Sentiment and Dissent: House of Commons Debates and Indian Self-Government, 1939-1945

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Abstract

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The rapid disintegration of the British Empire after the Second World War has provoked a wide and conflicting debate among historians. Therefore, the aim of this study will be to examine House of Commons debates from 1939 to 1945, in which Members of Parliament discussed government policy and contemporary issues during the war. This examination should provide insight into the impact of the war on the British Empire’s colonial system. I shall direct our examination of House of Commons debates to issues regarding India. In addition, I shall comparatively examine my findings with secondary literature regarding the decolonization of Dutch and French Empire’s and the impact of the Second World War. The anticipated historiographical significance of this research will resonate with historians of Britain, as well as historians of decolonization as a whole. This examination demonstrates the Second World War influenced both the meaning and usage of certain terms in the House of Commons used to debate Indian independence and self-government
Introduction:

The British Empire’s colonization of indigenous peoples in Africa, Asia and North America should be understood as part of the larger interaction between European colonial empires and non-Western societies. In the decades preceding the First World War, these empires expanded their influence and control further than in their previous periods. In the next three decades these empires increased another 8,655,000 square miles, expanding European colonies to a substantial portion of the globe. The British Empire alone extended over one-fourth of the globe’s surface and population. However, a sharp decline in the influence of European colonial empires would follow the Second World War. In particular, the rapid disintegration of the British Empire after the war has provoked a wide and conflicting debate among historians. The aim of this study will be to examine House of Commons debates from 1939 to 1945, in which Members of Parliament discussed government policy and contemporary issues during the Second World War.

The examination of House of Commons debates should provide insight into the impact of the war on the British Empire’s colonial structure. More specifically, if the British Empire’s involvement in the war prompted Members of Parliament to implement significant changes in colonial policy and in their management of colonial resources, this effect should be reflected in the debates during this period. This study will utilize both the printed series and microfilms of the Official Report (Hansard) of the House of Commons and The New York Times. In considering the decolonization of the British Empire, I shall concern myself primarily with India, where the Second World War was promptly followed by decolonization. I shall direct the examination of House of Commons debates

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above all to issues regarding India. In addition, I shall compare my findings with secondary literature regarding the decolonization of Dutch and French Empire and the impact of the Second World War.

Although the British Empire’s experience of decolonization will not necessarily hold for that of France, Portugal, Belgium, or the Netherlands, the sheer size and variety of the British imperial system, as well as Britain’s involvement in world politics, should hold meaning for decolonization as a whole. The anticipated historiographical significance of this research will resonate with historians of Britain and of decolonization in general. Through examining House of Commons debates from 1939 to 1945, I hope to provide insight into the impact of the Second World War on the rapid spread of decolonization throughout the British Empire, as well as other European colonial empires.

**The Second World War:**

What impact did the Second World War have on the British Empire? In assessing the impact of the Second World War on the British Empire historians have arrived at two distinct explanations. Historians such as John Gallagher and Robert Holland have argued that the Second World War itself caused no substantive changes to the British Empire’s colonial structure. These historians contended that self-government and independence of the colonies would have eventually transpired. The Second World War merely had accelerated and accentuated preexisting trends in the colonial structure. In contrast to this approach, historians such as John Darwin and Keith Jeffery have argued that the Second World War produced objective changes in the British Empire’s colonial structure that would not otherwise have occurred. These historians contended that the British Empire’s
involvement in the war impelled metropolitan policy makers to implement major changes in colonial policy and in the management of colonial resources.

Gallagher and Holland have asserted that before the Second World War the British Empire was fragile and had been deteriorating. Moreover, these historians argued the British Empire’s colonial structure would be at first reintegrated through its participation in the war. According to Gallagher, the British Empire began to deteriorate after the First World War and the Second World War in fact revitalized its colonial structure. As Gallagher stated, “In examining the breakdown of the British system, I shall take be taking for granted that the causes of that breakdown must be sought further back in time, that the collapse had its origins in small sparks eating their way through long historical fuses before the detonations began.”

Decolonization in this view was not the result of some single cause such as domestic constraints or international pressure during the war. In a similar argument, Holland proposed that the British Empire was struggling to maintain the self-sustaining virtue of equilibrium necessary for imperial control before the war. In discussing the impact of the war on the decolonization of the British Empire, Gallagher stated, “Whatever caused the end of the empire, it was not the Second World War, although this conclusion will not please those who think that the world came to an end in 1945; or those who think that the world’s great age began anew in 1945.” Therefore, Gallagher and Holland both supposed that whatever caused the end of the British Empire it was not the merely the Second World War.

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4 Gallagher, *Decline, Revival, and Fall*, 141-2.
In contrast, Darwin and Jeffery have asserted that before the Second World War the British Empire appeared to have been set on a course different from that which it was to follow after the war. According to these historians, the impact of the Second World War and the economic and social demands it imposed were destabilizing to the British Empire’s colonial structure. Their argument is that the Second World War provided the catalysts for change in the British Empire’s colonial structure. According to Darwin, it was the expansion of the Second World War into the Asian theater that smashed the British Empire’s influence in Indian politics and allowed for the rapid independence and partition after the war. Although there were no significant constitutional alterations during the war, the precise configuration of proposed constitutions and self-government were affected by the war and wartime conditions. Jeffery argued that the interment of the British Empire was an inevitable consequence of the Second World War. The increased authoritarian measures the British Empire extended over their colonies further exacerbated the economic and social constraints of the war. Concerning the increased authoritarianism during wartime and its impact on the British Empire’s colonial structure, Jeffery stated, “The corollary of this was that, where force failed-as in Asia-the Empire was gravely, if not fatally, injured.” Even within a reformed colonial structure, the British Empire would not have been able to reconcile the devastation the Second World War imposed on its colonial structure. These historians argued that ultimate cost of defending the British Empire during the Second World War was the Empire itself.

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6 Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation, 30.
7 Jeffery, The Second World War, 327.
8 Jeffery, The Second World War, 326.
The Political Situation in India:

Throughout the Second World War the preponderance of House of Commons debates regarding India concerned its political instabilities and constitutional development. The preeminent issues in these House of Commons debates were proposals to resolve India’s political situation and its establishment into the British Commonwealth of Nations. In particular, certain members of the House of Commons were concerned that political instabilities would be detrimental to the establishment of Indian self-government. These members argued that the various divisions between classes and communities in India would have to be resolved before the implementation of Indian self-government. In contrast, other members of the House of Commons argued that the implementation of Indian self-government was required to resolve their political instabilities. Nevertheless, during the war the House of Commons supported Indian self-government in the shape of Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

The political situation in India resulted from the growth of nationalistic movements coupled with constitutional development. During the Second World War, these nationalist movements attempted to secure social equalities and further India’s constitutional development. The Indian National Congress was the most prominent of these nationalistic movements, initiating civil and political disobedience throughout the war. In exchange for their political support, the Indian National Congress required Great Britain to define their wartime objectives and make a formal commitment to Indian self-government. These movements considered the Second World War to be a conflict between imperial nations, and would not support the British Empire’s fight for freedom.

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without the promise of their own. However, the causes that created the political situation in India during the Second World War were established during the inter-war period.

In that period, the British Empire’s colonial structure of governance in India had changed through two acts of constitutional reform. With the passage of the Government of India Act of 1919 and 1935, the Parliament of the United Kingdom increased the legislative authority of elected Indians in policy discussions, and granted them a large measure of influence over finance.\(^\text{10}\) As a result, Indian ministers acquired increased control in various aspects of provincial government. Despite the increased independence of Indian ministers, historians have argued the Government of India Act of 1919 and 1935 were designed to divert Indian political attention from national affairs and direct it to provincial affairs.\(^\text{11}\) The British government did not intend these reforms to be stages in a process towards independence. Instead, these reforms adjusted the methods used by the British to retain influence in Indian affairs.\(^\text{12}\) Although Indian ministers were entrusted with provincial affairs, these constitutional reforms increased the influence of the British Raj in the central Government of India. Moreover, the increased electorate of the new provincial administrations allowed the British Raj to acquire a larger range of collaborators.

These constitutional reforms provoked seminal developments in the colonial structure of governance in India which would reverberate in its political situation during the Second World War.\(^\text{13}\) The limited devolution of authority to elected Indian ministers and their lack of funds for economic and social investments in the provinces generated


\(^{11}\) Gallagher, *Decline, revival, and fall of the British Empire*, 101.

\(^{12}\) Gallagher, *Decline, revival, and fall of the British Empire*, 155.

\(^{13}\) Brown, *India*, 426.
hostilities towards the British Empire among Indians. Furthermore, the increased authority of Indian ministers in provincial affairs directed much of Indian political action to the provinces. The increased functions of local governmental bodies, which were to be chosen by the same voters who elected the new provincial legislators, would result in these constitutional reforms connecting the politics of localities more closely to the politics of the province. The connection between local and provincial politics resulted in a general trend among Indian politicians to replicate this connection in their legislation, and to divert their attentions towards provincial affairs. During the Second World War, nationalist movements sought to reconcile provincial politics with an all-India political policy.\textsuperscript{14} However, Untouchables, Muslims and other regional minorities, were suspicious and resentful of these nationalist movements. Therefore, the development of nationalist movements strained Indo-British relations as well as Indian political and social relations.

Another crucial political and social development in this period was the development of sectional politics among caste and religious groups. In particular, the expansion of Muslim participation in politics contributed to the instabilities of the Indian political situation. In this period of increasing political and social tension, Muslim organizations contributed to the divisive atmosphere of Indian politics. The Government of India Act of 1919 and 1935 further exacerbated the political situation in their provisions for a separate Muslim electorate.\textsuperscript{15} Similar to the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League was an attempt to secure social equalities of Islamic Indians as a distinctive element in India’s constitutional development. Movements such as the Muslim League prompted members in the House of Commons to advocate for resolutions on the divisions between classes

\textsuperscript{14} Brown, \textit{India}, 433.
\textsuperscript{15} Brown, \textit{India}, 435.
and communities before the implementation of Indian self-government. Social and political tensions, in short, complicated the emergence of Indian national identity.\textsuperscript{16}

**Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations:**

The British Commonwealth of Nations was established to construct new relationships between Great Britain and its colonial empire. However, the exact meaning and usage of the term “British Commonwealth of Nations” was nowhere defined during the period studied. Although the Statute of Westminster and the Balfour Declaration of 1925 enumerated the sovereign members and their mutual relationships, these documents do not impart the legal definition of these terms.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, there were numerous inconsistencies and variations in the official usage of the term “Dominion” in the British Commonwealth of Nations as well. The absence of formal definitions for these terms led to the vagueness when they were discussed in the House of Commons. During the initial House of Commons debates regarding India’s political situation, questions as to the exact definitions of these terms often arose. Although Mr. Wedgwood Benn would offer the accepted and propounded definition of Dominion Status as presented in the Balfour Declaration, there remained in the House of Commons a sense of confusion as to its specific meaning throughout the war.

Nevertheless, it appears that it was agreed upon in the House of Commons that Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations ensured the independence of colonies within the sphere of influence of the British Empire. The redefinitions of these colonial relationships were founded on mutual interests and support rather than on impe-

\textsuperscript{16} Brown, *India*, 441.
rialistic domination. Thus the British Commonwealth of Nations was the association of independent nations united through their common allegiance to Great Britain. However, the potential of a member to withdrawal from the British Commonwealth of Nations was not certain during this period. In the House of Commons, questions concerning India and whether it would be allowed to resign from the British Commonwealth of Nations persisted throughout the war. The Prime Minister, Mr. Clement Attlee, did not resolve this question until his address to the House of Commons on 3 June 1947. In his outline for the transition of power to India, Mr. Attlee stated:

The major political parties [in India] have repeatedly emphasized their desire that there should be the earliest possible transfer of power in India. With this desire His Majesty’s Government are in full sympathy, and...as the most expeditious, and indeed the only practical way of meeting this desire, His Majesty’s Government proposes to introduce legislation during the current session for the transfer of power this year on a Dominion status basis to the one or two successor authorities according to the decisions taken as a result of this announcement. This will be without prejudice to the right of Indian Constituent Assemblies to decide in due course whether or not the part of India in respect of which they have authority will remain within the British Commonwealth.

It is critical to consider the uncertainties of the terms British Commonwealth of Nations, Dominion Status and self-government in this examination of House of Commons debates. I will attempt to demonstrate the development of these terms in the House of Commons during the Second World War, and how they indicate changes in colonial policy.

House of Commons Debates:

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From the commencement of the Second World War, the House of Commons was concerned with India’s political situation and their participation in the Second World War. Similar to the First World War, the Governor-General of India declared the country to be a belligerent on behalf of the British Empire without consultation from Indian politicians. The unilateral entrance of India into the war offended Indian nationalist and resulted in their withdrawal from active participation in the Government of India. On 11 September 1939, the Governor-General further announced that the inauguration of the federal constitution under the Government of India Act of 1935 was to be postponed for the duration of the Second World War.\(^{20}\) In response to the Governor-General, the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress passed a resolution asking the British Government to declare their war aims on 14 September 1939.\(^{21}\) In particular, the Working Committee’s resolutions declared that, “...a free and democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defense against aggression and economic cooperation.”\(^{22}\) The Working Committee’s resolution was in effect an offer of cooperation with the British government in exchange for Indian self-government.

On 17 October 1939, the Governor-General responded to the Working Committee’s resolution with a statement in London newspapers. The Governor-General’s response, otherwise known as the White Paper, introduced the issue of India’s independence and war contributions into the House of Commons. The first House of Commons debate regarding India during the Second World War was to address the position of India in the conflict itself and the Working Committee’s resolution. On 21 September 1939, Member of Parliament, Mr. Reginald William Sorensen of West Leyton, asked the Under-


\(^{22}\) Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 13.
Secretary of State for India whether any approach has been or will be made to the Indian National Congress respecting the position of India in the war. The Under-Secretary of State for India, Sir Robert William Hugh O’Neill, responded that the Governor-General of India had conducted personal interviews with the Indian politicians, which included Provincial Governors and ministries of the Indian National Congress.²³ Mr. Sorensen's question indicates that from the commencement of the war, the cooperation of India in the conflict was a concern in the House of Commons. In his request for the explicit cooperation of the Indian National Congress, Mr. Sorensen suggested that perhaps a resolution to the political situation would be required to secure their support in the war.

In a later debate in the same session of parliament, Mr. Sorensen asked the Secretary of State whether the censorship of the mail to India was similar to all Dominions of the British Commonwealth of Nations. A Member of Parliament, Sir. Victor Warrender, replied that correspondences to and from British Dominions and colonies would not be affected by censorship.²⁴ Although Sorensen’s question regarding mail censorship to India appears inconsequential, it demonstrates that to certain members of the House of Commons, the status of India’s political situation at the commencement of the war remained ambiguous. While India had not reached the status of Dominion in the British Commonwealth, Sorensen’s query indicated that India’s political situation was distinct from other British colonies. Mr. Sorensen’s question would initiate a recurring debate in House of Commons as to the explicit details of India’s political situation.

On 26 October 1939, the House of Commons conducted a debate which would establish their initial position regarding the political situation in India and the war. In this

²³ Hansard, (Commons), vol. 351, (Sept. 21, 1939) p. 1076.
²⁴ Hansard, (Commons), vol. 351, (Sept. 21, 1939) p. 1703.
debate, Mr. Wedgwood Benn offered criticism of the White Paper on the position of the Governor-General of India regarding self-government and the war. In the White Paper, the Governor-General had made two proposals resulting from a series of the aforementioned interviews he had conducted with leaders of Indian opinion. The first proposal was that at the end of the Second World War, the British government would reconsider India’s constitutional problems in light of recent events. The second proposal was that with the intent to avail himself of Indian advice, and with the intention of bringing Indian leaders within his confidence, a committee be formed to discuss problems arising out of the war with trends in Indian opinion.\(^{25}\) Mr. Benn intended the debate to elucidate the position of the British government respecting their policy on India and their political situation. Furthermore, Mr. Benn intended the debate to prevent misconduct in resolution of India’s political crisis and the conduct of the war resulting from the consequences of the White Paper. According to Mr. Benn, the White Paper had provoked two penetrating questions from the Working Committee. These questions were, what are the war aims of the British government, and if they are to secure freedom then, was India to share in that freedom?\(^{26}\) It was the purpose of this debate to answer these questions, and to establish in the House of Commons a resolution on the political situation in India and the war.

Mr. Benn initiated the debate arguing that India’s contribution in the last war was substantial, and that the participation of India in the present war was of no small consequence. In response to the German offensive in Europe, the Governor-General of India enacted measures intended to safeguard their interests in India.\(^{27}\) However, this action contributed to the confusion which had arisen in India as to the aims of the British gov-

\(^{26}\) Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 1622.
\(^{27}\) Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 1624.
ernment in the war. Mr. Benn maintained that the agreed policy of the British Government was the inclusion of India in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Moreover, Mr. Benn offered the accepted and propounded definition of Dominion Status of the British government to clarify any confusion. Mr. Benn argued that the definition of Dominion Status as given at the Imperial Conference in 1926 by Mr. Balfour was also confirmed in the White Paper issued by the Governor-General Lord Linlithgow. The definition of Dominion Status stated by Mr. Benn was:

They were autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as Members in the British Common Wealth of Nations.

According to Mr. Benn, this was the only definition of Dominion Status that could satisfy the current demands put forward in the political situation in India. In addition, he argued this was the definition which the House of Commons had agreed upon to resolve the political situation. Mr. Benn’s opening statement indicates that the House of Commons regarded the political situation in India as pivotal to the conduct of the Second World War, and that mismanagement of the political situation would be detrimental to the war effort. More significant, Mr. Benn’s statement specifies that the House of Commons had supported self-government for India before for the war and would continue to support India throughout the war. However, the House of Commons supported Indian self-government in Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations, and not necessarily the independence of India from the British Empire.

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Further, Mr. Benn conceded that no legislation should be passed in the House of Commons regarding the development of self-government during the war. Although he believed that India was on the course towards Dominion Status, Mr. Benn argued that there was a difference between legislation and preparation. According to Mr. Benn, legislation would conclude negotiations conducted beforehand.\textsuperscript{30} In fact, Mr. Benn used the example of the mission to India by member of Parliament Henry Montagu during the First World War. As a result of that mission, Mr. Montagu submitted a report that would be the foundation for the Government of India Act of 1919. Mr. Benn argued Mr. Montagu’s mission did not hinder the conduct of India’s participation in the First World War.\textsuperscript{31} It was imperative that the House of Commons establish an accord with India during the war if India's political crisis was to be resolved after the war. Thus Mr. Benn suggested, “In the matter of finance and commerce is it not possible to give India control of her own affairs?”\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, he suggested that it would strengthen the British Empire to incorporate Indian opinion in matters of defense and foreign policy. Mr. Benn reasoned to conduct a successful war the British Empire required the maximum effort which India could deliver for its defense. However, the British Empire would not receive India’s maximum contribution unless Indian opinion and Indian good will were behind it.

Mr. Benn concluded his introduction to the debate arguing the British Government should not describe its objective in the war as the defense of its own interests. Since India was asked to enter into the war at the side of the British Empire and France, it would be inaccurate for the British Government to describe its war aims as the defense of its interests. As Mr. Benn said:

\textsuperscript{30} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 16
\textsuperscript{31} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 16
\textsuperscript{32} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 16
What do they care about them, and what do neutrals care about them. But if our war aim is defined as the defense of a great principle, you can rally, not only the Dominions and Canada, but the whole world, to your side, and, in fact, that is what it is. We are defending freedom for ourselves, and India is invited, not only to defend freedom for herself, but to defend freedom for those also who are weaker even than she is.\textsuperscript{33}

According to Mr. Benn, India was asked to come to the side of Great Britain to defend the British Empire, and to defend and rescue nations in worse positions than itself. India would benefit from its participation in the Second World War as well.

The Lord Privy Seal, Sir Samuel Hoare, continued, stating the House of Commons was committed to the inclusion of India into the British Commonwealth of Nations. Hoare commended Mr. Benn on his introduction to the debate, and reiterated that the definition of Dominion Status which he had proposed was his for India as well. Similarly, Sir Samuel concurred that no legislation should be passed in the House of Commons regarding the development of self-government until after the war. However, he contended that there were difficulties which would have to be overcome for India to achieve Dominion Status. In particular, the various divisions between classes and communities in India would have to be addressed before the implementation of self-government.\textsuperscript{34} It would be the obligation of the British Government to assist Indians in the removal of these divisions, however, removal would have to be attained through Indians themselves. Therefore, Sir Samuel declared that the inclusion of India in the British Commonwealth of Nations required the cooperation of India, and that non-cooperation would further delay a solution to their political situation. Sir Samuel stated:

\begin{quote}
The British Government want co-operation and not conflict. The British Government want to see the aim of their policy achieved and the conditions realised in which India can take its due place in the British Com-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 16  
\textsuperscript{34} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 16
monwealth of free peoples. Non-co-operation would put the clocks back for years. Whether its promoters desire it or not non-co-operation leads to civil disobedience, to breaches of law and order and the vicious circle of riot and repression from which we had hoped to have escaped for ever.\textsuperscript{35}

Sir Samuel further indicated Great Britain and India were faced with a common danger in the Second World War. For that reason, the non-cooperation of India in entering into the British Commonwealth of Nations would be disastrous for their political situation and to the British Empire’s position in the Second World War as well.

In a similar proclamation, Sir Samuel indicated that it was not the position of the British Government to engage in imperial practices as a result of their participation in the Second World War. According to him, the House of Commons had passed legislation to provide the Dominions with their constitutions and passed the Government of India Act, 1935, according to the British Empire's prerogative to relinquish its authority. As he said, “We have long ago set aside Imperialistic ambitions, for we believe that our mission in the world is not to govern other people but to help other people govern themselves.”\textsuperscript{36}

Despite the Governor-General's actions at the beginning of the war, which appear to contradict Hoare’s proclamation, the House of Commons was committed to the fulfillment of the Government of India Act, 1935. Thus the British Government intended to administer the Government of India Act, 1935, throughout the war, and to assist in the removal of the divisions that hinder the full achievement of the act.

Following Hoare’s speech, Sir George Schuster proposed a critical response to the resolution of India attaining Dominion Status. Although Sir George agreed that India was set on an irrevocable course towards Dominion Status, he argued that the British Gov-

\textsuperscript{35} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 16
\textsuperscript{36} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 1630.
The government should not abandon its commitment to the protection of minorities in response to a "temporary emergency." Schuster said of Mr. Benn’s introduction:

He seemed to imply that, just because it is so important for us to have India united with us during the present war emergency, we ought perhaps to consider doing things which we should not otherwise have done. I disagree with that entirely. I believe that we ought to continue with our purpose in India, and our purpose in India is very much that which the right hon. Gentleman described, but I think it would be very dangerous if we were to think, just because there is this emergency, that we ought to accept hastily considered variations from that purpose.³⁷

Sir George’s statement directly comments on the historical debate assessing the impact of the Second World War on the British Empire. In particular, Schuster was concerned that the British Empire’s involvement in the war might impel the House of Commons to implement major changes in the colonial status of India. Sir George’s concern was misplaced. It does not appear that the House of Commons intended to implement self-government in response to the Second World War. In point of fact, Mr. Benn and Sir Samuel had discussed that no legislation should be passed in the House of Commons regarding the development of Indian self-government until after the war. Nevertheless, these statements demonstrate the House of Commons was concerned about the potential impact of the Second World War on the political situation in India.

Regardless of his concerns, Sir George accepted that the British Empire should continue to support India in striving for Dominion Status. In particular, he concentrated on the economical and political relationship between the British Empire and India after the Second World War. Sir George argued that a consequence of the British government resolving the political situation in India could not be that it retains the benefits of their past aggression. Moreover, the intentions of the British government to resolve the situa-

tion should not be an attempt to use political actions for the sake of economic advantages. Sir George suggested that a greater degree of independence for India would be beneficial for Great Britain.

It was at this point in the debate that Sir Stafford Cripps articulated a widespread concern in the House of Commons regarding the British Empire’s involvement in the war and its effect on India’s political situation. Accordingly, Sir Stafford’s statement is critical in assessing the impact of the Second World War on the British Empire’s world system.

As Sir Stafford stated:

The problem of India, as I see it, is no longer a problem, as it might have been before the war broke out, of how this Government was to deal with a part, although a vitally important part, of the British Empire. The new developments in the world situation, and the avowed objectives of the British Government in declaring war, have made the treatment of India a test question in the eyes of the world, as well of many people in this country and the people of India itself. It raises indeed, the whole question of our future intentions as regards to British Imperialism.

It is notable that Sir Stafford indicated the war impeded the British Empire's management of India. Moreover, Sir Stafford implied that the war had changed the politics of the empire itself. According to Sir Stafford, a resolution of the political situation in India was a harbinger for the future of the British Imperialism, and to a certain extent, to the future of the British Empire itself. Nevertheless, it should not be suggested that Sir Stafford’s statement anticipates the subsequent decolonization of the British Empire initiated with the independence of India. Rather, the development of India into the British Commonwealth of Nations would establish a precedent in the future management of the British Empire.

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The remainder of the debate was for the most part concerned with the practical implementation of self-government and the protection of minorities in India. Members of Parliament such as Mr. Keeling and Viscount Wolmer argued that Dominion Status would be detrimental to the protection of minorities, and therefore the implementation of such measures should not continue until these concerns had been settled. Furthermore, the premature implementation of self-government would endanger Indians and estrange Muslim allies such as Egypt, Iraq and Turkey.\textsuperscript{41} However, Mr. MacLaren’s rebuttal suggested that these concerns for minorities were meant to attack the advance of self-government, and did not represent concerns for the welfare of Indians. Although Mr. MacLaren conceded there were legitimate concerns for the rights of minorities, it was unreasonable to stipulate that Dominion Status could not be achieved until Indians had resolved their internal religious differences.\textsuperscript{42} Nonetheless, it is apparent this debate on Indian self-government did not pertain to its validation, but to the practical details of its implementation.

It is significant that the House of Commons argued that any resolution of Indian self-government to be within the confines of the British Empire. On the whole, the House of Commons had accepted before war that India would attain some independence through membership in British Commonwealth of Nations. In this debate, Sir George even suggested that it would be advantageous to the British Empire for India to acquire a substantial degree of independence. However, there is no indication that the House of Commons intended to allow India to withdraw from the British Empire. In this stage of the debate, the Second World War provided a temporal structure for the development of

\textsuperscript{41} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 1663.
\textsuperscript{42} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 352, (Oct. 26, 1939) p. 1673.
self-government and a resolution to India’s political situation. Despite the intentions of
the House of Commons, Sir Stafford’s statement indicates that the British Empire’s in-
volvement in the war did impede the management of their colonial resources, and re-
sulted in the alteration of their imperial agenda.

On 29 October 1939, the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress
responded to the Governor-General’s White Paper with a resolution threatening civil dis-
obedience if the British Government did not adhere to their previous resolution. In this
resolution, the Working Committee further called on the Provincial Governors to resign
rather than carrying out the British Government’s war policies. During a debate on 7 No-
vember 1939, Mr. Benn asked the Under-Secretary of State for India through Private No-
tice whether the British government had a statement to make on the position of India as
disclosed by these announcements and correspondences published by the Governor-
General and the Working Committee. In response, Sir Hugh presented to the House of
Commons the salient points of the Governor-General’s announcement and correspon-
dence. In particular, Sir Hugh reiterated that, “The longstanding British connection with
India has left His Majesty’s Government with obligation towards her which it is imposs-
ible for them to shed by disinteresting themselves wholly in the shape of her future form
of governance.”

Although not a statement in the sense proposed in Mr. Benn’s notice, Sir Hugh’s answer further indicates that the British Government had not abandoned its
position in assisting India to reach a position in the British Commonwealth of Nations. In
addition, Sir Hugh’s response illustrates the impediment to the solution proposed to re-
solve the political situation in India. Although the British Government and the Indian Na-

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43 Moore, Churchill, Cripps, and India, 16.
tional Congress both desired self-government to resolve the situation, neither could agree upon its conditions. The debate concluded with Mr. Gallagher asking, “Is the Minster not aware that while there may be differences of opinions, Congress represents the great mass of Indian people and that their demands will have to be met sooner or later; and would it not be better to meet their demands right now by making the declaration that is asked for?” Mr. Gallagher represents the opinion in the House of Commons that the political situation in India required immediate action. Likewise, Mr. Gallagher indicates the House of Commons was beginning to recognize that the immediate independence of India was approaching.

In this stage of the debates, the House of Commons often discussed resolving India’s political situation and the demands of the Indian National Congress without considering the impact of the war. On 4 May 1940, Mr. Sorensen asked the Under-Secretary of State for India whether he had a statement to make respecting political developments in India, and in particular, respecting Mohandas Gandhi’s observations on the recent debates in the House of Commons. In a similar inquiry, Sir Stanley Reed asked the Under-Secretary whether he had official information suggesting the Indian National Congress might be prepared to accept a smaller council, representing all communities and interests of India, to frame the principles for the development of the Indian constitution. Sir Stanley further inquired whether the British government was prepared to encourage the convening of such a council with the least possible deferral. In his characteristic response to such questions during this period, Sir Hugh responded he had no statement to make.

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45 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 360, (May 4, 1939) p. 900.
46 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 360, (May 4, 1939) p. 900.
47 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 360, (May 4, 1939) p. 900.
48 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 360, (May 4, 1939) p. 900.
respecting the political developments in India. He presumed that Mr. Sorensen referred to Mr. Gandhi’s correspondence with English newspapers, in which he described the recent debates in the House of Commons regarding a committee of Indian leaders to discuss their constitutional development as promising. In regard to Sir Stanley’s question, Sir Hugh stated:

I do not think I can usefully comment, beyond saying that the Governor-General and my Noble Friend the Secretary of State would welcome the coming together for discussion of persons capable of leading the public opinion of the various sections in India; and they are convinced that the chances of a body producing results would diminish proportionately with increase in its numbers. The method of convening the members of such a body is obviously a question for the parties whom they represent.49

Although Sir Hugh demonstrates the British Government was committed to Indian self-government, his statement does not suggest the war had an impact on the government's position on India’s political situation. In contrast to subsequent debates, the House of Commons here does not advocate for immediate action in India’s political action in response to the developments of the war.

However, the continuous dissent of Indian politicians coupled with developments in the war contributed to the House of Commons’ alteration in their consideration of India’s political situation and the war effort. On 8 August 1940, Mr. Sorensen asked the Secretary of State for India whether he had any further statement to make respecting Mr. Gandhi’s opposition and India’s political situation.50 The Secretary for State of India, Mr. Amery, responded by reciting the text of the Governor-General’s statement issued that morning with the authorization of the British Government. The Governor-General’s statement, otherwise known as the

49 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 360, (May 4, 1939) p. 900.
Command Paper, stated the British Government was concerned with India’s political situation and the conduct of the war effort. As Mr. Amery quoted, “India’s anxiety as this moment of critical importance in the world’s struggle against tyranny and aggression to contribute to the full to the common cause and to the triumph of our common ideals is manifest.”\footnote{Hansard, (Commons), vol. 364, (Aug. 8, 1939) p. 402.} In order to facilitate the cooperation of Indian politicians, the British Government authorized the Governor-General to reaffirm its commitment to India’s attainment of Dominion Status after the completion of the war. Moreover, the Command Paper further proposed the expansion of the Governor-General’s Council and the establishment of a separate council of Indian public opinion to advise the conduct of the war. The Governor-General and the British Government were still nevertheless concerned with India’s political situation and their attainment of self-government. Referring to the British Government’s commitment towards Indian self-government, the Command Paper insisted:

It goes without saying they could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India’s national life.\footnote{Hansard, (Commons), vol. 364, (Aug. 8, 1939) p. 404.}

According to the Command Paper, the various divisions between classes and communities in India continued to impede the resolution of their political situation and thus the war. The Governor-General and the British Government considered these divisions to be an impediment to Indian self-government as well. The Command Paper further stated:

The second point of general interest is the machinery for building within the British Commonwealth of Nations the new constitutional scheme when the time comes. There has been very strong insis-
tence that the framing of that scheme should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves, and should originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic and political structure of Indian life. His Majesty’s Government are in sympathy with that desire and wish to see it given the fullest practical expression, subject to the due fulfillment of the obligations which Great Britain’s long connection with India has imposed on her and for which His Majesty’s Government cannot divest themselves of responsibility.\textsuperscript{53}

It is significant that the British Government qualified its commitment to India’s attainment of Dominion Status with its commitment to the fulfillment of certain obligations towards the Indian population. It also confirms that the government considered Indian self-government only within the confines of the British Empire. On the whole, this debate demonstrates that the impact of the Second World War was starting to manifest itself in the House of Commons.

Mr. Gordon Macdonald, on 26 March 1941, asked the Secretary of State for India whether the British government intended to make further attempts to resolve India’s political situation in order to increase India’s contribution to the war effort.\textsuperscript{54} In particular, Mr. Macdonald was concerned that the imprisonment of political dissenters would be detrimental to resolving India’s political situation. In response, Mr. Amery insisted the British Government was committed to resolving India’s political situation and the government would continue to pursue Indian cooperation in the war effort. Mr. Macdonald then asked, “In view of the statements of leading statesmen in India, and in view of the fact that as the war nears the East the problem becomes more vital, does the right hon. Gentleman intend to leave the matter where it is at present?”\textsuperscript{55} According to Mr. Macdonald, the spread of the war outside the European theater further necessitated the resolution of

\textsuperscript{53} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 364, (Aug. 8, 1939) p. 404.
\textsuperscript{54} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 370, (Mar. 26, 1941) p. 576.
\textsuperscript{55} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 370, (Mar. 26, 1941) p. 577.
the Indian political crisis. Darwin’s argument that the expansion of the Second World War into the Asian theater contributed to the rapid independence and partition of India after the war is perhaps corroborated in Mr. Macdonald’s statement.

On 18 December 1941, during a similar a debate, Mr. Sloan asked the Secretary of State for India whether in consideration of the Eastern situation, the secretary was prepared to make a statement concerning the immediate settlement of India’s political situation. Mr. Macdonald further inquired into the precautions the British government was taking to facilitate the quickest and fullest advantages of the changed position in the Eastern situation. Moreover, Mr. Macdonald asked whether the secretary intended to make an immediate and wholehearted attempt to resolve the present unsatisfactory condition of India’s political situation. Mr. Amery replied that both members had seen in the newspapers the earnest appeal for unity and cooperation in India issued by the Governor-General, and that the secretary supported such an appeal. Mr. Macdonald answered that similar appeals in the past had been ineffectual and suggested India’s political situation would undermine the war effort. Mr. Amery replied that he was unaware of any dangers in the political situation in India. In the final statement in this exchange, Mr. Shinwell asked, “Instead of talking of moving appeals, would it not be better if a first move came from His Majesty’s Government?” This debate demonstrates the House of Commons was becoming more concerned with the Indian political crisis with the development of the war outside of Europe. In particular, Mr. Shinwell’s question indicates certain members of the House of Commons were calling for immediate and direction actions to resolution the situation.

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56 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 376, (Dec. 18, 1941) p. 2045.
57 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 376, (Dec. 18, 1941) p. 2045.
58 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 376, (Dec. 18, 1941) p. 2046.
In the House of Commons, the climax of debates regarding India’s political situation corresponded to Sir Stafford Cripps’ three-week mission to India in March and April of 1942. In response to recent defeats in Burma and Malaya, the British Government attempted to heighten Indian cooperation of India in the war effort. The purpose of Cripps' mission was to communicate the British Government’s proposals for India’s attainment of self-government to leaders in the various sections of India’s population. In addition, Sir Stafford was to express the British Government’s desire for India’s active participation in its defense and in the British Empire’s common war effort. As discussed earlier, the cooperation of India with the British Government in the war was troubled from the start. At the request of the Working Committee, the Provincial Governors resigned in protest at India’s involvement in the war. In exchange for their cooperation, the Working Committee required the British Government to declare Indian Independence forthwith and permit the construction of a new Indian Constitution framed solely by Indians. Cripps’ mission was therefore the British Government’s attempt to address the Working Committee’s demands for Indian self-government.

Although occurring before Cripps’ mission, the debate on 25 February 1942, represents a fundamental shift in House of Commons debates pertaining to colonial policy and the resolution of India’s political situation. It was in this debate that Sir Richard Acland of Barnstable first introduced the proposal of solving the political situation in India with full independence. Although the House of Commons had been committed to resolve the political situation in India with Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations, Sir Richard’s proposal recognized that the separation of India from the British

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59 Moore, Churchill, Cripps, and India, 7.
Empire was inevitable. Hitherto to Sir Richard’s proposal, the House of Commons did not indicate that India’s attainment of Dominion Status would result in complete independence. As discussed earlier, the notion that India would become a Dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations implied that it would remain within the British Empire’s colonial structure in their allegiance to the crown. Therefore, Sir Richard’s proposal to replace the word “Dominion Status” with “independence” in debates regarding India’s constitutional development was not a difference in semantics. Sir Richard’s proposal designates an ideological shift in the House of Commons. Not that he initiated the process of Indian independence, or that the subsequent disintegration of the British Empire can be traced to his remarks. Instead, Sir Richard’s proposal signifies the recognition in the House of Commons that India would not remain within the British Empire’s colonial structure after the war. Sir Richard’s proposal indicates that the House of Commons acknowledged the complete independence of India from the British Empire during the war. Nevertheless, to determine the impact of the Second World War on this acknowledgment, we need to examine the Sir Richard’s proposal along with the debate itself.

Mr. Isaac Leslie Hore-Belisha of Davonport initiated the debate addressing the loss of Singapore to the Japanese and the resignation of two members of the War Cabinet occurring the day before. Although Mr. Hore-Belisha recognized the Japanese contribution to these misfortunes, he considered the loss of Singapore a result of the failure of the colonial administration. Mr. Hore-Belisha argued that it was imperative for the House of Commons to adopt new colonial policies in response to these failures. The loss of Singapore imposed an interruption in the management of colonial resources and required a reconsideration of supplies and communications throughout the empire. As Mr. Hore-

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Belisha stated, “We have lost part of our Colonial Empire and with it a very important source of supply.” Therefore, the protection of colonial resources would be a determining factor in determining the future success or failure of the war.

Mr. Hore-Belisha maintained that with proper considerations the British Empire would be able to retain these vital colonial resources. In particular, to resolve the political situation in India and secure their colonial resources, comprehensive proposals were required. In a similar speech, Mr. Vernon Bartlett of Bridgwater argued that it was imperative for the House of Commons to protect British colonial resources for the success of the war. As Mr. Bartlett stated:

> It remains a fact that the national effort of India in the war is nothing like as great as it should be. It remains a fact that we have not been able to inspire them with the determination that Japan shall be defeated at all costs, and I hope that Lord Privy Seal will be able to give us some hope about India.

Even though the colonial resources of the British Empire were essential to its protection, Mr. Bartlett did not consider India’s collaboration in the war substantial enough for this purpose. Mr. Bartlett considered the resolution of India’s political situation to benefit both India and the British Empire.

Sir Richard Acland’s speech began with an argument for the British government to implement a drastic reverse in the strategic and tactical policies of the British Empire’s colonial structure. According to Sir Richard, the recently installed government was to be judged on its immediate actions, and the people of Great Britain desired policies that would not have been implemented six months ago. It was in the context of revising the

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63 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 245.
strategic and tactical policies of the British Empire that Sir Richard proposed his resolution of India’s political situation. Sir Richard’s speech was as follows:

There is not an hour to be lost before we make that generous gesture to India which it is obvious we should have made 2 1/2 years ago. Not an hour to be lost, and in regards to that generous gesture may I make a point which I believe will appeal to the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the House? For Heaven’s sake let us banish those two words, “Dominion status.” Let use wipe them clean out of our vocabulary when dealing with India. That may seem outrageous, but I believe the case for doing so is absolutely unanswerable. I will put it in this quite short way. We have said that Dominion status is, for all practical purposes, the equivalent of independence. Is that true or is it nor true, because if it is not true, then in using the words “Dominion status” we are practicing a deception. If on the other hand, it is true that Dominion status is exactly the same thing as independence, then we are hanging on to a phrase for the sake of our own sentimentality.

Sir Richard thus considered Dominion status to have had the same meaning as independence, although the former contained more sentimental value. He further stated:

I am very keen on sentiment, and I do not minimise the importance of sentimental forces, but in order that the forces may be advantageous to us, the sentiment must be there; you cannot create it by sentimental phrases... I feel that to stress this Dominion status, which we state has no practical difference from independence, produces sentiment of a negative, unfavourable and disadvantageous kind.64

Sir Richard argued that the British Empire would not be able to retain India within its colonial structure, and that the current proposal of Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations was not a viable solution. According to Sir Richard, India should have received a statement guaranteeing independence at the beginning of the war. During this stage in the war’s development, it was agreed upon in the House of Commons that the success of the British Empire depended on its colonial resources. Thus Sir Richard would further state, “Surely it would be of great advantage to our war effort if we were to get rid of a set of ideas which are played out and finished, if we were to recognize that

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64 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 253.
this is the fact, and drop them into the waste paper basket.”\textsuperscript{65} It is apparent the House of Commons considered the political situation in India to be a hindrance to the war effort. In this regard, the revision of strategic and tactical policies of the British Empire’s colonial system was a direct result of the Second World War. Nonetheless, Sir Richard’s speech suggests that these changes should have been implemented at the beginning of the war, and it could be argued, even before that.

The candid discussion of colonial polices and of India’s political situation distinguished this debate from its predecessors. The unprecedented nature of this debate is reflected in the responses of its participants. Although not a member of the House of Commons, Major Vyvyan Adams from West Leeds was allowed to participate in the debate for his expertise in military operations. As Major Adams commented on Mr. Bartlett’s speech, “Like many speeches which have been already delivered in this Debate it was original, and this Debate has been remarkable so far for both its range and scope.”\textsuperscript{66} Major Adams would further reiterate the debate’s sentiment when he said, “This is a terrible war, the most terrible in history, and we shall not prevail without enduring reserves.”\textsuperscript{67}

The British Empire’s survival depended on the resources of its colonial structure, and India was a critical component in this structure. After Sir Richard’s proposal, Major-General Sir Alfred Knox would communicate the departure of this proposal from previous debates. Sir Knox stated:

\begin{quote}
I would like to say a word or two about a problem which many Members have touched upon in this Debate, the future of India. When my friends and I fought for the Government of India Bill some years ago anyone speaking of independence of would have been looked upon as an absolute lunatic. Times have indeed advanced-or receded. Whatever our opinions
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\textsuperscript{65} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 254-5.
\textsuperscript{66} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 245.
\textsuperscript{67} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 248.
are about independence for India, it is absolute lunacy to think of any big political change in India to-day under the stress of war.\textsuperscript{68}

Sir Alfred’s statement speaks to the transformation in the House of Commons regarding Indian independence. In contrast to Gallagher and Holland, Sir Knox suggested the House of Commons did not consider India’s constitutional development to be precursor of its independence. Similar to previous debates, Sir Alfred Knox contended that no legislation should be passed in the House of Commons regarding the development of Indian self-government during the war.

Nearing the debate’s conclusion, the House of Commons discussed the British Empire’s objectives in the war and the obstacles preventing their accomplishment. In particular, Members of Parliament debated India’s participation in the war effort and their political crisis. Regarding Indian cooperation in the war effort, Mr. Sloan of South Ayrshire delivered a speech that would contain an ominous prospect for Sir Stafford forthcoming mission. As Mr. Sloan stated:

India will not enter any council or take part in any movement with the British, unless and until the question of India’s freedom is resolved. Since 26th January nation-wide demonstrations have taken place in India celebrating Independence Day which they declared in 1929. National independence is the objective of the overwhelming majority of Indian people. It has intensified their unity and helped them to realise that their struggle for freedom is part of the larger world freedom... If, as been claimed, this is a war for freedom and democracy and the rights of other nations to govern themselves, we cannot limit our freedom to certain people...We must establish freedom wherever it does not exist, and if we have stumbled across areas which stand as much, or more, in need of freedom than some of our European countries, we must act as if we mean what we say and say what we mean.\textsuperscript{69}

Although not straightforward in his statement, Mr. Sloan argues that independence is needed to resolve India’s political situation, and to secure its cooperation in the war ef-

\textsuperscript{68} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 257.
\textsuperscript{69} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Feb. 25, 1942) p. 270-271.
fort. Moreover, Mr. Sloan appears to suggest the nature of the Second World War requires the British Empire to confer independence on India. The terms of the debate demonstrate the impact the Second World War had on views of India’s political situation and its future.

On 11 March 1942, another pivotal debate regarding the political situation in India and the Second World War took place. In this session of the House of Commons, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill, addressed the Japanese advance towards India. Mr. Churchill urged the House of Commons to remember that India remained a critical component in the war and a strategic location from where the war would be fought. Therefore, Mr. Churchill argued “all the forces of Indian life” were required to guard their land from the Japanese offensive. Mr. Churchill implied that India’s political situation was detrimental to the war effort and new terms were required for its solution. Mr. Churchill would first reiterate the British Government’s intentions towards India:

In August, 1940, a full statement was made about the aims and policy we are pursuing in India. This amounted, in short, to a promise that, as soon as possible after the war, India should attain Dominion status, in full freedom and equality with this country and the other Dominions, under a Constitution to be framed by Indians, by agreement among themselves and acceptable to the main elements in Indian national life. This was, of course, subjected to the fulfillment of our obligations for the protection of minorities, including the depressed classes, and of our treaty obligations to the Indian States, and to the settlement of certain lesser matters arising out of our long association with the fortunes of the Indian sub-continent.

Although he was not a proponent of self-government, Mr. Churchill recognized that reforms were needed. In this statement, Mr. Churchill recapitulated the general intentions of British Government regarding India’s political situation since the outbreak of the war.

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70 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Mar. 11, 1942) p. 1069.
71 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Mar. 11, 1942) p. 1069.
Mr. Churchill further declared that to fulfill these general declarations, the War Cabinet had agreed upon certain measures designed to resolve India’s political situation. However, these measures for both present and future actions were also intended to increase Indian cooperation in the war effort. Mr. Churchill argued that if these measures were accepted by India as a whole, both countries would avoid the alternative perils of the continuation of the present situation.

Mr. Churchill indicated that he had considered setting forth the terms of their current attempt to resolve India’s political situation; he was nevertheless concerned that a public announcement at this moment in the war would not be beneficial. The British Government had proposed to send Sir Stafford to India for personal consultation on a tentative solution. Mr. Churchill asked the House of Commons to abstain from debates that would burden Cripps’ mission to India, and lessen the prospect of a resolution.\textsuperscript{72} Mr. Churchill's statements suggest the British government perceived the political situation in India as detrimental to the war effort. Nonetheless, Mr. Churchill’s statement does not suggest that a solution to the political situation in India was a direct response to the war. The continued pressure of the war exacerbated the need to resolve the situation. As previous debates have indicated, the House of Commons intended to resolve India’s political situation before the war started. These debates notwithstanding, it is evident the Second World War had a significant effect on the British Government’s colonial policy and their management of colonial resources.

During the Bengal Famine of 1943-1944, which took the lives of three million Indians, historians have argued the famine failed to provoke a political response from the

\textsuperscript{72} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 378, (Mar. 11, 1942) p. 1070.
British Parliament. However, the Bengal Famine elicited in the House of Commons an increase in debates concerning administrative and relief debates. Accordingly, the prevalence of India’s political situation in debates declined during this period. The failure of Cripps' mission to establish a provisional Indian Government might account for the absence of discussion on these debates as well. Nevertheless, the British Empire’s loss of Burma and Singapore along with the Bengal Famine prompted the increase of debates in the House of Commons regarding administrative and relief policies during this period.

A departure from this trend was the address of Wing-Commander Grant-Ferris of North St. Pancras to the House of Commons. On 25 November 1943, Mr. Grant-Ferris discussed his recent experience in India, in particular, his tour in the Royal Air Force which lasted for the greater part of a year. Before Mr. Grant-Ferris, this session of the House of Commons had not broached the subject of Indian self-government or their contribution to the war effort. As Mr. Grant-Ferris stated in his introduction, “After an absence of almost three years from this House I intervene to raise a subject which is quite different from any that has been raised so far to-day.” During his tour in India, Mr. Grant-Ferris consulted with the Governor-General and with over 100 Indian politicians to discuss the country’s political situation. According to Mr. Grant-Ferris, the vast majority of Indian politicians he met with were hesitant to trust the British government’s offer of self-government. Moreover, Mr. Grant-Ferris concluded from his observations that as a result of its political situation, India was not at the moment capable of attaining Dominion status or self-government. As Mr. Grant-Ferris stated:

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74 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 395, (Nov. 25, 1943) p. 59.
I would like, right away, at the risk of offending some of my friends in India and perhaps on both sides of this House, to say that I am convinced, as a result of my experience, that India is not ready to reap the full benefit from full self-government and, to my mind, will not be ready to do so for many years to come.\textsuperscript{75}

Despite his concern about the implementation of self-government, Mr. Grant-Ferris acknowledged that it was too late for the British government to rescind its offer to India. Moreover, Mr. Grant-Ferris was not certain that there was agreement among the political parties in India for the framework required to establish self-government. Mr. Grant-Ferris argued if the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were able to agree upon conditions, India’s political situation would be resolved through Sir Stafford’ proposal. Thus the substance behind Sir Stafford’ proposal was not integral to the mission’s failure. According to Mr. Grant-Ferris, it was the negative response of Indians to Sir Stafford himself that derailed the resolution. As Mr. Grant-Ferris stated:

There is a considerable measure of agreement that the substance of the March, 1942, offer is what India wants, but in form and name it seems to be discredited. I regret to say that the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for East Bristol (Sir S. Cripps) seems to be universally unpopular in India. His methods of approach to the problem, his attitude to the minorities, including the Princes and scheduled castes, have produced bitterness.\textsuperscript{76}

In the House of Commons, the address of Mr. Grant-Ferris demonstrates how India’s political situation was considered during the Bengal Famine and after Sir Stafford’ mission. It is evident from Mr. Grant-Ferris’ statements that India’s political situation was not as prominent in debates during this period.

In a similar debate, occurring on 2 December 1943, Mr. Sorensen asked the Secretary of State for India whether the situation concerning the famine relief was the sole

\textsuperscript{75} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 395, (Nov. 25, 1943) p.160.

\textsuperscript{76} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 395, (Nov. 25, 1943) p. 162.
business of the recent conference between the Governor-General of India and the Provin-
cial Governors. In particular, Mr. Sorensen asked whether India’s political situation had been discussed in conjunction with famine relief measures. Mr. Amery replied, “The con-
ference was held for the purpose of an exchange of views and not to take executive deci-
sions.” Further, Mr. Amery stated that it was his understanding that famine relief and post-war reconstruction were the main subjects discussed during the conference. Mr. So-
rensen then inquired into whether the release of political detainees was discussed during the conference. In response Sir Knox interjected, “Is it not essential to give them a little food before stuffing them with politics?” Although India’s political situations continued to be an issue in the House of Commons, debates regarding the Bengal Famine took pre-
cedence during this period. Sir Knox’s response accurately depicts the House of Com-
mons attitude towards India’s political situation during the Bengal Famine of 1943-1944. Before India’s political situation could be resolved, the House of Commons would focus on the issue of resolving the Bengal Famine

As it became apparent the Second World War was nearing a favorable conclusion, the House of Commons embarked on debates to address the reconstruction and preserva-
tion of India after the war. On 28 July 1944, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence of East Edinburgh initiated the debate on the Indian political crisis to demonstrate to the people of India the commitment of the House of Commons was to self-government after the war. Although he recognized the significance of political matters, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence suggested that the economic situation deserved a few moments as well. Mr. Pethick-Lawrence sug-
gested that improvement in the economic conditions of both Great Britain and India would have a profound influence on India’s political situation. As Mr. Pethick-Lawrence stated, “In other words, from being a great debtor country, India has become one of the greatest creditor countries in the world. That, quite clearly, has a very important bearing on the economic future of the country.”

According to Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, the economic conditions of the British Empire and India would in part direct the process of resolving of India’s political crisis. Along with his economic considerations, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence argued that the preservation of India was another aspect that required attention. For instance, before the Second World War it was assumed the British Empire would protect the oceans surrounding India. However, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence contended that Great Britain's involvement in the war had demonstrated the inability of the British Empire to maintain order in the world’s oceans, let alone the ocean around the Indian subcontinent. In the House of Commons, concerns over the ability of the empire to protect itself then contributed to the wish to have India acquire more responsibilities after the war.

Although this concern for Indian participation in its reconstruction after the war was not a recent development in the House of Commons, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence argued the recent prospect of triumphing in the war had contributed to favorable negotiation conditions. Similar to previous debates, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence suggested the House of Commons should instigate renewed efforts to resolve India’s political situation. As Mr. Pethick-Lawrence stated:

> Therefore, the promise that we have made, and still make, of self-government-I think two years have elapsed since it was made-is a much more real and substantial thing than it ever was before and that alone, if

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there were not other factors, must have a great influence on the mind of members of the Congress Party. 82

According to Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, the development of the Second World War had a direct impact on India’s political situation. When it became apparent in the House of Commons the Second World War was nearing a favorable conclusion, Members of Parliament considered the resolution of India’s political situation to be more attainable.

Lieutenant-Colonel Elliot of Kelvingrove-Glasgow would raise similar concerns for the preservation of India after the war. According to Lieutenant-Colonel Elliot, India’s political situation required immediate reconciliation for both the war effort and the well being its population. As Lieutenant-Colonel Elliot stated:

Yet the problem is urgent. How urgent has been shown in the example of the Bengal famine, and still more in the situation underlying the Bengal famine. That situation has been brought most powerfully and simply before our notice by the junior Burgess for Cambridge University (Professor A.V. Hill), who has called out attention with the utmost emphasis to the fact that the population of India is increasing by about 6,000,000 a year. 83

Lieutenant-Colonel Elliot further suggested that the economic conditions would have enormous effects on India’s political situation. In particular, the reorganization of India’s agriculture condition to combat its population growth would present further economic constraints in both countries. 84 Besides these economic considerations, Lieutenant-Colonel Elliot argued it would not be conceivable for the British Empire to embark on these measures regardless. As Lieutenant-Colonel Elliot stated, “Such changes in India could not be made by a Government from outside, but only by those who realise, in their hearts, the urgency of the problem, and are willing to bring about a solution.” 85

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83 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 402, (Jul. 28, 1944) p. 1021.
84 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 402, (Jul. 28, 1944) p. 1023.
85 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 402, (Jul. 28, 1944) p. 1025.
nant-Colonel Elliot appears to argue independence was the sole prospect to resolve India’s economic situation.

As demonstrated earlier, the House of Commons engaged in more comprehensive discussions on India during the Second World War than in previous debates. The aptness of this particular debate is demonstrated in the deliverance of Sir George Schuster of Walsall. At the outset of his speech, Sir George stated:

In the two speeches which we have heard to-day, this House has had its attention called to the magnitude and significance of the Indian problem in a way that I do not think has characterised any of the many Debates on India to which I have listened to in the past.\(^8^6\)

Sir George’s statement speaks to the progress of debates in the House of Commons regarding India’s political situation. In addition, the economic and social considerations in this debate display a new trend in the House of Commons. Sir George would even suggest a practical timeframe for the fulfillment of these considerations:

It is not unrealistic to imagine that a year from now, on 27th July, 1945, the British Government might be able to say to the Indian leaders: “Gentlemen, the day has come. We have finished our task of carrying India through the war. Now we can turn over our eyes to the future. In accordance with our pledge, we are ready to take the mantle of responsibility from our shoulders and transfer it to yours. Tell us how you wish it to be placed. Are you ready to put it on?”\(^8^7\)

Sir George argued for constructive economic and political policies to assist in the development of Indian self-government. The House of Commons had introduced the topic of reconstruction and preservation of the Indian nation in response to both the wartime conditions and the acceptance of Indian self-government after the war. In considering the reconstruction and preservation of the nation of Indian, Mr. Clement Davies of Montgomery thereafter stated:

\(^8^6\) Hansard, (Commons), vol. 402, (Jul. 28, 1944) p. 1029.
\(^8^7\) Hansard, (Commons), vol. 402, (Jul. 28, 1944) p. 1034.
I have now been a Member of this House for over 15 years and I listened to every Debate on India and Indian affairs, but I do not remember such a note of unanimity as I have heard to-day, or such a single current of opinion running through all the speeches. The Debate seems to be summed up in this—that there is everywhere, not only a genuine desire but a genuine anxiety to see these problems settles satisfactory.\textsuperscript{88}

It is evident the House of Commons arrived at the consensus during the war that India was entitled to full independence at the conclusion of the conflict. As Mr. Davies demonstrated, the House of Commons was in full agreement that the Indian question required immediate resolution. Besides the resolution of its political situation, the House of Commons began to encompass India’s economic and social conditions in their debates. Their intention towards India’s political situation had evolved during the war into the concern over its reconstruction after the war. Once the House of Commons reached agreement on self-government, as demonstrated in its support of Sir Stafford’s mission, the house turned its attention to the implementation and practical consequences of self-government.

As the Second World War entered into its final stages, the character of debates in the House of Commons regarding India were again altered. On March 8, 1945, Mr. Shinwell asked the Secretary of State for India whether the British Government would consider Sir Stafford’s proposal and take the initiative in bringing the various interests in India together for another discussion concerning Indian self-government. Mr. Shinwell argued it would be desirable to resolve India’s political situations in the immediate future, and that it was dependent upon the British Government to initiate the process.\textsuperscript{89} Likewise, Mr. Creech Jones asked the secretary for a statement on the recent speech by Sir Zafrulla Kahn to the British Commonwealth of Nations Conference regarding another attempt by

\textsuperscript{88} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 402, (Jul. 28, 1944) p. 1056.
\textsuperscript{89} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 408, (Mar. 8, 1945) p. 2225.
the British Government to resolve the political situation in India. 90 Although Mr. Amery replied that he would not make another statement on the Indian policies of the British Government, Mr. Shinwell’s question demonstrates that the house continued to debate India’s political situation and Cripps’ mission until the conclusion of the war. Moreover, the significance of this debate is demonstrated subsequent discussions over proposals to resolve the differences between various interests in India.

On March 15, 1945, the House of Commons addressed the question of India’s participation in the United Nations Conference on International Organization. Otherwise known as the San Francisco Conference, the international forum resulted in the establishment of the United Nations. 91 In this particular debate, Sir George Schuster asked the Secretary of State for India whether the British government proposed to include Indian representation in the San Francisco Conference. In consideration of their wartime contributions, Sir George argued that Indian States deserved their own delegation in the conference. Mr. Amery replied that indeed the British government intended to provide India with its own delegation in the conference. The British government would be sending Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar and Sir Firiz Khan Noon would represent British India, and Sir V. T. Krishnamachari to represent the Indian States. 92 Mr. Gallacher then asked Mr. Amery whether it would not be advisable for India to be represented as an independent state at the San Francisco Conference. In a similar question, Mr. Edgar Granville asked whether Mr. Amery’s response indicated that the Indian representatives to the San Francisco Conference would be invited to attend the British Commonwealth of Nations Conference that was to be held in London. Although he did not respond to Mr. Gallacher’s question, Mr.

90 Hansard, (Commons), vol. 408, (Mar. 8, 1945) p. 2226.
Amery indicated that the Indian representatives would be invited to the London Conference as well.\textsuperscript{93} Whilst India had still not attained Dominion Status, the British government and the House of Commons had begun to regard them as an independent member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. To a certain degree, the approval in the House of Commons to represent India in these conferences signifies the British Government’s recognition and acceptance of India’s unabridged independence.

During a similar debate on 26 April 1945, Mr. Sorensen asked the Secretary of State for India what was the status of India at the forthcoming San Francisco Conference. In addition, Mr., Sorensen asked by whom the Indian representatives were nominated and appointed. Mr. Amery replied, “The status of India at the San Francisco Conference is the same as that of the other United Nations taking part.”\textsuperscript{94} Thus Mr. Amery indicates that concerning their representation in the United Nations, India achieved the status of an independent nation. Furthermore, Mr. Amery stated the Indian representatives were nominated and appointed by the Governor-General of India and by the Crown Representative.\textsuperscript{95} Therefore, the British Government decided to provide India with independent representation in the conference. The representation of India as an independent nation at San Francisco Conference is crucial in understanding the impact of the Second World War on the British Empire’s colonial system. Although its impact is not explicit, considering the preponderance of the debates thus far, it is reasonable to argue the Second World War had a significant influence in the British government’s decision to provide India with independent representation in the San Francisco Conference.

\textsuperscript{93} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 409, (Mar. 15, 1945) p. 366.
\textsuperscript{94} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 410, (Apr. 26, 1945) p. 988.
\textsuperscript{95} Hansard, (Commons), vol. 410, (Apr. 26, 1945) p. 988.
These debates on Indian representation in the San Francisco Conference and the British Commonwealth of Nations Conference should be considered the culmination of Indian debates in the House of Commons thus far during the war. Indian representation in the British Commonwealth of Nations Conference would produce substantial consequences for its political situation. On April 28, 1949, resulting from the British Commonwealth of Nations Conference, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers produced a declaration designed to both resolve India’s political situation and altering the conception of the association itself. 96 Otherwise known as the London Declaration, the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Southern Rhodesia, in consultation with Indian representatives, discarded the notion that membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations necessarily entailed allegiance to the Crown of England. In point of fact, the London Declaration renamed the association from the ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’ to the ‘Commonwealth of Nations’ to reflect this alteration. 97 Therefore, the London Declaration allowed India to become an independent nation while remaining a full member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Furthermore, the declaration constitutes the final stage of development in the meaning and usage of the terms used to describe Indian independence during this period.

In The New York Times, articles often described the impact of the war on the British Empire’s colonial structure during this period. In particular, these articles demonstrate the correlation between the climax of debates on self-government and recent defeats in the Asian theater. Moreover, these articles also depict the dissatisfaction of the British populace and both houses of the British Parliament concerning the war effort. Raymond

97 De Smith, The London Declaration, 351.
Daniell, their London correspondent, reported on the British Empire and developments in the Second World War. In his article, *Parliament Spurs British War Chiefs: Anxiety for Maximum Effort is Reflected in Critical Quires in Both Houses*, Daniell described the concern regarding the war effort prevalent throughout Great Britain during this period. On February 20, 1941, Daniell reported this concern was reflected in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. As Daniell stated, “In Parliament—that sensitive barometer of British opinion—this uneasiness was reflected today in a score of more of implied criticisms on big and little subjects.”98 According to Daniell, this criticism reflected the considerable disquiet among the British populace concerning the success of the war.

On March 5, 1942, *The New York Times* reported that proposed revisions to the empire's colonial polices were to achieve India’s maximum war effort. In the unaccredited article, *Compromise Is Rumored*, the article described Cripps’ mission to India as the concession of the British Government to the demands of the Indian Nation Congress in exchange for their support. As the article stated, “Important concessions, which, however, fall far short of the independence demanded by the All India Congress, are about to be offered to India by the British Government in an effort to win the wholehearted cooperation of the people of that vast subcontinent in the struggle against the Axis powers.”99 This article also depicted the growing frustration of the British populace concerning India’s political crisis. The article stated, “With the enemy almost at the gate of this huge, rich adjunct of the British Empire, there has been a growing demand for action to terminate or at least to quiet the unrest among the people of India.”100 Similar to Daniell,

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this article recounts the concern among the British populace regarding India's political crisis and the war effort.

The next day, March 6, 1942, Daniell reported that the House of Commons considered the war to be influencing debates on Indian self-government. In his article, *Britain Puts Off Indian Statement*, Daniell described that both Conservative and Labor elements in the House of Commons were demanding concessions to resolve the aspirations of “Indian Nationalist”101 and to protect the empire from the Japanese. As Daniell stated, “Both Labor and Conservative members of the House are showing increasing anxiety over the situation in India, where the enemy is almost at the border and where, some observers fear, the problem may become military rather than political.”102 According to Daniell, both parties in the House of Commons favored resolving India’s political situation considering the expansion of the war into the Asian theater.

In a similar article, *New British Colonial Policy Forged By War*, Daniell reported the war had destabilized the colonial structure of the British Empire. On March 22, 1942, Daniell’s article acknowledged that political dissent combined with the Japanese offensive had resulted in the alteration of the British government’s colonial policy. In particular, Daniell argued the expansion of the war into the Asian theater provided the catalysts for change in the empire. As Daniell reported, “Two and a half years of war against Germany and Italy has cost Britain only the loss of the Channel Island, as far as territory is concerned, but little more than four months’ war with Japan has cost Britain much of her

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colonial empire in the Far East.” Daniell contended the loss of colonies and the continued threat of Japan had altered British colonial policy. Describing the empire during the war, Daniell stated, “When pressure was exerted against it, it collapsed, and the British have decided that their system was not good enough. This feeling is likely to guide colonial policy for a long time after the war is over.” Daniell thus considered the war to have a lasting impact on the empire’s colonial structure and would continue to influence debate after the war. Overall, these articles further demonstrate the correlation between debates on self-government and recent defeats in the Asian theater.

**Conclusion and Comparison:**

The British experience of decolonization is not analogous to that of Netherlands or France. Although a comparison between these empires has its difficulties, there remain some points of comparison between these countries. In Sir Richard's speech, the same sentiment described as hindering Indian self-government can perhaps be observed in both the Dutch and French Empire's. Even though these countries decolonized at different rates and stages the same sentimental forces could possibly be at work. The impact of the Second World War on European colonial empires, like that on the British Empire, has provoked a debate among historians. Accordingly, the historiographical significance of this research should resonate for the debate among these historians. As debates in the House of Commons demonstrate, the Second World War did have a significant impact on the British Empire’s colonial structure. In the House of Commons, debates on India’s political situation reflected and corresponded to developments in the Second World War.

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However, the correlation between the development of the Second World War and debates in the House of Commons does not indicate the war resulted in the eventual interment of the British Empire. Instead, it appears the Second World War accelerated preexisting conditions resulting in substantial changes to the British Empire’s colonial structure.

Therefore, it is perhaps misleading for Gallagher and Holland to have argued the Second World War itself caused no substantial changes to the British Empire’s colonial structure. These historians might have been correct in arguing that self-government and independence of the colonies would have eventually transpired, but this examination demonstrates that the meaning and usage of these terms evolved as a consequence of the Second World War. As a result, the Second World War affected the consequences and implementation of self-government and independence of the colonies. Nevertheless, it is also misleading for Darwin and Jeffery to have asserted that before the Second World War the British Empire appeared to have been set on a course different from that which it was to follow after the war. The examination of House of Commons debates from 1939 to 1945 indicates that project of Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth of Nations was dire before, during and after the war. Although the implications of Dominion Status changed in the House of Commons, India was nonetheless on the path towards the British Commonwealth of Nations from the outset of the war.

The actual terminology used in the House of Commons to debate the constitutional development of India remained constant throughout the war. However, this examination demonstrates the meaning and usage of these terms evolved throughout this period. Therefore, the war accelerated the coming of Indian self-government by changing meaning of the terms used in the debate. Before the Second World War, the House of Com-
mons was committed to the entry of India into the British Commonwealth of Nations. Nevertheless, the House of Commons did not intend for India’s obtainment of Dominion Status to correspond to their obtainment of independence from the British Empire. During the Second World War, the initial debates on Indian self-government were conceived within the context of India remaining within the British Empire’s colonial structure. In these debates, Members of Parliament did not indicate Indian self-government would presage India’s unabridged independence from the British Empire. It was not until the expansion of the Second World War into the Asian theater did members of the House of Commons begin to refine the meaning and usage of terms such as Dominion Status and self-government. The evolution of these terms in the House of Commons is well demonstrated in Sir Richard Acland’s speech on 25 February 1942, and the announcement of Sir Stafford Cripps’ three-week mission to India on 11 March 1942. Both of these debates represent a fundamental shift in the House of Commons concerning the resolution of India’s political situation and the British Empire’s colonial policies.

In addition, Sir Richard’s speech was the first during the war to suggest that the term Dominion Status was interchangeable with independence. It is significant that these two debates occurred in the wake of recent defeats of the British Empire and the expansion of the Japan. It was not serendipitous that these two developments converged at this particular moment. The Second World War had a direct impact on the development of these terms, and thus in the development of the British Empire’s colonial structure.

The evolution of terms such as Dominion Status and self-government is evident in the reexamination of the initial and final debates in this research. In the debate on 21 September 1939, Mr. Sorensen asked the Secretary of State whether the censorship of the
mail to India was similar to that respecting of the Dominions of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Mr. Sorensen’s question indicated the House of Commons was not certain as to the position of India in relation of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Furthermore, the question of censorship demonstrates that in House of Commons the usage of the term Dominion Status did not correspond to independence from the British Empire. In contrast, during a debate on 15 March 1945, Sir George argued Indian States deserved their own delegation in the San Francisco Conference. In this debate Mr. Amery indicated that the Indian representatives would be invited to the London Conference of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In a similar vein during the debate on 26 April 1945, Mr. Sorensen asked the Secretary of State for India about the status of India at the forthcoming San Francisco Conference. Mr. Amery replied India had achieved the status of an independent nation. These debates demonstrate how the consideration of India’s political situation in the House of Commons advanced throughout the Second World War.

At the commencement of the war, the House of Commons was not certain of the relation between India and the British Commonwealth of Nations, whereas at the conclusion of the war India was represented as an independent nation at both the San Francisco and London Conferences.

In comparing the impact of the Second World War on the British Empire with the Dutch and French Empires, these findings correspond to the preponderance of historiographical literature. In Decolonization: the British, French, Dutch and Belgian Empires, 1919-1963, Henri Grimal argues the Second World War had a significant impact on the decolonization of European colonial empires. As Grimal states, “As early as 1940, the temporary eclipse of most of the colonial powers and the partial or total severance with
their oversea possessions destroyed the political balance which had been maintained up to 1939.” Therefore, Grimal considered the Second World War to have destabilized the political balance of European colonial empires. However, Grimal also attributes colonial nationalism as a driving force in the decolonization processes after the Second World War. Although the consequences of colonial nationalism would not be recognizable until after the war, Grimal considered their roots to be grounded in the interwar period. As Grimal Stated:

However, while colonial powers were set on perpetuating the past, a new mood was building up in the colonies themselves. During the years immediately following the First World War, the desire for independence was barely perceptible, but this period was in fact a turning-point. The idea of striving for independence while not yet widespread, began to take hold in a number of the more advanced territories, and the forces which would eventually lead to the day of reckoning began to gather momentum.

Grimal considered the influence of First World War and the interwar period as significant contributions to the process of post-Second World War decolonization. According to Grimal, the Second World War accelerated trends in colonial nationalism that developed after the First World War. Thus the Second World War both created and accelerated various repercussions that would destabilize European colonial empires after the war. Nevertheless, Grimal qualifies his argument with an important feature of interwar European colonial empires pertinent to this examination. According to Grimal, these empires were more concerned with the present state of colonial affairs than with their future developments. Before the Second World War, the British, Dutch and French Empire’s adopted colonial doctrines designed for the immediate continuance of their colonial structures.

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106 Grimal, *Decolonization*, 3.
Although the components and administration of these doctrines were dissimilar, these countries developed policies to accommodate recent trends in colonial nationalism and to maintain influence in their empires. Thus despite influence of First World War and the interwar period, the fact remains that before the Second World War these countries considered their continual presence in these colonials to be inevitable.

The sentiment that India should attain Dominion Status and remain within the British Empire, prevalent in the House of Commons before the Second World War, can be explained in Grimal’s account of European colonial doctrine before the war. The apparent contradiction within this sentiment is elucidated in recognizing the House of Commons was concerned with the present state of its colonial affairs rather than with its future developments. Whilst the House of Commons recognized India’s attainment of Dominion Status before the war, their immediate concerns were in the present state of the British Empire. As a result, the meaning and usage of terms such as Dominion Status and self-government evolved with the House of Commons’ recognition of the future developments of the British Empire and the development of the Second World War.

According to Grimal, the recognition of self-determination for colonies was the result of the weakened position of the various European colonial structures during the war.\(^\text{108}\) For instance, Grimal argues the impact of Second World War was a determining factor in the decolonization of the French Empire and in the evolution of both African and Asian constitutional development.\(^\text{109}\) In his article, *The Impact of the Two World Wars on the Decline of Colonialism*, Rudolf von Albertini constructs a similar argument re-

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\(^{108}\) Grimal, *Decolonization*, 22.

\(^{109}\) Grimal, *Decolonization*, 352.
garding the impact of the Second World War on European colonial empires. In his discussion of the impact of the war on European decolonization, Albertini states:

The war offered (colonies) a suitable opportunity for demanding autonomy and even independence, and this no longer as a mere promise to follow after the war, but effectively and at once. Refusal by the colonial powers to concede such incisive changes during the war resulted, for example in India, in a gradual sharpening of the tension with Congress and led to the “Quit India” movement, even though the possibility of a Japanese advance into India remained real. England clamped down hard but at the same time recognized that withdrawal from India was no longer avoidable; and the question was this reduced to “when” and “how” of the transfer of power.\(^{110}\)

Albertini considers the Second World War to have forced the British Empire to recognize the future development of their empire as well. In particular, the advance of the Japanese and dissent in India forced the British Empire to recognize the temporal constrictions the war placed on their colonies. The Second World War provided the impetus for the British Empire to comprehend the lasting consequences of the First World War and interwar period, and provided its own impediment in their colonial structure as well.

In another article, *The Decolonization of the Dutch East Indies*, Albertini demonstrates the Dutch Empire experienced a similar development in the terms used to describe the constitutional development of their colonies.\(^{111}\) Similar to the House of Commons, the Netherlands’ government-in-exile developed their understanding and usage of terms such as “Commonwealth” and “independence” in response to the Second World War. However, the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies complicates the comparison to the British Empire. Although sections of the British Empire were lost during the war, the Japanese never occupied a substantial portion of the empire as in the case of the Dutch


Empire. Albertini indicates the Japanese occupation allowed Dutch colonies to advance their independence quicker than otherwise would have been possible. As Albertini states, “Under ‘normal’ circumstances and if Indonesia had remained under Dutch rule during the war, there would surely have been some chance of gradually pursuing emancipation and improving relations with the former colonial power by negotiation.”

Nevertheless, the loss of Singapore to Japan and the threat of India’s occupation prompted Sir Richard’s speech, and elicited the House of Commons to consider renewed efforts to reconcile India’s political situation. Therefore, the Japanese occupation of British and Dutch colonies perhaps influenced the similar development in the terms these empires’ used to describe the independence of their colonies.

In a similar article, *The Dutch and West New Guinea*, Arend Lijphart described the sentimental factors involved in the decolonization of the Dutch Empire. Again we encounter similarities between the British and Dutch Empires in their subjective and emotional association with their empire's hindering decolonization. As Lijphart argues, “The real motives behind Holland’s reluctance to decolonize were entirely subjective and psychological: the search for national self-esteem, feelings of moral superiority, egocentric altruism, and deep resentment against Indonesia.” After the reoccupation of their colonies from the Japanese, the Dutch Empire was reluctant to relinquish their influence in the West Indies. According to Lijphart, the Dutch Empire spent twelve and a half years attempting to reestablish themselves in West New Guinea. The Dutch Empire’s attempted to remain in control of the last remnants if their empire was the result of an intense emotional commitment to their colonies. In the article, *The French Colonial Consensus and*
People’s War, 1946-1958, Tony Smith argues the decolonization of the French Empire was impeded by similar subjective and sentimental forces within the Forth Republic.¹¹⁴ Smith argues the French Empire considered the adherence of their colonies to the empire during the war as an indication of their national strength and emotional connection. Hence the French Empire was reluctant to relinquish their colonial empire because of the perceived sentiment that the colonies themselves wished to remain within the empire. As discussed earlier, Sir Richard suggested in his speech that sentiment in the House of Commons was detrimental to resolving India’s political situation. In their opposition to self-government, Members of Parliament often argued along the lines of national strength and emotional connection. The decolonization of the British, Dutch and French Empire’s were all hampered by sentimental forces. Despite the occupation of both the Dutch and French Empire’s during the war, the present examination of House of Commons debates will perhaps provide insight into this subjective and emotional aspect of European decolonization. Although the British Empire overcame this sentiment earlier than the Dutch and French Empire's, all these countries experienced similar internal-forces against decolonization.

In accordance with these findings, the historiographical debate on the impact of the Second World War on the British Empire cannot be reduced to the current opposing explanations. In both colonial resources and management, the Second World War was the pinnacle of the British Empire. Nevertheless, the war contained essential components for the interment of the empire as well. It is an oversimplification to confine the impact of the Second World War to the mere acceleration and accentuation of preexisting trends in

the British Empire’s colonial structure. However, it is not accurate to argue the Second World War produced objective changes in the British Empire’s colonial structure that otherwise would not have occurred. The examination of House of Commons debates from 1939 to 1945 indicates the Second World War both accelerated preexisting trends and provided the impetus for substantial changes in the British Empire’s colonial structure. In particular, this examination has demonstrated the Second World War influenced both the meaning and usage of certain terms in the House of Commons used to debate Indian independence and self-government. Therefore, the Second World War also accelerated the coming of Indian self-government by changing the meaning and usage of the terms used in the debates.


The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Parliament. House of Com-


