Socialist Internationalism in South and Southeast Asia, c1947-1960

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Abstract

This thesis studies centrally a set of South and Southeast Asian socialist intellectuals who crafted far-reaching radical networks from independence into the 1950s. It views these activists – who covered large distances by jet and drew likeminded leftists and anti-imperialists into their orbits – as indicative of dialogical dimensions to decolonisation that are only now being excavated. These ‘mobile intermediaries’ flitted from one country, conference, and cultural milieu to another, connecting the local with the global while recalibrating both. The thesis strings together letters, seminar transcripts and newspaper snippets which capture the shared ambitions and political plans of Asian socialists, as well as personal rifts and geopolitical shifts that stirred and stymied them in a fervid internationalist moment.

The thesis demonstrates how these South and Southeast Asian non-state actors shaped egalitarian and democratic visions of a post-imperial future through the Asian Socialist Conference (ASC), a body which they established in 1953. It proposes that the 1950s was a decade of effervescent political experimentation nourished by the kaleidoscopic hopes that decolonisation unleashed. What historians presently understand of this decade is conditioned by accounts of decolonisation which cast the latter as primarily nationalist in its intellectual and cultural orientations. Decolonisation in the 1950s in fact consisted in copious imaginaries and possibilities that able individuals – taking advantage of cheaper air travel and quicker communications technologies – fashioned in private meetings, public rallies, and diverse publishing projects, among other means.

The thesis ultimately integrates a new episode of Asian international history into our accounts of global decolonisation, world socialism, and the Cold War. It argues that the socialist visions which given activists honed were amorphous and malleable ones, though they could be reconciled with state-building agendas as the decade went on. It proposes that these activists were the doers, not just the thinkers, of post-war anti-imperialism.
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<td>Anti-Colonial Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFPFL</td>
<td>Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League</td>
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<td>ASC</td>
<td>Asian Socialist Conference</td>
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<td>BLP</td>
<td>British Labour Party</td>
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<td>BSP</td>
<td>Burma Socialist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCF</td>
<td>Congress for Cultural Freedom</td>
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<td>COPAI</td>
<td>Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPY</td>
<td>Communist Party of Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>Congress Socialist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>Indian National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>IUSY</td>
<td>International Union of Socialist Youth</td>
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<td>MCF</td>
<td>Movement for Colonial Freedom</td>
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<td>PSI</td>
<td>Socialist Party of Indonesia</td>
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<td>PSP</td>
<td>Praja Socialist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAWPY</td>
<td>Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia</td>
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<td>SI</td>
<td>Socialist International</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPI</td>
<td>Socialist Party of India</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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Author’s Declaration

I, Tom Shillam, declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.
Introduction

In September 1953, Burmese socialist U Hla Aung departed his home country for New York in the United States to attend the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which sat until December. On April 26 1955, he would give a speech in the same city to the United Nations (UN) Committee on Non-Self-Governing Territories in which he urged listeners to strengthen their resolve against ‘race domination’ and continued colonial rule in Africa.¹ In between these summits, Hla Aung ventured around Africa on a diplomatic visa, building up a network of contacts and comrades who would feed him information and ideas about the state of anti-colonial struggles in the region. Here, Hla Aung travelled primarily in his propensity as a member of the Asian Socialist Conference (ASC) rather than as a Burmese politician and diplomat, nurturing friendships with activists who shared the ASC brief of constructing socialism at the same time as dismantling imperialism, across borders. After the UNGA sitting of 1953 concluded, he attempted to attend two pan-African conferences in Ashanti, Gold Coast and Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia, missing the first one and reaching the second, which was subsequently cancelled due to the British preventing representatives travelling from Uganda and Kenya.² Hla Aung still made many friends during his sojourns across Africa, but the difficulties he faced emphasised the ad hoc nature of such experimental non-state journeys. Hla Aung also weathered and disrupted racist geographies on his travels; the Times of India reported on January 6 1954 that his hotel in Lusaka had to change a ‘whites only’ policy on his arrival, which disturbed fellow guests and prompted other hotel-keepers in Central Africa to consider whether to ‘relax their traditional colour bar’.³

This episode provides insights into global decolonisation as it unfolded in the 1950s. Scholars of the international history of anti-imperialism and decolonisation have traditionally viewed the post-war period as a period in which nation-states took precedence over empires as a new form of ‘imagined community’ for many of the world’s populations.⁴ For example, Mark

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Berger divides the 1950s-1970s into first and second generation ‘Bandung regimes’ which comprised new nation-states that tried to achieve ‘the prosperity and progress that national liberation and independence were supposed to deliver’ as Empire rapidly declined. Berger considers that the ‘rise of Third Worldism in the 1950s and 1960s’ spoke to the ascendancy of the postcolonial leaders who gathered at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, eager to discuss how to safeguard national sovereignty in an age of Cold War saber-rattling. This gives the impression that anti-imperial internationalism in the 1950s was synonymous with nationalist political leaders. Studies of intersections between decolonisation and the global Cold War have similarly pointed towards the 1950s as an age of postcolonial nationalisms narrowly focussed on achieving and preserving sovereignty, though not without drawing on and hybridising some aspects of Cold War ideologies. Studies of intersections between decolonisation and the cultural Cold War have suggested that postcolonial nationalism was concerned with other concepts than sovereignty such as human rights, indicating how Afro-Asian activists participated prominently in early debates within multilateral international organisations such as the UN, where they called for the fulfilment of the UN’s truncated ‘universalisms’.

Very little such decolonisation scholarship has probed the extent to which Asian non-state actors engaged in experimental, transnational political networking which imagined quite different futures to the ones being prepared by national leaders. For many Asian artists, activists, journalists and intellectuals, the 1950s-1960s was a period in which longstanding investments in sovereignty and self-determination could be translated into distinct agendas for political, cultural, social and economic emancipation. They often followed the lines of Hla Aung, identifying friends and contacts at home as well as further afield with whom they could thrash out agreements or disagreements about the political form the postcolonial future.

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6 Berger, “After the Third World?” 9-12.
should take.\textsuperscript{10} Asian and African agitators weaved intellectual paths at a remove from state and inter-state actors in the 1950s, envisioning diverse futures in league with far-flung allies who they met at conferences, festivals and rallies, and in hotel rooms and newspaper offices. Quicker and cheaper technologies of communication and air travel made the conduct of these internationalisms easier. Scholars of Third Worldism as well as decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia commonly take internationalism to have consisted in the diplomatic or foreign policy pursuits of particular states. Actually, a plethora of mobile non-state actors ventured around the globe in the 1950s, crafting distinctive imaginaries of regional and world futures in communion with copious allies. These imaginaries could reflect many influences and were considerably more open-ended than our understandings of the 1950s, centred around the teleologies of state-building modernisation programmes and Cold War ideologies, might suggest. Our definitions of internationalism need to be expanded so that these actors, and their contributions to a multi-directional and pluripotent ‘global’ decolonising moment, take on clearer relief.

This thesis takes a set of socialist politicians and intellectuals active in India, Burma, and Indonesia in the late 1940s and 1950s and traces how they sought collectively to transform regional social orders and the international order at a global conjuncture that seemed conducive towards comprehensive political change on each of these planes. India, Burma, and Indonesia all gained independence between 1947 and 1949, and in each country, a core of socialists who had been active in anti-colonial struggles moved to organise themselves into caucuses which could compete for political power. However, more than this, they also ventured across seas and borders to network with one another, eager to engage in transnational political activism as well as national. Their activism interweaved these scales – the national and the transnational – in the manner of a double helix. Asian socialists needed to succeed in national politics in order to effect change, but if their socialism was to be international, they also needed to conduct conversations with nearby contacts about what socialism consisted in, and what its global aims should be. This interlacing of scales was also vital for practical reasons; socialists hoped to facilitate interactions and exchanges between

regional trade unions and youth groups and similar formations elsewhere, thus connecting the local and the global and sometimes bypassing the national altogether.\textsuperscript{11}

The thesis argues that the socialist activists it assesses were engaged in the \textit{doing} of transnational anti-imperial solidarity in the 1950s, rather than just the \textit{thinking}. Nascent scholarship on the crafting of different imaginaries about post-imperial futures to the nationalist or developmentalist in the early to mid-twentieth century is overly attendant on agendas around which there was much consensus within particular intellectual worlds. This makes it seem as if solidarity were a by-product of ideological concordance. Gary Wilder and Adom Getachew have produced studies of African, African American, and Caribbean anti-colonial ‘worldmakers’ who largely agreed about what imperialism, and its legacies, consisted in, and about the political solutions required to defeat it.\textsuperscript{12} The Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective has investigated the 1950s more specifically, but chiefly through the lens of a number of conferences where African and Asian activists gathered to sound similar notes about how post-imperial futures should take shape.\textsuperscript{13} The making of anti-imperial solidarities also required much practical effort in shaping and maintaining friendships with distant allies – not just intellectual effort expended in print or at conferences. In addition, it involved mediating conflicts and tensions that could destabilise given conversations at any moment. This thesis focusses even more definitively than the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective has on themes of mobility and transnational networking. The non-state actors it surveys performed the labour of anti-imperial and internationalist strategising in the 1950s across space and place, journeying around the globe with little knowledge of who they might be meeting and the precise questions they might be discussing, and making rapid connections with possible allies in turbulent political conditions. The thesis brings the doers into our accounts of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century where the thinking of anti-colonial solidarity has previously been privileged.

The individuals examined in this thesis include Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia of India, U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein of Burma, and Sutan Sjahrir of Indonesia, as well as less well-known activists in each country who clustered around these prominent politicians. These individuals are introduced in detail in Chapter I. They are selected because they typify the experimental and multi-directional 1950s decolonising dialogues that this thesis focusses on. Jayaprakash Narayan – commonly known as JP – was a political leader and social worker who attempted to apply some of the ideas of his intellectual mentor Mahatma Gandhi about decentralisation and mass participation to postcolonial India, promoting movements of agrarian reform that sought to disperse land ownership among peasants. Later on, in the 1970s, he took a stand against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s invocation of a national ‘Emergency’, which Indira claimed was a vital measure to protect national security. JP, who was a complex figure, called for a ‘total revolution’ led by students to rid society of corruptions at the time – seemingly under the impress of Mao Zedong, who had made a similar call in China a decade earlier – yet two years later he was involved in forming a party, the ‘Janata Party’, which was a forerunner of today’s Bharatiya Janata Party, the governing right-wing party. This paradox is perhaps explained by JP’s visceral anti-authoritarianism, which resulted in him temporarily siding with heterogenous political groups who opposed the Indira Gandhi premiership, which included Hindu nationalists and right-wing populists.

Ram Manohar Lohia was a more philosophical socialist than JP who helped the latter craft transnational networks in the late 1940s that eventuated in the ASC, but who spent more time theorising socialism than attempting to carry it out in ensuing years. He was perhaps the chief brain behind the ASC, articulating the notion of a ‘Third Camp’ or ‘Third Force’ in world affairs at the beginning of the 1950s, which was to consist in a bloc of anti-imperial states and peoples that was neutral in the Cold War, and eager to beat their own political paths outside it. Lohia and JP helped form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) in 1952, a body which historians have struggled to characterise ideologically. The pair did not stay on good terms for long, with Lohia forming a separate party in 1956 out of frustration at JP and the PSP’s supposed closeness to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose ‘socialism’ Lohia deplored. Lohia was

a maverick whose many strands of thought influence progressives, feminists, and anti-caste campaigners today. However, Lohia also made many journeys around the globe in the immediate post-independence period which are less well-publicised than his domestic arguments and writings. These journeys – in terms of the poverty he encountered, the cooperative industrial experiments he observed, and the people he met and spoke with – were as vital in the making of 1950s anti-imperial socialist internationalisms as the theoretical tomes he produced on ideas of a ‘Third Camp’, which themselves spoke to these same experiences.

In Burma, U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein founded what became known as the Burma Socialist Party (BSP) in 1945, which became a key force in the governing Burmese Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) coalition from 1948. Ba Swe was to be the second Prime Minister of Burma after U Nu, taking up the posting in June 1956 for eight months. He had been involved in anti-imperial struggle since his student days in the mid-1930s, when he met Kyaw Nyein, a close comrade in years to come. Kyaw Nyein fell out with Nu in 1958 resulting in a split of the governing coalition into the ‘Clean AFPFL’ and the ‘Stable AFPFL’ – the latter of which Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein formed – a disagreement which ultimately paved the way for military rule in Burma within a matter of years. While plenty is understood about the involvements of this pairing in Burmese politics in the 1950s, less is known about their outlooks on international politics, though Kyaw Zaw Win has written about their work with the ASC. Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein stand out among the figures featured in this study in that they were state actors, even if their contributions to ASC congresses, publications, and private discussions were not often part of any obvious governmental brief. Another Burmese socialist who this thesis references regularly is Hla Aung, one of the ASC’s roving secretaries in the 1950s, who this thesis terms ‘mobile intermediaries’. The ASC’s secretaries did much of a groundwork of laying out Asian socialist projects from 1953 onwards, undertaking lengthy international tours to nurture

solidarities with far-flung contacts who had broadly similar ambitions to Asian socialists. They created anti-colonial organisations in league with these contacts such as the Anti-Colonial Bureau (ACB) oriented towards achieving tangible goals, not just intellectual agreement on common problems. Hla Aung was a Member of Parliament and a diplomat, but not a public-facing figure within the BSP in the vein of Ba Swe or Kyaw Nyein, and thus had more time than they did for experimental transnational political strategising.\(^\text{19}\)

In Indonesia, independence leader and revolutionary theoretician Sutan Sjahrir founded the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) in February 1948, which David Hill describes as ‘Indonesia’s most vocal promoter of democratic, liberal socialism’ before 1960 when it was banned.\(^\text{20}\) Sjahrir is a household name in Indonesia for his anti-imperial campaigns in the 1930s and 1940s and for acting as the first Prime Minister of the country between 1945 and 1947. He had significant differences with fellow Indonesian nationalists Mohammad Hatta and, most tellingly, Sukarno. Sukarno – the first President of Indonesia – annulled the country’s experiment with parliamentary democracy in 1959 and imprisoned Sjahrir in 1963; Sjahrir died three years later in 1966. Sjahrir helped to forge the South and Southeast Asian socialist networks at the turn of the 1950s that brought about the ASC, although he was too busy with domestic politics to involve himself deeply with its plans outside of major congresses. Similarly to the Burmese case, a PSI member who was not so public-facing, Soerjomo Koesoemo Wijono, took up a prominent role within the ASC in 1953, acting as its first General Secretary from that year. Alongside Hla Aung, he travelled far and wide expanding ASC networks, plugging its projects, and encouraging fellow international socialists to adopt anti-imperial positions on freedom fights in Africa. Wijono had participated in some of the Sjahrir cabinets of the 1940s, acting as vice-minister of the interior at one stage.\(^\text{21}\) Like Sjahrir, he found himself in opposition on a domestic front in the 1950s but had more time than the PSI leader for internationalist strategising.

Each of these figures viewed the onset of decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia with relish, considering the liberatory energies it unleashed as potentially epoch-making. They were socialists of an anti-imperial bent who felt that decolonisation across the region could

\(^{19}\) Zaw Win, “Burma Socialist Party,” 91.


ripple out to reshape the international order, as well as social orders at home. They quickly organised themselves into new socialist parties on a domestic level. They also penned letters to one another and convened a number of early meetings to share ideas about how an ‘Asian’ or global socialism might advance. They formed the ASC in 1953 as a vessel for their internationalisms; through this body, which was funded by various member parties, they honed imaginaries about socialist and post-imperial regional and global futures, and crafted plans to effect these imaginaries, which included anti-colonial, economic, and political strategies. Asian socialists bonded at many smaller-scale, ‘bureau’ meetings than their well-publicised conferences of 1953 and 1956. Here, the aforementioned ‘mobile intermediaries’ – lesser members of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialist parties who flitted around Asia, Africa, and Europe trying to identify new allies and make progress with ASC projects – took centre stage. They reported on their various struggles and successes between meetings and conducted open-ended discussions at the meetings about how to make progress in the months following. Their itinerant transnational political lives were crucial to the sustenance of Afro-Asian socialist networks through the 1950s. While the thesis terms them ‘intermediaries’ in their capacity to conduct conversations with far-flung contacts, they were also generators, creating ideas about how to deepen international socialist solidarities with these same contacts. They performed both practical and intellectual labour in creating new transnational solidarities.

The thesis considers these activists to epitomise what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms the ‘dialogical side of decolonization’. Chakrabarty distinguishes this from the ‘developmentalist side of decolonization whereby anti-colonial thinkers came to accept different versions of modernization theory that...made the West into a model for everyone to follow’.22 By and large, the postcolonial leaders of the 1950s and 1960s associated with the Bandung Conference and Non-Alignment – including Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Julius Nyerere – embraced notions of development in their respective state-building projects which identified rapid, state-driven economic growth as a sure-fire route to achieving political parity with Euro-American nations. They also launched nation-building projects predicated on the notion

that their peoples needed to be educated in how to be citizens.\textsuperscript{23} State- and nation-building were intimately linked, and the outcome of postcolonial leaders’ drive towards ‘development’ was what Chakrabarty terms a ‘pedagogical’ political style, in which these leaders made themselves out to be indispensable tutors of their peoples.\textsuperscript{24} It followed that postcolonial elites who viewed their own governance as vital in the pursuit of goals of ‘development’ and ‘modernisation’ – which Chakrabarty refers to as ‘catching-up-with-the-West’ – were not likely to be patient with political opponents, whether fellow elites or insurgencies challenging their administrations. Many postcolonial regimes gravitated towards authoritarianism by the 1970s at the latest, often set in train by the actions and policies of state leaders who considered their rule inextricable from the development and modernisation of given nation-states.

By contrast, Chakrabarty regards the ‘dialogical side’ of decolonisation as having been characterised by ‘different thinkers’ adopting ‘different positions’ on the future of their societies.\textsuperscript{25} This was a phenomenon of early post-war history when anti-imperialists articulated myriad ideas of possible post-imperial futures. The concept of ‘dialogical’ decolonisation can be applied to assessments of non-state, Afro-Asian internationalist networking in the 1950s to capture the dynamics of mobility and open-ended discussion about political futures which characterised this kind of networking. This thesis draws on David Featherstone in Chapter II in particular to emphasise that solidarities were actively engineered in testing political conditions. Featherstone argues that solidarities do not emerge from pre-existing ideological agreement among distant parties but are instead created by specific activists with broadly similar political ambitions which they seek to converse about further. These activists have considerable autonomy in shaping the said solidarities – and the relationships they forge, and ideas or ideologies they then mould, are subject to change depending on who is at the centre of the transnational network and who else they may or may not be able to keep in contact with.\textsuperscript{26} This perspective on solidarity demands closer

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Chakrabarty, “The Legacies of Bandung,” 53.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 54-55.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 47.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
attention to the doing, rather than just the thinking, of anti-imperialism. It suggests that travel and communication were vital in the making of kaleidoscopic 1950s anti-imperial imaginaries.

It is a core claim of this thesis that South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms took shape through a dialogical mode of decolonisation. The actors named above and many close comrades crafted fresh activist networks, founded journals, communicated regularly in person and at distance, and formed a body that allowed them to reach a broad shared understanding of how to pursue socialist international change. They aspired towards the destruction of imperialism and the construction of alternate, cooperative and egalitarian social orders. They brought African contacts into their networks, offering assistance with specific freedom struggles and hoping to gain from these contacts’ perspectives on how an international or Afro-Asian socialism should advance. Mobile intermediaries taking advantage of emerging technologies of travel and communication drove forth these decolonising dialogues whilst also participating in the Cold War, in that they influenced organisations as such as the Socialist International (SI) which they felt were excessively concerned with communism as against imperialism. European socialists sought to forge links with African and Asian contacts to gain insights into what was going on in the decolonising world; their pictures of these worlds were tinged with ‘deepening Cold War anxieties’. For their part, Asian socialists forced the SI among other institutions to adopt more anti-imperialist positions, whilst taking advantage of connections with Europeans for material reasons; Europeans often paid for their flight costs and provided accommodation, and Asian socialists travelled straight to Yugoslavia and Africa afterwards. The dialogical side to decolonisation needs to be restored to its place alongside the pedagogical – which it was intertwined with, not separate from – in scholarship on post-war international history.

The thesis proposes that socialism for many Asian and African activists consisted in a broad imaginary of an egalitarian and democratic, post-imperial future – not simply in an ideology or a philosophy – and that socialism’s power as a mobilisational category lay in this capaciousness. Maia Ramnath has shown that socialism was not an ‘ideological monolith’ but a ‘heteroglossic discourse’ between the 1900s and 1930s in which ‘an analogous range of

positions’ on how to confront capitalism and imperialism could be taken. Socialism served a similar discursive function in the 1950s, tempting many activists with comparable ideas about desirable post-imperial futures to network and campaign together, without necessarily creating fully-fledged philosophical concordance. Itinerant Asian socialists used it as a mobilisational tool on their travels around diverse regions. The invocation of socialism as a descriptor of an egalitarian and democratic future which could yet be shaped in any of a number of directions by given interlocutors, got socialists such as Hla Aung a hearing in brief sojourns to different cities and countries, where they might otherwise have had to labour even more intensely to make connections with sundry possible allies. Socialism was not infinitely malleable; it was opposed to capitalism and imperialism, but also communism. As the 1950s went on, it was conjured by South and Southeast Asian among other postcolonial regimes as a means of achieving equality and prosperity within a nation-state framework. Many such postcolonial state-building projects were moved by anti-communism, and leading Asian socialists shared their domestic political rivals’ fears of communism. Some Asian socialists grew more developmentalist or nationalist themselves, and concomitantly, the meanings of the socialisms they invoked became less flexible. Still, in the multi-directional decolonising dialogues of the 1950s, socialism was a potent mobilisational category because it hinted at the kind of equalitarian and participatory, post-imperial future that many interlocutors imagined, without being too prescriptive as to what these futures consisted in. This meant that diverse interlocutors could give their own views while scouring Afro-Asian socialist networks for material assistance as well.

The thesis outlines a chronology of internationalist collaboration and possibility through its assessment of the activities of Asian socialists between 1947 and 1960, during which time Asian socialists repeatedly adjusted their aims and strategies. This chronology – outlined in detail below – gives us a better understanding of the contingent, experimental, and ad hoc nature of non-state internationalist networking in the 1950s, whose prospects could be bolstered or diminished not just by geopolitical shifts, but also by personal squabbles and

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political disagreements. The thesis shows that Asian socialists did not simply view themselves as regional, or Afro-Asian actors, but also as global actors who engaged with European and Israeli contacts eagerly. They did this not just to glean material assistance for their travels, but in addition to observe social-democratic municipal housing projects and cooperative agricultural experiments among other state-building schemes, that they hoped to draw on in their own socialist activisms. They intended to create redistributive states at home that achieved economic plenty by pursuing some form of industrialisation; they also wanted these states to be deeply democratic, and found Yugoslavian and Israeli state-building experiments intriguing in their participatory, collectivistic ethos. Throughout, the thesis emphasises how key actors crossed and interwove different scales of political activism – local, national, regional, and international – and thus emphasises their agency, if also the diversity of intellectual paths that individuals could end up taking, in this turbulent decade.

Decolonisation in South and Southeast Asian Studies

The thrust of much recent historical study into decolonisation has been in the direction of assessing its cultural and social aspects alongside its political and economic ones. For some decades, metropolitan study of decolonisation attended primarily to the reasons for colonial withdrawal. Meanwhile, study of decolonisation in formerly colonised countries themselves tended to indulge in nationalist myth-making, proposing a teleology in which a narrow subset of heroic freedom fighters ousted colonial overlords, founded the nation, and shaped its early postcolonial history in their image. Within each of these categories, there were several gradations – metropolitan historiography included studies focussed on one empire as well as comparative approaches, for example, while historiography in formerly colonised countries varies in tenour, argument, and approach depending on the country or region concerned. However, these historiographies were largely different sides of the same coin, treating the

colonial encounter as a two-way street counterposing the colonial power against leading anti-imperial elites, and presenting decolonisation as if it were a simple handover of that power with consequences for both sides, and for the international order, which came to be structured by the Cold War and by nation-states more than by empires.

A microcosm of this can be seen in the debate in South Asian studies between the Cambridge and ‘subaltern studies’ historiographical schools. Historians of the 1960s ‘Cambridge School’, assessing the dynamics of Indian nationalist struggles, asserted that well-placed Indian elites, moved by narrow material self-interest, capitalised on limited opportunities for self-rule tendered by the British in areas such as the civil service and gradually eroded the legitimacy of British rule in this way.33 Young Indian scholars challenged this narrative, proposing that nationalism had been a coherent struggle for freedom from imperialism in which major anti-colonial leaders such as Nehru and Gandhi took centre stage. A more sophisticated take on the topic emerged in the 1980s with the ascendancy of the ‘subaltern studies’ school of historians, who viewed ‘subaltern’ – or non-elite, such as peasants and women and lower castes – groups as occupying their own domain of consciousness distinct from those of elites.34 This school viewed subaltern groups as agents of colonial modernity in their own right, even if the school came to be sceptical about the extent to which subalterns and their consciousness could be represented or spoken for through the archival record.35 Despite their profound differences, both the Cambridge and subaltern studies schools assessed colonialism as an encounter unfolding primarily within one particular empire or emerging nation. Similar debates played out in Southeast Asian studies, where anthropologist James Scott proposed that anti-colonial revolutions sprang from an insurgent peasantry’s moral economy, and

others countered that ‘nationalism’ comprised a struggle between interest groups for power within given colonial systems.  

With the exception of some works within the subaltern studies oeuvre, much of this scholarship could be termed teleological; it focussed on nationalist mobilisations which eventuated in the overthrow of colonialism, the achievement of independence, and the forging of a nation-state. This tendency towards teleology has found itself replicated in the work of ‘area studies’ scholars in the same decades. The emergence of ‘area studies’ scholarship, which is associated with the compartmentalisation of South and Southeast Asia as objects of study, related to American interest in how decolonisation might affect the world order in the context of Cold War concerns about communism. It spawned the advent of modernisation theories with which Western researchers attempted to delineate how recently independent countries might achieve levels of political and economic development similar to those of the United States and northern Europe.  

Although there were shifts in approaches to, funding for, and models of area studies across the second half of the twentieth century, which broadly correlated with developments in the Cold War, area studies works tended to be bounded and teleological in nature, centring processes that unfolded in particular nations or regions. Southeast Asian studies was critiqued in the 1990s for its inability to account for the ‘borderless worlds’ of people, capital, and diasporic communities, although this changed again in the 2000s with growing suspicion of those who had pronounced the ‘end of history’ a few years earlier in the face of the collapse of the Soviet Union and ascendancy of capitalist globalisation.

In the last 15 to 20 years, historians as well as scholars of literature, political scientists, and anthropologists among others have moved towards a view of decolonisation as a process unfolding on several scales – imperial, national, and international – which involved many

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different actors beyond prominent colonial and nationalist elites. New work on Asian and African societies between the 1930s and 1960s emphasised how actors ranging from labourers to students to urbane businessmen had a stake in decolonisation, embarking on cultural and political trajectories on local scales, which interpenetrated but were not coterminous with nationalist trends and policy-making. The cumulative effect of these developments on historians has been to impress upon them, as scholar of French West Africa Frederick Cooper put it, that decolonisation should not be reduced to ‘a singular phenomenon with certain determinant effects’, even if it was still ‘something that happened’ with particular consequences. A recent compendium on the global history of decolonisation combines local, regional, imperial, and international levels of analysis, suggesting that decolonisation touched politics, economies, and cultures across these scales, whilst also shifting ‘the normative foundations of the international community’.

There has been a proliferation of historical interest in postcolonial South Asia in recent years. Some of this has also been written in a teleological, or nationalist, key, focussing on major state-builders such as Nehru, even if it is now diversifying. In regard to India and Pakistan, key works attend to themes of partition, nation-building, border-making, identity, citizenship, and cultural diplomacy among others. There is growing interest in similar themes in Southeast Asian studies, though more so in relation to Indonesia than Burma – the latter of which is

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typically designated part of Southeast rather than South Asia.\textsuperscript{44} It is perhaps the case that Burma’s seeming insignificance in the Cold War as compared with India and Indonesia comparatively diminished interest in the country’s postcolonial experience. Whilst the growing interest in parts of postcolonial South and Southeast Asia is welcome, relevant studies still centre around the actions and initiatives of a small number of governing elites. Major political parties and intellectuals in their day which figure frequently in this study only appear on the sidelines of landmark works about nation- and state-building in each country – particularly concerning India and Indonesia.\textsuperscript{45} Copious biographies have been produced on the first Prime Minister of India, Nehru, and the first President of Indonesia, Sukarno, which contemplate their upbringings, intellectual and political awakenings, and actions as governors.\textsuperscript{46}

Historians of India and Indonesia have made attempts to assess contending postcolonial visions to those tendered by the aforementioned leaders. Kevin Fogg has produced important studies into Islamic and socialist trends within Indonesian nationalism.\textsuperscript{47} He demonstrates how neglected actors contributed strongly to domestic revolutionary struggles whilst borrowing from transnational intellectual roots.\textsuperscript{48} This is a point of concurrence with scholars of decolonisation in India, who are finding that rival political actors to mainstream nationalists


\textsuperscript{45} In Burma, as Chapter I lays out in more detail, major socialists assessed in this thesis were part of the government(s). Nevertheless, they too have attracted little attention, perhaps less than the first Burmese Prime Minister U Nu. Nehginpao Kipgen, “Political Change in Burma: Transition from Democracy to Military Dictatorship (1948-62),” \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} 46, no. 20 (2011): 48-55.


drew on diverse global intellectual resources in the 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{49} For example, Lydia Walker has written an article about Indian socialist JP which argues that JP ‘presented a non-statist critique of postcolonial state sovereignty’ marshalling concepts from the ‘Anglophone international peace movement’ of which he was a member.\textsuperscript{50} Her article is notable because it highlights how actors at the margins of the postcolonial state articulated their own notions of how decolonisation should unfold at a regional level which could contrast sharply with those of major state actors. It also captures how such actors scoured their international political networks to find intellectual support in this venture. This gives us a glimpse of the dialogical side of 1950s global decolonisation in which non-state activists beat innovative, itinerant political paths that drew on many influences.

Besides these attempts to expand our understanding of the sophistication of decolonisation in particular countries, there have also been attempts to situate decolonisation across South and Southeast Asia in a unified framework. Gyan Prakash, Michael Laffan, and Nikhil Menon have edited a volume which highlights how colonialism shaped postcolonial projects in India, Indonesia, and Burma among other countries. It distinguishes a ‘postcolonial moment’ which was ‘punctuated by vulnerability, uncertainty, anxiety, and violence’, extending from the end of World War II into the mid-1960s. While it attends primarily to actors who were involved in state-building projects in these countries, it is valuable in that it identifies that a ‘conscious sense of novelty, of trying to bring newness into the political world’, moved both South and Southeast Asians in this period.\textsuperscript{51} This sense of novelty also linked non-state actors across South and Southeast Asia who crafted their own postcolonial projects outlining what ideal social orders might look like at this time. A critique which might be levelled against this volume as well as the articles referred to on the previous page is that the notion of internationalism receives little or no hearing. The works tend to portray anti-imperial actors


\textsuperscript{50} Lydia Walker, “Jayaprakash Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation for the Postcolonial State and its Imperial Fragments,” \textit{The Indian Economic and Social History Review} 56, no. 2 (2019): 149-150.

as singularly concerned with realising a particular agenda for the development and flourishing of given nation-states. This is in spite of the fact that major politicians in these countries have been shown to have honed distinctive ideas and propositions about how to revise the global political order in the same period, in studies of their internationalisms.\textsuperscript{52}

This relative absence of considerations of the post-war internationalism of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian anti-imperialists can be attributed to the fact that South and Southeast Asianists chiefly view decolonisation as a state-building process, to be assessed and explained within familiar national contours. For example, Lydia Walker makes reference to JP’s international connections when and where he utilised them to advance arguments about decolonisation in India. This approach perceptively captures transnational dimensions of Indian decolonisation, but does not place the internationalism of individuals such as JP in full relief. Walker describes JP as both ‘an Indian patriot and an internationalist cosmopolitan’, which is suggestive of a narrow understanding of internationalism that pairs it with nationalism as a commitment, ultimately, to furthering the causes and reputation of a specific nation-state in a global order composed of such.\textsuperscript{53} This has been a common view within South Asian studies in particular of what ‘internationalism’ consists in, although Manu Bhagavan has contested it.\textsuperscript{54} It impedes study of international networks and connections in the 1950s and 1960s that were oriented towards achieving political change not just within South and Southeast Asia but also around the globe. The next section assesses how scholars of the international history of the ‘Third World’, Afro-Asianism, and the Cold War have understood nationalism and internationalism, and tries to articulate how a more expansive understanding of the global dimensions of decolonisation, particularly in the 1950s, is necessary to interpret some of the themes explored in this thesis.


\textsuperscript{53} Walker, “Jayaprakash Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation,” 150.

\textsuperscript{54} For a conversation between Partha Chatterjee, a leading advocate of this view of internationalism within South Asian studies, and Manu Bhagavan, an author who has shown how Nehru articulated a radical vision of ‘One World’ which conflicted with the notion of the nation-state as endpoint of decolonisation, see Partha Chatterjee, “Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some Observations from Modern Indian History,” \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East} 36, no. 2 (2016): 320-334; Manu Bhagavan, “Reflections on Indian Internationalism and a Postnational Global Order,” \textit{Provocations} 37, no. 2 (2017): 220-225.
Third Worldism, Afro-Asianism, and the Cold War

Historians of decolonisation and anti-imperialism have long since highlighted the ‘Third World’ movement as a crucial juncture at which postcolonial nationalists began to articulate a new internationalism. The term ‘Third World’ was a designation originally coined by French historian Alfred Sauvy in the early 1950s to refer to predominantly African and Asian countries outside of the power blocs of the Cold War that came together first at the Bandung Conference of April 1955, and later – according to the mythology – in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of the 1960s. There is some suggestion that the term should have been translated as ‘Third Force’ to emphasise more concretely a geopolitical entity distinct from the Western and Eastern blocs. Today, the ‘Third World’ is still broadly seen by historians as having comprised an ideology or project, launched by governing statesmen in Africa and Asia in the mid-1950s, seeking liberation for the peoples of formerly colonised regions of the globe from the shackles of imperial control, as well as from Cold War meddling with their hard-earned right to self-determination. Despite the myths that have continued to replicate themselves in the historiography of the ‘Third World’ movement since, a number of important state leaders did gather at Bandung and initiate solidarities which affected the course of decolonisation and the Cold War overall – even if these solidarities, as Naoko Shimazu has shown in relation to the choreography of Bandung, were somewhat performative, rather than being constructed across space and place at considerable personal risk, such as those non-state solidarities considered in this thesis.

However, scholarship on Third World history remains centrally focussed on a narrow cast of actors. This scholarship views decolonisation as an exercise in safeguarding sovereignty, building resilient nation-states, and creating an international order suitable to these purposes, and revolves around a familiar set of Third World nationalists who attempted this.

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It sees internationalism as a product of these core nationalist concerns. For example, Vijay Prashad, considering the emergence of the notion of a ‘Third World’ in the 1950s, references how Nehru gave a speech to the Indian parliament in 1958 iterating ‘main points of the Third World platform’ such as ‘political independence, nonviolent international relations, and the cultivation of the UN as the principle institution for planetary justice’.\(^{59}\) Prashad, like other writers about the Third World, identifies the Bandung Conference as a key moment when these leaders joined forces to articulate and promulgate their internationalism.\(^{60}\) A voluminous literature has grown up around this conference, in terms of how it was staged, the proceedings themselves, what the shared political platform, if any, consisted in, and what the repercussions were for international order.\(^{61}\) Bandung, though, was just one manifestation of an anti-imperial drive to rebalance global politics at this time. Many non-state actors formulated their own internationalisms, which did not necessarily bear a close resemblance to those of prominent Third World nationalists. The ‘Third World’ movement and the Bandung Conference arguably need to be historicised as having heralded the particular international aims of a cluster of statesmen, but not having precipitated what scholars sometimes term ‘Third Worldist’ sentiment – the desire to achieve independence and autonomy from imperialism and the Cold War and shift international power relations.

There is a general consensus among students of twentieth-century international history that interwar internationalisms were characterised by a deal of political openness and experimentation where post-war ones were more ideological and restricted. After what Erez Manela terms the ‘Wilsonian Moment’, when African and Asian nationalists ventured with little success to appropriate United States President Woodrow Wilson’s language of self-determination for their own ends at the close of World War I, it is considered that these nationalists initiated a search for other liberatory visions including communism but also non-secular alternatives.\(^{62}\) In fact, these searches were already underway; aspirations towards self-determination were widespread in Asia and Africa from the 1910s onwards. There is


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 31-50.


much work, not least by South and Southeast Asianists, investigating the vigour and dynamism of interwar internationalisms. These internationalisms were threaded through the lives of itinerant anti-imperialists and the webs of friends and contacts they honed. Some studies of decolonisation and anti-imperialism in the longue durée begin with major conferences of this era such as the Brussels Conference of the League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression in 1927, and link these meetings ultimately to the ‘Third Worldism’ of the post-World War II era, seeing the former meetings as more exploratory and the latter as more focussed on defining a coherent political agenda for the Third World.

The general bifurcation which these studies suggest between a fluid, circumstantial, and contingent interwar anti-imperial internationalism and a declaratory, statist post-war counterpart is questionable in light of the most recent research on the Afro-Asian internationalisms of the 1950s-1960s. This is because it supposes that African and Asian investments in self-determination translated seamlessly into the state-building projects and platforms of various Third World leaders in these decades, and into an attempt to articulate clearly a project or ideology for safeguarding and advancing Afro-Asian self-determination at a time of Cold War violence and saber-rattling that manifested in the Bandung Conference, when actually there were many contending ‘Third Worldisms’ which did not resemble this muscular, nationalist one. New works on Third World internationalism, such as that of Jeffrey James Byrne, recognise that the ‘Third World’ was something as hazy as a ‘trend’ which comprised ‘an application of the optimism of decolonisation to the international sphere’, but still focus predominantly on leading ‘political elites’ who aimed ‘to achieve an extremely ambitious, yet not wholly unrealistic, agenda of political and economic reordering on a global scale’. There was a definite radical internationalist sentiment among African and Asian political elites in the post-war era, but it should not be framed with reference to a single, Third


Worldist ‘political project’, as Byrne maintains, when there were often copious competing internationalisms even among the same elites.66

Fresh work on transnational Afro-Asianisms in the 1950s and 1960s reveals the contours of some of these internationalisms. This work looks into various conferences that occurred across these decades in Africa and Asia and brought myriad activists together hungry to discuss regional and global political change. It is notable that, amid the aforementioned scales of decolonisation which scholars of international history investigate – local or imperial, national, and international, as enumerated by Jan Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel – there is no place for the transnational, trans-local, or trans-regional.67 Studies of cross-border flows of ideas, practices, and materials have become increasingly important to sundry fields of historical enterprise in recent decades, and yet they rarely feature in decolonisation historiography, except in relation to diaspora.68 This is shifting with the work of the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, which pays attention to mobile cultural and political actors who beat paths between major international conferences and smaller-scale gatherings, crafting new radical networks of friends and sympathisers with whom these actors nurtured diverse ideas about possible postcolonial futures.69 An insight into the furtive and flighty lives of many such actors makes plain that the immediate post-war era of formal decolonisation and wanton Cold War violence was also one of experimentation and exploration for many Afro-Asian writers and thinkers.70

A de-centring of analytical lenses to bring to the fore the encounters and experiences of non-state individuals is necessary to illumine these worlds, the lineages and landmarks of which cannot be captured by standard chronologies of formal decolonisation, Cold War conflict, or ‘Third World’ mobilisation. Some scholarship on cultural dimensions of decolonisation and the ‘global Cold War’ has begun to do this, centring the encounters and experiences of Asian activists, writers, and journalists among others in assessing the political arguments and

66 Byrne, Mecca of Revolution, 6.
67 Jansen, and Osterhammel, Decolonization: A Short History, ix.
68 Marc Matera, Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).
alliances they made in the 1950s and 1960s. The notion of a ‘global Cold War’ originated with Odd Arne Westad’s seminal 2005 work of the same name, which posited that actors in the ‘Third World’ – chiefly military ones – helped to introduce Cold War conflict into their home regions as they ventured to carve out post-imperial futures. Westad’s book gave rise to a wave of research into decolonisation and the Cold War in Asia in particular, which viewed these processes as deeply interwoven in that cultural and political actors blended nationalist and capitalist and communist ideas in fashioning new imaginaries and finding new allies. Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake have recently argued that decolonisation and the Cold War were not ‘isolated, parallel phenomena’, but ‘a broader moment of intertwined, if sometimes paradoxical, local and global change’ for cultural and political actors across Africa and Asia and beyond.

There remains a tendency in some such acts of methodological ‘de-centring’ to designate ideas according to one of several familiar ideological labels such as nationalist, capitalist, or communist. The trouble with taking decolonisation and the Cold War to have been interlinked phenomena for most or all actors debating political futures is that individual specificities can be missed. James and Leake suggest, in common with many contributors to their volume, that decolonisation and the Cold War comprised a particular ‘era’ running through much of the 1950s and 1960s which both ‘elite and non-elite actors’ shaped. However, there were substantial differences between the 1950s and 1960s in terms of the political possibilities that individual actors sensed – and indeed within each of these decades themselves – which can be lost when they are viewed as an era. This thesis proposes a more finessed chronology of this ‘era’, and a more dexterous assessment of the 1950s in particular. The kind of anti-imperial networking which African and Asian activists undertook in the 1950s was often

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72 Westad, The Global Cold War.


75 James, and Leake, Decolonization and the Cold War, 12.
oriented towards supporting freedom struggles and thrashing out broad imaginaries of political futures that could be elaborated later, where in the 1960s, this networking was more about delineating shared notions of development and planning. As noted above, the 1950s was perhaps not so different to earlier decades in that anti-imperial networking was multidirectional, open-ended, and experimental, whereas in the 1960s anti-imperialism undoubtedly grew more nationalistic.

There is also a problem with designating a singular ‘Cold War’ or ‘global Cold War’, as if ideological conflict were experienced in analogous ways across diverse regions. The very notion that twentieth-century capitalist-communist conflict was ‘cold’ betrays a Northern analytical bias, in that many parts of the Global South experienced this conflict as naked violence which sundered their societies in profound ways.76 In addition, the experience of the Cold War in the ‘Third World’ or Global South was differentiated between countries, and was also differentiated within countries according to factors such as class or race. Heonik Kwon’s study of how Vietnamese villagers experienced the Cold War as violence which has riven their communities up to the present day supports his conclusion that ‘the history of the global Cold War consists of a multitude of...locally specific historical realities and variant human experiences’.77 Historians should first assess how capitalist-communist ideological conflict touched particular actors before integrating notions of a ‘global Cold War’ into their studies. For the actors considered in this thesis, the Cold War originally appeared as a new or altered form of ‘power politics’ which was a distraction from anti-imperial organising, but growing climates of anti-communism began to make Asian socialists view it as more of an ideological problem by the mid-1950s. Some Asian socialists viewed the apparent spread of communism domestically and internationally with great fear, and moved determinedly to distinguish their politics from that of communists. Even so, Asian socialists’ primary concern for much of the period studied was with channelling the liberatory propensities of Asian and later African decolonisation in socialist directions.

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The field of new international history, which has nourished many works about decolonisation and the cultural and global Cold Wars, understands decolonisation narrowly as a struggle for national independence and sovereignty waged by elites who were fascinated by ideas of modernisation and development. Many non-state African and Asian activists were arguably seeking different and more capacious visions of a post-imperial future to this in the 1950s. Scholars of post-war Afro-Asian internationalisms move forward from this by bringing relevant activists further to the fore, and operating with a sophisticated understanding of decolonisation. They focus centrally on what Su Lin Lewis terms an ‘arc of conferences of the post-colonial era’ that have been neglected as against extensive studies of the Bandung Conference, where given actors tended to meet, fraternise, and express their shared political hopes and aspirations. Anti-imperialists had been gathering at conferences to exchange notes on regional and international politics since the 1920s, and this extended into the post-war period at sites – one being Rangoon in Burma – that are not typically considered constitutive of Third Worldist sentiment or strategising. These conferences were largely sub- or non-state affairs, even if organisers may have leant on their connections in government circles to bring them about or to suss out the favourability of such figures to the associated agendas. They spoke to a common sense of political excitement and opportunity among freedom fighters and citizens of formerly colonised countries at the prospect of moulding their own futures. As Rachel Leow, a member of the aforementioned research collective, has perspicaciously demonstrated, emotion was crucial in fostering the Afro-Asian internationalisms of this period; popular investments in ideas of ‘peace’, for example, were deeply felt, rather than simply being arrived at philosophically or ideologically.

As yet, there is little work in this oeuvre on what took place between major conferences, even though scholars allude extensively to the intricate transnational lives that particular interlocutors led. This thesis moves beyond such allusions to the detailed tracking of inter-conference lives; the meetings, trips, visits, acquaintanceships, and correspondence that

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sustained the affinities that made Lewis’ ‘arc of conferences’ possible, and went beyond them. For activists moving in non-aligned circles at this time – those where capitalism and communism had no obvious pull as means of building just futures – there were many potential contacts and patrons in social-democratic Europe as well as Asia and Africa. The space between state and non-state in international society was populated by a host of private transnational organisations ranging from overtly political bodies such as the SI to ostensibly non-political trade union bodies such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) or the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), each of which had a leaning in the Cold War. Afro-Asian activists drew on the expertise and resources of these bodies and the events and individuals associated with them to pad out their global contact books and make the conduct of long-distance journeys and tours easier. While it was primarily decolonisation, and the associated opportunity to participate in the shaping of their own futures as well of those of other formerly colonised peoples, that stirred these activists to action in the 1950s, fashioning new international networks and connections was a necessarily messy and opportunistic affair. The Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, by focussing mostly on particular conferences, has arguably overstated the extent to which the non-state anti-imperial activisms of this period were specifically Afro-Asian in provenance; in many cases, they were as international or global as they were Afro-Asian, frequently requiring collaborations with European and Israeli contacts and institutions among others.

Socialist Internationalism in Southern Asia

This thesis aims to take scholarship on Afro-Asian internationalisms further by tracking the formation, shaping, sustaining, and afterlives of South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms through the prisms of their primary practitioners. This gives us plenteous insights into how non-state internationalisms functioned at the granular level – how the labour, imagination, cultural dexterity, and political diplomacy of countless activists put flesh on the bones of global anti-imperialist networks – as well as how they intersected with and

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influenced contending internationalisms. South and Southeast Asia are chosen as regional bases for the study for historical reasons. The three countries which the thesis selects – India, Burma, and Indonesia – all gained independence in the late 1940s and socialist intellectuals among others immediately set about networking with comrades across borders who wanted to discuss the wider meanings and applications of ‘socialism’, beyond the confines of their own nation-states. From the late 1940s, a core of socialists in each country initiated open-ended and optimistic conversations about how they might cooperate for the advancement of socialist ends on a regional and international scale. Socialism was a loose container yet also a deft mobilisational category for anti-imperialists aspiring towards the construction of an egalitarian and democratic political and economic future. South and Southeast Asians were at the forefront of expediting global socialist conversations from the moment of independence onwards.

The thesis rebuts and revises existing accounts of post-war South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms. Talbot Imlay has produced a Eurocentric history of socialist internationalism whose problematic presumptions and frameworks he exports to Asia with the onset of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century. The final chapter of his book *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism* seeks to examine the significance of decolonisation for international socialist prospects. This necessitates introducing new, Asian socialist actors into his study which Imlay does sparingly. Imlay outlines at the beginning of the work that he regards socialism as a ‘European phenomenon, even if its influence extended beyond Europe’, and identifies socialist internationalism as a practice of consultation between leftist political parties on regional and global issues. Operating with this understanding of socialism and socialist internationalism, Imlay is forced to view Asian socialists as, at best, partners in the enterprise of international socialism, or inheritors of its traditions, rather than as actors capable of forging their own notions of socialism and internationalism. This is exactly the mistake that the final chapter of his book, as well as separate articles on the topic, make; they propose that Asian socialists formed the ASC to make a mundane process of inter-party consultation on matters of policy easier, and that they became embroiled in debates with European socialists about whether supporting nationalism or ‘minority rights’ – the individual

rights of those who did not want to be part of new nation-states – was more important in addressing anti-imperial struggles.\textsuperscript{85}

This thesis proposes by contrast that the socialism of the ASC was capacious and primarily anti-imperial in provenance. When Asian and African socialists used this term, it tended to convey a future social and political order, both regionally and globally, that was highly egalitarian and democratic, and which had dispensed with imperialism and the hierarchies, domination, and exploitation characteristic of it. The individuals assessed in this thesis had begun deploying the term some decades earlier during interwar anti-imperial agitations to invoke this amorphous egalitarian and democratic future, and on achieving independence, they attempted to give it clearer definition. Its definition or postulates were not only to be explored in theoretical discussions, but more commonly, to be discussed and discerned in practice. This practice was not the practice of inter-party consultation, as per Imlay, but a process of negotiation and experimentation worked out by Asian socialist intermediaries on the ground. While leading Asian socialists such as JP and others created the links between parties that enabled the ASC to come into being, more junior colleagues in each party shaped Asian socialism’s international element, travelling to West Asia, Europe, and Africa to identify contacts conducive to their mutable socialist message, and observing and participating in constructive projects in countries such as Yugoslavia that helped them determine what the socialism of the future might look like.

Talbot Imlay is therefore ill-advised when, in a recent reworking of his arguments in an article for the \textit{International Review of Social History}, he tries to ‘define’ Asian socialism according to political statements made by the ASC at its inaugural conference in Rangoon in 1953. Imlay engages here with assessments of Asian socialists by scholars of Afro-Asian internationalisms, who he believes exaggerate the Afro-Asian affinities associated with the ASC and neglect the question of its ‘socialist dimension’. Imlay still believes that socialism has to be politically or philosophically defined before it can be assessed, and attributes the entirety of the article to outlining how Asian socialists failed to agree on a specific international, domestic, or economic agenda at Rangoon, on the basis of the papers of the Swedish Social Democratic

Party, which was presumably represented at this conference. Asian socialist aims and ambitions cannot be divined from an isolated moment when they in fact worked these out across many years of communication, collaboration, and experimentation, at the heart of which were several mobile intermediaries who did not feature prominently at such conferences. Anti-imperialism drove these intermediaries throughout and, for them, was not separable from socialism. To be sure, Asian socialists did seek to flesh out technocratic ideas about politics, economics, and international order – which included ideas about how to encourage capital formation, how widely to disperse political power, and how to promote cooperation between socialist countries – but what bound Asian socialist networks together and gave them a sense of purpose was the activities of the ASC’s anti-imperialist mobile intermediaries.

The thesis also addresses Su Lin Lewis, who has written a more persuasive account than Imlay of the Asian socialist interlude in post-war international history. She argues that Asian socialists initiated wide-ranging conversations about how to procure a state of ‘postcolonial freedom’ in an age of decolonising excitement and possibility. She situates her account against the backdrop of the ‘messy and divisive realm of post-colonial politics’ wherein Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists sought to distinguish themselves from other trends. She contends that Asian socialists were ‘first and foremost concerned with outlining the ideal character of the post-colonial state’ through the ASC, and demonstrates how they promulgated ideas of the ‘welfare state as a basis of social security, along with a protection of democratic rights’ as a model for postcolonial futures. She is perceptive in seeing that South and Southeast Asian socialists set out a distinctive internationalist agenda at major conferences which differed from those of rival politicians in their own countries, as well as from those of European socialists. Her case study is informed by a more sophisticated view of decolonisation than that of Imlay, in which anti-imperial activists were not straightforwardly nationalist in orientation but pursued diverse ideas and agendas depending on their own intellectual backgrounds, transnational friendship networks, and party-political positions.

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88 Ibid., 71.
This thesis draws on, but also departs, Lewis’ account in several ways. Lewis views the ASC as an alternate, more non-state form of ‘Third World solidarity’ to Bandung.89 She notes that prominent Asian socialists, who were well-represented at major ASC congresses, largely led rival parties to those of the Bandung statesmen, and thus identifies Asian socialism as a dissonant note within a wider Afro-Asian internationalist register that also included Bandung. This thesis argues that Asian socialists were international actors as well as Afro-Asian ones who wanted to bring about the establishment of new socialistic systems of social and economic organisation. They experienced the immediate post-war years not so much as a phase in which they needed to agree on notions of how to arrange a postcolonial state, but as a moment rife with possibilities for remaking world as well as regional orders whose fashioning and emergence they had to expedite. They ventured across regions of Asia and Africa but also to locations such as Yugoslavia, Sweden, and Israel to conceptualise how to construct these societies. Asian socialists wanted to build democratic socialist societies at home but also wanted to participate prominently in the construction of an international socialist society whose characteristics would take on definition in the course of their wide-ranging and far-reaching conversations and collaborations.

The major methodological difference between this thesis’ analysis of Asian socialism, and that of Lewis, is that this thesis closely follows how lesser-known Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian intermediaries honed anti-imperial socialist internationalisms between and beyond major conferences. This emphasises that the internationalisms that swirled around and suffused the ASC were as pragmatic as they were ideological, and as practiced – and negotiated – as they were thought. In Lewis’ account, political pronouncements made at significant ASC conferences remain in the foreground, even if we get an inkling of the messy, contingent, and ad hoc internationalist underworlds that characterised the global 1950s at other points in the article. The notion of Third World solidarity as bequeathed by scholars of the Bandung Conference is one of declarative state leaders professing anti-imperialism and searching for a shared concept of it at international summits. The solidarities that Asian socialists worked up were more flexible and experimental, following the lines and labours of the ASC’s little-known mobile intermediaries, who did most of their work across diverse locations and behind closed doors. This thesis proposes that Asian socialism is viewed as indicative of the dialogical side

89 Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 60.
to decolonisation in the global 1950s, and not simply as an alternate form of Third World solidarity to Bandung.

In making this case, the thesis engages a number of other historiographies that its findings bear on. One of these is a raft of works that have grown up around the notion of ‘cosmopolitanism’. A wide range of scholars from historians to anthropologists have produced studies of African and Asian activists who pursued visions of political futures from the 1930s through 1960s that did not sit easily with the eventual ascendancy of the nation-state as the basic sovereign unit of postcolonial societies. A majority of these scholars are interested in identifying what they regard as having constituted liberal and democratic alternatives to ascendant postcolonial nationalisms – alternatives which were often couched in republican or federalist language by their advocates. The advantages of this work are that it draws attention to the abundance of actors who attempted, across the late colonial and early postcolonial periods, to promote visions of the political future which were not explicitly nationalist, and that it highlights that anti-imperialism was not narrowly concerned with questions of sovereignty and development.90 It has been cogently critiqued, however, by Merve Fejzula, who questions its presumptions that such liberal-democratic visions comprised alternatives to the developmentalisms that eventually took hold, and that federalism and republicanism differed fundamentally to nationalism; she suggests that both could be about procuring a particular form of postcolonial state.91

Two significant works in this genre come from Gary Wilder and Adom Getachew. Wilder focusses on a number of French and Antillean thinkers who extracted from their ‘immanent critiques of colonialism and republicanism’ intellectual resources for the construction of an alternate future ‘through which they hoped to transcend the very idea of France, remake the world, and inaugurate a new epoch of human history’.92 Wilder critiques historians for treating decolonisation ‘as a series of dyadic encounters between imperial states and colonized peoples’, attributing this view to a ‘postwar logic that reduced colonial emancipation to national liberation’, and arguing instead that ‘decolonisation was an epochal

92 Wilder, Freedom Time, 2.
process of global restructuring that unfolded on a vast political terrain inhabited by diverse actors and agencies’. Most usefully, the book brings the opinions and arguments of its key interlocutors into the foreground, allowing the reader to appreciate the perspectives of the authors of this radical project. Wilder emphasises that utopianism was a signal feature of anti-imperial strategising for many such intellectuals in the post-war period, and did not necessarily sit easily with the notion of the nation-state as endpoint of decolonisation. The book develops a sophisticated account of utopianism, proposing that it was in fact closely paired with pragmatism, and extensively profiles how given thinkers devoured different political and intellectual traditions to make arguments at what they regarded as opportune global moments for radical change.

Adom Getachew similarly tracks the attempts of, in her case, black anglophone critics of colonialism, to launch a ‘worldmaking’ project with the fall of imperialism which would create a ‘domination-free and egalitarian international order’. Her book is rooted in a comprehensive account of the history of empire, which considers alien rule to have manifested in international structures of unequal integration and racial hierarchy that anticolonial nationalists sought to dismantle. From the 1930s, anticolonial thinkers such as George Padmore and CLR James identified that an oppressive international system required a coordinated international anti-imperial response, and they began working up a notion of self-determination which involved supplanting enslavement for democratic, developmental, and redistributive visions of the global future. Getachew traces various shifts in anticolonial thinking about how to achieve such futures which often alighted on one or another form of federalism or decentralisation to disperse power and disrupt structures of external domination. For our purposes, the key findings of Getachew’s work, in common with Wilder’s, are that decolonisation invited deep political soul-searching among anti-imperialists who often viewed radical global change as being concomitant with self-determination. To understand what internationalist politics individual activists envisioned during decolonisation, focussing centrally on their words and actions is key, whilst being mindful of the regional and world events and contexts that shaped and impinged on these.

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94 Getachew, Worldmaking After Empire, 2.
95 Ibid., 2.
96 Ibid., 67-84.
The thesis differs from these works in its regional coverage, bringing Asia to the heart of our accounts of the international intellectual history of the 1950s. There are a handful of works on cosmopolitanism and federalism in 1930s-1960s South and Southeast Asia.97 The thesis does not stray into debates about republicanism or federalism in the context of early Indian, Burmese, or Indonesian postcolonial politics since its key actors – at least in their mutual dealings – did not commonly debate questions of constitutional arrangements within South and Southeast Asian states, as compared with questions of power balances in the international arena, relating primarily to imperialism. This perhaps speaks to their relative privilege as against residents of these countries who, for example, were members of ethnic minorities, and for whom the notion of an anti-imperialism that took no stance on how much autonomy to delegate to minority nationals within emerging postcolonial states might have been dubious or distasteful. Still, the thesis contributes an account of how Asia fits into post-war international intellectual history – specifically, of the place of decolonisation in stoking fresh debates therein, in that Asian socialists initiated extensive conversations about accomplishing anti-imperial political change. There are few works that trace at length how Asian thinkers radicalised certain global political debates at this time except that of Roland Burke, who considers how Asian diplomats made the UN a forum for the advancement of anti-imperial claims and causes, not simply relating to independence but also other issues such as human rights.98

Beyond regional coverage, the thesis differs from Wilder and Getachew, as well as Burke, in de-emphasising ideas themselves and bringing to the fore themes of communicability, mobility, and contingency. Much work on federal and cosmopolitan alternatives to Empire and nationalism between the 1930s and 1960s zones in on ideas or intellectual traditions as repositories of dissent, and highlights consensus within particular activist worlds. The works of Wilder and Getachew would seem to suggest that advocacy of radical visions of regional and global political change requires agreement among a close-knit set of thinkers about what the precise nature of the problem with existing constitutional arrangements is, and detailed agreement about an alternate arrangement that might promote their desired ends. This

98 Burke, *Decolonization*. 
thesis agrees with both that a significant swathe of anti-imperialists during decolonisation pursued the construction of equalitarian and democratic futures that cannot necessarily be classed as nationalist. However, it finds that far from pursuing these futures through achieving consensus on the nature of global histories of domination and exploitation, of the imperial legacies of regional political constellations, and on the possible ideological solutions to these difficulties, Asian socialists pursued their desired futures through opportunistic networking and the rapid thrashing out of agreements and disagreements. Sometimes they breezed over the disagreements, which festered and caused furious arguments later on. These were the doers not just the thinkers of anti-colonialism.

There have been some investigations into the labour involved in crafting post-war internationalisms from scholars of Afro-Asian networks. Carolien Stolte has looked into how trade union networks in 1950s Afro-Asia connected local actors to regional and global ones – not just through the initiatives of major transnational trade union associations, but at least as much by horizontal ties between anti-imperialists themselves.99 Leslie James has demonstrated how mobile Trinidadian union leader McDonald Moses attempted to radically improve the lives of workers in early 1960s Nigeria through a seemingly ‘mundane’ practice of ‘daily administrivia’ characteristic of the international and nongovernmental organisations he patronised. James proposes that ‘it was in the realm of the tedious, the prosaic, and the routine where transnational dialogue was often activated as a tool for historical and social transformation’.100 James’ article is a welcome intervention because it identifies that the labour which Afro-Asian activists underwent in threading together new transnational solidarities was generative and radical, even if it sometimes appeared repetitive. This thesis contends that the notion of a dialogical decolonisation, fleshed out across space and place by mobile intermediaries, illuminates the socialist internationalisms it assesses more adroitly than an analysis of ideas themselves – though the thesis also attempts the latter where necessary.

100 James, ”Dialogues of Decolonization between the Caribbean and West Africa,” 378-401.
Arguments, Methodology, and Structure

The thesis is separated into four largely chronological chapters. It is arranged in this way so as to highlight, in Stolte’s terms, a ‘chronology of possibility’ that manifested in Asian socialist internationalisms between the late 1940s and late 1950s. For South and Southeast Asians, many of whom had just gained or did gain independence, the 1950s was a moment of political excitement and experimentation. The thesis suggests, in tune with Stolte and against scholars such as Michael Goebel who propose that the nation-state was set in train from much earlier as telos of anti-imperialism, that non-state South and Southeast Asian socialists viewed the political future as open, and alive with possibility, for much of this decade. As Christopher Lee outlines, decolonisation broadly comprised ‘a complex dialectical intersection of competing views and claims over colonial pasts, transitional presents, and inchoate futures’. We need to assess how particular actors conceived of the past, the present, and the future, and of their place and agency in foreclosing some pasts and prompting other futures, before presuming a narrow anti-imperialism predicated on nationalist goals. This thesis is the first survey of how a particular network of non-state Asian internationalists conceived of local and global pasts, presents, and futures in their mutual dealings, and of how they conceived of and attempted to inhibit or press forth possibilities at different times within the 1950s.

Chapter I, ‘Beginnings: Socialism in Decolonising Asia’, introduces a number of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian activists who feature centrally throughout the thesis. These activists, who occupied senior positions within various domestic socialist parties, considered the achievement of independence in large parts of South and Southeast Asia in the late 1940s to comprise a potentially epochal event. It emphasised that the time was ripe for actors desiring comprehensive regional and global political change to step forward and collectively mould visions of and agendas for the future. ‘Socialism’ seemed to beg the formation of not only more egalitarian and democratic social orders at home but also a more just international order – and Asian socialists sensed that closer solidarities between one another at an epochal moment in global history might constitute the beginnings of such a transition, regionally and

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102 Goebel, Anti-Imperial Metropolis, 250-278.
103 Lee, Making a World after Empire, 8.
This vision was not vague and did have some specificities; Asian socialists hoped that more member parties would take power, build redistributive states, and use their leverage to give support to freedom movements in Africa and nurture an avowedly anti-imperial international socialist movement. The chapter familiarises us with the individuals who exchanged letters, travelled to meet likeminded thinkers, and organised early meetings to discuss and explore these amorphous, but invigorating possibilities. It ties together the knots linking these individuals with an account of the inaugural ASC congress in Rangoon in January 1953, where they and many contacts met for extended conversations and often grew politically and personally closer, notwithstanding significant disagreements.

Chapter II, ‘The Solidarity of Action: Asian Socialism from Hyderabad to Tokyo’, reviews a period in which Asian socialists utilised the ASC, and the funding it received from major member parties, to formulate internationalist projects oriented towards achieving the aims they had set out at Rangoon. The chapter draws on the understanding of ‘solidarity’ articulated by political geographer David Featherstone, who questions the notion that solidarities require pre-existing ideological concordance, arguing instead that they are contingent — in other words, vulnerable, or capricious — relationships fashioned across uneven geographies by widely-dispersed communities of actors who seek to destabilise ‘material relations between places’.104 The chapter highlights how a mobile set of socialist intermediaries came to the fore within the ASC following the Rangoon Conference, populating its bureau and venturing around Africa and Asia in search of progressives and freedom fighters who supported their aspirations towards dismantling imperialism and constructing different social and international orders. It is structured around several intimate ASC ‘bureau meetings’ at which these intermediaries and close contacts nurtured ideas about how to achieve collective aims. They formed the ACB to encourage collaborations between Asian and African socialists on how to defeat imperialism and substitute it for a different system. They organised joint publishing ventures and international festivals to try and foster agreement about how to shape the futures they desired. Asian socialists were still moved by a strong sense of regional and international political possibility, but one which was touched by the Cold War as well as decolonisation. Their networking was hastened by an easing up of tensions in Korea and Indochina, which gave them hope that a period of global peace might

104 Featherstone, Solidarity, 16-18.
be nigh, should they be able to promote a non-aligned politics committed to ending power politics in the meantime.

Chapter III, ‘From Asian Socialism to World Socialism: Statesmen-In-Waiting and Subaltern Internationalists’, assesses how Asian socialists adjusted in the face of a series of political crises. The ASC declined from the mid-1950s as parties funnelled crucial funding elsewhere. Several of these parties lost important elections at home that weakened their credibility as potential governments of the future. These developments, along with the convening of the Bandung Conference which seemed to herald the emergence of an anti-imperial internationalism backed by powerful global leaders, diminished the political prospects of the various socialist internationalisms suffusing the ASC. The Cold War definitively spread into southern Asia at this time and ‘Third World’ statesmen tried to simultaneously resist and counterbalance the two superpowers through accepting varying amounts of aid and support. Similarly, leaders of socialist parties became concerned with how to orient themselves on budding Cold War or communist threats. Conversely, Asian socialism’s mobile intermediaries continued to zip between countries and continents fashioning anti-colonial and leftist linkages, less concerned with the Cold War. The chapter enunciates how Asian socialist networks began to fracture along these lines, culminating in the second ASC congress of November 1956 in Bombay, where furious disagreements about events in Hungary and Egypt, and how to rank the relative dangers of communism and imperialism, disrupted any chance of this now uneasy coalition of Asian socialists forging shared internationalisms in changed geopolitical conditions. The final section of the chapter, focussing in detail on the Bombay Conference, adds greatly to our understanding of the ASC through drawing on materials about the congress which have not yet been uncovered.

Chapter IV, ‘Afterlives of Asian Socialism’, addresses a question which is often asked of scholarship on Afro-Asian internationalisms, namely, what is the significance of studying a slew of seemingly failed utopias? The chapter emphasises how the hopes, ambitions, and alliances that the Asian socialist interlude of the 1950s nurtured, shaped the political lives of key interlocutors for years afterwards, influencing other historical actors who these interlocutors ran into in the process. Domestic politics and the contingent and capacious Afro-Asian socialist worlds that these interlocutors fashioned were to some extent a double helix; the one is inexplicable without the other. The chapter traces how leading Asian socialists
began to adopt a ‘democratic socialist’ ideological position in the late 1950s which was intended to counsel their governments in what they viewed as a more noble model of state-building to the developmentalist ones being pursued. Individuals such as JP did this by plumbing their international contact books in search of sources of intellectual nourishment. Meanwhile, the chapter traces how Asian socialism’s mobile intermediaries continued their attempts to mould an anti-imperial world socialism. They too blended the international with the national, by helping bring about various Israeli and European schemes for the promotion of solidarities between African and Asian youth; such schemes took place on the initiatives of various national leaders and actors, but also imbibed something of the non-state, anti-imperial socialist internationalism that particular Asian participants emblematised.

The methodology which the thesis adopts might be viewed as a networked variety of intellectual biography. The thesis tracks and analyses the transnational political engagements of a core set of South and Southeast Asian socialists from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. It does this in order to shine a light on what these socialists’ political aims were, how they hoped to use the ASC to advance these aims, and how the associated internationalisms expand what historians understand about decolonisation, Asian international history, and the global 1950s as a moment of beguiling possibility if also of urgency and anxiety. As such, the thesis introduces its key actors before discussing their chief meetings, the plans that came out of these, and a series of more intimate collaborations, journeys, and projects in between these major meetings which lay bare how these ‘subaltern internationalisms’ worked and the investments and labours that went into them. The approach is biographical in the sense that it follows common characters for an extended period, but not in the sense that it attempts to craft life-histories of these subjects. There are ample insights offered into key interlocutors’ backgrounds in the opening chapter, but to go one step further than this and try to illuminate the personal feelings and emotional states of these interlocutors through the decade – beyond their political aspirations, agreements, and disagreements – is not considered necessary to substantially expand historiographical knowledge in the ways indicated above. Biographical research on decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia is becoming increasingly common, especially where it outlines how neglected actors conceived of and sought to shape
presents and futures between the 1940s and 1970s, something this thesis attempts for the 1950s with reference to Asian socialists’ internationalisms.105

The large bulk of the primary sources which the thesis draws on are made up of private papers and letters, ASC journals, and newspaper snippets. These were consulted at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML) in New Delhi and the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. Volumes of Indian newspapers Janata and the Times of India were consulted at the Centre of South Asian Studies in Cambridge and online respectively, while a handful of other materials were consulted at the British Library reading room in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire. The private papers which the author has consulted encompass not only personal documents but also papers relating to the ASC, which were found in the collections of Prem Bhasin and Surendranath Dwivedy among other Indian socialists. These sources have not been studied by scholars of the ASC as yet and provide insights into the chronologies of possibility that Asian socialists overall sensed, even if they are primarily found in the collections of Indian socialists. The author has made use of communications made by key ASC intermediaries found in these collections, those found in collections at the IISH relating to the ASC and its relationship with the SI, and also references to these intermediaries in newspaper snippets, to provide a clear picture of Asian socialist strategy and activity in between formal meetings.

The nature of these sources fit with the methodology that has been outlined above. ASC institutional files as well as other documents pertaining to significant meetings of international socialists reveal common casts of characters across space and place and across a significant span of years, allowing the author to discern who major and minor figures in relevant networks were. Having discerned these networks, the author then searched for additional information on given figures, predominantly using a Times of India online database. This teased out similar chronologies in the lives of many of the figures concerned in terms of the possibilities they sensed and tried to realise in their interlinked activisms. Network and biography, then, marry well in assessing the non-state internationalisms of this era. A

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noteworthy number of sources examined in the thesis relate to conferences or to smaller-scale meetings of the ASC. Even where the author refers to activities which particular figures undertook between such meetings, the sources – such as minutes and secretarial reports – sometimes derive from collections dealing with conferences. These sources provide windows into key actors’ movements and engagements across a large swathe of the 1950s and are therefore useful. Their provenance to conferences does leave occasional gaps that the consultation of personal papers of given actors, some of which are difficult or impossible to examine, might have furnished. While the author is seeking to shine a light on what took place between conferences, it is not advisable to avoid these conferences or the evidence they offer about relevant networks and individuals. Where the author refers at length to ASC congresses, it is to support arguments about the chronology of Asian socialist activism and agitation in the 1950s, and point towards tensions in the networks that are harder to divine from materials relating to individuals. The sources utilised in this thesis do not reveal much about the emotional states of given individuals, or of the role of affect in cementing the networks concerned. However, the sources supply rich detail on the ad hoc transnational strategising of important actors and the factors that could either facilitate or interrupt it.

The author completed the fieldwork for this thesis over the course of several months, mainly spent in India. It proved possible to consult materials at the NMML extensively, but the author had to travel home in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began and has not found it feasible to return to South Asia since. In different circumstances, the author might have studied state archives in India as well as Burma. Fortunately, sources assessed at the NMML and at the IISH tendered copious information on the involvements of Burmese and Indonesian socialists, not just Indian socialists, in international socialist networks, making it feasible to assess these two countries alongside India. The politicians examined in this thesis were mostly anglophone. This also made it easier for the author to assess the necessary materials, which were almost exclusively in English. Some less prominent activists within South and Southeast Asian socialist caucuses spoke and wrote in languages other than English, as did leading activists, occasionally. There are obvious limits to how far a research methodology predicated around English-language sources might be able to pore into 1950s Afro-Asian internationalisms that were more polyglot than Asian socialism.
In gathering these sources, the author has benefitted from his privilege relative to other researchers interested in analogous topics. The enterprise of transnational and global history typically requires access to multiple, far-flung source bases, and white men can travel unimpeded to study these materials, where others, especially where colonialism has fostered and continues to foster discrimination along racial and ethnic lines, cannot. A debate has grown up in recent years about how far global history is an elite endeavour only practicable for scholars of privilege with the time and resources afforded them by posts predominantly in Western universities. Jeremy Adelman terms global history an ‘Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues’. Adelman here is intimating, as a number of other writers have pointed out, that practitioners of transnational and global history have not escaped a methodological Eurocentrism prevalent within the universities from which they hail. This methodological Eurocentrism manifests in a diffusionist brand of writing assessing how cultural, economic, intellectual, and political trends originating in Europe universalised across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the involvement of copious ‘non-Western’ agents. Adelman points out that many such works ‘dwell on integration and concord, rather than disintegration and discord’, as if these processes of diffusion and universalisation took place without resistance, dissent, or the formation of counter-universalisms, which many scholars are now showing was a feature of these centuries. He rightly suggests that such an enterprise appears dubious in a global present characterised by resurgent nationalisms, and not by the ever-closer forms of integration supposedly beloved of scholars of transnational and global flows.

This argument is not one which invalidates transnational and global history or the themes of connectivity, reciprocity, and mobility that they have prioritised, but invites closer scrutiny of

110 Adelman, “What is global history now.”
these categories, and the tensions and frictions that accompanied them.\textsuperscript{111} This thesis emerges from a branch of scholarly work which views movements of persons and ideas between and beyond specific nation-states and imperial entities as constitutive of fresh internationalisms in mid-twentieth century history. As such, it draws on the methods and insights of transnational and global history, even if it addresses scholars of international history as much as of the former fields. International history is becoming less distinguishable than before from global history, not least because many of its practitioners now integrate the above themes into their work. The thesis challenges scholars of the international history of decolonisation, socialism, and the Cold War to be more attendant to mobilities of persons and ideas in the 1950s – specifically, to how non-state actors waged their own anti-imperial, socialist, and non-aligned struggles through complex and dizzying processes of travel, interaction, and debate. These processes comprised the multi-directional flows and movements that are the stuff of global history – and yet this thesis does not attempt to sow Asian socialists into a universalistic world history of socialism framed around certain ideological or philosophical precepts, but instead emphasises discord, disjunction, and contingency, as much as connection and mutuality. Global history, as a cluster of themes and methods, is arguably vital to the endeavour of getting to grips with the complexities of the modern world in that it can demonstrate phenomena both of concord and discord.

One of the novelties of what follows is that the individuals assessed are viewed as having fashioned new solidarities and print cultures in their wake, rather than as having grown closer once print media nourished common sentiments and aspirations, as per Benedict Anderson’s influential notion of ‘imagined communities’.\textsuperscript{112} Another reason why some reckoning with the significance of multi-directional flows and mobilities is crucial to contemporary historical study, is that such a reckoning emphasises how presumptions borne through scholarship on nationalism and nation-states condition much of our wider historical understanding. That a set of individuals such as those considered in this thesis can have fashioned new imaginaries largely through the channelling of their own hopes into avid political activity, rather than through some form of print media first bringing them into contact, might seem counterintuitive. However, it is arguable that any struggle against exploitation and


\textsuperscript{112} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}. 
domination begins with individuals hankering after a totally different world to their own – even if they carry forth, sometimes consciously and sometimes unknowingly, categories of thought and life from the previous world, in altered form. Sequences that seem intuitive to historians often seem so because much historical writing up to the present day has been written in a teleological and modernist key, conditioned, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has powerfully captured, by accounts of the histories of a handful of West European nations whose features are taken to be universal.\footnote{Dipesh Chakrabarty, \textit{Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference} (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).}

Struggles against imperialism were the major form of resistance to large-scale exploitation and domination in the twentieth century. These struggles continue today especially in the cultural realm, where individuals who have mobilised on local and national scales seek to decolonise a wide range of institutions. This thesis hopes, by contributing an account of decolonisation in the recent past as a dialogical, multi-directional, and ad hoc struggle – not just as an event whose humanistic intellectual and cultural dimensions failed to change the world for the better – to give a fillip to some within and beyond academia who are waging decolonising struggles today, though it is careful not to romanticise any of the figures or visions assessed within. Ultimately, the thesis proposes that an energetic set of South and Southeast Asian socialists forged wide networks of progressives and anti-imperialists at the turn of the 1950s whose common goals were to build more democratic and egalitarian social orders, and transform an imperialistic international order into a more peaceable one. It suggests that socialism appealed to many Asian and African activists who moved in ASC circles chiefly in its capacity to invoke a broadly equalitarian and participatory post-imperial future. The thesis suggests that a distinct ‘chronology of possibility’ is discernible in the interactions and campaigns of major and intermediary ASC figures through the 1950s. It opines that the activities of these figures were characteristic of a dialogical side to decolonisation in which non-state intellectuals were more open about political futures than state counterparts, though the dialogical and the pedagogic and the non-state and the state inevitably crossed over, and later in the 1950s, many Asian socialists sensed fewer radical possibilities in the political worlds they inhabited than before.
Chapter I: Beginnings: Socialism in Decolonising Asia

History demanded a conference of this nature and you have answered history. Speaking for myself, this Conference has been an intense education. I have learnt a great many things. My understandings of socialism and of the socialist movement [have] been enlarged considerably and, I am sure, this must have been the experience also of others. We have laid down certain principles and policies, but we have also made human contacts here, which I am sure will be of no less importance than the resolutions we have adopted. For me the friendships that I have made at this Conference will be a treasure for the rest of my life and will be a source of inspiration in my personal work.¹

Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), speaking here on the occasion of the first ASC congress in Rangoon in January 1953, heralded an epochal moment in the lives of attendees. He suggested that they had initiated conversations and nurtured friendships which would serve as a springboard for socialist activism for many years to come. From the late 1940s, socialists across decolonising Asia began assessing how to advance their aims in a changing political climate. Many South and Southeast Asians achieved independence and created new political parties around which to gather their thoughts and concretise their plans for nascent postcolonial states. Aside from this, they also worked out ideas about how to construct a regional and global political order conducive to their personal aims. Such aims could be legion; the cessation of World War II, the onset of the Cold War, and increasing global shifts towards decolonisation, all generated fresh hopes, possibilities, and constraints. The socialists gathered in Rangoon, Burma, in 1953 envisioned the construction of egalitarian, just, and democratic social orders in Asia in particular, and an end to the imperialistic international order, and JP himself spent around five years at the turn of the 1950s bringing together a network of likeminded activists who could then carry this vision forward on gaining positions of power.

This chapter recounts an episode of transnational South and Southeast Asian socialist and anti-imperial networking using letters, biographies, party papers, intelligence sources, and newspaper snippets, among other materials. It demonstrates that prominent Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists fashioned close connections with one another as independence was achieved, as well as with other Asian activists seeking to discuss international socialist futures. It suggests that these socialists were imbued with an

excitement at a decolonising moment that they sensed could lead in a plethora of political directions. It avers that the scope of their ambitions was not limited simply to articulating a socialist policy programme for postcolonial states, but extended to transforming the international order by means of defeating imperialism, and promoting a global socialist politics in tandem with Yugoslavians and Africans that would come to supersede the Cold War. It illustrates that early conversations between Asian socialists resulted in the formation of the ASC – a vessel through which Asian as well as African socialists could then evolve their radical internationalist agendas with greater clarity. Not only this, but the ASC was also meant to make the task of international travel – necessary to cultivate friendships with transnational allies – easier, disbursing funds and itineraries for individuals to undertake long-distance journeys. The chapter proposes that the period between 1947 and 1953 consisted in a moment of acute political fervour for non-state South and Southeast Asians with the capability to network widely, who eagerly explored notions of socialist futures that struck them as distinct possibilities in the early 1950s.

The opening three sections introduce key activists and their vibrant political pasts. The first, ‘Internationalism in India: Congress Socialism and the ‘Third Force’’, introduces JP and Ram Manohar Lohia. The second, ‘U Ba Swe, U Kyaw Nyein, and Burmese Socialism’, considers two leading Burmese socialists, who, unlike Indian socialists, occupied positions in government. The third, ‘Sutan Sjahrir and Indonesian Socialism’, gives an insight into the early life of one of Indonesia’s most renowned freedom fighters. Beyond familiarising the reader with these individuals, the opening three sections also emphasise various common currents between them. Each prioritised anti-imperialism within their socialism, and none of them were deeply ideological. This stood them in good stead to participate prominently in the succeeding ‘Early Encounters’ of Asian socialism, the title of the fourth section. That section ties together the activities, trajectories, and political outlooks of key Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists between 1947 and 1952. It does this in order to emphasise how Asian socialism came about through the broad concordance of this web of figures on how regional and world political futures should take shape. The final section, ‘The High Moment of Asian Socialism’, assesses the first ASC congress of 1953, utilising transcripts, conference reports, and contemporary newspaper articles to capture the sense of decolonising excitement that brought many attendees together, and to outline what they discussed. Their discussions laid the
groundwork for the creation of a permanent organisation in Rangoon, which the ASC’s ‘mobile intermediaries’ would then shape profoundly in ensuing years.

The chapter invites a more expansive view of what Asian socialist internationalists aspired towards at this time than existing accounts allow. It contends that South and Southeast Asian socialists aimed to craft egalitarian and democratic social orders across the decolonising world, and to engineer a post-imperial international order, rather than simply imagining a particular form of postcolonial state, as Su Lin Lewis has suggested.1 The chapter assesses the first, and most open-ended, phase in the ‘chronology of possibility’ that Asian socialists detected across the 1950s.2 Asian decolonisation filled them with optimism and the Cold War had not yet impressed on them the urgency of defining and disseminating their internationalist agenda, meaning that they spent a great deal of time discussing fairly amorphous visions. The chapter gives us insights into the nature of the dialogical side of decolonisation as outlined in the introduction, in that it traces how individual activists crafted transnational networks of sympathisers and contacts with no immediate goal in mind, finding time away from their domestic political responsibilities to do so. These early exchanges then gave rise to the formation of print cultures and private international organisations that enabled more consistent communication between far-flung activists. To date, scholarly understanding of how the ASC emerged revolves around two conferences – the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) of 1947, where several key socialists met, and the ASC congress in Rangoon in 1953, where they were able to speak at length – but the many more intimate engagements that took place between 1947 and 1953 were crucial for how the ASC took shape.

Internationalism in India: Congress Socialism and the ‘Third Force’

India gained its independence on August 15 1947. Its nationalist movement was led by the Indian National Congress (INC), initially a reformist body for elite Indians which became a focal point for anti-imperialist struggle during the interwar period. From 1947, the INC ruled India for some 30 years, and its leading contingents consisted of many former freedom fighters

2 Stolte, “Trade Union Networks,” 332.
who sought prominence on the international stage. The best illustration of this was the nation’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who served from 1947 until 1964 and who viewed international affairs as his calling, playing a significant role in formulating the principles and ideals behind the NAM. Nehru, who was born and grew up in Allahabad in the North-Western Provinces – now Uttar Pradesh – travelled to the United Kingdom in 1905 to attend Harrow School and then the University of Cambridge, where he studied chemistry, geology and physics. Like many of his soon-to-be nationalist brethren, he was influenced by liberal and socialist trends here that emphasised progressive social and economic reform. From the 1920s through 1940s, he engaged in anti-imperialist agitation, becoming one of the most recognised names in the Indian independence struggle worldwide. He grew close to Mohandas Karamchand – or Mahatma – Gandhi, who jointly launched many of the movements against the British with him.

Michele Louro has recently written a book about Nehru’s intellectual upbringing, arguing that a series of engagements with radical activists within the League Against Imperialism (LAI), an organisation formed in Brussels in 1927 which hosted regular conferences and established affiliates around the world, influenced Nehru’s thought for decades to come. Her findings chime with nascent scholarship on the transnational dimensions of interwar internationalisms, which emphasises that the far-flung networks which individuals formed, and the characters they met, greatly shaped their worldviews. This is against an older understanding of internationalism, which some scholars continue to vigorously defend, that closely pairs anti-colonial nationalism with internationalism, proposing that anti-imperialists had the goal of achieving nationhood in mind long before independence was actually realised. This view lends itself to a teleological rendering of anti-imperialism in the longue-durée as being about achieving self-determination by means of a nation-state above all else. In fact, it is arguable that, among South Asians, there were copious groups angling for diverse visions of free and equalitarian futures in the interwar period that ideological labels of one kind or another fail to illuminate. Ali Raza has recently highlighted how Indian communists, at least until the 1930s, were a motley, broad-minded, and itinerant bunch seeking to fashion

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5 Raza, Roy, and Zachariah, The Internationalist Moment; Louro et al., The League Against Imperialism.
6 Goebel, Anti-Imperial Metropolis, 250-278.
some form of utopian future, but not in thrall to any ideology or narrow set of goals being peddled by the Communist International (Comintern).⁷

The ‘Congress Socialists’ were a case-in-point. The Congress Socialists were a group of left-leaning anti-imperialists who formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) as a vehicle within the INC in 1934 which could push the mainstream of the nationalist movement in a more radical direction.⁸ Much has been written about the leading thinkers in the CSP, its orientation towards the INC as well as towards the Communist Party of India (CPI) in the 1930s and 1940s, and how it fared in various regions of India in the same period.⁹ William Kuracina has produced a raft of works that consider the CSP’s political strategy as well as its ‘socialist ideals’, which included achieving left unity in India and adopting confrontational stances towards the colonial state.¹⁰ Surprisingly, very little has been written about any international dimensions of the CSP, even though its founding figures were itinerant characters who were interwoven into the fabric of interwar internationalisms. Christopher Bayly has made reference to the perplexing ideological heterogeneity of the body, which housed thinkers ranging from liberal humanists to doctrinaire Marxists, but his work tries to trace domestic intellectual genealogies at play in the CSP’s ‘socialism’ and is arguably off on the wrong track.¹¹ A foray into the transnational lives of leading Congress Socialists from the 1920s through 1940s suggests that they were at least as interested in fostering global as national political change – though these were coterminous and difficult to distinguish – and that an open-ended anti-imperialism moved them as much as any particular constellation of ideals or ideologies.

Among the figures that founded the CSP were JP and Ram Manohar Lohia. Lohia, who pioneered the concept of ‘Third Force’ in the 1940s, was born in Akbarpur near Ayodhya in

⁷ Raza, Revolutionary Pasts.
1910 into the Marwari Bania caste. His father, Hiralal, influenced him in his youth, taking him to see a 1918 INC event in Ahmedabad and stoking his nationalism from an early age. He subsequently studied at the Marwari School in Bombay, Banaras Hindu University, and Calcutta University, where he read English. Lohia, pictured in Figure 1 at an older age, travelled to Berlin in 1929 to pursue a doctorate in ‘national economy’ at the then Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, completing a dissertation in 1933 on ‘Salt Taxation in India’. His choice of Germany was due in part to an anti-imperial aversion to England, where he had first travelled. During this time, he experienced the decline of the Weimar Republic and the ascent of Nazism. He probably encountered diasporic Indian revolutionaries Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and Manabendra Nath (MN) Roy here who were then deeply involved with transnational anti-imperial activism through organisations such as the LAI. Whether it originated in encounters with these figures is unclear, but Lohia moved beyond the ‘teleological understanding of time’ and ‘Eurocentric understanding of space’ characteristic of colonial ideology and pedagogy from an early age, and initiated a ‘search for an alternative kind of universalism’ which would define his politics for decades to come.

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On returning to India in 1933, Lohia joined the independence movement and was sent by Nehru to work in Allahabad for the INC. He was close to Nehru at this time and lived in his home, Anand Bhavan, for several years, writing articles for CSP publication *Congress Socialist* and venturing around the country to speak at nationalist meetings. It was around this time that he met JP, with whom he would later organise the Quit India Movement. JP, pictured in 1959 in Figure 2, was born in the village of Sitabdiara in Bihar in 1902 to a lower middle-class family and began school in Patna at the age of nine. He was politicised by nationalist protest in Bengal and elsewhere and studied avidly, passing his matriculation at 16 and commencing higher education at Patna College. Mahatma Gandhi exerted a powerful early influence over JP, initiating his country-wide non-cooperation movement as events such as the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 laid bare British contempt for Indian aspirations towards self-government. JP soon moved directly into Gandhi’s sphere of influence with his marriage to Prabhabati Devi.

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18 Gupta, “Anti-Fascist Lohia.”
in 1920. Devi’s parents had adopted an austere lifestyle under Gandhi’s tutelage and their eldest daughter, Prabhabati, pursued this renunciatory ideal closely, prompting an invitation to Gandhi’s *ashram*.\(^{19}\) Her father, Braja Kishore, was informed of JP when searching for a groom who would not demand a dowry and the marriage took place in 1920.\(^{20}\)

![Figure 2. Jayaprakash Narayan. Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:JPN57.webp," Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:JPN57.webp&oldid=598932129 (accessed November 15, 2021).](image)

It seems JP first ventured out to the West in the early 1920s. In a handwritten manuscript dated June 3 1921, he recalled how he encountered Rabindranath Tagore in Berlin, which is consistent with Tagore’s movements at that time.\(^{21}\) Tagore was a prominent Bengali writer and thinker who disavowed nationalism in 1917 and sought to substitute it for a universalist humanism.\(^{22}\) JP was greatly impressed with the quiet confidence of ‘the Indian poet’ and

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\(^{19}\) Strictly a Hindu spiritual retreat, *ashrama* took on new meanings in the context of Indian nationalism as sites of political instruction by a core personality – in this case, Gandhi.


recorded how Tagore had spoken to a large audience about finding a philosophy to replace ‘militarism’.\(^{23}\) In 1922, JP opted to embark on postgraduate studies in the United States, deciding against Britain for the same reasons as Lohia.\(^{24}\) He worked in restaurants and vineyards to maintain an income and moved between universities in California, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Iowa.\(^{25}\) He probed the works of MN Roy, returning to India as a Marxist in 1929. Similarly to many Indians travelling abroad at the time, personal experiences of racism in the United States stayed with JP, strengthening his anti-imperial resolve in years to come.\(^{26}\)

At home, JP now moved to involve himself with nationalist struggle. Prabhabati acquainted him directly with Gandhi, and JP also met Nehru, who worked closely with him in the INC through these years. He joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and was arrested near Bombay, heading to Nasik Jail where he met Lohia along with other revolutionaries who would soon form the CSP.\(^{27}\)

Asoka Mehta was another member of this group who would play a key role in future Asian socialist ventures. He was born in Bhavnagar State in western India in 1911 and attended university in Bombay at the turn of the 1930s; later in life he would be arrested for opposing Indira Gandhi’s Emergency, like JP. Mehta recalled in 1980 how the ‘Congress Socialist Group was really a group of friends which shared ideas, but with a lot of latitude in it’.\(^{28}\) He went on: ‘the remarkable thing about the Socialist group from, say, 1933 to 1947, was that we were close and non-competitive...we kept our categories broad enough for us to be together and still be distinctive’.\(^{29}\) This suggests that the socialism to which Mehta and his comrades adhered was a malleable and capacious, rather than ideological, one. Mehta continued: ‘the world was bursting on us in the early thirties...suddenly we became internationally conscious’.\(^{30}\) This indicates that Congress Socialism was at least in part a global phenomenon, in that its practitioners were internationalists who did not view their struggles as extraneous to those unfolding elsewhere. Oral recollections may carry the risk of romanticism – especially

\(^{23}\) Jayaprakash Narayan, June 3, 1921, Hari Dev Sharma Papers (Jayaprakash Narayan Papers I & II Inst.), Writings By Him, fol. 12, NMML, 70.
\(^{24}\) Das, \textit{Jayaprakash Narayan}, 22.
\(^{27}\) Das, \textit{Jayaprakash Narayan}, 30-37.
\(^{28}\) Shri Asoka Mehta (interviewee), recorded by Dr Hari Dev Sharma (interviewer), December 4, 1980, NMML, 53.
\(^{29}\) Asoka Mehta (interviewee), 59.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 66.
in regard to early nationalist struggles – but what Mehta recalls is consonant with what we know about the group and the time. Key members remained very close through a period during which Ali Raza demonstrates that the phenomenon of Stalinism sharpened ideological divisions between communists and non-communists on the Indian left.\(^{31}\) This suggests that Congress Socialists aspired towards radical regional and global change but prioritised anti-imperial activism, seeking to delineate their socialist agenda more clearly later.

World War II posed new challenges to freedom fighters operating across Asia. In India, there was little appetite for a pro-British line as in World War I, and some subjects, such as Subhas Chandra Bose, viewed the Japanese Empire as offering up a more compelling vision for the future of South Asia than the British. For those of a comparably anti-fascist disposition such as JP and Lohia, aligning with Axis powers was out of the question, as was trusting the British to deliver on longstanding promises of self-government. Lohia, JP, and Mehta alongside Nehru and various other socialist Indians helped launch the Quit India Movement of 1942 with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was soon arrested and a number of Congress Socialists carried on the struggle underground, organising assaults on symbols of British imperialism such as post offices and railway stations and risking incarceration themselves.\(^{32}\) It was also in 1942 that Lohia and JP began gravitating towards the idea of engineering a revolutionary ‘Third Force’ in world politics. Lohia enunciated the concept, sensing that the British Empire was in retreat and colonised countries in ascent.\(^{33}\) As we will see, ‘Third Force’ is best seen not as an idea popularised by a dynamic thinker but as a concept naming a nascent global geography becoming plausible to many socialists and internationalists in South and Southeast Asia at the time. For JP, who himself took up the idea in 1943, the concept did not yet have a clear definition, pointing instead towards a possibility in world affairs beyond imperialism and communism.\(^{34}\)

In 1945, World War II ended but India did not immediately gain independence. Lohia and JP, now firmly established among the leaders of the nationalist movement, were released from

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\(^{31}\) Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*, 150-209.


\(^{33}\) Chandra Deo Prasad, *A Short Biography of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia* (New Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 2007), 32-42.

prison on April 22 1946 as a precondition for discussions of decolonisation to commence with the British government.\textsuperscript{35} While these negotiations took place over the coming year, Lohia and JP continued working for the CSP and also agitated for neighbouring independence struggles. Bisheshwar Prasad (BP) Koirala, Nepalese revolutionary, and future leader of the Himalayan country and ASC campaigner, recalls how he approached them for help with the Nepalese struggle and was warmly received.\textsuperscript{36} Lohia protested ardently against the Portuguese possession of Goa, clearly sensing that a historic opportunity for the colonised peoples of South Asia was nigh.\textsuperscript{37} It is also from around this time that both Lohia and JP began meeting anti-imperial contacts not only within but also beyond South Asia, two of whom are introduced in the next section.

**U Ba Swe, U Kyaw Nyein, and Burmese Socialism**

In 1947, Burma too was nearing independence. Its most illustrious nationalist Aung San had convinced Lord Louis Mountbatten to push the British government for concessions, and on January 27 Aung San signed an agreement with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee which assured independence within one year.\textsuperscript{38} Britain waged three wars on Burma in the nineteenth century, achieving complete dominion over the country by 1885. It imposed direct colonial rule to accommodate its strategic and commercial concerns, amalgamating Burma with British India until 1937 when the two countries were separated.\textsuperscript{39} The British encouraged Indian immigration into the country from the 1870s to develop the new rice fields of the Irawaddy delta and the economic system shifted from subsistence crops towards commercial crops as Indians acquired a stranglehold over Lower Burma.\textsuperscript{40} Burmans did not benefit from these developments and indigenous industries suffered as in other parts of South and Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{41} Buddhist Bamars – the dominant ethnic group – in particular feared the

\textsuperscript{35} Prasad, *Short Biography of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia*, 44.

\textsuperscript{36} Shri B.P. Koirala (interviewee), recorded by Dr Hari Dev Sharma (interviewer), February 26, 1976, NMML, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{37} Prasad, *Short Biography of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia*, 45-48.


\textsuperscript{40} Virginia Thompson, “Burma,” in *South East Asia: Colonial History: Imperial Decline: Nationalism and the Japanese Challenge* (1920s-1940s), ed. Paul Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 83-84.

\textsuperscript{41} Thompson, “Burma,” 84.
growing economic power of the Indian population in the country, and a nationalist movement
directed against both the British and ethnic Indian and Chinese groups grew from the 1920s
through 1940s. Despite some participation in government from 1937 until 1942 when the
Japanese invaded, this nationalist movement grew increasingly violent and anti-British.

Among those intellectuals who shifted towards militancy in the 1930s were U Ba Swe and U
Kyaw Nyein. This pairing were to become important figures within the broad anti-imperialist
front comprising the AFPFL from 1945. They identified as socialists from the late 1930s and
remained united in their commitment to anti-imperial struggle despite significant ideological
differences over Marxism among other questions. Ba Swe, pictured in Figure 3 in 1956, was
born in Onbinkwin village in southern Burma as a mineral boom took hold in the region.
Whites and a small number of Burmese benefitted, but Ba Swe’s parents, who were clerks
and coolies, did not; this left Ba Swe with a deep sense of injustice.

He went to high school in nearby Tavoy and participated in the 1936 student strike in which U Nu, Aung San, and
Kyaw Nyein also participated. He grew closer to them at Rangoon University where he
became fascinated by the writings of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, finding the latter trio’s scientific
method appealing. Leading Burmese nationalists were as internationally-conscious as Indian
ones in the 1930s; they took heed from the Irish Sinn Fein, Sun Yat Sen’s Chinese nationalism,
and Gandhi’s civil disobedience struggles.

Ba Swe came to take up a significant role in the
Burma Revolutionary Party (BRP) with other student leaders which aimed to launch a
rebellion that would oust the British. He was a military organiser for this body and then for
the Burma Independence Army (BIA), which the Japanese helped found in the region to
subvert British dominion. When, in 1942-3, the Japanese reversed their promises of
assistance and began to repress their erstwhile collaborators, the BIA began working against
them and with the Allies.

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42 Martin Smith, “Ethnic Politics and Citizenship in History,” in Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and
from Burma, ed. Ashley South, and Marie Lall (Singapore: ISEAS, 2017), 31-32.
44 George Totten, “Buddhism and Socialism in Japan and Burma,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 2,
no. 3 (1960): 295.
45 Robert Taylor, ed., Dr Maung Maung: Gentleman, Scholar, Patriot (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian
Studies, 2008), 201.
46 Taylor, Maung Maung, 203-204.
U Kyaw Nyein was born in March 1915 in Pyinmana, about 200 miles north of Rangoon, to a political family. He moved to Mandalay in 1930 to study science at college and proceeded on to the University College in Rangoon to study English literature soon afterwards. Throughout this period Kyaw Nyein engaged in political activism, transforming the Rangoon University Students’ Union into a less tame body, and participating prominently in the Shwedagon student strike of 1936. Nationalism grew through these years and Kyaw Nyein soon found himself managing the youthful BRP as war broke out. This group, which included Ba Swe and Aung San, was more a ‘group of people that shared similar views and worked for common objectives’ than a party. BRP members, like leading CSP members, viewed themselves as practical anti-imperialists above all else. Kyaw Nyein – seen in Figure 4 – soon joined the BIA and went underground during the Japanese occupation, forming a ‘United Front’ of anti-fascist forces with his compatriots. From March to April 1945, Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein joined the anti-fascist uprising against the Japanese as part of the AFPFL, a broad front which included socialists, communists, and anti-imperialists. Their grouping within this front

48 Taylor, Maung Maung, 126-131.
49 Ibid., 131.
imagined an amorphous path of ‘freedom, democracy and then socialism’. They understood regional and international politics as interconnected, anticipating a phase of anti-imperialist struggle after the anti-fascist one was complete since they sensed that the British were likely to unite with other capitalist powers after the war to crush the Soviet Union.

In June 1945, Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein founded the BSP as chairman and general secretary respectively. Strategically, the party sought leftist unity in order to strengthen anti-imperialist struggle, and politically, it committed to ‘scientific socialism’, which to some simply meant a state of expanded political, social, and economic freedom that followed independence. Its leaders were largely middle-class individuals who hoped to achieve a society free of exploitation on the bases of class and race. They aimed to generate pressure for a progressive politics from within the AFPFL, which would dominate Burmese politics until the

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52 Ibid., 54.
53 Ibid., 65-70.
54 Ibid., 121.
late 1950s. In mid-1946, the British determined to negotiate with the AFPFL with a view to granting Burma independence and the notion of left unity became more difficult to sustain, with communists leaving the formation. The British government had produced a White Paper in 1945 which proposed to delay self-rule whilst enabling the secession of the Kachins, Karens, and other hill peoples of Burma, a move Aung San worked against by attempting to bring these groups into the fold of the AFPFL. After Aung San and several others were assassinated in July 1947, Nu moved into the foreground and concluded an independence agreement with Britain in the Autumn. Soon afterwards, in 1948, Burmese communists launched an insurrection against the new governing party, which they considered to have inherited but not revolutionised the imperial state.

Following independence, Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein, still within the BSP, became increasingly interested in foreign policy. They wanted to shape Burmese foreign policy so as to give a boon to neighbouring freedom struggles. The BSP tried to nurture friendly relations with India while assisting Indonesian and Vietnamese freedom fighters. It sent support to the Indonesians in possible collaboration with the CSP who were doing the same thing. Kyaw Nyein himself stated that the reason for sending military aid to Indonesia was ‘to show Burmese support for Indonesians in their struggle for freedom’. It is possible that it was in these expressions of mutual support among Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists that the cordiality of senior figures towards one another – manifest in early ASC engagements – originated. Meanwhile, like CSP members exchanging ideas of a ‘Third Force’, major Burmese socialists were conscious that the Americans and the Soviet bloc were strengthening after World War II and that they would have to incorporate a reckoning with the strength of these powers into their foreign policy stances in years to come. They hoped to meet with socialist and anti-imperialist forces in neighbouring countries and discuss international politics together. The

57 Prasenjit Basu, Asia Reborn: A Continent Rises from the Ravages of Colonialism and War to a New Dynamism (Aleph, 2017), 57.
59 Ibid., 139.
61 Ibid., 166.
next section introduces an Indonesian activist who became pivotal to this burgeoning Asian socialist group, and thereafter the chapter assesses their first interactions and conversations.

Sutan Sjahrir and Indonesian Socialism

Indonesia officially gained independence on December 27 1949. Its nationalists had been struggling against the colonial state for much of the decade and originally proclaimed independence on August 17 1945, a full two years before Indian independence, though the Dutch refused to depart at this point. The borders of the new Indonesian nation-state, much like those of India and Burma, had been substantially shaped by its former coloniser. Batavia, today’s Jakarta, was founded in 1619 by Dutch explorers and the early development of the colony followed commercial lines, with the Dutch East India Company pursuing trade and the development of cash crops around the region. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Dutch Crown became more deeply involved, waging a bloody war in Aceh and augmenting its power across the enormously diverse archipelago which later became Indonesia. It began repressing nationalists from the early twentieth century, especially in the wake of the Russian Revolution in 1917. The notion of ‘indigenous advancement’ made way for a triad of Islamic, communist, and nationalist parties that sought to break with colonial rule. A new generation of largely secular and leftist leaders emerged from the late 1920s who prioritised the achievement of independence over debates about how far Marxist or Islamic trends should be adhered to. An organisation of Indonesian students educated in Holland called Perhimpoenan Indonesia (PI) was vital in the crystallisation of an avowedly anti-colonial movement.

Like progressive Indian students, many of these figures had opportunities to study overseas ahead of engaging in anti-colonial struggle. One of these was Sutan Sjahrir, later the first Prime Minister of the country in 1945. Sjahrir was born in Padang Panjang in the Minangkabau Valley of West Sumatra in 1909, a region which sent many children to Dutch schools and

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produced numerous intellectuals. Sjahrir attended schools in Medan and Bandung before departing for the Netherlands in 1929 where he studied in Amsterdam and Leiden and joined the PI, becoming secretary in February 1930 at 21 years of age. Here, he met Mohammad Hatta, forming the basis of a friendship which would shape the Indonesian independence struggle in decades to come.\(^{66}\) He was in search of radical comradeship and ideas and engaged critically with Dutch socialists through the stay; he also fanned out beyond these, organising a meeting of the PI with the LAI in 1930.\(^{67}\) Sjahrir became more familiar with socialist and Marxist literature in Europe, reading works by the likes of Rudolf Hilferding and Rosa Luxemburg as a means of comprehending Indonesia’s position within a potential alternative revolutionary modernity.\(^{68}\) He returned to Indonesia in November 1931 convinced that education of the masses and of nationalist cadres was essential in launching the next phase of anti-colonial struggle.\(^{69}\)

On his return, Sjahrir took a lead role in an organisation called *Pendidikan* which was one of a number of radical nationalist groups in Indonesia at the time. Through the 1930s and 1940s he operated with what his biographer, Rudolf Mrázek, terms a strategic ‘looseness’, exploring various concepts and ideas with others rather than to setting out any distinct political agenda. These included notions of people’s sovereignty, collectivism, mutual consent, and ‘original democracy’; like other Pendidikan activists, Sjahrir occasionally moved among workers himself.\(^{70}\) This is suggestive that Indonesian socialism, like Indian and Burmese socialism, was capacious and mutable, and not remotely ideological. The Dutch soon proscribed such organisations and arrested Sjahrir along with many other nationalists, moving him to Boven Digoel, a concentration camp, and Banda Neira, an island, for the rest of the decade. In common with many other anti-colonial revolutionaries in different locations during the early part of the twentieth century, he took incarceration as an opportunity to deepen his reading and in doing so, his radicalism.\(^{71}\) He mixed with fellow radicals and Dutch socialists during the

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\(^{67}\) Mrázek, *Sjahrir*, 75-76.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 63-74.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 79-110.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 91-105.

internments and spent some time teaching, lamenting the mendicancy of Indonesian youths who he felt should be confronting the Dutch more directly.\footnote{72}{Mrážek, Sjahrír, 82-207.}

On January 28 1942, the imminent Japanese invasion forced the Dutch to move Sjahrir and Hatta to Java, ending the period of confinement. There was a momentary fascination with Japanese imperialism, but this was soon quelled by repression.\footnote{73}{Benedict Anderson, Java In A Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944-1946 (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 33-35.} Nevertheless, some nationalists such as Hatta and future president Sukarno cooperated with the Japanese, viewing this as the only way to advance their aims, a move which smacked to Sjahrir of ‘fascism’. Sjahrir now engaged in a kind of ‘network and power building’ among impressionable elite youths who were vehemently anti-Dutch and worked in education; among the ‘swirl’ of friendships he achieved in these years were several future Indonesian ASC members.\footnote{74}{Mrážek, Sjahrír, 221-226.} The Japanese police made some attempts to contain him, but overall he enjoyed a great deal of autonomy, teaching at various schools and institutes in the mid-1940s. Among the topics he lectured on at this time was ‘socialism in Asia’.\footnote{75}{Ibid., 249.} This suggests an evolving conception of world affairs in which a series of Asian countries might achieve independence and begin to pursue a socialist society in the near future. As the Allies advanced on Okinawa in 1945 following the fall of Berlin to the Red Army, Sjahrir – pictured in Figure 5 in 1948 – encouraged Sukarno and Hatta to press the Japanese for complete independence. He considered these events to be of epochal significance and deployed the untranslatable term \textit{gelisah} to convey his sense that forces previously on the margins of Indonesian society – which also happened to be those most sensitive to the world outside – were now moving to the centre and promising to usher in a new phase in Indonesia’s history.\footnote{76}{Ibid., 253-261.}
On August 17 1945, Sukarno duly proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia and formed a cabinet with Sjahrir as Prime Minister. In November, Sjahrir, still at odds with Sukarno and Hatta, wrote a book, *Our Struggle*, which decried both and called for the radical youths he had worked with for some years to eviscerate the last remnants of colonialism and fascism. Benedict Anderson suggests that this work was ‘the only attempt made in the immediate post-surrender years to analyse systematically the domestic and international forces affecting Indonesia and provide a coherent perspective for the future of the independence movement’.77 Sjahrir, like Burmese and Indian socialists, viewed regional and global politics as interconnected and considered that anti-imperialist struggle had to encompass both of these scales. What moved Asian socialists through the 1930s and 1940s was a drive to rid their own societies of imperial oppressors but also a desire to disrupt and even incapacitate a wider global order that enshrined and enabled this oppression. This may have been apparent in the writings of relevant socialists, but more to the point, it was apparent in many of their actions and activities through these decades. It is also worth mentioning that Sjahrir’s

standing in international socialist circles benefitted from the fact of his unequivocal opposition to fascism during the Japanese occupation, a stance which other leading Indonesian nationalists had not adopted.

Sjahrir became minister for foreign affairs and the interior in the new parliament of November 1945 and chairman of a socialist party in December. Through 1946, Sjahrir sought to negotiate an agreement on independence with the Dutch, clashing with major personalities of the day such as Sukarno and Hatta and Tan Malaka in doing so. On July 3 he was kidnapped by forces dissatisfied with his engagement with the Dutch but persevered, being appointed Prime Minister again in August though his fellows often referred to him as ‘foreign minister Sjahrir’. Sjahrir continued in this vein until 1949, attempting to negotiate full independence whilst advocating a socialist domestic and foreign policy. After complete independence from the Dutch was secured, Sjahrir began reaching out to fellow Southeast and South Asians aspiring after the construction of a socialist society not only at home but also internationally.

Early Encounters: Asian Socialism, 1947-1952

Towards the end of the 1940s, many anti-imperial activists began to perceive new possibilities in regional and global politics. One manifestation of this was the ARC which took place in Delhi in March-April 1947. Su Lin Lewis terms this the first of an ‘arc of conferences of the post-colonial era’. These conferences were organised by Asian and African radical intellectuals, trade unionists, journalists, and writers, among others, who wanted to explore and plot shared political pathways against the backdrop of a declining imperialism. More than 200 delegates from 28 Asian countries attended the ARC – with ‘Asia’ capacious so as to include visitors from Egypt to Soviet Central Asia to Japan – and crowds in excess of 10,000 ventured into Old Fort, Delhi, to hear the inaugural speeches. The event was organised by the Indian Council for World Affairs and was ostensibly non-official, with cultural and academic organisations providing many papers and speeches. It consisted of opening and

78 Mrázek, Sjahrir, 283-400.
closing sessions at which the likes of Nehru and Gandhi spoke, plenary sessions, and roundtable groups on development, art and culture, women’s movements, migration, and racial problems. Stolte suggests that the unifying thread was ‘the shared experience of European domination and the struggle for independence’. Copious activists, writers, and academics came together to exchange ideas about manifold possible Asian futures.

One group of attendees at this event were Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists. These socialists included representatives of the various parties and tendencies introduced above including JP and Sutan Sjahrir. They were not at the centre of proceedings – none gave major speeches or sat on the working committee – and instead they communicated behind closed doors. They agreed in private to form an Asian socialist body in the near future which would enable them to explore their shared visions in more detail. Lewis slightly overstates the extent to which early Asian socialist conversations were underwritten by looming ideological divisions between Asian political groupings. She suggests that part of the reason Asian socialists agreed on closer collaboration at the ARC was to distinguish themselves from communists, mass nationalist parties, religious parties, and militaries. It is plausible that Asian socialists wanted to ‘carve out a place within the messy and divisive realm of post-colonial politics’. But professions in ‘Asian socialism’ which appeared in print in party publications, at least of Indian socialists, were not ideological but idealistic, and seemed to consist in an amorphous imaginary of an egalitarian and democratic, post-imperial future, across large parts of the globe rather than in particular nations. Early Asian socialist conversations followed the same lines.

This is seen in the dealings of Indian socialists at the time. Indian socialists, who continued to operate through the CSP until it was rebranded as the Socialist Party of India (SPI) in March 1948, enunciated an internationalist outlook early on. They did much of the heavy moving in bringing together the rudiments of Asian socialist networks. As Pradip Bose remarks, while several Indian socialists attempted to make contact with Indonesian and Burmese socialists

84 Asian relations being report of the proceedings and documentation of the First Asian relations conference, New Delhi, March, April, 1947 (New Delhi, 1948).
86 Ibid., 60-61.
at the time of the ARC meeting, it was left to individuals such as Ram Manohar Lohia to give shape to the idea of Asian socialism in coming engagements with fellow Indian and Asian socialists.\textsuperscript{87} Little was agreed on at the ARC. At National Executive and General Council meetings in Nagpur, Madhya Pradesh, in September 1947, the CSP pronounced the ‘convening of a World Socialist Conference in India’ as a key aim which Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a leading female Indian socialist, and Lohia were working towards.\textsuperscript{88} The CSP directed ‘greetings to Indonesia’ at the same meeting.\textsuperscript{89} The socialist movement which they hoped to bring about was not yet definitively Asian in makeup, but it had an anti-imperialist grounding. In October, JP sent a letter to ‘leader of world socialism and democracy’ Léon Blum in which he divined that beyond ‘totalitarian communism’ and ‘American capitalism’ was ‘a third camp of the oppressed and backward peoples of Asia and Africa and of the democratic socialists of Europe’. The likes of Blum could not take a lead role in this camp until they had leavened ‘the heavy load of imperialistic tradition that the past has lain on their shoulders’ by applying the ‘principles of socialism and democracy’ to their colonies as well as themselves.\textsuperscript{90} JP was manoeuvring himself and Indian socialists into a key position in the contemporary ‘world socialist’ scene.

These ideas took clearer shape in Indian socialist journal \textit{Janata}. \textit{Janata} had been founded in 1946 and adopted a strongly leftist and internationalist stance from the outset, hosting radical writers from Asia as well as from Europe and Africa. Its editorial board included JP, Lohia, and Asoka Mehta. The title piece of the December 7 1947 edition lamented the growing bipolarisation of the world order along the lines of ‘two white Governments’ – meaning the United States and Soviet Union – which shared ‘a monopoly of decision [making] in international affairs’. It welcomed ‘a new awareness of nearness’ between Indonesia, India, and Burma among other Asian countries which could ‘provide for the world a third focus of


\textsuperscript{88} Chattopadhyay was among the founders of the CSP in 1934. Like other leading Congress Socialists, she was strongly influenced by Gandhi, though she disagreed with his decision not to allow women to participate in the Mahatma’s Salt March of 1930. She was a significant figure in international socialist and feminist movements in decades to come. “Who was Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay?,” \textit{Indian Express}, Apr 3, 2018, accessed Nov 26, 2021, https://indianexpress.com/article/who-is/who-is-kamaladevi-chattopadhyay-5121371/.

\textsuperscript{89} “World Socialists to Meet in India,” \textit{Times of India}, Sep 9, 1947, 7.

\textsuperscript{90} Jayaprakash Narayan to Léon Blum, October 2 1947, Jayaprakash Narayan Papers (I & II Inst.), fol. 51, NMML, 55.
international relations’.

On March 21 1948, a self-described ‘Asian socialist’, probably Lohia, declared that ‘a Third Force of international socialism in world politics is possible only in Asia’ which had the ‘passion of nationalism’ necessary to generate a new ‘equalitarian philosophy’. ‘White socialism’ or ‘Western European socialism’ constituted an ‘imperialist ideology’ which could not produce this third world force. Lohia, giving a press conference in Delhi the following month, declaimed that a ‘regional federation’ in South and Southeast Asia should ‘launch a programme of positive peace’ in which Indian socialists were participators but not leaders, and which inspired admiration among socialists elsewhere. He believed that individual socialists had to initiate contact with likeminded persons around the region and build up a wider network of Asian socialist internationalists.

JP took up this posting. On August 15 1948, the first anniversary of Indian independence, he remarked on how India’s new leaders had waltzed ‘into the palaces vacated by the British and have surrounded themselves with all the pomp and panoply of power’. He alleged that the government had ‘bowed before the politics of caste domination and race’ in failing to support popular movements against social iniquities. Two months earlier, JP sent a letter to Siddique Lodhi, a Pakistani socialist who had been a comrade during India’s anti-imperial struggle. Lodhi had solicited JP’s advice on whether to remain in Pakistan – which had been formed a year earlier from majority Muslim areas of British India – or come to India to further socialist aims. JP requested that Lodhi stay in the former and ‘build up’ the new ‘Pakistan Socialist Party’. JP was keen to bolster socialist struggles around South Asia while honing closer bonds with important figures. At the turn of 1949, Ceylonese leftist Philip Gunawardena wired JP to propose an Asian socialist conference. Indian socialists were not the only South Asians who were sensing new possibilities in regional and international politics. JP proposed in response to ‘get in touch with the various Asian parties and sound them’ out.

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92 “European Socialism and Asia,” Janata, Mar 21, 1948, 12.
93 “Principles of Socialist Foreign Policy,” Janata, Apr 11, 1948, 11.
conference. Philip Gunawardena got back to JP on January 28 on the topic of the proposed Asian socialist conference, hoping that an ‘Indian Ocean’ assemblage comprising groups in India, Indonesia, Burma, and Iran could gather at such an event.

It became clear by March that sufficient contact could not be made with all of these parties, but the enthusiasm of JP for crafting fresh socialist solidarities around South and Southeast Asia was clear. Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein were also making some headway in fomenting Asianist solidarities at this time. Unlike the Indian socialists, this pair formed part of their national government from January 1948. Where the Indian socialists had a peripheral impact on the INC and left it in 1948 to campaign as an independent party, which became the SPI, the BSP was a strong faction within the governing AFPFL, though it did have some trouble making its voice heard in cabinet. Nevertheless, key figures within the body sensed similar political possibilities to those which were exciting Indian socialists. Some Burmese socialists had the opportunity to visit Europe in 1947 at the behest of leading figures in the British Labour Party (BLP). Kyaw Nyein recalled later how Denis Healey had asked him why he did not establish an Asian grouping of socialist parties, since, in Healey’s view, ‘Asian’ issues were quite distinct from European ones. Kyaw Nyein was in fact keen to do this. He and colleague Bo Khin Maung Gale travelled to Paris, Prague, and Belgrade after visiting Britain. Yugoslavia was of particular interest to the BSP at the time and they studied its constitution alongside that of the CSP in India. They were keen to build up a vision of an international socialism not simply centred in Europe – where the BLP among other social-democratic parties had taken power in the post-war period – but drawing on multiple examples and trends.

Burmese socialists began making contacts around Southeast and South Asia at the time. They sent missions consisting of military aid to Indonesia, Laos, and Vietnam in 1947, where independence struggles were taking place. Kyaw Zaw Win suggests that these moves

97 Jayaprakash Narayan to Madhu Limaye, Selected Works: Volume Five, 141.
101 Ibid., 231.
102 Ibid., 180.
103 Ibid., 167.
reflected a commitment to the principles of non-alignment long before the region’s statesmen had worked out such a policy.\textsuperscript{104} In December 1947, Ba Swe and Nu visited India to discuss Indo-Burmese relations with Nehru.\textsuperscript{105} Asian socialists were generally sceptical as to the leftist pretensions of South and Southeast Asian leaders such as Nehru, Nu, and Sukarno, but around the moment of independence, it was still unclear what policies such politicians might adopt on gaining power. When independence was achieved in 1948, the BSP began to work out its politics more clearly. It made pronouncements in favour of a Marxist-Leninist trajectory, committing to establishing a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in the country which realised a ‘new world and new life’, but it was not ideological in practice.\textsuperscript{106} It declared itself in favour of ‘neutralism’ in June 1948 and in June 1949, viewing Nehru’s stated antipathy towards Cold War politics as exemplary in an age of decolonisation and self-determination.\textsuperscript{107} There was a hint of difference here with Indian socialist professions in an idea of non-alignment or the ‘Third Force’, in that some Indian socialists such as Lohia shunned the term ‘neutralism’ for a more positive emphasis on what anti-imperial peoples and states would do differently to capitalist and communist ones, but the overall thrust was similar.

Sjahir, who was still in the midst of an independence struggle in the late 1940s, perceived similar possibilities to the Indians and Burmese. He attended the ARC in March 1947 as part of the Indonesian delegation to the event, and was greeted personally by Nehru at the airport. Sjahir did not make much of the event, nor depart with a positive impression of Nehru, who he felt abnegated the ‘spirit of modern and socialist leadership’.\textsuperscript{108} Nevertheless, he showed an interest in cultivating links with other attendees, meeting former BSP chairman Thakin Mya during proceedings to follow up on an interest in Burmese socialist politics.\textsuperscript{109} He also submitted a joint statement with the Vietnamese delegation to the event proposing ‘positive action to prevent the re-establishment of colonialism in Asia’ through putting colonialism on the UN Security Council agenda among other measures.\textsuperscript{110} In July 1947, Sjahir embarked on a diplomatic trip arranged by President Sukarno to campaign for recognition of Indonesia and

\textsuperscript{104} Zaw Win, “Burma Socialist Party,” 168.
\textsuperscript{106} Zaw Win, “Burma Socialist Party,” 122.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 225-227.
\textsuperscript{108} Mrázek, \textit{Sjahir}, 334-337.
its independence struggle. He stopped first in New Delhi where he convinced Nehru to request that the UN Security Council should discuss Dutch colonialism in Indonesia which he viewed as an affront to a resurgent Asia. He then moved on to Cairo, and the United States, making a speech to the Security Council itself on the same question.111

Sjahrir continued to meet socialist figures who interested him at the sidelines of such events. The Indonesian attendees to the UN summit convened a meeting to ‘celebrate the second anniversary of the proclamation of the Indonesian Republic’ in New York on August 15, the same day that India achieved independence. Sjahrir stated that Indonesians would achieve their freedom and rights regardless of the stance of the UN, perhaps imagining that decolonisation in Asia was a tide which it was not possible for colonial powers to turn back, nor the international community to ignore. One of the speakers at this meeting was Norman Thomas, an American socialist and anti-imperialist who took particular interest in events in Asia and Africa and would attend and speak at ASC conferences in the 1950s.112 Still, Sjahrir’s opportunities to fraternise outside of his official capacities were limited and much of 1948 and 1949 was spent campaigning for independence at home. He founded the PSI in February 1948 and fleshed out his position on world affairs. The PSI was founded after a split with a communist-leaning group of activists in an older party, but Sjahrir did not indulge a language of anti-communism which might have been tempting as the Cold War heated up. Instead, he refused to say anything which might be construed as siding with the United States or Soviet Union, preferring to outline a new set of guidelines on how Asian independence movements should institute a political system beyond capitalism and communism.113

Towards the turn of the decade, the Cold War created fresh impetus for Asian socialists to network among one another and discuss their ideas. Korea, which had been divided at the 38th parallel in 1945 between a Soviet-occupied north and a United States-occupied south, gradually degenerated into skirmishing and civil war as these occupying forces left the country from 1948. On October 1 1949, Mao Zedong led Chinese communists to power in the biggest country on the continent; meanwhile, the United States began to delineate a ‘defensive perimeter’ in East Asia. It was clear to Asian socialists that they had to distinguish more clearly

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111 Mrázek, Sjahri, 349-353.
113 Mrázek, Sjahri, 369-370.
what an international socialism might look like by contrast to communist and capitalist systems, were they to eventually compete with communist and capitalist actors not just on a domestic level, but also as a collection of politicians seeking to shape global futures. On the agenda of the SPI National Executive meeting in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, in February-March 1950, an Indian socialist annotated the section on ‘foreign policy’ with the words ‘Asian Socialist Conference to be concretised’. Lohia was chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the time and had been travelling abroad, conducting a lengthy trip to Europe and North Africa in late 1949 in which he invited local revolutionaries such as Abd el-Krim of Morocco to come to India and to the conference. The international socialism he imagined was not restricted to Asia – though its bulk may have been made up of Asian countries – it was an anti-imperialist one embracing African freedom fighters. Abd el-Krim sent a letter to the Annual Conference of the SPI in Madras in July 1950 not long after Lohia’s visit, agreeing with ‘our brothers in India’ that ‘one of the principal reasons for war and widespread discontent in the world is imperialism’.

The National Executive met again in Nagpur in November. Here, Lohia reported on talks with the Burmese socialists which he had held in February. The BSP had proposed a preparatory meeting of what was now being termed the ‘Asian Socialist Conference’ in Rangoon, which Lohia planned to attend along with two comrades. Burmese socialists were making contact with friends and allies in other countries who might be interested in attending the conference, for which a date had not been agreed. These included the Lebanon Socialist Party and other West Asian groups as well as Nigerian freedom fighter Nnamdi Azikiwe. It is clear that South and Southeast Asian socialists put out feelers to possible attendees in different regions of Asia and Africa, via the journeys of the likes of Lohia, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It is probable that some socialists and anti-imperialists in these regions such as Azikiwe initiated contact themselves, eager to visit decolonising regions of Asia and observe how independent countries were organising their politics and societies, as well as to participate in the

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114 “Agenda for the meeting of the National Executive to be held in Rewa on February 28, March 1st & 2nd 1950,” Surendranath Dwivedy Papers, Papers Relating to the Praja Socialist Party, fol. 5, NMML, 129.

115 “Minutes Received from Foreign Countries on the Occasion of the 8th Annual Conference of the Socialist Party held at Madras on the 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th July 1950,” Surendranath Dwivedy Papers, Papers Relating to the Praja Socialist Party, fol. 5, NMML, 153.

116 “Minutes Received,” 153-164.

discussions about international futures. Still, Indian socialists were working hand-in-glove with Burmese socialists to try and bring the relevant Afro-Asian gathering about; that same month – November 1950 – JP sent letters to BSP members Thakin Chit Maung and Ba Swe thanking them for their help with an unspecified ‘request’ and hoping ‘that the struggle for freedom so brilliantly started will soon end in success and the great citadel of reaction in Asia would be demolished’. Their growing intimacy was obvious.

Asian socialists resisted many blandishments from Western socialists at this time. From 1946, socialist parties in Europe sought to reconstruct the basis of the pre-war Labour and Socialist International through convening annual conferences and consultations. They formed the Committee of the International Socialist Conference (COMISCO) which became the SI in 1951. The BLP was at the centre of the SI, whose offices were in London, and various British socialists among others reached out to Asian socialists between 1946 and 1951. European socialists’ engagements with Asian socialists were not just minded towards bringing the latter into the SI, but also towards giving themselves an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of political developments in the decolonising world, about which they understood little. Asian socialists, for their part, also wanted to plug European socialists’ minds, but not as potential partners in an international socialist organisation. Asian socialists wanted to form their own organisation to formulate internationalist strategies. Rather, they often attended SI events as part of detailed itineraries of travel around Europe and surrounding regions during which they could observe ongoing social-democratic experiments and determine what applications these had to their own domestic agendas, as well as to their own internationalisms. These internationalisms were to be predicated on the need to proffer new models of social organisation beyond capitalism and imperialism.

Madhu Limaye, an Indian socialist who was close to Lohia, attended the December 1947 meeting of COMISCO in Antwerp, Belgium, and informed delegates that the gathering was too ‘European-minded’ and that socialists who had experienced ‘imperialist domination’ in Asia and Africa would convene their own conference. In the autumn of 1949, Lohia

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travelled to Europe and attended a meeting of the British-led Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism (COPAI) in London in October. Travelling to metropolitan centres within Europe enabled Asian socialists to speak not just to the predominantly white contingents of COMISCO and the SI, but also to Asian and African students and freedom fighters who formed part of organisations such as COPAI. Lohia networked with anti-colonial Indians and Africans at the COPAI meeting, and then launched his aforementioned venture across Europe and North Africa. He probably racked the brains of comrades he met as to where to travel in Europe and Africa. This was an early example of how the dialogical side to 1950s decolonisation worked; Asian socialists padded out their contact books via hastily-arranged meetings with progressive Europeans and Africans who could advise on future sojourns and stayovers. Lohia spent most of this particular trip in Europe and while it created new opportunities of travel and exchange for him, it also strengthened his conviction that Asian socialists needed to organise separately from European ones. Burmese and Indonesian socialists also resisted attempts from European socialists to bring them into closer conversation, and the only Asian parties to join COMISCO at the turn of the 1950s were from Israel and Japan.

Yugoslavia was perhaps the country within Europe of most interest to Asian socialists at the time. Asian socialists invariably visited the country on their Western excursions and invested more hopes in it than anti-communist European socialists did. Yugoslavia had begun diverging from the Soviet sphere in 1948, and its leader, Josip Broz Tito, sought to fashion a more decentralised and participatory form of socialism than that of the Soviet Union. It became a key member of the NAM in the 1960s and inspired many revolutionaries in the Global South. Asian socialists, particularly Indian ones who tended to suspect industrialism and the excessive centralisation of political power due to the influence of Gandhi on their thinking, were fascinated by Yugoslavian methods of social and economic organisation and their potential portability. Yugoslavia established a worker self-management system in 1950 under the stewardship of Edvard Kardelj, who was to attend Asian socialist events in coming years. This system was supposed to bolster working-class solidarity in the country as ‘people found

122 “India’s Foreign Policy: Dr Lohia’s Criticism,” *Times of India*, Nov 17, 1949, 9.
political avenues open to them as representatives of self-managed enterprises’. In November 1950, the SPI sent two members to a Socialist Women’s Conference taking place in the country. JP, Lohia, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay were closely involved in the decision. In January 1951, JP sent a letter to the ambassador of Yugoslavia requesting propaganda videos which covered social and economic development. The trio likely sensed that a familiarity with the experiments in cooperative working and living underway in Yugoslavia would inspire Indian socialists and Asian socialists more widely who sought to construct similarly egalitarian and democratic systems at home in the near future.

As preparations for an inaugural Asian socialist gathering intensified, the primary register on which key activists appealed to comrades nearby was one of openness and excitement about what Asian decolonisation prophesied. Again, their networking was sometimes accelerated by geopolitical developments. In October 1950, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) invaded and annexed Tibet, which had been an independent region for four decades. India, which had good relations with Tibet, resented this, and the incursion on an autonomous Asian region raised questions as to the legitimacy of Chinese professions in anti-imperialism. Lohia responded with a detailed note on ‘a Himalayan policy’ following a conference on the question in Lucknow in December. The note outlined how ‘status-quo Asia’, ‘Communist Asia’, and ‘socialist Asia’ were facing off and how the latter stood for a ‘new civilisation of active equality and tranquil activity’ in which the ‘people of Tibet’ took centre stage, along with other peoples seeking to shape their own futures. Lohia thus positioned an incipient Asian socialism as a guarantor of self-determination and democracy for occupied peoples and as progenitor of a longer passage of social reconstruction around the region. The conference, a small-scale and non-official event, brought together representatives of Tibet, Nepal,

Afghanistan, ‘Pakhtoonistan’, Burma, Bhutan, and Sikkim and expressed the drive of Lohia and close allies to define themselves as a uniquely democratic political force in the region.\footnote{Pakhtoonistan, more commonly referred to as Pashtunistan, is a region which is home to the Pashtun people within Pakistan and Afghanistan who are aspirants to nationhood in the area.}

Sutan Sjahrir took a similar view of world affairs to the Indian socialists. Sjahrir, who was now leading a PSI which was competing for political power in the newly-independent Indonesia, was in Bombay on September 30 1951 to meet socialist friends in the city. He had just spent five months studying socialist movements in Europe and was greeted by Asoka Mehta and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay on arrival. He addressed a public meeting under JP’s tutelage in which he outlined that Indonesia ought to ‘follow an independent foreign policy’ outside of the ‘two power blocs’.\footnote{“Dr. Sjahrir in Bombay,” \textit{Times of India}, Sep 30, 1951, 7.} Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists shared this notion of striking an independent foreign policy route outside the nascent Cold War, which Lohia termed the ‘Third Force’. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) showed a growing concern about the political direction of regional leaders. A CIA digest of April 1952 scrutinised the circle around Sjahrir and PSI journal \textit{Pedoman} for their supposed anti-Americanism and Russian connections. It found ‘little indication of a Socialist orientation toward the extreme left’, but remarked on how Sjahrir ‘strongly advocates the “third force” principle’ and had shaped Indonesia’s foreign policy appropriately.\footnote{Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Current Intelligence Digest,” CIA-RDP79T1146A000900180001-4, April 24 1952, accessed May 5, 2020, \url{https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t1146a000900180001-4}.} The latter claim was likely hyperbole given that Sjahrir was somewhat of a standalone figure within Indonesian nationalism who was then challenging the government’s foreign policy.\footnote{“Sjahrir in Bombay,” 7.} But the prior claim indicated that the CIA had noted the ascendency of the Third Force idea among Indonesian socialists and was beginning to vet their politics and their associations closely.

The CIA was similarly intrigued by the politics of the BSP leaders. Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein continued to play an important role in the wider AFPFL. On December 12 1951, the CIA noted that a ‘Cabinet shakeup’ was about to take place which was ‘dictated by the Socialists’, and feared that the ‘pro-communist’ and ‘extreme leftist’ Ba Swe might become new Prime Minister.\footnote{CIA, “Current Intelligence Bulletin,” 02698155, February 17 1952, accessed May 5, 2020, \url{https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02698155}.} Ba Swe eventually became defence minister in this shakeup. The CIA’s fears
related to the growing confidence and influence of the BSP within the AFPFL, and to the BSP’s advocacy of a non-aligned foreign policy. Kyaw Nyein decried the Marshall Plan in the same month as the report was filed, suggesting that if American capitalism moved into the ascendency worldwide, socialism would be the casualty.\textsuperscript{134} This indicated that the ‘neutralism’ the BSP backed was not a negative policy of remaining aloof from world affairs, but a constructive and internationalist one focussed on bolstering certain anti-capitalist forces. The pair also focussed on developing a fitting political agenda at home. Ba Swe gave an address to a large number of Burmese trade unionists that December in which he tried to explain what the BSP’s ideology was. Whilst there was some innovation – Ba Swe proposed a synthesis of Marxist and Buddhist ideas – the address located Burma within a wider imagined geography in which socialist politics were currently being worked out. He made reference to Yugoslav social and economic programmes and proposed that what was needed now, above all, was a kind of ‘fraternity and intimacy’ among trade unionists which might make the implementation of such cooperative schemes practicable.\textsuperscript{135} This emphasises that the nationalism and internationalism of Burmese socialists were intricately intertwined and quite malleable, rather than being overly prescriptive or ideological.

With Burmese and Indonesian comrades speaking with a common voice, Indian socialists now made the final plans for the meeting of a preparatory committee which would discuss how to formalise the connections Asian socialists had drawn in previous years. Lohia travelled abroad again in 1951, visiting Europe, the United States, Hawaii, Japan, and Indonesia; it is likely that he spoke at length with socialists in the latter two countries. Following the trip, Lohia made it clear how his global encounters had shaped and reinforced his politics, opining that ‘Rome to Honolulu is one world’ whilst ‘Tokyo to Cairo and beyond is another’. The poverty of ‘teaming millions’ in Asia contrasted with the ‘wholesome bodies’ of Europe and America; the only antidote could be a ‘common policy’ across Asia.\textsuperscript{136} In December, Lohia met representatives from the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon including Kamal Jumblatt, who was to visit

\textsuperscript{134} Kenton Clymer, \textit{A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar Since 1945} (New York: Cornell University, 2015), 116.

\textsuperscript{135} The address was later printed as U Ba Swe, \textit{The Burmese Revolution} (Rangoon: Information Department, Union of Burma, 1952).

\textsuperscript{136} Ram Manohar Lohia, ”An Asian Policy,” Prem Bhasin Papers, ASC Minutes of Bureau Meetings, fol. 7, NMML, 33-34.
Lohia and close friends several times in coming years.\textsuperscript{137} They published a shared statement following ‘a series of discussions and intimate conversations’ professing ‘faith in a new socialism...which alone will be capable of becoming even among the least organised groups, a massive and victorious instrument of the liberation of man and masses’. Social and economic equality and prosperity, a new ‘industrial and agricultural technique’ which suited the ‘physical, intellectual and moral development’ of man, and democratic decision-making at political and economic levels were named as the ideals undergirding this ‘new socialism’. The statement invited other Asian socialist parties to ‘cooperate to fully realise this ideal’.\textsuperscript{138}

This was the most profound statement yet of Asian socialist intent. It spoke to the depth of the ambitions of Lohia in particular, which extended to building a ‘new’ trans-regional socialist society, whose precise characteristics were to be determined in the course of future discussions. From the late 1940s through 1951, Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists sounded out Asian and African political activists who they thought could contribute to these discussions. They fashioned far-reaching anti-imperial networks on the basis of their own amorphous notions of a possible future socialist internationalism which would take shape outside the Cold War. The moving factor was Asian decolonisation, which South and Southeast Asian socialists felt could constitute the beginning of a fresh era in regional and global human affairs whereby more fair and equitable systems of government were substituted for old imperial methods. They investigated the suitability of Yugoslavian experiments in cooperative living to this vision, but for now, their chief aim was to initiate open-ended conversations with anti-imperial comrades about what exactly the vision was and how it might proceed. The next section assesses the first large-scale meeting of Asian socialists.

The High Moment of Asian Socialism

In March 1952, the first formal meeting of Asian socialists took place. Though Indian socialists had been the most industrious in initiating transnational conversations about an Asian socialist conference, they had just been involved in a general election between October 1951

\textsuperscript{137} “Feverish Preparations For Decisive Blow in Lebanon,” \textit{Times of India}, Jun 22, 1958, 4.
\textsuperscript{138} Unnamed Document, December 7 1951, Jayaprakash Narayan Papers (I & II Inst.), fol. 55, NMML, 150-152.
and February 1952 which may have temporarily turned their attentions elsewhere, and this meeting and the subsequent conference of January 1953 took place in Rangoon in Burma.\textsuperscript{139} From the Burmese perspective, not only did this allow them to play a key role in shaping discussions, but it also comprised a diplomatic opportunity for the leaders of a new nation-state in the region, of which Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein were two. Socialists from many countries who took an interest in Burma’s political system and economic programmes would visit, as would representatives of Israel, Japan, and a variety of other countries which Burmese politicians might hope to evolve closer relations with. Burma had been on a rocky road since the achievement of independence in 1948, suffering from civil war, communist insurgency, and also from incursions on their sovereignty by Chinese nationalist – Kuomintang – troops who were skirmishing with the Chinese communists to the north in the early 1950s. Life expectancy in 1952 was 34 years and Nu covertly scouted out the United States and the United Kingdom for aid. He could not reveal this publicly for to do so might stir dissension in the country, never mind in ruling circles – indeed, the BSP was among those factions who criticised Nu for accepting technical assistance from an American firm in 1951.\textsuperscript{140}

Nu articulated his \textit{Pyidawtha} plan to the country in 1952 which was presented as an ‘indigenous’ scheme in order to quell notions that the government might be growing beholden to foreign powers.\textsuperscript{141} Nu was thrilled with having just won the elections of 1950 and pushed back communist insurgencies; he now wanted to capture the attention of the masses with a term that conveyed a ‘majestic country that will prosper’.\textsuperscript{142} The development plan made out to hand power to the people, giving townships money to launch their own projects, while encouraging the construction of bridges, roads, and primary-school accommodation. It hoped to achieve a fair distribution of social welfare services.\textsuperscript{143} As such, Burma seemed a logical choice for the first formal gatherings of the ASC; not only did it have a socialist government, but it had also just commenced an ambitious programme of nation-building which its leaders looked forward to exhibiting, and which attendees would be interested in.

\textsuperscript{139} The SPI, led by JP, won a measly 12 seats at this election, although it gained 11% of the vote and was the second largest party in the \textit{Lok Sabha}, the Lower House of the Indian Parliament.
\textsuperscript{140} Tharaphi Than, “The languages of Pyidawtha and the Burmese approach to national development,” \textit{South East Asia Research} 21, no. 4 (2013): 644-645.
\textsuperscript{141} Than, “Languages of Pyidawtha,” 649.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 647.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 651.
As this chapter has emphasised, while Asian socialists were avidly networking with far-flung contacts at this time, they were also trying to discern and draw on socialist models of state-building on their travels, because their national and international political activisms were closely bound. Trips to Burma would further this end.

The ASC preparatory meeting of March 25 to March 29 1952 brought together socialists from India, Burma, Indonesia, and Japan. Ba Swe, Kyaw Nyein, and Lohia were in attendance, along with some close associates of Sjahrir such as Djohan Sjahruzah. It was an informal gathering which consisted in discussions about the principles of socialism, economic development, militarism, and what stance an Asian socialist grouping should adopt towards the SI. Delegates sought above all to strike an independent path in world politics – should enough socialist parties be able to take power to make coordinated foreign policies practicable. Discussions began with an assessment by Lohia of the sizes and strengths of socialist parties in different Asian countries. He noted that Korea, China, Mongolia, Indochina, and Malaya did not have socialist formations. Nevertheless, he hoped to contact individuals in these regions who might be able to build up domestic socialist forces while contributing to transnational socialist conversations. He named those individuals who he had managed to cultivate friendships with on his travels, including Kamal Jumblatt of Lebanon, BP Koirala of Nepal, and David Ben-Gurion, the leader of Mapai and first Prime Minister of Israel. A sticking point for Asian socialists for many years would be how to improve relations between Israeli and Arab socialists, such that these factions might coexist in Asian socialist networks. Around 700,000 Palestinians fled Palestine in the late 1940s and settled uncomfortably in surrounding states; Israeli efforts to establish relations with Arab leaders in Jordan and Syria fell on deaf ears, and tensions between Israel and the Arab world became increasingly clear.

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145 Japanese socialists were only invited to the event – as observers – after pressing ‘aggressive’ demands to attend. “Preliminary Meeting of the Asian Socialist Conference, 25 to 29 March 1952,” Prem Bhasin Papers, ASC Minutes of Bureau Meetings, fol. 7, NMML, 1.
146 “Preliminary Meeting,” 13.
cooperative living underway in Israel.\textsuperscript{148} Lohia had attempted to arrange a meeting between David Ben-Gurion and the leaders of the Arab League in September 1950 to discuss ‘federative approaches...between Israel and the Arab world’.\textsuperscript{149}

The next topic of discussion at the preparatory meeting concerned what ‘socialism’ consisted in. Socialism appealed to wide swaths of Asian and African freedom fighters in its capaciousness; it invoked notions of a democratic and egalitarian future which had yet to be constructed. However, there were some points of agreement about what it constituted. Attendees agreed that socialism should be frontally opposed to capitalism and imperialism. It implied a politics that attempted to liberate oppressed masses from these conditions. It also valued the individual apart from ‘the concept of group, class or collectivity’; this distinguished it from communism. More specifically, socialism implied commitment to socialised production for use; social justice, which meant the right to employment, medical care, education, and a pension; democratic rights such as freedom of speech, association, faith, and dissent; social rights; world peace; and an international order based on law and justice. These postulates indicated a clear internationalism of mind and intention; Asian socialists hoped to create a politics which would be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist in nature and would pursue social equity, economic equality and prosperity, and democracy across a large part of the Earth’s surface, whilst also promoting peace worldwide. In the discussions themselves, attendees disagreed somewhat about the implementation of this agenda. Lohia, in Gandhian vein, preferred a decentralised state and small-scale machinery, where the Burmese and Indonesians preferred a larger state and were less opposed to industrial technologies.\textsuperscript{150} It was a shared aspiration to generate a new international socialism more than concrete political beliefs that brought attendees together.

The remainder of the meeting focussed on how an Asian socialist bloc might defend, and extend, its boundaries in the nascent Cold War. Discussants agreed that what marked them out from the Cold War powers was their commitment to principles of self-determination,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Israel experimented with forms of agrarian collectivism during the first decades of its existence, which survive in altered form up to the present day. The grassroots model for this agrarian collectivism was supposed to be the kibbutz, a utopian farming community in which tools and clothing were owned communally and members held regular elections, emphasising their democratic credentials. Erik Cohen, “Paradox of the kibbutz,” \textit{Built Environment} 3, no. 12 (1974): 617-618.
\item \textsuperscript{149} “Indian Leader Pays Tribute to Israel Leadership,” \textit{Australian Jewish News}, Sep 29, 1950, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{150} “Preliminary Meeting,” 18.
\end{itemize}
democracy, and global peace, which capitalism and communism neglected or negated. Emerging states in Africa and Asia were not capable of competing militarily with Cold War powers; Kyaw Nyein suggested that Asian socialists should instead play on the ‘positive desire for neutrality and the third force’ in non-aligned regions, changing opinion ‘first in Asia and later on in the whole world so as to prevent this war for some time to come’. Kyaw Nyein did not delineate how comrades were to accomplish this radical aim. As Lewis has shown, Asian socialists were somewhat vague about their designs on ‘world public opinion’ throughout the 1950s. This was perhaps because they occupied elite social positions in their own countries which encouraged them to look at peoples below them as uniform. Indeed, Tharaphi Than has suggested that Nu advanced the Pyidawtha plan – which delegates to the preparatory meeting probably learnt much more about during their stay – in the ‘tone of a father’ asking his children to ‘turn their backs on pleasure and look to work’. Kyaw Nyein’s expectation of an easy marshalling of an incipient ‘desire’ for peace into forceful global public opinion by Asian socialists in the near future is indicative of paternalism. Still, the scope of Asian socialist ambitions was undoubtedly worldwide.

Following the meeting, a preparatory committee was formed in Rangoon in May 1952 which sought to organise the first Asian socialist conference. Kyaw Nyein sat on the committee alongside Prem Bhasin of India and Imam Slamet of Indonesia. Bhasin was a Punjabi socialist close to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Asoka Mehta who often toured India organising for the SPI. Imam Slamet was a PSI activist who had been drawn to Sjahrir at the time of the latter’s Pendidikan work. The committee, which would morph into the ASC Secretariat from 1953, hosted visitors from countries of interest and also produced a periodical, *Socialist Asia*, which was serialised in August and blended regional and international news with opinion pieces by Asian, African, and sometimes Latin American and European contributors. Rather than having any explicit aim, the journal appeared to constitute a vehicle of political discussion and debate for socialists everywhere who were dissatisfied with capitalism,

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151 “Preliminary Meeting,” 91.
152 Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 64-78.
communism, and mainstream social democracy. Lohia, Kyaw Nyein, and various other key personalities penned lengthy pieces, attempting to initiate conversations on topics of interest. The journal also exchanged with and republished pieces from socialist publications abroad – such as Janota – which touched on the same themes, bringing together voices which would be heard at ASC events in coming years.

Asian socialists continued to network far and wide in advance of the first conference. In May, JP met Marko Belinic, a communist and anti-fascist from Yugoslavia, in Bombay. Belinic remarked on the warmth and depth of their conversations and on how the Indian and Yugoslavian socialist movements had strengthened relations as a result.156 11 days after the pair met in Bombay, a large SPI delegation departed to Yugoslavia under the leadership of Faridul Haq Ansari, a close friend of JP. Lohia wrote a letter of greeting to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) as part of the trip which stated that the delegation would ‘cement the friendship between our two peoples and parties’. The delegation studied Yugoslavian experiments in cooperative living. Delegates visited cities, factories, and cooperative farms, whilst Ansari conducted an extended interview with Marshal Tito.157 In his letter to the CPY, Lohia enthused over how Indian and Yugoslavian socialists among others might ‘someday achieve the one world of our dreams’ and slay ‘the twin demons of hunger and war’ by evolving these experiments into a more universal model of social change.158 Milovan Djilas, a communist theorist who would attend many ASC events in coming years, wrote a warm response.159 This was the closest engagement yet between Asian and Yugoslavian socialists. Others were to follow, with PSI member Imam Slamet visiting Yugoslavia in November alongside Japanese and Indian socialists to attend the Sixth Congress of the CPY.160

In September, Kyaw Nyein travelled to Beirut and then to Milan where an SI conference was taking place. In Beirut, he probably met Lebanese socialists. An Indian socialist named

Madhav Gokhale, secretary of the Foreign Affairs Bureau within the SPI, travelled with him. Gokhale recorded in a letter to JP ahead of the trip how he hoped to travel by air, given ‘convenient sailings to Milan’ were not available, and asked JP to help him fund the flights. The increasing availability of cheap air travel was invaluable in facilitating Asian socialist networking at the turn of the 1950s. It was quicker than travel by sea, speeding up communication between far-flung individuals. It enabled Asian socialists to conduct more regular discussions with contacts such as the Lebanese socialists, who were soon to attend the first ASC convention. Conversations which might otherwise have had to be saved for the conference could be thrashed out in different locations, and the agenda for the event itself could be settled beforehand. The communication between Gokhale and JP also points towards the impromptu nature of non-state internationalist networking in the early 1950s. Gokhale was trying to raise funds for his journey just two days before he was due in Beirut, after receiving an invitation from Kyaw Nyein. As it turned out, he succeeded in doing so, travelling to Beirut and Milan then to Egypt to speak to North African agitators about the ASC.

The labour of South and Southeast Asian socialists in bringing these networks together also stirred the interest of activists without any obvious domestic political or party profile, who got in contact with leading Asian socialists themselves. In April 1952, Carson Chang addressed a letter to JP in which he recalled meeting JP several weeks before and travelling on to Thailand, Indonesia, Malaya, and Australia in the interim. Chang was a Chinese journalist who described himself in the letter as an ‘anti-communist’ – perhaps to distinguish himself from the Chinese government, about which Asian socialists were ambivalent – and attended various future ASC conventions. He made mention of having met Sjahrir in Indonesia. A ‘G Mapara’ wrote a similar letter to JP in October on returning from an extended trip to Indonesia, stating that JP’s letter of introduction to Sjahrir had made his journey easier,

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162 Madhav Gokhale to Jayaprakash Narayan, September 16 1952, Jayaprakash Narayan Papers (I & II Inst.), fol. 1309, NMML.
enabling a ‘cordial and intimate talk’ with the latter as well as warm receptions elsewhere.\(^{165}\)

This makes plain that the work South and Southeast Asian socialists had put into building close relationships with one another – in this case, JP and Sjahrir – as well as with those further afield had made it easier for copious less reputable left-wing activists around the region to make journeys and scope out new political possibilities. Taieb Slim, a North African freedom fighter, also travelled around South and Southeast Asia at this time forming ‘Aid to Tunisia’ committees in India, Burma, and Pakistan.\(^ {166}\)

In November, it was determined that the inaugural Asian socialist conference would take place two months later.\(^ {167}\) This event featured as key participants a cast of activists, politicians, intellectuals, trade unionists, and writers from across Asia as well as from Africa and Europe. Political geographer Jake Hodder has remarked on how organising conferences, seminars, and gatherings, was crucial to ‘imagining, negotiating and contesting the broader construction of post-war internationalism’. The ‘global composition of delegates’ at many such conferences suggested a space ‘singularly free from any sense of geographical limitation’.\(^ {168}\) Asian socialists pursued the organisation of a conference with relish from 1947 that would host delegates from decolonising states and freedom struggles across Asia and Africa, and from countries such as Yugoslavia that had no strong alignment in the Cold War. What animated them was excitement at the prospect of constructing a fresh socialist internationalist politics, which was to be global in scope rather than confined to one region, even if it channelled the energies unleashed by Asian decolonisation first and foremost. At this conference, South and Southeast Asian socialists hoped to imagine, in league with the many attendees, post-imperial, egalitarian and democratic world futures, and to ascertain how the given futures might then be constructed. This was not simply a process of rarefied political discussion in the conference hall but also of strengthening bonds with different attendees around the edges of the event.

Lewis is perceptive in seeing Rangoon as part of an ‘arc of sites’ where the Third World was made which have been neglected until recently. She emphasises the significance of Rangoon

\(^{166}\) “Aid Tunisia,” *Socialist Asia* 1, no. 2 (1952): 6–7.
\(^{167}\) “Asian Socialist Conferences Dates And Invites. Dates And Venue.” *Socialist Asia* 1, no. 6 (1952): 18.
as a cosmopolitan city and a ‘hub on transcontinental air routes’ in making a case for its elevation in histories of non-alignment and Third Worldism. This chapter concords with her finding that the networks of intellectuals who organised the conference were engaged ‘in the work of socialist internationalism with an Asian inflection’, but diverges from her argument that they promoted a cohesive ‘democratic socialist’ project at the event. Asian socialists did not yet promulgate anything so specific as a ‘project’. As the above analysis has shown, Asian socialist networks came together through the efforts of activists who shared ambitions of remaking social orders at home as well as the international order on a more egalitarian and peaceable basis. The phase in Asian socialist conversations where the notion of ‘democratic socialism’ came to the fore was several years later at the second ASC congress in Bombay, when the heightened anti-communism of key figures encouraged a more ideological line. Rangoon embodied a more open-ended and imaginative phase where delegates were not crafting a concrete ideology for state-building – although they did exchange some ideas on this – but imagining world futures together, and negotiating what these might be.

The conference took place in Rangoon’s Town Hall between January 6 and January 15 and consisted of three plenary sessions, separate committee discussions, and a mass rally at a sport stadium in Rangoon. The sessions and discussions were where delegates explored their various agreements and divergences, and the mass rally was part of the Burmese staging of Asian socialism at the conference. Clement Attlee, who attended the conference and was a well-known figure in Burma, wrote afterwards of how studious the Burmese organisers had been in their preparations; he eulogised their ‘excellent arrangements and the business-like manner of the proceedings’. Aside from the BSP, Indonesian, Indian, Israeli, Japanese, Lebanese, Malayan, Pakistani, and Egyptian socialist parties sent delegates to the event. The event took place in English without translators, giving an advantage to the sizeable Indian delegation. Not far shy of 100 Indians travelled, and this frustrated the Burmese organisers, who did not want one grouping dominating proceedings from the outset. Nevertheless, each delegation – as well as observers from Algeria, Kenya, Uganda, Tunisia, and Nepal, and fraternal delegates from the SI, the CPY, the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY), and

172 Shri Prem Bhasin (interviewee), recorded by Dr Hari Dev Sharma (interviewer), March 26, 1968, NMML, 206.
COPAI – got ample opportunity to contribute. Committee discussions lasted up to 23 hours a day and formed the basis for resolutions which were then adopted. Indians were well balanced by attendees from other nations in these committees. The visualisation shown in Figure 6, produced by the Afro-Asian Networks research team, shows where delegates travelled from.

Moshe Sharett, then the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, recalled in Janata in May how ‘newly acquired independence was at once an intoxicant and a stimulant’ at the conference. Delegates sensed that the achievement of self-determination across large parts of Asia begged a social and political transformation of international proportions – and in Rangoon they articulated a ‘positive response to the challenge’, exploring how they might foment this transition. A ‘depth of faith and freshness of enthusiasm’ pervaded the deliberations ‘in plenary sessions as well as in committee meetings and private conversations between fellow delegates’. This was obvious from the opening speeches. At City Hall in front of 200 people, Kyaw Nyein gave the introductory speech at the first plenary session. He explained that the initiative for the conference had come from individual Burmese, Indonesian, Indian, and Japanese activists who had then conducted a ‘modest, informal and intimate’ meeting 10 months before. He emphasised that the event constituted a historic opportunity to translate

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174 Ibid., 113-114.
anti-imperial solidarities into closer political affinities, mentioning his excitement at having African observers at the meeting.\footnote{Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference, 1-2.}

Ba Swe, the conference chairman, followed this with a brief address in which he named ‘the threat of a new world war, the colonial peoples’ struggle for freedom, national revolution, and the economic development of the under-developed areas... problems which concern not only the socialist parties of Asia’ as themes for discussion. He emphasised how the ASC, which formed as a permanent non-governmental organisation after the conference, was intended as a catalyst ‘for closer contact and cooperation’ among Asian socialists.\footnote{Ibid., 8-10.} Lewis rightly points out how Asian socialists understood conferences to be ‘ephemeral events’ whose spirit ‘needed to be sustained through regular contact and the circulation of information’.\footnote{Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 57.} After Ba Swe, delegates from a wide range of countries then gave short speeches. Sjahrir and JP sounded a common note on the need to fashion a system which channelled the energies of postcolonial peoples and forestalled a devastating third world war. The Israeli and Japanese addresses – the latter split into ‘left’ and ‘right’ socialist parties – were more ideological and focussed on economic development. Attendees from colonised and formerly colonised nations spoke in similar tones to the opening contributors, viewing colonialism and war as coterminous and locating ‘socialism’ as a democratic and egalitarian society which constituted its antithesis.\footnote{Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference, 18-29.}

In the ensuing days, three committees gathered to compile reports on different subjects. One committee, chaired by JP, considered the meanings and aims of socialism, world peace, and the format of the ASC; the second, chaired by Indonesian socialist Tandino Manu, considered agrarian policy and economic development in Asia; and the third, chaired by another Indonesian socialist, GHM Riekerk, considered freedom movements in the colonies. Talbot Imlay has uncovered minutes of conference meetings in the Swedish Social Democratic Party archives which shine a light on what took place in some of these committee discussions. His concern with identifying how far Asian socialists achieved a definitive consensus on either an international, political, or economic agenda at the conference is misplaced, since, as Sharett’s recollection above suggests, the aim of discussions was as much to explore different
possibilities as to realise a definite strategy, which would be more plausible in the wake of Rangoon when a permanent body formed. However, his analysis intelligently teases out some of the disagreements that delegates encountered. These appear to have been far better-spirited than the disagreements at the Bombay conference almost four years later.

On international issues, which presumably engrossed multiple committees, Imlay points towards the unanimity of opposition to colonialism at the congress. He considers this to have had insignificant ‘definitional potential’ in itself, but in this search for an intellectual definition lies a problem; anti-imperialism, for Asian socialists, was a sensibility and a set of goals rather than a philosophy of engagement. Anti-imperialism had brought many delegates together, and the South and Southeast Asian and African delegates in particular sought the destruction of imperialism and construction in its place of egalitarian and democratic social orders and a more peaceable international order, even if they did not yet have a plan as to how to go about this. This plan would take shape in coming years in the journeys, negotiations, and projects of the ASC’s mobile intermediaries who operated out of the body’s base in Rangoon. Imlay points out more insightfully that Asian socialists could not settle on an understanding of the ‘Third Force’ at Rangoon. Despite having been a bedrock of Asian socialist conversation, as encouraged by Lohia, in preceding years, the congress’ resolution on ‘Asia and World Peace’ did not mention it. Imlay observes that while Indian, Indonesian, and Burmese socialists wanted to articulate their collective chagrin at Cold War politics by committing to the creation of a ‘Third Force’ of states beyond it, right-wing Japanese socialists objected due to their closeness to the United States.

Imlay is perceptive in seeing that among those who did support the notion of a Third Force, there were significant differences between the Indians, Burmese, and Indonesians, who viewed it in ‘ambitious terms’ as a bloc that would form ‘an expanding zone of harmony that operated outside of Cold War dynamics and tensions’, and other attendees who viewed it ‘in predominantly practical terms’ as a force mediating disputes between member states. For example, he notes that the Pakistanis thought that the ‘Third Force’ should broker discussions

181 Ram Manohar Lohia did not in fact attend the first ASC congress, despite having put much bodywork into inviting people and organising it. Prem Bhasin recalls that this was because he felt that the Burmese frustration at the size of the Indian delegation was down to a sectarian dislike of Indians in Burma, for reasons that the beginning of this chapter alludes to. Shri Prem Bhasin (interviewee), 93.
between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Mohammed Sopiee of Malaya, one of the few attendees from a country which was not yet fully independent, also objected to the notion of a Third Force as articulated by the aforementioned major nations, for the practical reason that he wanted delegates to agree that colonialism needed to end before ‘social justice and social equality’ could be pursued. While these differences do not appear to have precipitated an outright argument at Rangoon, they certainly spoke to a tension in Asian socialist networks between representatives of larger nations who wanted to enumerate an idealistic and ambitious internationalism without discussing grittier questions of how to ease political problems within Asia, and representatives of smaller ones who wanted to disentangle colonialism at a local level before discussing grand plans for world reconstruction. This tension would grow more obvious in coming years as the sense of hope and optimism that infused discussions at this conference evaporated.

On questions of what Talbot Imlay terms ‘socialist politics’, there were debates about whether socialists should confine themselves to constitutional methods and how widely they should disperse power. Here, JP and Sjahrir differed, with JP promoting ideas of decentralisation and cooperation, and Sjahrir believing that strong centralised state authority was needed for socialists to achieve their potential. Indeed, the Times of India reported that JP, leading discussions of common ‘Asian problems’ on January 8, had led the Indian delegation in arguing for ‘the desirability of grafting the technique of non-violence to the Marxist method’. JP viewed ‘unconstitutional means’ of ‘civil disobedience as a practical method for achieving Socialism’, while the Malayans thought that this was ‘unrealistic in the Asian climate of naked imperialistic terrorism’. The Burmese delegation suggested that peaceful means could be supplemented by revolutionary methods where necessary. This appears as a vigorous debate about political means and methods hosting many different views, beyond just those of JP and Sjahrir. It can be conjectured that Marxism – perhaps the repository of socialist ideas and perspectives best known to all delegates – served as a medium around which specific delegations could frame their own interventions, which hybridised a domestic political strategy such as Pyidawtha in the Burmese case, or civil

186 “Coordination of Activities of Asian Socialists,” Times of India, Jan 9, 1953, 7.
disobedience in the Indian case, with aspects of Marxism. Meanwhile, speakers who felt that Asian socialists should discuss immediate problems before proffering grand solutions avoided theoretical discussions altogether and viewed direct support for anti-imperial struggle as the primary task, a view which would come to the fore in the activities of the ASC’s mobile intermediaries after the congress.

On economics, Talbot Imlay suggests that some socialists took an interest in European experiments in ‘social democracy’ where others manifested doubts about Western modernity, or ‘an urbanised and productivist oriented society’.\(^{187}\) He suggests that Asian socialists agreed that some form of ‘development’ – meaning the alleviation of poverty, and the reduction of the wealth gap between highly industrialised countries and the rest – needed to be pursued, but could not determine whether this should take the form of ramping up production, since it was not obvious where capital for this might come from. There were also objections to the idea of increased production couched in ethical terms which viewed productivism as inviting a fast-paced, Western capitalist way of life, though Imlay relies heavily on articles written by Lohia – who was not present at the congress – to make this claim.\(^{188}\) It appears that there was broad agreement on the need to abolish ‘feudalism’ – or concentrated land ownership – redistribute land to peasants, and build up systems of cooperative farming, rather than the collectivised farming of the Soviet Union, which Ales Bebler of Yugoslavia observed led to bureaucracy.\(^{189}\) Prominent South and Southeast Asian socialists had attributed considerable attention to Yugoslavian experiments in cooperative living on their travels in the previous five years, and it seems that delegates to the ASC congress of 1953 were similarly concerned with constructing a cooperative mode of socialism, whose precise approach to economic development was not yet determined.

On January 11, in a break from committee discussions, delegates spoke before a mass rally of 100,000 people at the Bogyoke Aung San Stadium in the city. Burmese socialists demonstrated their capacity to mobilise large publics in organising this event. The line-up included West European, Yugoslavian, Egyptian, Israeli, Indian, Pakistani, Nepali, Malayan, Indonesian, Japanese, Algerian, Ugandan, and Tunisian speakers. Delegates kept speeches

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\(^{188}\) Ibid., 436-438.

brief, thanking the Burmese government for the opportunity to visit the country, and earmarking the event as a historic occasion which spoke to the transformative political potential these countries and peoples had should they unite around socialist principles.\textsuperscript{190} The Rangoon correspondent of \textit{Janata} gave insights into how this event unfolded, remarking excitedly on how ‘nearly a lakh of people participated in the rally and scores of small processions, of industrial workers, of women and citizens, started pouring in at the spacious lawns since early morning’.\textsuperscript{191} The correspondent goes on: ‘that morning Rangoon woke up to the clamour of people marching in processions and lustily shouting full-throated slogans’.\textsuperscript{192} This suggests that there was significant local enthusiasm for the event, though the AFPFL – which often organised such rallies in the early years of its rule – doubtless also planned it out in detail so that publics whose interests Asian socialists professed to speak for, such as industrial workers, were well-represented in the crowds.

The \textit{Janata} correspondent who reported this also hints at the heady mood of the conference away from formal discussions themselves. They state that ‘the Asian solidarity evidenced at Rangoon...was not skin deep’, referencing how Nu had taken delegates on ‘a pleasant picnic aboard the ship P. S. MAHA to a district town called Maubin, 48 miles from Rangoon’ near the beginning of the conference, which was ‘a 10-hour trip, with plenty of fun and endless music for the guests’. They remarked on how Nu came across as ‘most unassuming and simple’ on the boat trip, patiently answering questions from delegates about the Burmese classical music that played out for eight hours. The spirit of conversation was free and open-ended; the correspondent recalls how even ‘a couple of Communists, or at least fellow travellers’ had made it onto the boat despite the fact that the state was faced with communist insurgents in various regions including the town, Maubin, they were visiting. The report mentions how other delegates including Ahmed Hussein of Egypt, Sharett, Sjahrir, and two Japanese socialists contributed songs – though the Indians were ‘too serious’ to do so – and comrades from the Gold Coast treated attendees to their dancing. Overall, it was a scene of ‘Asian merry-making’ from which only SI members ‘kept aloof’. The town itself looked to have been ravaged by war, but large numbers of people came to greet the delegation.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{191} ‘Lakh’ is an Indian term for 100,000.
\textsuperscript{192} “Asia Makes Music,” \textit{Janata}, Feb 1, 1953, 5.
\textsuperscript{193} “Asia Makes Music,” 5.
In the second congress plenary session on January 12, it was agreed that a permanent body would be formed on the conclusion of the conference, consisting of a bureau and a Secretariat. On the question of liaising with the SI, Israel and right-leaning Japanese socialists proposed closer alignment where Pakistan, Egypt, India, and Burma were more circumspect. Those attendees that valued anti-imperialism – whether in soaring internationalist terms, or in gritty, practical terms – opposed overly close relations with the SI where delegates without a legacy of anti-imperialism saw no problem. Lebanese attendee Nassim Majdalani had walked out of a committee discussion on ‘Asia and World Peace’ three days before this plenary session, declaring: “I cannot sit on the same table as the oppressor of one million Arabs who have been forced to leave Palestine”. The presence of Israel within Asian socialist networks was a further source of tension at Rangoon, as at later ASC meetings, that pertained to Asian socialist professions in anti-imperialism. This is not to say that there were not tensions between attendees of colonised and formerly colonised countries; Clement Attlee recalled later how some Indian attendees ‘learnt with surprise that Africans regarded Indians in West Africa as exploiters of the workers’. During the plenary session on January 12, a resolution on ‘Common Asian Problems’ was agreed. These tended to constitute problems which were colonial or universal in genesis, though the resolution was prone to lapse into the language of ‘the Asian mind’. Lewis notes that many delegates had been schooled in colonial institutions which might have imbued in some of them a proclivity to indulge in occasional orientalist cliches.

The third plenary session, on January 15, considered the ‘principles and objectives of socialism’. Asoka Mehta suggested weeks later that this resolution was the ‘key document’ produced by the conference; it took shape with ‘sharp points of disagreement melting into common areas of agreement...even as discussions deepened’. African contributors applied pressure; the Egyptian delegate asserted that ‘Asian socialists must back freedom movements as a step to world socialism’. JP and Kyaw Nyein carried the motion. The resolution called

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for the creation of a new ‘social order free from the exploitation of man by his fellow man’. It suggested that this social order would comprise ‘free and equal people co-operating together for common happiness and common progress’. It outlined various economic means by which this order might be approached. These consisted of a notion of ‘socialist planning’ that sought to raise productivity by an improved ‘technique of production in all fields’ and a ‘rational utilisation of natural resources’. This socialist planning was to engage ‘the whole people…in the process of production’ as far as possible, and prevent the growth of a bureaucracy. This aim – to ensure ‘a democratic control of economic and social life’ by expanding both the nationalised and cooperative sectors of the country’s economy – marked Asian socialists off from communists, who they were keen to distance themselves from in the resolution, but also from various postcolonial regimes where vast centralised planning bureaucracies were already growing up. The rendering of socialism contained within was an ambitious and idealistic one in its commitment to involving postcolonial peoples themselves in production.

The resolution went into some detail about the demographic functioning of this notion of democracy, pointing out that Asian countries were ‘predominantly agricultural’ and asking that peasants received public and state support in taking control of, and improving, production themselves, through ‘the development of the technology of the small enterprise’. Indian socialists had surely pushed for this acknowledgment of the importance of supporting ‘the small enterprise’ given their penchant for Gandhian ideas. The resolution identified basic ‘economic and social rights’ that it expected to be characteristic of the orders of the future, which included: the right to work; the right to leisure, including leave with full pay; the right to free medical care; the right to economic security including state support for the old, sick, and unemployed; the right to family allowances; the right of children and the young to good care, education and training according to their abilities; and the right to decent housing. These rights would not have sounded out of place in a European social-democratic manifesto of the 1950s, and indicated that Asian socialists believed that some form of redistributive state was necessary in the shift towards the social orders of the future, even if they wanted economic planning processes to be democratic.

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202 Ibid., 93.
203 Ibid., 94.
The resolution also named a series of political rights which it considered to be desirable. These included ‘freedom of speech, of organisation, of assembly, of faith and conscience, of election of representative bodies’. The resolution observed that these principles implied the right of opposition parties to form and operate, but then proposed euphemistically that the socialist state and socialist parties were duty-bound to ‘defend democracy’, hinting at the disagreement about whether constitutional or revolutionary methods were more suitable to achieving socialist aims which had unfolded in earlier committee discussions. The resolution added that socialism demanded ‘full equality of rights and dignity of position’ for women, a commitment which marked Asian socialists out from major postcolonial leaders of the 1950s, who did not make such a commitment at Bandung. A small number of women attended the Rangoon Conference where they encouraged this stance through ‘friendships and collegiate relationships with male socialists’. Finally, the resolution called for ‘the right of each people to national self-determination’ in its envisioning of a world which was ‘safe, prosperous, free and peaceful’, and in which ‘international collaboration’ was the norm.

A series of other resolutions followed which recapitulated some of these themes. Resolutions were passed on eradicating colonialism and securing world peace. There was unanimous opinion on the former. The resolution on ‘freedom movements in colonies’ acknowledged, as Egyptian delegates had insisted earlier in proceedings, that Asian socialists had to ‘fight’ for a total end to imperialism before ‘the world as a whole [can] embark on tasks of Socialist reconstruction’. It is notable, though, that this acknowledgement did not appear in the keynote resolution on socialism – only in a separate one – intimating that the prominent South and Southeast Asian socialists who shaped the resolution on socialism viewed imperialism as something which was slipping into the past with the progress of Asian decolonisation, and which they could give grand speeches about in relation to their lofty international aims, rather than pore through in granular detail. It was after the ASC formed as a permanent body that a different set of figures, more intimate with African comrades,

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204 Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference, 94.
206 Ibid., 73-74.
208 Ibid., 106.
began to hone the ASC’s anti-imperial socialism in practical engagements, as the next chapter will explore.

The discussion about world peace at Rangoon had been marred by disagreements over whether Asian socialists should identify their mission as one of forging a global ‘Third Force’. However, the resolution was staunch in condemning colonialism and hypothesising that only the spread of democratic and socialist systems of government through and beyond Asia could secure world peace, which was the thrust of the ‘Third Force’ idea. Overall, the Rangoon Conference constituted the first detailed discussion by predominantly Asian socialists of what the intellectual and strategic content of their shared internationalist visions should be. The South and Southeast Asian socialists who had brought the event together enunciated a commitment to constructing new social orders across Asia which were democratic, egalitarian, and somewhat welfarist in orientation. They also committed to ending imperialism and transforming the world order, which was gravitating towards another cataclysm with the spread of Cold War conflict. This section has proposed that political discussions at Rangoon, while significant in terms of setting out a path forward for Asian and African socialists, were not as telling in interpreting the ethic of early-1950s Asian internationalism as the lively spirit of the event itself. The recollections of Sharett, Mehta, and the Janata Rangoon correspondent, as well as sources on the disagreements that did exist – which appear to have been entirely civil – point towards the ethic of optimism and excitement that defined Asian socialist engagements at this time.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how a coterie of prominent Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists furnished up an internationalist network between 1947 and 1953 at a heady moment of decolonising promise in South and Southeast Asia. These figures took the achievement of independence in their home countries as a brief to engineer radical revisions of social orders at home and around the globe. They viewed socialism in an imaginary and idealistic propensity as a democratic and egalitarian society which bookended imperialism. They also hoped that it could come to supersede Cold War geopolitics, upending the

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international order. They identified likeminded comrades across large parts of Asia and limited parts of Africa and Europe and travelled to meet some of these, profiting from the increasing availability of air travel which made long journeys easier. They bounced ideas off people they encountered, not just about the upcoming conference or international socialism, but also about what the pedagogic value of, for example, Yugoslavian industrial experiments might be for domestic socialist struggles. Preparations for the conference accelerated at the turn of the 1950s, and at the resulting congress, sundry socialists discussed what a broadly anti-imperial international socialism might consist in. Many agreements if also disagreements were fleshed out here. JP, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, identified the ‘human contacts’ and ‘friendships’ achieved at Rangoon as having been just as important as the political discussions. Ba Swe followed this up in his farewell speech by vowing ‘to bring socialists in Asia and everywhere into a kind of emotional relationship’ and a ‘unity of thought and action’.210

The chapter has simultaneously contested and built on the findings of other scholars. It argues, in support of Lewis, that South and Southeast Asian socialists sought to promulgate distinctive anti-imperial internationalisms through the ASC. It proposes that these internationalisms were experimentative and open-ended in tenour, mirroring the mazy transnational lives of their primary practitioners, rather than ideological and focussed on distinguishing socialism from contending postcolonial trends. The early postcolonial political career of Ram Manohar Lohia is illustrative of this. He ventured far and wide between 1947 and 1953 stirring interest in an inaugural Asian socialist conference, but also simply embellishing his own global contact book. The itineraries that he and other Asian socialists followed on such journeys abroad were scattergun and ad hoc. They had to raise funds at the last minute and string together travel plans which included some countries they were not particularly interested in, but where allies could point them in useful directions on upcoming legs of their travels. They knew that they wanted to bring together fellow Asian as well as African and Yugoslavian activists to discuss common socialist futures, but they did not know exactly who they might run into, and what direction the ensuing conversations would take. At the Rangoon Conference of 1953, delegates were quite flexible about the kind of socialist future attendees could expect, focussing chiefly on articulating the need to construct fresh

social orders and to transform the international order. This reflected the sense of mutability that defined the political outlooks of South and Southeast Asians in the early 1950s, in that they felt the world was ripe for remaking in an age of rapid Asian decolonisation, and they had time to explore their options in league with those who were conducting intriguing experiments elsewhere.

The chapter views this openness as indicative of a dialogical side to decolonisation where many imaginaries intersected, rather than of a failed attempt to enunciate an Asian socialist project, as per Talbot Imlay. One of the interpretive threads which this chapter has opened up is that Asian socialist internationalisms cannot be viewed in isolation, or at one moment, but only take on clear definition when assessed in the course of their practitioners’ furtive political lives. The next chapter demonstrates that Asian socialists crafted various projects for the realisation of the internationalist visions they had articulated at Rangoon, which become apparent when following the ventures and activities of the ASC’s secretaries between 1953 and 1955. As such, this chapter has discerned the beginning of a chronology of possibility patent in Asian socialist internationalisms which the next chapter sketches further, while highlighting how geopolitical shifts sometimes altered perceptions of what these possibilities were, or how they might be achieved.
Chapter II: The Solidarity of Action: Asian Socialism from Hyderabad to Tokyo

The most important thing about the meeting was its evidence that Asian Socialists are still eager and inspired and active. At the first Asian Socialist Conference, held in Rangoon over a year ago...it was decided to establish at Rangoon a permanent secretariat of the conference which would work for closer unity among the young Asian Socialist parties...in the bureau and the secretariat the desire of Asian Socialists for unity and co-ordination has been converted into living organizations – feeble but still alive.¹

Writing shortly after the first meeting of the ACB in May 1954 in the hill town of Kalaw in Burma, BSP activist Maung Maung identified efforts at ‘unity and co-ordination’ as key Asian socialist achievements since the Rangoon Conference. The ASC had formed the ACB in August 1953, in Maung Maung’s words, to marshal ‘democratic forces against the remnants of colonialism in Asia and Africa’.² The ACB was just one of a number of ‘living organizations’ which Asian and African socialists honed in 1953 and 1954 with the aim of trashing colonialism and replacing it with democratic and egalitarian postcolonial social orders, as well as an equitable international order. This chapter conceptualises Asian socialist networking in the early to mid-1950s as consisting in a ‘solidarity of action’ oriented towards realising these ambitious aims. The Cold War hastened Asian socialist strategising, but the moving factor comprised what Indonesian activist and ASC General Secretary Wijono described as ‘Socialist Solidarity’ in his own reflections on the ‘resonance’ of the Kalaw meeting with attendees.³

This solidarity was borne through travel, discussion, and shared imaginaries of regional and world futures, as before, but also now through the forging of joint political projects and programmes. These programmes were designed to catalyse the end of colonialism and nurture the emergence of more participatory and equalitarian models of social organisation.

This chapter tracks the movements and engagements of a slightly different set of socialist intermediaries to those assessed in Chapter I. This is because after the first ASC congress, Asian socialists formed a bureau to coordinate organisational activities, staffed by individuals of a lesser political profile within and outside of their countries than JP, Lohia, Ba Swe, Kyaw

Nyein, and Sjahir. These individuals had more time for internationalist activity than the quintet just mentioned, as they had fewer domestic party responsibilities. They stepped out from the under the shadow of charismatic party leaders to assume a salient role in Afro-Asian socialist networks in the wake of the Rangoon Conference. The chapter continues to refer back to the quintet named above where they contributed to significant meetings and radical political ventures. However, primarily, it follows Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialist intermediaries who fashioned telling anti-imperial solidarities through the ASC in this period. It does this by means of newspaper snippets, journal runs, personal papers, and ASC institutional files housed among these personal papers, alongside other sources. The chapter is structured chronologically in order to outline how grassroots Asian socialists coordinated their schemes step-by-step, which gives us abundant insights into how non-state internationalisms were constructed and sustained between major conferences.

Chapter I stressed the need for a sensitive temporal framing of the ambitions and pursuits of Asian socialists, proposing that socialism was more of a rough-hewn decolonising imaginary than an ideology for state-building for many South and Southeast Asian radicals between 1947 and 1953. This chapter continues the work of highlighting the political possibilities and constraints that activists sensed at particular moments – specifically, the early to mid-1950s. In this vein, the chapter appreciates what Gary Wilder describes as the attempt to think, and move, with the actors concerned, ‘to appreciate their constraints and the possibilities they discerned, in order to understand their political and intellectual goals’. In the early 1950s, wars raged in Korea and Indochina which pitted, variously, liberation movements, colonial overlords, and Cold War superpowers against one another. These conflicts appeared to be ceasing in 1953 and 1954, creating hope among legion global actors that a period of international peace was nigh. Asian socialists were among those actors spurred on by these developments. They had long dreamt of constructing a peaceable and equitable international order and sensed an opportunity to press home their Third Force agenda among fellow Asian progressives, African freedom fighters, young European socialists, and wider public audiences who also wanted to defeat colonialism and pursue a new politics outside the ideological strictures of the Cold War.

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4 Wilder, Freedom Time, 12.
The first section of the chapter, ‘Formative Forays: The Journeys of the Asian Socialist Intermediaries’, introduces three key socialist intermediaries, and assesses important journeys and ventures which they made ahead of a gathering of the new ASC bureau in the city of Hyderabad, India, in August 1953. These journeys and ventures set the tone for wider Asian socialist transnational projects which were to follow. The second section, ‘The Hyderabad Meeting’, explores the discussions which took place at this bureau meeting, where the ASC launched several internationalist projects tilted towards ending colonialism and expediting the construction of the democratic and egalitarian societies of the future. One of these projects was the formation of the ACB, which was intended to further African anti-imperialist struggle; another involved bringing global socialist youth together to work on construction schemes. The third section, ‘The Asian and African Excursions’, studies how Wijono and Hla Aung endeavoured to stir support for these ambitions and projects on their travels during the period between the Hyderabad and Kalaw bureau meetings. The fourth section, ‘The Solidarity of Action: From Kalaw to Tokyo’, studies the Kalaw bureau meeting as well as the internationalist ventures that succeeded it. This was the phase in which Asian socialists, to paraphrase Maung Maung, were most ‘eager’ and ‘active’. The final section, ‘The Tokyo Gathering’, assesses the third bureau meeting of the period in Japan, considering how delegates renewed their Afro-Asian commitments, whilst also exploring potential economic strategies in greater depths than before.

The chapter draws on the writings of political geographer David Featherstone, who theorises solidarities as ‘transformative political relations’ which can ‘entrench as well as challenge privilege and can close down as well as open up political possibilities and alliances’. Featherstone rejects the commonplace view that solidarities spring from pre-existing ideological affinities, proposing instead that they consist in far-flung communities of actors crafting practical linkages between one another with the ultimate intention of interfering in ‘material relations between places’. The novelty of this theory is in its centring of the ‘conduct of political activity’ across ‘deeply uneven geographies’ encompassing empires and nation-states which key actors navigated in pursuing their particular political ends. It enables

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5 Between 1948 and 1956, the city of Hyderabad functioned as the capital of Hyderabad State. Where Hyderabad is referred to in this chapter, it is the city, rather than the state, that is being referred to.
6 Featherstone, Solidarity, 16.
7 Ibid., 17-18.
8 Ibid., 12.
us to make sense of the excursions undertaken by Asian socialist intermediaries as exercises in anti-imperial and internationalist agitation which were at once carefully coordinated and precarious. Asian and African socialists with broadly similar political aims set out on intellectual and real-world journeys in this period which had a coherence of purpose but could be derailed at any moment by visa restrictions, colonial intrusions, or financial difficulties. Wijono and Hla Aung, the Indonesian and Burmese socialists respectively mentioned in the introduction, avidly laboured to maintain and strengthen connections with fellow Afro-Asian socialists in unpredictable regional and geopolitical climates, and to set these connections on a surer footing with the shaping of joint political plans and programs. They faced many tribulations and trials in doing so. These facts point towards the importance of foregrounding the said intermediaries as actively crafting solidarities ‘through direct opposition to inequality and oppression’, and probing closely their key movements, conversations, and decisions.⁹

In following these intermediaries, the chapter offers significant insights into the functioning of non-state Afro-Asian internationalist networks at a granular level. It argues that the journeys and projects undertaken by these intermediaries were indicative of a dialogical side to 1950s decolonisation. Asian and African activists explored and negotiated capacious imaginaries of post-imperial futures in public and private meetings, producing ideas and plans which did not always bear fruit, but which spoke to the sense of political openness that defined much of this decade. The chapter demonstrates how particular activists marshalled the ASC towards their own ends, mobilising resources from domestic parties where needed to launch risky international undertakings, and thus threads back to the notion of a ‘double helix’ whereby activists flitted between the national and international in pursuing political causes in this period. Asian socialists grew more committed to ending imperialism at this time not just because the primary movers were more mobile than party leaders – able to travel more frequently to Africa and engage with freedom fighters – but also because African freedom fighters forced themselves and their struggles onto the agenda of the ASC, through their work in bodies such as the ACB. Asian socialists grew into the doers of 1950s anti-imperialism, attempting to link different freedom struggles and foster cooperation between

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⁹ Featherstone, *Solidarity*, 12.
them, at the same time as encouraging the emergence of more democratic and egalitarian social orders across these regions and beyond.

Formative Forays: The Journeys of the Asian Socialist Intermediaries

Beneath the prominent socialists who brought about the Rangoon Conference were a coterie of party politicians who were equally enthusiastic internationalists. These politicians came into their own in the aftermath of the conference. Decolonisation invited manifold Asian and African activists to travel from place to place creating transnational advocacy circles for particular causes in the 1950s and 1960s. Historians conceptualise these individuals as ‘intermediaries’ who, in the words of the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, navigated ‘new internationalisms that intersected and overlapped with each other’ and who ‘belonged to multiple, sometimes competing international organisations’; one such set of intermediaries were ‘Asian socialists who moved in and out of the realms of power’. There is some work to be done in distinguishing between different levels of ‘intermediaries’, here. As we have seen, party leaders in the vein of Ram Manohar Lohia energetically networked at the turn of the 1950s, but their domestic political responsibilities began to creep up on them. Less conspicuous socialists performed the more practical labour of far-flung political networking and strategising after the ASC formed. These socialists were not just intermediaries who navigated overlapping internationalisms but also generators who contributed profoundly to engineering these internationalisms – in this case, coming up with ideas for shared anti-imperial projects that set the ASC’s many threadbare friendships on surer political footings.

At Rangoon, Madhu Limaye of the PSP – which formed from a merger of the SPI with another Indian socialist party in September 1952 – and Hla Aung of the BSP were unanimously elected as joint secretaries of the ASC bureau. A permanent Secretariat was established at an office on 4 Wingaba Road, Rangoon, where the BSP was also based. The bureau organised ASC

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10 James, Padmore and Decolonization from Below.
11 Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, “Manifesto,” 177.
affairs from here, managing communications and contributions from member parties, hosting
visitors from different regions, and arranging future summits and conferences. It is probable
that this office had acted as an informal networking space for some time before, as Prem
Bhasin had spent five months in Burma in 1952 working with Imam Slamet and Kyaw Nyein
among others on preparations for the Rangoon Conference. For the first few months of its
existence, Limaye and Hla Aung performed bureau responsibilities whilst also venturing
abroad. Limaye had joined the CSP in the 1930s and become acquainted with JP and Lohia
through his work for the body in Poona in western India. He was arrested during the Quit
India movement and tortured by the British authorities who hoped to extract secrets from
him. He later travelled to Antwerp in Belgium to speak to European socialists in 1947,
becoming an important voice on foreign affairs within the SPI, and toured around the
continent afterwards. He was active within the Goa Liberation Movement and the PSP in
1950s India.

Limaye returned to Europe in 1953, partly to establish the ASC’s stance on cooperation with
the SI. Asian socialists had outlined at Rangoon that they wanted to operate separately from
the SI while maintaining friendly ties with it. Limaye attended a meeting of the Council of the
SI in Paris in mid-May as representative of the ASC, where he brushed shoulders with leading
SI figures such as Morgan Phillips, and major European socialists such as Nye Bevan of Britain,
Guy Mollet of France, and Erich Ollenhauer of West Germany. Despite the SI growing
progressively more interested in cultivating links with Asian socialists, Limaye had no interest
in any close identification between the SI and the ASC. At the meeting, he averred that
international tensions, which the SI viewed through the lens of the Cold War, could not be
abated without ending imperialism and racial discrimination and constituting an
‘international development fund’. This was not an attempt to substantively tilt the SI in an
anti-imperialist direction – Limaye bemoaned ‘how far removed the outlook of west European
socialists still is from real internationalism’ – as much as a statement of the Asian view of how
a socialist politics might advance on the world stage. Limaye set the tone for the

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16 Qurban Ali, “Short Political Biography of Madhu Limaye,” accessed Aug 1, 2020,
https://www.academia.edu/33401303/Short_Political_Biography_of_SHRI_MADHU_LIMAYE.
17 Van Kemseke, Globalization of Socialism, 87-94.
internationalist stances of Asian socialists in years to come by delineating an agenda for global political change in which imperialism and the hegemony of a small group of Western nations within the international order had to be eradicated as part of any worldwide shift towards socialism.

Hla Aung, Limaye’s colleague in the bureau, was a BSP member who grew increasingly important within the party after 1950.¹⁹ He is pictured in Figure 7 in 1959, second from right. Like Kyaw Nyein, he had been to university in Rangoon, and had travelled abroad in the wake of independence, visiting New Delhi in 1948 and meeting Nehru as part of a broader Burmese delegation.²⁰ He became highly familiar with regional politics and performed diplomatic duties for the Burmese Government, acting as envoy to Peking in China for a period in the early 1950s.²¹ As secretary of the preparatory committee for the Rangoon Conference in 1952 he honed his understanding of how an Asian socialism might take shape by working alongside Indian and Indonesian comrades for a period of many months. He viewed working classes and peasants as key social constituencies which Burmese and Asian socialists could mobilise by pursuing measures such as the end of landlordism and the institution of cooperative and collective systems of work.²² He was an indefatigable figure in Afro-Asian socialist circles from 1953 onwards, perhaps moved by the depth of emotional connection he felt with fellow ASC activists over shared imaginaries of post-imperial futures. He was also a former member of Burma’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and would act as a Burmese delegate to the UN later in 1953 and again in 1954.²³

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While Hla Aung joined forces with Limaye in Rangoon, the organisation searched for an Indonesian as its first General Secretary. This was an important decision and it was agreed that the appointment might take some time.\textsuperscript{24} The Rangoon Conference constituted the first opportunity for many Burmese and Indian socialists to meet Indonesian comrades and they eventually settled on Soerjomo Koesoemo Wijono, a politician and journalist who had attended the conference. Wijono had helped found an earlier Indonesian socialist party than the PSI in 1945 alongside the \textit{Barisan Tani Indonesia}, or Indonesian Peasants’ League. In 1948 he joined the PSI and moved more directly into Sjahrir’s orbit alongside several other Indonesians who were soon to take up briefs within the ASC.\textsuperscript{25} He held positions in the various Sjahrir cabinets of the late 1940s which included only a small number of socialists, operating as vice-minister of the interior in the third cabinet.\textsuperscript{26} It is likely that Wijono was chosen for General Secretary of the ASC due to his personal congeniality, aptitude, and enthusiasm. He organised many events and exchanges, travelled abroad himself, and nurtured friendships with a striking diversity of figures on the international scene in coming years. He viewed anti-imperialism as integral to the construction of a socialist internationalism and sought to bring

\textsuperscript{24} “Minutes of Bureau Meetings,” 2.
\textsuperscript{25} Anderson, \textit{Java In A Time of Revolution}, 204.
\textsuperscript{26} Mrázek, \textit{Sjahrir}, 322-323.
similarly-minded radicals from across Asia and Africa into Asian socialist networks in the 1950s.

As General Secretary, Wijono returned to Rangoon in April 1953 for several days, before moving there at the end of May to manage the bureau.27 He settled down in the city for several years with his wife, Sujatin, who was active alongside him in socialist and women’s movements in Indonesia.28 One of the first ventures he was involved in was the extended international tour of PSI colleague Lintong Mulia Sitorus beginning that spring. Sitorus was a writer and activist who joined the PSI in 1948 and had possibly associated with Sjahrir earlier in the revolutionary underground and in Pendidikan.29 He would become a prominent member of the PSI Central Executive running up to the first general election of 1955, where the PSI was soundly defeated.30 On May 1 1953, whilst General Secretary of the PSI, Sitorus attended May Day celebrations in Bombay alongside Asoka Mehta and Lohia, organised by the PSP and Indian trade union organisation the Hind-Mazdoor Sabha.31 He arrived in India via Burma where he had met Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe. Besides Mehta and Lohia, he also met JP on the Indian subcontinent as well as the Rashtra Seva Dal, a socialist youth organisation.32 Sitorus likely exchanged notes with Mehta, Lohia, and JP about politics in India and Indonesia and about upcoming ASC conventions and plans, whilst also channelling their expertise about what was going on in local trade union and student struggles – two terrains on which socialist internationalists needed to be strong. As Carolien Stolte has shown, Afro-Asian activists often engaged with grassroots political bodies where these enabled them to ‘leapfrog the national to fight old and new forms of imperialism across the decolonising world’.33 It is likely that Sitorus wanted to build up a knowledge base about regional youth and working-class campaigns so that he might draw connections with similar campaigns encountered abroad, and strengthen practical Afro-Asian solidarities.

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29 Anderson, Java In A Time Of Revolution, 204.
30 Mrázek, Sjahrir, 419.
31 “Workers Urged to Fight Unemployment: Leaders’ Call At May Day Celebrations in Bombay,” Times of India, May 2, 1953, 5.
Sitorus then proceeded on to Pakistan and to Yugoslavia. In Pakistan, he probably met leaders of the Pakistan Socialist Party Yussuf Khan and Mobarak Sagher, who regularly met visitors from within Asian socialist networks. Yugoslavia comprised an important cornerstone of the socialist imaginary which moved Asian and African anti-imperialists due to its seemingly cooperative and egalitarian ethos, and policy of non-alignment in the Cold War. Writing in 1957, Sitorus discussed how the Rangoon Conference of 1953 appeared to him to have presaged a new trend of ‘People’s Socialism’ centred in Asia channelling the energies and enthusiasms of the peasants and workers spearheading anti-colonial struggle. People’s Socialism had been intended as a powerful influence in international politics, acting as a positive ‘third force working for world peace and friendship’. Sitorus recalled how ‘the exchange of views and experiences and the close personal contact...among Asian socialist leaders’ had made the ASC ‘a living reality’ in early 1953, and that Yugoslavia offered an example of how to pursue socialism and maintain national independence against Cold War intruders at the same time. His visit to Yugoslavia shortly after the conference in 1953 doubtless nourished his belief that a new socialist internationalism was possible, which would take shape around decolonising states in Asia and non-aligned ones elsewhere such as Yugoslavia.

In July, five ASC members including Sitorus, Wijono, and Yussuf Khan represented the body at the annual SI conference in Stockholm. This was one stayover amid a plethora of lengthy itineraries which the ASC, supported by donations from member parties, part-funded; Wijono later lamented how expensive the trips had proved. The ASC’s mobile intermediaries commonly included stopovers with European socialists in their itineraries, since European socialists often arranged flights and provided accommodation for Asian comrades, making Asian socialists’ passage to the West easier. Prem Bhasin, the Indian member of the tour group, recounted in an article for Janata afterwards how inexperienced he had been in the rigours of air travel upon boarding a Scandinavian Airlines plane at Karachi to travel to Stockholm, and how he had sought reassurance about a lengthy delay from a fellow

passenger. A Scandinavian Airlines aircraft of the kind Bhasin would have boarded is pictured below, in Figure 8. Asian socialist intermediaries also had an intellectual interest, besides the material one, in European social democracy. Bhasin eulogised Uppsala in Sweden in the same piece, which he must have travelled to after the conference, as a modern ‘seat of socialist culture’ on account of its democratic municipal building projects and egalitarian ethos. Furthermore, Asian socialists who did not yet know one another very well could grow closer on these trips; Bhasin recalled in a later letter to Wijono how delighted he had been at the ‘comradeship’ they developed in Stockholm between one another.

Of the itineraries of the group in ensuing weeks, the most telling was that of Wijono. Wijono wrote in an annex to his secretarial report to the upcoming ASC bureau meeting in Hyderabad how interactions with Europeans at the Stockholm conference had been plagued by disagreement, with the Asian delegation emphasising that socialist internationalists should

focus on achieving freedom for colonised peoples in Africa and Asia, and Europeans fixating on the Cold War and the supposed ‘Russian’ threat. Wijono rejected the idea of a ‘common World Organisation of socialists’ that European socialists sought, stating that the ‘world fraternity’ he envisaged ‘would be radically different from that of the present International’. Wijono now journeyed down to North Africa and the Middle East where he attempted to meet local anti-imperialists. He succeeded in meeting Ahmed Hussein, an Egyptian socialist who had attended the Rangoon meeting. His other ventures were largely fruitless, but the trip reflected a profound Asian socialist interest in engaging with African freedom fighters, which would only deepen in the coming year. The ASC bureau was considering the possibility of helping convene an All-African Congress in Sudan or the Gold Coast, which prominent regional nationalists such as Kwame Nkrumah were also trying to do, to press for a similar blending of anti-imperialism and socialism as the ASC was pursuing, and Wijono’s trip was intended to scope out interest in this, as a prelude to more detailed discussions in Hyderabad.

The Hyderabad Meeting

The first gathering of the ASC bureau after the Rangoon Conference took place between August 10 and August 13 1953. The timing was auspicious for an internationalist gathering as the Korean Armistice Agreement had been reached on July 27, pointing the way towards an end to the most gruelling conflict on the Eurasian landmass. Wars pitting superpower-backed insurgents, nationalists, and a range of other combatants alongside and against one another pulsed around East Asia into the mid-1950s, appearing to portend another global war to observers in neighbouring regions where similar forces confronted one another, albeit in less obviously violent dispensations. Ba Swe was among those who regarded events that summer as being of profound significance. He considered that these events created an

43 Chamberlin, Cold War’s Killing Fields, 47-175.
opening for actors with a genuine commitment to anti-imperialism and socialism to take up the mantle of ‘world peace’ where actors elsewhere wielded it dishonestly or misunderstood how to achieve it. In a piece which appeared in *Janata* in the immediate wake of the Hyderabad meeting, Ba Swe warned of the dangers of a ‘third world war’ between the United States and Soviet Union which would constitute ‘the graveyard of Democratic Socialism as we know it’. To resist this, Asian socialists had to ‘mobilise world public opinion’ through campaigning against war and ‘by developing a Third Force under the leadership of Socialists’.\(^{44}\)

It is evident from this that the Cold War added a sense of urgency to the imperative for socialist internationalist action. Between August 1953 and November 1954, the ASC held three bureau meetings in three different countries, which was not an insignificant tally for the activists who had to arrange their diaries around these dates. These bureau meetings can be seen as part of a continuum with the ASC’s congresses, and even more so with its organisational ventures conducted between such gatherings, in the sense that, as Lewis states, Asian socialists needed to cement ‘regular contact and the circulation of information’ as the basis for a functioning radical transnational network.\(^{45}\) The bureau meetings are also worth contemplating closely because they manifested the drive for a solidarity of action oriented towards challenging colonialism and engineering alternate social and political orders that this chapter assesses. It was at the first two bureau meetings in India and Burma that members agreed on schemes with which they hoped to pursue these ends. The meetings were conducted on a smaller scale than ASC congresses and featured the organisation’s mobile intermediaries more prominently. They catalysed Afro-Asian socialist intimacies, even if the more private discussions conducted at these meetings are difficult to trace archivally.

In the run-up to Hyderabad, Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein headed a Burmese delegation to India which toured the country’s new state-run enterprises including hydro-electric and industrial schemes for four weeks.\(^{46}\) There was some interest from these leaders in the Nehruvian approach to development, in which government sought to increase domestic productive capacity across different industries as a means of achieving the economic independence key

\(^{44}\) U Ba Swe, “No Royal Road to Socialism,” *Janata*, Aug 23, 1953, 3-4.

\(^{45}\) Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 57.

to any anti-imperialist project. They then advanced on to Hyderabad where the ASC bureau meeting was taking place. As before, Burmese socialists took a lead role in convening the meeting. Even though this gathering happened in India, it seemed designed to fit the Burmese leaders’ schedule, with Morgan Phillips, chairman of the SI, travelling on to Rangoon immediately after the Hyderabad meeting as a state guest.\(^\text{47}\) There was a certain affection between Burmese and British socialists dating back to the Southeast Asian nation’s achievement of independence which Phillips’ sojourn doubtless renewed. However, the ASC’s secretaries Wijono, Hla Aung, and Limaye were the ones who solicited interest in the meeting on their travels in the previous six months, and it was they that put the most bodywork into shaping the ideas for joint political projects that came out of it. The choice of Hyderabad was perhaps an indicator as to the growing centrality of these intermediaries. Unlike the congresses of 1953 and 1956, the base for this meeting was not located along international air routes.\(^\text{48}\) The ASC’s secretaries may have been able to arrange for the passage of some friends from distant countries, but they did not seem bothered about making this event into a press opportunity or public relations spectacle; it seemed more suited to quick and close-knit planning as to what lay ahead for the body.

The meeting lasted for three days and saw attendees discuss a range of international issues as well as the future plans of the ASC. Between 20 and 30 figures attended, including the secretaries, prominent party figures such as Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein and Mehta and Lohia, comrades from the Burmese, Indonesian, and Indian socialist groupings, and politicians from Israel, Japan, Lebanon, and Pakistan. Yugoslavia and the SI sent fraternal delegates. In an introductory speech on August 10, Ba Swe identified the Cold War, inequality between nations, and colonialism as the three chief causes of international tension. He suggested that the goal of Asian socialists in this context had to be to encourage ‘a settlement of all outstanding disputes and bring about the destruction of colonialism’.\(^\text{49}\) He made reference to the notion of ‘world public opinion’ in the speech. This was in part a reference to the growing

\(^{47}\) “Mr. Morgan Phillips in Rangoon,” *Socialist Asia* 2, no. 5 (1953): 10.

\(^{48}\) Air India was the national carrier for flights around and beyond India in the 1950s. There were a number of smaller airlines operating around the country, one of which was Deccan Airlines in Hyderabad. It would therefore not have been difficult for Indian socialists to convey a small number of attendees to the bureau meeting by jet. Pranjal Pande, “A Brief History of Commercial Aviation in India,” *Simple Flying*, Jun 9, 2020, accessed Nov 29, 2021, https://simpleflying.com/indian-aviation-history/.

significance of the UN as an arbiter of international disputes, and as a venue where public opinion on major issues pertaining to decolonisation and the Cold War could be shaped. Asian socialists hoped to gain influence in the UN in coming years if and when more of them entered government and began to attend UN summits. Ba Swe’s injunction to Asian socialists to take advantage of the hiatus in geopolitical tensions to promote ideas of global peace probably registered on an affective level with attendees. As Rachel Leow has shown, peace was an ‘emotive, anti-imperialist political idea’ for many Asians in the early 1950s, not just one associated with diplomatic summity. It was a fluency in popular and local forms of peace politics that encouraged such activists to speak the language of world peace in major speeches.

This speech was followed up by a series of less scripted interventions, including demands from Mehta to know whether the Secretariat had tried to contact socialists in Ceylon, Iran, and Thailand, requests from Eki Sone of Japan for a greater closeness between the ASC and the SI, and a proposition from Kamal Jumblatt of Lebanon, who had attended with his wife Mai Jumblatt, that more West Asian socialists should attend such gatherings. There was also some tension around the stance the ASC should adopt with regard to China. A Burmese delegate described the ‘Mao movement as an independent movement’ where others viewed it as a malign force. The gathering was then treated to a secretarial report, probably delivered by General Secretary Wijono. Wijono revealed that the ASC had liaised with the SI, Yugoslavian communists, and COPAI in recent months. He admitted that ‘as sending out delegations costs a lot of money we shall have to reconsider this question’. He revealed too that he and his fellow secretaries had evolved closer relationships with African freedom fighters. The secretaries intended to establish an ACB ‘to extend more active help to the nationalist movements in Africa’, and welcomed the movements of African parties and anti-imperialist organisations they were in contact with towards setting up an All-African Congress to operate on a similar basis to the ASC.

50 Jansen, and Osterhammel, Decolonization: A Short History, 24.
54 “Secretariat Report to the 2nd Meeting,” 1-2.
The minutes of the meeting make plain the depth of interest among Asian socialists in engaging with anti-imperial struggles in Africa at this time. In these minutes, Asian socialists committed to an ‘Anti-Colonial Campaign’ in founding the ACB. They affirmed that their aim was for ‘a campaign against imperialism to be launched’.\textsuperscript{56} The ACB would host among its most prominent members Asian socialists such as Kyaw Nyein and Lohia but also African freedom fighters including Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Joseph Murumbi of Kenya, and Jim Markham of the Gold Coast. It would encourage the formation of an All-African Congress whilst breeding a greater familiarity among Asian socialists with African freedom struggles; the creation of the \textit{Anti-Colonial Bureau Newsletter} could serve the latter purpose. At Hyderabad, attendees were instructed to request newspapers in their own countries to ‘devote more space to Asian [and] African colonial questions and support the demands of freedom movements editorially’ and to appeal to their governments to intensify anti-imperialist efforts in the UN. Attendees were also asked to organise fact-finding missions to colonial possessions in Asia and to arrange year-long stays through their parties for Africans to study trade unionist, cooperative, youth, and peasant movements.\textsuperscript{57}

These proposals spoke to how committed the ASC secretaries in particular – who probably formulated them – were to challenging, and even defeating, imperialism. Defeating imperialism was a momentous task, but Asian socialists felt they could expedite its fall by encouraging Africans to gather to discuss and dissect regional politics, by amplifying the voices of these freedom fighters in Asian medias and in the UN, and by nurturing the political consciousness of young African socialists who came to stay in Asian countries. They were asking attendees – chiefly Asian ones – to take decisive action to challenge imperialism in a domestic context within their own parties and local presses. They were seeking to craft solidarities of action through the ASC, oriented towards interfering in material relations between places, where Asian socialists had previously connected mainly on the basis of shared imaginaries about regional and global futures. It is worth noting that the plan they laid out was to be a substantially elite-driven process whereby Asian socialists tried to mould a level of public consciousness on questions of imperialism from above by generating new print cultures. They were not, for example, making these propositions having reached a new

\textsuperscript{56} “Minutes of the Bureau Meeting Held Hyderabad August 10 to 13 53,” Prem Bhasin Papers (Socialist Party), fol. 25, NMML, 6.

\textsuperscript{57} “Minutes of the Bureau Meeting,” 7.
political consciousness from engaging with pre-existing anti-imperialist print cultures. There was also a hint of Asians tutoring Africans, even if some of the proposals seemed to attribute considerable autonomy to Africans in waging their freedom struggles and promoting socialist ideas at the same time, such as that for an All-African Congress.

The convening of a Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day was the second plank of the ASC’s ‘Anti-Colonial Campaign’. As the first edition of the *Anti-Colonial Bureau Newsletter* in June 1954 explained, this was to constitute a day of celebrations, mass rallies, and demonstrations organised by each socialist party and freedom movement associated with the ASC. It would take place yearly and stress the achievement of independence as a crucial political and emotional release for colonised peoples, as well as an event of world-historic significance in the struggle for global peace.\(^{58}\) Asian socialists hoped to plug their wide-ranging international networks for this. Wijono had been working on the idea for some time and broached it in Stockholm with little success.\(^{59}\) At Hyderabad, delegates agreed to continue pursuing cooperation on the day with the SI, alongside the League of Communists of Yugoslavia – the new name for the CPY – and COPAI.\(^{60}\) There was a growing interest in appealing to West European socialists to take a firm stance against colonialism – not just as members of an SI which was then disinterested in colonialism, but also as members of parties in countries some of which had empires, and who might therefore facilitate a change of policy on colonialism if sufficiently influenced by the ASC. However, the aim was also to coordinate events with Yugoslavia and Israel among other member parties of the ASC. To organise an annual event on this scale would be quite a propaganda coup for the Asian socialists. It would be difficult to reach wide audiences beyond those immediately sympathetic to anti-imperial or socialist aims in given countries. Nevertheless, to hone closer bonds with these narrower socialist audiences and familiarise them with ASC plans – now clearer, and more definitively anti-colonial, than before – might make the international socialism ASC intermediaries envisioned more action-oriented, and less discursive, than previously.

The other key proposal discussed at Hyderabad was the notion of holding a joint construction project under the tutelage of the Burmese or Israeli socialist parties, in which ‘a brigade drawn


\(^{60}\) “Minutes of the Bureau Meeting,” 7.
from all member parties and other fraternal organisations participated’. The Burmese and Israeli socialist parties were the only ASC member parties in power. It was thought that the project, which the ASC could not cover itself without further financial support from member parties and organisations, would ‘generate the necessary emotional fervour and camaraderie among Asian socialists’. This was presumably a fervour for creating radically egalitarian and democratic social orders. To date, Asian socialists had not discussed in detail how their alternate economic system, or ‘industrial and agricultural technique’, as Indian and Lebanese socialists had described it in 1951, would take shape. Industrial projects in Yugoslavia enthused them but no technical or developmental model had been framed around this. At Hyderabad, they began to explore the question. ‘Construction’ was a motif within anti-imperial discourses in the 1950s and 1960s, where actors in postcolonial politics produced and exchanged ideas about the social engineering of populations. It was also a motif of socialist discourses at a domestic level where actors set out to construct or engineer prosperous and harmonious political futures. Evolving some form of developmental philosophy was going to be crucial to the successful blending of socialist and anti-imperial internationalisms. Still, it seemed that Asian socialists felt there was considerable scope for experimentation vis-à-vis what this philosophy might consist in, given that their rendering of the ‘construction project’ was quite open-ended.

Overall, the Hyderabad meeting signalled a shift from a solidarity of connection towards a solidarity of action. At the Rangoon Conference eight months earlier, Asian socialists from diverse backgrounds bonded over the need to transform regional social orders and the international order. At Hyderabad, an intimate group of socialist intellectuals and intermediaries honed a number of internationalist schemes and ideas which might bring their goals of the formation of egalitarian and democratic postcolonial social orders, and of a more peaceable and equitable international order, closer. They also committed firmly to an end to imperialism. This was reflected in the instigation of an ‘Anti-Colonial Campaign’. Featherstone describes ‘solidarity as a transformative process which works through the negotiations and

62 Ibid., 6.
63 “Unnamed Document,” 150-152.
64 Chakrabarty, “The Legacies of Bandung,” 53.
65 Niclas-Tölle, Socialist Opposition in Nehruvian India, 181.
renegotiation of forms of political identification’. This description captures the emerging dialogical dynamic of the internationalist activism of Asian socialist intermediaries in the eight months since Rangoon, whereby these intermediaries began to engage African freedom fighters as partners in the achievement of transformative, anti-imperial and socialist goals. Asian and African socialists may not have identified politically with precisely the same thinkers or traditions – there was considerable variation among Asian socialists as well as African socialists, never mind between them – but the ASC’s secretaries were trying to create a dialogue that produced action on shared aims. Asian socialist intermediaries were to rub shoulders even more closely with African freedom fighters ahead of the next bureau meeting in Kalaw.

The Asian and African Excursions

A heady mood predominated among Asian socialists in the wake of the Hyderabad gathering. Ba Swe lauded the formation of the ACB, the concept of joint construction projects, and the general unity of purpose achieved at the meeting, as heralding a new era in anti-imperialism and world socialism to the Indian press after the event. Several of these ideas were quickly put into action. The CIA noticed this and produced a document entitled ‘Asian Socialist Conference Activities for 1954’ in which it sought to get to grips with the transnational ventures being planned and conducted by key personalities. Its foremost interest was in the Afro-Asianism of the ASC. It referenced the plans of the Secretariat to ‘actively engage in controlling and directing political movements in Asian countries and in certain African territories’ which included British and Belgian and French colonies. It added that the ‘Pan-African Socialist Conference’ serialised at Hyderabad would take place in 1954 under the tutelage of Gold Coast socialist Kwame Nkrumah and the Libyan Socialist Party. It referred to how Ba Swe, Sjahrir, and JP would attend to ‘show solidarity with the Africans’, though it did not seem to take the prospect of these figures forging an Afro-Asian ‘Third Force’ seriously, suggesting that their primary aims were to forestall the spread of communism. Finally, it listed several activities which the ACB had made significant progress with by October 1953, which

66 Featherstone, Solidarity, 37.
included plans for an ‘economic experts’ conference to take place alongside the next ASC gathering, the dispatch of study missions to various colonies, a ‘propaganda campaign’ aimed at certain countries in the UN, and the formation of ‘peaceful international brigades’ that would engage in direct action against colonial regimes.\(^68\)

This rapidity of coordination of several schemes agreed at Hyderabad points towards the vigorous activism of Wijono and Hla Aung in the immediate aftermath of the event. Hla Aung made what perhaps was the marquee journey of the period, attending the eighth session of the UNGA in New York from September through December as part of the Burmese delegation. He then travelled to West, East, and Central Africa to engage with persons and movements whom he believed might prove conducive to the establishment of an African socialist network analogous to the Asian. This appears to have been an addendum to the UNGA sitting which Hla Aung agreed with the General Secretary, Wijono; BSP donations to the ASC probably covered his travel expenses, and African friends of the ASC who he met may have helped out.\(^69\) Wijono asked first that Hla Aung establish whether the ASC could become a permanent non-governmental observer member of the UN, as had been proposed at Hyderabad, and that Hla Aung observe debates on Tunisia and Morocco.\(^70\) Tunisian and Moroccan freedom struggles against the French were ramping up in the early 1950s and, in autumn 1953, Arab and Asian states raised the situation at the UN.\(^71\) Asian socialists sensed that North African anti-imperialist struggle was reaching a crescendo, and that they could raise their own profile with regional freedom fighters as well as within the UN by becoming an observer member of the institution. Hla Aung would also learn something of the progress of relevant freedom struggles in the debates, which he could then explore in conversation with other African nationalists in coming months.

On reaching Africa in December, Hla Aung duly attempted to attend two potential All-African conferences bringing nationalists around the continent together.\(^72\) One was in the Gold Coast

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\(^{69}\) “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting,” 5.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 5.


in West Africa, sponsored by Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People’s Party, and one was in Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia, sponsored by the African National Congress. Hla Aung missed the first conference but reached the second, which was subsequently cancelled as representatives could not reach the conference from Uganda and Kenya due to interference from the British government. At this time, freedom of movement for radicals and agitators was heavily restricted by colonial powers; African nationalists had trouble organising such conferences, which had diminished by the time the Gold Coast (Ghana) gained independence five years later and launched a ‘new era of state-sponsored Pan-African activity’ consisting in ‘a gathering of liberation movements and political parties to trade unions and other non-state actors’ around the All-African Peoples’ Conference of December 1958. Afro-Asian socialist networking in the early to mid-1950s was a risky affair whose outcomes – in terms of which contacts Asian socialists managed to meet and scheme with – could vary significantly. Hla Aung’s own movements in the 1953-1954 trip were smoothed by the use of a diplomatic visa associated with his position in the Burmese government. Despite the conference cancellations, he managed to reach the countries concerned and forge friendships with individuals who would attend ASC events in coming years, such as Harry Nkumbula of Northern Rhodesia. He encountered racial discrimination while doing so; the Times of India reported that, when Hla Aung reached a new luxury hotel in Lusaka in January 1954 and asked for a room, the hotel proprietor was forced to dispense with a ‘whites only’ policy, causing consternation among other residents.

Meanwhile, Wijono embarked on a journey around Asia. The aim of the trip was to ‘contact democratic freedom movements’, the CIA reported, and spread the message of anti-imperialism. This fits with what we understand of the anti-imperialist bent of Asian socialist strategising at the time, as pioneered by the ASC’s intermediaries. The itinerary was to include Malaya, Thailand, and Indochina, mostly regions in the thrall of colonial powers. Wijono

74 “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting,” 6; “Patterns on the Loom,” 1954, 44.
76 “Patterns on the Loom,” 1954, 44.
departed Rangoon in September 1953 for Indonesia where he attended a National Executive Council meeting of the PSI, possibly to stoke interest among fellow Indonesian socialists in his venture. Again, Asian socialists sought to connect the national and the international where they could, bolstering support at home for some of the internationalist plans of the ASC. The Malaya part of the venture had to be dropped along with the Vietnam and Laos visits due to difficulties in obtaining a visa. The *Times of India* reported that Wijono also attempted to enter Singapore in October and was denied an entry visa. Without diplomatic clearance of the kind possessed by Hla Aung, Wijono was not able to conduct an uninterrupted tour around Southeast Asia, but this did not diminish his enthusiasm to make similar trips in coming years. Wijono still made connections with local socialists and freedom fighters which emboldened him and which registered in the increased involvement of such figures in ASC projects.

While Hla Aung and Wijono toured Africa and Asia to foment their ‘Anti-Colonial Campaign’, they initiated other tours and exchanges which might further world socialist struggle. There were increasing opportunities to interface with not just European socialists, but European socialist youth, who were more conducive to the anti-imperialism of the ASC than older members of the SI. These younger socialists clustered around the IUSY. This body had been founded in 1907, and began to expand outside of Europe after World War II, from 1954 in particular. It organised seminars in South Asia and began to appoint Asian members as presidents from the same year. It brought together European, African, and Asian socialist youth at summer schools and festivals. Asian socialists, for their part, were greatly interested in fomenting solidarities among far-flung bodies of socialist youth, because they knew that young comrades would be as important in engineering transnational political futures as themselves. The IUSY receives a passing treatment in recent accounts of Afro-Asian internationalisms as one of a number of institutions which individuals patronised to press particular claims. Ismay Milford has shown how it enabled East-Central African anti-imperialist activists to circumvent ‘a late colonial state that attempted to isolate them from transnational networks and from neighbouring countries’, and articulate views of how

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79 “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting,” 7.
decolonisation should unfold. The IUSY was a site of copious engagements between Asian, African, and European socialists from the early 1950s into the 1960s. The pragmatic pursuit of anti-imperial goals by Asian interlocutors in these engagements captures the ‘solidarity of action’ that this chapter invokes.

In this connection, in October 1953, Wijono encouraged Nath Pai, a young Indian socialist who would soon become President of the IUSY, to travel to Britain and represent the ASC at an executive meeting of the IUSY in London. Pai had been imprisoned during the Quit India movement in the 1940s and later became a Barrister-at-Law in London at the age of 25 in 1947. In England he had become friendly with British social democrats such as Clement Attlee, Fenner Brockway, and Henry Noel Brailsford. A ‘British-Asian Socialist Fellowship’ (BASF) was set up in London in 1951 of which Clement Attlee became President and Nath Pai Vice-President. The BLP established this to try and indicate its interest in fostering closer relations with Asian socialists. Pai returned to India in 1952 to contest elections to the Bombay Legislative Assembly for the SPI, losing out and returning to Europe not long afterwards, perhaps with encouragement and financial support from Wijono and the ASC. Young anglicised Indian as well as Burmese socialists bonded easily with British socialists. Both Nath Pai and Maung Maung of Burma attended a ‘tea party’ of the BASF with Attlee in Margate, Kent, in October 1953, during the BLP’s annual conference, around the time the BASF’s journal *East and West* was launched. The BASF was known to have the money to set up study groups and fellowships for young socialists to travel to Britain, which Pai and other Asian socialists may have liked the idea of. Wijono considered Pai an able and youthful cultural diplomat whose strong links in Britain Wijono could cultivate to push the IUSY to back particular ASC aims and projects.

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83 “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting,” 5.
84 Pai is pictured in Figure 7 on page 111 of this thesis; he is the second figure from left.
Ba Swe, as ASC chairman, duly cabled the London meeting of the IUSY offering solidarity and beseeching it to discuss ‘positive attitudes against colonialism’, ‘active participation’ in the ACB, support for Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day, and support for the idea of international socialist youth brigades.\textsuperscript{88} It is likely that Ram Manohar Lohia, too, attended the London meeting. Lohia flew to Europe in early September to begin a five-week tour of the continent.\textsuperscript{89} His flight was booked through Air India International with the help of Donald Chesworth, a young British socialist.\textsuperscript{90} He first visited an IUSY school in Luxembourg between September 2 and September 4, after which he moved from country to country, giving speeches to French socialists about imperialism in Indochina, and watching the West German elections.\textsuperscript{91} He grew close to German President of the IUSY – soon to give way to Pai – Peter Strasser during the tour, pictured in Figure 9, who had attended the Hyderabad meeting of the ASC, and issued a joint statement with him after the trip in which they intoned that ‘the world needs a positive internationalism’. They also commended the idea of international socialist youth brigades in tune with Pai and Ba Swe – an idea which had evolved since the ‘constructive project’ proposal of Hyderabad, seeming now to be more oriented towards fomenting anti-imperial feeling and action among global socialist youth, whether through shared work on an industrial project or otherwise.\textsuperscript{92} A fellow Indian socialist writing in \textit{Janata} in December, whilst strongly supportive of this idea, remarked on how ‘in these days of visas and passports the work of [combative] brigade will not be easy’.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{88} “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting,” 5.
\textsuperscript{89} “Rangoon Tracts,” \textit{Socialist Asia} 2, no. 8 (1953): 23.
\textsuperscript{90} Madhav Gokhale to Bhola Chatterjee, August 19 1953, Hari Dev Sharma Papers (Bhola Chatterjee Papers), Corr with Gokhale, M.S., NMML, 1.
\textsuperscript{91} “Rangoon Tracts,” 23; “West German Elections: Dr. Lohia As Observer,” \textit{Times of India}, Sep 2, 1953, 3.
\textsuperscript{92} “Patterns on the Loom,” \textit{Socialist Asia} 2, no. 7 (1953): 13-14.
\textsuperscript{93} “Notes and Comment,” \textit{Janata}, Dec 13, 1953, 4.
The international connections which Asian socialists drew also shaped their domestic political activism. At this time, the ASC bureau was arranging for its next gathering to take place in Indonesia, which, in conjunction with its bold internationalist ventures, might embolden PSI activists when Indonesia’s first election happened in 1955. Meanwhile, the PSP in India held its first annual conference in Allahabad from December 28 to December 31 1953, which the ASC asked Madhav Gokhale, who had replaced Madhu Limaye as Indian ASC secretary in September 1953, to attend on their behalf.94 An IUSY delegation to Asia led by Peter Strasser, which was probably encouraged to attend by Nath Pai and Lohia weeks earlier, and which toured India attending socialist youth seminars with Lohia’s assistance, also came to the conference.95 Prem Bhasin moved a ten-point resolution on foreign policy at the conference which demanded that the Indian government challenge British colonialism and cede from the Commonwealth; advocated for a revision of the UN Charter to facilitate ‘the equality of all nations’ and ‘the establishment of a world government’; and called for the ending of the ‘international caste system’ presiding in the UN, which meant ‘the domination of the international field by big Powers’.96 The notion of upending the international order in favour

94 “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting,” 4-8.
of much greater equality between nations had been broached at various points by Asian socialists not long before the Allahabad meeting. Their articulation by the PSP indicates that the internationalism of Asian socialists was integral to their political lives in the mid-1950s, whether they were consulting on party stances at home or bestriding other continents.

As the next bureau meeting in May 1954 closed in, the ASC pushed ahead with some of its internationalist projects and schemes. Asian socialist intermediaries made the most of their growing intimacies with European socialist youth to expedite some of these projects, though they continued to be in the driving seat as organisers of these schemes. Between February 4 and February 6, Wijono, Hla Aung, Gokhale, and Japanese socialist Roo Watanabe met the IUSY delegation that had attended the Allahabad PSP convention, in Rangoon. Here, they discussed several ASC plans. The ASC asked that the IUSY cooperate in making Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day multicontinental or global in scale by coordinating parallel events with socialist parties in Europe. The IUSY agreed to participate in an ASC scheme to bring ‘young comrades from Freedom Movements’ to socialist-run countries where their politics and trade union, peasant, youth, and women’s movements could be studied. This would enable anti-colonial Africans and Asians to engage with progressive social movements in different countries and begin to build up a view of how socialisms of the future might be constructed. The next section explores further the themes which this section has introduced.

The Solidarity of Action: From Kalaw to Tokyo

The second gathering of the ASC bureau took place in Kalaw, a hill town in the Shan State of Burma, between May 25 and May 28, 1954. The Secretariat originally planned to hold the meeting in Indonesia, but the Indonesian government feared offending Arab nations who it was pursuing close links with by granting visas to Israeli socialists who would attend. The Pakistan government had denied visas to some Indian socialists seeking to attend the Pakistan Socialist Party’s National Conference in April, and as Ba Swe acknowledged in his inaugural speech at Kalaw, such actions created an undertone of regret at the outset of proceedings.

These actions also framed the response of the regional and international press, which fixated on divisions between attendees over geopolitics, homing in on a disagreement between Lohia and Kyaw Nyein over whether a stance of absolute indifference towards Cold War ideologies was still appropriate when faced with the belligerence of what the latter termed a new ‘Soviet type of imperialism’. The Manchester Guardian offered one such account, remarking that the meeting did ‘not seem to have achieved very much’ by way of concordance on international politics and regional socialist strategy.

This account of the event did not tally with the experience of attendees. Wijono, in a piece for Socialist Asia entitled ‘Kalaw Resonance’, explicitly rejected the framing of the Manchester Guardian and other media outlets, stating that the ASC proposed to ‘become the advance guard of a new hopeful society’, and that ‘Socialist Solidarity as it was proved in the proceedings of the meeting’ mattered more than some inevitable disagreements about world politics. Maung Maung – the Burmese socialist mentioned above who was an academic and a journalist – writing in Burmese outlet The Nation, reprinted in Janata, agreed, intoning that ‘the important thing about the meeting was its evidence that Asian socialists are still eager and inspired and active’. He marshalled the establishment of the ACB and several other ASC programmes as evidence, referring to how the body was forming ‘living organisations’ which, in spite of their ‘growing pains’, pointed the way towards a post-imperial socialist future. These two accounts much more accurately conveyed the significance and spirit of the Kalaw meeting to its Asian and African delegates than accounts focussed on disagreements about the Cold War and geopolitics. They both suggested that Asian socialists viewed their interactions in such spaces as indicative of a solidarity which was moving them closer to the achievement of shared international political ambitions.

The choice of Kalaw as the location of the second bureau meeting again spoke to the growing influence of a mobile set of socialist intermediaries within the ASC. Kalaw, like Hyderabad, was not an obvious choice, had these intermediaries wished to draw in highly prestigious

socialist personalities from far and wide. It was more suited to intimate discussions and brisk decision-making than a repeat meeting in Rangoon, which might have been a grander affair. Kalaw, a former colonial town, was a regional hub within the Shan State of Burma, far north of Rangoon. The bureau meeting drew in attendees from Indonesia, India, Japan, Israel, and Pakistan, alongside Burma, who were housed in ‘Hotel Kalaw’. It included visitors from Yugoslavia, the IUSY, the Gold Coast, and Vietnam, several of whom had been contacted by the ASC’s roving secretaries in months gone by. The ASC may have made allowances for some of these to visit, but others will have had to pay their own way. The Vietnamese and Gold Coast delegates attended because the first gathering of the coordination committee of the ACB was taking place on May 23 and May 24 ahead of bureau discussions. The committee was chaired by Kyaw Nyein and featured Gold Coast journalist Jim Markham and Hla Aung as joint secretaries, and one member each from India, Indonesia, Israel, Lebanon, Nigeria, Kenya, Malaya, and Indochina. It considered reports on colonised regions produced by members, plans for Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day, and the activities of the ACB in the preceding and succeeding periods. The committee meeting did not pass without incident. The Vietnam representative, Dr Pham Van Ngoi, expressed a view that on gaining independence his country might prefer to stay in the French Union than to go it alone. This upset Lohia, who reiterated that the aim of the ACB was to ‘whip up public opinion to compel Governments of countries represented at the bureau to adopt a virile anti-imperialist approach’.

What mattered about the committee gathering was the message and programme of anti-colonial solidarity it conferred on the ASC meeting. The ASC meeting followed similar lines as the Hyderabad meeting nine months previously, beginning with a speech by Ba Swe followed by discussions about the body’s stance on key world events, the passing of resolutions, and the delineation of plans for the coming months. More significant to delegates than the actions

110 The ‘French Union’ was a new designation given to the French Empire in 1946 which claimed that there were no French colonies or overseas territories, but only one France. This was in pursuit of the assimilationist ideal that underlay much French colonial policy. Victor T. Le Vine, Politics in Francophone Africa (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 66.
111 “Current Topics: Bao Dai’s Status Mr. Bertrand Russell,” Times of India, May 26, 1954, 8.
of the Indonesian and Pakistani governments were events in Geneva, where a conference of nations had then gathered to consider how to end the conflict in Indochina. This conference resulted in July with a ceasefire, seeming independence for Vietnam, and an easing of Cold War tensions in Southeast Asia.\(^\text{112}\) Socialists in Kalaw sensed that an era of relative global peace was nigh as the Korean and Indochinese conflicts concluded, during which they could make the case for Asian socialism as the surest long-term route out of the Cold War quandary affecting nearby peoples. Israeli attendee Menahem Bargil captured the feeling of urgency that predominated at the meeting in a letter to Indian comrade Bhola Chatterjee afterwards, which referred to how ‘the rush of Kalaw’ had interrupted ‘correspondence with friends’.$^{113}$ Meanwhile, a conference had taken place in Colombo, Ceylon, earlier in the month between the Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia, and Burma, which covered common problems and pointed towards closer political alignment between key nations in the region. Ba Swe picked up on both of these developments in his inaugural speech, viewing them as propitious for actors pursuing global peace and an end to imperialism.$^{114}$

In discussions themselves, delegates first considered proposals for a joint publishing venture whereby member parties would produce and exchange books on the histories and orientations of regional socialist movements, socialism in theory and practice in Burma and Israel, colonial problems, socialism and world order, and trade union, youth, peasant, and women’s movements. Asian socialists wanted to nurture shared understandings and expectations, with African comrades in particular, of how socialism should advance on local, national, and international fronts, and believed that new printing projects alongside the ASC’s existing print cultures could help achieve this. They vowed to use their domestic parties as vehicles for accelerating this process, agreeing that monthly newsletters should be sent to members of these parties familiarising them with ASC plans and advertising some of the books mentioned. It was proposed that these newsletters should include discussion articles about ‘practical problems of socialism’ which the Burmese and Israeli governments had faced.$^{115}$

This suggests Asian socialists were beginning to think in more detail about the approach that regional parties should take to government, once in power, as several elections neared. The

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$^{113}$ Menahem Bargil to Bhola Chatterjee, June 14 1954, Hari Dev Sharma Papers (Bhola Chatterjee Papers), Corr with Menahem Bargil, NMML, 1–2.

$^{114}$ U Ba Swe, “Asia Must Strive To Forge A New Unity,” *Janata*, Jul 11, 1954, 12.

$^{115}$ “Minutes of the Bureau Meeting Held Kalaw,” 11-12.
solidarities they hoped to foster through these print cultures were at once experimental and practical, open-ended but action-oriented.

Delegates then discussed proposals for a study mission to Malaya and Indochina which was to take place in the near future and increase Asian socialists’ familiarity with conditions and possibilities in these regions. The aims and functioning of the ACB was explored, which consisted in maximising cooperation between ‘freedom movements everywhere...to speed the attainment of independence according to Socialist lines as adopted by the Rangoon Conference’. This could be achieved by strengthening links with ‘freedom movement organisations’ – a task already underway through the ventures of the ASC secretaries. There was a sense that Asian socialists anticipated tutoring Africans in how to prepare for independence here, though it was also outlined that the ACB coordination committee would have six members of freedom movement organisations on it and five from the ASC, thus giving participants who had not yet achieved independence a significant say in what the ACB would be doing. Scholarship schemes were named as a means of enabling African students to attend schools and universities in Asian countries – again, facilitated by individual parties, rather than by the ASC itself.116 Gerard McCann has written of how ‘educational provision was a key pillar of India’s quotidian engagement with Africans’ and a ‘talismanic marker...of Indian-led anti-colonial solidarity’ during decolonisation.117 It might be said that this was also a feature of Burmese and Indonesian engagement with Africans, given that Indians were matched by Indonesians, and outnumbered by Burmese attendees, at Kalaw.118

The topic which absorbed delegates most was Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day. Asian socialists hoped that this annual event would familiarise wide global audiences of socialists and anti-imperialists with their aims of defeating colonialism, ending the ‘exploitation of man by man’, and challenging ‘economic disequilibrium’ and the ‘politics of spheres of influence’. It was intended to ‘cement a bond of comradeship between fighters for freedom in all parts of the world, in the countries behind the iron curtain as well as the territories still under the heel of imperialism’.119 These were lofty aims, but ones which attendees felt in a propitious political moment to be both plausible and desirable. A date – in October – and a programme

117 McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 97.
118 “Minutes of the Bureau Meeting Held Kalaw,” 3.
119 Ibid., 15-16.
was established for the event, which would take place in many different countries simultaneously. It would include a mass rally that emphasised the significance of the achievement of freedom for colonised or recently-liberated peoples, considered the virtues of the principles set out in the preamble of the 1945 UN Charter, and offered a lecture and declaration on colonialism.\footnote{The UN Charter of 1945, which included a commitment to the self-determination of all peoples, was commonly invoked by anti-imperialists in succeeding years, most notably at Bandung. See Dinkel, \textit{The Non-Aligned Movement}, 55.} Demonstrations were to follow the mass rallies which drew in local publics in the manner of the rally at the Aung San Stadium in Rangoon in January 1953, imbuing them with an ‘anti-colonial spirit’, and making use of posters, banners, and mass-educational films on cooperative farming and constructive work.\footnote{\textquote[Minutes of the Bureau Meeting Held Kalaw, 15-16; “Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day,” IUSY Archives, Documents regarding the Asian Socialist Conference. 1953-1962., fol. 1508, IISH, 9-10.} This spoke to the democratic imaginary that defined Asian socialism in that Asian socialists aspired towards a political economy that integrated working-classes and peasants as participants in industrial enterprises, alongside political processes, marking them off from communists or capitalists. In practice, this may have grown into an elite-driven pattern of social transformation, but Asian socialists viewed it as vital to emphasise their democratic credentials at a juncture when it seemed that both colonialism and Cold War ideologies might be disintegrating and losing their lustre.

Another decision agreed on at the meeting was the appointment of Kyaw Nyein as ASC chairman, as Ba Swe stood down. This was not particularly significant since the position of chairman was ceremonial, with the ASC’s secretaries pulling the strings from behind the scenes. Following the summit, these secretaries launched themselves into an array of internationalist projects as before, positioning the ACB and its anti-colonial campaign at the forefront of their plans. Both Wijono and Hla Aung undertook key journeys in the six-month period ahead of the next bureau meeting in Tokyo, Japan. In the immediate aftermath of Kalaw, Wijono solicited long reports on political and social conditions in Indochina, Malaya, and Kashmir from an unnamed friend in the ASC, possibly Japanese socialist Roo Watanabe, who was now Joint Secretary of the ASC alongside Hla Aung.\footnote{“Secretariat Report to the 4\textsuperscript{th} Meeting of the Bureau (Japan) 19\textsuperscript{th} to 22\textsuperscript{nd} November, 1954,” Prem Bhasin Papers (Socialist Party), fol. 26, NMML, 3.} The interest that the ASC was taking in Malaya as well as Kashmir was notable, given the criticism laid at the door of leading
Asian socialists by Malayan and Pakistani delegates to the Rangoon Conference of 1953, where these delegates had questioned an anti-imperialism that avoided discussing how to achieve independence for Malaya or address the Kashmir problem. The ASC was trying to be more attentive to these issues – it proposed to send study missions to Malaya and published a resolution on Kashmir at Kalaw, whereby it directed its Secretariat to study the problem in consultation with the socialist parties of India and Pakistan.\(^{123}\) The solidarity of action that Hla Aung and Wijono were furnishing up required that Asian socialists proactively address these questions, through dialogue and direct study. As such, these Asian socialist intermediaries, the doers of 1950s anti-imperialism, were shaping the ASC in their image.

In the last week of June, Wijono, Watanabe, Jim Markham of the ACB, and Menahem Bargil of Mapai duly began a six-week trip to Malaya and Indochina.\(^{124}\) They spent the first month in Vietnam and the second in Malaya. It is likely that they were able to gain visas for the first part of this trip because it took place during the dates of the Geneva Conference and a ceasefire was in place between France and the Vietnamese nationalists. The trip enabled the group to consider how the ACB might make headway with local freedom fighters. It also allowed them to hone their capacities to shape ‘world public opinion’, by releasing press statements from cities such as Saigon which were timed to coincide with negotiations in Geneva and cast Asian Socialists as international spokespersons for the causes of self-determination, peace, and friendly cooperation between anti-imperial and socialist forces that the Vietnamese people supposedly wanted.\(^{125}\) The study mission also released a press statement from Penang in Malaya one month later, where they situated Malaya’s seemingly imminent independence within a radical temporality gravitating towards ‘socialism’, which meant ‘a coming new society where everybody could enjoy freedom, peace and human dignity without any sort of exploitation’.\(^{126}\) It is noteworthy that, despite the Rangoon Conference’s careful enumeration of what socialism consisted in, it still sounded capacious and somewhat indistinct in practice. Key Asian socialists such as Wijono were doing the work of non-state anti-imperial internationalism, and this work was vulnerable to visa restrictions, political disturbances, and any number of other interruptions. They appealed on the basis of

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123 “Asian Socialists Call For End Of Indo-China War,” *Times of India*, May 29, 1954, 8.
125 “Study Mission to Indo-China,” 10-11.
126 Ibid., 14.
what they expected to be popular, and amorphous, notions of what a post-imperial society might look like, because this enabled them to gain credence with new contacts quickly, where a more ideological tone could have turned such contacts away.

Meanwhile, Hla Aung returned to Africa. On this visit, he again travelled to Central, West, and East Africa. The ACB reported afterwards that ‘close contacts have been established with the Freedom Movements in these parts’ and that they had achieved ‘the active cooperation’ of movements in Nyasaland, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, Kenya, Uganda, and Algeria in particular. The density of connections Hla Aung made just months after his first, and less successful, trip to the continent, speaks to his growing intimacy with African members of the ACB, who must have given him tips about this second trip. Asian socialist networks were becoming more definitively Afro-Asian ones thanks to the ingenuity and industry of figures such as Jim Markham who edited the Anti-Colonial Bureau Newsletter, which, as Gerard McCann has written, was ‘an emerging database’, offering ‘primers for a myriad of African domestic political contexts’. Hla Aung’s friendship with Markham allowed Hla Aung to tap into pan-African worlds more concretely, through individuals such as George Padmore, to whom Markham was close. George Padmore, then chairman of the Pan-African Federation in London, produced a ‘Freedom Day Message’ on behalf of the Federation for Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day in November which welcomed Asian socialist engagement with African freedom struggles, stating that ‘this is a greater mark of true international comradeship than all the pious resolutions passed by European so-called socialist parties when they are out of power but who follow decidedly imperialist policies when in office’.

Like Wijono, Hla Aung also sought to bolster the credibility of the ASC as a vehicle for international political change. Later in 1954, he again travelled to New York, this time to participate in the ninth session of the UNGA. He encouraged the ACB to cable the UNGA on the occasion of Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day, which it duly did, expressing support for the inclusion of the Tunisian, Moroccan, and West New Guinean questions on the agenda – the latter was a region near Indonesia which the Dutch still held – and ‘WISHING SESSION

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128 McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 106.
129 Ibid., 103.
Independence struggles were heating up in each of these regions, and the UNGA acted as a theatre where claims against colonial overlords could be raised and contested. Asian socialists wanted to raise their voices in favour of self-determination and world peace in this theatre. Hla Aung gave his own speech as a Burmese delegate to the UNGA shortly afterwards entitled ‘The Problems of the Colonial Peoples’ in which he struck a melancholy note, regretting the entrenchment of colonial interests in Africa, Indochina, and Malaya, and remarking on the depth of economic exploitation and social and political discrimination in the former. This indicates that Asian socialist intermediaries often had more sobering experiences on their travels than public pronouncements let on, and that their excitement about the political future was an excitement tinged by apprehension, which could be tilted in one direction or another by what they personally encountered.

These intermediaries were also involved in trips taking place at the nexus between Afro-Asian socialist internationalisms and European socialist internationalisms. In July 1954, a small number of young Asian and African socialists participated in an IUSY project which involved studying socialist youth organisations first-hand in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Yugoslavia, alongside delegations of youth from various European countries, and from Canada. They had been invited to participate by the five-man IUSY delegation that visited India and Burma at the beginning of 1954 under the leadership of Peter Strasser. Nath Pai, the ASC’s foremost young socialist, led what compatriot and fellow participant G. Murahari described as ‘a strong delegation of Indian students from London’ on the project; it is doubtful that the IUSY or ASC could fund many Asian socialists to travel directly from their home countries. The IUSY tour began with a camp in Liège in Belgium which Murahari described as ‘one of the first contacts we had with the European youth’. The camp included discussions in tents of the problems of socialism as well as demonstrations and mass meetings in the city. Delegates then mingled with socialist youth movements in each country they
visited. Asian socialist youth found Yugoslavia particularly intriguing. Burmese participant Maung Kyi Nyunt, who is pictured alongside Nath Pai in Figure 7 on page 111, covered the final leg of the tour in Yugoslavia at greater length than the others in a piece for Socialist Asia, during which delegates studied how Yugoslavian youth participated in infrastructure and construction projects across the country. While Asian socialists became more actively anti-imperialist in the early to mid-1950s, this should not be understood as implying that the ASC’s solidarities of action took shape in an Afro-Asian frame alone. Asian socialists continued to plug their connections in Europe where these could help with causes such as educating socialist youth; they also had a genuine intellectual interest in European social democracy, even if they often participated in such ventures so that they could visit Yugoslavia at the end of them.

The other major venture which Asian socialists collaborated with European socialists on was Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day. The ASC confirmed the exact date as October 30 following a meeting with SI chairman Morgan Phillips in Rangoon in September. Burma established a preparatory committee to ‘plan everything in [connection] with the celebrations’. Celebrations took place across Burma on the day itself. Ba Swe addressed a ‘large gathering of men and women’ at the Aung San Stadium, where the ASC had held a mass rally at its inaugural conference 20 months earlier. He and Kyaw Nyein – who also addressed the rally, as pictured in Figure 10 – issued a statement declaring that colonialism perpetuated international tension and war as part of a ‘vicious cycle which must be broken ruthlessly’. In Bombay, the PSP held a rally at Kamgar Maidan, a public park, where Mehta emphasised how socialism could not be achieved before colonialism was abolished, and attacked French, Portuguese, and British imperialists. Socialists from across India travelled to the event. An ‘International Freedom Day’ rally took place in New York, where an Indian socialist close to Lohia and JP, Purshottam Trikamdas, gave an extended address about colonialism in Africa. Whether the schemes the ASC planned went ahead often depended on contingencies such as

138 Ibid., 27-28.
140 “Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day,” 7.
where key intermediaries were located at the time. It is likely that similar events took place in Indonesia, Israel, Britain, and Yugoslavia, all of whom had expressed interest in or been contacted extensively about the event.


The Tokyo Gathering

The final major event of 1954 for Asian socialists was their fourth bureau meeting, which took place in Tokyo from November 19 to November 21. The Tokyo meeting differed from previous meetings in that it was the first gathering to take place outside of South and Southeast Asia. Japanese socialists participated in the preparatory meeting of the ASC in 1952 and the Rangoon Conference in 1953, but were not at the centre of the organisation. This changed a little with the appointment of Roo Watanabe as Joint Secretary of the ASC in 1954, around the time he accompanied Wijono and Jim Markham on their visit to Malaya and Indochina. Jim Markham was also made a Joint Secretary of the ASC at this time, taking the brief of coordinating freedom movements through the ACB; Hla Aung continued to run general
administration, and Watanabe managed economic policy. The ASC had determined at Hyderabad that they would set up an ‘economic experts’ group to consider questions of ‘underdevelopment’. Japanese socialists took particular interest in these questions – they did not share the legacy of having been colonised with South and Southeast Asian socialists, and found the anti-imperialist ventures of the ASC comparatively uninteresting. South and Southeast Asian socialists did have significant interest in coordinating an economic policy, of course. ‘Underdevelopment’, or inhibited industrial production as against rich countries, was a phenomenon of colonialism itself – and as these South and Southeast Asians became increasingly attentive to what socialists needed to do when in government with various elections nearing, they grew closer to Japanese socialists, perhaps because the Japanese economy had begun to expand rapidly and they trusted Japanese socialists to be able to produce copious insights about development.

Japanese socialists operated in two separate parties from 1951 until 1955, when they merged back together again. Mosaburo Suzuki of the left-wing Japanese Socialist Party and Jotaro Kawakami of the right-wing Social Democratic Party of Japan chaired the ASC gathering in November 1954. The event was attended by the chairman and secretaries of the ASC and ACB and by delegates and observers from Burma, Indonesia, Israel, Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon, and the SI, along with ten Japanese socialists. Around 30 people participated in all. It was preceded by an informal meeting of economic experts between November 16 and November 18. As Ba Swe outlined to a Yugoslavian news agency, TANJUG, in May 1954, Asian socialists conceived the idea of convening small ‘economic experts’ gatherings at regular intervals because they could not see how ‘underdeveloped’ countries gaining their freedom could increase their productivity without taking aid from developed countries and jeopardising this freedom. Ba Swe hoped that the experts would discuss ideas about how Asian socialist parties could ‘build up their individual national economic life to become independent economically’ by evolving ‘a system of complementary economy’, and demand that the UN create a ‘world development authority’, or ‘a pool of resources in capital and skill from each nation according to its capacity and its dispensation to each nation according to its needs’. The thrust of this

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145 McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 105.
was that Asian socialists wanted their home nations to be able to prosper outside of an exploitative global capitalist economic system – a common anti-imperial sentiment. The notion of a ‘complementary economy’ implied that they wanted to ramp up trade and cooperation between Asian and African countries while keeping a lid on trade and cooperation with much more advanced economies.

The economic experts gathered in Tokyo – who were typically members of Asian socialist parties with a particular specialism in economics – discussed the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED), commodity trade, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), the ‘Asian Payment Union’ proposed by Japan, and ideas about setting up a ‘Planning Information Bureau’ and ‘Economic Council’ within the ASC to profile clearly what certain nations might be proficient at and deficient in, as per Ba Swe’s references to capacities and needs.¹⁴⁹ Japan was moving from a position of isolation to a position of integration on the international stage at the time.¹⁵⁰ Its recent history inclined it towards alignment with the free world, but Japanese politicians also considered that United States policymakers were preoccupied with the Cold War and inattentive towards Asian nationalism, and developed their own ideas for a Southeast Asian regionalism, some of which the United States engaged with.¹⁵¹ This interest in evolving a new regionalism was apparent in some of the ideas explored at the economic experts meeting ahead of the main ASC gathering, such as that of an Asian Payment Union.¹⁵²

Ba Swe marked the occasion of the ASC bureau gathering on November 19 by warmly referencing Japan’s integration ‘back into the community of nations as an equal member’, and welcoming the opportunity to ‘study the Socialist movement of Japan and its problems’ and to help the two socialist factions reunite. He remarked again on the Geneva and Colombo conferences, earmarking the diminution of Cold War tensions as a positive development. He named ‘the problem of the underdeveloped areas of the world’ as one of several threats to global peace, relegating colonialism to third place in the list, which may have been a

concession to his hosts. Mosaburo Suzuki, speaking next, referred to how Asian socialists needed to ‘further economic development in each country and to raise the living standards of each people by international co-operation’, and Jotaro Kawakami echoed him, with neither making any extended reference to colonialism. After this, delegates considered some of the plans of the Secretariat. These were many; Madhav Gokhale had remarked the day before on how the bureau meeting would have a ‘very heavy’ agenda. It was agreed that a study mission would go to Kashmir, that the ASC should continue trying to organise a pan-African conference, and that closer cooperation should be pursued with the SI in regard to revising the UN Charter and devising a ‘world plan for mutual aid’. Some new ideas were discussed, including a plan to convene a trade union seminar in Burma in 1955 which the Trade Union Congress there had proposed.

One of the topics which interested delegates most at the meeting was publishing. A joint publishing house including a publication programme and printing press was proposed – as it had been at Kalaw – to which each party would contribute a founding share. However, publishing was not just about rousing readerships to the causes of socialism and anti-imperialism. The ASC struggled to find capital for such ventures, and the circulation of Socialist Asia was disappointing. It was also about familiarising African and Asian socialists with one another’s struggles, where they did not always have the opportunity to travel and observe neighbouring struggles themselves. Travel between Asian as well as African countries was expensive and fraught with risk. BP Koirala, the Nepali delegate to the gathering, had written to an Indian friend in August outlining how he could only go to Tokyo as part of a longer tour which also included Europe, and would still have to cover ‘at least half my personal expenses…by my own efforts’. He raised the possibility of ‘writing to different papers or something periodically’ as one means to cover these expenses. It was suggested at Tokyo that each member party should appoint a reporter who could ‘feed the press of the other member Parties on the activity of the Party’, and another who would inform the national

156 “Minutes of the Tokyo Bureau Meeting,” 25-37.
press about the activities of the ASC.\textsuperscript{160} This might aid in promoting Asian socialist solidarities, whilst also simply keeping different individuals mindful of what was going on in socialist and anti-imperial struggles near and far.

A study commission on the UN Charter which had been named at Kalaw delivered its report to the Tokyo gathering. Ram Manohar Lohia, Madhav Gokhale, and Tandino Manu of Indonesia helped produce the report along with two Japanese and one Israeli socialist. The focus of the report was firmly on remaking the international order. The report reiterated ‘the pledge of the Asian Socialists to uphold the principles and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations’, which ‘could help in shaping a new world order of peace, equality, social progress and justice’. It named the main obstacles to this as the ‘lack of universality and equality’ associated with some nations holding great sway in the Security Council where others could not even gain admission to the UN itself, and the UN’s ‘inadequacy indevoting its energies and means to the development of underdeveloped countries’. Asian socialists envisaged the new states and freedom movements of Africa and Asia gaining ground in the UN, and effecting a universality and equality which allowed them to match or exceed the sway of the ‘bigger’ nations, if a different world order were to be achieved. A practical means of enacting this was to press for the ‘admission of all the applicant nations to the UN’; Kyaw Nyein agreed to cable the ninth sitting of the UNGA immediately with this demand.\textsuperscript{161} Asian socialists differed from European socialists on this, who also wanted revisions of the UN Charter but hesitated about campaigning for the admission of all applicant nations to the UN.\textsuperscript{162}

Overall, Asian socialists grasped the opportunity afforded by the Tokyo meeting to deepen connections between one another and the solidarities that flowed from these. Since the first bureau gathering in Hyderabad, the ASC’s mobile intermediaries had been busily flitting from one country and continent to another,padding out Asian socialist networks whilst disseminating and refining a message of socialism and anti-imperialism. In tandem with African and European socialists, they had honed transnational projects, schemes, and festivals that promoted an anti-colonial and constructive spirit among participants. This was with the

\textsuperscript{160} “Minutes of the Tokyo Bureau Meeting,” 37.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 40-41.
ultimate goal of expediting the achievement of new egalitarian and democratic social orders, and of a post-imperial international order. At Tokyo, Asian socialists demonstrated the same extent of political ambition as before. They promoted the end of empire through encouraging shared publishing ventures and renewing their commitment to pan-Africanism. They hoped to engender social transformation across Asia, convening an ‘economic experts’ group which could provide joined-up thinking on how to go about this while preserving sovereignty. And they aspired to revamp the world order not just by supporting continuing freedom struggles, but also by changing the UN into an instrument of global social justice which promoted the development of historically poor and exploited countries. At the Rangoon Conference 22 months earlier, Asian socialists had enunciated commitments to radical social, economic, and international political change. By late 1954, they had laid out copious plans and projects by which to realise some of these goals. This reflected the prolonged labours of the ASC’s indefatigable secretaries who crafted solidarities not just of connection but also of action through their many international engagements.

Conclusion

This chapter follows the internationalist activities and exploits of a mobile set of socialist South and Southeast Asian intermediaries around the dates of three ASC bureau meetings. These intermediaries – relatively obscure activists at home who had greater leeway than party leaders for experimentative global travel – organised and conducted international tours and festivals and established anti-colonial campaigning bodies, whilst overseeing the more mundane tasks of office administration. Each of these pursuits padded out Asian socialist networks and grounded them on a surer political-strategic footing. Asian and African socialists agreed that imperialism had to be trashed as the prelude to wider social and economic transformation. The ACB was formed as a joint enterprise between Asian and African socialists to explore how this end might be achieved and accelerate it. Hla Aung journeyed around Africa twice in 1953 and 1954, forging friendships with African freedom fighters who he hoped would craft a similar organisation to the ASC in Africa. Meanwhile, Wijono arranged for and conducted trips around Southeast Asia and to Europe during which these same aims – the end of imperialism and the evolution of alternate, equalitarian and participatory social
orders – were promulgated. Hla Aung, Wijono, and their comrades furnished up projects at the three ASC bureau meetings which were intended to advance these aspirations. The projects included ideas of Asian socialist publishing cultures, industrial schemes, youth brigades, and creating closer cooperation among African nationalists. In each case, Asian socialists hoped to foster a solidarity among participants oriented towards action on the broad goals they had set out at Rangoon.

The conversations which Asian socialist intermediaries fostered with fellow Asians as well as with Africans and young Europeans were dialogical and open-ended. This was in the nature of non-state internationalist networking in the early 1950s. One of the primary reasons for this was the risks involved in conducting long-distance excursions, even with factors such as cheap air travel making the conduct of these excursions easier. Conferences could be cancelled at short notice and comrades could have visas refused or passports withdrawn; funds could also be short. Whereas the Asian socialists furnishing up a network between 1947 and 1953 were primarily reaching out to other Asians, the socialist intermediaries taking the lead in this period were also trying to interact with African nationalists and European leftists. They had to familiarise diverse contacts with their aims and projects quickly, and scope out potential interest. This demanded patience, flexibility, and reciprocity. In return for invitations to events, offers of accommodation, and suggestions about further travels from their many hosts, Hla Aung and Wijono would have promised assistance with freedom struggles, scholarships for African students, and copious other ideas which became ASC policy in this period. Even if this chapter has framed its findings around three bureau meetings, many of the decisions made at bureau meetings would have followed open-ended and ad hoc individual conversations between Asian socialist intermediaries and contacts in prior travels. This only strengthens the case for closely tracing the transnational movements and engagements of mobile intermediaries in studying the non-state internationalisms of the 1950s.

The chapter proposes that socialism remained a mutable, anti-imperial tool into the middle of this decade. Hla Aung and Wijono were vague about its exact meanings, as can be seen in Wijono’s public statement from Penang in 1954, which simply emphasised how socialism suggested a society free of exploitation. This proves that Asian socialist internationalisms cannot be approached from the perspective of ideas or philosophy alone. Asian socialists had
sketched out a relatively coherent vision of what socialism might look like at the Rangoon
Conference, but in practice, key practitioners continued to refer to it in capacious terms. Hla
Aung and Wijono knew that socialism’s appeal was in its invocation of an egalitarian and
democratic future in the minds of sundry contacts, and as such, remaining indistinct about its
precise meanings was vital to their internationalist praxis. At the same time, the chapter has
argued that these socialists were keen to bring the socialisms of the future into being quickly,
sensing that the diminution of Cold War tensions had given them an opportunity. They honed
projects which they hoped might found solidarities among contacts on a more action-oriented
footing, challenging imperialism and nurturing cross-cultural affinities and a constructive zeal
among socialist youth, the architects of the said futures. They tried determinedly to mobilise
resources from within their own parties to familiarise Afro-Asian socialists with what
comrades across borders were doing and what the ASC was doing. Asian socialist agitation
consisted in a double helix in that the national and the international were intricately
intertwined in the political lives of activists.

This raises the final point, and also the elephant in the room, in relation to Asian socialist
activity; namely, the need to get more Asian socialist parties into government. The Burmese
and the Israeli governments were among the key funders of the ASC, as the next chapter
discusses in more detail, and Asian socialists had often turned to them for inspiration in the
early 1950s. To give Asian socialist internationalist visions a renewed lustre of possibility, the
Indian and Indonesian socialist parties among others needed to make substantial gains at
home. Much of the enthusiasm of South and Southeast Asian socialists derived from the
perception that they could make Asian decolonisation the catalyst of an epochal passage of
global political change. From 1955, this perception was undermined by the fact of election
losses, but also the ascendency of a rival non-aligned internationalism in the form of the
Bandung project, which diminished Asian socialists’ faith that they could achieve their aims
through the ASC, thus weakening the body. The next chapter considers how Asian socialists
reacted to these shifts.
Chapter III: From Asian Socialism to World Socialism: Statesmen-In-Waiting and Subaltern Internationalists

If in the immediate future our struggle for the freedom of dependent peoples, for the eradication of poverty, hunger and want from the world, for international co-operation based on equality and justice does not pass the test of immediacy, then the international Socialist movement will not take the shape and format, the point and direction which we all want it to take.1

With this statement, made in an article for Janata in August 1955, ASC General Secretary Wijono captured the sense of urgency that Asian socialists felt at needing to live up to the ‘test of immediacy’ with their ideas and projects. He also identified with an ‘international’ rather than specifically Asian socialist movement, which he believed should have a common shape, format, and direction. In 1953 and 1954, Asian socialists had begun to emphasise that the time was nigh to push their internationalist agenda more firmly in light of an easing of Cold War tensions, but as a primarily Asian or Afro-Asian outfit. In 1955 and 1956, this subtly changed, with Asian socialists determining that they should pursue their political ends in league with European contacts and institutions. The Cold War definitively spread into South and Southeast Asia at this time. Regional political leaders articulated a commitment to the principles of non-alignment at Bandung, co-opting something of the internationalism of Asian socialists. Meanwhile, the ASC lost sway with its own member parties which were fracturing and turning their attentions elsewhere. These developments encouraged Asian socialists to follow more individualised, though still interconnected, political trajectories, running up to the second ASC congress of November 1956, where longstanding contradictions within the Asian socialist movement burst into full view.

This chapter charts how the notion of an Asian socialism came to be superseded by the notion of a world socialism, tracking the same individuals as before. To date, only Su Lin Lewis has offered an account of the decline of Asian socialist internationalisms as against other internationalist visions from the mid-1950s. She argues that splits, fissures, and election losses suffered by Asian socialist parties weakened the ASC.2 This is indisputable, but only part of the story. It was also the case that leading Asian socialists had grown increasingly aloof

from ASC activities since the Rangoon Conference, partly because they were so engrossed in domestic political struggles. Increasing threats to South and Southeast Asian postcolonial national sovereignty from intrusive Cold War powers forced these socialists to adopt more strident positions on how to safeguard and promote self-determination around the region. Asian decolonisation had earlier nourished kaleidoscopic imaginaries of possible futures, but now – at least for prominent politicians – there seemed to be less scope for reinventing self-determination. The state leaders who gathered at the Bandung Conference of 1955 sounded their commitment to independent political, cultural, and economic decision-making on the international stage. The growth of a rival non-aligned internationalism in the shape of the Bandung project impressed upon Asian socialists the need to either distinguish themselves from this platform, associate with these state leaders more closely, or move in a different political direction entirely.

The chapter illustrates that while leading Asian socialists focussed predominantly on domestic politics, the ASC’s mobile intermediaries, introduced in the previous chapter, ventured to craft an anti-imperial world socialist movement in tandem with contacts in Asia, Europe, and Africa. They had dabbled in this earlier on, but their response to the financial peril of the ASC and the co-option of Asian socialist articles of faith such as non-alignment by the Bandung statesmen was to engage more deeply with European socialists in the SI and IUSY among other institutions. They attempted to convince these contacts of the importance of dismantling imperialism as a first step towards constructing world socialism. They also attempted to promote their longstanding aim of accomplishing more egalitarian and democratic social orders through these connections. The first section of the chapter discusses leading Asian socialists whereas the second, entitled ‘Subaltern Internationalists’, explores how Asian socialist intermediaries plugged their global contact books to try and stir up support for freedom struggles. The sections point towards a dynamic whereby ‘statesmen-in-waiting’ – or prominent Asian socialists – began to approximate the political trajectories of state leaders where ‘subaltern internationalists’ – the ASC’s mobile intermediaries – did not. These subaltern internationalists continued to be the carriers of a more dialogical approach to decolonisation where prominent politicians adopted a more pedagogic approach as state-making regimes consolidated themselves. A reckoning with this dynamic is important in surveying subsequent Asian socialist activities in this chapter and the next.
The third section of the chapter focusses on the second ASC congress, which took place in Bombay in November 1956. This congress has not been substantially assessed elsewhere and the chapter contributes the first extensive survey, drawing on conference reports, seminar transcripts, and study papers among other materials. It suggests that the congress crystallised the crises faced by the ASC. This congress had long been planned by the ASC’s mobile intermediaries who hoped to foster productive conversations about global political futures among far-flung friends and acquaintances. However, almost four long years in the early history of decolonisation and the Cold War had passed since Rangoon, and delegates arrived with manifold agendas; leading Asian socialists aimed to hone a ‘democratic socialist’ ideology for state-building, intermediary ones aimed to fashion an anti-imperial world socialism, African nationalists aimed to secure practical support for their freedom movements, and European socialists sought to bring the SI and ASC closer together. Furthermore, geopolitical events in the Suez and Hungary exacerbated tensions within the ASC between socialists of a more anti-imperialist bent, and socialists of a more ‘free world’ bent. The section demonstrates how the conference failed to deliver any shared programme for transnational political change due to these various pressures, thus weakening the ASC fatally.

Aside from offering a detailed take on the decline of the ASC and the fissuring of Asian socialist networks, the chapter adds further to its assessments of how decolonisation and the Cold War intersected in the political lives of South and Southeast Asian activists through the 1950s. The previous chapter proposed that the Cold War, in the early 1950s, actually bound Asian socialists closer together – at least in the instrumental sense that a let-up of tensions in East Asia highlighted to Asian socialists that they might be able to revamp the international order if they ramped up their networking and pursued collective political aims with greater vigour. This chapter proposes that the Cold War was one of the factors that split Asian socialists by 1956; some viewed communism as a totalitarian threat where others viewed imperialism as the more urgent threat, creating irresolvable differences within Asian socialist coalitions. Specific events which activists could not have foreseen determined the ways in which the Cold War affected Afro-Asian socialist networks; where developments in East Asia had previously given hope, now developments in Central Europe induced alarm and discord. Indeed, to South and Southeast Asian activists, the Cold War appeared to be moving to the centre of the world.
order in the mid-1950s, in that international organisations for collective defence brokered by the United States were taking shape which bore on Asia’s future, such as the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO).

This chapter traces a complex set of episodes, then, in the passage of the chronologies of possibility that moved Asian socialists through the 1950s. Much of the optimism about the future which had enabled activists to paper over political differences within Asian socialist networks in previous engagements derived from the sense that Asian decolonisation could take societies, and the international order, in a plethora of directions, if the right forces mobilised and got their hands on the levers of power. This optimism dissipated in the mid-1950s, and with it, the fragile unity among many Asian and African socialists who believed that the ASC was a vessel for internationalist change. However, this did not interdict the dialogical and open-ended internationalisms which Asian socialist intermediaries had fashioned in previous years. They engaged even more deeply with far-away allies, and advanced their agendas through a wider range of institutions than before, while remaining hopeful that the ASC could subserve their ends until the Bombay Conference tarnished this hope. The chapter designates them ‘subaltern internationalists’ in this propensity to bring an oppositional, and more anti-imperial, view to how global socialism should unfold in the mid-1950s. They interacted with copious contacts and avoided imposing any narrow understanding of ‘socialism’ on those they met, though they did insist on opposition to imperialism as a fundament of the ‘world socialism’ they came to advocate. The risky and ad hoc excursions they made were crucial in underwriting new international socialist ventures and solidarities of action long after the ASC itself declined.

Statesmen-In-Waiting

From 1955, it began to become obvious to Asian socialists that the ASC was not fit for purpose, at the same time as capitalist and communist superpowers and rival non-aligned internationalists grew abler and more articulate by way of promoting their own global political agendas. The financial plight of the ASC is suggestive of this. The ASC generally prospered as a young international organisation thanks to contributions from the Burmese,
Indonesian, Indian, Israeli, and Japanese socialist parties, which it hoped would amount to 87,000 Burmese Kyats in the May 1954 to April 1955 financial term. It carried forward a surplus of 20,000K into this term, which it hoped to supplement with income from subscriptions to *Socialist Asia* and the sale of socialist literature; it planned to spend 58,800K on salaries and allowances, 20,000K on travel, 10,000K on tours, 20,000K on the ACB, and 18,500K on publications.³

One year after this budget had been agreed at the May 1954 meeting in Kalaw, the ASC was in a dire financial situation. The Kalaw and Tokyo bureau meetings had proven costly, but arrears of contributions from the Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, and Israeli parties were the main shortfall, along with sums from the Lebanese, Pakistani, and Malayan parties which were irretrievable because the parties could not pay. The ASC was facing pressure from creditors ‘every day’ and raising loans to pay bills; Kyaw Nyein, its treasurer, had requested his own party, the BSP, to submit emergency monthly loans of 4000K.⁴ Wijono pinpointed the turn of 1955 as the moment when the situation became ‘desperate’; he discovered that swift ‘implementation of the Tokyo Bureau decisions’ was impossible because ‘the contributions of member parties came only in small instalments’.⁵ The arrears of contributions were due in part to domestic politics in different countries. In Indonesia, suspicion was growing of the government from 1954 onwards for delaying the first national election to maximise its chances of winning; the PSI was therefore uncertain of when it would have to divert significant resources towards this campaign.⁶ Japan held an election in 1955 in which the leftist and rightist socialist parties were genuine contenders.⁷ The Indian PSP was racked by personal and political rivalries and faced a serious split later in 1955 whereby Ram Manohar Lohia led a radical group out of the organisation.⁸

It seems that the ASC’s revenue streams were dwindling because leading Asian socialists – the figures most likely to be able to encourage the siphoning of funds to the ASC, or otherwise – were increasingly ensconced in domestic politics. They were not just concerned with

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³ “Minutes of the Bureau Meeting Held Kalaw,” 22.
⁸ Guha, *Makers of Modern India*, 386.
elections; they were also concerned with how to prevent incursions on their sovereignty from Cold War powers. The political future of South and Southeast Asia was as hot-a topic as it had ever been at this time. The United States as well as South and Southeast Asian powers themselves honed visions of regionalisms they thought suited to the integrity and stability of given states. The United States had been involved primarily in East Asian theatres from the late 1940s and expanded its remit to Southeast Asia in the 1950s, founding SEATO in 1954 after Ho Chi Minh appeared to secure North Vietnam following the Geneva conference. SEATO was aimed at keeping Southeast Asia safe from communism.\(^9\) It was but the military counterpart to a broader cultural offensive in which the Eisenhower administration – which entered office in 1953 – sought to present individual freedom and economic prosperity as social feats only achievable through a liberal-capitalist politics, by funding copious covert propaganda programmes that targeted both South and Southeast Asia.\(^10\) The military component of United States foreign policy was more obvious, and regularly invited the ire of Asian socialists.\(^11\)

In the mid-1950s, as Roland Burke writes, the Cold War was becoming ‘an established feature in the world system’.\(^12\) The Baghdad Pact, which later became CENTO, signed in 1955, was another attempt by the United States to ward off communism in Asia, in this case on the southwestern frontier of the Soviet Union. Leading Burmese socialists, who – as part of the AFPFL coalition – were among the few ASC members in power, and had the attention and admiration of those who were not, played Cold War powers off against one another. The AFPFL and its leader, Prime Minister Nu, were determined to maintain a ‘neutralist’ position in the Cold War – meaning they did not want to take sides – but had to accept British and American aid following the Chinese Revolution of 1949, which brought a communist state to the doorstep of a country already struggling with domestic communist insurgencies.\(^13\) Nevertheless, Nu remained strongly independent of United States foreign policy dictates, and the two nations conducted many long-winded negotiations over further instalments of aid in

\(^9\) Clymer, A Delicate Relationship, 141.
\(^10\) Kenneth Osgood, Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 2006); Greg Barnhisel, Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 1-179.
\(^12\) Burke, Decolonization, 15.
\(^13\) Clymer, A Delicate Relationship, 53.
coming years. Nu continued to solicit limited amounts of military and development aid from the United States in the middle of the decade, despite opposing SEATO. He travelled to the United States in 1955 to seek further development aid and warned his hosts that he might turn to the Soviets if his request was rejected, who did also supply some aid to the young nation-state.\textsuperscript{14} Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe held various briefs in the government during this time and participated in some of the aid negotiations, even though Kyaw Nyein announced in 1951 that the internationalisation of the Marshall Plan would doom chances of socialist transformation worldwide for good.\textsuperscript{15}

The other key parties and personalities within the ASC also became progressively more concerned with how to orientate themselves vis-à-vis the Cold War. Nehru solicited aid from both superpowers from the early 1950s for purposes of development like Nu.\textsuperscript{16} He was concerned with upholding a fiercely independent domestic and foreign policy, and pursued superpower assistance where and when he felt it might bolster his infrastructure projects.\textsuperscript{17} JP and Asoka Mehta of the PSP became preoccupied with how to stop the Cold War interfering with postcolonial politics. JP took a step back from frontline politics to lend his support to the \textit{Bhoodan Yajna} movement from 1953, a movement which sought to encourage big landowners to redistribute their land among the rural poor through mass action and civil disobedience.\textsuperscript{18} He felt that mainstream political parties were losing sight of the country's Gandhian inheritance, which could be turned towards procuring an independent postcolonial social order which resembled neither capitalism nor communism. To this end, he and Mehta became involved with a global liberal cultural organisation that was covertly funded by the CIA – the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) – which offered them an opportunity to network with intellectuals around South and Southeast Asia with similar aims at conferences and small-scale seminars.\textsuperscript{19} Lohia was also greatly concerned with how to avoid any form of engagement with the Cold War powers and consistently derided Nehru for his dalliance with

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{clymer2013delicate}Clymer, \textit{A Delicate Relationship}, 149.
\bibitem{ibid}Ibid., 115.
\bibitem{engerman2018price}David Engerman, \textit{The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), II-XLV.
\bibitem{guha2008india}Guha, \textit{India After Gandhi}, vii.
\end{thebibliography}
both; he split from the PSP later in 1955 partly because he felt it was making too many accommodations with the ruling INC.  

Ali Sastroamidjojo, the Prime Minister of Indonesia between August 1953 and July 1955, was the man who first proposed the idea of an Asian-African conference at the Colombo meeting between the Indian, Indonesian, Burmese, Pakistani, and Ceylonese Prime Ministers in April-May 1954. He sensed that the relaxation of Cold War tensions discernible at Geneva created an opening for Africans and Asians to enunciate their commitment to principles of self-determination on the world stage. Several statesmen including Nehru and Zhou Enlai, who had just elaborated the *Panch Shila* or ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ with one another, warmed to the idea. Sjahrir and the PSI, who were sharply critical of Sastroamidjojo for reasons including his continued deferral of elections, were alarmed at this. Sjahrir warned in September 1954 that Indonesia might gravitate towards the Soviet bloc in the Cold War rather than maintain its neutralist foreign policy should it agree a non-aggression pact with China as part of Sastroamidjojo’s pivot toward India and Burma. The CIA determined that Sjahrir and the PSI were ‘strongly anti-Communist’ and positively disposed towards cooperating with the West. It is more probable that Indonesian socialists, like Indian and Burmese socialists, had their own notion of regional cooperation which they hoped to advance should they take power – the Third Force – which the ascendancy of a competing regionalism endangered.

Each of these examples is intended to show that the field for a kind of experimentative non-state internationalism was closing around leading Asian socialists by the mid-1950s. These socialists were becoming engrossed in ruling class debates about how to safeguard national sovereignty from Cold War threats – which encompassed a range of strategies from vocally decrying alignment with the United States or Soviet Union, to appropriating their resources for the advancement of particular domestic and regional political goals. This explains why

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funds directed from major Asian socialist parties to the ASC quickly dropped around the turn of 1955 – before many of the splits and election losses Lewis references had taken place. Leading Asian socialists, who had involved themselves little in the vibrant organisational activities of the ASC in 1953 and 1954, became more estranged from the body’s operations at the same time as they became more ensconced in domestic politics. They began to grow into a class of statesmen-in-waiting who clothed themselves in a nationalist and anti-communist garb, focussing on how their nation-states could achieve democratic and socialist developmental goals close to those of political leaders. For the ASC, the most important split of the period was a looming division between this class of statesmen-in-waiting and a clutch of subaltern internationalists with subtly different goals, as the following sections will show.

Subaltern Internationalists

In 1955, Asian socialists were forced to engage with a rival non-aligned internationalism to their own, in the form of the Bandung project. This project took shape as a part of a confluence on foreign policy of Nehru, Nu, and Sastroamidjojo among others in 1954, in relation to ‘the increasing Cold War division of the world and the ensuing possibility of global, and possibly nuclear, conflict’. It culminated in the Bandung Conference itself in April 1955 which was attended by 29 African and Asian nations. Historians have assessed copious dimensions of the Bandung Conference, from the performativity of participants, to its resonances and afterlives within and across the Global South, to its legacies for international order. There is agreement that the focus on self-determination and economic and cultural cooperation at the meeting spoke to wider aspirations of African and Asian peoples towards an effective sovereign flourishing outside of the Cold War, though scholars question how far the narrowly male state leaders who predominated at Bandung can be taken as representative of these populations. It is important that Bandung is not conflated with the NAM, which formed six years later, in 1961; only India, Burma, and Indonesia supported notions of non-alignment explicitly in the mid-1950s. Christopher Lee views the most

'momentous result' of Bandung as having constituted ‘the feeling of political possibility presented through this first occasion of ‘Third World’ solidarity’.  

Where Third World solidarity is taken as a state phenomenon, this is true of the Bandung Conference, but as this thesis has shown, non-state actors had been fashioning Afro-Asian networks around feelings of political possibility for some years. To Asian socialists, Bandung tended to appear as an intriguing interlude which pointed towards the potentiality of African and Asian peoples uniting against colonialism, a longstanding aim of theirs; yet Bandung was also, as Rahul Rao writes, a ‘double-edged’ sword, in that it was ‘simultaneously a forward thrust against the imperialist powers and a rearguard action against domestic opponents’. Rao draws on the legacy of the subaltern studies movement within South Asian historiography to argue that the Asianist discourses which furnished the Bandung Moment betrayed the conservative and passive revolutionary core of the anti-colonial internationalism that Bandung inaugurated. In appointing themselves spokespersons of a Third World, the Bandung statesmen were attempting to cement their own legitimacy as the only credible leaders of their own countries, so long as these countries sought freedom and self-determination. And by co-opting – whether consciously or otherwise – the internationalism of the ASC in committing to the end of colonialism, some form of socialism, and closer Afro-Asian ties, they left Asian socialists with a dilemma in relation to whether to contest Bandung with their own non-aligned internationalism, or pursue other channels.

For most Asian socialists – certainly the mobile intermediaries assessed in the previous chapter – Bandung, alongside domestic political disappointments and the ratcheting up of Cold War tensions, solicited a rethink about how a socialist world order might be realised. At the turn of 1955, Yugoslavian Premier Tito visited India and Burma. Tito found it difficult to stay entirely aloof from the Cold War following the country’s expulsion from the Cominform in 1948. He sensed a new opportunity to engage with a decolonising Afro-Asia when Nehru, Nu, and Sastroamidjojo began to evolve a common ‘non-aligned’ outlook from September 1954. During his stay in Burma, Ba Swe, Wijono, and Hla Aung interviewed Tito for the ASC.

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28 Lee, Making a World After Empire, 15.
30 The Cominform was unofficially the successor of the Comintern.
31 Lüthi, Cold Wars, 289.
They asked him first about colonialism and Yugoslavian socialism. They then asked him about ‘international socialist co-operation’. Revealingly, their notion of international socialist cooperation now included the SI and the notion of ‘a possible future single international of Socialists’. Despite repeated attempts by the SI to advance this very idea in previous years, ASC thinkers had consistently strayed from it. In this interview they suggested otherwise – indicating a shift towards an alternate conception of socialist internationalism to the one which they had been promulgating to this point, which took shape in months to come.

In this conception, Asian socialist intermediaries sought to help shape a world socialist movement conducive to their anti-imperial aims. They continued to network among one another and imagine a world socialism channelling the liberatory energies of African and Asian freedom fighters, but they also engaged afresh with European contacts. Peter van Kemseke, considering the expansion of the SI in the 1950s, views Asian socialists as having consisted in a strongly independent ‘network’ in international socialist circles who ventured to radicalise the SI on questions of colonialism and disarmament, and succeeded in changing the SI from a ‘Cold War International’ towards one which was less Atlanticist in orientation in the mid-1950s.

It is beyond the purview of this thesis to assess how far the ASC altered the views of European socialists as a whole, but the more mobile Asian socialists definitely endeavoured to tilt European socialists in favour of anti-colonialism and anti-racism at this time. Asian socialists wanted to take the lead in pioneering a world socialism of their choosing, but they recognised that European socialists were becoming more important partners due to their relative political success as compared with Asian socialists. As before, they also engaged with international socialist institutions because these gave them the opportunity to pad out longer journeys abroad, and visit Africans and Yugoslavians who they might otherwise struggle to communicate with.

ASC secretary Hla Aung gave a revealing speech to the UN at this time. As the Burmese government’s chosen representative to the UN’s Committee on Non-Self-Governing territories, he delivered a speech to the UN’s Sixth Session on April 26 1955 on race relations and social conditions across the decolonising world. He had garnered much of the knowledge he distilled here from personal excursions as well as liaisons with Jim Markham in the ACB.

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33 Van Kemseke, Globalization of Socialism, 98-112.
Asian socialists believed that the UN was an institution through which ‘world public opinion’ could be shaped on questions of colonialism and international tension – but with the gradual decline of the ASC, it is likely that Hla Aung addressed the session with less grand aims in mind. Hla Aung discussed racial discrimination in non-self-governing territories across East, Central, and North Africa, and Southeast Asia, and asked that ‘principles of self-determination and equality of human rights’ be applied where colonial administrations continued to engage in ‘race domination’. He made reference to the ASC Rangoon congress of January 1953 as a landmark occasion on which Africans and Asians came together to demand self-determination, and listed the iniquities he had become familiar with travelling around Africa since. He concluded by stating that he ‘would like to add that the voice of millions in Asia and Africa, through their representatives at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung could in no way be discarded’ in the pursuit of ‘the final achievement of self-determination’.34

This last statement was revealing; where Hla Aung might previously have spoken in his capacity as an Asian socialist, he now consigned Asian socialism to the recent past and identified the Bandung project as holding out the most hope for Afro-Asia. This did not mean that Asian socialists unstintingly embraced the Bandung project, but that they relished its seeming potential to mobilise Africans and Asians against imperialism, a longstanding aim of their own. The ASC was losing appeal. Key parties in Burma and Israel explicitly rejected the idea of a ‘Third Force’ that had moved many Asian socialists since, and prior to, Rangoon.35 Jim Markham, a key figure within the ACB, left Rangoon in June 1955 and was not replaced, whether for financial reasons or because working with the ASC did not appear a legitimate means of fighting imperialism in Africa.36 Burke has shown that ‘Third World’ diplomats initiated vigorous debates about ‘human rights’ in the UN between 1950 and 1960, ‘through a mixture of idealism and political advantage’. Bandung was among those conferences where these diplomats signalled their commitment to the notion of universal human rights.37 Hla Aung invoked human rights at the UN to add to this growing global chorus against colonialism within and outside of the institution. Asian socialists continued to pursue the end of

36 “Secretariat Report to the 5th Meeting of the Bureau,” 31.
37 Burke, Decolonization, 146.
colonialism in coming months, but increasingly often through intersections with other
institutions besides their own, most often the socialist ones they were already familiar with.

One strong influence in international socialist circles in the mid-1950s was Israel. Mapai had
been in power since 1949, and Israeli socialists were eager participants in the SI, the IUSY, and
other such institutions, as well as attempting to forge connections with the decolonising
world. Wijono, still General Secretary of the ASC, exchanged letters with Menahem Bargil
of Israel in April 1955, who had recently been made Joint General Secretary of the IUSY. Bargil
already knew Wijono and hoped to deepen links between Mapai, the IUSY, and India,
Indonesia, and Burma among other countries. One of his first acts, he informed Wijono, would
be to make a travel grant available for an Indonesian to join a tour of Afro-Asian youth around
Europe and the Middle East from July to November. The programme was to ‘cover every
aspect of youth, party and trade union work’ and encourage ‘an investigation of economic,
social, educational, and other problems’; comrades would ‘visit FAO headquarters in Rome,
UNESCO headquarters in Paris, establishments of the ILO, the WHO, etc.’ as well as the IUSY’s
summer school, International Seminar, Executive Committee meeting, the SI congress, and a
meeting with COPAI in Britain.

In receipt of offers such as this, Wijono would doubtless have realised how well-connected
and capable his international socialist contacts were by way of facilitating transnational
solidarities, including between Afro-Asian youth. Wijono responded with interest soon
afterwards. His own priorities were moving closer to those of Bargil and the IUSY. He
proposed to raise the IUSY proposals at the upcoming PSI congress to see ‘what steps are to
be taken to bring more activities amongst the Youth national and international as well’; he
even broached the possibility of Sjahrir participating in the IUSY summer school. He revealed
that he had been speaking to Kyaw Nyein about when an international socialist training camp
in Asia could take place – his own idea, drawing on some suggestions made by the IUSY –
which they thought might be May 1956. He named an Indonesian novelist who he thought
might benefit from a liaison with the International PEN club, a worldwide organisation of
writers committed to intellectual freedom. He updated Bargil as to what he knew of political

39 Menachem Bargil to Wijono, April 22 1955, IUSY Archives, Documents regarding the Asian Socialist
Conference. 1953-1962., fol. 1508, IISH, 1317-1319.
conditions in China. He also outlined how he thought the IUSY should advance – through cultivating contacts in ‘Asia, Africa, and South America’, and suggested that Bargil contact ACB Secretary Jim Markham for contacts in Africa.\footnote{Wijono to Menachem Bargil, May 4 1955, IUSY Archives, Documents regarding the Asian Socialist Conference. 1953-1962., fol. 1508, IISH, 1315-1316.} Each of these responses indicated that Wijono wanted to network more intimately with international socialist contacts. Wijono appeared to plot a common agitational future with, in this case, the IUSY. There was also evidence of him attempting to enhance the anti-imperialism of the IUSY by putting Bargil in contact with Markham.

In July 1955, the fourth annual SI congress took place in London. Wijono arranged for a two-man delegation of the ASC to attend the London meeting consisting of himself and Madhav Gokhale – later supplemented by Pakistani Mobarak Sagher and Nepali Pushkar Nath Upadhyaya – reporting that ‘cooperation with the SI [had] improved very much’ in preceding months with the joint publication of \textit{Socialist Asia} and \textit{Socialist International Information}.\footnote{“Secretariat Report to the 5th Meeting of the Bureau,” 32.} Wijono stated in his address to the congress that European and Asian socialists should seek to ‘open up a new and imaginative vista of international Socialist co-operation’ through pursuing joint ventures. He emphasised ‘the need of having a world-embracing federation of Socialism’s regional experiences, endeavours, and practices’.\footnote{Wijono, “Socialist International and Asian Socialists,” \textit{Socialist Asia} 4, no. 2 (1955): 13-14.} This constituted a step away from Asia and Africa towards a notion of worldwide association. Wijono added that the SI and ASC had to get beyond ‘good-will’ to ‘intellectual and emotional harmony’. He acknowledged that differences over imperialism and ‘the approach to world politics’ had to be overcome in this new coalition. He expressly rejected what he termed the European socialist’s ‘emotionally dry, intellectually sterile and functionally static’ obsession with the ‘confrontation of democracy with totalitarianism’, or the Cold War, and suggested that the ‘socialist struggle for peace’ had instead to position ‘world reconstruction’ at the forefront of its agenda.\footnote{Wijono, “Socialist International,” 13-14.} This suggested a dual emphasis on challenging colonialism and constructing new social orders, as had been the internationalist agenda of Asian socialists for some years. Wijono wanted to influence the SI in this direction.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{wijono1955} Wijono to Menachem Bargil, May 4 1955, IUSY Archives, Documents regarding the Asian Socialist Conference. 1953-1962., fol. 1508, IISH, 1315-1316.
\bibitem{wijono1955a} “Secretariat Report to the 5th Meeting of the Bureau,” 32.
\end{thebibliography}
Whilst Wijono was relatively cordial in his speech, Gokhale – former Joint Secretary of the ASC – was more direct. He queried European speakers’ understanding of history, asserting that the ‘phenomenon of Asian and African peoples being used as a mere commodity across the counter of share markets’ did not ‘belong to the past’ but was ‘more or less the same even [today]’. He went on:

you – and I apologise if I have frequently to speak of “you” in this speech – under the conditions in which you live have decided...to join the Atlantic bloc. But we in Asia, and the Socialists in particular, do not accept the division of the world into the free world and the fettered world...we believe that there is a third world which must keep away from these two...and as this area consolidates and extends the influence of Socialists will extend too.\(^44\)

Gokhale’s reference to the notion of a ‘third world’ here was striking. Siba Grovogui discusses how although ‘Third World’ came to connote developing countries, it was ‘in actuality a moral space for setting up agendas and debates that otherwise lay outside of the concerns of the superpowers and their Cold War allies’.\(^45\) Gokhale was trying to start a debate in the SI about whether decolonisation or the Cold War mattered more to prospects of international socialism. He was making abundantly clear that the Asian socialist agenda involved challenging colonialism above all else, which was the position European socialists would have to try and reconcile with. Gokhale then added that while the Bandung Conference had ‘some encouraging aspects...we would disagree with most of its features’. He did not elaborate what these aspects and features were, other than that Bandung created ‘a more settled situation’ and bolstered Asian ‘efforts to achieve security’.\(^46\) This was surely intended to emphasise that self-determination for African and Asian peoples was sacrosanct. Crucially, the congress went on to produce a ‘Declaration on Colonialism’, which must have been encouraged by the eloquence and forthright pronouncements of both speakers.\(^47\) This was modelled on a declaration produced by the ASC Kalaw bureau meeting that highlighted the importance of supporting freedom fighters around the world, and comprised a step forward for the SI on matters of colonialism, encouraged by Asian socialists.\(^48\)


\(^{46}\) “Comrade Gokhale (Asia),” 24.


\(^{48}\) Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 82.
Asian socialists also made use of this liaison to craft other connections. In April 1955, Nath Pai, President of the IUSY, launched a satyagraha call to Indian students to stop all railway traffic between India and Goa, which was still occupied by the Portuguese.49 He internationalised this anti-imperial move in coming months, declaring on May 27 that he wanted to ‘lead a batch of European satyagrahis into Goa’ and ‘make the struggle for the liberation of the Portuguese colony a symbol of international solidarity’. He plumbed his contacts in Europe as a means of finding volunteers.50 By June 22, he had solicited the help of Fenner Brockway through the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) – a British anti-colonial organisation with Kenyan activist Joseph Murumbi as Joint Secretary – which succeeded COPAI.51 Pai planned to visit Europe later that year to garner further support himself, and it seems that he was in contact with the ASC delegation to the London SI congress that July to facilitate his travel. Wijono and Gokhale called on the MCF during their stay in the United Kingdom, who revealed that they were organising a ‘World Conference for Colonial Liberation’ to be held in Margate, England, on November 5. The ASC agreed to co-sponsor the conference since it could organise a Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day event to coincide with it.52 This would be preceded by an ‘International Third Way’ Conference in London in September at which a group of European and American leftists with a superficially similar understanding of world politics to Asian socialists hoped to achieve new recruits.53 Pai headed to Britain at the time of the Third Way event and stayed until the Margate conference in November, timing his appeals for European satyagrahis to join his anti-colonial struggle in Goa to coincide with these events.54 He had probably consulted with Wijono and Gokhale before deciding to do this, who may have suggested a timeline for his visit to the country.

This indicates that Asian socialists were coordinating their interactions with European socialists to advance particular, anti-imperial causes, as well as to try and build a more anti-

52 “Secretariat Report to the 5th Meeting of the Bureau,” 33-35.
imperial world socialist movement. Pai drew on his international connections to solicit support for the Goan freedom struggle, speaking again to the dexterity of Asian socialists in interweaving the global and the local in their socialist activisms. As before, Asian socialists also took advantage of these intersections with European contacts to string out itineraries around other regions of interest. Wijono returned home via Yugoslavia to ‘further [consolidate] cooperation with the Socialist Alliance of Working [People] of Yugoslavia’ (SAWPY) whilst Gokhale travelled back through Syria and Jordan where he observed the activities of socialist parties in those regions. Wijono reported that ‘Comrade Gokhale has done very good work, which is confirmed by reports from Lebanon, in removing misunderstandings regarding the Asian Socialist conference with the result that…a strong foundation for Socialism in this important area has been laid which will be able to find a solution to bring peace and prosperity to the people of this area’. Various socialist formations in the Middle East had shunned the ASC for several years due to the presence of Israel in its ranks. Wijono and Gokhale hoped to organise a second ASC congress in the near future at which they could explore their own ideas about how a socialist internationalism should take shape with a wide range of contacts and colleagues. They continued to cultivate friendships with socialists in Yugoslavia and West Asia among other regions who might send representatives to such a congress.

The World Conference for Colonial Liberation in Margate that British socialists had discussed with Asian socialists took place from November 5 to November 7 1955. Hla Aung addressed a letter to secretary of the MCF Douglas Rogers in advance of the event, asking whether the SI – which was centred in London like the MCF – might want to co-sponsor the conference, and what its attitude was to the event. This suggests that Hla Aung hoped for further productive discussions with the SI, following the July meeting. Hla Aung went on to remind Rogers that ‘we are trying to get [worldwide] support for Freedom movements’ and that ‘we could achieve greater success if we all could co-operate for this noble cause of Freedom, Peace,

55 The ‘Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia’ was a mass organisation set up by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, which had been called the ‘People’s Front’ until 1953. It mobilised ‘voluntary’ labour projects – presumably including some of those which Asian socialists such as Wijono observed. Dennison Rusinow, The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 77.
56 “Secretariat Report to the 5th Meeting of the Bureau,” 47.
Social Justice, and Equality’. Stephen Howe’s discussion of the MCF considers its anti-colonialism to have been rooted in British ‘radical-liberal’ ethical objections to Empire, but this note from Hla Aung suggests that some degree of the MCF’s anti-colonialism needed coaxing out by colleagues from formerly colonised countries. The conference was attended by 40 delegates from over 30 organisations across Africa, Asia, and Europe. The ASC co-sponsored the event, though it could only send two delegates – Burmese ACB members U Thwin and U Than Win – due to the perilous circumstances it found itself in. Wijono directed a message to the event stating that the ASC and the SI had agreed to draw up a time-bound programme for the freedom of the colonies. This shows that he and Hla Aung wanted to persuade European socialist contacts to unequivocally oppose colonialism. The conference was also an opportunity to network with delegates from across three continents, and with metropolitan student groups, who were well represented. Pai, who attended the event, succeeded in persuading the conference to adopt a strongly-worded resolution condemning the ‘reign of terror and repression’ in Goa – another instance of Asian socialists influencing European ones on matters of imperialism.

Whilst all of these events had been going on, there was bad news at home; on September 29 the PSI suffered a crushing defeat in the first Indonesian legislative election, gaining just 2% of the vote. The Manchester Guardian opined that ‘the elections have been a disaster for the Indonesian Socialists and their leader, Mr Sjahrir’; the ‘able and disciplined young men in their party’, some of whom were part of Asian socialist networks, ‘have failed entirely to gain popular backing’. Meanwhile, from June, the PSP suffered a serious split as Lohia exited the institution to form a separate party. The governing INC had adopted the ‘Avadi Resolution’ not long before which named ‘the establishment of a socialistic pattern of society’ as its aim, and this challenged the PSP to distinguish their platform from that of the INC. The likes of JP and Lohia disagreed strongly about how to do this, with JP emphasising the need for the PSP

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57 U Hla Aung to Douglas Rogers, August 8 1955, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference - Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.
64 “‘Imaginary Achievements To Hide Misery At Home,” 7.
to push Nehru towards his stated goal, and Lohia taking a more cynical stance. These failures meant that Burma and Israel continued to be the only nations within Asia where socialists had succeeded – and these nations were not then committing themselves to the notion of a ‘Third Force’, which Nu had explicitly ruled out in conversation with Israeli Premier Moshe Sharett in June because such a bloc would not be ‘economically or militarily fit’ to ‘compete with the other forces’. The next section considers how Asian socialists as a whole prepared for their second congress, to take place in Bombay, India, in November 1956, at which they hoped to regenerate a socialist internationalism suited to their aims and agendas.

The Second Asian Socialist Conference: Bombay, November 1956

Historians have not yet delved substantially into the second ASC congress. Sources on the event are scattered far and wide, and the ASC declined rapidly afterwards, meaning that the conference appears somewhat insignificant as an object of study. Talbot Imlay suggests that delegates were caught up in the growing bifurcation of international socialism between staunch nationalists and those who favoured ‘a progressive approach to independence’ – read African and Asian socialists supportive of independence movements versus European socialists supportive of human rights. This has little to do with what took place in Bombay. Lewis covers the conference fleetingly, seeing it as insignificant in the context of the collapse of the ASC’s ‘democratic socialist vision’. Her focus is on the ASC as an organisation, which she suggests ‘still saw itself as the guardian of international peace’ particularly when pressuring the UN to ‘live up to its ideals’. Gerard McCann views the conference as a crossroads between various Afro-Asian internationalisms which had become more ‘energetically multidirectional’ in conditions of ‘Cold War peril, late colonial restriction and heightened emancipatory potential’. He reveals how discordant ‘geopolitical environments’ associated with decolonisation and the Cold War encouraged African activists to navigate

69 McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 113-114.
‘overlapping, and sometimes conflicted, networks of anti-colonial solidarity’ in Bombay. This emphasis on how geopolitics shaped the terms on which delegates engaged at the congress is welcome.

The following analysis holds that the second ASC congress was more contentious and contested than the first. It brought in a wider range of participants, each with agendas of their own. It did not create opportunities for extensive discussion of what a transnational socialist politics was and how it might advance, let alone for detailed internationalist strategising. This was partly because Asian socialists themselves were not bound by as much as in 1953. At the Rangoon Conference, Asian decolonisation had been the primary driver of connection between delegates, but this was no longer the case at Bombay. Delegates disagreed about whether a socialist internationalist politics should prioritise channelling the energies of decolonising peoples, or distinguishing itself from communism. By and large, South and Southeast Asian socialist leaders adopted the latter position, where the ASC’s mobile intermediaries adopted the former. This distinction should not be overdrawn, but it had been growing since the early 1950s and became obvious at the second ASC congress. It was overlain by a similar contradiction in wider international socialist networks between anti-communists and anti-imperialists. European as well as Israeli socialists and South and Southeast Asian socialist leaders tended towards anti-communism where African socialists, and less prominent, ‘subaltern’ Asian socialists, tended towards anti-imperialism. The section argues that it was these divisions, accentuated by the Suez Crisis which took place as the congress unfolded, as much as any domestic failings among Asian socialist parties which created discord and despair at the conference. The section does not just analyse the conference itself but also preparations and trips ahead of it, as well as on the hoof connections which particular attendees to the congress made in small-scale events outside of the conference hall, that shine a light on their political lives and outlooks in years following.

The ASC’s secretaries had long since endeavoured to organise a second conference, especially with the cessation of regular bureau meetings following the Tokyo gathering in November 1954. By April 1955, they had discerned that their original preference, Indonesia, was not an

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70 McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 115.
option due to the attitude of the government towards Israel.\textsuperscript{71} This meant that the conference would take place in India as the ASC had already held one in Burma, and planning began some six months after November 1955, when the event had originally been slated for, and six months ahead of the actual conference in November 1956.\textsuperscript{72} At that moment – spring 1956 – geopolitical tensions in the Middle East had reached fever pitch, with Egyptian Premier Nasser considering war to be inevitable between his own nation and Israel, backed up by the United States and United Kingdom, and soliciting Soviet arms support in preparation. In July 1956 Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company after United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles withdrew funding for the Aswan Dam due to Nasser’s dalliance with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{73} Asian socialists were alarmed by this development, which made world peace less likely, and threatened to worsen rifts within their network between Arab and Israeli socialists. Ba Swe, who was set to become Prime Minister of Burma in June following Nu’s resignation, noted in his ‘May Day Message’ of 1956 that West Asia was beset by ‘acute tensions and conflicts’ to which ‘all the resources of world statesmanship’ had to be marshalled.\textsuperscript{74}

Indian socialists began planning the conference in earnest. A seven-person foreign affairs committee had been appointed by the PSP in March 1956 to organise the congress, including Mehta, Pai, Prem Bhasin, and Sucheta Kripalani.\textsuperscript{75} Lohia’s absence following his departure from the PSP meant that Indian socialists of a more ‘free world’ orientation took charge of the event, where Lohia may have demanded a staunchly anti-imperialist stance on events in the Middle East. In August 1955, Lohia called the attention of his new socialist party to ‘the significance of President Nasser’s action in nationalising the Suez Canal Company’ which ‘extended from beyond the frontiers of Egypt, and...must be actively supported by all Asian democrats’. He even proposed that an international brigade along the lines of that which supported the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War be convened to ‘assist Egypt in its struggle against the Western powers’.\textsuperscript{76} As it was, JP, Mehta, Pai, and Bhasin among other less radical Indians took a lead role at the event, which must have curried favour with

\textsuperscript{71} Wijono to Julius Braunthal, April 18 1955, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference - Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.


\textsuperscript{73} Lüthi, Cold Wars, 204-205.

\textsuperscript{74} U Ba Swe, “May Day Message,” Socialist Asia 5, no. 1 (1956): 3.

\textsuperscript{75} “Socialists in Asia: P.-S.P. Invitation,” Times of India, Mar 13, 1956, 7.

\textsuperscript{76} “Asian Brigade to Aid Egypt: Move By Socialists,” Times of India, Aug 9, 1956, 9.
European and Israeli attendees. Even so, this did not stop sharp disagreements breaking out between Israeli delegations and other delegations when the conference started.

The ASC secretaries sought to stir interest far and wide in the event in the months running up to it. Hla Aung travelled to newly-independent Tunisia and Morocco in mid-1956 to speak with local freedom fighters after meeting Algerian activist Mhamed Yazid in Rangoon, who had also visited politicians in India and Indonesia. The achievement of independence in Tunisia and Morocco in March 1956 and the ongoing Algerian freedom struggle stirred Burmese socialists, and perhaps excited them that a wave of decolonisation around Africa might be nigh. Ten months earlier, Kyaw Nyein had convened a mass meeting at City Hall in Rangoon to protest against French imperialism in Africa, which ‘was observed as Algerian week to co-operate with the North African Liberation Committee in Cairo’. This committee had been formed by the African Bureau in India with a view to organising an All-African Conference in Cairo, which Asian socialists thought might grow into a similar organisation to their own within Africa. Asian socialists had ventured to foster closer solidarities between African nationalists and socialists for years, and even if the ASC declined in this period, they continued to try and promote some of their projects in league with other contacts and institutions. Hla Aung’s journey was the latest episode in a liaison between Burmese and North African activists which would also serve to rouse interest in the upcoming ASC congress.

Wijono oversaw communications with Asian and European socialists ahead of the Bombay Conference. Wijono, Hla Aung, and fellow ASC secretary Chisato Tatebayashi of Japan, had sent out copious invitations by September, and expected more than 150 delegates from 23 countries to participate. Mehta outlined at a press conference in India that month that the organisers aimed to improve relations between Asian socialist parties, to synchronise their politics as far as possible, to form closer bonds with socialists elsewhere in the world, to ‘champion the cause of the colonial and oppressed peoples and to work for the maintenance of world peace’. These aims were broadly similar to those which Asian socialists had been pursuing for some years. The conference would be preceded by a meeting of the ‘economic

78 Ibid., 3.
79 Ibid., 10.
80 Wijono to Sun Pao Kang, July 3 1956, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference - Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH, No. 197. ASC (B)/56.
81 “Asian Socialists To Meet In Bombay On Nov. 1,” Times of India, Sep 22, 1956, 8.
The organisers spent the next month contacting fraternal organisations such as the SI and the IUSY with schedules and itineraries. Some delegations such as the German delegation planned to attend the conference as the mainstay of a longer tour around South Asia and received suggestions from the Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian organisers about where to visit before and after the event.

By the time the congress convened at the beginning of November 1956, there had been further developments in West Asia, as well as a major conflagration in the Cold War in Europe. Britain and France invaded Egypt on October 29 in an attempt to overthrow Nasser and regain control of the Suez Canal. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union moved to crush a serious revolt against its rule in Hungary in early November with devastating force. Moshe Sharett, former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, thus described his impressions upon arriving at the ASC congress in Bombay:

It was time to face the Asian Socialist Conference. Although that dearest of people, Ashoka Mehta, greeted me warmly on my arrival, I felt a great deal of tension all around...it was Mehta himself who told me, with [a] gloomy face, of the latest news from Hungary. After the Red Army had ostensibly withdrawn and [Imre] Nagy had formed the new government, the Russians were now back in force to suppress the freedom movement. I did not quite understand at first why he had told me this with such an angry expression on his face, but later I realised from explicit and implicit remarks that the common assumption was that the Franco-British invasion of Egypt by their air forces, who were bombing without a break, had provided the Soviet Union with the cover it had needed to intervene with force in Hungary’s internal affairs. It was clear that people here perceived us as guilty, for our actions had been the opening move in the current conflict, the prime cause.

To Asian socialists, who had been optimistic that geopolitical tensions were fading and prospects for world peace growing in 1953-1954, this was an emotional drain at the outset of an exciting international conference. It emphasised again how fragile the non-state internationalist networks of the 1950s were; turbulent global political shifts could create rifts where there had previously been friendships, or vice versa. Asian socialists had planned for over 150 foreign delegates to attend the Bombay Conference and, in the words of the Indian

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82 “Asian Socialists To Meet In Bombay,” 8.
socialists, to ‘deliberate over common economic, international and social policies of Asia and the world’, and despite visa and travel difficulties for some visitors, over 100 ended up coming from at least 21 Asian, African, European, and Latin American countries.\(^{86}\) These were: India, Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia, Hongkong, Nepal, Pakistan, Ceylon, Cambodia, Japan, Malaya, Vietnam, Israel, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy, the United Kingdom, Algeria, Chile, and Canada.\(^{87}\) The good-will with which Mehta and Prem Bhasin greeted Sharett, among many others, at the airport, testified to the optimism that had accompanied preparations for the conference. Delegates clearly hoped to make progress with exploring shared ambitions for regional and global change, though this was dimmed by contemporary geopolitical developments.

Conference organisers at Bombay prepared a dizzying itinerary. The economic experts and ACB meetings from November 1 to November 3 and a gathering of the ASC bureau on November 3 and November 4 would feed ideas on development, anti-imperialism, and socialist political strategy into the proceedings of economic, organisational, and political committees, which were to gather between November 5 and November 9.\(^{88}\) These committees would propose resolutions which were then discussed at plenary sessions. On a more intimate level, seminars would take place on several evenings where major African and Asian socialist leaders spoke on topics such as ‘Socialism Today’ and ‘The Struggle for Africa’ in front of smaller groups of delegates. There would be private trips and public rallies to foster a sense of solidarity among attendees, and between attendees and local audiences.\(^{89}\) In addition, individual organisers prepared their own gatherings with delegates of particular interest to them on other evenings, which were not officially part of the event but which had been arranged in advance, that enabled them to speak more informally than at the conference itself. These gatherings created closer connections between Indian socialists and fellow attendees, and enabled them to further particular agendas; the congress thus left a

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local footprint even if it did not produce concerted internationalist collaborations by all involved.

Delegates began arriving in Bombay on October 31 and November 1. Ba Swe, once again the ASC chairman, stopped in Calcutta to opine that Israel’s invasion of Egypt was the ‘most serious threat to peace since the end of World War II’. Sharett, David Hacohen, and Reuven Barkatt of Israel arrived via Burma and Ceylon, with plans to visit Malaya and Thailand afterwards. The growing diplomatic significance of Israel across the nascent ‘Third World’ granted this delegation access to major actors in the region such as Nehru, who Sharett had had an extended conversation with shortly before the conference. European socialists made similar journeys around Asia, funded by their home parties or by the SI. The German delegation, which included Erich Ollenhauer, and represented the SI at the conference, arrived from Pakistan, and met Sutan Sjahrir in Bombay ahead of the event, before lunching with JP, and going on to visit Colombo, Rangoon, Bangkok, and New Delhi in its aftermath. Figure 11 shows Austrian Adolf Schärf and Ollenhauer visiting trade union buildings in Karachi, Pakistan. Through means such as this they built up closer relationships with leading South Asian socialists around the dates of the conference proper. Socialists from West Pakistan – which had been formed as a merger of four areas of western Pakistan in November 1954 – were able to participate more fully in this congress than in previous ASC events due to its proximity to them. Two of them appear at the table alongside Austrian and German socialists in Figure 11.

91 Sharett, My Struggle For Peace: Volume 3, 1654.
92 Ibid., 1711-1725.
Afro-Asian networks brought others to Bombay. The likes of Joseph Murumbi, Munukayumbwa Sipalo, and Stephen Mhando, from Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, and Tanganyika respectively, spun intricate webs between different anti-colonial hubs and nationalisms in preceding years which brought them to the city.\(^{94}\) The choice of Bombay for the conference was linked to its status as a key political base of the PSP as well as its prominence on international air routes, which increased the likelihood that large numbers would attend, especially from great distances away.\(^{95}\) Bombay also constituted a significant anti-colonial hub in its own right, situated on the Indian Ocean seaboard and bringing far-flung radicals into intercourse from the colonial era onwards.\(^{96}\) Once in Bombay, most of the delegates were accommodated in the Ritz, Majestic, and Taj hotels.\(^{97}\) It is likely that the Burmese and Indian socialist parties covered accommodation expenses for those who could not pay themselves, which suggests that major activists were enthusiastic about this

\(^{94}\) McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 113-114.


conference, given they did not then disburse such sums to the ASC for its generic work between conferences in the mid-1950s. Kishen Chand Chellaram College, an institution of higher education established two years earlier in south Bombay, served as the base of the conference. The Times of India reported how the conference office at the college ‘hummed with activity’ on November 1 with the arrival of over 70 delegates. Indonesian socialist Lintong Mulia Sitorus recalled shortly afterwards that the conference attracted greater publicity than any previous Asian socialist gathering.

Before the opening session of the conference on November 4, the ACB and economic experts groups met. The ACB probably first hosted informal discussions between visitors from Africa and Asia about their freedom struggles and what the body’s strategies and objectives should be in the near future. The following morning, its coordination committee discussed reports and programmes for the freedom of the colonies, and the African Liberation Committee, represented by Sipalo – the same committee that was mentioned above, which Sipalo as a Zambian studying economics in India had helped create – presented a memorandum later in the day.

Hla Aung, who was by now well-versed in the trials and tribulations of African freedom movements, participated in the discussions and remembered later how while ‘we offered travelling grants to some representatives...some important delegates could not attend the conference as they could not obtain Passport or Exit-permits’. Those who did attend shared ideas about how to support freedom struggles, foster ‘a sense of Asian and African awareness and solidarity’ around these, gain the support of socialists in the metropole, and make the ACB an effective international campaigning body, at the ACB meeting and in discussions at the conference proper in coming days. This resulted in a series of resolutions on each topic. The fact that others could not attend due to passport restrictions – probably one of a number of barriers, including insufficient funds – indicated

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that long-distance political journeys continued to be fraught with risk, certainly where travel across colonised regions was concerned.

Mehta was head of the Indian delegation to the conference and a lead voice in the ‘economic experts’ meeting.\textsuperscript{103} In his inaugural speech to the meeting on November 1, he discussed how the Bandung Conference had raised the ‘need for integrating the economies of Asia and Africa’ thanks to the work of the ASC, and that it was the task of those before him ‘to give this idea a concrete shape’. He argued that such integration might be advanced by increasing economic cooperation between socialist countries wherever they were found. This could include communist-bloc countries, not just non-aligned socialists; the Soviet Union was thought to be open to cooperating with countries outside its own bloc following the death of Stalin, and liberalisation of Khrushchev.\textsuperscript{104} This suggests that there are limits on how far we can designate liberal socialist leaders such as Mehta ‘anti-communists’, given that Mehta was proposing cooperation with the communist bloc here. However, Asian socialists often made a distinction between cooperating with a country on an economic plane and endorsing its system of government. Kyaw Nyein spoke next, stating that at the time of the Rangoon Conference, Asian socialists had been overwhelmingly concerned with political independence as compared with economic development, and that the countries of Burma and Israel had moved to the centre of their ideas about economic planning in the intervening period.\textsuperscript{105} This line of thinking fed directly into deliberations of the economic committee, where delegates contemplated developing closer commercial and industrial relationships between socialist countries and sharing technical and managerial experiences.

On November 3, the ASC bureau gathered. After a discussion in the city in the morning they travelled to Vihar Lake 20 miles to the north in the afternoon.\textsuperscript{106} Another bureau meeting followed on the morning of November 4.\textsuperscript{107} Julius Braunthal, an Austrian-born socialist who attended the congress and bureau meeting and had been Secretary General of the SI between 1951 and 1956, mentioned afterwards that the first detailed discussions of international politics took place at these meetings. The bureau strongly condemned the Anglo-French

\textsuperscript{103} Raju, “Report on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Asian Socialist Conference,” 3.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{106} Raju, “Report on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Asian Socialist Conference,” 13.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 1.
invasion of Egypt but equivocated over Israel’s involvement, with the Israeli delegation claiming that their country had acted in self-defence without knowing of Anglo-French intentions. Pakistan scorned this reasoning, and discussions would have been considerably more bitter had any Arab nations been able to attend the conference.\textsuperscript{108} The Pakistani delegation was determined to raise the question of whether a ‘non-Jew’ could join Mapai and brought it up at Vihar Lake and at the bureau meeting the following day.\textsuperscript{109} This hints that a social trip at the beginning of the conference became bogged down in disagreements not only over how to characterise Israeli action in Egypt, but over the character of Israeli politics itself, or at least that of its governing party. Meanwhile, bureau members unanimously condemned Soviet action in Hungary.\textsuperscript{110} A Yugoslavian delegate also spoke at Vihar Lake about a thawing of relations with the Soviet Union following the death of Stalin.\textsuperscript{111}

The bureau prepared a resolution on West Asia on November 4, ahead of the opening session. Mehta declared that the bureau was ‘heartened by the assurance given to us by our friends from Israel that their objective was peace’ and called for peace negotiations brokered by the UN, the ‘sole hope of mankind’, since ‘we have a feeling that humanity is likely to be crucified again and we cannot be silent spectators’.\textsuperscript{112} Asian socialists had become more supportive of the UN since Rangoon as a means to international peace in a world riven by imperialism and the Cold War. The conversation then degenerated into an argument about how to weigh up these threats to world peace. The Pakistani delegation asked the bureau to ‘strongly condemn’ rather than ‘strongly disapprove’ of ‘the encroachment and occupation by Israeli troops’, and Sharett rejected the draft resolution for a different reason, opining that ‘Egypt has throughout maintained a state of war with Israel which has justified a series of actions from Israel’. Sharett proposed to abstain from voting on the resolution or even to vote against it if the phrase ‘bloodthirsty action’, coined by Pakistan, were included.\textsuperscript{113} The resolution was passed with no changes and two abstentions, probably from these two countries. The next


\textsuperscript{109} Raju, “Report on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Asian Socialist Conference,” 15.


\textsuperscript{112} “Study Papers,” 16.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 17-18.
resolution, on events in Hungary, was quickly challenged by Vladimir Bakarić of Yugoslavia, who suggested it was ‘a little stronger’ than the one on West Asia, and that the Israeli delegation were hypocrites for opposing one egregious intervention in a different country’s affairs while defending another. The meeting was ‘charged with emotion’ by its end due to these disagreements about crises unfolding in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{114} The crises had teased out divergences around whether imperialist interventions in Egypt or communist interventions in Hungary were more contemptible.

The opening session of the conference took place that evening. Chairman of the event’s Reception Committee Ganga Sharan Sinha, an Indian socialist who was a close friend of JP and had lived with the latter in Patna, Bihar, for some time, gave the first address.\textsuperscript{115} Sinha invited listeners to focus on how to bring into communion socialist movements across Asia and Africa that were faced with a revitalised imperialism whose ‘disdain of all the machinery for peace and international understanding’ was apparent in events in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{116} Figure 12 shows Hla Aung, Sinha, Ba Swe, and Wijono sitting in front of a tapestry of Africa and Asia that evening. Asian socialists appear to have staged the evening so as to present themselves as authentic spokespersons for the sovereign struggles of African and Asian peoples, given the tapestry behind them. After Sinha’s speech, conference chairman Ba Swe spoke. He carried forward what Julius Braunthal termed the ‘solemn’ tone of the bureau meeting.\textsuperscript{117} He worried that the Cold War was no longer abating after events abroad in recent days. He emphasised how ‘constructive’ socialist forces such as Burma and Israel and socialist movements elsewhere had to come together to build a ‘world socialist society’ and warned of a third world war should the centrifugal forces of global politics not be countered by the centripetal action of parties and persons represented at the meeting.\textsuperscript{118}

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\textsuperscript{114} “Study Papers,” 22-23.
\textsuperscript{115} Allan and Wendy Scarfe, \textit{J.P. His Biography} (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998), 60.
\textsuperscript{116} “Speeches, Reports, and Study-Papers Submitted by the Asian Socialist Delegates regarding the Socialist Youth Movements and others allied topics,” Prem Bhasin Papers (Socialist Party), fol. 24, NMML, 69.
\textsuperscript{118} “Study-Papers Submitted by the Asian Socialist Delegates,” 70-76.
\end{flushleft}
The difference in emphasis between Sinha and Ba Swe was subtle, but significant. The former considered anti-imperialist action as the most important task of world socialists where the latter considered political cooperation between established democracies as the most important task. For a long period, Asian socialists had viewed anti-imperialism and socialism as moving in lockstep. Now, Asian socialists were growing more modest about what they could achieve, and there was a slight cleavage between those who prioritised anti-imperialist aims, and those who prioritised ideas of socialist cooperation – with Sinha falling in the former category, and Ba Swe falling in the latter category. Erich Ollenhauer, pictured in Figure 13, spoke after Ba Swe. Asian socialists allowed European socialists to participate more extensively in this conference than Rangoon. Again, attention quickly turned to events in West Asia during proceedings, which foreshadowed the recriminatory spirit of committee discussions in coming days.\textsuperscript{119} On the morning of November 5, a plenary session that was open to the public took place in which delegates were allocated to three committees and Wijono presented his report as General Secretary to the conference.\textsuperscript{120} Wijono stated that ‘democratic socialism is the only alternative for Asia and Africa and wherever there are similar

\textsuperscript{119} “Present Trend Must Be Checked,” 1.
\textsuperscript{120} Raju, “Report on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Asian Socialist Conference,” 24.
conditions as existing in Asia and Africa’; he asked that delegates contemplate the prospects of ‘world socialism in general’.\textsuperscript{121} He and Ganga Sharan Sinha shared the view that Afro-Asia comprised the locus of a radical internationalist politics where prominent socialist politicians at the congress were more circumspect.

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
  \caption{Scholz, Arno. Ollenhauer Speaks, On His Right Braunthal, ?, and Nat Pai. 2021.}
\end{figure}

In the ensuing two days, delegates undertook committee discussions. In the political committee, Pakistan and Israel were once again at loggerheads, with Sagher of Pakistan asking ‘whether non-Jews can join the Mapai party’, and Sharett, pictured in Figure 14, firing back that they should consider the socialist status of all parties present rather than singling out Mapai.\textsuperscript{122} The Pakistan Socialist Party continued to develop the line that Mapai had an ‘un-socialistic character’ in years to come – it viewed Mapai’s politics as ethnically-rooted which smacked of imperialism rather than mutuality or plurality.\textsuperscript{123} The next morning, Rohit Dave of the PSP spoke. He adopted a strongly Afro-Asian internationalist stance. Referring to Bandung, he noted that it was ‘heartening that the governments and peoples of Asia and Africa are speaking with one voice at the present moment’ and identified a ‘new colonialism’ manifest in Goa in India over which the Portuguese retained sovereignty, West Irian in

\textsuperscript{121} Raju, “Report on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Asian Socialist Conference,” 24.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 29-30.
Indonesia over which the Dutch retained sovereignty, and in the northern reaches of Burma where there were incursions by Chinese Kuomintang troops, as a menace those present should take note of.\textsuperscript{124} In committee meetings as in open sessions, less prominent Asian and African attendees radiated a more anti-imperialist emphasis than the Asian socialist party leaders.

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
  \caption{Scholz, Arno. Sharett Speaks, Right From Him Kripalani, Mehta and Varayan. 2021.}
  \label{fig:1}
\end{figure}

This did not mean that there were not disagreements – specifically, about the nature of anti-imperialism – among rank and file Asian and African speakers. A Malayan speaker noted frustratedly that ‘many Indian friends’ were giving ‘beautiful speeches on international problems’ but had less to say about ‘immediate problems like Kashmir’, a state in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, whose peoples the UN had decreed should have a say in whether they were governed by India or Pakistan.\textsuperscript{125} Strikingly, this was almost exactly the same point as had been raised at Rangoon nearly four years earlier, where a Malayan speaker had queried Indian grandiloquence in light of ongoing anti-imperial struggles in Asia, and the Pakistanis had asked that Kashmir be addressed. This fissure over whether anti-imperialism should primarily consist in an international project or a granular struggle had never been

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 33.
closed, even if the ASC’s mobile intermediaries had formulated various schemes in relation to Kashmir and Malaya in the interim. An Indonesian speaker then admitted that world events had overtaken the ASC and that those present had little power to do anything other than formulate shared positions on global peace. Sharett asserted later in the same discussion that ‘the international situation is changing so much and there are so many grave dangers that we have to take a definite attitude’. He proposed that they disregard ‘local problems’ and ‘let the best minds get together in a committee to give and express a socialist lead to the world’. A sub-committee composed of Israel, Burma, India, Indonesia, Japan, Ceylon, and the SI then formed for this purpose. On the congress’ political committee, any attempt at achieving a unified understanding of anti-imperialism was being drowned out by the muscular and performative progressivism of major Asian socialist leaders.

The ‘grave dangers’ to which Sharett referred was a euphemism for developments in Egypt. The sub-committee discussions on November 6 precipitated an ‘emergency plenary session’ that night at which discussants tried to produce a draft resolution articulating the position of the ASC. Neither Pakistan nor Yugoslavia were on the sub-committee, which produced an anodyne resolution calling for ‘the reassertion of civilised behaviour and a return to the ways of peace’. By November 8, when the political committee gathered once more, the mood among delegates had become acrimonious. During discussions on a different topic, Yugoslavia intervened to accuse the conference of being too soft on Israel given its aggression in the Middle East. It asked, with Pakistan’s support, for an urgent meeting on the matter and threatened to withdraw from the conference; the next day, chairman of the committee Mehta lost control of the discussion, with Pakistan purportedly describing Israel’s action in the region as an ‘unprovoked attack’, and Israel countering that there had been ‘a long series of murderous attacks’ on its very existence which it suggested Pakistan made no effort to understand. These clashes repeatedly derailed political discussions at the congress. They spoke to how fragile the coalitions which Asian socialists had built through the ASC were,

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127 Ibid., 35.
128 On November 6 French and British troops stormed a number of ports around Egypt and agreed to a UN ceasefire coming into effect on November 7.
130 Ibid., 48.
which could be fractured at any moment by international events that exacerbated political
differences within these loose coalitions.

The deliberations of the economic committee were calmer than this. The ‘economic experts’
group which fed ideas to this committee on what to discuss had been founded with the
intention of addressing underdevelopment in Asia several years earlier. The economic
committee, chaired by Thakin San Myint of Burma, considered advice and recommendations
made by the economic experts group on SUNFED, problems of land reform, trade relations
between member parties and communist countries, the experiences of governing parties in
implementing a socialist programme, and how to establish closer economic relations between
socialist countries. They proposed studies of the liberalisation and promotion of
multilateral trade, GATT and the European customs union, the mobilisation of domestic
capital for social welfare and economic development, the exchange of technical personnel
and information, and ideas of cooperative agricultural development. The ASC’s economic
contingents were focussed on alleviating poverty and deprivation in the predominantly Asian
countries they represented. They wanted to do this in part through domestic political-
economic reform, with assistance from the UN via SUNFED. They wanted to encourage Burma
and Israel to share their technical and managerial expertise, perhaps anxious that should
Asian countries not integrate their economies more closely for developmental purposes, Cold
War powers, then lending aid to South and Southeast Asian nations, might only expand their
interests and influence in Asian politics.

British writer Alex Josey, who lived in Malaya for much of the 1950s and took an interest in
Asian politics, offers insights into exactly how discussions within the economic committee
unfolded. These discussions were more focussed on practical measures that Asian socialists
should take to pursue development, than on how the social and economic orders of the future
might look as per Rangoon, suggesting that the amorphousness of Asian socialist visions was
giving way to an emphasis on state-building for some activists. This was a measure of how far
the augmentation of the Cold War had impressed upon Asian socialists the urgency of
articulating an agenda for development distinct from capitalism and communism, while Asian
decolonisation, previously a phenomenon which appeared full of possibilities, was now itself

132 “Study Papers,” 27.
being shaped by particular state-building projects. Delegates on the committee discussed how tax systems should be erected that reduced inequality of incomes while not imperilling the ‘incentive to work and invest’. They determined that nationalisation schemes should only be pursued where increased production was ensured. They suggested that, with the help of the SI, technicians and skilled workers could be recruited from advanced industrial countries to support development schemes in underdeveloped countries. A recurrent question was where the capital might come from for coordination of development programmes, a matter raised but not answered by the Bandung Conference, on which the committee revived a proposal made at the Tokyo bureau meeting for an ‘Asian Payments Union’ distributing capital far and wide in the continent.133

The committee on ‘organisation’ focussed on how to coordinate the politics of different parties and states. Delegations representing parties in power such as the Israeli delegation raised ideas of permanent ASC schemes to exchange socialist youth, technical and managerial expertise, and economic aid for industrial development, which were difficult to implement due to the pitiful state of the ASC’s finances.134 This pointed towards a more disaggregated future for Asian socialist internationalisms in which countries like Israel directly organised such exchanges. On November 8 and November 10, two plenary sessions gathered to consider ideas put forward by the various committees. Resolutions were passed on freedom movements, nuclear weapons, the admission of new members such as South Vietnam to the UN, the right to self-determination as enshrined in the UN Charter, and the organisation of labour, peasants, women, and youth movements, and political parties, predominantly in relation to Asia.135 Alex Josey considered certain resolutions on, for example, dismantling all systems of military alliances to be ‘lofty idealism’.136 Only a small number of women attended the second ASC congress, who may yet have contributed significantly to the promulgation of the resolution on the position of women in socialist movements. While the resolution was largely progressive and explicitly identified women as active participants in the construction

133 Josey, Socialism in Asia, 32-33.
136 Josey, Socialism in Asia, 35.
of socialism, it also slipped into viewing them in a domestic propensity, and not as the intellectual equals of men. Still, women were not invisible at the congress, as at Bandung.\footnote{Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 74.}

Anti-imperialism seemed to have become substantially divorced from socialism over the course of the conference. Pulin De of East Pakistan, referring to a resolution on the release of freedom fighters in Algeria on November 10, declared that the fight for freedom in the colonies was a ‘fight of dark-skinned peoples against whites’ and that ‘we should join this struggle as dark-skinned people’.\footnote{Raju, “Report on the 2nd Asian Socialist Conference,” 66.} He spoke directly to African and Asian attendees here. Meanwhile, that afternoon, during the same plenary session, SWRD Bandaranaike, who had likely been part of the political committee as the Prime Minister of Ceylon, declared how he believed in socialist and democratic values alongside ‘religious-cultural values’ and ‘the need for religious revivalism’.\footnote{Ibid., 66.} This emphasised how the political committee had been unable to reach any kind of consensus on what coordinated socialist action might involve – where, several years earlier, ASC members tended to view socialism as an outgrowth of the achievement of political independence in African and Asian colonies which realised broad anti-imperial goals of social justice, economic equality, democracy, and a more egalitarian international order. There were almost no resolutions on the shared international socialist activities that several key activists had been organising for some years in league with freedom fighters, Israeli and Burmese activists, and the IUSY, the SI, and other private international organisations. The conference as a whole brought forward no coherent internationalist agenda.

It was at more intimate levels that the conference made an impact. Several seminars took place in the evenings at the event. These tended to be opportunities for key African and Asian socialists to expound on what socialist internationalism meant to them and generate conversation among interested observers. Sjahrir gave an address entitled ‘Socialism Today’ on November 6 in which he advocated for a ‘democratic socialism’ distinct from gradualist European social democracy, which lacked ‘vitality and energy’, and from ‘totalitarian’ alternatives such as communism. He considered that Asian socialists had to develop a clearer conception of democratic socialism so that they could engage in a ‘consistent ideological fight
against the communists’ across the region. They might also begin to craft socialism by softening their attitudes towards the acceptance of Western capital. Josey recalls how ‘there were critics in the corridors and over the coffee cups’ at the seminar. Sjahrir’s speech was an expression of an anti-communist line of thinking about international politics and development at the congress associated with prominent socialists, which had also been aired at the conference proper. Senior politicians and diplomats became engrossed in ideological debates about how to define their politics in Cold War environments, both domestically and internationally, as Sjahrir’s resort to ‘democratic socialism’ against communism indicates.

The seminars enabled delegates with similar ideas and agendas to fraternise. Two nights after the ‘Socialism Today’ seminar, Sjahrir took part in a seminar organised by his friend JP on the situations in Hungary and Egypt at Jai Hind College Hall, which was minutes away from Kishen Chand College by foot. This meeting was sponsored by the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (ICCF), a local offshoot of the international CCF, a liberal organisation which rallied intelligentsias against communism by funding specific individuals such as JP to organise events, hold festivals, and start magazines promoting a non-communist or anti-communist politics. It is likely that the focus of the ICCF meeting was predominantly on the despotism of the Soviet system. Sjahrir, JP, and Mehta, who was also involved with the ICCF, had brushed shoulders in the ASC political committee, and struck up a rapport around a shared ‘democratic socialist’ outlook on world politics at these side-events. It is probable that other conference delegates who leant towards a ‘free world’ perspective on global affairs attended the ICCF meeting given its proximity to the base of the ASC conference.

While Sjahrir and JP thrashed out common ground at these seminars, African internationalists also networked, predominantly on the theme of anti-imperialism. Joseph Murumbi gave a seminar on November 9 entitled ‘The Struggle for Africa’. The following day, Munukayumbwa Sipalo gave what Indian socialist SV Raju viewed as the most memorable

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141 Josey, Socialism in Asia, 38-47.
142 “Mr S. Sjahrir’s Talk,” Times of India, Nov 8, 1956, 3.
speech of the plenary session on political conditions in Africa, especially southern Africa. Sipalo and Murumbi had come to Bombay for similar reasons – to navigate ‘networks of anti-colonial solidarity to advocate and help fund their liberation movements’ – and they probably compared notes at the seminar before Sipalo delivered this powerful speech to the congress in which he decried imperialism and capitalism. By the time of the final events of the congress, then, in which deputies visited the nearby Elephanta Caves – pictured in Figure 15 – and returned to Bombay on the evening of November 11 for a public rally at Shivaji Park to observe Dependent Peoples’ Freedom Day, attendees had had ample opportunity to make connections with likeminded parties and nurture shared internationalist imaginaries. The speeches which they gave to the crowd of almost 20,000 at Shivaji Park were unequivocal in their condemnation of colonialism, but contained fewer calls to arms for a coordinated Asian or international socialist attack on colonialism than might have been expected. Speakers tended to appeal to the crowd on an individual basis, outlining who they were and how they variously supported peoples under subjugation in Algeria and Egypt, the pairing of the ASC and the SI, or a renewed but nebulous defence of ‘socialist ideals’.

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146 McCann, “Where was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity?” 116.
Conclusion

On leaving Bombay for New Delhi on November 12, 1956, Moshe Sharett concluded about the ASC congress: ‘the lesson it taught was that planning and preparation are to no avail. Facts, not intentions, dictated its proceedings’. The congress had seen key delegates from across Asia, Africa, and Europe contest how far Israel was to blame for the crisis in the Middle East. The political committee, where many of these delegates gathered, and to a lesser extent the plenary sessions, had been derailed by such geopolitical disputes. The economic and organisational committees had produced some resolutions of note, but nothing amounting to a shared socialist internationalist platform. Instead, the chief platforming procedure at the congress seemed to be that performed by the leading socialist spokespersons of India, Indonesia, Burma, and Israel, among other Asian countries. These leaders had long since departed the openness of the 1947-1953 period for a more focussed and diplomatic approach to transnational political networking, and they tried to cast themselves as potential statesmen-in-waiting – where they were not already in government – through their various high-minded sub-committee meetings and resolutions on contemporary global problems at Bombay. While the organisers of the conference itself tended to be a comparatively motley array of South and Southeast Asians often with anti-imperialist commitments, their party superiors had more multi-layered agendas. The crises in Hungary and Egypt brought this into clearer relief – the likes of JP, Mehta, and Sjahrir bonded during extensive seminars over the dangers of communism and the need for Asian countries to counteract this threat, whilst the likes of Murumbi, Sipalo, and some of the less conspicuous Asian attendees foregrounded the dangers of colonialism in Asia and Africa.

The fault-lines within mid-1950s Asian socialism are best understood against the backdrop of decolonisation and the Cold War. By 1955, the Cold War had become central to the international system and to Asian politics with the proliferation of collective defence arrangements. South and Southeast Asian statesmen ramped up state-building projects with some support from the Cold War powers. Leading Indian, Indonesian, and Burmese socialists, as ‘statesmen-in-waiting’ who hoped to take their parties into office, reckoned with how to build nation-states that resisted close alignment with either bloc in the Cold War,

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148 Sharett, My Struggle for Peace: Volume 3, 1782.
149 Burke, Decolonization, 15.
often by playing these leviathans off against each other. That same year, the state leaders who were thinking about similar questions to prominent Asian socialists articulated a non-aligned internationalism at the Bandung Conference which resembled the one that Asian socialists had been honing for an extensive period. Funding to the ASC from member parties nosedived around this time. Wijono and Hla Aung, the chief mobile intermediaries in Afro-Asian socialist networks, recast their activist nets across a wider spectrum of international society. They reasoned that their best hope of challenging imperialism whilst pursuing a socialist internationalist politics was in engaging with able contacts in the SI and IUSY among other organisations. They held meetings and travelled to SI and IUSY events where they attempted to tilt the ‘world socialist’ movement in the direction of anti-imperialist aims.

Wijono and Hla Aung, in tandem with friends from India, prepared a second congress in order to bring different persons and parties into conversation about global anti-imperialist and socialist futures. For reasons explored above, this conversation did not transpire, except among smaller and more intimate groups of attendees. There were latent contradictions within the coalition of forces that Asian socialist activists had brought together in the ASC which boiled over at the congress under the pressure of geopolitical crises elsewhere. One of these contradictions was between Israeli attendees and staunchly anti-imperial attendees who viewed Israel with suspicion, and took the opportunity to lambast its representatives for events in West Asia. Israel was an important interlocutor in world socialist circuits and fellow Asian socialists, as interlocutors in global socialist networks themselves, had to engage with Israeli contacts. Many eagerly did so – particularly Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialist leaders who were more concerned with communism than the imperialism apparent in events in the Suez. This created an atmosphere of recrimination and mutual suspicion at the event; Sharett recalls how JP carefully modulated his speeches at Bombay to avoid criticising Israel.\(^{150}\) It became obvious over the course of the congress that no private international organisation housing this coalition of forces under its roof could further either anti-imperial or socialist aims. Asian socialist networks were fissuring into a complex of different internationalisms, and this would only accelerate in the next period.

\(^{150}\) Sharett, *My Struggle for Peace: Volume 3*, 1776.
This chapter has provided a detailed account of what took place at the ASC Bombay Conference of 1956, which has not previously been probed in detail. It has tied this to an account of the mid-1950s history of South and Southeast Asian decolonisation and the Cold War. This account holds that the ASC declined due to election losses, party splits, but also an associated diminution in the belief that the ASC or Asian socialist parties could bring about any of the aims they professed with rival political leaders, who were in the ascendancy, professing similar ideals. All of these factors narrowed the common ground on which delegates to Bombay stood – and the Hungary and Suez crises then shattered this common ground in that they sparked serious arguments. These disagreements point towards the importance of surveying the dialogical side of decolonisation in the 1950s in attempting to fully grasp how debates about political futures unfolded, and how agendas about both regional and global futures were shaped, within and beyond significant international conferences. While major socialist figures were lead actors at Bombay, it was the ASC’s mobile intermediaries or subaltern internationalists who had brought the event together. They had spent some years preparing for it and travelled far and wide in advance of it, soliciting interest from copious comrades. As before, their networking was strategic if also impromptu and ad hoc, turning on exchanges for example with African freedom fighters who they hoped would put them in contact with others.

Being a non-state meeting, discussions at Bombay were not straightforwardly oriented towards crafting policy, and were more hypothetical and capricious. A number of internationalisms intersected at the conference and conversations could take different directions depending on who was able to attend, what their attitudes to contemporary issues and events were, and even whether particular friendship groups, such as that of Sjahrir, JP, and Mehta, predominated at relevant moments. The practice of non-state internationalism continued to be highly contingent, and only an assessment of the national and international political as well as practical trajectories of key participants can shine a light on how and why discussions proceeded in a particular way. The successes and failures which different participants had encountered in domestic and international engagements running up to this congress in fighting elections, keeping parties together, or renewing alliances with contacts and institutions abroad, to name just a few, bore greatly on what they made of ‘socialism’ or how they viewed its prospects. Socialism continued to be quite a capacious container at the
same time as delegates attempted to narrow it down under Cold War pressures to clearer definitions. It was a facet of a multi-directional, diverse transnational debate in which many activists and politicians pressed their agendas – whether focussed on granular anti-imperial struggles, global visions, state-building, or a mixture of these – which was nevertheless becoming more contested, bitter, and ideological.

This last point raises a tension which has been central to this chapter, and which the next chapter picks up. South and Southeast Asian socialist leaders had begun to adopt more ideological stances on regional and global politics in the mid-1950s, partly due to anti-communism. These figures had already grown distant from the work of the ASC in 1953-1954 while its mobile intermediaries fashioned solidarities of action with far-flung contacts who these leaders were not as familiar with. Meanwhile, the ASC’s mobile intermediaries moved even more definitively into international socialist circles in the mid-1950s, acting as ‘subaltern internationalists’ who worked with a host of private international organisations that might help them further their projects and programmes as the ASC declined. At Bombay, these intermediaries alongside many other Asians and Africans affected a strong anti-imperialism where their party superiors seemed disinterested in such stances. These intermediaries – the doers of 1950s anti-imperialism – were the carriers of the dialogical side to decolonisation that this thesis tracks, while leading Asian socialists gravitated towards a more ideological, and pedagogical, position, beginning to enunciate notions of state- and nation-building which they hoped to pursue should they gain power, or should they be able to influence relevant state leaders. This next chapter, ‘Afterlives of Asian Socialism’, follows this thread, emphasising how transnational dimensions of decolonisation intersected and entangled with more national ones to shape the political trajectories of given actors up to 1960.
Chapter IV: Afterlives of Asian Socialism

Dear Sri Narayan:

I have written to you over and over again in my mind, but I am just getting to the point of putting it on paper...words are inadequate for me to express my appreciation to you for making our visit a meaningful and enjoyable one. I will long remember our moments together. Your deep sense of dedication, your warm personality, and your devotion to God and man, tremendously impressed me from the very beginning. I was deeply moved by the powerful and positive manner that you are going about the task of serving humanity.¹

With these words, African-American civil rights activist Martin Luther King recorded his gratitude to JP for the latter’s hospitality during King’s inaugural journey to India in early 1959. King travelled to the country with sponsorship from the Gandhi National Memorial Fund and the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) to learn about non-violence.² He spent several days in JP’s company studying the Bhoodan movement and discussing the latter’s ‘decentralist ideas’, which he found challenging.³ This episode can be viewed as one of several potent afterlives of Asian socialist internationalism which tallied with radical trends elsewhere at the turn of the 1960s. From the Bombay Conference onwards, Asian socialists departed the notion that they could achieve their collective aims of revising regional social orders and the international order through the ASC, but many of them continued to pursue distinct, egalitarian and democratic decolonising visions in their own transnational lives. They branched out more fully into international society, engaging with extant progressive currents which appealed to them, and domesticating some of these progressive currents for application at home. The intellectual and emotional connections which activists drew in the Asian socialist moment between themselves and friends elsewhere underwrote many new political engagements and projects into the 1960s.

Central to many intellectual-historical endeavours, and particularly ones pertaining to decolonisation, is the task, as Leslie James writes, of recognising ‘a domain of thought that grows and evolves, that is struggle’.⁴ Decolonisation, seen as a cultural and a psychological

² Swami Vishwananda, With the Kings in India: A Souvenir Of Dr Martin Luther King’s Visit To India, February-March 1959 (New Delhi: Gandhi National Memorial Fund, 1959), 4.
³ Vishwananda, With the Kings in India, 17.
⁴ James, Padmore and Decolonization from Below, 198.
phenomenon rather than just a political or economic one, commenced early in the twentieth century, most obviously in the interwar period when copious radicals worldwide exchanged ideas about prospective independent futures in the wake of the post-WWI ‘Wilsonian Moment’. Scholars investigating interwar anti-imperial internationalisms have found that Asian and African activists’ formative political engagements and intellectual encounters during this heady era shaped them even decades later, when local and global circumstances had changed significantly. In some cases, activists refocussed their sights on the nation-state as a vehicle through which their ideas and ideals could be advanced in the post-WWII period as the nation-state became a more widely accepted vehicle for postcolonial sovereignty, though this did not necessarily mean that they viewed a world of nation-states as the endpoint of human flourishing. The networked radicalisms which anti-imperialists fashioned in moments of political possibility guided them well after these moments evanesced, and the networks that animated them, diffused.

This chapter, entitled ‘Afterlives of Asian Socialism’, traces similar dynamics at play in post-WWII decolonising Asia. Previous chapters have explored variously how Asian socialists crafted a transnational network of likeminded activists in a moment of political promise in South and Southeast Asia; worked up projects and schemes to try and make their internationalist visions a reality; and attempted to chart new paths forward for regional and global change as the Cold War reached fever pitch. The chapters have been predominantly framed around the ASC, which was for some time a vessel and a tool for African and Asian socialist internationalists to advance their aims. As the last chapter showed, the ASC, as well as the coalitions that underlay it, weakened and fractured in the mid-1950s under the pressure of geopolitical crises and domestic political realignments. This did not spell the end for the visions of more equalitarian, participatory, and just global social orders which Asian socialists had fashioned through and around the ASC. Key activists retained the contact books, friendships, and familiarities with means and mechanisms of non-state world travel that they had honed during the Asian socialist interlude. They turned the intellectual resources and

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6 Louro, Comrades Against Imperialism; Raza, Revolutionary Pasts; Louro et al., The League Against Imperialism.
interpersonal intimacies of this interlude towards radical ends, influencing actors within but also beyond South and Southeast Asia.

Historians assessing non-state Afro-Asian internationalisms view the 1950s and 1960s as an era of acute possibility for progressive African and Asian political activists which authoritarian and nationalistic turns came to circumscribe. It is generally agreed that these authoritarian turns took place at some point in the 1960s, depending on where given activists were based. Even though some historians have pointed out how individual Afro-Asian activists involved themselves in both nationalist and internationalist struggle, there have been no sustained reckonings with how any particular clutch of activists adjusted to the advance of the nation-state in these decades, leaving us to conclude that they were devastated by the eventual path of decolonisation and wholly failed in their political ambitions. This is perhaps because these historians tend to emphasise a sense of Afro-Asian affinity, discernible in major transnational engagements and conferences which steadily became less common through the 1960s, as the locus of the ‘subaltern internationalisms’ of this era, when in fact solidarity was not just felt but practiced, and practiced by intermediaries who engaged with a wide range of persons and institutions beyond just Africa and Asia. As this thesis has shown, Asian socialists were moved by experiments underway in Europe and Israel, and had copious allies in these regions which continued to be easy to travel to even as politics took a turn for the worse at home. This chapter reveals how many of them adjusted to the advance of more introspective nationalisms in South and Southeast Asia, rarely by disappearing, but often by plumbing the resources and intimacies of the Asian socialist internationalist interlude to try and renew and realise some of their goals.

The first section sets the scene by way of a consideration of the progress of ‘State-Building in Southern Asia’. It makes clear that state-building projects in South and Southeast Asia were consolidating themselves in the late 1950s, through implementing modernising policy agendas and clamping down on dissent. This further emphasised to Asian socialists that they had to either engage with these regimes as constructive critics or pursue alternate alignments domestically and internationally. The section then demonstrates how leading politicians in

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Burma and Indonesia articulated ideological responses to the consolidation of these state-making regimes which carried forth something of the tenour of earlier Asian socialist conversations, in the democratic ethos of the responses. The second section, ‘Democratic Socialism in India, 1957-1960’, examines the intellectual journeys of leading Indian socialists in the late 1950s, which also carried forward concerns with equality and democratic inclusivity. The case of Indian socialists is slightly different to that of Burmese and Indonesian socialists in that in India, there was greater scope for political experimentation and opposition. The PSP was trashed in the Indian general election of 1957. Individuals such as JP and Asoka Mehta responded in analogous ways to their domestic insignificance as against the INC; they attempted, rather like Burmese and Indonesian socialists, to evolve a more progressive model of state-building to the one tendered by the state leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, whilst making it legible to him. JP ventured abroad and met with familiar international contacts in Yugoslavia and Israel among other countries in trying to hone such a model.

The final section, ‘Afro-Asian Socialism, 1957-1960’, considers the trajectories of the more anti-imperialist, subaltern contingent of Asian socialists as the ASC declined. As before, there are distinct patterns to be found; where socialist leaders moved towards a pedagogic and ideological brand of ‘democratic socialism’ in the late 1950s, Asian socialist intermediaries continued to attempt to tilt international socialist contacts and institutions in the direction of the anti-imperial agenda they preferred. They increasingly engaged with their international contacts as an interconnected web of individuals rather than as representatives of the ASC. They sought to involve themselves in exchanges and adventures which promoted the end of imperialism and the honing of constructive socialist solidarities among Africans and Asians, speaking with and sending letters to prominent people within the SI and IUSY among other institutions. The key finding contained within is that the vibrant anti-imperial socialist internationalisms of the 1950s interfaced with other global political currents and agendas even as the hopes and expectations that gave them definition dissolved. Study of the transnational trajectories of Asian activists during decolonisation shines a light on their own subsequent political careers and those of significant national and international actors.
In the late 1950s, major political leaders in southern Asia redoubled state-building projects as perceived domestic threats to their rule multiplied. In Burma, U Nu resumed the premiership in June 1957 amid a factional struggle for control of AFPFL organisational machinery, and revised the country’s developmental programme in concert with U Ba Swe, which they felt was over-extended, by allowing more room for the private sector.\(^9\) Nation-building was integrally tied into this; Nu moved to strengthen the civil service as ethnic groups demanded more autonomy and power, and encouraged the growth of civil society more widely to manage social conflict.\(^10\) In Indonesia, President Sukarno fielded his concept of ‘guided democracy’ in the same year, signalling a shift away from parliamentary democracy towards a centralisation of politico-military control in Java.\(^11\) He launched a programme of state-led industrialisation, making the country’s central bank a pawn of infrastructure projects as well as ‘ambitious nation-building’ projects including large mosques, monuments, and international hotels.\(^12\) Meanwhile, Jawaharlal Nehru strengthened his grip on Indian politics with a thumping election victory in early 1957. He ploughed ahead with a five-year plan designed to industrialise India by expanding the public sector, developing heavy industries to achieve economic independence, and building dams and factories.\(^13\) Later in the same parliamentary term, he faced down political dissent from Kerala in the southwest to the Naga hills in the northeast, whilst also skirmishing with China on the Tibetan border.\(^14\)

The common thread linking these three cases is what Robert Young refers to as the postcolonial effort to ‘create successfully the sovereign state machine of modernity’.\(^15\) The nation-state became the typical unit of political sovereignty worldwide around the mid-twentieth century as copious decolonising struggles took this direction after achieving independence, in spite of the persistence of alternate visions at their margins. Political

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\(^13\) Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 152.
\(^14\) Ibid., 189-238.
\(^15\) Robert Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 137.
leaderships in Africa and Asia sought to cement control over large and diverse populations that the late colonial state had uneasily and coercively bound together. The statesmen who initiated this process authoritatively demonstrated their modernising credentials, as can be seen in how they moved from a notion of closeness to one of representation of the peoples they governed at Bandung. This linked them with the Cold War powers from which they wished, in the international arena, to distance themselves; capitalist, communist, and non-aligned statesmen all engineered teleological visions of modernisation and development gravitating towards an endpoint of peace, parity, and plenty. The institutionalisation of the nation-state as the typical unit of political sovereignty, and the parallel ascendancy of developmentalist regimes in decolonising Asia, took hold from at least the second half of the 1950s, with adverse consequences in Indonesia, Burma, and India for ethnic minorities, communist insurgents, and assorted political opponents who these regimes had to integrate or exclude.

Asian socialists adopted different orientations towards these nation-building modernisation projects. Those closer to the halls of state power tended to adopt a pedagogic vision of decolonisation in which political elites drove forth social transformation on a nation-state scale. In some cases, leading Asian socialists were those elites; in other cases, they hoped to influence them. Following the ASC Bombay Conference, four prime ministers – Ba Swe, Ali Sastroamidjojo, SWRD Bandaranaike, and Nehru – met in Delhi to discuss the Suez crisis. Here, they adjudged the Suez and Hungary crises to constitute unjustifiable aggressions of ‘larger countries against smaller ones’ which could be resolved by appealing to the conscience of the larger countries. They were concerned with a revival of the ‘methods’ of colonialism portended by such events, rather than by actually-existing colonialism in Africa and Asia. This analysis, which advanced appeals to the good-will of larger states as the route to ending colonialism and reducing international tensions, replicated the discussions of world politics which leading socialists had conducted at Bombay. On Ba Swe’s part, it comprised a pivot away from the grassroots anti-imperialism which had substantially underwritten Asian socialist internationalism at inception towards a reconciliation with the existing world order of nation-states and multilateral institutions. Ba Swe was now Prime Minister of Burma and

pursued good relations with regional leaders and diplomats over abstract discussions about political alternatives.

Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein soon became engrossed in factional power struggles within the AFPFL. Frank Trager suggests that these were rooted in a failure of the party to reach positive agreement on what it stood for once domestic Karen and communist insurgencies, the armed forces, and Chinese nationalist incursions had been pacified by 1954-55. Nu, Ba Swe, and Kyaw Nyein each occupied slightly different briefs within the AFPFL and were confronted with the question of how to refigure its identity after opposition parties gained ground in the 1956 elections. Nu launched a ‘clean-up’ designed to rid the party of corruption which resulted in Ba Swe assuming the premiership for a temporary period; by the time Nu regained it in June 1957, the scene was set for a split. He had expected Ba Swe to reassign many of his duties as trade union leader to other figures, and had expected deputy prime minister Kyaw Nyein to focus on his governmental tasks, too. But Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein felt that ‘an organisational structure based on a small group of disciplined and trained [cadres]’ was desirable, and retained their leadership of constituent organisations underneath the parliamentary party. The pairing proposed that Nu stay as president rather than resuming the premiership in mid-1957, which worsened the discord. They attempted to reconcile at a party congress in January 1958, where Nu gave a four-and-a-half-hour speech on ‘democratic socialism’. However, personal differences were too much and the ruling organisation squabbled until Nu asked Army General Ne Win to become interim Prime Minister in October.  

What is most notable here is Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe’s advocacy of a cadre party with themselves occupying key roles therein, as well as in civil society. This was distinct from any notion of democracy in which postcolonial peoples themselves prominently participated – an idea which Asian socialists had indulged in the early 1950s when they organised huge rallies in Burma and other countries. As Trager suggests, the phrase ‘democratic socialism’ coined at the congress in January 1958 connoted an ‘ideological position which clearly rejected any form of totalitarianism’, in particular Russian Communism, rather than a statement of positive political intent. This was a similar meaning to the one it held for Sutan Sjahrir as well as Western socialists within the SI who Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein had brushed shoulders with at

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18 Trager, “The Political Split in Burma,” 146-152.
19 Ibid., 150.
Bombay in 1956 – where both Burmese leaders had begun to focus explicitly on the Soviet Union as a threat to world peace. This is perhaps because, like some Western socialists, their country was closer to the ‘free world’ orbit than the Soviet one, and they sensed that Burma needed to maintain good relations with capitalist countries to progress with its developmental programme, with which these two politicians were intimately involved. Anyhow, they had gravitated towards a social-democratic politics in which the state sought to abate economic inequalities in close association with trade unions and business leaders. Their interactions with major social democrats at Bombay may have played a role in their shift towards a clearer ‘democratic socialist’ ideological position in 1958.

The demarcation of more distinct ideological and philosophical positions on the part of leading Asian socialists was a common pattern across southern Asia at this time. It spoke to a growing accommodation with extant state-building projects, even if socialists were critical of aspects of these projects. In Indonesia, leading Asian socialist Sjahrir had far less political sway than Burmese socialists. His party, the PSI, had done catastrophically badly in the 1955 elections, and by 1957 President Sukarno had affirmatively moved away from parliamentary democracy towards ‘Guided Democracy’ – de facto autocracy – which meant that the PSI could no longer compete for power. Sukarno faced off with Mohammad Hatta in coming years who disagreed with his political direction and preferred a more democratic approach. Hatta resigned his position as Vice President in 1956 and the pair clashed again in April 1957 when leaders of uprisings in the Indonesian provinces demanded that Hatta, a Sumatran, be appointed to the increasingly Javanese Government. The new Indonesian Prime Minister Djuanda Kartawidjaja met with Hatta as well as Sjahrir at the time to try and calm the unrest; Sjahrir was close to Hatta, and his party retained the affections of many of the country’s leading intellectuals. Nevertheless, Sukarno continued to tighten his stranglehold on Indonesian politics. He increasingly leant on the army and the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) to extirpate Dutch influence and balance the power of the Islamic parties and regional

20 Clymer, A Delicate Relationship, 137-197.
23 “Jakarta Chief Will Confer With Hatta,” A6.
secessionists. He purged ideological opponents in early 1958 and the military grew more Javanese and loyal to the President.\textsuperscript{24}

Hatta and Sjahrir tried to stake out clear positions on the President’s authoritarian turn.\textsuperscript{25} As we saw in the previous chapter, Sjahrir had gravitated towards a ‘democratic socialist’ politics from at least the Bombay meeting, arguing that Asian socialists should clearly distinguish themselves from communists. He and Hatta believed that Indonesians had to be instilled with a sense of democratic ‘responsibility’ which might enable them to carry forward the social revolution that both they and Sukarno wanted – rather than attributing that responsibility to the person of Sukarno. Hatta described this as ‘social democracy’.\textsuperscript{26} The way that they distinguished their platform from Hatta’s was to raise suspicions about the President’s dalliance with communists – before they became completely depressed with Sukarno’s growing authoritarianism and disappeared from Indonesian politics for a time.\textsuperscript{27} For example, in January 1958, Sjahrir issued a warning to the country that the PKI, which Sukarno had apparently grown close to, was planning a coup-d’état that would lead to civil war.\textsuperscript{28} Shortly afterwards, in league with a number of rebel colonels around the country, he called for Kartawidjaja’s cabinet, which Sukarno had handpicked the previous April, to resign.\textsuperscript{29} His name is mentioned little in the regional or international press after this point, suggesting his growing disillusionment with the direction of Indonesian politics, though he had made an attempt to alter it.

What is most revealing about this is how leading Indonesian socialists, like leading Burmese socialists, increasingly adopted a didactic ‘democratic socialist’ ideology. Sjahrir and Hatta – at least until the latter executed a volte-face in September 1959 after a study tour of Europe and determined to oppose parliamentary democracy and support ‘dictatorship’ – advocated for a social-democratic system of government in which they themselves took on significant responsibilities, in terms of instilling populations with an understanding of how to use their democratic rights for the furtherance of social revolution.\textsuperscript{30} The final section of the previous

\textsuperscript{24} Gross, Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{25} Mrázek, Sjahrir, 444-452.
\textsuperscript{26} Christie, Ideology and Revolution in Southeast Asia, 172-174.
\textsuperscript{27} Mrázek, Sjahrir, 452-457.
\textsuperscript{28} “Jakarta Warns West Against Any Reprisals,” The Washington Post and Times Herald, Jan 5, 1958, A5.
\textsuperscript{30} Rafiq Zakaria, “Asian Notebook,” Times of India, Sep 27, 1959, 8.
chapter proposed that Asian socialist leaders began to approximate the statist and pedagogic side of decolonisation more than the open, mutable, dialogical one around the mid-1950s. This section suggests that they continued in this direction in the late 1950s, though not as far as to shed constituent democratic elements of their political makeup. Rather, as had been anticipated by discussions at the ASC Bombay congress of November 1956, they moved towards a social-democratic or democratic socialist politics which they hoped could be implemented on local scales. It is not clear whether Burmese investments in fostering a ‘democratic’ socialism were instrumental – in relation to challenging communism – or genuine. However, regarding the Indonesian case, Sjahrir’s seeming desolation at the diminishing prospects of any kind of democratic involvement in the country’s politics points towards the cardinal position of democracy in his value-system. It is arguable that this democratic thrust cannot be assessed simply in a domestic political framework when it had also formed part of his internationalist outlook and advocacy for some time. It was also integrally tied to the anti-communism rife among leading Asian socialists. It is important to keep in mind that internationalist and nationalist political trends entangled in complex ways for Southeast Asian intellectuals at the turn of the 1960s as we turn towards the Indian case.

Democratic Socialism in India, 1957-1960

Two of the most active Indian socialists at the ASC Bombay congress of 1956 were JP and Asoka Mehta. Along with prominent Burmese and Indonesian interlocutors, this pair struck a distinct, social-democratic and anti-totalitarian chord at the congress. In the aftermath of the failed PSP election bid of February-June 1957, they worked these notes into a clearer political agenda, much as leading Burmese and Indonesian socialists did in the late 1950s. The most significant difference was that leading Indian socialists engaged progressive actors and audiences elsewhere in doing so, embarking on extensive trips abroad – perhaps because they had more political freedom and scope for manoeuvre than aforementioned Burmese and Indonesian socialists. Paradoxically, these Indian socialists grew closer to the Nehruvian state project as they ventured around international society, making connections with persons and institutions who took a professedly democratic approach to political and socio-economic development. They sought ultimately to turn the encounters and experiences they
underwent during this episode towards procuring a suitably democratic and socialist model of Indian state-building which realised aspects of the political agenda they had promoted in internationalist activities for several years, albeit on a smaller and more specific scale.

A facet of Indian socialist internationalist practice in this period which was intriguing was its cooperative or Gandhian turn. Indian socialists carried Gandhi’s mantle in domestic politics for much of the decade after his assassination, often critiquing the INC for straying too far from the principles of non-violence, mass mobilisation, and direct democracy for which the Mahatma seemingly stood. JP and close friends invoked Gandhi’s legacy even more frequently towards the end of the decade in domestic and international political engagements. Some historians have noted a Gandhian turn within postcolonial Indian socialism and attributed it to the growing ‘anti-totalitarianism’ of key PSP activists from the early 1950s, or to a delayed engagement with the ideas of Gandhian thinkers on the part of the Nehruvian state. Looking at this turn with the transnational life histories of key Indian socialists in the foreground, its onset might be moved to the late 1950s. JP, Asoka Mehta, and Jivatram Bhagwandas (JB) Kripalani, another Indian socialist assessed in this section, tended to restrict mention of Gandhi to domestic politics earlier in the 1950s, using him as a tool with which to critique Nehruvian state-building. In Asian socialist conversations, he featured rarely. By 1957, this definitively changed; each of them discussed Gandhi regularly with liberal and socialist contacts abroad, even proposing a Gandhian turn within international socialism – and they appeared to advocate for the pursuit of a Gandhian agenda at home, too. This related to a shift towards a vision of cooperative social democracy in their political thinking which bookended the era of Asian socialism but carried forward some of its concerns.

Lydia Walker has offered important insights into JP’s internationalist activism at this time. She contextualises his activism with reference to an accelerating global decolonisation which ‘asked nations to territorially delineate their sovereignties across the world’; in this environment, ‘it became difficult to conceive of political alternatives beyond imperial formations and independent nation-states’. Walker suggests that it was at ‘the edge of the dominant imperial and national centres’ that a different political calculus could be found – here, JP made interventions into ‘India’s own state-making project’, pioneering a Gandhian

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non-statist politics which enabled sub-national groups such as the Nagas, with whom JP sympathised, to advance claims for greater autonomy within India’s borders. His critique of the violence of the Indian state opened up spaces for sub-national claimants within the more expansive conception of the Indian Union which he proposed. Walker’s account squares with scholarship on Indian cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial cosmopolitanism more broadly, which emphasises how more inclusive anticolonial nationalisms could often be found at the itinerant margins of the mainstream movements. Walker’s account of JP is most instructive in viewing him as a non-statist thinker and actor who was bound up in if also critical of Nehru’s state-making project.

These insights can be taken further when JP’s peripatetic political activism in the late 1950s is situated against the backdrop of Asian socialism. Walker sees JP’s ‘international network’ as comprising ‘individuals from the United States, Britain, and elsewhere who had previously supported Gandhi and Indian national liberation’. JP’s international network was actually much more capacious than this. It spoke to longstanding efforts to achieve a kind of egalitarian, democratic, and anti-imperial global political change in tune with Asian socialists elsewhere. From the mid-1950s, with the ASC and the hopes associated with it wilting, JP executed a shift towards a social-democratic politics as did Burmese and Indonesian socialists. The cooperative or Gandhian turn among Indian socialists which followed was a further step in the assimilation of a moment of decolonising excitement and experimentation into a cluster of discourses about development and modernisation. As Clemens Six writes, this was an ‘era of state-centred modernisation’ in which ‘elites in (post)colonial countries often presented their own political and economic agenda in response to concepts of development’ propagated by Cold War powers – it was ideas about development and modernisation which Indian socialists increasingly engaged with in the late 1950s. At the same time, this late-1950s Gandhian turn was an attempt by JP and others to rescue something of the socialist internationalism they had forged in previous years by way of encouraging a more

35 Six, Secularism, Decolonisation, and the Cold War, 13.
decentralised and participatory approach to political-economic development than those of regional political leaders.

JP’s first priority in the wake of Bombay was to stoke a regional intellectual outcry over events in Hungary. He set up an ‘Indian Committee for Solidarity with Hungary’ (ICSH) with other Indian socialists including Mehta which exchanged notes with Western liberals and social democrats about political conditions in the country. He queried Nehru’s indecision on whether to condemn Soviet actions in Hungary, asking how ‘a healthy and democratic way of life can...be expected to grow’ in India given this hesitancy to condemn despotism abroad.36 This indicated a growing concern with defending civil liberties against state encroachments. It also indicated that JP feared the growth of authoritarianism more widely – he compared Nehru to ‘the Russian communist leaders’ on this count, whilst distinguishing both from ‘that great man, Marshal Tito’.37 The ICSH was part of a local ecology of anti-communist contacts and institutions which JP furnished up around this time, including the ICCF; but his admiration for Tito, which pre-empted further trips to Yugoslavia in coming years, suggested his politics had not simply merged with the ‘anti-totalitarian’ outlook of Cold Warriors in the international CCF.38 Even Tito’s imprisonment in 1956 of Yugoslavian dissident Milovan Djilas, who had attended various ASC events in previous years and which JP and Mehta furiously protested through public letters, did not diminish JP’s fascination with Yugoslavia.39 This might be attributed to a preoccupation with studying what JP viewed as grassroots, democratic approaches to social reconstruction – a search that would underpin much of his transnational activism in ensuing years.

The isolation of the PSP in domestic politics was brought home firmly by its poor showing in the 1957 election. This was the first election that the PSP contested following its 1952 merger with a party led by JB Kripalani, and its socialist ideology and cadres had been substantially

36 Handwritten note, Jayaprakash Narayan Papers (I & II Inst), Papers of the Indian Committee for Solidarity with Hungary, fol. 215, NMML, 22.
37 Handwritten note, 22.
co-opted by the victorious INC.\textsuperscript{40} JP had been disenchanted with frontline politics for some years, and he now moved to withdraw from parliamentary politics entirely after an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile with Ram Manohar Lohia in September.\textsuperscript{41} JP and Lohia had grown far apart in their conception of international politics and it is doubtful that they could have worked around these differences. JP deduced from the Hungary crisis that ‘imperialism knows no colour’ and could be perpetrated by ‘white against white’ as much as by ‘white nations against others’, whereas Lohia viewed race as constitutive of colonialism.\textsuperscript{42} Even though JP quit the PSP he remained in close contact with much of the PSP leadership as well as party leaders and state functionaries elsewhere in Asia who he had met through earlier socialist activism. Mehta, a senior figure within the party and an intimate associate of JP’s, was friendly with Nehru, chairing the INC’s Foodgrains Enquiry Committee in June 1957 despite having lost his seat in the Indian parliament months earlier.\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, Mehta travelled abroad to meetings of economists arranged by the CCF, an organisation to which Nehru was hostile.\textsuperscript{44} These points emphasise that leading PSP figures were become entangled in state-building projects at the time, even if they maintained a critical distance from national leaders.

The growing interest which Mehta showed in economic development approximated JP’s own increasing concern with Indian industrialisation. In December 1957, JP addressed a CCF meeting on democracy and development in New Delhi. Here, he averred that a programme of rapid, state-driven industrialisation invited authoritarianism or dictatorship, but that such a dictatorship would never work because 80% of the Indian population lived in villages and could not easily be manipulated by the state. He couched his objections in practical rather than moral terms; this hinted at his mounting acceptance of industrialisation in some form. He rejected parliamentary democracy as a means to reducing social inequality, proposing a


\textsuperscript{41} “Mr J. Narayan Foiled By Other P.-S.P. Leaders: Dr. Lohia on Failure of Socialist Unity Talks,” \textit{Times of India}, Sep 2, 1957, 7.


\textsuperscript{43} N. Jayapalan, \textit{Indian Political Thinkers: Modern Indian Political Thought} (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2003), 313-314.

\textsuperscript{44} Asoka Mehta, “Economic Development: I – Stimulating Exchange of Views,” \textit{Times of India}, May 1, 1957, 6; Coleman, \textit{Liberal Conspiracy}, 149.
more direct and participatory democracy, though he did not explain how this would work.\textsuperscript{45} He had been working this out as part of the Gandhian Sarvodaya movement for some months – a movement which, he told an audience in West Bengal, aimed at ‘the development of self-sufficient and self-ruling villages into a nucleus of non-party governments in the States and at the Centre’. This comprised ‘the logical development of socialistic and communistic movements...in the Indian perspective’.\textsuperscript{46} Such statements implied an overriding concern with evolving a decentralised and cooperative model of socio-economic development for India. In the CCF meeting of December 1957, JP distinguished his views strongly from those of communists, whilst at the press conference in West Bengal a month earlier, where communism held considerable sway, he suggested they were a kind of communism.\textsuperscript{47} His aim seemed to be to stir interest in a cooperative model of socio-economic development across multiple constituencies, ranging from peasants to liberal intellectuals. Walker suggests that these views were ‘fundamentally undemocratic’, but this is to privilege a parliamentary, European conception of ‘democracy’.\textsuperscript{48} JP actually continued a thread which had been present in his and other Asian socialists’ thought and practice for some years of seeking to encourage mass participation in socio-economic initiatives.

While JP focussed, for the moment, on domestic activism, his friend JB Kripalani travelled abroad. Kripalani first gained attention for his anti-imperialism in the interwar period. He became INC President in 1946-1947, before leaving the party in protest at Nehru’s dissociation from Gandhian methods of economic development.\textsuperscript{49} Like JP, he was friendly with Gandhi and sought the latter’s consent to marry Sucheta Mazumdar (Kripalani), which he gained in 1936.\textsuperscript{50} Sucheta is pictured with Gandhi in Figure 16 in 1947. Both JB and Sucheta joined the socialist opposition in the 1950s, but Sucheta returned to the INC in 1957, more sympathetic to Nehruvian developmentalism than JB.\textsuperscript{51} Both also attended some ASC events

\textsuperscript{46} “Gramdan Must Be Given Fair Trial By People: Mr. J. Narayan’s Call,” \textit{Times of India}, Nov 3, 1957, 8.
\textsuperscript{47} “Little Hope of Having Democracy in India,” 7; “Gramdan Must Be Given Fair Trial,” 8.
\textsuperscript{48} Walker, “Jayaprakash Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation,” 152.
whilst not being at the centre of the body. JB now grew closer to JP and Mehta. He attended the fifth conference of the SI in Vienna in July 1957 as a prelude to a journey around Europe and the Middle East – possibly with the encouragement of senior PSP colleagues, who had copious contacts on the European socialist scene. Hla Aung and Reuven Barkatt, from Burma and Israel respectively, also attended and spoke at the Vienna conference, during a wider tour which encompassed Ghanaian independence celebrations, a meeting of a workers’ council in Yugoslavia, and visits to Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, India, Pakistan, north Vietnam, and south China. Asian socialists continued to travel to Europe at the beginning of long international tours, not just because they wanted to speak to the SI, but more emphatically because European socialists arranged flights, provided accommodation, and made suggestions about where to go next.

JB Kripalani did not follow the same tour route as this group. At Vienna, he noted the presence of Austrian Chancellor Adolf Schärf, BLP MPs Aneurin Bevan and Hugh Gaitskell, and ‘redoubtable leader of the German Social Democratic Party’ Erich Ollenhauer. He then


travelled to Yugoslavia, West Germany, France, Switzerland, Britain, and to the eastern bloc and Russia, before stopping by Israel on the way home. His chief interest was in approaches to socio-economic development taken by European countries. He identified the importance of Yugoslav experiments with workers’ councils as lying in efforts to ‘associate fully the workers with the management of industry’. He thought that Western socialists, rather than condemning Yugoslavia as a ‘totalitarian regime’, should attempt to integrate workers into their own state-managed industries, as should the Indian government, which might ‘set an example for private enterprise’ and ‘at the least ensure lasting industrial peace’. He felt that European socialists could ultimately ‘minimise the differences arising from the national policies of their countries and evolve a higher unity on the basis of Democratic Socialism’ if they were to develop a common industrial policy.53 This demonstrated that JB, like JP, was evolving his own ideas about how to fashion a decentralised and cooperative social democracy. Europe, as the global capital of social democracy, was of great interest in this sense. Yugoslavia specifically was of interest because it constituted an example of participatory socio-economic development.

JP soon undertook an analogous tour to Europe as well as the Middle East and North Africa for five months from May 1958. The CCF funded the trip; JP was then an Honorary President of the organisation, which he had long used to promote Sarvodaya.54 He predominantly met leading liberal and social-democratic statesmen who he thought he could influence. His overall aim was ‘to explain Bhoodan to the non-Communist bloc’.55 Bhoodan, a movement which aimed to break up land ownership in postcolonial India into small parcels owned and operated by villagers and peasants themselves, was part of the same cooperative imaginary as Sarvodaya whereby local peoples participated strongly in industrial production. JP followed a similar trajectory to JB Kripalani one year earlier, first visiting West Germany where he spoke to leader of the SPD Erich Ollenhauer who had attended the Bombay ASC congress in November 1956 – with whom JP is pictured in Figure 17 on May 28 1958 – and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.56 Ollenhauer and Adenauer were strongly pro-Western in a Cold War context, indicating that JP leaned towards a ‘free world’ position in this global ideological

conflict. News quickly spread of JP’s presence in Europe via the socialist networks he had earlier helped to establish, and Albert Carthy, the British Secretary General of the SI, invited him to speak at the Brussels SI congress in June.\(^\text{57}\) JP spoke to the congress on June 12, where he declared that Western socialism was going in the wrong direction and suggested a ‘neo-Gandhist’ reorientation. He did not enter into the minutiae of how this might work, suggesting merely that world peace and unilateral disarmament were implied by any engagement with Gandhi.\(^\text{58}\)

![Figure 17. Associated Press Bilderdiest (Frankfurt am Main). Narayan (right) Is Welcomed By SPD-president Ollenhauer in Bonn.](image)

This speech comprised an attempt by JP to persuade European social democrats that there was another route to the prosperous and egalitarian political order they imagined besides the narrowly statist. While, as we will see, JP’s primary interest on this trip was in identifying and drawing from instances of participatory socio-economic development abroad, he remained an internationalist concerned with socialist prospects worldwide, and hoped to make his views on global social democracy plain in such engagements. JP had opined at Bombay that the ‘ideals’ of socialism were being ‘hollowed out’ or ‘maliciously appropriated’ by the Cold

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57 Albert Carthy to U Hla Aung, May 13 1958, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference - Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.

War powers and that ‘new roads’ had to be furnished by which to realise these ideals, one of which was the Gandhian method of non-violence.\textsuperscript{59} His speech at Brussels renewed this demand. JP did not just engage with socialists, though. On arriving in Britain a week later, he met Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan as well as General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress Vincent Tewson and Leader of the Opposition Hugh Gaitskell.\textsuperscript{60} Each of these figures were stalwarts of Britain’s post-war social-democratic establishment, which brought together Conservatives with trade unionists and Labour politicians in a cross-political consensus that state involvement was critical in mediating between capital and labour, alleviating poverty, and reducing inequality.\textsuperscript{61} The ‘neo-Gandhist’ orientation of JP’s socialism appears to have constituted a tilt towards tempering the statism of European social democracy rather than a total rejection of it.

On his subsequent visit to Yugoslavia as part of the trip, JP named Yugoslavia’s system of political and economic decentralisation, its system of workers’ management, party-less democracy, and organisation of agriculture, as his key interests. He instructed a small team of Gandhian freedom fighters, activists, and academics to study Yugoslav state-building. This team joined JP in Yugoslavia with sponsorship from the \textit{Sarva Seva Sangh}, an Indian body associated with the Sarvodaya movement, on the agreement of the SAWPY. Seeking to arrive at ‘an objective assessment of the success of decentralised institutions, and of the effectiveness of the steps taken to control the powers of the party and bureaucracy’, the group visited factories, cooperative unions, farms, major cities, roads built by youth organisations, and mining towns.\textsuperscript{62} JP’s inclusion of a meticulously-organised six-week study tour to Yugoslavia in a trip funded by the CCF does not square with accounts of his activism which cast its international dimension as straightforwardly anti-communist or ‘First World’-aligned.\textsuperscript{63} The engagement of the study group with a wide range of participatory political-economic initiatives in the non-aligned country suggests that JP wanted his compatriots to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{60}{“Mr J.P. Narayan,” \textit{Times of India}, Jun 20, 1958, 8.}
\footnotetext{62}{“JP’s study tour to Yugoslavia,” Jayaprakash Narayan Papers (I & II Inst.), fol. 300, NMML, 3-9.}
\footnotetext{63}{Walker, “Jayaprakash Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation,” 151-152.}
\end{footnotes}
return home abuzz with ideas about how to push Indian state-building projects in similarly democratic and cooperative directions.

JP travelled through Israel on his way back to India. Here, he met David Ben-Gurion, who he is pictured with in Tel Aviv on September 1 1958 in Figure 18. Israel constituted a strong pull for African and Asian socialists at this time thanks to its communitarian state-building experiments and its seeming neutrality in Cold War politics. The Israeli trade union body Histadrut was growing increasingly important in this connection, organising events for African and Asian youth to gather, socialise, and work on constructive projects. JP was fascinated by Israeli kibbutzim – agrarian communities that attempted to integrate residents and workers into farming cooperatives, theoretically leading to a state of equality and democracy – which he spent some time touring around, and eulogised as an example of a spirited ‘community life’ that set an example for ‘the rebuilding of India’. This was the most naked reference yet to JP’s ultimate goal of exporting collectivistic models of socio-economic development he encountered on his travels to India. His exchanges with Ben-Gurion concerned Sarvodaya, Indian philosophy, and most likely, comparisons between Sarvodaya or Bhoodan and cooperative life as practiced in the kibbutzim.

![Figure 18. JP and Ben-Gurion. Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:J P Narayan.JPG," Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:J_P_Narayan.JPG&oldid=510530443 (accessed November 12, 2021).](image)

64 Arnold Rivkin, “Israel and the Afro-Asian World,” Foreign Affairs 37, no. 3 (1959): 486.
65 “Unconquerable Spirit” Of People Of Israel: Mr J. Narayan Commends Example To India,” Times of India, Sep 29, 1958, 3.
JP briefed the Indian press on his experiences abroad when returning to New Delhi later in September. It is notable how he positioned himself to inform and educate Nehru rather than to propose a different approach to development entirely. For example, at the press conference, he strongly supported Nehru’s stance on West Asia – which was to encourage the growth of secular nationalism in the region – against the idea predominating in the Western press that President Nasser ‘wanted to dominate the entire Arab world’, and suggested that Nasser, whose country JP may also have visited, was engaged ‘in a struggle for democratic socialism’ along with other statesmen in the region. JP took this position not only due to his interest in democratic socialism and desire for peace in the Middle East, but also because he wanted to minimise differences between himself and Nehru. He chose not to promulgate wider conclusions about his trip until six months hence after he had fully studied ‘the material he had collected during his tour’.66 This was probably so he could enunciate his findings clearly to Nehru and to the INC, who might then implement some of them. Overall, JP’s extensive trip abroad in 1958 can be viewed as an attempt to evolve a democratic socialist model of state-building fit for India, in a period when building up oppositional socialist alignments across South and Southeast Asia appeared difficult, and engaging with extant state-building projects in the region was an obvious alternative.

It was shortly after JP’s return, at the beginning of 1959, that he and JB Kripalani met Martin Luther King in India. King’s visit to India has been framed as a ‘transnational diffusion between protest groups’ in which itinerant African-American intellectuals reshaped ‘the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent direct action in ways that made it applicable during the American civil rights movement’.67 Nico Slate briefly assesses the trip in his account of cosmopolitan connections between Indian and African-American freedom movements in the twentieth century, but privileges King in his account of why the trip came about, neglecting to explain the depth of Indian involvement.68 Sucheta Kripalani, then General Secretary of the INC, appears to have been heavily involved in bringing King and wife Coretta to India as vice-

66 “Multi-Party System Unsuited To Asia: Mr Jayaprakash Narayan’s Tour Impressions,” *Times of India*, Sep 22, 1958, 7.
chairman of the Gandhi National Memorial Fund which sponsored the trip, and she welcomed them personally on their arrival in Delhi on February 10. The Kings met the Prime Minister and President of India at the beginning of their tour. In the following weeks they visited JP’s as well as Vinoba Bhave’s ashram – Bhave was a Gandhian ascetic and pioneer of Bhoodan – whilst touring rural Bihar, the capital of the Bhoodan movement. The Kings dined at JB Kripalani’s home on their final evening, asking questions about the latter’s ‘days with Gandhi and the development and growth of his thinking’. The chronicler of the trip, a Quaker named James Bristol, conveyed the intimacy of the relationship between the Kripalanis and the Kings immediately afterwards, remarking on how ‘most happily at the last minute’ the Kripalanis arrived at Delhi airport to see the group off at the end of this ‘rich and meaningful month’.

The trip was another instance of Indian socialists turning their transnational connections towards the furtherance of a Gandhian domestic activism. JP and JB viewed Bhoodan as the epitome of Gandhian approaches to socio-economic development and engaged King in deep conversation on such decentralist models of development. Neither appears to have inquired much after King’s own political struggles in the United States. It is likely that they asked some questions by way of comparing their struggles and identifying how to advance the causes of impoverished and oppressed populaces in their respective countries. This reveals once more how far Indian socialists had oriented their transnational lives towards advancing particular domestic political agendas. Between 1947 and 1953, and to some extent into the mid-1950s, leading Indian socialists had sought primarily to bolster prospects of an international socialist ‘Third Force’ taking shape through their cross-border travels and engagements. Now, the pendulum swung the other way, and these individuals sought primarily to bolster what they considered to be progressive and democratic struggles at home. While JP and JB Kripalani took some interest in democratic socialist experiments underway abroad, this was increasingly as a means of discerning how a participatory model of Indian state-building could be evolved. They moved between the global and the local with consummate ease – though their international networks had been furnished up with the labour of countless comrades – evoking again the image of a double helix whereby Asian

69 Vishwananda, *With the Kings in India*, 3-23.
71 Vishwananda, *With the Kings in India*, 17.
socialists blended the national with the international in their 1950s political activisms in complex ways.

Overall, this section has argued that major Indian socialists utilised their transnational activities for domestic, ‘democratic socialist’ purposes in the late 1950s. They reacted to internationalist disappointments not by withdrawing from global socialist networks altogether, but by plumbing their connections for ideas and experiments that they could draw on to democratise state-building projects in their own nation. This finding concords with findings in the previous section in relation to prominent Burmese and Indonesian socialists. While political contexts in each country were different, and intellectuals in Southeast Asia found it harder to travel abroad in the manner of JP or JB Kripalani, each socialist assessed above moved in a similar, social-democratic or democratic socialist ideological direction. They sensed that the future lay with the nation-state and that they had to work with, or take clearer positions on, its modernising agendas were they to remain relevant. They therefore began to enunciate an ideology or philosophy for national flourishing. The ‘democratic’ element of their philosophies was informed by anti-communism, but not this alone. It was also a function of a genuine commitment to crafting egalitarian and participatory postcolonial societies which they had worked for through the ASC for a number of years, and which they now determined to campaign for at home, to varying extents. This indicates how integrally the transnational dimensions of decolonisation were tied to national or regional ones in the 1950s, and that exploring the former provides fresh perspectives on the latter. The next section considers how the political careers of the ASC’s mobile intermediaries in the late 1950s can also be conceptualised as Asian socialist afterlives.

Afro-Asian Socialism, 1957-1960

For the mobile intermediaries at the heart of Asian socialism, the ASC Bombay congress of 1956 was bittersweet. It brought together many friends and contacts who these intermediaries had cultivated across Asia, Africa, and Europe, but failed to spark any renewal of the kind of transformative transnational political project they had envisioned. Even so, in the years afterwards, the likes of Hla Aung, Nath Pai, and Wijono increased their standing in world socialist circles. These Burmese, Indian, and Indonesian socialists aimed to integrate
anti-imperialism into the lexicon and praxis of their global partners and contacts. They also wanted to launch and participate in international socialist ventures which facilitated close contact between Africans and Asians in particular. More African nations – most significantly, Ghana – gained independence in the late 1950s, which these Asian socialists were conscious of. They made some journeys to these nations following trips to Europe, as before. They also hastened to global socialist hubs such as Israel, which provided the space, time, and resources that Afro-Asian socialists needed to find common cause. In doing so, they participated in the developmentalist turn among Asian socialists which the previous section has pointed towards, contributing to training and education projects that prepared interlocutors for involvement in state-building activities at home. However, the concerns of these mobile intermediaries were more international and less domestic than those of leading Asian socialists. They were less ideological and more focussed on pushing world socialist institutions and parties in anti-imperialist directions while nurturing Afro-Asian solidarities. They continued to act as labourers and doers of anti-imperialism into the 1960s, though rarely as the primary architects of given projects, which distinguishes their transnational engagements from those ‘solidarities of action’ assessed in Chapter II.

One mobile socialist intermediary who featured in previous chapters was Nath Pai. Pai had been made President of the IUSY in 1954. One of Pai’s first actions as IUSY President had been to attempt to stir interest from European socialists in supporting the Goan freedom struggle in 1955. He pressed this project forward in December 1956, hosting a Presidium of the IUSY in New Delhi, the first to take place outside Europe, where he passed a resolution offering ‘fullest support’ to the people of Goa ‘in their struggle to wipe out the last outpost of imperialism on the soil of India’. The Presidium also passed resolutions on Hungary and Egypt, condemning Communist atrocities in the former and welcoming UN intervention in the latter.\(^72\) Pai’s convocation of an IUSY assembly in South Asia and use of the event to highlight anti-imperialist struggle in Goa made plain that he wanted to turn the body’s attentions towards ongoing efforts at decolonisation in the region. The Presidium constituted an ideal opportunity to sow an advocacy for anti-imperialist movements into the transnational fabric of IUSY activism – and to tie a knot with socialist youth from Europe and beyond who travelled to the Indian capital and were not necessarily as convinced as Pai that socialism and anti-

imperialism were inextricable. The IUSY grew more interested in the decolonising world from the mid-1950s; in 1957, it was to expand its scholarship programme for African and Asian youth and work even harder to solicit ‘Third World’ engagement, thanks to the efforts of Pai among others.\(^73\)

Indian socialists benefitted from stable political conditions in these interactions. In February 1957, Joint General Secretary of the IUSY Menahem Bargil addressed a letter to editor of *Janata* Rohit Dave in which he reminded Dave to send him copies of the newspaper following their meeting at the *Janata* offices during the ASC congress.\(^74\) Dave was one of several junior Indian socialists who was working vigorously to craft connections with socialists and anti-imperialists abroad through print cultures among other means. He was also keenly involved with Indian youth movements such as PSP youth group the Samajwadi Yuwak Sabha (SYS), whom he lectured in July 1957 on his ‘picture of a socialist society’.\(^75\) Some Indian socialists such as Dave rarely had the chance to venture across borders to other countries themselves, but they acted as vital conduits between South and Southeast Asian socialists, European socialists, and African freedom fighters who hoped to wage shared international struggles. *Socialist Asia* ceased publication in 1957 and keen journalists such as Dave, as editor of *Janata*, could keep international communication circuits alive that were partially sustained through print cultures. It was through rooted activisms such as this, not just flighty excursions and participation in conventions, that institutions such as the IUSY came to constitute ‘an arm’ of Asian socialists by the late 1950s.\(^76\)

Hla Aung and Wijono of Burma and Indonesia respectively continued to figure centrally in international socialist networks. This pair had contributed greatly to the ASC’s keynote Afro-Asian projects in the early to mid-1950s – communicating with interested parties from Rangoon whilst commissioning and conducting lengthy transnational excursions themselves. With the seeming diminution of internationalist possibilities in the mid-1950s, they entered into a stinting embrace with the SI, hoping to change its priorities from anti-communism towards anti-imperialism. They pursued similar objectives as the ASC declined even further in

\(^73\) Luža, *International Socialist Youth Movement*, 175.

\(^74\) Menahem Bargil to Rohit Dave, February 13 1957, IUSY Archives, Documents regarding India, 1957-1962, 1965, fol. 1528, IISH.

\(^75\) Rohit Dave, “My Picture of a Socialist Society,” *Janata* 12, no. 27 (1957): 10-11.

\(^76\) Luža, *International Socialist Youth Movement*, 169.
the late 1950s. The ASC had not yet vanished completely and this pairing used its offices to stay in contact with friends elsewhere and organise their communications long after Bombay – Hla Aung probably funnelled limited funding from the BSP to keep it going. In May 1957, Hla Aung proposed to postpone the next ASC bureau meeting in Nepal until October. This followed on from discussions with Mobarak Sagher of Pakistan, BP Koirala of Nepal, and two Indian socialists, about how the ASC needed to define a clearer policy for ‘West Asia’ and ‘contact friendly elements in various Arab countries’. There had been serious disagreements on West Asian tensions at Bombay in November 1956, where major party leaders tended towards a pro-Israel position whilst others preferred an anti-imperialist one. With these party leaders operating at a disconnect from the main business of the ASC, it was the more Afro-Asian contingent such as Hla Aung and Wijono that was making decisions in 1957. On this point, Hla Aung noted how the ‘absence of the Chairman’ had forced him to take the decision on postponement in his circular to member parties – Ba Swe still held the brief of chairman but grew increasingly aloof of the organisation.

Meanwhile, Hla Aung expanded his own contact book. In April 1957, he exchanged letters with Mary Saran, Secretary of the International Council of Social Democratic Women (ICSDW). The ICSDW was another organisation alongside the IUSY around which European and Afro-Asian socialists interfaced in this period, which has been little studied by historians. Early treatments of post-war feminist internationalism focus on transnational institutions where these institutions allowed predominantly white women to reach out to women elsewhere. Female as well as male socialists could reach in the other direction, often where they sensed that an organisation such as the ICSDW, like the IUSY, could create opportunities for fruitful dialogues between African, Asian, and European activists about regional or world socialist prospects, and especially women’s involvement in them. The ICSDW established scholarship schemes to allow women from the ‘Third World’ to study abroad at this time, as well as programmes of technical assistance to women in particular countries. Indian socialists had

78 “Letter No. 116 ASC II (B)/57.”
recently formed a women’s section of the PSP, and this allowed ICSDW activists to network with Asian socialist women more easily. In his letter to Mary Saran, Hla Aung apologised for having missed Rita Hinden, a British social democrat who edited a journal with Saran in London, on Hinden’s trip to Rangoon in early 1957, and sent Saran an article by Indonesian socialist Lintong Mulia Sitorus about the latest ASC congress in Bombay.\footnote{U Hla Aung to Mary Saran, April 3 1957, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference - Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.} This revealed that Hla Aung was keen to remain a stalwart of the international socialist scene in the late 1950s by renewing and expanding his contact book with members of increasingly active transnational organisations such as the ICSDW. It also hinted at Asian socialists’ position as critical intermediaries in ongoing world socialist conversations who could bring European and Asian activists into closer contact.

In July, Hla Aung attended the SI congress in Vienna, where he is pictured on the right in Figure 19. At this congress, Israeli attendee Reuven Barkatt – head of the Political and Arab Affairs departments of Histadrut – remarked on how Hla Aung had spoken in favour of ‘consultation between Socialist delegations from both Europe and Asia’ in light of the disappointing record of delegations from Afro-Asian countries in the UN, which had failed to ‘influence that bloc in the direction of making it a new moral force in international relations’.\footnote{Moshe Sharett, My Struggle for Peace: The Diary of Moshe Sharett 1953-1956: Volume 1 October 1953 – December 1954, ed. and trans. Neil Caplan, and Yaakov Sharett (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2019), 138; “Fifth Congress of the SI Vienna, 2-6 July 1957,” Prem Bhasin Papers (Socialist Party), fol. 32, NMML, 60.} Hla Aung and Barkatt seemed to hope that socialist internationalism could become an effective alternate vehicle for articulating Afro-Asian claims to self-determination and a just and fair international order to the UN. In this connection, Hla Aung – in Barkatt’s words – talked about the problems faced by socialist parties in Asia, which included ‘splits, internal tensions, and...heavy setbacks’, whilst ‘more and more governments in Asia – whether they be Socialist in character or not – are following a Socialist pattern of action’.\footnote{“Fifth Congress of the SI Vienna,” 60.} The pair were concerned with how to rejuvenate a genuine socialism in Asia so that it could feed a coherent Afro-Asian voice into international socialism. Around the dates of this congress, Hla Aung also made visits to Ghana in West Africa – where independence had just been celebrated – Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland in Europe, Pakistan and India in South Asia, and north Vietnam and south China in East Asia. He enjoyed his trip to Ghana in particular where he had the opportunity to ‘renew
old acquaintances’ such as EMK Mulira of Uganda and Harry Nkumbula of Northern Rhodesia and ‘[make] new friends too’. This spoke to the depth of his own Afro-Asian excitement, which he still hoped to map onto a notion of anti-imperial or world socialism.

Barkatt’s assumption of the role of mediator between European and Asian socialisms at the congress indicated the diplomatic importance of Israel within international socialism. Mapai endeavoured to bring African, Asian, and European socialists into communion. This became apparent in the aftermath of the Vienna congress. Hla Aung addressed Albert Carthy of the SI in September about an ‘Asian Seminar’ due to be held in Israel in 1958. He suggested that this proposal may have originated with Barkatt in Vienna, and that he would ‘inform our member parties and sound their opinion’. He planned to raise the idea at the ASC bureau meeting in Kathmandu in November – which would soon be delayed until 1958 itself – but worried about whether the ‘political climate’ in southern Asia would be conducive to such a seminar, in reference to hostility to Israel. The SI helped Mapai plan the event, which was to bring between 20 and 30 students to Israel for one month to consider ‘aspects of party tasks and Socialist thought’; these would include socialism and democracy, party organisation and

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84 “Report of the Secretary to the Second Bureau Meeting of the Second Term held in Kathmandu,” 86-87.
government, educational problems, problems of youth, and the ‘role of women in the party
and in the new society’. The SI proposed to bring a small group of the students to various
European countries after the event, which European socialist parties would pay for. The SI
and Mapai were close-knit organisations and could jointly provide opportunities for Asian
socialist youth to travel and network with fellow socialist youth where the ASC itself could
not. As we will see, these plans were sober by comparison with what the organisations
actually achieved by way of this ‘Asian Seminar’ the following year.

As the next, and final, ASC bureau meeting in Nepal neared, Asian socialists communicated
extensively with European contacts about how shared ventures could be advanced at the
bureau meeting. Two Burmese socialists – future President of the IUSY Maung Kyi Nyunt, and
AFPFL Minister of Finance Bo Khin Maung Gale – attended an IUSY congress in Rome in
October, where the IUSY determined to increase Asian representation on its Bureau. Here,
the IUSY decided to send Nath Pai to the upcoming ASC gathering in Kathmandu. Swedish
Secretary General of the IUSY Kurt Kristiansson had received an agenda for the Kathmandu
meeting from Hla Aung, and proposed that Asian socialists should discuss closer cooperation
with the IUSY alongside the other topics. Kristiansson also sent his regards to Wijono, who
had been doing much behind-the-scenes work for the ASC, cabling the SI on Dependent
People’s Freedom Day that week with a message which read: ‘accept greetings from ASC on
this occasion...colonialism is constant danger to peace and threat to harmony among peoples
stop believe unity and solidarity are strong weapons to defeat evils of exploitation, injustice,
 inequality, and expansionism’. Kristiansson detailed various IUSY ventures to Asia, the
Middle East, Europe, and Africa in the same letter, asking Hla Aung for recommendations
about countries for an IUSY delegation to visit in the latter.

The final ASC bureau meeting gathered in Kathmandu in Nepal from March 26 to March 29,
1958. Nepal was a constitutional monarchy in which an increasingly authoritarian king
accumulated political strength as against a divided civilian government; it would become a

89 Kurt Kristiansson to U Hla Aung.
parliamentary democracy in mid-1959 with BP Koirala at the helm. Koirala spent much of the 1950s pressing for this eventuality whilst travelling to Asian socialist meetings abroad. The bureau meeting began with a tragedy as a plane crashed near Kathmandu on an internal routine flight with no survivors, killing two members of the working committee of the Nepali Congress (NC). This event captured the sorry and confused state of Asian socialist politics overall; not only did ‘the top leaders of the various member parties’ such as Ba Swe, Kyaw Nyein, Sutan Sjahrr, Mosaburo Suzuki, and Asoka Mehta, not attend, but others, such as Mobarak Sagher, appeared with no invitation, causing difficulties for the organisers. There was clearly less preparation by the ASC itself and little interest from prominent socialists, who must have known that the organisation was in decline and was not particularly relevant. The main body of the attendees was made up of less well-known socialists from Asian and African countries. This included the secretaries Hla Aung and Wijono, Indian socialists KK Menon, NG Goray, and Prem Bhasin, members of the Burmese, Japanese, Israeli, Indonesian, and Nepali parties, a representative of the IUSY, and Peter Mafiamba of the African Bureau in New Delhi. Hla Aung may have secured a modest amount of funding from the BSP to cover some delegates’ travel costs, while the NC provided accommodation.

Hla Aung had been to Delhi shortly before the event and remarked that the three ‘energetic’ Indian socialists who attended the Kathmandu meeting – Menon, Goray, and Bhasin – had introduced a ‘new vigour into the structure of [the PSP]’. The trio had established a publication named the New Socialist in late 1957, which they would try and turn into a new magazine of anti-imperialist socialism as Socialist Asia disappeared. Print cultures were one of the means by which South and Southeast Asian socialists hoped to stay in close contact – which was why Hla Aung was interested in this trio. Wijono gave a speech to the Kathmandu meeting as vice-chairman which reckoned with what Asian and African socialists might contribute to world socialism. He remarked on how ‘peace’, which Cold War powers and postcolonial regimes made much of in propounding their social philosophies, had ‘become just a means to attain one’s political end rather than a determined struggle to obtain the full

93 “Report of the Secretary to the Second Bureau Meeting of the Second Term held in Kathmandu,” 90.
rights of the people to exercise freedom and democracy’. In earmarking ‘freedom’, here, he renewed the pledge of Asian socialists to fight for the right to self-determination of all colonised peoples, and he also emphasised his fidelity to ‘democracy’. He hoped that African and Asian socialists could constitute a ‘movement’ and ‘working programmes’ to pursue these ideals; this was to be their contribution to world socialism. Notably, Wijono did not position the ASC at the forefront of this ‘movement’; it appeared merely as an administrative centre which might facilitate exchanges and conversations.94

The resolutions adopted by the meeting were revealing in terms of the demise of the ASC but also the continued idealism of the individuals present. The first of a mere three resolutions was on international tension; it proposed a ‘summit talk’ between the United States and the Soviet Union, which would consider banning nuclear tests and prohibiting all nuclear weapons, suspending the supply of arms to foreign countries, removing nuclear bases across the world, concluding a non-aggression treaty, and reopening disarmament talks. This was aimed at abating or even ending the Cold War, as well as power politics itself, in order to nurture world peace. It showed that the socialists present had significant ambition by way of revising the existing international order – a longstanding Asian socialist goal. The following two resolutions concerned aid for freedom struggles in Africa and Algeria. The former expressed solidarity with Africans striving towards ‘a free world committed to peace, equality, and social justice’; the latter focussed on the repression of the Algerian struggle, averring that anything other than full support from French socialists for the struggle would ‘be an aberration from basic Socialist principles’.95 Taken together, the resolutions revealed that attendees viewed developments in African theatres – where decolonisation was gathering pace – as being immensely important in the general course of world socialism.

In the wake of the Kathmandu meeting, the ASC’s mobile intermediaries pursued their own internationalist trajectories once more. They maintained anti-imperialism as a key plank of their activisms and tried to link the local to the global in this regard, where their superiors more often acted as diplomats for particular state-making projects. Nath Pai, again, was a key figure here. In August 1958 he brought the Executive Committee of the IUSY to Bombay –

having earlier brought its Presidium to Delhi in 1956. Pai had become an MP for Ratnagiri in Bombay State in the 1957 elections for the PSP. He was elected alongside another of the ‘energetic’ Indian socialist workers who so enthused Hla Aung, NG Goray, who took the Pune seat.96 Pai cultivated links with youth organisations in the post such as the SYS, which grew closer to the IUSY as a result.97 He continued as President of the IUSY until 1960. The August 1958 Executive Committee meeting featured delegates from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Holland, Israel, the United States, and Kenya, and was organised closely by the Rashtra Seva Dal (RSD) – a youth organisation associated with the INC – as well as the SYS. The meeting focussed on imperialism in Kenya, Goa, and Algeria, as well as the ‘new kind of imperialism of Russia’, according to General Secretary Kurt Kristiansson.98 Pai had worked to turn the attentions of international socialist youth towards imperialism for some years and his influence was clearly felt in the emphasis of this meeting. It also indicated a willingness to foment links between local and global socialist youth. A ‘leapfrogging of the national’ to the global had been characteristic of the work of Asian socialist intermediaries since their early exchanges and indicates the depth of enthusiasm some interlocutors still had for trying to nurture the emergence of an anti-imperial world socialism in the late 1950s.99

A major event which epitomised all of the efforts of Asian socialists towards maximising international socialist cooperation in the late 1950s was the Afro-Asian Seminar on Cooperation in Israel. This brought together 100 participants from over 60 countries for four months, beginning in November 1958, to study what Aliza Belman Inbal and Shachar Zahavi term ‘Israel’s unique mode of cooperative socialism, which offered an alternative to Western capitalism and Eastern bloc government-led socialism’. This seminar was the outcome of the ‘Asian seminar’ idea which the SI, Mapai, and the ASC had been collaborating on for over 12 months, following Hla Aung and Reuven Barkatt’s liaison at the SI Vienna congress. It was jointly organised by Histadrut and Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.100 These two institutions worked together on national development projects including kibbutzim, and attracted

96 “Paean for Pai.”
100 Aliza Belman Inbal, and Shachar Zahavi, The Rise and Fall of Israeli’s Bilateral Aid Budget (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and Pears Foundation, 2009), 26.
growing interest from countries undergoing their own development projects in the nascent ‘Third World’, particularly in the sphere of labour and cooperative organisations.\footnote{Akiva Eger, “Histadrut: Pioneer and Pilot Plant for Israel’s International Cooperation with the Third World,” in \textit{Israel in the Third World}, ed. Michael Curtis, and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1976), 75.} The story of this seminar, which has largely been forgotten as against the larger and more prolonged Afro-Asian solidarity programmes of the period such as the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), could easily be told through the lens of Israeli national politics and diplomacy; but this was only one side of the coin. The seminar was in part a non-state affair – resulting not just from the initiatives of major Israeli actors, but also from those of actors without an obvious state brief such as Hla Aung – which imbibed the energies of countless transnational Asian and African actors.

As we have seen, Carthy and Barkatt of the SI and Mapai respectively first shared ideas about the project in 1957. It was then concretised by Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir in response to the requests of West Africans she visited the same year for technical assistance and advice, and by Barkatt and associates in the ASC – likely Hla Aung, Wijono, and a handful of Indian socialists – who stirred interest in their networks and at international labour gatherings.\footnote{“Cooperative Life in Israel Studied: 60 from Asia and Africa Look for Patterns for Projects at Home,” \textit{Times of India}, Jan 24, 1959, 4.} David Ben-Gurion, Meir, and Barkatt all spoke at the inaugural meeting of the seminar on November 20 1958. Ben-Gurion and Meir affected a kind of paternalistic solidarity, inviting attendees to ‘learn a little from our experience’ in the ‘economic, social, and scientific domain’; by contrast, Barkatt was overtly anti-imperialist, identifying decolonising peoples as an ‘emerging new world’ engaged in a collective struggle for ‘material well-being’. Two African speakers – JA Ayorindo of Nigeria, and EFK Atiemo of Ghana – and one Asian speaker, Omprakash Gupta of the Bhoodan movement in India, added their thoughts, enthusing about the potentially ‘universal’ applications of the cooperative ethos underlying Israeli agricultural experiments.\footnote{“Excerpts from Addresses at the opening of the Afro-Asian Seminar on Cooperation,” Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference – Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.} This suggested that many African and Asian attendees cared as much about evolving a new form of constructive socialism linking far-flung radical actors and movements
as about state-building – though the two impulses inevitably entangled. Over 1000 people listened in to these speeches.\textsuperscript{104}

The subsequent four-month study tour of Israel enabled participants to experience life in smallholder villages directly. A \textit{Times of India} report from the Kfar Vitkin \textit{moshav} – or cooperative agricultural community – in January 1959 documented how about 60 visitors took up residence with local farmers, serving on the staffs of bus companies, banks, hospitals, marketing organisations, and other enterprises owned by workers.\textsuperscript{105} The visitors included trade union and cooperative officials, government officials, professors, farmers, social workers, and economists from French and British colonies as well as independent countries. Their concerns and conclusions when studying these projects were diverse; some visitors from Burma and Thailand, for instance, hoped to ‘develop chains of border settlements’ at home ‘to make their frontiers less vulnerable to communist and rebel infiltrators’, whilst others, such as Ghanaians and Ethiopians, hoped to ‘raise the prestige of farm work in their countries to combat the worrisome tide of youth from the bush to the cities’. Some found the Israeli communes to bolster their confidence in tackling domestic political problems whilst others did not.\textsuperscript{106} The seminar had long-term repercussions. Histadrut formed an ‘Afro-Asian Training Institute’ in 1960 in response to requests from countries that sent delegates to the event for technical support.\textsuperscript{107} This institute hosted African and Asian trade unionists on government scholarships and contributed to the establishment of local trades union-to-trades union schemes particularly in Africa.\textsuperscript{108} Through helping conceive this 1958 Afro-Asian seminar, Asian socialist internationalists helped create the material bases of the labouring and technocratic internationalisms of the next decade, whilst also promoting solidarities between African and Asian attendees to the event itself.

Meanwhile, the ASC flatlined at the close of 1958; Barkatt informed Carthy of how ‘from time to time’ he received cables from the body to international organisations including ‘a strange

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\item\textsuperscript{104} Esther Herlitz to Albert Carthy, December 14 1958, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference – Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.
\item\textsuperscript{105} Moshavim are similar to kibbutzim except that in the former, smallholders typically own and operate the land, whereas in the latter, it is farmed collectively. Michael Brecher, \textit{Political Leadership and Charisma: Nehru, Ben-Gurion, and Other 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Political Leaders: Intellectual Odyssey I} (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 206.
\item\textsuperscript{106} “Cooperative Life in Israel Studied,” 4.
\item\textsuperscript{107} Inbal and Zahavi, \textit{Israel’s Bilateral Aid Budget}, 26.
\item\textsuperscript{108} Gary Busch, \textit{The Political Role of International Trades Unions} (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1983), 40.
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cable on the matter of Algeria’, but that in practical terms it could hardly be said to still exist. Wijono moved to Jakarta from Rangoon at the beginning of 1959 as the ASC’s office in Burma had become obsolete. Carthy recorded in a message to Barkatt how ‘serious and vigorous’ Wijono continued to be in replies to letters, and in reports on individual Asian socialist parties. Wijono’s embrace of Carthy and the SI did not mean that he toned down his anti-imperialism; Carthy noted in the letter how Wijono supported the recognition of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria, which reflected ‘a different emphasis from the International’. Wijono did not have the ‘dual responsibilities’ which Hla Aung, as a Burmese MP, did, meaning that he could dedicate himself more resolutely to internationalist campaigning. Wijono remained deeply interested in political events around Asia and how they affected socialist prospects more widely. Whilst lamenting the rise of authoritarianism in Pakistan and Thailand, he viewed the ascension to power of Ne Win in Burma more calmly as this leadership was still ‘firmly within the circles of Burma’s revolutionist professionals’. He worried about the supposed rise of communism in Burma and elsewhere. For him, as for other Asian socialists, the key threat which democratic socialism faced in Asia and Africa was communism, and this may further have entrenched his determination to work with democratic socialists internationally who could provide models of non-communist social organisation for Asians and Africans to draw on.

Wijono excited in a letter to Carthy over an IUSY ‘youth leader training seminar’ which was to take place in Israel in March-April 1959 and enable participants from Europe, Africa, North America, and the Caribbean to study Israeli youth movements for six weeks. Arrangements for this seminar had been made at Rome in Italy and then at the New Delhi IUSY Presidium in 1956, suggesting Nath Pai’s involvement. Wijono cabled the IUSY and Mapai with the words: ‘ASC CHEERING OF HOLDING YOUTH SEMINAR ON ASIAN HOPES RISE VALUABLE YOUTHCADRES STRENGTHENING AFROASIAN SOCIALISM’. Even though the seminar hosted


110 U Hla Aung to Albert Carthy, January 4 1959, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference – Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.


youths from all around the globe, Wijono’s primary interest was in how such ventures advanced the causes of socialism in Asia and Africa in particular. This was also obvious in engagements with the SI. In March, he addressed Carthy, who he first thanked for ‘the way you are looking after ASC interests’. Carthy was likely keeping him and other Asian socialists in the loop as to ‘world socialist’ plans. Wijono recorded how he was glad to assent to a request from Belgian socialist Franz Tielemans to meet an ASC representative at the upcoming SI congress in Hamburg personally to discuss ‘the situation in the Congo’ after the event.\textsuperscript{114} Clamour for independence was ramping up in this Belgian colony, and European socialists valued Asian socialist knowledge about what was taking place.

Wijono had his own ideas as to what the SI should do about the Congo. He suggested that the SI should ‘collect as much information as possible’ by way of inviting Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, George Padmore, Tom Mboya, Ferhat Abbas, Taieb Slim, and Allal Fazi to Hamburg. He added that ‘these are some of them only’ – indicating his wider knowledge of the continent – and asked if the SI would have another bureau meeting ‘to consider the African Problem as a whole’.\textsuperscript{115} It is notable that several of these names were friends from the ASC. Others were leading freedom fighters and thus would constitute quite a coup to bring to Europe at one time. Wijono’s ambitions were not diminishing. There was also a reason to focus on bringing anti-colonial leaders to the congress as opposed to mere cadres. Hla Aung addressed a letter several days later to Asian socialist parties, the SI, the IUSY, the ICSDW, the BLP, and Wijono, in which he declared that it was their collective ‘objective [to] bring the freedom forces in Africa as a solid unit to fight for Freedom and Justice for the whole of Africa’. He identified disturbances in Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, and the Congo as portending a politics of ‘suppression and persecutions of individual leaders’ on the part of the late colonial state which socialists had to combat. Increasing the international profile of these individual leaders by such means as inviting them to major European conferences might forestall this tactic of the colonial state. Hla Aung, like Wijono, strongly positioned himself as an arbiter between European and African socialists; he emphasised how leaders in Northern

\textsuperscript{114} Wijono to Albert Carthy, March 8 1959, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference – Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.

\textsuperscript{115} Wijono to Carthy, March 8 1959.
Rhodesia and Nyasaland were well known to him, and that the ASC and SI should collectively organise a ‘fact finding Mission’ to these areas.\(^{116}\)

These communiqués presaged a longer-term dialectic between European and Asian socialists which ran into the early 1960s. European socialists solicited information about decolonisation in Africa and Asia from Asian socialist contacts. Asian socialists endeavoured in turn to sway the world socialist movement towards adopting anti-imperialist positions on anti-colonial struggles. Asian socialists had sought to radicalise European comrades’ positions on imperialism since the mid-1950s as part of their own internationalist praxis. That they continued to do this tenders an example of another Asian socialist afterlife in global politics.

At the turn of the 1960s, the growth of authoritarianism in Southeast Asia harmed prospects of Asian socialists involving themselves in international socialist conversations at all. In February 1960, Burma held elections in which a civilian government resumed power from a military administration. U Nu’s ‘Clean AFPFL’ defeated Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein’s ‘Stable AFPFL’, which was a blow to Burmese socialists; this did not arrest the militarist drift of Burma, and General Ne Win overthrew Nu for good in March 1962. Meanwhile, Wijono recorded how Indonesia was ‘strongly developing its ‘Guided Democracy’, personified in the personality of the President himself’. President Sukarno dissolved parliament with immediate effect in March 1960, reasoning that it had been uncooperative in his pursuit of Guided Democracy.\(^{117}\) The implications of these developments for chances of democratic socialism in the region were obvious.

Overall, this section has argued that mobile South and Southeast Asian socialist intermediaries continued to endeavour to craft an anti-imperialist internationalism at the end of the 1950s. They pursued this end as a more discrete web of actors than before. Each of them took advantage of their familiarity with European socialists and world socialist institutions to push for coordinated action on colonialism. Nath Pai contributed an Afro-Asian perspective to international youth socialist networks, making the IUSY a more global than simply European body. Hla Aung and Wijono tried to involve themselves in SI projects as well as Mapai schemes that facilitated the growth of Afro-Asian solidarities and channelled


\(^{117}\) Wijono to Albert Carthy, March 6 1960, Socialist International Archives, Asian Socialist Conference – Dependent Peoples Freedom Day, fol. 513, IISH.
support to African freedom struggles. These entanglements typified a more dialogical approach to decolonisation which persisted until around 1960, whereby South and Southeast Asian activists attempted to foment solidarities between Africans and Asians oriented towards constructing the egalitarian and democratic, post-imperial societies of the future. These intermediaries embarked on experimental, long-distance journeys, connecting African and Asian youth – with Europeans and Israelis often acting as facilitators – who they hoped might be the engineers of these futures. There was no guarantee that the ventures Asian socialist intermediaries participated in would bear any fruit, and they doubtless had to funnel some funding from their parties to make them feasible, indicating again how far non-state anti-imperial nationalisms and internationalisms were connate in the 1950s.

Conclusion

This chapter has tracked the political activities and internationalist trajectories of Asian socialists in the late 1950s. By and large, leading Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists reconciled with social-democratic and developmentalist trends in regional and international politics at this time. These leading socialists, who tended to operate closer to the halls of state power than those just considered, moved in a social-democratic ideological direction. They sought to democratise state-building projects in their own countries. Their focus on ideas of democracy and cooperation were an inflection of Asian socialist internationalism, turned inwards to critique and modify the political pursuits of state leaders in South and Southeast Asia. This is most obvious in the case of Indian socialists such as JP, who embarked on extensive trips abroad with the intention of honing a clear ‘democratic socialist’ agenda that India could draw on. His journey followed a broadly similar pattern as Asian socialist journeys several years earlier, covering countries in Western Europe as well as Yugoslavia and parts of the Middle East. Most Asian socialists that this chapter has considered, with the exception of leading Burmese and Indonesian socialists, engaged analogous persons, institutions, and networks as they had in previous periods to advance their claims and press their agendas. This speaks to the continued significance of the Asian socialist interlude that this thesis has studied for individuals who held sway in different ways at home as well as in international liberal and socialist circles, running at least into the early 1960s.
The bifurcation of Asian socialist internationalists along the lines of statesmen and charismatic party leaders against peripatetic junior politicians and intellectuals that this chapter has surveyed illuminates an important tension between postcolonial state-building and transnational anti-imperialist organising which sharpened in the late 1950s. The Bandung Conference of 1955 signified a shift towards a more pedagogic brand of nation-state-building among various Afro-Asian political leaders which foregrounded economic development as a vital task of postcolonial regimes. Centralised planning undertaken by enlightened technocrats appeared to be the zeitgeist of the era. The victories of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian state leaders in elections in the mid to late 1950s emboldened them in the sanctity of their rule, and made prospects of Asian socialists gaining power and promoting more democratic notions of development and postcolonial flourishing appear non-existent. The febrile decolonising moment that coaxed experimental Asian socialisms into being was doused by the political direction of official decolonisation as well as the Cold War – even if freedom struggles in Africa provided new sources of excitement. The Cold War, which increasingly appeared as a global ideological struggle in which the United States and Soviet Union tendered universalistic modernisation theories, encouraged South and Southeast Asian state leaders to emphasise their own modernising credentials even more clearly, since these leaders wanted to preserve their sovereignty whilst also taking aid from the superpowers where necessary.

In these conditions, prominent South and Southeast Asian socialists, who had more domestic responsibilities than their party brethren and fewer opportunities to engage in experimental long-distance journeys, considered that their only options as far as accomplishing the egalitarian and democratic political change they envisioned were to engage with and alter developmentalist postcolonial nationalisms. This thesis has emphasised how the actors it studies flitted between the national and the international, and that the one was inextricable from the other. However, the regional base which activists operated from bore significantly on what they were able to envisage in regard to local and global political transformation. Even those activists who were as mobile and keenly internationalist as Hla Aung and Wijono began to retreat from their transnational networks by the early 1960s. The chapter hints at a growing hegemony of postcolonial state-building in southern Asia which gradually enfolded formerly oppositional activists. The pedagogical and dialogical sides of decolonisation existed...
alongside one another and interpenetrated, but the dialogical consisted in mobile intermediaries fielding open-ended conversations between far-flung contacts about political change, and this was getting rarer and more difficult for South and Southeast Asians. This argument feeds back to a key claim of this thesis that the 1950s was a decade resplendent with possibility for non-state internationalists centred in southern Asia, which cannot be said as easily for the 1960s, although further research is required into the topic.

In this connection, it is apt to close with a note from Ram Manohar Lohia, who was unusual among socialist leaders in that he had remained fiercely critical of his government through the 1950s and continued to travel abroad almost as frequently as before. Lohia had moved away from both the INC and the PSP by the late 1950s and aspired to meet the likes of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Thorez on upcoming travels to Europe. He wrote in 1960 of how a ‘philosophy of cosmopolitanism, which has ruled India over the past thirteen years’ was pervasive in ruling circles. He went on: ‘this is the philosophy that strives to make the world alike without trying to make it equal, to imitate some superficial virtues of the dominant countries, to be liberal without being revolutionary. The result is a concept of citizenship, which is provincial at one end, sons of the soil, and world-wide at the other, world brotherhood and statehood’. What Lohia was talking about here was a dualistic philosophy of liberal nationalism and internationalism – a desire to integrate one’s self into a monochromatic global family of nation-states. It chimes with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s invocation of a pedagogic approach to decolonisation, pioneered by prominent South and Southeast Asian state leaders among others, which made ‘catching-up-with-the-West’ the goal of its modernisation and development programmes. It arguably characterised the political direction of given regimes at the close of the 1950s, for all of the efforts of Asian socialists to hone different internationalist imaginaries earlier in the decade that prioritised the achievement of a specific kind of society – equal, democratic, fair, and just – over the ascendancy of a particular nation-state.

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Conclusion

This thesis has painted a portrait of a South and Southeast Asian socialist and anti-imperialist interlude in immediate post-war history which refines and advances our understandings of decolonisation and subaltern internationalisms in the global 1950s. The 1950s was a decade of great political innovation and experimentation among mobile non-state actors who flitted from country to country forging quick connections with copious allies. The thesis takes an energetic set of activists from the newly-independent nations of India, Burma, and Indonesia and tracks their attempts across a diversity of platforms, contexts, and circumstances to fashion the beginnings of different regional and global social and political orders in the 1950s. It considers how they came into contact, what they aimed to achieve by way of national and international change, how they promoted these aims via the ASC, and how they sought to shift the politics of local and world actors as the ASC declined in the late 1950s. These activists typify the ‘dialogical’ side to 1950s decolonisation, whereby non-state actors initiated open-ended conversations with far-flung contacts after independence about how to transform social orders in the direction of equality, democracy, social justice, prosperity, and fairness. These actors utilised cheaper and more effective technologies of communication and air travel to furnish up motley transnational networks of radicals and freedom fighters. Their networking was ad hoc and fragile – capable of being interrupted by visa and passport restrictions, financial difficulties, colonial surveillance, Cold War geopolitics, and Asian state development – if also generative, in that key activists crafted new solidarities through their extensive labours in this decade. The 1950s played host to manifold multi-directional decolonising underworlds which historians have only recently begun investigating. This thesis adds much more detail, depth, and nuance to our understandings of these subaltern internationalisms in terms of the labours that went into them, the conflicts and tensions that characterised them, and how they were sustained between conferences.

The thesis adopts a biographical and networked approach to following the transnational political lives of leading and intermediary South and Southeast Asian socialists from 1947 onwards. It reveals how these socialists conceptualised their internationalist agendas in conferences but also small-scale meetings, personal travels, and reflections on those travels and meetings. In doing so, it reveals much about the global dimensions of Asian
decolonisation. Formal decolonisation nourished kaleidoscopic imaginaries about post-imperial futures whose roots can be found in earlier anti-colonial struggles, but which now saw a world rife with possibility that they could make anew. Specific activists took these visions forward in rough-hewn form, hoping to cultivate friendships with likeminded actors near and far who could help them give the visions clearer definition. On their journeys, these activists came into contact with anti-imperialists and socialists from other regions of Asia as well as Europe and Africa who they grew close to and fashioned shared political projects with. As such, tracing their mazy transnational lives brings to earth fresh histories of Asia-in-the-world that bore on African freedom fighters and European social democrats and ricocheted back to touch state-building regimes at home. Asian socialists tendered material and ideological support to African freedom movements in padding out their networks; these African nationalists taught Asian socialists in turn about the progress of relevant struggles. Asian socialists fed information to European socialists about decolonisation in Asia, while encouraging them to be more anti-imperialist, and in return, received help in organising long-distance journeys and tours. More pointedly, these histories speak to how countless ‘subaltern’ actors in decolonising Asia experienced and attempted to shape decolonisation in the 1950s, irrespective of whether they succeeded in realising aspects of their visions at home or around the globe. These actors created meaning in the course of their own conversations and political plots which continued to move them into the 1960s when the possibilities they had discerned in the 1950s were no longer plausible.

Chapter I, ‘Beginnings: Socialism in Decolonising Asia’, introduces leading Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialist politicians and assesses their formative encounters. It proposes that each of these individuals – including JP and Ram Manohar Lohia in the case of India, U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein in Burma, and Sutan Sjahrir of Indonesia – had a similar view of how the newfound freedom of South and Southeast Asian nations could subserve an international socialist agenda seeking to defeat imperialism and craft more egalitarian and democratic social orders in its place. The chapter makes use of print cultures, letters, and private papers to advance this argument, and examines how the first ASC congress in Rangoon in January 1953 was infused with an idealism that spoke to this brimming sense of political promise. The five years following independence in South and Southeast Asia constituted a moment of particular political excitement in the region and this excitement played into the foundation of
the ASC, which was intended as a vehicle for promoting closer partnership between Asian socialists who could then work out ideas for achieving radical international political change. At Rangoon, delegates attempted to reach a shared understanding of what socialism might consist in, both at a national and an international level. They tended to see it as implying deeply egalitarian and democratic social orders integrating workers themselves into the management of industry as in Yugoslavia, if also as a notion implying a strong, redistributive welfare state. There were questions over how an international socialism should approach issues of ongoing colonialism in Asia, disputes between nations such as that unfolding in Kashmir, and the state of Israel, but the spirit of excitement about the future tended to keep any disagreements civil. Socialism could be carried in a number of directions by different interlocutors and it is in this capaciousness that its strength as a deft mobilisational category lay; it opened up conversations about potential post-imperial futures between heterogenous persons and parties.

Chapter II, ‘The Solidarity of Action: Asian Socialism from Hyderabad to Tokyo’, seeks to demonstrate how Asian and African socialists constructed telling transnational solidarities around the ASC in 1953 and 1954 that made the realisation of their collective dreams a genuine possibility. The chapter describes these solidarities as ‘solidarities of action’ that manifested in practical programmes and schemes for the furtherance of Afro-Asian socialist aims. The Afro-Asian solidarities historians are most familiar with in relation to the 1950s are those which took shape around the Bandung project, but these were largely performative; the solidarities that this chapter surveys were created through hard graft. This hard graft included fulfilling administrative tasks in the Rangoon office of the ASC whilst also embarking on experimental journeys abroad, that were difficult to fund and vulnerable to many potential interruptions. The chapter is structured around a succession of ASC bureau meetings, more intimate than the large conferences which most scholarship on Afro-Asian internationalisms focusses on, at which a set of less reputable Asian socialists than the ones introduced in Chapter I came to the fore. These individuals, whom the thesis terms ‘mobile intermediaries’, ventured far and wide bringing new freedom fighters into Asian socialist networks and grounding these friendships on surer political footings. They came up with ideas for how to challenge imperialism and construct international socialism in collaboration with predominantly African and Asian allies, formulating an ‘Anti-Colonial Campaign’ through the
ACB which tried to link different African freedom struggles. As with the leading socialists traced in Chapter I, they took considerable risks for uncertain rewards on their travels, and turned to European socialists to help them find accommodation, flights, and pad out their itineraries. It was not only anti-colonial strategising which Asian socialists pressed forward with in this period; the chapter closes with a discussion of the ASC bureau meeting in Tokyo, which symbolised the growing preoccupation of certain Asian socialists with how to integrate their economies, as Cold War blocs expanded through Asia and threatened to botch the imagined ‘Third Force’ unless relevant political parties gained power and implemented the necessary policies in the near future.

Chapter III, ‘From Asian Socialism to World Socialism: Statesmen-In-Waiting and Subaltern Internationalists’, studies how Asian socialists adjusted in the face of domestic political splits and defeats, the ascendancy of a rival internationalism comprising the Bandung project, and growing Cold War paranoia. This was, as the title suggests, in moving towards notions of world socialist partnership. The mobile intermediaries at the forefront of the ASC – U Hla Aung and Wijono – cultivated friendships with European and Israeli socialists many of whom were in government and capable of expediting projects which promoted international socialist solidarities. These intermediaries made anti-imperialism the fulcrum of their trade-off with European socialists, insisting that these socialists commit to supporting freedom movements in Africa and ending colonialism as a precursor to constructing world socialism. The final section of the chapter considers the second ASC congress in Bombay, which was racked by Cold War tensions manifest in events in Europe and the Middle East that laid bare fissures in the coalitions of socialists and anti-imperialists that the ASC’s intermediaries had cobbled together at the congress. The non-state internationalisms of the 1950s were inherently unstable enterprises, and the diverse collections of attendees that Asian socialist intermediaries invited to this meeting – including grassroots anti-imperialists, Cold Warriors, Israeli diplomats, and grandiose Indians – did not combine well given the geopolitics of late 1956. There had always been tensions between participants in Asian socialist conversations who wanted to quickly channel support to local freedom struggles and those who made lofty pronouncements about world politics, those who felt imperialism was the key problem in world politics and those who felt that communism was the most dangerous force, and Bombay accentuated these. Even so, several of these groups of attendees grew closer with
one another and fostered relationships which would have been of use to them in years to come.

Chapter IV, ‘Afterlives of Asian Socialism’, investigates the political trajectories of key and intermediary Asian socialists in the late 1950s. Leading Asian socialists adopted a social-democratic or democratic socialist ideological stance with which they hoped to critique and revamp the state-making regimes of South and Southeast Asia. This carried forward something of the Asian socialist internationalism to which they had dedicated themselves earlier on, in the form of a commitment to democratising these regimes with reference to some of the cooperative socialist experiments underway abroad. Intermediary Asian socialists continued to engage with international socialists albeit on more individualised terms as the ASC disappeared. They contributed to some schemes launched by international socialist partners oriented towards promoting solidarities among young Africans and Asians, and facilitating the transfers of technical knowledge and ideas about agricultural organisation from Israel in particular to nascent African and Asian nation-states. In both cases, the chapter suggests that the transnational dimensions of the lives of significant political actors in India, Burma, and Indonesia need to be accounted for in order to be able to appreciate their careers in all of their complexity. The best example of this is JP. As the chapter shows, JP’s international political engagements in the late 1950s cannot be understood without a reckoning with his domestic commitments and goals, and vice versa.

The thesis follows this structure so as to highlight, in Carolien Stolte’s terms, a ‘chronology of possibility’ which animated relevant activists across the 1950s. Among scholars of international history, the 1950s is typically viewed as an era in which decolonisation and the Cold War conjoined to accelerate the formation of nation-states pursuing goals of development and modernisation. Mark Berger writes that ‘the overall consolidation of Third Worldism is grounded in the post-1945 conjuncture of decolonisation, national liberation, and the Cold War’. He corrals the emergence of ‘Third Worldism’ into two temporal categories – first-generation Bandung regimes in the 1950s-1960s, and second-generation Bandung regimes in the 1960s-1970s – with the first defined by attempts to disaffiliate from the Cold War and forge a separate alignment in global politics, which quickly failed because various

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1 Stolte, “Trade Union Networks,” 332.
‘Bandung regimes’ began soliciting aid from the Cold War powers. This focus on a singular Third Worldism precludes the study of alternate anti-colonial trends in ‘Bandung regime’ countries that may have had distinctive visions for how post-imperial regional and global orders should be achieved. It lends itself to a teleological rendering of decolonisation in which self-determination, the *sine qua non* of anti-imperialism, was seamlessly translated into nation- and state-building projects by a familiar pantheon of statesmen in the post-war period.

More recently, scholars of post-war Afro-Asian internationalisms have questioned such a rendering, invoking a series of non-state conferences around which Africans and Asians gathered who imagined different futures to those which their national leaders were preparing. These African and Asian activists travelled far and wide in the post-war era, identifying allies throughout the decolonising world with whom they could flesh out particular ideas and agendas. These agendas could be imaginary but they could also be practical, consisting in the channelling of support to African freedom struggles from independent Asian nations, for example. The crux was that they were threaded through individuals hungry for radical political change who moved around but also beyond conventional sites of ‘Third Worldism’ such as Indonesia or Egypt, often on their own initiative. These studies of Afro-Asian internationalisms point towards the widespread sense of possibility that such activists sensed in the post-war era, and sometimes specify what given activists thought to be possible vis-à-vis regional and global political change at particular moments in the 1950s and 1960s, when contexts, circumstances, and events aligned themselves appropriately. However, none track a common set of activists from a region which encountered similar combinations of contexts and circumstances across a decade or more, so as to discern the characteristics and contours of a longer internationalist moment in one of these regions. This leads to an overly generalised account of the 1950s and 1960s in the writings of scholars of Afro-Asian internationalisms which does not pin down common senses of possibility to given regions and moments, and instead presumes the category of ‘possibility’ to have almost blanket application to the 1950s and 1960s.

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This thesis demonstrates, through an unprecedentedly rich empirical account of Asia’s international socialist networks, that the 1950s comprised a period of substantial political experimentation and openness among Africans and Asians, countervailing the standard rendering of this era as one of state-building and ideological conflict. Specifically, it was a passage of time in which South and Southeast Asian internationalists moved to the fore, eager to flesh out visions of an egalitarian and democratic post-imperial future in communion with contacts near and far. One of the innovations of the thesis has been to trace the transnational political engagements and hopes of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian activists in parallel. This reveals that South and Southeast Asian decolonisation in the late 1940s prompted regional politicians and intellectuals to begin constructing cross-border networks with comrades that they would then nurture shared imaginaries about political futures with. This shaping of imaginaries and solidarities of action in the 1950s was accelerated by the Cold War, whose spread through Asia encouraged non-aligned actors to distinguish their politics from that of capitalists and communists more clearly. Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian activists all moved to build up a clearer view of what ‘socialism’ might consist in by way of producing resolutions at conferences, but also observing participatory Yugoslavian and Israeli industrial experiments among others. Various factors diminished the capacity and motivation of South and Southeast Asians to engage in open-ended transnational political networking by the turn of the 1960s.

The thesis has therefore expanded our understanding of 1950s Asian international history by means of a loosely biographical approach to studying non-state internationalisms. While a significant swathe of the content of the chapters has focussed on small-scale meetings, these are largely more intimate meetings than those assessed by scholars of Afro-Asian internationalisms, and they are interspersed with anecdotes from individual activists’ transnational journeys in the interim, the outlines of which support the thesis’ arguments as much as the discussion of bureau meetings. The thesis has also examined two major ASC congresses. Its analyses of these conferences capture the zeitgeists that defined different phases of the early history of Asian decolonisation and the Cold War. These analyses also emphasise what took place outside of the main conference hall where traceable, to highlight that such events were not simply about the promulgation of resolutions, but more emphatically, about speeding ahead conversations which might otherwise have to be conducted over great distances. It was the labours of the ASC’s mobile intermediaries that
enabled Asian socialist internationalisms to subsist, and conferences, like the body’s bureau meetings, were important intervals in the passage of these longer Asian socialist conversations, albeit intervals over which intermediaries might have had less control as against party leaders. Many of the sources which this thesis has assessed derive from conferences and it is not feasible or desirable to avoid these conferences. The combination of source materials relating to ASC events and projects with materials relating to interlocutors’ mazy political lives makes plain how these intermediaries coordinated the internationalisms that clustered around the ASC. While their global networking was ad hoc and impromptu, it had a definite direction; South and Southeast Asians wanted to expedite the emergence of more egalitarian and democratic social orders, and a fairer and more just international order. The thesis arguably goes further than other historians who have contributed histories of Asia-in-the-world in the 1950s. It focusses predominantly on non-state actors and examines how they furnished up their own discourses about and agendas for achieving transnational political change, outside of and beyond familiar arenas such as the UN.

The thesis makes a number of claims in the course of its arguments which bear on historiographies beyond those on Third Worldism and Afro-Asianism. One such claim is that ‘socialism’, to South and Southeast Asians and maybe to anti-colonial Asians and Africans more widely, consisted in a capacious imaginary of an egalitarian and democratic, post-imperial future. The South and Southeast Asians who initiated conversations about regional and international change in the early 1950s referred to socialism in vague terms; for example, Lohia described it as ‘a coming new society where everybody could enjoy freedom, peace and human dignity without any sort of exploitation’. The appeal of socialism was in its capacity to convey a future social order which was less exploitative and more participatory than imperialism. In domestic political contexts, it might have had more technocratic or developmentalist overtones, but in Asian socialist engagements, it registered largely in its ability to suggest an egalitarian and democratic future whose precise features would be determined in the near future. Scholars of the global intellectual histories of the 1950s, especially where South and Southeast Asians are concerned, need to recognise that socialism


could constitute a rough-hewn imaginary of a post-imperial future as much as a political philosophy or agenda for postcolonial state-building. The thesis has found Talbot Imlay’s arguments about Asian socialism to have significant shortcomings because they presume that Asians must have been seeking to define coherent socialist agendas for settling political, economic, and international issues in their ASC meetings. Actually, meanings of socialism were often thrashed out on-the-job by key Asian socialists; this was in the nature of the dialogical side to 1950s decolonisation.

The thesis asks that the language of the ‘global Cold War’ which historians of decolonisation frequently invoke be utilised with greater care, at least as far as intellectual and cultural histories are concerned. Scholars of decolonisation and the Cold War assessing the 1950s propose that these phenomena interacted to produce enhanced interest in questions of development and modernisation in post-war Asian and African politics. This cannot be taken as an analytical framework with which to assess all intersections of these phenomena since many Asian and African actors were not consumed by questions of nation-state-building until the late 1950s. The Cold War is typically taken as an ideological struggle which manifested at political, military, cultural, and intellectual levels across different societies from very early in the post-war era. However, Asian socialists tended to see it as a continuation of power politics until the mid-1950s, when anti-communism began to create tensions in Asian socialist networks. If the global Cold War was a bifurcating ideological struggle, its onset might be placed at different times and moments depending on the actors being assessed, and events such as the Suez and Hungary crises could accentuate its impact with little warning. It is arguable that for South and Southeast Asians, the Cold War fully globalised from the mid-1950s, in that government policies and regional power constellations began to be shaped by superpower manoeuvres, and certain actors aspiring after local and global political change took more strident anti-communist positions. Even so, other Asian socialists continued to see the ‘Cold War’ as a distraction from vital transnational anti-imperial organising.

As far as this anti-imperial organising itself is concerned, the thesis offers fresh perspectives. Scholars who have considered decolonisation as a process of intellectual and cultural experimentation usually restrict themselves to assessing its ideational aspects. They search

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6 James, and Leake, *Decolonization and the Cold War*.
for actors and groups of actors who advanced concrete notions of a regional and international future distinct from imperialism, often underpinned by a shared understanding of imperialism and philosophy of self-determination which would resolve the ills of imperialism. Gary Wilder and Adom Getachew are examples of this. This thesis is quite different. For the actors assessed within, anti-imperialism was practiced at the same time as it was thought. Asian socialists engaged countless Asian and African activists on the terms of a mutable imaginary about how post-imperial futures might be shaped. They ventured around Asia and Africa trying to bring freedom movements into contact with one another and accelerate the end of imperialism, as much as they attempted to forge any common reckoning with what imperialism constituted or what a socialist alternative might look like. They also moved constantly between national and international scales – a phenomenon this thesis has dubbed the ‘double helix’ characteristic of non-state internationalist activity in the 1950s – rather than seeking out consensus within a particular intellectual world, or cultural milieu, for a federalist or republican vision of regional post-imperial realignment. These were the doers of post-war anti-imperialism whose activities, as their visions, were multi-directional and in flux.

The thesis suggests that scholarship on decolonisation might periodise the growth and shaping of anti-imperialism less teleologically. Some scholars hold that anti-imperialist movements had the achievement of sovereignty within a nation-state as their central goal from an early stage. Others suggest that there was a moment – broadly from the 1930s through 1960s – when various anti-colonialists sought a cosmopolitan alternative to the nation-state, though Merve Fejzula has pointed out that these anti-colonialists were often seeking a particular, liberal-democratic form of stateness rather than something that transcended ‘the principles of international society’ altogether. Across these works there is a reasonable presumption that nationalism was the ascendant force in the decolonising world through the first half of the twentieth century, and yet this thesis has indicated that many significant politicians in 1950s South and Southeast Asia actually engaged with open-ended ideas about crafting different social orders more proactively than they did with specific agendas for state-building. This illustrates that the tenour of anti-imperialism could take different directions according to what certain individuals considered to be politically desirable

7 Wilder, Freedom Time; Getachew, Worldmaking After Empire.
8 Goebel, Anti-Imperial Metropolis, 250-278.
at given intervals – which was not reflective of an upwards nationalist curve, but of factors such as when particular freedom struggles succeeded, who key anti-imperialists got the opportunity to meet, whether new technologies enabled them to speak to different clusters of allies than before, and what the politics of these manifold influences were. The thesis has hinted intriguingly that there were comparisons between the networked global anti-imperialisms of the interwar era and the Afro-Asian socialist internationalism of the 1950s. It is plausible that the perception of an upwards nationalist curve in anti-imperialist activity in the first and middle parts of the twentieth century is attributable to an excessive interest in the intellectual evolution of major anti-colonial nationalists. Greater attention to more ‘subaltern’ figures might query teleological readings of anti-imperialism, suggesting instead that anti-imperial struggle was kaleidoscopic in political orientation – even with self-determination at the heart of it – and full of beginnings and endings at different junctures, depending on the actors being assessed and how contexts and circumstances suited or stymied them.

The thesis has provided insights to students of South and Southeast Asian decolonisation. Scholarship on decolonisation in India, Burma, and Indonesia tends to focus on nation-state-building. There have been very few studies of post-war anti-imperial internationalism outside of those of the Bandung project, in which each of these nations was embroiled. Lydia Walker has expanded our understanding of postcolonial nationalism with an article about JP which shows that significant politicians could stretch and refigure the boundaries of state-making projects in the 1950s and 1960s, to integrate peoples and struggles otherwise overlooked or oppressed by these projects. However, this argument reflects the same presumption about the 1950s as has just been discussed; that state-building was the only game in town, and that any internationalist activities must have been ultimately about promoting the interests of certain postcolonial nation-states. This thesis has argued by contrast that Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists carried over capacious hopes for post-imperial societies into the postcolonial period. They viewed South and Southeast Asian decolonisation as a moment alive with possibility. They ventured abroad of their own accord rather than as diplomats for

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particular state-building projects, seeking to construct quite a different world to the one in which they resided, and fielding different ideas and experiments as to how to succeed.

The thesis does not propose that the Asian socialists it studies opposed outright the state-building projects and political leaderships of their respective countries. It makes a subtler claim; that Asian socialists viewed the vital political task in the post-war era as being to construct social orders and an international order characterised by equality, democracy, justice, and fairness, and that they did not immediately see national sovereignty as the vessel through which to achieve these ends. To be sure, they wanted to gain power at home so as to begin implementing some of their agendas on a domestic scale, but they also mobilised resources from national parties for use in ambitious internationalist projects that had no obvious, material benefit for their own states. The local and the global are inextricable in understanding the politics of non-state activists in the 1950s. They entwined in complex ways and mobile activists acted as conduits between them, trying to negotiate the achievement of their aims in both, and transferring resources and ideas from one to the other at different points to enliven political debates and struggles at both national and international levels. The thesis asks that scholars of postcolonial nationalisms expand their understanding of internationalism beyond that of the diplomatic ventures of particular states, to embrace itinerant South and Southeast Asian politicians who pursued distinctive agendas at the margins of their domestic projects that shone a light on their wider ambitions. This might break down the teleology within substantial swathes of scholarship on decolonisation in India, Burma, and Indonesia among other nations, and tender a wider definition of postcolonial nationalism that captures the multiple senses in which South and Southeast Asians tried to reinvent self-determination in the 1950s, before it grew more narrowly nation-state oriented from the end of the decade.11

This can be achieved by further biographical study of prominent politicians as well as their less well-known colleagues in each country. The thesis has drawn on party and institutional papers, letters, newspaper transcripts, journal runs, intelligence files, and some secondary materials. It has covered this range of materials in order to account for what Asian socialists’ political agendas were through the 1950s. Biography can easily become hagiographical, or

11 The notion of a ‘reinvention of self-determination’ is originally Adom Getachew’s. Getachew, Worldmaking After Empire, 10.
subject to a teleology in which given individuals’ dreams and aspirations conform to great national successes such as the realisation of independence, or are seen as reflecting more humane alternatives to political paths which were taken – humane alternatives which might still be recovered, should enough readers of such biographies heed the lessons contained within. However, with due care to avoid romanticising or reifying particular visions, biographical scholarship on decolonisation can enlighten us as to the kaleidoscopic hopes that decolonisation nourished, and benefit various historiographies as discussed above. It enables the reader to appreciate the perspectives on events unfolding around them that individuals held, their agency within particular constellations of circumstances and contexts, and the limits to nationalist narratives about decolonisation, in the sense that these rarely reflect how actors actually experienced relevant eras and events. These findings apply to other, more intimate forms of biographical history such as those predicated on oral sources which reflect how actors less privileged than those considered in this thesis experienced decolonisation as violence, imposition, and dispossession, rather than as a moment tendering hopeful new political openings.\footnote{12} This thesis designates particular actors as ‘subalterns’ in an international context where they were pressing for an end to imperialism in conversation with white socialists among others, but it does not make any claim that these actors were subalterns in national contexts; few, for example, were women, or from a disadvantaged class or caste background.

Even so, the thesis is able to offer some insights about the passage of formal decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia which have resonances for today. The thesis lends credence to the notion that postcolonial ruling classes failed to follow through on public commitments to achieving states of social justice, democracy, and economic equality in the post-war period. Vijay Prashad has most ably articulated this in his book \textit{The Darker Nations}, which, while flawed in that it views anti-imperial internationalism as consisting in a singular ‘Third World project’, emphasises that state leaders across Asia and Africa maintained social hierarchies in the post-war period rather than dismantling them to ‘create an entirely new society’.\footnote{13} These social hierarchies were often the residue of colonial juridical-political complexes which

\footnote{12} The most obvious example of this in relation to the regions under study is Partition in India. Scholarship on Partition is increasingly turning to biographical materials such as oral histories. Pippa Virdee, “Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947,” \textit{Oral History} 41, no. 2 (2013): 49-62; Sayeed Ferdous, \textit{Partition as Border-Making: East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh} (London: Routledge, 2021).

\footnote{13} Prashad, \textit{The Darker Nations}, xvii.
postcolonial governments elected not to deconstruct. This thesis has pointed towards how postcolonial leaders were deeply concerned with development and modernisation as the 1950s went on, often with less regard for democracy. It has suggested that they began to formulate clearer ideologies with which to legitimise these modernising ambitions in the mid to late 1950s. Some prominent Asian socialists honed or engaged with these ‘democratic socialist’ projects themselves, seemingly under the impress of an anti-communism which pressed them to distinguish themselves more definitively from communists in national political arenas. It is arguable that postcolonial governing elites became excessively concerned with defeating supposed domestic communist threats and with negating the wider international Communist movement through the latter half of the 1950s, when they could have attributed their attentions to promoting positive agendas for comprehensive regional and global political change, of the kind that Lohia – a socialist leader less concerned with communism than others – repeatedly called for, and more junior figures travelled around trying to bring into clearer relief.

This is a less homogenising view of the relatively elite quotients of freedom fighters who pursued decolonising projects in the 1950s and 1960s than that which the likes of Prashad advance. South and Southeast Asianists frequently blend politicians from major parties into a wider cultural elite that had somewhat profited from colonialism, as against less privileged classes and genders and castes, and who wanted to reconstitute old colonial states into new nation-states without touching their own privileges. However, Prashad himself notes that ‘the fight against the colonial and imperial forces enforced a unity among various political parties and across social classes’. Priyamvada Gopal has shown how the CSP engaged in various cultural projects for the economic emancipation of Indian working and agrarian classes from around the time of its foundation, as part of a ‘historical conjuncture from the early 1930s to the years immediately after independence’ that ‘made possible a range of historical tasks or, at the very least, a perception that it would be possible – and necessary – to undertake certain kinds of radical endeavours’. This thesis has shown that various South

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and Southeast Asian socialists sought radical social change in the immediate post-independence era which involved the participation of labouring classes – these socialists often travelled to Yugoslavia to observe experiments whose hints of industrial democracy intrigued them. There were perhaps significant possibilities for the renewal of cross-class anti-imperial linkages in South and Southeast Asia during the early 1950s in the form of a politics committed to nurturing popular involvement with economic processes. Even if this does not mean that any highly egalitarian system would have emerged on the order of what these South and Southeast Asian socialists professed to envisage, it may have promoted a more democratic political ethos where Burma and Indonesia took authoritarian directions in the 1960s which still shape their societies today.

On the theme of politics today, democracy and authoritarianism are facing off within South and Southeast Asia but also globally, in what is an intimately interconnected world in which developments in one region profoundly affect another. To head off drifts towards authoritarianism in different regions and instead pursue states of democracy and sustainability, activists require sources of intellectual inspiration and sustenance. In his fascinating book entitled The Crisis of Global Modernity, Indian historian of China Prasenjit Duara proposes that ‘many important and eventful changes in world history have in one way or another been tied to transcendent sources of imagination, inspiration, commitment and resolve, even though these qualities have hardly been sufficient in themselves as explanations’.\(^{17}\) He argues that in order to turn societies in the direction of democracy, plurality, and sustainability as soon as possible, activists must engage and are engaging with local sources of intellectual sustenance, such as Gandhian traditions in India. Such sources of ‘transcendence’ can include any cluster of ideals or utopian goals that ‘effectively appeal to a source of universal authority beyond the existing structure of power’, whether secular or otherwise.\(^{18}\) Duara distinguishes between two levels of transcendent ideas; a ‘dialogical’ level at which ideas circulate quite freely and are of use to individuals and social groups as ways of imagining and reimagining selves and communities consonant with the needs of the day, and

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\(^{18}\) Duara, Crisis of Global Modernity, 6.
a more ‘high cultural’ level ‘of transcendent ideas [that] seeks to anchor, subordinate and deploy the ‘small culture’ of circulatory transformations to its own projects and purposes’.\textsuperscript{19}

While Duara tends to see ideas as key factors in history, he sees less dualist or confessional traditions as dynamic – or as capable of being shaped by the circulatory processes which are the ‘global and historical underside of modernity’.\textsuperscript{20} On modernity’s other side are more doctrinal forces such as nationalism and bifurcating universalisms – such as the ideologies of the Cold War – which engender violence and exclusivity. Duara is strangely quiet about decolonisation, simplifying it to a process by which new nations ‘with their goal of building strong nation-states in the periphery’ succeeded in wresting some power away from ‘the older Western capitalist core’.\textsuperscript{21} This is the familiar, narrow historical understanding of decolonisation which this thesis problematises. Alongside the more pedagogical side of decolonisation that Duara seems to be alluding to, whereby statesmen fashioned development projects to achieve ‘modernisation’ on the level of the Western nations, there was a more dynamic, circulatory, dialogical underside consisting of non-state actors who crafted imaginaries about how to make regional and global orders less discriminatory and hierarchical and more egalitarian and democratic. These actors were moved by analogous and mutable ideals from several different regions which they tried to work up into an agenda for human emancipation in moments of acute political possibility, if also crisis. It is arguable that it is in this vein that decolonising struggles continue today; although these may be rooted in practical demands for cultural restitution, social movements are burgeoning around these spontaneous and transnational demands for decolonisation that call more widely for the creation of just and sustainable futures. If there is a purpose which studies such as the present one serve, it is to indicate that regional and global pasts are intimately intertwined with regional and global presents, and that while certain moments may have elapsed, others are opening. As Duara says, ‘history is the circulatory and dynamic repository of live possibilities for future actions’.\textsuperscript{22}

This thesis has assessed a dialogical South and Southeast Asian socialist chapter in post-war international history. It chronicles the local and world possibilities that South and Southeast

\textsuperscript{19} Duara, \textit{Crisis of Global Modernity}, 92.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 9.
Asians sensed across the 1950s and tried to realise through anti-imperial internationalisms, touching countless national and global actors in the process. These South and Southeast Asian socialist actors did not succeed in achieving their goals – although some were realised coincidentally, such as the gaining of independence by various African freedom struggles in the early 1960s. The thesis proposes ultimately that ascendant nationalism and authoritarianism around this time disfigured the socialist internationalisms it assesses beyond recognition, even if specific activists wove related threads into their individual activisms. This was laid bare at the PSP’s Silver Jubilee Conference of November 1959 in Bombay – three years after the ASC Bombay Congress of 1956 – where Indian socialists hosted such familiar faces as Sutan Sjahrir, Moshe Sharett, David Ben-Gurion, and U Kyaw Nyein, who joined the likes of JP, JB Kripalani, and Asoka Mehta in the city. NG Goray, who U Hla Aung had previously eulogised as a creative thinker about new socialist futures in 1958, set the tone for the meeting in advance by declaring ‘that it is the planning and phasing of development that is meaningful, not vague, distant goals’, and that ‘the arc of nationalism needed to be completed by socialist awareness’.23 This implied that ‘socialism’ simply constituted an ethic of egalitarianism to accompany the nationalist goal of economic planning. It contradicted the essence of Asian socialist activism in prior years whereby vague goals, or unspecific ideals, had moved key interlocutors to action. It intimated that non-state 1960s socialist internationalisms were to be more doctrinally specific – by way of sketching out and advocating for particular development programmes – or ideological than the internationalisms of the 1950s, a topic which needs more research in regard to the South and Southeast Asian theatres assessed in this thesis.

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