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## **The War Resister's Dilemma: On the Radical Pacifist Struggle with Anti-Imperialism in the War Resisters' International (1925-1930)**

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# The War Resister's Dilemma

On the Radical Pacifist Struggle with Anti-Imperialism in War Resisters'  
International (1925-1930)

Research Master Politics, Culture and National Identities

Leiden University

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*So it goes.*

## Table of Contents

List of abbreviations .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Chapter one – Idealists: War Resisters’ International and Anti-Imperialism (1925-1930) .....	13
1.1 Setting the Stage – the Beginnings of War Resister’s International.....	13
1.2 Restarting the Movement – the Hoddesdon Conference and Imperialism.....	14
1.3 ‘Attacking Imperialism with Bare Hands’ – The International Council Discusses.....	17
1.4 The Sonntagsberg Conference – a Nonviolent Solution to Anti-Imperialist Resistance? .....	23
1.5 The Limits of Pacifist Anti-Imperialism .....	27
Chapter Two – Radicals: Dutch Pacifist Anti-Imperialism in the War Resisters’ International (1925-1930).....	32
2.1 Anarchist Visions – Anarcho-Communist Anti-Imperialism in the WRI .....	32
2.2 Radical Council Member – Jo Meijer’s Anti-Imperialism .....	37
2.3 Anti-Imperialist Exchanges – Dutch Anti-Militarists at the WRI Conference .....	42
Chapter Three – Anti-Colonialists: War Resisters International and the League Against Imperialism (1927-1929).....	46
3.1 An Anti-Colonial Coalition – a Short Introduction to the LAI .....	47
3.2 A Real League of Nations – Radical Pacifists at the Brussels Congress .....	48
3.3 Tensions Rise – Defining the Relationship between the WRI and LAI.....	53
3.4 Non-Violence – Radical Pacifists at the Frankfurt Congress .....	56
Conclusion.....	61
Bibliography.....	65
Primary sources .....	65
Secondary sources .....	66

## List of abbreviations

BRAC	<i>Bond van Religieuze Anarcho-Communisten</i>
IAMB	International Anti-Militarist Bureau
IAMV	<i>Internationale Anti-Militaristische Vereeniging</i>
IISH	International Institute for Social History
LAI	League Against Imperialism and for National Independence
WRI	War Resisters' International
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
WRL	War Resisters' League

## Introduction

Helene Stöcker was present at a historic event, and she knew it.<sup>1</sup> It was the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1927, the last day of a remarkable gathering of anticolonial activists from all over the world at the Palais Egmont in Brussels. Stöcker, a German pacifist and feminist, had come to this very first Congress against Imperialism as the representative of the international pacifist organisation War Resisters' International (WRI). The WRI was a coalition of the most radical pacifist voices of the interwar period. WRI members were opposed to all wars, dedicated themselves to personal war resistance and complete nonviolence.<sup>2</sup> To the radical pacifists of the WRI, there was no possible justification for war and violence.

In this anticolonial congress, the WRI's standpoints were far from accepted. As Stöcker sat in the audience, she listened to delegates from India, South Africa, Indonesia, Morocco and many more colonial and semi-colonial countries rallying for national liberation and an end to colonial oppression. She heard delegates speak favourably about recent violent uprisings against colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> Others proclaimed their support for future struggles to end imperialism.<sup>4</sup> The pacifist values which Stöcker held so dearly, were scarcely represented in this anticolonial movement. Even worse, the support for violent struggles against imperialism inherently contradicted her values of nonviolence. Still, when Stöcker took to the stage herself, she declared solidarity between the radical pacifists and the anticolonial struggle.

The involvement of the WRI with the first anticolonial congress thus seemingly presents a contradiction. In the peace movement radical pacifists held the most extreme position, renouncing all war and propagating nonviolence. In the anticolonial movement, however, radical pacifists expressed their solidarity with anticolonial freedom struggles. This thesis takes the WRI and its relation to anti-imperialism, as a case study of the connections between radical pacifists and anticolonialism in the interwar period. It asks why radical pacifists were active in the anti-colonial movement and explores the intersections and disconnects between the two ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Stöcker, 'Der Brüsseler Kongreß gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus', *Die Friedens-Warte* 27:3 (March 1927), 81-82, 81.

<sup>2</sup> R. Braker, 'Helene Stöcker's Pacifism in the Weimar Republic: Between Ideal and Reality', *Journal of Women's History* 13, nr. 3 (2001): 70-97, 74.

<sup>3</sup> K. Stutje, 'To Maintain an Independent Course. Inter-War Indonesian Nationalism and International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage', *Dutch Crossing* 39:3 (2015): 204-20, 207.

<sup>4</sup> M. L. Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge, 2018), 44.

The variety of different radical pacifist ideologies in the WRI makes it a perfect vehicle to gain a broad understanding of radical pacifism and its connections with anti-imperialism in the interwar period. The WRI had over twenty different national sections, all representing different national pacifist traditions. Furthermore, the WRI was known for its diverse membership, consisting of socialists, anarchists, protestants and Catholics, all holding different peace ideologies.<sup>5</sup> In order to protect the diversity of their movement, the WRI organisation was decentralised. Sections were free to organise themselves. The WRI had a central office which kept sections in contact with each other and published propaganda for war resistance. Most of the WRI sections had a leftist political signature, as radical pacifists overwhelmingly considered capitalism to be the main cause of war. However, what really brought WRI members together, was their dedication to absolute pacifism.

Absolute pacifists unconditionally rejected all war, violence and armed class revolution.<sup>6</sup> This was in contrast to the majority of the peace movement, where most anti-war peace advocates accepted that war could not be outlawed completely and even was necessary in some cases.<sup>7</sup> For example, liberal peace activists accepted the need for ‘just wars’, such as wars of defence. And in the left flank of the peace movement, anti-militarists recognised that war was necessary in order to end capitalism in the class struggle.<sup>8</sup> What made the WRI stand out even from other radical pacifist organisations in the period, was the personal dedication of its members to war resistance, or conscientious objection.<sup>9</sup> WRI members refused military service, as well as any kind of alternative service. As conscription laws were commonplace in many parts of Europe, being a conscientious objector meant that one could land in prison, which many of the WRI members had already experienced in the First World War.<sup>10</sup> The WRI can thus be considered an international forum for a wide range of radical pacifist ideas, which also offers a look into the anti-imperialist ideas which were discussed in the radical pacifist movement.

The connections between radical pacifism and anti-imperialism have been all but neglected in the historiography of the peace movement. This is the unintended consequence of

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<sup>5</sup> O. Ashkenazi, ‘Reframing the Interwar Peace Movement: The Curious Case of Albert Einstein’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 46:4 (2011), 741–66, 750.

<sup>6</sup> D. Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, I use the term radical pacifist as an umbrella term for all the peace activists in the WRI and affiliated groups. Most of them were absolutists, but not all. When I refer to people or groups which did not have an absolutist outlook, this is explicitly mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> A. Fiala, A. ‘Pacifism in the Twentieth Century and Beyond’, in: A. Fiala (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence* (New York, 2018), 30–42, 30.

<sup>9</sup> P. Brock & N. Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1999), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Brock & Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century*, 103.

two aspects of the historiography. Firstly, traditional histories of the interwar peace movement generally focus on anti-war activism within the boundaries of specific states and national discourses.<sup>11</sup> This national framework has led to transnational aspects of pacifist activism being obscured. As anti-imperialist activism played out mostly in the transnational sphere, the connection between pacifism and anti-imperialism specifically is mostly absent from these histories.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, histories of interwar pacifism often consider developments in the peace movement as separate from the histories of other social movements. Narratives mostly engage with pacifists' activities to end war, not on their relation to other ideologies like socialism, anarchism, anti-fascism or anti-imperialism. So while the transnational turn in history has led historians in recent years to explore transnational peace activism, this has been limited to traditional pacifist topics like disarmament or ending conscription.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the overlaps, intersections and solidarities between the radical pacifist movement and other movements are not covered well, at least in the specific historiography of the interwar peace movement.

In contrast, historians of anticolonialism have begun to specifically look at the intersections between interwar anticolonialism and other kinds of internationalisms and social movements. While pacifism has not yet been tackled, the overlaps and tensions between other movements have been explored in recent studies.<sup>14</sup> By focussing on the anticolonial networks in European cities, for example, studies have shown that anticolonial activists from the colonies forged connections with communists, socialists and other members of the European labour movement.<sup>15</sup> Other studies have revealed these diverse networks of anticolonial activism in Europe by focusing on the networks in international organisations. Especially the anticolonial

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<sup>11</sup> Classic works on the interwar peace movement in the Anglophone world are: P. Brock, *Twentieth Century Pacifism* (New York, 1970) and M. Caedel *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, 1980). For the French movement: N. Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939* (Oxford, 1991). Insightful for the German pacifist movement is: K. Holl & W. Wette (eds.), *Pazifismus in der Weimarer Republik: Beiträge zur historischen Friedensforschung* (Paderborn, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Revisions of classics on the American and British peace movement which included a broader geographical scope came out around the turn of the Century: M. Caedel, *Semi-detached Idealists: the British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford, 2000) and Brock & Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>13</sup> C. Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, 2007); T.R. Davies, *The Possibilities of Transnational Activism: the Campaign for Disarmament between the Two World Wars* (Leiden, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> On the connections between anti-fascism and anticolonialism: T. Buchanan, "'The Dark Millions in the Colonies Are Unavenged': Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s", *Contemporary European History* 25:4 (2016), 645–65; D. Featherstone, 'Anti-Fascism, Anti-Colonialism and the Making of Solidarities' in: K. Braskén, B. Bayerlein, and U. Sonnenberg (eds.), *Global Spaces for Radical Transnational Solidarity. Contributions to the First International Willi Münzenberg Congress 2015 in Berlin* (Berlin, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> On anticolonial networks in Paris see: M. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2017). For networks in Berlin: F. Petersson, 'Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933', *Interventions* 16:1 (2014), 49–71. More examples are listed in: D. Brückenhaus, 'Challenging Imperialism Across Borders: Recent Studies of Twentieth-Century Internationalist Networks against Empire', *Contemporary European History* 29:1 (2020), 104–15.



networks of the League Against Imperialism (LAI) has seen considerable attention in recent years. The LAI was formed out of the Congress against Imperialism, at which Helene Stöcker represented the radical pacifist movement, and was an anticolonial organisation which brought activists from the colonies together with the European labour movement.<sup>16</sup>

When works do investigate the intersection between anticolonialism and pacifism, they show that integrating anti-imperialism into pacifism was challenging. An intriguing picture emerges from these studies of pacifists supporting anti-imperialism, but struggling to break free from their preconceptions about non-Europeans. A national case study of the interwar German peace movement, for example, showed that radical pacifists were active in anticolonial campaigns. However, even German pacifists who vehemently opposed colonialism usually saw colonial populations as less developed than Europeans.<sup>17</sup> While international pacifist organisations framed peace as an international problem, these spaces were also not free from assumptions of European superiority. Recently, some scholars have even argued that the international pacifist movement could not be free of imperial discourse about moral superiority and civility, due to the inherent Eurocentricity of the peace movement, which had its roots firmly in the Enlightenment and liberalism.<sup>18</sup> At least for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) scholars have shown that conflicts arose between European and colonial members when the organisation branched out to include sections from colonial countries.<sup>19</sup> The WILPF, was also part of the radical sphere of the peace movement, like the WRI. While the WILPF officially condemned imperialism, there were marked differences between sections about their views on empire.<sup>20</sup>

Writing a history about an international pacifist organisation, like the WRI, is a challenging task as archives of members and sections are spread across the globe. This is an inherent feature of research into transnational movements. In order to gain a broad

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<sup>16</sup> M.L. Louro, C. Stolte, H. Streets-Salter and S. Tannoury-Karam, *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> S. Heyn, 'Der kolonialkritische Diskurs der Weimarer Friedensbewegung zwischen Antikolonialismus und Kulturmission', *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 5:9 (2005), 37-65.

<sup>18</sup> H. Nehring, 'Peace Movements', in: S. Berger and H. Nehring (eds.), *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective* (London, 2017), 485-513, 488.

<sup>19</sup> L.J. Rupp, 'Challenging Imperialism in International Women's Organizations, 1888-1945', *NWSA Journal* 8:1 (1996), 8-27; M.L. Siegel, 'Feminism, Pacifism and Political Violence in Europe and China in the Era of the World Wars', *Gender & History* 28:3 (2016), 641-59; M.L. Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women's Rights After the First World War* (New York, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> L. Beers, 'Advocating for a Feminist Internationalism Between the Wars', in G. Sluga & C. James (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International politics since 1500* (London, 2016), 202-11; M.B. Jerónimo, 'Imperial Internationalisms' in the 1920s: The Shaping of Colonial Affairs at the League of Nations', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48:5 (2020), 866-91.

understanding of radical pacifism, which explains the connection with anti-imperialism, I have made use of a wide range of source material.

The main archive utilised for this thesis are the official WRI archives, held at the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam.<sup>21</sup> This archive has two important limitations. Firstly, the WRI archives do not have a lot material on the interwar period. My research covered all the folders from 1925 until 1935, which did not provide a whole lot of material. Secondly, this is only the archive of the WRI's central office, not of national sections. The WRI's central office was mainly responsible for keeping various anti-war organisations in different countries in contact with each other, as well as disseminating information about conscientious objection and absolute pacifism to their sections through journals, pamphlets and correspondence.<sup>22</sup> The central office sent out thousands of letters each year, but only a fraction has found its way into the WRI archive.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, the WRI archive holds the minutes of council meetings, reports of international conferences, the WRI's official bulletin and some publications. The minutes of council meetings are useful in illustrating the discussions between the WRI's leadership. The publications and the bulletin were the WRI's propaganda material, and reflect the organisations' official standpoints. Reports of international conferences also present the WRI's standpoints, but give a glimpse into the ideologies of national sections and other radical pacifists as well. However, contextualising the variety of radical pacifist ideas is difficult using only the WRI archive. It mostly helpful to illustrate the WRI's official standpoints and discussions within its leadership.

Additionally, I have made use of the archive of the League against Imperialism, also held at the IISH, to explore the involvement of radical pacifists in the anti-colonial movement. This archive holds proceedings of the LAI's anticolonial congresses, in which radical pacifists took part. These reflect the public proceedings, not what but not what happened behind the scenes.

Overcoming these limitations of the WRI archive, as well as the LAI archive, is not an easy feat. Most of the archives of leading figures within the WRI are located in the UK,

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<sup>21</sup> A part of the WRI archive is also held at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, but unfortunately this collection has not been digitized.

<sup>22</sup> Ceadel, *Semi-detached Idealists*, 247.

<sup>23</sup> Between 1928 and 1932 alone the head office wrote and received around fifteen thousand letters according to a WRI publication: *Report of the Work of the International Council, August 1928-Spring 1932* (Enfield, 1932), 4. The head office also informed international council members of developments a few times per month: International Institute for Social History (hereafter IISH), War Resisters' International Archives (hereafter WRI archives), inventory number 26, Minutes of the Meetings of the Council 1926-1934, 'Minutes of the International Council meeting in Berlin 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1926', 9. All this correspondence is not a part of the IISH archive.

Germany, Austria and the US and are unfortunately not digitized. The IISH holds some personal archives of WRI members, but these only include a few official publications, and no correspondence pertaining to the WRI. Where possible, I have used biographies and autobiographies to overcome these gaps. The diversity of radical pacifist ideologies is best reconstructed by looking at publications of national sections and affiliated organisations. I have made use of Dutch radical pacifist journals. These journals reflect the official standpoints of radical pacifist organisations, but there was also room for internal discussions.

The bulk of this thesis builds on primary sources, as the historiography on the WRI and its sections is unfortunately rather limited. There are only two works which completely centre the WRI, both of which have significant limitations. The first, *Widerstand gegen den Krieg, Zur Geschichte der WRI*, gives some insight to the WRI in the interwar period, but is based on a limited number of pamphlets and periodicals.<sup>24</sup> The second work is *War is a Crime against Humanity* published by the WRI in 2005.<sup>25</sup> This work is based on the WRI archives, but has been criticized for not being a scholarly account.<sup>26</sup> There are some histories of WRI sections, but these are mostly written as national histories and hardly discuss with the relationship between the sections and the WRI.<sup>27</sup> This has led to many blind spots in the history of the WRI, as the organisations' standpoints and relationship with its sections are not well researched. Illustrative for this gap in our knowledge is the fact that even the size of the organisations membership is completely unknown.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in reconstructing the connections between radical pacifism and anti-imperialism within the WRI, this research breaches into new territory.

The main aim of this thesis is to explain the involvement of radical pacifist in the anticolonial movement. This thesis takes the foundation of the WRI in 1925 as a starting point

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<sup>24</sup> There are two versions of this work, in English and German with a few differences: W. Beyer, *War Resisters' International, 60 Years The War Resisters' International (WRI), the Political Insight of the WRI with Special Reference to the period 1921-1939* (Berlin, 1985) and W. Beyer, *Widerstand Gegen den Krieg: Beiträge zur Geschichte der War Resisters' International-Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegnerinnen* (Kassel, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> D. Prasad, *War Is a Crime against Humanity: The Story of War Resister's International* (London, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> S.H. Bennett, 'War Is a Crime against Humanity: The Story of War Resisters' International - By Devi Prasad', *Peace & Change* 32:4 (2007), 608–11, 610.

<sup>27</sup> On the American section, the War Resisters League: S.H. Bennett, *Radical pacifism: the War Resisters League and Gandhian nonviolence in America, 1915-1963* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2003). The German section, the Bund der Kriegsdienstgegner has been described in: G. Grunewald, 'War Resisters in Weimar Germany', in: P. Brock and T.P. Socknat (eds.) *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945* (Toronto, 1999), 67-88. The British section, the No More War Movement features in Caedel, *Semi-detached Idealists*.

<sup>28</sup> It is likely to not be extensive thought. The biggest section was the British section, with around three thousand members: M. Caedel, *A Legitimate Peace Movement: The Case of Interwar Britain 1918-1945*, in: P. Brock and T.P. Socknat (eds.) *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945* (Toronto, 1999), 134-148, 141. The membership of the German section might be more representative for the other sections, which held about 100 active members in the interwar period: W. Wette, 'Probleme des Pazifismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit' in: K. Holl & W. Wette (eds.), *Pazifismus in der Weimarer Republik: Beiträge zur historischen Friedensforschung* (Paderborn, 1981), 9-25, 21.

and ends in 1930. It covers a high point for both the anticolonial as the peace movement in Europe. Around 1930, the collaborations between different groups in the colonial movement started to decrease.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the rise of fascism in Europe became a major preoccupation for the peace movement in the 1930s.<sup>30</sup>

Through the WRI, which was a platform for radical pacifist ideas, I explore the relationship between the radical pacifism and anticolonial thought. This thesis especially aims to understand the diverse motivations behind connections between anti-colonialism and pacifism, as well as the diverse expressions of anti-imperialist ideas by radical pacifists. It also looks at the tensions and disconnects between the two ideologies. To gain an overview of the differences between radical pacifists, this thesis looks at three different spheres in which radical pacifists discussed anti-imperialism: the international radical pacifist sphere, a national radical pacifist sphere and the anticolonial sphere.

The first chapter explores expressions of anti-imperialism in the international radical pacifist sphere, namely the international forum of the WRI. It analyses the WRI's official stance on imperialism, through an analysis of WRI publications and discussions between the organisation's leadership and on international conferences. I show that the WRI's anti-imperialist ideology became intricately intertwined with their anti-war ideology, as imperialism was presented to be the main cause of war. The tension between the WRI's dedication to nonviolence and their anti-imperialist standpoint, however, was a point of concern. The WRI found a convincing nonviolent programme to resist imperialism in Gandhi's methods of non-cooperation. This chapter also shows that WRI's anti-imperialist thought had its limitations and was not free from bias.

The second chapter moves away from the international sphere, to a national framework. By focusing on the anti-imperialist ideas of Dutch radical pacifists affiliated with the WRI, it illustrates the variety of anti-imperialist thought among radical pacifists. The Dutch case is specifically interesting, because radical pacifists had a long tradition of integrating anti-imperialism into their anti-militarist ideology. Through an analysis of Dutch anti-militarist journals and pamphlets, I show that Dutch radical pacifists were motivated by anarchism in their anti-imperialist ideas. They were more engaged with issues of anti-imperialism than the WRI.

The understanding of radical pacifist ideology in the first two chapters is the context for the activities of radical pacifists in the anticolonial movement. The third chapter shows how

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<sup>29</sup> Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 211.

<sup>30</sup> Cortright, *Peace*, 80; Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism*, 40.

radical pacifists expressed their anti-imperialist ideas in the anticolonial sphere. Here, I explore the relationship between radical pacifists and the League Against Imperialism. Through an analysis of speeches at the LAI's anticolonial congresses and discussions of the LAI among radical pacifists, I argue that radical pacifists had a number of reasons to attempt to spread their ideology of nonviolent resistance in anticolonial networks.

By analysing the discussion about colonialism in three different settings, the international, the national and anti-colonial sphere, I show that there was a wide range of ever changing motivations for pacifists, to get involved in the anticolonial movement.

## **Chapter one – Idealists: War Resisters' International and Anti-Imperialism (1925-1930)**

The WRI was a coalition of the radicals in the interwar peace movement, who shared a personal dedication to war resistance. In this chapter, I show that anti-imperialism was an essential part of radical international pacifist ideology as expressed in the WRI. Through an analysis of the organisation's official standpoints and discussions in the leadership, I explore the interactions between radical pacifism and anti-imperialism in the international radical pacifist sphere.

After a brief outline of the WRI's early history and its character, the first section explores the anti-imperialist ideas expressed in the WRI's early years. By analysing the proceedings of the WRI's first conference in 1925, I show that radical pacifists spoke out against imperialism because it clashed with the movements' humanistic principles. Radical pacifists' anti-imperialism was also driven by the idea that imperialism was one of the causes of war. However, as the WRI was mainly an organisation for conscientious objectors at this point, anti-imperialism was a minor aspect of their ideology.

The second section shows, how notion of imperialism as a cause of war gained more importance as the WRI changed their objective to organising broader war resistance. The watershed moment in this development was the WRI's second international conference in 1928. At the Sonntagsberg Conference, the WRI's aim to stop all war definitively became entangled with the need to eradicate imperialism. The difficulty which plagued radical pacifists, was to create a policy to challenge imperialism which kept true to their values of complete nonviolence. I show that at the WRI's second international congress, the Gandhian methods of nonviolent resistance were adopted as a convincing policy.

In the third section, I discuss the limits to the WRI's anti-imperialist attitude. Through an analysis of WRI publications, I demonstrate that the WRI struggled to integrate their anti-imperialist beliefs into their anti-war propaganda. Furthermore, the WRI limited its discussions of colonial issues to the British Empire and favoured depictions of nationalist movements which were nonviolent.

### **1.1 Setting the Stage – the Beginnings of War Resister's International**

From its conception in March of 1921, the WRI was an organisation which brought together idealists. It was founded in a tiny village called Bilthoven, which lies almost precisely in the middle of the Netherlands. A group of about twenty absolutist pacifists had come together in the home of Kees Boeke, a well-known Dutch anarchist and Quaker, to discuss the beginning

of a new movement. They had not planned to do so. All had attended the third International Antimilitarist Congress in the Hague, where a new international antimilitarist organisation was being prepared.<sup>31</sup> These absolutists had tried to convince their fellow antimilitarists that this new organisation should be dedicated to complete nonviolence, but all to no avail. And thus, they founded their own international anti-militarist organisation, which renounced the use of violence in all circumstances.<sup>32</sup> It was now called PACO, or 'peace' in Esperanto.<sup>33</sup>

PACO was an anti-capitalist organisation for absolutist war resisters, but it never really came into its own. While PACO's secretary Jo Meijer, a Dutch pacifist and conscientious objector, created some contacts with other pacifist organisations in Europe, the organisation remained small. When Meijer stopped PACO's secretary in 1922, PACO was not able to find anyone in the Netherlands who would take over his work. Eventually, a suitable candidate was found in Britain: Herbert Runham Brown, a builder by profession. With the transfer of the secretariat to the United Kingdom, the organisation changed its name from PACO into War Resisters' International.

In Runham Brown, the WRI found a dedicated secretary. He was almost solely responsible for the WRI's growth in the early years. Like Meijer, Runham Brown had been a conscientious objector during the First World War and had spent more than two years in prison for refusing war service.<sup>34</sup> After the War, he joined the No More War Movement, an absolutist organisation for war resisters, which became a section of the WRI. Runham Brown ran the WRI in his free time, from his home in Enfield, a small town near London.<sup>35</sup> It was only after its first international conference in 1925, that the WRI really started operating effectively.

## **1.2 Restarting the Movement – the Hoddesdon Conference and Imperialism**

The WRI's first international conference was a new beginning, and it was meant to lead to the devising of the WRI's new principles and practical policies of war resistance. Over ninety delegates and visitors were present in Hoddesdon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1925, for the WRI's first international conference. The proceedings of the conference were published as a booklet afterwards, to convey the WRI's principles to people who were interested in war resistance. It is from this report that we can read how Runham Brown welcomed the attendees in Hoddesdon.

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<sup>31</sup> A. de Jong, *Fragmenten uit mijn leven* (Utrecht, 2017), XV.

<sup>32</sup> G. Jochheim, *Antimilitaristische Aktionstheorie, Soziale Revolution und Soziale Verteidigung: zur Entwicklung d. Gewaltfreiheitsstheorie in d. Europ. Antimilitarist. u. Sozialist. Bewegung 1890-1940, unter bes. Berücks. d. Niederlande* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977), 234.

<sup>33</sup> Caedel, *Semi-detached Idealists*, 247.

<sup>34</sup> H. Bing, 'Herbert Runham Brown', *The War Resister* 57 (1950).

<sup>35</sup> Caedel, *Semi-detached Idealists*, 247.

He said that the people in the hall represented thousands of men and women, across four continents, who refused to take part in any war and armed violence. 'Frankly, we are idealists', he said. He quickly added that ideals alone would never succeed in stopping war. He emphasised that the conference was meant to create a practical programme of war resistance, including plans to achieve a 'new social order of co-operation for the common good.'<sup>36</sup> The conference was thus characterised by the search for what the WRI's ideals and official standpoints were to be. A wide range of topics were discussed during the conference, among which was the WRI's stance on imperialism.

The conference reaffirmed PACO's original principles, which meant that WRI also adopted PACO's stance on imperialism. If someone wanted to become a member of the WRI, they had to sign a document which outlined the WRI's principles. This declaration started with a personal pledge of war resistance, which read: 'War is a crime against Humanity, I therefore am determined to not support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war.'<sup>37</sup> Protecting the sanctity of human life against violence and war had been a leading principle for PACO's founders. War was caused, according to the WRI's principles, by the division of human kind. There were several factors which divided humanity, namely differences between races, religions, classes and nations, as well as the existence of states.<sup>38</sup> The principles emphasised the responsibility of the individual to stop war and are formulated in a way which echoes the humanist anarchist roots of PACO's founders.

The WRI's principles had an underlying anti-imperialist element to them, but it was not very explicit. For example, the principles read that there are forces which lead to differences between races and nations. These differences between races and nations, are one of the causes of war. The forces which cause these differences, however, are not explicitly named in the principles. For example, what causes differences between 'races' is not described in the principles, only that they lead to 'envy and hatred' through 'artificial aggravation'.<sup>39</sup> The cause for the differences between nations, is described much more explicitly as the 'present system of production' with which capitalism was meant.<sup>40</sup> When made explicit, within the WRI's ideology the forces which divided humanity and thus caused war, were imperialism and capitalism. However, this critique of the systems which caused war, was not central to the

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<sup>36</sup> *War Resisters of the World, an Account of the Movement in Twenty Countries and a Report of the International Conference held at Hoddeson, Herts., England, July 1925* (Enfield, 1925), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Brock & Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century*, 103.

<sup>38</sup> IISH, Kees Boeke Archive, inventory number. 437, pamphlet 'PACO, Oorlog is een misdaad tegen de menscheid' (1922).

<sup>39</sup> IISH, WRI Archive, inventory number 2, pamphlet: 'The War Resisters' International' (December 1925).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.



WRI's ideology. At this time, individual resistance of war was most important. The WRI was an organisation for people who refused to take part in war and it was the act of war resistance which was central to the organisation's image.

The conference discussed the WRI's stance on imperialism in an evening session, called 'imperialism and subject races'. The conference report gives some shortened versions of the session. The discussion centred mostly on wars which were fought in colonies at the time. There were three major colonial conflicts going on, which weighed heavy on the attendees minds. France was fighting a war in Morocco, Britain was at war in Syria and its imperial army had just become involved in the shooting of protestors in Shanghai. There had been considerable protest to these conflicts by the WRI's national sections. One of the delegates the WRI's French section had even been denied a visa to Britain for the conference because of their protest of the situation in Morocco.<sup>41</sup> The situation in Shanghai was addressed by a Chinese representative from the Union of Chinese Associations, H.C. Chang. To the audience, which did mostly consist of British pacifists, he asked five questions meant to illustrate the cruelty of the British in Shanghai and the different ways in which the British operated in the colonial versus in their own country. Chang asked: why should the British murder child demonstrators; why should machine guns be fired on spectators; why should the British do things in China which they would never do in their own country and would the British accept this behaviour if other European nations would do the same thing in London for example?<sup>42</sup> In the discussion which followed, the imperial policies of Britain across the world were discussed. The only Indian delegate to the conference, R.O. Raha, outlined the political situation in India.

While this discussion shows that the WRI found the topic of imperialism important, the actual discussion remained surface level. Of course, WRI members were opposed to wars happening in the colonies. They were opposed to wars everywhere. How anti-imperialism fitted within the WRI's anti-war ideology, however, was not discussed. There was outrage over the actions of the British army in Syria and the French in Morocco, but no one asked how the colonial populations should resist the violence which was brought onto them.

This vague position on imperialism also becomes clear from the resolution which the conference passed to declare sympathy with 'all subject peoples'. The resolution declared that the conference had heard 'with deep sympathy of the suffering of our friends in Asia, America and Africa under the tyrannic oppression of foreign Governments'. It further named world capitalism as another factor of oppression. They declared their belief in 'the oneness of the

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<sup>41</sup> *War Resisters of the World*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, 35.

human family and that every member should be free from all kinds of oppression' and asked those living under oppression to join the 'movement for world brotherhood and freedom by the method of fearless nonviolence'.<sup>43</sup>

At this stage, the WRI signalled its solidarity with those oppressed by imperialism, but there was no clear way in which this fitted in with their other anti-war ideas. Principally, they opposed all forms of oppression. It is suggested that they see 'imperialism' as an umbrella term for colonialism, but also economic domination of countries by Europeans. Most importantly, there was no war resisters' approach for those living under imperialism yet. How were they to resist? This issue was to come up more and more as the WRI established itself further.



Figure 1, Attendees of the Hoddesdon Conference, 1925. *War Resisters of the World*, 2.

### **1.3 'Attacking Imperialism with Bare Hands' – The International Council Discusses**

After the first international congress, the WRI began to function like a real international organisation. An international council was instated, which was to lead the WRI. The council consisted of representatives from the WRI's national sections, as well as representatives from different political groups. In theory, the council was supposed to meet at least twice a year, but in practice they met infrequently due to lack of finances and difficulties in planning. The organisation's executive, consisting of the chairman, secretaries and treasurer, met more often, as they all lived in Britain. The organisation's chairman was Fenner Brockway, a British socialist, who was also a part of the leadership of the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

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<sup>43</sup> *War Resisters of the World*, 16.

Brockway also had been a conscientious objector during the First World War. He had been imprisoned for almost three years, having also refused alternative military service. Runham Brown was supported in his secretarial duties by German pacifist Martha Steinitz, who had moved to Britain early in the 1920's.

The WRI expanded its activities considerably after 1925. The international office published a quarterly bulletin called *The War Resister*, which updated sections about the fate of war resisters across Europe, as well as the developments in the peace movement at large. Further propaganda efforts came in the form of pamphlets, translated in at least five European languages and Esperanto, as well as a handbook for practical war resistance. The WRI also started to become more involved in anti-war campaigns. Sections were kept informed of campaigns and developments through the organisations considerable international correspondence.

While at the Hoddesdon Conference it had been made clear that the WRI was sympathetic with anti-imperialist and nationalist movements in the colonies, there was no practical policy to challenge imperialism. In the years following, this would become a much more important theme for the WRI and its leading members.

Reconciling radical pacifist ideology with anticolonial aims posed a challenge to the WRI's leadership. The mid-1920s were a heyday of anticolonial activism in Europe. Many organisations in the left flank of the political spectrum were deciding on their stance on imperialism and their relation to the anticolonial movement.<sup>44</sup> The absolutists from the WRI were in a unique position however. They recognised the oppression of imperialist governments, but still advocated for nonviolent resistance. The WRI had just begun to expand their movement, and their exact standpoints on many issues were not fully clear at this time. It's international council had to decide how they as radical pacifists would relate to anti-imperialism.

The issues which plagued pacifists when advocating for a nonviolent method in independence struggles are illustrated by an exchange between Runham Brown and an academic from Lithuania, Dr. Vitoldo Ozelis. Ozelis had written an extensive letter to the WRI, early in 1927, in which he questioned the WRI's methods in struggles against oppressive governments. He compared his own country's war for national independence with conflicts happening in colonies. The only way to effectively defeat oppressive regimes, Ozelis wrote, was by taking up arms to fight for national liberation. He argued:

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<sup>44</sup> D. Brückenhau, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anti-Colonialists in Europe, 1905-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 139.

Would it not be ridiculous to proclaim anti-militarism amongst the Riffs of Morocco, the Syrians, and at present the Chinese, who rightfully demand the removal of their shackles? [...] To attack imperialism and militarism with bare hands is a task very exhausting, dangerous, and not soon accomplished.<sup>45</sup>

The issue Ozelis further recognised, was that it was practically impossible to convince to people who suffer under oppression to adopt nonviolent means of resistance. The question at the heart of this issue: how does one resist oppression without using violence?

Runham Brown had waited almost two months to reply to the letter, because he found the topic so difficult to discuss. However, in the end he did not offer a solution to the problem which Ozelis had formulated. Runham Brown wrote to Ozelis that he had wanted to give the issue enough thought before replying, as it was such an important topic..<sup>46</sup> He acknowledged that in countries other than England, especially in places with oppressive governments, the risks of war resistance were far greater. Thus, he hesitated to persuade anyone in these circumstances, as much people in Eastern Europe as well as the Moroccans, the Chinese and the people of the Riffs, to take up the task of war resistance. Instead of attempting to formulate an answer to Ozelis' problem, Runham Brown expanded on the ideology behind the WRI. He wrote that behind war resistance was something bigger: the dawning of a new consciousness that the greatest service to humanity is to personally refuse to become the tools of the oppressor by withdrawing their personal assistance in violence, war and domination. He was certain that the use of violence would only give temporary relief in freedom struggles, and that in the end it would lead to a new power of domination.

The exchange between Runham Brown and Ozelis led to an intense discussion among the WRI's leadership about what kind of anti-imperialist policy the WRI should propagate. Runham Brown put the dilemma to the WRI's international council at their second meeting in May 1927. The members of the council had last seen each other a year before. They now met at Runham Brown's home in Enfield. The direction in which the movement should develop further was a central topic of discussion, and also centred around the question how to relate to anti-imperialism. The chairman, Fenner Brockway, brought to the table that he thought the letters raised specific questions about the WRI's attitude towards war resisters in imperialistic

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<sup>45</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, Minutes of the Meetings of the Council 1926-1934, 'Minutes of Meeting of the War Resisters' International Council held at 11, Abbey Road, Enfield, England, on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1927', 38-9.

<sup>46</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 40.

countries. Would the WRI say that they should not resist imperialism by force? Should the WRI accept organisations from colonies? And if so, what would be the alternative pacifist policy that the WRI would present to resisting imperialism by force?<sup>47</sup> He saw it as the WRI's duty to devise practical pacifist policies to resist imperialism without using force. These would have to be so convincing that no pacifist would hesitate to present these alternatives.<sup>48</sup>

According to the meeting's minutes the discussion between the council members which followed took a considerable amount of time, which suggest that there was some disagreement. The council had a limited amount of time to discuss everything that was going on in the movement, so they usually kept the discussions brief. The minutes normally relay all the points that were made in a discussion, but of this topic only a summary by Brockway was written down. This summary illustrates the difficulties pacifists faced in integrating their dedication to nonviolence with their anti-imperialism.

The specific issue for radical pacifists was that other anti-imperialists did not use the methods of nonviolence, according to Brockway. He reminded his fellow council members of the WRI's purpose: a new society, in which the differences between classes and races were eradicated. Their war resistance was driven by the longing for a better, more equal world. As current society was as far off from this ultimate goal as possible, pacifists had to work out how they would bridge this gap between ideal and reality, both in their personal lives and in their policies. All around them, violence was being used and considered. The ruling classes and imperialistic nations used violence to oppress the subjugated classes and nations. But those who were subjugated also used violence to resist their oppressors.<sup>49</sup> The dilemma which Brockway presented here was thus not necessarily that radical pacifists found it difficult to believe in nonviolent methods of resistance themselves. Rather, the problem was that others had not yet accepted these nonviolent methods. The WRI shared the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist goals of other social movements, but not the methods. Should radical pacifists then engage in the anticolonial movement, when the anticolonial movement was not dedicated to absolute pacifism? From the minutes it seems that this dilemma was agreed on by all the council members, but Brockway's own solution to this problem was controversial.

Brockway saw two courses of actions for radical pacifists who believed that capitalism and imperialism were oppressive forces, and who also dedicated themselves to nonviolence. The first was what he called martyrdom, which entailed that as an individual you would lead a

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<sup>47</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 41.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

life corresponding to the ideals of nonviolence. This meant that one would not engage with movements which were not absolutist. The second option which Brockway suggested, was that radical pacifists actually wanted to participate in building a new society, by engaging with other movements which had the same goal. He supported the second course of action himself: 'I say we have to give our lives to the advocacy of policies which are opposed to capitalism and imperialism and which are making the new cooperative order.'<sup>50</sup> However, Brockway argued that radical pacifists had to face the fact that both subject classes and races would use violence in their fight for freedom. While Brockway personally believed that freedom could be won with pacifist methods, he argued that humanity was not ready to adopt these means.

The issue which Brockway introduced here, was not so much about the anti-imperialist ideology of the WRI and their practical policies, but more about cooperating with other non-absolutist groups. Brockway declared that he himself would not stay out of movements which fought for human freedom and equality even if they used methods of violence. He argued that the role of pacifists in these movements should be to prevent the use of violence and to urge for nonviolent methods. Given the fact that the WRI was originally founded precisely because absolutists did not want to work together with non-absolutists in the anti-militarist movement, this was a contentious statement.<sup>51</sup>

Brockway's proposal to cooperate in with non-absolutists, in order to fight capitalism and imperialism, was very controversial. Eleanor Byrns, who represented the American section, took offense with how Brockway had summarised the discussion in the council. After she had read the minutes of the council meeting, she had an addendum added to the minutes. This read that Brockway's statement was not accurate summary of the council's discussion and did not reflect the outlook of the whole of the international council.<sup>52</sup> It is not surprising that Byrns objected to cooperation with non-absolutists to work for a new social order. The War Resister's League (WRL) of which Byrns was a member, was an explicitly single-issue organisation. The issue being war resistance.<sup>53</sup> The WRL leadership was convinced that taking a stance on general social, economic and political issues would only divide its membership and distract from the WRL's primary mission. It was thus quite understandable that Byrns specifically disagreed vehemently with Brockway. She, however, was not the only one. Jo Meijer, who represented the Dutch section, wrote in the section's journal that that Brockway could not be described as

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<sup>50</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 42.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, 67.

<sup>53</sup> Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, xiii.

an absolutist.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, hen Brockway's summary of the discussion was published in *The War Resister*, it caused a stir among its readership.<sup>55</sup> The central office felt the need to clarify in the bulletin that Brockway's statement was his personal opinion, and not accepted by the whole international council.<sup>56</sup>

In any case, the discussion between the members of the international council did not lead to devising pacifist proposals to resist imperialism at this time. It was decided that the topic 'Pacifists in relation to Imperialism' should be discussed at the next international conference.<sup>57</sup> Especially Helene Stöcker, the representative of the German peace movement, argued that it was absolutely crucial to discuss the issue of imperialism and war resistance at the conference.

Stöcker believed that a clear pacifist policy on the imperialism would help to expand the WRI in Europe. The European absolutist movement was very small, especially compared to the British and American movement.<sup>58</sup> Stöcker argued that the WRI could attract much more attention and members if they were to offer a combined anti-militarist and anti-imperialist outlook. If the WRI were to do so, they would be the only organisation on the continent to have a pacifist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist agenda.<sup>59</sup> The WRI's need for a practical policy on imperialism was thus also motivated by the desire to gain more influence.

Four questions on imperialism were sent to the national sections in advance of the conference, drafted by Brockway, Jo Meijer and Harold Bing, the British youth representative. The first two questions related to the actions that European pacifists could do themselves, namely how they could 'oppose the Imperialism of their own government?' and 'assist the struggle of subject peoples against Imperialist oppression?'. The third question related to the actions possible for those living under imperialism, asking by 'what pacifist means can subject peoples overthrow imperialist control?'

The last question reveals an aspect of the pacifist anti-imperialism which usually remained implicit, namely the idea that pacifists had a task to help civilise colonial populations. The question was phrased as follows: 'What are the practical proposals of pacifists for the development towards a higher civilisation of countries and peoples as yet little developed?'<sup>60</sup> This question shows that radical pacifists, while declaring solidarity with imperial subjects, were not free from ideas of European superiority. For some reason, the WRI's council thought

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<sup>54</sup> J.B. Meijer, 'W.R.I.', *Bevrijding* 83 (August 1927), 3.

<sup>55</sup> F. Brockway, 'The International Outlook', *The War Resister* 17 (August, 1927), 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> *The War Resister* 18 (November, 1927), 15.

<sup>57</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 44.

<sup>58</sup> Brock & Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century*, 92.

<sup>59</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 62.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, 61.

that colonial populations had to 'develop further'. The actual meaning of this question remains a bit vague. In the minutes of the meeting, there is no explanation as to why these questions were chosen.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to trace the discussions about these questions in any sections.<sup>62</sup> I see two possible motivations behind this question. Firstly, it could be in line with the imperial civilising mission which was performed by colonial governments. In the rest of the peace movement, liberal pacifists and internationalists often defended imperialism because it civilized colonial populations.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, this question could be motivated by the idea that humanity as a whole had to reach a higher stage of civilisation, were they to adopt the radical pacifist outlook. With both options, colonial populations were not regarded to have the same level of development as Europeans.

The WRI council meeting had thus introduced the dilemma's which radical pacifists faced when relating to imperialism. Now it was up to the next international conference to come up with a solution.

#### **1.4 The Sonntagsberg Conference – a Nonviolent Solution to Anti-Imperialist Resistance?**

The WRI's second international conference revolved around one theme: deciding on the future of the movement. The emphasis on individual war resistance left the WRI's sections small, isolated and without influence. If they were to grow their movement, they would have to work together with other likeminded organisations and extend their contacts with non-absolutists. For this purpose, they would have to work out their policies on several topics other than war resistance. Imperialism, was one of the main topics which had to be addressed.

The conference was held between the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1928, in a small Austrian town near the Sonntag mountain. About one hundred war resisters, from twenty-one sections, had travelled together by train in an open rail carriage from Vienna to gather together at what would be called the Sonntagsberg Conference.<sup>64</sup>

The Sonntagsberg Conference shifted the WRI's goals from personal war resistance, to policies for the removal of the causes of war. From the conference's opening addresses, it was clear that the WRI was moving in a very different direction than they had before. Runham Brown, in his opening statement, argued that personal refusal to engage in war was not enough. The WRI should work to end war completely, by addressing the causes of war. The main causes

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<sup>61</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 61.

<sup>62</sup> As the correspondence with the WRI's sections does not seem to have survived, I have not found any reference to the discussions within the WRI's sections about these questions. Furthermore, the topics which were thought of by the international council were not discussed at the Sonntagsberg Conference in this precise way.

<sup>63</sup> Nehring, 'Peace Movements', 496.

<sup>64</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 9.



of war were now expressed very explicitly: capitalism and imperialism. The WRI's anti-imperialist policy thus took on new importance. Anti-imperialism was now an intrinsic part of the WRI's anti-war agenda. To illustrate this shift, a resolution was passed explicitly stating that war resisters should 'work for the supersession of Capitalism and Imperialism', to create new social and international order based on the principles of cooperation for the common good.<sup>65</sup>

At the beginning of the conference, Runham Brown had proposed some policies for pacifists to challenge imperialism. War resisters 'of subject races' could use passive means of resistance to imperialism, like the boycott and the strike. Runham Brown urged radical pacifists who lived in imperialist nations to actively oppose imperialism. They should demand the withdrawal from the colonies and grant self-governance to colonies only as a first step on the road to independence for all peoples.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, radical pacifists should be prepared to 'place national points of military strategy under international laws and the natural resources of the wealth of Empire at the service of the world.'<sup>67</sup>

Surprisingly, given the fact that anti-imperialism was declared to be so central to the WRI's new goals, there was no specific session on the topic during the Sonntagsberg Conference. Most questions about imperialism which the international council had drawn up were not discussed. Only the question with which pacifist means imperialism could be overthrown was extensively considered. The only real discussion of imperialism at the Sonntagsberg Conference was Mahatma Gandhi's struggle in India and his nonviolent methods of resistance.

WRI members were enthralled by the stories of Gandhi's struggle against the British Empire. The nonviolent resistance tactics which were employed by Gandhi's followers were very attractive to European radical pacifists. There was even talk before the start of the Sonntagsberg conference, that Gandhi himself would be attending.<sup>68</sup> Fenner Brockway had many contacts among Indian nationalists and kept in touch with Gandhi.<sup>69</sup> When Brockway was in India during the previous Christmas, Brockway had personally invited Gandhi to speak at the conference. In the end, however, Gandhi felt that he needed to remain in India. He believed that the country was passing through a critical stage in its struggle against British

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<sup>65</sup> *The War Resister* 17 (August 1927), 6.

<sup>66</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>68</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 312, Letter from Mahatma Gandhi to Harold F. Bing, 11-2-1928.

<sup>69</sup> F. Brockway, *Inside the Left Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London, 1942), 180.

imperialism, and that he needed to be in the country.<sup>70</sup> Gandhi sent one of his disciples, Rajendra Prasad, to address the conference on his behalf. Prasad, an anti-colonial activist who would later become the first president India after its independence, had been on a tour of Europe at the time and made his way to Austria.<sup>71</sup>

Prasad's contribution to the congress was considerable. He was the first to speak after all the introductory words and greetings from sections at the opening day, and he also delivered the very last speech. The importance of Prasad's speeches were twofold. First, Gandhi's well wishes, which Prasad conveyed to the conference, strengthened the conviction of the war resisters present that keeping true to their ideals was just. Secondly, Prasad presented the conference with a convincing policy for nonviolent resistance against imperialism, which was actually being executed in India at that very moment. This was what the WRI had been looking for.

Prasad's speech on the first day broadly outlined Gandhi's work in India so far.<sup>72</sup> He presented to the conference Gandhi's 'experiment' in India, explaining that Gandhi hoped to bring down British imperialism in India with his method of non-violence.<sup>73</sup> While his method had not yet proven successful, his ideas had spread far and wide. The majority of the nationalist movement in India had adopted the creed of nonviolence as their method. To the war resisters in the audience, whose own nonviolent organisations were very small, this must have been an encouraging image. Like the WRI's newfound message, Gandhi was not content with resisting imperialism through nonviolence, he also aimed for a complete reordering of the social and economic order. Prasad explained that Gandhi identified the current capitalistic economic system, which created a need for colonies, and thus violence and oppression between nations, as the cause of war.<sup>74</sup> In this the WRI's members could hear their own interpretation of capitalism and imperialism as the main causes of war.

Prasad's last speech focused on the practical methods of nonviolent resistance. He outlined the positive impact of non-cooperation, through some examples of successful noncooperative action in India. He presented the story of Gandhi's first satyagraha movement, a rent strike of indigo farmers in 1917, and of the Akali movement, a passive resistance movement to reform Sikh temples. Prasad emphasised the suffering which came with non-

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<sup>70</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> R. Prasad, *Autobiography* (New Delhi, 2010), 271.

<sup>72</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 26 & 60.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

cooperation and the method of non-violence, which had to be endured in order to gain freedom.<sup>75</sup> He told the conference:

If we want to succeed we cannot afford to dally with violence of any kind. We have to remember that in a fight where the principle is the thing, we cannot count upon numbers.

Prasad's message thus connected to the WRI's members' experience of being outsiders and idealists. It reassured them that the nonviolent way, even though it was hard, was going to be worth it.

The extent of Prasad's personal conviction to nonviolence was illustrated after the conference. Prasad was to speak at public demonstration of Austrian war resisters in Graz, together with some members from the WRI, a few days after the Sonntagsberg Conference. The meeting was disturbed by a group of fascists, who shouted racist slurs at Prasad and went on to violently attack him.<sup>76</sup> Prasad was protected by some war resisters, but he received an injury to the head and managed to leave the building bleeding profusely.<sup>77</sup> As he did not speak German, it was completely unclear to him why the attack had taken place.<sup>78</sup> Among European war resisters, it was said that Prasad had not even lifted a hand to defend himself. Years later, Runham Brown even wrote that Prasad had been carried out of the building unconscious.<sup>79</sup> To them, Prasad had embodied the ideal of nonviolent resistance.

The Sonntagsberg Conference thus presents a confusing picture when considering the WRI's relationship to anti-imperialism. On the one hand, imperialism was recognised as one of the main causes of war. As the WRI shifted its goal to eradicate all causes of war, anti-imperialism became an intrinsic part of their radical pacifist ideology. On the other hand, imperialism was not discussed in a separate session, and on a whole was not a major topic at the conference. The discussion of imperialism was focused mostly on India, and was led by a delegate who was not a member of the WRI. While Gandhi's method of nonviolent resistance was an opportunity for radical pacifists to present a convincing anti-imperialist programme, it is striking that the conference had such a limited scope when it came to imperialism.

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<sup>75</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> A. de Jong, *Fragmenten uit mijn Leven* (Utrecht, 2017), 181.

<sup>77</sup> Prasad, *Autobiography*, 272.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>79</sup> H. Runham Brown, 'A Living Proof of the Invincibility of Gentleness', *The War Resister* 52 (1948), 32.



Figure 2, Group photograph of the attendees at the Sonntagsberg Conference, July 1927. *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 2.

### 1.5 The Limits of Pacifist Anti-Imperialism

As the Sonntagsberg Conference had affirmed the WRI's shift towards a broader social policy which centred on the causes of war, the core message of the WRI became entangled with anti-imperialism. In principle, their movement had a universal appeal, and worked for the supersession of imperialism everywhere. In practice, the anti-imperialist message of the WRI as well as their anti-imperialist work had its limits. These limitations come to the forefront when looking at the WRI's membership and their publications.

The membership of the WRI was largely European. While the WRI presented itself as an international organisation, between 1925 and 1930 most of their sections were located in Europe and America.. The central office diverted a lot of time in creating contacts in countries where they had no affiliations yet, including colonial countries. However, these efforts had little effect. There was a short lived Indian section, which was founded in 1925. It seems to have consisted of not more than ten members and was disbanded within a year.<sup>80</sup> The furthest that WRI influence reached was Australia and New Zealand.<sup>81</sup> This limited reach of the WRI outside of Europe and America clashed with the organisations' identity of a truly international organisation with a diverse membership.

The European character of the WRI is best illustrated by looking at the international conferences. The WRI's conferences were meant to be a show of the reach and diversity of the

<sup>80</sup> *The War Resister* 14 (March 1926), 10.

<sup>81</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 3-4.

war resistance movement. The conferences were not only open to WRI members, but to representatives from other peace organisations and visitors who were just interested in war resistance. While the WRI's leadership kept on emphasising that the conferences brought together people from 'all corners of the earth', this was far from the truth.<sup>82</sup> Both the Hoddesdon and Sonntagsberg Conference were overwhelmingly a European and North-American affair. At Hoddesdon only two of the over one hundred delegates in total came from outside Europe or North America.<sup>83</sup> The Sonntagsberg Conference had two delegates from India: Rajendra Prasad and Tarini Prasad Sinha, an anticolonial activist and acquaintance of Fenner Brockway through the Independent Labour Party.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, a Persian attendee representing the Bahai faith had visited the congress. The WRI was not alone in their limited internationality, other international pacifist organisations of the time had the same issue. However, the WILPF, which represented pacifist women, was more successful in creating sections in Asia, South America and North Africa than the WRI around the same time.<sup>85</sup> The involvement from women from colonial countries in the WILPF, led to the challenging of some implicit imperialist biases in the WILPF's organisation and work.<sup>86</sup> The lack of involvement of colonial subjects in the WRI, also meant that their conception of anti-imperialism was European. This could lead to serious limitations.

These limitations are best seen in the WRI's publications. The WRI published a journal, called *The War Resister*, which was meant to keep their members up to date with developments in other parts of the movement. It came out roughly every three or four months, dependent on the financial state of the organisation and was published in English, German, French and Esperanto. Pieces from the journal were often reprinted or reported on in affiliated journals or journals of sections, such as the Dutch *De Wapens Neder* and the British *The New World*.

In *The War Resister* issues from 1926 until 1930, only a few articles refer directly to developments in the colonial world. In total, this research covered fourteen editions of *The War Resister*, which were generally around 35 pages and consisted of roughly 30 short articles. It was not a space for debate, rather it reflected the developments which the central office thought most important for the movement. Most of the pieces focus on the war resistance movement in

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<sup>82</sup> *The War Resister* 21 (October 1928), 3.

<sup>83</sup> *War Resisters of the World*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 61. Sinha apparently worked for the Indian office of the ILP: <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/league-against-imperialism> (last consulted 28-6-2023). After 1929, he worked for the League of Nations: M. Herren-Oesch, 'Between Territoriality, Performance, and Transcultural Entanglement (1920–1939): A Typology of Transboundary Lives', *Comperativ* 23:6 (2013), 100-24, 120.

<sup>85</sup> Rupp, 'Challenging Imperialism in International Women's Organisations', 16.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

Europe and national military policies of European nations. In the articles that do refer to developments in the colonies, there are a few striking aspects.

Firstly, the overwhelming majority of the articles deal with the British Empire. Surprisingly, the major theme which is discussed in these articles are the conscription laws in parts of the British Empire.<sup>87</sup> After 1928, there were more articles about the independence movement in India, mostly reprints of personal letters of Rajendra Prasad from other journals. Remarkably, the journal lacked coverage of current colonial wars and conflicts, also within the British Empire. For a war resistance movement, this oversight is striking. Between 1925 and 1930, there were uprisings in the Dutch East Indies, for example, which were not covered by the WRI at all.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the WRI signalled the oppressive nature of colonialism in general, could have warranted coverage on more general oppressive policies of colonial governments for example. The absence of these colonial issues is most likely due to the fact that the journal served to inform people of the developments within the war resisters' movement. However, especially after the WRI's shift towards a broader policy of war resistance which explicitly built on anti-imperialism, it is striking that colonial countries other than India were not at all in the WRI's view. It also signals that the WRI found it challenging to actually shift from their emphasis on personal war resistance, towards more actively campaigning against imperialism as a cause of war.

Other WRI publications also rarely discussed colonialism. In the WRI's handbook, which was meant to inform readers of all aspects of radical pacifism, imperialism is only mentioned a handful of times in a publication which spans over two hundred pages.<sup>89</sup> Of the WRI's pamphlets published between 1925 and 1930, only one specifically focused on a colonial issue, the rest focused on the work of the WRI and European war resistance.<sup>90</sup> This is the publication 'Western Samoa', written by a WRI member from New Zealand and published in 1930. Interestingly enough, this pamphlet shows that when the WRI went into the topic of colonialism in depth, their anti-imperialist stance was also not as radical as they always presented.

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<sup>87</sup> *The War Resister* 14 (December 1926), 10; *The War Resister* 16 (May 1927), 10. *The War Resister* 22 (Winter 1929), 14; *The War Resister* 25 (Winter 1930), 13.

<sup>88</sup> Stutje, 'To Maintain an Independent Course', 206.

<sup>89</sup> F. Kobler, (ed.), *Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit*, Handbuch des aktiven Pazifismus (Zurich, 1928).

<sup>90</sup> Between 1926 and 1930 the WRI published five pamphlets, other than the reports of their international conferences. Three of these did not refer to imperialism at all: *Modern Martyrs* (1929), *Thoughts of Leo Tolstoi* (1930) and *Catholic Voices against War* (1930). The pamphlet *Cutting Ice* only shortly refers to imperialism when discussing the WRI's aims: H. Runham Brown, *Cutting Ice* (London: WRI, 1930). The only pamphlet which discusses the WRI's anti-imperialist ideas further is: A.W. Page, *Western Samoa, Imprisonment, Deportation and Shooting* (Enfield, 1930).

The pamphlet outlined the resistance movement against colonial rule in Samoa, which was then called Western Samoa. Samoa was officially under colonial rule by New Zealand since 1914, after the mandate was transferred from Britain to the New Zealand government. From the mid-1920s, the Samoans had started a nonviolent and passive resistance movement to the New Zealand administration, known as the Mau movement.<sup>91</sup> The WRI pamphlet presented the injustices and oppression which Samoans faced. It paints the Samoans as a ‘primitive’ people, but also highlights their high development of social and judicial systems before British imperialism. It further argued that the Mau movement did not aim to secure independence, but rather hoped to improve the conditions of Samoans and urged the administration to use their civilising power in the right way.<sup>92</sup> This is not completely accurate, as the Mau movement did advocate for complete self-determination.<sup>93</sup> The pamphlet even emphasises that the Samoans themselves would like to remain a part of the British Empire. The introduction to the pamphlet reads that the nonviolent resistance of the Mau would no doubt force the government to respect the Samoans rights. It did not, however, argue that radical pacifists should urge for the independence of Samoa.<sup>94</sup>

The pamphlet shows two things which usually remain absent from WRI sources. Firstly, it is clearly motivated by aversion of the mismanagement of Samoa by its colonial administration, and paints a sympathetic picture of the Samoans resistance movement. However, it still presents the Samoans as less developed than Europeans, as a people with a different historical path for development. This publication thus shows that when the WRI actually discussed colonial topics in depth, they were not free from preconceptions about colonial people.

Secondly, the pamphlet reiterates the fact that the WRI was mostly focused on actual nonviolent resistance in colonial contexts and neglected struggles which were not fought through nonviolence. The preface, written by Brockway, reads that the story of the Mau shows:

that it is possible for a subject people to oppose with dignity and strength and without resorting to violence, the domination of military and civil forces. The pacifist is often challenged to say how injustice maintained by force can be overthrown without the use of counterforce. The example of given by the people of Western Samoa is an answer.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> H. Droessler, *Coconut Colonialism: Workers and the Globalization of Samoa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022), 198.

<sup>92</sup> Page, *Western Samoa*, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Droessler, *Coconut Colonialism*, 198.

<sup>94</sup> Page, *Western Samoa*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

It clearly proved difficult for the WRI fully integrate their anti-imperialism into their radical pacifism. The emphasis on nonviolent struggles against imperialism shows that radical pacifists were engaged with the anticolonial struggle, without having to hold the difficult discussion about how to relate to violent struggles against imperialism.



## **Chapter Two – Radicals: Dutch Pacifist Anti-Imperialism in the War Resisters' International (1925-1930)**

The WRI was an international forum for an ideologically diverse coalition of radical pacifists. This chapter illustrates the diversity of anti-imperialist ideas expressed in the WRI, by exploring anti-imperialist discourse in the Dutch radical pacifist sphere. Through this national framework, ideas which were expressed in the WRI can be contextualised and other yet unknown ideas can be uncovered. The WRI's relationship with anti-imperialism is thus further investigated by looking at the ideas of Dutch radical pacifists who were active in the WRI.<sup>96</sup>

In the first section, I explore the discourse about imperialism in the WRI's only Dutch section, the Bond van Religieuze Anarcho-Communisten ("BRAC", the Union of Religious Anarcho-Communists). Through analysis of BRAC's journal *Bevrijding* between 1925 and 1929, I illustrate the influence of Christian anarchism on the Dutch radical pacifists in the WRI. In the second section, I explore to the anti-imperialist views of Jo Meijer, the WRI's Dutch council member between 1926 and 1930. Through Meijer, I further elaborate on anti-imperialist ideas which were common among Dutch antimilitarists. With this context in mind, I move on to discuss the input of Dutch antimilitarists on imperialism at the WRI's conferences.

I argue that Dutch antimilitarists were the radical flank in the WRI when it came to anti-imperialism. Dutch radical pacifism was intrinsically linked to anti-imperialist ideology. I show that for Dutch radical pacifists, their antimilitarism as well as their anti-imperialism was motivated by anarchist ideology. Dutch antimilitarists succeeded better in integrating anti-imperialist thought into their radical pacifism. However, these anti-imperialist ideas specific to the Dutch radical pacifist sphere, were only sparsely expressed in the WRI's international forum.

### **2.1 Anarchist Visions – Anarcho-Communist Anti-Imperialism in the WRI**

In December of 1926, a violent anticolonial rebellion broke out in Java, the largest island of the Dutch East Indies.<sup>97</sup> Support for the revolutionaries soon came from the Dutch section of the WRI: the nonviolent anarcho-communists of BRAC. As absolutists, surely they could not support a violent uprising?

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<sup>96</sup> In this chapter, I use the term antimilitarists interchangeably with radical pacifists. The Dutch referred to themselves as well as the others in the WRI as anti-militarists. Because they took part in the international radical pacifist sphere, I use both terms.

<sup>97</sup> Stutje, 'To Maintain an Independent Course', 206.

The varieties of pacifist anti-imperialism even within the WRI, become clear when moving the frame of analysis from the international to the national sphere. Within the WRI, BRAC represented a different stance on anti-imperialism, influenced by their national context.

While the WRI had its roots in the Netherlands, BRAC was the only Dutch section between 1925 and 1930. BRAC was a small anarchist organisation, set apart in the Dutch anarchist movement by their religious interpretations of anarchism. While BRAC had Christian members, the organisation mostly had members who were attracted to the religious ideal of personal improvement. BRAC's religious anarcho-socialism was motivated by 'cosmic solidarity', meaning that they felt a sense of community with all of humanity.<sup>98</sup> BRAC's political program consisted of the aim for a world without states, in which the means of production would be owned by everyone and distributed through workers councils. Some members called themselves socialists, others free communists. Anti-militarism and complete nonviolence were a central feature of BRAC's ideology. BRAC's vision of the new world culture after revolution, in which all of humanity would be bound together in solidarity, was incompatible with the method of violence.<sup>99</sup> In the WRI, BRAC found an international community which also adhered completely to nonviolence, and aimed for social revolution through nonviolent means.

While BRAC might seem an insignificant organisation when judged on their limited membership, which never exceeded more than 300, it significantly contributed to anti-militarist theory.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, their absolutist stance did not prevent the organisation from intensive contacts with non-absolutist anti-militarists and anarchists both in the national and international sphere. BRAC's members often were also

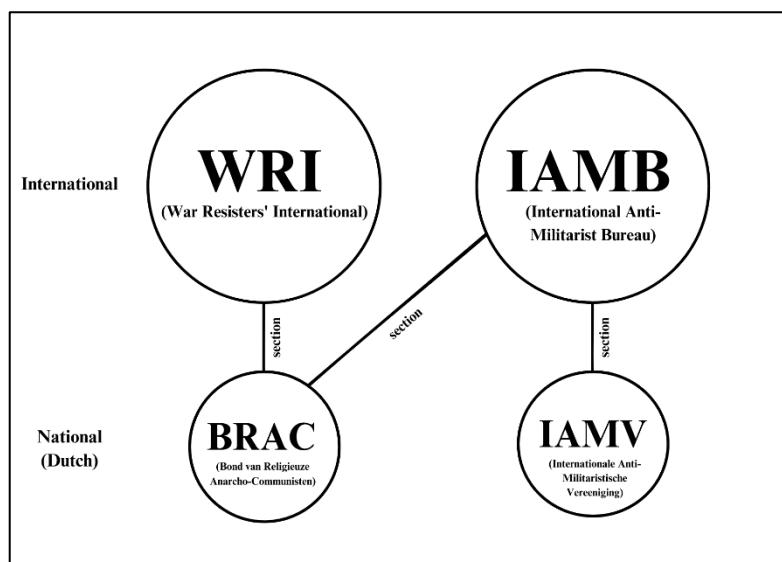


Figure 3, Illustration of the radical pacifist organisations which feature in this chapter.

<sup>98</sup> H. Ramaer (ed.), *De Piramide der Tirannie: Anarchisten in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1977). 47.

<sup>99</sup> Jochheim, *Antimilitaristische Aktionstheorie*, 237.

<sup>100</sup> H. Noordegraaf, 'The Anarchopacifism of Bart de Ligt', in: P. Brock and T.P. Socknat (eds.), *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945* (Toronto, 1999), 89-100, 89.

members of the Internationale Anti-Militaristische Vereeniging (IAMV), the largest anarchist organisation in the Netherlands which agitated against both militarism and colonialism. Furthermore, BRAC was affiliated with another radical pacifist international, the IAMB which represented revolutionary anti-militarists. Both the IAMV and the IAMB were not absolutist organisations, in theory they were open to the use of violence in the social revolution.

BRAC's religious anarchist orientation was relatively rare in the WRI, which was mostly dominated by socialists. Their shared dedication to war resistance was enough to not mind the theoretical differences.<sup>101</sup> However, BRAC had more radical views than most other sections of the WRI. BRAC's delegate to the WRI's first congress in Hoddesdon, argued that many of the delegates were not as critical toward the state and capitalism as the religious anarchists would have liked.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, BRAC representatives thought the WRI should focus more on the proletariat.<sup>103</sup> The theoretical differences between BRAC and the WRI are especially remarkable on the topic of anti-imperialism.

An analysis of BRAC's monthly journal *Bevrijding*, shows that BRAC was much more oriented on anti-imperialist topics than the WRI. *Bevrijding* was BRAC's official organ until 1929, when it rebranded into a 'monthly dedicated to the renewal of socialism'. After this change, the journal grew into an important platform for a range of anarchist and socialist ideas, all banded together through their antimilitarist outlook.<sup>104</sup> For this research, I only looked at the editions of *Bevrijding* which were available between 1925 and 1929, as they fully reflect BRAC's standpoints. This consisted of roughly forty editions. *Bevrijding* had much less pages than the WRI bulletin *The War Resister*. However, articles in *Bevrijding* were longer, and combined anti-militarist news with philosophical pieces about anarcho-communism. Until its rebranding in 1929, *Bevrijding* featured articles about imperialism in about three-quarter of the issues. The organisation thus diverted much more pages to colonial topics than the WRI's bulletin. Furthermore, the editors of *Bevrijding* presented a broader geographical scope when it came to anti-imperialist themes than *The War Resister*. Contributors to *Bevrijding* wrote articles about colonial conflicts on the world stage, such as the nationalist movement in India and British interference in China. However, Dutch radical pacifists were also closely following developments in the Dutch Empire, especially in the Dutch East Indies, which was completely outside the scope of the WRI.

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<sup>101</sup> 'Het Internationaal Congres van de W.R.I. te Londen', *Bevrijding* 59 (July-August 1925), 4.

<sup>102</sup> 'Het Internationaal Congres van de W.R.I.', 4.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>104</sup> Ramaer, *De Piramide der Tirannie*, 46.

BRAC did not only inform their members of military domination in the Dutch Empire, but focused on all oppressive aspects of the colonial regime. This is another marked difference with the WRI, which published mostly about anti-imperialist issues close to war resistance such as conscription in the colonies. The increasingly oppressive political regime in the Dutch East Indies throughout the 1920s was followed thoroughly in *Bevrijding*.<sup>105</sup> In the mid-1920's the colonial government in the Dutch East Indies doubled down on the anticolonial movement. Throughout 1925 and 1926, *Bevrijding* published articles on the abolishment of freedom of assembly, banishment of nationalist leaders and anti-communist actions by the colonial government.<sup>106</sup> Editors argued that this increased oppression by the state was bound to grow and strengthen the Indonesian nationalist movement. In a particularly remarkable observation, one of *Bevrijding*'s contributors wrote that the colonial government was creating a revolutionary climate which would particularly benefit communists.<sup>107</sup>

And indeed, a revolt was set in motion in the Dutch East Indies, in November of 1926. An armed insurrection started at Java, fostered by the leaders of the Indonesian Communist Party, and spread to Sumatra in the early months of 1927.<sup>108</sup> The revolt was ill-prepared and suppressed quickly by the colonial government. BRAC's reaction to the revolt especially reveals their type of pacifist anti-imperialism.

As the revolt spread through Java, BRAC declared itself in complete solidarity with the revolutionaries. There were not many other Dutch organisations supporting the revolt, only the Dutch communist party and BRAC's comrades in the anarchist IAMV.<sup>109</sup> BRAC's solidarity was not motivated by a shared ideology. BRAC recognised that the revolt was motivated by nationalist aims. The solidarity came from a shared sense of oppression by capitalism and the state. The fact that the Javanese had relied on arms, was in direct opposition with BRAC's ideology of strict nonviolence. Of this contradiction, BRAC's members were well aware. A contributor to *Bevrijding* wrote:

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<sup>105</sup> J.G. Westerweel, 'De Bruine Kameraad', *Bevrijding* 64 (January 1926), 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> J.G. Westerweel, 'Een doekje voor het bloeden', *Bevrijding* 60 (September 1925); A. Storm, 'De Indische Vrijheid', *Bevrijding* 67 (April 1926), 3; A.R. de Jonge, 'De vloek der overheersching' *Bevrijding* 68 (May 1926), 1-2; A.R. de Jonge 'Anti-communistische actie', *Bevrijding* 71 (August 1926).

<sup>107</sup> Storm, 'De Indische Vrijheid', 3.

<sup>108</sup> Stutje, 'To Maintain an Independent Course', 206.

<sup>109</sup> H. Eikeboom, 'Opstand in Indië, Indië los van Holland!', *De Wapens Neder* 22:2, 2.

Many outside our movement may not understand how we, as non-violent communists, can feel solidarity with the Javanese insurgents. To them we say, that we will not act as self-serving moralists towards the rioting Javanese.<sup>110</sup>

To BRAC, it was essential to stand with every freedom movement for oppressed groups, even if they used violence. Their motivation for this is complex, as it was deeply centred in religious anarcho-communist theory. Essentially, BRAC strived for the development of humankind towards the highest ideal. Capitalism and states were thought to stand in between this realisation of the fullest development of humanity. Violence was considered to be a method of ‘lower development’. The social revolution would eventually lead to the higher development of mankind, and an ideal society, but only if fought with ‘higher’ methods. BRAC’s members had realised that the only way to true freedom was through the nonviolent social revolution. They realised however, that with the state of society as it was, humanity had not developed yet as to accept the methods of nonviolence. Consequently, they knew that the Javanese were not developed enough to accept the method of nonviolence. This also applied to their expectations of the entire European proletariat, of which BRAC also argued that they were not ready to adopt the method of nonviolence.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, BRAC argued that they could not expect oppressed groups to wait with resistance until they were developed enough to accept nonviolent means of resistance. BRAC’s task then, was to express their solidarity and offer alternatives to violence.<sup>112</sup>

An intriguing feature of BRAC’s anti-imperialist ideology, is what you could call a “reverse civilising mission”. The justification of colonialism at the time was often sought in the responsibility of the colonial government to educate and civilise colonial populations. This idea was also accepted within the labour movement. BRAC’s members, however, argued that it was actually the Europeans who were not civilised.<sup>113</sup> Capitalism had estranged Western society from its true cultural character, and created a society based on class oppression and warfare. In the ‘civilising’ colonial populations, colonialism actually spread capitalism and oppression.<sup>114</sup> The fact that Indonesians used violence in their revolt, was thought to have been the effect of

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<sup>110</sup> M.v.P., ‘Het kommunistisch oproer op Java’, *Bevrijding* 75 (December 1926), 1. ‘Vele buiten onze beweging staanden begrijpen misschien niet hoe wij, geweldloze kommunisten, ons solidair kunnen voelen met de Javaansche oproerlingen. Voor hen zij gezegd, dat wij tegenover de oproerige Javanen niet staan als eigendunkelijke zedenprekers.’

<sup>111</sup> M.v.P., ‘Het kommunistisch oproer op Java’, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>113</sup> Westerweel, ‘Het doekje voor het bloeden’, *Bevrijding* 60 (September 1925), 1.

<sup>114</sup> A. Storm, ‘Ethische Koloniale Politiek’, *Bevrijding* 72 (September 1926), 4.

Dutch imperialism, as the introduction of capitalism had ‘alienated the Orientals from their souls’.<sup>115</sup> If the Indonesians had not been influenced by ‘barbaric’ Western culture, they might have sought out the methods of non-cooperation for their struggle. A contributor to *Bevrijding* argued that the methods of Gandhi was much more fitting for the Indonesians, but due to the corruption of colonialism they were not able to adopt ‘such a spiritual and economically revolutionary attitude’.<sup>116</sup> However, even this ‘lower’ manner of way of revolution, was an important step towards freedom.

Thus, BRAC presented a somewhat confusing anti-imperialist agenda. Motivated by their aversion of the state and their dedication to humanity, they agitated against all forms of oppression in the Dutch colonies. However, they did present Indonesians as being in a lower state of development.

## **2.2 Radical Council Member – Jo Meijer’s Anti-Imperialism**

Within the WRI’s international council, the Dutch movement was represented by Jo Meijer. Meijer was appointed as a member of the WRI’s international council at the Hoddesdon Conference in 1925 and remained until 1931. This section outlines Meijer’s anti-imperialist ideas, showing another variety of anti-imperialist thought in the radical pacifist sphere. Additionally, it shows that the coalition between radical pacifists of different ideologies in the WRI was not always easy and the differences between anti-imperialist thought also led to doubts.

In many ways Meijer embodied the Dutch Christian anarchist roots of the WRI. He was an anarchist, inspired by religious faith, and practiced complete nonviolence. Meijer had served a prison sentence of 10 months for resisting military service during the First World War.<sup>117</sup> Throughout his life, he was active in a range of antimilitarist movements in the Netherlands. Not only had he helped to found BRAC, he also was involved with the Internationale Anti-Militaristische Vereniging. He even served as an editor of the IAMV’s journal *De Wapens Neder* between 1926 and 1927. He combined his anti-militarist activities with his job as a dentist and the care for his young daughter, as his wife Clara had died in childbirth in 1922.<sup>118</sup> Clara

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<sup>115</sup> A. Storm, ‘Het Indisch Communistisch Verzet’, *Bevrijding* 76 (January 1927), 1.

<sup>116</sup> Storm, ‘Het Indisch Communistisch Verzet’, 1-2.

<sup>117</sup> E. Kloek, ‘Wichmann, Clara Gertrud’, in: *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland* (1-9-2017), <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/wichmans>. Last consulted on 21-6-2023.

<sup>118</sup> IISH, Archive Jo Meijer, inventory number 3, Letter from Gerrit van Oort to Jo Meijer, 11-9-1924.

had also been a very active member of BRAC, and Meijer spent many years of his life to publishing her works posthumously.<sup>119</sup>

Meijer's contributions to *De Wapens Neder* mostly focused on imperialism. Evidently, this was a topic which occupied him, but it was also an intrinsic part of the IAMV's ideology. The IAMV's was the first organisation in the Netherlands to call for Indonesian independence, already in 1904.<sup>120</sup> Their motto was dually anti-militaristic and anti-imperialist: 'Geen man, geen cent voor het militarisme en Indië los van Holland – nu!'. In Meijer's articles a range of prevalent anti-militarist anti-imperialist talking points can be recognised

Most importantly, anti-militarists, like Meijer, were convinced that it was imperialist wars which would inevitably lead to a new world war. It was clear to them that imperialist nations would start wars colonial contexts, motivated by the capitalist drive for new profitable raw materials and markets. However, these colonial conflicts would not forever stay in the colonies. Through a domino effect, these local wars were sure to end up in a global conflict, as coalitions between nations would drag more and more countries into the conflict.<sup>121</sup>

With this concept of in mind, anarchist anti-militarists often presented the League of Nations as an agent of imperialism. In anti-colonial circles, this was a relatively common talking point.<sup>122</sup> The mandate commission of the League of Nations had supported the creation of mandate states such as Syria and Lebanon, which was considered to be colonialism with a different name by anti-colonialists. However, in the general peace movement, the League of Nations was seen as one of the promises to enforce peace in international relations.<sup>123</sup> Anarchists, like Meijer, were principally opposed to the League, as it represented a cooperation of states. However, it was the League's support of imperialist nations which showed that instead of a platform to build peace, the League sanctified war. Meijer wrote several critical articles in which he 'exposed' the League of Nations as a tool of British imperialism, and thus militarism. In these articles, he demonstrated a broad understanding of international politics. He covered the role of the League of Nations in declaring Iraq a mandate territory for the British Empire in depth, as well as the territorial disputes between the British and Turkey which followed. He emphasised the importance of oil in these territories for the British interest in Iraq and predicted that if a military conflict would break out, it would soon spread. Additionally, Meijer predicted

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<sup>119</sup> Kloek, 'Wichmann, Clara Gertrud',

<https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/wichmans>. Last consulted on 21-6-2023.

<sup>120</sup> Ramaer, Ramaer, *De Piramide der Tirannie*, 54.

<sup>121</sup> J.B. Meijer, 'Mosol als toetssteen voor den "Volkenbond"', *De Wapens Neder* 22:2 (February 1926), 2-3.

<sup>122</sup> S. Pedersen, *The Guardians: the League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Cortright, *Peace*, 79.

that the British and Italians would divide Abyssinia amongst themselves, with endorsement of the League of Nations after the fact. These articles were accompanied with small maps which Meijer had drawn himself, to illustrate to Dutch readers where all these places actually were.<sup>124</sup>

Meijer's broad orientation on colonial conflicts on the world stage, was motivated by his idea that that imperialism was the main cause of war. To Meijer, it was impossible to oppose war without opposing imperialism. He argued that 'the struggle against war without fighting imperialism is in this stage of history madness, as foundations of imperialism are the most important causes for war at this moment.'<sup>125</sup> Again, Meijer's words demonstrate that radical pacifism could not be separated from anti-imperialism. Additionally, the aim for social revolution was intertwined with the anti-imperialist struggle. Meijer also argued that the struggle against imperialism would kickstart the revolution of the European working class. The support of the European proletariat with the oppressed in other countries would awaken international solidarity and a deeper felt humanity, which would usher in the social revolution and lead to a higher developed world.<sup>126</sup>



Figure 1, Jo Meijer in 1928. IISH, WRI Archive: accessed via: <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/AA629099-DB31-40C6-BD6C-BF3E6304DBB8>, last consulted 18-6-2023.

Meijer also demonstrated this critical attitude towards Dutch colonialism. His pamphlet, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen* further introduces articulation of anti-imperialism which were common in the Dutch radical pacifist sphere.

The pamphlet, which was first published in 1922 and reprinted by the IAMV in 1929, is a scathing analysis of the exploitation of Indonesia by the Dutch throughout history up to then. The brochure was written to protest a statue of an influential officer of the Dutch East India Company, Jan Pieterszoon Coen. Coen was celebrated as a national hero because of his actions in expanding Dutch influence in the Indonesian archipelago and as the founder of Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies. In this brochure, Meijer agitated against Coens

<sup>124</sup> J.B. Meijer, 'Mosoel als toetssteen voor den "Volkenbond"', *De Wapens Neder* 22:2 (February 1926), 2-3.

<sup>125</sup> J.B. Meijer, 'Wat gebeurt er in Abessinië?', *De Wapens Neder* 22:9 (September 1926), 2 & 4.

<sup>126</sup> Meijer, 'Wat gebeurt er in Abessinië?', 2 & 4.



heroic status. He characterised Coen as a proto-capitalist, who gathered riches for himself and the Company over the backs of Indonesian people through violence, murder and oppression.<sup>127</sup> Meijer argued that the Dutch had profited for centuries of the oppression of Indonesians, and thus had economic as well as moral debts to Indonesia.<sup>128</sup> He deliberately referred to the colony which was commonly called 'Indië', as "Indonesia" to signify that there was a history long before the Dutch came there.<sup>129</sup>

In the pamphlet Meijer argued that anti-militarists should be opposed to imperialism in the Dutch East Indies, even if in the present state of Dutch imperialism when it seemed on first glance as though there was no military conflict in the colony. He posed that while the Dutch were not fighting wars anymore to expand their Empire, the preservation of the Empire was still built on militarism. Defensive imperialism might seem less violent than earlier stages of conquest, but colonial rule was built on violent oppression and the motivation behind colonial rule remained drive for economic profits. Meijer considered the 'ethical policy', which reframed Dutch colonial rule as a mission to civilise and educate, to be a smokescreen for ongoing exploitation. Meijer described the relation between militarism and imperialism concisely: 'Without militarism, no colonies. Without militarism, no imperialism. Without militarism, all forms of oppression will cease.' It was clear, the preservation of Empire was only possible because of ongoing military violence and thus anti-militarists had to take a stance against imperialism.<sup>130</sup>

The reverse civilising impact of imperialism, as presented in BRAC's publications, was also argued by Meijer, suggesting that this was a common talking point in the Dutch radical pacifist sphere. Meijer argued that centuries of colonial influence and capitalism had corrupted the Indonesian people, into adopting the barbaric means of violence.<sup>131</sup> He wrote that this impeded the cultural development of the Indonesian people, again echoing the idea that colonial populations had to develop to a higher level. The fact that in the Indonesian nationalist struggle was developing along the lines of European militarism was concerning to him, as it would also impede the social revolution. Meijer wrote:

We hope that Gandhi's example shall resound in Indonesia, and will lead the Indonesian peoples to non-barbaric methods, higher than European-American methods of

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<sup>127</sup> J.B. Meijer, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Een Held uit onze Jeugd* (Amsterdam, 1929), 21

<sup>128</sup> Meijer, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen*, 22.

<sup>129</sup> Ibidem, 7.

<sup>130</sup> Ibidem, 27.

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem, 27.

resistance, which will be more effective in our opinion, while the spread of the European method across the world shall postpone the renewing of the world to a future far away.<sup>132</sup>

Jo Meijer's work reflects that Dutch radical pacifists could not separate their anti-militarism from anti-imperialist thought. They were two sides of the same coin. Within the WRI, however, the Dutch anarchists were the radical flank. On war resistance everyone in the WRI agreed. But on other topics, like anti-imperialism, the ideological differences between members could clash.

As an anarchist, Meijer had trouble with the British socialist character of the WRI. He had been involved with the WRI from the very beginning. While Meijer appreciated the differing outlooks in the international, he became to be critical of the influence of the British radical pacifist movement on the WRI's policies. Theoretically, the WRI's principles had remained the same as at its foundation in 1921. These were very much inspired by the Dutch anarchists who helped found the movement. However, Meijer argued that the move of the secretariat to Britain had in practice changed the outlook of the organisation and redirected it more towards British socialism. He thought that because the work of the international was mostly done by its British council members, the organisations outreach was shaped immensely by their ideologies. In a report on the WRI's work for BRAC, Meijer outlined the political ideologies of his fellow council members, with an emphasis of those living and working in the UK. He characterised Brockway and Runham Brown as Labour men and Martha Steinitz, the WRI's secretary, as a social democrat. He wrote that he felt that had most in common with Harold Bing, the representative of the youth, who reportedly was sympathetic towards anarchism.<sup>133</sup>

Meijer was certain that his British comrades' dedication to nonviolence and antimilitarism was deeply sincere, but disagreed with them on many topics. He wrote that he felt a deep spiritual connection with his British comrades. Meijer thought that they might be even closer in spirit to BRAC, than some of their comrades in the Netherlands.<sup>134</sup> This heartfelt connection however did not stop Meijer from thinking that the influence of the British movement on the WRI was detrimental. He signalled that on many topics, the WRI represented a stance influenced by developments in British socialist circles. Meijer thought that the WRI presented a much less radical stance on the League of Nations and revolutionary movements in

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<sup>132</sup> Meijer, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen*, 20. 'Onze hoop is dat Gandhi's voorbeeld in Indonesië doorwerken zal, en de Indonesische volken tot nietbarbaarsche, boven Europeesch-Amerikaanse strijdmiddelen voeren zal, welke o.i. ten slotte doeltreffender zullen blijken, terwijl de Europeesche methode over de gehele wereld uitgebreid een vernieuwing van de wereld naar verre toekomst schuift.'

<sup>133</sup> J.B. Meijer, 'W.R.I.', *Bevrijding* 82 (July 1927), 3.

<sup>134</sup> J.B. Meijer, 'W.R.I.' *Bevrijding* 83 (August 1927), 3.

the colonies than Dutch radical pacifists, as result of the influence of the British movement.<sup>135</sup> It is true that the Dutch radical pacifists in the WRI were very sceptical of the League of Nations, but the WRI never presented an official position it. WRI representatives did lobby with the League of Nations against conscription, which anarchists would not hear of.

Additionally, Meijer disliked the WRI's tactics, which he thought were opportunistic. He found that in the WRI's efforts to broaden the movement and make contacts with the masses and their organisations, the WRI lost the theoretical substance behind the movement. Meijer expressed that in the WRI's attempts to create contacts worldwide, sometimes their ideology was clearly expressed..

The fact that the WRI was dominated by socialists, who took an active part in the government, did worry Meijer. Meijer expressed that as an anarchist, who represented the proletariat, he felt increasingly alienated in this sphere. However, as he trusted the sincerity of the British in the WRI, he was assured that there was place for Dutch radical pacifists in the WRI.<sup>136</sup>

### **2.3 Anti-Imperialist Exchanges – Dutch Anti-Militarists at the WRI Conference**

The previous sections have outlined a variety of anti-imperialist ideas which were common among the Dutch radical pacifists in the WRI. There were not many possibilities to exchange these ideas with others in the movement. The WRI bulletin was written by the central office and was limited to short articles about war resistance. The only forum in which sections could express their own ideas, was at the WRI's international conferences. This section looks at the anti-imperialist ideas which were expressed by Dutch radical pacifists at the Sonntagsberg Conference.

There were several representatives from the Dutch radical pacifist sphere at the Sonntagsberg Conference. Jo Meijer represented the Dutch movement in general. BRAC also sent a representative: Année Rinzes de Jong. Additionally, two representatives from the IAMB were present as visitors. Delegates of the IAMB were regulars at the WRI's international conferences. Of all the other international pacifist organisations active in the interwar period, the WRI had the best working relationship with the IAMB. Both organisations had been born out of the anti-militarist congress in The Hague in 1921, the WRI for the absolutists, the IAMB for other anti-militarists.<sup>137</sup> Their standpoints differed on absolutism, but not on much else. For

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<sup>135</sup> Meijer, 'W.R.I.', *Bevrijding* 82 (July 1927), 3.

<sup>136</sup> Meijer, 'W.R.I.' *Bevrijding* 83 (August 1927), 3.

<sup>137</sup> Jochheim, *Antimilitaristische Aktionstheorie*, 234.

the Sonntagsberg Conference, the IAMB sent two delegates: Albert de Jong and Bart de Ligt. De Ligt was an absolutist religious anarchist and antimilitarist philosopher. Albert de Jong was active in the anarcho-syndicalist sphere and was not an absolutist per se.

As outlined in the first chapter, there was no specific point on the Sonntagsberg agenda to discuss imperialism, and the emphasis was laid on Gandhi's struggle. There were some expressions of anti-imperialism however, mostly done by Dutch delegates. They weaved in their stance on imperialism in discussions of other topics.

BRAC's delegate very shortly touched upon their anti-imperialist outlook in his introductory statement. The representative, A.R. de Jong, shortly introduced BRAC's main ideology. He said that BRAC saw its anti-militarism not as an isolated matter, arguing that militarism could only be conquered together with capitalism. De Jong did not expand on BRAC's anti-imperialist standpoint, only saying that 'in its anti-militarist, anarchist and anti-imperialist work [BRAC] is anxious to use the new weapons of the spirit, not the old barbarian methods of the past'.<sup>138</sup>

Meijer did demonstrate his broad orientation on world politics and imperialism during a session on 'war resistance and revolution'. He outlined his concerns about the influence of Soviet Russia on burgeoning independence movements in Asia. Meijer believed that a conflict between Soviet Russia and Britain was in the make. While the WRI 'stand[s] for the liberation of the oppressed races', he signalled that Soviet Russia was not only fighting imperialism in Asia, but encouraging nationalism.<sup>139</sup> He doubted Russia's intentions, thinking it was mostly motivated by the aim to gain more allies, which would prove disastrous in the case that Russia became involved in a war. He thus warned the anti-imperialists that they should not trust the Soviet Union as a reliable partner in the anti-imperialist struggle.

The most in depth articulations of anti-imperialism were done by the representatives of the IAMB. The position of war resisters in colonial revolutions was outlined by Albert de Jong. De Jong compared the European proletariat to colonial populations. As radical pacifists, de Jong said, they had to declare their solidarity with all struggles against oppression, even if these were violent. He said:

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<sup>138</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 26.

<sup>139</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 47.

If we deny the right of the oppressed, of the exploited, of the tortured, of the hungry to rebel against their oppressors, we deny the sacredness of human life. The right of the oppressed to rebel against oppression is also a sacred human right.<sup>140</sup>

De Jong emphasised that the military methods of the state would not work to build the new social order. If the oppressed used violence in their struggle against the oppressors, it would only birth a new militarism. It was thus the task of war resisters to offer anti-militarist methods to the oppressed, like colonial populations. The notion of the anti-imperialist struggle as a stage in the world revolution again shines through in de Jong's argument.

Bart de Ligt further outlined the IAMB's standpoints on imperialism, presenting a bleak picture of the danger of war which imperialist conflicts would inevitably lead to. He addressed the audience as follows:

'We are experiencing a world crisis where continents threaten to devour continents. America increases her economic predominance over Europe; Asia is attempting to liberate herself; and there is a tendency among the negroes towards military organisation against their white oppressors – never have the problems been so vast as now!'<sup>141</sup>

De Ligt was the only one at the conference, together with Meijer, who engaged with the state of world politics and presented the colonial world as a breeding ground for conflicts and future wars. He went much further than the WRI's new credo 'imperialism is the cause of war', rather opting to present the audience with a tantalizing and rather frightening account of the conflict which would arise out of imperialism in the near future.

Where the WRI presented the methods of Gandhi as a convincing means to resist imperialism and tackle these problems, de Ligt was sceptical. He typified the Indian struggle for independence as 'not reliable as an anti-militarist movement'.<sup>142</sup> He had much less confidence in Gandhi's own nonviolence than the members of the WRI. De Ligt reminded the conference that Gandhi had worked for the British army during the First World War and that he had called for Indians to volunteer. How could they trust that Gandhi, or other Indian leaders, would not again send Indians into a violent conflict, now against the British?<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 57.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*, 39

<sup>142</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

De Ligt also feared that the methods of pacifism were only used by anticolonial movements to create newly independent states. As a religious anarchist, he argued that the method of nonviolence was not meant for the 'limited purposes of nationalism'.<sup>144</sup> To De Ligt, and many other Dutch radical pacifists, these methods were meant to start a social revolution, which would lead to the freedom of the whole of humanity. Again, De Ligt's speech indicates that the articulations of anti-imperialism in the Dutch radical pacifist sphere were tied to the aim for social revolution. Anti-imperialism was not a goal in of itself, but a step towards a new social order.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 39.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, 40.

### **Chapter Three – Anti-Colonialists: War Resisters International and the League Against Imperialism (1927-1929)**

The platform which the WRI offered to radical pacifists was used to construct and express pacifist ideology, including anti-imperialist ideas, among kindred spirits. Radical pacifists also expressed their anti-imperialist ideology outside of their own circles, in the anticolonial sphere. Radical pacifists found a truly international and ideologically diverse podium to exchange their anti-imperialist ideas in the League against Imperialism and for National Independence (LAI). The LAI, which was founded in 1927, aimed to bring together the broader European Left with anti-colonial activists from all over the world.<sup>146</sup> The WRI's radical pacifists as well as their Dutch antimilitarist comrades, participated in the LAI's conferences and sections. Radical pacifists were a minority in the organisation, which did not adhere to nonviolence or have an antimilitarist agenda.

The previous chapters have shown the ideological basis which supported the involvement of radical pacifists in the anticolonial movement. This chapter then explores the relationship of the radical pacifists associated with the WRI with the LAI. It asks why these peace activists were drawn to the LAI in the first place, and which ideas they expressed in this anti-imperialist forum. To this end, I analyse the involvement of radical pacifists in the LAI's two international congresses: the foundational congress in Brussels in 1927 and the second and last congress in Frankfurt in 1929.

I argue that, for all their differences, radical pacifists had the same reasons for being active in the LAI. The first being that they regarded the LAI to be a promising organisation for fighting imperialism, as it brought together so many different groups from colonial countries and the European working class. As their pacifist ideologies all included anti-imperialist thought, it was consistent to join the LAI in their fight against imperialism. Furthermore, they looked at the LAI's international networks with interest, as it brought them an opportunity to connect with groups and people to spread their own ideas much further than they had ever been able to. Lastly, they feared that anti-imperialist activists from colonial countries would use the means of war to free themselves from oppression. They felt that it was their duty to present them other means of resistance.

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<sup>146</sup> Louro et al, 'The League against Imperialism', 22.

### 3.1 An Anti-Colonial Coalition – a Short Introduction to the LAI

The League against Imperialism and for National Independence, or as it was more commonly known: the League against Imperialism, was an international anti-colonial organisation active between 1927 and 1937. The LAI had grown out of the First World Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism at the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels, which was held from the 10<sup>th</sup> until the 15<sup>th</sup> of February in 1927.<sup>147</sup> The Congress was a remarkable affair. Anti-colonial activists from all over the world came together in Brussels. The Congress brought together 174 delegates, representing thirty-one states, colonies or regions and 143 organisations.<sup>148</sup> It managed to bring together an ideologically diverse coalition of anti-imperialist sympathizers. Representatives of the broader European Left, like communists, socialists, trade-unionists and radical pacifists, stood side to side with anti-colonial activists from colonial and semi-colonial countries. The Congress also attracted the support of famous public intellectuals, such as Albert Einstein and Henri Barbusse.<sup>149</sup> The LAI also attracted representatives of the European peace movement. International pacifist and anti-militarist organisations like the WRI, the WILPF, the IAMB, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Society of Friends sent delegates to the Brussels Congress. Several German pacifist organisations were also represented.<sup>150</sup>

After five days filled with speeches and discussions in which inter-racial and inter-cultural solidarity was declared between the delegates, the congress officially founded a permanent, anti-colonial organisation: the LAI. The LAI was to publish propaganda for the anti-colonial cause, support the liberation of colonies across the world and foster solidarity between the working classes in imperialist countries and the oppressed in the colonies.<sup>151</sup> Sections of the LAI were founded across Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, making it one of the largest and inclusive international organisations of the time.<sup>152</sup>

The Brussels Congress had a major impact on many of the attendees, who experienced their ideal of international solidarity for the very first time. The LAI, however, did not live up to its promising start. Tensions developed between members along political lines, especially between communists and non-communists. While the LAI's leadership and membership might have been diverse in the early years of the organisation, behind the scenes it was directed and financed by the Comintern. The precise impact of the Comintern on the LAI divides historians.

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<sup>147</sup> J. Dinkel, 'League Against Imperialism and for National Independence (LAI)', in: I. Ness and Z. Cope (eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, (London, 2021), 1610-15, 1611.

<sup>148</sup> Louro et al, 'The League Against Imperialism', 17.

<sup>149</sup> Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 200.

<sup>150</sup> *Das Flammenzeichen*, 239.

<sup>151</sup> Louro et al, 'The League Against Imperialism', 22.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*, 20.



Some see it as a communist front organisation, others dismiss the importance of the Comintern's influence almost completely. What is evident, is that the LAI's broad coalition of anti-imperialists slowly narrowed as non-communists in the LAI grew suspicious of communists and vice versa.<sup>153</sup> The European pacifist flank in the LAI also waned, due to these internal tensions. When the LAI's second world congress in Frankfurt came along, the WRI and the IAMB were one of the few radical pacifist organisations which sent representatives.<sup>154</sup> The atmosphere of the Frankfurt Congress stood in stark contrast to the euphoric scenes in Brussels Congress. It was a chaotic affair, marked by infighting and denunciations of non-communist members by communist members.<sup>155</sup>

### **3.2 A Real League of Nations – Radical Pacifists at the Brussels Congress**

The LAI's coalition between anti-colonial nationalists and leftist militants created an anticolonial platform for radical pacifists to express their anti-imperialist viewpoints, outside of their own movement. The profound connection between the radical pacifist and the anticolonial movement is illustrated by the fact that leading WRI members played important roles in the LAI.

Both the WRI's chairman, Fenner Brockway, and Helene Stöcker, the German representative in the international council, came to fill positions in the LAI leadership. When they attended the Brussels Congress, both did not strictly represent the WRI. Brockway acted as the representative of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Stöcker, who was involved in the German feminist as well as pacifist movement, represented both the WRI and a broad coalition of German pacifist organisations.<sup>156</sup> As a matter of fact, Stöcker was involved with the LAI from the very beginning. She had been a leading member of the LAI's predecessor, the League against Colonial Oppression (LACO), which was the heart of the German anti-colonial movement. LACO had organised a few successful anti-colonial campaigns in Germany together with pacifist organisations.<sup>157</sup> As one of only two women (both representing pacifist

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<sup>153</sup> Louro et al, 'The League Against Imperialism', 25.

<sup>154</sup> IISH, LAI Archives, inventory number 67, List of affiliated, associated and sympathising organisations. 1929.

<sup>155</sup> Louro et al, 'The League Against Imperialism', 12.

<sup>156</sup> Braker, 'Helene Stocker's Pacifism', 465.

<sup>157</sup> F. Petersson, "'We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers'", Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925-1933' (Abo Akademi University, 2013), 121.

organisations), Stöcker sat on the executive committee which organised the Brussels congress.<sup>158</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no documentation about the decision of the WRI to send delegates to the Brussels Congress. Why Brockway did not represent the WRI and Stöcker did, is thus unclear. On the list of represented organisations which was published before the congress, the WRI was not even named.<sup>159</sup> This suggests that Stöcker was initially attending for another organisation and only later decided to also speak for the WRI.

In his capacity as representative from the ILP, Brockway featured prominently in one of the Congresses' most famous moments of solidarity between imperialist and colonial.

On the first day of the Congress, Brockway promised the Chinese delegation that the ILP would do everything to stop a military conflict between the UK and China from happening.<sup>160</sup> To solidify this declaration of solidarity, Brockway joined hands with a Chinese delegate and raised them up in the air, under loud applause of the entire congress hall.<sup>161</sup> While the crux of Brockway's speech leaned heavily on his promise of war resistance in the case of British aggression in China, he spoke for the left wing of the labour movement, not for the radical pacifists.

Rather, the essence of the WRI's viewpoints were presented to the Congress by Stöcker.<sup>162</sup> Her speech was one of the few addresses which expressed radical pacifist



Figure 4, Portrait of Helene Stöcker in the 1920's. IISH, WRI Archive, via: <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/DC900C3E-456F-4132-B1EB-4F53ACD16261> last consulted 18-6-2023.

<sup>158</sup> IISH, LAI Archives, inventory number 2, List of organisations and delegates attending the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism. Brussels. 1927.

<sup>159</sup> The WRI is not listed in the list of delegates and organisations printed before the congress. IISH, LAI Archives, inventory number 2, List of organisations and delegates attending the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism. Brussels. 1927.

<sup>160</sup> Petersson, "We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers", 141.

<sup>161</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>162</sup> There are conflicting messages about who officially represented the WRI at Brussels. According to the WRI Bulletin it was Stöcker and a Belgian delegate called A. de Bevere: *The War Resister* 16 (May 1927), 9. However, in the official proceedings of the Congress Stöcker and writer Armin T. Wegner are mentioned as official representatives of the WRI, together with De Bevere and the British conscientious objector R.W. Postgate: *Das*

interpretations of anti-imperialism, although her arguments were very concise due the limited time to speak.<sup>163</sup> Her speech can be found, in full, in the protocol of the congress which was published as a book by the LAI.

Stöcker's address rested on one pillar: convincing the other attendees of the effectivity of nonviolent resistance in colonial liberation movements. She introduced the WRI in a few sentences as a coalition of war resisters, who refused to engage with war in any way. She emphasised the influence of British conscientious objectors in the movement and pointed out that many of the British socialists who were present at the congress came from this movement. Quickly, she went on to her main points. Firstly, she argued that war resistance yielded results, by describing two successful campaigns against war led by radical pacifists. Stöcker referred to a strike during Hands of Russia campaign in 1919, and the Hands of China campaign of 1925 in which radical pacifists lobbied against military interventions of the British government. Then, she presented that the methods of war resistance could also work as to resist imperialism in colonial countries, citing Gandhi's struggle in India as an example of nonviolent resistance against colonialism.

Rather than further expanding on practical policies of nonviolent resistance to the Congress, Stöcker delineated why it was necessary to use nonviolent methods. She did so, with arguments which were specific to the radical pacifist sphere. One of the most tragic things, she said, was that in the righteous struggle for freedom and higher development, people demeaned themselves by using 'low and evil means of killing, of destroying.'<sup>164</sup> This, she argued, was the biggest obstacle for true liberation. 'The means change the goal', Stöcker said, which would have sounded rather cryptical to the non-pacifists in the audience. Within the framework of radical pacifism however, this was exactly the reasoning which motivated their absolutism. In order to create a better world, free from war and oppression, they could only use righteous means.<sup>165</sup> If they were to use the means of the oppressor, they would not reach true liberation. Here, a clear contradiction between the aims of radical pacifists and anti-colonial nationalists emerged. Many of the colonial delegates were not striving for a new world, but for national independence or self-rule. In that case, this specific argument from Stöcker might not have been very convincing.

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*Flammenzeichen*, 238, 239 & 240. Possibly, Wegner attended as a representative of the German section of the WRI, which can be inferred from *Das Flammenzeichen*, 254.

<sup>163</sup> Another was Lansbury's speech, who was also active in the No More War Movement and became the chairman of the WRI in later years: *Das Flammenzeichen*, 165; Beyer, *60 Years the War Resisters' International*, 36.

<sup>164</sup> *Das Flammenzeichen*, 166.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*, 166.

Stöcker also presented the some of WRI's humanistic anti-imperialist arguments at the Congress. She argued that imperialism impeded humanity's full development and squashed the richness of different cultures. In these arguments, the idea prevalent in radical pacifist spheres that colonial peoples were on a lower stage of development implicitly came through. Stöcker urged for the development of a new worldview, in which all peoples were free to develop themselves and offer their own unique insights and experiences to one another.<sup>166</sup>

When wrapping her address up, Stöcker asked her audience to remember other freedom struggles than their own, especially the struggle for women's rights.<sup>167</sup> She ended her speech by referring to a line from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in which spirit she thought all the work in the LAI should be done: 'Alle Menschen werden Brüder!'<sup>168</sup>

Stöcker's speech reflect the state of the anti-imperialist arguments in the WRI at the time quite well. She emphasised personal war resistance, but struggled in articulating a practical pacifist programme to resist imperialism. Furthermore, she highlighted the need for anti-imperialism because it impeded the full development of humanity, rather than arguing that imperialism was the cause of war.

Other expressions of radical pacifist ideology were scarce, at least in the plenary sessions. While there were some representatives of the IAMB in Brussels, among them Bart de Ligt and Albert de Jong, they did not manage to outline their ideas in detail.<sup>169</sup> This is particularly remarkable, because one of the main themes of the Congress which created common ground between delegates was the perceived war danger posed by imperialism.<sup>170</sup> Especially the threat of British imperialism was emphasised during the Congress, predicting that China and India would become battlegrounds in the anti-imperialist struggle.<sup>171</sup> While the Congress' manifesto on the war danger was not explicit which methods the anti-imperialists should use in their struggle, it definitely gravitated towards militarism.<sup>172</sup>

Assessing the impact of the speeches by radical pacifists on the rest of the delegates is very difficult. From the protocol, the reactions of attendees to what was said on the podium are impossible to determine. It is also hard to gain a sense of the personal contacts between radical pacifists and colonial delegates at the anticolonial congress. It is known that delegates from the IAMB laid contacts with Indonesian nationalists at the congress, which would lead to long term

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<sup>166</sup> *Das Flammenzeichen*, 166.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*, 167.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibidem*, 167.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibidem*, 261.

<sup>170</sup> Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 49.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibidem*, 45.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibidem*, 45.

relationship between the Dutch anti-militarists and Indonesian anti-colonial activists.<sup>173</sup> The degree to which radical pacifists discussed their ideology with delegates from the colonies is difficult to determine as well. One striking example, is a meeting held by the WRI and the Fellowship of Reconciliation after the Brussels Congress where Nehru and a Chinese anti-colonial activist spoke together with European pacifists, ‘to proclaim their belief in reconciliation through justice to all races’.<sup>174</sup> Unfortunately, the proceedings of this meeting remain unclear. As for contacts between the WRI and anti-colonial nationalists, it seems as though the Congress had no such effects. While both Brockway and Stöcker were elected on the LAI’s executive committee, which facilitated contacts with many anti-colonial nationalists, nothing in the WRI archive indicates that these contacts extended to the WRI.<sup>175</sup>

In any case, for the radical pacifists the Congress was a captivating and special experience. Bart de Ligt later described it as a real league of nations.<sup>176</sup> Brockway and Stöcker also described it as a historical moment. Stöcker wrote that the postulate ‘Proletarians of the



Figure 5, the Executive Committee of the LAI. Helene Stöcker is fourth from the right, with her hand on the shoulder of Lamine Senghor, a Senegalese anti-colonial activist. Brockway does not seem to feature on this specific photograph. *Das Flammenzeichen*, 249.

<sup>173</sup> A. Lehning and M. Hunink (eds.), *Uit het archief van Arthur Lehning: Documenten over de Stichting van een Bibliotheek voor Politieke en Sociale Geschiedenis in Indonesië, 1949-1952* (Amsterdam, 1984), 15.

<sup>174</sup> *The War Resister* 16 (May 1927), 9. Speaking at this meeting were Stöcker, Ernst Toller, Duchene, Nehru, Lansbury and M. Wang Tsen Way.

<sup>175</sup> Petersson, “We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers”, 168.

<sup>176</sup> B. de Ligt, ‘Waarom de Liga?’, *De Wapens Neder* 25:29 (September 1929), 1.

World Unite!’ was embodied fully in the Congress, for the very first time in world history.<sup>177</sup> It was this enthusiasm for the LAI’s cause that they took with them to the WRI’s international council meeting only three months later. Brockway and Stöcker were set on convincing the rest of the council to create an affiliation between WRI and the LAI.

### **3.3 Tensions Rise – Defining the Relationship between the WRI and LAI**

On Sunday morning, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1927, the WRI’s international council came together again in the home of Runham Brown. It was the second day of their meeting. The day before had seen a heated debate about the extent to which the WRI should work together with non-absolutist organisations which worked for a new social order. That discussion, however, had been completely theoretical. No suggestions had been given for organisations to cooperate with. Today, however, Stöcker and Brockway would present to their fellow council members a proposition to work together with another organisation: the LAI. While the LAI’s anti-imperialist character was in line with the WRI’s principles, it was far from an absolutist organisation. Stöcker and Brockway thus had to convince the rest of the council that an affiliation with the LAI made sense.

Both Stöcker and Brockway presented the anticolonial congress as an extraordinary event to the rest of the WRI council.<sup>178</sup> Brockway said that the congress was the most remarkable international meeting he had ever attended. Both he and Stöcker emphasised the deep personal impressions the encounters with colonial delegates had made on them. Brockway, for example, praised the diversity of the congress’ attendees, saying that there was ‘scarcely a race on earth that one could not see represented in that audience’.<sup>179</sup> Stöcker told the council that meeting so many ‘excellent people’ from the colonies had caused European attendees to feel deeply ashamed that they had ever considered ‘these races inferior to their own’.<sup>180</sup> She also was very impressed with the coalition between so many different groups with contrasting ideologies, fighting against a common enemy. Stöcker told her fellow council members that this was something which the WRI also should endeavour in the peace movement.

Additionally, Brockway and Stöcker emphasised the important role which the LAI was going to play in the struggle against imperialism. Brockway even predicted that the LAI might

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<sup>177</sup> Stöcker, ‘Der Brüsseler Kongress’ 81.

<sup>178</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, ‘Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927’, 42.

<sup>179</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>180</sup> Ibidem, 43.

become 'one of the great revolutionary movements of our time.'<sup>181</sup> Brockway and Stöcker painted a very positive picture of the LAI and its possible accomplishments in the future.

Stöcker outlined three reasons why the WRI should affiliate with the newly founded LAI. The first was to assist the LAI in their fight against imperialism. The second reason was more strategic. She argued that the international networks of the LAI would be helpful to spread their radical pacifist message. Stöcker believed that these networks would make it possible to reach a new public in the colonies, as well as in Europe. Lastly, she expressed that the anticolonial movement was in need of nonviolent methods of resistance to imperialism. By connecting the WRI with the LAI, Stöcker argued that they could influence colonial activists to adopt nonviolent methods. She posed to the rest of the council: 'We must try to help them in their great fight against oppression, and find methods for that fight which will not be in opposition to our principles.'<sup>182</sup>

Stöcker and Brockway did explain to the rest of the council that the LAI was not an absolutist organisation. Brockway said that the dominant note of the anticolonial congress was a belief in the method of armed force.<sup>183</sup> He had signalled that the anti-colonial movement in general was responding positively violence as means for freedom struggles. The right thing to do here, according to Brockway, was to engage with the anticolonial movement as much as they could, in order to influence it away from the method of armed force. Stöcker agreed with him, saying that radical pacifists should be tolerant of the differences in the anticolonial movement.<sup>184</sup>

The suggestion posed by Brockway and Stöcker to affiliate with the LAI was not exactly received enthusiastically by the other council members. One council member was principally opposed to an affiliation with the LAI: Eleanor Byrns, the representative for the American section. In the minutes of the council meeting, a note was later added in pencil reading that she was 'strongly against affiliation with the LAI'.<sup>185</sup> Her reasons for objecting to an affiliation are not specified in the minutes. It is safe to say however, that she opposed it because it diverted attention from war resistance. The WRL, of which she was a representative in this council meeting, was a single issue group, focused on war resistance only.<sup>186</sup> Other members of the council were hesitant. Some wanted to read the constitution of the LAI before deciding to

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<sup>181</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 43.

<sup>182</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>183</sup> Ibidem, 44.

<sup>184</sup> Ibidem, 44.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem, 45.

<sup>186</sup> Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, 24.

affiliate. Others thought that the WRI's sections should decide, not the international council.<sup>187</sup> Eventually, the council agreed to affiliate with the LAI if they all agreed that the LAI's constitution did not contradict the WRI's principles. If there was any doubt, the next WRI conference would have to decide.<sup>188</sup>

The discussion within the WRI's council thus did not address the anti-imperialist ideology which radical pacifists shared with anticolonial activists in the LAI. Rather, it revolved around the question if the WRI could affiliate with an organisation which was not absolutist.

The minutes of this meeting show how dedicated Stöcker and Brockway were to advocate for the LAI at this time, even in spaces in which they knew they would be met with opposition. Brockway also lobbied for the LAI in the socialist movement around the same time as this meeting. However, he was met with immense opposition in the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), who were sceptical of the LAI's communist connections.<sup>189</sup> In the WRI council, he was met with much less suspicion than in the LSI. Brockway's assurance that the LAI was free from communist interference convinced the rest of the council members.<sup>190</sup>

Stöcker and Brockway's belief in the LAI, however, quickly waned. By the next council meeting of the WRI, which was held more than a year later, the issue about affiliation with the LAI was still not resolved. Now, the council met in Vienna, just before the beginning of the WRI's second international conference near the Sonntagberg. In the year between the two meetings, Brockway had severed all official ties. After a revealing publication about the LAI's communist ties, he stepped down from the organisation in October 1927. He still supported the LAI's goals, but his enthusiasm about a broad anti-imperialist coalition had faded.<sup>191</sup> However, Brockway had changed his mind about the WRI affiliating with the LAI. He told his fellow council members that he was convinced that LAI and its sections would sooner or later become involved in revolutionary risings. A war resisters organisation could not affiliate themselves with an organisation which might actively start military conflicts.<sup>192</sup> Another council member argued that the fact that the LAI did not take the WRI's position of absolute pacifism, was the prime reason why an affiliation was impossible.<sup>193</sup> To this argument, Brockway objected. He

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<sup>187</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 44..

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem, 45.

<sup>189</sup> Brockway's efforts have been meticulously described by Petersson, "We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers", 190-194.

<sup>190</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of the Council Meeting, Enfield, May 1927', 43-4.

<sup>191</sup> Petersson, "We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers", 195.

<sup>192</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, Minutes of the Meetings of the Council 1926-1934, 'Minutes of International Council Meeting held at Vienna, 26 July 1928', 75.

<sup>193</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of International Council Meeting held at Vienna, 26 July 1928', 74.



argued that the WRI worked with many people and organisations in the peace movement who were non-absolutists. If radical pacifists were prepared to cooperate in the peace movement with people who supported wars for national defence, why should they not work together in the anti-colonial movement with groups who did not swear off the use of violence? This emotional response shows again that Brockway, personally, was intent on working together with others in the anti-imperialist sphere whether or not they were dedicated to nonviolence. Helene Stöcker was surprisingly silent at this meeting. Only a year earlier, she had advocated for an official relationship between the LAI and the WRI with so much conviction. But now, she did not speak a word.

In the end, it was decided to not affiliate with the LAI. However, the council did agree to keep in touch.<sup>194</sup> At the Sonntagsberg Conference, which took place in the days after this council meeting, the LAI was not mentioned.<sup>195</sup> Even though this conference was the moment when the WRI broadened their scope and declared that they wanted to work together with others who worked to end capitalism and imperialism, the LAI was not in the picture. In the previous year, two of the WRI's council members had described the first anticolonial congress as a historic moment, but now they did not even discuss the LAI with the WRI's sections.

However, the WRI did not fully renounce the LAI. When the time came for the second anticolonial congress, the international council decided to send a delegate anyway. The goal would be: 'to identify ourselves with the struggle against imperialism and using our presence there to urge the way for nonviolence in order to free the world from imperialism.'<sup>196</sup> Stöcker would make her way to Frankfurt to present the WRI's standpoints in the anticolonial movement, once again.

### **3.4 Non-Violence – Radical Pacifists at the Frankfurt Congress**

By the second anticolonial congress in Frankfurt, the ideologically diverse coalition anti-imperialists had started to erode. Of all the radical pacifist organisations which had been involved with the first anticolonial congress, the WRI and the IAMB were the only ones left.<sup>197</sup> In *The War Resister* and the IAMB's press service, radical pacifists were presented as one front.

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<sup>194</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of International Council Meeting held at Vienna, 26 July 1928', 75.

<sup>195</sup> *War Resisters in Many Lands*, 40.

<sup>196</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 26, 'Minutes of Meeting of International Council held at 11, Abbey Road, Enfield, England, on 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> January 1929', 37.

<sup>197</sup> IISH, LAI Archives, inventory number 128, List of affiliated, associated and sympathizing organisations. 1929. The *Bund der Kriegsdienstgegner*, the German section of the WRI, was also still affiliated. Gabrielle Duchene, a French pacifist from the WILPF, still sat on the executive council but it seems that she did not officially represent the WILPF.

The second anticolonial congress would be first real opportunity for the WRI and the IAMB to propagate nonviolent methods for ‘the achievement of liberation to colonial peoples.’<sup>198</sup> The WRI’s bulletin only diverted a few words to the congress, the IAMB’s press service more than three pages. The goal for congress for radical pacifists was clear: presenting nonviolent methods to anticolonial activists.

This time, Stöcker was the WRI’s only delegate. It is unclear if she was still a part of the LAI’s leadership at this second anticolonial congress. She had been elected on the LAI’s executive committee in Brussels. However, her name does not feature on the list of members of executive committee which was printed on the agenda for the second anticolonial congress.<sup>199</sup> Additionally, she is not listed in the congress’ agenda as a representative of the WRI, rather as a representative of the women’s movement.<sup>200</sup> These uncertainties and contradictions are common in historical narratives about the Frankfurt Congress, as sources are very limited.<sup>201</sup> In order to reconstruct the speeches of radical pacifists at the second colonial congress, I have mostly made use of reports in the Dutch anti-militarist press. These printed the entirety of the speeches made by Dutch radical pacifists, and summaries of of the rest of the speeches. As other historical analyses primarily have been based on communist and socialist sources, the radical pacifist contributions to the congress has so far been overlooked.<sup>202</sup>

All in all, the second anticolonial congress was a hostile environment for radical pacifists. Communist members of the LAI denounced anyone who would not vow to support the Soviet Union if a war broke out. At the time, fears about a conflict between China and the Soviet Union ran high under communists, who were now the biggest ideological bloc in the LAI.<sup>203</sup> Stöcker had a tough job in this arena. She had to take to the stage immediately after an intense speech by a British communist who had rallied for support for the Soviet Union in the case of war, and who called for the purging of non-revolutionaries from the LAI.<sup>204</sup>

Still, as Stöcker stood on the stage she called for the adoption of nonviolent methods to resist imperialism. The contrast between her speech, which urged for nonviolence and the previous, which called for military support to the Soviet Union, could not have been greater.

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<sup>198</sup> *The War Resister* 24 (Autumn, 1929), 27-8. ‘Het IAMB op het antiekoloniale wereldcongres’, Persdienst Uitgave van de Internationale Antimilitaristische Kommissie no. 31 (29-7-1929), p. 2.

<sup>199</sup> IISH, LAI Archives, inventory number 69, Agenda of the Second Anti-Imperialist World Congress, 1929, 9

<sup>200</sup> Generally, there is little information about Stocker’s involvement with the WRI as well as the LAI. Her biography, Christl Wickert, *Helene Stöcker, 1869-1943: Frauenrechtlerin, Sexualreformerin und Pazifistin: eine Biographie* (Bonn, 1991). does not refer to her activities in either organisation in detail.

<sup>201</sup> Petersson, “‘We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers’”, 327.

<sup>202</sup> Peterson has made an excellent reconstruction of the Frankfurt Congress, which unfortunately does not mention any radical pacifists. Petersson, “‘We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers’”, 322-338.

<sup>203</sup> Louro et al, ‘The League Against Imperialism’, 36.

<sup>204</sup> Petersson, “‘We Are Neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers’”, 327.

From the summary of her speech, it seems as though she repeated many of the things she said at the first anticolonial congress. She argued that a revision of the methods for the struggle against imperialism was absolutely necessary and introduced two nonviolent methods of resistance to the conference. Firstly, she introduced the general strike as a tool against war and against imperialism. This, she argued, was successful in halting a war between the UK and the Soviet Union in 1920. Secondly, she argued for the tactics of resistance used by Gandhi in India.<sup>205</sup>

The reception of her speech is difficult to assess due to the lack of source material. However, as the atmosphere was so hostile towards non-communists, especially those who did not want to declare their support for the Soviet Union in the case of war, it could not have been enthusiastic. Even in the Dutch anti-militarist press her performance was described as ‘not very strong, nor convincing’.<sup>206</sup>

Dutch radical pacifists even had trouble to get to speak due to the chaotic circumstances at the Frankfurt Congress. Bart de Ligt, who had spoken so extensively about imperialism at the WRI’s conference at the Sonntagsberg, now attempted to present his ideas to the anticolonial movement as a representative of the IAMB. He found a much less willing audience in the communists of the LAI. According to a report on the congress in *De Wapens Neder*, De Ligt had trouble to even take to the stage. He was interrupted half way through his speech and was unable to finish it.<sup>207</sup> While *De Wapens Neder* reported that de Ligt had enough chance to convey the standpoints of the IAMB. However, an opinion piece in a different Dutch anarchist newspaper alleged that de Ligt’s speech was not correctly represented in the protocol. The writer of this piece, an anarchist who was opposed to the involvement of the IAMB in the LAI, even claimed that the speeches of non-communists had not been translated. This would have made it impossible for colonial delegates to understand De Ligt.<sup>208</sup>

Based on the report in *De Wapens Neder* De Ligt told his anticolonial audience roughly the same as he had said to the WRI’s members at the Sonntagsberg Conference. He presented three main points. Firstly, De Ligt warned that the support of the Soviets to colonial nations would lead to the establishment of militaristic ‘bourgeois states’, such as Persia and China. Secondly, the Ligt spoke out against nationalism as a driving force behind freedom movements

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<sup>205</sup> ‘Het IAMB op het antiekoloniale wereldcongres’, Persdienst Uitgave van de Internationale Antimilitaristische Commissie no. 31 (29-7-1929), 2.

<sup>206</sup> ‘Van het anti-koloniale congres in Frankfurt’, *De Wapens Neder* 25:8 (Augustus 1929), 3. ‘Niet heel sterk, noch overtuigend’.

<sup>207</sup> ‘Van het anti-koloniale congres in Frankfurt’, 3.

<sup>208</sup> Constandse, ‘De anarchisten, “de Liga” en het nationalisme’, *De Arbeider, socialistisch weekblad voor de provincie Groningen* 39:23 (17-8-1929), 4.

in the colonies. From an anarchist perspective, national independence without a social revolution would just mean that colonial populations would be ‘subjugated and enslaved’ by their new national rulers. De Ligt’s speech shows again that for radical pacifists, colonial national liberation was not the end goal of anti-imperialist activism. Rather, it was a temporary step in the global revolution which would bring about a new social order.<sup>209</sup> This was an argument that was expressed among radical pacifists themselves, but thus also in the anticolonial sphere. The last point which De Ligt made, referred to the methods with which to resist imperialism. He argued that workers in the West had to use the methods of direct action which had developed in ‘the East’, such as the boycott and non-cooperation, together with the general strike, against all war and war preparations.<sup>210</sup>

The IAMB’s other delegate, actually had success in presenting nonviolent methods more success in addressing the conference Arthur Müller Lehning, tried to get the antimilitarist stance across to the conference a while later, and had more success in actually addressing the congress. His speech only lasted ten minutes, but illustrates very well which issues with regard to imperialism were brought forward from the radical pacifist sphere. Müller Lehning’s speech centred around the methods to be used for the freedom struggle of oppressed peoples. He posed the question to the congress if war and militaristic methods were actually useful and effective. He pointed out that in China the methods of war in the fight for national independence had led to mass murder of peasants and workers, supported by the work of the white proletariat in the war industry. He warned that all national wars in this era, could end up to be a new world war, in which citizens would be hit hardest. He went on to frame the problem of imperialism as a social-economic problem, which would be unable to solve through war, only through social revolution which would abolish the state.<sup>211</sup> He presented consistent non-cooperation, boycotts and the refusal to pay taxes as methods of resistance which would be able to stop all violence and military occupation. They expected that the social-economic measures would work better to work towards their goals. He emphasised that the use of nonviolent methods was necessary to support the revolution: ‘We are not pacifists, nor are we followers of some sort of questionable nonviolence. We are revolutionary socialists.’<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Daniel Brückenhaus, ‘Challenging Imperialism Across Borders: Recent Studies of Twentieth-Century Internationalist Networks against Empire’, *Contemporary European History* 29:1(2020), 104-15, 111.

<sup>210</sup> ‘Het IAMB op het antiekoloniale wereldcongres’, 2.

<sup>211</sup> A translation of the speech in English can be found in the LAI archives, but there are some differences between this and the published speech in the *De Wapens Neder*. IISH, LAI Archives, inventory number 83, Text of the Speech of A. Müller Lehning, representative of the International Anti-Militarist Bureau, 1929.

<sup>212</sup> ‘Het Revol. Anti-Militarisme en de Anti-Imperialistische Taktiek’ *De Wapens Neder* 25:29 (September 1929), 2.

The words of Müller Lehning were also reportedly not well received from the communist side. Communists accused the IAMB of being bourgeois pacifists and of supporting imperialism.<sup>213</sup> All in all, the ideas of nonviolent resistance present in the European radical peace movement were only sparsely expressed in Frankfurt, at least in the public demonstrations. According to De Ligt, however, their ideas of direct action against war in the revolutionary antimilitarist sense did resonate with colonial delegates and the non-communists in the LAI. As nonviolent methods of resistance originated in ‘the East’ and Gandhi’s experiences in fighting colonialism in India were known throughout the world, De Ligt still saw an audience for their ideas in the colonies.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> ‘Het IAMB op het antikoloniale wereldcongres’, 4.

<sup>214</sup> B. de Ligt, ‘Waarom de Liga?’, *De Wapens Neder* 25:29 (September 1929), 1.

## Conclusion

The promise of a broad coalition of anti-imperialists had faded after the chaotic second colonial congress in Frankfurt. One by one, leaders from the colonial world and Europe severed their ties with the LAI. Radical pacifists were one of the only non-communist groups which remained in the LAI. They found their mission in the anticolonial movement too important to disheartened by the communist character of the LAI. At the next international council meeting of the WRI, Helene Stöcker urged her fellow council members that the role of radical pacifists in the anticolonial movement was too vital to completely renounce the LAI.<sup>215</sup> The radical peace movement simply had to present a non-violent method to resist imperialism to colonial populations. This sentiment was echoed in the Dutch anti-militarist movement as well. In a long article in *De Wapens Neder*, Bart de Ligt argued that it was the duty of radical pacifists to remain in the LAI.<sup>216</sup> They were the only ones left to warn anticolonial activists against the use of war for national liberation. Naturally, radical pacifists wanted to protect colonial populations from the horrors of imperialist military violence. But, it was their own fears of the new world wars which colonial revolutions would set in stage, which made their solidarity with the anticolonial movement last so long.

Radical pacifists declaring solidarity with the anticolonial movement, seemed contradictory at the beginning of this thesis. With this thesis, I aimed to explain this involvement of radical pacifists in the anticolonial movement between 1925 and 1930. Through the WRI, which was a platform of radical pacifist ideas, I examined the relationship between radical pacifism and anti-imperialism. Two themes in radical pacifist ideology were central to illustrate the connection between radical pacifism and anti-imperialism: the motivations for anti-imperialism and the kinds of anti-imperialist ideas which were expressed. This thesis further followed the varieties of anti-imperialist ideas expressed by radical pacifists in three distinct spheres: the international radical pacifist sphere, a national radical pacifist forum, and a distinctly anti-colonial forum.

This thesis' main conclusion is that anti-imperialism was an essential part of international radical pacifist ideology during the 1920's. As the radical pacifist sphere existed of a plethora of different groups the motivations behind anti-imperialism, as well as their

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<sup>215</sup> IISH, WRI Archives, inventory number 32, Council Meeting Zurich, August 30<sup>th</sup> to September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1929, 4.

<sup>216</sup> De Ligt, 'Waarom de Liga?', 1.

specific anti-imperialist ideas, were not the same across the movement. Additionally, the importance of anti-imperialism within the radical pacifist sphere grew over time. However, this thesis has also shown that there were inherent tensions in the integration of anti-imperialism in radical pacifist thought, which primarily lay with the issue of nonviolent resistance. Additionally, radical pacifists were not free from ideas of European superiority.

The international radical pacifist sphere was central to the first section of this thesis, which focused on the anti-imperialist ideology of the WRI between 1925 and 1930. I have shown that the a critique of imperialism was a part of WRI ideology from its foundation. The oppressive nature of imperialism, clashed with the WRI's leading principle to recognise the sanctity of human life. However, anti-imperialism only became a major theme after the Sonntagsberg Conference in 1927, which cemented the WRI's new broader program meant to fight the causes of war. Their new critique of imperialism relied on the idea that imperialism was the main cause of war, together with capitalism. The end of all war, and the new social order, could only be attained by ending imperialism and capitalism. By explicitly stating the causal link between imperialism and war, anti-imperialism could be integrated in the WRI's pacifist thought. By dedicating themselves to this broader social critique, the WRI could create more connections outside the isolated sphere of war resisters. It played a major role in the development of the WRI into a movement for war resistance, not just war resisters.

The second chapter of this thesis delved into the variety of anti-imperialists ideas in the radical pacifist sphere, by looking at the Dutch radical pacifists in the WRI's sphere. Here, I showed that anti-imperialism was a central feature of Dutch radical pacifism as well. There were marked differences between anti-imperialist ideas and motivations expressed in the Dutch sphere and in the WRI, however. Firstly, as most of the Dutch radical pacifists were anarchists, their anti-imperialism was strongly informed by this worldview. Their anti-imperialism was motivated by their dislike of the state and a shared sense of oppression. Secondly, Dutch radical pacifists integrated their anti-imperialism into their radical pacifism more successfully than the WRI did. Their journals engaged with developments in the Dutch Empire and the world stage and offered a much more fundamental critique of imperialism than WRI publications.

These two chapters showed that there was one issue which radical pacifists all faced: how to reconcile their dedication to nonviolence with the aim to resist and bring an end to imperialism. Within the WRI's international forum, this difficulty was solved by emphasising the possibilities of nonviolent resistance, as illustrated by Gandhi in his struggle against British imperialism in India. The WRI did not engage with violent anticolonial movements. In contrast, its Dutch section actually welcomed violent uprisings in the Dutch East Indies. Motivated by

their anarchist worldview, they found the need to support all freedom struggles too important to renounce these movements for their methods. Dutch radical pacifists also argued that it was important to stand in solidarity with anti-colonialists, so they could introduce methods of nonviolent resistance.

The ideological connections between radical pacifism and anti-imperialism were central to the first two chapters. This served as context for the third chapter, which examined how radical pacifists actually engaged with the anticolonial movement. The anticolonial congresses of the LAI were a space for radical pacifists to fully engage with the international anticolonial movement. Their participation in the LAI was also motivated by the hope that they could profit of the LAI's international networks. Radical pacifists' main aim, however, was to spread their principles of nonviolence to the colonial world. However, their methods of nonviolent resistance were hard to get across. The necessity of nonviolence was so linked to radical pacifists' aim for a new social order, that it did not present a convincing argument to delegates which just aimed to end colonial rule.

This thesis has also shown the limits of radical pacifist anti-imperialism. Firstly, radical pacifists believed in their own version of the civilising mission. While they declared their solidarity with colonial populations, they still believed that Europeans were further developed. This was rooted in their ideas about the social revolution, which could only start after humanity developed to accept methods of nonviolence. While radical pacifists also regarded the European proletariat as being in a lower state of development, it was still a patronising viewpoint towards colonial populations. Secondly, the integration of anti-imperialism into anti-war standpoints proved challenging. For an organisation which argued that imperialism the central cause of war, WRI publications are surprisingly lacking in discussions about colonial topics. While Dutch radical pacifists were much more engaged with anti-imperialist topics, even in this sphere there was a bit of uncertainty how to present anti-imperialism as a pacifist issue. In most colonial countries there was no war going on. Radical pacifists came up with a wide range of reasons why they should be anti-imperialists, from imperialism as the cause of the new world war to the idea that imperialism was an oppressive military system. It was just much harder to explain than their other ideas which clearly related to questions of war and peace, such as ending conscription and disarmament.

There are three themes in my research which were beyond the scope of this thesis, but which are interesting avenues for further research. Firstly, the relation between other international pacifist organisations and (anti-)imperialism could further contextualise the findings of this thesis. The WRI was only one of several international pacifist organisations in



the interwar period which were involved in the anticolonial movement. Christian organisations like the Quaker Society of Friends and the Fellowship of Reconciliation were also active in the LAI, for example. On the other side of the spectrum, there were international pacifist organisations which supported imperialism. Further research could give a clearer view of the relationship between anti-imperialism and the peace movement as a whole. Secondly, the personal contacts between radical pacifists and other anti-colonialists were largely beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the few contacts that I have found, raise some questions. What ideas were exchanged between radical pacifists and colonial activists? How did colonial delegates react to the ideas of radical pacifists? What was the impact of these personal exchanges? A biographical approach might further illustrate these personal contacts. Lastly, this thesis focused on radical pacifist ideas expressed by Europeans. This is a consequence of the fact that the WRI, even though it aimed to be international, was mainly a European organisation in this period. The question arises how non-European radical pacifists integrated their pacifism with anti-imperialism. Historians have explored this topic already for some non-European radical pacifists, such as the Indian anarchist M.P.T. Acharya and W.E.B. Dubois, who was a Black civil rights activist.<sup>217</sup> One wonders what standpoints the few Indian and Chinese visitors of the WRI's conferences held. Future research could expand more on the non-European sections and members of the WRI.

This thesis focused on a short period in time when connections between the radical peace movement and the anticolonial movement in Europe were fostered. The 1930's would see the demise of the anticolonial movement, and the rise of the antifascist movement. Radical pacifists now dedicated themselves to antifascism. The connection between the pacifist movement and anti-imperialism, however, never really went away. Radical pacifists were idealists. They all strived for a better world and were prepared to personally suffer to establish that world. They were motivated by a love for humankind. It was this which led radical pacifists to declare their solidarity with the oppressed everywhere. Although their solidarity had its limitations, their dedication was sincere. The WRI still exists to this day and remain committed to the 1921 founding declaration: 'War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war'.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> O.B. Laursen, "Anarchism, Pure and Simple": M. P. T. Acharya, Anti-Colonialism and the International Anarchist Movement', *Postcolonial Studies* 23:2 (2020), 241-55; C. Corazza, 'By No Other Means Than Peace: W.E.B. Du Bois on Nonviolence, World Peace, and Justice', *Peace & Change* 46: 4 (2021), 336-52.

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