

May 2008

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Mr. Gandhi Visits Lancashire:
A Study in Imperial
Miscommunication

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May 5, 2008

The Arrival

“A crowd numbering three or four thousand people assembled at Darwen Station...when the train was heard to be entering the station, there was a babel [sic] of eager voices, and every eye was focused on the station exit, but hopes were quickly dashed to the ground and the crowd was greatly disappointed when the first passenger to see the gathering shouted, ‘You can all go home. He got off at Spring Vale [sic].’”¹

Darwen and Springvale were economically depressed cotton towns in Lancashire, England; “he” was Mohandas Gandhi, leader of the Indian National Congress, whose boycott of English cotton goods was at its height; and the anticipation and disappointment manifested at the railroad station set the stage for the rest of the visit. In 1931, the Lancashire textile industry had been in a depression for ten years, with huge losses especially in its exports to the Indian market. The Indian boycott, though only one factor, and not a very important one, in Lancashire’s decline, was targeted by industrialists and trade unionists alike as the main cause of the trade depression. At the same time, Indian nationalists blamed Lancashire for the suppression of the Indian textile industry. Given this animosity, it seems surprising that Lancashire would be eager to host Gandhi or that Gandhi would travel to Lancashire. Yet Gandhi and Lancashire mill owners and workers embraced the opportunity to engage in “frank and friendly discussion” of the problems surrounding Lancashire and India’s economic relationship.²

Gandhi arrived in Springvale at 11 p.m. on Friday, September 25, 1931 to be greeted “by hand-clapping and cheers.”³ He visited several mill towns before his departure at 10 p.m. on Sunday, September 27, 1931. During that time he stayed with non-conformist, progressive industrialists. He met with the Mayor of Darwen and the

¹ “Darwen Houses Mr. Gandhi: At Darwen Railway Station,” The Darwen News [henceforth DN], September 26, 1931, p. 10.

² British Library, India Office Records [henceforth BL/IOR] L/PO/1/30, letter, Joint Committee of Cotton Trades Organisation [henceforth JCCTO] to William Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State for India, July 25, 1931.

³ Charles Haworth, “Mr. Gandhi – the Man and his policy,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7. See also, “Mr. Gandhi in Darwen,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

Mayor of Preston, with mill owners, with Manchester traders, with workers from both spinning and weaving districts, and with legions of journalists. Newspaper sources in Lancashire and India reveal the contradictory expectations of the Indian and English participants of the visit. A story told in the Blackburn Northern Daily Telegraph neatly illustrates what people in Lancashire wanted the visit to be like. While standing on the lawn with some workers,

“The Mahatma then approached a woman carrying a child. He stroked the child’s face. ‘Get hold of the baby, Mr Gandhi,’ some one [sic] shouted, so he extended both arms. The youngster made no move, and Mr Gandhi asked in mock despair, ‘What can I do?’ After more coaxing, the baby smiled back. The mother blushed and neighbours laughed as the Darwen baby and the Indian leader became friends.”⁴

Lancashire society anticipated that the “civility and kindness... simplicity and peace” of Lancashire air would soothe “even deep differences of opinion.”⁵ Gandhi’s “native sympathy [would] materialise in favour of Lancashire’s workless”⁶ and he would end the boycott, thus returning Lancashire to its former full volume of trade. However, this effect did not materialize. Gandhi, while sympathetic to Lancashire’s economic troubles, saw the visit as an opportunity to educate Lancashire on the nature of Indian nationalism, not to rescue the unemployed textile workers of Lancashire. He told his audience that the boycott was not the main cause of their depression and that the boycott was a social and spiritual necessity for Indian peasants.⁷ In spite of the rhetoric about dialogue used by both sides prior to the visit, Gandhi and Lancashire society⁸ remained too rooted in their own historical and cultural contexts to successfully communicate with each other.

⁴ Lancashire’s Poverty: Workless Deputation,” BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 4.

⁵ “Birds and Empire Drama: Mr Gandhi’s day in the country,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 3.

⁶ “Mr. Gandhi,” DN, September 26, 1931, p. 5.

⁷ See for example: “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford: Indian Poverty,” BNDT, October 2, 1931, p. 5; “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi: India able to do little for Lancashire: India’s Standard of Living,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

⁸ A note about my use of the terms “Lancashire society” or “cotton society”: By no means do I intend to imply that the Lancashire cotton industry was a homogenous group. People in the cotton industry were very diverse in their social

The Anticipation

Months of anticipation had preceded Gandhi's arrival at Springvale Station on that September night. The visit was originally suggested by Charles Freer Andrews, a non-conformist minister and a close friend of Gandhi. Andrews went to Lancashire in June 1931 and was greatly disturbed by the poverty he saw there. He wrote to workers and mill owners, to Gandhi, and to William Wedgwood Benn, the Secretary of State for India, proposing that Gandhi meet with people involved in the Lancashire textile industry in an attempt to heal the resentment between the two parties.⁹ Andrews' proposal seemed to be a success; mill owners and mill workers in Lancashire enthusiastically supported the idea¹⁰ and Gandhi also indicated willingness to speak to Lancashire if he came to England.¹¹ Gandhi's attendance at the Round Table Conference in London to consult on the future constitution of India provided the perfect opportunity for such a trip.

The language used before the visit certainly seemed to indicate that communication would be possible. Both sides spoke of dialogue, of friendliness, of reaching a mutual understanding. In a letter to Andrews, Gandhi wrote, he would "gladly see Lancashire friends immediately on arrival."¹² He claimed that during his visit he would attempt to "remove any misunderstanding" in the "minds of the people of Lancashire."¹³ Likewise, the Joint Committee of Cotton Trades Organisations, the main coalition of Lancashire mill owners, responded to Andrews' suggestion of a visit by

and economic experiences and their political viewpoints. Later in the paper I will explore some of the tensions within the textile industry. Given how diverse cotton society was, it is all the more striking how unanimous these different groups are on issues surrounding the boycott, Lancashire's economic decline, and Gandhi's visit. In these matters, at least, Lancashire seemed to speak with one voice.

⁹ BL/IO/L/PO/1/48, letter, C. F. Andrews to Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, June 8, 1931.

¹⁰ BL/IO/L/PO/1/30, letter, JCCTO to Wedgwood Benn, July 25, 1931; BL/IO/L/PO/1/48, letter, C. F. Andrews to Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, June 8, 1931.

¹¹ BL/IO/L/PO/1/48, copy of telegram, Mohandas Gandhi to Andrews, n.d., enclosed in letter, Andrews to Wedgwood Benn, June 20 1931.

¹² BL/IO/L/PO/1/48, copy of telegram, Gandhi to Andrews, n.d., enclosed in letter, Andrews to Wedgwood Benn, June 20, 1931.

¹³ "Interview to the Press," September 12, 1931, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [henceforth *CWMG*] v. 48 (September 1931-January 1932) (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1971), 6.

informing Wedgwood Benn that Lancashire would be happy to engage in “a frank and friendly discussion” with Gandhi in the hopes that such a discussion would “remove some of the misunderstandings which appear to exist in India as well as in Lancashire.”¹⁴

The afternoon before Gandhi arrived, Greenfield Mill Co., Ltd. posted a sign on their mill doors declaring, “We welcome Mr. Gandhi in the spirit of friendliness on this visit.”¹⁵ At first glance it seems that the rhetoric used by both sides indicated a unity of purpose that boded well for the outcome of the visit.

The similar vocabulary used by Gandhi and representatives of the textile industry, however, masked very different intentions. The textile workers and mill owners expected that the discussion would focus on Lancashire’s poverty and would induce Gandhi to end the boycott. Gandhi saw the visit to Lancashire as part of a larger mission to explain the Indian National Congress’ cause to British citizens in the hopes of gaining electoral support for Indian independence. These divergent expectations came from the very different histories of the two parties, to which I now turn.

“Custom-bound, ageing, inward-looking”¹⁶: Lancashire’s reactions to the depression

At the time of the visit, the Lancashire cotton industry was in the middle of its most severe depression, a depression that had started in 1922 and would last until the final demise of the industry some thirty years later. Despite the hard times, however, most people in the cotton industry confidently awaited a return to better times. And the good times in Lancashire had been very good indeed. Since the nineteenth century Lancashire had been the site of the world’s premier cotton-goods industry. Manchester

¹⁴ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/30, letter, JCCTO to Wedgwood Benn, July 25, 1931.

¹⁵ “Mr. Gandhi’s Visit: Statement by the Greenfield Mill Co., Ltd.,” *DN*, September 26, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁶ John K. Walton, *Lancashire: a social history, 1558-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 352.

and the surrounding region were at the forefront of Britain's industrial revolution. Although there were other industries in Lancashire (mining and shipping, primarily), Lancashire was predominantly a textiles region. In many towns, the mills were the only source of income for working families. In the nineteenth century, the Empire provided ever-expanding markets for the goods produced by those mills, as well as becoming a source of cheap raw cotton.¹⁷ In 1913, almost sixty percent of Lancashire's cotton products, or three billion yards of cloth, were sent from Lancashire mills to India.¹⁸ The First World War permanently altered these patterns of production and trade, dealing Lancashire a blow from which it would never recover. During the war years, Lancashire's cotton industry stagnated while Indian, Japanese, and U.S. competitors implemented new, more efficient technology and organization.¹⁹ In India, the competition from native and Japanese mills was combined with nationalist opposition to British goods. In 1922, the government in Delhi was given fiscal autonomy, with the result that tariffs on British goods shot up to twenty-five percent by 1931.²⁰ In 1929, the Indian National Congress instituted a nation-wide boycott of English textiles. Lancashire's outdated technology and organization and foreign competition were the main factors in the decline in Lancashire trade, but the tariffs and the boycott exacerbated

¹⁷ India, Egypt, and Latin America, all of which took large quantities of Lancashire textiles, were also the major growers of raw cotton. Alan Fowler, Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900-1950: A Social History of Lancashire Cotton Operatives in the Twentieth Century, Modern Economic and Social History Series, ed. Derek H. Aldcroft (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 10.

¹⁸ Sixty percent of Lancashire's export trade went to the "Far East," which comprised India and China, with the majority going to India. Rex Pope, Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area, 1920-1938, Harris Paper Three (Preston, England: University of Central Lancashire, 2000): 9-10.

¹⁹ Walton, Lancashire, 326.

²⁰ Andrew Muldoon, "'An Unholy Row in Lancashire': The Textile Lobby, Conservative Politics, and Indian Policy, 1931-1935," Twentieth Century British History 14, no. 2 (2003): 94. Although the Delhi government was still controlled by British politicians, not Indians, the politicians in India were more likely to respond to Indian pressure groups than the London government was. The decision to shift control over Indian's economic policy from London to Delhi in 1922 was hotly contested by many in Britain, including a vocal Lancashire group. See: S.C. Ghosh, "Pressure and Privilege: The Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Problem, 1930-1934," Parliamentary Affairs 18 (1965): 204. Tariffs were also erected after the war in the Far East and in Latin America, Lancashire's other big markets (Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 8).

Lancashire's problems, as did the stock market crash in 1929. The repercussions of this chain of events on Lancashire were dramatic. "Between 1924 and 1935...cotton fell from third to eleventh place among British industries in value of net output."²¹ In March 1931, 24,000 out of 90,000 looms in one weaving town had closed and another 46,000 had stopped indefinitely.²² In 1931, the year of Gandhi's visit, one in three cotton workers was unemployed.²³ Cotton society searched desperately for a way in which to explain the industry's precipitous decline.

Lancashire's attitude to the depression, the textile industry's interpretation of the causes of decline, and Lancashire society's reaction to Gandhi were all mediated by a romanticized memory of the nineteenth century cotton industry. Throughout the early twentieth century, Lancashire society was undergoing enormous economic and social changes, all of which seemed to bring destruction and despair. As a result, people were very resistant to innovations. Instead, everyone looked backwards to an idealized version of the cotton industry's golden age in the nineteenth century as the standard for the future. The language of conciliation used during the visit, the resistance to rationalization, the representation of nineteenth century trading patterns as normal, and the expectation of imminent revival for the industry all emanated from a commitment to reinstating the nineteenth century cotton industry.

²¹ A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945, vol. 15 of The Oxford History of England, ed. Sir George Clark (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 304-5.

²² BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, Précis of the Statement made to the Meeting of Lancashire members of Parliament, by Representatives of the Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Association and the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners' Associations Ltd., March 13, 1931.

²³ Walton, Lancashire, 341; Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 76.

“Minimising the friction and distress”²⁴: The language of conciliation and its roots in Lancashire’s labor relations

Although strategies of friendliness and compromise were advocated by both Gandhi and representatives of the cotton industry, the two parties anticipated very different outcomes from the dialogue that they promoted. Lancashire cotton society anticipated certain results from conciliation and face-to-face interaction with Gandhi. These expectations emerged from the history of labor relations in Lancashire. Lancashire was famous (in some circles, infamous) for amicable relations between trade unions and employers. Trade union officials tended to be much more upwardly mobile than in other regions.²⁵ In 1931, Luke Bates, the secretary of the Blackburn Weavers’ Association, was also Mayor of Blackburn. Both Bates and Andrew Naesmith, secretary of the Weavers’ Amalgamation, were referred to as *Esquire*, a social distinction that was rare for a member of the working class. Several other trade union members were Justices of the Peace. The social proximity between trade union officials and employers, as well as the small-town nature of the cotton industry, meant that much value was placed on face-to-face interaction and reconciliation.²⁶ The emphasis on “personal contact” with Gandhi was an extension of Lancashire’s standard operating procedure for resolving conflict.²⁷ The statement posted on the doors of the Greenfield Mill asserted this basic philosophy:

²⁴ “Gandhi’s Week-End: Talks to Mayor and Workless,” Blackburn Northern Daily Telegraph [henceforth BNDT], September 24, 1931, p. 4.

²⁵ Patrick Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the question of class 1848-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 137. Eddie Cass, Alan Fowler, and Terry Wyke, “The Remarkable Rise and Long Decline of the *Cotton Factory Times*,” Media History 4, no. 2 (1998): 146.

²⁶ Cass et al, “The Remarkable Rise,” 144; Joseph L. White, The Limits of Trade Union Militancy: The Lancashire Textile Workers, 1910-1914, no. 5 in Contributions in Labor History, ed. Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1978), 87.

²⁷ “Darwen Houses Mr. Gandhi,” DN, September 26, 1931, p. 10.

“We believe it is only on a basis of reconciliation and co-operation that the future well-being of both Lancashire and India can be built.”²⁸

The connotations of “conciliation” were affected by how Lancashire traditionally handled industrial disputes. Andrew Flinn argues that “the conservative and cautious nature of much of the trade unionism in this period was...deeply rooted in occupational and community identities.”²⁹ Strikes were rare and short-lived.³⁰ Value was placed instead on consensus, with the result that workers often ended up capitulating to employers’ demands in order to keep the peace.³¹ The unions fully endorsed this “rhetoric of industrial peace”³² with the result that “collective bargaining machinery rapidly degenerated into a vehicle for autocratic employers to assert their right to manage as they saw fit.”³³ When representatives of the cotton industry (both mill owners and operatives) argued that “friendly discussion”³⁴ would resolve the tension between India and Lancashire, what they envisioned was a “reconciliation”³⁵ that involved Gandhi’s total capitulation to Lancashire demands. In the language used to describe the purpose of the visit, as in so many other things, Lancashire operatives and employers looked to their image of the “golden past” of Lancashire’s industrial history for the solutions of the future.

²⁸ “Mr. Gandhi’s Visit,” DN, September 26, 1931, p. 1. Also quoted in “Getting Ready for Mr Gandhi,” BNDT, September 25, 1931, p. 4. See also: “Mr. Gandhi’s visit,” BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 2.

²⁹ Andrew Flinn, “Labour’s family: local Labour parties, trade unions and trades councils in cotton Lancashire, 1931–39”, in Labour’s grass roots : essays on the activities and experiences of local Labour parties and members, 1918-1945 ed. Worley, Matthew, Studies in Labour History (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 118.

³⁰ Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 76. The situation was changing in the 1930s as the depression worsened and workers grew more desperate. Generally, however, radical politics and labor conflicts were limited to the northwest weaving districts of Nelson and Colne (Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 76; Pope, Unemployment, 88, 125).

³¹ Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 76; Joyce, Visions, 115-6; Walton, Lancashire, 352; White, Militancy, 75-6.

³² Joyce, Visions, 116.

³³ Walton, Lancashire, 352.

³⁴ T. D. Barlow, quoted in “Gandhi’s Week-End: Talks to Mayor and Workless,” BNDT, September 24, 1931, p. 4.

³⁵ “Mr. Gandhi’s Visit: Statement by the Greenfield Mill Co., Ltd.,” DN, September 26, 1931, p. 1.

“Taking a change for the better”³⁶: the interpretation of economic decline as momentary

Even after ten years of lowered production and exports, Lancashire remained confident that a revival of production levels was imminent. The pre-war expansion of the industry “produced a series of statistics...which were to be the point of reference for the rest of the twentieth century.”³⁷ The cotton industry could not “believe that Lancashire would not continue to be a major force in world cotton.”³⁸ Throughout 1931, there remained a sense of constant watchfulness as slight statistical changes were reported with great import almost every week. The Textile Mercury, a newspaper that catered to mill owners and Manchester traders, monitored changes in the Indian situation city by city, week by week. On February 27, the paper stated that “[t]he opinion is growing that the Indian position has reached the turning point”; on March 6, an article rejoiced that “Lancashire found reason for renewed hope of much bigger things when the terms of the settlement of the political trouble in India were made known yesterday”; on March 13, the paper reported that “even in the storm centre of Bombay, dealers and Indian importers there are taking up their contracts after the lapse of many many [sic] months.”³⁹ By October, the paper was enthusiastically (and incorrectly) declaring that the “Congress ban has practically ceased to operate.”⁴⁰ The Cotton Factory Times, a paper whose sympathies were with the cotton operatives and which had a political agenda to the left of most of cotton society,⁴¹ echoed these optimistic assertions, with weekly bulletins of

³⁶ “Darwen Trade: More Looms at Work,” The Cotton Factory Times [henceforth CFT], August 21, 1931, p. 3.

³⁷ Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 5.

³⁸ Cass et al, “The Remarkable Rise,” 153. See also Andrew Thorpe, “The Industrial Meaning of ‘Gradualism’: The Labour Party and Industry, 1918-1931,” Journal of British Studies 35, no. 1 (1996), 107; Walton, Lancashire, 329.

³⁹ “World Textile Markets: Manchester Cotton,” Textile Mercury [henceforth TM], February 27, 1931, p. 197; “Lancashire and Peace in India,” TM, March 6, 1931, p. 207; “World Textile Markets: Southern India,” TM, March 13, 1931, p. 244.

⁴⁰ “World Cotton Markets: Manchester,” TM, October 2, 1931, p. 356.

⁴¹ Cass et al, “The Remarkable Rise,” 156.

hopes for improving trade in the near future (reports on actual improvements were much rarer than announcements of “anticipation” of increasing markets).⁴² Even when more pessimistic opinions were voiced, they were usually refuted within the same issue, if not within the same article. In one of The Cotton Factory Times’ more negative articles, the author states that “[t]he past quarter...has been as bad, so far as unemployment is concerned, as 1930, and there does not seem any immediate hope for better times.”⁴³ Yet he concludes the paragraph: “perhaps we can in the near future look for better times in Lancashire for the cotton trade.”⁴⁴ This positive outlook was rooted in a fervent belief that Lancashire’s textile industry would continue to be as great as it had been in the nineteenth century.

The resistance to rationalization, or improvements in organization and technology, stemmed from the assumption that since Lancashire had been at the head of the world’s cotton textile production for a century, it should continue to lead the world, without needing to update technology or organization. What had worked for Lancashire in the past was expected to continue working.⁴⁵ Workers and employers discounted criticisms of Lancashire’s outdated industrial policy from “rank outsiders, politicians, and amateurs.”⁴⁶

⁴² See for example: “Peace in India: Civil Disobedience Off,” CFT, March 6, 1931, p. 3; “Preston Spinners: Indian settlement hopes,” CFT, March 13, 1931, p. 4.

⁴³ “Heywood Cardroom: The Position in India,” CFT, April 17, 1931, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Taylor, English History, 300; Walton, Lancashire, 354

⁴⁶ Lancashire Records Office [henceforth LRO] DDX1115/6/25, “Lancashire Mill Efficiency: Facts and Figures in Reply to Sir W. Preston,” unknown newspaper clipping, n.d. See also: LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, letter to T. Ashurst Esquire, March 30, 1931; LRO/DDX1274/6/3, The Journal of the Burnley and District Weavers’, Winders’ and Beamers’ Association, August 1931; LRO/DDX1115/6/1, pamphlet, Measures for the Revival of the Lancashire Cotton Industry (September 1936, printed by The Federation of Master Cotton Spinners Associations, Ltd.).

Rationalization was implemented in several other industries in Britain (with varying degrees of success) during the 1930s.⁴⁷ Rationalization usually involved amalgamation among companies and the introduction of new technology. In Lancashire, the major change in technology that was advocated was a shift from the nineteenth century technique of mule spinning to the new method of ring spinning.⁴⁸ Those in favor of rationalization also argued for the combination of spinning and weaving companies into big concerns that could coordinate technological advances and wages.⁴⁹ These innovations were adamantly opposed by both trade unionists and industrialists.⁵⁰ As the situation in the industry became ever more dire in the 1920s and 1930s, owners and operatives occasionally used pro-rationalization rhetoric to undermine the other group.⁵¹ Rationalization would surely be implemented, stated the Textile Mercury, if it were not for “the obstructionist attitude of the trade unions.”⁵² “Employers,” countered The Cotton Factory Times, “are the biggest obstacle to social and industrial reform.”⁵³ In reality, however, neither group was committed to change.⁵⁴

Trade unionists feared rationalization because it often came with a loss of union power. Workers worried that the shift from mule spinning to ring spinning would be a

⁴⁷ Thorpe, “‘Gradualism,’” 105-6. The Labour government of 1929-31 intervened in iron and steel, two other failing industries. However, the proposed intervention in the cotton industry was pre-empted by the election of the National Government in August 1931 (CFT, January 9, 1931, p. 1).

⁴⁸ Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 29.

⁴⁹ Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 96-7.

⁵⁰ White, Militancy, 88-9; Joyce, Visions, 118; Walton, Lancashire, 330; Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 82-3.

⁵¹ For trade unions’ support of rationalization, see: “‘Lancashire Bleeding to Death’: Radical reorganisation of industry only solution to problem,” Clitheroe Advertiser and Times [henceforth CAT], February 13, 1931, p. 3; “Indian Debate,” CFT, May 15, 1931, p. 4. For employers’ support of rationalization, see: “Lancashire and Peace in India,” TM, March 6, 1931, p. 207; “From the Districts: Cotton Reform Call at Blackburn,” DN, September 26, 1931, p. 2.

⁵² “Textile News: Need for an Industrial Outlook,” TM, September 18, 1931, p. 320.

⁵³ “Notes on Passing Events,” CFT, April 17, 1931, p. 1. See also: “Lancashire’s Need,” BNDT, September 25, 1931, p. 2; “Six-Loom Mill restarted: Wage-Cut Devices: Nelson Weavers’ Warning to the Trade,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 7; “‘Lancashire Bleeding to Death’: Radical reorganisation of industry only solution to problem,” CAT, February 13, 1931, p. 3; “Indian Debate: Hope in Round Table Conference: Lancashire opinion,” CFT, May 15, 1931, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Fowler, Cotton Operatives, 128.

decline from skilled to semi-skilled labor, involving a loss of status and wages.⁵⁵ The only reorganization that employers in Lancashire were willing to implement was the “more looms” system, where workers manned six or eight looms instead of two or four without a corresponding raise in wages.⁵⁶ This system “seemed to confirm the view that reorganization meant simply more effective exploitation of labor.”⁵⁷ Pro-Labour papers occasionally vilified the employers for resisting industrial reorganization,⁵⁸ but in practice the workers, too, were unwilling to modernize.

However, as historian Alan Fowler says, “the cotton trade union leaders of the interwar years can perhaps be forgiven for not responding in a more imaginative way to economic crisis for neither, after all, did their employers.”⁵⁹ Joseph White argues that even in the prosperous years up to 1914, industrial magnates were not “disposed toward innovation and experimentation.”⁶⁰ During the depression, when resources were scarce, employers were even less willing to risk money on industrial reorganization.⁶¹ Changes in technology, vertical integration, and lower prices were vehemently rejected as unnecessary and damaging.

Lancashire cotton society was unwilling to see that changes in the rest of the world had made the factory system of the nineteenth century impractical. Indeed, changes in the outside world were sometimes used as justification for resistance to rationalization. As late as 1936, the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners Associations

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Cotton Operatives*, 29.

⁵⁶ Fowler, *Cotton Operatives*, 76, 91.

⁵⁷ Thorpe, “Gradualism,” 110. See also the report from a 1928 Trade Unions Conference that “Rationalization will mean to our class...a speeding-up, an increase of unemployment, and a necessary lowering of the standard of life” (quoted in Thorpe, “Gradualism,” 105).

⁵⁸ “Lancashire’s Need,” *BNDT*, September 25, 1931, p. 2; “Six-Loom Mill restarted: Wage-Cut Devices: Nelson Weavers’ Warning to the Trade,” *BNDT*, September 28, 1931, p. 7; “‘Lancashire Bleeding to Death’: Radical reorganisation of industry only solution to problem,” *CAT*, February 13, 1931, p. 3; “Notes on Passing Events,” *CFT*, April 17, 1931, p. 1; “Indian Debate: Hope in Round Table Conference: Lancashire opinion,” *CFT*, May 15, 1931, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Fowler, *Cotton Operatives*, 128.

⁶⁰ White, *Militancy*, 20.

⁶¹ Muldoon, “An Unholy Row,” 95.

was arguing that the rise in tariffs occurred because “every competing industry finds high protective tariffs necessary to keep Lancashire products out of their own country.”⁶²

Tariffs were proof, not that Lancashire needed to become more competitive in order to keep export levels up, but “that the vague and general charges of inefficiency leveled at our industry, even by men in responsible position [sic], are without foundation.”⁶³

Those changes in external conditions that Lancashire did acknowledge were seen as temporary, abnormal occurrences. The “pronounced and unhealthy growth”⁶⁴ of the Japanese and Indian textile industries were seen as being aided by tariffs and boycotts erected by nationalists who were impractical and unfair.⁶⁵ These hindrances to “normal” trade relations, however, were for the most part perceived as momentary.⁶⁶ Lancashire regarded the boycott and tariffs as aberrations that should disappear. This led them into conflict with the British government, as employers and traders in the cotton industry simultaneously pressured London to crush the Indian nationalist movement and resisted governmental pressure for industrial reform.⁶⁷

External factors were used as excuses to avoid changing the status quo in the Lancashire factory system. Throughout the cotton industry’s steady decline in the interwar years, both mill owners and mill operatives consistently and emphatically laid

⁶² LRO/DDX1115/6/1, pamphlet, “Measures for the Revival of the Lancashire Cotton Industry,” September 1936, printed by The Federation of Master Cotton Spinners Associations, Ltd.

⁶³ LRO/DDX1115/6/1, pamphlet, “Measures for the Revival of the Lancashire Cotton Industry,” September 1936, printed by The Federation of Master Cotton Spinners Associations, Ltd.

⁶⁴ LRO/DDX1115/6/25, “The Lancashire Cotton Trade and the India Market: Case for Deputation to the President of the Board of Trade,” November 1, 1934.

⁶⁵ LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, resolution for the mass meeting April 28, 1931; “Indian Boycott: Movement represented as a great hoax,” *CFT*, May 15, 1931, p. 1; “Heywood Cardroom: Indian Boycott resented,” *CFT*, July 17, 1931, p. 4; *CAT*, October 2, 1931, p. 7; LRO/DDX1115/6/25, pamphlet, S. S. Hammersley, “The Lancashire Textile Mission to India,” 1933.

⁶⁶ Walton, *Lancashire*, 329; Thorpe, ““Gradualism,”” 107; Fowler, *Cotton Operatives*, 5.

⁶⁷ Ghosh, “Pressure and Privilege,” 204; LRO/DDX1115/6/25, unknown newspaper clipping, “Lancashire Mill Efficiency: Facts and Figures in Reply to Sir W. Preston,” *Daily Dispatch*; BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, Précis of the Statement made to the Meeting of Lancashire Members of Parliament, Representatives of the Cotton Spinners’ and Manufacturers’ Association and the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners’ Associations Ltd., March 13, 1931; “Indian Boycott,” *CFT*, March 27, 1931, p. 5; LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, letter to T. Ashurst Esquire, March 30, 1931; BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, letter, Wedgwood Benn to W. Graham (President of the Board of Trade), April 14, 1931; “Indian boycott,” *CFT*, May 8, 1931, p. 1.

the blame on causes that lay outside Lancashire. In speaking of the nineteenth century, Patrick Joyce writes that the “idea of an external enemy was in fact very strong... particularly...in industries dependent on foreign trade [or] subject to foreign competition.”⁶⁸ In the twentieth century, the cotton industry’s primary markets were India and China, which were increasingly being lost to Indian and Japanese competition. As a result, Indian tariffs, the boycott, and Japanese competition became three factors that were used by Lancashire as the sole explanation of the region’s waning economic power.⁶⁹ “It would be a gross error,” the Burnley and District Weavers’, Winders’ and Warpners’ Journal stated, “to convey the impression that the depression in the cotton trade...is due solely to the out-of-dateness of our industry.”⁷⁰ The Blackburn Cotton Employers’ Association informed the government in London that

“the Government [would] be spending their time and energy more profitably in helping to improve the Cotton Trade if they would leave the question of Amalgamation and Re-organisation to the trade itself, and would concentrate their undivided attention on the six Clauses given above.”⁷¹

The six clauses included excessive taxation, tariffs, monetary policy, and “lawlessness and disorder in the chief markets” (a clear reference to the Indian boycott).⁷² Industrialists and workers expected the government to prevent Indian nationalism and Japanese competition from threatening Lancashire trade.

⁶⁸ Joyce, Visions, 119.

⁶⁹ Pope, Unemployment, 11, 14. See also LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association Circulars, letter, January 26, 1931; LRO/DDX1115/8/3, handbill, “Cotton Crisis: State of Trade with India and Unemployment: A Mass Meeting of protests will be held on Tuesday, April 28th, 1931,” n.d.; Rylands’ Library, Bolton and District Cotton Spinners’ Provincial Association papers [henceforth BCS] 1/1/22, 52nd Annual Report for the Year ending Dec. 31, 1931.

⁷⁰ LRO/DDX1274/6/3, The Journal of the Burnley and District Weavers’, Winders’ and Beamers’ Association, August 1931.

⁷¹ LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, letter to T. Ashurst Esquire, March 30, 1931.

⁷² LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, letter to T. Ashurst Esquire, March 30, 1931.

Although several external factors were used by Lancashire to explain the trade depression,⁷³ the Indian nationalist boycott received by far the most blame. Statements such as that made by the Darwen Weavers' Association Committee that "10,000 people were unemployed in Darwen, mainly through the Indian boycott" were common.⁷⁴ In April 1931, eight thousand people gathered in Blackburn "to inform the Government that...unless a firm stand is taken which will stamp out Sedition, Lawlessness and Disorder [in India], there can be no hope for a revival of the Lancashire Cotton Trade."⁷⁵ This meeting was jointly run by the trade unions, employers' association, and Manchester Chamber of Commerce. The venom directed toward the boycott was totally out of proportion to its effect on Lancashire's trade, as Gandhi and others tried to argue.⁷⁶ The focus on external causes, however, like resistance to rationalization and the evocation of traditional labour-employer relationships in the language of conciliation, was directly linked to the tendency of workers and employers to interpret their current situation in light of the nineteenth century.

⁷³ Pope, Unemployment, 11, 14. See also: LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers' Association Circulars, letter, January 26, 1931; LRO/DDX1115/8/3, handbill, "Cotton Crisis: State of Trade with India and Unemployment: A Mass Meeting of protests will be held on Tuesday, April 28th, 1931," n.d.; Rylands' Library, BCS/1/1/22, 52nd Annual Report for the Year Ending December 31, 1931.

⁷⁴ "Lancashire's Poverty: Workless Deputation," BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 4. Even those commentators who acknowledged that the boycott was not the only factor in Lancashire's decline stressed its prominence ("Gandhi, the Gold Standard and the Cotton Trade," TM, October 2, 1931, p. 347).

⁷⁵ LRO/DDX1115/1/6, Blackburn District Cotton Employers' Association, Minute book, September 7, 1931.

⁷⁶ Gandhi's assertions that the boycott had not had a great effect on trade, compared to the effects of factors such as the general depression and Japanese competition, were ignored or dismissed by his Lancashire audience. See for example: "Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi: Boycott's 'Small' Effect," BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6; "Mr. Gandhi," Darwen Advertiser and Courier of Coming Events, October 2, 1931, p. 2. These arguments, as well as the argument that Lancashire needed to rationalize its industry first, were echoed by the London government. See for example: BL/IOR/L/PO/1/30, letter, W. D. Croft to Secretary of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, July 20, 1931.

“Gandhi, the *bania*, the dealer in bargains” vs. “Gandhi, the idealist”⁷⁷: the theory and the practice of *khadi*

The 1929-32 boycott was the result of twenty years of Gandhi’s musing on the economic, spiritual, and political implications of Indian independence. Gandhi’s ideas about independence were intimately linked to the concepts of *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, and *khadi*. These terms must be defined before any exploration of Gandhi’s philosophy is possible. Gandhi’s definition of *swaraj* differed from that of most other Indian nationalists. *Swaraj* means self-rule, and for most nationalists, *swaraj* meant merely a political shift of power from the British to Indians. Gandhi, however, disdained this idea of independence as “English rule without the Englishman.”⁷⁸ Gandhi’s *swaraj* entailed a revolution in Indian cultural and economic life as well as in the political realm. For Gandhi, *swaraj* could not be achieved without embracing *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* translates as “of one’s country” and is mostly used specifically in the context of goods being either foreign or *swadeshi*. For the majority of Indian nationalists, any goods made in India qualified as *swadeshi*. Gandhi, however, had a much more specific, spiritual definition of *swadeshi*. For him, *swadeshi* meant “reliance on our own strength...the strength of our body, our mind and our soul.”⁷⁹ Integral to this definition of *swadeshi*, particularly of *swadeshi* cloth, was the idea that *swadeshi* goods should not be produced in factories because factories were immoral and un-Indian.⁸⁰ This definition of *swadeshi* led Gandhi to embrace *khadi* as the quintessential *swadeshi* product. *Khadi* is usually translated as homespun cloth, although Gandhi’s rules for what qualified as *khadi* changed over time.

⁷⁷ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 234.

⁷⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *Indian Home Rule [or Hind Swaraj]* (1909, 1910), trans. M.K. Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics, eds. John Dunn and Geoffrey Hawthorn (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town: Cambridge University Press 1997), 28.

⁷⁹ Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 21.

⁸⁰ Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2007), xx, 9; Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 108.

For Gandhi, the achievement of *swaraj* was predicated on pursuit of *swadeshi*, and, particularly, of *khadi* production.

In Gandhi's most developed, most theoretical articulations, *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, and *khadi* were inextricably intertwined practices. In 1939, Gandhi told the Indian National Congress that "[k]hadi...is the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and, therefore, ultimately, in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, 'the livery of India's freedom.'"⁸¹ *Khadi* was nothing less than the physical incarnation of *swaraj*. "Real home-rule," Gandhi explained in Hind Swaraj (1909), "is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul-force or love-force. In order to exert this force, *Swadeshi* in every sense is necessary."⁸² *Khadi* was the most important *swadeshi* product for two reasons. First, food and clothes were the two essentials of life and true *swadeshi* meant each person being able to provide him- or herself with those essentials.⁸³ Second, spinning provided valuable time for meditation, so that everyone who spun could be led to the path of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence).⁸⁴ For Gandhi, *khadi* was the perfection of *swadeshi*; *swadeshi* taught *ahimsa*; *ahimsa* was the only way to achieve *swaraj*.

Although this was clearly the theoretical basis behind Gandhi's championship of *khadi*, using this simple formula to describe his ideas is difficult because Gandhi stressed different aspects of his theory to different audiences. Gandhi's ideas about *khadi* were

⁸¹ quoted in Hind Swaraj and other writings, ed. Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics, eds. John Dunn and Geoffrey Hawthorn (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 174.

⁸² Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 118.

⁸³ Although Gandhi did not use gender neutral language, I feel that using gender inclusive pronouns does not do damage to Gandhi's ideas, as he was very aware of reaching out to Indian women in his work (Brown, Gandhi, 223). See for example: "Speech at Federal Structure Committee," CWMSG v. 48, 16; "In this Exclusive Article—**Gandhi** talks on... **Myself My Spinning Wheel—and Women**," Daily Herald, September 28, 1931, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Gandhi considered *ahimsa* was distinct from *satyagraha*, which referred specifically to non-violent resistance. *Ahimsa* was not just refraining from violent actions during political protests, it was a way of life that involved not hurting anyone.

not developed in a vacuum, although he did try to present his beliefs as “pure” and unsullied by economic or political considerations. Gandhi’s shifting theory of *khadi* was a response, in part, to changing political and economic factors in India and England. In the spiritual, abstract realm, *khadi*, *ahimsa*, *swadeshi*, *swaraj* were all one. In his political capacity, however, Gandhi might emphasize the economic necessity of *khadi*, the political expediency of boycott, or the traditional nativist value of *swadeshi*.

The fully articulated theory of *khadi* and *swaraj* took quite some time to develop. Gandhi spent years grappling with different ideas on *swaraj*, India, and industrialization before arriving at his philosophy of *khadi*. Gandhi’s attention to political matters, as well as his exposure to various religions, began while he lived in England in the early 1890s, studying to be a barrister. It was in London that Gandhi discovered European critiques of Western industrialism.⁸⁵ It was at this time that Gandhi also began to read Indian nationalist writings and discovered, among others, Romesh C. Dutt’s theory of the “economic drain” imposed by Britain on India.⁸⁶ Gandhi took these ideas with him to South Africa, where he lived and worked until 1914. It was in South Africa that Gandhi first employed *satyagraha*, usually translated as passive resistance or non-violent resistance,⁸⁷ in opposition to the British government. It was also in South Africa that he began to pay attention to the struggles of Indian nationalism in India, as well as elsewhere in the Empire.

⁸⁵ These critiques included arguments by Tolstoy, John Ruskin, and several Theosophists (M. K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1948, 1983), 77; Anthony Parel, “Introduction,” in *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics, eds. John Dunn and Geoffrey Hawthorn (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town: Cambridge University Press 1997), xxxiv, xxxviii-xxxli; Brown, *Gandhi*, 78-9).

⁸⁶ Parel, “Introduction,” xxxi.

⁸⁷ Literally translated *satyagraha* means “truth force,” and although it is often translated as passive resistance, Gandhi came to dislike this term because of the negative implications of “passive” (Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 284).

Swadeshi was already part of the nationalist vocabulary when Gandhi began articulating his own ideas of *swadeshi*, which interacted with and diverged from previous incarnations of the idea. Early nationalists⁸⁸ advocated boycotting British cloth in favor of *swadeshi* cloth as a specific response to the historical relationship between the political and military subjugation of India and the economic exploitation of Indian raw cotton and suppression of the indigenous textile industry by the British. The history of textiles in India was so fraught with nationalist tensions that Jawaharlal Nehru said that the “history of cotton and of textiles...might be considered the history of India.”⁸⁹ The British had originally arrived in India as traders, in search of spices and Indians’ magnificently woven textiles. Over time the British East India Company started interfering in local politics and in 1758 they were granted the *diwan*, or landlord rights, to the province of Bengal. As the EIC, backed by the British Parliament, poured more money and more arms into settling new markets in India, the British gradually took political and military control over the entire sub-continent. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution was gaining a foothold in Britain. By the 1820s and 1830s, India’s textile production in Calcutta and similar cities had been squashed and India was converted into a producer of raw goods for the Lancashire factories. In the late nineteenth century, Indian nationalists began to rediscover this history and to blame England for stifling India’s historic industry.⁹⁰ *Swadeshi* was first advocated by Indian nationalists in the early twentieth century as being retributive justice as well as proving an invaluable tool with which to

⁸⁸ It seems inaccurate to call these early intellectuals “nationalists” since they were fighting neither for a unified nation-state nor for total independence from Britain as later nationalists were. They were merely calling for increased Indian representation within the British imperial structure. However, for the sake of convention as well as brevity, I will use the term “nationalist.”

⁸⁹ Quoted in Simon Robert Brough Leadbeater, The Politics of Textiles: The Indian cotton-mill industry and the legacy of Swadeshi, 1900-1985 (New Delhi, Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications, 1993), 29.

⁹⁰ The classic nationalist exposition of this argument is Romesh C. Dutt’s Economic History of India (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1902, 1963).

pressure Britain. Gandhi built on this earlier tradition of *swadeshi* even as he criticized it and enlarged upon it.

Hind Swaraj, Gandhi's first political manifesto, was written in 1909 while working and living in South Africa, but it explicitly addressed the nationalist movement in India. Hind Swaraj contained a critique of industrialization, as well as of British rule and culture, and advocated a return to "traditional" Indian values. Although he drew on earlier nationalist thought, Gandhi's theories involved a radical departure from previous ideas of *swaraj*. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi paid tribute to the earlier generation of nationalist thinkers, such as Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Dutt.⁹¹ Yet while acknowledging their efforts, Gandhi criticized these nationalists for their lack of imagination in defining *swaraj*. In the chapter in Hind Swaraj entitled, "What is *Swaraj*?" Gandhi claimed that an independence in which the British removed their political and military power from India but Indians continued to live like the British would be no independence at all.⁹² He was deeply critical of nationalists who wanted "English rule without the Englishman...that is to say, [who] would make India English, and when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan."⁹³ Gandhi rejected predominant views of Britain as the superior society. He represented India as an "Ancient Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of God."⁹⁴ To gain true *swaraj*, India must reject modern Western industrial madness. All the themes that were to be central to Gandhi's promotion of *khadi* (with the exception of the idea of peasant uplift) were present in Hind Swaraj, but the relations between those ideas were not yet articulated.

⁹¹ Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 15, 107.

⁹² Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 28.

⁹³ Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 28.

⁹⁴ Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 7.

When Hind Swaraj was written, Gandhi's general theory of *swadeshi* had not yet become focused on *khadi* as the Indian industry. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi praised the Bengal *swadeshi* campaigns, but said that the boycott should have been "a boycott of all machine-made goods" rather than of just British goods.⁹⁵ He argued that "it were better for us to send money to Manchester and to use flimsy Manchester cloth, than to multiply mills in India...[B]y reproducing Manchester in India, we shall keep our money at the price of our blood, because our very moral being will be sapped."⁹⁶ Here was a critique of industrialization as un-Indian and immoral, but at this point (1909), Gandhi saw textile mills as just one example among many of the "bane of civilization."⁹⁷

Hind Swaraj, although it carries a lot of weight as Gandhi's only political manifesto,⁹⁸ was an early piece of work, written about India at a point when Gandhi was only familiar with India's political and economic situation from a distance. It was only once he began working in India after 1915 that Gandhi began to focus on textiles as the key issue in the struggle for *swaraj*. Gandhi quickly became involved in the politics of Ahmadabad, one of the biggest mill towns in India. He built his *ashram* on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, and developed relationships with textile workers and mill owners. Gandhi's work with the textile workers in the strikes of 1917 was the first example of Gandhi's incorporation of social groups that were ignored by other nationalists.⁹⁹ Ahmedabad provided Gandhi with an opportunity to explore the textile industry he had criticized so sharply in Hind Swaraj.

⁹⁵ Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 107.

⁹⁶ Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 108.

⁹⁷ Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 108. Other examples of the evils of the Western, modern world include doctors, lawyers, and the railroads.

⁹⁸ Although Gandhi wrote a lot of letters, speeches, and articles (the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi runs to 100 volumes), Hind Swaraj is the only text in which he laid out a comprehensive theory of political, economic, and social issues.

⁹⁹ For more details on Gandhi's work in Ahmedabad, see Mahadev Haribhai Desai, A Righteous Struggle: a chronicle of the Ahmedabad textile labourers' fight for justice, trans. Somnath P. Dave, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1951).

Gandhi's work in Ahmedabad was the beginning of a relationship with Indian industrialists that was constantly being renegotiated. The growth of the textile industry after World War I in Bombay, Ahmedabad, and other cities had made Indian mill owners a significant group in Indian politics.¹⁰⁰ Traditionally, industrialists had aligned themselves with the British government, rather than with nationalist opposition.¹⁰¹ Since Gandhi knew the mill owners would not support nationalist politics,¹⁰² he felt comfortable in his early writings condemning the use of industrial cloth wholesale. But industrialists' political positions shifted during the 1920s and '30s, and Gandhi's rhetoric on industrialization vacillated in response to these shifts. He never retreated from his belief that industry was immoral, but he was willing to moderate his rhetoric when he felt that industrialists might endorse the nationalist movement.¹⁰³ During Gandhi's work in Ahmedabad in 1917, he developed several lifelong friends and political supporters among the mill owners. These industrialists were instrumental in funding Gandhi's *ashram*, as well as his peasant education efforts and *khadi* production.¹⁰⁴ By the 1930s, many industrialists, in Bombay and other cities as well as in Ahmedabad, felt that the benefits

¹⁰⁰ For a fuller history of the development of the Indian textile industry and its relationship with Indian nationalism, see Claude Markovits, Indian business and nationalist politics 1931-1939: the indigenous capitalist class and the rise of the Congress Party, Cambridge South Asian Studies, eds. C.A. Bayly, G. P. Hawthorn, Gordon Johnson, W.J. Macpherson, S.J. Tambiah (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Alan Ross, The Emissary: G. D. Birla, Gandhi, and Independence (London, Glasgow, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto, Johannesburg: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1986); Leadbeater, Textiles.

¹⁰¹ Markovits, Indian Business, 29-30, Leadbeater, Textiles, 95, Ross, Emissary, 39. There were several reasons for this, as well as regional differences in industrialists' political positions.

¹⁰² Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 108.

¹⁰³ Markovits, Indian Business, 71. For instance, Gandhi in the first edition of Hind Swaraj says that it would be better to use Manchester cloth than Indian mill cloth because Indians would not lose their souls by buying Manchester cloth but they would if they produced Indian mill cloth (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 108). However, Gandhi stated in the preface to the 1921 Hindi translation that "My views in regard to mills have undergone this much change. In view of the present predicament of India, we should produce in our own country all the cloth we need even by supporting, if necessary, mills in India" (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 108). Gandhi also at times tried to present his views as more reasonable, less radical than his earlier statements make him appear. For instance, in 1922, Gandhi asked his audience "not [to] allow yourself to be prejudiced by anything you might have heard about my strange views about machinery" (quoted in Parel, Hind Swaraj and other writings, 165). At different times, Gandhi argued that he was not against all machinery only against machinery used in excess, machinery in India, or machinery used to produce cloth.

¹⁰⁴ Ross, Emissary, 54; Desai, Struggle, 35.

of supporting the nationalist movement now outweighed the dangers of doing so.¹⁰⁵

Many industrialists participated in the 1929-32 boycott though they had not in the INC's *swadeshi* movement of 1919-22. Despite Gandhi's involvement with mill owners from 1917 onwards, he always downplayed these connections to focus on what he saw as his most important work: his involvement with Indian peasants.

Throughout his career in Indian politics, Gandhi was very involved with improving conditions of life for Indian peasants.¹⁰⁶ Gandhi argued that the pure, Indian villages were being impoverished by the corrupt, industrialized, Westernized cities.¹⁰⁷ *Khadi* production was, for Gandhi, the ideal tool with which to return India to its previous state of sacred, self-sufficient village communities that had no need of foreign trade, cities, or industry—"the village of my dreams," Gandhi called it.¹⁰⁸ The peasants needed "a daily task that is not mere drudgery," and *khadi* was the perfect instrument.¹⁰⁹ To create his ideal villages, Gandhi organized groups to reach out to marginalized communities of peasants, especially peasant women, bringing them "the message of the spinning-wheel."¹¹⁰ He saw this "constructive programme," as he called it, as central to the attainment of *swaraj*.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Markovits, *Indian Business*, 30; Leadbeater, *Textiles*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Gandhi deserves significant recognition for being the first nationalist leader in India to address the hardships of the peasants and to enlist them in the nationalist movement. It should be recognized, however, that he encouraged the peasants to engage in civil disobedience only on his terms and under his command. For an analysis of the limitations of Gandhi's engagement with the peasants, see Gyandendra Pandey, "Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 233-287.

¹⁰⁷ quoted in Parel, *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, 168. See for example: Parel, *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, 164, 166; "Broadcast to America," *CWMG* v. 48: 23.

¹⁰⁸ Letter, Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru, October 5, 1945, in Parel, *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, 150. For Gandhi's image of India's village communities see for example: "What I Want," in *The Daily Mail*, September 19, 1931, in *CWMG* v. 48: 41; "Broadcast to America," *CWMG* v. 48: 10.

¹⁰⁹ Parel, *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, 166.

¹¹⁰ "Broadcast to America," September 13, 1931, *CWMG* v. 48: 16. By 1931, the All-India Spinners' Association was employing nearly 50,000 women in nearly 2,000 villages ("Speech at Federal Structure Committee," September 15, 1931, in *CWMG* v. 48: 16).

¹¹¹ Indeed, Gandhi argued throughout his career (most emphatically at times when he had lost control of the INC) that the constructive programme was more important than political work (Brown, *Gandhi*, 182-3, 223, 251, 256, 330). The constructive programme was also referred to as peasant uplift or social uplift.

By the mid-1910s, Gandhi had the “theology” of *khadi*¹¹² worked out, but the practicalities continued to daunt him. In his Autobiography, Gandhi detailed how difficult it was for him to find the technology and the knowledge needed for hand-spinning and hand-weaving.¹¹³ Gandhi later admitted that although he advocated *khadi* “as the panacea for the growing pauperism of India” as early as 1908, he had only seen a handloom or spinning wheel once in his life at that point.¹¹⁴ The *ashram* he founded did not begin to manufacture woven cloth until 1917 and it took almost another two years before Gandhi could find a spinning wheel and someone who could teach hand-spinning. During that time the *ashram* produced what it called *khadi*, although it used mill-spun yarn. Only by the end of 1918 did the *ashram* define *khadi* as hand-spun and hand-woven, although for political purposes Gandhi moderated this definition outside the *ashram*.¹¹⁵

Although not all Gandhi’s ideas on *khadi* were accepted outside his *ashram*, *khadi* in a looser sense did become central to the Indian National Congress’s opposition to British rule from the 1920s through independence. After the 1920s, *khadi* was always a visual symbol of INC resistance.¹¹⁶ The spinning wheel appeared on the flags adopted by the Indian National Congress in 1921 and 1931.¹¹⁷ To this day, official versions of the Indian flag must be made of *khadi*.¹¹⁸

The INC’s first engagement with Gandhi’s ideas of *khadi* and *ahimsa* occurred during the 1919-1924 non-cooperation movement. In many ways, this movement was a

¹¹² Brown, Gandhi, 90.

¹¹³ Gandhi, Autobiography, 440-447.

¹¹⁴ Gandhi, Autobiography, 440.

¹¹⁵ Trivedi, Clothing, 7, 12, 34.

¹¹⁶ Leadbeater, Textiles, 16; Trivedi, Clothing, 119, 123.

¹¹⁷ Ivan Sache, “India: Historical Maps,” May 27, 2004, <<http://www.crwflags.com/FOTW/flags/in-hist.html>> (March 20, 2008).

¹¹⁸ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, “Flag Code of India (2002),” <<http://mha.nic.in/nationalflag2002.htm>> (March 27, 2008).

predecessor to the 1929-1932 civil disobedience movement and provided an opportunity for Gandhi and the INC to work out the practices of boycott and *satyagraha*. Although *swadeshi* was adopted by the INC, Gandhi felt that “[k]hadi had not as yet found its proper place.”¹¹⁹ The resolution adopted by the INC in 1920 framed *khadi* as the expedient back-up for the industrial *swadeshi* production. It stated:

“This Congress advises the adoption of *swadeshi* in piecegoods on a vast scale and inasmuch as the existing mills of India with the indigenous capital and control do not manufacture sufficient yarn and sufficient cloth for the requirements of the nation...this Congress advises immediate stimulation of further manufacture by means of reviving handspinning in every house and handweaving on the part of millions of weavers.”¹²⁰

Even this minimal support for *khadi* was to prove temporary. By 1922, the non-cooperation movement had lost momentum and by 1924 was officially declared over.

The INC’s endorsement of *khadi* was always contingent on its effectiveness as a political tool. During times when resistance to the British was widespread there was a rise of organizations and resolutions supporting *khadi*. But during the periods of less antagonistic policies, when the INC’s executive committee was not directly under Gandhi’s influence, *khadi* ceased to be a focus of INC action. Thus, the non-cooperation movement of the early 1920s saw the creation of a Khaddar (*Khadi*) Board to increase education and production of *khadi* throughout India and the passing of a resolution that all Congress representatives must wear and spin *khadi*.¹²¹ Once non-cooperation ended, however, the resolution was repealed and the Khaddar Board suspended.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 433.

¹²⁰ Leadbeater, *Textiles*, 110.

¹²¹ This was nothing less than a revolution in the aesthetics of the INC and was a political declaration of independence from previously accepted Western norms of dress. There were many members of Congress who disapproved of Gandhi’s opposition to Western culture, but Gandhi’s influence was such that in spite of opposition, the adoption at least of the “Gandhi cap” made of *khadi* became the virtual uniform of the Congress. For more on the visual impact of *khadi*, see Lisa Trivedi’s *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India*.

¹²² Trivedi, *Clothing*, 28.

Gandhi continued his work with *khadi* even without the INC's support. With the end of non-cooperation, Gandhi "retired" from politics (something he was to do many times during his career as India's foremost politician) and returned to his *ashram*. There he set about continuing his constructive work outside the formal apparatus of Congress. He founded the All-India Spinners' Association (ostensibly not a Congress operation, although run by several Congress members) to replace the Khaddar Board.¹²³ During the "lull" period of the mid and late 1920s, Gandhi concentrated on the spiritual and social impacts of *khadi* and cultivated a network in the villages of peasants who were to be instrumental in the 1929-32 boycott.

By the end of the twenties, the INC was again ready for a major push against British power. The younger members of the INC, including Jawaharlal Nehru, were impatient with continued delays in implementing the new Indian Constitution. Indian nationalists particularly resented the high-handed nature of the Simon Commission of 1927, which was intended to review Indian conditions to determine the measure of self-government in the new constitution, and which totally excluded Indian advisers.¹²⁴ In 1929, the Congress resolved to begin a campaign of civil disobedience to push for *purna swaraj*, or complete independence (as opposed to greater political autonomy within the Commonwealth). As the INC prepared for nationwide action, they appealed to Gandhi to return to command. Seeing that he was now in a position to push his agenda, Gandhi agreed. As with the earlier non-cooperation movement, the civil disobedience movement included an endorsement of *swadeshi*. In order to put extra pressure on the British,

¹²³ Trivedi, *Clothing*, 28; Brown, *Gandhi*, 184.

¹²⁴ D. A. Low, *Britain and Indian nationalism: the imprint of ambiguity 1929-1942* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 44.

Gandhi agreed to limit the boycott to British, rather than all foreign, goods¹²⁵ and to broaden the definition of *khadi* to include all Indian manufactured cloth, not merely hand-spun and/or hand-woven.¹²⁶

Many people who took part in the 1929-1932 civil disobedience movement had never participated before in nationalist action. Peasants involved in Gandhi's *khadi* education network were mobilized, as were mill owners in the cities, and the traditional professional elite of the INC. The movement had an unprecedented geographical and social breadth. One measure of the strength of local support networks Gandhi had built up was that when all the major leaders of the INC were arrested civil disobedience continued with just as much, or more, fervor than previously.¹²⁷

The civil disobedience movement had such an effect in both India and England that in February of 1931, Gandhi was invited to meet with the Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, in an attempt to come to some accommodation. Over many days of negotiations, Gandhi and Irwin finally agreed on certain compromises.¹²⁸ Gandhi agreed to expand the boycott to include all foreign-produced cloth, instead of limiting it to British goods,¹²⁹ to end violent or coercive picketing,¹³⁰ and to end civil disobedience for the time being.¹³¹ In return, Irwin agreed to release several political prisoners and to countenance the continued boycott in its altered form.¹³² He also offered an invitation to Gandhi to attend

¹²⁵ This decision was reversed after the Gandhi-Irwin talks (BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, "Conversations between the Governor-General of India and Mr. Gandhi: Statement issued by the Government of India," n.d.).

¹²⁶ The categories of approved sources of cloth were as follows: "Swadeshi mills, non-Swadeshi mills not on the boycott list, mills on the boycott list." The list of mills to boycott was finalized in December 1930 after extensive negotiations (Markovits, *Indian Business*, 72-3).

¹²⁷ Brown, *Gandhi*, 240-1.

¹²⁸ Terms were negotiated over a series of interviews from 1 February to March 3, 1931 (BL/IOR/L/PO/49).

¹²⁹ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, "Conversations between the Governor-General of India and Mr. Gandhi: Statement issued by the Government of India," n.d.

¹³⁰ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, "Note of two further interviews with Mr. Gandhi on 1 February 1931."

¹³¹ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, "Note of a further interview with Mr. Gandhi on 18th February 1931."

¹³² BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, "Note of an interview with Mr. Gandhi on 17th February 1931"; BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, "Conversations between the Governor-General of India and Mr. Gandhi: Statement issued by the Government of India," n.d.

the Round Table Conference in England to participate in the discussions about a new constitution for India. Accordingly (and after months of indecision), on Saturday, August 29, 1931, Gandhi embarked on the S.S. Rajputana to travel to London and ultimately to Lancashire to engage in “friendly discussions”¹³³ with those who blamed him the loss of their livelihood.

Anticipations: Lancashire and Gandhi’s differing understandings of the purpose of the visit

Although Gandhi and Lancashire spokesmen talked about communication, they anticipated very different outcomes from the conversations. Operatives and mill owners expected that discussions with Lancashire workers would lead Gandhi to realize the boycott’s devastating impact on the textile industry and to end the boycott. This idea was present from the first moment of invitation, when Andrews suggested that the discussions between Lancashire and India “might lead to some fair division of trade on behalf of labour.”¹³⁴ Despite his sympathy for Indian nationalism, Andrews felt that the boycott was “hitting below the belt” in “a double act of violence not merely hitting Lancashire, but hitting England also” and was, therefore, not in accord with Gandhi’s principle of *ahimsa*, or non-violence.¹³⁵ Andrews believed, and encouraged the Lancashire community to believe, that Gandhi would end the boycott once he saw its effects firsthand. The outrage expressed by The Darwen News the week after Gandhi’s visit reveals the light in which Lancashire viewed the “communication” that was to have taken place:

¹³³ Gandhi quoted in “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

¹³⁴ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, letter, Andrews to Irwin, June 8, 1931.

¹³⁵ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, Andrews’ summary of his letter to Gandhi, letter, Andrews to Irwin, June 8, 1931. This accusation of the boycott being opposed to Gandhi’s principles of non-violence was used by Irwin also, in the Irwin-Gandhi agreements (BL/IOR/L/PO/1/49, “Note of a further interview with Mr. Gandhi on 18th February 1931.”

“The impression conveyed to the majority of people here was that the visit was with a view to any misunderstandings or differences being dissolved in the hope that our trading relations with India might ultimately be re-established.”¹³⁶

The belief that Gandhi would end the boycott once he saw Lancashire’s poverty was advanced by Andrews, but had deeper roots in Lancashire’s belief about the power of conciliation and misconceptions about the nature of Gandhi’s mission in India.

In declarations about the visit made by trade union representatives, mill owners, and newspaper reporters, cotton society revealed the fervent belief that face-to-face communication would solve all the conflict between Lancashire and India. In the weeks prior to Gandhi’s visit, friendliness was advocated by people of all political backgrounds and social positions. The Conservative Textile Mercury, which over the previous months consistently had cast aspersions on Indian nationalists’ ethics and intelligence, cautioned their readers that “it was of vital importance that any comments on the case...should be framed so as not to risk prejudicing the friendly discussions which we all hope will be arranged.”¹³⁷ Luke Bates, Mayor of Blackburn and Secretary of the Blackburn Weavers’ Association, who had said in February that he “could not regard him [Gandhi] as a friend of Lancashire,”¹³⁸ in September advised that Gandhi “should be welcomed.”¹³⁹ This was not hypocrisy. Rather, Bates’ turn-around stemmed from the belief, widespread in Lancashire, that Gandhi should be welcomed because “his visit would be productive of considerable good;”¹⁴⁰ that is, that his visit would result in an end to the boycott, and

¹³⁶ “Mr. Gandhi’s Visit,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 4.

¹³⁷ “The Mahatma Gandhi and the Cotton Trade: ‘Textile Mercury’ explains right attitude for Lancashire,” TM, September 25, 1931, p. 321.

¹³⁸ “Ald. [Alderman] Bates on Trade: Gandhi and Lancashire,” CFT, February 27, 1931, p. 3.

¹³⁹ “Mr. Gandhi’s Wish: To Meet Lancashire’s Leading Men: Mutually Beneficial Proposals,” CFT, July 3, 1931, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ “Mr. Gandhi’s Wish: To Meet Lancashire’s Leading Men: Mutually Beneficial Proposals,” CFT, July 3, 1931, p. 2.

hence, to Lancashire's depression. "Friendly discussion,"¹⁴¹ "candid" and "frank" conversations¹⁴² were seen as a panacea to solve even the worst of Lancashire's economic problems.

The idea that Gandhi would effect an about-face in his policy as a result of the visit gained strength from the romanticization of Gandhi as a humanitarian and a friend of the peasant/worker. The Darwen News explained the impetus behind mill owner Corder Catchpool's invitation: "Mr. Gandhi has a heart that quickly responds to the sight of human suffering and poverty, and Mr. Catchpool's idea was that he should come and see for himself what the effect of the Indian boycott and the cotton duties was upon Lancashire."¹⁴³ Bates said that "if Gandhi could see for himself the devastating effect of his policy among the Lancashire cotton operatives...he, as a humanitarian and a deeply religious man, would realise what our grievance is."¹⁴⁴

The idea of Gandhi as humanitarian is one area in which social and political differences between the newspapers are articulated. The pro-Labour newspapers aimed at the working class tended to emphasize Gandhi's support of the "voiceless millions" of Indian peasants. In these newspapers, Gandhi's support of the Indian peasants was interpreted to mean that he would also support Lancashire's working class. The Cotton Factory Times explained that hopes for the visit were based on "the fact that Gandhi is the friend of the poor in all climes."¹⁴⁵ If Gandhi was "afire in the interests of the poorest of the poor," then, reasoned George Brame, secretary of the Clitheroe Weavers,

¹⁴¹ "Gandhi's Week-End," BNDT, September 24, 1931, p. 4; "Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi," BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6; "The Mahatma Gandhi and the Cotton Trade: 'Textile Mercury' Explains Right Attitude for Lancashire," TM, September 25, 1931, p. 321.

¹⁴² "Mr. Gandhi's visit," BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 2; "Mr. Gandhi in Darwen," DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

¹⁴³ "Mr. Gandhi Coming to Darwen," DN, September 23, 1931. Repeated in "Darwen Houses Mr. Gandhi," DN, September 26, 1931, p. 10. See also "Gandhi's Visit: Blackburn Hospitality," CFT, September 4, 1931, p. 3; "Mr. Gandhi," DN, September 26, 1931, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ "Mr. Gandhi's Wish: To Meet Lancashire's Leading Men: Mutually Beneficial Proposals," CFT, July 3, 1931, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ "Notes on Passing Events," CFT, June 26, 1931, p. 1.

Winders and Warpers' Association, he would not inflict further economic devastation on Lancashire once he saw the misery of the unemployed mill workers.¹⁴⁶ Less political working-class newspapers merely cited Gandhi as a humanitarian, not stressing his championing of peasants. The Textile Mercury, the Conservative, upper-class newspaper, did not emphasize either Gandhi's status as a humanitarian or his interest in improving peasant life. Its hopes for the visit were expressed only in terms of personal interaction and exchanges of opinion. The identification of Gandhi as a friend of the peasant (or the lower classes) was specific to the working-class papers. The idea that Gandhi's humanitarianism would lead him to end the boycott demonstrates the failure of textile workers and industrialists to appreciate the difference between Lancashire poverty and the poverty of the Indian peasants, to understand the nationalist impetus behind the boycott, or to consider the spiritual facet of Gandhi's anti-industrial policy.

Gandhi, while using similar language of friendship and dialogue, had objectives for the visit that were in direct conflict with Lancashire's expectations. Gandhi intended to educate his Lancashire audience about the purpose of the boycott, the intentions of Indian nationalism, and the exploitative nature of British imperialism. He also hoped to gain support among the British electorate, particularly amongst the working class, for Indian independence. This hope was encouraged by Andrews in his initial proposal for the visit. In his letter to Gandhi, Andrews argued that Gandhi "could get his own position with regard to the freedom of India much more generously recognised in this country" if he ended the boycott.¹⁴⁷ While Gandhi had no intentions of buying British support by ending the boycott, he did hope that he could convince British citizens, especially the

¹⁴⁶ "Mr. Gandhi's visit to West Bradford," CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, Andrews's summary of his letter to Gandhi enclosed in letter, Andrews to Irwin, June 8, 1931.

working class, to see the justice in Indian independence. His trip to Lancashire was of a piece with this larger goal.

Gandhi's plans for his visit to England had very little to do with the Round Table Conference, and much more to do with exposing his British audience to the ideals of (his own) Indian nationalism. From the beginning, Gandhi had little faith in the constitutional negotiations of the Round Table Conference. He did not trust "the unbending and unbendable...Government" to provide any substantial changes to India's status.¹⁴⁸ He also felt that a "merely" constitutional *swaraj*, without economic and spiritual self-sufficiency for every Indian, was meaningless.¹⁴⁹ While in England, Gandhi tried "to show to every Englishman and Englishwoman [he met] that what the Congress stands for is what is deserved by India."¹⁵⁰ Often he framed his mission in populist terms; Gandhi claimed to be "the sole representative of those half-starved, half-naked dumb millions" of Indian peasants.¹⁵¹ He was particularly interested in bringing his message to the working class of England.¹⁵² Thus he chose (at great inconvenience to everyone else associated with the Round Table Conference) to live in a settlement house in the East End.¹⁵³ During his stay in London, he frequently reiterated to correspondents and the press the joy he and the East-Enders took in each others' company and how he was able to explain

¹⁴⁸ Gandhi, quoted in Mahadev Desai, "London Letter: No Progress," *Young India* v. 13, no. 41, October 8, 1931, p. 288. See also: James D. Hunt, *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi: Promilla & Co., Publishers, 1978), 193, 196, 199; Brown, *Gandhi*, 256; "Interview to 'The News Chronicle,'" September 17, 1931, *CWMG* v. 53, 26.

¹⁴⁹ Brown, *Gandhi*, 217-218, 252, 256; "Speech at Federal Structure Committee," September 15, 1931, *CWMG* v. 48: 18.

¹⁵⁰ Gandhi, quoted in Desai, "Friends in Need," *Young India* v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 308. See also Hunt, *London*, 196, 199; Brown, *Gandhi*, 259-260.

¹⁵¹ "Interview to unemployed Workers' Deputation [West Bradford]," September 27, 1931, in *CWMG* v. 48: 73. See also: "Broadcast to America," September 13, 1931, *CWMG* v. 48: 10; "Speech at Federal Structure Committee," September 15, 1931, *CWMG* v. 48: 16; "Speech at Meeting of Labour M.P.s.," September 16, 1931, *CWMG* v. 48: 21; "Speech at Federal Structure Committee," September 17, 1931, *CWMG* v. 48: 28; "What I Want," in *The Daily Mail*, September 19, 1931 in *CWMG*, v. 48: 41; "Speech at Reception," in *The Sunday Times*, September 20, 1931, *CWMG*, v. 48: 42.

¹⁵² Desai, "London Letter: A Warm Welcome," *Young India*, v. 13, no. 40, October 1, 1931, p. 282; Hunt, *London*, 199; Brown, *Gandhi*, 259-260.

¹⁵³ Hunt, *London*, 198-199.

India's position to them.¹⁵⁴ One day he was able to teach the children in the neighborhood about *ahimsa* and common roots between Sanskrit and English words.¹⁵⁵ For Gandhi, the important task of his visit to England was to “place before the British public the Case for India.”¹⁵⁶

But educating unemployed Lancashire workers was especially important and would take extra effort. In Lancashire, Gandhi had not only to combat general prejudice and misinformation about Indian nationalism, but to confront the deeply held assertion that his actions were depriving thousands of their livelihood. An English friend of Gandhi's, according to Gandhi's newspaper Young India, claimed that it was “not possible for men and women under such conditions to take a balanced or rational view of things or policies!”¹⁵⁷ But Gandhi was determined to convince Lancashire society of the justness of his demands by seeing “as much as possible of working people there who are engaged in the cotton trade and [getting] with them face to face and heart to heart.”¹⁵⁸ Gandhi intended to explain his beliefs about *swadeshi* and *swaraj* to Lancashire workers and industrialists. In an interview with the Press prior to the visit, Gandhi said that, “there is so much misunderstanding [in Lancashire] about what we have done with foreign cloth. If I went up there and talked with them I should be cross-examined, and would speak to them without reserve.”¹⁵⁹ Gandhi's aim in going to Lancashire was not, as Charles Andrews and Lancashire society hoped, to “learn the facts of the position of Lancashire and how the policy of the All-India Congress has affected that position” so

¹⁵⁴ Letter to Lord Willingdon [Viceroy of India], September 18, 1931, CWMG, v. 48: 39.

¹⁵⁵ “Discussion with Children,” in The Sunday Observer, September 20, 1931, CWMG, v. 48: 42.

¹⁵⁶ Desai, “What India Wants,” Young India v. 13, no. 41 (October 8, 1931), p. 288. See also: Desai, “Friends in Need,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 308.

¹⁵⁷ P., “An Old Chapter Recalled: The Present Crisis,” Young India v. 13, no. 41 (October 8, 1931), p. 293.

¹⁵⁸ “Statement to the Press,” September 25, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 65.

¹⁵⁹ “Interview to the Press,” September 12, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 6.

that he would take pity on Lancashire and end the boycott.¹⁶⁰ He was merely going to Lancashire in an attempt to alleviate any bitterness there by educating the public about his ideas about *swadeshi* and *swaraj*.

Education was Gandhi's primary goal, but secondary to that was the hope that by explaining his mission Gandhi could persuade English people to support *swaraj*. In an article entitled "What I Want," published in The Evening Standard, Gandhi stated, "What I want is peace for India. I want the people of Britain to help me."¹⁶¹ In Lancashire, he told his audience, "I am powerless to do anything without the active co-operation of Lancashire and then of Englishmen in other parts of Great Britain."¹⁶² Gandhi said, "I am...acquaint[ing] myself with their [British] mentality, and trying to give them as I know it the correct situation in India."¹⁶³ By countering "the vicious propaganda going on today in England to prejudice the Indian cause," Gandhi hoped to see "the creation of goodwill between the two countries."¹⁶⁴

"Disappointment"¹⁶⁵: the failure of communication between Gandhi and cotton society

In spite of efforts on both sides to create amity between Lancashire and India, Gandhi and Lancashire mill workers and mill owners had such different visions of the past and the future that they could not communicate effectively about the causes and solutions to the boycott. Cotton society would not relinquish their romanticization of Lancashire's economic past and they insisted on interpreting the Indian boycott as a

¹⁶⁰ This proclamation of the Greenfield Mill Company, Ltd. was posted on the mill door and repeated in the Blackburn Daily Telegraph, the Darwen Advertiser and Courier of Coming Events, and the Darwen News.

¹⁶¹ "Interview to the 'The Evening Standard,'" September 12, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 1. See also, "Message to 'The Times,'" [September 14, 1931], CWMG v. 48: 11.

¹⁶² "Lancashire's Poverty: Overwhelmed," BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 4.

¹⁶³ "Lancashire's Poverty: Overwhelmed," BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ "Interview to Textile Mercury," September 17, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 24.

¹⁶⁵ "Darwen Houses Mr. Gandhi," DN, September 26, 1931, p. 10.

momentary irregularity in Lancashire's normal export business. Even when Lancashire heard Gandhi's arguments about the necessity of the boycott (for instance, trade union leaders sympathized with Gandhi's attempts to alleviate the condition of the Indian peasants) they misinterpreted the context, minimizing the spiritual and nationalist aspects of the boycott.

Narrow Nationalism vs. Peasant Uplift: the dispute over the nature of the boycott

Lancashire cotton society refused to accept Gandhi's interpretation of the boycott as a movement comprising economic, political, and spiritual motivations. According to the nationalist newspaper Young India, Gandhi "poured out his heart before them [Lancashire workers] for three quarters of an hour—describing how economics and ethics and politics were in his life inextricably mixed up."¹⁶⁶ This message was completely lost on the Lancashire audience, who insisted on making distinctions between what they called the "political boycott" and the "economic boycott." The phrase "political boycott" was used by the English to designate the "narrow nationalism" that specifically targeted Lancashire cloth products.¹⁶⁷ The term "economic boycott," on the other hand, was used to indicate a free-trade choice not to buy British goods but to support native industry.¹⁶⁸ This misconception then allowed cotton society to dismiss the strength of the boycott movement. Once people in Lancashire categorized the boycott as *either* economic opportunism *or* political maneuvering, they argued that Indians could be threatened or cajoled into abandoning it. If the boycott were merely a political move by a minority,

¹⁶⁶ Mahadev Desai, "Gandhiji in Lancashire: Lancashire's Case and Gandhi's [sic] Reply," Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 309.

¹⁶⁷ "Birds and Empire Drama: Lancashire's hope," BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 3. See also: "Situation in India," CFT, March 20, 1931, p. 2; "Indian Boycott," CFT, March 27, 1931, p. 5; LRO/DDX1115/6/25, typescript, Chamber of Commerce Blackburn, January 17, 1934.

¹⁶⁸ "Economic boycott" and "political boycott" were not real entities. They were phrases used by Lancashire sources to indicate a division that the cotton industry, incorrectly, believed to exist in India.

then presumably it could be crushed by sufficient force from the English government.¹⁶⁹ Alternatively, if the boycott were exclusively an attempt to create a solution to India's economic problems, then alternate industries could be developed in India that would not compete with Lancashire textiles. For instance, George Brame suggested that the Indian peasants might charge more for their rice instead of weaving cotton.¹⁷⁰ Mill owners and workers saw the "economic boycott" as negligible and focused on the "political boycott," instead of seeing the boycott as a movement that integrated various concerns in Indian society. Creating a distinction between economic and political boycott allowed Lancashire commentators to marginalize the boycott as the work of a small group of malicious nationalists who bullied the rest of India into sabotaging their own economy.¹⁷¹

Representatives of the cotton industry attacked the boycott as a form of "narrow,"¹⁷² "dangerous,"¹⁷³ nationalism that specifically targeted English, and indeed Lancashire, cloth products. Depictions of the boycott as the work of a small group of malicious nationalists were common. The Cotton Factory Times' commercial correspondent in Calcutta declared that the Congress used social exclusion to "stifle any cry of dissent, so that though Congress represents actually only a minority, it has been able to deceive the world into believing that its demand is a unanimous Indian one."¹⁷⁴ "As regards resumption of business with Manchester," he concluded, "political

¹⁶⁹ LRO/DDX1115/1/6, Blackburn District Cotton Employers' Association, Minute book, resolution sent to the Central Association in Manchester, September 7, 1931.

¹⁷⁰ "Mr. Gandhi's visit to West Bradford: Efforts to Improve Position," CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ "Mill breakaways condemned," BNDT, September 24, 1931, p. 8. A very similar statement appears in "Mr. Naesmith on India," CFT, September 25, 1931, p. 4. See also: "Indian Boycott: Movement represented as a great hoax: Government blunder," CFT, May 15, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁷² "Birds and Empire Drama: Lancashire's hope," BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 3.

¹⁷³ "Mr. Gandhi's Visit to West Bradford: Indian Poverty," CAT, October 2, 1931 p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ "Indian Boycott: Movement represented as a great hoax: Government blunder," CFT, May 15, 1931, p. 1.

conditions alone hinder it.”¹⁷⁵ The interpretation of the INC as a small group that forced other Indians to comply with their nefarious designs bolstered Lancashire’s conviction that the boycott was a deviant campaign, which would soon collapse, allowing trading patterns to return to normal.

During the visit, Gandhi responded to Lancashire’s characterization of the boycott as a narrow and selfish political policy by stressing that the boycott was fueled by a mixture of political, economic, and spiritual concerns. He introduced to Lancashire the idea of the constructive, or “peasant uplift,” program. Gandhi refuted Lancashire’s claim that Indian nationalists were motivated by selfish interests by claiming that the Indian nationalist movement, and specifically the boycott, was initiated in the interests of Indian peasants. Throughout his visit, Gandhi spoke to the British public as the sole representative of the Congress and portrayed the Congress as giving voice to the unexpressed yearnings of the peasants, who could not speak for themselves. The INC was, he argued, “essentially a peasant organization” in that it “represent[ed], in its essence, the dumb, semi-starved millions scattered over the length and breadth of the land in its 700,000 villages...[and would] sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interests of these dumb millions.”¹⁷⁶ It was those “dumb and starving millions” for whom Gandhi had come to claim “freedom unadulterated” and in whose interests the boycott was carried out.¹⁷⁷ Gandhi countered claims of *swadeshi* being a “dangerous form of nationalism”¹⁷⁸ by arguing that it was the only solution to the problem of Indian poverty.

¹⁷⁵ “Indian Boycott: Movement represented as a great hoax: Government blunder,” *CFT*, May 15, 1931, p. 1. Similar statements were made by trade union leaders (see for example: “Mill breakaways condemned,” *BNDT*, September 24, 1931, p. 8).

¹⁷⁶ “Speech at the Federal Structure Committee,” September 15, 1931, *CWGMG*, v. 48: 16. This assertion is repeated innumerable times. See also: “Speech at Friends’ House, London,” September 12, 1931, *CWGMG*, v. 48: 3; “Speech at the Federal Committee,” September 17, 1931, *CWGMG*, v. 48: 28; “What I Want,” in *The Daily Mail*, September 19, 1931, *CWGMG* v. 48: 41; “Lancashire’s Poverty: Overwhelmed,” *BNDT*, September 26, 1931, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ “Speech at Friends’ House, London,” September 12, 1931, *CWGMG*, v. 48: 3.

¹⁷⁸ “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford: Indian Poverty,” *CAT*, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

He explained the economic arrangements that left Indian peasants unemployed for six months of the year and the program of spinning and weaving that he tried to implement as a palliative to this poverty. He regretted the effects of the boycott on Lancashire, but was consoled by the fact that it was, as he told the mill owners, “a result of the steps I took, and *had to take*, as part of my duty towards the...starving millions of India.”¹⁷⁹

“Symbol of Salvation”¹⁸⁰: Gandhi explains and Lancashire ignores the spiritual implications of *khadi*

Lancashire cotton society refused to listen to what Gandhi said about *swadeshi* as a spiritual program. Even as representatives of the cotton industry absorbed Gandhi’s message of peasant uplift, they ignored or distorted other aspects of his argument. T. D. Barlow, chairman of the main employers’ association, said that, as a result of the visit, Lancashire now understood that the boycott was not merely political but “was also of great social significance.”¹⁸¹ Yet in spite of Lancashire society’s sense of gaining a new appreciation of the social implications of Gandhi’s mission, industrialists and trade unionists still dismissed the idea that there was a spiritual aspect of the boycott. Young India reported that Gandhi told Lancashire that he could “take before them [the peasants] a message of God only by taking the message of sacred work before them.”¹⁸² In Lancashire newspapers, the idea that spinning is “sacred work” was entirely lost, as was the idea that Gandhi saw *khadi* as bringing God to the peasants. What Gandhi articulated

¹⁷⁹ Italics mine. Gandhi quoted by Mahadev Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Joy Not Unmixed,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 309.

¹⁸⁰ Gandhi, quoted in “In this Exclusive Article -- **Gandhi** talks on... **Myself My Spinning Wheel** —and **Women**,” Daily Herald, September 28, 1931, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6. The same phrase was repeated in “Mr. Gandhi in Darwen: Not Against Lancashire,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

¹⁸² Gandhi quoted by Mahadev Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Lancashire’s Case and Gandhi’jis [sic] Reply,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 310.

as a spiritual cleansing, “an entirely self-purifactory endeavour,”¹⁸³ Lancashire reinterpreted as social or economic reform.

The extent to which Barlow and his cohort failed to understand Gandhi’s intentions is revealed in Barlow’s musing that “M [sic] Gandhi would, he presumed, accept any alternative craft that would provide what he was seeking to achieve—enlargement and economic betterment of the peasant life.”¹⁸⁴ This idea, which was echoed by George Brame, a trade unionist, does not take into account Gandhi’s statement in the Daily Herald (a London-based paper) that the “spinning wheel is for India’s starving millions the symbol of salvation.”¹⁸⁵ When representatives of the cotton industry did note the spiritual aspect, it was only to denigrate it.¹⁸⁶ The most benign judgment Lancashire passed on Gandhi’s spiritual ideas was that they were “sincere enough, but for the most part impractical.”¹⁸⁷

“A Historical Fact”: Gandhi and Lancashire contest the nature of British imperialism

Representatives of the cotton industry argued that while Gandhi’s aims for peasant uplift were worthwhile, the boycott was not a responsible or appropriate solution. T. D. Barlow argued that although Lancashire “must sympathise” with Gandhi’s peasant uplift program, “the boycott has cut off a trade which it has taken generations to build up and the results to those dependent on that trade are catastrophic.”¹⁸⁸ In almost the same

¹⁸³ Gandhi quoted by Mahadev Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Wholly Economic,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 310.

¹⁸⁴ “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ “In this Exclusive Article: **Gandhi** talks on...**Myself My Spinning Wheel—and Women**,” Daily Herald, September 28, 1931, p. 8.

¹⁸⁶ See for example: “Mahatma Gandhi and Lancashire,” CFT, September 25, 1931, p. 1; “Situation in India: Cause of untold harm,” CFT, July 3, 1931, p. 2; Rover, “Wayside Gleanings,” CFT, September 18, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ “Gandhi, the Gold Standard and the Cotton Trade: ‘We must depend on ourselves’: No substitute for reorganization,” TM, October 2, 1931, p. 347. The text is bolded in the original. See also: “Gandhi’s Aim: Conflict of Interest,” CFT, August 14, 1931, p. 3.

words, George Brame told Gandhi that although trade unionists “had every sympathy with Mr. Gandhi in his efforts to try and uplift that class...the system he [Gandhi] was putting into operation was certainly having grievous results upon Lancashire cotton operatives generally.”¹⁸⁹ Spokesmen for the cotton industry persisted in believing that Lancashire’s trade with India should continue unabated without harming Indian interests, and that the boycott was a thoughtless, destructive impulse.

The criticism of Gandhi’s methods often led into the argument that Gandhi did not understand (as Lancashire industrialists did) the forces with which he was working. Barlow worried that “Mr. Gandhi must find it difficult to differentiate between the political aspirations of Congress and their economic effects.”¹⁹⁰ At the opposite end of the political spectrum from Barlow, “Rover,” the weekly commentator of the Cotton Factory Times, stated that “in his effort to secure the independence of his country, Gandhi is ignoring the all-important economic laws which are the real basis of the problem of India.”¹⁹¹ Lancashire spokesmen were impressed by “the sincerity and earnestness of the little man in the loin cloth” but felt that but he was “grasping at the shadow and missing the substance.”¹⁹² The secretary of the Heywood Cardroom Association argued that Gandhi was mistaken in his tactics because the boycott was “in no way calculated to assist India toward independence.”¹⁹³ The portrayal of Gandhi as a naïve player in a vastly complicated economic and political game bolstered Lancashire’s

¹⁸⁹ “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford: Clitheroe Visitors,” CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ “Gandhi, the Gold Standard and the Cotton Trade: ‘We must depend on ourselves’: No substitute for reorganization,” TM, October 2, 1931, p. 347. See also: “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi: Mr J.H. Grey’s question,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

¹⁹¹ Rover, “Wayside Gleanings,” CFT, October 2, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁹² Rover, “Wayside Gleanings,” CFT, October 2, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁹³ “Heywood Cardroom: Indian Boycott resented,” CFT, July 17, 1931, p. 4.

argument that Indians were not yet ready for independence and that “any withdrawal of British power from India will open the way to a period of prolonged conflict.”¹⁹⁴

One of the manifestations of Lancashire’s commitment to the standards of the nineteenth century was the belief that the imperial relations of the nineteenth century were beneficial and normative. The premise that empire (and imperial trading patterns) was good for colonial subjects and for England was accepted by almost everyone. An editorial in the Manchester Guardian rejoiced that “Lancashire’s rightful heritage to a fair share of the Indian market does not conflict with Great Britain’s trusteeship for the welfare of India as a whole.”¹⁹⁵ Opposition to the boycott, raised tariffs, and the growth of the Indian mill industry was couched as paternalist protection of “masses of Indians, who are undoubtedly suffering” from the ill-conceived plans of self-absorbed Indian nationalists and industrialists.¹⁹⁶ Spokesmen for the cotton industry argued that the boycott harmed Indians as much as it did the English. “If...the door is barred to goods that are not [of] Indian origin, the natives themselves are going to be the sufferers,” warned the Textile Mercury.¹⁹⁷ The Manchester Chamber of Commerce elaborated on this argument:

“India raw cotton exports will suffer if Lancashire doesn’t buy them; other Indian exports will suffer if Britain can’t buy them because of unemployment; Indian consumers will suffer if British goods aren’t there on a free market to compete with Indian goods.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ DN, September 30, 1931, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ LRO/DDX1115/6/25, “Lancashire Trade with India: Mr. Mody’s Visit,” Manchester Guardian, n.d. [probably 1933].

¹⁹⁶ LRO/DDX1115/1/6, Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association, Minute book, September 7, 1931. See also: LRO/DDX1115/6/25, “The Lancashire Cotton Trade and the India Market: Case for Deputation to the President of the Board of Trade,” November 1, 1934; LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, Resolution for the Mass Meeting April 28, 1931; LRO/DDX1115/6/26, pamphlet, “Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform Presented Nov. 3rd, 1933, [Reprinted...23rd July, 1934],” published by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce; LRO/DDX1115/6/25, letter to the editor, “Lancashire Trade with India: Mr. Mody’s Visit,” Manchester Guardian, n.d., [probably 1933]; “Lancashire Manufactures and the Indian Situation,” TM, March 13, 1931, p. 231; “Heywood Cardroom: Indian Boycott resented,” CFT, July 17, 1931, p. 4.

¹⁹⁷ “Lancashire Manufactures and the Indian Situation,” TM, March 13, 1931, p. 231.

¹⁹⁸ LRO/DDX1115/6/26, pamphlet, “Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, Presented November 3, 1933, [Reprinted...23rd July, 1934],” published by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

In contrast to the wise, responsible, caring Lancashire industrialists, Indian nationalists were portrayed as either naïve or conniving.¹⁹⁹ It was in this light that John Grey, a mill owner, stated his opinion that “Mr Gandhi does not, I suggest, appreciate fully the power” of the forces with which he was meddling.²⁰⁰ Only English rule (and Lancashire cotton) could save Indians from themselves.

There was a difference, however, between Conservative and Labour interpretations of benevolent empire. While both envisioned a return to the past in terms of the relationship between Lancashire and India, they had different routes to get there. Conservatives focused on suppressing the Indian nationalist movement by force. They identified the Indian nationalist movement as “evil”²⁰¹ and painted Lancashire as an innocent “victim of political passion and prejudice.”²⁰² They wanted the British government to return to a more dictatorial relationship with India by ending the Indian Government’s fiscal autonomy and “securing the complete elimination of the Boycott of British Goods and Picketing.”²⁰³ Major tensions developed between industrial interests and the London government as the mill owners pressured the government to turn the clock back in imperial relationships.²⁰⁴ One member of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce wrote that to “rely solely on what is called a policy of goodwill, but which is really a unilateral policy of concessions on the part of Great Britain...is to fly in the face

¹⁹⁹ *CAT*, October 2, 1931, p. 7; “Situation in India: Cause of untold harm,” *CFT*, July 3, 1931, p. 2; Rover, “Wayside Gleanings,” *CFT*, October 2, 1931, p. 1; “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford,” *CAT*, October 2, 1931, p. 5; “Indian Boycott,” *CFT*, May 15, 1931, p. 1; “Gandhi, the Gold Standard and the Cotton Trade,” *TM*, October 2, 1931, p. 347.

²⁰⁰ “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi: Mr J.H. Grey’s question,” *BNDT*, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

²⁰¹ LRO/DDX1115/8/3, The Blackburn District Cotton Employers’ Association circulars, handbill, “Cotton Crisis: State of Trade with India and Unemployment: A Mass Meeting of protests will be held on Tuesday, April 28th, 1931.”

²⁰² LRO/DDX1115/6/25, pamphlet, S. S. Hammersley, “The Lancashire Textile Mission to India,” 1933. See also: LRO/DDX1115/6/25, typescript, Chamber of Commerce, Blackburn, January 17, 1934.

²⁰³ BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, Précis of the Statement made to the Meeting of Lancashire Members of Parliament Representatives of the Cotton Spinners’ and Manufacturers’ Association and the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners’ Associations Ltd., March 13, 1931.

²⁰⁴ Muldoon, “‘An Unholy Row,’” 94; Fowler, *Cotton Operatives*, 74; BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, memorandum, Manchester Chamber of Commerce to the Secretary of State for India, n.d., [ca. 23 December, 1931]; BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, letter, Sir Campbell Rhodes to E. Raymond Streat, December 27, 1931; “Trade with India,” *CFT*, May 1, 1931, p. 3.

of all the teachings of history.”²⁰⁵ The London government was continually fending off accusations that the British government had abandoned Lancashire cotton interests.²⁰⁶

The Manchester Chamber of Commerce declared that “[t]he Joint Select Committee is concerned with the future good Government of India from the point of view of Indian and British interests equally.”²⁰⁷ But, it continued, “[i]t cannot be questioned that the British Parliament is under an obligation to avoid any situation which would imperil the existence of the cotton trade.”²⁰⁸

Labour and Socialist commentators tended to be more accommodating, advocating cooperation within the empire. Leftist workers stressed worker solidarity, even if this was mostly rhetoric.²⁰⁹ The trade unionist George Brame, in his interview with Gandhi “pointed out the sympathy the deputation had for the Indian people...and...with Mr. Gandhi in his efforts to try and uplift that class.”²¹⁰ They talked more about acknowledging the legitimate demands of Indian nationalists (it is uncertain which demands they considered legitimate and which illegitimate). Liberal and Labour cotton society opposed “the rank, overbearing attitude of Winston Churchill and his kind.”²¹¹ In the end, however, despite differences of accent, all of Lancashire society saw the imperial relationship as benevolent and inevitable.

²⁰⁵ LRO/DDX1115/6/26, letter, James Watts, Jr. to Richard Bond, Esquire, July 7, 1934.

²⁰⁶ “Indian Boycott: Position worse than before agreement,” CFT, March 27, 1931, p. 5; “Heywood Cardroom: Indian Boycott resented,” CFT, July 17, 1931, p. 4; BL/IOR/L/PO/1/48, letter, T. D. Barlow to Sir Samuel Hoare, September 4, 1931.

²⁰⁷ LRO/DDX1115/6/26, pamphlet, “Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, Presented November 3, 1933, [Reprinted...23rd July, 1934],” published by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Rover, “Wayside Gleanings: What are we doing?” CFT, January 2, 1931, p. 1; Rylands Library, Archives of the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners and Twiners [henceforth ACS] 9/5/1/26, “Report of the Proceedings at the 63rd Annual Trades Union Congress, held at Bristol, September 7-11, 1931, Joint Internationals, Resolutions on Unemployment and the Economic Crisis,” p. 127.

²¹⁰ “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford,” CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

²¹¹ Rover, “Wayside Gleanings: Winston’s Woes,” CFT, February 6, 1931, p. 1. See also: “Mr. Shaw on India,” CFT, April 17, 1931, p. 2.

While in Lancashire, Gandhi attempted to provide an alternate history of British rule and the role of economic imperialism in India, which was largely ignored in the Lancashire papers. Young India reported that while in England Gandhi “combated the preconceived notions and the hardened prejudices of even educated Britishers who were systematically being taught false history.”²¹² Gandhi blamed British rule for making India “progressively poor and emasculate” economically, politically, and militarily.²¹³ He specifically blamed the East India Company for ruining the village industries and linked the EIC’s exploitation to Lancashire’s wealth.²¹⁴ Therefore, Gandhi argued, the *khadi* movement was “an appeal to go back to our former calling.”²¹⁵ Gandhi declared that the *khadi* movement was a return to the true, glorious past of India’s prosperous, autonomous village system that had been destroyed by British rule. This was a direct repudiation of Lancashire’s version of a history of benevolent, natural economic relations within an imperial framework in which both India and Lancashire benefited and in which the nationalist boycott was an unnatural aberration from traditional trade relations. In Gandhi’s paradigm, England’s current deprivation was merely the result of Indians reclaiming their birthright.²¹⁶ Gandhi “urged that England must not build her happiness on the tombs of millions as she had done.”²¹⁷ Lancashire was not eager to hear Gandhi’s version of history, which denied Lancashire’s right to the Indian textile market. On the few occasions that Lancashire newspapers noted Gandhi’s alternate history, they dismissed it as entirely Gandhi’s peculiar, erroneous viewpoint.²¹⁸

²¹² Desai, “What India Wants,” Young India v. 13, no. 41 (October 8, 1931), p. 288. See also: Desai, “London Letter: Future Friends,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 306; Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Good Will,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 311.

²¹³ “What I want,” in The Daily Mail, September 19, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 41.

²¹⁴ See for example: “Broadcast to America,” September 13, 1931, CWMG, v. 48: 8.

²¹⁵ Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Wholly Economic,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 310.

²¹⁶ “Speech at a Meeting of Labour M.P.s,” September 16, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 22.

²¹⁷ “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford: Indian Poverty,” CAT, October 2, 1931 p. 5.

²¹⁸ See for example: “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford: Indian Poverty,” CAT, October 2, 1931 p. 5.

“Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi”²¹⁹: Lancashire rejects Gandhi’s overtures

As we have seen, one of Gandhi’s goals for the visit was to create support in Lancashire for the INC. To this end, Gandhi repeatedly presented to Lancashire a scenario under which the British cotton industry could regain a certain amount of their trade with India. He remained quite clear that “Lancashire...could never hope to get back to the quantity of goods formerly supplied to India.”²²⁰ However, “supposing there were a full-hearted settlement with India and supposing India had to buy foreign cloth to supplement indigenous homespun and mill-spun, preference would be given to Lancashire over all other foreign cloth.”²²¹ Gandhi hoped to win political support for Indian independence by presenting it as something that would benefit Lancashire economically. “What will conduce to the prosperity of Great Britain, the economic freedom of Great Britain,” he asked, “an enslaved but rebellious India, or an India an esteemed partner with Britain?”²²² He promised that an independent India would “deal with England as a partner.”²²³ Gandhi’s repeated emphasis on partnership and friendliness between England and India were intended to counter British fears that an independent India would impose vengeful economic restrictions on British trade. “I

²¹⁹ “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

²²⁰ “Lancashire’s Poverty: Talk with Mayor: No Hope of Regaining Full Flow of Exports,” BNDT, September 26, 1931, p. 4. Gandhi and his party were aware that his offer might not satisfy Lancashire. Desai reported that “it was no happiness to Gandhiji to tell them that he could bring them very little comfort [though] [t]hey had come with great expectations perhaps” (Gandhi quoted by Mahadev Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Lancashire’s Case and Gandhiji’s [sic] Reply,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 310).

²²¹ “Interview to ‘Textile Mercury,’” September 17, 1931, CWMG v. 48: 24-25. This proposition was repeated several times during the visit and reinterpreted in several different newspaper accounts. See for example: “Mr. Gandhi to Meet Aga Khan To-night: Mr. Gandhi’s Promise,” Daily Herald, September 28, 1931, p. 3; “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi: Boycott’s ‘Small’ Effect,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6; “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford,” CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5; “Gandhi and Japan,” CFT, July 3, 1931, p. 3. This was misrepresented in some places as a “complete ban on Japanese cloth”: “Birds and Empire Drama,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 3. See also: “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi: Banning Japanese goods,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6.

²²² “Speech at Federal Structure Committee,” September 15, 1931, CWMG, v. 48: 19.

²²³ “Mr. Gandhi in Darwen,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

have come to give you fair trade,” he promised Lancashire, “[b]ut, if I go without giving it, it will not be through any fault of mine.”²²⁴

In the end, however, Gandhi was to leave Lancashire without giving them “fair trade,” as Lancashire cotton society completely scorned what it saw as Gandhi’s minimal concessions. The Clitheroe Advertiser and Times reported that Gandhi “made an important statement concerning his Lancashire tour and the prospects—*slight indeed*—of help from India being forthcoming.”²²⁵ The Darwen Advertiser angrily rejected Gandhi’s offer: “[W]hat he [Gandhi] may do for ‘the suffering operative’ will, to our mind, neither start a solitary loom nor sell a single piece of cloth.”²²⁶ The expectation of economic revival, the view of Indian nationalism as a fleeting and deviant phenomenon, and the persistent clinging to idealized nineteenth century standards as normative led Lancashire to reject Gandhi’s offer because it did not suit their imagined scenario of what the volume of Lancashire-India trade ought to be. What Gandhi characterized as “the old Lancashire trade,”²²⁷ the Blackburn Northern Daily Telegraph described as “ordinary trading relations.”²²⁸ Lancashire society firmly believed that the market would return to “normal;” that is, the total dominance of the Indian market that had existed during the heyday of empire. Anything short of this was unacceptable. The limitations imposed on the cotton industry and on Gandhi by Lancashire’s commitment to competing visions of the past and future ensured that no real communication ensued between Gandhi and his

²²⁴ Gandhi quoted by Mahadev Desai, “Gandhiji in Lancashire: Lancashire’s Case and Gandhi’s [sic] Reply,” Young India v. 13, no. 42 (October 15, 1931), p. 310.

²²⁵ My italics. “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford,” CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

²²⁶ “Mr. Gandhi in Darwen,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

²²⁷ “Interview to Unemployed Workers’ Deputation,” CWMG v. 48: 74.

²²⁸ “Cold Comfort from Mr Gandhi,” BNDT, September 28, 1931, p. 6. See also: “Mr. Gandhi in Darwen,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7; “Mr. Gandhi’s visit to West Bradford,” CAT, October 2, 1931, p. 5.

Lancashire audience. As The Darwen News put it, “Mr. Gandhi has seen Lancashire, and Lancashire has seen Mr. Gandhi, and there is the end of it.”²²⁹

Conclusion:

Today Gandhi’s visit to Lancashire survives in a few photographs decorating books of Lancashire history, but receives almost no critical attention. Even a month after the visit, the principal actors in Lancashire had, to all appearances, already forgotten it. In 1933, several Lancashire industrialists traveled to India to hold “conversations [of] the greatest cordiality” with Indian mill owners in the hopes of achieving “a satisfactory settlement of the Indo-Lancashire textile question.”²³⁰ The language and hopes of the Lancashire mill owners remained the same as it had been in 1931, yet no mention of the failed visit of Gandhi to Lancashire was made. If the visit produced no tangible results and soon faded into obscurity, why should historians study it? It is precisely because the visit was a failure that it should be of interest. Recent historical studies have looked at how marginalized subjects (women, non-whites, non-Protestants) within the empire interacted with each other, in reaction to or in concert with the imperial state.²³¹ Books and articles have proliferated in the last ten years or so exploring communication and exchange between British suffragists, Irish nationalists, Theosophists, and Indian nationalists, among others. While some of these historians include the caveat that “moments of cross-national contact between native intellectuals were...often sporadic and impressionistic [and] also highly context-specific,” other authors overlook the extent to which nationalists, even in moments of cross-cultural communication “were primarily

²²⁹ “Mr. Gandhi in Darwen,” DN, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

²³⁰ LRO/DDX1115/6/23, The Indian Textile Journal: A Representative Publication for the Textile Engineering and Electrical Industries of India, vol. XLIII, no. 516, September 30, 1933.

²³¹ See for women and empire: Antoinette Burton, At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain (New Delhi: Mushiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998). For nationalists in the empire, see: Elleke Boehmer, Empire, the National and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in Interaction (Oxford, New York, et al.: Oxford university Press, 2002).

concerned with their *own particular* projects of self-definition and/or anti-colonial subversion.”²³² The moment of contact between Lancashire mill workers and owners and Gandhi provides an excellent example of the failure of historical actors to transcend their own historical and cultural contexts. Although participants spoke of a desire to create a space for dialogue, the context-specific preconceptions each party brought to the encounter precluded any possibility of true communication.

²³² Boehmer 10.

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The John Rylands University Library (University of Manchester):

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