

The Rise and Fall of Empire Day: An Exploration of a Global Imperial Festival

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Abstract

This thesis explores Empire Day, a popular festival of imperialism that was celebrated throughout the British world during the first half of the twentieth century and which had particular prominence between 1905-1931. It is a comparative study that uses case studies of South Africa, India and the metropole to draw conclusions about the functions and utility of Empire Day itself as well as considering what the annual commemoration reveals about the extent of popular imperialism within the British Empire. The celebration was conceived initially as a means of encouraging imperial sentiment in the minds of schoolchildren, but in some locations it caught the spirit of the time and spawned enthusiastic festivities amongst the population at large. It is evidence pertaining to this element of the Day that helps to settle the live historical debate around the question of how far imperialism constituted a popular ideology in the early twentieth century.

The trans-national scope of this study uncovers aspects of Empire Day that provide an insight into the ways in which imperialists sought to sustain British identity in the colonial context. It also shows how Empire Day served several other functions such as, *inter alia*, helping to validate and sustain hierarchical relations; assimilating non-British immigrants in the 'white' settler colonies; providing an active political domain for disenfranchised women; buttressing the social position of subaltern officials and dignitaries in India; creating a forum for claiming or defending political rights and the advancement of party-political agendas. The study also describes and explains dissenting responses and opposition to Empire Day in the various locations, which helps us chart aspects of the advance of nationalist movements and the decline of imperialism as a popular ideology in the British Empire.

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Note: part of this thesis, that does not exceed 13% of the total, was originally presented for my Masters degree on the same subject. This material was subsequently re-worked and appeared in published form as: Jim English, 'Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958' in *The Historical Journal*, 49,1 (2006). It now appears scattered through various parts of this thesis.

Introduction

Empire Day was an annual celebration of imperialism that was introduced to Canadian schools in 1898. It was adopted in Britain in 1904 and thereafter it was instituted in schools throughout the British Empire. It declined sharply during the 1930s and was finally put to rest by the British Government in 1958, when ministers accepted that it had fallen into desuetude. This thesis uses the Empire Day celebration as an index with which to measure the extent of imperial sentiment internationally and analyse important aspects of popular imperialism in Great Britain, the metropole, and key imperial territories, most notably, India and South Africa. Evidence pertaining to other parts of the empire is deployed strategically for comparative purposes.

Of primary consideration is a facet of Empire Day that has been largely passed over by academic scholarship – the degree to which the wider community outside of the schools adopted and supported Empire Day. If the significance of this characteristic of the Empire Day celebrations can be substantiated, it will provide a convincing corroboration of the view that British, and perhaps colonial, society in the early twentieth century was in large measure imperially minded and that imperialism as an ideology had achieved hegemonic status. Following from the seminal work of John Mackenzie, who demonstrated that the pervasive influence of imperialist propaganda in Britain extended far beyond the flurry of jingoism that accompanied the South African War, the contention that the British population developed an enduring imperial outlook due to the impact of empire on the metropole has been well developed.¹ Even after the First World War, as Anthony Hopkins observed,

¹ John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester, 1986), see also *ibid.* (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986); Mangan, J. A. (ed.), *Making imperial mentalities: Socialisation and British imperialism* (Manchester, 1990); Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-*

'imperialism and empire remained strong in sentiment and reality' and 'patriotic displays, political oratory and media invocations continued to touch the imperial button'.² However, there is no historical consensus on this issue.

Bernard Porter has, in measured terms, laid out the counter argument in the debate.³ He disputed the assumption that the presence of a glut of imperialist substance (such as imagery, song, literature and overt propaganda), which pervaded many aspects of British society, was an indication of its absorption into the popular consciousness. He concluded that 'however much Britain was affected by her Empire, it was not by making her people into imperialists – most Britons were relatively unaffected by it.'⁴ An important aspect of Porter's argument is his refutation that many of the attributes applied to imperialism in recent historiography (such as 'racism, patriotism, militarism, masculinism, adventure stories, the study of geography and so on')⁵ were, in fact, necessarily imperialistic. He observed that their use as signifiers of imperialist culture raises questions about the semantics of 'imperialism'. He preferred an analysis that emphasised the independent existence of these supposed indicators of imperialism that just happened to coincide with the high tide of the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

1953 (Manchester, 2001); *ibid.*, (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989); Antoinette Burton, 'Rules of Thumb: British History and Imperial Culture' in *Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Britain* in *Women's History Review*, 3 (1994); *ibid.*, *Burdens of History; British Feminists; Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, 1994); Hobsbawm Eric and Ranger Terence (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

² Hopkins, A.G., 'Back to the Future: From National Identity to Imperial History' in *Past and Present* No.164, (1999), pp.210-214.

³ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists: What the British really thought about empire* (Oxford, 2004). For an uncompromising rejection of the idea that the working class had an ongoing sympathy for imperialism, see Henry Pelling, *Popular politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1979), pp.82-100.

⁴ Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists*, p. 305.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.7-13.

This thesis is not intended to unpick meticulously Porter's argument,⁷ but it contributes to the debate. In part, it provides evidence that is not so susceptible to the accusations of ambiguity that Porter ties to many aspects of supposed imperial culture. It assesses if Empire Day celebrations in the general community were a good indicator of a widespread (although certainly not universal) imperialistic outlook within the British population. In order to avoid the semantic ambiguities that Porter believes frequently distort the historical analysis of imperialism, in this study 'popular imperialism' is taken to mean an acceptance of the legitimacy of the imperial state and a personal affiliation with Great Britain's role in a colonial empire; in the main, this attitude was predicated on a popular belief in the certainty of Anglo-Saxon racial pre-eminence and the superiority of the British political and social system.⁸

Admittedly, the notions of 'acceptance' and 'personal affiliation' are problematic, certainly in terms of how they are to be measured, but this is where the study of Empire Day (outside the confines of the school) has such value: some supposed attributes of popular imperialism can be criticised as denoting a passive absorption of the imperial trope, with limited evidence as to its reception (for example, watching movies with an imperial theme, reading adventure stories set in the colonial context, consuming 'imperial' products, listening to music hall songs, looking at the pink sections of a world map or reading 'imperialist' history);⁹ Empire Day celebrations, on the other hand, involved distinctly *active and resolute* expression of imperial sentiment. The meaning and purpose of Empire Day was, in the British context, clear-cut. The many people who joined the celebrations made a voluntary and conscious

⁷ For a critique see Antoinette Burton's review of *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really Thought About Empire* in *Victorian Studies*, Volume 47, Number 4, Summer 2005, pp. 626-628.

⁸ It is in some ways a corollary of integral nationalism (or perhaps a modified, less illiberal and tyrannous version): see Peter Alter, *Nationalism* (London, 1985), pp.26-35 esp. p.30.

⁹ Anthony Hopkins would argue that even these passive activities were 'expressions of tangible realities', Hopkins 'Back to the Future', p.214.

choice to participate in a celebration of the British Empire. This thesis examines the extent of that participation and analyses the implications of this public and unambiguous support for the empire.

This thesis is also intended to fill a historical gap. The historiography of Empire Day is patchy and there has not yet been a detailed comparative study of the celebration. There are some concise studies of Empire Day in Britain, which have concentrated upon its relation to particular cultural aspects, such as the ethos of public schools or dance and music.¹⁰ Furthermore, Empire Day in Britain is frequently mentioned within the academic debate concerning the degree to which imperialism as an ideology penetrated the working class.¹¹ There has been scholarly consideration of the Day in Ireland, Australia and particular territories within certain white dominions,¹² but this thesis is the first reflection upon Empire Day that incorporates an in-depth, trans-national scope. No doubt, in time, a comprehensive global consideration of Empire Day will be forthcoming, but for the purposes of this study the celebrations in the metropole are set in context against the enactment of the

¹⁰ Anne Bloomfield, 'Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism' in J.A. Mangan (ed.), *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1990), pp.74-95; *ibid.*, 'The grit of our forefathers': invented traditions, propaganda and imperialism' in Mackenzie *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, pp.113-139; Springhall, J. O., 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire' in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 5 Number 4, (1970), p.100; Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, pp.164-176; sections of the current thesis are to be found in Jim English, 'Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958' in *The Historical Journal*, 49.1 (2006), pp.247-276.

¹¹ Porter, *The Absent Minded Imperialists*, pp. 208-10, 256-7, 259-278 and *passim*; Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or rebels? An oral history of working class children and youth* (Oxford, 1981), pp.38-42; Stephen Heathorn, *For home country and race. Constructing gender class, and Englishness in the elementary school, 1880-1914*, (Toronto, 2000), p.186; Jonathan Rose, *The intellectual life of the British working classes* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 338-41. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p.231-6 and *passim*.

¹² Robert M. Stamp, 'Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario: The Training of Young Imperialists' in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, VIII, August 1973; Maurice French, 'The Ambiguity of Empire Day in New South Wales 1901-21: Imperial Consensus or National Division' in *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, (1978) Volume 24 Issue 1, pp. 61-74; *ibid.*, 'One People, One Destiny' - A Question of Loyalty: The Origins of Empire Day in New South Wales 1900-1905' in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, December 1975, Vol. 61 Part 4; Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hearn, 'From Empire Day to Cracker Night' in P. Spearritt and D. Walker (eds), *Australian Popular Culture* (Sydney, 1979); David H. Hume, 'Empire Day in Ireland 1896-1962' in Keith Jeffrey ed., *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), pp.149-67.

commemoration in two key imperial settings, India and South Africa, though there is deployment of material gleaned from primary and secondary sources relating to other territories. This makes this study the first step towards a 'global' history of the festival.

Measuring the impact of Empire Day in the wider colonial context throws up different issues to those raised by such a study of the festival in the metropole. For Lord Curzon, the basis of 'moral' (or popular) imperialism in the 'circumference' of the empire was essentially 'a sense of partnership in a great idea'.¹³ Certainly, a sense of common purpose with the imperial government is one factor to be assessed with relation to the avowed purpose of Empire Day in the colonial context, but the focus on the periphery also uncovers other functions of the Day. India has been selected because it was the largest of the 'non-white' colonies and the first to achieve independence. In contrast to the waves of decolonisation that followed the Second World War, when Empire Day was either moribund or over and done with, Britain was effectively losing its grip on India during the 1920s and 30s, when Empire Day was still an important festival. The fortunes of the commemoration in India will provide an insight into both the imperial identity of British residents in the subcontinent and the characteristics of imperialist ideology amongst the Indian populations themselves – all against a backdrop of general acquiescence to British rule that rapidly disintegrated into a prolonged crisis of authority from the period of the First World War. Constraints of space foreclose a wider exposition of the commemoration in other non-white colonial possessions such as the West Indies, Ceylon, Malaya, West Africa and so on, but tentative probing into these peripheries confirm that Empire Day established a firm footing and a popular following

¹³ Lord Curzon, quoted in Peter J. Cain and Mark Harrison, *Imperialism: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies, Volume 1* (London, 2001), p.155.

throughout the British Empire;¹⁴ it also had significance in relation to some nascent independence movements. For example, a Ghanaian composer, Ephraim Amu was asked to write a song for Empire Day in 1929 and introduced an 'African idiom' into the music and lyrics that the people enjoyed because it inspired a 'national idea'.¹⁵ As we shall see, this is not the only example where the symbolic representation of nationalism drew upon or subverted the Empire Day repertoire of symbolism and ritual. It will be for future historians to consolidate the rich evidence pertaining to Empire Day in the wider peripheries of the empire, but for now India - the largest colony and the one with the earliest development of mass nationalism - will serve as the archetype for surveying the extent of imperialism as a popular ideology in the non-white colonial empire. Indeed, future investigations will determine whether the Indian experience is typical of the non-white empire in general. Indicative research suggests that this might not be the case as there was great variation in the extent to which indigenous populations in other imperial possessions adopted Empire day.¹⁶

To a large degree the success of Empire Day in Britain was replicated and even surpassed in the white settler colonies, albeit with various nuances in form and

¹⁴ See for example, *Ceylon Independent* 25 May 1906 p.1, *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 25 May 1908, pp.2 and 7; Lloyd Braithwaite, *West Students in Britain* (Mona, 2001) p.32. Dudley Thompson, *From Kingston to Kenya: The Making of a Pan-Africanist Lawyer* (Dover MA, 1993), p.137; Olive Lewin, "Rock It Come Over" *The Folk Music of Jamaica*, (Barbados, 2000), pp. 6 and 132; 'The Celebration of Empire Day in Jamaica' *Daily Gleaner*, 28 May 1914, p.18. *Daily Gleaner*, 26 May 1914, p.4; Olean Owomoyela, *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* (Nebraska, 1993), pp. 145-6. Simon Gikande, *Reading Chinua Achebe: language & ideology in fiction* (Oxford, 2002), p.13, *The Gold Coast Leader* 30 May 1914, p.2.; Kofi Agawu, V., 'Conversation with Ephraim Amu: The Making of a Composer' in *The Black Perspective in Music* Volume 15 No.1 (Spring 1987), p. 53.; Margarat Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun. The British in Malaya 1880-1960* (London, 2002), pp.133 and 207-8; Wen-Hsin Yeh and Frederic Wakeman (eds), *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley, 1992) pp. 12, 119-120; Cyril S. Belshaw, *The Great Village The Economic And Social Welfare Of Hanuabada, An Urban Community In Papua* (London, 1957) p.7; Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom: a Statement of African Ideology* (Westport, 1976) p. 7.

¹⁵ Kofi Agawu, V., 'Conversation with Ephraim Amu', pp.53-54.

¹⁶ See, for example, evidence from Jamaica: 'The Celebration of Empire Day' in *The Daily Gleaner*, 26 May 1914, p.4; 29 May 1922 p.11; 26 May 1925, p. 5; 25 May 1927, p.6, and for Ceylon in *The Ceylon Independent*, 26 May 1905, p.4; 24 May 1907, p.4; *Ceylon Morning Leader* 22 May 1908 p.1; 22 May 1909, p.9; for the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Leader*, 30 May 1914, p. 2; 24 May 1924, p.4 and 6 June 1914, p.3.

function. The development of the commemoration in Australia and Canada has been tracked previously by a handful of academics (although a scholarly account of the festival in New Zealand remains to be written)¹⁷ and so South Africa appears the obvious choice for investigation, in part to fill a historical gap, but also because, alone among the white settler colonies, the British white settlers did not, in the twentieth century, form the majority population. Moreover, the white inhabitants, (who were a minority overall) were sharply divided: most of the Afrikaner majority amongst the white population were recent and reluctant inductees into the British Empire. Moreover the circumstances of the South African War had been a primary factor that convinced imperialists that there was a need to rouse popular support for the empire so that it might be effectively defended from external and *internal* threats. It was without doubt that many British imperialists saw the Afrikaner population as such an internal threat to the empire. The fortunes of the new Empire Day festival in this region were, then, of particular significance: from the beginning the festival encountered a bitterly antagonistic, anti-imperial nationalism amongst a decisive section of the white population. This study uses Empire Day to assess how the imperial identities of British migrants dispersed in South Africa were shaped (indeed, limited) by this fact.

Limitations of time and space forced an unhappy, though inevitable, choice in respect to the study of Empire Day in South Africa. In selecting to focus on the white populations of South Africa, especially those of British extraction, the experience of the subaltern populations in regard to Empire Day have had to be left in abeyance for the time being. This is a significant gap, for the indications from exploratory research suggest that there are important issues to be addressed. It remains for a future

¹⁷ In New Zealand, Empire Day seems to have had a similar trajectory to Canada and Australia: see Gavin McLean, *The Governors: New Zealand's Governors and Governors-General* (Otago, 2006), pp 132 and 149 and also <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/empire-day> (Accessed 14 October 2009).

historian to explore the African press in this regard. The English language press rarely mentioned the attitude of Africans to Empire Day, but there was evidently some support for the celebration amongst Africans as documented in 1913, when a collection at the various 'native' eating-houses in Cape Town raised enough money for two commemorative wreaths, flags and bunting to decorate these establishments on Empire Day.¹⁸ It seems also that some companies that employed significant numbers of Africans organised Empire Day celebrations for their workforce, perhaps in the belief that the 'natives' were as predisposed to absorb imperialist propaganda as were children, the main target of the festival. This theme was particularly relevant to India and is explored in Chapter 2.¹⁹ In the inter-war years, Africans sometimes used the Union Jack as a symbol of protest in actions that occasionally resulted in violence.²⁰ The extent of African participation in Empire Day celebrations remains to be seen, but in 1926, the *Cape Times* claimed that 'fully 5,000 natives, headed by a native choir, marched through the town with a huge Union Jack at the head of the procession . . . Patriotic speeches were made and 'Rule Britannia' heartily sung'.²¹ On the other hand, Empire Day could be used to express considerable hostility amongst Africans. In 1908, Empire Day was declared 'a day of national humiliation' by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Transvaal, during a campaign against the removal of Africans from the small mining town of Boksburg.²²

It is also apparent that some Indians in South Africa exploited Empire Day to remonstrate against legislative injustices, whilst simultaneously professing staunch

¹⁸ 'The Natives Dole' in *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1913, p.1.

¹⁹ 'Empire Day at Whites - Great Time for children and natives' in *The Friend*, 2 June 1923, p.12.

²⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 June 1927, p.1 and 2 June 1928, p.10; see also *Cape Times* 4 April 1919 and Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa The African National Congress 1912-1952* (London, 1970), p.34.

²¹ 'Partners in a Mighty Empire' in *Cape Times*, 25 May 1926, p.9. It was asserted that this was a annual gathering, although it hadn't been previously mentioned by the newspaper.

²² Petition of the Boksburg Native Vigilance Association quoted in James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York, 1995) p. 157-158.

loyalty to the empire. This approach became a continuing feature of a certain kind of oppositional politics - as will be demonstrated, indigenous loyalists in India especially used it. In 1903 and 1914, the Indian League and the APO²³ organised Empire Day meetings in South Africa as a protest about discrimination against British subjects of colour.²⁴ Also, during the *Satyagraha* struggle, Gandhi's Durban based newspaper, *Indian Opinion*²⁵ criticised Empire Day, even though it viewed its own concerns as essentially imperial.²⁶ In an ironic coincidence, Gandhi was released from a period of imprisonment on Empire Day in 1909. Many 'Asiatic' supporters celebrated his release in Pretoria and Johannesburg.²⁷ Reverend J. J. Doke, who addressed Gandhi at Johannesburg said 'this is Empire Day. I stand here as one who loves our Empire', yet Gandhi's imprisonment was a 'blot on the Empire' for which he blushed.²⁸ In 1908, Gandhi had noted the popularity of Empire Day in Natal, but he questioned whether the day continued to hold any meaning for British Indians resident in South Africa while 'white Imperialists engaged in flag wagging . . . seek to annihilate them absolutely'.²⁹ Despite Gandhi's disenchantment, he nevertheless retained his faith in the British Empire for another decade.³⁰ The *Indian Opinion* looked forward to a time when Empire Day 'will be observed with smiles and genuine rejoicings by those colonially resident British Asiatics'.³¹ It seems that the ideological investment that

²³ African Political Organisation.

²⁴ In Cape Town, the Indian League objected to loss of voting rights and the creation of out of town ghettos: see *Cape Times*, 25 May 1903, p.9; and in Ferreirastown, 'coloureds' had been prohibited from riding the trams: *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1914, p.7.

²⁵ Gandhi is credited with writing most of the editorials for the *Indian Opinion* between 1903-14 see Maureen Swan, *Gandhi - The South African Experience* (Johannesburg, 1985), p.58.

²⁶ Extracts from editorials in *Indian Opinion* between 1903-1904 quoted by Uma Shashikant Mesthrie 'From Advocacy to Mobilization, *Indian Opinion*, 1903-1914' in Les Switzer (ed.), *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960* (Cambridge, 1997), p.103.

²⁷ *Indian Opinion*, Vol. II Number 22, 29 May 1909, p.235, and *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1909, p.7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.236.

²⁹ *Indian Opinion*, Vol. VI, Number 22, 30 May 1908, p.229.

³⁰ Robert A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa. British Imperialism and the Indian Question, 1860-1914* (London, 1971) p.181.

³¹ *Indian Opinion*, Vol. VI, Number 22, 30 May 1908, p.229.

many Indians and Africans had in the Empire made it very difficult at this time to break with its hegemonic constructs.

It is clear, then, that a detailed assessment of the Indian and African responses to Empire Day in South Africa would reveal much about subaltern political cultures and concerns. But, given that South Africa is merely one of the case studies at this time, and that the primary objective is to utilise it to explore imperial identity amongst colonial whites of British origin, it became evident that the systematic exploration of the Indian and African experience of the festival in South Africa was not possible here. Nevertheless it remains a feature of this thesis to highlight in the hope that another historian will seek to fill this gap.

Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, the comparative examination of the Empire Day festival provides an important opportunity to explore the capacity for a co-ordinated empire-wide popular imperialist mobilisation, which was achieved independently of any central government direction and often in spite of government indifference. As we shall see, the influence of the press, the activities of women's organisations, municipal bodies, youth movements, commercial enterprises and imperialist organisations (amongst others) were all important factors in the creation of an imperialist nexus that found a common expression of identity on Empire Day.

Chapter One is concerned with the origins, development, functions and significance of Empire Day in the metropole and key 'white' colonies, notably South Africa. There is an assessment of the Empire Day Movement's success within the predominantly juvenile settings of schools and voluntary youth movements, and also an exploration of how the celebration caught the popular mood and rapidly crossed into wider civil society to encompass a significant and socially diverse adult constituency. The chapter seeks to identify the links between Empire Day and a

popular notion of British imperial identity and there is a consideration of whether engagement with the annual festival of imperialism suggested a buoyant and positive public attitude toward the empire. The hegemonic aspects of imperial culture are also discussed in relation to the ease of transition of the Empire Day rituals and rhetoric into varied social settings. A particular concern of the chapter is the delineation of class, ethnic, religious and other differences that affected the growth and spread of the new 'tradition' in the 'white' empire.

Chapter Two moves the spotlight to India. In common with South Africa, this is a part of the empire for which there has been no previous research in respect to Empire Day. The present investigation is concerned with the extent of the celebration and what it can reveal about attitudes toward imperialism as an ideology amongst both Indians and their colonial rulers. Practicalities have limited the source materials used to those produced in the English language. This means that the analysis relies heavily on the reports of the English language (imperialist) press that was unanimous in its support for the occasion. The exception is the Indian-owned, English language newspaper, the *Bengalee*. Its acerbic criticisms of Empire Day in India suggest that a review of the vernacular press would throw up evidence that might allow a more thorough scrutiny of Indian attitudes toward the meaning and significance of the day.

Notwithstanding the constraints of language, this chapter seeks to identify the particular communities, British and Indian, which made efforts to observe the occasion outside of the schools, where Empire Day seemed to have a separate existence in India. The British relied on the cooperation of key Indian constituencies to uphold colonial rule in India, which included Indian army regiments, the rulers of the princely states, Indian office holders and professional groups. The chapter evokes their behaviour Empire Day in order to on give us an idea as to how far this

cooperation with the Raj was simply pragmatism or reflected a genuine affection for the empire. The chapter also explores the response of British communities to Empire Day in India and assesses if this conformed to an expected form of racial segregation. The chapter also analyses how Indians independently used Empire Day in terms of political positioning, whether that be in respect of personal advancement, maintaining communal interests, countering the rising nationalist movement, or in the struggle to advance constitutional rights. Finally, this chapter assesses the extent of opposition to Empire Day in India before the First World War and how, why and when this was expressed.

Chapter Three is concerned with the impact of the First World War on Empire Day in the 'white' empire, the prime focus being Britain and South Africa, but the chapter also assesses the ways in which the festival contributed to a growth in militarism during the Edwardian era and influenced the manner in which people responded to the War. It was during the war that the British Government perceived a propaganda value in Empire Day and extended recognition to what had previously been a wholly voluntary movement. This chapter will explore the ways in which Empire Day mutated in response to the needs of a society at war, and indeed, how the long-term repercussions of the war affected the nature of the commemoration after 1918. In the context of South Africa, where the decision to enter the war exacerbated the social and political divisions of the Union, the fate of Empire day is tracked in relation to the rise in Afrikaner Nationalist sentiment and the political inexpediency of a recourse to imperialist patriotism during the war.

Chapter four shifts the analysis back to India, where the war engendered a far wider participation in national politics. Initially this was tied to the need for the empire to exploit the resources of the subcontinent for the war effort (a boon for

Empire Day), but subsequently a radicalised national movement began to mobilise sections of the population hitherto quiescent in anything other than parochial concerns. This chapter will explain why Empire Day achieved its high point in India during the war, but will also discuss how the circumstances of wider political participation had a critical impact on the imperial celebration and its adherents. Empire Day here provides an aperture through which to scrutinise the wider political scene and can help to explain the rapid rise and fall of imperialist sentiment at this time.

Remaining with India, Chapter Five charts the failure of Empire Day celebrations in India during the interwar years. It explores how the eruption of episodes of large scale communal violence, the rise of a new type of nationalism that inducted the masses into direct political action and the abject failure of the imperial administration to retain the faith of the Indian people were all factors that rendered Empire Day in India an anachronism almost overnight. Where, how and why Empire Day continued to be celebrated at this time is revealed, but the emphasis is on how the fate of the festival can be used to time and confirm the imperial decline and the nationalist advance. Chapter Six, meanwhile, sketches the nature and significance of the demise of Empire Day at the centre of the empire, in Britain, and in certain principal 'white' colonies, above all South Africa. The thesis concludes with general reflections on the significance of the rise and fall of an imperial festival that spanned the globe.

Chapter 1

A Day is born: the festival in the 'white' Empire to 1914

The Birth of Empire Day

The origin and context of Empire Day in Great Britain lay in a wider endeavour to ally the population to the concept of a justified imperial state. The object of Empire Day was to promote patriotism in schools and nurture a sense of collective identity and imperial responsibility amongst youth throughout the British Empire. The chief instigator of Empire Day was Reginald Brabazon, the seventh Earl of Meath who, with considerable support from various imperialist organisations,¹ succeeded in instituting the celebration in schools across the entire empire. Meath was an ardent imperialist and tireless campaigner for the introduction of soldierly rituals within state schools: he founded a number of martial youth organisations and was associated with 'nearly every movement organised by the military imperialist caste that was active before 1914'.²

Empire Day was both symbolic of the imperial discourse and a method through which Britons were inculcated with imperialist ideology. In order to help young Britons understand their imperial affinity and obligations the celebrations employed the patriotic tropes of racial superiority, military pre-eminence, nationalistic

¹ These included The League of Empire, Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, The Victoria League, The Sons of England, The British Empire League, The Guild of Loyal Women and The Royal Colonial Institute. The work of some of these organisations is discussed in John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester, 1986), especially pp.147-172.

² J. O. Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire' in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 5, Number 4, (1970), p.100.

pride, unquestioned global might, a glorious monarchy, and the progress of civilisation. However, for all the pomp and self-assuredness of Empire Day in Britain, it was actually a deep concern about the security of the empire that motivated its instigators. Their apprehension stemmed from a mounting awareness of the external and internal menaces that threatened Britain's extensive imperial territories. The period of New Imperialism that began in the late nineteenth century had seen the emergence of rival colonial empires in Europe and the wider world as well as a waning of British economic supremacy, which alarmed British imperialists. However, the critical event that prompted Meath and other imperialists to action was the South African War that had necessitated an unprecedented military effort on Britain's part to impose supremacy over the Boer republics. The South African War exposed difficulties of effectively maintaining and defending the empire. Meath believed that by drawing 'the attention of the next generation to imperial questions' they would develop a greater awareness and knowledge of the British Empire and thereby 'perceive the advantages of a closer federation'.³

The anxiety of imperialists in Britain was shared in the white settler colonies. In the heartlands of the long colonial expansion of Great Britain, political, economic and social changes threatened the bond between metropole and periphery and prompted uncertainty about the future of the imperial relationship. In South Africa, the empire had absorbed a majority white population with a deep enmity toward the British Empire and in Australia constitutional change in the separate territories followed by unification under the Commonwealth⁴ prompted a nationalist challenge

³ Meath to Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary, 13 July 1902 reproduced in Earl of Meath, *Brabazon Potpourri* (London, 1928), pp. 93-4.

⁴ For details of constitutional change in South Australia between 1850-1900 and an exposition of the Commonwealth Constitution see Bradley Selway, *The Constitution of South Australia* (Annandale, 1997), pp.7-10. Helen Irving's historical evaluation of the Constitution is recognised as a key text on

to the imperial order. In *fin-de-siecle* Canada, meanwhile, there was growing uncertainty regarding the economic and constitutional future of the nation. Indeed, as we shall see, fear about the durability of the imperial connection in Canada accounted for the inauguration of the original Empire Day celebrations in 1899, thereafter adapted by Meath and extended throughout the British Empire.

In the late nineteenth century, some journalists and academics in Canada proposed that the nation's miserable economic performance might be ameliorated through dissolving the imperial connection, joining the United States and enjoying a share in its prosperity.⁵ For example, the anti-imperialist writer Goldwin Smith held that the 'natural' economy of the North American continent was geographically determined and thus transcended artificial political boundaries.⁶ An elderly Canadian widow and fervent patriotic loyalist, Clementina Fessenden, was alarmed by such arguments, which she believed were symptomatic of a general feeling of negativity and national insecurity. She decided that instilling patriotic sentiment in the young would be an antidote to such pessimism and she proposed a 'national patriotic scheme of education' centred on an annual flag day.⁷ She believed the next generation would consequently be infused with an imperialist spirit and would not succumb to the doubts that threatened Canada's place within the British Empire.⁸ Fessenden's scheme reflected a public tendency toward political polarisation that accompanied the debate over economic relations with the United States. Goldwin

the subject. Helen Irving, *To Constitute a Nation: A Cultural History of Australia's Constitution* (New York, 1997) see especially p.1 and pp. 212-219.

⁵ See Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921, A Nation Transformed* (Toronto, 1974), p.28 and Goldwin Smith, 'Canada and the Canadian Question' partly reproduced in J. M. Bumstead (ed), *Interpreting Canada's Past: Volume II, After Confederation* (Toronto, 1986), p.145.

⁶ Bumstead, *Interpreting Canada's Past*, p.153.

⁷ Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto, 1982), p.34.

⁸ For an account of the events that inspired Fessenden, see W. Sanford Evans, 'The Birth of Empire Day' in *Canadian Magazine* July 1898, reprinted in *The Founding of Empire Day with Photographs of Mrs. Clementina Fessenden, Founder of Empire Day* (Hamilton, c.1926), pp. 5-6.

Smith observed that 'to make up for the dearth of economic arguments against reciprocity [with the U.S.] its opponents appeal to Loyalty and the Old Flag'.⁹

Robert M. Stamp has detailed the crucial intervention of George Ross, the Liberal Minister of Education for Ontario, in the development of Empire Day.¹⁰ Ross had long struggled to find a balance in the schools between Canadian patriotism and imperial sentiment without providing Conservatives with an issue of imperial 'loyalty' to exploit during provincial elections. He thought Fessenden's idea for patriotic celebrations would be effective in dispelling tensions between nationalists and imperialists as it would blend 'the imperial and national visions into one' by promoting the view that the Canadian nation and the British Empire were indivisible the one being 'but an expansion of the other'.¹¹

In 1897, under Ross's tutelage, and with the voluble support of the press, Fessenden persuaded her local schools to institute an annual 'Flag Day' when, 'for the purpose of inculcating patriotic sentiment', the children would write essays about the imperial bond, sing patriotic songs and listen to addresses of a similar nature.¹² Ross persuaded the Protestant schools to adopt the format throughout Ontario¹³ before extending the scheme to the whole of Canada. Queen Victoria's birthday (May 24) became the designated date for 'Empire Day'¹⁴ because it was already marked throughout the Empire with military displays, royal salutes and high society

⁹ Bumstead, *Interpreting Canada's Past*, p.153.

¹⁰ Robert M. Stamp, 'Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario: The Training of Young Imperialists' in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, VIII, August 1973, pp. 32-42.

¹¹ Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976*, p.34.

¹² *The Founding of Empire Day with Photographs of Mrs. Clementina Fessenden, Founder of Empire Day* (Hamilton, c.1926) p.7, and Stamp, 'Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario', p.33.

¹³ *The Founding of Empire Day*, p.7.

¹⁴ The Dominion Educational Association rejected 'Britannia Day' and 'Patriotic Day' in favour of Ross's own preference 'Empire Day'. The name 'Flag Day', favoured by Fessenden, was considered unsuitable because it lacked an immediate imperial connotation. Furthermore, a patriotic 'Flag Day' occurred annually in the United States and the Dominion Educational Association wanted to ensure that their scheme maintained a distinctive character. Stamp, 'Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario', pp.33-34.

banquets.¹⁵ Victoria's reign had coincided with the massive expansion of the British Empire and the advent of a new kind of colonial imperialism whereby Britain incorporated in excess of 4 million square miles of overseas territory into the Empire.¹⁶ In the Colonies and Dominions, the Queen became a metaphor for Empire. After her death in 1901, the Canadian parliament instituted a permanent public holiday ('Victoria Day') on May 24;¹⁷ its coincidence with the schools' Empire Day encouraged the idea that a wider imperialist celebration should take place. Almost immediately, the appellations Victoria Day and Empire Day became interchangeable.

In 1899, The *Montreal Daily Star* reported that there was considerable public interest in 'the first real attempt to foster an imperial spirit in the hearts of the rising generation'¹⁸ and the inaugural Empire Day 'was observed from Ocean to Ocean' in the Protestant schools of Canada. In Halifax it was heralded the 'greatest celebration ever known in the schools of Nova-Scotia'.¹⁹ The festival steadily increased in popularity, in Montreal, the combined schools' Empire Day concert of 1901 attracted a patriotic audience of six thousand, which was increased to nine thousand in 1902.²⁰ The immediate success of Empire Day in Canada inspired Meath's notion of an empire-wide celebration.²¹ He proposed a half-holiday for schools preceded by morning lessons 'calculated to remind [the children] of their mighty heritage'; the centrepiece of the day was to be the ritualised veneration of the

¹⁵ The inaugural Empire Day in 1899 was further stimulated by public celebrations of the Queen's eightieth birthday, which echoed the enthusiastic celebrations of her Diamond Jubilee two years previously. This fervour for the British monarchy was further stirred by the threat of a war in South Africa - which would undoubtedly be 'an imperial undertaking', *ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm gives the figure of 4 million square miles for the period 1876-1915. If territory gained after the death of Victoria is offset against imperial acquisitions between 1837 and 1876 the broad figure can stand safely. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, (London, 1987), p.59.

¹⁷ John Herd Thompson has signalled how in Canada the reaction to Victoria's death was sorrow and a strengthening of imperial sentiment. John Herd Thompson, 'Canada and the "Third British Empire", 1901-1939' in Phillip Buckner (ed.), *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2008), p.87.

¹⁸ *Montreal Daily Star*, 22 May 1899, p.9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1899, p.9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1901, p.11 and 22 May 1902, p.3.

²¹ For Meath's review of the successful establishment of Empire Day in the white settler colonies see Reginald Earl of Meath, *Memories of the XXth Century* (London, 1924), pp. 56-57 & 88-89.

Union Flag.²² Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, allowed Meath to petition the delegates to the Imperial Conference of 1902 and the favourable response of the colonial authorities to his idea of an harmonized observance of the day in the schools proved pivotal in the establishment of Empire Day throughout the British world.

Meath's accomplishment is impressive given the official coolness of the British and some Colonial governments to the idea;²³ even the British Parliament refused to recognise Empire Day until 1916 (an expedient response to the needs of the war effort). Nevertheless, Empire Day proved to have popular appeal and this was exploited by various imperialist groups in Britain and the colonies whose campaigning augmented Meath's efforts and helped establish Empire Day on the ceremonial calendar in most imperial territories from 1905 onwards. The ease with which an overt plan of political indoctrination was pioneered within the state education systems in Britain, Canada and Australia is notable. This was partly due to the consistency of Empire Day activities with symbols, myths and rituals that were emblematic of a hegemonic British imperial culture. In Britain, lessons and lectures were centred on the teaching of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and its civilising mission, the empire story (replete with myths and heroes) and the vast geographical extent of the British Empire.²⁴ Thus, Empire Day could be presented as the righteous celebration of what was generally held to be a set of social facts - the primacy and destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race, the virtuous progression of the British

²² Earl of Meath, 'British youth and the empire' in *Brabazon Potpourri*, p.95.

²³ Maurice French, 'One People, One Destiny' - A Question of Loyalty: The Origins of Empire Day in New South Wales 1900-1905' in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, December 1975, Vol. 61 Part 4, p. 237.

²⁴ The ideological utility of cartography in the symbolic articulation of power is emphasised by J. B. Harley, who interestingly uses a satirical poem of G. K. Chesterton to illustrate the point: 'The earth is a place on which England is found, And you find it however you twirl the globe round; For the spots are all red and the rest is all grey, And that is the meaning of Empire Day'. See J. B. Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge and Power' in D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 295

Empire and the common bond of an 'imagined community'²⁵ inhabiting a vast and far flung empire.

In Australia, Empire Day complimented a pre-existing emphasis on patriotism in the schools' curriculum. For example, Victoria's Minister for Education favoured 'systematizing efforts to maintain and increase . . . patriotic sentiment'.²⁶ His department insisted teachers use classroom time to imbue a sense of imperial loyalty in their pupils' minds and centrally produced teaching materials were crammed with patriotic stories, poems and songs designed to promote an imperialistic spirit. From 1905, the education authorities supplied schools with an abundance of material to be used on Empire Day²⁷ and advocated the substitution of regular classes with lessons on patriotism, parades and the ritual of saluting the flag.²⁸ Imperialist organisations such as the League of Empire²⁹ actively supported this endeavour and succeeded in assembling an 'immense audience' of juveniles in Adelaide in 1907 whilst the Australian Women's National League issued all children in state schools with a pamphlet "Empire Day and the Union Jack".³⁰

In 1909, Meath disseminated directions as to the 'correct' organisation of Empire Day through a circular letter to the major newspapers of the Empire. He stipulated that 'every true citizen' of Great Britain and the empire 'should see that his local school is endowed promptly with the following: A flagstaff, the Union Jack, a

²⁵ Benedict Anderson has discussed the cultural practices that form the identities of nation states, his thesis has utility for the consideration of imperial identities: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983).

²⁶ Kelvin Edwards, 'School Reading Texts: The School Papers and the Moulding of Young Minds' in *Post-Script*, Volume 5, 1, September 2004, pp. 33-36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁸ See examples of Scott's Creek, Cradock and Blackrock, 'Empire Day Events in the Country' in *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 3 June 1905, p.16.

²⁹ For a contemporary discussion of the League of Empire and other imperialist organisations in the interwar period see John Marriman Gaus, *Great Britain* (Chicago, 1929), pp. 85-91.

³⁰ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 01 June 1907, p.43.

portrait of the King, an Empire wall map, the Empire Catechism, Empire songs'.³¹

Meath also supplied a general guide as to the organisation of the day:

1. Assemble with representatives of the local officials; military and territorial forces at the schools.
2. Hoist the Union Jack.
3. Sing the National Anthem.
4. Salute the Flag.
5. Address on "citizenship" or "The Empire".
6. Recital of poem that illustrates heroic duty or self-sacrifice for the nation.
7. Recital of Kipling's "Recessional".
8. National Anthem and final salute.
9. Organise games, sports or holiday for the school children.³²

The evidence from 1909 demonstrates that Meath's plan had rapidly been realised on a vast scale. His standardisation of Empire Day established a formula for the celebration in schools that was more or less consistent throughout the British Empire. The set of rituals that he had prescribed remained the core of the day in schools for over half a century.

Crossing the generations and the classes?

There is a prevailing misconception that Empire Day was exclusively a day for schoolchildren. This is contradicted by the historical record, which reveals that Empire Day had greater social influence than has been generally recognised. In Great Britain and the white settler colonies, the Empire Day celebration rapidly migrated from the confines of the schools to be established (in varying degrees) as a popular community event in a variety of contexts. However, there is no denying that in Great Britain and the white settler colonies, Empire Day was emphatically directed at a youthful constituency, and that the imposition of lessons in imperialism on a passive juvenile population was essentially an attempt at ideological indoctrination, which

³¹ *Montreal Daily Star*, 22 May 1909, p.17.

³² *Ibid.*

does not constitute evidence of a popular endorsement of imperial ideology. However, in the wider social context it becomes possible to assess and contemplate the popular appeal of imperialist ideology.

At a school level, there was considerable preparation invested in Empire Day celebrations, including numerous practice runs of the rituals to be enacted in public. The young and excitable participants in the schools must have to some extent conveyed the extraordinary nature of the proceedings into the domestic sphere. The notable absence of evidence of parental dissent before 1918 is a significant indicator that such ideological conditioning was at the very least considered acceptable by most parents, if not entirely supported. Of greater significance is the way in which Empire Day percolated into the public domain and the manner in which many British people embraced it.

From its inception, Empire Day was extended in a way that invited the public gaze. George Ross issued a directive to all school inspectors that schools in Ontario should make provision for including the 'public generally' in the festivities.³³ The passage of Empire Day from the schoolhouse to a wider society was facilitated through the enactment of patriotic rituals and ceremonies by some schools in the public arena, and there was also a good deal of voluntary community endeavour in the preparation and organisation of events within the schools. Furthermore, large contingents of 'outsiders', such as parents and local dignitaries, were as a matter of course invited into the schools to witness or participate *willingly* in the celebrations. In England, the many adult visitors to the schools were believed to be as susceptible to the imperial propaganda as were the children:

³³ W. Sanford Evans, 'Empire Day, A Detailed History of its Origin and Inception' in *The Canadian Magazine of Politics, Art, Science and Literature* July 1899, p.277.

'Empire Day ... was celebrated at the elementary schools ... in a manner which will no doubt make an indelible impression upon the minds of the scholars, as on the minds of those adults who were present at the schools in the morning ... and were evidently impressed at what they saw and heard.'³⁴

Canadian schools organised large demonstrations in the city centres. In 1905, Toronto's celebrations attracted a crowd of enthusiastic schoolchildren and adults that was estimated to number 'fully 20,000'.³⁵ Montreal held a regular concert, which was consistently well attended by thousands of parents, relatives and friends of the children. On one occasion the performing choir was composed of one thousand children, which gives an indication as to the scale of the event.³⁶ Music was interspersed with patriotic recitations and speeches, which the *Montreal Daily Star* claimed,

... could not well but stir the young blood as it certainly did the older and more staid members of the audience ... From the grey haired man and woman to the boy and girl just beginning life, the school concert at the arena last evening could not be otherwise than impressive' and in this respect 'Empire Day has well served its purpose'.³⁷

In Canada, Empire Day rapidly attracted an adult following, partly assisted by its colonisation of the Victoria Day public holiday. In 1906, The *Quebec Daily Telegraph* stated that 'Victoria Day is in an especial manner Canada's day ... it has been and ever will be our great spring festival'.³⁸ Two years later the transition of

³⁴ Report on Empire Day in the elementary schools at Brightlingsea, Essex, *Essex County Standard*, 27 May 1905, p.5. See also Anne Bloomfield for evidence from schools in and around Nottingham where the 'message of empire was conveyed to parents as well as children' in Anne Bloomfield, 'Drill and dance as symbols of imperialism' in Mangan, J. A. (ed.), *Making imperial mentalities: Socialisation and British imperialism* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 76.

³⁵ *Montreal Daily Star*, 24 May 1905, p.7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1899, p.5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 1906, p.2.

'Victoria Day' to 'Empire Day' was heralded by the *Toronto Globe*: 'as years pass, the day under the new name will acquire increasing significance and call out intensifying enthusiasm'.³⁹ (Perhaps one measure of popular enthusiasm for celebrating Empire Day in Toronto might be the number of times the fire brigade were called to extinguish fires set off by the numerous crackers and rockets being ignited. It was reported by one newspaper that fireworks on Empire Day were responsible for half a dozen fires).⁴⁰ Some civic bodies were at the forefront of the effort to propagate Empire Day within the wider community. In particular, the church and its associated missionary societies played a key role in sanctifying the 'spirit of imperialism', infusing Empire Day with a moral and spiritual aspect that corresponded with Meath's purpose.⁴¹ The city churches of Ottawa pioneered special Empire Day services in 1904,⁴² an initiative later emulated on a large scale by the Church in Great Britain.⁴³

Introducing Empire Day celebrations to the community at large was evidently seen as an essential facet of the commemoration by some imperialists - the absence of such a demonstration in Ontario resulted in journalistic reproach and accusations of negligence against the local Board of Education.⁴⁴ In Australia, the imperialist press were also liable to complain if Empire Day events did not allow the inclusion of the general public, such as in Adelaide when the local newspaper protested after a

³⁹ *The Globe*, 25 May 1908, p.4.

⁴⁰ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 25 May 1909, p.1.

⁴¹ John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London, 1994), p.224. See also, John Mackenzie, 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain' in Judith M. Brown and W.M. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), p.213.

⁴² *Montreal Daily Star*, 25 May 1904, p.4.

⁴³ In 1908, over one thousand members of the clergy made assurances to the Empire Day Movement that on Empire Day they would preach 'on one aspect or another' regarding 'our imperial obligation'. *The Times*, 23 May 1908, p.11.

⁴⁴ *Montreal Daily Star*, 23 May 1899, p.9.

proposed demonstration in the city was abandoned.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, many schools encouraged adults to participate⁴⁶ and in 1906, the *Adelaide Chronicle* described Empire Day as a 'well established annual affair' throughout South Australia. Various community organisations had supplemented the schools celebrations with extravagant processions, a profusion of flags and bunting, informal business holidays and patriotic concerts.⁴⁷

Despite the undoubted advance of Empire Day in Australia, the *Adelaide Chronicle* acknowledged that it lacked the 'heartiness and unanimity [that] characterise the celebration of other national days' and admitted that the 'bulk of the community' had not yet embraced imperial ideology' - a problem supposedly exacerbated by the government's refusal to extend the official recognition of Empire Day by deeming it a national holiday,⁴⁸ thereby denying 'the opportunity' for the people to give their feelings 'public expression'. The *Chronicle* predicted that as Australians were 'educated up to an adequate realisation of the mighty heritage that is enjoyed by the British Race . . . Empire Day will grow in polar favour year by year'.⁴⁹

To some extent the *Chronicle* was right; it probably remained the case that Empire Day never succeeded in embracing 'the bulk of the community' in Australia, but it certainly grew in favour and attracted an increasing number of participants. Some exclusively adult institutions, such as the Adelaide Stock Exchange, began to

⁴⁵ *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 27 May 1905, p.30.

⁴⁶ For examples see reports from Eudunda, where the schools celebrations were supplemented with a fancy dress ball for the adults; Port Augusta, where a march through the main streets of the town involved over 400 children and 'a large attendance of the general public'; Kapunda, where the general public demonstrated their loyalty through the hosting of Union Jacks and the organisers promised 'a large scale' celebration for the following year' and Port Lincoln, where a school concert was given, which attracted a good attendance, 'rarely has the hall been so crowded, every available chair was used': 'Empire Day Events in the Country' in *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 3 June 1905, p.16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 02 June 1906, p.17. See this edition and *ibid.*, 03 June 1906, p.16 for reports from Port Lincoln, Jamestown, Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Salisbury and Adelaide. The claims are supported by photographic evidence that appeared to show an equivalent number of adults and children involved in the festivities, see *ibid.*, 30 May 1906, p.28.

⁴⁸ Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hearn, 'From Empire Day to Cracker Night' in P. Spearritt and D. Walker (eds.), *Australian Popular Culture* (Sydney, 1979), p.19.

⁴⁹ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 01 June 1907, p.43.

commemorate Empire Day at this time⁵⁰ and in the absence of a public holiday some communities took it upon themselves to declare a 'trades holiday'. In 1908, an impromptu half-holiday at Narracoorte encouraged 'most of the towns people' to attend the celebrations and at Walleroo, a special tram was commissioned that conveyed several hundred people to the united schools demonstration.⁵¹ Empire Day events, then, became widespread throughout Australia⁵² and some took on a grandiose character. In 1909 a massive event at the Sydney cricket ground involved 10,000 children and an 'enthusiastic' audience that was estimated at 40,000 people - photographic evidence confirms this as a reliable estimate.⁵³ The *Sydney Mail* proclaimed that 'the impression as to the meaning of our Empire does not end with the young. It has value for the older heads, and never more than at present'.⁵⁴ Amongst the 'older heads' celebrating in Sydney were over 800 participants in a 'Merchants Demonstration' and those at an adult gathering addressed by Canon Boyce, President of the British Empire League.⁵⁵ In Melbourne, there was a similar response to Empire Day, which was celebrated with 'conspicuous enthusiasm':

Each district honoured in its own way, Public meetings, outdoor gatherings, patriotic concerts, Imperialistic tableaux, Cadet parades, school assemblages were held almost everywhere.⁵⁶

Maurice French's history of Empire Day in New South Wales confirms the popularity of the event among large sections of the general public, who regularly

⁵⁰ In 1908, the *Adelaide Chronicle* reported that at the close of the first meeting of the Adelaide Stock Exchange several patriotic speeches were made in recognition of the celebration of Empire Day. In addition the inmates of the Destitute Asylum were given an annual tea on Empire Day. Perhaps the impecunious residents therein, like the schoolchildren represented another 'captive' audience, but at the least, the organisers showed a proclivity for imperial zeal. *Adelaide Chronicle*, 02 June 1908, p.28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30 May 1908, p.42. See also reports on Milang, and Kadina.

⁵² See reports from Hobart, Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne and Sydney in *ibid.*, 30 May 1908, pp. 41-43 and 29 May 1908, p.42.

⁵³ *Sydney Mail*, 26 May 1909, pp. 30 and 31.

⁵⁴ 'Growth of Empire Day' *ibid.*, p.8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.33 & 34.

⁵⁶ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 29 May 1909, p.46.

absented themselves from work in order to join the patriotic demonstrations that took place in town and city centres.⁵⁷ However, French noted that the Empire Day Movement in Australia tended to provoke 'anglophobic groups . . . the Irish, the Roman Catholics, and the Labour Movement' and thus in the process of uniting imperial loyalists, it also exacerbated social divisions.⁵⁸ Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hoorn accept that Empire Day fell short of achieving a consensus in the years before the First World War, but they emphasised the appeal of the celebrations across a broad section of the Australian population and asserted that its significance in terms of the dominant conception of Australian patriotism is undoubted.⁵⁹

The development of parallel community festivities that supplemented and often superseded the school celebrations was assisted in no small part by Meath's tireless efforts to propagate the festival. In Britain, he enjoyed the voluble support of popular newspapers (most conspicuously Northcliffe's publications).⁶⁰ Some newspapers, most notably *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, published bulky Empire Day supplements that treated their readers to an education in all things imperial.⁶¹ In common with some British newspapers, the imperialist press in the colonies, such as the unashamedly jingoistic *Montreal Daily Star* (which, as J. I. Cooper observed 'might as well have been published in London'),⁶² adopted an instructive and propagandist role. The *Quebec Daily Telegraph* coordinated a sale and distribution of flags for 'Empire and Victoria Days'; in 1914, large advertisements, bearing an image of the Union Flag - 'The Emblem of the Greatest Empire the World has ever known' -

⁵⁷ Maurice French, 'One People, One Destiny', pp.236-248.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.246.

⁵⁹ Firth and Hearn, pp. 17-38.

⁶⁰ *The Daily Mirror*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *Daily Mail* and *The Observer*. The editor of the *Observer*, J.L. Garvin, clearly had a personal affiliation with the day as each year he dated his personal diary 'Empire Day' rather than May 24 see Alfred M. Gollin, *The Observer and J. L. Garvin, 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 100 and 188.

⁶¹ *The Times* published a substantial Empire Day supplement every year from 1909 to 1927 (excepting three years during the First World War).

⁶² J. I. Cooper, *Montreal: A Brief History* (Montreal, 1969), p.118-119.

commanded that 'You Should Get One of These . . . unfurl it to the gaze, let it float to the breeze . . . whether – it be from your house top, boat or yacht.'⁶³ In common with other colonial newspapers, the *Telegraph* habitually published hyperbolic accounts of Empire Day gatherings, allocating disproportionate column space (frequently on the front-pages) to the various celebrations no matter how mundane or modest.⁶⁴

Advertisers, too, evidently believed that Empire Day had achieved an affiliation that went far beyond the schools' celebrations and some strove to attract the consuming public through the use of the imperial trope. Many full and double page advertisements featured in the Empire Day editions of newspapers. In 1909, the newly opened Selfridges in London placed a newspaper advertisement that is typical of the tone found in many of the others.

This is Empire Day and we have the honour of placing this business side by side with the thousands of other older Business Houses and the millions of the lieges who today will salute the FLAG that guards this nation. On the incontestable grounds of Duty, Right and Privilege we must associate our House and our staff (1,500 strong and Britons nearly all) in celebrating the day set apart to do special honour to the flag.⁶⁵

In Canada, as early as 1902, some traders began to refer to the public holiday as 'Empire Day' rather than 'Victoria Day' in their newspaper advertisements⁶⁶ and one department store in Montreal, Scroggies, presciently declared an 'Empire Week' as a means of cashing in on popular enthusiasm toward Empire Day:

⁶³ 'Telegraph's Flags are Going Fast' in *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 21 May 1914, p. 4. and 25 May 1914, p.7.

⁶⁴ See, for example, 'Empire Day in Girls High School. Interesting Exercises Carried out this Morning' in *ibid.*, 23 May 1912, p.1.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 24 May 1909, p.26.

⁶⁶ For example see *The Montreal Daily Star*, 21 May 1902, p.9. For an example of Australian traders also keen to fly the imperial flag, see the photograph of an elaborate Empire Day Window display in the *Adelaide Chronicle* 29 May 1909, p.34.

Scroggies 'Empire Week'

From the ends of the earth to the ends of the earth extends the empire on which the sun never sets - the British Empire - whose strength and unity all classes will celebrate on Empire Day. Scroggies 'Empire Week' is a tribute to patriotism and sentiment. A part of that universal celebration of achievement is the greatest sale we have ever had. Come and hear Scroggies Empire Choir tomorrow at 10, 2.30 and 4pm. Remember this sale closes Friday night and to give our employees an opportunity of more thoroughly enjoying Empire Day this store will close from Friday until Monday at 1 '0 clock.⁶⁷

The confidence that commercial advertisers had in Empire Day was a good demonstration of how it had caught the public mood and this popular enthusiasm was demonstrated in various other ways. In 1906, Meath's suggestion that public buildings should be decorated with the Union Jack on Empire Day⁶⁸ was taken up with gusto and the day 'was celebrated in many towns and villages throughout the country by the ringing of bells, the flying of flags and the singing of patriotic songs'.⁶⁹ In Britain, as Empire Day celebrations outside of the schools gathered momentum, public interest was stimulated though varied events such as patriotic concerts, military parades, special church services and public lectures.⁷⁰ When May 24 fell on a Saturday or Sunday, celebrations in the British schools took place on the previous Friday, but the extensive public festivities extended over the weekend.⁷¹ Birmingham's effusive Empire Day celebration of 1907 took place in the evening in order to attract large

⁶⁷ *Montreal Daily Star*, 21 May 1913, p.13. This trader's exploitation of imperialist sympathies foreshadowed a movement in Great Britain between 1926 and 1933. The Empire Marketing Board promoted 'a huge number of Empire Shopping Weeks' during these years. See John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), p.207.

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 24 May 1906, p.12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1906, p.11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1907, p.9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1908, p.11.

adult contingent that would otherwise have been working⁷² and, in 1908, a special festival was held at the Crystal Palace in London and two special concerts filled the Albert Hall.⁷³ In Manchester, the celebrations were organised jointly by a friendly society and a military veterans association,⁷⁴ whilst in Bolton a parade and gala day took place - most of the participants were adult members of diverse organisations that included various friendly societies, delegates from Bolton Co-operative Society and a contingent from the Conservative Workingmen's Association. The parade attracted great public interest and 'thousands of people lined the principal streets of the town and crowded the spacious recreation ground'.⁷⁵

The participation by members of the Co-operative movement in a public celebration of imperialism is not an isolated case. In 1913, the Millom Co-operative Society went as far as contributing two decorated floats to the local Empire Day Carnival, a level of involvement that demonstrates how Empire Day rituals were able to permeate working class culture in the local context.⁷⁶ Millom was a town founded on iron ore mining and steel making. In 1909, its first Empire Day celebration, a lively carnival procession, attracted spectators who lined the main streets in crowds up to three persons deep. The event was organised by the Millom Tradesmen's Association, a distinctly middle class group, yet the grand procession 'included all sorts and conditions' and was reportedly 'one of the very best ever seen' in the town.⁷⁷ A thirty-page souvenir booklet of the 'great day in the history of Millom'

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 23 May 1908, p.11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 23 May 1908, p.11.

⁷⁵ *The Bolton Evening News*, 25 May 1908 p.2 and *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1908, p.9.

⁷⁶ *The Millom Gazette* 30 May 1913, p.1. Imperial sentiment within the Co-operative Movement has been explored by Peter Gurney in *Co-operative culture and the politics of consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester, 1996), pp.105-10.

⁷⁷ *The Millom News*, 29 May 1909, p.7.

substantiates, through photographic evidence, the popularity of the event.⁷⁸ Such was the public interest, that in 1912 the local railway company decided to run cheap trains to Millom for the occasion, a concession 'of which the inhabitants of the surrounding districts did not fail to take full advantage'.⁷⁹ In 1913, a local newspaper declared that 'a public celebration of Empire Day is now the rule and not the exception as far as Millom is concerned.'⁸⁰

A similar sense of civic pride can be detected in other accounts of Empire Day in England. In 1907, a correspondent to the *Northern Daily Mail* welcomed the growing recognition of the day in the new borough of West Hartlepool, but expressed concern that neighbouring Hartlepool was some years ahead in their organisation and public response to the day.⁸¹ The swelling Empire Day movement in Hartlepool had been accelerated by the formation of a local branch of the National Service League, which vigorously promoted Empire Day in the community and persuaded the local education authority to fly the national flag at all schools in the area (the League even provided a flagstaff and flag for each school).⁸² The zeal of the National Service League was to be expected, but as Andrew Thompson has noted, there were a variety of other diverse public bodies that endorsed and supported Empire Day, including the Salvation Army, the Women's Institute and the established church.⁸³

The sense of self-importance that a successful Empire Day event could endow on a town or district, combined with the promotional activities of national organisations, were factors that undoubtedly hastened the spread of the festival in

⁷⁸ 'Souvenir of the Millom Empire Day Carnival' (supplement to the *Millom Gazette*, 28 May 1909), *passim*.

⁷⁹ *The Millom Gazette*, 31 May 1912, p.8.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 May 1913, p.1.

⁸¹ *Northern Daily Mail*, 24 May 1907, p.2. Andrew Thompson has also signalled the importance of civic pride in this respect, Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (Harlow, 2005), p.120.

⁸² *Northern Daily Mail*, 24 May 1907, p.4.

⁸³ Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?* p.118 and *The Times*, 23 May 1908, p.11.

Britain. Within four years of Empire Day's inception, *The Times* suggested (with much credibility), that it was already 'an established festival' of national importance.⁸⁴ The large number of adult participants demonstrated a significant degree of public sympathy with Empire Day and its message of triumphant imperialism. Such were the numbers of people who wanted to be involved that major sports grounds were frequently used to accommodate the celebrants. Everton football club was the venue for Liverpool's celebration in 1909⁸⁵ and 20,000 people joined 4,000 children at an Empire Day celebration in Preston.⁸⁶ In Sheffield, the Bramhill Lane cricket ground was regularly utilised on Empire Day; in 1906 it was packed full for an Empire Day pageant whose participants alone numbered 10,000.⁸⁷ Newsreel archives and the many surviving photographic postcards produced to commemorate such events verify the newspaper reports of mass attendances.⁸⁸

Turning now to South Africa, a very different picture emerges. The progress of Empire Day as an occasion for adult celebrations varied significantly according to region. Obviously, the Afrikaner populations of the Orange Free State and Transvaal subjugated by the recent war were hardly likely to have particular affection for the British Empire and there exists only scant evidence of Afrikaner participation in the Cape and Natal. However, it is also the case that the British populations did not embrace the festival with anything approaching the widespread enthusiasm and accord that we see in Britain and the other white settler colonies. In Transvaal, where white mine workers were predominantly British,⁸⁹ public Empire Day celebrations

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 24 May 1909, p.13.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 24 May 1909, p.12.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 25 May 1906, p.11

⁸⁸ For examples see collection of Pathe newsreels available to view at http://www.britishpathe.com/product_display.php?searchword=empire+day

⁸⁹ Krikler notes that the Afrikaner proportion of white mineworkers rose sharply between 1900 and 1914, but they were still outnumbered by at least 3 to 1. Jeremy Krikler, *White Rising: The 1922 Insurrection and Racial Killing in South Africa* (Manchester, 2005), pp.26-27.

did not emerge until 1909 and even then, the miners, whose 'allegiances [were] far from set by ethnicity'⁹⁰ were not inclined to become involved.

In Natal and the Cape, Empire Day was preceded in 1902 by the establishment of 'Victoria Day' as a permanent public holiday. This was regarded as an opportunity for leisure, sports and entertainment and was not recognised generally as an occasion for patriotic hubris.⁹¹ However, in common with the other white Colonies, women's imperialist organisations enacted a homogeneous ritualised commemoration of the Queen on Victoria Day.⁹² In South Africa, The Guild of Loyal Women was at the forefront of these commemorations, which proved crucial in the transmutation of Empire Day from schools to the public milieu. In the colonial context generally, the revered memory of Victoria became a central element of the Empire Day repertoire. Brian Graham has signalled the importance of the 'monumental iconography' of Queen Victoria's statue, a public memorial that became ubiquitous throughout the British world, which reinforced the supposed 'bond of identity of a family of nations . . . through the metaphor of mother and growing children'.⁹³ Through Victoria, the empire was reified through a figurative representation that embodied maternal qualities - femininity, passivity and selflessness, which helped to diffuse and embed an interpretation of imperial relations that drew on the mythical past and were the antithesis of the celebrated characteristics of the empire builders so often evoked in Empire Day speeches.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.246.

⁹¹ Even in parliament, whose members disobeyed their own statutory direction on the Day, by remaining in session, it was recognised that it was most likely that people would pay their respects to the late Queen by such patriotic gestures as 'visiting the racecourse at Kenilworth'. *Cape Times*, 24 May 1905, p.8.

⁹² The ceremony incorporated many of the mourning customs of the Victorian English bourgeoisie including floral tributes, the preservation a memorial likeness of the deceased and a psychological idealization of their memory. See Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 284-299.

⁹³ G. J. Ashworth, Brian Graham, J. E. Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy* (London, 2000), p. 193.

In the case of South Africa, in the aftermath of a bitter war, the commemoration of the late Queen was less contentious than standard Empire Day celebrations, which often emphasized British military prowess and the glory of conquest. Hence, the development of Empire Day in South Africa was often enmeshed with the Victoria Day 'traditions', which frequently eclipsed Empire Day in its embryonic form. As late as 1914 (and beyond), in Cape Town, the Victoria League continued to perform their memorial service to Queen Victoria and avoided making an explicit Empire Day connection. A speaker at their commemoration in 1914, Mr. Justice Searle, noted that in South Africa, Victoria was appreciated by 'English, Dutch, black and white'. Nevertheless, the tact and diplomacy of the 'Victoria Day' commemoration was by this time offset by the activity of Empire Day enthusiasts in Cape Town who had organised a 'great patriotic concert', which was markedly less cautious about the expression of triumphant imperialist rhetoric.⁹⁴

In 1902, the *Cape Times* had asserted that few dates were as 'memorable and familiar throughout the British Empire' as Victoria Day and predicted that it would be long commemorated.⁹⁵ The following year it noted the strong connection between the memorial rituals of the Guild of Loyal Women and the idea of Empire Day in Canada.⁹⁶ Subsequently, *The Cape Times* became a strident champion of Empire Day and tended to place an Empire Day connotation on virtually any public event that took place on May 24.

A large attendance of both adults and children in Cape Town at the Empire Day celebrations in 1905 gave a new tenor to the ceremony, as did other innovations that were pioneered in that year including the draping of the Victoria statue with the

⁹⁴ *Cape Times*, 26 May 1914, p.8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1902, p.6.

⁹⁶ See reports of Victoria Day and Empire Day in *ibid.*, 26 May 1902, p.5. The women themselves did nothing to promote this association; they simply announced that their wreath would be placed under the statue of Queen Victoria 'as a token of love and allegiance in honour of Victoria Day'.

Union Jack and the national flags of Scotland and Ireland and the singing of the National Anthem prior to the usual wreath placing ritual.⁹⁷ In South Africa generally, Victoria Day ceremonies became intertwined with the Empire Day repertoire and although the term 'Victoria Day' survived in some communities, it became virtually indistinguishable from Empire Day.

Despite the growing public awareness of Empire Day in South Africa, and the enthusiasm evident in 1905, in Cape Town, participation in the ceremonies tended to be relatively small. In 1906, *The Cape Times* accused the citizens of Cape Town of having a mistaken lack of appreciation regarding the value of a communal observance of the day and called for a 'more forceful patriotic spirit' to be introduced:

The present manner of holding Empire Day as a mere holiday, sans ceremony, and sans respect hardly fulfils the ideas underlying the institution. The children and especially the children should be reminded of what they celebrate, no less a thing than a union of free nations, forming together the greatest of world states and holding one to the other through common ideas of peace and liberty.⁹⁸

The Cape Times suggested that the public should inspire the children by demonstrating their patriotism in processions and military parades because 'the public display of patriotism at its best . . . has been considered by the wisest of nations as something not much less sacred than religion and as much to be commended as filial duty'.⁹⁹

In Natal, ever the most British of the colonies in South Africa, the imperialist press also strove to promote the festival. From 1908, the *Natal Witness* published special Empire Day editions in advance of the celebration and *The Natal Mercury*

⁹⁷ Ibid., 25 May 1905, p.5.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 25 May 1906, p.4.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

established an Empire Day scholarship to promote an 'imperial national celebration'.¹⁰⁰ But, the *Natal Witness* believed the solemn funereal rituals organised by the Loyal Women's Guild (occasionally supported by other imperialist organisations)¹⁰¹ were too sombre and discreet for the occasion. It advocated and endeavoured to promote a great patriotic demonstration that would allow people to celebrate in the 'heartiest fashion'.¹⁰² Thanks to the advocacy of the *Witness*, Empire Day celebrations in Pietermaritzburg became larger and more effusive, both in terms of spectacle and the level of public participation.¹⁰³ In 1908, a massive trade carnival and fancy dress procession took place in the afternoon followed by an evening torchlight parade to the showground where three separate bands entertained the crowds.¹⁰⁴ The *Natal Mercury* congratulated the *Natal Witness* on its success in advancing Empire Day in Pietermaritzburg and noted the rising importance of the occasion in general:

Empire Day as each year comes around is more and more fittingly celebrated throughout British territory all the world over, and the colonies seem to be vying with the motherland in marking the date as a sort of imperial saints day in the annals of history.¹⁰⁵

Elsewhere in South Africa, Meath's preferred format was not always duplicated faithfully and a diverse set of Empire Day 'traditions' was developed. At Port Elizabeth and East London, the main activity of the day was mass tree planting

¹⁰⁰ *Natal Witness*, 24 May 1905, p.5.

¹⁰¹ In Port Elizabeth, The Cadet Corps of the local high school introduced a martial ingredient to the occasion when they fired a *feu-de-joie* before leading the singing of the National Anthem. In Pietermaritzburg female members of the League of Empire accompanied the Guild of Loyal Women. *Ibid.*, 25 May 1905, p.5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24 May 1905, p.5.

¹⁰³ See the report of the 1906 celebrations in *Cape Times*, 24 May 1906, p.6

¹⁰⁴ *Natal Witness*, 25 May 1908, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Excerpt from an editorial in the *Natal Mercury* reproduced in *ibid.*, 27 May 1908, p.5.

by children,¹⁰⁶ although these horticultural jamborees were always accompanied by a small patriotic ceremony and the delivery of a magniloquent address by a local dignitary; invariably the League of Empire and Loyal Women's Guild maintained a conspicuous presence.¹⁰⁷ Other varied events included picnic parties, some of which drew attendances of 500 people or more¹⁰⁸ and an Empire Day ascent up Table Mountain regularly completed by groups of ramblers in the Cape Peninsula.¹⁰⁹ A Caledonian Society sports meeting in Johannesburg became closely associated with Empire Day, as did a well-established annual Eisteddfod that incorporated an increasing number of patriotic recitations.¹¹⁰ The integration of an imperial theme into what were previously insular celebrations of Scots' athletic prowess and the Welsh language demonstrates how, in the imperial context, Englishness did not delimit 'Britishness'; other ethnicities emanating from the British Isles could 'be perceived as embodying and representing imperial power'.¹¹¹

Unsurprisingly, Empire Day's development within the former Boer republics was slower than in Natal and the Cape. Before 1909, sports and recreations were popular, but the political meaning of Empire Day was weakly underlined, if at all. It was not until 1909 that a celebration surfaced in Johannesburg (other than the raising of the Union Flag on principal buildings). However, the organisers clearly intended to

¹⁰⁶ This appears to be an idea imported from the U.S. via Australia. Lily Robin traces the history of Arbor Day in Australia, which avoided the ambiguities of Empire Day and Australia Day in Libby Robin, 'Nationalising Nature: Wattle Day in Australia' in *Journal of Australian Studies* March 2002, p.14.

¹⁰⁷ For examples see *Natal Witness* 25 May 1905, p.5., *The Cape Times* 25 May 1906 p.5 and 25 May 1909, p.7.

¹⁰⁸ For example the Pietermaritzburg 'monster picnics', *Natal Witness*, 24 May 1905, p.5 and *The Cape Times*, 24 May 1906, p.6

¹⁰⁹ *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1907, p.7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1906, p.5.

¹¹¹ Aled Jones and Bill Jones, 'The Welsh World and the British Empire, c. 1851-1939: An Exploration' in Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London, 2003), p.66. See also John Lambert 's references to Scottish identity in South Africa in John Lambert, 'South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The evolution of an identity in the 1910s and 1920s' in *South African Historical Journal* 43 (Nov. 2000), p.206-207. For an examination of Scotland's imperial partnership see R. J. Finlay, *The Rise and Fall of Popular Imperialism in Scotland, 1850-1950* in *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1997, 113, 1, pp. 13-21.

introduce the festival to a wide audience. Thousands of schoolchildren (and accompanying adults) were marshalled in a procession that terminated in a central city location that was brightly decorated with flags and bunting. A programme of dance, recitation and song was performed and speeches were delivered by important military and public figures including Lord Methuen. Many other prominent civic leaders were in conspicuous attendance.¹¹² The *Rand Daily Mail* claimed that the 'first celebration of Empire Day in the Transvaal' would 'be long remembered in Johannesburg' ¹¹³

In Bloemfontein, on the other hand, there was a complete lack of revelry associated with Empire Day. The press noted the absence of official celebrations, (even in the garrison) and remarked upon the lack of animation usually associated with public holidays:

The feature of the holiday was the absence of rowdiness or drunkenness in the streets, all sections of the citizens passing the holiday away in rational and healthy relaxation from the turmoil of business . . . [there were] no arrests of the usual holiday character.¹¹⁴

Bloemfontein was to remain largely immune from Empire Day celebrations that were other than 'rational and healthy' until after Union in 1910. Nevertheless in 1909, The Bloemfontein *Friend* acknowledged that Empire Day had been incorporated, in one form or another, into the civic calendar in a good number of the towns and cities and that overall in South Africa 'a uniform plan [had] been followed in organising the celebrations, with patriotic demonstrations by school children and meetings, receptions and banquets for the elders'.¹¹⁵ The *Cape Times* also remarked also upon the rise of the day generally,

¹¹² 'Empire Day', *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1909, p.6.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ *The Friend*, 25 May 1906, p.5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 25 May 1909, p.6.

[b]y an almost inevitable transition the day which marked the birth of the Great Queen, who is dead, has come to be celebrated as the national fête of the British Empire.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that overall the adoption of Empire Day by the adult community in South Africa was patchy and inconsistent. There were imperialist 'hotspots' such as in Natal where Empire Day attracted a following that was comparable to Great Britain. There were celebrations elsewhere that were distinctly adult orientated (such as in Cape Town), but these were more modest and sensitively pitched. In Transvaal celebrations relied mainly on the participation of school children and were all but ignored by the considerable pool of British citizens residing there. Without doubt, the proximity of the inauguration of the Empire Day festival to the recent war in South Africa precluded anything but a diffident reception and hesitant observation of the day.

Putting aside for a moment the variable response to Empire Day in South Africa, the analysis of the general development of Empire Day in Britain and the white settler colonies shows that in the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a vibrant imperialist movement that successfully marked out a distinct commemorative space that was afforded significant and enthusiastic social approval. The transition of what was originally intended as a children's festival into the wider adult community was aided in no small measure by the imperialist press, various imperialist organisations, (not least those that were controlled by women) and commercial advertisers. Empire Day advocates also capitalised on the popular iconography of Queen Victoria and found that imperial sentiment was not demarcated along class lines. The reticence of central government to bestow official sanction

¹¹⁶ *Cape Times*, 24 May 1909, p.6.

upon Empire Day did not inhibit parochial public bodies from supporting the occasion and invoking civic pride as a motivation to produce a worthy public spectacle.

Ongoing adult participation in Empire Day celebrations allows us an insight into responses to imperial ideology that represents a far more consistent index of public sentiment than unique occurrences of widespread and popular imperialist exultation, such as witnessed following the relief of Mafeking. The patchy response to Empire Day in South Africa furnishes us with information about the limitations of the celebration; in the wider context too Empire Day functions as a useful barometer of sentiment and delineates some of the nooks and crannies of Empire where ethnic and class barriers were less permeable to imperialist ideology.

Women and Empire Day

Any scholar who has attended closely to the history of Empire Day will be struck by the prominent role played in it by women, a feature that requires exploration. Perhaps this was not surprising given the connection between Empire day and Victoria Day which, after all, had drawn its inspiration from an ideal of benevolent matriarchy wherein the imperial relationship was personified through the iconic figure of the late queen. This theme of empowered femininity was furthered by the prominence of women's organisations in the commemoration of Victoria Day, which prefigured their crucial role in its transmutation into Empire Day and its successful incorporation into the public consciousness. The prominent role that women played in the organisation and propagation of Empire Day was not only evident in South Africa; as will become clear later women's groups provided an important conduit across continents that assisted in the simultaneous development of the festival.

The original conception of Empire Day as a schoolchildren's festival encouraged female participation as chaperones, as teachers¹¹⁷ and as helpers, but women's involvement went far beyond these ancillary functions. The significant number of women's imperialist associations that sprang up at the end of the nineteenth century assumed a pioneering role in the instigation, management and maintenance of Empire Day in the various regions of the empire.¹¹⁸ The Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) in Canada,¹¹⁹ the Guild of the Queen's Garland (Australia)¹²⁰ and the Guild of Loyal Women¹²¹ (South Africa) were all closely associated with Empire Day as they purposefully segued the new imperialist rituals into the dedicatory ceremony they had established in commemoration of Queen Victoria. The IODE was determined to ensure that Canada remained within the British Empire and insisted upon the 'assimilation of all difference' in the fostering of a Canadian identity that was firmly pro-British.¹²² One of the primary objectives of the Guild of Loyal Women was the reconciliation of the former combatants of the South African War, yet their activities betrayed a distinctly Anglo-centric perspective, although they judiciously avoided the extreme jingoism of some other loyalists.¹²³

The profusion of women's imperial organisations at this time is partly explained by the dominance of men in existing colonial clubs and societies, which

¹¹⁷ In 1901, 75 percent of Canadian teachers were female. See Adele Perry, 'Women, Gender and Empire' in Buckner, pp.220-239.

¹¹⁸ Eliza Reidi has emphasised the impact of the South African War 'in giving rise to a network of women's organisations devoted to imperial propaganda and patriotic charity' in Eliza Reidi, 'Teaching Empire: British and Dominions Women Teachers in the South African War Concentration Camps' in *English Historical Review* Vol. CXX No. 489 (December 2005), p.1316.

¹¹⁹ For an account of the IODE in Manitoba see Shauna Wilton, 'Mothers of the Nation. Manitoba Women and Maternal Nationalism', Unpublished MA Thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1998, pp. 71-102.

¹²⁰ *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 28 May 1904, p.26.

¹²¹ For examples see, *Natal Witness*, 26 May 1902, p.5 and *The Cape Times*, 23 May 1903, p.7.

¹²² One of the ambitions of the IODE was to form an empire-wide federated organization, but the Victoria League, which also harboured such aspirations, blocked the development of the IODE outside of Canada. Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 3-4 & 16-18.

¹²³ Elizabeth van Heyningen and Pat Merrett, 'The Healing Touch'; The Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa 1900-1912' in *South African Historical Journal* 47 (Nov. 2003), p.40.

barred women from membership. The Royal Colonial Institute, for example, excluded women until 1909.¹²⁴ Angela Woollacott has considered the gendered dimension of middle class and elite colonial women's lives and the role of formal imperial organisations in reinforcing an 'ideology of separate spheres for respectable men and women'.¹²⁵ She argued that women, in the 'process of entrenching themselves in the political process and public life', formed separate organisations as part of an active resistance against patriarchal oppression.¹²⁶

It seems also that active female involvement in imperial societies promoted and sustained links between reform-minded women who inhabited separate continents and the formation of women's imperial societies served to 'extend their engagement with the public domain'.¹²⁷ Katie Pickles has revealed how female imperialist organisations successfully penetrated the 'masculine domain of politics, nation and empire',¹²⁸ and although some claimed to be avowedly non political they did provide women with a political voice whilst avoiding 'the odium . . . of being regarded as Women Politicians'.¹²⁹ Julia Bush has argued that 'the leading ladies of female imperialism sought to impose their gendered, class-bound values upon the national and imperial scene'.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Even then women were only allowed to be 'associate members' and were thereby excluded from most of the privileges and resources that male members enjoyed Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (New York, 2001), p.74.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.106.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.97. See also, Mary A. Procida, "'The Greater Part of My Life Has Been Spent in India": Autobiography and the Crisis of Empire in the Twentieth Century' in *Biography*, Volume: 25. Issue: 1, 2002, p.130.

¹²⁸ Pickles, p. 2. Other historians have remarked on the IODE's willingness 'to work within a masculinist and militaristic idiom' see Adele Perry, p.232.

¹²⁹ From an editorial in the *Cape Argus* (1900) quoted in van Heyningen and Merrett, p.28.

¹³⁰ Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, p. 13.

In Australia, where women were granted voting rights at the turn of the century¹³¹ (and where successive governments achieved power on the slimmest of majorities), politicians were attentive to the possible electoral consequences if they frustrated this imperialist lobby. This factor could well have influenced the decision of at least one Premier to support the adoption of Empire Day in Australia.¹³² Women of the Liberal Union (the forerunner to the Liberal Party) organised Adelaide's Empire Day demonstrations in 1911 and 1912. The Liberal Union had a commitment in their rules to the foundation of women-only branches and these women had a distinctly imperial outlook. In 1911, a speaker insisted that 'the tendency of politics in Australia was far too much to think of Australia only, they should realise they were part of a large Empire'.¹³³ In 1912, one of the leading women, Mrs E. Hawker, president of the Liberal Union, insisted that 'previous foes in the Transvaal' realised the benefits of being 'forced into the empire'.¹³⁴ Such an uncompromising attitude must have given politicians pause for thought when they considered that Empire Day addresses to schoolgirls frequently emphasized 'the power and influence' that voting rights gave women in Australia'.¹³⁵ In this context, Hawker's assertion that 'women were peculiarly and particularly interested in Empire Day' although they 'wanted the cooperation and help of the men'¹³⁶ might be interpreted as a veiled political threat.

Lisa Chilton contends that female imperialists demonstrated a tendency to construct an imperialism that was 'strikingly different from most other imperial discourses of their day, in that it aimed to re-create and empower British women in

¹³¹ In 1894, South Australian Women were granted the right to vote followed by Western Australia in 1899, NSW in 1902 and finally Victoria in 1908.

¹³² French, p.244.

¹³³ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 27 May 1911, p. 29 and 48.

¹³⁴ 'Women Loyalists. A Liberal Union Celebration', *The Adelaide Observer* 01 June 1912, p.50.

¹³⁵ Edwards, p.33.

¹³⁶ *The Adelaide Observer*, 01 June 1912, p.50.

the colonial context'.¹³⁷ There were undoubted links between imperialist women's organisations and the colonial suffragist movement,¹³⁸ yet despite the number of women's imperial associations brought into existence at this time, no specific agenda existed in 'regard to women's status or to the gendered apportionment of imperial power'. Instead these organisations brought women together through philanthropy, missionary work or through the sponsoring of emigration from the mother country.¹³⁹

Empire Day provided an ideal opportunity for women to act independently of men in their endeavours to advance the patriotic cause. Women took the lead in bringing Empire Day celebrations out of the confines of the schools and in this way they were able to behave as autonomous and assertive progenitors of empire whilst also being seen to conform to the expected and gendered maternal role. The annual rituals of Empire Day that were established in the white colonies emphasised women's 'natural' expertise as nurturers and educators, but also allowed them to exercise authority within civil society. So strong was the association of women with Empire Day during its inaugural period in South Africa that the *Cape Times* reported with a sense of revelation that the 1905 ceremony in Cape Town, which was supported by a 'large and representative gathering' of adults, included a large *male* contingent in the crowd.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Lisa Chilton 'A New Class of Women for the Colonies: *The Imperial Colonist* and the Construction of Empire' in Bridge and Fedorowich, pp.37-38.

¹³⁸ For Example see Deborah Gaitskell, 'The Imperial Tie: Obstacle or Asset for South Africa's Women Suffragists before 1930?' in *South African Historical Journal* 47 (Nov. 2003) p.1-23 p. 8.

¹³⁹ Woollacott, p.110.

¹⁴⁰ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1905, p.5. The close association of women with Empire Day was enduring, as Caroline Oliver observed. She spent time in East Africa after the Second World War and keenly remembered colonial women in Uganda taking responsibility for the organisation of Empire Day. Caroline Oliver, *Western Women in Colonial Africa* (Westport, 1982), p.190. Antoinette Burton has delineated the enmeshment of feminism with imperialism during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, but highlights a complaint of one feminist who believed that Empire Day was restrictive in that it 'only recognized the kinds of imperial service "which are done to the sound of a drum."' She also complained that girls had been deliberately excluded from the celebration in Hyde Park in 1914, signalling that male imperialists might have been endeavouring to stifle the feminist cause by staking their own claim upon Empire Day. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens Of History. British Feminists, Indian Women, And Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (University of North Carolina, 1994), p.iii.

Functions and Significance of Empire Day: Britain

In Britain, where Empire Day was undoubtedly a success, it is plausible to suggest that as an 'invented tradition' it realised (or at least came close to realising) its hegemonic potential in the metropole during this time. The popular adoption and development of the day during the Edwardian era saw it rise to become an expected, consistent and widely practiced social celebration. This is in many ways unsurprising. The commemoration incorporated cultural elements that tapped into and amplified the effervescent imperial nationalism that had popular appeal in the late nineteenth century.¹⁴¹

The success of Empire Day in Britain can be partially attributed to its strong appeal across class and party boundaries. This is supported by a number of working class autobiographies and middle class testimony that provides an insight into the reactions of children to Empire Day and the ways in which it contributed to the construction of imperial identities. The reception among the adult population is more difficult to determine, although the remarkable levels of adult attendance at the celebrations and the energy expended contributing to the event on the part of commercial interests and in family households (such as raising flags and bunting outside homes and businesses) certainly suggests that the adult population embraced the day.

However, Empire Day's appeal was by no means universal. Social commentators such as G. K. Chesterton thought 'the peculiarly un-English habit of flying a flag on Empire Day' was patriotism at its crudest;¹⁴² one of the rare opinions

¹⁴¹ For a discussion of imperial nationalism and public sentiment see Mackenzie, *Imperialism and Popular culture*, pp.1-7.

¹⁴² Gilbert K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (New York, 1910), p. 274.

that he shared with his friend and intellectual adversary George Bernard Shaw¹⁴³ Some Liberals and socialists expressed discomfort with the triumphalism and jingoistic aspects of the festival and recognised that the expansionist imperialist perspective of the Empire Day Movement was consistent with the policies of the Conservative Party, 'pre-eminently the party of the imperial idea'.¹⁴⁴ In 1909, when a Liberal government rejected a bill to make Empire Day a public holiday, an editorial in *The Times* surmised that Asquith's refusal to honour Empire Day was a consequence of his party being in 'fear [of] its influence'.¹⁴⁵ Without doubt, the government would have been aware of the propaganda value of the annual celebration to the Conservative Party; as Fforde observes, a multitude of imperial pressure groups were associated with the Tories and 'the Union Jack was as much a party symbol as a national symbol. It was constantly used in party propaganda and to adorn Tory platforms.'¹⁴⁶ The association of the Conservative Party and Empire Day prompted the move, in 1907, by Battersea Borough Council's socialist majority to ban the celebration in local schools, fearing its hidden function as a 'Tory vote catcher'.¹⁴⁷ In 1908, Keir Hardie noted the growing popularity of Empire Day and said that 'it might be necessary for socialists some day to take action to check this new and insidious' form of imperial sentimentality.¹⁴⁸ Conservatives frequently 'surrendered to the temptation to depict their political opponents as . . . unpatriotic [and] determined to

¹⁴³ The two men famously disagreed on most topics. Shaw's play *Geneva* features Begonia Brown, a 'bigoted, chauvinistic, war-minded, anti-intellectual' who, whilst at school, was frequently chosen to recite on Empire Day. see Louis Simon, *Shaw on Education* (New York, 1958), p. 197.

¹⁴⁴ As the party of imperialism, the Conservatives insisted that the Empire was fundamental to Britain's power and prosperity, Richard Shannon, *The Age of Salisbury 1881-1902* (London, 1996), p.480.

¹⁴⁵ *The Times*, 24 May 1909, p.13.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew Fforde, *Conservatism and collectivism 1886-1914* (Edinburgh, 1990), p.84.

¹⁴⁷ Springhall, 'Lord Meath, youth and empire', p.97.

¹⁴⁸ Passing reference made by Kier Hardie during a public meeting in Bristol, reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1908, p.10.

break up the empire'.¹⁴⁹ The Liberals' refusal to grant Empire Day official recognition was presented by their political enemies as an antipathy to empire that could undermine the power and prosperity that it brought to the metropole.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in Britain opposition to Empire Day was rare before the 1920s¹⁵¹ and on the whole it was marginal and inchoate, partly because the festival had been so easily absorbed into the social order.¹⁵²

In rural areas Empire Day celebrations were also utilised as an attempt to revive paternalistic cultures of hierarchy and deference. The role that Empire Day played in underpinning social relations was particularly important in smaller towns and villages, where the population embraced the new festival of empire with enthusiasm and local wealthy landowners and aristocrats used it to further assert their position in what they perceived as the natural social order. Howkins has described the attempt in the late nineteenth century to revive a paternalistic culture of 'ranks and obligation' in the countryside, previously destroyed and replaced with the new order of the market.¹⁵³ Empire Day in some rural districts closely imitated the harvest festival celebrations that had been a feature of rural life since the 1850s, when revived (or invented) by local clergy wanting to suppress rowdy and drunken secular folk festivals.¹⁵⁴ In addition, Empire Day festivities were frequently organised and financed by members of the local social elite and this phenomenon of local wealthy landowners or those of the 'lieutenant classes' providing funds can be compared to

¹⁴⁹ Martin Pugh, 'Chapter 5 – 1886-1905' in Anthony Seldon (ed.), *How Tory governments fall: The Tory party in power since 1783* (London, 1996), p.208.

¹⁵⁰ John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics 1900-1996* (Basingstoke, 1996), p.25.

¹⁵¹ As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, voluble and sustained opposition to Empire Day in Britain was a feature of the inter-war years and was most intense in the period 1926-1934.

¹⁵² Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country and race. Constructing gender class, and Englishness in the elementary school, 1880-1914*, (Toronto, 2000), p.186.

¹⁵³ Alun Howkins, *Reshaping rural England: A social history 1850-1925* (London, 1992), p.71-4.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

the old paternalistic ritual of gift giving.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, there are some examples of Empire Day participants being bestowed with silver coins by local wealthy benefactors.¹⁵⁶ Some took their responsibilities in this respect seriously enough to arrange for the continuance of their benevolence beyond the grave, as demonstrated through the bequest in a will of £100 'to spend the income therefrom annually on Empire Day refreshments for the children of the National and Parochial school'.¹⁵⁷ Thus, on Empire Day, the local elites were given a chance to patronize the community through a demonstration of their economic power, which presumably, *inter alia*, reinforced the sense of social power they possessed. Newby points out that rural philanthropy, although a 'patchy affair', was a form of charity that complemented a 'recognisably functioning' deferential rural society right up until the First World War.¹⁵⁸ The practice of gift giving on Empire Day was far less prevalent after the war, although it did not disappear altogether. In 1922, at Chappel in Essex, a local woman used the occasion of Empire Day to provide a tea for fifty children 'and a meat tea for all the old people of the parish'.¹⁵⁹

Once established, the Empire Day festival survived in the schools of Britain for over fifty years, although after the Second World War the carnival spirit had been drained from the occasion and its presence on the school curriculum was conspicuously anachronistic.¹⁶⁰ Throughout the Edwardian era however, it was celebrated with spirit and enthusiasm in many schools and Empire Day retained its vibrancy for much of the interwar period. In this section, evidence from the interwar

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.76. For examples see *The Times*, 24 May 1905, p.8 and *Essex County Standard*, 30 May 1905, p.5

¹⁵⁶ *Essex County Standard*, 29 May 1909, p.2 and 28 May 1910, p.5.

¹⁵⁷ *The Times*, 2 May 1910, p.13.

¹⁵⁸ Howard Newby, *Country Life* (London, 1987), p.87.

¹⁵⁹ *Essex County Standard*, 27 May 1922, p.5.

¹⁶⁰ National Portrait Gallery catalogue to accompany the exhibition *We are the people: Postcards from the collection of Tom Phillips* 2 Mar. - 20 Jun. 2004 (London, 2004), pp.117-24.

years is deployed alongside pre-1914 sources to illustrate the enduring appeal of the festival. In 1908, 1,036 schools in London alone conducted some sort of ceremony to mark the 'great patriotic day'.¹⁶¹ It is misleading to assume that the children ushered into the playgrounds for the celebrations were passive stooges forced to enact rituals that had little meaning for them. Many children looked forward to Empire Day and appeared at school suitably attired in colourful ribbons and patriotic finery, no doubt assisted in their preparations by their parents.¹⁶² For many children, Empire Day was an exciting and stirring occasion and, most importantly, the patriotic sentiment of the festival was appealing to children from differing class backgrounds.

Louis Heren, who grew up between the wars in a working class neighbourhood in London, was immersed in socialist politics from a young age and found it 'almost unbelievable' when the general election returns demonstrated that 'some Tories lived in the neighbourhood',¹⁶³ nevertheless, he saw no contradiction between the socialist politics that united the diverse communities in Shadwell and the imperial patriotism of Empire Day celebrations at school. As a child, Heren knew by heart the words of the *Red Flag* and the *Internationale*, yet he admitted that every year he 'rather enjoyed' Empire Day at school and long remembered the ideological content of the lessons that accompanied it. Although in retrospect Heren claimed that Empire Day made little impression on him, he conceded (accepting that this was 'a very large qualification') that it contributed in great part to the development of 'an expansive and proprietary view of the world which has never quite left me . . . in a way it amounted to an awful arrogance'.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ *The Times*, 23 May 1908, p. 11. Porter warns that such estimates of participation put out by the Empire Day Movement might be exaggerated. Bernard Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists*, p. 187.

¹⁶² See autobiographies of Dora Bargate, untitled typescript, Brunel University Library (BUL), p. 1 and Molly Keen, 'Childhood memories 1903-1921', unpublished manuscript, BUL, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Louis Heren, *Growing up poor in London* (London, 1973), p. 11.

¹⁶⁴ Heren, pp. 35-6 and pp. 58-9.

Heren's keen memory of Empire Day and his enthusiastic response to the celebrations are repeated in a number of working class autobiographies. Dora Bargate, also from the East End of London, retained clear memories of Empire Day pageantry and recalled that 'the whole school would sing at the tops of their voices *Rule Britannia* and all the other patriotic songs'.¹⁶⁵ Molly Keen recorded that Empire Day in Hounslow was 'a red letter day for us' and as a result of the rituals, heartily-sung songs and colourful symbolism 'we all felt proud of being British and thought that England was the best country in the world'.¹⁶⁶ Rose Gamble recorded vivid and detailed memories of Empire Day, but points out that some children might have processed the propaganda of the day in a reductive fashion: 'we sauntered home in the sunshine that always blessed Empire Day, with no understanding of anything we had done, but aware that we were exceptional because we were English'.¹⁶⁷ Elsie Goodhead's reminiscences tell a similar story:

We were constantly reminded by our teachers that May 24th was Empire Day when they tried to instil into us a sense of national pride. The red parts of the globe were proudly pointed out to us and we were told what an important day it was. It was made a holiday and in the afternoon a concert was put on by the children dressed in national costume to which the parents were invited and where tea was provided . . . I remember how proud we children were to be British.¹⁶⁸

Goodhead, who was brought up in the 'squalor and poverty' of the Derby slums, remembered Empire Day as 'one of the rare childhood treats' that she experienced,

¹⁶⁵ Dora Bargate, untitled typescript, Brunel University Library (BUL), p.1.

¹⁶⁶ Molly Keen, 'Childhood memories 1903-1921', unpublished manuscript, BUL

¹⁶⁷ Rose Gamble, *Chelsea child* (London, 1979), pp.60-1.

¹⁶⁸ Elsie Elizabeth Goodhead, *The West End story* (Matlock, 1983), p.48.

ranking it in importance alongside Christmas, Whitsuntide, The Derby Fair, May Day and Guy Fawkes night.¹⁶⁹

Nancy Day's autobiography shows how some working class parents could be unsettled by ideas that questioned the perpetuation of Britain's imperial status. She recalled Empire Day in Cirencester, when a teacher at her school told the children about the empires of history that had come and gone and had suggested that even the British empire wouldn't last for ever: 'Some parents were quite shocked when his remarks were repeated to them.'¹⁷⁰ Henrietta Burkin, who described herself as one of the 'poor cockney children' in her school, reminisced about being brought up to be 'very patriotic' and clearly recollected marching round the school playground on Empire Day and saluting a large Union Jack. She described an uncle whose house had a very tiny garden, but within it stood a large flagpole on which he would run up the Union Jack on Empire Day and other suitable patriotic occasions.¹⁷¹ Lottie Barker from Nottingham remembered that during the years before the First World War 'there was a great patriotic feeling sweeping the country. We children were taught songs of greatness in both military as well as naval power and our love of country was second to none',¹⁷² a sentiment reinforced by Bill Woods, a Bristol labourer:

They used to encourage us to be proud of the flag, salute the flag when we was at school. Yes, I was proud of being British. We was always taught to be proud of the Queen and King. We was the people of the world wasn't us?¹⁷³

Heren noted the importance of song in regard to sentiment,¹⁷⁴ a point that scholarship has proved abundantly.¹⁷⁵ It follows that the rousing patriotic songs,

¹⁶⁹ Goodhead, pp.46-8.

¹⁷⁰ Nancy Day, untitled manuscript, BUL, pp.44-5.

¹⁷¹ Henrietta Burkin, 'Memoirs of Henrietta Burkin', unpublished manuscript BUL, p.20.

¹⁷² Lottie Barker, 'My life as I remember it, 1889-1920', unpublished manuscript BUL, p.15.

¹⁷³ Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London, 1992) p.181-2, see also the recollections of Robert Roberts in Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London, 2004) p. 14.

which featured in all Empire Day celebrations, would have often induced a strong emotive response. Indeed, Heren found it difficult to recall the patriotic speeches given in the playground, but could remember with great clarity the emotional experience of singing *Land of Hope and Glory*. Similarly, James Ward's lucid memories of Empire Day include the disclosure that he was reduced to tears when singing the *Oath of Allegiance* whilst watching the Union Jack unfurled at his school in Northshields:

It was the last verse that appealed to me "Lord of our Birth, our faith, our pride, For who's dear sake our fathers died, Oh Motherland we pledge to thee, Head, Heart and Hand in the years to be". We did just that.¹⁷⁶

Some youngsters, however, found they were immune to such sentimental propaganda. Joe Loftus, who lived in Lancashire, remembers singing patriotic songs and hooraying in the playground, but unlike James Ward, the experience induced no emotional reaction in him. He and his mates made up their own words 'so that Rule Britannia came out Ruby-tanya, two tanners make a bob, four half crowns make ten bob.'¹⁷⁷ This sort of response is consistent with accounts of school life during this period collected by Stephen Humphries, who has noted how some working class children received the message of Empire Day in a sceptical or indifferent way.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Jonathan Rose has used working class memoirs to argue that on the whole, working class children were unaffected by the propaganda of Empire Day and that they failed

¹⁷⁴ Heren, p.26.

¹⁷⁵ For examples see Christopher Norris (ed.), *Music and the politics of culture* (London, 1989), Martin Stokes ed., *Ethnicity, identity and music* (Oxford, 1997), Tia DeNora, *Music in everyday life* (Cambridge, 2000), Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester, 2001), especially the section on Empire Day, pp. 164-176.

¹⁷⁶ James Robert Ward, 'Low Street Boy', unpublished typescript, BUL, p.6.

¹⁷⁷ Joe Loftus 'Leaside', unpublished typescript, BUL, p.88.

¹⁷⁸ Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or rebels? An oral history of working class children and youth* (Oxford, 1981), pp.38-42.

to absorb any enduring knowledge of the Empire.¹⁷⁹ It might be true that 'forty years of Empire Day propaganda' failed to inculcate a cohesive and ardent imperialist spirit amongst all or even most working class children, but this does not necessarily indicate that the empire had no meaning or attraction for them. Humphries acknowledges that despite the ability of some perspicacious individuals to identify the hypocrisy and inconsistencies that were evident in the rhetoric of Empire Day, 'working class children were generally much more responsive to lessons and activities that were inspired by imperialism'. He shows how many children welcomed imperial celebrations as a change from the monotony of the school regime and that 'Imperialist elements in the school curriculum, when combined with the jingoistic juvenile literature of the period, did exercise an important influence in guiding the thoughts and feelings of some working class youths into conformist channels.'¹⁸⁰

Jonathan Rose has argued that a general ignorance regarding imperial possessions powerfully attests to a supposed failure of Empire Day. His observations regarding unfamiliarity with the empire amongst working class youth are supported by the comments of an intelligence officer assigned to give lectures on current affairs to army recruits during the Second World War; he complained about the 'neglect of Empire teaching in the schools' and the 'ignorance of most soldiers on elementary points'.¹⁸¹ However, it is evident in other memoirs quoted by Rose,¹⁸² that ignorance regarding the empire can be seen as a corollary of ignorance of current affairs in general. Hence, lack of knowledge of imperial matters does not necessarily equate with a rejection of the imperial state per se. Four decades of imperial propaganda might not have transformed the working class into fervent imperialists, but it certainly

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Rose, *The intellectual life of the British working classes* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 338-41.

¹⁸⁰ Humphries, pp. 38-42.

¹⁸¹ National Archives Britain (NA): DO 35/1191.

¹⁸² For examples see reminiscences of Guy Aldred and Vernon Scannell in Rose, pp.343 and p.362.

helped to instil within many minds the idea of unquestioned British superiority in the world and of the empire as an accepted social fact. Don McCullin, who grew up in Finsbury in the 1930s, was assigned to Kenya during his national service in 1951 and disclosed how:

... to us the Mau Mau were monster baddie Indians ... As to Great Britain's right to throw its weight around on another continent, that went without question. We were all Labour of course in Finsbury Park, but when it came to anything foreign, I was a super patriot ... My country could do no wrong.'¹⁸³

Likewise, Louis Heren's childhood experiences led him to believe that 'we the British were superior people. Not only did we rule hundreds of millions of Indians, Africans, Malays and so on, but we had beaten the Germans – almost in spite of the French.' He described how this worldview was promoted on Empire Day, but also had a lot to do with the influence of his mother, the BBC, the public library and other aspects of his education at school.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Charles Sanderson from Sutton in Ashfield remembered being 'primed and indoctrinated with King, Country and Empire ... from our very first day at school' and noted the impression made by military parades (a regular feature of the Empire Day repertoire), in working class districts: 'In areas like ours, the appearance of a body of marching soldiers preceded by a military band, and sometimes in dress uniform, was the cause of great excitement and admiration.'¹⁸⁵ Middle class children too were enthused by such displays. In 1935, Vera Brittain despaired of the effect on her children of a grand imperial procession on Silver Jubilee Day in London; '[my] children played all afternoon at soldiers and Kings and Queens; demanded war stories and wanted to see my war

¹⁸³ Don McCullin, *Unreasonable behaviour* (Cambridge, 1992), p.35.

¹⁸⁴ Heren, p.59.

¹⁸⁵ Charles Whiten Sanderson, 'Half a lifetime in the twentieth century, a book of memoirs', unpublished typescript, BUL, pp. 46-7.

medals. I'm afraid these official ceremonies with all their troops don't exactly help to educate the youngest generation the way of peace!' ¹⁸⁶

The celebration of Empire Day then, involved militaristic and patriotic cultural idioms that successfully tapped into society's generalised acceptance of Britain's imperial role. At the very least, the celebrations fostered a sense of racial superiority and pride among many within its constituency of schoolchildren and this was accompanied by a fondness for the martial rituals and music of the festival. The potency of the prevailing imperial ideal, demonstrated by the enthusiasm for the Empire Day spectacle, was part of what Tom Collins illustrates as a wider and 'unembarrassed fervour for king and country [which] was once a component of every fete, parade, gala or even session of home dressing up'. ¹⁸⁷

Functions and significances of Empire Day: 'white colonies'

In contrast to Great Britain, Empire Day in South Africa was unable seamlessly to colonise popular consciousness and in many respects it was a failure as an invented tradition. The South African case also stands as an exception among the white settler colonies in that Empire Day aimed to promote the interests of a minority section of the white population. To be sure, dissenting groups in Australia and Canada attempted to undermine the festival, but as in Great Britain, there was a relatively smooth positioning of Empire Day within a national culture where imperialist ideology was a prevalent feature. In these locations, positive approval of empire seems to have been reflected *and* shaped by the new tradition. Empire Day inculcated a shared sense of national and racial superiority in the minds of Britons, whilst simultaneously reinforcing aspects of the hierarchical social order at home and

¹⁸⁶ Alan Bishop ed., *Chronicle of Friendship. Vera Brittain, diary of the thirties 1932-1939* (London, 1986), p. 178.

¹⁸⁷ National Portrait Gallery *We are the people*, pp. 117-24.

abroad. In South Africa, as we shall see, Empire Day was an overall failure although it had important utility in regional contexts and was given extra impetus as Afrikaner nationalism began its resurgence after Union in 1910.

In Australia, Canada and South Africa, ethnic divisions and the rise of separatist nationalism within the emerging 'white' nations were the most important aspects of social cohesion that the Empire Day Movement sought to address. In Canada and Australia there were significant populations of French and Irish Catholics who did not share any sense of Britishness with the majority and were repelled by the jingoistic imperialism that Empire Day seemed to represent. In South Africa, the white ethnic majority were Afrikaners, who in general were hostile to the imperial subject status that they acquired following their defeat in war.

The increasing administrative autonomy granted to the white settler colonies during the nineteenth century engendered pertinent questions about national identity and facilitated the rise of a separatist nationalism that troubled imperialists. However, a mixture of sentimental attachment and political pragmatism ensured that the imperial bond remained intact; in Canada and Australia, a close identification with Britain as a 'distinct cultural homeland' provided a 'sense of belonging and membership of a wider imperial community' for a majority of the populations; the intensity of this sense of Britishness was a primary obstacle to a homegrown independence nationalism.¹⁸⁸ However, continued fidelity to the Metropole did not signify the existence of a fixed or coherent sense of Britishness amongst the populations where Empire loyalty was most pervasive. Andrew Thomson has demonstrated that, 'across the self governing empire, loyalism was a concept capable

¹⁸⁸ James Curran, 'The "Thin Dividing Line": Prime Ministers and the Problem of Australian Nationalism, 1972-1996' in *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume: 48. Issue: 4. (2002), p.469, see also, Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography' in *Australian Historical Studies* 116 (April 2001), pp. 76-91.

of a range of notions of identity'.¹⁸⁹ This was especially the case in South Africa. The demographic realities of South Africa were sufficient explanation for why imperial nationalism failed to triumph as a hegemonic precept amongst the white population. Regional variations in the interpretation and expression of imperialism, coupled with a disparate array of loyalist identities, contributed to the difficulty in building a mass following for Empire Day, even amongst its key constituency of English-speaking whites. In South Africa, it is not plausible to suggest that Empire Day succeeded as an invented tradition in terms of 'legitimising institutions, status or relations of authority' and it certainly did not come anywhere near reflecting or establishing a collective set of 'beliefs, value systems or patterns of behaviour'.¹⁹⁰ However, it did have an important role to play in helping to promote and sustain a sense of group membership for imperialists who were otherwise aware of the fragmentation of British identity in South Africa. For this reason it merits scholarly investigation.

The political value of Empire Day in the other white settler colonies was more straightforward than in the South African case. Before 1914, other than the underdeveloped separatist nationalism of the French Canadians, nationalism was predominantly an imperial nationalism, which aimed to suppress pluralist tendencies among the increasingly diverse population. This influenced the ways in which Empire Day was celebrated as well as the motivations of its supporters. For example, some Canadian imperialists saw Empire Day as an ideal means of promoting and building cultural homogeneity amongst diverse waves of immigrants from mainland Europe.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Andrew Thompson, 'The Languages of Loyalism in South Africa, c.1870-1939' in *English Historical Review*, June 2003, p.649.

¹⁹⁰ See definition of invented tradition in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge, 1983), p.9.

¹⁹¹ Ross McCormack, 'Cloth Caps and Jobs: The Ethnicity of English Immigrants in Canada 1900-1914' in Bumstead, p.175. The new immigrants were far more ethnically diverse than earlier settlers who had mainly originated from the British Isles; 'Besides French and British stock they were Austrians and Belgians; Bulgarians and Czechs and Slovaks; Danes, Norwegians, Dutch, Finns, Germans and Greeks and Turks; Jews, Hungarians, Icelanders and Italians, Poles Rumanians and

who they feared would swamp 'British-Canadian' culture and present 'an insurmountable obstacle to "Canadianization"'.¹⁹²

Imperialists became preoccupied with eroding the sense of ethnic identity among 'foreign' immigrants (who often maintained their ethnic consciousness by forming voluntary associations for the formal and symbolic expression of group identity)¹⁹³ and replacing it with an affiliation to 'British' standards of citizenship and culture. It has been noted that this mission of assimilation frequently served as 'a cloak for nativism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-francophone prejudices, which were all factors in provincial life'.¹⁹⁴ The public school system was the primary agency for 'moulding the second generation of foreign born into Canadian citizens'¹⁹⁵ and Empire Day was seen as an ideal means for the indoctrination of European immigrant children in the 'appropriate national and imperial outlooks'.¹⁹⁶ The day was eulogized for uniting 'children of twenty-seven races . . . to carry Canadian flags and sing Canadian songs and to hear addresses from prominent men on patriotic subjects'.¹⁹⁷ The *Montreal Daily Star* thought that an emphasis on 'British holidays' was 'certainly no mistake in a country which is being penetrated by a mixed population' and it recommended exporting the festival to the 'Mother-country' in order to increase the

Russians, Swedes and Ukrainians'. Laurier La Pierre in reference to the two million immigrants who entered Canada between 1901 and 1911, Laurier La Pierre, *Canada, My Canada – What Happened?* (Toronto, 1992), p. 154.

¹⁹² Brown and Cook, p. 68.

¹⁹³ For examples of embryonic ethnic national associations see Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicising Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Quebec, 1994), p. 95. Karl Aun. *The Political Refugees. A History of the Estonians in Canada* (Toronto, 1985), p. 16-18 and Patricia K. Wood, *Nationalism from the Margins: Italians in Alberta and British Columbia* (Montreal, 2002).

¹⁹⁴ Greg Marquis, 'Commemorating the Loyalists in the Loyalist City: Saint John, New Brunswick, 1883-1934' in *Urban History Review*, Vol. 33, 2004, pp. 24-33.

¹⁹⁵ J. R. Lumby, Fort William Board of Education trustee quoted in Stamp, R. M., *The Schools of Ontario*, p. 95.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 94. Michael Brown provides a wider insight into processes of assimilation in Canada with his discussion of the assimilation of Jewish immigrants as 'British subjects' in Michael Brown, *Jew or Juif? Jews, French Canadians and Anglo-Canadians, 1759-1914* (Philadelphia, 1987), esp. p. 63.

¹⁹⁷ J. R. Lumby, Fort William Board of Education trustee, quoted in Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario* p. 95.

ratio of British immigrants and dilute the impact of the 'foreign mass'.¹⁹⁸ This function of Empire Day had been a long held aspiration of the newspaper that it had expressed in full a decade earlier as the celebration was inaugurated in Canada:

In Manitoba and the North West territories, where so many foreigners are settling, Empire Day [is] invaluable as a means of instilling patriotic ideas into the minds of the rising generation. It is to be hoped that in Great Britain and Australia the idea will be adopted. If in all the schools of Great Britain Empire Day should be observed every year there would be less cause in the future to complain that British emigrants go to the United States instead of the colonies.

It would be worthwhile for some of our Canadian Imperialists who have friends in Great Britain to urge them to endeavour to bring this about.¹⁹⁹

The belief that British immigrants would have strong imperial affiliations was sustained by the sense that they shared an 'effusive affection' for imperialism that took precedence over other aspects of their identities: indeed, Ross McCormack has demonstrated how 'agrarian and lower-middle-class English immigrants' were most likely to have embraced an imperialist identity, but he also found evidence that working class immigrants were susceptible to this ideology.²⁰⁰

The question of the relationship of class affiliation to imperialist doctrine was also of importance to the Empire Day Movement in Australia, where some of the principles of the pro-British nationalism that had surfaced in the 1860s were challenged by a new indigenous nationalism that grew up in the 1890s. The former nationalist ideology had a 'decidedly Anglicist' character and predominated within

¹⁹⁸ *Montreal Daily Star*, 24 May 1909, p.3. Marjory Cooper charts the social and cultural impact of British migration to Canada in 'Rhetoric and Reality: British Migration to Canada, 1867-1967' in Buckner, pp160-180.

¹⁹⁹ *The Montreal Daily Star*, 23 May 1899, p.4.

²⁰⁰ For example McCormack quotes a Lancashire man who arrived in Vancouver in 1907 who believed that he was a partner 'in a glorious imperial system destined to civilise the world under the Union Jack', McCormack, p.180.

the colonial middle class, the greater proportion of whom originated from England and Scotland,²⁰¹ whilst the indigenous nationalism was popular among the working class, which included a greater number of Australians of Irish origin.

The leading proponent of Empire Day in Australia, Canon F. B. Boyce, was determined that Australians should not cast off their imperial loyalty and believed that the celebration would fortify Australian imperial sentiment against anti-British nationalism. Boyce's energetic campaigning included writing to several newspapers, including the London *Times*, outlining the purpose of the festival:

An Empire Day would be essentially a Briton's Day. It would be one in which Australia, whence I write, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, India and other countries under one flag would be especially reminded of their same nationality . . . There can be no question that the 4th July holiday in the United States has been of immense service in fostering a love among the people there of their history and country and of friendliness between the several states, Britons have no such day!²⁰²

There was never such a clear sense of purpose for the Empire Day Movement in South Africa, where 'differing kinds of imperial faith could coexist'.²⁰³ This meant that the development of Empire Day followed a less linear trajectory than in Canada and Australia and was subject to ambiguous interpretations. Thompson has demonstrated that local and regional contexts were important in the construction (and contestation) of imperial loyalism in South Africa and that loyalism encompassed a 'broad church' that was not the preserve of a singular ethnic group.²⁰⁴ The nature of

²⁰¹ See Richard Cashman, 'Symbols of Unity: Anglo Australian Cricketers 1877 -1900 in *International Journal of History of Sport* Volume 7, May 1990, Number.1, pp. 97-110.

²⁰² *The Times*, 11 April 1903, p.11.

²⁰³ Andrew Thompson, *The Language of Loyalism*, pp. 619-620.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 620-621.

Empire Day celebrations and their perceived meaning was thus subject to significant variations within the four major regions of South Africa.

Natal, the most British of the South African colonies, cherished a tradition of loyalty to Great Britain, which was more vocally expressed than in other regions of South Africa.²⁰⁵ In Natal, there was generally little tact or sensitivity toward the Afrikaner population in the celebration of Empire Day. An early celebration in Pietermaritzburg in 1905 was described as 'evening of entertainment' given 'to honour Empire Day' which consisted of a lecture on 'Our Duty to Empire' accompanied by a magic lantern exhibition of triumphant scenes of British military exploits from the Anglo-Boer war.²⁰⁶

Natal's imperialist press perceived an advantage in the popularity of Empire Day during the campaign against a centralised constitution under Union and exploited the heightened atmosphere of patriotism on Empire Day to urge Natalians to defend the 'splendid . . . [imperialist] tradition' and 'individuality' of the colony: 'Being British, stay British'.²⁰⁷ Despite such entreaties, a majority of Natalians voted pragmatically in favour of Union as they expected that the empire would rally to defend Natal if 'its freedom and cultural identity were threatened'.²⁰⁸ For a brief period after Union, there seemed to be a temporary cooling of imperial ardour in Natal and in 1911 Empire Day provided a far a less imposing spectacle in Pietermaritzburg than in the pre-union years - an unassuming parade of girls from the city schools replaced the usual martial displays.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the Afrikaner nationalism that began to surface after 1912 brought 'surprise and displeasure' to the

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.628.

²⁰⁶ *Natal Witness*, 25 May 1905, p.5.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 4 May 1909, p.4.

²⁰⁸ W.F. Gutteridge 'The Making of the Union of South Africa' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume IX, Number 2, (1955), pp.218-219. Gutteridge suggested that the Natalian vote was influenced by the perceived economic advantages of Union, which overrode cultural concerns.

²⁰⁹ *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1911, p.4.

English-speaking people of Natal²¹⁰ and Empire Day was re-invigorated as a fulsome spectacle.

Natal's imperialists believed that they could guard 'British interests' in South Africa against the white Afrikaner majority through nurturing a wider patriotic imperialism and to this end they attempted to extend the influence and popularity of Empire Day. In Pietermaritzburg, an Empire Day Celebration Committee was formed, which developed the celebrations beyond the established traditions (a grand procession and the tranquil decoration of the Victoria statue). The committee widened the invitation of what was 'nominally a children's Day' to the parents and guardians of the 'little folk' and other citizens. In 1913, around 4,000 adults joined the programme of parades and festivities. The *Natal Witness* reported that the day 'passed off with all the enthusiasm gaiety and show of patriotism, which the most ardent imperialist could have desired.'²¹¹ Natal also pioneered a successful scheme of bonfire lighting (to provide a symbolic link for all the British people across the globe) that was promoted widely throughout the empire by the *Daily Mail* overseas edition.²¹² In Natal alone, over twenty grand Empire Day bonfires were lighted and *The Natal Witness* published an extensive list of the other global participants.²¹³

The Natal Witness's efforts to advance Empire Day far exceeded the promotional efforts of other South African newspapers. Special 'Empire Day' editions presented a highly polarised and antagonistic representation of relationships between Afrikaners and Britons. In 1912, the *Witness* applauded the spread of British authority in South Africa 'since we first drove the Dutch East India Company out of Cape

²¹⁰ Edgar H. Brooks, 'The Secession Movement in South Africa' in *Foreign Affairs*, 11:1/4 1933-1934 pp.348-9.

²¹¹ *The Natal Witness*, 25 May 1913, p.5.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 24 May 1913, p.7.

²¹³ 'A chain of flames around the Empire - Girdle of bonfires tonight', *Ibid.*, 24 May 1913, p.1.

Town' and it saluted not just the magnitude of British influence but its supposed permanence too, 'even the most retrograde racialist admits it would be a hopeless task to endeavour to challenge . . . [British] supremacy'.²¹⁴ In 1913, the *Witness* published a collection of doggerel clearly not intended for purposes of conciliation:

This is the Day of Empire
When Visions of Brave Men Rise
From their lonely graves on veldt and sea
They gladden the mother's eyes
They lived and they died for England
They fostered that common weal
With a love that is more than a woman's love
That only the patriots feel
O mother in our dear homeland
Whose hedges are white with may
And the red flag floats over spire and tower
Remember your dead today.²¹⁵

The memorialisation of the war dead was a salient factor in the construction of both imperial and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa after 1902. As demonstrated above, commemoration of the South African War was very much a polarised activity and there was no convincing attempt to foster a sense of collective loss. As we shall see, the British often commemorated their nation's sacrifice on Empire Day, yet Afrikaner nationalists were inclined to organise simultaneous events where they mourned the victims of British imperialism. Commemoration became one of the key areas of contestation on Empire Day, but the symbolic battle between Afrikaner and

²¹⁴ *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1912, p.4.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1913, p.1.

Briton was also played out through various 'flag controversies'. An early example occurred in Natal where the *Natal Witness's* inflammatory reporting intensified a minor dispute over the refusal of the Union government to allow the British Flag to be displayed on public buildings in Pietermaritzburg on St. Georges Day (April 23). A government spokesperson had commented that the phenomenon of private individuals exhibiting flags 'how and when they please' was 'quite a new thing' but not a practice to be recommended on official buildings. The Pietermaritzburg branch of the 'The Sons of England'²¹⁶ complained, claiming it had always been allowed under the Natal Government.²¹⁷ The *Natal Witness* responded by printing letters from supposed (anonymous) readers that proclaimed 'this is British South Africa' and 'every Britisher has a right to fly the Union Jack'. Natalians were exhorted to rise to the occasion 'and fly the dear old Union Jack on Empire Day and at all other particular times. The Union Jack was always flown before Union . . . fly it again now and always.'²¹⁸ The *Witness* composed its own antagonistic rhyme about the situation:

... we might hope, though blatant Dutchmen brag

Leave to obtain to fly the British flag,

And if to do so, weak officials fear,

To simply tell them they're not wanted here

²¹⁶ The Sons of England Benevolent Society was formed in Canada in 1874. It encompassed middle class artisans and labourers as well as some white-collar workers. Its remit was to provide support and financial assistance to compatriots in need 'Being English and Protestant was a condition of membership'. The society was committed to 'the preservation and perpetuity of the British Empire' and was vigorous in upholding their interpretation of British traditions. The Sons of England flourished in Southern Africa where they presented a particularly uncompromising imperial vision. After World War Two they adopted a shadowy political role. For Canada see David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary* (Vancouver, 1998) p. 225. See also H. F. Angus and R. M. MacIver *Canada and Her Great Neighbor: Sociological Surveys of Opinions and Attitudes in Canada concerning the United States* (Toronto, 1938), p. 49 and 232. For South Africa see Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939*, (Durham, NC, 1987), p. 180 and John Lambert, 'South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The evolution of an identity in the 1910s and 1920s' in *South African Historical Journal* 43 (Nov. 2000), p. 205.

²¹⁷ *The Natal Witness* (Empire Day Number), 'The Flag Incident', 21 May 1913, p. 5.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Let them take German berths, if they so please,
Or find some posts amongst the Portuguese,
And then the land enfranchised should see,
A British Colony from sea to sea!²¹⁹

And according to the *Witness*, the citizens of Natal settled 'the great flag question' on Empire Day:

Whatever the authorities had to say on the subject the people decided that Empire Day should not lack for flags. They were of all sorts and sizes, and cracked and strained cheerily in the gusting wind. Storekeepers made a great display and the private residences were brave with bunting. A staff without a flag was a rare sight, but among the omissions were the Supreme Court, the P.O. and the railway headquarters'.²²⁰

Natal's imperialists increasingly viewed the Union of South Africa as an aberration that gave Afrikaners undue power. It was believed that the advance of imperialism could only be achieved if the 'Dutch' were willing to submit and assimilate. The *Natal Witness* accused Afrikaners of 'racial blindness' in their attitude toward the empire and suggested that through Empire Day 'the people and politicians of the next generation' would develop 'a clearer outlook on the glorious heritage to which they have become heirs'.²²¹ The paper optimistically, if unrealistically, 'looked forward to the time when the men who today, secretly or openly, deride our flag, will perhaps though travail and tribulations seek the shelter of the Union Jack with affection and contrition'.²²²

²¹⁹ *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1913, p.7.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1913, p.5.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1913, p.4.

²²² *Ibid.*

The profession of faith for every young man with British blood in his veins and for every young man of alien blood who casts his lot in with this fraternity of Anglo- Saxon confederation. ... [is] to be loyal to the flag.²²³

There was a strong sense of overcompensation in the tirades against Afrikaners and the Union government in the pages of the *Witness* on Empire Day. The atrophy of 'British' influence within the South African polity was underlined by political success of Louis Botha (the first Prime Minister of South Africa) and Jan Smuts, his most prominent cabinet minister. Smuts, like Botha, was a former general who fought against the British in the Anglo-Boer war, yet in the short period between the end of the war and the accomplishment of Union, they had advanced political development in South Africa and embodied political pragmatism and conciliation. In contrast, the constraining ideology of 'race solidarity' had proved inadequate as a means of advancing the interests of British South Africans. Chamberlain's call for reconciliation between the British and the Afrikaners during his tour of South Africa in 1903 supposed they could be united in a 'common Empire citizenship' that bestowed equal privileges and implied common duties.²²⁴ However, Chamberlain's high ideals masked a prevailing belief amongst policy-makers that the defeated Afrikaners would eventually find themselves swamped by British settlers and would become assimilated as imperial citizens through necessity rather than choice. The imperial Governor of South Africa, Lord Milner, thought that the 'war of bullets' might have ended, but reconstruction was 'still war' and although holding 'the winning cards', Britain had not necessarily 'won the game'.²²⁵ However, 'Milner's

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Terrence H. O'Brien, *Milner: Viscount Milner of St. James and Cape Town 1854-1925* (London, 1979) p.202.

²²⁵ Milner, quoted in O'Brien, p.205.

desire to swamp Afrikaners demographically²²⁶ and inspire 'a spirit of wider British patriotism' failed. The Transvaal British 'upon whom imperial policy ultimately depended'²²⁷ were also 'divided by almost every factor, but language'²²⁸ and their lack of cohesion assisted Louis Botha's Het Volk to victory in the 1907 election.

The victory of the Afrikaner conciliators did not duly concern Milner's successor, Lord Selborne. He believed that the development of the capitalist state and protection of mining interests on the Rand, (which were also some of Milner's primary goals) were not dependent on the political and cultural ascendancy of the British. Selborne trusted Het Volk to remain loyal to the Empire. The short-term goals of a resurgent Boer/Afrikaner nationalism in the Transvaal coincided with or did not interfere with the requirements of the mining magnates and Selborne did not consider any ulterior motives that might be realised in the long term.²²⁹

An event that took place, ironically, on Empire Day during the 1907 miners' strike clearly demonstrated how the needs of capital were not necessarily commensurate with the maintenance of British ethnic solidarity in South Africa. Following a number of violent confrontations around the mines,²³⁰ Botha deployed British imperial troops in an attempt to restore order and relieve pressure on the regular police force.²³¹ The predominantly British strikers picketing the goldmines included many former soldiers who believed that their erstwhile comrades in arms would not move against them. They were quickly disabused of this idea when British

²²⁶ Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, Lord Milner and the South African State in *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979, Autumn), p.66.

²²⁷ Donald Denoon, Capital and Capitalists in the Transvaal in the 1890s and 1900s, *The Historical Journal*, Volume 23, Number 1 (march 1980) p.127, pp. 11-132

²²⁸ N.G. Garson, 'South Africa and World War One' in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Volume 8, Issue 1 October 1979, pp. 68 - 85.

²²⁹ Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge, 1999), p.79.

²³⁰ For reports of these incidents see the *Cape Times* 24 May 1907, p.3 and *The Rand Daily Mail*, 24 May 1907, p.6.

²³¹ Keith Shear, 'The 1907 Strike: A Reassessment', unpublished paper, African Studies Institute, (University of Witwatersrand, 1994), pp. 7-12.

Dragoons, brandishing swords, mounted a cavalry charge into a large crowd of strikers who fled 'scuttling across the veldt in all directions'.²³²

The imperialist press avoided calling attention to the irony that the clash of British troops and British workers happened on Empire Day. The *Cape Times* attempted to dilute the heavy symbolism of the occasion by emphasising the supposed heterogeneity of the strikers: 'among the mob were Italians, Germans, French, Dagos of all sorts including a fair sprinkling of stiffes and unemployed'.²³³ However, the overarching message of the day was that in the era of Reconstruction, leading politicians believed that political pragmatism was far more important than a reductive 'race solidarity'.

Nevertheless, one should note that the imperial connection was a powerful symbol of comfort to some British communities in South Africa, who felt beleaguered by the electoral successes of Afrikaners in the former Boer Republics. For them, Empire Day was seized upon as an opportunity to protest publicly against the negation, under responsible government of what some English speakers saw as their imperial prerogatives. The prime example was a meeting organised in Bloemfontein where five hundred British people gathered to criticise the elected government of the Orange River Colony (ORC) and condemn a recent Education Act as 'unfair to English speaking children'.²³⁴

Education and language were crucial battlegrounds in the development of white national consciousness in South Africa. Alfred Milner had viewed educational development in the former Boer states as the 'means of winning Boer children from their mother tongue and filling their heads with British ideas about the past and future

²³² *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1907, p.7. For a detailed account of the events of Empire Day 1907 on the Rand see Shear, 'The 1907 Strike: A Reassessment'.

²³³ *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1907, p.7.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1909, p.7.

of their nation'.²³⁵ Isabel Hofmeyer has traced the development of the Afrikaans language from 1902 and identified its importance in the creation of ethnic identity.²³⁶ Nevertheless in the early years of the twentieth century Afrikaans 'needed the shelter of Dutch while it was building its strength'.²³⁷ Soon after the ORC attained self-government, the Minister of Education General Hertzog had enforced bi-lingual teaching in the schools. This provoked the intense reaction of some British people as displayed at the Empire Day meeting; they also objected to the sacking of English-speaking school inspectors who were not bi-lingual.

The familiar mantras of Empire Day were incorporated into animated appeals for restorative action; it was asserted that 'the Empire stood for freedom and justice' and that Orange River Colony 'was as much a part of the Empire as Scotland or Wales'.²³⁸ According to various speakers their imperial citizenship meant that they had the right to have their children taught in the tradition of the English 'race'; the duty of the imperial government was to ensure that justice was done. The protesters unanimously approved resolutions that called for the imperial government to intervene directly and allow the 'British subjects' in the Colony the right to have their children 'taught wholly through the medium of the English Language'²³⁹ and to institute a judicial inquiry into the dismissal of the inspectors. The meeting concluded with a lusty rendering of the National Anthem and Rule Britannia.²⁴⁰

The arrogance and intolerance displayed at the Empire Day protest was at once condemned within the pages of the Bloemfontein *Friend*. An editorial column

²³⁵ W. K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years 1870-1919* (Cambridge, 1992), p.174.

²³⁶ Isabel Hofmeyer, 'Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity 1902-1924 in Marks and Trapido, pp. 95-123.

²³⁷ Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years*, p.178.

²³⁸ *The Friend*, 25 May 1909, p.8.

²³⁹ *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1909, p.7.

²⁴⁰ This tactic of addressing resolutions, not to the elected government but to the imperial executive was reminiscent of the schemes of The South African League, who before the war had attempted to undermine the republican government of the Transvaal by addressing their petitions directly to the Queen. see Hancock, pp.72-73.

deplored the petitioners' appeal for the British Government to interfere in the affairs of the Colony.²⁴¹ The protesters were also satirised through a spoof news report of the event; 'A Historical Gathering: The Saviours of our Empire':

We English are actually advised to learn a foreign language (Dutch) in a British Colony of Dutch Origin. Why can't the stupid 80,000 original Dutchmen throw away their own language and traditions and immediately learn those of the 5,000 English who have come to their country . . . The Minister of Education has had the audacity . . . [to appoint] a Dutch official in English South Africa . . . We have arrived at a great crisis in our Empire's history . . . Gentleman does not the Empire stand for absolute freedom and justice? . . . if this School Act continues the Empire is doomed . . . We will appeal to our Mother Imperial Government – if it wasn't so beastly liberal-minded itself.²⁴²

It is clear that some of the British population of South Africa grasped the concept of Empire Day as a weapon with which to resist Afrikaner political advances, by emphasising the ultimate supremacy of the British Empire over the local white-dominated state. However, there were other Britons who contributed to a genuine, if fruitless, attempt to employ Empire Day as a medium of conciliation. Saul Dubow's examination of the development of a South African colonial nationalism in this period notes the efforts of 'fusion' politicians such as Sir Percy Fitzpatrick and Abe Bailey to promote a sense of South African identity that avoided the atavistic fixations of Afrikaner nationalists and retrograde imperial loyalists.²⁴³ Both these figures participated in Empire Day celebrations, but as a rule they avoided the jingoistic rhetoric associated with the expression of imperial loyalty in Natal. Instead they

²⁴¹ *The Friend*, 25 May 1909, p.4.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 26 May 1909, p.4.

²⁴³ See Dubow, pp. 62, 65, 70, 73-74.

delivered Empire Day speeches that called for the creation of an inclusive white South African nationalism.

The owner of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Abe Bailey, presided at an Empire Day banquet in 1905 and called for all British subjects to end parochialism and work toward a national policy in South Africa. He warned of the danger from 'natives' who under the 'guise of religion' (i.e. the so-called Ethiopian Movement) were having 'doctrines of equality with whites' instilled into their minds and 'being told that this was their country and they should regain it'. Bailey insisted that these ideas must be checked; otherwise there was probability of a war 'when the British, Dutch and all other whites would have to stand together'.²⁴⁴ Bailey's early call for the development of a united dominion nationalism presaged other attempts by some 'architects and ideologues of the Union'²⁴⁵ to employ Empire Day as part of the attempt to promote an inclusive sense of 'white South Africanism'.

Percy Fitzpatrick was the speaker at a large Empire Day picnic party organised by the Unionist Party in Pretoria in 1911 (like the Conservatives in Britain, the Unionists tried to accrue party political advantage from the imperial festival). Although ostensibly a children's event - entertainment was provided that included, 'bands, clowns, Punch and Judy, boating, shooting, skittles, quoits and various ... races'²⁴⁶ - Fitzpatrick's long speech was evidently pitched for the many adults present. He lamented the divide between Afrikaners and British South Africans and proposed that the Empire Day celebration transcended party political affiliation and class 'or any other' distinction by uniting those 'who were in sympathy with the interests of the country and the welfare of South Africa'. He urged his audience to adopt a liberal spirit and accept that in South Africa 'there was room for everyone,

²⁴⁴ *Cape Times* 24 May 1905, p.5.

²⁴⁵ Thompson, 'Languages of Loyalty', pp.618-9.

²⁴⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 May 1911, p.8.

and everyone was equal'. Fitzpatrick insisted the welfare of South Africa was dependent on 'keeping the white race pure' and that Empire Day was the symbolic means of holding the people of the empire together and that duty to the mother country did not require English ancestry which as an Irishman he did not have, but in common with millions of the empire's people he would sink his differences in favour of the glorious heritage of the British Empire.²⁴⁷

Some imperialists, who advocated conciliation, understood that the traditional rhetoric of Empire Day denied Afrikaners their collective history and they were attentive (or manipulative) enough to incorporate elements of Afrikaner heritage into the repertoire of the day. At one Johannesburg school celebration, the unlikely names of the *Voortrekkers* Piet Retief and Gert Maritz were added to the familiar list of empire builders such as Clive, Hastings and Cecil Rhodes. The children also recited a catechism that included the call and response, 'what was their Country? An empire was their country and South Africa was their home.'²⁴⁸ The attempt to patch together a collective heritage in the building of a shared national identity was, as we shall see, a tactic later employed by Afrikaners when trying to broaden the appeal of Dingaan's Day after 1918. The *Cape Times* supported Empire Day celebrations that tended to seek an affirmation that there existed a fellowship of all empire citizens in South Africa and published what it purported to be the credo of British imperialism:

Let us see that the principles [for which the Empire stands] suffer no detriment, that our Empire shall be as just as it is great, the home of 'a happy breed of men' among whom loyalty is not the compulsory duty of the

²⁴⁷ 'Unionist Picnic', *ibid.*, 25 May 1911, p.6.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 26th May 1913, p.8.

oppressed to the oppressor, but the sentiment of free men toward a system, which better than any other secures human freedom.²⁴⁹

This aspiration to inclusiveness indicated that some Empire Day adherents hoped to persuade Afrikaners that their best interests were tied up with the acceptance of a wholehearted allegiance to the British Empire. However this was always unlikely. Even though a combination of War and rural poverty accelerated the migration of Afrikaners into urban areas and some Afrikaners adopted the English language and mimicked the anglicised bourgeois culture as a means of 'getting on',²⁵⁰ the evidence pertaining to Empire Day suggests there was little inclination amongst these groups to embrace imperialism.

Afrikaner involvement with Empire Day, unsurprisingly after the British imperial aggression against the Boers, was extremely rare. There are, however, one or two examples of participation that run against the general trend. In 1906 a convention of Cape fruit growers, including several Afrikaner farmers from the Western Cape, adjourned on Empire Day to hold an impromptu public ceremony.²⁵¹ Mr J Landsbury, the British instigator of the observance, proclaimed that Empire Day 'was held in reverence by every British subject'. Landsbury expressed gratitude for the manner in which his idea had been carried out 'by the gentlemen of the Western Province' and he 'trusted that what had happened in the past would be forgotten'.²⁵² Mr. Dempera (an Afrikaner member of the legislative assembly), spoke (in Dutch) on 'behalf of the Afrikanders'. He said he agreed with every word previously uttered by the speakers

²⁴⁹ *Cape Times* 24 May 1902, p.6.

²⁵⁰ Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, 1983), p. 104.

²⁵¹ *Cape Times*, 24 May 1906, p.6.

²⁵² A member of the legislature Hon C.W. H. Kohler MLC gave a short speech: *Ibid.*, 25 May 1906, p.7.

and all he could add was 'long live the King'.²⁵³ Thompson's analysis of the regional contexts that shaped loyalty among British and Afrikaner South Africans showed how pragmatist concerns about securing markets for their produce might have influenced the loyalism of Cape Afrikaner farmers.²⁵⁴

In Bloemfontein, the Afrikaner Director of Education, Dr. Viljoen advocated the 'cultivation of a true and broad South African patriotism'²⁵⁵ and was a prominent supporter of Empire Day (and latterly Union Day and Dingaan's Day as well). He was the principal speaker at the Bloemfontein celebrations between 1912 and 1914 and on each occasion he repeated the assertion that their great national festivals Empire Day and Union Day' were the 'effective means of training the youth of the land, the descendents of the old Dutch, French, British, German and other settlers'. Viljoen insisted that the Victoria League (the organiser of Empire Day in Bloemfontein) was a 'non political and non racial' association, whose members merely wanted to encourage South African citizens to meet equality 'on the common platform of love, devotion and service of their country and their Empire'. In 1912, over 2,000 English and Afrikaner children²⁵⁶ paraded in the city and listened to Viljoen proclaim that the British Empire was the 'greatest under the sun' and that 'unity is strength'.²⁵⁷ But despite the spirited efforts of Viljoen and the Victoria League, Empire Day's success in Bloemfontein was limited to the children's celebration. Aside from the schoolchildren's parade, no other celebration occurred, and the press complained of an atmosphere of 'holiday dullness' with the 'outward and visible signs of festivity

²⁵³ Ibid., 25 May 1906, p.7.

²⁵⁴ Thompson, 'The Languages of Loyalism', p.634.

²⁵⁵ In 1932, Viljoen reviewed the struggle to bridge 'the gulfs of tradition, race and language' between Afrikaners and British in South Africa in W. J. Viljoen, 'How We Solved the Language Problem in South Africa' in *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 23, No. 89 (October, 1923); see especially pp.2-5.

²⁵⁶ *The Bloemfontein Post*, 25 May 1912, p.3.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

usually associated with . . . Empire Day . . . not in great evidence'. The *Bloemfontein Post* detected that there was even a spirit of protest, albeit expressed mutely, amongst the people at being asked to holiday on this day.

It is significant that the appeal of Empire Day increased after the Union government was formed. In Cape Town, where more than anywhere else the spirit of compromise predominated, over 1,200 citizens attended the annual Empire Day rally of the Boy Scouts in 1911. By 1914, this number was well surpassed as a more joyous element was introduced to supplement the wreath laying ceremony enacted by the Guild of Loyal Women. A grand patriotic concert in the City Hall attracted an 'immense audience' that 'exceeded any full house since Clara Butt performed there'.²⁵⁸ In Johannesburg too, where previously Empire Day events were distinctly modest, the 1914 demonstration was clearly designed to make an impression on the populace. The principal event was a parade of the citizen defence forces who numbered between five and six thousand. The *Cape Times* reported that 'such a spectacle has not been witnessed on the Rand for many years',²⁵⁹ but neglected to mention that following the brutal repression of the 1913 general strike by imperial troops and the imposition of martial law in response to the railway strike of 1914 (January to March), the military had established a high profile in the Transvaal, where industrial unrest was beginning to be equated with civil war.²⁶⁰ In that context, the Empire Day parade seems more like a forewarning of the strength of arms available to the Government than a joyous celebration of the Empire. One can imagine how organised labour viewed it.

²⁵⁸ *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1914, p.8.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ For a discussion of labour unrest and military intervention in the Transvaal see Alison Drew, 'Will the real Sidney Bunting Stand Up? Constructing and Contesting the Identity of a South African Communist' in *English Historical Review* Volume 118, Number 479 (2003), pp. 1223–1226.

Resistance to Empire Day

As Empire Day began to establish a foothold (albeit precarious) in South Africa, there is evidence that Afrikaner nationalists sought increasingly to counter its potential influence. In 1907, the Pretoria based Afrikaner newspaper, *Die Volkstem*, was little concerned by Empire Day, pointing out 'the unpopularity of this holiday'.²⁶¹ However, by 1911 the paper was troubled enough to begin criticising the efforts of businesses in Pretoria to decorate their shops for the patriotic day, that included a jibe about a line of 'English flaglets' resembling 'quantities of kaffir handkerchiefs' and concluded 'there can be no disputing about taste'.²⁶² Despite such obvious disdain, there were never any direct 'anti-Empire Day' demonstrations in South Africa (as we shall see, these were to be very apparent in interwar Britain), but instead nationalists sought to emphasise Afrikaner nationality through alternative commemorative events that were pointedly organised to take place on May 24. The attempt to promote an imperial identity in South Africa was also undermined through the revival of an annual Afrikaner commemoration, Dingaan's Day, on December 16.

It is unlikely that imperialists would have been surprised by such developments, especially in view of what had occurred in the white settler colonies of Australia and Canada, where it was never likely that the Irish and French populations would embrace Empire Day. In Canada, there was a rapid expansion of *nationaliste* movements during the nineteenth century (although only a minority of these envisaged political independence for Quebec) that strove to preserve their Quebecois culture through the protection of linguistic and educational privileges, defence of religious liberty and the assertion of established rights under the provincial

²⁶¹ *Die Volkstem*, 29 May 1907, p7.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 26 May 1911, p.5.

franchise.²⁶³ The South African War exacerbated the cultural cleavage between the English and French speaking communities; the French-language press were solidly opposed to Canadian participation in a war that was denounced as British imperial aggression²⁶⁴ and the English press abused the French-Canadians for their reluctance to support the imperial war.²⁶⁵ In March 1900, the relief of Ladysmith precipitated boisterous student demonstrations in Montreal that deteriorated into a riotous attack upon the French-Canadian Laval University.²⁶⁶ The French language press was enraged; *La Patrie* declared that the nation was 'within two steps of civil war'.²⁶⁷ Further rioting followed, this time by French-Canadians. The office of the *Montreal Daily Star* was attacked and a Union Jack flying from the roof was removed. *The Star* fumed:

Perhaps a British flag has never before been so treated in a British country. The treatment of that flag could not be worse, it could not be more insulting. The[y] . . . tore this emblem of freedom and fair play all over the world into shreds, spat and trampled on it and shouted 'A bas le Union Jack' .²⁶⁸

The disturbances continued for a few days and the issues of Confederation, nationalism and imperialism became prominent topics for discussion in the newspapers. Coming so soon after the Montreal riots, Empire Day that in 1900 took on a special significance but, surprisingly, it passed without incident. Just as in earlier years, the French Catholic schools of Quebec refused to participate (overall in the city

²⁶³ Brown and Cook, pp.127 -128

²⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

²⁶⁵ Michael Brown, 'From Stereotype to Scapegoat: Anti-Jewish Sentiment in French-Canada from Confederation to World War One' in Alan Davies (ed), *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation* (Ontario, 1992), p.445

²⁶⁶ *The Montreal Daily Star*, 2 March 1900, p.2.

²⁶⁷ Part of a *La Patrie* editorial reproduced in *ibid.*, March 3rd 1900, p.13.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 March 1900, p.21.

there was only 'a slight observance' of the day in the protestant schools) but there was no conflict.²⁶⁹

However, Greg Marquis has remarked that social divisions in some Canadian cities were clearly delineated according to class and ethnicity and that such divisions overlapped the cleavage between Protestants and Catholics, who were not necessarily French.²⁷⁰ Marquis used the example of St. John, New Brunswick to illustrate Protestant imperialists' domination of the discourse of local public history and how a parochial loyalist interpretation of the past was framed within the 'larger national and international context'. Hence 'citizenship identity' in localised circumstances was easily conflated with the imperialist connection to Britain. In such milieus, Empire Day celebrations were neatly incorporated into the existing discourse of imperial loyalty and the songs, history and rituals were even embraced by some of the separate Catholic schools. Notwithstanding the clear divisions that according to Marquis amounted to a 'social apartheid', in St. John, Empire Day celebrations crossed ethnic and religious lines where Canadian nationalism (in this case, firmly connected to Britain) was a key defining feature of local citizenship.²⁷¹ However, for obvious reasons, this could not occur in Quebec, where French-speakers continued to harbour resentment, born of their historic subjugation by the British.

As the tensions of the South African War receded, some indomitable imperialists were optimistic that French-Canadians might be persuaded to embrace the imperial vision and even produced a French language version of *God Save the King*

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 23 May 1899, p.9. For a detailed report on the activities in the Quebec public schools see *The Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1899, p.3. The habit of French Canadians of simply ignoring Empire Day is noted by Ralph Allen, *Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945* (Toronto, 1961), p. 8.

²⁷⁰ Greg Marquis, 'Commemorating the Loyalists in the Loyalist City: Saint John, New Brunswick, 1883-1934' in *Urban History Review*, Vol. 33, 2004.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

especially for Empire Day.²⁷² However, it was clear that this large section of the Canadian population would remain impervious or hostile to the celebration.²⁷³ This non-participation little concerned most British Canadians, but some imperialists became 'disgruntled' when the *Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française*²⁷⁴ deliberately chose Empire Day to commemorate the memory of Adam Dollard des Ormeaux,²⁷⁵ a French colonial martyr.

The attempt to subvert Empire Day by substituting it with an alternative commemoration later became a familiar tactic of anti-imperialist groups in Australia, South Africa and India. In Australia, politics were influenced by the strong sectarianism imported into the country by its colonists. Protestant politicians frequently employed anti-Catholic rhetoric against political opponents who's Catholicism was often immaterial to their political ideologies. Opportunist Protestant politicians emphasised the supposed threat of the Catholic Church so as to rouse the 'scarcely submerged, complex of Protestant beliefs about Catholics' that characterised sectarian prejudice.²⁷⁶ The Protestant majority understood themselves as 'primarily a British people'. 'Britishness' was the 'dominant cultural myth' during the pre-war period and Empire Day was one of the key occasions on the public calendar that

²⁷² *Montreal Daily Star*, 25th May 1905, p.13.

²⁷³ In 1901, French Canadians comprised 30 percent of the Canadian population, but did not comprise a majority in any one Canadian province. 60 percent of the population were identified as being of British origin. See Buckner, pp.4-5. For a longer view of the French Canadian attitude toward the British Empire see Colin M. Coates, 'French Canadians Ambivalence to the Empire' in Buckner, pp.181-199.

²⁷⁴ The *Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française* (formed in 1903) has been described as 'the nursery of twentieth century French Canadian nationalism' in Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1945* (New York, 1955), p. 516.

²⁷⁵ See Ralph Allen, *Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945* (Toronto, 1961) p. 8 and Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1945* (New York, 1955), p. 636.

²⁷⁶ Judith Brett draws upon Michael Hogan's work to show how such prejudices included crude characterisations of Catholic morality including susceptibility to vices such as drinking and gambling as well as emphasising the history of disloyalty demonstrated by Catholics in British history. Judith Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Cambridge, 2003), p.46. Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand. Religion in Australian History* (Melbourne, 1987), pp. 106-9.

reinforced the pervasive social idea of community cohesion that 'gave meaning to the people'.²⁷⁷

Australian Catholics of Irish origin, whose ancestry was bound up with the long struggle against British oppression,²⁷⁸ had no time for the preposterous vanities and patent untruths uttered by imperialists on Empire Day, such as the Governor of South Australia's assertion that '[t]he individual Englishman was probably the greatest product of the age'²⁷⁹ and the Adelaide Observer's claim that 'The British Empire . . . had never allowed any oppressions or slavery'.²⁸⁰ The Catholic educational institutions comprehensively rejected Empire Day and their antipathy soon evolved into mischievous and provocative attempts at sabotaging the celebrations. From 1911, Catholic schools in Australia began to celebrate 'Australia Day' on 24 May. This was an overt endorsement of a nationalist vision that disdained the imperial connection and was bound to cause controversy. Hogan asserts that the decision of Catholic schools to turn their back on the imperial nationalism of Empire Day was a defensive move in that Catholics perceived an anti-Catholic potential within British imperial imagery and thus preferred to demonstrate loyalty to the Australian nation.²⁸¹ Alan Gilbert, on the other hand, argued that such overt rejections of empire²⁸² denoted a provocative motive and if the general levels of sympathy for the Irish nationalist cause are taken as an indicator of imperial loyalty, or its opposite,

²⁷⁷ Neville Meaney quoted in James Curran, 'The "Thin Dividing Line": Prime Ministers and the Problem of Australian Nationalism, 1972-1961' in *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* Volume 48, Issue: 4, 2002, p. 469.

²⁷⁸ Anti-British sentiment among Irish Catholics was not however a universal phenomenon in the settler Dominions. In Canada, Irish Catholics had distanced themselves from an entrenched anti-British stance and had little inclination toward an avowedly anti-imperialist orientation. See Mark McGowan, *The Waning of the Green, Catholics, the Irish and Identity in Toronto 1887-1922* (Montreal, 1999), pp.202-9.

²⁷⁹ Governor of South Australia speaking at Commonwealth Dinner on Empire Day in Adelaide Observer, 31 May 1913, p.50

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 30 May 1908, p.41.

²⁸¹ Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand. Religion in Australian History* (Melbourne, 1987), pp. 106-9.

²⁸² Gilbert, Alan D. 'Protestants, Catholics and loyalty: An aspect of the conscription controversies, 1916-17' *Politics*, 6:1, 1971, pp. 15-25.

then Gilbert's view seems more convincing.²⁸³ Cardinal Moran, the head of the Catholic Church in Sydney proclaimed that Empire Day was 'a childish matter' and reproached the Earl of Meath as 'an absentee Irish landlord who makes up in Imperial loyalty for lack of Irish patriotism'.²⁸⁴

That apostle of Empire Day, Archdeacon Canon Boyce, however, dismissed the attempts to usurp Empire Day as the work of 'Empire disruptionists'²⁸⁵ and The *Sydney Mail* condemned Cardinal Moran and the Roman Catholic Church as the promulgators of a limited and dangerous concept of Australian nationalism. It accused Catholics of initiating 'Australia Day' not merely as an attempt to assert their national aspirations, but as a 'counterblast to Empire Day' and a 'protest against those who in their wisdom have refrained from giving Home Rule to Ireland'.²⁸⁶ Both the *Sydney Mail* and Boyce claimed they had no objection to the idea of 'Australia Day', (Boyce suggested it should occur on 'Anniversary Day' already celebrated on January 26),²⁸⁷ but said it should not be 'a mere negation of another day'. The newspaper confidently predicted that 'Australia Day' in its present auspices was 'doomed to failure' due to popular imperial sentiment:

The Roman Catholic Church offers its protest, but the loyalty of the Australian citizens to the Empire voices itself in crashing thunder of praise and jubilation – the triumph of an immense majority over a small minority.²⁸⁸

²⁸³ The *Adelaide Chronicle* reported on a visit to Adelaide in May 1906 of two members of the Irish National Party. They were given an extraordinarily enthusiastic reception by an 'overflowing audience' made up of members of the various Irish societies of the city. A resolution in favour of Home Rule was passed without 'a whisper of opposites' and the meeting resolved to inform the Secretary of State as to their activities and resolutions. *The Adelaide Chronicle* 19 May 1906, p.34.

²⁸⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1908, p.

²⁸⁵ Archdeacon F. B. Boyce, *Empire Day* (Sydney, 1931), p.29.

²⁸⁶ *Sydney Mail*, 24th May 1911, p.6.

²⁸⁷ For a discussion of the implications of the Irish Catholics' choice of symbolism (i.e. choosing a date that actually represented the extension of the colonial empire through Captain James Cook's landing in Australia), see Jeremy Beckett 'Aboriginal Myths: Aboriginal Histories An Introduction' in *Oceania*, Volume: 65, Issue: 2, 1994, p. 97.

²⁸⁸ *Sydney Mail*, 24th May 1911, p.6.

In South Africa, where many Afrikaners' stern observance of the Protestant faith made British religious commitment appear lukewarm at best, religious divisions had little relevance to the celebration of Empire Day (although it should be noted that few Catholics in South Africa, or indeed Great Britain, had any great proclivity to celebrating Empire Day or other Protestant festivals).²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the new imperial festival brought forth a variety of responses, which help to illuminate the fluid nature of political alliances during this period. The discourse of imperial supremacy that was a central feature of the celebrations served to fix and solidify attitudes in some communities and promoted a dissenting response in others that contributed to what Marks and Trapido refer to as 'ethnic mobilisation'.²⁹⁰ As we have seen, there were some British South Africans who believed that the imperial spirit was capable of uniting the white populations. However, in many instances the enactments of Empire Day celebrations were often arrogant and deliberately exclusive. In the immediate post-war years, when Afrikaner fears of cultural disintegration abounded, some of the overblown rhetoric of Empire Day appeared to confirm a perceived threat to the way of life of the Afrikaner people. Afrikaner nationalists, determined to protect their unique culture, developed a range of strategies in response to this.

The Afrikaner rejoinder to Empire Day did not involve direct confrontation with the imperialists. Instead, between 1904-14 dissenting Afrikaners organised a number of conferences and symbolic acts of remembrance (such as the public unveilings of commemorative statues) that coincided with the day of the Empire.

²⁸⁹ On this question with respect to Britain, see Paul Ward's examination of the response to Empire Day by Irish Catholics in Manchester, Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London, 2004), p.16.

²⁹⁰ Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, 'The politics of race, class and nationalism' in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1987), p.2.

In 1904, the Boer Congress in Pretoria chose May 24 as the opening day of their conference. Whether this was planned deliberately to coincide with the imperial festival is open to question, but it is highly likely that the significance of the day was clear to the organisers. The result was that newspapers carried reports of Empire Day celebrations juxtaposed with Afrikaner criticisms of imperial strategy regarding war compensation and repatriation; it seems that, at the least, the Boer Congress had cocked a snook at South African imperialists.

Johannesburg's first Empire Day celebration took place in 1909, but Jan Smuts also appeared in the city on that day to open the congress of the South African Monuments Society whose founder was the uncompromising ex-president of the Orange Free State and founder of Orangia Unie, Martinus Steyn. The Society's sphere of activity lay in the erection and preservation of monuments to Afrikaners who had fallen in South African Wars and 'for similar purposes'. Considering the *raison d'être* of the Society, it is unquestionable that the choice of Empire Day for the opening of its congress was pure political calculation and was certainly no coincidence.²⁹¹ Smuts spoke with an affected air of virtuousness and claimed that the Society was concerned with 'nothing but what would honour their great dead and tend to the spiritual ennobling of their people' and proclaimed 'they could not but succeed in such a truly national undertaking as that for which the society had been formed'.²⁹² Obviously the occasion was imbued with ideological symbolism and perhaps the strongest indication that the South African Monuments Society's commemorative work was as much about politicisation as solemnisation was the absence of Louis Botha, Smuts' ally who was near to becoming the first Prime Minister of the new Union government.

²⁹¹ Indeed. Het Volk had decided that Empire Day should not be celebrated in the Transvaal schools the previous year., see Thompson, 'Languages of Loyalty', pp.642-3.

²⁹² *The Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1909, p.5.

Botha cited health reasons for his non-attendance, but he habitually avoided appearing in public at events with the potential to disrupt his mission of conciliation in South Africa. Smuts, probably with the agreement of Botha, demonstrated no such queasiness; at this time, he was convinced that creating unity in South Africa should not involve the elision of uncomfortable historical moments. Smuts reminded his audience that 'a holiday' was being observed over the whole of the British possessions, but he pointedly dismissed the import of Empire Day for Afrikaners by insisting that for him, May 24 had a deeper significance than that of Empire Day, 'It recalled to him the 24th May 1902, when they were gathered at Vereeniging to discuss the terms of peace, the declaration of which for him was the most memorable event of the world.'²⁹³

Smuts recounted that calls for the erection monuments to the fallen immediately after the war were deferred 'because the needs of the living had to come before the honouring of the dead', but the time for building monuments had now arrived. An earlier idea to erect a great national monument had been rejected 'for the people in each locality naturally felt they wanted something in their midst as a memorial to those of them who had given up their lives'.²⁹⁴ Local memorials, agreed Smuts, would have a deeper and more intimate meaning for them, yet he also appealed for contributions toward a great national memorial 'to the women and children who died in the concentration camps', to express the idea of their common suffering in the task of preserving their common history,

Their national life must be deepened and strengthened, and in no way could this be done better than studying the great achievements of their past history.

²⁹³ Smuts was in fact participating in the Pretoria round of the peace talks on 24 May 1902. The final act at Vereeniging did not take place until 29 May and the process culminated in the signing of the Treaty on 31 May.

²⁹⁴ *The Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1909, p.5.

Great deeds had been wrought so that the South African people might become a nation great in the history of nations and if they lived up to their past they would become a people of which the world would be proud.²⁹⁵

Consequently, whilst in one part of Johannesburg, children were being reminded of the wonder and glory of the British Empire, in another quarter, the empire's former enemies were memorialising the cruel losses inflicted upon their people by the imperial army. Smuts appeared to be taking seriously his promise made during the War that 'the ghost of the murdered Boer people will haunt the British Empire to its grave.'²⁹⁶

The Afrikaner response to Empire Day then was similar to the tactics used by Catholics in Canada and Australia and later, as we shall see, by Indian nationalists. Such a stratagem did not directly confront the imperialists, yet served to counterbalance the commemoration. However, it can also be understood as an attempt to sabotage, undermine or negate the imperial festival. This approach was exemplified in 1913, when a bronze statue of Paul Kruger (the former *bête noir* of the British Empire) was unveiled in Pretoria on, of all days, Empire Day. The statue had originally been an obsequious gift to Pretoria from the grand capitalist Sammy Marks. During the South African War, it was stored at Delagoa Bay and remained there until 1913.²⁹⁷ In fact, the return of the statue to Pretoria and its unveiling on Empire Day put the Prime Minister Louis Botha, the former overall commander of the Boer forces, in a difficult position.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years*, p.149. Although, as Hancock points out, Smuts had predicted that this would be the case only if the British 'hardened their hearts' toward the Boer people after the war. It seems that the ghosts of the dead Boers were not willing to lie down even though responsible government had been granted in the former Boer states.

²⁹⁷ For an account of the history of the Kruger Statue see Richard Mendelsohn, *Sammy Marks 'The Uncrowned King of the Transvaal'* (Cape Town, 1991), pp.89-90 and *passim*.

Louis Botha always chose an evasive strategy on Empire Day. Despite his acceptance that the new Union of South Africa was of necessity tied to the imperial nexus, personal and political considerations meant that Botha would not countenance attending Empire Day events and whilst never overtly condemning the celebration he managed successfully to distance himself from it. As Premier of the Transvaal, Botha had been careful to avoid associating himself in any way with Empire Day. However, as an agent of conciliation he also steered clear of any overt criticism of the festival – he knew that the loyalist press picked up and exploited even the subtlest hint of disapproval. This had been demonstrated in 1908 when Botha received Empire Day greetings from a school for Jewish children in Leeds (the children had written to colonial leaders throughout the Empire). The *Natal Witness* was very quick to reproduce and sneer at Botha's written response in which he acknowledged the children's good wishes and said he was pleased to hear of their correspondence with friends in other parts of the world, but went on to declare, 'if so desirable a spirit of sincere brotherhood should exist among members of the human family, it is not essential that such a spirit should first of all be fostered among members of the same Empire.'²⁹⁸

Botha operated cautiously in his efforts to avoid antagonising either side of the white ethnic divide in South Africa and he also avoided any close association with events associated with Afrikaner nationalists who refused to reconcile themselves to British supremacy in South Africa. A few years after Union, J. B. M. Hertzog, also a former Boer general, had been manoeuvred out of the cabinet on account of his injudicious expressions of anti-imperialism and he had continued to issue his overt appeals to Afrikaner nationalism. Thus, for Botha, the political risks associated with a

²⁹⁸ *The Natal Witness*, 25 May 1908, p.5

public appearance at the unveiling of the Kruger statue on Empire Day in 1913 were simply too great. So, rather than appearing in person, Botha sent a written message to be read out at the ceremony. The *Natal Witness*, which would have spared little malice if Botha had actually attended, now accused him of irresolution and weakness,

His position is too invidious, the equilibrium of his seat between two stools, is too precarious to render it advisable to appear before an audience largely composed of Dutch reactionaries; and the sting of recent attacks is too fresh for him to provoke a fresh onslaught. He therefore chose as usual the line of least resistance, and fell back onto the written word. His message to the assembly was characteristically platitudinous and conciliatory, and not of a statesmanlike cast.²⁹⁹

Botha's position was indeed invidious, even if self imposed. His hope of uniting the colonial populations and building a unitary white South African nationhood³⁰⁰ was severely tested by the entrenched positions of both jingo imperialists and Afrikaner nationalists. Botha understood the need to seek support from English-speaking South Africans, but had to avoid disaffecting his Afrikaner constituency.

As it happened, the unveiling of Kruger's statue was far less provocative than might have been anticipated. Indeed, The *Natal Witness*, quite forgetting its crude characterisation of the people who turned out to watch the ceremony ('an audience . . . of Dutch reactionaries') applauded the tributes paid to Kruger, which it insisted were 'well deserved'.³⁰¹ The *Rand Daily Mail* agreed and suggested that such events could

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 26 May 1913, p.5.

³⁰⁰ See John Lambert, 'South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The evolution of an identity in the 1910s and 1920s' in *South African Historical Journal* 43 (Nov. 2000), p.199.

³⁰¹ The *Natal Witness*, 26 May 1913, p.4.

contribute to the development of a 'shared national feeling' among Afrikaners and English speakers.³⁰²

The efforts of the conciliators to create a tangible bond of nationhood in South Africa were often obstructed by obstinate Afrikaner nationalists and jingoistic imperialists who were unwilling to bury and forget bitter feelings. Ethnic separation was characterised by the complete lack of consensus as to which day of the year should symbolise the South African nation. Diehard imperialists conceived South African nationhood as a corollary of loyalty to the British Empire and promoted the veneration of Empire Day as the national day of South Africa. In 1910, the year of political union, the *Cape Times* claimed that Empire Day was embedded in the calendar in much the same way, as was Christmas Day. The dual themes of sacred reverence for the empire and national communion were further emphasised through a eulogy that envisaged Empire Day as being 'emblematical of the unity of the Empire': it was nothing less than 'the British Thanksgiving Day'.³⁰³ This attempt to consecrate Empire Day seemed to be a response to the renewed interest that Afrikaners were showing in their own 'Thanksgiving Day' - Dingaan's Day - which in 1910 the Union parliament had declared a public holiday throughout South Africa. The English speaking and non-white South Africans attached little import to the day, and merely used the public holiday to pursue leisure and recreational activities, (in much the same way as those unmoved by or uninterested in Empire Day enjoyed that public holiday as a day of relaxation). But the celebration of the day by many Afrikaners was infused with a fervour of political and ideological consequence. It served to stimulate their historical consciousness and, following the First World War, aided the further revival

³⁰² *The Rand Daily Mail*, 1913, p.5.

³⁰³ *The Cape Times*, 24 May 1910, p.6.

of national awareness and cultural reinvigoration.³⁰⁴ The seriousness attached to the occasion was indicated by the resolution of a Dingaan's Day planning committee that (unlike Empire Day) 'no sports or target shooting [was] to be held in conjunction with the festival'.³⁰⁵

Dingaan's Day was revived by nationalists as a way to implant and sustain a historical sense of belonging within the Boer/Afrikaner community. It was used to emphasise the exceptionality of the Afrikaner people and validate their claim to the settlement and ownership of the land, just as British imperialists used Empire Day to legitimise colonial settlement and imperial rule. Notably, both Empire Day and Dingaan's Day legitimised white supremacy although, significantly, unlike Afrikaner nationalist ideology, Empire Day's message was ostensibly inclusive, because imperial rhetoric and the experience of the Cape franchise held out the promise of elevating black people to an equal political status.³⁰⁶ In contrast, Dingaan's Day promoted an exclusive Afrikaner identity based on their historical relationship with God.³⁰⁷

Dingaan's Day (or The Day of the Covenant) was the oldest Afrikaner national celebration. It commemorated the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838 where the *Voortrekkers* secured a crucial victory against the far superior numbers of the Zulu army of King Dingane. The 'covenant' refers to the apparent oath made by the *Voortekkers* on the eve of combat that if God granted them victory, they would honour the day in perpetuity. Dingaan's Day was celebrated as an ecclesiastical day of thanksgiving until 1865 when it was declared a public holiday by

³⁰⁴ <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-07242003-161607/> accessed 29 September 2005. Bailey, Alana. 'Die gelofte van 16 Desember 1838: Die herdenking en betekenis daarvan, 1838 tot 1910' *Unpublished Master's Dissertation*, University of Pretoria, 2003. English language abstract

³⁰⁵ *Die Volkstem*, 27 May 1913, p.15.

³⁰⁶ Donald Denoon and Balam Nyeko, *Southern Africa since 1800*, (Harlow, 1986), pp162-163.

³⁰⁷ In 1948, the National Party in Government, renamed Dingaan's Day as the Day of the Covenant.

the South African Republic. Thirty years later the Orange Free State followed suit. During the South African War, the commemoration of the day was inspirational for Boer soldiers who once again found they were fighting against overwhelming odds.³⁰⁸ Significantly, the funeral of Paul Kruger, took place on Dingaan's Day 1904, several months after his death.

In realisation of the difficulties of reconciling Afrikaners to Empire Day and the British to Dingaan's Day, some South Africans promoted an alternative national day. The celebration of Union appeared to offer the prospect of constructing a 'secular' day of national commemoration for the new South Africa and thus Union Day was introduced into the calendar in 1910. However, there was little enthusiasm for the day. The *Cape Times* insisted that the new celebration should have an equal status to that of Empire Day,³⁰⁹ but also complained that the proximity of Union Day (31 May) to Empire Day accounted for the modest nature of Empire Day celebrations in 1910.³¹⁰

Interest in organising Union Day celebrations, however, was generally lacking. Peter Merrington has signalled the 'immense enthusiasm of the moment of Union', but notes that this was short lived and hopes of cohesive imperial and national identity formation in South Africa were comprehensively shattered by the ramifications of the 1913 Land Act and the Afrikaner Rebellion in 1914.³¹¹ However, prior to these events, in Bloemfontein it was supposed that Union Day might inspire greater numbers than Empire Day. In 1912, the Bloemfontein branch of the Victoria

³⁰⁸ Deneys Reitz had witnessed the revival of the Dingaan's Day commemoration during the South African War when General Beyers organised a religious gathering and a symbolic cairn building ritual. Reitz himself stayed away thinking that it was all too theatrical: see Deneys Reitz, *Commando. A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (London, 1929), p.140.

³⁰⁹ *The Cape Times*, 24 May 1910, p.6.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1910, p.10. It was in fact the death and funeral of King Edward that affected the celebration of Empire Day in 1910.

³¹¹ Peter Merrington, 'Masques, Monuments, and Masons: The 1910 Pageant of the Union of South Africa' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 1. Performing (In) South Africa (March, 1997), pp.1-14.

League moved their annual fete from Empire Day to Union Day - an initiative surely based upon humility and common sense. The *Bloemfontein Post* had more or less written off Empire Day a week earlier when it pointed out that the Afrikaners who had so recently been brought into the empire could hardly be expected to demonstrate 'an excess of fiery zeal' for this. Nevertheless, the newspaper did retain the belief that as 'intolerant jingoism' and 'narrow, rigid, racial exclusiveness' waned, the appeal of celebrating the imperial attachment would increase and the larger idea (pride in Empire) 'must conquer'.³¹² All the same, Union Day, which ostensibly offered a benign platform for integrated celebrations, 'was generally observed without any manifestation of excitement' or pride.³¹³ Nevertheless, the ever-sanguine Dr. Viljoen (the Empire Day enthusiast) insisted that it was a success in Bloemfontein:

[Union Day] succeeded in accomplishing what their politicians had failed to do, and that was to get Dutch and English to cooperate in [such] a way that neither was really concerned about what his neighbour was by birth.³¹⁴

Notwithstanding, Viljoen's enthusing, Union Day was to remain a dormant national day until a temporary revival in the 1920s prompted by the 'Flag Controversy'.

In the pre-war era, then, Empire Day was faced with various nationalist challenges in the white settler colonies, but only in South Africa was the notion of an avowedly imperialist identity amongst the white population so disparate in its manifestation as to so severely compromise the festival's development and impact. The fact of the minority status of British South Africans amongst whites in the Union was undoubtedly an impediment to Empire Day from the start, but its potential was further hindered by the polarisation engendered by the South African War. Ultimately Empire Day's function amongst the white population in South Africa was reduced

³¹² *The Bloemfontein Post*, 25 May 1912, p.6.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

mainly to a platitudinous expression of loyalty to the Crown or as an opportunity for jingoist posturing aimed at the protection of 'British' interests in the face of an emerging Afrikaner nationalism.

Conclusion

Empire Day had been conceived as a children's festival with the specific aim of inculcating imperial sentiment into the minds of schoolchildren throughout the Empire, and more especially in its principal areas of white settlement: the metropole itself obviously, and in places such as Canada, Australia and South Africa.

Nevertheless, in Britain, Canada and Australia the development of the imperial celebration followed a dual trajectory; on the one hand it was used as a pedagogic strategy designed to encourage loyalty, patriotism and imperial awareness among the rising generations and on the other it was developed as a community festival that brought forth a profusion of patriotic demonstrations in the wider adult community. Adult participation is a persistent feature of Empire Day celebrations in the white colonies between 1902 and 1914, and in some cases the adult festivities became more important than the children's. In the white settler colonies, the nature of adult participation was often highly politicised in the context of competing ethnic groups; this is in contrast to the political battles that were later to take place on Empire Day in Great Britain (see Chapter 6) which were based on class conflict rather than a battle for ethnic supremacy. Before 1918, however, although Empire Day was criticised in Britain for its apparent vulgarity and its capacity to serve party political purposes, the core message of Empire Day, that is the righteousness of the British Empire, was rarely challenged.

To some extent, the success of Empire Day in Great Britain, Canada and Australia can be attributed to a spontaneous enthusiasm amongst sections of the

populations that was informed by the fact that their cultures were anyway saturated with imperialist imagery, symbols and propaganda. The construction of imperial identities was a deliberate component of the educational curriculum and was reinforced within wider civil society in multifarious ways ranging from the selling of merchandise to public celebrations of the monarchical imperialist state such as during Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. Nevertheless, the Empire Day Movement was denied direct governmental support and would probably not have been established as a recognised festival on the civic calendar without the considerable promotional efforts by sympathetic social entrepreneurs. In the context of local politics Empire Day sometimes became a matter of civic pride and managed to draw in a diverse set of supporters.

It is without doubt that the imperial press network was at the forefront of the campaign to advance Empire Day. In every corner of the empire, there seemed to be at least one newspaper that allocated extensive space on its pages to promoting and supporting the new commemoration. Future research into Empire Day will no doubt analyse the role of the press in the less developed colonies and more isolated outposts of the empire.³¹⁵ Commonly, there was near consensus amongst the Empire-supporting press that Empire Day was an event of considerable importance and merited comprehensive coverage. The adoption of Empire Day imagery and rhetoric by many commercial advertisers in the pages of the newspapers provides a good indicator of how it was perceived that popular sentiment was very sympathetic to the new festival. The sellers of goods, after all, are averse to aligning themselves with phenomena that won't promote sales.

³¹⁵ Indicative research suggests that there is a rich seam to be mined in this respect.

The efforts of imperialist organisations to extend the spread and importance of Empire Day reveal the effective functioning of an active imperialist nexus across several continents. Despite the reluctance of the British government to institutionalise Empire Day, the higher echelons of power were well represented in the organisation of Empire Day events. For those amongst the white population usually excluded from power on account of their gender, Empire Day offered a quite unique opportunity for empowerment. Without departing from the male-dominated discourse of patriotic imperialism, women established themselves as the vanguard of the Empire Day Movement in the white settler colonies and gave themselves a leading role in political organisation which may have helped established their authority in civil society.

In Britain, Empire Day as an invented tradition had particular efficacy in the years 1905 to 1914. The celebrations spilled out from the schools into the wider community with significant numbers of adults becoming involved in the voluntary organisation of Empire Day festivities. The rituals and symbolism of Empire Day helped to create a sense of social cohesion that appeared to transcend class divisions. It played a part in reinforcing existing social relations and performed a socialising role upholding and inculcating a belief in racial superiority and the rectitude of the British Empire. Although the festival did not have an absolutely universal appeal, many working class biographies attest to the influential role the schools celebrations played in shaping their British imperial identity. As shown, outside of the schools it was not unknown for working class organisations to participate in the celebrations.

In many senses Empire Day in Britain, then, had a hegemonic quality and reflected popular support for imperialism. In the white settler colonies Empire Day performed some different roles. It could be central to the task of buttressing a colonial identity and aiding cultural assimilation amongst non-British emigrants. In Canada

and Australia, there were dissenting sections of the population who were mainly defined by their ethnicity (although in Australia there was a strong correlation between certain ethnicities and class status) and some groups responded to Empire Day by dreaming up nationalist-orientated counter commemorations. Nevertheless, imperial nationalism³¹⁶ was in the ascendancy before the First World War and Empire Day cemented itself firmly in place in those colonies. In South Africa on the other hand, the majority section of the white population had too recently been the victims of a brutal imperial subjugation for Empire Day to have any significant purchase upon them. The Afrikaner leaders of the Union government accepted their constitutional position within the empire, but in this period neither Smuts nor Botha went out of their way to acknowledge Empire Day: Botha did his best to ignore the celebration, whilst Smuts went so far as to associate himself with alternative commemorative events on May 24.

Empire Day never secured a united English-speaking constituency in South Africa either and this was simply because the English speaking South Africans were not united. The English speaking white working class of the Transvaal saw class interests as their foremost priority and concerns about their identity were primarily centred on the attempts to dilute white labour with more exploitable non-white, or indeed Afrikaner, labour in the mines.³¹⁷ On the whole, Empire Day in the Transvaal remained a children's festival. There were some stalwart imperialists in the Cape who promoted Empire Day with vigour, but on the whole Empire Day seemed to have a mainly commemorative function (rather than a starkly propagandist one as in Natal)

³¹⁶ For a discussion of the distinction between Colonial nationalism and patriotism see Douglas Cole, 'The Problem of "Nationalism" and "Imperialism" in British Settlement Colonies' in *Journal of British Studies*, 10 (1971), pp.162-4, 174, 178-9.

³¹⁷ See Dagmar Engelken, 'The Labour Movement and the Chinese Labour Question in Britain and South Africa, 1900-1910' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2009), chap. 1, especially pp. 27-30; 36-8; 52-4; 74-77; 100-2.

and was even envisaged as a vehicle of conciliation or as a means of securing party political advantage. The belligerent jingoism that accompanied Empire Day in Natal, by contrast, was an indicator of how regional identity – and indeed demography: English-speakers outnumbered Afrikaners here - influenced the interpretation of the purpose of the celebration. The obstinate imperialists of Natal did little to temper the jingoistic aspects of Empire Day and used the event in an attempt to defend their British identity in the face of an encroaching South Africanism that sought to define the nation in a way that transcended the white ethnic divide. Overall in South Africa, Empire Day seemed to have a disparate manifestation and its constituency lacked the sense of popular cohesiveness that sustained it in Britain and the other white colonies. Moreover, imperialism, where it was embraced, was the doctrine of the minority white population in South Africa and was never likely to achieve hegemonic status.

Chapter 2

Empire Day in India 1905-1914.

As the previous chapter has shown, the South African War demonstrated to imperialists that the possibility of 'internal rebellion' complicated the existing problems of defending the extensive land frontier of the Empire. Meath observed that a 'ridiculously small a number of fighting men' defended the vast imperial domain; he hoped Empire Day would inspire young boys and men throughout the British colonial world to seek military and physical training as preparation for protecting their 'mighty heritage' when required to do so.¹

Such views would certainly have resonated amongst the colonial rulers in India who were haunted by unsettling memories of the 1857 rebellion. The total population exceeded 300 millions and was garrisoned by approximately 65,000 British troops.² For Lord Minto, viceroy between 1905 and 1910, the centrality of the small Indian army to the Raj was encapsulated in his assertion that '[w]e hold our position here by the sword'.³

In fact, Minto's conviction that British rule in India was secured more by coercion than consent was not universally accepted. Twenty-five years previously

¹ Earl of Meath, 'British Youth and Empire' in *Brabazon Potpourri*, pp. 94-97.

² The British soldiers were outnumbered by about 130,000 Indian troops who served in the Indian Army. Exact figures for 1879 state that the army in India was comprised of 6,602 British officers and 60,341 British and 123,254 Indian troops: Pradeep P. Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (Westport, 2003), p.3. By 1911, the number of British soldiers had increased by 10,000, whilst 26,000 had been added to the number of Indian troops. Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London, 2001), p. 430.

³ Lord Minto in a letter to John Morley, 13 May 1909, quoted in M. N. Das, *India Under Morley and Minto. Politics Behind Revolution, Repression and Reforms* (London, 1964), p.20.

during the furore over the Ilbert Bill,⁴ the Tory MP Ellis Ashmead Bartlett had declared that 'It is not by force alone that British rule in India is maintained'; he acclaimed 'the little band of soldiers and administrators' who were 'respected and obeyed by the masses around them' by dint of the 'prestige' they held among the Indian people.⁵ Bartlett's conception of an imperial government that retained power by creating and maintaining esteem and legitimacy amongst the subject population (or rather a strategic section of the population) stresses a key aspect of British imperial rule. Of course, the esteem that the British enjoyed amongst the many different sections of the population(s) of India is difficult to measure and, as the events following the partition of Bengal (and indeed, the revocation of that administrative arrangement) demonstrated, the regard for British rule was contingent and variable. Nevertheless, it is the esteem that key sections of the population held for the British, or rather the British *system* of rule, which supports the idea that, during this period, consent to imperial rule was axiomatic to its maintenance. The disintegration of that consent in later years would demonstrate the impossibility of holding India 'by the sword' alone. Judith Brown observed that the British Indian Army was certainly a factor in ensuring obedience in India, but it 'could not have contained India-wide rebellion or serious non-cooperation with their regime: mass acquiescence was vital'.⁶ John Morley, Secretary of State for India during Minto's viceroyalty, believed that controlling India solely by military means was not viable and that the government lacked the capacity to institute any form of effective martial law.⁷

⁴ The Bill was a failed attempt to equalise the justice system by allowing Indian judges to try European British subjects. The hysterical reaction of the British Indians against this proposal was a profound demonstration of the deep racist attitudes of the white European minority in India. See for example, S. M. Burke and Salim Al-Din Quraishi, *The British Raj in India: An Historical Review* (Oxford, 1995), p.58.

⁵ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India, III.4, Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1994), p.210.

⁶ Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford, 1995), p.138.

⁷ See James, *Raj*, p.430.

Minto's analysis of British rule in India was influenced by the circumstances of his viceroyalty in the early twentieth century, which coincided with a period of political turmoil and seditious violence in Bengal. Curzon's partition of the region created such intense political discord that it threw up critical and dangerous questions about the nature and legitimacy of British authority in India and introduced into the political realm a form of protest that was unequivocally anti-British. In this context, the Earl of Meath's efforts to propagate the new Empire Day celebration could be seen as particularly timely for the Government of India, which might have chosen to use Empire Day to cultivate and exploit such imperial sentiment and loyalty as existed among elements of the population. However, in the decade preceding the First World War, the Government of India demonstrated little inclination to promote or encourage Empire Day celebrations. In part, this was a reflection of the British Government's attitude to Empire Day at home where, despite widespread public participation, it was not recognised officially until 1916. In addition, as Thomas Metcalf has pointed out, the government in India did not necessarily see Empire Day as a political opportunity precisely because it was launched at a time of heightened nationalist activity and insurrectionary violence. Some officials believed it would be difficult to pitch Empire Day at the right note due to concerns about provoking a negative response from extreme nationalists. Widespread protest and resistance to the partition of Bengal had strengthened radical groups within the Indian National Congress and the idea of *swaraj* (self-rule) was beginning to be seen as a viable goal among a growing number of political thinkers and activists.⁸

According to Metcalf, the British authorities in India adopted a pragmatic approach to Empire Day and played down its importance, anticipating that the

⁸ See Jim Masselos, *Indian Nationalism: An History* (New Delhi, 1986), pp.111-118.

triumphalist tone of the new festival would provoke indignation among Indian nationalists. Moreover,

Empire Day had to contend with the contradictions that bedevilled the underlying ideology of empire, for it was difficult for the British to conceive of Indians as patriotic members of an 'imperial race'. Hence the Indian government sought to sidestep the issue by cultivating instead a feeling of 'personal loyalty' to the sovereign.⁹

Without doubt, Metcalf has identified some of the issues that inhibited the Indian government from promulgating the new festival of Empire. However, his analysis is problematic. He has made inferences using evidence gleaned from a single archival file that relates to the year 1907 and that concerns the province of Bengal, where anti-British agitation in response to partition was widespread. In fact, there has been no previous research concerning Empire Day in India, and in relying on seemingly unrepresentative snippets of information, Metcalf has assumed that the negligible official government interest in Empire Day was a fair reflection of the public response to the new festival. He asserts that 'Indian [imperial] celebrations carefully avoided the date of 24 May'.¹⁰ This is not the case. As we shall see, the wider evidence demonstrates that between 1905 and 1914 Empire Day was celebrated in India on a more extensive scale than suggested by Metcalf. Despite the near-absence of central government co-ordination, the celebrations did receive official approbation in some states. In the schools, the organisation of Empire Day was an accompaniment to a more generalised effort to promote a deeper knowledge of, and affiliation to the ideal of empire and it is evident that across the sub-continent a range of groups perceived Empire Day as having a useful social or political function; despite official disinterest,

⁹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.221.

¹⁰ Ibid.

many Empire Day events were organised by enthused clusters of British residents and Indian loyalists.¹¹

What is notable about the development of Empire Day in India is its mutability. In Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon and Jamaica, the core rituals of the festival were quickly established and to a large degree remained consistent and predictable up until the First World War. In comparison, the purpose and function of Empire Day in India was interpreted in a variety of ways, producing an irregular and changeable collection of ceremonies and customs. The difficulty in establishing a homogeneous celebration in India is hardly surprising considering the diverse socio-cultural landscape of the gigantic British colony. On the other hand, Meath's centralised coordination¹² ensured that core Empire Day rituals performed in Montreal would, on the whole, remain consistent with those enacted in Cape Town, Colombo, Adelaide, Birmingham or Kingston. The close similarity in the development of the new Empire Day 'traditions' throughout the British world illustrated that there was a general understanding of a key principle of the Empire Day Movement - the desire to foster a sense of shared community and purpose across continents. Nevertheless, despite Meath's success in developing a concordant Empire Day format in many regions, it appears that in India only a small number of communities managed to introduce a celebration that consistently incorporated

¹¹ There was not an entire absence of Empire Day celebrations in Bengal during the troubled partition years either. In 1906, *The Englishman* reported on a 'worthy' Empire Day concert organised by the teachers of St. Xavier's, a Jesuit school in Calcutta, *The Englishman*, 25 May 1906, p.6. St. Xavier's was a former school of several notable Indians including Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet; see *Times of India*, 8 May 2009, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Tagore-flunked-school-St-Xaviers-School-reveals/articleshow/4497442.cms> (accessed 6 December 2009).

¹² Meath poured forth a relentless stream of circular letters to newspapers throughout the Empire, which he supplemented with numerous communiqués, and instructions that he issued to the assorted imperialist organisations and individuals who orchestrated Empire Day events. For examples, see India Office Records, (hereafter IOR) P/2697, acknowledgement of receipt of a series of leaflets from the Empire Day Movement, Madras Education Department, Miscellaneous Papers, January-June, 1907, p.iv; and *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1911, p.3, detailing the prominence given to Meath's annual circular at the Empire Day celebration in 1911.

Meath's prescriptions. Generally, Empire Day celebrations in India continued to be changeable from region to region and from year to year. An examination of the different ways in which Empire Day was celebrated in India before the First World War reveals that its meaning did not acquire fixity during this period and that the nature of celebrations depended on the interpretation of the functions of Empire Day by the various social groups who organised and participated in the events.

It would be stretching credulity to suggest that Empire Day was a popular event in India; the majority of the population rarely encountered an agent of the Raj,¹³ let alone felt the compunction to rejoice publicly in honour of the Empire. However, an analysis of Empire Day allows insight into the critical constituencies upon which the British relied for the maintenance of their rule. The speeches and pronouncements made on Empire Day shine a light upon how loyalists perceived themselves in relation to their imperial rulers and can demonstrate either the fragile or enduring nature of imperialist sentiment in a particular region or within a specific group. Furthermore, the public display of putative imperial unity on Empire Day exposes through its organisation and enactment not only the myriad patterns of colonial society, but also some of the flaws, weaknesses, divisions and tensions therein. The long view of Empire Day in India, which will be further explored in succeeding chapters, shows how there was an ebb and flow of loyalist sentiment among constituencies that were important to the British. Yet, with the rise of a truly popular nationalism in India, most of these loyalist groups became marginalized and their imperialism irrelevant. In contrast, the influence of particular sections of the 'loyal' population in the pre-war era was sometimes crucial to the British administration. In this chapter Empire Day is disinterred from its forgotten tomb in India, and dissected,

¹³ David Taylor, *The Territories and States of India* (London, 2002), p. 5.

in order to illuminate aspects of the nature of consent to, and accommodation with, British rule.

The Establishment of Empire Day in India

Empire Day had an immediate appeal for some sections of the population in India; it is evident that a considerable number of events were organised throughout the colony. In some communities, the arrival of a new festive day was greeted with impulsive eagerness (which might partly be explained by the fact that Indian society was well attuned to festivals by the great number of religious celebrations that peppered the calendar). For example, in Bangalore the first Empire Day festival in 1905 was both elaborate and inclusive. There was no official recognition by the Mysore government, but much energy was nevertheless expended in ornamenting public buildings, shops and the main streets of Bangalore with bunting, flags and decorative arches.¹⁴ A grand Empire Day fete attracted 10,000 people representing 'all classes including a large number of society people'. They listened to bands, and were entertained with a burlesque football match, minstrels, clowns, wrestling and horsemanship displays. In the evening an impressive imperial procession preceded a torchlight tattoo, fireworks and patriotic singing. *The Madras Mail* declared it 'one of the best attended and most interesting fetes ever held in Bangalore' and congratulated the Empire Day Committee on its success.¹⁵

The extravagant celebration of Empire, then, was clearly taken up with enthusiasm in Bangalore and the festivities encompassed a wide section of the British and Indian communities. The inaugural celebrations in the city had been distinct and unrivalled: the Bangalore Empire Day Committee anticipated a large surplus from the

¹⁴ *The Madras Mail*, 24 May 1905, p.7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1905, p.5.

takings in the following year. This too, attracted 'many thousands of people, of all classes', some of whom travelled from as far as Mysore and Madras to take part.¹⁶ Whether it was patriotism and imperial fervour or the lure of well-organised entertainment that motivated such mass participation is of course open to question. However, whatever the balance between imperialistic zeal and simple pleasure seeking, it seems that the organisers tried hard to strike an equilibrium between 'secular' amusements and the promotion of imperial pride.¹⁷

It should be noted that the organisers of Empire Day in Bangalore were able to build upon the military garrison's customary celebration of Queen Victoria's birthday.¹⁸ Nevertheless, there were plenty of towns and cities with no such tradition, yet a popular and enthusiastic response to the new festival was recorded. A case in point is Karachi. Flags were raised on all public buildings and in the evening 'large numbers of people' gathered around the Victoria memorial statue to lay wreaths and listen to a military band concert. Later, an 'audience of all communities' congregated inside a large function hall 'filled to overflowing' to witness the first public debate of the local branch of the British Empire League. The debate, entitled 'India and the Empire' involved a succession of British speakers, who discoursed on the putative advantages Indian people enjoyed through their subjection to imperial rule. (This was a familiar trope, to be found for example on Empire Day in Ceylon).¹⁹ Particular emphasis was placed upon the notion of the mutual interdependence of India and

¹⁶ *The Englishman*, 26 May 1906, p.5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The British regional administrative headquarters for the princely state of Mysore had been located in Bangalore since 1831.

¹⁹ *The Englishman*, 26 May 1906, p.5. In his Empire Day speech of 1908, the Governor of Ceylon reminded 'the Ceylonese in general' that British rule brought peace; security of life and property; protection from foreign invasion; religious freedom; impartial justice; civilisation and excellent administration without corruption; 'a series of magnificent public works which have added to your prosperity, a network of roads, hundreds of bridges, a fine system of railways, a splendid harbour, ... post office and telegraphs everywhere – and all these combine with the enormous development that has taken place under British rule and by the introduction of so much British capital for the purpose of agriculture'. See *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 23 May 1908, p.5.

Britain and the 'disastrous consequences' that would arise if their connection were to be severed. By 1909, Empire Day in Karachi had outgrown any public hall; the new venue was the zoological gardens, duly decorated with flags and pennants. The crowds gathered there 'until the whole gardens were a mass of human beings representing every nationality'.²⁰

Despite the aloofness of the Government of India and a paucity of official recognition, then, popular initiative and voluntary endeavour ensured Empire Day was recognised as a significant anniversary in some locations. As early as 1908, Empire Day featured prominently in a Madras Almanac within a list of fixed anniversaries and memorable festivals.²¹ And, according to *The Englishman*, Empire Day was celebrated in Karachi with such enthusiasm that it was generally regarded as an unofficial holiday.²²

Predictably, the military regularly marked Empire Day - although the character of celebrations depended on the discretion of local commanders. Hence, festivities were sometimes conducted in a light-hearted fashion involving sports and entertainment, such as those in 1905 at Cannanore where the 79th Carnatic Infantry, a predominantly Indian regiment, were stationed.²³ Other garrisons adopted a ritualised ceremonial formula that involved grandiose military parades and artillery salutes;²⁴ such formidable Empire Day spectacles were witnessed by large crowds of the Indian public and no doubt made an impact on their minds as to the coercive power of the imperial government.

²⁰ *The Bombay Gazette*, 27 May 1909, p.6.

²¹ *The Asylum Press Almanac and Directory of Madras and Southern India* (Madras, 1908), p.2 and p.11.

²² *The Englishman*, 26 May 1909, p.5.

²³ *Madras Mail*, 27 May 1905, p.7. See also the reports that detail the various displays and cavorting of the regiments based in Bangalore in 1906 in 'Empire Day Celebrations', *The Englishman*, 26 May 1906, p.8.

²⁴ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1906, p.5.

Grand banquets and dinners were a regular feature of Empire Day in India, such as that organised in 1905 by Thomas Leishman, a brewer and sweets manufacturer who later went on to form United Breweries. Over sixty army pensioners and their families were treated to a generous feast chosen from an 'appropriate menu' compiled of dishes that reflected the breadth and diversity of the Empire: the diners could choose from a selection that included: 'Empire Soup', Canadian Tongue, Irish Turkey, Welsh Sauce, Roast Beef of Old England, Mysore Roast Fowl, British Colombian apricots, Nilgiri vegetables, Cheddar cheese, Leishman bon bons, Kimberley jewelled crackers, Bangalore Fruit and Imperial plums. General Eccles Nixon addressed the gathering and observed that there were men present who were veterans of 'the Mutiny' and some who had joined up even earlier (the oldest veteran having enlisted during the 1840s). 'No one', proclaimed the general, 'has a greater right to be present or is more welcome on this occasion than you who manfully doing their duty in the station allocated to them have personally helped to extend the empire.'²⁵

The work of extending and protecting the borders of the empire was an ongoing task, and in India the army relied heavily on the recruitment of Indian troops to maintain its strength. As noted earlier, Indian troops outnumbered British soldiers by a ratio of two to one and occasions such as Empire Day carried great significance in reinforcing a sense of imperial loyalty within the army. There is some evidence that Empire Day rapidly colonised the military consciousness, as demonstrated through a heliographed message sent from the field of action by General Willcocks in 1908, during the culmination of a short campaign against a 'troublesome' people on the North West Frontier:

²⁵ *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1905, p.3.

Empire Day dawned with every prospect of a good fight with the Utman Khels who were reported strongly placed on our line of advance and about 3,000 strong . . . The Utman Khels have never previously been punished and their losses today amounting to about 100 killed, should have a quietening effect. Our losses amounted to one native soldier killed and nine wounded.²⁶

In addition to the activities of the regular army, volunteer battalions in the towns and cities were conspicuously active on Empire Day. For example, in 1912, the Viceroy witnessed an impressive display in Simla where volunteer forces 'swarmed' down a ridge toward the city. The surrounding hillsides were 'covered with spectators' and this large public attendance was facilitated by the fact that in Simla Empire Day was observed as a public holiday and all government offices, banks and places of business were closed.²⁷

Indeed, despite the Government of India's refusal to declare Empire Day a public holiday, a number of provinces and princely states in India declared it to be so. For example, as early as 1907, the Mysore government recognised Empire Day by granting an official public holiday²⁸ and in Bombay the civil and military authorities confirmed that Empire day should be observed as a public holiday in 1911.²⁹ At the higher levels of government also, time was put aside to celebrate Empire Day; in 1905, a state ball given at Darjeeling by the Lieutenant Governor was affirmed as a

²⁶ *The Madras Mail*, 26 May 1908, p.3. This kind of punishment expedition (which is better described as a massacre) was a frequent occurrence on the North West Frontier and demonstrated the vast superiority of the British India Army over the 'tribal' armies they encountered. Such was the efficacy of the Indian units under his command that Willcocks became well known in England for a series of such short and conclusive encounters, which were christened by *Punch* magazine as 'Willcock's Weekend Wars': see T. R. Moreman, 'The British and Indian Armies and North West Frontier Warfare, 1849-1914' in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 10, 1, January 1992, p.57.

²⁷ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1912, p.6. For other examples of typical Empire Day events involving the Military: see *Madras Mail* 26 May 1908, p.3 (parade and shooting competition, Kolar); *The Englishman*, 26 May 1909, p.5 (Mussoorie Rifles officers dinner, Lucknow); *Madras Mail*, 27 May 1909, p.5 (Dinner-dance for Officers, NCOs and veterans, Poonamallee).

²⁸ *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1907, p.7 and 29 May 1907, p.3.

²⁹ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1911, p.5.

'brilliant success' and in 1907, Lord Minto gave a state dinner in Simla: this was a sumptuous affair attended by 81 heads of department and 81 other high officers including Lord Kitchener and all the members of the viceroy's executive council. Telegrams were read from Earl Meath and from the Mayor of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, sending the congratulations of the Sikh Community to the Viceroy on Empire Day.³⁰

These examples of early Empire Day celebrations in India demonstrate that both within the official sphere and sections of the general public there was an undoubted enthusiasm for the new festival and that it was certainly not carefully avoided or ignored in the manner that Metcalf suggests. Indeed, there is no doubt that the Empire Day Movement established a foothold in India prior to the First World War. Nevertheless, this tells us little about its actual significance. In terms of the number of communities who marked Empire Day and the total of participants proportionate to the population of India, an evaluation of its success would veer sharply toward a pessimistic view. As will be demonstrated, this is not to suggest that Empire Day was without importance in India, but it does indicate that the instigators and organisers of the festival had to work extremely hard to establish a sense that the celebrations were an attractive, accepted and enduring addition to the calendar.

The ongoing history of Empire Day in Bangalore provides an example of where the maintenance of the celebrations represented more the disproportionate efforts of a few individuals than a popular demonstration of imperialist sentiment. Compared to the spectacularly successful events of 1905 and 1906, subsequent celebrations were undoubtedly dry and dismal. Between 1907 and 1910 the event was

³⁰ *The Madras Mail*, 26 May 1905, p.5 and 25 May 1907, p.7.

conspicuously subdued and never attracted more than 300 participants.³¹ In 1911, a handful of Bangalore residents led by an indefatigable campaigner, Mrs. Dawson, attempted to revive the festival. Mrs Dawson recruited a brace of military men - Captain Baker (who was also the local scoutmaster)³² and Captain Applin (of the 14th Hussars) to assist her imperialistic endeavours. Nevertheless, in 1911, they struggled to muster 100 schoolchildren for the Empire Day procession and associated rituals, with *The Englishman* pointing out that 'fully 30% of the boys and girls present belonged to the various Indian educational institutions in the station, the Mahomedin detachment being particularly strong and enthusiastic in their loyal demonstration.'³³

In 1912, Dawson and her compatriots convinced the Bangalore public and its Traders Association to contribute to the costs. *The Englishman* supported public donations to the day and insisted that 'the municipality should in future associate itself more closely with the celebration and take a more prominent part in organising yearly demonstrations by the children in this part of the Empire'.³⁴ Dawson's campaigning was successful - over 2,000 children assembled that year; they wore red, white and blue rosettes and each carried a miniature Union Jack. That the success of the day can be largely attributed to Mrs. Dawson's efforts is confirmed by the fact that her absence (due to illness) the following year resulted in 'modified enthusiasm': participation was in the main limited to a troop of boy scouts and a large number of army officers who probably had little choice about the matter after having 'been especially asked' by the General to attend.³⁵ In 1914, an attempt to organise a more

³¹ Ibid., 26 May 1908, p.3 and 28 May 1909, p.3. The absence of anything other than a pitiful gathering of schoolchildren in Bangalore in 1909 ran counter to the general trend in India when Empire Day was celebrated on a larger scale than previously.

³² T. H. Baker was one of the pioneers of scouting, his Bangalore troop, which was the first in India was established in 1909, G. R. Madan, *Indian Social Problems. Volume 2. Social Disorganisation and Reconstruction* (New Delhi, 2005), p.133.

³³ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1911, p.5, and 26 May 1911, p.3.

³⁴ Ibid., 25 May 1912, p.6.

³⁵ *The Madras Mail*, 28 May 1913, p.6.

extravagant Empire Day celebration encountered 'certain obstacles' and the plans were abandoned. Nevertheless the stalwart troop of Boy Scouts, ushered by Captain Baker,³⁶ assembled as usual, accompanied by the band of the Bangalore Rifle Volunteers and a 'large gathering of all classes' who listened to the recitation of Earl Meath's message and speeches.

The well-documented narrative of Empire Day in Bangalore demonstrates how a tiny number of devoted Anglo-Indians were able to sustain the imperial festival. However, the adoption of Meath's ritualistic prescriptions seemed particularly uninspiring when folk had clear memories of the jollity and entertainment of the inaugural Empire Day events in the city. The annual trudge to the Victoria statue to witness Boy Scouts laying wreaths and saluting the flag presented a dreary prospect to those who expected a holiday atmosphere to prevail. Nevertheless, despite scant public interest, the efforts of such unfaltering souls as Miss Dawson and her devoted entourage of military men ensured that Empire Day remained on the calendar.

A comparison of the Bangalore celebrations with other Empire Day events in India demonstrates that varied groups had differing ideals regarding the day. As will be shown, the enactment of a series of dissimilar celebrations across diverse communities in India shows that there was little common understanding of the reasons for commemorating the empire or indeed a shared agreement regarding the nature or purpose of British imperialism in India.

³⁶ Previously, the fifty boy scouts had marched to Miss Dawson's residence to collect a number of wreaths (we can only assume that she was too ill to attend the ceremony in person).

Participation among different groups.

(i) The English

For some British communities in India, Empire Day was interpreted as a 'society' event and the elite white residents made no attempt to include the Indian population. Such exclusivity served to defend the identity of the colonials, whose 'culture of whiteness' was protected by the manner in which they 'cordoned [themselves] off from the native world'.³⁷ The British settled in new suburbs, which were built a safe distance from the old Indian cities and, for the white population, the British civil and military boundaries seemed to represent the frontier of civilisation. This geographical and social separation was to an extent informed by sanitary fears and security concerns: Kipling's description of the world outside the civil lines as 'dark and crooked and fantastic and wicked'³⁸ provides an insight into the anxieties and fantasies that troubled the minds of the British and partly explains their desire for separateness.³⁹

However, a resolute sense of racial supremacy also played a crucial role in determining the nature and the limits of social intercourse in the public sphere; this is reflected in the way that Empire Day was celebrated by some of the British communities in India. In the small British communities and hill stations, an unrefined racial arrogance and a self-imposed isolation from everyday Indian society led many British residents to interpret Empire Day solely as an exultation of the British 'race'.

³⁷ Ann Laura Stoller, 'Cultivating bourgeois bodies and racial selves' in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire. Colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Manchester, 2000), p.97.

³⁸ Kipling quoted in Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London, 1991), p.121. Kipling warned his readers of the adversities that the Englishman would encounter if he 'strayed beyond the protection of Anglo India'; see David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London, 2002), p.31.

³⁹ Kiernan emphasises the fortress-like quality of the Englishman's bungalow where 'he could be kept out of sight or sound of any Indians but his own underlings.' V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.45.

The idea that the festival should be an all-encompassing communion of imperial subjects and citizens was elided and the only Indians present at the celebrations were those serving their white masters. The deliberate exclusion of Indians from social events such as Empire Day perpetuated longstanding social cleavages in British India. This would scarcely have been a concern for many of the British colonists who were predominantly transient, 'mere sojourners in the land', and had scarce motivation to encourage patriotic sentiment among the Indians amidst whom they lived.⁴⁰

Furthermore, as Edward Said points out, at this time there were no 'appreciable deterrents to the imperialist world view' of the European masters of India. The notion of equalising or incorporating social relations would simply not have occurred to many of the colonists who remained confident that British rule would be enduring and were thus 'untroubled' by dissident ideas that their behaviour might serve to provoke or intensify.⁴¹

It was of paramount importance for the British to maintain their racial and social identity in India, and in the context of Empire Day the preservation of identity was sometimes associated with a determination to resist innovation. For many Britons the need for a sense of continuity superseded any desire to engage in the wider world to which Britain's imperial expansion had brought them. A reluctance to understand or engage with Indian life on the part of many created an archipelago of small marooned communities who had to rely on themselves to re-emphasise the values attributed to England.

Hence, the celebration of Empire Day in some of the hill stations took on a form that is all but indistinguishable from quintessentially English parochial social customs. The new 'traditions' of Empire Day were on the whole ignored. The

⁴⁰ Das, *India Under Morley and Minto*, p. 51.

⁴¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1994), p. 176.

patriotic speeches and rituals such as saluting the flag, which elsewhere were familiarly associated with Meath's conception of imperial communion, were frequently absent and it seems that the participants in these particular Empire Day celebrations wilfully neglected overtly patriotic or imperialistic gestures.

In the large hill station of Coonoor, for example, Empire day in 1913 was marked with a floral fete and bazaar opened by the Governor's wife, Lady Pentland. Empire Day celebrations here presented an image of insular genteelness that was reinforced by the fact that the celebration appeared to be an exclusively feminine affair. A vegetable and fruit display and a home made cake stall numbered among the many diversions that were a reproduction of an English country bazaar. The women took part in competitions such as table decorating and candle lighting whilst a tennis tournament was organised for the more vigorous participants.⁴² In Yercaud too, where Empire Day became a regular and popular event, the festival at times seemed to resemble a well-mannered English fete; it featured egg and spoon races, a golf driving competition and other such amusements. Although the local organisers proclaimed that they had come together to celebrate Empire Day, any sense of imperialistic zeal or patriotic ardour was certainly not in evidence. The day existed primarily as one of entertainment and the patriotic purpose of the new festival received only minimal acknowledgement - usually in the singing of the national anthem at the close of the day. There was a regular neglect of the imperial paeans, militaristic rituals and proclamations of loyalty normally associated with Empire Day.⁴³

That Empire Day seemed to be celebrated only by the women at Coonoor can be partly explained by reference to the habit of British women and children retreating

⁴² *Advocate of India*, 26 May 1913, p.5 and *The Madras Mail*, 28 May 1913, p.6. Similarly refined Empire Day celebrations are recorded at Yercaud in 1911 and Cannanore in 1905. See *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1905, p.7 and 25 May 1911, p.3

⁴³ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1912, p.6; *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1905, p.3; 29 May 1905, p.5 and 27 May 1911, p.6.

to the hills every summer to escape the oppressive heat of the plains. They shared this privilege with only the senior government officers; the women's unfortunate husbands employed by the military or civil service were left to 'soldier on below'.⁴⁴ Empire Day fell in the midst of the hot weather season in India, so it can be assumed that at this time of year many women living in Coonoor were separated from their husbands. This temporary absence of men, the ultimate guarantors of patriarchal and racial authority, may have made even more imperative that the races should remain separated.

Despite the rigorous policing of racial boundaries by some of the British communities, the reporting of Empire Day in the Anglo-Indian press sometimes suggested that on these occasions there was a natural and easy collaboration between the Indian and English populations. In 1905, *The Madras Mail* claimed that 'all castes and creeds' participated in the gymkhana organised at Yercaud on Empire Day. However, closer scrutiny of this newspaper report reveals that it was solely 'European' residents who took part in the fun and games. If other 'castes and creeds' were present, then it can only be assumed that they were onlookers or servants rather than active participants. In later years, the Yercaud Empire Day gymkhana, allowed the active participation of the Indian population who attended in 'great numbers'. However, a distinct separation between the Indian community and the white population was maintained; the sports and races for Europeans took place in the cool air of the evening several hours after the Indian athletics had been contested in the heat of the day.⁴⁵

Inequalities that characterised relationships between the races were obvious and well understood, but a closer sharing of public space in the social arena was

⁴⁴ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.183.

⁴⁵ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1912, p.6.

possible and desirable. It needs to be noted that in some regions of India, a well-developed network of institutional practices bridged the social divide between the British and Indians and a greater degree of familiarity and respect allowed the coming together of the communities on important occasions. Hence, despite the exclusiveness of the new Empire Day festival in some British communities, in some locations there was an effort to use the celebration to draw Britons and Indians together in their tribute to British imperialism. The revels that took place in Bangalore and Karachi (described above) were deliberately inclusive. In Karachi, it was reported that the programme of musical entertainment and fireworks provided for the celebrants 'was most successfully carried out by members of the European and Indian communities who mingled freely in the gardens and appeared to enjoy themselves with equal zest and satisfaction'.⁴⁶

This description of the white and Indian communities mingling together freely on Empire Day promoted an illusion of equality that of course did not exist. Nevertheless, it does illustrate another aspect of British life in India that was far removed from Kipling's descriptions of hill station existence where there was barely any 'connection between race and race'.⁴⁷ Kipling himself was often warm in his feelings for Indians, but he believed strongly that the English had 'little or nothing in common' with them, apart from in matters of trade. He thought that racial separateness was essential and that the Indian and European peoples needed only to come together, with mutual respect, when dealing with matters of work or on 'certain social occasions'. It is unlikely that Kipling approved of 'mixed' Empire Day gatherings such as the one at Karachi, because he believed that mixed social occasions

⁴⁶ *The Bombay Gazette*, 27 May 1909, p.6.

⁴⁷ Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling - His Life and Works* (London, 1977), p.71.

should be only those that were representative of 'shared custom'.⁴⁸ Unquestionably, the military parades that used to take place on Queen Victoria's birthday were altogether less ambiguous affairs and served to remind Indian observers of the power of the Raj, a function that Kipling felt was essential:

Never forget that unless the outward and visible signs of our authority are always before a native he is as incapable as a child of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it.⁴⁹

This attitude toward the Indian population, which was shared by many Britons in India, indicates the limitations of Empire Day in its aspiration of bringing together the subject people of the Empire with its citizens and creating a shared imperial vision. Nevertheless, it is evident that there could be true intimacy between the British and the Indians whom they ruled. For example, Sir Andrew Fraser's memoirs frequently mention 'Indian friends whom I have learned to love as we love our friends at home'.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, however affectionate these 'loving relationships' were, the British were able to circumvent any sense (or threat) of equality through a psychological structuring of the relationship that indicated clearly the lines of power and authority that it was imperative to maintain. Thus, Fraser ensured that in his close relationships with Indians he assumed a paternal role. He describes how one good friend 'treated me almost as a father' and another friendship required him to 'fulfil a father's part'.⁵¹ Kipling who insisted that Indians 'needed paternalism' reinforces this

⁴⁸ Kingsly Amis, *Rudyard Kipling and his World* (Norwich, 1975), p.54.

⁴⁹ Kipling quoted in Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p.14. Although Kipling's Recessional became an indispensable feature of the Empire Day repertoire he was reluctant to participate directly in Empire Day events. He was adverse to making speeches about England and the Empire (despite constant requests) and up until the First World War, Lord Milner and Kipling would spend Empire Day at one another's homes, alternating on a yearly basis: Gilmour, *The Long Recessional*, p.172 and p.198.

⁵⁰ Sir Andrew H. L. Fraser, K.C.S.I., *Among Indian Rajahs and Ryats* (London, 1911), p.65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.64 and p.62. Golant offers an inverted interpretation of the parent-child relationship by suggesting that the English developed a 'childlike dependence on native servants' and thus they tended to view them as 'hated parental figures'. The master-servant relationship was reinforced by the

infantilisation of Indians; he claimed that in order to gain their confidence, 'Indians had to be handled like children or young horses'.⁵² This conflation of personal relationships and lived experience with the politics of imperialism is a common trope in the autobiographies of the British who lived in India during the first half of the twentieth century. Mary Procida has demonstrated the dual purpose of this form of recollection as a validation of their lives and also as an explanation of the role, as they perceived it, of the British Empire in India.⁵³

The mingling of Indians and Europeans at Karachi and other places on Empire Day, then, was no more free or equal than the mingling together of adults and children on this day. Whatever the level of fraternisation or friendship, 'the division between white and non-white, in India and elsewhere, was absolute'.⁵⁴ Indeed, the organisers of, and commentators upon, Empire Day events in India who enthused about the participation of 'all nationalities' might well have perceived the involvement of the Indian population as being cognate to the participation of schoolchildren. Meath's original vision of Empire Day was a means of inculcating an imperial spirit in the youth; it seems the organisers thought that such a spirit might be induced in those other supposed infants of the empire, the 'native' populations. In 1906, *The Englishman* explained that the general idea of Empire Day was to encourage a sense of imperial awareness and loyalty among the young, but emphasised the 'especial value' of 'such instruction' in India in relation to the growing number of Indian 'political aspirants'. The newspaper suggested that the objective of Empire Day in

sometimes abusive behaviour of the English toward the Indians. W. Golant, *British India 1601-1947* (London, 1975), pp.22-24.

⁵² Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p.136 and David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional*, p.58.

⁵³ Mary A. Procida 'The Greater Part of My Life Has Been Spent in India': Autobiography and the Crisis of Empire in the Twentieth Century' in *Biography*. Volume: 25, Issue: 1, 2002, pp. 130-150.

⁵⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.134.

India should be to help factional groups 'sink selfish motives and personal gain for the common ideal'.⁵⁵

(ii) *Indian Celebrations*

Some Indians absorbed elements of the imposed paternalism of their rulers, as demonstrated by an Empire Day enthusiast in Mysore, Mr. A. Ramannah, who spoke of the 'arduous task' faced by the British in developing India morally and physically: the parallels with child rearing are obvious.⁵⁶ Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks have posited that the acceptance by many amongst the Indian elites and intelligentsia of the idea that, prior to British rule, the development of 'civilisation' in India was retarded, if not negligible, was essential to the 'legitimising discourse of imperialism'.⁵⁷ The acceptance of the idea that India was supposedly morally backward allowed those Indians who held this view to embrace British rule as a period of nurturing for their supposedly immature society. And, even those who condemned the extreme patriotism of Empire Day were not immune to the sense that in some ways the empire offered Indians guidance and protection as does a parent to a child: during an anti-Empire Day rally in 1906, the nationalist Lajput Rai spoke warmly of the late Queen Victoria as a 'respected . . . mother . . . to all Indians'.⁵⁸ This reminds us that we should be careful about using Empire Day as the sole index of Indian loyalty to the Raj: in contrast to the small numbers who turned out for Empire Day demonstrations, the funeral of Edward VII in 1910 brought forth massive demonstrations of loyalty from 'all sections of the community'. It is evident that the British monarch was seen as unassociated with colonial oppression at this time. *The Bengalee*, a consistent critic of the imperial government, explained the mass sympathy for the crown through the

⁵⁵ *The Englishman*, 25 May 1906, p.4.

⁵⁶ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1908, p.6.

⁵⁷ Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks, *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London, 1994), p.42.

⁵⁸ *The Bengalee*, 27 May 1906, p.4.

claim that the Indian people understood the 'essence of the constitution . . . and do not associate the sovereign with administrative measures and grievances'.⁵⁹

If the enthusiasm of myriads of Indians for the British monarchy was never matched by their participation in Empire Day, and notwithstanding the exclusion of Indians from some of the events of the Day, the records reveal that some Indians nevertheless established their own Empire Day occasions and traditions independently of the British. These were often themselves exclusive events, although for particular reasons – usually a reflection of the tensions between Muslims and Hindus that were the cause of deep enmity and segregation in some regions.

In 1909, the Loyal Society, an exclusively Muslim organisation marked Empire Day in Vaniyambadi I, 100 kilometres southeast of Bangalore. In the daytime 400 boys from the Islamic Secondary School participated in a sports competition, but the principal event of the day was a 'largely attended' meeting of adults where speakers pontificated upon the 'Muslim conception of loyalty', which was understood as an overt and unashamed fidelity toward the imperial government.⁶⁰ At this time, such sentiment was seen to be consistent with the interests of the Muslim population of India as perceived by certain Muslim leaders such as Mohsin-ul-Mulk, 'who kept in close touch with the Viceroy's private secretary' and other important British officials.⁶¹

The emergence of a nationalist movement in India at the end of the nineteenth century was accompanied by the surfacing of Hindu revivalism. Many Indian Muslims were uneasy with the fusion of nationalist politics and the proselytising activities of organisations such as the *Arya Samaj*, a passionately pro-Hindu revivalist reform movement that made considerable advances in the late nineteenth-century.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 22 May 1910, p.5.

⁶⁰ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1909, p.3.

⁶¹ Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp.140-142.

Some Muslims also believed that the nationalism of Congress was harmful to their communal interests⁶² and sought reassurance from the British administration that the introduction of any form of representative governance in the provinces would not marginalize the Muslim communities. The partition of Bengal encouraged Muslims to embrace a new approach to communal affairs⁶³ and throughout India Muslim leaders began to assert their interests through an unprecedented involvement in overt political activity.

In 1906, Lord Minto had promised that any future administrative reforms in India would 'safeguard the political rights and interests' of the Muslim community⁶⁴ and a proviso for separate Muslim electorates was contained within the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909.⁶⁵ Hence, many influential Muslims in India became convinced that their communal interests were best served by the British government and this helped reinforce an antipathy toward the Indian National Congress's secular goal of self-rule and liberal representative government. Not surprisingly, then, one of the affirmed purposes of the Empire Day rally in Vaniyambadi was to counter nationalist agitation. The principal speakers at the meeting Mr Yakus Hasan and Mr. K. Asadulla maintained that ideas of self-government for India were 'premature' and that India was in no position to govern itself without foreign help. It was stated that the British had as much right to remain there as rulers 'as any others who have in more distant times crossed its borders', seemingly a reference to the Mughal Muslims who had ruled India prior to the British. The Hindu press was condemned for its 'insolent tone' and its criticism of the British and the Empire Day celebrants were enjoined not to criticise the administration because it was liable to create contempt for responsible

⁶² See Stanley Woolpert, *A New History of India* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 258-264.

⁶³ See M. N. Das, *India under Morley and Minto*, p.33.

⁶⁴ Masselos, *Indian Nationalism*, p.134.

⁶⁵ Farzana Shaikh, 'Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 3 (1986), p.541.

authority and make the government 'look small in the eyes of the public'. Both speakers were concerned with the 'damage' incurred when 'the vernacular press ... pours its venom on the minds of the masses'. The masses, it was claimed, had no means or capacity for forming an independent opinion and 'adopted without question the ready-made opinions of the press [which] ... become the talk of the bazaar and the gossip of the kitchen and do incalculably great harm'.⁶⁶

Similar sentiments were expressed in 1907 at Patiala, 200 kilometres south east of Lahore, where a large gathering of 'citizens and municipal commissioners' met together on Empire Day. The chair of the meeting resolved that:

This meeting takes the opportunity of Empire Day to express its unwavering devotion to the British Throne, and disassociates itself from all movements which have in any way in other places tended to cause or spread discontent among the people.

Numerous speakers, described in the press as 'leaders and educated gentlemen of all classes', were keen to reiterate what they believed to be the 'blessings and advantages of British Rule'. For example, Khalita Hussain wanted to celebrate

the equity and justice of the British Raj, and the peace it had secured the country, where all classes enjoyed perfect freedom. Empire Day was one on which all without distinction of class or creed shall unite and return thanks for the many inestimable blessings of the British Raj.

Other vented their anger against anti-British agitators in India and in particular against the encouragement given to students and schoolboys to participate in politics. The

⁶⁶ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1909, p.3. Hasan's portrayal of 'the masses' as lacking the ability to develop an independent opinion assumes that their moral sense is as underdeveloped as a child's thus reinforcing the white man's role as a 'moral parent'.

'tone and language' of the press was also deplored and identified as a key factor in incitement to disloyalty.⁶⁷

Empire Day was thus utilised to establish favour with the Raj and to encourage Muslims to remain loyal to the British in the face of rising nationalist activism in India. The call for an unquestioning loyalty to the British was clearly a pragmatic political strategy designed to defend the interests of Muslims against a surging nationalist movement dominated by Hindus. Muslim alarm over the emergence of a sectarian nationalist movement is illustrated by Asadulla's fretful Empire Day speech wherein he warned that 'some Hindus think that India belonged exclusively to them, and that their influence alone should remain supreme in deciding its future'.⁶⁸

Congress actually promoted a secular nationalism, but Muslims were mindful of the Hindu revivalist movement and its influence on Congress.⁶⁹ Moreover, a secular nationalist programme necessarily rejected the notion of special electoral provision to take account of communal interests. Hence, the perception that the nationalism of Congress threatened, by one way or another, to divest Muslims of the political means to protect their communal interests. Active imperialist loyalty amongst many Muslims was a strategic position adopted in defence of political concessions granted to them by the British government;⁷⁰ Empire Day provided an ideal opportunity to demonstrate that loyalty in the public domain.

⁶⁷ *The Bombay Gazette*, 1 June 1907, p.15; *The Englishman*, 25 May 1907, p.5, and 28 May 1907, p.5.

⁶⁸ *The Madras Mail*, 29 May 1909, p.3.

⁶⁹ Burke and Quraishi emphasise the role of prominent 'extremists' within Congress (notably Tilak and Lajpat Rai) and their manipulation of Hindu festivals to promote the *Swadeshi* movement (the boycott of goods manufactured by English companies), while Brown demonstrates the subsequent difficulties that Muslims encountered working within Congress against a background of Hindu revivalism on one hand and Brahmin domination on the other. Burke and Quraishi, *The British Raj in India*, pp.110-113 and Brown, *Modern India*, pp.190-192.

⁷⁰ At Vaniyambadi, Hasan indicated the disquiet such meetings caused among nationalists when he referred to a campaign of threatening letters that the Loyal Society had endured. *The Madras Mail*, 29 May 1909, p.3.

However, it is important to note that some Hindus at this time believed their interests were the interests of the Empire. In Bombay for example, an Empire Day Committee formed by prominent Hindus succeeded in convening 'a large and influential' gathering in 1909. In contrast with 'British' Empire Day celebrations, it was overwhelmingly a male affair although thirty women were in attendance, albeit provided with separate accommodation. The head of the Empire Day Movement in Bombay was Mr. P. B. Joshi - Purushottam Balkrishna Joshi was a distinguished Fellow and MA Examiner at Bombay University, a magistrate, and a prolific writer both in English and Marathi. A long-time loyalist, his service to the government had been recognised at the 1903 Delhi Durbah with the award of a Certificate of Merit.⁷¹

Joshi's faith in the British Empire was predicated on the belief that given time, the British administration in India would grant equal rights to all. The successful and enduring celebration of Empire Day in Bombay can be interpreted as the outward manifestation of such resolute faith. Nevertheless, such a public expression of imperial loyalty can also be understood as a shrewd political manoeuvre; that is, an attempt to position Indians advantageously in order to claim constitutional rights that were lauded as an exemplary aspect of imperial liberalism. Certainly the stubbornness of the British government in perpetually delaying radical constitutional change began to irk Joshi after the First World War, as one of his publications attests).⁷²

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, in South Africa, such an attempt to employ Empire Day for political advantage was nothing new. The Indian League in Cape Town had met in 1903, ostensibly to mark Empire Day, but had used the meeting to protest against discrimination. Speakers at that meeting had claimed common political privileges and rights although it was emphasised that the Indian

⁷¹ *Who's Who in India 1911*, Parts V-VIII (Lucknow, 1911), p.129.

⁷² P. B. Joshi, *The Attainment of Swaraja in India, When and How it can be Achieved* (Bombay, 1924).

community had to prove themselves worthy of these through 'obedience and regard for the laws' among other things.⁷³ Similarly, Joshi made a claim for rights in his Empire Day speech that included a caveat implying that Indians were as yet undeserving of full political rights.⁷⁴ This was a similar position to that held by the moderate nationalist politician G. K. Gokhale, who believed in the 'divine purpose of British Rule' and maintained that the benign empire would eventually grant self-government to India, but it would have to be earned by the Indians by their 'assimilation of the British Way'.

Delivering a blast against caste hierarchy, a reminder of how Empire Day could be used on behalf of those marginalized within Indian society, Joshi proposed that if Indians wanted to advance socially and politically they had to be prepared to eschew discrimination based upon caste. If this could be achieved, he maintained that:

God will give us at the hands of our benign rulers the same equal rights and privileges without distinction of "caste, creed" or "colour" as have been vouchsafed to us in the solemn proclamation of Victoria the Good . . . Let us therefore try to remove our social disabilities and internal dissensions in the first instance and then political rights and privileges are sure to follow. . . . Let us therefore take heart, rejoice and pray to God for the stability of the British Empire.⁷⁵

Notwithstanding his objections to the inequities of the Caste system, Joshi justified loyalty to the British through the Hindu scriptures and pronounced that 'our Shastras tell us that the king or ruler should always be considered as sacred as Vishnu the guardian deity' and therefore every respect should be paid to the reigning sovereign.⁷⁶

⁷³ *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1903, p.9.

⁷⁴ See Golant, *British India*, p.70.

⁷⁵ *The Madras Mail*, 29 May 1909, p.8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

It is evident that Joshi, though for different reasons, was as concerned about the influence of nationalism upon the 'masses' as were the Muslims at Vaniyambadi. In what can be interpreted as a justification of the government's harsh treatment of 'extreme' nationalists such as Tilak and Lajpat Rai, Joshi added that 'it is enjoined that those who ridicule, or speak evil of, their sovereign and those who try to bring him into contempt should be treated as wicked and deserving of severe punishment.'⁷⁷ In the face of nationalist agitation, Joshi thought it was vital to inculcate an imperialist ideology among the wider population:

...our duty and responsibility as loyal and patriotic citizens not of Bombay but of the British Empire, ... is ... to improve the condition of the masses and to see that socially and religiously they are treated as our brethren and not as strangers. It is our duty to spread among them a correct knowledge of the numerous blessings and advantages that India has reaped under the British Rule; and a solemn responsibility lies on our shoulders to see that our children and youths do not fall into the snare of the mischievous agitators and the sweet tongued pseudo-patriots.⁷⁸

The 'agitators' had evidently spread their mischief prior to Bombay's Empire Day – Joshi's speech was, in part a defence against charges of Jingoism. He acknowledged there were 'many in India' who believed Empire Day was 'organised by the Jingos to celebrate the triumph of Jingoism, the victories of Imperialism and the achievements of bureaucracy'. He also noted that some people criticised the celebrations as merely an opportunity for posturing Indian notables to 'imitate these friends of Imperialism!'⁷⁹ Evidently, Joshi's unprompted and stout defence of Empire Day

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

indicates that his committee had received a hostile reception from some quarters during their organisation of the celebrations.

Significantly, Joshi's Empire Day scheme hadn't benefited through help or support from the British themselves.⁸⁰ The celebration in Bombay emanated entirely from Indian initiative. What is more, Joshi insisted that their celebration set a challenge for the Anglo-Indians of Bombay; he hoped that 'next year our Anglo-Indian fellow citizens will take the lead in celebrating 'Empire Day' in Bombay and thereby set an example to others in the cause of loyalty and good citizenship'.⁸¹ Joshi ensured that the British were kept aware of his efforts to promulgate Empire Day in Bombay by sending a copy of his addresses to the administration.⁸² It would appear that there were those, such as Joshi, who had a vested interest in keeping the favour of the British. We might see their Empire Day activism as somehow linked to the very material gains they enjoyed - in this case, in magisterial and university positions - at the behest of the British.

A regular Empire Day celebration was thus established in Bombay and influential Hindus gathered annually to listen to speeches and participate in prayers.⁸³ In 1911, the Muslims in the city organised their own celebration. This was not on the same scale of the Hindu event and seemed mainly to involve 'gentlemen' guests who were closely involved with the university movement. In common with the Hindu

⁸⁰ Colonel Kirtikar, 'a learned and distinguished citizen of Bombay' had been invited to chair the meeting but had declined, claiming a previous professional engagement: see *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Joshi's efforts and encouragement were clearly not in vain, by 1911, The Anglo-Indian League in Bombay had instituted their own celebration: see *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1911, p.5. Rao Bahadur P.B. Joshi continued to take the lead in promoting imperial sentiment. He was influential in the formation of a local committee of the Duty and Discipline Movement in 1914. This was another of Meath's conceptions, and was aimed at challenging political sectarianism and trying to arrest the putative degeneracy of youth. For notes on the Duty and Discipline movement, see J. A. Mangan, 'The grit of our forefathers' in Mackenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, pp.127-128.

⁸² His reports were filed under 'Matters Of Routine And Minor Importance', APAC P/8320 *Government of Bombay, Political Department Proceedings*, April-June 1909. B20 A

⁸³ See, for example *The Englishman* 25 May 1908, p.5; *The Bengalee* 25 May 1909, p.7; *The Madras Mail* 25 May 1911, p.5; *Advocate of India*, 26 May 1913, p.5.

meeting, obsequious speeches, which dwelt 'at length' on the 'sincere loyalty of the Mahomedans to the British Raj', were delivered in number.⁸⁴

Certain Indians took special care to make themselves prominent on Empire Day. Metcalf observes how becoming involved in such endeavours was important to those whose collaboration with the British administration served their personal advancement: 'participation in even the least consequential civic ceremony enabled local notables to at once lay claim to a high status as public leaders and to acknowledge the authority of the Raj which sustained them.'⁸⁵ This was certainly the case for the surviving princes of India, whose antiquated Monarchies were allowed to exist insofar as they 'kept on the right side of the Foreign Department'.⁸⁶ In the periods between coronation durbars in India, Empire Day provided an annual opportunity for the various Nizams, Nawabs and Maharajas to engage in an ostentatious display of pageantry, which served to emphasise hierarchical power structures and illustrate the supposedly natural order of aristocratic governance. For example, in 1906, the Director of Public Institutions for Punjab issued a circular instructing the schools in the province to mark Empire Day with festivities and rejoicing. In Patiala, the Council of Regency, acting on behalf of the Maharaja (who was a juvenile at this time) organised a ceremony that was attended by over 1,500 school students and 'an appreciable number' of other people. The Council of Regency also arranged for sweets to be distributed in the girls' schools, the Victoria Memorial Poor House and the orphan asylum.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ There were sometimes appeals to the youth asking them to recognise the significance of the wider Muslim community outside of India, with whom they shared common ties 'irrespective of territorial boundaries', *Advocate of India*, 27 May 1911, p.8.

⁸⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.91.

⁸⁶ James, *Raj*, p.325.

⁸⁷ *The Englishman*, 26 May 1906, p.5.

The widespread affection, or at least public displays of affection, for the British Monarchy in India was useful for many of the ruling princes. There were many hundreds of supposedly independent 'rulerships' in India. Although divergent in size and character, in all cases their power was largely dependent on the continuance of imperial governance in India. Although not constitutionally tied to Britain, the princely states in India were inextricably coupled with the British Empire and the British Government was able to exert control (to the extent of determining royal succession) in many crucial aspects.⁸⁸ Empire Day provided an occasion when monarchical authority could be acclaimed through ritual and defended by religious endorsement of the British Empire. For instance, in 1905 Empire Day was observed in Ettiyapuram in a manner that evoked memories of the revelry that accompanied Victoria's jubilees. An indulgence of monarchical ritual was accompanied by traditional elements of Hindu rites of worship. The figure of the Rajah was central to the observance of the day. In the early morning, 101 rockets were fired from the royal palace whilst the Union Jack was hoisted over the palace dome. The Rajah visited the local school and presided at a meeting where he addressed the children and explained to them the object of celebrating Empire Day. The Rajah also appeared at two other public functions that day and he was at pains to emphasise his role of benefactor to the townspeople. According to the *Madras Mail* it was the Rajah's 'generosity' that allowed Empire Day activities to be carried out in a 'splendid manner'. The poor of

⁸⁸ The surviving princely states had proved to be valuable allies of the British during the 1857 rising and the British had subsequently discontinued the ongoing process of aggressive annexation of such territories. The British developed an effective means of controlling the states without the need for military intervention although this option was, in the final analysis, the unspoken threat that assured loyalty. The princes were ever mindful that their loyalty to the British crown ensured the continuance of their (and their heirs') exalted status in their own territories and the Indian States 'had become part and parcel of the British Empire in India'. See V. P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States* (London, 1956) pp.10-14. The British were so assured of the loyalty of the Indian nobility that it was from among this class that the first Indian Officer Corps was recruited during Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty: Pradeep P. Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (Westport, 2003), p.9.

the town were 'sumptuously fed' and prayers and offerings were made within the Hindu temples calling forth divine blessings for the imperial crown. Throughout the day, the Rajah invoked recognition of the supreme authority of the Empire as represented by the imperial royal family, and he delivered speeches that vowed fidelity and loyalty to imperial rule. In the town, the day was marked with a mixture of religious ceremony, alms giving and an ostentatious parade. The grand procession 'in which all the estate officials and townspeople joined' was headed by 'native music' and included richly decorated elephants, camels, horses and state carriages. The largest elephant was decorated in regal purple and gold and upon it were borne photographs of the royal family adorned with garlands. There could be no question as to whence the Rajah derived his personal authority.⁸⁹

(iii) Schools Celebrations

An effort to propagate a greater knowledge of and loyalty toward the British Empire among the schoolchildren of the colonies was initiated by Joseph Chamberlain when he was Secretary of State for the Colonies. He was encouraged in this venture by Meath, among others. In a circular dispatch of September 1902, Chamberlain had approved of a scheme devised by the School Board of London in conjunction with the League of Empire 'to establish more intimate relations between the schools and school children of the colonies and those of the Mother Country'. A committee was established to develop a scheme of 'first rate lectures' to be accompanied by magic lantern slides, a technique of instruction inspired by methods in the United States. By 1905, Indian schools were adopting the lecture scheme with the 'heartly approval' of Alfred Lyttleton, the Under-Secretary of State in the India

⁸⁹ *The Madras Mail*, 29 May 1905, p.5.

Office, and both local governments and the Government of India were anxious to provide funds to purchase the requisite lantern slides and equipment.⁹⁰

The enthusiasm of government officials to promote a positive understanding of and affection for the British Empire among school children is an indicator of the political importance of the school environment in India at this time. This was well illustrated during the intense period of agitation and violence that followed the partition of Bengal in 1905. At the height of the protest in 1907, a report submitted to the Government from Bakarganj in East Bengal painted a troubling and pessimistic picture of the political affiliations and influence of teachers in the schools during that year. A Government agent Mr. R Hughes Buller recorded that:

Schools are again a powerful weapon in the hands of the agitators and a very potent factor for evil. The masters are anti-government almost to a man and instil the principles of *swadeshi* and *swaraj* into their pupils. The result is that the boys grow up systematically trained to hate and despise the British nation and government.

Despite his alarmist view, Hughes Buller was hopeful that there was enough loyalty among other teachers to combat the effects of the seditious masters and he proposed a 'purging of the educational system of its poisonous defects which have resulted in the production of a semi-educated disloyal class'.⁹¹

School pupils and university students played a prominent role in the agitation against the partition of Bengal and, troubled by such reports, the Government of India sought to take action against recalcitrant students and their tutors. The government

⁹⁰ See APAC, *FP/7015 Government of the Punjab, Home Department proceedings*, August 1905, letter received from Alfred Lyttleton, and correspondence between government officials dated 4 August 1905 and 27 July 1905.

⁹¹ APAC, *P/7875, Indian Confidential Political Papers* 1908. No. 914-C, Excerpt from Diary of Mr. R. Hughes Buller - Resume of affairs in Backarganj for 1907. Sent from Mr. P.C. Lyons, Chief Secretary to Government of East Bengal and Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Office.

believed that the tendency of teachers and pupils to associate themselves with political movements was a fairly recent development, although Judith Brown demonstrates that members of the teaching profession had for many years constituted a not insignificant percentage of the delegates to the Indian National Congress.⁹² Not surprisingly, the Government cobbled together a number of measures designed to repress the popular students' movement. For example, in 1907, a circular was issued to the Chief Secretaries of Bengal, East Bengal and Assam recommending the dismissal of any schoolmaster who was found 'to have personally conducted his pupils to a political meeting or to have deliberately encouraged this attendance for the purpose of educating them in his own political views'.⁹³ Further action was initiated in 1908, when all Indian school children were barred from 'attending or taking part in the organisation or conduct of any public meeting of any kind' (this rule was conveniently forgotten about on Empire Day) and teachers were warned against going to political meetings 'or speaking in public on politics'. Moreover, there were strict restrictions imposed against taking newspapers into school or even allowing anyone else to take them in, and teachers were instructed to try to persuade parents to help them in keeping schoolboys away from political meetings.⁹⁴ One Bombay resident wrote to the Education Department suggesting that the Government should pay some attention to those Indian schoolchildren not taught in the English language:

The only way of rooting out all the mischief caused by the 'new spirit' that has come over the whole of India is to have books written in the vernaculars of the

⁹² Brown, *Modern India*, p. 186.

⁹³ APAC, P/7749, *Bombay Education Proceedings*, No. 332-34, letter from Sir Herbert Risley, Secretary to the Government of India to Chief Secretaries of Government of Bengal, East Bengal and Assam and Burma. Undated 1907.

⁹⁴ APAC, P/8031, *Bombay Education Proceedings* 1908. B-31, Education Department, Resolution of Government, 30 September 1908, pp. 1267 and 1269.

Presidency inculcating loyalty and enlarging upon the benefits of British Rule in India and to provide them as text books in the vernacular schools.⁹⁵

It was clear to the Government and politicised people of India that schools had become an ideological battleground; it is in this light that we might assess the importance to the colonial rulers of Empire Day ceremonies for school children.

Empire Day in the schools of India began with a broadly inclusive agenda. This did not necessarily entail a series of close encounters of Indian children with their white counterparts. Indeed white chauvinism was sometimes the order of the day - such as at Bolarum in 1907, when the Reverend Bridge took care to invite only the 'European' children in the community to the parsonage grounds for an Empire Day school treat with their parents.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, for the reasons discussed above, there was an undoubted conviction within the educational environment that Empire Day should encompass all school children in India regardless of race or religion. Hence in 1905, India's inaugural Empire Day, there were celebrations involving numerous schools at various locations. For example, at Tirupati, 600 schoolchildren, representing 'almost all' the primary schools gathered with their teachers to mark Empire Day, whilst at Bangalore 1,500 children from the various Hindu and Muslim schools were ushered together to commemorate the day; other pioneer Empire Day celebrations were reported at Vellore (west of Madras) and Nandyal in the Central Provinces. It was emphasised in the press that at Nandyal 'both Mahomedan and Hindu' schoolchildren gathered to sing songs in praise of the Empire. The 300 schoolchildren were joined by a large number of officials and non-officials.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *British Library Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection* (Hereafter APAC), P/8031, *Bombay Education Proceedings* 1908, B-13, Letter to Bombay Education Department from Mr. Chaturbhaj Jivandas Thakkar of Bombay, p.89.

⁹⁶ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1907, p.3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1905, p.5.

The format of the Empire Day celebrations in Indian schools was fairly uniform and some events were virtually identical with those that would have occurred in any small English, Canadian, South African or Australian town at this time. For example at Tirupati, a procession was formed behind 'a native band', which proceeded along the main streets of the town. The children gathered at one of the school buildings where they were greeted by 'several of the leading officials and citizens'. Lectures were delivered in Telugu and the children sang specially composed songs in the same language.⁹⁸ Similar scenes were reported from other locations where sports or gift giving (usually food or sweets) completed what was to become the familiar Empire Day repertoire.⁹⁹ In all cases adult participation in these events was not limited to the school staff. At Vellore, for example, the celebration of the day was deemed by the local government to be an important occasion and the 'influential and leading citizens of the town' made their way to the Voorhees College to join all the students of the various educational establishments to listen to speeches. At Tirupati, the Empire Day celebrations were described in the press as a 'wholly Indian affair' and involved the embracing of the imperial festival by both the Indian educational community and civic leaders.¹⁰⁰ As in other imperial territories, the schools were at the forefront in the development of the Empire Day festival in India and celebrations in the educational arena rapidly gathered pace after 1905. The following year *The Englishman* reported school and college celebrations in locations as far apart as Hooghly (near Calcutta) and Quetta (in the far northwest of British India):¹⁰¹ in the report from Nandyal (mentioned above), and that from Quetta, state

⁹⁸ Ibid., 24 May 1905, p.7.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27 May 1905, p.7 and 29 May 1905, p.7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 29 May 1905, p.7.

¹⁰¹ *The Englishman*, 28 May 1906, p.5.

that a large demonstration of Indian schoolboys 'of all denominations' celebrated Empire Day for the first time.¹⁰²

The reporting of Empire Day in the newspapers occasionally drew a distinct line between school celebrations and festivities organised for the general public, the latter being given special prominence. For example, the *Madras Mail* commented that Empire Day in 1907 'was allowed to pass almost unnoticed in Madras until the evening' when a musical performance drew a large crowd. This disconsolate account of Empire Day in Madras ignored the plentiful reports posted to the newspaper that year, which detailed the celebrations in the local schools. The different sense of importance attached to the adult community's celebration of Empire Day, as compared to the activities of the children is an indication that journalists expected or hoped the day would bring forth a spontaneous gushing of imperialist rapture within civil society and the efforts made by the schools were less important because of the 'captive' status of the juvenile Empire day audiences. To a large extent this is true. Nevertheless, the schools celebrations still demonstrate a level of imperial sentiment that was not lacking in significance.

The great efforts made by the various educational institutions to inspire imperial loyalty, and indeed the participation in the schools' celebrations of significant numbers of adults, indicate that within some sections of civil society there ran a rich seam of imperial patriotism. For example, in the Georgetown area of Madras all the managers, pupils and teachers of several schools met together. The chair of the meeting, Mr. T. Anthonysawmy Pillay of the government training school, observed that he 'gladly noticed the union that existed among the teachers of Madras, whose imperative duty it was to instil into the minds of their pupils the rudiments of

¹⁰² *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1905, p.5.

British tradition and fair play'. Another Indian speaker, Mr A Raj Moodely, supported Pillay and read a paper concerning the positive effects of the British in India.

According to the *Madras Mail* 'many other schools in Madras' suspended lessons in favour of Empire Day celebrations, which were witnessed by numerous parents 'and other well-wishers' of the institutions. Typically the children sang songs in English and vernacular languages (in which songs were specially written for Empire Day) and were reminded of the supposed advantages of British rule in India.¹⁰³

Elsewhere, Empire Day in the schools was positively reported in a manner that attempted to emphasise a sense of excitement. Even *The Bengalee*, whose editor maintained an overtly hostile attitude toward Empire Day, published a report that gushed forth about Empire Day in Simla where the public schools apparently celebrated 'with all possible élat'. The students of the municipal school 'were seen very jubilant over the function and their variegated turbans and richly coloured pajamas added much novelty to the occasion'.¹⁰⁴ In 1909, the schools in Simla were granted a holiday on Empire Day, which became usual practice in the city where the cadet corps of Bishop Cotton's schools also acquired the tradition of mustering to fire a *feu de joie* in honour of the day.¹⁰⁵

The numerous reports in the Indian press regarding the adoption and spread of Empire Day rituals in schools runs counter to Metcalf's supposition that May 24th was all but avoided by the authorities. Furthermore, the large congregations of Indian schoolchildren who celebrated Empire Day delineates an important element in the attempt to construct consent to British rule. Despite the social inequalities and discrimination suffered by the Indian people, many Indian communities evidently embraced the celebration to perform patriotic rituals and be instructed in the virtues of

¹⁰³ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1907, p.3.

¹⁰⁴ *The Bengalee*, 25 May 1907, p.5.

¹⁰⁵ See: *Ibid.*, 25 May 1909, p.7 and *The Englishman*, 25 May 1911, p.5.

loyalty to the crown by teachers and assorted civic leaders. Empire Day was used to advance a justification of imperial rule founded on the claim that the British had propelled the sub-continent into the modern world, bringing social improvement and progress. This justification of imperialism was all the more potent in that it came from the lips of Indians themselves. For example, at Mysore in 1908, Indian and English school students from Marrimallappa's High School were among the 2,000 strong Empire Day crowd who assembled in the gaily decorated Town Hall and heard the chair of the meeting Mr. A Ramannah, made a long speech which described the

extent and rapid development of the British Empire under Queen Victoria, the advancement of the Arts and sciences, the security, peace and prosperity of the Indian Dependency during her benign rule, the many blessings that had been conferred upon and are being enjoyed by the Indian Nation, and, most importantly of all, the sympathy, love and solidarity that pervade the British nation in their dealings with their fellow subjects in India and elsewhere . . . the different nationalities in the Indian Continent [should] combine with love and sympathy and strengthen the hands of the British Government in their arduous task of developing India morally, materially and physically.¹⁰⁶

This was a familiar defence of British imperialism. The idea of the supposed advance of civilisation in India under the imperial order was used to extenuate the evident inequalities that existed between the Indian people and the white colonials. It was thus understood that the primary function of empire was to elevate the Indian people to a superior level of social functioning, and whilst this undertaking was as yet incomplete, the subject status of the indigenous peoples would, through necessity,

¹⁰⁶ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1908, p.6.

have to be further endured.¹⁰⁷ Where better to propagate the discourse of benevolent imperialism than in the minds of the privileged minority of educated children who would in the future be best placed to harvest the putative benefits of enlightened British rule? And who better to instil this message than teachers, civil servants, municipal functionaries and local dignitaries? – the representatives of that layer of society who had already been absorbed into the imperial bureaucratic state, except of course, elements of this layer who had been captured by nationalism.

One major area of British India, however, remained largely immune to Empire Day: Bengal. As we have seen, during partition the education sector here became a hub of anti-British political activity and teachers were seen to be at the centre of the agitation. Unsurprisingly, Empire Day was not celebrated in Bengal at this time; it would no doubt have proved far too provocative had this been attempted. In the rest of India, however, Empire Day was beginning to acquire a significant following and workers in the education division proved most amenable in organising the festival of imperialism; students too, were acquiescent in the celebration of the day. It is true that their 'captive' status makes it difficult to assess the true sentiment of the students. However, bearing in mind that at this time the British administration found it necessary to repress sternly pro-nationalist student protest in Bengal, the absence of student dissent elsewhere indicates a level of compliance that suggests at the least a dispassionate attitude to the British Empire and, possibly, a willing acceptance on the part of the students of their subject status under imperial rule.

It might be argued that both the audiences and the orators who convened at the schools on Empire Day represented a tiny minority of the population and thus the celebrations have minimal significance. In a generally optimistic analysis of British

¹⁰⁷ For examples see Dagmar Engels, 'Modes of Knowledge, Modes of power: universities in 19th-century India' in Engels and Marks, *Contesting Colonial Hegemony*, pp. 87-110. See also Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.191.

rule in India written during the inter-war period, Thompson and Garratt conceded that a determined government campaign to promote primary education, which began in 1904, was in large part a disappointing failure.¹⁰⁸ Judith Brown gives a figure of approximately 3% for the proportion of the Indian population being educated in 1921.¹⁰⁹ We can assume this was slightly less during the period under consideration. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons, the Empire Day rallies that occurred within the schools remain noteworthy: firstly, although the total number of schoolchildren in India as a proportion of the population was minuscule, a closer analysis of the figures tells a more complex story. In urban areas such as Madras, Bombay and Bengal, nearly 40% of boys and between 6-10% of girls were being educated at this time.¹¹⁰ In the Punjab, overall figures were even higher: Hardy cites figures pertaining to 1871, which demonstrate that a proportion of the juvenile population exceeding 50% were being educated in schools in this region.¹¹¹ Thus, on Empire Day an ideology of loyalty based on consent to British rule was propagated among a constituency of schoolchildren in regions where their significance was far in excess of what the statistical evidence for India as a whole would suggest.

Secondly, as we have seen, Empire Day celebrations in the schools were not only directed at the small number of Indian children who were taught in the English language.¹¹² Empire Day speeches and songs and services were delivered in many of the vernacular languages. As early as 1854, the British government in India had recognised that the only feasible way of advancing mass education would be to

¹⁰⁸ Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (London, 1934), p.572.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Modern India*, p.124.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 93.

¹¹² The class that Macaulay assumed would be raised up 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' - a much used quotation to be found in Metcalf and Brown amongst others.

promote learning in the vernaculars and to this end departments of education were set up in all regions. Moreover, in 1882 the Municipal Councils Act identified education as an area that could be taken over by local bodies and administered by Indians.¹¹³

The campaign of 1904 to promote primary education also introduced government aid and grants as an incentive to set up Indian schools. Partha Chatterjee has described how the Indian educated elite's opportunities to provide education free from the direct control of the colonial state provided an opportunity to create a space 'outside the domain of the state', where Indian tradition might be maintained and a 'national culture developed'.¹¹⁴

Primary and secondary education in the vernacular languages was just such a space where Indian identities based on tradition and drawing on autochthonous culture might have been promoted. However, the number of vernacular schools that initiated Empire Day events is an important signifier of how, for many of the educated elite and local schoolteachers, 'national' identity was firmly based on a sense of imperial conformity rather than the emerging radical nationalism. In addition, as we have seen, larger proportions of children were educated in urban centres than elsewhere and the government believed that it was important to immerse these children in imperial ideology in order to encourage what might be termed a culture of consent. In these provincial urban areas where Indian nationalism arose and had the greatest influence,¹¹⁵ Empire Day was not ignored or neglected and certainly in the schools it can be safely interpreted as part of the process that attempted to counter or undermine nationalist ideology.

¹¹³ Barbara D Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge, 2002), p.135.

¹¹⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragment: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), pp.8-9.

¹¹⁵ Gordon Johnson describes the importance of provincial urban centres to the development of a nationalist movement in Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1880 to 1915* (Cambridge, 1973), pp.5-52 and *passim*.

Finally, the achievement of the schools in rousing so many of their students to participate in Empire Day events is remarkable considering the factors that stacked the odds against success in this endeavour. For a start, May 24th fell at time when many schools had started their vacation period. Boarding schools could only draw upon the small number of pupils who, for whatever reasons, were still around on the premises, and this often accounted for the propensity of schools to make a combined effort to celebrate the day. In the towns and villages, participation in Empire Day celebrations must therefore have relied on non-boarder school children voluntarily emerging, or encouraged by their parents, to join the marches and rallies, rather than their being involved in Empire Day events by dint of their captivity in the schoolhouse. In addition, Empire Day celebrations had to compete with the large number of festivals and holy days that 'chequered . . . the Indian calendar'¹¹⁶ not least the recently-revived and extremely popular Ganesh festival that preceded Empire Day by only a few weeks. Falling as it did at the end of May, Empire Day was also the victim of the humid and oppressive weather that characterised the Indian summer and, as we have seen, drove many Europeans to take refuge in the cool hill stations.

Opposition

Direct opposition to Empire Day in India during the period 1905-1914 was rare. The prominent and persistent critic of the celebration was a Calcutta newspaper, *The Bengalee*, co-owned and founded by Surendranath Banerjea, leader of the anti-partition movement in Bengal and twice president (1895 and 1902) of the Indian

¹¹⁶ E.G. Pearson, *Looking Back: Being an Autobiography covering 75 years in the life of E. G. Pearson, for 45 years the managing director of the Times of India* (Aldershot, not dated), p.65.

National Congress.¹¹⁷ *The Bengalee* appears to have been the sole English language newspaper that disapproved of Empire Day in India during the foundational years of the festival,¹¹⁸ and it used its editorial columns to attack Empire Day and sometimes published extended polemical remonstrations against the festival on other pages. The newspaper dismissed Empire Day as an insignificant charade, but the space it devoted to condemning the new 'tradition' seems to indicate that it believed the imperialist festival to be worth countering. *The Bengalee* accused imperialists of pursuing the 'militant development of Empire Day' and its editorials set moderate nationalist sentiment as a polar opposite to oppressive imperialism.¹¹⁹ For example, in 1906 *The Bengalee* disputed the 'theoretical' assertion, made on Empire Day, which held that the people of Great Britain and her colonies were 'all members of the same brotherhood, citizens of the same Empire'. This, it pointed out, was at odds with the social and political realities in India where a widening gulf separated the 'European from the Asiatic, the Britisher from the Indian'. The newspaper also declared that the new festival promoted a feeling of resentment in the minds of many Indians.¹²⁰

Certainly the founder and co-owner of *the paper* harboured such resentments: Banerjea had suffered outrageous racial discrimination during his brief career within the Indian Civil Service and in his autobiography he wrote that 'I had suffered because I was an Indian . . . the personal wrong done to me was an illustration of the helpless impotency of our people.'¹²¹ There is no doubting the force of his analysis, but at this time moderate nationalists were not prone to the strong denunciations of the

¹¹⁷ For Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925), see Robert S. Shadle (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire* (Westport, 1996), p.110 and David Fisher, *The Proudest Day: India's Long Road to Independence* (New York, 1998), p.88.

¹¹⁸ It will be remembered that the British administration and anglophile Indians constantly referred to the pernicious influence of some of the vernacular press on the minds of the Indian people. There is scope for a multi-lingual historian to investigate the reaction of the vernacular press to Empire Day.

¹¹⁹ *The Bengalee*, 26 May 1909, p.5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1906, p.4.

¹²¹ Banerjea quoted in David Fisher, *The Proudest Day: India's Long Road to Independence* (New York, 1998), p. 64.

British Empire that could be found in the pages of Banerjea's newspaper and they did not seek the dissolution of the imperial relationship (Banerjea himself was later to accept a knighthood from the imperial government). Moreover, Judith Walsh demonstrates that outside of Bengal, Banerjea's peers within the first-generation of Western educated Indian elites 'were liable to express their ideas through forms of behaviour, which were less openly defiant'.¹²² The evidence suggests that *The Bengalee's* preoccupation with the censure of Empire Day before the First World War was at odds with the general trend among moderate nationalists at this time and was in part a displacement of Banerjea's personal grievances with the British administration.

Whatever the motivation, *The Bengalee* was unrelenting in its attacks. In 1909, it published a lengthy criticism of Lord Amthill's campaign to establish an official Indian flag to be used on Empire Day and other imperial occasions. The much-debated question as to whether the flag should incorporate recognisable Hindu and Muslim symbols was, according to *The Bengalee*, an unwelcome distraction from the real issues of imperial politics:

All this is the silveriest twaddle. Hindus and Mahomadons probably do not care about a flag which . . . would represent not the idea of union but of disunion, not of racial equality but of inequality, not of the making of a nation but the unmaking of a nation.

Empire Day, on which 'little boys are expected to salute' the flag, was written off as 'the enthusing day . . . which was set apart for parades of troops, shooting competitions for schoolboys and merely enthusing on the vastness of dominions and the vastness and variety of colours of subject races'. This sort of activity, complained

¹²² Judith E. Walsh, *Growing Up in British India: Indian Autobiographers on Childhood and Education under the Raj* (New York, 1983), p. 119.

The Bengalee, was inappropriate and lacked the 'least symptom' of imperial patriotism; there were far more important questions concerning racial domination and the inequalities of imperial citizenship to put to the promoters of the Empire Day celebrations.¹²³

In the same year *The Bengalee* published a long denunciation of Empire Day written by its Bombay correspondent who contended that the 'tawdry celebration' was merely 'an idiotic craze' that lacked durability and substance. The writer dismissed the possibility of Empire Day having any meaning for the Indian people and insisted that 'the Empire they are called upon to worship is an alien empire. It is not their own. How then may there be a forced worship?' Moreover, the writer pointed out that the illiteracy of the masses, especially the Muslims, who 'are even more illiterate' than the Hindus, represented an insurmountable obstacle to the development of popular imperialism in India:

Is it not evident that as far as nine tenths of the Indian population are concerned the word "Empire" is as meaningless to them as the word "Mesopotamia"? To these teeming millions sufficient it is for the day that they get a full meal or even half a meal ... while these... are daily occupied in eking out a miserable subsistence how may you impart to them even a concrete, let alone abstract, idea of the "Empire". . . . Of course a few of our Indian aspirants to titles and promotions are in evidence this one day, or rather one hour of the day, in the year. They beat up a kind of scratch following in temple or mosque, chant prayers, which . . . they disbelieve, and parade this mock, this spurious, celebration in organs dedicated to "tinsel Imperialism". Then the poor school children are dragged in to swell the chorus. . . . This is called

¹²³ *The Bengalee*, 26 May 1909, p.5.

Empire Day celebration in India and, of course a flaming account of it is flashed six thousand miles away! Was ever such a spurious celebration manufactured in the world before, ancient or modern? . . . neither Imperialism nor Caesarism or any other *ism* can save an Empire when it is in decline. It is to be devoutly hoped that India shall never be inculcated with this feeble and inefficacious prophylactic of a few crazy political Hakims of the day.¹²⁴

But, despite its dismissal of Empire Day as ineffectual, irrational and inconsequential, *The Bengalee* continued to deliver annual condemnations, thereby investing in Empire Day the very significance that it claimed was absent. Indeed, in 1913, the assault on the 'milk and watery' festival was delivered via a passionate essay that seemed to betray a fair degree of concern regarding the celebrations in India.¹²⁵ The newspaper had predicted that the new Empire Day would suffer a rapid demise, but it was clearly rattled when the festival managed to establish and hold its place on the calendar whilst continuing to attract new adherents. The Bombay celebrations regularly attracted an Indian following that numbered around one thousand. This turnout may have been derided by *The Bengalee*, but the newspaper was unable to refer to a crowd of any size mustered against the festival in the city at this time.

However, there is certainly evidence to suggest that some Empire Day participants were unable to hide their deep ambivalence concerning the nature of British rule. For example, one Empire Day speaker in Tanjore delivered a lecture to a Tamil audience during which he observed that 'British Rule was most benevolent, notwithstanding its too frequent bunglings and lapses from its old high ideals'.¹²⁶ As we have seen, some Indians believed that the Government of India had temporarily

¹²⁴ Ibid., 29 May 1909, p.5.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 31 May 1913, p.4.

¹²⁶ *The Madras Mail*, 27 May 1907, p.7.

lost its way and used Empire Day as a vehicle to claim the rights denied to them by the imperial power. Nevertheless, despite the evident ambivalence of some Indian celebrants and regardless of the criticisms of *the Bengalee*, the nationalist movement at this time essentially wanted reform within the empire rather than the overthrow of the British regime. This underlying belief in the essential integrity of the British Empire led to some curious equivocations in the statements of Empire Day's fiercest critics. For example, that article (earlier quoted) carried by *The Bengalee* may have declared that the attempt to manufacture a celebration such as Empire Day was symbolic of the decline of the Empire and, moreover, that the Day in India was sham-bolic, artificial and essentially meaningless to the majority of the population. However, the newspaper subsequently observed that if the British would initiate political reforms which established the principles of equal citizenship rights in India, then 'Empire Day will be a *reality* . . . and no artificial agitation like the present or any other cry will be necessary to sing the glories of Empire and celebrate the day. It will be a *spontaneous national Movement*.'¹²⁷

There is only one occasion recorded in the English language press before 1914 when Indian people actually organised a physical demonstration against Empire Day. This occurred in Lahore in 1906. Even here, although the protesters appear to have shared a generalised sense of dissatisfaction with the British administration, they did not present a coherent dissenting ideology. Among the speakers was the editor of *Paisa Akbhar*, Mahbub Alam, who objected to Empire Day on the grounds that it was unnecessary for the British authorities to 'enforce loyalty, manufactured to order' and he objected to 'our loyalty being doubted and our being made to express it'. Another speaker, whilst complaining about the expectation that Indians should 'bear the

¹²⁷ *The Bengalee*, 29 May 1909, p.5, my italics.

burden of citizenship' without being allowed to share its privileges, could nevertheless see a time when all Indians would share in the jubilation and celebrations of the British Empire.¹²⁸ Such were the sentiments expressed at the demonstration against Empire Day in Lahore on May 24 1906, where around two thousand people had gathered to protest against 'the innovation of Empire Day'. The main speaker at the demonstration was Lala Lajput Rai, an early leader of the *Arya Samaj* in Punjab and a radical ally of Tilak within the Congress movement.¹²⁹ During the protest Rai proclaimed that 'patriotism toward the Empire was meaningless' and that 'Empire signified subjection of one race to another, and patriotism could not exist in regard to it'.¹³⁰ The nationalist strategy in Lahore at this time was clearly based on exploiting various civil grievances by tying them to an anti-imperialist platform. The opportunity presented by Empire Day as a focus of protest corresponds with Metcalf's explanation of why some British administrators were reluctant to promote Empire Day (particularly in Bengal during partition). In the Punjab, of which Lahore was the capital city, an occasional ventilation of strong anti-British opinion accompanied an ephemeral surge of political extremism between 1904 and 1907. But, this was distinctly at odds with the 'normal' state of affairs in the region that supplied one third of the men for the British Indian Army. In 1906, the Lahore demonstration coincided with a temporary surge of anti-British agitation in the Punjab, which was linked to an excessive rise in land tax and other unpopular revenue initiatives. In addition, an earthquake in the region had produced heavy casualties, which added to civil

¹²⁸ Ibid., 27 May 1906, p.4.

¹²⁹ Although advocating that the Indian National Congress should adopt a sharper form of nationalism, Lajput Rai attempted to play a conciliatory role as the movement began to split apart after 1904. Nevertheless, his uncompromising criticism of the British government in India led to his deportation to Burma in 1907.

¹³⁰ *The Bengalee*, 27 May 1906, p.4.

tensions.¹³¹ Lala Lajput Rai capitalised on the levels of frustration and unrest during this period and cultivated a significant following. The anti Empire Day protests were not repeated in the Punjab at any other time before the war.

Unsurprisingly, the temporary social unrest in the Punjab was a spur to the agitators of the anti-partition movement in Bengal who were anxious to extend their boycott of all things British into the wider political arena: hence, *The Bengalee* paid particularly close attention to the anti-Empire Day activities in Lahore. That newspaper applauded the citizens of Lahore for protesting against Empire Day and was, as usual, unequivocal in its condemnation. It asserted that the people of India had little cause to celebrate 'the Empire Day, which is suggestive of nothing but humiliation and bondage for them'; the celebration of Empire was 'hypocritical, meaningless and wholly inconsistent with any notion of self respect' because the Indians were denied 'most of the rights of British citizenship' and were effectively 'the slaves of the Empire'.¹³²

Even though *The Bengalee* repeatedly took advantage of Empire Day to deliver anti-imperialist attacks, contrary to the fears of the British administration (emphasised by Metcalf), nationalists did not generally exploit Empire Day in this way. Amongst the English language press, *The Bengalee* was a lone voice of dissent, and soon enough British policy seemed to be reducing the space for this kind of 'educated' dissent. The Morley-Minto reforms that had been announced in November of the previous year allowed the admittance of Indian representatives to the Viceroy's council and to the provincial legislative councils and these were measures believed by many educated Indians (including moderates in the nationalist movement) to represent a progressive turn in British policy. The Calcutta weekly newspaper *Indian Nation*

¹³¹ Bakhshigh Singh Nijar, *Panjab under the British Rule* (New Delhi, 1974), pp.8-11.

¹³² *The Bengalee*, 27 May 1906, p.3.

(proprietor – Babu Rajendranath Ghose) anticipated a brighter future for Indians under the British flag. A front-page article proposed that Empire Day 1909 was an opportunity to celebrate 'our common ties, our common responsibilities and our common pride'. Empire Day was now deemed to be a 'happy inspiration' and served to foster a feeling of unity and loyalty:

To us in India this year's Empire Day possesses a peculiar significance. We are now identified with the British Empire in a closer manner than before; and, though we have not yet attained to the full stature of British Citizenship, we are seeing our way clear. The day is not far distant when we hope to see a welding together of the various units of the Empire into a compact and harmonious whole, when the Asiatic and Colonial, the Indian and the Englishman will stand on the common platform of a British Federation, each acknowledging in the other an additional source of strength and security to the British throne. That is a consummation to which things are moving slowly but surely . . . Well may we Indians be proud of our place in the mightiest Empire of the Earth, an Empire which stands to-day in the forefront of civilisation, the embodiment of power and prosperity, the guardian of the weak and the home of liberty.¹³³

The moderate nationalists of the Indian National Congress thus shared the belief that India was destined to achieve a political status within the Empire, which was akin to the autonomy enjoyed by the white settler colonies.¹³⁴ Early nationalists pinned their hopes on the advance of progressive government in India and the fulfilment of the pledges made in Queen Victoria's 1858 proclamation, which allowed for the 'free and impartial' entry of appropriately-educated Indians into the offices of

¹³³ *The Indian Nation*, 31 May 1909, p.1.

¹³⁴ Masselos, *Indian Nationalism*, p.117.

government. The gradual evolution of these ideas and the recognition that India could and should be governed by the Indians themselves did not yet actually encompass an assumption that political rupture with the Empire was a necessity.¹³⁵ The rise of a radical nationalist tendency within Congress and the shift to a violent struggle in Bengal during partition only served to emphasise the moderate position of Gokhale and his colleagues in relation to reform. In the face of firm repressive measures taken by the British against the 'extremist' nationalists, it would have been inexpedient for Congress generally to adopt any position other than one that was built on a premise of ultimate loyalty to the Crown. Thus, the moderate membership of Congress at this time was wedded to a vision of liberal politics based on the English model. Their antipathy was directed against the inequalities and racism that marked the system of government in India, not against the idea of Empire itself. 'Self government' within the Empire was thus the goal of Congress. When the Muslim League, angered by the revocation of partition, abandoned its deferential pro-British policy in 1913, its conception of nationalism, like Congress's, remained bounded by the all-embracing imperial conception.¹³⁶ Given this, we should not be surprised by the limited opposition to Empire Day in the first decade of its existence in India.

Conclusion

No matter how it was dressed up, the reality of Empire in India was predicated on a history of conquest and oppression and assumed the natural superiority of the white race. Relations of domination and exploitation characterised what was in essence a 'fundamentally autocratic' regime.¹³⁷ As Thomas Metcalf has pointed out,

¹³⁵ See John Keay, *India: A History* (London, 2000), pp. 454–455.

¹³⁶ Woolpert, *A New History of India*, p.286.

¹³⁷ Denis Judd, *Empire. The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* (London, 1996), p.237.

the Indian government, alert to 'the contradictions that bedevilled the ideology of empire' did not go out of its way to promote the Empire Day festival. Some officials advocated instead an emphasis on the cultivation among the Indian people of a feeling of personal loyalty to and affection for the British Monarchy.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, between 1905 and 1914 Empire Day in India was successfully established. The anniversary became a fixture of the calendar; British and Indians actively celebrated it throughout the subcontinent; and it was understood as being symbolic of a sense of social cohesion or the expression of solidarity among diverse communities.¹³⁹ To be sure, Empire Day could never be described as a popular festival in India. All true enough, but the provenance of British Rule in India was not the consent of the voiceless mass of the people but rather a period of conquest and a series of strategic alliances with the traditional aristocracy. Latterly, British rule had been reinforced through the cultivation of an urban middle class of Indians whose social values and political ideas were informed by their Western education. Hence, it would seem that rather than attempting to inspire broad swathes of the population with the imperial idea, the organisers of Empire Day in India focused on crucial constituencies whose loyalty was of key importance.

The adoption of Empire Day rituals by the remnants of the traditional aristocracy - the princes whose 'indirect rule' covered one third of the population of India - ¹⁴⁰ is unsurprising as it served to uphold the princes' authority as well as that of the British. The need to inculcate a sense of intense imperial loyalty among the Indian troops who vastly outnumbered their white counterparts is obvious, and the military in India were often at the forefront of celebrations on Empire Day. However,

¹³⁸ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.210.

¹³⁹ See Eric Hobsbawm's discussion of types of invented tradition in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p.9.

¹⁴⁰ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, p.103.

the British residents of India were often disinclined to make any great efforts to organise Empire Day events and even when they did they were frequently unable to demonstrate a visible sense of exhilaration regarding their imperial privileges. All the same, many British communities in India dutifully marked Empire Day in a variety of ways throughout this period. In some places, as demonstrated in Bangalore, it appears that the novelty of the event soon wore thin for many of the celebrants, especially as the ritual forms of commemoration recommended by the Earl of Meath began to take precedence over the exuberant entertainment that characterised the early festivals. Nevertheless, there were a number of ardent imperialists who made exhaustive efforts to ensure that Empire Day, once established, continued to be marked regularly.

Empire Day celebrations among the British communities in India, within the military establishment or those initiated by the old monarchical states are, in a sense, a predictable manifestation of established power relations in Indian society. Empire Day rituals were designed to transmit a representation of the empire as a solid and immovable entity, to encourage a feeling of permanence and continuity and to encourage imperial subjects to be loyal and ready to defend their 'heritage'. What is more remarkable, and indeed more significant, than the Empire Day celebrations that took place among the groups mentioned above, were the celebrations initiated by Indians themselves, predominantly within the urban milieu and often within the schools and colleges. Some of these Indian loyalists who made public their annual declaration of affection for the empire enjoyed individual social and political advantage through their enmeshment with the colonial administration and were happy to kiss the hand that fed them. Like the Indian princes, their participation in Empire Day events served their own narrow aims and reinforced their social position.

However, the overall picture was much more complex than this. Muslim loyalists demonstrated an enthusiasm for Empire Day only as long as they perceived political advantage would accrue from their identification with the British imperial establishment. (This is clear proof of the dangers of reading emotion and investment in celebration.) Other Empire Day adherents frequently betrayed ambivalence in their thinking about the imperial relationship and used the assertion of their own patriotism as a means of demanding the political rights they expected from, but were denied by, the very system of government that they were publicly celebrating. This paradoxical strategy of turning the ideology of empire against itself seemed like one of the only viable political options for many middle-class Indians unable to contemplate or even imagine engaging in direct opposition to imperial rule. Like Gandhi in South Africa at this time, they nurtured an optimistic belief that in the last instance the British government would be true to the promises made in Queen Victoria's famous proclamation of 1858.

The moderate members of the Indian National Congress were similarly trapped in an ideological bind, whereby their demands for self-government were contained within a political discourse that identified constitutional and administrative reform as the only legitimate means to their desired ends. In 1908, Congressional delegates were required to agree in writing that they would abide by this 'creed' and that self-government meant self-government *within* the British Empire.¹⁴¹ Thus, even though the celebration of imperial domination on Empire Day was antithetical to their idea of political progress in the sub-continent, moderate nationalists were unable to articulate a forcible protest in regard to the new festival. Those moderate commentators who could not conceal their antipathy toward Empire Day invariably

¹⁴¹ Burke and Quraishi, *The British Raj in India*, p.123.

tempered their criticisms with a caveat that predicted a unified and widespread future celebration of the day once full political rights had been granted to the Indian population.

The most vociferous opponents of Empire Day were the extreme nationalists who eventually left Congress (albeit temporarily) and were harshly repressed by the British Government. But the large anti-Empire Day demonstration of 1907, organised by Lajput Rai in Lahore was opportunist and ephemeral, capitalising on a passing period of regional unrest. Empire Day continued to be celebrated in Lahore and many other locations in the Punjab but there was no recurrence of anti-Empire Day protests before the First World War. The mocking and bitter criticism of Empire Day by newspapers such as *The Bengalee* was not accompanied by organised action. Admittedly, in the provinces of Bengal where vigorous protests might well have been expected, the inauguration of Empire Day in India occurring during the turbulent years of anti-British protest following partition, the festival was very slow to establish a foothold. It was only after the revocation of partition, which followed on the heels of the Morley-Minto reforms that reports of Empire Day celebrations in this region appear in the newspapers.

Despite the reluctance of the British administration in India to promote Empire Day on a national level, between 1905 and 1914 it became established as a regular festival in numerous towns and cities throughout the sub-continent. In some regions Empire Day was designated as a public holiday. This institutionalisation of Empire Day at a regional level and the participation in Empire Day celebrations by high-ranking officials, including the Viceroys of this period, undermine Metcalf's assertion that 'Indian celebrations carefully avoided the date of 24 May'.¹⁴² This might have

¹⁴² Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p.221.

been the case in Bengal under partition, but elsewhere a number of social constituencies, whose loyalty was crucial to the maintenance of British rule, developed a variety of practices and customs that are consistent with the concept of invented tradition. Furthermore, the marking of Empire Day in the schools of India became an established practice; this was of special importance to the British rulers and loyalist Indians who were well aware of the destabilising effects of an antagonistic education community.

Chapter 3

Empire Day, the 'white' empire and the First World War.

Introduction

We have seen that Empire Day exemplified an imperialist culture that successfully infiltrated the popular consciousness of pre-war Britain and assisted in the demarcation of the frontiers of British authority and influence in the colonial context. This chapter, in part, considers how far the enactment of the Empire Day commemoration, with its emphasis on military duty in the service of the empire, contributed to the shaping of attitudes and responses to the First World War in the 'white' empire, with a particular emphasis on Britain and South Africa. Material pertaining to the other white settler colonies is once again employed for comparative purposes.

The Empire Day celebration was part of an imperialist-militaristic discourse that accompanied the New Imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and so an analysis of Empire Day celebrations during the First World War cannot be divorced from the relationship of Empire Day to militarism within pre-war imperial culture. The catastrophe of the war, in turn, mutated the inherent tenor of the Empire Day commemoration and had an impact on the public expression of imperialist sentiment for a number of years following the end of hostilities. This chapter attempts, therefore, to incorporate an evaluation of certain aspects of Empire Day that widens the analytical timeframe beyond the specific period of 1914-18. It will also

examine the effect of the British government's decision to give official recognition to Empire Day in 1916 and the melancholic air that began to infect the commemoration due to the exigencies of war and the recognition of common loss and grief among the population. The failure of Empire day in South Africa is also explored in relation to Afrikaner nationalism, the rise of which cannot be divorced from the First World War.

Pre-War Militarism and Empire Day

The symbols and rhetoric of Empire Day both reflected and influenced an imperialistic consciousness that, in part, accounts for the voluntary mass enlistment that occurred in Britain and throughout the Empire upon the outbreak of war. It would be nigh on impossible to assess with any validity the full influence that Empire Day had upon voluntary military recruitment between 1914-18; so many other interrelated factors, both measurable and intangible, accounted for the unprecedented enlistment of so many young men at that time. Nevertheless, it is still possible to make credible inferences regarding Empire Day celebrations and their contribution to a popular militaristic sensibility in Britain and the empire. The primary aspiration of the Empire Day Movement was to encourage imperial patriotism in youth, with the explicit purpose of implanting a sense of duty that would become manifest in times of war. This section considers the effect that the unconcealed militarism of Empire Day had upon the expression of popular imperialism in the years leading to the human catastrophe of the First World War.

The importance of defending the empire was a theme that was integral to Empire Day. The Earl of Meath believed that Britain's experience in the South African War had alerted the empire to an alarming inadequacy regarding its defensive

capability. He pointed out that before the South African War, only '200,000 white soldiers, recruited by voluntary enlistment' defended the Empire, but the War had 'taught us the folly of believing that such an Empire can be defended by so ridiculously small a number of fighting men'.¹ In 1914, an unprecedented number of men from around the globe demonstrated their willingness to fight and die to protect the empire by enlisting in the forces. It is certain that many of these individuals would have experienced or participated in Empire Day celebrations in one form or another during the previous decade.

Tracking back from 1914, it is evident that there was an unquestionable infusion of militarism in Empire Day celebrations. The association of the military with Queen Victoria's birthday celebrations was long established before the emergence of Empire Day. The martial traditions of May 24 merged comfortably into the Empire Day repertoire and were often at the core of the celebrations. Empire Day parades provided opportunities for army and navy bands to deliver public performances and allowed local volunteer and cadet forces to make ostentatious appearances in towns and cities.

Without doubt, the general public were attracted by the spectacle of military processions and it would have been difficult to completely escape the noise and sense of occasion when such events occurred in a locality: for example, the firing of a *feu de joie* by 80 sailors from HMS Forte must have made sufficient noise to alert all the residents of Port Elizabeth to the fact that something out of the ordinary was happening on Empire Day in 1906.² Nevertheless, a conspicuous military presence was not a universal feature of Empire Day celebrations; proximity to garrison towns or military barracks increased the likelihood of martial displays, but many festivities in small towns and villages in Britain and abroad did not benefit from such

¹ Earl of Meath, *Brabazon Potpourri*, p.95.

² *Cape Times*, 25 May 1906, p.5.

associations. However, the drill exercises of the children that culminated in the ritualised saluting of the flag, a feature of virtually all Empire Day celebrations, added a soldierly tone to even the smallest of events.

A popular proclivity toward militarism arose in Britain and the colonies at the turn of the century. This was in part generated during the South African War, but it was further fuelled by the international tensions in Europe. The white colonies in particular were faced with novel dilemmas that accompanied the New Imperialism. Apprehension about the rising empires of Japan and the United States brought forth a political debate in Canada and Australia around the issue of imperial defence, while in South Africa the bickering of the European empires, which had serious implications for colonial Africa, was cause for a fixation with military matters in some quarters.

The South African War created awareness in some minds of the potential fragilities of the empire and the need for an effective fighting force to defend it. In 1900, the *Toronto Globe* thought that the city's Empire Day celebration, which culminated in a massive cadet parade, reflected 'a general interest in things military' generated by the war.³ Ceremonial military parades were a common feature of Empire Day that continued throughout the period preceding the First World War. The impact in terms of sheer spectacle was frequently commented upon in the press. For example, the marching display of 800 troops through Adelaide in 1908 was considered 'one of the largest and most interesting spectacular parades of the kind seen in the state'.⁴ Similarly, the 10,000 troops who marched through Sydney in the

³ *The Toronto Globe*, 24 May 1900. Stamp reports that in Toronto the Empire Day cadet parade became a key event in the city's calendar and that the number of participating cadets dramatically increased in number so that 'by the mid 1920's upwards of ten thousand khaki uniformed boys were marching': Robert M. Stamp, 'Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario', p.37.

⁴ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 30 May 1908, p.41.

same year caused great excitement on the streets, which were 'thronging with people'.⁵

The noise and animation of Empire Day military parades provided sufficient stimulus to attract interest and attention among the general public, which created a wider audience to absorb the pedagogic element of the grandiose displays. These often concluded with rituals designed to impress the values of patriotic duty and obedience on those who gathered to observe or participate. For example, an Empire Day parade of citizen soldiers in Cape Town during 1902 included a medal pinning ceremony for veterans of various campaigns that had been fought prior to the South African War. The Governor extolled the virtues of a 'citizen soldiery who are all ready to work together in defence of the Empire' and added that although the medals 'will be valued as a memorial of duty done in the past' they will also be 'an example of duty that may have to be done in the future'.⁶

The message of inherent duty, delivered through an amalgamation of commemoration and patriotic rallying call, was delivered repeatedly in one form or another to a host of Empire Day audiences around the world throughout the decade that preceded the First World War. Examples include the regular gathering of the Canadian Military Veterans Association (CMVA) in Toronto where, in addition to the familiar rituals of the day, the monuments 'of departed soldiers' were decorated. Three serving regiments and a number of South African War veterans accompanied the CMVA in 1907 in the performance of what was referred to in the press as a 'custom'.⁷ It is interesting to note that many of the dignitaries who spoke at this event (including the Premier, Wilfred Laurier), wore recently issued campaign medals awarded to members of the Imperial and Canadian forces who had been on active

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1902, p.5.

⁷ 'In Memory of the Dead.' in *The Globe*, 25 May 1907, p.24.

duty during the suppression of the Fenian raids on Canada between 1866 and 1870.⁸ Laurier (who somewhat defensively insisted that Empire Day was not a parade of 'little Englishers' in 'a state of mental dyspepsia')⁹ claimed that Canadians 'were a unit in their affection for the British Empire' (a disclosure that would have come as an unwelcome revelation to most French-Canadians) and he enjoined them to 'remember that there was not a friendly nation on their boundaries'. Another veteran of 1866, Chancellor Burwash, proclaimed that Empire Day gatherings were 'object lessons' for children.¹⁰

The children and youth of the British world were the main target of the patriotic entreaty to take to arms when their time came. In Toronto, a 'huge' congregation of children and cadets met on Empire Day in 1907 to honour volunteers who were killed in the North West Rebellion of 1885. The Honourable J. P. Whitney addressed them and observed that 'in the children before him he saw the future soldiers of the crown who would defend all that the British Empire stood for throughout the world.'¹¹ At Simonstown in South Africa, the end of a long programme of Empire Day events, (organised jointly by the town council and officers of the British Navy) culminated in the address of Vice Admiral Egerton to an assembly of children from the local schools. He enjoined them to be ready at all times to defend their country, as by doing that they were defending the Empire also.¹² As we have seen, the female imperialist organisations, which were so actively involved in

⁸ Ibid.. These medals were issued in 1899, 30 years after the Fenian Raids across the border, and eligibility was very loosely defined. Hence, many 'veterans' uninitiated in combat were entitled to wear them. See website of Veteran Affairs Canada at <http://www.vacacc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/cmdp/mainmenu/group03/cgsm&CFID=16417415&CFTOKEN=42079055>, accessed 10 July 2007.

⁹ 'In Memory of the Dead.' in *The Globe*, May 25, 1907, p.24 and 'How to Spend Holiday' in *ibid.*, 23 May 1907, p.4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 'Decorate Monuments. Thousands of School Children in Queen's Park' in, May 24 1907, p.7.

¹² Admiral Egerton and Captain Dumas of HMS *Hermes* had been instrumental in organising Empire Day in Simonstown that year, *The Cape Times*, 27 May 1909, p.5.

the Empire Day movement, were at pains to reinforce these values and emphasise the virtues of valour and self-sacrifice. They contrived mourning activities on Empire Day in respect of the exemplary 'heroes' of the empire who had died in service,¹³ which provided a clear understanding of the imperial responsibilities of the boys of the rising generation. Thus, in 1908 in Toronto, the women of the Grenadier Chapter, Daughters of the Empire decorated the graves of 18th Royal Grenadiers Necropolis.

J.A. Mangan has emphasised the importance of drill as a 'basic ingredient' of the Empire Day Movement in his consideration of the inculcation of imperialistic attitudes in British schools. In preparation for Empire Day, children in Britain were taught the fundamentals of drill and marching on school playgrounds in the belief that discipline and conformity would produce a 'harmony of thoughts and deeds . . . [and] culminate in an imperial ideal'.¹⁴ The absorption of the ideals of British imperialism and the formation of an imperial attachment was infused with militaristic values, which included adherence to duty and self-sacrifice. Before the First World War, this rigid fusion of militarism and imperial sentiment was more akin to the ethos of the British public schools than the wider education system.¹⁵ The massive cadet parades on Empire Day in the white dominions were the supreme example of the crusade to perpetuate the British imperial 'tradition' in the younger generation. Imperialists maintained that such parades were the external symbolism that indicated the inner beliefs of the empire's youth. Of course, it is not easy to gauge the accuracy of such claims, but perhaps the unprecedented rush to arms in 1914 of segments of the youth of Australia, South Africa and Canada to fight in a distant European war, was in part a confirmation that the project of imperial instruction had been effectual – for many of

¹³ 'Earl Grey was at Veterans Parade' in *The Globe*, May 25 1908, p.12.

¹⁴ J.A. Mangan (ed.), 'Pig Sticking is the Greatest Fun': Martial Conditioning on the Hunting Fields of Empire' in *Militarism, Sport, Europe: War without Weapons* (London, 2003), p.88-89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 'The Grit of our Forefathers', p.135.

the young men in the colonies, it seems that loyalty to the nation had become inseparable from an allegiance to the empire.

On very rare occasions a dissident voice emerged amidst the militaristic entreaties to defend the empire through arms. In 1908, Professor Naylor, a speaker at the united schools demonstration in Adelaide, announced that he wanted to speak to the children 'not about the army and navy, but about privileges of a peaceful kind which they enjoyed and owed to the Union Jack'. Naylor, it seemed, was ill at ease with the strong military overtones of the day and insisted that 'there were greater things than winning battles on land and at sea'. He quoted Milton, 'peace hath her victories no less renowned than war' and appealed to the boys and girls to try and win victories over themselves by learning to fight 'the awful vices of drink and gambling and worse things'. Naylor said that by disciplining themselves in this way they could do

more for the British Empire than the army and navy ... could do. If they turned themselves out as good citizens then they would be doing more to uphold the honour of the Union Jack than all Britain's grand soldiers and sailors had done in the past.

The Governor of Victoria, who spoke next, appeared disconcerted by Professor Naylor's disquisition and proclaimed that it was his duty to 'defend their troops and their fleets'. He made the usual disingenuous, yet popularly accepted claim that the British Empire had been made by fighting for liberty 'not by taking what belonged to other nations' and he encouraged the children to take up the military cause when their turn came 'in a battle for the right and liberty of the people'.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 30 May 1908, p.41.

Many of the young people, courted as future defenders of the Empire, were inducted into military organisations long before the First World War and the cadet movements of the pre-war era were prominent on Empire Day. The emphasis on military prowess among young male citizens was believed by imperialists to be vital in preparing them to defend the Empire against foreign attacks. Throughout Australia and Canada, thousands of cadets marched and performed military exercises in public spaces on Empire Day and there were also some locations in South Africa where they were prominent. For example, Kimberley was permeated with a martial spirit in 1907 as military cadets headed a procession of school children through the town and fired a *feu-de-joie* after delivering a hearty rendition of Rule Britannia.¹⁷ In Montreal, the cadets made their regular contribution to the Empire Day concert in 1909 and participated in a rifle shooting competition that was contested by more than six hundred entrants. (Following the initiative of the *Daily Mail* in Britain many youngsters and adults participated in an empire-wide shooting competition, thus creating a cohort of youth proficient in the use of arms).¹⁸ In Toronto, 3,000 school cadets paraded through the city in 1912¹⁹ and Empire Day was marked in Adelaide the following year by a parade of 6,000 men and boy cadets - 'the largest military procession which had ever passed through its streets'.²⁰

In the white settler colonies the importance of the imperial connection in relation to defence had been given particular salience since the turn of the century, and without doubt Empire Day had been used to accentuate the supposed vulnerability of the colonies in the presence of rival powers. As Judith Brett has pointed out, the feeble nascent republican movement in Australia was in large part defeated by

¹⁷ *The Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1907, p.7.

¹⁸ *Montreal Daily Star*, 22 May 1909, p.17.

¹⁹ *The Globe*, 24 May 1912, p.1.

²⁰ 'King and Country. Young Defenders. A Magnificent Parade' in *Adelaide Chronicle*, 27 May 1913, p.35.

Australians' awareness of their exposed position in the region and the absolute necessity of British military protection.²¹ In this period, it seems that the acceptance of the imperial link was based as much on pragmatism as it was on sentimentalism. Empire Day was used at once to amplify a sense of unease should the bond be dissolved and inspire the younger generation through an animated celebration of the diverse wonders and glory of the British Empire.

Indeed, even in the midst of war, efforts were made on Empire Day to dispel any doubts about the value of the empire. One of the speeches delivered in Pietermaritzburg in 1917 emphasised the role of the British Navy during the war claiming that its presence saved South Africa from a German invasion.²² This was surely a response to the Afrikaner nationalist argument that involvement in the European war was contrary to the interests of the Union and that the involvement of South African troops in Africa itself was more about imperial expansion than national defence. The Mayor of Durban that year addressed the city's Empire Day gathering in bellicose fashion, deriding MPs who presented such arguments as 'rebels at heart' and dismissing their analysis as 'nonsense' and 'vapourings'. He insisted that loyalty to the King and the Union could only equate with loyalty to the empire and suggested that any break with the empire would result in South Africa succumbing to 'German Rule'. His uncompromising stance reportedly received loud plaudits from the audience of troops and children.²³

In Australia, the perceived threat of the rising Japanese empire (Japanese land forces had defeated both Chinese and Russian armies in the wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) was compounded by concern over the limitations of the army. Japan's emergence as a major world power (its status cemented with the defeat

²¹ Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, p.45.

²² 'Empire Day in the City. Inspiring addresses' in *The Natal Witness*, 25 May 1917, p.1.

²³ *The Natal Witness*, 25 May 1917, p.3.

of the Russian fleet in 1905) accentuated worries about Australia's ability to defend her sovereign territory. In response, a comprehensive and coordinated system of school cadet corps was formed in 1904; an initiative that received popular and all-party political support. In 1909, the schools' cadets system was expanded to include compulsory military training for junior and senior cadets aged between twelve and eighteen. In addition, a citizens' force was created that made training compulsory for adult males aged eighteen to twenty.²⁴ The swell of militaristic sentiment and preparedness for war in the 'white' empire reflected the concurrent arms race that was occurring among the European imperial powers. Participation in citizen militias and cadet organisations created an able fighting force in the colonies, while indoctrination through the education system and grandiose events such as Empire Day created a tangible basis for their military preparedness.

For imperialists in Australia, South Africa and Canada the relative strength of the British Navy to its European counterparts was of immediate concern to their perception of the defence interests of their countries. At the colonial conference in London in 1902, Australia committed itself to an annual subscription of £200,000 to support the costs of the British Navy's defence of the Australian coast. The longer-term defence needs of the nation in relation to the unpredictable strategic policy of Great Britain caused unease among some Australian politicians. The cost of contributing to the imperial fleet was, in essence, taxation without representation and a mounting sense of resentment over this issue meant that the Naval Debate dominated Canadian and Australian politics for a short period between 1909 and 1912.²⁵

²⁴ For a concise overview of defence issues in Australia at this time see Frank G. Clarke, *The History of Australia* (Westport, 2002), pp. 98-101.

²⁵ See Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 69-82.

Empire Day was, in this context, an opportunity for imperialists to exploit patriotic feelings and mobilise support for increased contributions from the dominions for maintaining a fleet over which Britain retained ultimate control. Empire Day embraced the "One Fleet, One Flag" motto and at the height of the Dreadnought crisis in 1909,²⁶ many Empire Day ceremonies included reference to the naval relationship. In Adelaide, two torchlight processions took place at which gigantic models of Dreadnoughts were carried and the proceeds of the massive demonstration in Sydney were put toward the Dreadnought fund.²⁷ On the same day, Vice Admiral Sir Richard Poore delivered a speech at the Royal Exchange where he called attention to the German threat to British naval supremacy and maintained that 'the question of the formation of an Australian navy must be shelved for decades'.²⁸ In South Africa, the *Natal Witness* utilised the Empire Day holiday of 1913 as an opportunity to raise money for imperial defence. It drew attention to the 'stupendous armaments of foreign powers' and the 'imminent danger'²⁹ of a European war that might necessitate a naval withdrawal to British waters leaving South Africa at 'the mercy of any hostile power'.³⁰ Drawing inspiration from New Zealand, where a Dreadnought was built from funds donated by the people 'as a gift to the Empire' (this vessel had recently visited South Africa and had docked at Durban), the *Witness* proposed that Natal should be 'the first of the overseas portions of the Empire to present an aeroplane to the Motherland'.³¹ It proposed that Empire Day could not be more appropriate a time to begin raising funds for this patriotic project. The idea was that each reader should

²⁶ For an overview of the naval development of the industrial nations at this time see Lisle A. Rose, *Power at Sea: The Age of Navalism, 1890-1918, Vol. I*, (University of Missouri, 2006), pp 41-89; for an older but more specific summary of the Dreadnought Crisis see Donald C. Gordon, 'The Admiralty and Dominion Navies, 1902-1914' in *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 33, Number 4, (December, 1961), pp. 411-415.

²⁷ *Adelaide Chronicle*, 29 May 1909, p.46.

²⁸ 'The Naval Crisis. Admiral Poore's Advice and Warning', in *ibid.*

²⁹ L.J. Hodges writing in *The Natal Witness, Empire Day Special Edition*, 21 May 1913, p.3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

use the increased opportunities for social contact on Empire Day to persuade other Natalians of the 'force and utility' of the idea and endeavour to obtain subscribers,

'Then we will be able to announce in a day or two that Empire Day in Natal, 1913, had really and truly inaugurated the Overseas campaign for increasing the aerial defences of Great Britain . . . If you are at a picnic on Empire Day, at a sports meeting, at a dance, at a place of entertainment, at a gathering in your home, use the time and the occasion to talk of this new project and collect if you can six subscriptions. We guarantee you will realise afterwards this was the best thing you did on Empire Day.'³²

Self-sacrifice was central to Meath's conception of the collective responsibilities and duties of empire citizens. He had an obsessive determination to infuse youth with a patriotic spirit, believing that 'the rising generation [should be] ... taught to subordinate the individual to the common interest'.³³ J.A. Mangan has argued that the militaristic rituals of Empire Day were intended to 'create a menial frame of mind', the idea being that as schoolchildren learnt their drill and saluted the flag they would develop inner beliefs that corresponded with patriotic imperialism.³⁴ We can see that the efforts to inculcate a patriotic consciousness extended into the adult domain and although it is impossible to assess with any accuracy the relationship between the project of inculcating a warlike patriotism on Empire Day and the eagerness to join the armed forces in 1914, it is not unreasonable to assert that Empire Day militarism was undoubtedly a successful part of the wider mission of

³² Ibid.

³³ Meath quoted by Springhall, in 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire', p.107.

³⁴ J.A. Mangan and Hamad S. Ndee, 'Military Drill, Rather more 'Brief and Basic': English Elementary Schools and English Militarism' in J. A. Mangan, *Militarism, Sport, Europe*, p.89.

imperialist indoctrination that surely influenced the fervent clamour to enlist among young men in Britain and the white settler populations in 1914.³⁵

Approach to Empire Day in wartime Britain

It was during the First World War that Empire Day was given official status by the British government. Although there is evidence to demonstrate that in some areas the celebration was boosted by this political move, overall it seems that the government were confirming what was already a widespread and well-established social 'tradition'. However, it was also during the war that an emerging antipathy toward the day began to be revealed as some children, and even teachers, questioned the rhetoric of imperialism.

The putative qualities of patriotic obedience, loyalty and service to the state, so beloved by imperial propagandists, coincided directly with the need of the British government to mobilise the country to fight a total war during 1914-18. An awareness of the propaganda value of Empire Day celebrations and a crisis in military recruitment were primary factors in persuading the government to bestow official status on Empire Day in 1916. The official recognition of the day corresponded with an increased effort on the part of educational authorities in Britain to amplify the influence of Empire Day within the schools.

In 1916, *The Times* reported that the 'first national Empire Day' marked a shift in attitude whereby the 'cold and haughty England' of days gone was enlightened by a realisation that 'it is not unseemly to be enthusiastic'.³⁶ The necessity of inspiring public enthusiasm for the Empire and the war was of acute importance at this time. During the previous month, the Easter uprising in Dublin and its bloody aftermath had

³⁵ Bob Besant, 'British Imperial Propaganda in Australian Schools 1900-1930' in *Working Papers in Australian Studies*, No. 98, 1995, p.20.

³⁶ *The Times*, May 24 1916, p.9.

created a 'tide of sympathy for the insurgents' across Ireland that was expressed as hostility toward the British Empire.³⁷ Furthermore, the second Military Conscription Act was passed in late April. The first Act, passed in January, had caused considerable misgiving in the Labour movement, even though it exempted married men.³⁸ The second Act allowed the enlistment of married men and measures taken to enforce enlistment: it 'aroused much indignation among ordinary citizens'.³⁹ The official recognition of Empire Day contributed to a stirring up of patriotic and nationalistic fervour and no doubt played a part in dissipating dissent in respect of unpopular wartime measures undertaken by the government.

The inauguration of an official Empire Day stimulated the celebration in areas where it had previously struggled to establish a foothold. For example, in the garrison town of Colchester, where Empire Day had received rather muted recognition before the war, it was now welcomed by an enthusiastic display of loyalty and patriotism. Flags were flown from 'all the chief buildings of the town' and the High Street 'presented a particularly brilliant spectacle'.⁴⁰ During a war where the casualty lists were of an unprecedented size, it would seem that the rituals and rhetoric of Empire Day helped to provide justification for and meaning to the slaughter on the battlefields. Children in the schools were exhorted to express their pride in the empire 'to which they belonged and do what they could to hold up the empire',⁴¹ whilst on 'Empire Sunday' (the appellation given to the Sunday that fell nearest to May 24) church congregations listened to sermons that emphasised the duties of the citizens toward the empire.

³⁷ Liz Curtis, *The Cause of Ireland: From the United Irishmen to Partition* (Dublin, 1994), pp. 280-283.

³⁸ Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 397-399.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

⁴⁰ *Essex County Standard*, 26 May 1916, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Evidence from Hertfordshire shows how during the war, the county council instructed schools to make patriotism a 'ubiquitous feature of school life' and Empire Day, which was not universally celebrated in Hertfordshire before the war, became 'the most widely honoured day' in the county's schools.⁴² There was an effort to maximise the impact of the day upon the children and a more serious patriotic tone and ritualistic agenda replaced the pre-war mode of celebration that had largely been based on treat giving. A local editorial writer emphasised the duty of school teachers to promote a patriotic attitude and declared that '[w]e should have heard a great deal less about conscientious objectors had the spirit which Empire Day seeks to inculcate in our children been more generally fostered.'⁴³

Headmasters were anxious to emphasise the need for self-sacrifice and on Empire Day the familiar list of imperial heroes, such as Nelson and Gordon, were praised for their willingness to give up their lives for the good of the Empire.⁴⁴ A similar message was promulgated in the celebrations that occurred outside of the schools. In the Essex town of Brightlingsea, the Reverend Canon Pertwee insisted that the people should be prepared to bear their burden of sacrifice,

all the more so because they were threatened by another great empire which was pitted against them. One of the two must come down, but it must not be the British.⁴⁵

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⁴² David H. Parker, "'The Talent at Its Command': The First World War and the Vocational Aspect of Education, 1914-39" in *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), p. 249.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Essex County Standard*, 26 May 1916, p.2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Although, in general Empire Day continued to be greeted with enthusiasm during the war, there are examples of dissent that demonstrate the imperialist propaganda of Empire Day did not go unquestioned at this time. It was certainly not the case that the growth of Empire Day with its theme of belligerent militarism was supported unanimously, even during the war. J. A. Hobson criticised the prevailing 'bias of patriotism' that had become embedded within the schools' curriculum and he inferred a sinister purpose in the construction of a militarist sensibility in elementary and secondary education. He believed that 'military drill, the worship of the flag. Empire Day . . . and the whole tenor of the *esprit de corps*' was an attempt to turn schools 'into forcing houses for militarism, imperialism, and exclusive nationalism'. Hobson feared that the infection of education with a social dogma directed at producing an 'effective fighting patriotism' in wartime promoted race hostility and undermined class solidarity and was, in effect, a reactionary defence 'against the inroads of democracy'.⁴⁶ Establishment figures, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, writing in 1916, did not deny that there had been a deliberate attempt to fasten the curriculum to a patriotic standard:

Let any one read the circulars which have been issued by the Director of Education . . . year after year . . . giving guidance and direction how to teach patriotism, what should be the meaning of Empire Day, how our Empire came to be what it is, and instructing them [the teachers] to give this information through geography, through history, through other various lessons which lead up to the character basis on which it is desired to build.

⁴⁶ J. A. Hobson *Democracy After the War*, (London, 1918), p. 186.

However, the Archbishop refuted Hobson's idea that the teaching of patriotism involved a 'mischievous' agenda of militarism and he claimed the two concepts were entirely separate.⁴⁷

Despite the heightened atmosphere of patriotism during wartime, there were a few children, the primary audience in the attempt to inculcate imperialist pride, who were apparently able to discern the antimonies of imperialist rhetoric; Grace Foakes from the East End of London remembered harbouring deep doubts about the Empire Day message:

We sang of our lands and our possessions overseas. We sang of "Deeds of Glory". We sang and believed we were the mightiest nation on earth. But how many, I wonder, felt as I did. Whilst all this went on I'm afraid I sang with my mouth only, not from the heart. For I saw only those same high walls and thought to myself, "We sing of our possessions, whilst not one of us here owns as much as a flowerpot of earth".⁴⁸

Some children, who questioned the ethos of imperialism, were actively encouraged in their dissent by certain teachers, who evidently reviled the Empire Day propaganda they were expected to transmit to their classes, as Edith Hall recounted:

On Empire Day we ran around the playground in our worn-out clothing, waving our new Union Jacks; some of the girls could have done with some new undies judging by the rags they revealed. When we got to the singing of 'Britons never shall be slaves', I did think about it because prior to Dad being called up, he was a baker leaving home at four a.m. each morning and working six and a half days a week. One day we were singing 'God Save The King', I

⁴⁷ Donald O. Wagner, *The Church of England and Social Reform since 1854* (New York, 1930), pp. 289-290.

⁴⁸ Grace Foakes, *Between High Walls. A London Childhood* (London, 1972), pp.18-19.

asked Miss Gilbert if we could also sing 'God save the Phillipses' because out of ten children five of their boys had already been killed in the war'.⁴⁹

Hall's questioning was welcomed by her teacher, who suggested that she attend a Socialist Sunday School run by her fiancé. It turned out that Miss Gilbert taught there too, but as Edith observed 'of course, it wouldn't do for anybody to . . . [have known] that'.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, despite such revelatory vignettes, it appears that the dissenting response to Empire Day in Britain was still marginal to the general attitude of the British population during wartime. However, although celebrated with colour and exuberance in 1916, by 1917 the exigencies of war demanded that the day serve some practical purpose toward the war effort. Thus, *The Times* reported:

In place of the rejoicings with which the day is usually celebrated there will be meetings and demonstrations all over the country, at which the people will be called upon to show their patriotism by signing the King's Pledge in regard to the consumption of food.⁵¹

The change of tenor was taken seriously and local organisations coordinated their response as demonstrated by Colchester Education Committee's letter issued to all borough schools offering the children an Empire Day address on food by a member of the Food Control Committee and encouraging them to make a 'special effort in aid of the Food Economy Campaign'.⁵² The toning down of Empire Day celebrations in favour of a pragmatic initiative that addressed a pressing need (by October 1917, food shortages led to riots in Colchester and other locations) pre-empted a solemnisation of

⁴⁹ Edith, Hall *Canary Girls and Stockpots* (Luton, 1977), p.23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 24 May 1917, p.7.

⁵² *Essex County Standard*, 26 May 1917, p.6.

the occasion as the population were drawn toward a communal sharing of grief that was far removed from the boisterous imperialist jamborees of pre-war days.

Empire Day's first retreat: The waning of adult support in South Africa

In comparison to Great Britain where, despite the transitions of Empire Day from festivity through pragmatism to solemnity, a general sense of unity was maintained, Empire Day in South Africa was fraught with political controversy. As was shown in an earlier chapter, Empire Day from the beginning had a limited reach amongst its target white population. During the war, the celebration became evermore a demarcation of political affiliation rather than an expression of national solidarity. The South African government's unquestioning support for the war did not reflect popular feeling amongst the South African people overall and the period 1914-18 proved to be a watershed in the revival of Afrikaner nationalism. A brief review of the political context must therefore precede the consideration of Empire Day celebrations in South Africa during the war.

The nascent Afrikaner nationalist movement had experienced difficulties mobilizing support before the war and its leader J. B. M. Hertzog had actually contemplated giving up his mission for the 'national salvation' of the Afrikaner people.⁵³ However, Botha's executive decision to join the war without conditions went beyond what was acceptable for many Afrikaners and support for the Nationalist Party burgeoned. The rebellion of a section of extremist nationalists in 1915 was easily suppressed and Botha's government wisely demonstrated considerable restraint in punishing the defeated insurgents; the Government executed only one rebel leader,

⁵³ T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley, 1975), p.76.

Jopie Fourie, and acted with great leniency dealing with the others.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the conflict revived Afrikaner bitterness toward the British and drove many of Botha's Afrikaner supporters into the growing ranks of the National Party.⁵⁵ Furthermore, for many Afrikaners it seemed that Botha's invasion of German South West Africa was as much about strengthening and extending imperial rule as about defeating Germany – an idea reinforced by the *Cape Times* in 1916 through a cartoon entitled 'Empire Day. Africa's Bit' that showed a map of the region with Union Jacks planted in the German territories occupied by South African forces.⁵⁶ Certainly, the African campaigns of the Union's Defence Forces were an opportunity for the new dominion to pursue its own imperial interests. As early as 1916, Smuts' indicated his aspiration to extend South Africa to its 'natural' boundaries, which at the time (according to Smuts) included Portuguese colonial territory.⁵⁷

In 1915, in fear of Nationalist Party gains, the South African Party and the Unionist Party formed an electoral pact that further alienated many Afrikaner moderates who were sorely tested by the unreformed jingoism of some Unionist Party activists and supporters.⁵⁸ As Barber points out, a pragmatic electoral strategy on Botha's part was interpreted ungenerously; 'the jingoists in the UP so offended even moderate Afrikaners' that Botha had to endure accusations of 'guilt by association'.⁵⁹

Afrikaner disaffection with the Union government during wartime accounted for the establishment of a firm electoral base for the National Party (NP), as evidenced by the significant electoral gains in 1915, a great revival of the Afrikaans

⁵⁴ See T. R. H. Davenport, 'The South African Rebellion, 1914' *English Historical Review*, 1963, pp.92-83.

⁵⁵ Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, pp.75-6.

⁵⁶ *Cape Times*, 24 May 1916, p.9.

⁵⁷ Anne Samson, *Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign 1914-1918: The Union Comes of Age* (London, 2006), p.99.

⁵⁸ Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (Cape Town, 2003), p. 355.

⁵⁹ Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, pp.75-6.

language⁶⁰ and the success of a new nationalist newspaper *Die Burger*.⁶¹ as Moodie has noted, 'the policy of opposing imperialism was paying handsome dividends'.⁶² The relatively small number of seats gained by Herzog's party in 1915 belied the great expansion of its popular base since it emerged as a credible force for the promotion of Afrikaner national identity.⁶³ Most significantly the NP provided a home, not just for Afrikaner extremists but also for those Afrikaner moderates whom the South African Party (SAP) alienated through its wartime actions and policies.⁶⁴ Within five years the NP became the largest single party in the house forcing the SAP and the Unionists to merge in order to try and counter the nationalist advance.⁶⁵

The progress of the NP seemed to be inversely proportional to the fortunes of Empire Day in South Africa during the war, an indication of how the rise of Afrikaner nationalism was transforming the political context and cultures of South Africa. In 1915, Empire Day was characterised by a somewhat unrestrained expression of ebullient imperialist patriotism. By 1917, however, some supporters of Empire Day had reined in their fervour and appeared keen to promote a more reserved commemoration of the day. At an Empire Day ceremony in Capetown in 1918, it was declared that 'we have come in no spirit of boastfulness or Jingoism, but in a calm reliance of almighty God, and with a determination to win for the cause'.⁶⁶ The new toning down of imperialist rhetoric was undoubtedly due, in part, to the organisers' awareness of the negative political association that Empire Day had with jingoism,

⁶⁰ Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p.49.

⁶¹ Established in 1915 edited by Dr. Malan, *Die Burger* more than doubled its circulation between 1915 and 1921 from 3,000 to 7,000, *Cape Argus* had 20,000: Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p.84.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁶³ For a political biography of Hertzog and a discussion of the rise of the National Party at this time, see Peter H., Molotsi, 'General J. B. M. Hertzog, 1866-1942: Architect Of Apartheid,' *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 11:1 (1983:Spring), pp.24.

⁶⁴ Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 76- 84.

⁶⁵ C. E. M. O'Dowd, 'The General Election of 1924' in *South African Historical Journal*, 2 (November 1970), pp. 54-76.

⁶⁶ *Cape Times* 26 May 1918, p.7.

but it is also likely that the celebrants had been somewhat sobered by the experiences of South African troops on the Western Front during the war. Mass death in appalling circumstances was hardly the cause for jollity upon the Empire's original day of remembrance. What is most evident at this time is that Empire Day haemorrhaged the adult support that had been slowly building in South Africa prior to the war; it quickly retreated to become mainly a celebration by the schools.

On Empire Day 1915, the theme of an empire-wide solidarity with the metropole at its time of need had been employed to both justify the war and promote a sense of imperial harmony. The *Cape Times* printed an article purportedly taken from *Der Tag*, a German newspaper that lamented the solid unity of the British Empire in wartime,

We expected that British India would rise when the first shot was fired in Europe, but in reality thousands of Indians came to fight with the British against us. We anticipated that the whole British Empire would be torn to pieces, but the colonies appear to be united more closely than ever with the Mother Country. We expected a triumphant rebellion in South Africa, yet it turned out nothing but failure. We expected trouble in Ireland, but instead she sent her best soldiers against us.⁶⁷

This seemed as much a list of British fears as German expectations. The imperialist press well understood that the empire was 'facing the supreme test of its endurance and its unity' and welcomed 'the most momentous Empire Day in our history' as an opportunity to rejoice in the maintenance of an imperial concord that

⁶⁷ Ibid., 24 May 1915, p.6.

'shattered all the illusions of Germany'.⁶⁸ *The Cape Times* went as far to assert that the empire remained intact because it was a union based upon 'freedom'.⁶⁹

This notion of imperial freedom, however, is unlikely to have impressed many Afrikaner people. As it was, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts came to be reviled by Afrikaner nationalists for their role in the imperial war. Botha was harshly criticised for his campaigns against the Afrikaner rebels and in German South West Africa, whilst Smuts was denounced as a collaborator for taking a position in the imperial war cabinet 'which was seen as nothing less than betrayal'.⁷⁰ Smuts' apparent perfidy might well have been illustrated by his willingness to appear in person at Empire Day events (a concession to which Botha never yielded), which he used in an attempt to validate the actions of the South African government. In 1917, Smuts made three separate Empire Day speeches at various locations in London, including Stepney.⁷¹ Smuts' words appeared to have been composed as much for South African ears as his immediate audience of British troops and civilians. Residual tensions of the South African War were defused through dry humour as Smuts introduced himself as 'a barbarian from the Veldt'. He said he had fought against the British for three years 'when you were very wrong indeed', but the 'Boers' had 'helped to . . . win you back to the right road of freedom and liberty'. The artful Smuts stated 'I don't think it is love of the British Empire' that explained why he 'and thousands of my old companions of the Boer War' some of whom 'could not speak a word of English' had volunteered to fight for the empire. If not a bond of love, Smuts portrayed the imperial connection as a marriage of convenience in a war that was 'a battle of the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, p.76.

⁷¹ Letter from Smuts to his mother, S.M. Smuts, 26 May 1917 in W. K. Hancock and Jean van Der Poel (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers Volume III, June 1910 – November 1918* (Cambridge, 1966), pp.535-6.

world' where 'the greatest most precious and most spiritual forces of the human race are at stake'. Smuts extolled the unifying capability of the empire as illustrated by the 'wonderful' sight of English, Dutch and South Africans uniting together in order to lay on the altar the best they could give for a good cause.⁷²

Smut's references to the South African War and denial of love for the empire were clearly designed as an attempt to appease Afrikaner abhorrence at his role in the British War Cabinet. Interestingly Smut's flowery and disingenuous rationalisation for South Africa's participation in the war contrasts sharply with Botha's parched constitutional explanation, 'The Empire is at war; consequently South Africa is at war with the common enemy'.⁷³

In 1915, Botha's erstwhile detractors, Natal's imperialist press, used the occasion of Empire Day to applaud the Prime Minister's unflinching resolve to fulfil what he saw as his imperial duty. The *Times of Natal* held him as an exemplar of the 'subject races' of an empire that 'enabled all races of mankind to fulfil their own destiny'. The newspaper boasted that 'because England has respected the interests of the Dutch community . . . 30,000 burghers were today on the side of England' many of whom, including Botha, were fifteen years previously 'trying to haul down the British Flag'.⁷⁴ On Empire Day, 1916, the same newspaper acclaimed Botha's policies as a 'blend of true South Africanism and true imperialism'. It acknowledged that the 'great majority' of the government's political supporters were 'not of the race whose forebears fought at Trafalgar and the Nile, and whose traditions are not those reflected in Browning's "Home Thoughts"' yet insisted that Empire Day freshly consecrated the hopes of a nation 'that was proud to reaffirm . . . South Africa, this

⁷² 'Why Boers are Fighting. Gen. Smuts' Speech', *The Bengalee*, 27 May 1917, p.9.

⁷³ Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, p.73.

⁷⁴ *The Times of Natal*, 25 May 1915, p. 4.

day, this year will do its duty.'⁷⁵ But, as we have seen, the hyperbole surrounding Empire Day, was a thin edifice that masked the declining influence of imperialists in South Africa. Whilst it is true that a good number of Afrikaners enlisted to fight for the British, they were vastly outnumbered by those who steered clear of recruiting centres.

The influence of Empire Day upon the recruitment of South Africans during the First World War is not really possible to measure. However, the historical record does inform us that a personal or group affinity with imperialist ideology was not necessarily a motivating factor for volunteers. The enlistment of considerable numbers of British miners from the Transvaal in 1914 provides a persuasive case in point.

Many English-speaking South Africans were quick to enlist when war came and the miners demonstrated that their patriotism was as strong as their labour militancy when they enlisted in large numbers in the British army.⁷⁶ This is surprising, because the miners had had a tense relationship with the British military before the war due to the South African government's use of imperial troops to crush strikes in 1907 and 1913. In the latter episode, British soldiers had been responsible for the deaths of 25 strikers and bystanders;⁷⁷ consequently expressions of strong anti-imperialist feeling had emerged in the mines.⁷⁸ *The Worker*, the official organ of the South African Labour Party (SALP) wrote that the British actions were 'a crime . . . which the working class of the Rand will NEVER FORGET and NEVER

⁷⁵ 'The Prime Minister and Empire Day' in *The Times of Natal*, 25 May 1916, p. 4.

⁷⁶ David Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa. State, Capital, and the Incorporation of Organised Labor on the South African Gold Fields, 1902-1939* (Westport, Connecticut, 1983), p.129.

⁷⁷ W. P. Visser, 'The South African Labour Movement's Responses to Declarations Of Martial Law, 1913-1922' in *Scientia Militaria*, Vol.31, No.2, 2003, pp.142-157.

⁷⁸ Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa*, p.99.

FORGIVE.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, it seems that for many non-Afrikaner miners, class solidarity and socialist ideology were trumped by patriotism as they responded enthusiastically to the empire's call to arms in 1914. British miners on the Transvaal were not conspicuous in their support for Empire Day before the war, so it seems that a strong patriotic creed was embedded within their consciousness irrespective of their response to the formalised imperialist rituals of May 24.⁸⁰

As is well known, when the quest for territorial advantage in Europe was largely given over to tactics of attrition through relentless industrialised slaughter, the need for soldiers became more acute. However, there is little evidence to show that in South Africa, Empire Day was regarded as an occasion on which to exploit patriotic sentiment in order to boost recruitment. In the Transvaal for example, the occasional rousing Empire Day speech contained an exhortation for South Africans to enlist,⁸¹ but such entreaties were rare and there was a notable absence of official recruiting initiatives attached to Empire Day. The news of the British Government's formal recognition of Empire Day in 1916 was accompanied by a message to the people of South Africa from Rudyard Kipling, celebrating the 'unflinching stand of Empire'.⁸² However, in the Cape Peninsula it seemed that most people celebrated Empire Day with an unflinching recourse to leisure, retreat to the resorts and various sports venues being the most popular activities.⁸³ The Empire Day service at the Victoria memorial was attended by a small number of people who remained in Cape Town long enough to witness the ceremony, but military involvement was limited to a small corps of

⁷⁹ *The Worker* 10 July 1913, p.5; quoted in Visser, 'The South African Labour Movement's Responses To Declarations Of Martial Law', p.6.

⁸⁰ For an account of dissenting socialists in South Africa who opposed the war, see Alison Drew, 'Will the real Sidney Bunting Stand Up? Constructing and Contesting the Identity of a South African Communist' in *English Historical Review*, Volume 118, Number 479 (2003), pp.1228-1230.

⁸¹ For example, see the speech delivered by Mr. Frank Brown at the 1916 Unionist Club Empire Day Celebration in Johannesburg, *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 May 1916, p.5.

⁸² 'Mr. Kipling's Message to South Africa', *The Cape Times*, 25 May 1916, p.7.

⁸³ 'Celebration of Empire Day' in *Ibid*.

veterans from the imperial campaigns of the previous century, including the Boer and Zulu wars. In Johannesburg, during the fourth year of the war, Empire Day was actually considered a distraction to recruiting rather than an inspiration to enlistment. The *Rand Daily Mail* observed that Empire Day in the city was closely connected to 'the popular leaning toward athletics' and the 'artistic side of life'. The *Mail* reported that no attempt was made 'to solemnise an occasion which, after all, is a popular holiday day' and although some of the takings at sports meetings were used to contribute to war funds, Empire Day was not given any special military emphasis 'because the recruiting business was going strong' in any case.⁸⁴

In Bloemfontein, there was an initial flourish of patriotic exuberance at the beginning of the war that included an expansive celebration on May 24. However, there was a purposeful reining in of the jingoistic aspects of Empire Day in 1917, to the extent that it was announced that the day would no longer be celebrated as Empire Day. Instead, the practice of celebrating 'Victoria Day' was re-instated. The principal speaker Sir Andries Maasdorp, the Chief Justice (previously Lt. Governor of the Transvaal and member of the Royal Colonial Institute) explained that:

On previous occasions they were more bellicose. And there was good reason for that. The British Empire was in the throes of a great struggle for which, at the beginning, she was not prepared, and it was right and proper that the speeches should rally the people of the Empire together in all their might.

Now, said Maasdorp, the nations of the British Commonwealth were in the field and 'meeting the enemy at the gate . . . they were quite rightly taking a peaceful view of the war.'⁸⁵ In view of the political advances of the NP during the war, a more likely explanation for a reversion to Victoria Day was that Empire Day was undoubtedly a

⁸⁴ *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1918, p.4.

⁸⁵ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1917, p.6.

provocation to disaffected Afrikaners. It would have been politically inexpedient for supporters of the SAP to be associated with the unreformed imperialist hullabaloo that formerly accompanied the celebrations, particularly given the circumstances of their uncomfortable electoral pact with the less restrained Unionist Party. Moreover, as support for Empire Day waned generally, there would have been little chance in the Orange Free State, an Afrikaner bastion, of rousing a crowd that would do justice to the grandiose title of Empire Day.

In the Cape and Natal, where a consistent, if modest, base of support was achieved, there was rarely such delicacy surrounding the celebration of Empire Day⁸⁶ (although in 1915, the Cape Town celebration was pitched with a heavy emphasis on Queen Victoria rather than imperialism *per se*). Nevertheless, in common with the Orange Free State and Transvaal, there was an absence of official initiative to link the celebration to the needs of the British war effort. This fact was picked up by the *Times of Natal* which contrasted the holiday atmosphere of Empire Day in South Africa with the upcoming commemorations in Britain where the day was 'to be celebrated by food economy propaganda . . . the people, old and young, will be asked to sign the pledge to keep within the rations'. The *Times* called for a reflective response: 'ought we not in South Africa to let our deeds and our actions, our public and our private lives, to be chastened and moulded by a deep and abiding sense of gratitude?'⁸⁷

In South Africa, simple demographics had ensured that there was never any likelihood that Empire Day would secure a mass following amongst the general population. However, pockets of community support had been established before 1914, particularly in Natal and the Cape where some British South Africans perceived its potential as a vehicle for defending their interests within the Union. However, it

⁸⁶ 'At the Victoria Statue' in *ibid.*, 27 May 1915, p.7.

⁸⁷ 'Empire Day: A contrast', *The Times of Natal*, 23 May 1917, p. 4.

seemed that the First World War exposed Empire Day's capacity to exacerbate division at a time when the Union government wanted to defend itself against a surge of Afrikaner nationalism. The jingoism associated with Empire Day was clearly an impediment to the creation of an inclusive South African identity as illustrated by the reluctance of the military authorities to associate the celebration with recruiting drives.⁸⁸ The reversion to Victoria Day – which, after all, had been celebrated *before* the South African War and which had no connotations of a jingoistic crowing over the defeat of the Boers – also reflected the need of imperialists to tread gingerly in South Africa once the War had engendered a resurgent Afrikaner nationalism there.

The return to first principles: mobilising schoolchildren in South Africa.

We see that in South Africa, Empire Day did not feature prominently as a recruiting tool, or indeed have any great patriotic rousing effect in the wider community during the war. Indeed, the military preferred to steer clear of Empire Day in their official recruitment drives. Nevertheless, Empire Day's failure amongst the adult community in South Africa during the war did not reflect a lack of endeavour on the part of the Empire Day Movement to promote the occasion. In fact, as might be expected, the outbreak of war stimulated greater efforts on its part to celebrate the day in South Africa. The form, size and demographic constituency of celebrations continued to vary from region to region and town to town, but a predominant feature of wartime celebrations was that it was the juvenile population who participated in ever greater numbers and they soon came to outnumber considerably the number of adults who participated. In the early years of the war, adults in significant numbers were in evidence at several of the celebrations but, after 1916, whilst the number of

⁸⁸ However, the Unionist party sometimes took it upon itself to use Empire Day as a recruitment opportunity. For example see the speech delivered by Mr. Frank Brown at the 1916 Unionist Club Empire Day Celebration in Johannesburg in *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 May 1916, p.5.

children who were present at the celebrations continued to rise dramatically, the number in the adult contingent stagnated and then began to decline. This is not to suggest that the occasion became an exclusively juvenile occasion, but to signal the great effort on the part of the Empire Day Movement to mobilise many thousands of children (whose participation was enforced by their schools) and the absence, in the main, of initiatives aimed at rousing adults in such numbers.

School children, the key target of the organisers of the imperial festival, were of course a malleable audience, who mostly had little choice about their participation – circumstances that the Empire Day Movement did not fail to exploit as the celebration began to lose its potential to engage a significant adult constituency. At Port Elizabeth in 1915, where Empire Day was ‘unsurpassed for impressiveness’, 600 adults who gathered for the celebrations were well outnumbered by over 2,000 children⁸⁹ and in 1916 the number of children almost doubled.⁹⁰ At Bloemfontein, with the exception of the Afrikaner Orange Meisjes school (which declined to send its pupils), the schools herded 2,000 children to the Market Square in 1915 to witness an ‘impressive ceremonial’.⁹¹ In Pretoria, Empire Day was organised on a massive scale and apparently included ‘a few thousand adults’, but without doubt, it was a festival for the children who numbered over seven thousand. 500 adult stewards were needed to shepherd the children, whilst ‘two hundred ladies’ provided refreshments.⁹² In 1916, an Empire Day party at Pretoria Zoo was attended by a similar number of children.⁹³

The *Natal Witness* had welcomed the presence of a good number of ‘parents and other townsfolk’ to the Martizburg celebrations in 1915 and in 1917 the festival

⁸⁹ *Cape Times* 27 May 1915, p.7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1916, p.7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² ‘Empire Day Fighting the forces of Barbarism’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1915, p.5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1916, p.5.

was proclaimed to be the 'most successful that has ever been held', yet in both instances it was overwhelmingly children who were the main participants.⁹⁴ In 1917, several thousand children gathered for Empire Day in Durban⁹⁵ and in 1918 the celebrations in Maritzburg were once again dominated by thousands of children 'packed into the town hall and delivered of speeches and bioscope pictures of the great battle before Antwerp'.⁹⁶ Later on, a 'large number of citizens assembled' to see children march past the Queen Victoria statue.⁹⁷ It was clear that overall, the primary focus of Empire Day during the war was upon the younger generation, a circumstance with correlates with the explicit intent by some education departments to 'produce imperial patriot[s]'.⁹⁸ The consistent exception to the general trend of Empire Day retreating from the adult sphere in South Africa occurred in Cape Town, where the well established ceremony in the grounds of Parliament House was predominantly an affair for adults and attracted many prominent civic leaders and politicians.⁹⁹

The speakers at the juvenile Empire Day events did not pass up the opportunity to justify South Africa's participation in the war and attempt to instil a sense of duty in the young minds of their audiences. For example, in Cape Town in 1915, the primary orator, Frederic de Waal, the Belgian born lawyer and long serving administrator of the Cape Province, detailed a list of supposed German atrocities (such as 'the use of poison noxious chemicals and the sinking of the *Lusitania*') that demonstrated the inhumanity of the German military. The audience were encouraged

⁹⁴ *Natal Witness*, 25 May 1917, p.1: 'Empire Day in the City. Inspiring addresses' and 'Empire Day Celebrations in the City The Duty of Our Children', *The Times of Natal*, 24 May 1915, p.5.

⁹⁵ *Natal Witness*, 25 May 1917, p.3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1918, p.1.

⁹⁷ *Natal Witness*, 25 May 1918, p.5.

⁹⁸ Thompson has demonstrated that the protection of a sense of 'British' identity in Natal was embedded in the schools curriculum and supported through the propaganda of the League of Empire, Royal Colonial Institute and the British Empire Union: Paul Thompson, 'Schools, Sport and Britishness: Young White Natal, 1902-1961' in *South African Historical Journal*, 45 (Nov. 2001), p.229.

⁹⁹ In 1915 these included Lady Buxton, Lord Carlton, Sir Fredric de Waal, Sir James Molteno, Sir Ernest Kiplin, The Hon W. Ross and Col. R. Stuart Solomon. *Cape Times*, 27 May 1915, p.7.

to 'be determined' to make their sacrifice 'upon the altar of our common country'.¹⁰⁰ Another speaker in Maritzburg spoke of the inspiring example provided by 'the many thousands . . . ready to lay down their lives for their King and country'.¹⁰¹ He praised the 'fathers and brothers' of the boys present who were 'risking their lives for the preservation of right and justice, for our home and our country' and asked them: 'are you prepared to be loyal and brave when your time comes, as they are now?'¹⁰² In 1918, two Empire Day stalwarts who had visited the fronts in East Africa and Flanders (Bishop Furse and Justice Tatham) returned to Cape Town to report their experiences. They enlivened their accounts with many references to the 'gruesome scenes' they had witnessed. Their gory stories appeared calculated to hold the attention of their audience and centred on the familiar Empire Day theme of self-sacrifice. Furse said he wanted 'to show the greatness of our people and the sacrifices they were prepared to make for freedom'. The speakers were reported to have made a 'great impression, particularly on the younger generation'.¹⁰³

The impression that Empire Day made on the younger generation was cause for concern for some socialists in Johannesburg, who considered the ideological message of Empire Day to be a potent threat and thus campaigned against it. The International Socialist League (ISL) in Johannesburg was a socialist anti-war organisation that had split from the South African Labour Party, which supported the war. The ISL took issue with the circulation of what it considered to be 'virulent Jingo propaganda'.¹⁰⁴ This was the material that the Victoria League distributed to South African schools as part of its Empire Day work. One example was a colourful pamphlet, sold for a penny; it took the form of a folded "Union Jack", which when

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *The Times of Natal*, 25 May 1916, p. 5.

¹⁰³ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1918, p.7.

¹⁰⁴ 'Socialist Manifesto on Education', supplement to *The International*, 2 June 1916.

opened revealed a treatise on the meaning of the flag accompanied by patriotic verse, including the lines:

'Tis thy flag , and my flag , dark millions own its sway
and know that neath its ample folds their night is turned to day
with us they join in heartfelt prayer, ascending to the sky
That God will bless the dear old flag, and keep it flying high

The ISL used its short-lived newspaper, *The International*, to provide a bitter commentary upon the patriotic rhymes:

This is a preliminary to the 100,000 native troops they want from Africa.¹⁰⁵

Dark millions own its sway, right enough, and know that neath its ample folds
they can get phthisis on two bob a day. To us they send a heartfelt curse,
ascending to the sky when they are rushed in trainloads over the Portuguese
border, for a softer place to die.¹⁰⁶

A further concern of *The International* was a paper entitled *You and I and the Empire*, which was employed on Empire Day as the subject of study for elementary classes.

You and I and the Empire acclaimed the wonders of the empire and provided justification for the war. According to *The International*, the schoolchildren were taken through the paper paragraph by paragraph in a frenetic effort to 'inject the jingo virus into the child in youth . . . whether Jew, Gentile, Afrikander, or English'. The

¹⁰⁵ During the war, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) suspended its political activity and 42,000 Africans enlisted voluntarily in the imperial forces. Most were allocated to the Native Labour Contingent 'as there was considerable unease regarding the idea of using black troops against white soldiers': Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), p.73; see also, Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912-1952* (London, 1982), pp.52-54 and B. P. Willan, 'The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918' in *Journal of African History*, XIX, 1 (1978), pp.61-86. At the end of the war a Congress deputation travelled to Versailles with a memorial to King George V that cited the contribution of African workers in the various military campaigns. It emphasised that the war had been fought in the name of national self-determination and to free oppressed peoples. The deputation was not heard at Versailles and the British Colonial Office informed its members that 'the Government could not interfere in the internal affairs of the Union of South Africa', see Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (ed), *The Oxford History of South Africa Volume II* (Oxford, 1971), pp.347-8

¹⁰⁶ *The International*, 2 June 1916, p.2.

ISL was not content however, simply to deride in print those who encouraged the 'idolatry' of empire. *The International* announced that the ISL intended to contest the imminent school board elections in an attempt to stem the tide of imperialist propaganda that was being introduced into the curriculum. Soon after Empire Day in 1916, *The International*, which at this time claimed to be 'the only Socialist Labour paper in South Africa' issued a manifesto that condemned the standards of elementary education in the Transvaal and the increase of militarist and 'Jingo' propaganda that the children were exposed to. As well as attacking the general increase of 'brain softening' imperialist propaganda in the schools of Johannesburg, Empire Day was targeted as a an exemplar of the 'unctuous Imperialism that had flourished' since the outbreak of war:

A breed of Empire idolaters is being industriously reared up by our God-fearing government . . . Extra whole or half holidays are repeatedly enforced to enable the children to attend some flag saluting or Khaki worshipping celebration or debauch . . . The Victoria League, handmaiden of the Imperialist bosses, reprints, and the education department sedulously circulates literature extolling the virtues of loyalty, patriotism and courage ... in the brutalising standards of the Army and Navy . . . our town schools have been degraded into little more than nurseries of Jingoism and militarism.¹⁰⁷

The International reported that by the end of June, 24,000 copies of the manifesto had been printed and that willing 'comrades' had delivered them to local households.¹⁰⁸

The campaign did not achieve electoral success but the anti-imperialist candidates – probably picking up some Afrikaner support – did manage to secure roughly one

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 30 June 1916, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

quarter of votes cast.¹⁰⁹ In this case, the vigorous efforts of Empire Day campaigners to promote the imperial message had resulted in a counter offensive from the left which promoted class identity over imperial identity. It is apposite to note that the following year, in Canada, a large anti-conscription parade of 'workingmen' was organised on Empire Day by trade unions and a militant French nationalist league 'Les Constitutionneis' in Montreal.¹¹⁰ This was immediately followed by a pro-conscription demonstration.¹¹¹ Empire day was beginning to be targeted by the left as a suitable occasion for protest. As we shall see, the most significant skirmishes and confrontations over Empire Day took place in the Metropole after the war, yet at this time we can see across continents that the battle lines were beginning to be drawn.

A national day rises.

We have seen how in the pre-war era, opponents of British imperialism in South Africa frequently attempted to undermine Empire Day through the simultaneous enactment of alternate commemorative ceremonies that emphasised Afrikaner culture and identity. This tactic was to become central to the Indian National Congress's response to Empire Day - direct confrontation was avoided in favour of counter celebrations of the Indian nation. In South Africa, the acknowledgment of Empire Day's failure to provide a foundation for a common South African identity can be measured by the absence of concurrent Afrikaner counter-commemorations after 1914. Afrikaner nationalism became popular enough

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2 July 1916, p. 3. The election results suggest that one in four voters in the Transvaal were hostile toward imperial propaganda. However, there was a low turnout (22%) and significant numbers of eligible voters were absent due to their military enlistment (that demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt their support for the empire).

¹¹⁰ *Montreal Daily Star*, 23 May 1917, p.9; 24 May 1917, p.1 and 25 May 1917, p.10.

¹¹¹ Normal Hillman and Adam Chapnick, *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal, 2007), p.161.

to support its own revived celebration that took place in December, coincidently more or less as far from Empire Day as the calendar would allow.

In 1914, Dingaan's Day – the central Afrikaner celebration – very much resembled other public holidays in that on it there was an 'invasion of holiday resorts', many picnics, bathing and sports activities.¹¹² However, after 1915 Dingaan's Day was revitalized more emphatically as a symbol of Afrikaner nationalism (just as Empire Day was emblematic of an imperial identity) and complemented the political advance of Herzog's party during the war. In 1916, Dingaan's Day was marked through a massive gathering at Paardekraal in a manner that eclipsed any single Empire Day event in South Africa. Isabel Hofmeyr has described the pivotal role of Gustav Preller, the editor of *Die Volkstem*, in the revival of Dingaan's Day. Preller was the central figure behind the revitalization of the Afrikaner festival and much like Meath's role in the promotion of Empire Day, Preller tirelessly promoted the festival and largely determined its form, advising various organising committees and publishing articles about the event in his newspaper. Preller was also an historian, author, linguist and scriptwriter, amongst other things, and he exploited these roles in his attempts to help construct a popular national movement.¹¹³ The Praadekraal event (planned as the first of a five-yearly re-occurrence) attracted over 30,000 people and was one of a series of performances that served to cement the 'key myth of Afrikaner nationalism' - the Great Trek and its central event the Battle of Blood River. However, the elaborate festivities at Paardekraal served as a motif for a national vision that was not exclusively Afrikaner. A 'fair sprinkling of English speaking people' were reported to be in attendance and the main speeches were those by Smuts

¹¹² *Cape Times*, 17 December 1914, p.8.

¹¹³ Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Popularizing History: The Case of Gustav Preller' in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1988), pp. 521-535.

(*in absentia*)¹¹⁴ and Botha, whose conciliatory vision was greeted with great approval. Smuts acknowledged 'the suffering of our ancestors' but called for the establishment of 'a broader, purer and stronger national life' in a 'Greater South Africa'. Smuts was by this time one of the tiny number of Afrikaners who were active on Empire Day as well as Dingaan's Day, and his attempt to wade down both streams of national life concurrently was not always received generously by his opponents. Botha, who made a point of avoiding any Empire Day events, introduced a theme which was to re-emerge regularly at future celebrations,¹¹⁵ that of English and Boer/Afrikaner cooperation in the face of adversity. Whilst acknowledging the enmity between the two ethnic groups, he recalled the help that a small party of Britons had lent the *Voortrekkers* at the Battle of Blood River,

... when they faced a common enemy , the two races which represented civilisation had forgotten their differences and had stood together fought together and perished together . These examples of the past had showed what was in these races, and what happened then had come to happen again, as the two great white races had come together to make this a great country ¹¹⁶

Just as the names of *Voortrekkers* had been added to the pantheon of the British Empire's heroes as part of some Empire Day celebrations that strived for South African unity (see chapter 1), so there was an attempt to make the most of the minimal contribution of a group of Englishmen to the key historical event that informed Afrikaner national mythology.

¹¹⁴ Dingaan's Day was clearly very important to Smuts. He spent it with his family in 1917 and he 'recounted some great doings from Boer History': Smuts to Alice Clark, 16 December 1917 in Hancock and van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers Volume III*, pp.581-2.

¹¹⁵ For example in 1924, Smuts referred to the assistance given by the English people to the Boers during their struggle with Dingaan. He insisted that 'their Dingaan's Day was not the property of one race, but was common to the whole people.' *Cape Times*, 18 December 1924, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ 'The Dingaan's Day Celebrations' in *ibid.*, 18 December 1916, p.8.

However, the spirit of conciliation was absent from some other Dingaan's Day commemorations. The *Cape Times* reported on the Nationalist Party's celebration of Dingaan's Day at Senekal, which despite denials from some of the participants, looked as if it had been set up in competition with that at Paardekraal. Traditional Boer costumes were worn by many of the 10,000 participants and the opening address, delivered by Senator Marais asserted the rights that the 'Dutch' had gained by their sacrifices of the past. His compatriot, G. Fitchardt reminded the celebrants of the blood that had been 'spilt for the fatherland', but made no mention of the present war.¹¹⁷ It was plain that in this context the heroes of 'Young South Africa' were those who had died fighting against the British, not alongside them. Indeed, there had been calls for the commemoration of concentration camp victims to be included in the Dingaan's Day repertoire.¹¹⁸ Dr. Malan pontificated upon the supposed 'strong characteristics of the Afrikander' and in a response to the political splits engendered by the Great War he called for unison among the 'Afrikander People'.¹¹⁹ The popularity of Dingaan's Day in comparison to Empire Day was a stark indication that the imperialist celebration would have negligible impact in South Africa in the future

Empire day and memorialisation of the First World War.

Throughout the British Empire, the First World War brought about changes to the celebration of Empire Day so that for a temporary period, its impact as a tool of imperialism became less important than its social utility in a time of catastrophe. As Munkler has pointed out, the representation and attributed meaning of war as mediated through culture, creates the idea of a common history and mutual

¹¹⁷ 'Dingaan's Day. Opening celebrations at Senekal', *Ibid.*, 16 December 1916, p.6.

¹¹⁸ Hofmeyr, 'Popularizing History', p. 527.

¹¹⁹ 'The Dingaan's Day Celebrations. Nationalists at Senekal', in *Cape Times*, 18 December 1916, p.8.

solidarity.¹²⁰ Following the First World War, there was a widespread construction of war memorials and the formation of what Michael Rowlands has called a 'monumentalising discourse', that was itself hegemonic and included the concept of nation as a hegemonic principle.¹²¹ The defence of the nation (and by direct association the Empire), that the war supposedly represented, provided the bereaved with a palpable reason for their great loss.

Empire Day in many areas thus became closely associated with remembrance of the dead. After the war and throughout the interwar years, numerous communities marked Empire Day by making a pilgrimage to the local war memorial. Indeed, many memorials situated as they were in central spaces, came to be the focus of Empire Day celebrations and it was not exceptional for new war memorials to be unveiled on Empire Day. Thus, after 1918, a distinct shift in emphasis occurred whereby the celebration of Empire Day that had originally involved colour, flag waving and festivities was replaced by one that, as its centrepiece, enacted sombre rituals of remembrance. This, as we shall see, temporary, but dramatic shift illustrates not only how the function of Empire Day as an emblem of social cohesion was of prime importance, but also how it had to adapt to changing beliefs within society and incorporate new conventions of public behaviour. In order to adjust the Empire Day activities to reflect a public mood that was increasingly cynical toward the jingoistic glorification of war, elements of another recently invented tradition, Armistice Day,¹²² were integrated into Empire Day ritual and this had the effect of further extending the observance of Empire Day to the wider community outside of the schools.

¹²⁰ Herfried Munkler, 'Nation as a model of political order and the growth of national identity in Europe' in *International Sociology*, 14 (1999), p.289.

¹²¹ Michael Rowlands, 'Memory, sacrifice and the nation' in *New Formations*, 30 (Winter 1996- 97) p.10.

¹²² Adrian Gregory observes how the Armistice Day rituals that were performed in every community after the war were 'a classic case of what Hobsbawm has described as the invention of tradition'.

Even a cursory survey of Empire Day in Essex during the five years following the end of the war, well illustrates this trend: on Empire Day 1919, the names of Brightlingsea men 'who had given their lives for the Empire' were read out in the church;¹²³ new war memorials were unveiled on Empire Day in Feering in 1922¹²⁴ and in Colchester in 1923. During the Colchester War Memorial unveiling ceremony (attended by many thousands of the townspeople), Field Marshall William Robertson, the guest of honour, proclaimed that it was fitting that the memorial should be unveiled on Empire Day because 'the British empire never presented a more praiseworthy spectacle than in the years 1914-1918.'¹²⁵ At Maldon, the main Empire Day event in 1921 involved a special service at the new war memorial,¹²⁶ whilst at Wivenhoe in 1922, a special flower laying ceremony at the war memorial interrupted the normal Empire Day events at the schools.¹²⁷ In the same year at Clacton-on-Sea, 'a large concourse of people' assembled in the town to witness five companies of Girl Guides march to the war memorial and lay a wreath of laurels 'in memory of the fallen'.¹²⁸

In London, the Cenotaph became the site of an annual wreath laying ceremony on Empire Day; a similar ceremony at the grave of the Unknown Soldier was also observed.¹²⁹ Likewise, the cenotaph in Manchester was regularly draped with Union flags and became the focus of Empire Day in the city.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the relationship of Empire Day to collective remembrance of the war was not without its ambiguities. For some participants, particularly those representing the military, the

Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994), p.9. See also Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp.1-14 and passim.

¹²³ *Essex County Standard*, 28 May 1919, p.2

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1922, p.5

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1923, p.5

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1921, p.2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 May 1922, p.5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹²⁹ See *The Times*, 25 May 1921, p.12 and 23 May 1931, p.13 and the *Daily Mirror*, 25 May 1923, p.8.

¹³⁰ See *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 May 1926, p.7 and 25 May 1927, p.11.

correlation between war and empire was straightforward and their rhetoric reflected pre-war attitudes. Major A. Solly Flood unveiled Sale and Ashton-upon-Mersey's war memorial in 1923 and had no doubts about the purpose of Empire Day. He exhorted his audience to:

devote themselves to the cause for which the 300 men died - the peace and prosperity of the British Empire. Much of the trouble that was occurring in the land today was due to nothing but the selfishness of all classes. People were thinking of their own advantage and not of the welfare of the community and the Empire.¹³¹

Addressing himself specifically to the younger generation, Flood instructed them to prepare themselves in some way or another for the defence of the empire. Claiming that he was no advocate of war, he nevertheless foresaw that 'war may be thrust on England again . . . [and] the only way to stop war is to be ready for war.'¹³² In London, the Empire Day event given the most significance in the press was a ceremony at the Cenotaph, which took place at the hour of the signing of the Armistice. Lord Inverforth, who was accompanied by patrons of the Veterans' Association, laid a wreath upon the Cenotaph that had been presented by Princess Beatrice. Representatives from the dominions and Crown colonies also made tributes.¹³³ The enduring association of Empire Day with the war was recorded as late as 1932, when the British Legion and The Old Contemptibles Association chose Empire Day as the occasion to launch a collection for war cemeteries abroad.¹³⁴

The focus of many schools' Empire Day celebrations became the war memorial and the solemn ceremony was a tangible reminder of the sort of sacrifice

¹³¹ Ibid., 24 May 1923, p.8.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ *Daily Mirror*, 25 May 1923, p.8. Also reported was an Empire Day ceremony at St. John's, Ealing where Mr. George Miles, a member of the Australian Senate laid a wreath upon the school cenotaph.

¹³⁴ *Evening Express*, 24 May 1932, p.1.

that the future defenders of the Empire might be required to make. Thus, when over 1000 pupils gathered at the Daisy Street schools in Kirkdale to witness the placing of a wreath on the memorial erected in honour of the former scholars who had died in the war, the *Liverpool Evening Express* gloried in the 'spirit of loyalty' demonstrated there.¹³⁵

Despite these sorts of militaristic interpretations of the purpose of Empire Day, other commentators saw things differently. At an unveiling ceremony in Blackpool, one speaker depicted the liberal paternalist 'moral' view of empire:

It was sometimes said that the war was so terrible that they should forget it; but ... [t]hey ought to see to it that their children remembered it ... so they might be led to consecrate to the great enterprise of making war impossible, and preserving civilisation. That day was Empire Day, and the boys whose memory they sought to perpetuate died in the service of the Empire, the greatest confederation of free peoples the world has ever known. The British Empire existed, not merely for its own selfish advantage, but the advancement of the course of freedom and civilization throughout the world.¹³⁶

In 1925, as if to emphasise the wretched sacrifices necessary to defend the empire, a mother who had lost three sons in the war laid a wreath on the Manchester War Memorial on Empire Day.¹³⁷ *The Manchester Guardian* questioned the worth of self-sacrifice for the empire by emphasising the pathetic sight of wounded veterans participating in the Empire Day parade at the Wembley Empire Exhibition in 1925:

Then came the Earl of Meath, the pioneer of Empire Day, and behind him a procession that must for all thinking people have torn the last shred of glory from war. It represented the suffering and the wreckage of war and the work

¹³⁵ *Evening Express*, 24 May 1929, p.5.

¹³⁶ *Blackpool Gazette and Herald, Fylde News and Advertiser*, 27 May 1924, p.3.

¹³⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1925, p.11.

of the remedial services. Here were the Chelsea pensioners, two lines of blinded men from St. Dunstan's, a group of disabled soldiers in hospital blue, members of the British Legion, the nurses of all the services, many of whom are still engaged in patching up our disabled and enfeebled men.¹³⁸

* * * * *

The consecration of the war dead became the dominant theme of Empire Day in the Dominions too. As early as 1916, Empire Day events in South Africa were becoming predominantly ceremonies of remembrance. Richard Feetham, MLA, pronounced in Cape Town that the 'object of the May 24 ceremony was three fold': to honour a great queen, to honour 'the sons of South Africa' who had sacrificed themselves in the various campaigns during the war and finally to honour Empire Day.¹³⁹ Unsurprisingly it was the memorialisation of the dead that dominated the proceedings. Many of the wreaths and tributes that were placed on the steps of the Victoria memorial were inscribed with dedications that underlined the sacrifice of South African fighters: 'In loving and grateful memory to the sons of South Africa who have given their lives in defence of King and Country' and '*Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori*'. The following year, Feetham elevated the commemoration of the dead soldiers to become the primary function of Empire Day,¹⁴⁰ a view that was shared by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick who insisted 'their burial place was the altar of the nation'.¹⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, who had lost a son at the front, also spoke movingly about the 'horror' of war and the men 'whose sacrifices were longer and harder to endure.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 25 May 1925, p.10.

¹³⁹ *Cape Times*, 27 May 1916, p.9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 25 May 1917, p.7.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 25 May 1917, p.6.

Crippled and maimed, they would have to live it out.' Fitzpatrick appealed to those in their teens to recognise that 'in their own hands lay the fulfilment of their duty to them and the state', but made it clear that he was not referring to the familiar mantra of military duty and self-sacrifice, but rather that they should 'be animated by a spirit which would attempt to do justice without resorting to violence'.¹⁴²

In 1918, Empire Day was chosen as an appropriate time for the unveiling in Cape Town of a memorial tablet erected by the residents of Camps Bay 'as a roll of honour of those who answered the call to duty'. The names of 36 men who had left the 'village' for the front were inscribed on the tablet, 'four of whom have made the great sacrifice and sixteen have returned home invalided.'¹⁴³ In Cape Town, the Empire Day celebration of 1919 was in many ways unrecognisable in respect of the formula encouraged by Meath before the war. The sober ceremonies began with a rendition of 'Oh God Our Help in Ages Past' followed by a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving. There were numerous epithets regarding Queen Victoria and expressions of gratitude for the ending of hostilities. Numerous individuals and organisations laid wreaths as tributes to the war dead (including those who fell in the Boer War) before the service culminated in the singing of the national anthem.¹⁴⁴ Pompous declarations concerning the size, wonder and grandeur of the Empire (the heart of pre-war Empire Days) was not a feature in the transformed repertoire.

¹⁴² Ibid., 25 May 1917, p.6. This was rich coming from a man who had taken 'pot shots at striking white miners' in 1913 and bemoaned the lenient treatment of Afrikaner rebels after the 1914-15 uprising. Perhaps Fitzpatrick's bereavement had engendered his newfound sympathy with pacifism: see Bill Nasson, 'Delville Wood and South African Great War Commemoration' in *English Historical Review*, cxix, 480 (Feb. 2004), p.67.

¹⁴³ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1918, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 24 May 1919, p.7.

It is pertinent to note that in Canada, Empire Day also became inextricably linked with the memory of war.¹⁴⁵ Education departments issued books of heroic tales from the war to be used by teachers on Empire Day. The Ontario Department of Education encouraged teachers to use its *Annals of Valour* to 'strengthen pupils pride' and 'patriotic resolve' so that when required they too might conduct themselves with 'supreme valour' and 'unswerving allegiance' to the empire.¹⁴⁶ Notably, it attributed 'one of the bravest deeds of the war' to a French Canadian.¹⁴⁷ Manitoba schools were furnished with a similar text, *Empire Day 1919*, for telling the history of the war.¹⁴⁸ The only textbook to present a more candid account of the misery and horror of modern warfare, *Canada: Its History and Progress* (1926), reflected a turn away from pre-war militaristic imperialism by a small minority of social campaigners including local branches of The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.¹⁴⁹ Amongst other things WILPF campaigned against the biased portrayal of war in history texts. Despite such efforts it was difficult to compete with the imperial patriotism of Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), which undoubtedly had greater influence. The IODE provided inspirational war paintings for schools that were to be sited near their war memorials and it worked hard to ensure that Armistice Day and Empire Day valorised the experience of Canadian soldiers and remained 'a source of inspiration and instruction for schoolchildren'.¹⁵⁰ The IODE proclaimed their aims to be directly concerned with the promotion of 'the sentiment

¹⁴⁵ See 'Dead Soldiers Honoured Today', *Montreal Daily Star*, 24 May 1918, p.1; 'Dead Honoured on Empire Day' in *Ibid.*, 26 May 1919, p.13; 'Comrades Salute the Gallant Dead', *Ibid.*, 24 May 1920, p.19.

¹⁴⁶ Ontario Department of Education, *Annals of Valour* (Toronto, 1919), pp.5-9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.158.

¹⁴⁸ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver, 1997), p.238.

¹⁴⁹ For brief overviews of the formation and early activities of the WILPF see Joyce Blackwell, *No peace without freedom: race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Carbondale, 2004), pp. 31-32 and Herbert Stroup, *Social Welfare Pioneers* (Chicago, 1986), pp.27-28.

¹⁵⁰ Vance, *Death So Noble*, p. 400.

of patriotism' among the women and the children of the Empire and to that effect they aspired to 'provide an efficient organisation by which prompt and united action may be taken by the women and the children of the Empire when such action may be desired'.¹⁵¹

There was an absence of specificity with regard to the type of 'action' that might be engaged in, but without doubt the IODE wanted to ensure that boys understood that it was their duty to serve in the military and engage in combat if necessary. If the ultimate sacrifice was made then the women of the IODE strove:

To cherish the memory of brave and heroic deeds and the last resting places of our heroes . . . especially such as are in distant and solitary places; to erect memorial stones on spots that have become sacred to the nation . . . [through acts of] heroic and patriotic self-sacrifice.'¹⁵²

As Elshtain, amongst others,¹⁵³ has noted, the representation of war in the community evaded the primary function of the soldier, which was to destroy the enemy. Instead public commemorations of war elevated the notion of sacrifice: 'the young man goes to war not so much to kill as to die'.¹⁵⁴ The conception of a 'sacrificial national identity' was sustained throughout the empire by public acts of commemoration and, before the institutionalisation of Armistice Day, Empire Day served as the primary day of remembrance.

The memorialising ceremonies of Empire Day tied the idea of patriotic sacrifice to an imperial identity. However, just as in Great Britain, Armistice Day later

¹⁵¹ 'Echoes' *The Official Organ of the Imperial Daughters of the Empire*, March 1919, p.5.

¹⁵² Ibid.,

¹⁵³ See for example, Michael Rowlands, 'Memory, sacrifice and the nation' in *New Formations*, 30 (Winter 1996- 97), pp.12-17, Catherine Moriarty explores the idealisation of death and the process of 'omission or redescription' within the memorialising discourse in Catherine Moriarty, 'The Absent Dead and Figurative First World War Memorials' in *Transactions of the Ancient Memorials Society*, Volume 39, 1995, pp.7-40.

¹⁵⁴ Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'Sovereignty ,Identity , Sacrifice' in Marjorie Ringrose and Adam J. Lerner (eds), *Reimagining the Nation* (Buckinghamshire, 1993), p. 160.

became consecrated in the white settler colonies as a national day of remembrance, which had wider social appeal than the overtly ideological Empire Day. Moreover, in South Africa and Australia distinctive commemorative days were developed that to an extent promoted a national identity over imperial identity. In Australia there was a slipping away of popular sentiment for the empire as a result of the war. The meaning of the war became enmeshed with a sense of a 'uniquely Australian nationhood' that was born in the trenches at Gallipoli.¹⁵⁵ Empire Day quickly became overshadowed by Anzac Day, which occurred a month beforehand (25 April) and was a celebration of patriotism that had a wider resonance than the imperial festival.¹⁵⁶ As Oliver Hogue succinctly put it, 'faith in the might and wisdom of the British Empire and the idea of war as a glamorous adventure could not survive Gallipoli.'¹⁵⁷ Maurice French has argued that Empire Day was further weakened in Australia by its enthusiastic adoption as recruiting tool by the military authorities whereby it became 'indistinguishable from other recruiting efforts'.¹⁵⁸ In addition, Anzac Day was a national communion that had meaning to Roman Catholics who had rejected Empire Day in their schools. On the outbreak of war, Catholics had enlisted 'in numbers almost proportionate to the Catholic share of the population'¹⁵⁹ and were encouraged to do so by the same Catholic clergy who, from 1911, had attempted to undermine Empire Day by celebrating 'Australia Day' on May 24.

In South Africa, there was never a point during the War when such a moment of consensus was reached among the divided white populations. Even so, a number of

¹⁵⁵ Stewart Firth, *Australia in International Politics: An Introduction to Australian Foreign Policy* (New South Wales, 2005), p. 26.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Firth points out that although popular interest in imperialism waned, the war 'conservatised the country' at a state level.

¹⁵⁷ Oliver Hogue quoted in Deborah Gare, 'Britishness in Recent Australian Historiography' in *The Historical Journal*, 43,4 (2000), p.1148.

¹⁵⁸ French, 'The Ambiguity of Empire Day in New South Wales', pp.72-73

¹⁵⁹ Brett, *The Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, p.47.

Afrikaners did enlist to fight and die under the Union Flag in the European and other theatres. After the battle of the Somme, where South African forces endured a casualty rate of shocking proportions, there was a move to inaugurate a new commemorative day as a permanent observation of the actions and sacrifices of the English-speaking South Africans and Afrikaner soldiers who had perished on all fronts during the war. From 1917, 'the empire loyalist Anglo-Afrikaner elite' began to construct a myth of a unifying blood sacrifice that was created in the carnage on the Somme.¹⁶⁰ The slaughter of a great number of men from the 3rd South African Infantry (Springbok) Brigade during the capture and defence of Delville Wood (a pointless tactical venture, typical of the First World War) was supposed to represent a 'historical transition' as the English and Afrikaner men within the Brigade had finally found each other as fighting 'shoulder to shoulder, they made their sacrifice for the nation.'¹⁶¹ Their doom was the supposed moment of birth of a truly cohesive white national South African identity. Bill Nasson has explored the role of Delville Wood in the attempt to commemorate a South African Dominion identity.¹⁶² He points out that the aspiration of the mythmakers to use Delville Wood to create and commemorate a South African Dominion identity was 'more than a little optimistic', given that two thirds of the Afrikaner population were vehemently opposed to South African involvement in the imperialist war and that a mere 12 % of the Springbok Brigade were of Afrikaner origin.¹⁶³

The direct involvement of the imperialistic Sons of England, who alongside an organisation called the Comrades of the Great War had organised an annual Deville Wood Day ceremony in Cape Town, would have added little to the notion that a

¹⁶⁰ Bill Nasson, 'Delville Wood ad South African Great War Commemoration' in *English Historical Review*, cxix. 480 (Feb. 2004), pp.57-86.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp.58-63

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.63.

Dominion identity rested on common sentiments. Nevertheless in 1921 a meeting was held to discuss extending the ceremony to the whole country.¹⁶⁴ The South African Government had purchased Deville Wood itself and a committee was formed to decide the nature of a memorial there. The commemoration of Delville Wood was infused with ambiguities from the start, yet it is notable that Hertzog, who had opposed the war, travelled to Europe in 1926, as Prime Minister of South Africa, to attend the unveiling of the memorial. Despite Smuts' metamorphosis into something of an ardent empire loyalist and his willingness to associate himself with Empire Day, most Afrikaners avoided the imperialist festival. However, as Herzog demonstrated in inimitable style, Delville Wood commemorations could be interpreted in ways that steered clear of imperialist ideology.

For several reasons, Empire Day in South Africa became one of the casualties of the First World War, but it was not snuffed out altogether. During the war it lost its purchase (which had been weak anyhow) on its adult consistency, whose number began to decline, yet it retained its utility as a means of attempting to inculcate children with imperialist ideas. In addition, Empire Day temporarily served a mourning function in many places, just as it did in the metropole, Canada and Australia. With the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, however, and the competition of a rival national commemorative day that drew a far larger audience, Empire Day began to slip out of the public realm in South Africa even if, as we shall see, it was later to experience a final flourish as white South Africans engaged in a drawn out dispute over the symbolic representation of their nation.

In the case of Great Britain and the other white settler colonies, the impact of the First World War on Empire Day was by no means terminal; indeed it was during

¹⁶⁴ 'Delville Wood – Annual Commemoration decided upon.' *Cape Times*, 27 May 1921, p.8.

the war that it was formally recognised by the government. Yet, the war undoubtedly affected the ways in which imperialist sentiment was expressed. In all cases Empire Day was transformed, in large part, from an occasion of optimistic jollity and swaggering boastfulness, to a solemnised commemoration of the war dead – a real and serious bereavement ritual that had little in common with the abstract and affected mourning rites associated with the memory of Queen Victoria. It seems apposite that Empire Day came to serve this function, given the important part it had played in embedding the idea of self-sacrifice for the empire amongst the cohort of youth and adolescents who participated in the ceremonies (which often had a strong military emphasis) during the decade preceding the war. In Australia, however, the usefulness of Empire Day as a means of rousing patriotic sentiment was diluted by the inauguration of Anzac Day, which was an occasion that extended patriotism beyond the narrow confines of imperialistic Protestantism and promoted a distinctly Australian identity and a pride in the Australian nation. Empire Day, for all its rhetoric of imperial partnership, implied that Australia's sacrifice was ancillary to a greater cause; Anzac Day placed Australia at the centre of the commemoration.

As we shall see, despite the adaptation of Empire Day ceremonies to fit the post-war mood, and the innovation of national remembrance days, the Day retained its potency for at least another decade in the metropole and the white settler colonies, excluding South Africa. Nevertheless, imperialism as an ideology was less palatable in general after the war and public assumptions about the legitimacy of British imperial power that were, by and large, unquestioned before 1914 began to be challenged: as will be shown, in many cases Empire Day in Britain became the focus of heated political contestation, a phenomenon that demonstrated the loosening of the ideology of imperialism as an unquestioned faith amongst the British public.

Chapter 4

‘The Empire’s Need is India’s Opportunity’: Empire Day, India and the Great War.

The significance of Empire Day in India during the First World War centres upon three main themes. First, there was a general reinvigoration of the celebration due to the outpouring of patriotic sentiment that accompanied the early period of the war; the rhetoric of Empire Day temporarily coincided with underlying social reality and, for a short time, it seemed that the very *raison d’etre* of the Empire Day Movement was fulfilled in India. Secondly, the intellectual engagement with the ideological precepts of Empire Day during 1916-18 by elements of the Home Rule League gives an insight into how an otherwise radicalised nationalist movement internalised and rationalised its defence of the imperial link, a position that eventually contributed to the weakening of the Home Rule Leagues’ political influence. Finally, the analysis of Empire Day speeches and newspaper articles at this time demonstrates how changing social and political circumstances, due to the demands of the war, caused loyalist Indians to manoeuvre for position and re-evaluate their political tactics in terms of advancing claims for equality. However, the reluctance of the British government to contemplate anything beyond superficial reform of imperial governance helped shape the conditions for the beginning of a mass engagement in nationalist politics. In the face of this nationalist awakening, Empire Day in India was divested of any potential to advance the imperialist creed within a wider audience. The small constituency of influential Indians who (aside from the British) were the primary participants in Empire Day celebrations found that overnight their vanguard position was transformed into a defensive redoubt.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Indian loyalty to the Raj had been tested by Curzon's ill-considered partition of Bengal, which provoked considerable anti-British agitation in India and near-revolutionary turmoil in Bengal. The Government of India responded in a heavy-handed manner; radical members of the Indian National Congress were imprisoned or exiled and critical newspapers were censored or forced to close. Nevertheless, the tumult of the early years of the century gave way to a short phase of stability and relative calm. Congress endured a period of division and disarray as its separation into 'extremist' and 'moderate' factions led to a split after radical members made an unsuccessful bid for leadership in 1907. The moderates, who remained in control of Congress, were heartened by the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909, which engendered optimistic hopes that the Government was making long-term plans for a more inclusive system of representation.¹⁶⁵ The Government of India wanted to impress upon Indian politicians that measured evolutionary policies were the means of achieving nationalist goals rather than extremist or violent opposition to imperial rule.¹⁶⁶ The partition of Bengal was revoked in 1911 and in the same year the coronation of George V was celebrated with imperialist extravagance in the newly constructed capital at New Delhi. The supposed permanency of British rule in India was emphasised by the Viceroy Lord Hardinge, who, in 1912, wholly dismissed any notion of colonial self-government in India as 'ridiculous and absurd'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Masselos, *Indian Nationalism*, pp.111-118.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, p.149.

¹⁶⁷ Judith M Brown, 'Britain, India and the War of 1914' in Ellinwood D. C. and Pradhan, S.D. (eds.), *India and World War One* (Columbia, 1978), pp.22-23. See also Brown, *Modern India*, p. 204.

When war broke out in August 1914, moderation characterised Indian politics and members of Congress were near solid in their support for the war effort. Even the Muslim League, whose loyalty had been greatly tested by the revocation of the partition of Bengal, were firm in their support for the war despite the entry of Ottoman Turkey – the centre of pan-Islamism – as an enemy of Britain.¹⁶⁸ Terrorist murders in Bengal persisted, but had a negligible impact and a tiny minority of Indians were involved in anti-British activities elsewhere in India, such as in the Punjab, but these were localised and sporadic. There was no mainstream political impulse to exploit wartime popular grievances by means of an anti-colonial mass movement. Overall, Indian loyalists and moderate nationalists dominated the articulation of ‘Indian opinion’ during the first year of the war,¹⁶⁹ but their pre-eminence was short lived and as early as 1915 nationalist politics began to take a radical turn. By 1918, it was patent that the experience of war had accelerated the course of Indian nationalism; the nationalist vision had been irrevocably altered. Moderation had given way to radicalism and the imagined timescale for the establishment of colonial self-government in India was no longer conceived in terms of several decades, but rather with a sense of urgency that the British were minded to heed; for the first time under the Raj, Indian nationalists had realistic expectations of self-government occurring in their own lifetimes. The United Provinces politician Madan Mohan Malaviya suggested that in the journey to independence the war ‘put the clock . . . fifty years forward.’¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, p.161.

¹⁶⁹ For an overview of localized dissent see Suchetana Chattopadhyay, ‘War, Migration and Alienation in Colonial Calcutta: the Remaking of Muzaffar Ahmad’ in *History Workshop Journal*, Autumn 2007, Vol. 64, p. 216.

¹⁷⁰ Madan Mohan Malaviya quoted in Brown, *Modern India*, p.198.

India's wartime role as an active imperial ally was a *fait accompli* with no pretence of, or indeed any perceived need for, consultation.¹⁷¹ During the early months of the war, Indians in great numbers, including prominent nationalists, expressed their loyalty to the imperial government and made generous offers of practical support.¹⁷² Even radical members of Congress such as Tilak,¹⁷³ the most influential leader of the 'extremist' faction (he was released from prison in June 1914 following a period of incarceration for seditious activities), placed the principle of imperial defence above all other considerations, arguing that the Empire needed to be protected in order for nationalist goals to be achieved.¹⁷⁴ Along with Tilak, Gandhi (who was also well-acquainted with the imperial penal system) professed 'inherent and unswerving loyalty' and wanted to demonstrate that Indians were able to share 'the responsibilities of membership of a great Empire'.¹⁷⁵ Indian solidarity with the Empire in war was in part due to a sentimental affiliation with the Raj, but the imperial patriotism of nationalists also reflected a definite political strategy. It was believed that unquestioned support for Britain in a war that was supposedly being fought to defend the ideal of national self-determination would make the appeal for self-government and equality within the Empire eminently credible.

Indian support for the war found practical expression through donations of financial and material aid, offers of service and the organisation of public meetings

¹⁷¹ Judd, *Empire*, p.248.

¹⁷² For a detailed overview of the response of the Anglo-Indian and vernacular press and Indians in general see Budheswar Pati, *India and the First World War 1914 - 1918* (New Delhi, 1996), pp.7-29.

¹⁷³ Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) is widely regarded as the most important figure (after Gandhi) in the early Indian nationalist movement. Unlike the westernised 'moderates' in Congress, he believed in propagating patriotic feeling in non-secular milieus (such as the popular Ganesh festival) to broaden the nationalist support base. He founded two regional newspapers and was imprisoned by the British on several occasions for his seditious activities. See Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford 2001), p.31 and Sankar Ghose, *Indian National Congress: Its History and Heritage* (New Dehli, 1975), p.25.

¹⁷⁴ James, *Raj*, p.456.

¹⁷⁵ Tilak and Gandhi quoted in *ibid.*, p.440.

that were purportedly an expression of widespread feeling.¹⁷⁶ Thus, in 1915, the first wartime Empire Day provided an opportunity for imperialists to capitalise on the broad feeling of goodwill amongst Indians. For the first time since its inception, it appeared that the Empire Day celebrations in India might actually reflect a true unanimity of sentiment among the political community. In Bombay, however, it was necessary to explain the provenance of the imperial festival to the many participants for whom the celebration was a novel experience.¹⁷⁷ But such was the confidence among imperialist activists and sympathisers that they felt that the shortcomings of previous Empire Day celebrations could be discussed openly for the first time. *The Times of India* proclaimed Empire Day in Bombay to be 'more than ever a success' and applauded the 'gallantly persistent' efforts of P.B. Joshi and others in promoting the festival; the choice of vocabulary strongly hinted that Joshi had hitherto struggled to maintain convincing or consistent support. It is notable that *The Times of India* disclosed blithely that 'certain sections of Indian thought' had been previously hostile toward the Empire Day rally. The British press in India had in the past neglected to report opposition to Empire Day, but the widespread patriotic fervour stirred up by war evidently convinced the press that differences of opinion had been laid aside. That the Empire Day gathering was deemed to be 'more representative' than usual was a strong indication that it was now considered safe to discuss previous disagreements.¹⁷⁸ This apparent political détente also prompted a more open account of the past by P.B. Joshi (the instigator of the Bombay Empire Day) who admitted that both Indians and 'English experts on Indian affairs' had been among the detractors of the festival before the war; Indian nationalists had 'denounced all loyal

¹⁷⁶ N. Gerald Barrier, 'Ruling India: Coercion and Propaganda in British India during the First World War' in Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War One*, p.82.

¹⁷⁷ 'Empire Day - Hindu Meeting in Bombay' in *The Times of India*, 25 May 1915, p.10.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

demonstrations' and English critics had expressed a basic mistrust of all educated Indians. Joshi believed the Indian critics were now convinced that the interests of India were inextricably entwined with those of the British Empire and that the war had 'made them alive to the necessity, utility and wisdom of these loyal demonstrations'. He said that because Indians had shown they were ready to 'shed their blood for the glory and defence of the Indian Empire', criticism from Indians at home and abroad had been silenced and disparaging talk about educated Indians and the 'imaginary Indian danger' had ceased.¹⁷⁹

In Bangalore too, where before the war support for Empire Day had dwindled, an unusually large number of celebrants augmented the occasion. In addition, the Bangalore Trades Association facilitated the show of solidarity through the coordination of early closing for shops and businesses around the city.¹⁸⁰ No doubt heartened by this surge in support, Reverend Borlasse and Captain Baker of the Boy Scouts – veteran activists of the Empire Day Movement in the city – delivered self-satisfied speeches, emphasising their long fidelity with the celebration and rebuking those who had previously disregarded Empire Day. Borlasse heralded the advent of 'an Empire more united' and divulged that 'forces active for division' had presented 'a danger of disruption' to the celebration in the past, although he was unspecific about the identity of the erstwhile opposition.¹⁸¹ Borlasse declared that the spirit of Empire Day now struck a 'deeper note of reality'; the declaration of war in 1914 had immediately brought forth an inspiring response:

Instantaneously came soul-stirring offers of help and, now, facing the enemy united in aim and often in death, with the men of Britain are the sons of Canada, of India, of Australia, of New Zealand, and chivalrous sons from all

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1915, p.3.

¹⁸¹ 'Empire Day - Impressive Bangalore Ceremony' in *The Times of India*, 25 May 1915, p.10.

parts, who have hastened to acknowledge their right and obligation to uphold the Empire's honour.¹⁸²

The British Army in India had been rapidly mobilised for overseas operations in 1914 and, by 1915, the names of several men from Bangalore had appeared on the casualty lists. The dead were honoured through a silent and solemn wreath laying ceremony at the Queen Victoria statue. Among the 'heroes' who had 'fallen for the Empire' were a number of the former boy scouts who had, as we have seen, been stalwarts in the maintenance of Bangalore's Empire Day. *The Last Post* 'pathetically accentuated' the melancholic aura and Borlasse delivered a morbid and portentous address that evoked 'the sound of the guns and the sufferings of the wounded and the sight of the dead . . . the daily lists of killed and mutilated and the names of those we know and those we loved'. Borlasse called upon all present to respond to the call of the Empire even if their call of duty was by necessity away from the front:

Still, we can share in all we may and join in fellowship with the heroes of the battleship and the trenches in a new spirit of quiet courage and uncompromising sacrifice we gallantly respond to our responsibilities. Empire Day comes this year with a great appeal that we also prove ourselves worthy.¹⁸³

The sense of imperial solidarity, patriotic duty and willingness to sacrifice that flourished in 1915 perfectly complimented the rhetoric of Empire Day. The fulfilment of the pledge made by many young imperialists to sacrifice their lives to defend the Empire demonstrated that the annual Empire Day speeches were more than just flowery oratory. Imperialists were prepared to translate words into action and activists

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

such as Borlasse were convinced that sacrifice on the battlefield was advancing the imperialists' dream of forging tighter imperial attachments:

Today in part that vision of the mists has taken form and substance . . . we may mourn our dead, but through them we are binding all the units of the Empire into a closer and more understanding whole.¹⁸⁴

The Times of India, meanwhile, noted that the presence of injured Indian soldiers at the Empire Day meeting in Bombay demonstrated that India's share in the war was very real and proved that the exaltation of the imperial spirit, which had been the 'key note' of the Empire Day Movement, was more than 'an empty profession of faith.'¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the voluntary recruitment of over 1.3 million Indian men during the war tells its own story - before 1914, about 15,000 Indians a year enlisted in the Indian Army. Unlike black African volunteers from the British colonies, who on the whole were given an auxiliary non-combatant role, over 800,000 Indians served as combatants during the war (of which number approximately 10% became casualties).¹⁸⁶

The broad appeal of Empire Day in 1915 is illustrated by a gathering in Matheran, which was notable for the presence of Raghunath Mudholkar,¹⁸⁷ a moderate nationalist who had served in the Indian National Congress continually from 1888. Along with the other celebrants who gathered at the Shri Shiva Temple and later at a local school, he voted in favour of a resolution that called for victory in the war and avowed an unequivocal regard for the British Empire. The Empire loyalist Sir Jagmohandas Vurjeevandas further associated Congress with Empire Day by cunningly extending special thanks to the late Gokhale for his former efforts in the

¹⁸⁴ *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1915, p.3.

¹⁸⁵ *The Times of India*, 25 May 1915, p.6.

¹⁸⁶ For a breakdown of the figures year by year see Pati, *India and the First World War*, pp.31-36.

¹⁸⁷ Biographical details can be found at http://www.indiannationalcongress.com/history/presidents/rao_bahadur_raghunath_narasinha.html (accessed 29 March 2008).

cause of primary education.¹⁸⁸ Such an association would not have been an embarrassment to the Congress at this time, but rather emphasised the strategic bearing of nationalists who anticipated that unreserved support for the Empire in the war would result in a quickened pace of political reform.

The effusive support of many Indians during the early years of the war unquestionably increased the numbers of Empire Day participants. In Karachi it was estimated that 10,000 people had participated in the Empire Day celebrations¹⁸⁹ although, in truth, this sort of mass participation was an exception to the general trend. It must be kept in mind that, in relation to the population, and considering the vast number of participants who could be expected at religious festivals in India, Indian Empire Day celebrations in the main attracted comparatively modest or very small turnouts. Moreover, the number of imperialist activists responsible for organising and speaking at events was, in relative terms, tiny. Nevertheless, it is the relationship to power of such individuals that is of greater importance than their number. The majority of the population in India were at this time a predominantly dormant political force. In the main, 'Indian opinion' was articulated by a Western-educated, middle-class elite, which claimed to understand and represent the will of the people. Most were content to work within the political structures imposed on India by the imperial government and political campaigning employed essentially the same 'devices developed for the purposes of public life in bourgeois society – the press, public meetings, parties'.¹⁹⁰

The British response to the dangerous agitation of the pre-war years had been based on a dual strategy of repression and conciliation; revolutionaries and extremists

¹⁸⁸ *The Times of India*, 27 May 1915, p.10.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1915, p.8.

¹⁹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London, 1997), p.202.

were incarcerated, exiled and censored in order to remove their influence from the core of Indian politics whilst moderate politicians were conciliated with the Indian Councils Act of 1909, which effectively created Indian majorities in the provincial legislatures.¹⁹¹ It was provincial public bodies such as chambers of commerce, universities and municipal and district boards which elected the members of provisional assemblies and it was representatives of such public bodies who were frequently predominant at Empire Day events organised by Indians. Indeed, as the war dragged on and radical nationalists replaced the moderates in Congress, new Empire Day events were initiated that aimed to induct influential locals into pro-imperial politics, such as at Bassein in 1917, where the local sub-judge invited a 'number of local officers and the elite of the town' to a celebration in the courthouse.¹⁹² N. Gerald Barrier has observed how British officials 'worked closely with moderate politicians so as to win over "reasonable" Indian opinion to the side of the *raj*';¹⁹³ the overwhelmingly positive response to the imperial Government when war was declared attested to the success of the British strategy.

India's Empire Day in 1915 was a reflection of this success both in terms of its reinvigoration and also in respect of the substantiation of its *raison d'être*. Meath promoted the imperial festival throughout Britain's global territories in order to foster and encourage the very attitudes and behaviour that many Indians were now demonstrating. Empire Day, with its traditions of militaristic ritual, collective activity and remembrance, was perfectly suited to the moment as an emblem of concord between the British and their Indian subjects. Broadly hegemonic aspects of imperialist ideology were strengthened by communal gestures of support for the war effort, a shared sense of endurance and the impact of loss on the community. What,

¹⁹¹ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, pp.158-159.

¹⁹² *The Times of India*, 28 May 1917, p.8.

¹⁹³ Barrier, 'Ruling India' in Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War One*, p.77.

after all, was Empire Day about if not the nurturing of an imperial spirit that would manifest itself in terms of solidarity and self-sacrifice when the Empire was threatened? India made a crucial contribution to the war in terms of men, material and morale: 1,304,394 combatant and auxiliary recruits were sent overseas as were 172,815 animals and over three and a half million tons of supplies. War bond sales also raised 'a substantial sum' for the British Government.¹⁹⁴ Of course, Empire Day itself had little more than a negligible effect on the Indian response to the war, but for a year at the least, the sentiments expressed on Empire Day became consistent with the general political outlook, a situation that was without precedent - and which did not last.

Perhaps the British were a little too satisfied with the political détente in India that reached its apogee in the early war years. In the press, there was little of the usual effusive reporting of Empire Day events in India and the sense of urgency that accompanied the promotion of the celebration seemed to have ebbed. Moreover, among the scant reporting of Empire Day events in the British military stations (obviously depleted of personnel at this time), there was a suggestion that high-spirited revelry and merriment characterised the celebrations, rather than the patriotic seriousness of the city celebrations.¹⁹⁵ In Bengal, it seemed that the press expected the tumult of the partition years to have left no scars. The correspondent for *The Englishman* was unable to conceal his disappointment at the absence of Empire Day festivities in Calcutta in 1916. From the tone of his report it can be assumed that he had spent previous Empire Days somewhere other than Bengal where pro-British sentiment was clearly muted among Indians:

¹⁹⁴ Figures taken from Krishan G Saini, 'The Economic Aspects of India's Participation in the First World War' in *ibid.*, p.143.

¹⁹⁵ 'Mussoorie Doings - Empire Day Celebrations' in *The Englishman (Weekly Summary)*, 3 June 1915, p.16 and a report of the Lucknow celebrations appears in *The Times of India*, 26 May 1915, p.8.

Empire Day in Calcutta was spent in the same way as any ordinary day. Everybody went to work and nobody got excited unless anyone managed this at the sight of the few new flags and the many old ones that flew from the public buildings, hotels clubs etc. There was no volunteers' assembly, no banquet, and no mass meeting of patriots, the one suitable function we have been able to trace being a special service at the cathedral.¹⁹⁶

Whilst bemoaning the apparent general apathy or disinterest in Calcutta, the correspondent did make mention of Empire Day meetings organised by the Kalighat People's Association (the goddess Kali was the patron deity of Calcutta) and the Calcutta Literary Society. However, his report of Indian initiative was haughty and condescending: he mocked the extravagant nature of the 'Imperial eulogies' performed at these meetings and portrayed pro-British, Indian speakers as entertainingly eccentric, if not deranged.¹⁹⁷ The correspondent was unaware that despite the lack of popular enthusiasm, 1916 was the first time that Empire Day had been publicly celebrated in the city by anyone other than the Calcutta Literary Society. The inauguration of Empire Day in 1905 had coincided with the advent of partition. Calcutta had been the centre of anti-British protest and revolutionary violence during those years. Even in the patriotic atmosphere of 1914, Nirad Chaudhuri, then a student in Calcutta, was shocked to encounter 'a good deal of malicious pleasure' at the early British reverses at land and sea.¹⁹⁸ That Union Flags appeared at all, then, was of greater significance than *The Englishman's* reporter intimated. *The Times of India*, on the other hand, recognised the importance of the marking of Empire Day in Calcutta - albeit on a distinctly limited basis - and had reported in advance that an attempt was being made 'to secure a fitting celebration' of

¹⁹⁶ 'Empire Day. No celebration in Calcutta', *The Englishman*, 26 May 1916, p.3.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (London, 1987), p.307-8.

the day in the city.¹⁹⁹ This austere sanguinity regarding the hopes for Empire Day is an indication of just how little had been happening in the city previous to the war.

It is striking then, that in 1917, Empire Day in Calcutta was marked by an extensive military parade involving the entire garrison. The parade, which included recruits who had been drafted under the Compulsion Act, extended to nearly a mile in length and was a spectacular and formidable display of military strength.²⁰⁰ However, by 1917, the political détente of the early war years had given way to a resurgence of nationalist activity in India, there had been a dissolution of the unity of 1915 and the British decision to march the entire military garrison through the city on Empire Day could be better interpreted as a demonstration of coercive power in the face of an impending crisis rather than as a sign that the city had suddenly become well disposed toward the pomp of an imperial parade. Such a notion can be supported through the evidence from Punjab (another region of anti-imperial discontent during the war), where in Lahore, Empire Day was marked by a parade of the Punjab Volunteer Rifles.²⁰¹

II

Two primary factors account for the undoing of the wartime accord in India. Firstly, the imperial government's tendency toward obfuscation and delay in respect of constitutional reform was a source of dismay and disaffection among many moderate Indians and contributed in no small way to the growth of the Home Rule Movements. Through their repeated expressions of loyalty, the moderates tended toward constitutional engagement. But, as early as 1915, some moderate politicians were lamenting their misplaced faith in the British - who were prepared to make

¹⁹⁹ *The Times of India*, 24 May 1916, p.7.

²⁰⁰ 'Empire Day in Calcutta' in *The Englishman*, 1 June 1917, p.9.

²⁰¹ *The Times of India*, 25 May 1916, p.8.

minor concessions in municipal government, but demonstrated no intention of shifting their position in regard to the development of self-government in India. Montagu's announcement of future government policy in India (in 1917) caused great disappointment among Indian politicians, including the Government of India's most loyal Indian supporters, who expected that partnership in war should have been mirrored by a true partnership in government.²⁰² Montagu assured Indians that 'substantial' steps would be taken towards self-government in India, yet his intended policy proposed only piecemeal adjustments to administrative structures (to allow greater Indian participation) within an indefinite timeframe. Secondly, if British intransigence and procrastination over constitutional reform created disenchantment, then British heavy-handedness in dealing with dissent endowed the cause of separatist nationalism with legitimacy and encouraged radical nationalists to seek new constituencies and methods of agitation.

In 1915, Annie Besant and Tilak began to agitate for Home Rule and worked to inspire a wider constituency of Indians to become active nationalists. At its annual meeting in December, Congress gave arm's length approval to the idea of a possible Home Rule campaign in the future. Although aware of the growing support for the dynamic operations initiated by Besant and Tilak, Congress demurred on the question of official authorization of Home Rule agitation in the midst of war. Gandhi was at this time averse to the demand for Home Rule and in common with many other prominent politicians he kept the Home Rule Leagues at a distance where he would not be compromised.²⁰³ Despite such lukewarm support from Congress, Besant and Tilak took their respective campaigns forward in 1916. They believed that the nationalist movement needed to incorporate a wider social base - membership of

²⁰² Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War One*, p.19.

²⁰³ Nancy Fix Anderson, 'Mother Besant' and Indian National Politics' in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 30, No.3, September 2002, p.43.

Congress (and the Muslim League) reflected a tiny section of Western-educated elites from a limited geographical spread who offered very little of significance in the times between their annual conferences.²⁰⁴

Tilak and Besant established parallel Home Rule Leagues during 1916. Besant claimed that she set up her Home Rule League 'as an auxiliary to the National Congress . . . with Home Rule for India as its only object', but in reality her frustration with the moderate dogma of steady reform drove her to act independently to further the nationalist cause.²⁰⁵ The two Leagues co-operated but never merged, each campaigning separately in agreed areas throughout India. The Home Rule doctrine was spread by means of speaking tours, mass meetings, petitions and widespread publishing activities (newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets). The Home Rule movements established multiple local branches with organising committees and they recruited members from provincial locations and sections of the population previously detached from nationalist politics.²⁰⁶ Other initiatives included schemes of practical support in villages, such as legal assistance and the establishment of co-operative stores.²⁰⁷ By 1917, the Leagues had a combined membership of over 60,000 - over three times the membership of Congress.²⁰⁸

During the war, the most acerbic criticism of the Government of India within the English language press appeared in the pages of Annie Besant's newspaper, *New*

²⁰⁴ Judith Brown supplies data related to the period 1895-1909, which demonstrates that over two thirds of the membership of Congress came from Bombay, Madras and Bengal: Judith A. Brown, *Ghandi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge, 1972) pp.18-20.

²⁰⁵ Burke and Quraishi, *The British Raj in India*, pp.157-158.

²⁰⁶ Hugh Owen, for example, emphasises the Home Rule Leagues' engagement with rural populations: see Hugh F. Owen, 'The Non-Brahmin Movements and the Transformation of Congress 1912-1922' in Jim Masselos (ed.), *Struggling and Ruling, The Indian National Congress 1885-1985* (London, 1987), p.46.

²⁰⁷ Mrinal Kumar Basu, *Rift and Reunion. Contradictions in the Congress, 1908-1918* (Calcutta, 1990), pp. 239-240.

²⁰⁸ For an account of the rise of the Home Rule Leagues, see Joanne Stafford Mortimer, 'Annie Besant and India 1913-1917' in *Journal of Contemporary History* Volume 18, Number 1 (January 1983), pp.69-72 and passim. For a history that includes a detailed breakdown of membership patterns, see Basu, *Rift and Reunion*, pp. 226-28, (pp. 249-256 details the patterns of membership).

India, which came to be probably the most widely-read paper in Madras.²⁰⁹ Besant was committed to the doctrine of immediate Home Rule in India, but she doggedly upheld her steadfast loyalty to the British Empire (*New India* carried the maxim 'For God, Crown and Country' on its front page), arguing that a self-governing India should preserve the imperial connection.²¹⁰ From 1916, *New India* seized upon Empire Day as an opportunity to attack the nature of British rule in India, but simultaneously defended the maintenance of the imperial link through an elucidation of Besant's idiosyncratic conception of an alternative imperialism. Before 1916, *New India* paid little attention to Empire Day and merely published the syndicated reports that appeared in most Indian newspapers. However, from the end of 1915, Besant had been agitating for Home Rule in earnest and the British Government's decision to give official sanction to Empire Day in 1916 seemed to induce a paroxysm of indignation within the pages of *New India*.

On May 24 1916, *New India* published an 'Empire Day Special Number'. This was a pastiche of the Empire Day special editions produced by Lord Northcliffe's London newspapers, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*. As noted in an earlier chapter, Empire Day editions of these titles had been published regularly since 1909; they followed a common theme that incorporated specially written features dedicated to topics such as imperial geography, Empire history, topography and colonial produce. *New India* took issue with a roll call of the nations of the Empire that appeared in Northcliffe's newspapers on Empire Day. India was absent from this

²⁰⁹ Annie Besant founded *New India* in January 1914 after she bought and renamed the daily *Madras Standard*. From July 1914, Besant used her newspaper to promote the concept of 'Home Rule' for India and it later became a mouthpiece for her Home Rule League. By December 1915, *New India* was reported to be the most popular newspaper in Madras with circulation figures higher than any of its rivals. See Anderson, 'Mother Besant', p.39 and Joanne Stafford Mortimer, 'Annie Besant and India 1913-1917' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 18, Number 1 (January 1983), pp.61-78. Judith M. Brown gives details about the composition of *New India*'s readership and demonstrates that although the Home Rule movement could not be described as a 'mass movement', it had a deeper and wider political significance than any previous nationalist movement: Brown, *Modern India*, p.199.

²¹⁰ Anderson, 'Mother Besant', p.34.

list. Only the United Kingdom and the white self-governing colonies, which had been given official 'dominion' status in 1907, were included:

Lord Northcliffe did not choose to include India in the "Five Nations" that compose the British Empire, but we refuse to recognise the theory of the existence of the British Empire without India for purposes of re-adjustment of Imperial relations.²¹¹

It was well known that, despite frequent claims of good intentions by British politicians and colonial administrators, the process of devolution in India had barely started and appeared virtually ossified at an early stage. As will become abundantly clear later in this chapter, moderate Indian nationalists believed that the contribution of India to the war rendered irresistible their claim for equal recognition within the Empire. The absence of the crown colony from the family of the Empire's nations as represented by the London press was, however, a fairly accurate reflection of the British Government's attitude toward India, notwithstanding the circumstances of war. *New India's* response was formulated as a lengthy cerebral challenge, on that avoided the passive deferential language of moderate entreaties, adopting instead an assertive and critical style. Nevertheless, censure of the Imperial Government was introduced with the caveat that *New India* remained loyal and the 'concrete expression' of its imperial loyalty was demonstrated on Empire Day by the flying of the Union Flag over the newspaper's buildings.²¹²

Despite the loyal rhetoric, *New India* reproduced the text of a lecture, 'Theosophy and Imperialism', written by Besant in 1902. She had condemned the British Empire as 'an enslaver of the world', the despotic ruler of 300 million people in India, which was treated as a conquered territory without love or sympathy. In

²¹¹ 'On the Line. Our Empire Day Number', *New India, Empire Day Number*, 24 May 1916, p.1.

²¹² Ibid.

India, the sole motivation of imperial rule was economic exploitation carried out by temporary sojourners who had no concern for the prosperity of the Indian people.²¹³

This polemical tract seemed at odds with Besant's Empire Day editorial, which maintained that 'no sane man doubts today the Indian's ardent desire to be part and parcel of the British Empire'. She claimed that Empire Day was recognised as a 'great day' in India due to the long association of the date with the 'sacred memory' of Queen Victoria 'which clings to the people in connection with the British Raj in India'. Besant stated that Empire Day was in that context a 'beautiful idea' and it should continue to be observed. However, she noted that Indian people had in recent years become immune to the appeal and significance of the imperial celebration, but not on account of disloyalty or a desire to sever the link with the British Empire.²¹⁴ Rather, for Besant, the problem in India did not lie in imperialism *per se* but in an interpretation of imperialism exemplified by Kipling and enacted by a tyrannical Anglo-Indian administration,

with their haughty ways, their rude manners, their repressive laws, their selfishness, their greed, who are afraid of teaching us the wisdom of the Democrats, engendering patriotism to the Empire and loyalty to the Imperial Throne, who are in mortal terror of giving us arms which in times like these would bring glory to Britain and enhance the value of the Empire in the eyes of civilisation. They are the enemies of their country and their king.²¹⁵

Criticism of Kipling, was accompanied by a denunciation of Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Curzon and Lord Salisbury who were identified by *New India* as responsible for an attitude and policies that facilitated the continuing oppression of the Indian people. Hence, for Besant, it was the nature of imperial administration in India that justified

²¹³ Ibid., p.3.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.6.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

the continuous criticism from nationalists. Congress, she insisted, had always asserted that India's destiny lay within the Empire and thus had every right to fight against the 'cruel injustice, sinister unfairness, a provoking colour bar policy' and the 'insidious force of mere might'.²¹⁶

The following year, *New India*, remained unfavourably impressed with the administration of the Government of India. On its pages, on Empire Day, Besant admonished 'the treatment meted out to its subject coloured races by the white sons of White Britannia' and directly attacked 'the narrow minded people who come out to India' and 'continuously and systematically . . . undo the work' of 'noble statesmen of liberal principles'. *New India* complained that the transient traders, administrators and missionaries in India disregarded 'the grave responsibilities' of colonisation, in order to harvest profits for themselves and other 'vested interests':

Herein lies the root of all trouble, political and economic. "Taxation without representation is robbery" but that "robbery" was taking place all the time; and what is true in the domain of administration also obtains in other spheres of public life.²¹⁷

Besant's paraphrasing of the American revolutionaries was apposite. Woodrow Wilson had one month previously committed the United States to the war supposedly in order to fight 'for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples . . . for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments'.²¹⁸ With the espousal of such high principles, Britain's new ally was corroborating the belief among many Indians that their sacrifice for the Empire should bring its just rewards. Besant, reminded her readers of Lincoln's 'sublime dictum' of

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.4.

²¹⁷ 'Empire Day', Ibid., 24 May 1917, p.6.

²¹⁸ Woodrow Wilson quoted in Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (London, 1985), pp.490-491.

"Government of the people, for the people, by the people" and insisted that 'necessities require that India shall be a self-governing nation.'²¹⁹

For Besant, the obvious remedy for the iniquities of maladministration in India by malevolent imperialists was Home Rule. *New India* called for a voice in the management of the affairs of the Commonwealth in the spirit that it belongs as much to us Indians as anyone else. For that purpose we must be a free people under the aegis of the Union Jack; hence our continuous demand for immediate Home Rule. ... Such are the thoughts that come to us on this Empire Day. As lovers of that vast British Commonwealth, Indians should offer their homage to the ideals for which it stands and without which it must inevitably perish – ideals of Liberty, and Justice and Equality, ideals which must fashion autonomous countries and free peoples. ... Why India should not have Home Rule is a question the opponents of Home Rule will have to answer'.²²⁰

New India accompanied its call for Home Rule with a review of the struggle for Home Rule in Ireland and an appraisal of various movements in favour of political autonomy within the white dominions. In the case of Ireland, *New India* chose its words very carefully; British troops were at that time dealing with the direct aftermath of the Easter Rising in Dublin. *New India* was very attentive in its differentiation between the 'dangerous' proponents of 'physical force' in Ireland who advocated 'entire separation from England' and the majority of 'orthodox' nationalists who were held to demand self-government within the Empire. There was an obvious parallel

²¹⁹ 'Empire Day', *New India*, 24 May 1917, p.6.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

between Irish factions and the divide between so-called 'extremist'/'terrorist' Indian nationalists and moderate Congress.²²¹

Despite her self-confessed political 'orthodoxy', Besant discovered that the designation 'extremist' was a fluctuating notion applied by the British in India whenever they felt the necessity to repress political troublemakers. And her uncompromising position on Home Rule was too much for the Government of India, which was unsettled by the accomplishment of the Home Rule Leagues. Strict censorship controls over the press were imposed and Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, demanded that Besant bring to an end *New India's* criticism of imperial policy. However, the provisions of the Press Act proved incapable of silencing her. The Government chose instead to employ the Defence of India Act²²² to place her under house arrest in Ootacamund along with *New India's* editor and the organising secretary of Besant's Home Rule League, D.P Walia and G. S. Arudale.

Besant's detention, however, had the contrary effect than that intended by the British. Hostility and suspicion toward the Government increased among moderates - important Indian politicians who had previously maintained their distance flocked to the Home Rule League and became involved in its leadership.²²³ Jinnah, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru were among those who had previously refused to join the Home Rule League, but insisted on becoming members after Besant's arrest. Gandhi, who as we have seen 'did not like much in Mrs. Besant's method' acknowledged the level of popular rage against her internment and registered a strong

²²¹ *New India, Empire Day Number*, 24 May 1916, p.5.

²²² The provisions and the practical enforcement of the Defence of India Act are discussed in Barrier, 'Ruling India', p.85.

²²³ 'The Empire's Need is India's Opportunity', *New India*, 24 May 1918, p.3.

²²³ Nancy L. Paxton, 'Feminism under the Raj: Complicity and Resistance in the wirings of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 13, No.4, 1990, pp.344-5.

protest.²²⁴ The application of the Defence of India Act was to achieve on a small scale what the notorious Rowlatt Acts achieved on a far more profound and extensive level in 1919 – the alienation of wide swathes of the Indian population and their induction into nationalist politics.

Besant was released in September 1917, and she was in no doubt as to the success of the Home Rule Leagues. In that year she was nominated for the Presidency of Congress and the moderates finally capitulated to the capture of the organisation by the radicals. *New India* continued to turn the rhetoric of Empire Day against the Government. In 1918, a syndicated news report recounted how Meath had instructed schools across the Empire to address their pupils with respect 'to the essential unity of the Empire and the freedom of its institutions among all its subjects'.²²⁵ *New India* responded with its own appeal:

We shall be glad if our people here and the Bureaucracy will keep this fact in mind. The freedom of the Empire's institutions is not restricted, at least in principle to the white races; it is intended for *all* the subjects of His Majesty, whether white, black, brown, pale or yellow, If we allow that freedom to be curtailed anywhere for any people, we shall prove untrue to the spirit and traditions of the Empire. Home Rulers therefore are in the right when they demand equal treatment for India in the Empire and Anglo Indians, bureaucrats and pseudo-loyalists are in the wrong when they oppose these demands.²²⁶

Besant's confidence was soaring. She proclaimed that the Home Rule Movement 'in little over a year, had become more powerful than any other movement that has been

²²⁴ See, Joanne Stafford Mortimer, 'Annie Besant and India', p.75 and Anderson, 'Mother Besant', pp.43-44.

²²⁵ 'Empire Day', *New India*, 27 May 1918, p.8.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.

seen in India'. The moderates were apparently 'at a loss' in the face of the new movement that had 'made a clean sweep of educated India'. According to Besant Congress as 'a purely deliberative body' was no match for the sustained propaganda of the Home Rule League. Most significantly, *New India* understood the important role that Home Rule workers had played in the dissemination of nationalist ideology: 'for the first time in history India's millions are beginning to get a political education'.²²⁷

Notwithstanding such quantitative exaggerations, the nationalist movement was growing significantly as a result of Home Rule agitation. However, some of *New India's* readership, newly inducted into nationalist political discourse, might have had trouble understanding a nationalist ideology that was antithetical toward the imperial government, yet embraced an idealised conception of the British Empire. The Empire Day editions of *New India* are replete with inconsistency on the subject of the British Empire in India, which must have caused some confusion for the new nationalist cohorts.

In 1916, *New India* lauded the 'beautiful idea' of Empire Day, but at the same time attacked the structure of imperial rule that it was supposed to celebrate:

Empire Day! It ought to make us proud of the sister Nations across the seas;
but does it? How can it when a narrow and selfish Imperialism of race
boundary and skin colour is all that is shown to us?²²⁸

New India called for the Empire to reform itself, to become 'a helper, a teacher, an upholder, a guide unto a nobler civilisation' because the only justification of Empire was 'righteousness of rule'.²²⁹ Nevertheless, it seemed that amongst Britain's colonies *New India* believed the sub-continent was to be treated as a unique case; there was no

²²⁷ Ibid., 24 May 1918, p.3.

²²⁸ Ibid., 24 May 1916, p.6.

²²⁹ Ibid., p.3.

advocacy of the right of imperial nationhood for subject peoples in Britain's other colonies. *New India* sought to differentiate the Indian people from supposedly inferior and uncivilised races:

We protest very strongly against being confused with Negroes and Kaffirs and with the Red Indians of North America. We, the people of India, are as a mass Aryans; some of us are of purest Aryan descent . . . the learned everywhere are now-a-days awakening to the tremendous difference in racial age between ourselves . . . and the black-skinned, woolly-haired, flat-nosed, thick-lipped African sub-race . . . It is useless for . . . Britain and her colonies to try and turn us out of the family . . . The Aryan Empire that is forming cannot do without us, and man to man we stand as equals to the other Nations that will make it complete. Equal in degree, differing in kind, we come to know each other slowly after obscuring centuries and the War is tearing down the veils.²³⁰

This remarkable differentiation complimented Besant's Theosophical racial ideology which, whilst rejecting white supremacist beliefs in so far as these were turned against Indians, placed emphasis on the Aryan racial bond between the British and the Indians and promoted the notion of an 'Aryan Empire'.²³¹ Such a view was not out of kilter with the views of some other nationalists, who believed that the Indian army's invasion of Mesopotamia could be construed as symbolic of the coming of age of India as an Imperial nation itself in that a devolved India could administer new imperial possessions wrestled from the decaying Ottoman Empire.²³²

New India did attempt to resolve some of the contradictions thrown up by its support for Empire and the simultaneous call for Home Rule. However, unlike other

²³⁰ Ibid., p.5.

²³¹ Nancy Fix Anderson, 'Mother Besant', p.35.

²³² Priya Satia, 'Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War' in *Past & Present*, 2007, 197 (1) p.234.

nationalists who simply called for the administration of India to evolve in a way that was commensurate with the 'dominion' status of the white settler colonies, Besant used Empire Day to cogitate upon her esoteric conception of a 'return' to an idealised imperialism that had been lost under the weight of 'selfish Tory' interests. In 1916, she outlined her desire to revive 'real imperialism – not the imperialism of Kipling but the imperialism of Swinburne.' Besant recorded a litany of British politicians and poets, whom she claimed represented a just and noble imperialism and with whom she claimed the Indian people had a natural affinity:

Do not Indians love Milton and Shelly, Burke and Sheridan, John Bright and Henry Fawcett, Bradlaugh and Gladstone, Hume and Webberburn, Mill and Morley? Do we not treasure the words of these our heroes – true Imperialists? Which Indian would not sing Swinburne with Kalidsa? Which Indian would not appreciate Pitt equally with Gokhale? Who would not venerate Cromwell as he venerates Shivaji? It is the Britain of these lovers of Liberty, these fighters for freedom, these sweet singers of National Brotherhood, these mighty orators of true Imperialism that India worships with a whole hearted devotion.²³³

In Besant's imagined liberal and progressive imperial heritage there is a resonance of what Paul Ward calls an 'oppositional Englishness'.²³⁴ This can be described as the attempt by British socialists of the time to rescue a socialist patriotism based on a supposed era of past glory when, as Hyndman phrased it, 'the mass of the people . . . were in their most prosperous and wholesome condition'.²³⁵ The fantasy of the restoration of an England of the 'Golden Age' was a theme of

²³³ *New India, Empire Day Number*, 24 May 1916, p.6.

²³⁴ Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack. Englishness Patriotism and the British Left 1881-1924* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp.20-36.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.22.

radical discourse from the early nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century this idea was accompanied by a defence of British imperialism by the Fabians, amongst others, who conceived of imperial federation as a precursor of true internationalism. Progressive imperialism justified the annexation of other countries on the supposition that English civilisation, being 'the best and widest and most tolerant in the world', could not but improve the condition of the countries absorbed into the Empire.²³⁶ For Besant, and some members of the Indian National Congress, there was no doubting that British Rule in India had raised the 'prestige, influence and might' of India. Even 'extremist' nationalists like Lala Lajput Rai, acknowledged that the British had opened 'the flood gates of the ocean of thought and culture and liberalism'.²³⁷ However, just as the proponents of an oppositional patriotism in England imagined that the 'Norman yoke' had descended on England to oppress the mass of the people, so Besant argued that the administrative yoke of the Anglo-English in India had stultified the process of liberal development whereby India 'the mother of Religion, the Fountain Source of all philosophy, the Spiritual Teacher of all Humanity' should have taken her 'proper place' in the Empire. Besant believed that Empire Day was the appropriate occasion to demand the recovery of the lost ideal:

But what has all this to do with Empire Day? Someone might ask. It has much to do therewith, because on all of this depend the safety and further unfoldment of India and the Empire. The Empire would not exist without India; the British Crown devoid of the Kohinoor would be a very tame affair. British trade mainly depends on India and on trade rests Britain's

²³⁶ Ibid., pp.62-64. For a discussion of the various interpretations of the terms 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' prior to the First World War, see Andrew S. Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914' in *The Journal of British Studies* Vol. 36, No. 2, Twentieth-Century British Studies (Apr., 1997), pp. 147-177.

²³⁷ *New India, Empire Day Number*, 24 May 1916, p.5.

prosperity. . . . We are working towards a righteous end for our God, our King, and our Country. We want to usher in a true Imperialism . . . Empire Day! – Let us salute with joyous hope all those who love the King-Emperor on his Throne, and who serve him in their own ways. Differences must and will exist, but Hindus and Muslims and Parsis and Jains and Sikhs and Christians are all one in our love of the Empire of Free Citizenship²³⁸

Besant's explication of the nature of the relationship between Britain and India was problematic considering the widespread perception that the British had manifestly exploited their considerable advantages in this putative partnership of trade. Besant sought to ameliorate any sense that Indians were the subjugated victims of rapacious imperialism by propounding a manifestly fabricated version of history that imagined that 'India passed into the hands of the British, not by conquest, but otherwise. By the consent of the Indian people, by the welcome of the Indian people have our rulers come to occupy their present position'.²³⁹ This rosy and benign picture of imperial development complemented Besant's romanticised list of progressive imperialists (not least Cromwell, whose 'liberal' hand in Ireland, England's first overseas colony, involved the killing and enslaving of thousands)²⁴⁰ for whom she imagined the Indian people had so much love.

Besant's notion of progressive imperialism was in harmony with the moderate nationalism of Congress, whose vision of autonomy within the Empire essentially involved the replacement of metropolitan leaders in India (the 'selfish bureaucrats')

²³⁸ Ibid., p.6.

²³⁹ Ibid. This is a slightly nuanced version of Besant's earlier disquisition upon England's 'quiet diplomacy' and 'intrigue' whereby the conquest of India was achieved not by the sword but 'by the help of her [India's] own swords'. See Bevir's notes on Besant's documentary history of the INC (published in 1915) 'How India Wrought for Freedom' in M. Bevir, 'In opposition to the Raj: Annie Besant and the dialectic of Empire. Theosophy and political philosophy as applied to India' in *History of Political Thought* Volume 19, Issue 1, Spring 1998, pp.73-75.

²⁴⁰ For Cromwell's colonial repression and Irish slaves see Sean O'Callaghan, *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland* (Brandon, 2001).

by that influential indigenous class, relatively privileged in comparison to the Indian masses, who according to Besant wanted to 'reconstruct civilisation' alongside 'noble Britishers'. Despite, the successes of the Home Rule Leagues, the Empire Day ruminations within *New India* demonstrate the limits of Besant's radicalism. Besant maintained an unbreakable allegiance with the Empire and despite her romanticised reconstruction of the imperial relationship, her imperialism remained an elitist concern and would have had little meaning for the mass of Indians 'poor, black, white and brown' who she supposed would be happy to labour for the reconstructed empire under Home Rule.

Paradoxically, it was the success of the Home Rule Leagues in their eventual domination of Congress that 'sapped the vitality of the [Home Rule] movement'. The control of Congress by the Home Rulers drew them, like the moderates before them, into constitutional politics. This had the effect of weakening the movement by alienating many of the new groups that the Home Rule Leagues had brought into Indian nationalist politics, many of whom would not accompany Congress into what was seen as the 'blind ally' of institutional politics. Furthermore, in the last year of the war, Besant became a vociferous supporter of military recruitment campaigns. Her failure to attach conditions to her appeals for Indians to defend the Empire led to a split in the Home Rule League and Besant began to ally herself with the government on some political issues.²⁴¹ In common with Indian loyalists and nationalist moderates, the Home Rule League found that during the course of the war, the rapid development of nationalist politics meant that it was increasingly difficult to maintain a position of political credibility in regard to retaining an imperial allegiance.

²⁴¹ Basu, *Rift and Reunion*, p.226, p.262 and p.351.

III

The preservation of political credibility was a particularly knotty problem for Indian loyalists who had benefited from the period of goodwill that arose during 1914. However, the general cordiality of the relationship between Indian politicians and the Government of India was short lived. This was partly due to the exigencies of war and partly because the intractability of the imperial government began to be confronted by a united and radicalised Indian National Congress. Between 1907 and 1916, Congress had been rendered an impotent political force by its fracture into 'extremist and 'moderate' factions. The 'moderate' division, dominated by Gokhale, effectively blocked any reconciliation by ratifying a new constitution that excluded anything other than constitutional means to advance the goal of self-government under the Empire.²⁴² After the death of Gokhale in 1915, Congress revised the constitution in order to allow the return of the radical nationalists, led by Tilak. As we have seen, the 'moderates' in Congress ceded control to the 'extremists', which created the conditions for a more radical nationalist trajectory. Furthermore, the Lucknow agreement with the Muslim League²⁴³ and the success of the Home Rule Leagues meant that by 1916, Congress was in a position to make stronger demands for change. By 1917, it was clear that the ascendancy of mendicant nationalism had passed.

The spirit of cooperation within nationalist politics coincided with a stiffening of the British attitude toward dissent. While Indians had congregated under the Imperial Flag early in the war, the introduction of Defence of India Act in 1915 (a

²⁴² For an account of the stand off between Gokhale and Tilak, see Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism. Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1880-1915* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 185-190 and B.N. Pandey, *The Break up of British India* (New York, 1969), p.97.

²⁴³ The revocation of the Partition of Bengal in 1912 had removed the political advantage of elite Bengali Muslims. The consequent disaffection propelled an anti-loyalist, pan-Islamist section to the leadership of the All-India Muslim League. In 1916, the League and Congress established agreement on the question of separate electorates through the Lucknow Pact. This stole away an important lever of political negotiation from the British: see Farzana Shaikh, 'Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan' *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 3 (1986), p.541.

colonial adaptation of the Defence of the Realm Act) caused some concern among moderate politicians, but overall it was accepted as a justifiable war measure and the British employed it sparingly and judiciously. Latterly, however, the British selected this particular sledgehammer to crack the nut of parochial dissent, real and imagined, particularly in Bengal and Punjab. Indians began to abjure the provisions of the Act; it allowed internment without trial and was used inconsistently, and often unnecessarily, as a means of enforcing censorship.²⁴⁴ British heavy-handedness in matters of internal security during the war was an unwelcome rejoinder to those Indians who had shown such faithfulness to the Empire in 1914 and this further contributed to the radicalisation of Congress.

It was during the war that the Indian masses began to be drawn into the affairs of the Empire; the predominantly parochial concerns of many communities became enmeshed with issues related to the wider context. As the war dragged on, the impact on the Indian economy began to create an atmosphere of resentment. The cost of wheat and cotton goods rapidly inflated and cheap consumer products that had previously been imported from Germany became unavailable: 'Indians realised that for most of them war merely meant higher prices, more taxes and less of everything else'.²⁴⁵ Indians fought and suffering in the major theatres of war, including Flanders, Gallipoli, East Africa and Mesopotamia and the death of over 62,000 Indian soldiers (with 68,000 wounded, missing or taken prisoner)²⁴⁶ contributed to rising criticism and war weariness.²⁴⁷ The 'distress and disturbance' created by the war resulted in a

²⁴⁴ Brown, *Modern India*, p.202 and James, *Raj*, p. 455.

²⁴⁵ Stanley A. Woolpert, *Congress Leadership in Transition: Jinnah to Gandhi, 1914-20* in Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War One*, pp.130-131.

²⁴⁶ Judd puts the total of deaths at 'over 62,000' but Pati's figures detail only 53,486 (excluding almost 4,000 missing or prisoners) Denis Judd, *The lion and the tiger: the rise and fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947* (Oxford, 2004), p.123 and Pati. *India and the First World War*, p.37.

²⁴⁷ Judd, *The lion and the tiger*, p.123.

number of localised outbreaks of disorder and lawlessness; however these never coalesced into a national campaign against high prices or increased taxation.²⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the transformation of Indian aspirations during the war prepared the ground for what was to be a paradigm shift in nationalist politics after 1919. Empire Day speeches in Bombay and associated articles in *The Bengalee* demonstrate how loyalists and moderate nationalists reacted to the pace of change between 1915 and 1918. Loyalists, such as P. B. Joshi, who had previously demonstrated estimable patience with the imperial government, began to take a firmer line on what they expected in terms of reform when the war was over. However, during the course of the war, Indian politics became radicalised to the extent that despite the determined language of loyalists, they still gave the impression of being timid apologists for the Raj.

In 1915, Joshi and his co-speaker, the Honourable Mr. N. M. Samarth invoked the familiar Empire Day platitudes concerning Queen Victoria, the Proclamation of 1858 and Indian claims for equality within the Empire. They once again requested that 'the Premier and the Home Government . . . fulfil those promises of the proclamation which remain still unfulfilled'.²⁴⁹ This appeal was balanced with the call for Indians to demonstrate 'unsurpassed spontaneity and enthusiasm in the hour of England's need and peril'.²⁵⁰ The message was plain - if Indians supported the British Empire in war, their loyalty would be rewarded through the advancement of their political aspirations. Yet, by 1916, a substantially bolder spirit can be detected on Empire Day. It is particularly significant that Joshi paid noticeably less attention to the legacy of Queen Victoria and instead framed the Indian claim for equality upon the known principles for which the war was being fought. It is interesting to note that

²⁴⁸ Brown, *Modern India*, pp.196-7.

²⁴⁹ 'Empire Day - Hindu Meeting in Bombay' in *The Times of India*, 25 May 1915, p.10.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

in Bangalore, the Queen Victoria statue 'as a symbol of Imperial power was attacked on more than one occasion in 1917 . . . [which] led to redoubled surveillance of the statue and its surroundings'. When the statue had been erected in 1906, many Indian groups 'from all walks of life' contributed to its installation. The Statue's situation in a park that separated the city from the British cantonment '[marked] space in a way that spoke of authority and power'.²⁵¹ Clearly, the radicalisation of Indian politics had narrowed the distinction in the minds of some Indians between the British monarchy and the Government administration.

In India, the very foundation of British authority was beginning to be questioned. It is not surprising then, that Joshi began to claim rights that were not defined or limited by monarchical decree, but rather, were firmly embedded within a broader political philosophy. Furthermore, he dismissed the notion that Indians should be granted equal rights as recompense for their wartime solidarity, insisting instead that racial equality was a right endowed on Indians by the very principles that supposedly guided the British war effort:

I am sure Mr. Asquith, the worthy Premier of England and his cabinet, who are so solicitous to safeguard the liberties and interests of smaller nations like Belgium and Serbia will not fail to do their best for raising the status of India as a nation by granting her people equal rights and privileges not as a reward for our loyalty and faithful services, but for the due observance of the sacred principles of righteousness, justice and freedom for the vindication of which England has unsheathed her sword.²⁵²

Unlike many other Indian cities Bombay, when Joshi delivered this speech, was not shielded, by distance, from the reality of a foreign war. Troops in their hundreds of

²⁵¹ See Janaki Nair, *The Promise of the Metropole: Bangalore's Twentieth Century* (New Delhi, 2005), pp.62 and 294.

²⁵² 'Empire Day, Bombay Celebrations' in *Times of India*, 25 May 1916, p.8.

thousands, destined for France, East Africa, Egypt and Mesopotamia left India through the port, which also served as the reception centre for wounded soldiers returning to India from the battlefields.²⁵³ Indeed, special Empire Day entertainments were organised in Bombay for the 'wounded soldiers in our midst'.²⁵⁴ Hence, in the knowledge that Bombay's citizens were first hand witnesses of wartime mobilisation, Joshi had shrewdly chosen to echo the Viceroy's Empire Day message to General Haig, wherein Hardinge anticipated that in victory, 'India's sons will share in the Empire's triumph achieved in the defence of those ideals for which the Empire has drawn the sword'.²⁵⁵ Haig's Empire Day message saluted his fellow subjects throughout the empire and reminded them that 'freedom and justice' were 'the watchwords of our race'.²⁵⁶

Although such florid rhetoric was full of ambiguity, hypocrisy and oblique language, the profusion of high ideals allowed Joshi and his compatriots²⁵⁷ to refashion the expression of their persistent claim for equal rights. In the past, Empire Day supplications were always attended by earnest assurances of loyalty; now the British rationale for war against Germany allowed the call for equality to be supplemented by an appeal for 'justice and freedom' as an incontrovertible moral right. Equality of opportunity under the Raj was no longer held to be as compelling a demand than that which insisted, with reference to Belgium and Serbia, that 'freedom'

²⁵³ Sir Stanley Reed, *The India I Knew 1897-1947* (London, 1952), p.83.

²⁵⁴ 'Celebrations in India – Bombay' in *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1916, p.5 and 'Empire Day - Wounded Entertained' in *The Times of India*, 25 May 1916, p.8

²⁵⁵ 'Empire Day' in *The Bengalee*, 26 May 1916, p.2.

²⁵⁶ Both messages had been given high prominence in the English language newspapers in India. For example see *Times of India*, 26 May 1916, p.7.

²⁵⁷ In 1916, Joshi was joined on the platform by Tribhovandas Mangaldas Nathubhai. Nathubhai had recently published a meditation on Indian politics, *Methods Constructive and Destructive* (Bombay, 1915) and was involved in the funding of the nascent Bombay film industry. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Curious Case of Bombay's Hindi Cinema: The Career of Indigenous 'Exhibition' Capital' in *Journal of the Moving Image*, Number 5, December, 2006. http://www.jmionline.org/jmi5_1_2 (accessed 5 February 2009).

should mean self-determination - that Indians should be allowed to govern their own country.

The English language press in India responded to Empire Day in a way that validated the expectation among Indians that a substantial post-war reform of the imperial relationship would be forthcoming. For example, *The Times of India* made much of a report of an Empire Day banquet in Moscow where the British Ambassador spoke of the British imperial ideal, which was 'to secure equal rights and justice for all nations and to protect the weak and oppressed'. He believed that it was this ideal that accounted for the 'wholehearted support that Britain has received from her Dominions and dependencies' and he was sure that after the war 'they would be given a voice in the direction of Imperial policy and that an imperial trade policy would be elaborated.'²⁵⁸ Such suggestions were reinforced by the admission of Indian representatives to the Imperial Conference in 1917, which Joshi said gave Empire Day 'a special interest' in that 'events are occurring which tend to show that the Indians shall not, in future, be denied the rights of free citizenship of the British Empire'.²⁵⁹

As discussed above, the Home Rule Leagues did not shy from outspoken criticism of the Government of India and the Home Rulers' tendency toward political confrontation contrasted sharply with loyalist deferential petitioning. As Borlase noted on Empire Day in Bangalore, the war had proved to be a 'testing time' and 'many are tired of it' to the extent that 'querulous complaining and expressions of impatience' were becoming more common.²⁶⁰ In this context, Joshi's appeals for justice appear flaccid when compared to the challenge presented to the government by Home Rule agitation. Moreover, the long patience of Indian loyalists with the British

²⁵⁸ *The Times of India*, 25 May 1916, p.9.

²⁵⁹ 'Empire Day, Bombay Hindu Celebrations' in *Times of India*, 27 May 1917, p.5.

²⁶⁰ *The Madras Mail*, 25 May 1916, p.3.

administration began to appear naïve. The loyalists and moderates were unable to compete with Home Rule Leagues and, perhaps aware of his political position becoming increasingly anachronistic, Joshi began to take a more equivocal line, which in some respects hinted at disillusion with the British and suggested that he anticipated the possibility of post-war British faithlessness. Yet he also called for Indians to retain their confidence in imperial justice and condemned radical solutions as premature:

It is true that India has her grievances to be addressed, disabilities to be removed, and her hopes and aspirations to be fulfilled. But the present is not the time suitable for airing our grievances or for carrying on an agitation or heated discussion for attaining self-government or Home Rule.²⁶¹

Although appearing to eschew radical calls for Home Rule in India, implicit in this passage is the suggestion that an appropriate time for Home Rule agitation might arise, specifically ‘when the clouds of war have passed.’²⁶² Without doubt, loyalists such as Joshi, who for so long had demonstrated hope, fortitude and patience in respect to imperial rule, believed the war represented a turning point and wanted far reaching changes to be initiated by the British as soon as victory was assured, not least to dampen the rising flame of ‘extremist’ nationalism

Paradoxically, *The Bengalee*, the erstwhile scourge of Empire Day celebrations in India, showed a far more temperate face during the War than during the partition years, something which was to lead to increasing political marginalisation.²⁶³ Surendranath Banerjea, a prominent moderate within Congress and the owner and editor of *The Bengalee* was at heart ‘committed to political

²⁶¹ ‘Empire Day, Bombay Celebrations in *Times of India*, 25 May 1916, p.8.

²⁶² Joshi, quoted in *ibid.*

²⁶³ See ‘What India has done for The Empire – an Opportune Reminder’ in *The Bengalee*, 26 May 1916 p.3.

liberalism'.²⁶⁴ During the War, Banerjea tried and failed to bring about political accord between moderates and the radical Home Rulers. Nonetheless, his enthusiastic recruitment campaigns did little to endear him to the radicals (as shown, similar campaigns supported by Besant in 1918 were to undermine her own political standing amongst radicals). With the ascendancy of Tilak and Besant in Congress after 1916, Banerjea became increasingly isolated and eventually joined the National Liberal League in 1918. This was a political movement that embraced moderates, some aristocrats and a number of British sympathisers.²⁶⁵

It is hardly surprising, then, that Banerjea's newspaper no longer mocked and derided Empire Day, but instead it eulogized the loyalty of Indians in their commemoration of the occasion. However, as celebrations in Bengal were noticeably absent, *The Bengalee* reported on the festivities elsewhere in India such as Karachi in 1916, where the Hindu, Muslim and Parsi communities 'were present in full force'.²⁶⁶ By 1918, successful Indian Empire Day events appear to have been scarce, so *The Bengalee* chose to lead with a front-page report of Empire day celebrations in London and noted how Parisian newspapers had also published 'very warm and enthusiastic articles about Empire Day'.²⁶⁷

The Bengalee's abandonment of its acerbic criticism of Empire Day was also a sign of its concern to counter a distinctly anti-British mood that was sweeping through India by the last year of the war. The radicalisation of all India politics effectively exposed the ineffectiveness of moderate nationalism. The sea change that was taking place in Indian nationalism trapped imperial loyalists and moderate nationalists within an awkward and compromising double bind. They were obliged to demonstrate

²⁶⁴ Brown, *Modern India*, p.155.

²⁶⁵ Basu, *Rift and Reunion*, pp.271, 320 and 333.

²⁶⁶ *The Bengalee*, 26 May 1916, p.2.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1918, p.1.

fidelity to the Government, but found that official rhetoric promising freedom and equality was not reflected in government policy. Thus, Empire Day pronouncements by Indians on Empire Day often appeared contradictory - such as in Bombay in 1917, when enthusiastic Indian loyalists called for Empire Day to be declared a public holiday throughout India, but simultaneously condemned the very principles of imperialism.²⁶⁸ Sir Jagmohandas Varjivansdas believed that a national holiday to celebrate imperialism would positively influence public opinion if the Indian people were reminded of the rewards that the Empire conferred upon them. He suggested that 'government officers and leaders of the public' should cooperate in the arrangement of fetes and celebrations. Given the outpouring of support for the Empire at the beginning of the war and the outstanding success of Empire Day in various locations in 1915, his concern about public opinion is an indication that imperial festivity had subsequently lost its appeal and was in need of re-invigoration. Varjivansdas insisted that the contribution to the war effort had elevated India from the status of 'a mere helpmate' to 'a sharer of the Empire'. However, he also commented upon the reasons for the United States' entry to the European war, which was 'to guard the interests and liberties of the smaller states'. Predicting the inevitable collapse of the Central Powers he said that 'their policy of aggrandisement and running over the lands of others by force is now despised and defeated'.²⁶⁹ Although intended as an attack on German militarism, Varjivansdas had unwittingly delivered a condemnation of European imperialism in general.

In the same year, Joshi's irritation with the Government was clearly evident in his analysis of the Prime Minister's speech at the Imperial Conference. Lloyd George had proclaimed that the Dominions and India had 'established claims to equal

²⁶⁸ Sir Jagmohandas Varjivansdas reported in 'Empire Day, Bombay Hindu Celebrations' in *The Times of India*, 27 May 1917, p.5.

²⁶⁹ 'Empire Day, Bombay Hindu Celebrations' in *Ibid.*, 27 May 1917, p.5.

partnership in the affairs of the Empire', being careful to use the term *claims* when rights would have been more binding. This was a point not missed by Joshi:

When India has not a single member of her own in the British Parliament, when Indians are excluded from the commissioned ranks . . . in the Army and Navy even of India and when the people of India have not equal rights in the administration of their own country, we fail to see any special attraction or any special charm in the declaration of the worthy premier that India has established her claim for equal partnership in the affairs of the Empire.

Joshi then set forth a challenge to the Government:

If the Prime Minister is true to his words – and we have no doubt about that – and if the British nation really want to raise their Indian fellow subjects to a status of equal partnership let the home authorities clearly announce the liberal policy which they propose to accept for the future welfare and advancement of India . . . the time for sweet words and charming speeches has gone.²⁷⁰

For Joshi, 'the best remedy for putting a stop to all political agitation and hostile criticism was the adoption of a generous policy'. His tone suggested that he was a mere observer of political unrest in India, yet his speech also implied that loyal Indians might become disaffected in the absence of reform. Nevertheless, to suppose that Joshi might cross the line between rebuke of the Government and political dissent is perhaps reading too much into his reprimands. The Bombay Hindu loyalists long collaboration with imperialism, coupled with their vested interest in the imperial system ensured that, despite their frustrations and simmering discontent, they would not offer resistance to the imperial Government. Indeed, despite all his grumbling,

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Joshi urged his audience, on the last Empire Day of the War, to trust the British Government and remain 'loyal and law abiding citizens of the British Empire'.²⁷¹

In 1918, Joshi reprised his refrain that 'the time for eloquent and sweet speeches has gone' and repeated his appeal to the British Cabinet to 'grant India an equal partnership in the management of her own affairs'. Yet Joshi was more concerned with the fact that the Indian government had declared Empire Day to be an official public holiday in India. He mourned the fact that this announcement had come too late to arrange a larger event and, indeed, the scattering of reports of Empire Day celebrations elsewhere in India did not indicate that the Government's action had had any special impact.²⁷²

Despite the magnified enthusiasm for Empire Day in 1915, then it soon withered to its pre-war condition whereby certain events such as those in Bombay, Bangalore and Karachi continued to attract a moderate amount of interest, whilst elsewhere in India celebrations although relatively numerous were unpredictable and variable in character. These ranged from free educational Kinematograph shows for children in Jamnager state, including a film showing how Empire Day was celebrated in London; theatrical entertainment for the patients at the Deccan British War hospital in Poona; Hindu sermons at Surat on the subject of loyalty to the King, the duty of subjects to the Government and the 'manifest advantages of British Rule' as well as an inaugural celebration at Bassein, where the local sub-judge invited 'a number of local officers and the *elite* of the town to the courthouse to celebrate the occasion'.²⁷³

The Government's initiative to make Empire Day a public holiday and the ongoing support of various different groups failed to re-invigorate Empire Day. Unlike in other regions of the empire, it failed to attract a mass audience and failed to establish a

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² 'Empire Day. Hindu Celebrations', Ibid., 25 May 1918, p.10.

²⁷³ Ibid., 26 May 1917, p.7 and 28 May 1917, p.7.

standardized or consistent repertoire. Without doubt the apogee of Empire Day in India was in 1915. From then onwards the radicalisation of all India politics and the nurturing of new political constituencies through the Home Rule Leagues (and latterly Gandhi's *satyagraha* campaigns) meant that after the war Empire Day was to have little support (or indeed meaning) in India, save as a mode of denial or nostalgia for the British and as a symbolic refuge for disparate Indian groups whom, as we shall see, continued to follow something of an imperialist path as long as it suited their interests.

In 1918, the King Emperor addressed his Indian subjects on Empire Day with the salutation '*The Empire's Need is India's Opportunity*'. By this time the Montagu announcement had dispelled optimistic notions, held by Indians, that the British Government would reward the loyalty of its Indian subjects with a serious move toward self-government. The obvious ironic reading of the King's aphorism must have occurred to most nationalists and it was left to Besant's *New India* to deliver the ominous riposte: '*India's Freedom is the Empire's Opportunity*'.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ *New India*, 24 May 1918, p.3

Chapter 5

The fall of Empire Day in India.

As noted in the preceding chapter, there had been an expectation among politicised Indians of a post-war constitutional transformation that would have allowed their equal participation in a Government equivalent in status to those of the White Dominions. The Montagu announcement of 1917 had pledged advancement toward self-government, but it was vague about the actual timetable. After the war, recourse to revolutionary terrorism by a small number of Indian dissidents alarmed the British administration, which was already troubled by difficulties such as the trade depression and the threat of Bolshevism. The British overreacted in that 'all forms of protests against imperial misrule were seen as conspiratorial and seditious';¹ and a needlessly brutal wave of political repression was unleashed, which was facilitated by the notorious Rowlatt Acts, passed in March 1919.² This legislation prolonged the special judicial powers (such as detention without trial and trial without jury) that had been utilised during wartime and which characterised the British Government's tendency to solve imperial problems by military means in the period following the war.³ By the time that the Montagu-Chelmsford system was announced in late 1919, the dark episode at Amritsar had undermined confidence in the ability and willingness of the British to complete an even-handed reform of government in India. The massacre of unarmed civilians by imperial troops at Jallianwallah Bagh was universally shocking to Indians, and the subsequent imposition of martial law and

¹ K. G. Kannabiran, *The Wages Of Impunity: Power, Justice, And Human Rights* (Hyderabad, 2004), p.88.

² For Motilal Nehru's description of the Rowlatt Acts, see *ibid.*, pp.88-90.

³ Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22* (Manchester, 1984), p. vi.

open degradation of Indians, which included savage public floggings and General Dyer's infamous crawling order,⁴ compounded widespread ill-feeling toward the British.⁵ Thus, when the Montagu-Chelmsford system became law under the provisions of the Government of India Act in 1920, its reception was considerably overshadowed by events. The new system, of 'dyarchy' brought about far reaching reform in provincial government, but, crucially, denied Indians the opportunity of equal participation in central administration.⁶ This was a bitter disappointment to Indian nationalists, especially in the context of the continued imposition of the Rowlatt Acts. Moderate nationalists found that the political initiative passed to Gandhi who then began to advocate and coordinate strategies that were later to coalesce into the non-cooperation movement. For the first time, the 'British idiom'⁷ of politics that was conducted within a progressive constitutional framework was replaced by a new mode of mass political activity that rejected the westernised model.

Congress approved Gandhi's non-cooperation strategy in 1920 and the nationalists began to induct the Indian masses into political activity that coupled parochial discontent over issues such as land and rents to the iniquities of British rule.⁸ India's peasants had been mostly immune to anything other than parochial politics in the past, but due to new methods of nationalist agitation, they were awakening to all-India politics. The nationalist movement's new cohorts had not internalised the values and ideology of imperial rule in the manner of the western-

⁴ Indians were forced to crawl the length of a street where an English woman had been seriously assaulted. For details of the crawling order and a harrowing eyewitness account of the flogging of six boys accused of the crime, see Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (London, 2005), pp.282-285.

⁵ Collett, *Ibid.*, provides a detailed description of the massacre, but also provides an excellent analysis of its context and aftermath, including an illuminating psychological portrait of Dyer. For an interesting overview of the events at Jallianwallah Bagh through a case study of the British press coverage, see Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: the British press and India, c. 1880-1922* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 199- 229.

⁶ Brown, *Modern India*, pp.204-205.

⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India' in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 208-9.

⁸ Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp.198-204.

educated Indian middle class, and the ritualised veneration of the empire had little, if any, significance for the broad sections of the Indian people as they exerted pressure from below. Hence, outside of the established political orthodoxy in India, Empire Day was divested of its hegemonic potential.

The continued existence of Empire Day in India appeared tenuous in the face of dwindling support due to factors such as a falling-away of press coverage, the attraction of the new Armistice Day and the deliberate efforts of nationalists to undermine Empire Day through the organisation of alternative commemorative events. However, Cohn asserts that 'the British idiom did not die easily or quickly'⁹ and a survey of the period 1919-47 reveals that Empire Day was one of the forms outside of formal constitutional politics in which it remained animate in India.

Although, the English language press were no longer unanimous in their support and promotion of the day, the most important and widely circulated dailies, the *Times of India* and the *Madras Mail* continued to give enthusiastic backing to the imperial celebration. Furthermore, throughout the years preceding independence, Empire Day continued to be celebrated by some members of the British elite and the domiciled communities. This is unsurprising. However, what is less expected is the evidence that shows how disparate enclaves of Indian loyalists, who believed their interests were bound up with the imperial connection, maintained or even initiated vigorous support for Empire Day. This type of Empire Day activism provides an insight into the reception among some increasingly isolated Indian groups of the widespread social and political transformations that characterised the final three decades of British power in India.

⁹ Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', p. 209.

During the interwar years it is also apparent that imperialist politicians and journalists attempted to find different ways of representing the Empire due to their unease about the obvious contradictions of the colonial relationship as previously characterized. As we shall see, their cogitations about the reform of the symbolic representation of the imperial connection were made public on Empire Day in a way that sometimes undermined the festival itself.

I

An important measure of the rapidly declining significance of Empire Day in India was the relative importance awarded to it by the press. After 1918, the main English language publications in India (which mostly shared an obdurate Anglo-centric perspective) no longer supported the imperial festival with the fervency of the pre-war era. Before 1918, the gala day of British imperialism was reported fulsomely in the press, no matter how trifling the actual events. After the war, many newspapers abandoned the hyperbolic reporting of celebrations and Empire Day was all but ignored by some of its former champions such as *The Englishman*. The withering of interest in the festival can be explained partly through the consequences of the First World War whereby the assumed superiority of the imperial 'race' was rendered anachronistic and partly by the disaffection of Indians with the empire.

However, some newspapers maintained faith with Empire Day, most notably India's first national newspaper, the Bombay-based *Times of India* (both the daily and its abundantly-illustrated weekly edition) and *The Madras Mail*. The *Times of India* attempted to convince its readership that Empire Day was not only surviving, but was actually robust in India. The sharp decline in the number of celebrations in India was overlooked and every year excitable accounts of the various meetings and social

gatherings that did take place were allocated disproportionate column space. In the weekly edition, large photographs invariably supplemented the inflated reports.¹⁰ When sufficiently noteworthy Empire Day events were difficult to locate in India, the *Times of India* published reports from elsewhere in the empire and paid much attention to the Empire Day speeches of Prime Ministers, Viceroys and other imperial notables. Alongside the *Times of India*, *The Madras Mail* determinedly strove to support Empire Day, sometimes through overstated coverage. A particularly brazen example concerning Calcutta appeared in 1920, where aside from the usual display of flags on Government buildings, there had been no public event whatsoever; the *Madras Mail* responded with the preposterous euphemism that Empire Day was celebrated in the city 'with quiet enthusiasm'.¹¹ In that year, the first wave of non-cooperation was in process, described by Sarkar as the 'biggest and most violent anti-British upsurge seen since 1857',¹² yet the *Madras Mail* claimed that it had received telegrams from 'all parts of India and Burma' stating that Empire Day was 'celebrated everywhere'.¹³ Clearly the imperialist press were still keen to promote Empire Day as a bulwark against nationalist advances and without doubt certain sections of the press were fundamental to maintaining public awareness of Empire Day in India. Indeed, Stanley Reed, the editor of the *Times of India* until 1923, had stated overtly that he believed the imperial press was one of 'the foundations for imperial defence' and he was determined to use his paper to 'defend the mother country against those

¹⁰ Examples include images of prominent establishment figures such as Sir Norman McLeod, Chief Justice of Bombay and Lady Goschen (wife of Lord Goschen, Governor of Madras 1924-29 and Acting Viceroy 1929-31) participating in Empire Day events. There were also various depictions of rallies, fancy dress balls and other events from around India. See coverage of events at Bombay, Deolali, Byculla, Simla, Madras and Ootacamund in *The Times of India Illustrated Weekly*, 1 June 1924, p.31; 8 June 1924, p.19; 27 May 1928, Late News Supplement, pp. iv-v and 9 June 1929, p.32.

¹¹ *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1920, p. 5.

¹² Sarkar, *Modern India*, p.189.

¹³ *Madras Mail*, 26 May 1920, p. 5.

[nationalists] who did 'immense mischief'.¹⁴ As long as the major Indian newspapers, such as the *Times* and the *Madras Mail*, remained under British ownership and so long as editorial control remained in the hands of ardent imperialists such as Reed, it was likely that Empire Day would receive favourable, if not hyperbolic, attention. It was not until after 1945 that these papers passed into Indian hands.

In later years there was also a half-hearted attempt to use radio broadcasting to support the imperial government. The Indian broadcasting company 'All Indian Radio' endeavoured to promote Empire Day in 1937 through a special Empire Day transmission broadcast from Bombay, although it was more educational than overtly propagandist. The *Times of India* enthused over the 'hundreds of listeners in Bombay' who had 'waited late into the night to listen to the programme'.¹⁵ It seems extraordinary that in the golden age of wireless broadcasting, and in a city as large and developed as Bombay, radio listeners were being measured in hundreds. But, in 1935, Lionel Fielden, who had been seconded by the BBC to develop 'All India Radio', described the attempt to cultivate a mass listening audience as 'the biggest flop of all time'.¹⁶ Partha Gupta has explained the factors that account for the underdevelopment of broadcasting in India, where barely 90,000 wireless sets were owned in 1939 (within a population of 400 millions). These included slack administration, institutional confusion and ambivalence on the part of the Government of India over the usefulness of the medium due to a perceived potential for political subversion. Gupta points out how the Simon Commission report (which allowed for full provincial autonomy in India whilst maintaining firm imperial control at the

¹⁴ J. Lee Thompson, 'Selling the Mother Country to the Empire: The Imperial Press Conference of June 1909' in Julie F. Codill (ed), *Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press* (London, 2003), p.120-121.

¹⁵ *Times of India*, 25 May 1937, p.10.

¹⁶ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Power, Politics and the People: Studies in British Imperialism and Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi, 2002), p.449.

centre) influenced the Government's attitude to broadcasting, favouring the development of a fragmented policy as a strategy to assist in the attempt to provincialise the ambitions of Indian politicians.¹⁷ Hence, due to a reluctance to broadcast national political discussions the Government of India contributed to a policy, which in effect denied itself the effective utilisation of a proven tool of propaganda that had in the 1920s been used successfully by both Fascist Italy and the Soviet Union 'to manufacture an illusion of political consensus'.¹⁸

In India, then, the printed word continued to be the main tool of political persuasion for the British and their collaborators. After the war, the foremost English language newspapers demonstrated an awareness that the imperial relationship needed to be portrayed in a different way and Empire Day offered the opportunity for imperialists to cogitate publicly (and at length) on this matter. In the post-war era, it became widely accepted that the established justification of Western imperial domination in Asia and Africa, built on the notions of race supremacy and moral superiority, was no longer sustainable. In short, the reality of racism and iniquitous colonial practice (the atrocity at Amritsar in 1919, and its aftermath, epitomised both) was cloaked in the rhetoric of paternalist trusteeship. Intellectuals, writers and journalists began to portray the British Empire in a way that masked the contradictions between imperial rhetoric and lived reality.¹⁹ In India, British politicians and imperialists attempted to develop a sanitised version of the imperial connection, much as Annie Besant had imagined that a progressive imperialism could be rescued from the chauvinistic militaristic imperial administration, which would uphold a myth of imperial rule as essentially benign. And the ruminations of

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.447-468.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.447.

¹⁹ See the discussion in Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, pp.1-14.

imperialists upon the presentation of the imperial relationship were given ample coverage in the press on Empire Day.

In 1920, the *Madras Mail* reflected on the resurgence of political strife in India and announced that Empire Day 'comes with counsels of moderation'. Nevertheless, nationalist political agitators were accused of 'self aggrandisement' and in an apparent refutation of the principle of national self-determination, (that had been used to justify the war), it was proposed that 'the day of smaller and weaker nations, if temporarily revived, cannot endure'; the clear implication was that India was one of the 'weaker' nations. For India, loyalty to the Empire was seen to be of principal importance for self-preservation, equal to national 'self development' and sometimes taking priority over 'justice'. The *Madras Mail* accepted that imperial policy had its shortcomings, but restated the axiomatic belief that imperial union was essential for prosperity and strength, both in times of war and peace:

Like members of a family who find occasion for controversy in ordinary times, adversity reveals the strength of the bond of the union. But in ordinary times it is as well to dwell together in unity.²⁰

The metaphor of the Empire as family (that had previously been employed by Annie Besant and the Fabian imperialists) contrasted with the chauvinistic bombast that had often typified imperial rhetoric before the war. This tempering of the language of imperialism was characteristic of the inter-war period and is further illustrated by Empire Day editorials in the press that dwelt on 'changed prospects' and 'new values' that would assist in the prolongation of imperialism:

The old methods are gone, the old angles were not always accurate . . .

Empires have tottered and fallen around us. Empire Day fills us with pride and

²⁰ 'Empire Day' in *Madras Mail*, 24 May 1920, p.4.

gratitude . . . not the pride of flag wagging, the pride of arrogance, the pride of not being as others; but the pride of duty, of freedom, of generosity, and of living up to those qualities for which we have been commended in the days that have passed. It is not an easy task.²¹

Although appearing to accept the need for change, there was still an entrenched Anglo-centric, paternalist bent to this way of imagining the empire. The revised conception of the imperial relationship did not embrace the principle of equality; the bestowal of 'freedom' upon Indians was a duty to be performed generously – a refined version of the 'white man's burden'. This ideal of benevolent imperial paternalism quickly migrated from the pages of the press to the speeches delivered on Empire Day, such as in Lucknow in 1921 where the Reverend Norman Bennett explained to his audience of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides that 'We are not here in India from a selfish standpoint. We are here to do our best for India and the British Empire is calling on India to do its best for itself'.²²

Phrases such as 'Empires have tottered and fallen around us' were imbued with anxiety and reveal that some imperialists recognised the danger of imperial conceit, especially in the combustible political and social context of India. The *Madras Mail* wanted to avoid a return to 'the sickly, impractical emotionalism of old Empire Days', which were to be regarded with 'a sort of amused contempt'. It warned darkly that 'something better must replace this or something worse quickly will':

We have travelled a long way since the inauguration of Empire Day . . . Is not flag wagging considered rather stupid and boastful and smug? It was a sign of

²¹ Ibid., 24 May 1921, p.4.

²² Ibid., 25 May 1921, p.8.

stagnation, a people able to observe and preen itself and feel highly self-satisfied.²³

The newspaper wondered what was to replace the 'bond of emotion' that apparently united Britain and her colonies before the war, but was now considered mere 'sentimentality':

What is to take its place? Something, we trust, finer, nobler, of more service to mankind.... [t]he traditions of justice, security, freedom, honour, and instinct in the British Race will survive and find great exponents again. And the common interests, the common heritage of free institutions, the love of order and decency in all things, the possession of a great language and a great literature, enthusiasm to cultivate the fruits of the Earth and enjoy them, in peace together will hold those who own allegiance to King George in a unity of sounder proportions than one depending on precarious ties of affection and sentiment.²⁴

This passage inadvertently signalled the essential problem of recasting the Empire in India. The apparent commonalities that united the 'Empire family' were more often than not the exclusive preserve of whites. For many Indians, 'Justice, security' and 'freedom' were elusive privileges; the British administration's supposed love of order and decency was contingent upon circumstance and, as demonstrated at Amritsar, order was too often imposed at the cost of decency. When the political cant in the *Madras Mail's* editorial was put aside, it seemed that all that remained, as a bonding force, was culture - and a restricted white, British culture at that, even if the claims of the English language and its literature, treasured by many Indians, had certain universal pretensions. In the last analysis, the imperial relationship in India was

²³ 'Empire Day' in *Ibid.*, 24 May 1922, p.6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

always reducible to a dyad of domination and obedience; the linguistic manoeuvring of the press, British politicians and Empire Day activists was an inadequate attempt to disguise that relationship. The Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, offered a more complete camouflage in his Empire Day broadcast of 1925, which was reported widely in the Indian press. He actually pleaded the case for the term 'Empire' to be replaced altogether, insisting that the 'sentiment of Empire' whose bonds 'were light as air, yet strong as iron' should be encouraged but that the word "Empire" should be given a new meaning. He suggested the title "Commonwealth of British Nations" as more appropriate.²⁵

The attempt to soften the phraseology of imperialism, however, was resisted by some of the more zealous imperialists such as Leo Amery, whose reflections were reported by the *Times of India* on Empire Day in 1925. Amery believed that imperial federation was the way to advance the empire in the modern world. His federal vision was based on his economic doctrine and was not concerned with social equality or representative democracy inside the nation itself. He believed that Federation should be based on the constitutional equality of nations within the empire, which would encourage 'other nations [to] seek admission to the Empire partnership'.²⁶ The *Times of India*, however, might have given space to these unsentimental views, but it still cautioned its readers against too strong a reaction against pride in the Empire: The danger today lies not in Jingoism but in a false humility, the attitude which is content to apologise for the existence of the Empire rather than to be keen on trying to strengthen it . . . One need not be a patriot of the Jingo type firmly to believe that the

²⁵ 'Know Your Empire' – Report of Stanley Baldwin's Empire Day broadcast. *Times of India*, 27 May 1925, p. 9.

²⁶ See the reporting of Leo Amery's speech at the Colonial Institute's Empire Day dinner: 'Danger to the Empire', *Times of India Illustrated Weekly*, 24 May 1925, p.49.

British Empire, which owes its growth more to historical accident than to any set plan of military conquest, has a mission in the world.²⁷

The *Times* was careful to distance itself from the 'swashbuckling imperialism' of the pre-war years but steadfastly maintained its support for benevolent imperial expansion or, as the Viceroy explained in his Empire Day speech, an imperialism that celebrated the British race and their centuries-old role of spreading 'the spirit of liberty and responsibility'.²⁸ Empire Day then, had to have a practical and ideological purpose commensurate with this mission:

patriotism is not enough ...to be a living force for the world's good, patriotism must be inspired by a wide sympathy and find its outlet not in oratory but in service. We do not want children in the schools to associate Empire Day with a frantic waving of flags and a raucous singing of Rule Britannia. We do wish them to be taught, through the observance of Empire Day the ideals for which the British Empire stands, Duty, Responsibility, Sympathy and Self Sacrifice. There is a *Noblesse Oblige* of Empire as well as of lineage and they only have a right to be proud of Empire who are willing, in proportion to their power, to serve the Empire.²⁹

Within these conceptions of the imperial relationship that were made public on Empire Day, there were discernable themes of uncertainty and disagreement among British imperialists regarding the function and even the fate of the British Empire in the post-war world. There was a growing lack of confidence in the old assurances of imperial rule. On the one hand there was Stanley Baldwin's call for a semantic shift so that the Empire might be described in softer terms that disguised the reality of imperial domination. On the other hand, there was Leo Amery's reluctance to engage

²⁷ 'Empire Day' in *Times of India*, 24 May 1926, p.8.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

with the social and political realities of imperial rule in the colonies whilst proposing a manifesto for a federated empire with expansive aspirations. Finally, the most widely circulated newspaper in India (one of the most unequal of Baldwin's putative 'Commonwealth of Nations') defended the imperial relationship through a conception of a racial *noblesse oblige*.

As Empire Day became an occasion for debating the character and fate of the British Empire, then, the prospect for Empire Day remaining a meaningful occasion also came under scrutiny. In 1926, *The Englishman* pointed out the Government's failure to exploit the potential of Empire Day and suggested that the celebration was met with indifference partly because of the inclination of the 'average Briton' to be rather unemotional about the subject of Empire and partly because the festival was unlikely to raise the passions of the 'people of India'. Despite its coolness toward Empire Day, *The Englishman* was confident that 'the peoples' of the Empire could be 'relied upon to rally round the flag' when the Empire was threatened and recalled that during the War many had 'voluntarily and cheerfully [given] up their lives'. It was concluded that 'Empire was no empty phrase', but that Empire Day was no longer an appropriate day for an all-India holiday. *The Englishman* conceded that a patriotic celebration was still needed and suggested that maybe the King Emperor's birthday would be a better day, or alternatively, that an 'India Day' should be inaugurated.³⁰

Despite its unremitting support for Empire Day, as early as 1920, the *Madras Mail* also anticipated problems for its continued celebration. This was in the context of the introduction of Armistice Day as a national commemorative event in India:

Now a serious rival has arisen in Armistice Day, for, whilst the 11th November is too important to be passed, it is advanced by some that our commemorations

³⁰ *The Englishman*, 27 May 1926, p.1.

are many enough, and Empire Day might also coincide with the culminating day of our Empire's great victory. The battle of the days will be fought afresh.³¹

As demonstrated earlier, Empire Day had always been infused with rituals of remembrance, particularly in Britain and the white dominions. The memorial aspects of the festival became more pronounced after the war and sometimes the social function of commemoration eclipsed the original intention of promoting an imperial consciousness amongst the young. *The Statesman And Friend of India* reflected the prevailing mood in its suggestion that Empire Day could 'fittingly' be observed as a special day of prayer 'for the spiritual welfare of His Majesty's forces in all parts at home and abroad ... "Lest we forget". . . . It will remind us ... of the debt we owe to the men who defended our homes and liberties in the Great War'.³² The proposal that Empire Day should replicate or even merge with the popular Armistice Day commemoration confirms the prevailing uncertainty about the sustained appeal of Empire Day in its pre-war form.

Even the Earl of Meath attempted to modify the cultural symbols of the festival. In 1921, at a Scouts and Guides Empire Day rally in Lucknow, it was announced that Meath had recommended the wearing of a daisy on Empire Day because it was the national flower of England and the petals represented the component parts of the empire.³³ Meath's proposal that Empire loyalists wear a flower as a symbol of imperial communion preceded the British Legion's use of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance by several months. However, the provenance of the remembrance poppy has been traced to North America (in common with Empire Day, it was inspired by a Canadian) where it was taken up long before coming to

³¹ 'Empire Day' in *Madras Mail*, 24 May 1920, p.4.

³² 'Empire Day' in *The Statesman and Friend of India*, 24 May 1922, p.6.

³³ 'Empire Day at Lucknow', *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1921, p.8.

Britain via France.³⁴ It is probable that Meath was aware of the popularity of the poppy in France and North America and reworked the idea as a way of revitalizing Empire Day. In comparison to the poppy (which was quickly established as a cultural icon and the mass-produced artificial flower was readily available for sale in India on Armistice Day between the wars)³⁵ the daisy as a symbol of empire did not inspire the public imagination in Britain and was even less likely to succeed in India because, amongst other reasons, as one Empire Day speaker pointed out, 'it was impossible to get daisies in Lucknow'.³⁶ The benign and passive symbol of the daisy contrasted sharply with the martial associations of the instantly recognizable Union Flag - Meath's attempt to introduce a new icon of Empire suggests he well recognised that the characteristic emblem of empire, although beloved by many, was also encumbered with divisive connotations. In common with other imperialists, after the war Meath came to realise it was necessary to represent the empire within the empire in a more palatable way.

The *Madras Mail's* suggestion of a rivalry between Empire Day and Armistice Day is unsubstantiated. In fact, according to the letters and diary entries of some Britons stationed in India, an apathetic or lukewarm attitude to both Empire Day and Armistice Day was more likely. In the letters that Reverend Aubrey Storr Fox sent to his mother in England between 1913 and 1934, Empire Day is never mentioned. However, he sometimes referred to events that were obviously Empire Day rallies even if he wasn't alert to their significance. For example, in both 1933 and 1934 he wrote that he would be attending 'some sort of Girl Guide show at St. Denys' on May

³⁴ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994), p.99.

³⁵ Hodder Diary: see entry for 11 November 1937 in *APAC Mss Eur/F233/17*.

³⁶ Reverend Norman Bennett speaking at Lucknow Empire Day Celebrations, 'Empire Day at Lucknow' in *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1921, p.8.

24.³⁷ The Girl Guides and Boy Scouts were at this time the vanguard of the Empire Day movement in India and, despite Storr Fox's indifference, it can safely be assumed that they were indeed Empire Day demonstrations. In other years, he describes May 24 as 'barren of events' or 'innocuous' and it is evident that Empire Day had no import for him.³⁸

Armistice Day had a greater impact on Storr Fox, but only because he detested the day and often made great efforts to avoid having to perform services: in 1921, he complained of a poor turnout and hoped that there would be a 'complete fizzling out of this new festival of the Church of England.'³⁹ In 1923, he described it as 'a hell day',⁴⁰ and in subsequent years he made efforts to avoid Armistice Day altogether.⁴¹ George Hodder⁴² arrived in India in after the war with a more enthusiastic attitude to both Empire Day and Armistice Day. However, it was rare that he actually participated in any event or celebration during the many years that he lived and worked in India. During 1924, his first year in India, he was disappointed at the lack of attention paid to either of the special days. Of Empire Day, he wrote that 'it is to be noted that the only effect of Empire Day in this part of the world is that the bankers and cashiers in Government employ get a holiday so that Sahibs cannot so much as buy a one anna stamp'.⁴³ Hodder frequently forgot to mark the two minutes silence

³⁷ Aubrey Storr Fox, letter to Mother, 23 May 1934 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/25*, p.6. See also Aubrey Storr Fox, letter to Mother, May 24 1934 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/23*, p.7.

³⁸ Aubrey Storr Fox, Letter to Mother, 19 May 1929 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/18*, and Aubrey Storr Fox, Letter to Mother, 28 May 1924 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/13*, p.1. In the 1924 letter Aubrey reports being invited to a 'Ladies of the Empire tea' on 29 May, but makes no association between it and Empire Day.

³⁹ Aubrey Storr Fox, Letter to Mother, 13 November 1921 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/9*

⁴⁰ Aubrey Storr Fox, Letter to Mother, 12 November 1923, pp.2-3 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/12*

⁴¹ See for example letters written in 1928, 1929 and 1930 in APAC, *Mss Eur/E 343/17*; *Mss Eur/E 343/18* and *Mss Eur/E 343/19*.

⁴² Hodder was first an assistant and later a manager for tea companies in Assam and Bengal between 1924-37. he became a civil servant during the Second World War.

⁴³ Hodder Diary: entry for 24 May 1924 in APAC *Mss Eur /F233/4*

on Armistice Day⁴⁴ although there were several years when he did observe the day.⁴⁵ Empire Day, on the other hand, barely gets a mention in Hodder's diaries although there is an occasional gripe about its non-observance; in 1937, he wrote that despite it being Empire Day 'no one even remarked on the fact'.⁴⁶ It is not until the war that Hodder actually got to mark Empire Day in India. In 1941, although full of pessimism about the course of the war, Hodder attended an Empire Day dinner at his club, which he described as 'a very good show indeed'. As with many Empire Day events in India, this dinner was organised not by British patriots but by loyal Indians.⁴⁷

Whatever the mixed attitudes of the British in India to Empire Day and Armistice Day, newspaper reports indicate that Armistice Day ceremonies were attended by far more people than those who turned out on Empire Day and that there was a much larger contingent of Indians present on these occasions.⁴⁸ Hodder and Storr Fox's perceptions of Empire Day suggest that during their time in India, the celebration had little impact and lacked significance. However, contrary to their experiences, Empire Day did not simply fade away.

Some of the British living in India continued to mark Empire Day, although for many the introduction of an official holiday in India was simply an opportunity to seek out enjoyable leisure pursuits, as described in the diary of civil servant, Andrew Hume:

⁴⁴ Hodder Diary: *APAC Mss Eur /F233/7* and *APAC Mss Eur /F233/10*

⁴⁵ Hodder Diary: see entries for 11 November 1924 in *APAC Mss Eur /F233/4*; 11 November 1927 in *APAC Mss Eur /F233/12* and 11 November 1929 in *APAC Mss Eur /F233/13*.

⁴⁶ Hodder Diary: *APAC Mss Eur /F233/17*

⁴⁷ Hodder Diary: *APAC Mss Eur /F233/21*

⁴⁸ See examples from *Times of India*, 12 November 1921, 12 November 1926, 12 November 1931 and 12 November 1935. There is clearly scope for research into the history of Armistice Day in India

Empire Day and a partial holiday, except for an hour or two's work in the treasury....The tennis club gave an at home. [A]ttended with three others who were invited. It was really terrifically hot, close and oppressive.⁴⁹

This was in many ways typical of the Empire Day experience of the British domiciled communities in India. There were opportunities for pleasure and relaxation afforded by the half-holiday on Empire Day, but these were often curtailed by the extreme climate. May was not a good time for celebrations of any kind in the scorched flatland areas. Nevertheless, in some other locations, which were not unfavourably affected by the heat, efforts were made to energise the day, such as at Murree in 1926:

[Empire Day] was very much kept up . . . The various schools celebrated it with entertainments and sports and at each of them there was a big parade. The adult population of the station celebrated the day in a more frivolous fashion, by dancing. There were two fancy-dress balls that night, which means that one was well attended and the other badly, since we have not yet sufficient people up here to crowd two affairs.⁵⁰

In Bangalore the pre-war tradition of marching to Queen Victoria's statue in Cubbon Park was maintained by the scouts⁵¹ and similar rallies took place in other places such as Naini Tal, Calcutta, Delhi, Karachi, Simla and Lahore⁵² The Empire Day Scout and Guide Rallies were not necessarily small affairs (as demonstrated by the occasional photographs that appeared in the *Times of India*) and they invariably attracted large crowds to witness the commemorative activities such as saluting rituals, parading and tableaux formation. In 1932, 500 scouts assembled at Lahore on Empire Day and the *Times of India* reported that Scout and Guide rallies took place at

⁴⁹ Diaries of Andrew Hume: entry for 24 May 1928 in APAC Mss Eur D 724 /65.

⁵⁰ 'Notes from Murree', *Times of India*, 1 June 1926, p.11.

⁵¹ See 'Mofussil Intelligence' in the *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1921, p.8 and 25 May 1922, p.4.

⁵² Ibid., 25 May 1921 p.6; 25 May 1923 p.5; 25 May 1926 p.8 and *Times of India*, 28 May 1927; p. 12, 9 June 1929 p.32; 25 May 1932, p.8 and 29 May 1937, p. 28.

60 other locations in India.⁵³ During the interwar years the scout movement was in the vanguard of the Empire Day Movement generally and in India scouts and guides regularly made themselves visible paying homage to the Empire.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, scouts in India were divided by politics during the 1920s and 1930s and it may be assumed that not all those involved in the Scout Movement were affiliated to the Empire Day Movement.

The Boy Scout Movement had been established in India in 1909. The first troops were comprised of European and Anglo-Indian boys - Indians were excluded. However, separate scouting organisations for Indian boys appeared between 1913 and 1916, including those closely associated with the nationalist movement such as Annie Besant's Indian Boy Scout Association and the Seva Samiti Scout Association.⁵⁵ Besant's scout movement proved most popular and by 1920 it had attracted over 20,000 members.⁵⁶ In 1921, the Government decided to encourage Baden Powell's movement as a means of countering the growth of unauthorised scouting groups and the various scouting organisations were merged into the new All India Boy Scout Association. However the nationalist-orientated Seva Samiti objected to the loyalty pledge to the King as Emperor of India⁵⁷ and remained outside of Baden Powell's movement whilst having an active role within the non-cooperation movement.⁵⁸ Hence on Empire Day many, but not all, Indian boy scouts became regular participants in the rituals of the occasion.

⁵³ 'For the King and the Great Empire', *Times of India*, 25 May 1932, p.8.

⁵⁴ Further examples include: a 'grand rally' of the Delhi Boy Scout troops observed by a large gathering of spectators (*The Englishman*, 27th May 1926, p.6); celebrations at Mussorie where Boy Scouts and Girl Guides headed a grand march (*Times of India* 25 May 1926, p.13); the massed drill and parade at Sanawar, (Ibid., 28 May 1927, p. 12.) and the Simla Scouts Empire Day Rally (Ibid., 25 May 1934, p.9.)

⁵⁵ See G.R. Madan, *Indian Social Problems*, p.135.

⁵⁶ Timothy Parsons, *Race, Resistance and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Ohio, 2004), p.65.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ben Misra, 'Mass Disobedience as India's Weapon of Revolt' in *Current History* (New York), 17:6 (1923:Mar.), p.983.

In many respects, the prominence of scouts (who were often joined by military cadets and other school-children)⁵⁹ at so many Empire Day events in India is an indication that the general appeal of the celebration for the British in India had receded. Empire Day appeared to be losing the capacity to attract a community-wide range of celebrants and increasingly it encompassed mainly the narrow juvenile constituency originally targeted by Meath. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the British administration in India believed that Empire Day was still a crucial political event and Congress thought it an important enough occasion to disrupt through the organisation of counter demonstrations.

II

In 1921, the new Viceroy, Lord Reading (Rufus Issacs), was dismayed by the muted celebration of Empire Day in India, but he believed that, in time, it might become more popular: 'We celebrate in England because we are so proud of our Empire . . . is it too much to express the hope that it may not be very long before in India too Empire Day will be a day of pride to those who are partners, full partners in that great Empire?'⁶⁰ The Viceroy's disappointment with the lack of enthusiasm for Empire Day in India appeared to demonstrate disconnection with the popular politics of the post war era. In 1921, the first wave of non-cooperation was at its most intense. Ghandi had successfully mobilised Congress and the Khilafat movement in a united campaign that had introduced new cohorts of activists to nationalist ideology from 'deep within the provinces'; for the first time British rule in India was being challenged on a sub-continental level.⁶¹ The idea of India as a sovereign nation was

⁵⁹ See *Madras Mail*, 25 May 1923, p.5 and *Times of India*, 25 May 1926, p.13 and 24 May 1933, p.8.

⁶⁰ From Lord Reading's speech at the Viceregal Empire Day banquet in Simla, 1921 in 'Empire Day celebrations', *Madras Mail*, 28 May 1921, p. 6.

⁶¹ Brown *Modern India*, p.225.

beginning to enter public consciousness to a wider extent and belief in the importance of the imperial connection was being eroded. In 1920, Gandhi had formally announced his loss of faith in the 'representatives of the Empire' and his loss of esteem for 'a Government so evilly manned.'⁶²

In this context Lord Reading's expectation of Empire Day solidarity seems excessively optimistic. However, the Imperial Government understood its key partners in India to be those educated Indians who worked within the formal system of Government or provided influential support from the fringes. The Viceroy concluded that despite Congress's adaptation of its political methods and its temporary abandonment of constitutional activity, Gandhi's marshalling of 'the ignorant masses . . . has the advantage of bringing intellectuals and persons of property to us'.⁶³ To a degree, the Viceroy was proved right. Judith Brown recounts how despite the near loss of moderate political support in 1921, the Government of India's 'continuing solicitation of collaboration' was a major factor in the preservation of British authority.⁶⁴

There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that for a few years after the war, the imperial administration in India believed that Empire Day retained its potential as a propaganda tool and as a symbol of unity among the empire's 'partners'. Thus, the Government of India attempted to advance Empire Day by making it a public holiday in 1918. In Bombay, it was claimed that the holiday facilitated a growth in the number of celebrants, as previously 'people could not attend public meetings to celebrate the day in a suitable manner'.⁶⁵ However, despite such claims, there is little evidence to suggest that the granting of a holiday stimulated Empire Day in India. Regardless of

⁶² Ibid., p.221.

⁶³ See Reading's Telegram to Secretary of State, 15 October 1921, quoted in Sarkar, *Modern India*, p.205.

⁶⁴ Brown, *Modern India*, p.227.

⁶⁵ 'Empire Day. Celebration in Bombay' in *Times of India*, 25 May 1920, p.10.

the Government's endorsement, there was a paucity of initiative at central or local level in organising events to celebrate the patriotic festival. There was a yearly instruction issued by the Viceroy that all Government offices should be closed on Empire Day⁶⁶ and in 1921 (at the height of the first non-cooperation campaign) the administration issued an additional reminder to all departments that Empire Day should be celebrated as a public holiday.⁶⁷ But, such bland formalities seem to have been the extent of Government initiative and even a prompt by the Governor of Madras in 1920, who sought the Home Department's lead in respect of instructions for the celebration,⁶⁸ was met with a perfunctory and lacklustre reply that went no further than advising the Governor that 'the 24th May (Empire Day) should be notified under the Negotiable Instruments Act as Public Holiday.'⁶⁹

Although action at a governmental level was hardly inspiring, Empire Day celebrations of one kind or another continued to be organised in India until the end of the Second World War and, despite its obvious decline, its symbolism remained important enough for Congress to organise counter demonstrations in the early 1930s. If there was any real 'Battle of the Days' it was centred on the tactics of the nationalist movement in instituting their own commemorative days that deliberately coincided with Empire Day or thereabouts. Such initiatives were mostly a feature of the period of heightened civil disobedience in the early 1930s. The English language Indian newspaper, *The Leader* (based in Allahabad) detailed some of these occasions, including a very well attended Bombay event in 1930 where Congress had called for Empire Day in Bombay to be observed as 'Dharasana Day' in commemoration of the

⁶⁶ See APAC P/10842, *Home Department Proceedings* No. 1215 - No. 1218, 29 April 1920; APAC P/10598; *Home Department Proceedings* No.260, May 1919 and APAC P/10374, *Home Department Proceedings* No. 396-397, 21 May 1918.

⁶⁷ APAC, P/11047, *Home Department Proceedings*, No. 56 -57, 9-10 May 1921.

⁶⁸ APAC P/10842, *Home Department Proceedings*, No. 1291-1, telegram from R. A. Graham, Acting Chief Secretary to Governor of Madras to the Secretary of the Government of India, 21 May 1918.

⁶⁹ APAC P/10842, No. 1215, 29 April 1920.

recent (21 May) Satyagraha protest at Dharasana salt works, fifty miles north of Bombay. The American journalist Webb Miller's account of the distressing scenes at Dharasana, where Indian police tortured and brutalised hundreds of peaceful demonstrators, was published in over 1,300 newspapers worldwide (despite an attempt by the Government of India to censor his report).⁷⁰ On the festival day of the British Empire, a sombre procession wound through the city of Bombay, which included ambulance cars carrying some twenty-five of the injured. At least two peaceful protesters had died of their injuries at Dharasana and the procession was conducted in complete silence,⁷¹ which was a powerful rejoinder to the intended gaiety and patriotic pride of Empire Day.

In 1932, Congress called for the commemoration of 'Gandhi Day' on May 24 and the Lucknow Swadeshi League organised an All India Swadeshi Day on May 29 that included a procession and a public meeting.⁷² In the same year a hartal (work stoppage) was organised by Congress in Cawnpore on Empire Day and a procession and meeting in Dehli commemorated 'Congress Day'. If the deliberate targeting of Empire Day by Congress wasn't enough, then moderate liberals and Muslim nationalists further undermined Empire Day with the organisation of a series of rival commemorative events in late May. In 1930, the All India Muslim Conference on Palestine Affairs organised 'Palestine Day' celebrations on May 16th at Bulsar, Gandevi, Calcutta, Parantej, Mahandha, Borsad, Rangpur and nine other locations where a complete hartal was observed, processions took place and mass meetings were held. In Karachi, 'Goodwill Day' was celebrated in some of the schools on May 18. This was an innovation that had originated from the League of Nations Union in Wales ten years previously. It was a direct challenge to Empire Day in that it was

⁷⁰ Mazhar Kibriya, *Ghandi and Indian Freedom Struggle* (New Delhi, 1999), pp.284-285.

⁷¹ *The Leader*, 28 May 1930, p.10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 25 May 1932, p.4 and 26 May 1932, p.7.

based on a constituency of school children who were encouraged to favour the idea of the League of Nations as the most appropriate supranational organisation, rather than the British Empire.⁷³

Sometimes the British even succeeded in undermining the celebration themselves. In 1927, in an action reminiscent of Gandhi's release from prison in South Africa on Empire Day 1909, the British chose Empire Day to release S.A. Dange, the prominent Bombay communist and labour leader.⁷⁴ Dange had been imprisoned for four years in a high profile conspiracy case as the British tried to repress communist organisation in India. A grand reception was organised for Dange at Congress House in Bombay and the significance of the day was repeatedly emphasised as speakers heralded the apparent 'death knell of capitalistic imperialism and the British Empire.'⁷⁵ An opportunity to further assail Empire Day was handed to the nationalists by the British due to the arrest on the same day of "General" Avari, a prominent figure in the non-violent Satyagraha movement, an incident that the *Indian National Herald* described as 'the latest atrocity perpetrated on the "Empire Day"'.⁷⁶

The Indian National Herald, a short-lived English language nationalist newspaper, believed that the significance of the 'pomp requisitioned on Empire Day to make the spirit of Imperialism vivid and natural' was that 'ceremonies come into being when realities decline'. In 1927, it published a long editorial on the subject of Empire Day claiming that the 'joyous anticipation' among some in India was paradoxical to the 'exhausted mission of empire'. Britain, it pointed out was the only

⁷³ 'Palestine Day Celebration in India', in *Times of India*, 27 May 1930, p.3 and 'Goodwill Day - First Celebration in India', in *Ibid.*, 27 May 1930, p.4.

⁷⁴ For brief biographical details, see Sankar Ghose, *Socialism and Communism in India* (New Dehli, 1971), pp.58-59 and Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Social* (New York, 1993), p.16.

⁷⁵ *Indian National Herald*, 26 May 1927, p.6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

European country that 'rejoices in the possession of an Empire', but that no amount of imperial ceremonial will be a substitute for liberty.'⁷⁷ *The Indian National Herald* believed that the conduct of imperialists in India represented a 'moral evil' and poured scorn on the Indians who participated in Empire Day:

The Indian who affects exuberance over the Empire, as now constituted, is obviously gravely deluded by propagandist dope, a designing hypocrite, or a witless flunkey, because Empire conveys to him the negation of freedom.⁷⁸

The authority of Empire Day was thus challenged by newspaper criticism and a proliferation of commemorative days and political protests that in one way or another undermined the imperial celebration. However, it is notable that Congress made a conscious effort to appropriate the symbolic power of the occasion in the initiation of a national Flag Day from 1923. Arundhati Virmani has explored Gandhi's efforts to institutionalise the Indian tricolour within the nationalist movement and argued that the Flag Day (which took place annually in mid-July) not only replicated the rituals of the imperial ceremony, but also retained the 'very essence of Empire Day . . . with Indian culture assimilated into an imperial model'.⁷⁹ Congress adopted the ritualised veneration of the flag, including saluting rituals and patriotic songs in an event that aimed to create a national ceremonial rite to bring together the disparate populations of a 'complex political entity' in much the same way as the Empire Day Movement aspired to create a 'ceremony of belonging'.

Virmani notes the subsequent success of the Indian flag as a device in rallying support

⁷⁷ 'Flummery of Imperialism' in *ibid.*, 24 May 1927, p.5. Mussolini's 'pale and decadent imitation' of imperial grandeur was written off as pure vanity. Interestingly, a decade later the *Times of India* reported on 'Empire Day in Rome' which consisted of a huge military parade and 'Empire Day' march involving thousands of colonial troops and watched by over half a million Italians. In what seemed like an envious tone it was pointed out that 'The idea of Empire . . . was developed with the full powers of display at the government's command, see *Times of India*, 22 May 1937, p.22.

⁷⁸ *The Indian National Herald*, 24 May 1927, p.5.

⁷⁹ Arundhati Virmani, 'National Symbols Under Colonial Domination: The Nationalization Of The Indian Flag, March-August 1923' in *Past and Present*, 1999, Vol. 164, pp. 192-197.

for nationalist political endeavours and demonstrates how the creation of a national flag created a direct rival to the Union Flag, the symbol of imperial domination.⁸⁰

The new Indian flag came to be used at the many new 'national' holidays created by Congress in the 1930s to commemorate the lives and actions of Indian nationalist heroes and particular events such as the Amritsar Massacre. In 1930, Congress declared that its goal was no longer self-government within the British Empire, but complete independence. The 'Declaration of Independence Day' was assigned as January 26 and the flag designed by Gandhi was formally adopted as the national symbol.⁸¹ The civil disobedience movement of the 1930s was animated by the nationalist slogan 'Up up with the National Flag, Down down with the Union Jack'.⁸² Lisa Trevedi points out that 'in all, the range and number of new holidays were designed to make it difficult for people to live for more than a few weeks without thinking about the national community that Gandhi and his followers sought to create'.⁸³ In comparison, the efforts to promote the idea of an imperial community in India through the annual Empire Day celebration appeared futile.

Certainly, the groundswell of nationalist support was deeply unsettling for the British, although some comfort was offered by the continuing faithfulness of sections of the Indian population, who resisted the attempts of Congress to challenge Empire Day and showed their support for the British through their display of the Union Flag. The patriotic flags and banners put out by a number of Indians on Empire Day were evidently reassuring for some British commentators who were buoyed by the devoted actions of loyalists. For example, in 1930, the *Times of India's* Simla correspondent

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Lisa Trevedi provides a useful concise account of the development of the national flag and its importance to the nationalist movement after 1930 in Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's nation: homespun and modern India* (Bloomington, 2007), pp.104-107.

⁸² Virmani, 'National Symbols Under Colonial Domination', p. 197.

⁸³ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's nation*, p.108.

claimed that the 'lavishly beflagged' streets of Simla were a sign of 'unusual cordiality' in the city, and:

particularly noticeable was the number of Union Jacks displayed by Indians on their houses. Sometimes they were on poles, at others just hung out of windows. How they were shown was evidently a secondary consideration. The first was to make a demonstration of loyalty and also, as one could easily perceive, one of appreciation.⁸⁴

This flourish of support on Empire Day in Simla was connected to a political battle between some Simla traders and Congress activists in the city. The *Times of India*, suggested that some Indians had used Empire Day to protest against nationalist attempts to coerce them into joining anti-British protest actions:

The Congress, if you please, has presumed to order them when to open a shop and when to close as though on his return from Moscow Pundit Motilal Nehru had brought back with him for Congress use the whole Bolshevik plan of depriving private traders of their rights and liberties.⁸⁵

A number of Indian traders in Simla disagreed with the nationalist non-cooperation strategies and resented the conduct of the local Congress activists, which apparently included the hounding and hectoring of Indian tradesmen in an attempt to force them to support hartals. This harrying tactic was exemplified by assaults upon the premises of a tradesman who displayed a signboard 'proudly indicating his earlier service in the King- Emperor's uniform'. The tradesman refused to be intimidated by the repeated attacks on his signboard and he had reported the matter to the authorities. On Empire Day the shop in question displayed a large Union Jack, which the *Times of India* regarded as 'a sign of his thanksgiving' that the government had 'beaten up the local

⁸⁴ 'Empire Day in Simla. Indians Loyalty' in *Times of India*, 26 May 1930, p.12.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

trouble makers and thus re-assured him in his rights of citizenship under the British 'Raj'.⁸⁶ Other Indian tradesmen who were supposedly pressurised into keeping a hartal also displayed Union flags on Empire day:

They were under no obligation to do so. Their flags were new and must have cost them money. Their action was therefore spontaneous and genuine like the rise in the Bombay stock market after Mr. Gandhi was shut up.⁸⁷

Despite the apparent joyous atmosphere of cordiality on Empire Day in Simla (the tales of Indian loyalty were supplemented with reports of a large gathering at the Empire Day horse show, an Empire Day production by the Amateur Dramatic Society and a 'great dance'), the abiding impression was that the British and their Indian supporters were besieged by the nationalist movement and Empire Day was more about the resistance of staunch loyalists against a massive tide of anti-British activism, rather than any residual aspiration for the day to be a unifying and universal celebration.

III

However, the utility of Empire Day as a symbol of loyalist Indians' resistance to the surge of nationalism is well illustrated through the example of the Parsis of Bombay. The Parsis had long insisted that their 'destiny' was 'bound up with the British in India',⁸⁸ yet, in Bombay (where most Indian Parsis lived) they did not begin celebrating Empire Day until 1933. This sudden affiliation with Empire Day was linked to the growing influence of the nationalist movement at this time. Parsis had long enjoyed a privileged and influential position within the Raj, which was

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *The Parsi* 1905, 8:324 quoted in T.M. Luhrman, 'Evil in the Sands of Time: Theology and Identity Politics among the Zoroastrian Parsis' in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Aug., 2002), p.868.

incommensurate with their small number.⁸⁹ Their affection for the British was also expressed in terms of a strong identification with western values.⁹⁰ The Parsi elite gained considerable prestige among their own people through the 'titular hierarchy' of the British honours system⁹¹ and they were over-represented in the burgeoning industrial sector, where they filled many higher supervisory and lower management posts.⁹² The advances of the democratic nationalist movement in India threatened those privileges.⁹³

Many Parsis (especially the affluent) were thoroughly anglicised⁹⁴ and, unsurprisingly, they became alienated from other Indians. In 1905, a Parsi journal emphasised the apparent differences between the Parsis and 'the rest of the Indians' and predicted the 'complete Europeanisation of the Parsis' in British India.⁹⁵ Notwithstanding their assimilationist aspirations, Parsis were not accepted as social equals by the colonial establishment. This dynamic of unrequited regard correlated with the experience of the Anglo-Indians, who also saw themselves as more British than Indian, but were kept at arm's length socially by the British.

Given their loyalty, their prominence as imperial collaborators and their protected position, it might be expected that, like the Anglo Indians, the Parsis would have been among the pioneers of the Empire Day Movement in India. However, this

⁸⁹ In 1931, the census recorded 109,329 Parsis living in India. See J.H. Hutton 'Census of India, 1931', which is cited as an authoritative demographic source used by scholars working on Parsi history by T.K. Roy, P.M. Kulkarni, Mari Bhatt, *National Commission for Minorities. Expert Group to analyse 2001 Census data on Religion* (Delhi, 2002), p.2, footnote 1.

⁹⁰ For an account of Parsi involvement in the early nationalist movement and the community's identification with the British up to 1918, see Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Leiden, 2001), pp.301-305.

⁹¹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism. How the British saw their Empire* (London, 2001), pp. 85-100.

⁹² Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, 2003), p.418.

⁹³ For an explanation of the provenance of the Parsis' position during the Raj, see Lührman, 'Evil in the Sands of Time', p.861 and Eckehard Kulke, *The Parsees in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 50.

⁹⁴ Lührman has described them as 'the most westernised indigenous community under the Raj': see 'Evil in the Sands of Time', p.862.

⁹⁵ *The Parsi* 1905, 8:324 quoted in Lührman *ibid.*, p.868.

was not the case. There is no discernible evidence of Parsi Empire Day celebrations at any time before 1933. The Parsi Empire Day events, which were quite separate from the well-established Hindi celebration in the city, were held at the Majestic cinema in Bombay and attracted a large attendance, although some participants were most probably motivated more by the free films on offer than a blossoming imperial spirit.

Beneficiaries of the British honours system were at the forefront of the Parsi Empire Day celebrations. Luminaries such as the J.P. Sir Shapoorji Billimoria, (subsequently Sheriff of Bombay and probably the only Indian accountant ever knighted by the British Government) and the lawyer Sir Jehangir Coyajee spoke about 'the prestige, prosperity and the position of the Parsi community'.⁹⁶ The assertion that 'the Parsi community owed its rise to British Rule' was affirmed repeatedly⁹⁷ and loyalty to the government was claimed to be more of a religious duty than a political action.⁹⁸ It is curious, then, that Parsis did not feel compelled to mark Empire Day until the early 1930s when the festival was rapidly waning. Their late enthusiasm for the celebration can be partly attributed to a disinclination to demonstrate obvious partisan political allegiance.⁹⁹

However, it is obvious that the initiation of an Empire Day celebration was an explicitly political manoeuvre aimed at defending the interests of the older generation against the influence of the nationalist movement amongst younger Parsis. Prior to the 1930s, there had been no large-scale enrolment of Parsis in the nationalist movement,¹⁰⁰ but as the non-cooperation strategy began to expose the weaknesses of the Raj and Congress emerged as a credible alternative to imperial rule, Parsis,

⁹⁶ Billimoria quoted in 'Symbol of Unity, Harmony and Goodwill. What Empire Day means to India. Observance in Bombay: Parsee's faith in Constitutional Methods' in *Times of India*, 25 May 1933, p.8.

⁹⁷ See, for example, reports in *Times of India*, 25 May 1937, p.11; 25 May 1937, p.11 and 25 May 1936, p.14.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 25 May 1933, p.8.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, pp.305-306.

particularly the younger generation, began to embrace Congress in greater numbers. Other Parsis resisted the drift to nationalism, thinking it 'well nigh impossible' that they might find common ground with the majority Indian population and even suggesting that they were 'differently constituted' to Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.¹⁰¹ Most Parsis eschewed the prevalent cultural manifestations of nationalism, such as 'donning Indian clothes, eating Indian food or communicating through Indian customs'.¹⁰² However, as Congress gained ground among Parsis, non-nationalists found themselves increasingly marginalized and political allegiances within the community became sharply polarised.¹⁰³

The political cleavage within the Parsi community partly reflected the transformation of Bombay in the 1920s and the 1930s. Until 1918, the middle class western-educated loyalist minority had dominated Indian politics in the city and were virtually unchallenged; after the war Bombay became a centre of nationalist agitation, working class unrest and communal violence. The British government perceived Bombay as an 'insurrectionary centre' and the Governor of Bombay was profoundly troubled by the civil disobedience campaigns of the early 1930s, which he felt could be described as a mass movement.

The growing influence of Congress raised deep concerns among the elite and titled leaders of the Parsi community. There was a coordinated move in the Parsi press to counter criticism of the Raj and to urge Parsis to have nothing to do with the nationalist movement.¹⁰⁴ New organisations were formed such as the Parsi Patriotic (Loyalty) League and the Young Men's Zoroastrian Association (which was probably a counter to the nationalists' Young Men's Parsi Association). These organisations

¹⁰¹ *The Parsi* 1905, 8:324 quoted in Luhrman, 'Evil in the Sands of Time', p.868.

¹⁰² T. M. Luhrmann, 'The Good Parsi: The Postcolonial 'Feminization' of a Colonial Elite' in *Man*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Jun., 1994), p.346.

¹⁰³ Palsetia, *The Parsis of India*, p.310.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.187-188.

were responsible for promoting the Empire Day rallies in Bombay in 1936 and 1937, which were utilised explicitly as a platform from which to attack Congress¹⁰⁵ and emphasise the advantages of imperial loyalty.¹⁰⁶

The Parsi celebration of Empire Day was evidently a last-ditch defensive tactic of a small minority whose advantageous social position was rapidly destabilized following the war. The previously 'rich and thriving'¹⁰⁷ Parsi community was described in 1932 as getting 'poorer day by day.'¹⁰⁸ Their strong identification with the British and western cultural norms alienated them from the nationalist masses who were manoeuvring to take power and whose politics were increasingly capturing youthful Parsis. The advantages of celebrating Empire Day were probably negligible: there is no evidence in the press that the Parsi event continued after 1937 (even though conservative Parsis resisted the nationalist movement almost until independence). The Indian National Congress demonstrated a generosity of spirit to Parsi empire loyalists and convinced many to change their orientation. Indeed, one of the principal speakers at the first 'Parsee Nationalist Conference' convened on the eve of independence was the erstwhile Empire Day organiser, Sir Cowasjee Jehangir.¹⁰⁹

Another social group who closely associated themselves with the British, the Anglo-Indians, seemed to have all but abandoned Empire Day after the First World War. Despite enthusiastic participation before 1918, newspaper reports of Anglo-Indian Empire Day celebrations are rare during the interwar years. The *Times of India* reported only three Empire Day events, between 1919 and 1947, that can be directly

¹⁰⁵ 'Empire Day in Bombay - Expression of Loyalty to Crown. Empire Day celebrations by Hindus and Parsees', *Times of India*, 25 May 1936, p.14.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., and 'Empire Day Celebration in Bombay. Loyalty to British Crown. Bombay Parsi's tribute' in Ibid., 25 May 1937, p.11.

¹⁰⁷ As described by the Earl of Lyton, quoted by Lührman in 'The Good Parsi', p.358.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Kulke, *The Parsees in India*, p. 264.

linked to the Anglo-Indian community.¹¹⁰ However, this apparent disassociation from the Empire Day Movement does not indicate that the community was becoming any less supportive of the Raj. As Lionel Caplan points out, the main Anglo-Indian journal regularly accentuated the community's bond of 'blood' with the British.¹¹¹ Moreover, Anglo-Indian autobiographies attest to the Anglophile feelings of the community. Eric Stracey wrote of his 'thoroughly western . . . education, culture and outlook' and the 'almost total neglect at school, church and home of the 'Indian' side of . . . [his] background.'¹¹² Another Anglo-Indian, Stan Blackford, innocently unaware of his true ethnic origins, felt certain of his racial superiority whilst at elementary school:

I was seven years of age and was awakening to a growing pride in being who I was, British and Church of England . . . gradually I was getting my facts straight and my priorities right: Britannia ruled the waves, the sun never set on the British Empire, all the best people were British and Church of England [. . .] I certainly knew who I was and on which side of the fence I should take my stand [. . .] Our . . . [schoolmasters] had sprung from a race of Empire builders and felt that they would be failing in their sacred duty if they didn't turn out fearless future defenders of that glorious Empire on which the sun never set.¹¹³

Until further historical research is conducted, one can only speculate as to why the proudly Anglophile Anglo-Indians no longer saw any advantage in openly affiliating

¹¹⁰ See 'Empire Day at Agra' in *Times of India*, 25 May 1926, p.7; *Ibid.*, 25 May 1932, p.8; and 'Celebrations in India' in *Ibid.*, 26 May 1927, p.9.

¹¹¹ Lionel Caplan has surveyed various editions of *The Anglo Indian* in Lionel Caplan, 'Iconographies Of Anglo-Indian Women: Gender Constructs And Contrasts In A Changing Society' in *Modern Asian Studies* 34, 4 (2000), pp.175-176.

¹¹² Eric Stracey, *Odd Man In: My Years in the Indian Police* (Delhi, 1981), p.vii.

¹¹³ Captain Stan Blackford 'One Hell of a Life' *An Anglo Indian Wallah's memoir from the last decades of the Raj* (Self Published, 2000), pp.14-25.

with Empire Day. Certainly some Anglo-Indians, who passed themselves off as Europeans, would not have been inclined to make public their ethnic roots¹¹⁴ and might well have been present at Empire Day events, where formal social barriers were less apparent due to the predominantly outdoor nature of the festival. However, there was a definite dropping away of specifically Anglo-Indian festivities, although this is consistent with the general decline in Empire Day celebrations during this time.

The Anglo-Indian population was very small, with the 1921 census numbering them at 113,090 (roughly equivalent to the Parsis).¹¹⁵ Post war increases in unemployment and a limitation imposed on reserved occupations under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms caused doubt and insecurity within the community.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Anglo-Indians had a direct interest in the maintenance of British rule and it might be expected that they would have continued to emphasise the benefits of the imperial connection through the promotion and celebration of Empire Day. Perhaps, however, it was the active and visible responsibility many Anglo-Indians had in protecting the Raj that might have made continued vociferous participation in the imperial festival a less than prudent choice.

Anglo-Indians played a prominent role in the policing of India during the years of nationalist tumult and communal violence that preceded independence. They made up 75% of the personnel of the Auxiliary Force (AFI), which was frequently deployed to contain disturbances. As government employees, many were compelled to join the AFI as part of their conditions of employment and in areas where no

¹¹⁴ For contemporary discussions of identity within Anglo Indian communities, see Elmer L. Hedin, 'The Anglo Indian Community' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (September, 1934) pp. 165-179 and Paul Frederick Cressey, 'The Anglo Indians. A Disorganised Marginal Group' in *Social Forces* Vol 14, No.2 (December 1935), pp.263-268.

¹¹⁵ Hedin, 'The Anglo Indian Community', p.178.

¹¹⁶ Megan Stuart Mills, 'Some Comments on Stereotypes of the Anglo Indians (Part II)' in *The International Journal Of Anglo-Indian Studies* Volume 1, Number 2, 1996.
<http://www.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/mills1.html>

military were stationed it was the Anglo Indians in the AFI who were mustered in periods of emergency and 'often [had] to fire to kill'.¹¹⁷

This force was usually called upon to maintain order during communal riots [thus] incurring the hostility of the major communities as often the suppression of communal riots meant shooting down, impartially, both Hindu and Muslim miscreants.¹¹⁸

This of course engendered considerable enmity and hatred toward Anglo-Indians from much of the Indian population. Under these circumstances, open participation in Empire Day activities might have been seen as provocative and would have undermined any claim that the AFI was a neutral policing organisation. The role of the AFI in the suppression of nationalist activities was also a cause for resentment of the Anglo-Indians: any notion of impartiality in this respect was harder to maintain. Blackford has candidly acknowledged that 'the Anglo-Indians played a vital part in safeguarding the British interests and in keeping India in subjugation, and for this role they were detested by the Indians'.¹¹⁹

Another probable reason for the Anglo-Indians' abandonment of Empire Day is that a significant section of the Anglo-Indians themselves felt abandoned by the British government in India. By the mid 1930's, the effect of the gradual loss of reserved occupations was obvious as one third of Anglo-Indians of working age were unemployed.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the esteem that Anglo-Indians held for the British was in no way reciprocated and many within the community increasingly (albeit

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Frank Anthony, *Britain's Betrayal in India. The Story of the Anglo Indian Community* (New Dehli, 1969), p.3. See also Megan Stuart Mills who explains that the exemplary and often heroic role played by the AFI during the crisis of partition did much to reinforce the claim of communal impartiality of the Anglo Indians and Nehru was moved to 'thank the community expressly' in Mills, 'Some Comments on Stereotypes'.

¹¹⁹ Blackford, *One Hell of a Life*, p.96.

¹²⁰ Allen D Grimshaw, 'The Anglo-Indian Community. The Integration of a Marginal group' in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 18, No.2 (February 1959), pp.232.

reluctantly) began to recognise that their future lay with Indians in an independent India and not in the imaginary motherland of England.

Whereas some community leaders found it difficult to see Anglo-Indians as anything other than British, other prominent Anglo-Indians, such as Sir Henry Gidney, began to understand that an acceptance of 'dual loyalty, to both Britain and to India' would be a far more pragmatic position. Gidney who had been president of the Anglo-Indian Empire League subsequently became the recognised leader of Anglo-Indians and was nominated for their one reserved seat in the legislative assembly. However, the Anglo-Indians suffered continued rebuffs from the British Government who, for the purposes of employment law, refused to define Anglo-Indians as anything other than 'statutory natives of India' (with unabashed hypocrisy the British defined Anglo-Indians as 'European British subjects' when it came to military and defence expediencies) and insisted that they had 'a permanent stake in India and no other country'. However, as Gidney observed, the acceptance of India as 'our Motherland was laden with anxiety and suspicion.'¹²¹ In 1925, Lord Birkenhead (the Secretary of State for India) advised Anglo-Indians who were concerned about their future that 'the community as a whole has no future outside India, and . . . its best interests will in the long run be served by throwing in its lot, generally speaking, with the Indian peoples'.¹²² In the face of such direct rejection, it is understandable that the Anglo-Indians' appetite for pro-imperialist demonstrations diminished. With a mixture of political expediency and (especially among the younger generation) an acceptance that there could be pride in cultivating an Indian identity, the Anglo-

¹²¹ Alison Blunt, "Land of our Mothers': Home, Identity and Nationality for Anglo Indians in British India 1919-1947" in *History Workshop Journal*, Number 54 (2002), p.50.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.57.

Indians who chose to remain in India 'found themselves ready to take their place in the front rank of Indian Nationalism.'¹²³

Another constituency of loyalist support on Empire Day before the War had been the Muslim League (although like the League itself, Muslim Empire Day celebrations had been disparate and generally uncoordinated). Yet by the end of the War, the potential advantages for most Muslims of a demonstration of imperial loyalty had dissipated. The paradox of British policy in granting the Muslims separate electorates in India was that, although this tactic might have garnered political advantage for the British administration in the short term, it also created a *sine qua non* for Muslim politicians¹²⁴ that soon became a bargaining point in their dealings with the Indian National Congress. That is, if Muslims could reach an accord on separate electorates with Congress, as the Muslim League did at Lucknow in 1916, then Muslims could act to advance their national interests, rather than being wholly beholden to the British administration to protect their provincial interests. As we have seen, before 1914, many Muslims in India, including many in the Muslim League, had been prominent on Empire Day in the organisation of loyalty meetings. At this time the assertion of an imperial identity by prominent Muslims coincided with their vested interest in supporting the partition arrangements in Bengal. When the British announced the revocation of the Partition in 1911, the Muslim League was radicalised and abandoned their imperial loyalty in favour of a political cooperation with nationalist Hindus.¹²⁵ The political utility of Empire Day for Muslim all-India politics was thus negated. Even as the Muslim-Hindi nationalist accord began to loosen in the 1920's, there was no turning back for the Muslim League. The chief concern of the

¹²³ Frank Anthony quoted by Blunt, 'Land of our Mothers', p.61.

¹²⁴ See Judith M Brown, 'India' in Brown and Louis, 'Oxford History of the British Empire', Vol IV, p.435.

¹²⁵ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p.143.

Muslims became the political shape of India *after* independence:¹²⁶ hence Empire Day was worthless to them as a political tool. It should be noted however that marginal groups of Muslim loyalists were still apparent such as the Muslim Citizens' League in Delhi, who organised an Empire Day meeting in 1932 and called upon 'all responsible people of India to counteract the propaganda begun by a section of Indian people for independence and severance from the Empire'.¹²⁷

IV

Notwithstanding the vacillations of some loyalist groups, the long-established Empire Day celebration in Bombay continued without interruption until independence. However, longevity, in this case, did not equate with efficacy. After the war Bombay became a hub of nationalist activity; it was also a focal point of industrial strife and communal tensions, which frequently exploded into violent riots. In this context, the assembling of Indian loyalists who gathered on Empire Day was something of an anachronistic curiosity. Yet, the speeches of P.B. Joshi and his compatriots serve as a useful indicator of the dilemma faced by Indian moderates who were determined to retain the imperial connection, but also campaigned for the constitutional change necessary to equalise political and social relationships.

What is of greatest significance seems to be the dogged maintenance of faith with the British despite the imperial government's obvious intention to crush the nationalist movement and retain executive power as long as it was practicable. As it happened, the first post-war Empire Day celebration in Bombay coincided with the period of widespread civil disturbances in protest against the Rowlatt Acts. P.B. Joshi and Sir Jugamohandas Vurjeevandas censured Congress's civil disobedience strategy,

¹²⁶ Brown, *Modern India*, pp.236-238.

¹²⁷ *Times of India*, 25 May 1932, p.8.

particularly the episodes of criminality that had occurred during the anti-Rowlatt protests.¹²⁸ But, there was no mention, of the dreadful atrocity at Amritsar. It was two years before Joshi alluded to this subject on Empire Day and then he resorted to euphemism ('the Punjab tragedy') and called for conciliation – 'forgive and forget' – rather than justice.¹²⁹ Although he did criticise the British for their wrongheaded policy of 'coercion and repression', Joshi continued to admonish the nationalists for their 'hatred and non-cooperation' and he insisted that Indian self-government would only come about under conditions of 'mutual confidence and mutual cooperation and goodwill'.¹³⁰

The quandary of Bombay's Indian imperial loyalists was made known by their attempts on Empire Day to balance their judicious criticism of the British with their rejection of nationalist strategies of protest; in essence they were trapped in a political double bind. Indians who were prominent within the Empire Day Movement generally held high office or positions of status and privilege within the imperial system. The Empire Day speeches of loyalist Indians were generally a criticism of the government that was carefully worded, a mixture of obeisance and remonstrance, and any association with the ideology of the radical nationalists was avoided. It is noteworthy that the emphasis upon the principles of national self-determination and democracy, which had been a feature of Empire Day during the War, was hurriedly dropped after 1918. Joshi simply returned to his explicatory lectures on the 1858 Proclamation and constructed a myth of a golden age during Victoria's reign, which he compared favourably to the unfortunate circumstances of post-war India.¹³¹ Joshi failed to perceive that politics in India had undergone a paradigm shift and his

¹²⁸ 'Empire Day. Celebrations in Bombay.' in *Times of India*, 26 May 1919, p.7.

¹²⁹ 'Empire Day. Bombay Celebrations' in *ibid.*, 25 May 1921, p.10.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ 'Empire Day. Celebration in Bombay' in *ibid.*, 25 May 1920, p.10.

advocacy of lawful and deferential opposition coupled with eternal patience was not even faintly encouraging to the newly politicised masses. It was a form of political denial. He condemned Congress's 'mischievous methods of non-cooperation, obstruction and boycott' and asserted that self rule within the Empire should be sought through 'the sympathy, cooperation and goodwill of Great Britain'.¹³² After 1918, Joshi's faith in the empire drew opprobrium from fellow Indians and praise from the imperialist press.¹³³ However, by 1926, even *The Times of India*, which saluted Joshi's 'splendid example of loyalty', was prepared to concede that Empire Day was 'an unpopular cause', and Joshi, its 'champion', was not highly regarded within the wider political community of Bombay.¹³⁴ In 1928, at the last Empire Day meeting before his death, Joshi by now appeared angrily disillusioned. He was upset at the British Government's recent decision to appoint only British parliamentarians to the Simon Commission,¹³⁵ which was 'not a cause of any enthusiasm or joy' and he asserted that 'the exclusion of Indians from the Commission has been considered by a majority of our people as an affront to the Indian nation'.¹³⁶ Other prominent loyalists shared Joshi's outrage: for example, Diwan Bahadur T Rangachariar, an Indian dignitary visiting Australia for the opening of Parliament House in 1927,¹³⁷ took time out to speak at the Empire Day celebrations in Brisbane and declared that,

without home rule it was impossible to expect Indians to join in the empire celebrations with the same heart and spirit. . . loyalty cannot be forced or

¹³² *Times of India*, 25 May 1926, p.10.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1921, p.6.

¹³⁴ 'A Fine Example', in *ibid.*, 26 May 1926, p.8.

¹³⁵ The body set up to review the constitutional arrangements in India and recommend reform.

¹³⁶ *Times of India*, 25 May 1928, p.10.

¹³⁷ National Archives of Australia, Department of Home and Territories memorandum commenting on representations by Diwan T Rangachariar on behalf of Indian residents of Australia, 27 August 1927 NAA: A1, 1927/12853, p. 8, viewed at <http://uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/contents.asp?cID=93> (accessed 03 June 2009). Rangachariar was the Chairman of the Indian Cinematograph Committee, a British Government initiative that was concerned with controlling foreign film to promote the British and Indian film industry. See Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (University of California, 1987), p. 44.

driven by military strength, neither can it be generated by mere authority. It must come from the heart and spring from the encouragement of the great ideal the Empire has in view. It is that spirit we stand for, namely Home Rule in India.¹³⁸

However, the pronouncements of imperial loyalists were, by this time, of little significance to the course of politics in India. A second wave of non-cooperation was initiated in 1930, which drew in groups previously immune to the nationalist movement,¹³⁹ and Congress was able to legitimise the idea of complete independence for India. In this context, the Empire Day Movement in India was moribund.

As Congress's campaigns of civil disobedience intensified, Bombay's Indian Empire Day activists reined in their criticism of the government and concentrated upon political attacks against the nationalists, condemning the 'principles of socialism which were being advocated by Nehru and other political leaders.'¹⁴⁰ The Empire Day Movement in India was clearly irrelevant and beleaguered. In the midst of the communal violence that shattered Bombay in the 1930s, Empire Day enthusiasts made desperate and grandiose claims as to the potential social utility of the celebration, such as 'if the significance of Empire Day was properly understood, it was bound to solve the problem of communal differences'¹⁴¹ and that when Indians achieved home rule, 'the might and meaning of the British Empire will be brought home to every loyal and patriotic Indian, and the [Empire Day] celebrations will be universal in India'.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ "India needs Home Rule." Mr. Rangachariar's Empire Day speech in Australia', *Times of India*, 26 May 1927, p.9.

¹³⁹ Metcalfe and Metcalfe, *Concise History of India*, p.192.

¹⁴⁰ *Times of India*, 25 May 1932, p.8 and 25 May 1936, p.14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1935, p.11.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 25 May 1929, p.12.

After 1935, Empire Day speeches reveal that loyalist enmity toward Congress had dissolved somewhat following the passage of The Government of India Act (that abolished dyarchy and 'substantially extended provincial autonomy').¹⁴³ Congress re-entered constitutional politics and scored stunning electoral success including winning control of Madras and Bombay. Congressional politicians demonstrated restraint in power and did not behave subversively as they had threatened to do prior to the elections.¹⁴⁴ The popular mandate for the nationalists coupled with Congress's record of responsible governance further marginalized the imperial loyalists to the extent that they began to make gestures of conciliation. In 1939, Joshi's successor, S. K. Naique, the honorary general secretary of the Hindu 'Aryan Excelsior League',¹⁴⁵ used his Empire Day platform to emphasise the shared 'sense of nationalism' between the loyalists and Congress. He expressed his 'pleasure' that Congress 'had accepted office and that the Congress Ministries had been discharging their duties'. He understood that the government of the country would gradually pass in to the hands of Indians and expressed the hope that Congress would work as successfully as the way it was working in the autonomous provinces. It seemed that the loyalists in Bombay were at last accepting that a self-governing India was likely to be dominated by Congress,¹⁴⁶ but were nevertheless hopeful that the imperial connection would not be totally severed.

The mould of late-1930s Indian politics, however, was shattered in 1939 after Britain took India into war through imperial decree with no previous consultation with

¹⁴³ Metcalfe and Metcalfe, *'Concise History of India'*, p.195.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.195-196.

¹⁴⁵ For details of the Aryan Excelsior League and other Hindu clubs and societies, see Priya Jaikumar, 'More Than Morality. The Indian Cinematograph Committee Interviews (1927)' in *The Moving Image* 3.1 (2003) 82-109, p.102, and Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire* (Duke University Press, 2006), p.81. See Prashant Kidambi, *The making of an Indian metropolis: colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920* (Leicester, 2007), p.183.

¹⁴⁶ In the 1937 elections Congress won almost half of the provincial assembly seats see Sarkar, *Modern India*, p.349.

Indians who governed in the provincial ministries. Nationalist negotiations with the British regarding cooperation in government and support of the war eventually broke down after the imperial government was unable to offer a commitment to a full transfer of power. Although the British could still command sufficient loyalty to govern India, there was no outbreak of unity in 1939 as there had been in 1914, the calamitous course of the war until late 1942 convinced some Indian leaders (including Gandhi) that Britain's Empire was doomed¹⁴⁷ and such calculations partly influenced the initiation of the Quit India campaign. The Bombay loyalists fully supported Britain's war effort despite the news of military disasters in 1941¹⁴⁸ and the British retreat from Burma in 1942. In that year, the Empire Day platform was used to urge Indians 'to sink all differences, political or otherwise and help in the successful prosecution of the war' that was 'very near our frontiers'.¹⁴⁹ Non-cooperationists were accused of 'fifth column activity' and 'Sunderrao, a labourer' took the platform and 'exhorted the workers to stick to their posts and play their part in winning the war'.¹⁵⁰ Civic dignitaries or other high-ranking officials had traditionally delivered Empire Day speeches in India and allowing a labourer to take the platform demonstrates the anxiety of loyalists to raise popular support for the war effort.

The British successfully contained the massive outbreak of popular resistance in 1942 as they strove to utilise Indian assets of men and materials; Congress leaders were detained until end of war and special wartime powers were used to suppress the movement. Nevertheless, it seems that such harsh repression did not sit well with the Indian loyalists in Bombay who on Empire Day 1945 urged the 'release the imprisoned leaders so that the war against Japan might be brought to a successful end

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.390-391

¹⁴⁸ HMS Hood was sunk on Empire Day and the Nazis were in the process of capturing Crete from the British.

¹⁴⁹ 'Empire Day is the Symbol of Unity' in *Times of India*, 25 May 1941, p.7.

¹⁵⁰ 'Empire Day In Bombay' in Ibid., 25 May 1942, p.4.

earlier'.¹⁵¹ In a sense, this was an acknowledgement that the imperial government's employment of ruthless strategies to suppress Congress was no longer sustainable or desirable. Perhaps it was also a tacit admission that India was in fact ungovernable without the cooperation of Congress and that British supremacy in India was coming to an end.

V

During the 1940s came the final disintegration of the 'network of Indian allies' that had previously been the bulwark of imperial rule.¹⁵² Judith Brown argues that the crisis of wartime was the denouement of a process that had been largely completed in the 1930s.¹⁵³ After 1918, there was a steady disintegration of the collaborative systems of rule that relied on alliances with landlords, rulers of the princely states and Indians who had been elevated into prestigious establishment positions. This process had been accelerated by the constitutional reforms of the interwar years and the nationalist mobilisation of a stratum of activists who became integrated into the new constitutional system. In short, the wide-scale participation of Indians in the institutions of government at a provincial level fostered a progressive democratic political consciousness. In this context, the continuation of imperial domination at the centre of Indian government was divested of legitimacy and the government relied increasingly on coercive measures to sustain its authority in periods of crisis.

Tracing the fortunes of the Empire Day celebration in India provides evidence that supports Brown's thesis; it demonstrates how loyalist groups that were previously central to the hegemonic structures of the British state in India became progressively dislocated from the political forces that were shaping change in India. Empire Day

¹⁵¹ 'Indo-British Unity Stressed. Empire Day Meeting' in *ibid.*, 25 May 1945, p.4.

¹⁵² Brown, *Modern India*, pp.320-330.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-316.

celebrations organised by imperial loyalists seemed relevant only to the groups and individuals whose privileged positions in society were dependent on the prolongation of the imperial state. Constitutional reform, which gave Indians power in the provinces, led to the democratisation of civil society in a way that denied groups such as the Parsis and the Anglo-Indians privileged access to government employment and other perquisites previously enjoyed by Indians who worked with the British administration. The engagement or disengagement of these groups with or from the Empire Day festival (and the speeches delivered on Empire Day) gives an insight into the psychological and political responses of Britain's Indian 'collaborators' to the fading of imperial authority. The continued celebrations organised by small groups of Indian loyalists, such as that in Bombay, were increasingly irrelevant to the political scene despite the inflated coverage of events provided by the two most important newspapers in India. Optimistic Empire Day coverage in the press was however invariably accompanied by agonised editorials concerning the public representation of the empire and the uncertain future of Empire Day. This reflected a fading confidence among imperialists about the capacity of the empire to raise support among its subjects, as also a diminishing sense amongst imperialists of the justice of the project. The inherent contradictions between Empire Day rhetoric and imperial rule were unavoidable; in the aftermath of the First World War, Indians' faith was rewarded with inadequate reform, political repression and mass murder at Amritsar. After 1918, as the base of political participation was massively expanded, what the Empire Day movement in India lacked was a plausible message, popular appeal and relevance to the emerging political scene.

Nevertheless, there was a perception within government that Empire Day might still be a viable means of garnering support for British rule as illustrated

through the attempt by the Indian government to encourage Empire Day celebrations. An official Empire Day holiday for India was instituted, yet the executive promotion of celebrations was mainly limited to lame bureaucratic reminders addressed to government departments, which reflected the general attitude of most of the domiciled British in India who after 1918 were, on the whole, thoroughly uninspired by the occasion or saw it simply as an opportunity for recreation rather than patriotic exuberance. There were some exceptions to this, but in the main celebrations in India organised by British residents contracted to encompass chiefly the youth constituencies of scouts and schoolchildren.

Notwithstanding the obvious decline of Empire Day as an effective political instrument, as late as the 1930s the Indian National Congress still considered it important enough to warrant counter-celebrations or alternative commemorations designed to undermine the day. Moreover, the modes of celebration (ritual veneration of the flag, patriotic hymns etc.) developed for Empire Day were employed successfully by Congress as a means of raising national consciousness – in effect an acknowledgment of the efficacy of Meath's techniques even if his political message had little relevance any longer.

Chapter 6

A fighting retreat? The festival in the 'white' Empire after 1918

Although Empire Day was not discontinued officially until after the Second World War, it was during the inter-war period that the festival lost its ability to rouse widespread popular support for imperialism in the metropole and the white settler heartlands. As we shall see, the trajectory of the festival in South Africa was one of almost immediate and sharp decline after 1918, yet in Great Britain, Australia and Canada, Empire Day retained the enthusiasm of significant sections of the population throughout the 1920s.

In Chapter 3, we saw how the impact of war had transformed Empire Day in these locations from an occasion of high spirits and imperial boastfulness to a solemnised day of reverence for those lost in the war. Nevertheless, the new solemnity of Empire day was gradually countered by the revival of pageantry. In Canada, militarism had been a prominent feature of the Day before 1914; this association was not broken by the war, despite the catastrophic losses of the Canadian Army. In 1931, almost 45,000 cadets were on parade in the province of Ontario on Empire Day, a number that dwarfed the 8,800 who had turned out in 1914.¹ Moreover the function of assimilation that Empire Day played in Canada before the war was still considered important in the 1920s, as demonstrated by Stamp, who described the particular attention paid by Empire Day activists to schools with 'large "foreign"

¹ Stamp, 'Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario', p.39.

enrolments'. Stamp also showed the perceived utility of Empire Day parades as a counter to 'Bolshevism' and 'European socialism'.² However, after 1931, Empire Day celebrations in Canada were considerably scaled down as the economic stringencies of the 1930s affected schools' abilities to fund large cadet corps. The absence of the ostentatious displays put on by cadets seemed to deflate the Empire Day Movement as a whole; in particular it exposed the decline of public interest in the affair. Stamp identified a number of factors that account for the falling away of public concern with imperial grandiosity in Canada: the deaths of prominent Empire Day activists who had been at the centre of the movement for many years; some instances of opposition to Empire Day parades by Communists and various pacifist groups and a growing concept of a Canadian Nationalism that no longer saw Canada's destiny subsumed within the imperial relationship.³ Interestingly, however, Stamp believed that it was the influence of American Popular Culture that, above all, 'lured' young Canadians away from the 'imperialist concept'.⁴

In Australia, as Firth and Hoorn have shown,⁵ Empire Day continued to be celebrated in state schools throughout the inter-war years, whilst Catholic schools sustained their boycott of the day. As we have seen, in the public arena, the inauguration of Anzac Day created a day of remembrance that was concerned with Australian rather than imperial identity and diminished the importance of Empire Day on the commemorative calendar. However, The British Empire Union, founded with the help of the Empire Day stalwart Archdeacon Boyce, managed to sustain the celebration for the adult constituency outside of the schools for some years. Empire Day took on an overtly party political tone at times, as some Empire loyalists, who

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., pp.40-42; see also Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario*, pp.104-6 and passim.

⁵ Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hearn, 'From Empire Day to Cracker Night' in Peter Spearitt and D. Walker (eds), *Australian Popular Culture* (Sydney, 1979), pp.29-32.

were also conservatives, equated their love of the Empire with a mission to eradicate the 'Red' threat in Australia. Unsurprisingly, many workers were unimpressed by the reactionary sentiments of these Empire Day enthusiasts and as early as 1921, the New South Wales Trade and Labour Council urged a boycott of Empire Day.⁶ Despite its potential for divisiveness, Empire Day was celebrated in Australia until the early 1950s. As the British Empire began to disintegrate, however, the occasion began to 'look quaint and old fashioned, if not ridiculous'.⁷ The imperialist language quickly faded and was forgotten as the Day became more important as a rowdy occasion for bonfires and fireworks (elements that had always been present in the celebration in Australia) and was popularly re-invented as 'Cracker Night'.⁸

It would seem that in the 'white' heartlands of the empire, interest in the imperial celebration dissolved as the empire became less relevant to people's lives, either because they saw that the imperial tie was of less importance or that different cultural forms rendered the language and ideas of the New Imperialism virtually redundant. The celebration was maintained on a small scale by stalwarts of the Empire Day Movement, but it became the concern, essentially, of a small minority of nostalgic empire loyalists and not an affirmation of imperialist faith by a great number of the population. In accordance with the analysis provided so far, case studies of the fate of Empire Day in Great Britain and South Africa will show how far this pattern of decline was a parallel process across the empire.

⁶ Ibid., p.29.

⁷ Ibid., p.34.

⁸ Ibid., p.36-7.

The last throes of Empire Day in South Africa.

As we have seen, Empire Day in South Africa never achieved a consensus in regard to support for imperialism, even among the British population. Nevertheless, for a few years before 1916 it did have the capacity to mobilise reasonably sized audiences and had a political utility that was exploited by the Unionists and the SAP. Moreover, it was established as a permanent public holiday and some Afrikaners, not least Jan Smuts, came to recognise and support it as an important symbolic occasion. Before the war, hostile Afrikaners recognised its importance through the organisation of counter- commemorative events on May 24. After the war however, although Empire Day remained a public holiday, its actual celebration became so marginal as to almost render it arcane. This slide into virtual insignificance is well evidenced through the reports of the newspaper press in the interwar years.

Between 1919 and 1924 the *Rand Daily Mail* printed very little about Empire Day.⁹ It was almost with a sigh of relief that the newspaper reported Baldwin's 1925 Empire Day speech when he suggested that the appellation 'Commonwealth of British Nations' should replace the term Empire. The newspaper implied that 'Empire' was now an archaic term that affronted the 'rights and dignity of the Dominions . . . they are no longer colonies, but nations of the Commonwealth' and it complained about the 'tendency to make excessive use of the word Empire in this country, where, quite frankly, it has rather an unfortunate association in the minds of some people.'¹⁰ In contrast, The *Cape Times* continued to promote and support Empire Day uncritically for at least a decade after the war: there was, nevertheless, an awareness of the 'unfortunate association' at the Cape Town ceremony. The pre-war themes of imperialist pride, militarism and expansion were noticeably absent and

⁹ There is scarcely a mention of the day in the *Rand Daily Mail* between 20 May and 2 June in the years 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1924.

¹⁰ 'A new meaning for empire', *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 May 1925, p.5.

there was a renewed emphasis on the monarchy although, as we have seen, during the immediate post war years, commemoration of the war dead was the main focus of the day.¹¹

When Prince Arthur of Connaught became Governor General of South Africa (1920-23) and appeared at the celebration, the memory of his grandmother, Queen Victoria, once again became the focus of the commemoration.¹² The monarchical connection was further heightened through the participation of Arthur's father in 1922.¹³ In 1923, a gramophone recording of King George and Queen Mary's Empire Day message was played to the children of the elementary schools in the Cape. In the transcript (distributed to the children) the word 'Empire' is mentioned only once, the term 'British Commonwealth' being used frequently instead,¹⁴ as it was in the Canadian Prime Minister's (William Lyon Mackenzie King) Empire Day message also published in the *Cape Times*.¹⁵ Clearly the monarchy, as a palpable bonding link of Empire, was at this time more comfortable and less contentious than the exultations of British imperial power that had often characterised Empire Day previously. Some speakers were even apologetic about the nature of Empire Day in the past, such as Murray Bisset, the celebrated South African test cricketer who went on to become acting Governor of Rhodesia, who conceded that:

there were some manifestations of Imperialism which had given offence . . .
[but] old style grand parades . . . had to pass away . . . the concept of Empire
had undergone a great transformation . . . and today we had become a British

¹¹ *Cape Times*, 26 May 1919, p.8

¹² 'Empire Day. Admiral's Great Tribute to the Queen', *ibid.*, 25 May 1921, p.7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1922, p.7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1923, p.9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

League of free and co-equal nations, knit together in a common loyalty to one king.¹⁶

Despite its continued faith in Empire Day, the *Cape Times* evidently found little of note to report. The Empire Day ceremony in Cape Town, that took place around the Victoria statue in the garden of the Legislature, consistently attracted a crowd equivalent to the numbers who had participated during the war years, and this was the main focus of journalistic attention year upon year. The groups who gathered at the meeting usually including veterans, girls guides, boy scouts, naval cadets, members of the Victoria League, Navy League and the representatives of South African Soldiers Graves Committee.¹⁷ The *Cape Times*, attempted occasionally, and somewhat unconvincingly, to convince its readership that Empire Day had a universal appeal:

the assemblage included commoners, statesmen and soldiers, rich and poor, employed and unemployed – coloured as well as white, all present to pay tribute to the memory of Victoria the Good.¹⁸

In fact, Empire Day depended upon a few hundred loyal supporters in Cape Town, a city of about 270,000 persons, yet the *Cape Times* attempted to uphold the notion that the day had wide appeal and political significance. In contrast, in the Orange Free State, *The Friend's* Empire Day reports were far from effusive and certainly didn't intimate that there was anything to be overly excited about: it reported on the day with journalistic detachment. In the Orange Free State, Empire Day (organised in Bloemfontein by the Victoria League) seemed to be indistinguishable from Union Day (coordinated by the Railway Recreation Committee): in 1921, both occasions were marked by the organisation of children's sports days with musical

¹⁶ 'Message of Empire Day', *Ibid.*, 24 May 1924, p.9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1919, p.8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1922, p.7.

entertainment and newspaper advertisements promoting these events were virtually identical.¹⁹ It was noticeable that *The Friend* favoured Union Day and promoted it in much the same way that the press had endorsed Empire Day before the War.²⁰

It seems that in the Cape, OFS and Transvaal, celebrations of Empire Day, which were far from popular, had been divested of any ideological potency. Where celebrations did occur, they had a more 'secular' character than before the war. In Natal, however, there was far less squeamishness in promoting British imperialism. In its Empire Day editorial in 1919, the *Natal Witness* claimed that 'the true spirit of Imperialism deeply penetrates the whole of the empire . . . that spirit it is our duty to keep alive, and to cultivate in coming generations. That is the reason why Empire Day should be observed and honoured.' It did, however, acknowledge that the condition of imperialism in South Africa was 'not what it should be . . . and could hardly be worse'. The *Witness* despaired of the South Africa's main political parties: the Unionist Party was 'moribund'; the SAP 'Dutch'; the Labour Party 'full of cranks' and the Nationalists were 'narrow, fanatical retrogrades'. The inadequacy or hostility of the main political parties when it came to supporting the Empire meant that 'the spirit of imperialism' should be 'kept alive' elsewhere:

We who cherish the Imperial ideal, must do our part to keep it before the country. In our schools we must see that the story of the Empire is taught, and the aims of the Empire instilled into the minds of the children. In the life of the community we must see that the fact is never lost sight of that we are citizens of the British Empire as well as of the Union. And in political life we must

¹⁹ *The Friend*, 24 May 1921, p.4.

²⁰ See for example *Ibid.*, 26 May 1922, p. 5 and 31 May 1922, p.8.

urge that Imperialism is the standard by which our legislation should be measured.²¹

The *Witness* warned of 'forces within, that threaten us acutely', yet conceded that few others were unduly alarmed by the decline of imperial spirit in South Africa – it lamented the general apathy in Maritzburg, where the usual Empire Day demonstration 'for the benefit of the younger generation' had not occurred in 1919. It also reminded its readership of the purpose of the day:

Empire Day should not be merely a day on which to hold a race meeting and organise sports . . . Room should be found for something of a distinctive character . . . This is not Jingoism, or the flag flapping which the world rightly condemns. It is the duty; it should be the political religion of every true South African to do his utmost to encourage the spirit of Imperialism in the land of glorious promise.²²

After a hiatus of two years, the Empire Day demonstration returned to Maritzburg in 1921, thanks to an energetic campaign coordinated by the League of Empire, and the *Natal Witness*. It was however, chiefly an affair for youth: about 600 schoolchildren were marched around the city, in an apparently 'brave and noble manner'.²³ One can only speculate as to need for bravery on this occasion - perhaps for endurance of the hackneyed speeches of the Empire Day activists, who lectured the corralled youngsters at length. The annual schoolchildren's demonstration was the only regular Empire Day event reported by the *Witness* between 1921-24 and the prospect of inspiring a voluntary adult contingent at this time looked bleak; a patriotic concert organised for Empire Day in 1923 failed to attract more than a scattering of

²¹ 'Empire Day', *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1919, p.4.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1921, p.1.

people.²⁴ Even in the region of South Africa where the most obstinate sense of Britishness was maintained, Empire Day failed to rouse any significant imperial fervour after the war.

The continuation of Empire Day after the war did not seem to concern Afrikaner nationalists, who all but ignored the occasion apart from a coordinated attack on the Day in Parliament that took place in 1921, but this seemed to be more of a mischievous provocation than anything else. On Empire Day that year, the NP leader J. B. M. Hertzog delivered a pastiche of a typical Empire Day speech in the House of Assembly: he announced that that Holland had done a great deal for the civilisation of the world and in the history of the world. He asked members to 'bear in minds the bonds which had tied many of them to Holland' and complained that England's involvement in South Africa meant that 'the relations and bonds with other countries were often lost sight of.'²⁵ Whereas Hertzog lampooned Empire Day in an oblique manner in the House, the ex-president of the Orange Free State, F.W. Reitz had launched a direct attack in the Senate the previous day. He proposed that Empire Day be abolished as a public holiday. Reitz conceded that the perseverance and determination of the British settlers in South Africa should be commemorated with a public holiday, but not Empire Day because 'it leads to fits of rage' and consequently to dispute between the two sections of the . . . population.' Reitz suggested 11 April, the date on which the British settlers arrived in 1820, as 'an event worthy of remembrance and such a holiday would be honoured by all sections of the population'.²⁶

Although Reitz was probably overstating the capacity for Empire Day to engender conflict in the post war era, his proposal was considered seriously:

²⁴ Ibid., 26 May 1923, p.4.

²⁵ *The Friend*, 24 May 1921, p.5.

²⁶ 'Afskaffing van "Empire Dag"' in *Die Volkstem*, 23 May 1921, p.8.

according to *Die Volkstem* there were no major objections in principle to the abolition of Empire Day - as long as an alternative public holiday replaced it. However, the general consensus was that it would be easier to leave things as they stood, particularly given the potential for misunderstanding 'by a major part of the population, especially in Natal': Reitz's motion was withheld.²⁷ This half-hearted stalking was the most energy that was put into attacking Empire Day by the nationalists between the wars. Paradoxically it demonstrated, that even though the majority of the British population in South Africa largely ignored Empire Day as a political event, politicians anticipated that the threat of its removal from the calendar would be viewed by many as symbolically significant. As we shall see, this notion of a tenacious popular attachment to symbolic representations of Britishness (that is, the idea that British patriotism was dormant rather than virtually extinct) was borne out by the reaction to the attempt to remove the Union Flag from South Africa's flag a few years later.

Coincidentally, in the year that nationalist politicians made their last assault on Empire Day, the date became tarnished because of an armed action taken against African villagers and 'squatters', which brought forth a Communist protest pointing out the bitter irony of such a mass killing taking place on May 24. A number of millenarian Christians (the 'Israelites') led by the prophet, Enoch Mgijima, had settled (apparently illegally) at Bulhoek in the Eastern Cape. Their persistent refusal to leave their land resulted in a joint police and army assault with machine guns that killed nearly 200 Africans (one policeman suffered a stab wound).²⁸ The mainstream press insisted that the 'terribly large' casualty figures were 'not only justifiable, but

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Robert Edgar, *Because They Chose the Plan of God: The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre*, (Johannesburg, 1988), pp.32-24.

necessary’²⁹ and did not suggest ‘undue severity on the part of the Police’. The Communist Party interpreted events less generously and distributed a pamphlet with headlines that mocked Empire Day with savage irony:

MURDER! MURDER ! MURDER! THE BULHOEK MASSACRE.

Christians Slaughter Their Christian Brethren.

Great Empire Day Celebration.³⁰

Unsurprisingly, the mainstream press avoided any reference to Empire Day when reporting the event.

Overall however, Empire Day was rarely an occasion for controversy in South Africa between the wars. The occasion retained a function as a prop for holding up a conception of British identity within the Union, as articulated at an Empire Day meeting in 1925, when the speaker, Professor Radcliffe Brown, said that ‘being South African is not incompatible with maintaining our traditions and love for the land of our nativity whether that be love for South Africa, England or Holland.’ Empire Day, he said, was a way of keeping the ‘precious’ British tradition ‘alive in our hearts’.³¹ It is clear that some Empire Day adherents had abandoned any aspiration to impose a ‘British’ or imperial identity on South Africa itself and the Day was even seen as vehicle of conciliation rather than the cause of the ‘fits of rage’ suggested by Reitz. Certainly Jan Smuts no longer expressed ambivalent feelings about the day. His political journey within the British Empire had commenced more or less at the same time that Empire Day was inaugurated. His performance on Empire Day in 1924, during the general election campaign was a measure of the distance travelled: Smuts

²⁹ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1921, p.7.

³⁰ Jack and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950* (International Defence and Aid Fund, 1983), p.255. Wilfrid Harrison, the party secretary, and William Dryburg, then in his eighties, were prosecuted for issuing the leaflet under an ordinance of 1754 forbidding the publication of offensive, rebellious or libellous lampoons. The Appeal Court held that the statute was no longer in force and quashed the convictions.

³¹ ‘Love for the Motherland. Empire Day Ceremony in Cape Town’ in *Cape Times*, 25 May 1925, p.9.

had spent Empire Day in 1909 promoting a fund for memorials to the victims of British imperialism. In 1917, as a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, he had been an Empire Day speaker in London, yet he denied any affection for the British Empire. By 1924, however, he had no compunction in proclaiming the 'chivalrous, magnanimous' nature of the empire, the sacrosanct quality of the imperial connection - 'something which should not be touched or questioned' - and the 'wisdom' of the Boers in 'sign[ing] away their independence.'³²

Most other Afrikaner politicians were more circumspect than Smuts, yet saw in Empire Day a potential for enhancing unity. The Mayor of Bloemfontein, Mr. J. H. Brand Reitz, received an 'unsolicited and unexpected' invitation to the Empire Day celebration in 1921, for which he thanked the organisers for the confidence they had placed in him 'knowing my views and realising my sentiments.'³³ His willingness to speak at the celebration was due to his concern over Afrikaner nationalist advocacy of a separate existence for the white populations in South Africa. Unlike Smuts, he expressed a deep ambivalence toward the imperial government, but felt the idea of separate existence compared unfavourably with the advantages that South Africa enjoyed due to the 'influence, resources and power of the British Empire'. Reitz said that Empire Day demonstrations tended to evoke in him 'uncomfortable memories' of the South African War, but the imperial state had proved to be comparable to a 'kind and good stepmother'. Brand Reitz said he welcomed Empire Day from a South African point of view because it had the potential 'to create, to foster and to cultivate a truly South African patriotic spirit [which] should be encouraged by all':

Let us when we celebrate this day not think only of the mighty British Empire
...[but] let us all strive and endeavour, by being proud of everything South

³² Ibid., 24 May 1924, p.9.

³³ Ibid., 25 May 1921, p.7, see also, *Die Volkstem*, 27 May 1921, p.11.

African ... to unite the two great white races into one common nation with common ideals and common ambitions. ... We shall by creating our own nationalism, strengthen the bonds which today unite that Empire, in whose honour we are here today.³⁴

Brand Reitz's attitude demonstrates that, in Bloemfontein at least, the toxic associations of Empire Day had been rendered harmless by the development of the nation after Union. However, Empire Day was to have one final flourish as a contentious partisan occasion as a result of the Flag Controversy of the mid 1920s. However, as will be shown, despite a rise in attendances and an increase of patriotic enthusiasm, even this episode served to demonstrate the fading utility of the day.

* * * * *

The original flag of the South African Union on which the Union Jack featured prominently was never popular and 'remained unfamiliar' through lack of use.³⁵ Despite some rumblings and discontent during his premiership regarding the need for a national flag acceptable to Afrikaners and British South Africans, Smuts successfully steered clear of the issue. However, as the nationalists continued to gain electoral ground after the war, a simmering crisis developed as uncompromising leaders such as Malan tried to stir up antipathy toward the flag through a polemical campaign that included denouncing the Union Jack as a symbol of 'race domination . . . murder and rapine'.³⁶ The simmering affair finally erupted after the victory of the Nationalist-Labour Pact in 1924. Spurred by the example of the Irish Free State, whose tricolour, adopted in 1921, excluded any reference to the British connection,

³⁴ *The Friend*, 25 May 1921, p.5..

³⁵ Harry Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy, 1925-1928* (Oxford, 1980), p.3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

nationalists began to prepare legislation that would institute a South African national flag. The nationalist intention to keep the Union Jack out of any new design raised the ire of many English speakers, particularly in Natal, who insisted that the Union Jack should remain on the national flag.³⁷ The lines were drawn for a controversy that spanned the best part of three years and stimulated widespread agitation, public protest and even violence.³⁸

The first reading of the 1926 Flag Bill occurred on 20 May, only four days before Empire Day. The antipathy of the English language press to the proposal of a flag that did not feature the Union Jack and resembled the Transvaal *Vierkleur* was expressed in explosive terms and fuelled a storm of protest aimed at derailing the bill before its second reading that was, ironically, due to take place on 24 May. In the event, and cognisant of the protest movement that had erupted, parliament contrived to delay the reading until the following day.³⁹ In some locations, Empire Day suddenly enjoyed an unprecedented popularity. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported on the atmosphere in Pretoria, which was 'bristling with Union Jacks':

Yesterday – Empire Day – saw the colours of the Union Jack in evidence everywhere. Schoolchildren carried banners demanding the retention of the flag, and motorcars flew the Union Jack from bonnet and hood. At many patriotic demonstrations a petition was displayed for signatures.⁴⁰

In Johannesburg, the *Mail* reported, 'no solemn ceremonial occasion honoured the day' instead the city was 'alive' with the colours of the British flag.⁴¹ In Cape Town, the Empire Day meeting enjoyed its largest attendance ever, verified by photographic

³⁷ Ibid., pp.9-11.

³⁸ See Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy* for a comprehensive account of the history of the controversy.

³⁹ *Natal Witness*, 24 May 1926. p.4.

⁴⁰ 'Cheers for the Union Jack' in *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1926. p.2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

evidence that appeared in the press.⁴² The *Cape Times* described an incident when, at the 'conclusion of the service one of the medal bedecked veterans stepped from the ranks . . . he produced from inside his coat a furled flag'. Uncovering it aloft he called for 'three cheers for the good old Union Jack' to which those assembled responded with 'enthusiastic vigour.'⁴³

However, despite such theatricality, the larger than normal attendances and the notable flourish of flags around the cities, this Empire Day activity was, in fact, quite unimpressive compared to the protest meetings against the Flag Bill that occurred around about the same time. Examples include Cape Town (25 May) where an 'enormous and enthusiastic' meeting was described by the *Cape Times*: 'Rarely in the time of the Great War, or at the commemoration services since, or at the greatest political rallies known has there been such a throng';⁴⁴ at Johannesburg a mass meeting attracted 3,000 people to a venue with 'thousands unable to gain admission.'⁴⁵ Other large and voluble protest meetings took place in Durban (21 May) and Maritzburg (23 May).⁴⁶ The lack of exploitation of Empire Day during the flag controversy suggests that there was a clear separation between the cultural sense of a 'British' identity in South Africa, as symbolised by the fight to retain the Union Jack, and the highly politicised identification with the imperial British state as promoted on Empire Day. We might also read these developments as suggesting that, by this time in South Africa, those who saw themselves as linked to the Britain were embattled and defensive about their identity, rather than assertively trying to make it fundamental to the 'white nation' of South Africa as a whole.

⁴² *Cape Times*, 29 May 1926, Weekly Supplement, p. 1.

⁴³ 'Partners in a Mighty Empire' in *Ibid.*, 25 May 1926, p.9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1926, p.11.

⁴⁵ It is likely that many of those assembled were military veterans as 'songs reminiscent of the Great War' such as 'It's a long way to Tipperary' and 'Pack up your troubles in your old Kit Bag were sung lustily to the accompaniment of the Great Organ', *ibid.*, 29 May 1926, Weekly Supplement p. 1.

⁴⁶ 'Durban's emphatic voice' in *Natal Witness*, 24 May 1926, p.4 and *Ibid.*, p.5.

The campaign to protect the Union Jack as part of the symbolic representation of South African nationhood thus mobilised many thousands who wished to protect their unique identity within a national milieu. Yet, the majority of these activists were not in evidence on Empire Day. Moreover, in the negotiations over the Flag Bill, the nationalists conceded early on that they were 'willing to have . . . the flag of the Empire . . . [displayed officially] on all occasions which are intended specifically to represent or to indicate our relationship to the British Community of Nations.'⁴⁷ Smuts noted sarcastically in Parliament that Empire Day was, in fact, 'the only occasion' that was relevant to this 'great concession', which would mean 'there might be one occasion in the year on which the British flag might be seen in South Africa, and even that occasion might disappear.'⁴⁸ Consequently, Empire Day would, in effect, remain untouched by any changes brought about by the Flag Bill and thus was not a live issue at this moment.

In 1927, a new reading of the Flag Bill once again coincided with late May. A new design had been proposed, but again, because of the exclusion of the Union Jack, it was not accepted by many of the English speaking community. Again, the profile of Empire Day was raised by its proximity to the reading of the Bill, yet it failed to inspire anti-Flag bill campaigners. Maritzburg's Empire Day procession was predominantly an affair for schoolchildren⁴⁹ and it was dwarfed by an anti-Flag Bill demonstration in Durban on 25 May where 15,000 protestors were active.⁵⁰ 'Cheers for the Union Jack' were given at the Cape Town Empire Day ceremony, but it was not an occasion for any purposeful anti-Flag Bill agitation.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Malan reported in *Cape Times*, 29 May 1926, Weekly Supplement, p.1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., In view of the circumstances, the ironic coincidence of Smuts' birthday and Empire Day was cause for some hilarity when pointed out by a Labour member during Smuts' speech.

⁴⁹ *Natal Witness*, 26 May 1927, p.5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27 May 1927, p.6.

⁵¹ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1927, p.9.

The Flag controversy was finally resolved in 1928, and the details of the compromise settlement need not detain us here, aside from noting that the Union Jack was included on the new flag and that the full Union Jack was allowed to be flown alongside the South African flag from certain government buildings on specific days (such as Union Day) 'to demote the Union's association with the British Commonwealth'; flying the Union Jack from other government buildings was discretionary according to local preferences. The spirit of compromise engendered by the resolution of the crisis was evident at the Cape Town Empire Day ceremony: a speaker proclaimed that 'no longer does anyone want to look upon England as a ruling body' as there was a 'new meaning of Empire' where members of the British Commonwealth were 'comrades'.⁵² The *Cape Times* concurred: it observed that although Empire Day 'will be given over almost entirely to sport and pleasure' there was a real meaning and significance to the day embodied in the new national flag, which was 'the tangible expression of the Union's new status and will symbolise her coming-of-age. No longer is South Africa an outpost or a colony, but a nation with complete autonomy'.⁵³

The *Cape Times* was indicating one of the important factors that accounted for the virtual insignificance of Empire Day after 1926. The electoral success of the Nationalist and Labour Party Pact in 1924 had been the political accompaniment to the cultural ascendancy of a 'version of South Africanism' that eventually replaced 'Smutsian South Africanism' as the power of the SAP evaporated.⁵⁴ Moreover, the

⁵² Lieutenant -Colonel C. E. S. Bull in *Cape Times*, 25 May 1928, p.10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge Science, Sensibility and White South Africa 1820-2000* (Oxford, 2006), p.6-7. Dubow has shown how the project of building a South African identity was part of the modernisation of the nation and was 'tied up with a modernisation of South Africa, cemented by cultural and scientific ventures (museums, Art galleries, National Parks and other symbols of national unity).' Although Smutsian South Africanism declined after 1924, Dubow argues 'it still remained important for a quarter of a century'.

Labour Party, for its part, was concerned with protecting white labour in the mines and elsewhere and had no vested interest in supporting imperialism or, indeed expending energy campaigning against Empire Day, as did elements of the Left in Britain, as we shall see. Although Nationalists insisted that any conflict of interest between capital and labour was due to 'foreign' influence and the domination of an imperialist capitalism,⁵⁵ in government they concentrated on attempting to improve the economic circumstances of Afrikaners, and any long-term aspirations to disavow the British connection to South Africa were put aside in favour of the pressing need to demonstrate competency in government.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Nationalists in power strengthened white South African identity through drawn-out negotiations with the imperial government regarding political autonomy that were eventually consummated through the Statute of Westminster (1931). This was the culmination of a process whereby Dominion nationhood was re-defined. The Balfour Report of 1926, had, amongst other things, recognised the Dominions' voluntary and equal status within the Empire: in that year Hertzog suspended his anti-imperial agitation asserting that South Africans were 'just as free as the English people' and that it was in their interest to remain within the Empire.⁵⁷ In 1931, constitutional autonomy was established as the British Parliament relinquished its power to legislate for the Dominions (unless requested to do so).⁵⁸

The growing political autonomy of South Africa was accompanied by a nationalist cultural resurgence. Swart has observed that December 16, Dingaan's Day,

⁵⁵ Jon Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924-55* (Cambridge, 1984), p.70.

⁵⁶ Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, p.105-6.

⁵⁷ T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* (Berkeley, 1975), p.92 .

⁵⁸ John Darwin, 'The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics' in Brown and Louis, *Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol IV.*, (Oxford, 2001), p.69.

was 'an excellent barometer of the national consciousness' in South Africa⁵⁹ just as we have seen that Empire Day was a similarly useful tool for measuring imperial consciousness. A brief comment upon the development of Dingaan's Day serves to emphasise the inverse fortunes of the Empire Day festival in South Africa. The realisation of a national vision was being firmly tied to Afrikaner culture, rather than the imperial model promoted by the Empire Day Movement.

Due to its deeply religious roots, Dingaan's Day - The Day of the Covenant - was for many years a quite austere puritan tradition, but in the 1920's an aversion to popular entertainments as an accompaniment to the festival was slowly eroded and sporting competitions, song and Afrikaner plays began to be introduced.⁶⁰ The Empire Day Movement had found that 'secular' entertainment provided a strong incentive for many people to join the celebrations and the political efficacy of extending the Dingaan's Day repertoire in a similar fashion was obvious. The remoulding of tradition was not without its critics such as Reverend Jacobus Conradie who warned that the commemoration might 'degenerate into one of picnics and sports' - clearly a reference to the 'degeneration' of Empire Day.⁶¹ It's interesting to note that just as Dingaan's Day was acquiring a more secular character, a member of the legislative assembly, D. M. Brown, attempted to promote a quasi-religious aspect to Empire Day. He suggested that like 'Christianity and Christmas Day, the Jews and the Day of Atonement', Empire Day was the representative day for a great movement.⁶² This conflation of religious doctrine and imperial loyalty might have been prompted by the rising challenge of Dingaan's Day, which unlike Empire Day (where secular and military concerns always took a greater prominence than religious fidelity) was

⁵⁹ Marius Swart, quoted by Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p.96.

⁶⁰ 'Celebration of Dingaan's Day. Breaking down a prejudice' in *Cape Times*, 23 Dec 1921, p.9.

⁶¹ 'Great Trek in Drama' in *ibid.*, 17 December 1936, p.17.

⁶² 'Empire Day - Ceremony in Grounds of Parliament' in *ibid.*, 25 May 1920, p.7.

founded on a pledge with God and markedly enmeshed the concept of an Afrikaner nation state with a spiritual ideal.

After the First World War, the Dingaan's Day commemoration was sometimes accompanied by efforts to eschew the exclusive nationalist vision associated with the event and many activists attempted to span the divide between Afrikaner and Briton. For example, in 1921, an eminent English historian of South Africa, Professor G. E. Cory of Rhodes University, claimed that 'Dingaan's Day might be regarded almost as much a British festival as a Dutch national day'. He anticipated that in the future, when the 'Dutch' and the English had become more aware of their history 'they would love one another more' and Dingaan's Day 'would not be a nationalist, but a national festival'. Echoing Botha in 1916, Cory noted the occasions on which the two European races had 'fought side by side in Kafir wars' and he lamented the tendency of the nineteenth century British government overseas to side with the 'blacks' when disputes arose with the Afrikaners in the border provinces.⁶³ In 1926, Abe Bailey, a frequent Empire Day speaker in the pre-war period, appeared at the Dingaan's Day festival at Paardekraal. He described himself as an 'English Afrikander' and emphasised his belief that Dingaan's Day was 'our national day'.⁶⁴ Jan Smuts (who was a prominent speaker at both Empire Day and Dingaan's Day celebrations) went as far as suggesting that the name of the festival be changed. He said 'it was a mistake to name the celebration Dingaan's Day' because this was an obstacle to it becoming 'a permanent national institution throughout the country'. All the same, Smuts 'rejoiced' in the fact that there were many English present at the event and insisted that both 'Dutch and English' should share the occasion'.⁶⁵ The aspiration to use the

⁶³ 'Professor Cory on Dingaan's Day' in *ibid.*, 17 December 1921, p.10.

⁶⁴ 'National Ceremony at Paardekraal. Striking address by Sir Abe Bailey' in *ibid.*, 17 December 1926, p.11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 December 1933, p.12.

day to create a generalised white South African solidarity was also vocalised in East London, where A.P.J. Fourie (Minister of Industries in the Smuts government) suggested that the white South African were a chosen people:

South Africa has . . . been populated by the very best blood of Europe, the best stocks of England, Scotland, Holland, France and Germany. There must have been some high purpose in calling together in a new country the best blood from overseas.⁶⁶

Hence, although Dingaan's Day was undoubtedly a means of asserting Afrikaner identity, it was not intended to deliberately exclude other white South Africans, a point established by Grundlingh and Sapire in their consideration of the commemorations of the Great Trek in 1938 and beyond..⁶⁷ However, it was comfortably employed to affirm white supremacy in South Africa: Dingaan's Day marked an important defeat of Zulus by Boers and one finds it occasioning a call for 'firm control' over the 'native population'.⁶⁸ It thus became a more appropriate marking of South Africa's 'national day' for whites, and it was somewhat disingenuous of Smuts in 1924 to claim that Dingaan's Day celebrations should not be offensive to the Black population: 'Some of the natives thought that Dingaan's Day was a feast of triumph over the natives but this was not the case'.⁶⁹ The African National Congress thought otherwise and Dingaan's Day was chosen as a day of protest and resistance. The Communist Party, moreover, was in the forefront of the organisation of protests on Dingaan's Day that frequently resulted in violence.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ 'South Africa's Chance' in *ibid.*, 18 December 1933, p.12.

⁶⁷ Albert Grundlingh and Hilary Sapire, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrialising South Africa, 1938-1988' in *South African Historical Journal*, 21 (1989), p.21.

⁶⁸ *Cape Times*, 17 December 1926, p.11 and 'Use of Native Labour in the Union', *ibid.*, p.13.

⁶⁹ 'Great Day in our History – General Smuts on the meaning of DD' in *ibid.*, 18 December 1924, p.6.

⁷⁰ 'Unemployed attack Communists' in *ibid.*, 17 December 1931, p.10. Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (ed.), *The Oxford History of South Africa Volume II* (Oxford, 1971), P.445; Sifiso Mxolisi

Empire day was never targeted for protest in this way in South Africa. That day never excluded people of colour and, in the main, avoided the trumpeting of white supremacy.

As the nationalist ascendancy strengthened, there was less delicacy amongst some Afrikaners in emphasising the divide between South Africa and Britain. In 1931, Prime Minister Hertzog used Dingaan's Day as an occasion to crow about the recent Statute of Westminster and announced that the 'British Parliament and the British People finally and for all time and in all respects, [had] relinquished all rights formal and informal to any claims they may have had to the subjection of South Africa or the South African people'. He insisted that it was the duty of 'the British' to 'behold the evil done by you in South Africa'.⁷¹ Hertzog's audacious rhetoric stung deeply some of those few 'British' South Africans who continued to celebrate Empire Day as a means of protecting their identity. At the Empire Day celebrations in East London in 1932, the Mayor, Mr. N.O. Norton, said he could not forgive nor forget . . . [Hertzog's] Dingaan's Day utterance' of the previous year 'when he insulted every South African . . . born of British parents in the union.'⁷² Nevertheless, whatever Norton's feelings, the post-war trajectory of Dingaan's Day in South Africa was undoubtedly an indication of the ascent of nationalist sentiment. The inverse fortunes of Empire Day celebrations reflected the increasing poverty of imperialist ideology in South Africa. Perhaps the decline in imperialist feeling is best summed up by a correspondent to the *Natal Witness* who in 1928 complained bitterly about the

Ndlovu, 'Johannes Nkosi and the Communist Party of South Africa: Images of 'Blood River' and King Dingane in the Late 1920s-1930' in *History and Theory* Volume 39: Issue 4, December 2000, pp. 111-132.

⁷¹ 'Attack on the British' in *Cape Times*, 17 December 1931, p.10.

⁷² 'Empire Day in East London - Mayor cannot forgive General Hertzog' in *Natal Witness* 26 May 1932, p. 10.

deplorable lack of patriotism shown on Empire Day in the city as the schoolchildren marched to the Empire Day ceremony:

not a flagpole in the vicinity . . . was draped with the Union Jack . . . Was it to instil in the minds of those children present the contempt which South Africa displays for the flag . . . that the parade was organised, for if so, nothing could have been more successful, for no single child present or teacher could have gone away with any feeling of pride instilled by the wretched ceremony so devoid of patriotic fervour . . . what else can we expect from the rotten apathy shown by our so-called loyalists in matters concerning British rights, British Prestige and British Heritage? Where is our British pluck when we are afraid to make a display of loyalty because of the derisive jeers of those who wish to take the Irish initiative and give South Africa the doubtful blessing of "sovereign independence". . . ⁷³

Aside from the *Natal Witness*, which continued to publish long Empire Day editorials, most of the English Language press gradually lost interest in Empire Day. The *Cape Times* usually produced a photograph and a small report of the event that typically emphasised the memory of Queen Victoria and the war dead.⁷⁴ However, it was no longer an active promoter of Empire Day. Indeed, in 1933, it reported on Jan Smuts' birthday, but made no mention whatsoever of Empire Day.⁷⁵ The *Rand Daily Mail* all but ignored Empire Day after 1929 - two years earlier it had conceded that the Union as a whole gave little attention to the significance of the holiday.⁷⁶ For its part, the *Natal Witness* maintained its hyperbolic reporting of the children's

⁷³ Ibid., 25 May 1928, p.12

⁷⁴ *Cape Times*, 25 May 1929, p.13; 25 May 1929, p.18; 25 May 1931, p.1 and 25 May 1932, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 24 May 1933, p.1.

⁷⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 May 1927, p.10.

processions in Maritzburg, which fluctuated in size year by year.⁷⁷ However, frequent caveats often appeared that revealed a general pessimism about the day. In 1932, the *Natal Witness* acknowledged that the 'value' of Empire Day was 'still not as well recognised as it should be'⁷⁸ and in 1932, it noted that Empire Day had 'developed more and more into a public holiday' and there was 'a danger that its real significance may be overlooked'.⁷⁹ The procession of 1935, although 'of average size' was criticised for lacking colour, 'a few banners would have made all the difference'.⁸⁰

In 1939, the editor of the *Natal Witness*, G.H. Calpin, was the principal Empire Day speaker in Maritzburg. He addressed about 1,000 children and 150 adults. His speech was peppered with lamentations about the day that are a good indicator of its general demise in South Africa: 'it was a pity that more adults do not use part of these great festival days to think of their real meaning . . . it is left to a few devoted men and women to arrange that the children of the city should do so . . . It was a regrettable thing that so many people had learned to scoff at the word "Empire".'⁸¹ Imperialists in South Africa had found themselves washed over by the tide of Afrikaner Nationalism. Canute-like they had hopelessly attempted to stem the flood though bold assertion of the empire's pre-eminence. The truth was that despite the maintenance of the empire connection through another world war (but not far beyond) imperialism as an ideology was washed out in South Africa and this was eminently illustrated by the fact that Empire Day did not seem to concern Afrikaners unduly after 1921. There was, unlike the period before the War, a complete absence of provocation or protest entailed by the ceremony.

⁷⁷ 800 children processed through the city in 1929, whereas only 88 appeared in 1931. In 1935 the Sons of England succeeded in marshalling 2,000, a figure that was halved the following year: *The Natal Witness*, 25 May 1929, p.1; 26 May 1931, p.8; 25 May 1935, p.1 and 26 May 1936, p.20.

⁷⁸ 'Empire Day' in *ibid.*, 24 May 1929, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1932, p.4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1932, p.12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1939, p.9.

Empire Day in Britain 1918-58

In the metropole, the situation was very different. John Mackenzie has challenged the previously accepted notion that the First World War effectively extinguished the flame of popular imperialism in Britain. He called attention to the ongoing cultural and institutional expression of popular imperialism in the interwar years and observed how striking new forms of cultural dissemination facilitated the growth of a 'moral' conception of empire. Hence, the waning of an 'aggressive, offensive and xenophobic' imperialist culture did not signify a concomitant evaporation of popular imperialism, which was still crucially important in terms of British identity, even if its expression increasingly took on more subtle and less arrogant forms.⁸²

The study of Empire Day in Britain between the wars reveals a parallel process of imperialist revanchism running alongside a growth of significant disaffection in regard to the imperial ideal. It would appear that after 1918, the potential value of Empire Day as an instrument of hegemony was far more uncertain than before. To be sure, Empire Day was widely accepted as a national festival. It had successfully colonised the consciousness of the population, so that it rapidly became an accepted tradition that had the capacity to traverse class lines. This was made apparent in the industrial town of Accrington in Lancashire where a May Day demonstration took place in 1920, which was described by one of its organisers as an 'innovation' for the town. Councillor Constantine, the Chair of the local Labour Party who gave a speech at the demonstration, noted that May Day as a labour day was

⁸² Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester, 1986), pp.1-14.

becoming increasingly popular in England and how there was no reason why it should not become a regular feature on the calendar.

As all knew there were many festivals held, they as Christians celebrated Christmas and Good Friday and made them holidays. They had too Empire Day and St. George's Day. Why should they not have Labour Day?

The seamless association of Empire Day with such ancient popular traditions by a Labour Party councillor in front of a predominantly working class audience is an important indicator of how Empire Day had developed a strong and widespread social currency and that it needed no explanation or mediation when being presented as a national festival. It seems reasonable to conclude that the idea of the day as a fixed and recognised national commemoration had taken root across a broad section of the population. An elderly itinerant woman, who was arrested in Bootle for drunkenness, cited the imperial festival as the reason for her latest episode of public intoxication: 'It was Empire Day and I had a few Empire Day drinks.' Notwithstanding her feeble explanatory plea, some significance can be given to the awareness of Empire Day on the part of an aged inebriate down and out.⁸³

However, the very celebration of the festival in the post-war era began to expose the empire and imperialism as distinctly ideological concepts. Some advocates and organisers of Empire Day celebrations consciously departed from a position that viewed imperial sentiment as an expression of a neutral social identity and began openly to exploit the party political advantages of the annual festival. At the same time, Empire Day attracted sustained criticism from the Left, which eventually solidified into organised protests and direct challenges.

⁸³ *Evening Express*, 25 May 1929, p.1.

The ideological battles of Empire Day, which occasionally erupted into direct confrontation, have a critical importance when considering popular imperialism of the interwar years. Mackenzie has demonstrated how the forms of imperialist dissemination that were common between the wars (the cinema, imperial exhibitions, juvenile literature, commercial ephemera, Reithian broadcasting, documentary film and so on) projected 'an imperial ethos as part of an immutable order. In short, an implicit imperialism.'⁸⁴ A hegemonic imperial 'national consensus' such as Mackenzie describes leaves little room for resistance, because the means of reinforcing internalised imperial social identities were seemingly benign and in the context of the time, almost subliminal. Empire Day, on the other hand, was a conspicuous legacy of an outmoded and unsubtle imperialism. Through its rituals and rhetoric, it betrayed the actuality of the empire as raw military domination and racial arrogance. Empire Day thus provided something immediate and tangible as a target for anti-imperial protest.

Even so, the festival could still surprise with its capacity to capture a mass constituency, nowhere more so than at the time of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, which was an antidote to the solemnity that the First World War brought to Empire Day. The Exhibition helped give a fresh impetus to the Day and even the *Daily Herald* acknowledged that almost 140,000 people attended an Empire Day thanksgiving service in the new sports stadium that year and that the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company had organised forty six special trains in order that people from the provinces could take part.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, despite the evident popularity of empire after the First World War, there was also a rising tide of anti-imperial dissent among sections of the population.

⁸⁴ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp.10-11.

⁸⁵ *Daily Herald*, 26 May 1924, p.5.

Following the war, the empire was undergoing political and structural changes that were, to say the least, unsettling for ardent imperialists. The white Dominions were demanding and achieving greater autonomy,⁸⁶ the nationalist movement in India was able to manoeuvre the British government into a position where it was forced to negotiate limited political reforms in the subcontinent⁸⁷ and in 1922 the Irish Free State was proclaimed in Dublin. Stuart Ball illustrates how the range and significance of concerns about the empire at this time can be described as 'a general imperial crisis' and many in the Conservative Party believed that the future integrity of the empire was in serious doubt.⁸⁸ There were also those on the political right who subscribed to a theory that 'all expressions of discontent in Britain and throughout the empire owed their origins to covert communist agitation'.⁸⁹ Some members of the establishment saw flamboyant Empire Day demonstrations as an effective means of meeting the challenge of socialism; during the course of an Empire Day speech made in 1921, the vice chancellor of Liverpool University insisted that the development of imperial sentiment was essential in countering the communist threat:

more concrete efforts should be made in this country to cultivate a national spirit and pride in Empire. More especially was this necessary today when notably in London and some other towns, long processions of schoolchildren could be witnessed waving red flags. These were children brought up in communistic schools, in who was inculcated the spirit of destruction of existing systems.⁹⁰

Notwithstanding such elaborate fantasies, it was certainly the case that Empire Day provided an opportunity for those on the Left to make confrontational gestures of

⁸⁶ Keith Robbins, *The eclipse of a great power: Modern Britain 1870-1975* (London, 1983), pp.109-14.

⁸⁷ Franz Ansprenger, *The dissolution of the colonial empires* (London, 1989), pp.34-48.

⁸⁸ Stuart Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party* (London, 1988), p.6.

⁸⁹ Lawrence James, *The rise and fall of the British Empire* (London, 1998), pp.372-73.

⁹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1921, p.8.

defiance. For example, the Salford Unemployed Workers Committee chose Empire Day to hoist a red flag above the old school building they used as a meeting place. This led to their expulsion from the premises, the use of which had been granted to them by the council on the condition that it wouldn't be used for political purposes. The timing of their provocative gesture seemed to be a reaction to the attempt by Salford Council to celebrate Empire Day in a more effusive fashion than in previous years.⁹¹

It was in the context of perceived threats to the Empire at home and abroad, that the political Right seized upon Empire Day as an opportunity to attack what were seen as seditious groups. In England, the events that occurred in the small Essex town of Thaxted in 1922 are an early example of Empire Day being used as a means to attack political enemies. Conrad Noel, a founder member of the Church Socialist League, had been appointed as the vicar of Thaxted Church through the private patronage of an aristocratic socialist, Lady Warwick. Noel was a passionate anti-imperialist, an advocate of Irish nationalism and a vociferous supporter of the Labour Party.⁹² In 1918, his sympathies for the Irish cause and the Russian Revolution extended to his displaying a Sinn Fein flag and a red flag in the church. Following local objections, a number of Cambridge undergraduates visited the town in 1919, removed the flags and set the Union Jack in the church. According to Noel, 'Some of the devout churchgoers rallied round me and we tore up or burnt this emblem of the British Empire with all the cruel exploitation for which it stood.'⁹³ A second Union Jack was then placed on the roof of the church; this was also removed and destroyed. Noel replaced the Sinn Fein and red flags but, on Empire Day 1921, the town was

⁹¹ *Reporter for the County Borough of Salford*, 28 May 1921, p.3.

⁹² Jack Putterill, *Conrad Noel: Prophet and Priest 1869-1942*, from a transcript of Number 5 in the series "Men of vision" broadcast in the overseas programme of the B.B.C. on 12th Aug. 1962, p.3 and Conrad Noel, *An Autobiography* (London, 1946), pp.48-9 and p.110.

⁹³ Noel, *An Autobiography*, p.111.

visited by a large group of aggressive demonstrators organised by members of the Conservative Party at Cambridge. The demonstrators attached Union Jacks to lampposts outside of the church and held a meeting in the guildhall, where they resolved to remove the offending flags, and expressed their outrage at the preaching of 'treasonous doctrines [and] political theories from the pulpit'. The demonstrators, who insisted that 'the British Union Jack stood for freedom wherever it flew',⁹⁴ had brought with them a large lorry of stones with which they 'threatened to stone the vicarage and every cottage not flying the Union Jack'. However, Noel enjoyed the support of a number of ex-policemen who had been dismissed from the force during the police strike in 1919; they sabotaged the demonstrators' vehicles and removed the lorry of stones from the town. Later on, some fighting broke out between supporters of the vicar and the Empire Day demonstrators and Noel claimed that 'shots were fired on that afternoon.'⁹⁵ However, the *Daily Herald* claimed that the 'shots' were more likely 'the loud report of exhaust cut outs' as the demonstrators dispersed in their cars, but not before they had surrounded the vicarage shouting threats and slogans.⁹⁶

The politicisation of Empire Day, as seen so dramatically in Thaxted, was taken up by Conservative politicians in conjunction with imperial propaganda organisations in the 1920s. Empire Day events were often as much concerned with opposition to socialist ideas as they were with a celebration of imperialism. In 1926, the British Empire Union commissioned the Royal Mint to produce 30,000 bronze Empire Day medals that were distributed to children in schools and hospitals throughout the country. The B.E.U. claimed the medals were issued 'with the view to fostering and developing in the minds of the children a love of Empire and an

⁹⁴ *Essex County Standard*, 28 May 1921, p.5.

⁹⁵ Noel, *An Autobiography*, p.112.

⁹⁶ *Daily Herald*, 25 May 1921, p.5.

appreciation of their wonderful heritage⁹⁷ and offered the medals for sale to interested parties who were responsible for their distribution. However, by 1929, officials from the Royal Mint were becoming concerned that the medals were being used to further party political ends. Newspaper reports that Conservative Party activists in Devonshire had purchased and distributed a number of medals the previous year irritated treasury officials, who did not want the royal family associated with party politics.⁹⁸ The Mint asked the B.E.U. for an explanation and an assurance that medals were not to be used by party political organisations.⁹⁹ In an inept response the B.E.U. agreed that the medal should not be used 'in connection with any activity of [party political] organisations', but they also expressed a determination to fulfil all orders for the 1929 issue, because in that election year they believed that 'the general celebration of Empire Day may have a good deal to do in counteracting the activities of the socialists and may influence many votes'.¹⁰⁰ Following a complaint to the Treasury from the principally communist League against Imperialism,¹⁰¹ Ramsay MacDonald got wind of the nature of the B.E.U.'s propaganda and his displeasure was evident as the Mint subsequently refused to press any more Empire Day medals.¹⁰²

The B.E.U.'s transparent manipulation of Empire Day as a means to attack the Left was imitated in part by the Conservative Party, which unsurprisingly used

⁹⁷ NA: T 160/375, Quoted from a letter written by Reginald Wilson (General Secretary of the B.E.U.) to R. A. Johnson (Deputy master and comptroller of the Royal Mint), 7 Jan. 1929.

⁹⁸ NA: T 160/375, Oldham (Treasury official init. H.F.) to Johnson, 2 Jan. 1929.

⁹⁹ NA: T 160/375, Johnson to Wilson, 4 Jan. 1929.

¹⁰⁰ NA: T 160/375, Wilson to Johnson, 19 Feb. 1929. See also PRO: T 160/375, "Your empire" (revised version)

¹⁰¹ NA: T 160/375 Letter from Reginald Bridgeman, (Secretary of the League against Imperialism) to financial secretary to the Treasury, 29 Apr. 1930. For a brief history of the League, see Jean Jones, 'The League against Imperialism', *Socialist History Society Occasional Paper Series: No.4*. (Preston, 1996).

¹⁰² NA: T 160/375, Memo from Fisher to undisclosed person.

Empire Day as a means of political campaigning between the wars.¹⁰³ The Conservatives' association with Empire Day was reinforced by their activists' commitment to organising Empire Day events, by their general recognition as the party of imperialism and through Stanley Baldwin's Empire Day addresses broadcast by the BBC. Although Ramsay MacDonald also made Empire Day addresses to the nation, Baldwin's longevity of tenure as Premier meant that his was the voice most associated with the event.

On these occasions, Baldwin was not shy in rehashing the old empire story, but at the same time he attempted to distance the British Empire from the militarism prevalent before the war; 'The Empires of old were created by military conquest and sustained by military domination. They were Empires of subject races governed by a central power. Our Empire is so different from these that we must give the word Empire a new meaning.'¹⁰⁴ However, not all Conservatives wanted to present such a benign vision of empire. In 1928, the *Manchester Guardian* complained that Empire Day was occasionally abused with celebrations designed to appeal to 'the vulgar instinct that rejoices in anything large and showy'. It emphasised the propensity of the Tories to manipulate Empire Day, claiming it as their own for 'the glorification of their...party'. The *Guardian* condemned such conduct on the grounds that there was a long tradition of supposedly benevolent Liberal imperialism that was the converse of belligerent military imperialism:

¹⁰³ For example, see the activities of the Frinton-on-Sea Conservatives in *Essex County Standard*, 30 May 1925, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Prime Minister's Empire Day Message, 1925 in Stanley Baldwin, *On England* (London, 1926), p.213.

Empire Day is justified and its influence good in so far as it ... eschews bombast, does not cover up ugly facts either of the past or of the present and encourages the children of this generation to think and work for peace.¹⁰⁵

The Liberal Party were certainly not content to let the Conservatives steal all the party political advantage associated with Empire Day. In 1929, Empire Day fell a week before the general election and in Manchester, Liberal parliamentary candidates from three districts organised an Empire Day open air meeting, where they protested against 'the Conservative Party's claim to own the Union Jack' and the 'arrogant claim that there was something essentially Conservative about the British Empire'. Speeches were made defending the Liberals' dealings with the Empire and the Liberal vision of imperial development.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, in 1930 the *Manchester Guardian* again complained that 'The Conservative Party has somehow come to regard the empire as its special creation and care, and Empire Day as the special recognition of that profitable fact.'¹⁰⁷ Following the Conservatives' election defeat of 1929, Tory imperialists identified empire as 'the positive political creed' that could win over 'the industrialised masses' and encouraged the party to take it up 'in a positive fighting spirit'.¹⁰⁸ Undoubtedly, Tory politicians made efforts to make Empire Day work for them and Stuart Ball observes that 'it became as much a party as a national festival' and was frequently used as a reason for organising political mass meetings.¹⁰⁹

However, the Conservatives could not always enlist Empire Day with ease. In the Durham town of Blaydon, a ten-year ideological struggle over the celebration of Empire Day began in 1925, when the local education committee submitted an anti-

¹⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 May 1928, p.10.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1929, p.16.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1930, p.14.

¹⁰⁸ Leo Amery quoted in Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, p.35.

¹⁰⁹ Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, p.80. For examples of Empire Day events organised by local Conservative associations see *Burnley Express and Clitheroe District Advertiser*, 28 May 1927, p.6, *Essex County Standard*, 31 May 1930, p.11 and 30 May 1931, p. 9.

Empire Day resolution to Durham district council, instructing teachers not to take part in Empire Day celebrations in schools. This provoked an immediate reaction among Blaydon Conservatives, who organised an Empire Day Committee and in subsequent years exploited the issue as much as possible.¹¹⁰ Tensions between the supporters of Empire Day and the Labour-dominated council increased to such a point that in 1927 the county police, fearing an outbreak of violence between the opposing sides, decided to intervene in a dispute over the flying of the Union Flag from the council chamber. The Conservatives had organised a march on Empire Day with the intention of forcibly raising the flag over the chamber; the Labour Councillors responded with a public statement proclaiming that 'Force would be met with force and the only way they [the imperialists] would place a Union Jack on that flagpole would be over some of their dead bodies.'¹¹¹ The police announced that they would defend the council's decision to prohibit the flying of the Union Jack and would take charge of the council chamber on Empire Day. The Empire Day Committee duly admitted defeat, but placed a half page advertisement on the front page of the *Blaydon Courier*, proclaiming that the Union Jack would now be unfurled on a specially erected flagpole next to the war memorial.¹¹² The national press followed these events¹¹³ and consequently 20,000 people, mainly adults, appeared in Blaydon for the Empire Day celebrations in 1927, a stunning coup for the Conservatives.

¹¹⁰ The Conservatives continued to agitate against the Blaydon Council despite the fact that in 1926, Durham County Council announced that it would not issue instructions to teachers forbidding Empire Day celebrations but 'would rather leave the matter with the teachers themselves', *The Blaydon Courier*, 1 May 1926, p.8.

¹¹¹ Councillor R. Bull at a public meeting called by the Labour group reported in *Ibid.*, 21 May 1927, p.1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ For example see *The Times* 5 May 1927, p.13, 20 May 1927, p.14, and 23 May 1927, p.8

In 1926, the Teacher Labour League, an organisation whose active members were closely associated with the Communist Party,¹¹⁴ submitted a resolution to the Labour Party conference held at Margate. It condemned 'the widespread reactionary and imperialistic teaching in the schools' with particular regard 'to Empire Day celebrations and the use of history and other text books with an anti-working class bias'. The resolution called upon 'the educational organisations of the labour movement, Labour school managers and Labour members of education authorities to take steps to prevent the further celebration of Empire Day.'¹¹⁵ It was passed unanimously and adopted as Labour Party policy. This was the first official acknowledgement by the party that the celebration of Empire Day was not 'outside politics', which was a frequently repeated claim of its adherents.¹¹⁶

When the Labour Party acceded to power in 1924, Ramsay MacDonald demonstrated no inclination toward political reform regarding the Empire - continuity was the prevailing feature of Labour's colonial policies. In that year, J. R. Clynes, deputy party leader, wrote to *The Manchester Guardian* announcing the twentieth anniversary of Empire Day and encouraging the one million unemployed to emigrate to the colonies with their 'millions of acres of fertile lands'. In his letter, he demonstrated that the Labour leadership believed in the political efficacy of promoting a British imperial identity, even if (in common with the other parties), this involved recasting the image of empire:

¹¹⁴ A survey of British communist party membership conducted in 1931 does not list teachers as an 'industrial category' However, in the 1950s and 60s teachers formed a high ratio of total membership, see Kenneth Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism* (London, 1968), pp.34 and 43. The activity of some teachers in opposing Empire Day reveals a strong connection with the Communist Party and it would seem reasonable to assume that post-1945 membership patterns signal a propensity that can be applied to the interwar years. This is further supported by autobiographical evidence from teachers who were Communists in the interwar years: see Edward Upton, *In the Thirties* (London, 1962).

¹¹⁵ *The Educational Worker* (organ of the Teacher's Labour League) 1, (May 1927), p.4.

¹¹⁶ For example, see *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1925, p.8.

Today we may well remember that empire does not stand for aggression but for human progress and world peace, and take up again, with new heart and furbished ideals, the sacred trust of Empire settlement as an equal boon for the country and the colonist.

Two years after Labour's first administration, the anti-Empire Day resolution passed in Margate signalled a major divergence of feelings between the rank and file of the party and the national executive. When again in power, the Labour government failed to implement the resolution against Empire Day that had enjoyed undisputed support in 1926, which prompted the League against Imperialism to take issue with Charles Trevelyan, the President of the Board of Education, asking in writing:

whether instructions have been issued by your department, or whether it is intended to issue such instructions, giving effect to the Resolution in favour of the prevention of the future celebration of Empire Day which was passed at the 26th Annual Conference of the Labour Party held at Margate in 1926.¹¹⁷

Trevelyan replied with a statement confirming that, despite the mandate for action adopted at Margate, the Labour government was determined to maintain the *status quo* as far as Empire Day was concerned: 'it is not the practice of the Board of Education to issue any instructions with regard to Empire Day. Such celebrations are a matter for the consideration of Local Education Authorities.'¹¹⁸

The Labour Party often promoted a reformist approach to colonial affairs that did not suggest an end to British imperial domination in the world. Like the

¹¹⁷ Reginald Bridgeman to Charles Trevelyan, 10 Apr. 1930, published in *The Educational Worker*, 4, (May 1930), p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Charles Trevelyan to Reginald Bridgeman, 14 Apr. 1930, in *ibid.*

Conservatives, Labour strove to recast the image of the empire as a co-operative association of nations. As Barbara Bush points out, between the wars there were concerted efforts to 'neutralise' the concept of empire with the introduction of 'slippery terms' such as 'trusteeship', 'commonwealth' and 'self-determination'.¹¹⁹ In 1934, Londoners returned a Labour majority to the metropolis's county council. The new education committee issued a directive that the name of Empire Day be changed to 'Commonwealth Day'. The committee were of the opinion that the regulation of 1907, which provided for the celebration of Empire Day in London schools, was out of step with the 'more modern description' of the British Empire as 'The British Commonwealth of Nations'. The committee wanted the celebrations to be a 'family affair', where no 'warlike spirit' would be present and where there would be an absence of 'any unworthy feelings of racial superiority or antagonism towards the rest of the world'. Any 'attitude of Britain *versus* the rest of the world' was to be discouraged in favour of a patriotic celebration of 'domestic love of country'.¹²⁰

The change of name and emphasis outraged the organisations that had for almost a decade been campaigning against Empire Day. *The Educational Worker* complained that many teachers and ordinary Labour party members would be deceived by the new 'socialist sounding title' given to Empire Day and the campaign against imperial celebrations would become more difficult. Furthermore, it was reported that in spite of the new directive, London schools were continuing to celebrate Empire Day in traditional fashion:

The full weight of authority is still being used, through the whole of the school machinery, to glorify imperialism on May 24th. Those teachers, parents and

¹¹⁹ Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, race and resistance: Africa and Britain 1914-1945* (London, 1999) p.22.

¹²⁰ NA: ED 34/36 London County Council, Report of the education committee, 15 May 1934.

children who oppose imperialism are still being coerced to take part, since absenteeism might lead to unpleasantness or victimisation.¹²¹

Such accusations were not without foundation. In 1932, a Quaker teacher in Coventry had been sacked after absenting herself from Empire Day activities in her school. Beryl Aylward was refused permission to be excused from participating in Empire Day celebrations on grounds of conscience, but after seeing her class into its place for the Empire Day assembly, she withdrew to the classroom 'and occupied herself with school duties until the celebrations were over.'¹²² Aylward appealed against her dismissal but was unsuccessful. The National Union of Teachers would not support her case and issued a statement upholding the education authority's entitlement to terminate her services summarily on the basis that 'even in the matter of religious instruction there is no "conscience clause" for teachers ... the same applies to the claim of the teacher to be excused from participation in the Empire Day celebrations.'¹²³

In Leyton, the Conservative dominated council had in 1928 reacted against some teachers' disinterest in Empire Day by instituting a regulation that 'the Union Jack be saluted and the National Anthem sung on Empire Day by the children in the schools under its authority'. The Labour members of the council resisted this move and organised a public meeting to protest against 'the attempt to force the children at Leyton schools to observe Empire Day'.¹²⁴ A manifesto protesting against Empire Day was produced and fifteen thousand copies were distributed locally. It ran thus:

A message to parents, teachers and children of Leyton.

¹²¹ *The Educational Worker*, 6, (Jun. 1934), p.5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 5, (Jul. 1932), p.7. For details of Quaker objections to Empire Day celebrations, see PRO: ED 34/36 London County Council, report of the education committee, 15 May 1934 and Kathleen E. Innis (ed.) *Sunday school lessons on peace – for special Sundays (Armistice Day; Empire Day; Christmas Day etc.)*, (London, 1929), p.27.

¹²³ *The Educational Worker*, 5, (Jul. 1932), p.7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, (Apr. 1928), p.7.

The Tories of Leyton who use the Union Jack for election purposes have ordered your children to salute the flag on Empire Day. The Empire was built up at the point of a bayonet and by bayonet and bullet it is maintained today ... the colonial workers who live under the Union Jack are not free people but slaves. In India, "the brightest jewel in the crown", 8,500 children under 12 years of age are employed in the mines, and 29,000 in the jute mills ... what has this to do with you? Just this, that these facts are so ugly that you should see that the children know the truth, for they will not learn it in school The Empire, say the Tories and Liberals, "is above politics". Don't you believe it. There is good political reason for teaching school children to honour the Union Jack and the Empire. A speaker at an Empire Day celebration in 1926 said: "The spirit of Empire is the spirit that broke the general strike".¹²⁵

The manifesto called upon the community to mount a spirited protest against Empire Day, although it was careful to warn teachers against compromising their conditions of employment. In the week preceding Empire Day, daily open-air meetings were held in the district with the aim of organising mass absenteeism from schools. Supporters of Leyton Council's directive were angered at this threat and the ratepayers' association discussed the idea of punishing any parents who kept their children from school on Empire Day - this idea was abandoned after it was recognised that prosecution of parents would result in the creation of martyrs.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the vehemence of Leyton's Conservatives in trying to ensure that local children conformed in the celebration of Empire Day exposed a general feeling of uncertainty regarding public support for the tradition. In 1928, a private members bill was introduced to the House of Commons that sought to make Empire Day compulsory in

¹²⁵ *The Walthamstow, Leyton and Chingford Guardian*, 25 May 1928, p.8.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

all national schools - never before had such coercive devices been contemplated in order to ensure the participation of children. The second reading of the Empire Day Bill, which had some Labour and Liberal backers, never went to the vote as it was 'talked out' by Labour M.P.s.¹²⁷

Empire Day controversy was not restricted to the schools celebrations, it also extended to some of the community festivals organised to celebrate the day. In 1930, Richard Annakin, the mayor of Harrogate, persuaded the local council to delete 'Rule Britannia' and 'Hearts of Oak' from the programme of the town's Empire Day celebration on the grounds that they were 'boastful war songs'. In response, the local British Legion issued an unofficial programme that included the lyrics of the deleted songs. Before Annakin arrived at the Empire Day concert, both songs were 'sung lustily' and when the mayor appeared, an attempt was made to boo him and sing Rule Britannia again. The Harrogate Silver Prize Band drowned out the singing by playing 'Fight the Good Fight', but throughout the evening some sections of the crowd continued to interrupt the programme by singing the banned songs.¹²⁸ At Derby in the same year, the Labour mayor refused to take part in the community Empire Day procession because he felt it 'had become subject to ridicule' and 'had lost its popularity'.¹²⁹ The attitude of the mayor and the subsequent refusal of the council to give official recognition to the celebrations, provoked a revival of interest in the festival and an 'imposing procession' and rally took place. But the following year, Derby town council refused to support Empire Day celebrations in the town because they 'led to the encouragement of fighting tendencies'. The council also attempted to replace Empire Day in the schools with a 'Peace Day' and nearly all the schools addressed the children on The League of Nations. This did not prevent one Labour

¹²⁷ *The Times*, 28 Apr. 1928, p.9.

¹²⁸ *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1930, p.6.

¹²⁹ *The Derbyshire Advertiser*, 22 May 1930, p.7.

councillor from addressing the Empire Day crowds, saying he was 'mystified by the Town Council's attitude' as 'surely the Empire was above politics'.¹³⁰

The Communist Party of course rejected the idea of the empire as a benign force and British communists were foremost in the resistance against Empire Day celebrations. The *Daily Worker* called upon its readers to busy themselves in anti-Empire Day activities. 'Chalking squads' were advised to write slogans on every street through which Empire Day demonstrations were due to pass, party members were urged to organise poster parades 'in the places where most of the workers congregate' and paper sellers were encouraged to concentrate on selling the 'empire number' of the *Daily Worker* in factories, labour exchanges, on working class streets and at Empire Day demonstrations.¹³¹ In 1930, communists handed out leaflets in Liverpool urging parents to keep their children from school and take them to tea at the local communist headquarters. According to *The Times*, the 'offer of buns and tea' failed to keep the children from school 'and thousands of them, carrying Union Jacks' attended school to join in the celebrations.¹³²

Despite such setbacks, the Communist Party was eager to cultivate children and youth as a political constituency. Through the pages of the *Daily Worker* and innumerable leaflet campaigns, it demonstrated the injustices of the British Empire and encouraged children to campaign against Empire Day in the schools.¹³³ In common with other national newspapers, the *Daily Worker* produced special 'empire numbers' but concentrated on the oppressive nature of the British Empire, rather than its perceived wonders and benefits. Despite the publication of letters purporting to come from young readers who had organised their own anti-Empire Day crusades in

¹³⁰ Ibid., 29 May 1931, p. 2 and p.11.

¹³¹ *The Daily Worker*, 23 May 1930, p.3.

¹³² *The Times*, 24 May 1930, p.14.

¹³³ For examples see *The Daily Worker*, 28 May 1930, p.4 and 23 May 1931, p.4.

their schools,¹³⁴ the communists consistently advocated collective protests, believing that individual actions were ineffective and ran a strong risk of victimisation for the child.¹³⁵ The Party wanted the protests against Empire Day to include children, teachers and parents. A manifesto published by the communist led London First of May Celebration Committee urged children to agitate collectively.

On Empire Day, working class children must refuse to take part in the lying demonstrations that are held in the schools. They must unite with their parents. They must go with their parents to their teachers and head teachers in the schools just before Empire Day and say they will not take part in Empire Day celebrations in the schools, and that public money must not be spent in making children believe in the lies that are told about the British Empire.¹³⁶

Some teachers, who may have been communists, did not need persuading that Empire Day should be opposed and were active in protesting against the celebrations both inside and outside the classroom, as one young correspondent attested: 'My teacher is against Empire Day. She was not going to have Empire Day but the authorities told her if she did not, she would have to retire. My teacher told us that the Indians should govern themselves.'¹³⁷ There is a suggestion here of how the Indian nationalist movement was 'feeding' anti-imperialism in the metropole.

The communist teachers' bulletin, *The Educational Worker* reported on several organised protests that took place including a demonstration outside a Southall school in 1930, led by the League against Imperialism and the Teachers Labour League. On arriving at the school, the demonstrators were met by a large body of police, who refused to let them hold a meeting near the school gates and threatened to

¹³⁴ For examples see, *ibid.*, 26 May 1930, p.5 and 24 May 1931, p.1.

¹³⁵ *The Educational Worker*, 2, (Jun. 1928), p.9.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5, (May 1931), p.2.

¹³⁷ *The Daily Worker*, 23 May 1930, p.4.

arrest one of the organisers when he attempted to approach parents gathered for the Empire Day celebrations. The demonstrators held a meeting one hundred yards away from the school (the nearest the police would allow them to be), and were heartened when 'many parents sympathetic to the purpose of the meeting gathered around'. However, some parents who considered that the demonstrators were 'spoiling the fun for the little kiddies' heckled the speakers. *The Educational Worker* claimed that some schools in the local district had cancelled their outdoor celebrations after an extensive chalking campaign had taken place in the local streets outside the Southall schools, 'the prospect of counter demonstrations clearly not being relished'.¹³⁸

However, it seemed there were only a limited number of effective protests. *The Educational Worker* admitted that demonstrations were often poorly organised and that, despite a 'growing feeling against Empire Day among parents and teachers', the League against Imperialism had 'failed to press home its ... propaganda'.¹³⁹ The *Daily Worker* urged its readers to concentrate on disseminating anti-Empire Day propaganda to working class parents in 'factories, labour exchanges and working class streets',¹⁴⁰ and even leafleted soldiers taking part in an Empire Day parade in Liverpool.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, in 1931, the *Daily Worker* conceded that, 'We have not yet sufficiently aroused the mass of workers to go along to the schools on Empire Day ... and to turn the flag wagging demonstration into a demonstration against the Empire and the slavery it stands for.'¹⁴² Interestingly, Bernard Porter quotes the chairman of the Empire Day Movement who, in the same year, complained that 'there are still many dark corners in Great Britain, especially in the industrial areas where

¹³⁸ *The Educational Worker*, 4, (Jun. 1930), p.4. For details of other protest meetings and anti-Empire Day activities see *ibid.*, 5, (Jul. 1931), p.7 and 6, (Jun. 1932), p.10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, Jun. (1932), p.10.

¹⁴⁰ *The Daily Worker*, 23 May 1930, p.3.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1930, p.1.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 23 May 1931, p.4

[we] have not yet been able to penetrate'. Evidently, there were areas where Empire Day failed to rouse passions either way and was met with a distinctly apathetic response.¹⁴³ The Communist Party eventually lost interest in demonstrating against Empire Day and only three accounts of anti-Empire Day activities were reported in *Daily Worker* after 1933.¹⁴⁴ However, it did continue to print anti-imperial articles every year on Empire Day and was triumphant when Rhonda Urban District Council banned Empire Day celebrations in its schools.¹⁴⁵

During the Second World War, the Empire Day Movement benefited from an extraordinary increase of membership and funds. Nevertheless, after 1939 there seemed to be considerably fewer reports of Empire Day celebrations in the press so that, after 1946, Empire Day is rarely mentioned at all. The increase in revenue that the Movement enjoyed during the war seems to have been directed toward large-scale patriotic events in the capital, such as the Festivals of Empire at the Royal Albert Hall in 1944 and 1945. In addition, the Empire Day Movement spent money on new staff, publications, lecture tours and a magazine, *New Empire*.¹⁴⁶

After 1947 the Empire Day Movement experienced a rapid decline in both funds and membership, as it rapidly became an imperialist relic that had no relevance to the post-war international order. In 1946, John Paton, the Labour M.P. for Norwich, appealed to the Minister of Education to abandon Empire Day in the schools and replace it with 'United Nations Day'.¹⁴⁷ The minister, Ellen Wilkinson, whilst supporting the idea of a United Nations Day did not intend to abandon Empire Day, but was careful in her answer not to use the word 'empire'. She declared; 'I believe

¹⁴³ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share*, p.285.

¹⁴⁴ *The Daily Worker*, 28 May 1934, p.4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1936, p.5.

¹⁴⁶ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p.235.

¹⁴⁷ NA: ED 34/36, John Paton question in Parliament to Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education, 7 Feb. 1946.

that a child who understands the value of the British Commonwealth will understand all the better the idea of cooperation between the United Nations'.¹⁴⁸

By 1957, however, the Conservative government was under pressure to face the fact that Empire Day was no longer of any significance. Lord Hailsham, Minister of Education, wrote to the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, explaining that he was being encouraged by 'various concerned organisations' to 'do something' about Empire Day, which had fallen into 'desuetude compared with, for instance, United Nations Day . . . Empire Day as such is at the moment dead beat and a non-starter. No one can regret this more than I do.'¹⁴⁹ Hailsham's suggestion that Empire Day be re-launched under the new name of Commonwealth Day was supported by the four High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon and Pakistan. The Commonwealth Relations Officer also wrote to the Prime Minister telling him he 'must face the fact that Empire Day is moribund'.¹⁵⁰ However, Macmillan was reluctant to allow Empire Day to be replaced by 'Commonwealth Day' and instructed Hailsham to 'let the matter drop'.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, during the course of the next year, various imperial organisations whose titles included 'Empire' changed their names.¹⁵² Even the Empire Day Movement, which resisted changing its name until 1965,¹⁵³ began to press the Prime Minister to change the name of Empire Day and finally, in September 1958, Macmillan agreed to the change.¹⁵⁴ The death knell was sounded on December 18th 1958 when, in response to a 'planted' question from a Conservative M.P., the Prime Minister announced.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., Ellen Wilkinson reply to John Paton, 7 Feb. 1946.

¹⁴⁹ NA: PREM 11/2601, Lord Hailsham to Harold Macmillan, 23 May 1957.

¹⁵⁰ NA: PREM 11/2601, Commonwealth relations officer to Harold Macmillan, 14 Jun. 1957.

¹⁵¹ NA: PREM 11/2601, Macmillan to Hailsham, 17 Jun. 1957.

¹⁵² For example the Royal Empire Society became the Royal Commonwealth Society.

¹⁵³ NA: PREM 11/2601, Colonial Office report, Nov. 1965.

¹⁵⁴ NA: PREM 11/2601, Macmillan, memo to private secretary.

I am glad to be able to tell the house that with the concurrence of other Commonwealth Governments and of the Empire Day Movement, it is proposed to change the name of Empire Day forthwith to Commonwealth Day. I'm sure this change will be widely welcomed as representing the general feeling in the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries on this matter.¹⁵⁵

Empire Day was over.

¹⁵⁵ NA: PREM 11/2601, cutting from Hansard, 18 Dec. 1958.

Conclusion

This thesis is the widest examination so far of Empire Day that has been undertaken. A worldwide scope is befitting of what was, after all, a global phenomenon. Even so, considerations of space have delimited the extent of this investigation, yet the case studies of India, South Africa and Great Britain, alongside significant reference to the two largest of the 'white' settler colonies, provide evidence that allows us to draw conclusions both about the nature and importance of the celebration itself and its value to historians in the settling and evaluation of historical questions related to popular imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Empire Day Movement aspired to universalise strong imperialist sentiment within the populations of the empire: whereas in Britain, class barriers and ideological differences had some impact upon the growth and spread of the new 'tradition', the greater obstacles facing the promoters of Empire Day overseas were the sensitive ethnic divides that tended to polarise political behaviour. Despite some dissenting responses, within the white settler colonies in general, Empire Day became customary in the Protestant, English-speaking schools. However, the adult response to the imperialist gala was more irregular and subject to variation in patterns of adoption according to national and regional distinctions. Empire Day, nevertheless, became one of the ways through which imperialists strove to counter the rising nationalist movements in the white settler colonies. In South Africa, Empire Day struggled to establish an influential presence, not least because a majority of the white population had, through the experience of war, been immunised from the contagion of imperialist sentiment. Indeed, the Afrikaners' reluctant subject status within the empire prompted an antithetical and sometimes disruptionist response to Empire Day, which in some

ways mirrored the responses to the festival of French Canadians and the Catholic Irish in Australia. Moreover, the divided and disparate English-speaking population in South Africa displayed varying degrees of imperial patriotism and their responses to Empire Day were to a large degree shaped by strong regional cultures or by class interest rather than ethnic solidarity. This prevented Empire Day from developing fixity of meaning or purpose in South Africa. Differing interpretations of the function and utility of Empire Day in South Africa resulted in sharp variations in its popularity across regional divides and saw it being employed simultaneously as a reactionary bulwark against Afrikaner political influence *and* as a supposed tool of conciliation.

The overall failure of Empire Day to rouse popular imperial sentiment in South Africa provides a very useful contrast by which to measure the success of the festival in Great Britain. Indeed, those historians who question the extent to which Empire Day celebrations in Britain denote a popular affiliation with the imperial state need only look at the South African example to see how Empire Day might have played itself out in Britain had it been as inconsequential as they suggest.

This thesis demonstrates beyond doubt, that in Britain, and indeed Australia and Canada, Empire Day almost immediately engaged a far broader constituency than had been anticipated. Empire Day burst out of the schools, where it was intended to inculcate an imperial consciousness in a 'captive' juvenile audience, and was embraced by a broad adult constituency who developed a vibrant community festival. This active demonstration of imperial pride was not enacted as an adjunct to other social activities and because of this it can be claimed as a genuine, measurable and active expression of popular imperialism. It is this evidence that can go some way in helping to settle the debate between Mackenzie and Porter, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis. It is true that an array of imperialist organisations, with the

support of the mainstream press mounted an energetic campaign to launch and sustain Empire Day; however, as the South African example amply demonstrates, the seeds of imperial propaganda had little effect if they were not sewn on fertile ground. The celebration of Empire Day by a broad and diverse constituency of adults shows that imperialism was, for many sections of British society, part of the ether in which they lived their lives. Before 1914, at the heart of the empire, the symbolic rituals and general gaiety that were part and parcel of the Empire Day celebration affirmed a proud and unquestioning belief in the moral correctness of the British Empire that frequently transcended class and political divisions. There is no suggestion that the festival had universal appeal, yet the extent of popular support demonstrated in this study shows that imperialism had a hegemonic quality. In addition, the responses of working class children to Empire Day, as illuminated through biographical accounts, reveals that the propaganda delivered through the educational curriculum successfully implanted a sense of the righteousness of the Empire in many young minds

The evidence from India corrects a previous historical misunderstanding as to the degree that Empire Day was celebrated in the subcontinent. It was, of course, never likely to be a truly popular festival in India before the war, where the majority of the population were preoccupied with the immediate vicissitudes of everyday existence and whose political concerns were largely parochial. Empire Day was, however, successfully established within that stratum of the population that were strategically crucial to the maintenance of British rule. It was celebrated by both British and Indians and amongst diverse communities spread across the whole of the vast colony. The maintenance of British rule in India depended upon the loyalty of the western educated Indian middle class and sections of the traditional elite and Empire Day gave them the opportunity of demonstrating their fidelity to the imperial

Government: the festival was embraced by the rulers of the princely states, by Indian office holders in the cities and the provinces and by varied and diverse elements of the population who perceived their interests as being tightly coupled to British rule.

The British in India, contrary to what might have been expected, did not always mark the occasion and some of their celebrations often lacked the exuberant patriotic spirit that characterised Empire Day in other parts of the empire. The importance of promoting Empire Day in the schools of India was, however, recognised early on by the British as the educational community were seen to be in the vanguard of anti-British agitation in Bengal during partition. However, in contrast to the situation in the metropole, the attitude of some British communities in India on Empire Day betrayed disinterestedness in imperialist propaganda and it was not unusual for Indians to outshine the British in their enthusiasm for the Day. British celebrations of Empire Day in India also demonstrate a marked divergence in respect to how far the 'masters' of India were prepared to intermingle with their colonial subjects. Whereas some celebrations were planned as communal events, at others, Indians were pointedly excluded from Empire Day ceremonies. The reinforcing of racial hierarchies in this manner is a predictable manifestation of some of the beliefs and attitudes held by the British resident in India

Perhaps of greatest significance are the Empire Day ceremonies that were organised by Indians, independently of the British. Events of this kind were instigated by both Muslim and Hindu loyalists and were often exclusive in their own right. Although taking many forms, Indian celebrations seemed to share a commonality in that behind the public avowals of loyalty to the empire and professed love of the imperial ideal, there was a perception that the enactment of Empire Day ceremonials were calculated to reinforce the perceived advantages of loyalty to the imperial state.

Participation in Empire Day celebrations was often a means of reinforcing social status and securing political advantage, as evidenced by Muslim loyalists whose enthusiasm for the Day quickly evaporated after the revocation of the partition of Bengal. Circumstances like this show how Empire Day serves as a fine litmus of ideological shifts within a given constituency: the increased warmth demonstrated toward Empire Day in 1909, for example, shows us how the Morley-Minto reforms had an immediate ideological impact. Some loyalists, exemplified by P.B. Joshi, employed Empire Day as a means of claiming political rights from the Government without seeming to be challenging the imperial order. Empire Day celebrations of this kind show us how many Indians were, in effect, unable to think or operate outside of the British imperial idiom in pursuit of equality in their own country.

Changes in support for Empire Day on the part of Indians during the First World War can provide a useful barometer of the political climate at this time. To an extent, the scrutiny of Empire Day celebrations provides some evidence which challenges previously held ideas about the precise time that mainstream Indian politicians demonstrated a willingness to move beyond the established paradigm of western constitutionalism, wherein political progress was accepted as bounded within the imperial discourse. In 1915, Indian Empire Day celebrations hit their highpoint, gaining unprecedented support in a public demonstration of unity that was even supported by some nationalist politicians. However, within a year, as the burdens and losses of war became manifest and as it became clear that the British would not make decisive steps towards Indian equality, the goodwill and support for Empire Day suffered a severe slump, from which it never recovered. Clearly, some of the key constituencies on which British rule depended were withdrawing their unquestioning support for the Government, and their absence from Empire day celebrations that they

had previously attended was an indication of this loss of faith in the imperial government. The success of the nationalists in raising a new broad constituency during the war occurred simultaneously and Empire Day was held up by sections of the nationalist movement as a symbol of the inequity of British rule. Hence, the period between Empire day in 1915 and the next celebration in 1916 can be demonstrated as the moment of separation of many Indian politicians from the British hegemonic grip, whereby imperial rule was no longer seen as benign and progressive. On the contrary, imperialism was beginning to be understood as an essentially repressive system of government that contained little potential for meaningful reform. It was the first non-cooperation campaign of 1920 that is usually held up as marking the comprehensive move away from constitutional politics, yet the circumstances of Empire Day after 1915 demonstrate that politicians were withdrawing early on during the War.

Nevertheless, even after the war it was apparent that Empire Day retained a utility as a propaganda tool in India and, at this time, some politicians and journalists attempted to reformulate imperial dogma in Empire Day speeches and newspaper articles. Moreover, some Indians whose interests were firmly tied to the imperial government and the continuation of British rule continued to celebrate the Day. In some ways this seemed like a vain and hopeless resistance against the nationalist tide that swept over the sub-continent. On the other hand, Congress itself demonstrated that it was concerned about the potential of Empire Day to raise support for the imperial government as it made significant efforts to undermine the festival. The tactics of Congress were to confront Empire Day through demonstrations and strikes, but there was also an appropriation of certain aspects of the commemorative repertoire employed on Empire Day to cement a sense of Indian national feeling -

undoubtedly an unspoken testament to the efficacy of Meath's methods of indoctrination.

In the cases of the metropole and the 'white' settler colonies, the First World War had a transformational effect on Empire Day. In many respects the rush to arms throughout the empire in 1914 was an affirmation that imperial patriotism was deeply embedded amongst the younger generation. It is difficult to prove an undisputed connection between Empire Day celebrations in the schools and the success of military recruitment in defence of the empire, but it is most probable that the festival had played its part in instilling a militaristic and patriotic sensibility in the minds of its audience that had some influence among many young men in their decision to enlist. Nevertheless, during the War, Empire Day was drained of its vitality - it is not without irony that the Government bestowed official status on the day at this time - and it was reshaped as a sombre occasion where memorialisation of the war dead became its primary function. Of course, such commemoration had its own didactic purpose that, in part, served to validate the deaths of so many men in battle. Despite its temporary transformation, in Britain and the white heartlands of Australia and Canada, Empire Day retained the potential to draw public support for the empire, a potential that continued to be realised throughout the 1920s. Yet, in South Africa, where the war had revived Afrikaner nationalism as a leading political force, Empire Day, which had only limited support anyway, became an almost arcane affirmation of British identity and had no authority as a representative symbol of South African nationhood.

Perhaps the strongest indication that Empire Day was moribund in South Africa after 1918 was the lack of opposition that was offered to the imperialists on their day of celebration. Apart from a half-hearted tilt at the Day, staged by the

provocative leadership of the Afrikaner nationalists in 1921, it was of little interest to Afrikaners any longer and they allowed it to fade slowly in its own time. Again, the situation in South Africa contrasts sharply with the metropole, where the interwar years saw Empire Day become a political battleground. The fact that Empire Day supporters became involved in a bitter struggle with the political Left affirms the continued importance of the Day. This thesis has demonstrated how during the interwar years the ongoing celebration of Empire Day provides an index of the extent of a continuing popular imperialism, especially as the festival began to shrug off the gloomy atmosphere of memorialisation: this is further evidence to sustain the Mackenzie thesis.

However, it would appear that imperialism was losing its hegemonic grip at this time, particularly as the Conservative Party began to exploit its political utility during election years. Empire Day was employed as a bulwark against socialist ideas and seen as a means to counteract what was seen as a radicalised teaching profession. In turn, the Communist Party and some radical Labour Party members began to protest against the celebration of Empire Day. The political establishment attempted to recast imperialism with a sly use of language, designed to disguise its true nature, but battle lines had been drawn. There was no longer a wholesale and unquestioning public alignment with the imperialist state. Nevertheless, imperialism undoubtedly retained its utility as a living part of political culture in Britain; none of the mainstream parties adopted an anti-imperial stance at this time and Conservatives, and sometimes Liberals, positively embraced Empire Day as a useful political tool. Support for Empire Day did begin to fall away in the later 1930s, to be revived temporarily during the war, yet it was not until the empire itself began to disintegrate that Empire Day was finally laid to rest, over half a century after its inauguration.

In summary, Empire Day has proved to be a useful subject of historical study. The analysis of the celebration provided a means by which to gauge the extent of imperial sentiment on a global scale. It demonstrates how imperialism was a popular concern that could inspire an active response from diverse sections of the populations of Britain and its colonial empire. Empire Day has also been employed to register the key differences in imperial sentiment across the British world. The case studies have shown the multiple functions that the celebration served for a variety of groups. It has been proved that Empire Day was a far broader celebration than commonly recognised and it was certainly much more than merely a festival in the schools. This study has also looked at what was said and done on Empire Day as a way of charting the breakdown of imperialism as a hegemonic concept. Empire day is of course, not the only instrument that may be employed in this way, yet because Empire Day was a regular annual occurrence the historian is able to use it with greater precision than some other sources might allow.

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