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‘Anarchism, pure and simple’

**M. P. T. Acharya, anti-colonialism and the
international anarchist movement**

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Notes on contributor

Ole Birk Laursen is a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands. His research focuses on South Asian history and literature, anticolonialism, and anarchism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing on political networks, representations of exile, and pacifism/terrorism. He is editor of *Lay Down Your Arms* (2019), *M.P.T. Acharya, We Are Anarchists* (2019), *Networking the Globe* (2017), and *Reworking Postcolonialism* (2016), and he has published on the transnational intersections between anticolonialism, socialism, and anarchism.

prevented him from speaking, he continued writing right up to the time of his death.⁸³

Victor Garcia mourned that, ‘Acharya ... is the most prominent figure among Indian libertarians,’ and Hem Day summed up that,

he is not well known to some, even to our own people, for he has neither the fame of Gandhi, nor the fame of Nehru, nor the popularity of Vinoba, nor the notoriety of Kumarapa, nor the dignity of Tagore. He is Acharya, a revolutionary, an agitator, a publicist.⁸⁴

To conclude via Meltzer, Garcia and Day, then, Acharya’s long career as a revolutionary, an agitator and a publicist in the international anarchist movement broadens our conception of the global reach of anarchism and, at the same time, challenges the orthodox anarcho-pacifist tendencies embodied by Gandhi in India. This unique figure extended his anti-colonial revolutionary activities to the ethics and principles of anarchism and, in so doing, brought the politics of anti-colonialism and anarchism into closer conversation. Such conversations demand a re-orientation of conceptions of post-colonial statebuilding if we are to decolonise the state through anarchism.

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I am grateful to Lina Bernstein, Stephen Legg and Alex Tickell for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

⁸³ Internationalist [Albert Meltzer], ‘M.P.T. Acharya,’ *Freedom: The Anarchist Weekly*, 15(33), 14 August 1954, p 3.

⁸⁴ Garcia, ‘Mandyam Acharya,’ p 219, author’s own translation; Hem Day, ‘Voici Un Agitateur Indou: M.P. Acharya,’ n.d., n.p.; author’s own translation.

Contents

Abstract	5
Introduction	5
Acharya and the Indian revolutionary movement abroad, 1908–1914	10
Indo-German conspiracies and the limits of international socialism, 1914–1917	14
The Russian Revolution and the Communist turn, 1917–1922	15
Acharya and the international anarchist movement, 1923–1954	18
Acknowledgements	30
Disclosure statement	31
Notes on contributor	31

in India, twenty-five year later Acharya, once again, clarified that 'what the Bolsheviks do in Russia and try to do elsewhere is just Capitalism of another type and the quarrel between Capitalists and Bolsheviks is not about Communism but about the type of Capitalism which would prevail.'⁸⁰ In other words, little changed in the immediate post-independent Indian context, despite the fact that he advocated anarchism as the only viable way forward for India for a quarter of a century, and the task of bringing anarchism as a revolutionary movement to India still faced obstacles.

A tireless agitator in the international anarchist movement for almost thirty years, Acharya wrote to Hem Day in May 1951 that: 'I have been ill for the last three years and postponed writing a large number of friends abroad. Recently my wife and breadwinner also died and I feel like a baby without anyone to take care of me. I am now 65 years old.'⁸¹ Subsequently, to raise money, he contacted Albert Meltzer in London to help him stage an exhibition with Nachman's artwork, but just as Meltzer had found a gallery prepared to stage the exhibition, news came of Acharya's death on 20 March 1954.⁸² In a fitting testimony to Acharya, Meltzer wrote in his obituary that

it was impossible to comprehend the difficulty in standing out against the tide so completely as was necessary in a country like India. It was easy for former 'nationalist revolutionaries' to assert their claims to the positions left vacant by the old 'imperialist oppressors.' This Acharya would not do. He remained an uncompromising rebel, and when age

⁸⁰ M P T Acharya, 'Confusion Between Communism and State Capitalism,' *Harijan*, 27 October 1951, p 298.

⁸¹ Letter to Hem Day.

⁸² Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels*, pp 128-130.

the Indian Institute of Sociology in Bombay, set up by R. B. Lotvala, and started printing anarchist literature.⁷⁶ In addition to writing on the philosophy of anarchism for *Tierra y Libertad* and *Freedom*, he now also wrote more frequently in Indian books and magazines such as *Harijan* and *Thought*. Perhaps most importantly, his essay ‘What is Anarchism?’ (1948) introduced anarchism into the intellectual discourse of radical politics in India. Summarising many of his thoughts on Bolshevism, economics, Gandhi and pacifism over the previous twenty-five years, he crystallised anarchy as ‘non-rule, non-government, non-state,’ meaning ‘government of society by society, by all members of society.’⁷⁷ The state would not only hinder freedom, in its true meaning, but also prevent progress under the guise of a static constitution. Strikes, boycott, civil disobedience and other forms of direct action would establish the anarchist society, and only then would there be freedom, democracy and socialism. Expropriation and immediate abolition of all classes, rather than the Marxian reformist transition, Acharya argued, would allow the state to wither away. The ‘motto of anarchism,’ he said, ‘is each for all and all for each, and an injury to one is injury to all.’⁷⁸ Taking this motto further, in ‘How Long Can Capitalism Survive?’ (1951), Acharya again argued for the inevitable abolition of the wage system, which was ‘made hopelessly bankrupt by the capitalists themselves.’ Under such conditions, he noted, ‘there is only one feasible possibility ahead. That is Anarchism. The time for testing Anarchist economics is nearer than ever.’⁷⁹ In one of his final essays, returning to his 1926 warnings on the dangers of communism

⁷⁶ Acharya, ‘What is Anarchism?’, p 140; Garcia, ‘Mandyam Acharya’; Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism*, pp 134–145.

⁷⁷ Acharya, ‘What is Anarchism?’, pp 117, 119.

⁷⁸ Acharya, ‘What is Anarchism?’, p 134.

⁷⁹ M P T Acharya, ‘How Long Can Capitalism Survive?’ in *World Scene from the Libertarian Point of View*, Chicago, IL: Free Society Group of Chicago, 1951, p 53.

Abstract

In late 1922, the Indian revolutionary M. P. T. Acharya returned to Berlin from Moscow and joined the international anarchist movement. Straddling anti-colonial, anarchist, and pacifist circles in the interwar years, Acharya stands out as a distinctive figure within global revolutionary networks and broadens our conception of the global reach of the international anarchist movement. Staking out a different path towards freedom than most of his contemporaries, an analysis of Acharya’s activities within the international anarchist movement enables a more nuanced understanding of anti-colonial struggles against the totalised oppression of the state and redirects our attention towards anarchist conceptions of non-statist national liberation movements within anti-colonial frameworks. In doing so, the article extends recent scholarship on anarchism in the colonial and postcolonial world but also acknowledges anarchism’s limitations. However, exploring Acharya’s life and thought is part of a greater ambition to consider post-independent Indian politics through anarchism a rejection of the nation-state as a necessity for nation liberation as well as to allow for anti-authoritarian voices within India’s freedom struggle to be heard alongside a polyphony of independence narratives.

Introduction

In late 1922, the Indian nationalist Mandayam Prativadi Tirumal ‘M. P. T.’ Acharya returned to Berlin with his Russian wife, the artist Magda Nachman, and a few weeks later attended the founding meeting of the International Working Men’s Association (IWMA).¹ Shortly after, he wrote to Chittaranjan ‘C. R.’

¹ ‘Bericht des Sekretariats der IAA über 1923–1924,’ IWMA Archives, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam; British Library,

Das, editor of the radical Bengali paper *Forward*, that his political belief was now ‘anarchism, pure and simple.’² Acharya’s admission signals his political turn to international anarchism after falling out with the other Indian nationalists in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the formation of the exiled Communist Party of India (CPI) in Tashkent, Russia, in October 1920. This Indian anarchist who was ‘striving on his own in the whole sub-continent to establish a movement,’ as Albert Meltzer recalled, charted new territories as he straddled both anti-colonial, Communist and, more importantly, anarchist circles in the first half of the twentieth century.³ Taking another path than the Tolstoyan anarchopacifist tendencies of M. K. Gandhi, even in his approach to non-violence, Acharya remarked that ‘while [Gandhi] is violently opposed to violence in general, he is more opposed to the mass liberation from violence than to the violence of Governments.’⁴ Challenging such visions of Gandhi in India, Acharya stands out as a unique figure within global revolutionary networks and, as I demonstrate in this article, broadens our conception of the global reach of the international anarchist movement. What is more, during this ‘age of entanglement’ in 1920s Berlin, Acharya staked out a different path towards freedom than those of his former allies Virendranath ‘Chatto’ Chattopadhyaya, who worked with Willi Münzenberg in the League Against Imperialism, and M. N. Roy, who was expelled from the Communist International

India Office Records (IOR) L/PJ/12/ 174, file 7997/23 ‘Mandayam P Tirumal Acharya, anarchist; activities and passport application.’

² IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23.

³ Albert Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation*, Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996, p 127.

⁴ M Acharya, ‘Mother India,’ *The Road to Freedom* 4(9), April 1928, p 7; for more on Gandhi, anarchism and non-violence, see Geoffrey Ostergaard and Melville Currell, *The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Non-Violent Revolution in India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

was killed, pacifism is dead in India [...] there is no Gandhi in Gandhians.’⁷²

Turning instead to the question of independence, he stated that: ‘without an anarchist movement, this country will go Fascist and go to the dogs – in spite of labour leaders trying to adapt themselves to capitalist-Fascism, which is the wage system.’⁷³ He instantly criticised Nehru and the Indian government for trying to bring in foreign capital investment to increase production in an attempt to raise the ‘standard of living of the masses.’ Going back to his earlier proposal to abandon the wage system, he argued that the workers employed in order to increase production will not benefit from this as ‘the fundamental basis of bourgeois – or state – economy is not to increase consumption, but profits’ for the capitalists.⁷⁴ Similarly, in *Freedom*, he criticised Sardar Patel, the first Deputy Prime Minister of India, for going about ‘like an Emperor and speak[ing] like an Emperor’ and instead proposed to calculate the material needs of the entire population to allow the rest to ‘produce other things, to transport everything, to give education, medical aid and sanitation, to provide clothing and housing, and even entertainment, to all people all over the country.’⁷⁵

While Acharya’s critique had little impact on the immediate post-independent Indian state, his thoughts on anarchism gained greater currency during this period. Still keen to establish an anarchist movement in India, he became secretary of

⁷² Letter to Hem Day, 15 May 1951, Mundaneum Archives, Belgium, MUND ARCH 15 ANAR 3F 01 30, correspondence avec Hem Day, ‘Mandayam Acharya, révolutionnaire agitateur indou.’

⁷³ M P T Acharya, ‘Labour Splits in India,’ *Freedom: Anarchist Fortnightly* 31 May 1947, p 5. I am grateful to the Bishopsgate Institute Library, London, for assistance and providing access to *Freedom*.

⁷⁴ M P T Acharya, ‘El Fin de Una Era: Ecos Libres de la India,’ *Tierra y Libertad* 8(113), July 1950, p 2; author’s own translation.

⁷⁵ M P T Acharya, ‘An Indian Looks at “Independence”,’ *Freedom: The Anarchist Weekly* 28 October 1950, p 3.

Gandhi was only territorial, a kind of ‘anarchistic direct action by individuals and groups.’ Comparing it to Makhnovism, Acharya asserted that:

Ghandist [*sic*] nationalism fights without arms between two fires and fronts: inner and outer violence. The men participating in this fight cannot be expected to submit to or tolerate a native violence, be these Bolshevik or constitutional dictatorial. Gandhi has given an education and foretold – nay prepared them to meet successfully every violence with non violent unarmed resistance, simply by mass refusal to obey and submit.⁶⁹

When Adolf Hitler came to power in early 1933, Berlin was no longer safe for many Indians. Moreover, often destitute and in need of money, Acharya and Magda moved to Switzerland in 1934 to live with some of her relatives.⁷⁰ After a prolonged passport application process, Acharya moved back to India in April 1935, and Nachman joined him a year later. The Second World War interrupted his correspondence with the international anarchist movement, but after the war, he resumed writing for international anarchist magazines, including *L’Unique*, *Tierra y Libertad*, *Inquietud* and *Freedom*. Picking up where he left off before the war, he commented on the Tolstoyan and Thoreau-esque influences in Muriel Lester’s *Gandhi, World Citizen* (1945), and for *Les Nouvelles Pacifistes*, the organ of the Confédération Générale Pacifiste, wrote an article on the pacifist conference in India.⁷¹ However, after the assassination of Gandhi, he wrote despairingly to Hem Day that, ‘since Gandhi

⁶⁹ Acharya, ‘Nationalism in India.’

⁷⁰ IOR/L/PJ/6/1968, file 3981.

⁷¹ M P T Acharya, ‘Lettre de l’Inde,’ *L’Unique*, 11 June 1946, pp 13–14.

in November 1929.⁵ Against these more well-known figures, an analysis of Acharya’s activities within the international anarchist movement enables a more nuanced understanding of anti-imperial struggles against the totalised oppression of the state. In doing so, it re-directs our attention towards theoretical conceptions of non-statist nationalism within a postcolonial framework.

His peripatetic movements throughout India, Europe, the Middle East, North America and Russia in the early twentieth century has made it difficult for historians to grasp Acharya’s personal political development from anti-colonial nationalist to Indian Bolshevik and, then finally, to international anarchist as the archives are scattered across the globe.⁶ With the notable exception of Vadim Damier’s work on the IWMA (in Russian), it is perhaps not surprising that, aside from Maia Ramnath’s descriptive admission that, ‘among radical nationalist revolutionaries, none made their identification with the international anarchist movement more explicit than Acharya,’ there has been no sustained attempt to understand Acharya’s anarchist ethics and philosophy as a logical extension of his

⁵ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014, p 13; Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933*, Lewiston: Queenston Press, 2013; Kris Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism*, Delhi: Routledge, 2010. Remarkably, Manjapra neglects Acharya’s role in the formation of the CPI.

⁶ See for instance Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011; C S Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya: His Life and Times: Revolutionary Trends in the Early Anti-Imperialist Movements in South India and Abroad*, Madras: Institute of South Indian Studies, 1995; Lina Bernstein, ‘Indian Nationalists’ Cooperation with Soviet Russia in Central Asia: The Case of M.P.T. Acharya,’ in Anthony Barker, et al. (eds), *Personal Narratives, Peripheral Theatres: Essays on the Great War (1914–1918)*, Springer International Publishing, 2018, pp 201–214; Nick Heath, ‘Acharya, M.P.T. (1887–1954).’ Available at: <https://libcom.org/history/acharya-mpt-1887-1951>.

anti-colonial revolutionary activities.⁷ Indeed, Victor Garcia's brief sketch of anarchism in India draws attention to Acharya's key role, but avoids any deeper engagement with his work and philosophy, and Garcia's biographical obituary, too, gives only a brief glimpse into the depth of Acharya's anarchist ideals.⁸ Perhaps most disappointingly, C. S. Subramanyam's biography lacks any detailed examination of Acharya as an international anarchist, focusing instead primarily on his anticolonial and Bolshevik activities. In fact, Subramanyam goes as far as to note that, after he had become an anarchist,

he seems to have come back [to India in 1935] having lost faith in political organisation and political parties. That probably accounts for the lack of any significant political activity of his that could be traced or any activity that had any relevance to the events and movements of this period 1935–1954.⁹

Subramanyam's suggestion that Acharya disappeared from politics in India signals, of course, the relatively obscure impact of anarchism in India but, at the same time, it may also reveal a political-historical myopia within Subramanyam's own critical reading as he was one of the founding members of the CPI

⁷ Vadim Damier, 'Kropotkin's Ideas and the International Anarchist Movement in the 1920s and 1930s' (n.d.); Vadim Damier, 'Мандьяма Пративади Бхаянкара Тирумала Ачарья: от большевизма к анархизму,' НЕПРИКОСНОВЕННЫЙ ЗАПАС, 115:5 (2017). Available at: <http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/9143>; Maia Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India's Liberation Struggle*, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011, p 125.

⁸ Victor Garcia, 'El anarquismo en la India,' *Tierra y Libertad*, November 1959–February 1960; Victor Garcia, 'Mandyam Acharya,' in Louis Louvet (ed.), *Les Cahiers de Contre-Courant: Pionniers et Militants d-Avant-Garde*, Paris: Contre-Courant, 1960, pp 219–224.

⁹ Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, p 189.

elastic system in which all can live without killing or even imprisoning anyone.⁶³

While Acharya, in many ways, had great respect for Gandhi and his non-violence campaign (*ahimsa*), he also pointed out the inconsistencies and limitations of Gandhi's project already in the 1930s.⁶⁴ For instance, he repeatedly stressed that, in failing to denounce governments *in toto*, Gandhi indirectly condoned the violence of the state.⁶⁵ Whereas Hippolyte Havel praised the great significance of the Gandhi movement in India, Sam Dolgoff criticised Gandhi for emulating Western democracy and not advocating 'an aggressive militant revolutionary spirit aimed at the abolition of the political state.'⁶⁶ Acharya, somewhere in-between, remarked that: 'without being a follower of Gandhi I am an admirer of Gandhism as practised today in India.'⁶⁷ The principles of civil disobedience and non-violence, as practised by Gandhi, had taught people to resist state-led provocations and exposed the hypocrisy of government. Commenting on the Salt March in 1930, Acharya argued that: 'he overtook and unnerved the government and its readiness to use and justify its own violence over all. As such he acted like an Anarchist tactician of first magnitude.'⁶⁸ Ultimately, for Acharya, nationalism in India as advocated by

⁶³ M. Acharya, 'Anarchy or Chaos?,' *Man!* September–October 1934, p 4; see also M. Acharya, 'Der Antimilitarismus in Indien,' *Die Internationale* May 1928, pp 14–17.

⁶⁴ For more on Gandhi and non-violence, see Harish Trivedi, 'Revolutionary Non-Violence: Gandhi in Postcolonial and Subaltern Discourse,' *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13(4), 2011, pp 521–549.

⁶⁵ M Acharya, 'Mother India,' p 7.

⁶⁶ Hippolyte Havel, 'Gandhi's Ideal,' *The Road to Freedom* 6(10), June 1930, p 1; Sam Dolgoff, 'Gandhi and Indian Freedom,' *The Road to Freedom*, April 1931, p 6.

⁶⁷ M Acharya, 'Gandhi and Non-Violence,' *The Road to Freedom* 7(1), September 1930, p 1.

⁶⁸ M Acharya, 'Nationalism in India,' *Man!* July 1933, p 2.

shed vainly.⁶⁰ The present money system, he warned in *Man!*, was crashing and could only be saved through an anarchist ‘decentralist, non-dictatorship, democratic arrangement,’ where everyone equally participates in decision-making and ‘without money, prices, wages and state.’⁶¹

Despite warnings that a failure to commit to anarchist principles of economics would inevitably lead to bloodshed, his profound economic insights were inextricably linked to the ethics of non-violence. His transition from militant anti-colonialist to pacifist anarchist is, undoubtedly, one of the more fascinating aspects of Acharya’s career. In support of Acharya’s passport application in July 1931, British Labour MP Fenner Brockway remarked that: ‘from his letters he appears to be a pacifist Anarchist, quite a harmless sort of person.’⁶² Reflecting on the politics of anti-colonial terrorism, Acharya admitted that those methods of resistance were necessary at the time, somewhat absolving his former militancy, but throughout the 1920s and towards the end of his life, he became a pacifist. This was partly a strategic point he emphasised in his passport applications (both in 1926 and 1929), but also developed in *Die Internationale* and *Man!*, for instance. ‘The anarchists don’t want killing,’ he argued in 1934,

whether by order from above or spontaneously from below. As consistent and logical to the extreme pacifists, they try to prevent every bloodshed. They are trying to help in arranging an

⁶⁰ M Acharya, ‘The End of the Money System,’ *Man! A Journal of the Anarchist Ideal and Movement* 1(4), April 1933, p 8.

⁶¹ M Acharya, ‘Is the Present System Doomed?’, *Man!* 1(10), October 1933, p 5.

⁶² IOR/L/PJ/6/1968, file 3981.

in the south of India.¹⁰ What is more, engaging in a sort of ‘new internationalism,’ as Kris Manjapra suggests, Acharya’s turn to anarchism signals a decidedly international approach to the question of freedom that extends beyond the immediate concerns of the Indian nation-state.¹¹

Indeed, while sceptics might object that Acharya’s writings had little or no impact in India, his place within the international anarchist scene compels us to think more carefully about the global reach of anarchism and, at the same time, to acknowledge the limits of anarchist thought and praxis in the Indian context, where the project of national liberation, backed and usurped by the Communist International, often held greater sway. Conversely, we might argue that, at the dawn of Indian independence in 1947, when Iqbal Singh and Raja Rao invited Acharya to contribute his essay ‘What is Anarchism?’ to their edited collection *Whither India?* (1948), it suggested that the future of post-independence Indian politics was open to various possibilities, including anarchism.¹² As a supplementary aim in this article, to read Acharya’s writings under such circumstances is actually part of a greater ambition to decolonise the post-independent state through anarchism, to paraphrase Ramnath, as well as to allow for anti-authoritarian voices within India’s freedom struggle to be heard alongside a polyphony of independence narratives. Drawing on Acharya’s own writings on anarchism, texts and correspondence from his contemporaries within the international anarchist movement and intelligence reports from the India Office Records, this article traces the anarchist ethics and politics of this ‘logical pacifist,’ as he

¹⁰ A R Venkatachalapathy, ‘Communist Chronicler C S Subramanyam,’ *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(3), 19 January 2013, n.p.

¹¹ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, p 45.

¹² M P T Acharya, ‘What is Anarchism?’, in Iqbal Singh and Raja Rao (eds), *Whither India?* Baroda: Padmaja Publications, 1948, pp 117–140.

called himself towards the end of his life, in the international anarchist movement from 1923 to his death in 1954.¹³

In his anarchist writings, Acharya repeatedly returned to his years of anti-British agitation among European socialists, Marxists and anarchists, Irish and Egyptian anti-colonialists, as well as his disagreements with other Indian nationalists to justify and explain his revolutionary trajectory and turn to anarchism. With that in mind, to fully understand Acharya's anarchist politics and place within post-Russian Revolution radical networks, it is necessary to situate him in relation to his anti-colonial, nationalist activities in the early twentieth century as well as the split within the exiled CPI during its formative years. In the first part of this article, therefore, I briefly chart Acharya's anti-colonial activities in India, Britain, France, Germany and Sweden, before discussing his split from the Indian Bolsheviks and return to Berlin in 1922. Analysing primary texts by Acharya, the main part of the article is then devoted to an examination of his understandings of anarchist non-violence, economics and the Indian freedom struggle.

Acharya and the Indian revolutionary movement abroad, 1908–1914

Born in Madras on 15 April 1887, Acharya became involved in the Indian freedom struggle at an early age. In collaboration with C. Subramania Bharati, he edited the nationalist paper *India* from August to November 1907, and through his continued connection with the paper came into contact with V. V. S. Aiyar, then in London.¹⁴ With increased pressure on the French

¹³ IOR/L/PJ/6/1968, file 3981.

¹⁴ IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23; Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*; Andrew Davies, 'Exile in the Homeland? Anti-Colonialism, Subaltern Geographies and the Politics of Friendship in Early Twentieth Century Pondicherry, India,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35 (3), 2017, pp 457–

gallows – and not establishing a class-clique for dictatorship for a period of transition.⁵⁷

From his observations on Bolshevism, the failures of state-led capitalism and exploitation of workers, he developed an economic critique rooted in anarchist principles of nondomination and self-governance. This was perhaps best articulated in his article 'Principles of Non-Violent Economics,' in which he argued that 'any system of economy which is run neither in the interests of the consumers nor is administered by them must necessarily impoverish them and then disappear.'⁵⁸ He advocated the abolition of wage slavery, property and monopolies (state, private or combined) and the establishment of 'autonomous communes' within which 'each member will be equal to another member and will represent himself instead of being represented by someone else.'⁵⁹ These autonomous communes would allow groups to coordinate their economic efforts voluntarily, distribute utilities democratically as they think fit and be free from institutional laws, police or judges, he argued. The severest punishment of anti-social behaviour would be rejection from the commune.

During the Great Depression and after the US effectively abandoned the gold standard in 1933, Acharya argued that such autonomous communes, following the 'Anarchist production for distribution and use, not exchange for money, will be the only possible solution of the crisis, the only way left open.' The major question, to him, was 'whether people want to reach Anarchist social economics – without trade, finance and state – safely and deliberately and systematically, i.e. by prearranged transition and volition, or to wade after blood is

⁵⁷ M Acharya, 'Some Confusion Among Workers,' *The Road to Freedom* 8(3), November 1931, p 1.

⁵⁸ M P T Acharya, 'Principles of Non-Violent Economics,' *Economic Bulletin No. 1*, International University of Non-Violence: University of Calcutta, [1928] 1947, p 2.

⁵⁹ Acharya, 'Principles of Non-Violent Economics,' p 3.

such as Shapurji Saklatvala and M. N. Roy were trying to infiltrate India, he argued in the French anarchist publication *La Voix du Travail*.⁵⁴ Writing for the American magazine *The Road to Freedom*, he continued to critique the Marxist theory advanced by Max Eastman in *Marx, Lenin and the Science of Revolution* (1926) and his old friend Angelica Balabanoff in her memoirs (1927). ‘We are Anarchists,’ he argued, ‘because we do not want authoritarianism outside or inside, because to us anti-Marxists, life and society must be, immanently – one indivisible whole impossible of mechanical separation – as the Marxists inorganically think and believe.’⁵⁵

But Acharya’s articulation of anarchism was not just in opposition to Bolshevism. He wrote extensively about the exploitation of workers and the collusion of Statism, capitalism and Bolshevism. ‘The capitalists or even the state can and will exploit,’ he wrote in *Die Internationale* with specific reference to India, ‘as long as the workers agree to receive wages against the delivery of their products, while the products are distributed by nonproducers.’⁵⁶ In the pages of *The Road to Freedom*, Acharya continued to clarify that any state-led political party, ideology or even trade union necessarily operates against the interests of the workers. Resistance through class-war, he argued, was forced upon the workers, and the two-stage theory advanced by Marxists would necessarily lead to oppression and exploitation. Instead, he argued for the ‘abolition of money wages, laws, prisons, police, military and

⁵⁴ M Acharya, ‘Dans l’Inde,’ *La Voix du Travail* 2(9), April 1927, p 16.

⁵⁵ M Acharya, ‘From a Bolshevik,’ *The Road to Freedom* 4(6), January 1928, p 3; M Acharya, ‘Disruption of Marxism,’ *The Road to Freedom* 3(12), July 1927, pp 6–7.

⁵⁶ M Acharya, ‘Das Problem der Ausbeutung und ihrer Beseitigung,’ *Die Internationale* 4(6), April 1931, pp 131–132: ‘Der Kapitalist oder auch der Staat kann und wird solange ausbeuten wie die Arbeiter damit einverstanden sind, dass sie Lohn gegen Auslieferung ihrer Erzeugnisse bekommen, während die Erzeugnisse durch Nichtproduzenten verteilt werden.’ Author’s own translation.

authorities in Pondicherry to suppress the Indian revolutionaries in the province, Acharya realised that it was time to leave. ‘Being cooped in Pondicherry almost always threatened with persecution, it was not at all interesting to live there,’ he wrote in his *Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary*, and handed over the management of *India* to his cousin S. Srinivasa Chari before he left for Europe in November 1908.¹⁵ After spending a week in Paris, at the suggestion of Shyamaji Krishnavarma, founder-editor of the Indian nationalist propaganda organ *The Indian Sociologist* and proprietor of India House in London, and at the invitation of Aiyar, Acharya went on to London, where he soon became involved in the activities at India House. Working closely with Aiyar and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, two of the most radical leaders of the Indian nationalists in London, Acharya reportedly ‘prepared to become a martyr’ in the struggle for Indian independence in the spring of 1909.¹⁶ Around the same time, he was responsible for finding a printer for Savarkar’s revisionist history manifesto *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (1909), and eventually arranged with the London agent of the Rotterdamsche Art and Book Printers to undertake this task. The book was immediately banned from import into India, but was smuggled in hidden in newspapers and book dust jackets.¹⁷

In the spring of 1909, contact between the Indian nationalists and anarchists in London also became more frequent. Krishnavarma contacted Thomas Keell, editor of the anarchist journal *Freedom*, requesting him to print *The Indian Sociologist*, and Keell soon associated with several other Indian

474; Bishamber Yadav, ‘Introduction’ to M. P. T. Acharya, *Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1991, p 3.

¹⁵ Yadav, ‘Introduction,’ p 68.

¹⁶ Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 17 July 1909; IOR/L/PJ/6/1039, file 3823.

¹⁷ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthagar, 1970 [1909], pp xiii–xix.

nationalists.¹⁸ Whether Acharya met Keell at this point as well is uncertain. However, as I return to below, when they corresponded via Alexander Berkman in 1925, Keell did not appear to recognise Acharya's name. In August 1909, with Sukh Sagar Dutt, Acharya decided to leave for Morocco to join the Rifs against Spain. However, while Dutt made it to Gibraltar and returned to London, Acharya made it to Tangier, where he stayed with 'a friend and philosopher' for a month.¹⁹ Meanwhile, in September 1909, a warrant for his arrest under Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code was issued and, instead of returning to London, Aiyar suggested that Acharya proceed to Paris.²⁰ Arriving in Paris in October 1909, he first stayed with S. R. Rana, a pearl merchant and financier of the Indian nationalists in Paris, and did secretarial work for him. He then lodged with Chatto at 26 Rue Cadet and worked for 'Madame' Bhikaiji Cama's nationalist journal *The Bande Mataram*. The Indians in Paris frequently met French socialists such as Jean Jaurès and Jean Longuet, and Russian revolutionaries such as Ilya Rubanovich, Charles Rappoport and Mikhail Pavlovich, but according to Bhupendranath Dutta's recollections, Acharya and Chatto also associated with anarchists in Paris.²¹ However, while Chatto's associations with European anarchists such as Jean Grave, Mauricius and Luigi Bertoni have gradually been documented, there is no evidence of Acharya's connections with any anarchists at this time.²² That said, given that Acharya and Chatto lived

¹⁸ Ole Birk Laursen, 'Anarchist Anti-Imperialism: Guy Aldred and the Indian Revolutionary Movement, 1909–1914,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2018, pp 1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2018.1431435>.

¹⁹ Acharya, *Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary*, pp 101–107.

²⁰ Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, p 107.

²¹ Quoted in G. Adhikari (ed), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1971, p 7.

²² Ole Birk Laursen, "'The Bomb Plot of Zurich': Indian Nationalism, Italian Anarchism and the First World War,' in Ruth Kinna and Matthew

few months later, he published 'an anarchist manifesto' in *The People* (Lahore), listing four necessary steps towards 'unity, peace and harmony':

1. Give up looking for political or economic central government, of any kind whatever;
2. Give up looking for any kind of constitution, legislature, even village legislature;
3. Give up *all* religious, political, party groupings;
4. Mind your immediate living affairs from birth to death – such as food, clothing, housing, work, instruction, recreation.

Assure these for yourself in common with others.⁵²

Developing these thoughts over the next twenty-five years, Acharya immersed himself in the international anarchist movement and wrote extensively for various journals, often giving a unique perspective on anarchism from an Indian perspective.

From the outset, Acharya was keen to distinguish his turn to anarchism from the Bolsheviks, who he accused of collaborating with the capitalists in the 1925–1927 Chinese Revolution. For him, 'the Bolsheviks and capitalists are together playing their different parts in their capitalist aggression in China.'⁵³ Similarly, taking orders from Moscow, communists

listed as: 'Berlin W. 62, Landgrafenstr. 3A II,' which was Acharya's address in Berlin; italics in original.

⁵² Untitled essay reprinted in *The Road to Freedom* 3(1), 1 September 1926, pp 5–6; italics in original. Although Acharya was sentenced in absentia in the Ghadar Conspiracy Trials of 1918–1919, in the biographical note it incorrectly states that Acharya was 'deported from the United States during the era of Mitchell Palmer.' I am grateful to Kenyon Zimmer for confirming this information.

⁵³ M Acharya, 'The Mystery Behind the Chinese Trouble,' *The Road to Freedom* 3(4), 1 November 1926, p 2.

Acharya was fine and outlined a list of publications to be sent to Acharya.⁴⁷ Their exchange suggests that, although Keell associated with other Indian nationalists in London in 1909, he did not meet Acharya at that time. Upon receipt of these publications, Acharya wrote to Berkman and asked for advertising bills for Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912) and *The Bolshevik Myth* (1925), some of them meant for Augustin Souchy, a key figure in the IWMA and editor of *Der Syndikalist*, but mostly to be included in correspondence to India, Turkey, and South Africa.⁴⁸ In October 1926, he also contacted Guy Aldred, a long-time supporter of the Indian freedom struggle, and asked for Aldred's pamphlet 'Socialism and Parliament' (1923) to be sent to India.⁴⁹ Inspired by the literature sent to him by Berkman, Keell, Aldred and others, Acharya soon articulated his own unique perspectives on anarchism, with a particular interest in issues of anarchism as the alternative to the socialist state, Bolshevism, economics and the abolition of wage slavery, and Indian nationalism and non-violence.

It is clear that the failure of the Russian Revolution and split within the CPI greatly influenced Acharya's turn to anarchism. In a statement given in his application for a passport in February 1926, he remarked that 'I am also a convinced anti-Bolshevik.'⁵⁰ In June 1926, he submitted some early thoughts on anarchism to the Indian nationalist paper *The Mahratta*. In here, he argued against the growing tendencies of Communism in India that: 'Anarchists may be individualists but communists are opportunists and legalised reformists.'⁵¹ A

⁴⁷ Alexander Berkman (Berlin, Germany) to [Thomas H.] Keell (n.p.), 26 August 1925, Emma Goldman Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁴⁸ M Acharya to Alexander Berkman, 29 August 1925, ARCH00040.7, Alexander Berkman Papers, IISH.

⁴⁹ IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23.

⁵⁰ IOR/L/E/7/1439, file 721.

⁵¹ 'Communism in Its True Form,' *The Mahratta*, 13 June 1926, p 307. Acharya's name is not given in this letter to the editor, but the address is

together in Paris, they may have travelled in the same circles and become familiar with the revolutionary tenets of European anarchism.

Nevertheless, Acharya moved also within the anti-colonial and nationalist networks of early twentieth-century Europe, and in September 1910 attended the Egyptian National Congress in Brussels under the name 'Bhayankaram' ('awe-inspiring').²³ Shortly after, he moved to Berlin to agitate amongst the Indians there, but to little avail, and relocated to Munich in early 1911, where he first met Walter Strickland, a staunch supporter of the Indian nationalists in Europe and 'the most anti-British Englishman,' as Acharya recalled.²⁴ Acharya was still communicating with the Indians in Paris, and Ajit Singh, who had recently arrived in Paris from Persia, suggested that Acharya travel to Constantinople to establish connections with the Committee of Union and Progress. Although he had an introductory letter from Strickland in hand, he appears to have made little progress with the Young Turks, except to get a sense of the potential threat of pan-Islamism to the British Empire.²⁵ Instead, he proceeded to New York, where he lodged with Chandra Kanta Chakravarti. Little is known of his activities in the US in this period, but he is reported to have been in contact with George Freeman, editor of the Irish nationalist paper *The Gaelic American*, and briefly joined the Ghadar Party in California before returning to the East Coast, where he attended a meeting in the Hindustan Association in New York on 25 April 1914.²⁶

S. Adams (eds), *Anarchism, 1914- 1918*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017, pp 135-154.

²³ IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23.

²⁴ M P T Acharya, 'The Most Anti-British Englishman: Walter Strickland,' *The Mahratta*, 9 September 1938, p 3.

²⁵ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, 171; A C Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1927: Select Documents*, New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2002, p 119.

²⁶ IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23; Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, pp 121-123.

Indo-German conspiracies and the limits of international socialism, 1914–1917

With the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the Indians in Europe were quick to capitalise on this threat to the British Empire. In September 1914, Chatto set up the Indian Independence Committee (IIC), which was formally attached to the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient*, a branch of the German Foreign Office. Acharya soon returned from the US and joined the IIC. In April 1915, under the assumed name ‘Muhammad Akbar,’ he accompanied Werner Otto von Hentig’s mission to the Suez Canal to found the Indian National Volunteer Corps from Indian soldiers and prisoners in POW camps. They do not appear to have succeeded, and in March 1916 Acharya was back in Constantinople where he joined the Young Hindustan Association. When the Association closed down in March 1917, Acharya returned to Berlin, briefly, only to proceed to Stockholm with Chatto in May 1917.²⁷

After the February 1917 revolution in Russia, leading European socialists within the divided Second International started planning for a peace conference to be held in Stockholm. With the tides of the war turning, and in an attempt to dissociate themselves from the German Foreign Office, Chatto and Acharya tied their efforts to the fate of international socialism. Setting up the Indian National Committee as a branch of the IIC, they agitated among European socialists in Stockholm and, in mid-July 1917, met the organising Dutch-Scandinavian Committee. The Dutch socialist Pieter Jelles Troelstra, however, dismissed their claims to independence and noted that ‘the Indian question is very important. But it is a diversion.’²⁸ While Acharya and Chatto achieved little from their meeting

²⁷ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp 170–185.

²⁸ ‘Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavischen Komitees mit der Delegation aus Indien, 12. Juli 1917,’ Dokument no. P/55. Available at: <http://www.socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111637>.

tion and the Comintern had set in among the global radical left. In late December 1922, anarcho-syndicalist groups from across the world met in Berlin and formally established the IWMA with Rudolf Rocker, Augustin Souchy and Alexander Schapiro as secretaries.⁴² Acharya and a group of Indians attended the weeklong meeting and, at the suggestion of the IWMA, subsequently set up a committee with the aim to send anarcho-syndicalist propaganda literature to India. Their first ‘success,’ according to the IWMA secretariat, was to get IWMA literature banned from import into India.⁴³ Writing for this committee, Acharya contributed to Sylvia Pankhurst’s *The Worker’s Dreadnought* and the Berlinbased Russian anarcho-syndicalist paper *Rabochii put*, and sent his articles to India.⁴⁴

In August 1925, Acharya contacted Thomas Keell, editor of *Freedom* in London, and asked for copies of *Freedom* and other anarchist literature to be sent to India for propaganda purposes. He also wrote that he knew Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and Hippolyte Havel from Berlin, and asked Keell if he knew of anyone in Berlin who could lend him Berkman’s *The Bolshevik Myth* (1925) and Goldman’s work on Russia.⁴⁵ While Emma Goldman recalls meeting Chatto in Berlin in her memoirs, there is no reference to Acharya.⁴⁶ Keell found this request strange and checked in with Berkman, who verified that

⁴² Internationalen Arbeiter-Assoziation, *Resolutionen Angenommen auf dem Internationalen Kongress der Revolutionären Syndikalistinnen zu Berlin, vom 25 Dezember 1922 bis 2 Januar 1923*, Berlin: Verlag Fritz Kater, 1923.

⁴³ ‘Bericht des Sekretariats der IAA über 1923–1924.’ The names of the other Indians who attended the meeting are not known.

⁴⁴ IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23; Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, pp 176–177.

⁴⁵ Thomas Keell to Alexander Berkman, 7 August 1925, ARCH00040.42, Alexander Berkman Papers, IISH.

⁴⁶ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1931, p 771: ‘Chatto was intellectual and witty, but he impressed me as a somewhat crafty individual. He called himself an anarchist, though it was evident that it was Hindu nationalism to which he had devoted himself entirely.’

was unnecessary.³⁹ On the same day, Roy wrote to Acharya and removed him from Chairmanship of the Central Revolutionary Committee 'on account of actively supporting people engaged in frankly anticommunist propaganda.'⁴⁰

Throughout the next six months, as Chatto and the Berlin group of Indian nationalists arrived in Moscow, forming now a third strand of Indians in Russia, Acharya and Roy continued to quarrel, and Acharya eventually aligned himself with Chatto's group. Chatto returned to Berlin in September 1921, and Acharya joined him in December 1921, only to remain in the city for a few months. Apparently disillusioned with the activities of both Chatto in Berlin and Roy in Moscow, in April 1922, Acharya returned to Moscow and found work for the American Relief Administration. During this second sojourn in Moscow, he met and married the Russian artist Magda Nachman, with whom he returned to Berlin in late 1922 and 'proceeded to denounce Roy in no uncertain terms.'⁴¹

Acharya and the international anarchist movement, 1923–1954

Arriving back in Berlin, Acharya entered a different revolutionary atmosphere than the one he had experienced in Russia. The disillusionment with the promises of the Russian Revolu-

³⁹ Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, p 162.

⁴⁰ 'Copy of letter dated 30.1.21 from Secretary, Indian Communist Party, to M.P.B.T. Acharya criticising his activities and informing him of his removal from the Chairmanship of the Central Committee,' in Purabi et al., *Indo-Russian Relations*, pp 58–59.

⁴¹ IOR/L/PJ/12/174, file 7997/23; Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, pp 161–167; for more on Magda Nachman, see Lina Bernstein, 'The Great Little Lady of the Bombay Art World,' in Christoph Flamm, Roland Marti, and Ada Raev (eds), *Transcending the Borders of Countries, Languages, and Disciplines in Russian Émigré Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 143–158.

with the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee, they remained in Stockholm and agitated among the European socialists, particularly the Swedish social democrats, and published various propaganda pieces in Scandinavian newspapers.²⁹ At the third Zimmerwald conference held in Stockholm in early September 1917, Acharya and Chatto met Angelica Balabanoff and Konstantin Troyanovsky, which led to new contacts with Russian revolutionaries and paved the way for a turn to Communism after the dust of the Russian Revolution had settled.³⁰ Meanwhile, perhaps still hopeful of socialist support for Indian independence, Acharya went on to Switzerland in February 1919 and attended the International Socialist Conference in Bern. As in Stockholm, Acharya was not an official delegate and little is known of his activities there, except he is known to have met the British socialist Philip Snowden wife.³¹

The Russian Revolution and the Communist turn, 1917–1922

After years of agitation among European socialists, and a fateful alliance with the Germans during the First World War, Acharya and the Indian nationalists in Europe had achieved little in terms Indian independence. The Russian Revolution ushered in new hope, as V. I. Lenin noted that 'imperialism is leading to annexation, to increased national oppression, and con-

²⁹ Fredrik Petersson, 'Subversive Indian Networks in Berlin and Europe, 1914–1918: The History and Legacy of the Berlin Committee,' in Rana T. S. Chhina (ed.), *India and the Great War, 1914–1918*, New Delhi: United Service Institution of India, 2017; for Acharya's own perspective, see M P T Acharya, 'Indian Propaganda During the Great War,' *The Mahratta*, 21 October 1938, p 3.

³⁰ Nirode K Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp 100–156.

³¹ IOR/L/PJ/6/1968, file 3981.

sequently, also to increased resistance,' and nationalists from across the colonial world soon tied their freedom struggles to the Communist International.³² In May 1919, the Indian nationalist Mahendra Pratap led a group of Indians, including Acharya, to meet Lenin in Moscow. Now with formal assistance from the Soviet government, Acharya, Pratap and Abdur Rabb joined Yakov Z. Suritz's mission to Kabul in early December 1919 to agitate among the Muslim border-tribes in Afghanistan. Acharya and Rabb soon disagreed with Pratap over the direction of the mission, and instead set up the Indian Revolutionary Association (IRA), comprised mostly of Muslim Indians, in January 1920.³³ After agreements with the British at the end of the Afghan War, the Emir of Afghanistan, Amanullah Khan, expelled Acharya and Rabb from Afghanistan, and they relocated to Tashkent in May 1920, where 28 Indians soon arrived and joined the IRA.³⁴ By contrast to the Emir, Lenin wrote to them that: 'I am glad to greet the young union of Muslim and Hindu revolutionaries and sincerely wish that this Association will extend its activities among all the workmen of the East,' lending the IRA credence with the Russians.³⁵

Replacing Rabb as chairman of the IRA, Acharya attended the Second Congress of the Communist International in July–August 1920, where Lenin presented his 'Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions.' M. N. Roy, who had formed the Communist Party of Mexico in 1917, and attended the

³² Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1948, p 146.

³³ Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, p 154; K H Ansari, 'Pan-Islam and the Making of the Early Indian Muslim Socialists,' *Modern Asian Studies* 20(3), 1986, p 520.

³⁴ Ansari, 'Pan-Islam,' p 531.

³⁵ 'Wireless Message of Greetings dated 14.5.20 from V. I. Lenin to Abdur Rabb Barq, Chairman, Indian Revolutionary Association,' in Roy Purabi, Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, Hari Vasudevan (eds), *Indo-Russian Relations, 1917–1947: Select Documents from the Archives of the Russian Federation*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1999, p 6.

Congress in that capacity, also presented his 'Supplementary Theses.' After the Congress, on 7 August 1920, Acharya, Roy and Abani Mukherji, among others, joined forces to form the Provisional All-India Central Revolutionary Committee. This was quickly followed, two months later, by the formation of the Communist Party of India in Tashkent with Acharya as Chairman and Roy as Secretary.³⁶

Acharya and Rabb soon fell out with Roy, both because of personal and ideological reasons, and Acharya's turn to anarchism can partly be located here in the split in the CPI. Roy wanted to affiliate the CPI directly with the Comintern and did not allow membership of other revolutionary groups, while Acharya was first and foremost a nationalist, wary of the dangers of tying the efforts of Indian independence to another statist ideology. He felt that India was not ready for 'left communism' and communist propaganda might instead lead to a counter-revolution.³⁷ As they quarrelled over the next couple of months, Acharya and Rabb, on the one side, and Roy and Mukherji, on the other, accusations of espionage activity flew both ways, and Rabb was expelled from the CPI in December 1920. Shortly afterwards, accused of 'making groundless accusations against the Committee members and the condition of the Indian work as a whole,' Acharya was expelled from the Provisional All India Central Revolutionary Committee on 24 January 1921.³⁸ Six days later, Acharya wrote to the Executive Committee of the Comintern that an Indian Communist Party

³⁶ Subramanyam, *M. P. T. Acharya*, p 159; 'Handwritten Minutes of Meetings Concerning the Formation of the Indian Communist Party at Tashkent between 18.10.20 and 26.12.20,' in Purabi et al., *Indo-Russian Relations*, pp 38–43.

³⁷ 'M.P.B.T. Acharya's signed letter dated 30.8.21 to the Secretariat, Comintern raising allegations against M.N. Roy and his group,' in Purabi et al., *Indo-Russian Relations*, pp 96–98.

³⁸ 'Copy of letter of Provisional All India Central Revolutionary Committee dated 24.1.21. to M.P.B.T. Acharya removing him from membership of the Committee,' in Purabi et al., *Indo-Russian Relations*, pp 57–58.