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# “The Sinn Féin of India”: Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal

*Michael Silvestri*

A recent article in the Calcutta magazine *Desh* outlined the exploits of a revolutionary fighting for “national freedom” against the British Empire. The article related how, during wartime, this revolutionary traveled secretly to secure the aid of Britain’s enemies in starting a rebellion in his country. His mission failed, but this “selfless patriot” gained immortality as a nationalist hero. For an Indian—and particularly a Bengali—audience, the logical protagonist of this story would be the Bengali nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose, the former president of the Indian National Congress, assumed the leadership of the Indian National Army with the support of the Japanese imperial government during the Second World War in the hopes of freeing India from British rule. The subject of the story, however, was not Bose, but the United Irishmen leader Theobald Wolfe Tone and his efforts in 1796 to secure assistance for an Irish rebellion from the government of Revolutionary France. The article went on to narrate how Ireland had been held in the “grip of imperialism” for an even longer period of time than India and concluded that the Irish and Indian nationalist movements were linked by a history of rebellion against British rule.<sup>1</sup>

As the *Desh* article illustrates, the popular image of the relationship between Ireland and India within the British Empire has been that of

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<sup>1</sup>Sharmila Basu, “Bidrohi Bondhon: Ireland O Bharat” (Revolutionary bond: Ireland and India), *Desh* 62 (6 May 1995): 37–49.

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two subject peoples striving for national freedom.<sup>2</sup> This linkage of Irish and Indian history has had particular resonance in Bengal. Although the rise of the revolutionary terrorist movement in Bengal preceded the Easter Rising by more than a decade, after the First World War Ireland became the most important model for physical-force nationalists in the province. Both Bengali nationalists and British administrators drew comparisons between Irish resistance to the British Empire and contemporary terrorist activity in Bengal. For the former group, the Irish experience provided a heroic model of anticolonial resistance, as well as what seemed to be a blueprint for national liberation. For the British officers involved in countering terrorism in Bengal, however, the British experience in Ireland offered a wealth of strategies to apply—or avoid—as well as a way of understanding the “terrorist mentality.” This article explores the ways in which the Anglo-Irish conflict, and Ireland and “Irishness” in a broader sense, were seen to be relevant to both the proponents of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal and those responsible for policing it. These linkages between Ireland and India were far from the first made by both Indian nationalists and the British colonial administrators. There were, however, new types of comparisons made after 1921 that linked Ireland and India to a greater degree than before as “oppressed peoples” of the British Empire. After the episode of Irish “decolonization” in 1921, the experience of Ireland had special resonance as the first example of “successful” rebellion against the British Empire.

Bengali admiration for Irish nationalism and emulation of Irish tactics are significant for students of both Indian history and British imperialism. First, they demonstrate the regional variation of Indian nationalism and how Bengali nationalism, with its prominent focus on physical force, differed from what is commonly thought of as the mainstream (based on Gandhi’s doctrines of nonviolence). The recent analyses of Indian nationalism by Partha Chatterjee have projected a monolithic conception of Indian nationalism, in which colonial nationalism “seeks to replace

<sup>2</sup> According to Ashis Nandy, for colonial India, Ireland signified a Western nation whose culture was “non-dominant” and more accessible to Indians and whose people were “a co-victim of British imperialism.” See Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 43. For surveys of the various connections between Ireland and India within the British Empire, see Ganesh Devi, “India and Ireland: Literary Relations,” in *The Internationalism of Irish Literature and Drama*, ed. Joseph McMinn (Gerard’s Cross, 1992), pp. 294–308; T. G. Fraser, “Ireland and India,” in *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Keith Jeffery (New York and Manchester, 1996), pp. 77–93; Narinder Kapur, *The Irish Raj: Illustrated Stories about Irish in India and Indians in Ireland* (Antrim, Northern Ireland, 1997); and Nicholas Mansergh, *The Prelude to Partition: Concepts and Aims in Ireland and India* (Cambridge, 1978).

the structures of colonial power with a new order, that of national power."<sup>3</sup> In Chatterjee's formulation, there is little alternative but for the nationalism of a colonial society to lead to a monolithic nation-state; there is no alternative to an "all-India" nationalism. But as critics have observed, this analysis downplays the extent to which alternative visions of the nation-state were formulated during the Indian "freedom movement," particularly around regional and linguistic lines.<sup>4</sup> The Bengali reception of Irish nationalism calls attention to the distinctiveness of nationalism in Bengal and, more generally, to the significant linkages that obtained among far-flung nationalist groups within the British Empire.

Gandhi has been taken to represent the views of Indian nationalists as a whole on this issue. The Mahatma, while admiring the goals of Sinn Féin, condemned their methods and compared them to General Dyer, the perpetrator of the Amritsar massacre. Indian noncooperation, Gandhi wrote in 1920, in contrast to Sinn Féin agitation in Ireland, depended for its success on nonviolence. "The Sinn Féiners resort to violence in every shape and form. Theirs is a 'frightfulness' not unlike General Dyer's," he argued. "We may pardon it if we choose, because we sympathize with their cause. But it does not on that account differ in quality from General Dyer's act."<sup>5</sup> Historians have generally taken the comments of Gandhi to mean that the physical-force variety of Irish nationalism had no impact in India after 1921.<sup>6</sup> The experience of Bengal, however, indicates the importance of European nationalist movements and Irish nationalism, in particular, for colonial nationalist movements within the British Empire. This borrowing from the Western world was an eclectic process in which ideas and ideologies were not taken wholesale but adapted in differing degrees.

In this context, Indian nationalist sympathy for Ireland was not fortuitous. Historians have emphasized Ireland's anomalous status in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as both an "imperial" and a "colo-

<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee identifies three stages of the colonial nationalist encounter with the West. By the last of these stages, "the moment of arrival," he argues that nationalist thought has become a "discourse of order" and "the rational organization of power." Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (1986; reprint, Minneapolis, 1993), pp. 42 and 50–51.

<sup>4</sup> For a critique of Chatterjee along these lines, see Sugata Bose, "Nation as Mother: Representations and Contestations of 'India' in Bengali Literature and Culture," in *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, ed. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (Delhi, 1997), pp. 50–75.

<sup>5</sup> *Young India* (1 September 1920); cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi, 1965), 18:219.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Jeffery, e.g., argues that "in India . . . the Irish model of guerilla warfare that developed in 1919–21 was not followed." See his "Introduction," in Jeffery, ed., *An Irish Empire?* p. 9.

nial” part of the empire.<sup>7</sup> One important factor in this liminal position was the role of Irishmen as servants of the British Empire.<sup>8</sup> As a part of the United Kingdom during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ireland’s experience was equivalent to neither the white “colonies of settlement” nor the nonwhite colonies of Africa or Asia. The issue of race further complicated Ireland’s dual role as colony and colonial power. Although the Irish were sometimes ranked with the nonwhite races of the world in Victorian racial discourse, within the colonial context, the Irish undoubtedly ranked as colonial masters.<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of nineteenth-century Irish nationalists, however, Ireland was a conquered and subject nation, closer to India and the colonial empire rather than to Australia or Canada.<sup>10</sup> As lingering Indian suspicions of the Irish as both imperial servants and a “white and Christian race” eroded in the aftermath of the First World War, these contradictory Irish identities allowed Indian—and especially Bengali—nationalists to embrace the Irish as a fellow “subject race.”

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In the late nineteenth century, Irish and Indian nationalist leaders shared to varying degrees romanticized notions of a common struggle against the British Empire.<sup>11</sup> At least some Irish nationalists encouraged

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1; and P. J. Marshall, “Introduction: The World Shaped by Empire,” in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Cambridge, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> See Scott B. Cook, “The Irish Raj: Social Origins and Careers of Irishmen in the Indian Civil Service, 1855–1914,” *Journal of Social History* 20, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 507–29; and Keith Jeffery, “The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire,” in Jeffery, ed., *An Irish Empire?* pp. 94–122.

<sup>9</sup> R. F. Foster writes, “The Irish occupied administrative and legislative roles in the imperial hierarchy that would never be allotted to Africans or Indians.” See R. F. Foster, “Marginal Men and Micks on the Make: The Uses of Irish Exile, c. 1840–1922,” in his *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London, 1993), p. 287. For the debate on the nature of Victorian perceptions of the Irish, see R. F. Foster, “Paddy and Mr. Punch,” in *ibid.*, pp. 171–94.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffery, “Introduction,” p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> There is a substantial literature on the connections between Irish and Indian nationalism before the First World War, most of which focuses on constitutional nationalists in both countries. See H. V. Brasted, “Indian Nationalist Development and the Influence of Irish Home Rule, 1870–1886,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (February 1980): 37–63; “Irish Home Rule Politics and India, 1870–1886: F. H. O’Donnell and Other Irish ‘Friends of India’” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1974); “Irish Models and the Indian National Congress, 1870–1922,” *South Asia*, n.s., 8, nos. 1–2 (1985): 24–45, and “Irish Nationalism and the British Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750–1950*, ed. Oliver MacDonagh, W. F. Mandel, and Paucic Travers (London, 1986), pp. 83–103; Richard P. Davis, “India in Irish Revolutionary Propaganda, 1905–1922,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* 22, no. 1 (January 1977): 66–89, and “The Influence of the Irish Revolution on Indian Nationalism:

this formation of alliances with their African and Asian counterparts. The foremost example of this affinity was the Irish Home Ruler, F. H. O'Donnell, who supported the transformation of the British Empire into a Commonwealth of equal partners and argued that Ireland should lead "a coalition with the oppressed natives of India." In 1875, O'Donnell helped set up an abortive Home Rule society for India, the Constitutional Society of India, with a mixture of Irish politicians and Indian students in London. O'Donnell was not the only Irish Parliamentary Party member to show an interest in India and imperial matters. Under Charles Stewart Parnell's leadership in the late 1870s and 1880s, Irish Home Rulers dominated parliamentary question-time on India.<sup>12</sup>

Contacts between nineteenth-century Irish and Indian nationalists were always sharply circumscribed, however. With the exception of a few politicians such as O'Donnell, any expressions of support for other nationalist movements were always secondary to the needs of the Irish cause. While the Anglophobe Parnell could be a vigorous opponent of the British Empire, he was far from a crusader for nationalist causes outside of Ireland. He accordingly vetoed a suggestion in 1883 that the Indian Nationalist leader Dadabhai Naorji stand for parliament as an Irish Home Rule candidate.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to direct contacts between nationalist leaders, the Indian press, which rapidly expanded from the 1870s, included ample coverage of Irish affairs, particularly in the eventful decade of the 1880s. The agrarian agitation of the Land War elicited a decidedly mixed reaction from Indian educated opinion, with the more conservative segments appalled but the more liberal sections issuing calls for the mobilization of the Indian peasantry. Certainly, the boast of the *Bengalee* newspaper of Calcutta that Parnell's cry of "No Rent" echoed through the "wide length of Bengal" was a tremendous exaggeration. As H. V. Brasted has argued, "Nationalism, as revealed by Ireland, was always regarded as a model as much to avoid as to emulate. Instead of an inflexibly designed blueprint, Ireland presented an agenda for debate and supplied a frame of reference that permitted India to define its own attitudes to British rule."<sup>14</sup>

One obstacle to Indian emulation of Irish tactics was the perceived racial difference between the Irish and the Indians. While the racialist beliefs of some Victorians branded Celtic races such as the Irish as inferior, and some Irish revolutionaries claimed that Indians shared a com-

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The Evidence of the Indian Press, 1916–1922," *South Asia*, n.s., 9, no. 2 (1986): 55–68.

<sup>12</sup> Brasted, "Indian Nationalist Development," p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire," p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> Brasted, "Indian Nationalist Development," p. 42.

mon Aryan heritage with the Irish, for most Indian nationalists, the position of the Irish as a white, Christian race placed limits on their desire to imitate Irish tactics. Indian nationalists feared that because of racial similarity between the Irish and English, revolutionary activity by the Irish would be treated much more leniently than would such action by Indians.<sup>15</sup> Indian commentary on events in Ireland before and immediately after the First World War accordingly emphasized racial difference as much as nationalist solidarity, focusing in particular on the relative restraint with which the British disciplined Irish, as opposed to Indian, dissent. This theme was expressed with particular force in the wake of the Amritsar massacre of 13 April 1919. The *Bangali* newspaper complained that the British had “ungrudgingly put up with all sorts of their turbulence and violence” from the Irish, who were “a white and Christian race” and the “kinsmen and near neighbours of the English”: “Is not the offense of the Punjab nothing as compared with that of Ireland? Punjab was trampled under foot by Sir Michael O’Dwyer, who is himself an Irishman and a Roman Catholic. Such is the difference between Ireland and India! India is a conquered country, inhabited by black people; she is merely a zamindari of the conquerors. So no comparison should be attempted between Ireland and India. Nor should Indians imitate the Irish.”<sup>16</sup>

Relations between Irish and Indian nationalists began to change, however, after the First World War. Historians have demonstrated how the Anglo-Irish War and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 had an impact on not simply the United Kingdom but the larger British Empire as well. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Anglo-Irish conflict provided inspiration for nationalist movements in both India and Egypt.<sup>17</sup> Eamon de Valera emphasized this idea of common cause among nationalists in Ireland, Egypt, and India while fund-raising for Sinn Féin in the

<sup>15</sup> According to Richard P. Davis, “Common Aryan origin was one argument used to encourage Indo-Hibernian solidarity” by Sinn Féin publicists. Patrick Ford, the editor and proprietor of the New York *Irish World*, argued that Indians were “brown Irishmen,” “fellow subjects” who suffered under the same “diabolical system” of British rule. Davis, “India in Irish Revolutionary Propaganda,” p. 66; and Brasted, “Indian Nationalist Development,” p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Bangali* (8 February 1920), in *Report on the Native Papers in Bengal (BRNP)* (Calcutta, 1920), p. 96. For the relevance of Amritsar to contemporary debates about British policy in Ireland, see Derek Sayer, “British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919–1920,” *Past and Present*, no. 131 (May 1991): 130–64.

<sup>17</sup> According to John Gallagher, the years 1919–22 constituted a time of interlocking crises for the British Empire in Ireland, Egypt, and India, in which “Zaghul Pasha, Gandhi and Mr. de Valera pursued the old aims by new methods. . . . No analysis of any of these crises will be complete without establishing its interplay with the others.” John Gallagher, “Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire, 1919–1922,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (July 1981): 355.

United States in 1920. At a meeting of the Friends of Freedom for India in New York, he stressed both Irish-Indian-Egyptian solidarity and the need for armed rebellion to throw off the yoke of the British Empire. "We of Ireland and you of India must each of us endeavor, both as separate peoples and in combination, to rid ourselves of the vampire that is fattening on our blood and we must never allow ourselves to forget what weapon it was by which Washington rid his country of this same vampire. Our cause is a common cause."<sup>18</sup>

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 established the Irish Free State as a dominion within the British Empire with the same constitutional status as "colonies of settlement" such as Canada. In the interwar period, as the historian W. K. Hancock observed in 1937, the influence of Ireland in the Commonwealth was "decisively disintegrating."<sup>19</sup> In particular, the 1932 election that brought de Valera and Fianna Fáil to power aroused concern among British observers for both the Commonwealth and India.<sup>20</sup> De Valera's campaign to remove the oath of allegiance culminated in the Executive Authority (External Relations) Act of 1936, which removed all references to the king from the internal constitution of the Irish Free State, abolished the office of governor-general, and aroused British fears of its impact on mass colonial nationalism. Many British observers linked de Valera and Gandhi together as advocates of mass colonial nationalisms that posed a threat to the integrity of the British Empire.<sup>21</sup> The Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, began to attend the meetings of the Cabinet's Irish Situation Committee out of concern for the effects of Irish agitation upon the Indian situation. Zetland argued explicitly that "revolutionary elements in India had taken Ireland as their model; and when in 1921 it had appeared that the Irish extremists, as

<sup>18</sup> Eamon de Valera, *India and Ireland* (New York, 1920), pp. 23–24.

<sup>19</sup> W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Nationality, 1918–1936* (London, 1937), 1:92. D. W. Harkness argues that from Ireland's first participation in the Imperial Conference of 1923, the Irish Free State acted as a spur to greater autonomy for the dominions within the British Empire. R. F. Holland, however, stresses the "passivity and concern with domestic matters" of Irish governments prior to 1932. D. W. Harkness, *The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921–31* (London, 1969); and R. F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance, 1918–1939* (London, 1981), p. 153.

<sup>20</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance*, chap. 9; and Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Deirdre McMahon writes, "The tall, sullen figure of de Valera, with his impassioned rhetoric of wrongs to be righted and injustices to be acknowledged, was the very personification of unreconciled nationalism, an image all the more potent at a time when Gandhi and his Congress party were challenging the British Raj. . . . The comparison between de Valera and Gandhi was a recurring one in British minds." McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists*, p. 30.

the reward of their resort to violence, were being given the substance of their demands, Indian opinion had been greatly affected.”<sup>22</sup>

Although both contemporary Britons and historians have noted the linkage of Irish and Indian nationalism in the period between the world wars, there has been little investigation of the reception of Irish nationalism in India.<sup>23</sup> Testimony such as Jawaharlal Nehru’s claim that by 1929 knowledge of Ireland among Congress Party leaders had virtually disappeared has been taken to confirm the relative unimportance of Ireland for Indian nationalism in this period.<sup>24</sup> Such analyses have ignored the regional dimensions of Indian nationalism, however, and in particular have failed to account for the continued attraction of Irish nationalism for Bengali nationalists and revolutionaries. The connections between nationalism in Ireland and Bengal, however, illustrate several important aspects of the British Empire in the interwar period.

First, the connections demonstrate the interaction of geographically diverse nationalist movements at a time when the British Empire was at its greatest extent but was subject to considerable internal pressures. Bengal demonstrates that these contacts concerned not merely mass nationalist movements but armed resistance to the British Empire. In Bengal the mass nationalism of the Indian National Congress combined with the revolutionary activities of a number of groups to create a considerable public order dilemma for the colonial state. In 1932, King George V, in apparent bafflement, pleaded with the provincial governor to answer the question “What is *wrong* with Bengal?”<sup>25</sup>

Second, Bengal provides a striking example of how Ireland continued to influence events in the British Empire after 1922. The reception of Irish nationalism in Bengal illustrates both the multiplicity of Indian “nationalisms” as well as the changing meaning of “Irishness” within the British Empire. To Bengali nationalists in the 1920s and 1930s, who were ambivalent about Gandhi and the efficacy of nonviolent nationalist methods and already committed to violence as a means of achieving Indian independence, Ireland represented a successful model of armed re-

<sup>22</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 183–84. Zetland had served as Governor of Bengal from 1917 to 1922. According to McMahon, Bengali nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose’s visit to Ireland in 1936, where he met with de Valera and other Irish leaders, may have been the source of Zetland’s concern.

<sup>23</sup> According to Scott Benjamin Cook, after the establishment of the Irish Free State, “the relevance of the Irish to the Indian situation became increasingly remote.” Scott Benjamin Cook, “The Example of Ireland: Political and Administrative Aspects of the Imperial Relationship with British India, 1855–1922” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1987), p. 361.

<sup>24</sup> Brasted, “Irish Models,” p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson: Viscount Waverly* (London, 1962), p. 126.

sistance to the British Empire that could be studied and duplicated. To British observers, the events in Ireland also held out potential ways to neutralize the “terrorist” threat in Bengal. To understand fully the impact of Ireland on events in India during the interwar period, we need to move from an all-India picture to examine events in the province of Bengal.

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Nationalism in Bengal differed in many respects from what is generally regarded as the mainstream of Indian nationalism, based on Gandhi’s doctrines of nonviolence (*ahimsa*). In particular, the sympathy of large numbers of middle-class Bengali nationalists for armed resistance to British rule distinguished them from the predominant attitudes of the Indian National Congress.<sup>26</sup> To be sure, revolutionary movements were active in other parts of India, but in the British view, Bengal was “the home and breeding ground of terrorism.”<sup>27</sup>

The revolutionary movement in Bengal was rooted in the *bhadralok*, or educated Hindu middle classes, and was in large part a response to the racism of colonial rule. In Bengal, where British commercial interests had a particularly entrenched grip on power, stereotypes portrayed Bengalis—and particularly the *bhadralok*—as weak and effeminate. By the end of the nineteenth century a well-established physical culture movement among middle-class youth had sought to counter the British stereotype of Bengali “effeteness.”<sup>28</sup> This physical culture movement in turn became the basis for revolutionary terrorism in Bengal. In 1902 a revolutionary group named the Anushilan Samiti, or “cultural society,” emerged in Calcutta, becoming the model for all later Bengali revolutionary organizations. Secret societies sprang up elsewhere in Bengal at this time but achieved little until the combined effect of the 1905 Partition

<sup>26</sup> There is no satisfactory synthesis of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal, but among the studies treating terrorism in Bengal from various perspectives are Hiren Chakrabarti, *Political Protest in Bengal: Boycott and Terrorism, 1905–1918* (Calcutta, 1992); Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India* (Delhi, 1993); David M. Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left* (Calcutta, 1975); and Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875–1927* (Delhi, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> H. W. Hale, *Terrorism in India, 1917–1936* (1937; reprint, New Delhi, 1974), p. 5. The label of “terrorism” applied by the British, was, however, rejected emphatically by Bengali nationalists. The term “revolutionary terrorism” employed by Peter Heehs seems the best way of categorizing the actions of physical-force nationalists in Bengal. Heehs, *Bomb in Bengal*, p. xi.

<sup>28</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York and Manchester, 1995); and John Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” *Past and Present*, no. 86 (February 1980): 121–48.

of Bengal and the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War spurred interest in revolutionary activity.<sup>29</sup>

The terrorist movement in Bengal was never numerically large and was limited almost exclusively to the *bhadralok*.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in spite of the limited segments of Bengali society who were attracted to terrorism, the movement was considered a great threat to British rule in Bengal. Prior to the passage in 1915 of the Defence of India Act, which allowed for the detention of revolutionary suspects without trial, the Bengal terrorist campaign almost completely disrupted the province's administration.<sup>31</sup> From 1906 until 1935, the Bengal Police Intelligence Branch recorded a total of over five hundred “revolutionary crimes” involving terrorists and estimated that another two hundred incidents of theft or disappearance of arms or ammunition occurred in the same period. “Terrorist” incidents occurred every year from 1908 to 1947 in Bengal.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1930s, revolutionaries carried out a series of assassinations whose victims included the inspector general of the Bengal police and three successive district magistrates in Midnapore District, as well as an attack on the Writer's Building, the seat of the Bengal government in Calcutta.

After a general amnesty issued in December 1919 for those imprisoned for terrorist offenses during the First World War, large numbers of former revolutionaries reestablished their organizations. By the mid-1920s, traditionally considered a quiet period for Indian nationalism, Bengali revolutionaries had revived their campaign of political dacoities, or gang robberies, assassinations, and plans for general risings. By the end of the decade, leaders of different terrorist groups were no longer able to contain the demands of younger members for action against the Raj, and assassination attempts on British and Bengali representatives of the colonial state began to increase. From 1930 to 1934, revolutionaries assassinated nine British officials, including the inspector general of police, and their activities were suppressed only when British and Indian army units were stationed in a number of districts. By the mid-1930s,

<sup>29</sup> Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest*, p. 141.

<sup>30</sup> According to the Rowlett Committee (1918), 89 percent of the 186 persons killed or convicted of “revolutionary crimes” in Bengal from 1907 to 1917 belonged to the three chief *bhadralok* castes of Brahmin, Kayastha, or Baidya. The largest single occupation listed for the terrorists was “student,” while a significant number were professionals such as teachers or in government service. Heehs, *Bomb in Bengal*, pp. 268–71.

<sup>31</sup> Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defense: British Intelligence and the Defense of the Indian Empire, 1904–1924* (London, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> H. J. Twynham and R. E. A. Ray, *Enquiry into Temporary Establishments of the Central and District Intelligence Branches of the Bengal Police* (Alipore, 1936), pp. 9–10; and Marcus F. Franda, *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1971), p. 16.

however, the attraction of terrorism for those who had been its principal supporters, the middle-class Hindu youth of Bengal, began to wane. Marxism, which encouraged action based on mass organization and preparation for proletarian revolution, attracted many of the former terrorists of Bengal. At the same time, the extensive use of police and military forces by the colonial state and the constitutional reforms of the 1935 Government of India Act combined to blunt Bengali support for the revolutionaries.<sup>33</sup>

In Bengal, the line between the mass agitation of the Indian National Congress and the clandestine activities of revolutionaries was a narrow one. Until the mid-1930s, the revolutionary terrorist movement in Bengal enjoyed the sympathy of broad segments of the *bhadralok* population.<sup>34</sup> The first revolutionary organizations drew their support from many of the *samitis*, or societies, which were set up during the Swadeshi movement in protest of the 1905 Partition of Bengal. After the 1919 amnesty, large numbers of former revolutionaries reestablished their organizations under the cover of Gandhi's noncooperation movement. Many former terrorists became organizers of noncooperation activities, and, according to an Intelligence Branch report, they "recruited many of the volunteers as terrorists."<sup>35</sup> Terrorist groups also found a fertile recruiting ground in Gandhi's civil disobedience campaign, which began in 1930.

This connection to revolutionary activity extended to the leadership of the Congress Party in Bengal as well. Surya Sen, a leader of the revolutionary Jugantar Party, had also been a member of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, while Surendra Mohan Ghose was both a member of Jugantar and the president of the Bengal Congress.<sup>36</sup> C. R. Das's Swaraj Party also was closely allied with cells of the two main Bengali revolutionary groups, Jugantar and the Anushilan Samiti, and a number of leaders from both groups held important positions within the Swaraj Party. At least twenty-eight Bengalis convicted or detained for terrorist offenses held offices in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee in 1924, and twenty-one Bengali revolutionaries were elected to the

<sup>33</sup> The conversion of many former Bengal terrorists to Marxism is the subject of Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left*.

<sup>34</sup> Rajat Kanta Ray writes, "In the grim battle between the police and the revolutionaries, the sympathy of large sections of Bengali society lay with the latter." Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest*, p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> R. E. A. Ray, "Brief Note on the Alliance of Congress with Terrorism in Bengal," in *Terrorism in Bengal: A Collection of Documents*, ed. Amiya K. Samanta, 6 vols. (Calcutta, 1995), 3:933.

<sup>36</sup> Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of the Indian Nationalists Subhas and Sarat Chandra Bose* (New York, 1989), p. 229.

All-India Congress Committee in the same year.<sup>37</sup> In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Jugantar Party was closely linked with Congress leader Subhas Chandra Bose.<sup>38</sup>

From the beginning, British officials almost unanimously considered the Bengali “terrorist” movement to be patterned after European nihilism and anarchism. Here, British stereotypes of Bengalis as unthinking imitators of Western culture were used to explain the rise of revolutionary societies. One of the most influential proponents of this view was *The Times* correspondent Valentine Chirol, who argued that Bengalis were “of all Indians the most slavish imitators of the West, as represented, at any rate, by the Irish Fenians and the Russian anarchist.”<sup>39</sup> In 1908, the inspector general of police of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam wrote of wild rumors of contacts between Bengali and foreign revolutionaries, including gunrunning by German steamers and reports of “nondescript foreigners strolling about this country.” He concluded his report by requesting the assistance of a Scotland Yard police officer experienced in dealing with European anarchists and terrorists.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of the readily available indigenous inspirations for armed resistance to British rule, Bengali revolutionaries did in fact owe an enormous intellectual debt to European techniques of revolution.<sup>41</sup> Prior to 1916, however, direct influences on revolutionary tactics came largely from Continental rather than Irish sources. Bengali revolutionaries learned techniques of bomb making from anarchists in Paris and copied the organization of secret cells of Russian revolutionary organizations. While Bengalis regarded Irish nationalism with sympathy as “the nationalism of subject people,” its relatively quiescent and constitutional nature in the decades before the First World War meant that it provided a poor example of a nation gaining freedom through armed struggle.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest*, pp. 324–25.

<sup>38</sup> Although Subhas Bose certainly did have connections to Bengali revolutionaries, many of the tales of his involvement with revolutionary organizations in Bengal were wildly exaggerated. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest* (London, 1910), p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> Notes by H. LeMesurier, Inspector General of Police, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 5 July 1908 and 15 June 1908, Calcutta, West Bengal State Archives (WBSA), Government of Bengal Home (Political) Confidential file (GOB Home [Pol.] Conf.) no. 390/C of 1909.

<sup>41</sup> Although Peter Heehs argues that revolutionary terrorism in Bengal was purely a “natural and indigenous response to British imperial domination,” his article provides numerous examples of the influence of European revolutionaries. Peter Heehs, “Foreign Influences on Bengali Revolutionary Terrorism, 1902–1908,” *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1994): 533–56.

<sup>42</sup> Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (London, 1951), p. 224.

By the 1920s, however, the relative indifference of Bengali nationalists and revolutionaries to events in Ireland had changed dramatically. In 1926 the *Daily Mail's* correspondent in Calcutta reported that "Ireland has furnished the inspiration for the revolutionary movement in Bengal. Nothing interests the Bengali so much as the story of the rising against Dublin Castle, with its attendant ambushes, assassinations, and street fighting. Nearly all the literature dealing with the campaign of Michael Collins and his followers has been translated into the vernacular and is sold in native bookshops. The Bengali believes that if he adopts the same methods as the Irish Republicans he will achieve at least as great a measure of self-government."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the writer and critic Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who was intensely critical of the terrorist movement, noted the attraction of Sinn Féin for Bengali nationalists after the Anglo-Irish War. "The success of the Irish in securing independence for their country by this method made them think that they too would succeed," Chaudhuri wrote of the Bengali revolutionaries. The Bengalis, he concluded, "thought they were the Sinn Féin of India."<sup>44</sup> In 1935 Subhas Chandra Bose wrote to the secretary of the Irish-Indian Independence League that "in my part of the country (Bengal), recent Irish history is studied closely by freedom-loving men and women and several Irish characters are literally worshipped in many a home."<sup>45</sup> Bose himself traveled to Ireland in 1936 and met three times with de Valera, who received him "as something like an 'envoy' of a friendly nation," as well as with other members of Fianna Fáil and opposition members of Sinn Féin.<sup>46</sup>

The frustration of mostly Hindu, middle-class Bengalis at the inability to enlist the largely Muslim population of the province in the nationalist struggle also played an important part in popularizing Irish nationalism in Bengal. The problem of mass mobilization of a majority Muslim populace by the nationalist movement's largely Hindu, middle-class politicians in the face of concerted opposition by European commercial interests left Bengali *bhadralok* increasingly frustrated by legal constitutionalism and disposed to violent resistance or communal ideologies. As

<sup>43</sup> Sir Percival Philips, "The Firm Hand in Bengal," *Daily Mail* (12 February 1926), Tegart Papers, Centre of South Asian Studies Archive (CSAS), University of Cambridge.

<sup>44</sup> Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand Great Anarch! India, 1921-1952* (London, 1987), pp. 292 and 298.

<sup>45</sup> Bose later wrote, "In my part of India—Bengal—there is hardly an educated family where books about the Irish heroes are not read and if I may say so, devoured." Subhas Bose to Mrs. Woods, Subhas Chandra Bose Papers, 7 December 1933 and 21 December 1935, Netaji Research Bureau, Calcutta.

<sup>46</sup> For details of Bose's journey to the Irish Free State, see Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, pp. 303-6.

Rajat Kanta Ray has noted, nationalists were ready “to try any variant of political extremism based on a narrow social basis.” In this “psycho-pathological atmosphere of cruelty, suspicion and treachery,” Ireland was seized upon as a model of anticolonial resistance to the hated British Empire.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to North Indian terrorist organizations such as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, whose goal was the “death knell of capitalism,” the ideology of Bengal terrorism focused not on social revolution but on “courageous martyrdom” and the overthrow of the “blood-thirsty English.”<sup>48</sup>

Increasingly, by the late 1920s, the younger men of revolutionary parties began to push for immediate action against the British, rather than a patient campaign involving the collection of arms and the commission of dacoities to accumulate funds. Many of these younger revolutionaries were admirers of the Irish example. The vehemently anti-British tone of Irish nationalism held great attraction for radical Bengali nationalists, while the writings of Irish nationalists provided a further intellectual justification for the idea of physical force. In particular, both the “self-sacrificial idealist” Patrick Pearse and the “pragmatic rebel” Dan Breen provided models for Bengali terrorists in the 1920s and 1930s, as Bengali revolutionaries attempted to employ the practical tactics of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), while at the same time displaying a willingness to sacrifice themselves in the service of the motherland.<sup>49</sup>

In this period, Bengali nationalist leaders assimilated Irish Republican leaders into the canon of nationalist heroes fighting against the British Empire and embraced the Irish themselves as a fellow subject race. The greatest recipient of nationalist acclaim was Eamon de Valera. While Michael Collins was lauded as a master strategist of guerilla warfare and intelligence operations, de Valera was praised as a nation builder. One Bengali writer referred to Ireland as de Valera’s “handmade nation,” and in 1923 a Bengali-language newspaper esteemed de Valera, Gandhi, and the Egyptian nationalist leader Zaghul Pasha as the three greatest popular leaders of anti-imperial struggle.<sup>50</sup> Numerous serialized accounts of the life of de Valera were published in the 1920s in newspapers both in Calcutta and in the hinterland. The Irish elections in 1932, which

<sup>47</sup> Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest*, pp. 185 and 376.

<sup>48</sup> Tanika Sarkar, “Bengali Middle-Class Nationalism and Literature: A Study of Saratchandra’s ‘Pather Dabi’ and Rabindranath’s ‘Char Adhyay,’” in *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India*, ed. D. N. Panigrahi (New Delhi, 1985), p. 451.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars: Counter-insurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1986), p. 146.

<sup>50</sup> *Student* (8 January 1920), in *BRNP* (1920), p. 72; and *Soltan* (30 November 1923), in *BRNP* (1923), p. 1098.

brought de Valera to power, were also the subject of “keen interest” in the Bengali press.<sup>51</sup>

In this period numerous books and articles displayed a detailed knowledge of an interpretation of Irish history that was deeply influenced by Sinn Féin.<sup>52</sup> Bengali accounts emphasized the physical-force tradition of Irish nationalism, culminating with the victory of Sinn Féin in 1921, disparaged Daniel O’Connell, and depicted Parnell as a failed constitutional leader who opposed the use of violence. Bengali authors writing about Irish history saw Ireland’s “current of national life” flowing toward political violence in the late nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

The parallel between Ireland and India as “colonial” peoples included a presumption of general Irish sympathy for all forms of resistance to the British Empire. The “Irish jailor” who was sympathetic to imprisoned revolutionaries became a stock figure in the memoirs and recollections of Bengali nationalists.<sup>54</sup> Surendra Mohan Ghose recalled two Irish jail superintendents in Burma and Madras who had “some sort of sympathy for this kind of [revolutionary] political prisoner” and “believed that we were unnecessarily persecuted because of political views.”<sup>55</sup> While in Ireland, Subhas Bose had a cordial meeting with the former officer in charge of Mandalay Jail, where he had been detained

<sup>51</sup> Serialized accounts of de Valera’s life appeared in *Sankha* (September–October 1923); *Barisal* (September 1923); *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (March 1925); and *Swadeshi Bazaar* (September–December 1928). Citations may be found in *BRNP* (1923), pp. 836, 876, 935, 958, and 985; *BRNP* (1925), pp. 213 and 265; *BRNP* (1928), pp. 526, 559, 567, 609, and 622; and *BRNP* (1929), pp. 28 and 44, respectively. The annual *BRNP* contain only the dates of publication and sometimes the title and author of these articles, however, and I have been unable to locate the complete texts. For Bengali interest in the 1932 Irish elections, see the Fortnightly Reports on the Political Situation in Bengal, first half of March and first half of April, 1932, British Library, London, Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC), L/P&J/12/36.

<sup>52</sup> The Calcutta nationalist newspaper *Forward* carried a weekly column on Irish affairs during the 1920s. See Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876–1940* (New York, 1974), p. 338.

<sup>53</sup> *John Mitchel O Biplabi Ireland* (John Mitchel and revolutionary Ireland), p. 3, Proscribed Literature Collection, OIOC, IOR MIC 11599/9. This interpretation of Irish history was consistent with that of the contemporary Irish Free State, where a stress on “the supposed message of Irish history” was used to assert a separate Irish identity after 1921. As R. F. Foster writes, this involved “a necessary degree of deliberate amnesia,” in which “the record of parliamentary nationalism [was] more or less dismissed.” R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600 to 1972* (New York, 1988), p. 535.

<sup>54</sup> I owe this point to Partha Chatterjee.

<sup>55</sup> Surendra Mohan Ghose, Oral History Transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi. One revolutionary deported to the Andaman Islands before the First World War, Hrishikesh Kunji Lal, was known among the prison staff as “All for Ireland” for his attempts to enlist an Irish jailor’s sympathy “as another oppressed subject of the British Crown, saying ‘We fought for the Irish also, we are all for Ireland.’” C. A. Tegart, “Notes on the Andaman Enquiries (August 1913),” pp. 27–28, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 293 of 1913.

in the previous decade. According to the Fianna Fáil newspaper, the *Irish Press*, “the two men had a talk and exchanged views on their last meeting in different circumstances.”<sup>56</sup>

In a more practical sense, Bengalis believed that the experiences of Irish nationalists provided a blueprint for liberation from British rule. The Irish republicans offered to Bengal a tradition of heroic martyrdom to add to the ranks of Bengali revolutionaries who had already died in the campaign against the British. A famous revolutionary leaflet seized by the Bengal police in 1929 quoted Patrick Pearse and urged Bengalis to imitate his sacrifice: “This is how a nation awakes. Flare up with the fire of vengeance for the annihilation of foreign enemies. You will find that the victory is yours. History bears testimony to this. Read and learn the history of Pearse—the gem of young Ireland—and you will find how noble is his sacrifice; how he stimulated new animation in the nation, being mad over independence. . . . Pearse died and by so dying he roused in the heart of the nation an indomitable desire for armed revolution. Who will deny this truth?”<sup>57</sup> A more direct link was the imitation of Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork who fasted to death in 1920, by the Bengali revolutionary Jatindranath Das, who died while on a hunger strike in Lahore Jail in 1929. According to Nirad C. Chaudhuri, “MacSwiney was almost worshipped by politically conscious Bengalis,” and the mayor of Calcutta sent a message to MacSwiney’s widow in which he stated that “Terence MacSwiney showed the way to Ireland’s freedom. Jatin Das has followed him.” In 1940, Subhas Chandra Bose wrote that he was inspired by “the classic and immortal examples of Terence MacSwiney and Jatin Das” in beginning a hunger strike to protest his detention by the Government of Bengal.<sup>58</sup>

Probably the greatest single Irish inspiration for Bengali revolutionaries, however, was Dan Breen’s *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (1924), one of the first memoirs of a member of the Irish Republican Army to be published. Much to the dismay of the Government of Bengal, Breen’s book was used a manual for rebellion.<sup>59</sup> According to Sir John Anderson,

<sup>56</sup> *Irish Press* (12 February 1936), cited in Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, p. 693.

<sup>57</sup> “The Youths of Bengal” (1929), cited in Hale, *Terrorism in India*, p. 214.

<sup>58</sup> Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand Great Anarch!* p. 314; *An Phoblacht* (29 September 1929), National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi, Government of India, Home Department (Political) file, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 28/6 of 1929; and Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, pp. 417–18.

<sup>59</sup> *My Fight for Irish Freedom* was originally published in Dublin by the Talbot Press in 1924. Breen, a native of County Tipperary and a member of the Tipperary Volunteers, was involved in the murder of two Royal Irish Constabulary men at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary, in January 1919. To many Republicans, he epitomized the Irish “gunman” who took arms against the British, and his actions are often depicted as the beginning of the Irish “war for independence.”

the governor of Bengal in the 1930s, Breen represented "the individual terrorist as a heroic and romantic figure," a portrait that had tremendous appeal to Bengali revolutionaries.<sup>60</sup> In *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, Breen glorified armed struggle against British authority in Ireland and outlined the need for a ruthless campaign against Irish "traitors," police, informers, and high government officials.<sup>61</sup> The book had great attraction for revolutionaries throughout India, and translations in Hindi, Punjabi, and Tamil were published, all of which were banned by the Government of India.<sup>62</sup>

Breen's book was widely recognized, according to the Bengali revolutionary Chinmohan Sehanabis, as "one of our bibles."<sup>63</sup> Contemporary police intelligence reports also point to the status of Breen's book as a canonical work for Bengali revolutionaries. By 1929 several terrorist leaders had begun to study the Irish rebellion, "particularly in Dan Breen's book 'My Fight for Irish Freedom,' which described *inter alia* successful surprise attacks on armed police posts. Niranjan Sen Gupta adopted this book as his terrorist text-book and conceived the idea of acting on similar lines in Bengal."<sup>64</sup> Kalpana Dutta, a former member of the Chittagong District revolutionary circle of Surya Sen, wrote that she read *My Fight For Irish Freedom* several times and that Breen was Sen's "ideal" of a revolutionary guerilla fighter.<sup>65</sup> Breen's account of the Anglo-Irish War and the Easter Rising of 1916 were the inspiration for what one former Indian Civil Service officer called "the biggest coup the terrorist party in Bengal ever brought off": the Chittagong Armoury Raid of April 1930.<sup>66</sup> The raid was staged by members of Jugantar in

<sup>60</sup> Sir John Anderson, governor of Bengal, to H. D. Craik, 28 October 1935, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 41/6 of 1935.

<sup>61</sup> Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, rev. ed. (Dublin, 1964), pp. 75 and 83.

<sup>62</sup> There were at least two translations of Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* into Hindi and one each into Punjabi and Tamil, all of which were proscribed. For details see Graham Shaw and Mary Lloyd, eds., *Publications Proscribed by the Government of India* (London, 1985). A copy of one Hindi edition of Breen, *Ireland Ka Svatantraya Yudh* (Kanpur, 1928), is in the collection of Indian Proscribed Tracts, 1907-47 (microfilm), NMML. I am grateful to my colleague Mridu Rai for identifying this edition for me.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, p. 103.

<sup>64</sup> R. E. A. Ray, "Report on the Activities of Terrorists in Bengal during the Period April to December 1930," in Samanta, ed., *Terrorism in Bengal*, 1:603.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, p. 103; and Kalpana Dutt, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders: Reminiscences*, rev. ed. (Delhi, 1979), p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam* (London, 1966), p. 53. For Breen's influence among the Chittagong revolutionaries, see I. Mallikarjuna Sharma, *Easter Rebellion in India: The Chittagong Uprising* (Hyderabad, 1993), pp. 82, 111, 128, and 132.

self-conscious imitation of the Easter Rising of 1916 on Good Friday, 18 April 1930, in the town of Chittagong in eastern Bengal. Bengal police intelligence reports referred to the action as a “coup, unprecedented in the annals of terrorist crime in Bengal or any other province of India.”<sup>67</sup> On the night of 18 April, three groups of more than sixty revolutionaries armed with revolvers and pistols captured and set fire to police and auxiliary force armories in Chittagong and seized arms and ammunition, while others destroyed rail and telegraph communications. After a brief battle with police, in which nineteen of the revolutionaries were killed, they were forced to retreat into the jungle surrounding the town. A number of those involved in the raid, including their leader, Surya Sen, remained at large for three years and were only captured through the use of British and Indian Army battalions to carry out search operations in the district.<sup>68</sup>

The Chittagong Armoury Raid, the largest and most effective revolutionary action ever mounted by the Bengali revolutionaries, occurred in the middle of the Congress Party’s civil disobedience campaign. The raid created a boom in recruitment for revolutionary organizations and sparked British fears of similar raids elsewhere. According to the Bengal Police Intelligence Branch, “When the truth was known the effect was electric, and from that moment the outlook of the Bengali terrorists changed. The younger members of all parties, whose heads were already crammed with ideas of driving the British out of India by force of arms . . . clamoured for a change to emulate the Chittagong terrorists.”<sup>69</sup>

The Irish inspiration for the action was acknowledged by both British and Indian observers. The members of Jugantar who carried out the attack afterward distributed leaflets signed by the “Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch,” a name clearly modeled after the Irish Republican Army.<sup>70</sup> According to Bhupati Mazumdar, a revolutionary and secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee in 1922–23, the revolutionaries responsible for the Chittagong raid became “impatient” because “they read that Irish rebel Dan Breen’s book.” One participant in the raid, Lokenath Bal, later wrote, “the blood-stained memory of the Easter Revolution of the IRA [*sic*] touched our young minds with fiery enthusiasm!”<sup>71</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the raid, police searches found evidence that “the present rising has been based on the Irish Re-

<sup>67</sup> Ray, “Report on the Activities of Terrorists in Bengal,” p. 607.

<sup>68</sup> Surya Sen was executed in Chittagong Jail on 15 January 1934.

<sup>69</sup> Ray, “Report on the Activities of Terrorists in Bengal,” p. 608.

<sup>70</sup> Dutt, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders*, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Bhupati Mazumdar, Oral History Transcript, NMML; and R. C. Majumdar, *History of Modern Bengal, Part 2 (1905–1947): Freedom Movement* (Calcutta, 1981), p. 263.

bellion which started on a Friday.”<sup>72</sup> This was confirmed by the statements of the accused during the first Chittagong Armoury Raid trial in 1930. The district magistrate of Chittagong District observed that *My Fight for Irish Freedom* “might aptly be described as ‘The Revolutionaries’ Manual’” and that the Chittagong Raiders were “thoroughly conversant” with it: “The book throughout extols armed rebellion against constituted authority and is written in such a way as to win the sympathies of young emotional minds for the spirit of revolt. . . . Dan Breen’s book is held up as a text book for the revolutionaries of India. . . . The action of the revolutionaries was largely inspired by this book and that their plan of operations was based on its lessons.”<sup>73</sup>

The Chittagong Armoury Raid demonstrates how Bengali revolutionaries were inspired by both the Easter Rising and the guerilla tactics of the Irish Republican Army as depicted by Dan Breen. More generally, Breen’s tales of IRA exploits inspired Bengali revolutionaries to draw up ambitious plans for cutting telegraph lines, blowing up bridges and railway lines, and disabling the electricity supply of Calcutta.<sup>74</sup> The Easter Rising was especially influential in promoting the idea of martyrdom as a means of obtaining national freedom. Ganesh Ghosh, one of the leaders of the raid, later recalled the preparations for the rising as “a programme of death.” “The main object,” he wrote, “was not to attempt to free the whole of India or the province of Bengal, but to set an example before the countrymen, particularly the youths and the students, and demoralise the British imperialists.”<sup>75</sup> Surya Sen himself often quoted the words of the Irish Fenian leader Fintan Lalor that “somewhere, somehow and by somebody a beginning must be made and the first act of resistance is always and shall ever be premature, imprudent, unwise and dangerous.”<sup>76</sup> As Kalpana Dutt observed in her memoirs, “They knew that a handful of revolutionaries cannot destroy the British government. But they had the conviction that even a handful of revolutionaries with a properly planned programme and determination could give a severe blow to British administration.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> J. R. Johnson, Superintendent of Police, Chittagong, to F. J. Lowman, Inspector General, Bengal Police, 24 April 1930, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 335 of 1930.

<sup>73</sup> H. R. Wilkinson, District Magistrate, Chittagong, to H. Tufnell-Barrett, Pol. Dept., GOB, 10 October 1930, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 749 of 1930.

<sup>74</sup> Ray, “Report on the Activities of Terrorists in Bengal,” pp. 608–9.

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Sharma, *Easter Rebellion in India*, p. 159.

<sup>76</sup> Dutt, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders*, p. ix.

<sup>77</sup> Sharma, *Easter Rebellion in India*, p. 17; and Dutt, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders*, p. ix.

British officials involved with the policing of the terrorist movement in Bengal had been aware well before 1930 of the connection Bengali nationalist revolutionaries made with the Irish nationalist movement. After the Anglo-Irish War, police intelligence reports featured a new description for the tactics of Bengali revolutionaries: “Sinn Féin” methods. “The attack on Government has been definitely organized on Sinn Féin lines,” stated a 1924 police intelligence report. “Local administration is to be captured and controlled by revolutionary organizations throughout the province and Government officials terrorized by a campaign of assassination.”<sup>78</sup> Two years later the Bengal Police Intelligence Branch reported that a secret section of the Labour Swaraj Party had a program “to smuggle arms from the Far East and to work on Sinn Féin lines in India.” In British eyes, any attempt to combine armed resistance with mass agitation became known as “Sinn Féin” tactics.<sup>79</sup>

The Bengal Police Intelligence Branch regarded the Bengal revolutionaries’ infatuation with Irish revolutionary methods as an accurate predictor of future revolutionary action. The “Irish gunman,” recalled one former Bengal police officer, was “regarded as an example to copy.”<sup>80</sup> Two English policemen, both former heads of the Bengal Police Intelligence Branch, resigned in 1921–22, citing their fear of “an intensive campaign on the lines of Sinn Féin.” One of the officers wrote that “it is the declared aim of the extremists to cause this development to follow on Sinn Féin lines,” which he feared would be in large part directed at the Bengal police.<sup>81</sup>

Bengal policemen and civil servants cited Dan Breen as an authority nearly as often as did the Bengali revolutionaries. *My Fight for Irish Freedom* was seen by British observers as providing insight into the “terrorist mentality.” A Government of India intelligence report noted that in 1929 “a new amalgamated party” had been formed in Bengal “for immediate terrorism based on the methods, such as surprise attacks on armed police posts, and guerilla warfare, as described in Dan Breen’s *My Fight for Irish Freedom*.” In the aftermath of the Chittagong Armoury Raid, a British police officer reported that individual members of the revolutionary groups were acting independently of their leaders “just

<sup>78</sup> Bengal Police Intelligence Branch, “Existence of a Revolutionary Conspiracy,” Indian Police Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 161/36.

<sup>79</sup> R. E. A. Ray, *Terrorist Conspiracy in Bengal from 1st January to 30th June 1926* (1926), Indian Police Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 161/36.

<sup>80</sup> I. G. H. Holman memoirs, pp. 272–73, Holman Papers, OIOC, MSS Eur. D 884.

<sup>81</sup> J. A. Goldie to Chief Sec. to GOB, September 1921; and G. W. Dixon to Chief Sec. to GOB, 6 January 1922, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 409 of 1922.

as Dan Breen and his desperadoes acted independently of the recognized leaders of the Irish Independent Party [*sic*].”<sup>82</sup>

In an attempt to counter the influence of “Sinn Féin” ideology on Bengali nationalists, the Government of India attempted to ban literature dealing with Ireland, which, in their view, had revolutionary implications.<sup>83</sup> The proscription of Irish materials began even before the First World War with the banning of the Irish-American nationalist paper the *Gaelic American*, which circulated widely among nationalists in Bengal as well as elsewhere in India.<sup>84</sup> In arguing for the ban, the Director of Criminal Intelligence, C. J. Stevenson-Moore, observed that “this paper makes a point of linking Ireland and India together as two down-trodden countries struggling for freedom. All its utterances are marked by violent and deep-rooted hatred for British rule and are a direct incitement to natives of this country to struggle or intrigue in order to overthrow it.”<sup>85</sup>

After the Easter Rising, the Government of India was especially concerned to monitor news from Ireland. Reports of nationalist opposition to conscription in Ireland, for example, were censored in April 1918 because the Home Department felt that such news would be “a great encouragement” to the Indian Home Rule movement.<sup>86</sup> Until the end of the Anglo-Irish War, the proscription of seditious materials relating to

<sup>82</sup> Hale, *Terrorism in India*, p. 23; and J. C. Farmer, Bengal Police Intelligence Branch, to T. J. A. Craig, Inspector General, Bengal Police, 5 May 1931, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 296 of 1931.

<sup>83</sup> The vast majority of works banned by the Government of India were those seen as seditious or revolutionary, although some were banned on the grounds of inflaming communal sentiments. For lists and details of proscribed works and the machinery of proscription see Shaw and Lloyd, *Publications Proscribed by the Government of India*; and N. G. Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India* (Columbus, Mo., 1971). A recent compilation—in Bengali with a summary in English—of books banned in Bengal is Hiranmay Bhattacharya, *Nirbasita Sahitya* (Proscribed Bengali books), vols. 1 and 2 (Calcutta, 1981 and 1987).

<sup>84</sup> Forty copies of the *Gaelic American* were seized in the French enclave of Chandernagore, near Calcutta, in December 1907, addressed to one S. N. Sen. After the proscription of the paper, Sen “apparently at the instigation” of Bengali revolutionaries based in Chandernagore, sought to obtain copies for over seventy other subscribers, mostly newspaper editors in Calcutta and the mofussil, through the French postal service. C. A. Tegart, “Note on the Chandernagore Gang,” 20 July 1913, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 342 of 1913.

<sup>85</sup> Note by C. J. Stevenson-Moore, 11 July 1907, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) A, August 1907, 243–50. In July 1907 orders were given for postal officials to surreptitiously seize copies of the paper; 335 copies of the *Gaelic American* had been seized before it was formally proscribed under the Sea Customs Act in September 1907; NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) A, January 1908, 38–42.

<sup>86</sup> Davis, “The Influence of the Irish Revolution on Indian Nationalism,” p. 55; and note by H. W. Vincent, 1 May 1918, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) Deposit, May 1918, no. 39.

Ireland was undertaken with regard to their impact on the Indian nationalist movement. In 1920, for example, copies of an English pamphlet titled “Hindustan and Ireland,” Eamon de Valera’s speech on “India and Ireland,” the *Sinn Féiner* newspaper of New York, and all publications of the Friends of Irish Freedom in New York were banned in India.<sup>87</sup> Although Dan Breen’s *My Fight for Irish Freedom* and the Republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* were proscribed by the Government of India in 1929, by this time the proscription of materials about Ireland was considered specifically with Bengal in mind.<sup>88</sup> In addition to imported works, numerous Bengali-language publications about Ireland were considered “seditious” and proscribed by the Government of Bengal.<sup>89</sup>

By the 1930s, the British considered any book about recent Irish history to be dangerous in the context of Bengal. In 1935 the Government of India debated the proscription of Louis DuBois’s account of the Anglo-Irish War, *The Irish Struggle and Its Results*, at the request of the Government of Bengal. The request came from the Special Branch of the Calcutta police, who grouped Dubois’s book with Breen’s *Irish Freedom* as books that were “very dangerous” in India. “I base my request that this book be banned entry into this country for very much the same reasons as must have been put forward in the case of Dan Breen’s book,” wrote a member of the Special Branch: “The struggle of Ireland for freedom has *always*, as you well know very well, been the example that the terrorists of Bengal have striven to follow. Dan Breen’s book, with its detailed description of how to run successfully a terrorist campaign, has been something in the nature of a bible to them. ‘What Ireland has done Bengal can do’ has always been a slogan in Bengal, and so . . .

<sup>87</sup> “Publications, etc., Proscribed under Section 12 (I) of the Indian Press Act, 1910 and since Its Repeal, under Section 99-A, of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1920 to 1924 (October),” in Samanta, ed., *Terrorism in Bengal*, 4:57–58; and “Prohibition under the Sea Customs Act of the Importation in British India of Copies of Publications Issued by Revolutionary Societies in Foreign Countries,” WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 317 of 1920.

<sup>88</sup> The district magistrate of Chittagong, who was unaware of the proscription order, wrote to the Government of Bengal in October 1930 requesting that *My Fight for Irish Freedom* be banned for reasons of its “injurious influence” on “impressionable minds” as well the application of its ideas by revolutionaries in the Chittagong Armoury Raid. H. R. Wilkinson, District Magistrate, Chittagong, to H. Tufnell-Barrett, Second Additional Sec. to GOB, 10 October 1930, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 749 of 1930.

<sup>89</sup> These included biographies of John Mitchel as well as books containing shorter sketches about the Féinian Luke Dillon and the Sinn Féin leader Countess Markievicz. A Hindi-language biography of de Valera published in Calcutta was also proscribed by the Government of India. See Shaw and Lloyd, *Publications Proscribed by the Government of India*. For details of Narayan Chakrabarti’s *Vidrohi Ireland* (Revolutionary Ireland), proscribed by the Government of Bengal in 1929, see NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) 27/1 of 1929.

to allow it entry into this country would be, in my opinion, really dangerous."<sup>90</sup> The book, he concluded, was "a most dangerous recruiting weapon in the hands of revolutionary organizers" and "inherently just as dangerous as Dan Breen's." The director of the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India, Horace Williamson, agreed that the book should be banned, arguing that "in practically every instance I have found that the very beginning of their initiation into terrorism has been caused by their being given exciting books such as *My Fight for Irish Freedom* to read."<sup>91</sup> The matter was eventually referred to the governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson. Anderson agreed that it was "unquestionable" that the book would do harm if widely read but that its author, unlike Breen, did not "represent the individual terrorist as a heroic and romantic figure." Anderson doubted that the message that terrorism "may force England to her knees" would "at this time of day . . . cut much ice in India." The government eventually decided that proscription would give undue attention to the book, and it was in consequence not banned.<sup>92</sup>

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The efforts of the British in Bengal to combat Bengali terrorism were not limited to the proscription of literature by or about Irish revolutionaries and nationalists, however. In the formulation of legal and administrative measures to combat terrorism, the Government of Bengal looked first to the experience of the Irish Free State in dealing with militant members of the IRA after 1922 and later, after the appointment of Sir John Anderson as governor in 1932, to the British experience in the Anglo-Irish War.

This strategy marked a shift in the British understanding of the relationship of Ireland to India in particular and the empire in general. In the nineteenth century, Ireland had been a fertile source of precedents for the British Empire in two major areas: land tenure and law and order. In the former case, a greater concern for the concept of the rights of tenantry influenced legislation in both countries. Indian land legislation provided the precedent for the Land Act of 1870 in Ireland, while the Irish Land Act of 1881 in turn provided the basis for the Bengal Tenancy

<sup>90</sup> Emphasis added. Johnston, Calcutta Special Branch, to Director, Intelligence Bureau, GOI, 10 September 1935, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 41/6 of 1935.

<sup>91</sup> Note by H. Williamson, 17 September 1935, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 41/6 of 1935.

<sup>92</sup> Note by H. D. Craik, 25 October 1935; and Anderson to Craik, 28 October 1935, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 41/6 of 1935. The Government of India also considered but ultimately rejected the proscription of Dorothy Macardle's *The Irish Republic* (1937) after copies were seized in Calcutta. For details, see NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 41/7 of 1937.

Act of 1885.<sup>93</sup> In terms of issues of law and order, specific legislation to combat nationalist movements in India was based upon similar measures enacted in Ireland.<sup>94</sup> More generally, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) exerted a profound influence on the development of policing in India, as well as elsewhere in the empire. The RIC was regarded as an ideal of what colonial policing ought to be, and the reorganization of the Indian police in the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 replicated the centralized control and semimilitary aspects of the Irish Constabulary.

After the disbandment of the RIC in 1921, large numbers of its officers, as well as auxiliary forces raised during the Anglo-Irish War, were recruited for service elsewhere in the empire.<sup>95</sup> In 1922, the India Office made an abortive attempt to secure places for demobilized members of the RIC in India. As Malcolm Seton of the India Office remarked, members of the RIC “a drilled, semi-military force,” were considered “tactful—and painfully experienced—in handling crowds. . . . In a place like Calcutta, the men should do very well indeed after a short training.”<sup>96</sup> In the end, however, few members of the RIC were tempted by the prospect of Indian service after the British government awarded them a generous pension.<sup>97</sup>

The British attempt to recruit members of the RIC for the Indian police focused on the “regular” recruits of the constabulary; the India Office specifically tried to avoid recruiting members of the RIC’s Auxiliary Division or the “Black and Tans” for service in India, for fear of inflaming nationalist opinion.<sup>98</sup> By later in the decade, however, the lessons that the British began to absorb from Ireland were not those of “normal” police techniques of crowd control but of “abnormal” con-

<sup>93</sup> S. B. Cook, *Imperial Affinities: Nineteenth-Century Analogies and Exchanges between India and Ireland* (New Delhi, London, and Newbury Park, Calif., 1993); Clive Dewey, “Celtic Agrarian Legislation and the Celtic Revival: Historicist Implications of Gladstone’s Irish and Scottish Land Acts, 1870–1886,” *Past and Present*, no. 64 (August 1974): 30–70, and “Images of the Village Community: A Study in Anglo-Indian Ideology,” *Modern Asian Studies* 6, no. 3 (July 1972): 291–328.

<sup>94</sup> Two examples were the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 and the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908. Cook, *Imperial Affinities*, pp. 32–36.

<sup>95</sup> Kent Fedorowich, “The Problems of Disbandment: The Royal Irish Constabulary and Imperial Migration, 1919–1929,” *Irish Historical Studies* 30, no. 117 (May 1996): 88–110.

<sup>96</sup> Seton to W. H. Vincent, Home Dept., GOI, 13 April 1922, NAI, GOI Home (Police) no. 627 of 1922.

<sup>97</sup> Lionel Curtis, Colonial Office, to Sir William Duke, India Office, 25 August 1922, OIOC, P&J no. 2092 of 1922, L/P&J/6/1800.

<sup>98</sup> Malcolm Seton wrote of the “desirability that this special recruitment should not be criticised in India as a drafting of ‘Black and Tans’ to inaugurate new methods of repression.” Sir Malcolm Seton to Sir W. Duke, 19 May 1922, OIOC, P&J no. 2092 of 1922, L/P&J/6/1800.

flict: the suppression of terrorism and the development of counterinsurgency techniques. In the development of British ideas about how best to combat insurgency, Ireland played a crucial role.<sup>99</sup>

The initial interest of British officials in the relevance of Ireland to the policing of terrorism in Bengal, however, came from the experience of the Irish Free State. Republican opposition to the Irish Free State government established in 1922 over the twenty-six counties of “southern” Ireland continued after the end of the Civil War of 1922–23 and necessitated a series of “public safety” laws.<sup>100</sup> By the 1930s, Government of India officials had become thoroughly conversant with this legislation. While considering a bill proposed by the Government of Bengal to try terrorist offenders by military courts in 1932, for example, the Government of India noted its similarity to the Irish Free State Public Safety Act of 1927.<sup>101</sup> The Irish legislation that attracted the most attention, however, was a 1931 amendment to the Free State’s Constitution that established military tribunals to try offenses without reference to any court of appeal. The tribunals were not limited by penalties fixed by the law but were empowered to impose “any greater punishment (including the penalty of death) if in the opinion of the Tribunal such greater punishment” was “necessary or expedient.” The police were also given extensive powers of search and preventative detention.<sup>102</sup>

This act was regarded by British observers in India as a useful example of how to counter acts of terrorism.<sup>103</sup> Malcolm Seton wrote, “This remarkable act is worth perusal. If its terms were known in India, the Indian public would begin to understand what ‘zulum’ [repression] really

<sup>99</sup> According to Thomas Mockaitis, the Anglo-Irish War was “part of a long series of internal-security operations that collectively gave rise to a traditional wisdom on how to combat irregulars.” Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counter-insurgency, 1919–1960* (London, 1990), p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> These began with the Public Safety (Emergency Powers) Act of 1 August 1923 and extended to the Offenses against the State Act of 1939.

<sup>101</sup> See NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 4/66 of 1932. The 1927 Public Safety Act, passed after the assassination of Minister for Justice and External Affairs Kevin O’Higgins by an IRA gunman, provided for the establishment of “Special Courts” consisting of three or more members. The courts were established to try a range of offenses including murder, attempted murder, or conspiracy to murder the governor-general of Ireland or any member of the Irish legislature or judges. There was no appeal from the tribunals’ decisions.

<sup>102</sup> Suspects had to be brought before tribunals within one month and three days of arrest. The India Office noted that “the powers of detention are not so great” as those in India, although “the reasons justifying detention without trial in India do not however exist in Ireland in virtue of the power of the Tribunal to order its procedure.” Note by W. Johnston, 26 October 1931, OIOC, L/P&J/7/235.

<sup>103</sup> British legislation to combat terrorism in India was based largely on the Defence of India Act of 1915, which allowed for detention without trial and the trial of terrorist suspects by tribunal rather than by jury.

is.”<sup>104</sup> The Government of Bengal requested copies of the act from the India Office in October 1931, and it was quickly seized upon as a possible way to stop the assassination of district magistrates by Bengali terrorists.<sup>105</sup> The government noted that military tribunals would probably be more effective in dealing with terrorists because of their complete control over their own procedures and powers. R. E. A. Ray of the Bengal Police Intelligence Branch argued even more forcefully for a similar Public Safety Act with secret trials and the power to impose unrestricted penalties. “The Irish Free State Government,” he wrote, “is composed of persons who themselves were terrorists and presumably know the best methods of dealing with terrorism.”<sup>106</sup>

The use of Irish precedents in the policing of terrorism in Bengal was expressed most clearly, however, after the appointment of Sir John Anderson as governor of Bengal in 1932. In 1920, Anderson had been appointed undersecretary of state at Dublin Castle in an overhaul of the British administration in Ireland that was designed to create a strong executive in a country that was rapidly becoming ungovernable.<sup>107</sup> During Anderson’s tenure, the Black and Tans (composed of ex-servicemen) and the Auxiliary Division (composed of ex-army officers) were recruited into the Royal Irish Constabulary, and in August 1920, the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act was passed, giving the government sweeping powers of arrest and imprisonment without trial. Anderson was a key figure in the implementation of this legislation and soon became, according to his biographer, “the most powerful force in the Government of Ireland.”<sup>108</sup>

After his tour of duty in Ireland, Anderson served as permanent undersecretary of the Home Office, where, in his own words, he was “for ten years responsible for internal intelligence in Great Britain.”<sup>109</sup> British observers believed that Anderson was uniquely talented to deal with terrorism in Bengal due to his experience in Ireland. Lionel Curtis wrote to Anderson that “everyone believes that you, better than any other

<sup>104</sup> Note by Malcolm Seton, 27 October 1931, OIOC, L/P&J/7/235.

<sup>105</sup> At the same time the Government of Bengal also examined the Irish Free State Fire Arms Act of 1925 and the Treasonable Offenses Act of 1925. See WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 825 of 1931. The Government of the Punjab also requested to see copies of the 1931 act; NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 295 of 1931.

<sup>106</sup> Note by H. Twynham, 14 December 1931; and note by R. E. A. Ray, 29 October 1931, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. of 825 of 1931.

<sup>107</sup> As Charles Townshend observes, that result was not achieved. Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919–1921* (Oxford, 1975), p. 73.

<sup>108</sup> Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, pp. 67–68. For a more critical assessment of Anderson’s role, see Townshend, *British Campaign*, p. 80.

<sup>109</sup> Anderson to Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, 13 January 1933, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. E 240/9.

Englishman, with your long experience at the Home Office and in Ireland will be able to grapple with the disorders in Bengal and suppress the terrorists.”<sup>110</sup> Other observers drew parallels between Bengal and Ireland but were less optimistic. During a visit to Bengal in March 1932 the Marquis of Lothian informed Anderson that the situation he would encounter in Bengal was not radically different from that which he had faced while at Dublin Castle. Lothian wrote that the Bengali revolutionaries possessed a “theatrical and pathological attitude, a state not unlike the state of Ireland before and after the Treaty.” Sir Nevil Macready, former commander-in-chief in Ireland during Anderson’s tenure, wrote that he could not congratulate Anderson on the appointment, “for I fear it may prove a dirty job, not unlike our penance in Ireland.”<sup>111</sup>

More significant, Anderson himself made frequent reference to his Irish experience while he served as governor of Bengal.<sup>112</sup> Anderson referred to the (Better) Government of Ireland Act (1920), for example, as a model for financial and constitutional relations between the Government of India and the provinces.<sup>113</sup> Nor was his use of his Irish experience limited to legislative analogies, for he also deployed it in the development of policies to counter terrorism, which he clearly considered to be his brief in Bengal.<sup>114</sup> As governor, Anderson sought to counter terrorism in two ways that illustrate the complex interaction between British understanding of the Irish and Bengali situations: the consideration of legal measures against terrorism and the development of combined civil-military policies.

After Anderson’s arrival, the Government of Bengal began to investigate whether legislation from the Anglo-Irish War might serve as a possible solution for the “terrorist menace” in Bengal.<sup>115</sup> In September

<sup>110</sup> Lionel Curtis to Anderson, 27 February 1932, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207/5.

<sup>111</sup> Lothian to Anderson, 12 March 1932; and Macready to Anderson, 24 November 1931, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207.

<sup>112</sup> R. N. Reid recalled that Anderson “could expound with equal facility the methods used to repress terrorism in Ireland or the niceties of Parliamentary procedure.” Reid, *Years of Change*, p. 70.

<sup>113</sup> The act established two separate parliaments to administer Home Rule in northern and southern Ireland. Each was in turn subordinate to the imperial parliament in London. Anderson to Findlater Stewart, 17 November 1932; and Anderson to Samuel Hoare, 29 July 1933, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207/5.

<sup>114</sup> In response to King George V’s query, “What is *wrong* with Bengal?” Anderson replied in June 1932 that “the most conspicuous and the most urgent of our problems is without question the suppression of terrorism.” Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson*, p. 126; and John Anderson, “The Situation in Bengal,” June 1932, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207/14.

<sup>115</sup> In 1932 the Government of Bengal requested copies of “Orders for Internment Camps in Ireland,” although the exact content is not clear, since the relevant file has not been transferred to the archives. NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 59 of 1932.

1932, the Government of Bengal submitted the “Trial of Terrorist Offenses Bill” to the Government of India. The legislation, based largely on the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act of 1920, was an attempt to allow military tribunals to try certain terrorist offenses under three broad headings of “waging war against the king,” murder, and dacoity. While the chief secretary, R. N. Reid, noted that “the Irish analogy does not exactly cover the case” since there had been no “complete breakdown” of law and order in Bengal, the court-martial provision was applicable and would provide a “stiffening” of tribunals under the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act.<sup>116</sup> In arguing in its favor, Anderson stressed that this method had “worked well” in Ireland. If the civil administration of justice ceased to function effectively, he argued, it would be better “to institute another form of administration of justice properly recognized and well tried in the shape of the Court Martial procedure, rather than to introduce under civil forms a more drastic procedure than the existing one, which might hardly be consonant with civil ideas.”<sup>117</sup>

The Government of India, however, rejected the proposals on the grounds that they would place an “unreasonable responsibility” on the military officers serving on tribunals and create general hostility among nationalists toward the Indian Army. The government feared both a retaliatory outrage against soldiers and a subsequent retaliation by the military. Anderson acknowledged that the proposals were not an “ideal solution” but argued that they were the only practical way of dealing with a situation in which the judiciary in Bengal were thoroughly cowed by the threat of terrorist violence. “I have seen the same system working, and working successfully under not dissimilar conditions in Ireland,” Anderson wrote. “Martial law in Ireland was not a success, but the courts martial system worked well.”<sup>118</sup>

In two other respects, however, Anderson successfully applied his Irish experience to the question of “Bengali terrorism.” First, Anderson firmly opposed a policy of reprisals, in spite of pressure from both members of the Government of Bengal and the British community in Calcutta. The assassination of a number of British policemen, district magistrates, and businessmen in the early 1930s generated increased pressure from both the European community and within the Government of Bengal for drastic measures.<sup>119</sup> Government of Bengal officials made explicit refer-

<sup>116</sup> Note by R. N. Reid, 29 June 1932, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. no. 685 of 1932.

<sup>117</sup> Note by H. G. Haig, 25 October 1932, NAI, GOI Home (Pol.) no. 4/66 of 1932.

<sup>118</sup> H. G. Haig to Anderson, 19 November 1932; and Anderson to Haig, 22 November 1932, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207/3.

<sup>119</sup> A conference of officials from the Government of Bengal and the Government of India in November 1931 noted a “very real danger of the European population taking

ences to the Anglo-Irish War in calling for reprisals. R. E. A. Ray noted that “during the [Irish] Rebellion hostages were shot in retaliation for outrages” and that similar action should be carried out against “hostages” at a detention camp for revolutionaries. R. N. Reid, the chief secretary, argued that “it would be easy to announce that for every Government official killed 3 or 4 or 5 or any number which Government thought suitable to the occasion, would be taken out and shot.”<sup>120</sup> Anderson, however, was strongly opposed to reprisals, and he used his influence to ensure that no such policy was adopted. The repeated demands of one member of the Bengal Government for such measures prompted Anderson to give a “lucid and comprehensive” discourse on the subject. “He drew on his Irish experience,” R. N. Reid recalled, “to prove that reprisals were what was publicly remembered, not the outrages that provoked them.”<sup>121</sup>

The final component of Anderson’s Irish experience that influenced the campaign against terrorism was the use of military forces. Although there was never any question of relinquishing control of the Bengal administration to the military, Anderson made a concerted effort to increase military involvement in police operations against terrorists in Bengal.<sup>122</sup> One of his first decisions was to enlist the Army’s help in boosting the morale of the civil administration in Bengal, and seven battalions of British and Indian troops were distributed over the province. More ambitiously, Anderson incorporated military officers into the civil administration. At Anderson’s request, General Sir Norman Macmullen was appointed in 1932 as a liaison officer to the Government of Bengal. Anderson also provided the impetus for the recruitment of military officers into the Intelligence Branch of the Bengal police. Three officers were initially appointed, and the number was later increased to twelve.<sup>123</sup>

These Military Intelligence Officers (MIOs) served as plainclothes inspectors in the Intelligence Branch and coordinated the use of military forces in search operations for terrorist suspects. Although most of the

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the law into their own hands, if outrages continue.” H. W. Emerson, “Note on Discussion with the Bengal Government,” 5 November 1931, OIOC, L/P&J/7/242.

<sup>120</sup> Note by R. E. A. Ray, 29 October 1931, WBSA, GOB Home (Pol.) Conf. of 825 of 1931; and note by R. N. Reid, 24 March 1932, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207/12. For the origins of reprisals during the Anglo-Irish War, see Townshend, *British Campaign*, pp. 95–97.

<sup>121</sup> Reid, *Years of Change*, p. 70. In his memoirs Reid does not, however, mention his own advocacy of reprisals against terrorists.

<sup>122</sup> For a brief discussion of the Indian Army’s involvement in the campaign against terrorism in Bengal, see David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (London, 1994), pp. 223–25.

<sup>123</sup> R. N. Reid, “Bomb and Pistol in a Bengal District,” Reid Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. E 278/2.

officers who volunteered for intelligence work had “no training in covert operations” or experience of living among the Bengali population, the experiment nonetheless improved the flow of intelligence about terrorist groups to the Bengal police. The most important function, however, of these MIOs was not amateur sleuthing but coordinating the use of Indian and British Army forces in the search for terrorist suspects. In Chittagong District, MIOs led the search for Surya Sen and other members of the Chittagong raiders who had eluded capture in 1930. The district magistrate and MIO in Chittagong developed a system of cordoning off villages for search by troops that one officer characterized as a “crude” method “of countering violence with violence” in which homes were “ransacked in a search—often fruitless—for arms.”<sup>124</sup>

These tactics, although they looked forward to later British experience of counterinsurgency in Malaya and Kenya, also owed a debt to the experience of the Anglo-Irish War. In 1932, Sir Samuel Hoare, the secretary of state for India, expressed his fears to Anderson that “further outrages” by terrorists in Calcutta would “lead to a really dangerous Black and Tan atmosphere.” From the British perspective, such events were avoided in Bengal through a judicious use of military power—namely, the use of Military Intelligence Officers and British and Indian Army units in support of the Bengal police that Anderson had coordinated. For Bengalis, however, fears that Anderson’s tenure would be a repeat of Black and Tan repression in Ireland were realized. The repression of terrorism in Bengal provided one more linkage between Ireland and Bengal in the minds of Bengali nationalists. On the occasion of Anderson’s departure in 1937, the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* wrote that the Bengali people would not soon forget the “painful memory” of Anderson’s regime “just as Ireland has not as yet been able to forget the story of the Andersonian era in that country.”<sup>125</sup>

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This article has demonstrated that both Bengali nationalists and British administrators linked Irish nationalism to the experience of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal during the interwar period. For almost two decades, Ireland exerted a tremendous impact upon Bengali nationalists such as Subhas Chandra Bose and members of revolutionary groups.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> John Hunt, *Life Is Meeting* (London, 1978), pp. 21–22.

<sup>125</sup> Hoare to Anderson, 14 October 1932, Templewood Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. E 240/9; and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 23 November 1937, and *Advance*, 22 November 1937, Anderson Collection, OIOC, MSS Eur. F 207/22.

<sup>126</sup> Leonard A. Gordon concludes his biography of Subhas and Sarat Chandra Bose by observing that “of all the foreign nationalists, both the Boses had a special feeling for the Irish. Both visited Ireland, both talked of the lessons that India had to learn from

Although historians have documented the impact of Ireland on the British Empire after the creation of the Irish Free State, their work has focused on the Irish influence on the “white dominions” and on the constitutional evolution of the Commonwealth. The impact of Irish nationalism in Bengal, however, suggests a different legacy and meaning of “Irishness”: a model for decolonization in the non-Western world and a source of the tactics needed to achieve it. In spite of its anomalous status within the British Empire, Ireland was a potent example of decolonization in the non-Western world after 1922, and Irish actions seemed to create a new paradigm for guerilla warfare to which Bengali revolutionaries, already committed to the goal of forcing the British from India by force of arms, enthusiastically responded.

Bengali revolutionaries had been inspired by the acts of European revolutionaries since the early twentieth century, but in the 1920s and 1930s, the example of Ireland took precedence over all others. To be sure, the imagined bonds between Irish and Bengali nationalism were more important than any concrete linkages. The tangible connections between Indian and Irish nationalists in this period were rather limited. While some anti-Treaty members of the IRA spoke of traveling to India “to carry on the fight against the Empire” and “strike a real blow for freedom,” nothing came of such talk. A decade later, V. J. Patel, the founder of the Irish-Indian Independence League, hoped to enlist the aid of the newly elected Fianna Fáil government for the Indian nationalist movement. Patel, however, was rebuffed by both de Valera and the Irish Republican Army, and he commented that de Valera had evolved “a kind of nationalism that is not anti-imperialist.”<sup>127</sup> As Charles Townshend has observed, however, the campaign of the Irish Republican Army from 1919–21 “was as much a matter of myth as of reality,” and for Bengali nationalists, the inspiration of de Valera, Dan Breen, and Patrick Pearse and the “martyrs” of the Easter Rising helped inspire plans for revolution against the British Raj.<sup>128</sup>

From the British perspective, the threat of Bengali terrorism and the influence of Ireland upon it were taken seriously, and the connections made by British officials between India and Ireland were numerous and

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the bravery of Irish patriots and the determination with which the Irish worked for complete independence from the British Empire.” Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, p. 618.

<sup>127</sup> Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 179; Robert Briscoe with Alden Hatch, *For the Life of Me* (Boston and Toronto, 1958), p. 141; and George Gilmore, *The Irish Republican Congress*, rev. ed. (Cork, 1978), p. 30.

<sup>128</sup> Charles Townshend, “The IRA and the Development of Guerilla Warfare, 1916–21,” *English Historical Review* 94, no. 371 (April 1979): 344.

sustained.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, as this article has demonstrated, these Irish-Indian analogies had an impact on policy. John Anderson and other British officials did not equate the situation in Bengal with that of Ireland following the First World War, but they did recognize the utility of the Irish example in the attempt to suppress Bengali “terrorism.” Although Ireland had been a model for British imperial policy in areas such as land tenure and policing in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century it provided new lessons in counterinsurgency, as Ireland seemed to hold out models for how to neutralize “Bengali terrorism.” The appointment of John Anderson as governor of Bengal was itself a symbolic linkage between “terrorism” in Ireland and Bengal, and he actively attempted to draw on the lessons of the Anglo-Irish War in suppressing terrorism in Bengal, most successfully through the use of the military to supplement the intelligence apparatus of the Bengal police.

One of the great ironies of the impact of Ireland upon Bengali revolutionary movement was that the acknowledged “British” expert on “Bengali terrorism,” Sir Charles Tegart of the Indian police, was himself an Irishman. At the same time as Bengali revolutionaries were avidly reading Dan Breen, their primary target for assassination was Tegart, who survived numerous attempts on his life while police commissioner of Calcutta from 1923 to 1931.<sup>130</sup> Prior to 1921, the experience of Ireland within the British Empire was both imperial and colonial, and the role of Irishmen as imperial servants in India had been particularly prominent. This imperial role of Irishmen continued after 1921, as Tegart’s career demonstrates. In a 1924 speech to the Friends of Freedom for India in New York, Sean T. O’Ceallaigh felt obliged to acknowledge this “deep debt” he believed that the Irish owed to Indian nationalists on account of their service on behalf of the British Empire. It was “largely by the work of Irish brains and Irish brawn and muscle,” O’Ceallaigh asserted, that the people of India “have been beaten into subjection and have been so long oppressed. Until Ireland has taken some very definite steps to win back her good name and relieve herself of the odium that attaches to the race by reason of scandalous work done for England’s benefit in

<sup>129</sup> It is not true, as Richard J. Popplewell maintains, that “comparisons between India and Ireland by British statesmen are extremely few and far between.” Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defense*, p. 32.

<sup>130</sup> After his retirement from the Indian Police in 1931, Tegart became the first former policeman appointed to the Council of India. In 1932, he delivered a lecture to the Royal Empire Society on “Terrorism in India.” For Tegart’s career, see J. C. Curry, *Tegart of the Indian Police* (Tunbridge Wells, 1960); and Michael Silvestri, “‘An Irishman Is Specially Suited to Be a Policeman’: Sir Charles Tegart and the Revolutionary Terrorist Movement in Bengal,” *History Ireland* (in press).

India . . . we Irish have every reason to hang our heads in shame when the name of India is mentioned.”<sup>131</sup>

In spite of this tradition of Irish imperial service, there was certainly Indian admiration of Ireland and Irish nationalism prior to the First World War. The Bengali nationalist Aurobindo Ghose wrote poetry about Ireland and editorials in praise of the Home Rule movement. Another commentator, S. M. Mitra, concluded that “many Anglo-Indian officers have tried to understand the Hindu mind, but there is no denying the fact that the most successful attempts at comprehension have generally been made by Irishmen.”<sup>132</sup> Mitra was not referring to Irish nationalists, however, but to the Ulsterman John Lawrence, a pivotal figure in the British suppression of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and later viceroy of India. For in an important sense, the meaning of Irishness for Indians prior to 1914 reflected this view of Irishmen as a white race and imperial servants.

After 1921, the “colonial” aspects of Ireland’s experience within the empire came to the fore in the case of Bengal. While there was no mass exodus of Irishmen from imperial service in India after 1921,<sup>133</sup> the perception of Irishmen had markedly changed for Bengalis. Irishmen were no longer seen as imperial servants but embraced as a fellow subject race. If Ireland in the nineteenth century occupied an “analogous intermediary relationship” between Britain and its empire, from the perspective of Bengali revolutionaries after the First World War, Ireland’s relationship seemed purely colonial.<sup>134</sup> British observers, as well, linked de Valera with Gandhi as leaders of mass colonial nationalist movements. The Anglo-Irish conflict became a model for liberation from the British Empire to which in the case of Bengal both nationalists and imperialists gave their full attention in the following two decades.

<sup>131</sup> Sean T. O’Ceallaigh, *India and Ireland* (New York, 1925), p. 9.

<sup>132</sup> Devi, “India and Ireland,” 299; Kapur, *The Irish Raj*, p. 45; and S. M. Mitra, *Anglo-Indian Studies* (New York, Bombay, and Calcutta, 1913), p. 464.

<sup>133</sup> Of 106 Irish civil servants in India in 1919, only three retired prematurely as a result of either the Anglo-Irish War or the civil war that followed. Cook, “The Example of Ireland,” p. 182.

<sup>134</sup> Cook, *Imperial Affinities*, p. 136.