

**British reactions to Amritsar and Croke Park : Connections and comparisons**

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**British Reactions to Amritsar and Croke Park: Connections and Comparisons**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of History by Research awarded by Sheffield Hallam University.

## Abstract

This thesis explores British reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919 and the Croke Park Massacre 1920. It centres on the British Government's response to these massacres, and the perspectives of two opposed political groups: the British and Irish Unionists, and the Labour Party. Connections and comparisons are drawn between the Government response to both cases and the official representations of the events. Right-wing criticism of the Government's management of the Amritsar crisis is discussed. How the right-wing response connected to the Croke Park Massacre is evaluated. Notions of 'Britishness' and how these were used to bolster the arguments presented by the Government and the right wing are also considered. The right-wing defence of Amritsar is contrasted with the reaction of the Labour Party. This thesis demonstrates how Labour objected to both massacres and challenged the official portrayals of the shootings. The Labour Party's support for Indian and Irish nationalists and preferred approach to imperial rule in India and Ireland in 1920 is illustrated. The reactions of the right wing and the Labour Party are continuously juxtaposed with the official responses. How British reactions to the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre were connected by the overriding context of 'imperial crisis' is highlighted throughout. This thesis contributes to existing comparative and connected studies on India, Ireland and imperial violence in the interwar period, as well as general studies on the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre. It draws attention to similarities, differences, and connections between both cases, which are absent from existing historiography. This thesis employs several primary sources that have been under-utilised by historians, and gives sufficient focus to the left-wing response which has previously received limited scholarly attention.

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# **British Reactions to Amritsar and Croke Park: Connections and Comparisons**

## **Introduction**

The Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre were two episodes of British imperial violence that remain controversial events in British, Indian and Irish history. This thesis will analyse the reactions that these massacres inspired in Britain. This study centres on the British Government's response, and the perspectives of two polarised political groups: the British and Irish Unionists, and the Labour Party. How and why these two political extremes challenged the official view will be explored. This thesis will focus predominantly on reactions to these atrocities in British Parliament and the press, whilst drawing connections and comparisons between the varying perspectives and portrayals of both cases.

This thesis is not concerned with investigating how and why Amritsar and Croke Park took place, as these questions dominate existing scholarship. However, the first section of this introduction will provide an overview of the massacres for contextual purposes, based on the facts that have been generally agreed upon by historians. Contentious details will be avoided, and the historiographical debates on these will be discussed in chapter 1. This section will also provide a brief insight into the political climate in which these massacres took place. The following section of this introduction explains the British political context of this thesis. It is important to outline the political landscape in Britain from 1919-1920 here, as it was within this framework the Government and the Opposition had to respond to Amritsar and Croke Park. The final sections will provide insight into the methodology and key sources used, and a chapter outline that will clarify the scope of this thesis.

## The Massacres at Amritsar and Croke Park: An Overview

Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, had promised Indian nationalists in 1917 that India's loyalty during the war would be rewarded with a move towards self-government. Hence, after the armistice Indian expectations were high and eventual independence seemed possible. India was relatively stable at this time, especially in comparison to Ireland. However, the 1919 Montagu-Chelmsford reforms which offered India dyarchy, "a system of power sharing in which Indians could be elected to hold office at the provincial level only"<sup>1</sup>, came as a disappointment, and Indian nationalists became increasingly disaffected with the imperial administration. In addition, the Government of India introduced the Rowlatt Acts in March that same year, which permitted the British authorities to use extreme powers of surveillance and arrest, such as those seen during the war. This snubbed Indian expectations of the end of wartime emergency measures and a move towards implementing home rule.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, a number of *hartals* (a form of protest which involved the closing of workplaces and businesses) were held across India in objection to the harsh legislation. Violence had broken out in Delhi during one of these protests, but the city of Amritsar had remained peaceful. However, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1919 the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, had two renowned Indian nationalists arrested in Amritsar, to prevent them from speaking to the public about current political grievances. This provoked riots to start across the city. Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, who was stationed just a few hours away, was informed of the unrest. He arrived in

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<sup>1</sup> Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2016), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Amritsar the following day and immediately assumed command, with the intention of restoring order.<sup>3</sup>

By the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, Amritsar had quietened. Still, General Dyer sent out a proclamation that morning prohibiting public gatherings in the city. However, it was the day of the Baisakhi festival and tens of thousands of people were gathering in Amritsar to celebrate. Many convened at the Jallianwala Bagh, a large enclosure near the Golden Temple at the heart of the city. Dyer's proclamation was read out at nineteen different spots around Amritsar that day, yet the area around the Golden Temple was avoided.

At approximately 4.15pm, General Dyer marched a special force of 50 armed riflemen into the Jallianwala Bagh, and without warning, fired 1620 rounds upon the crowd of 25,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Hundreds were killed instantly, and thousands more wounded. Dyer had also ordered a curfew in the city that prevented sufficient aid being given to the injured, thus many more died in the night.<sup>5</sup> Official figures placed the death toll at 379, but Indian estimations contest that the true number of fatalities was much higher. The Amritsar Massacre remains the largest civilian bloodshed during peacetime in the history of the British Empire.<sup>6</sup>

The following year, 14 spectators at a football match in Dublin suffered a very similar fate. Unlike India, which had been given hope during the war by Montagu's promise for self-government, Irish nationalists' aspirations had become increasingly frustrated. Ireland had been assured home rule in 1912 and this was due to be implemented in September 1914, but the outbreak of WWI meant that it was postponed. Nationalist frustrations peaked in Easter 1916 when a group of radicals declared an Irish Republic.

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<sup>3</sup> Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (New York, 2005), pp. 234-235.

<sup>4</sup> Rosemary Rees, *India 1900-47* (Oxford, 2006), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, C. 1880-1922* (Manchester, 2003), p. 199.



Britain responded to the Easter Rising with extreme force, and “alienated the majority of Irish public opinion”.<sup>7</sup> By 1918 home rule was no longer going to satisfy the growing number of Irish Republicans who sought independence. This increase in support for more radical Irish nationalism became clear during the 1918 general election, when Sinn Fein gained 73 seats and decimated the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), which supported home rule. However, Sinn Fein refused to participate in the British Parliament.<sup>8</sup> Instead, they set up their own parliamentary body, Dáil Éireann, and sparked the Irish War for Independence.

By November 1920, guerrilla war had been waged in Ireland by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) for nearly two years, hence, there were thousands of British counterinsurgency police and soldiers in Dublin. These included the 'Black and Tans', ex-soldiers recruited as temporary constables into the Irish Royal Constabulary (IRC), and the Auxiliaries, a paramilitary division of the IRC comprising of ex-British Army officers.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, on the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> November 1920, the IRA visited eight addresses across Dublin, assassinated thirteen British men, and wounded six more. The majority of those targeted were British Army officers.<sup>10</sup>

That afternoon, a Gaelic football match between Tipperary and Dublin was due to take place at Croke Park football ground. The proceeds of the match were to go to the families of IRA volunteers who had been killed or captured during the war so far. The IRC were aware that this match was scheduled. It began at 3:15pm, with between 5,000 and 15,000 spectators in attendance. At 3:25pm, a heavily armed force of Black and

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<sup>7</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Malcom Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History 1867-1990, Democracy and Decline* (London, 1992), p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> David Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 38 (2003), pp. 45-46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.

Tans and of Auxiliaries drove to the ground and fired 114 rounds into the crowd. Seven spectators were shot dead instantly, five were trampled to death by the panicked crowd, and another five were fatally wounded. The British forces fired for approximately 90 seconds, resulting in a total of 14 civilians being killed.<sup>11</sup> The next day the *Freemans Journal* reported: "AMRITZAR REPEATED IN DUBLIN".<sup>12</sup>

### British Political Context

The Government in power during the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre was the Liberal-Conservative coalition led by David Lloyd George. In preparation for the 1918 general election, Prime Minister Lloyd George, and the Leader of the Conservative Party Andrew Bonar Law, negotiated an electoral pact which gave their approval to coalition-supporting MPs. This was an attempt to maintain the existing war-time coalition. The approval was given in a letter to pro-coalition candidates signed by both parties, and became known as the 'coupon'. Where a 'couponed Liberal' ran in the election, no Conservative would challenge them, and vice versa. Thus, the Conservative party (or the Unionists as they were more commonly known at this time) won a majority with 335 'couponed' seats, but remained in coalition with Lloyd George's Liberals who made up a further 133 seats for the Government. The Labour Party emerged for the first time as the main opposition with 57 MPs. 28 Independent Liberals and 7 Irish Parliamentary MPs also sat in opposition to the Government.<sup>13</sup> Sinn Fein's boycott of British Parliament meant that the Irish Parliamentary Party were the only Irish nationalists to sit in the House of Commons in 1919 and 1920.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-58.

<sup>12</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22 November 1920, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Pearce and Stewart, *British Political History*, p. 219.

The Government's majority in Parliament enabled them to direct the House of Commons with few obstructions. However, cracks within the Liberal-Unionist coalition became increasingly visible along ideological lines in the immediate inter-war years. These were particularly obvious during the Amritsar debate. Moreover, the composition of British Parliament affected the way in which issues in India and Ireland were dealt with by the Government. For example, most Liberals were against the repressive policies in Ireland, however, the Unionists' majority enabled them to have significant sway over the Irish question. The Unionists fervently maintained a zero-tolerance stance towards Irish nationalism.<sup>14</sup> Hence, the British political climate affected the responses of the Coalition Government and the Opposition to both massacres. Nonetheless, the political landscape in Britain remained relatively consistent from April 1919 to the end of 1920, during both massacres and their aftermath.

### Methodology and Sources

This thesis will add to ongoing research that adopts comparative and transnational approaches to Indian and Irish history. The nature of transnational and comparative methods has been debated by historians. For example, Peter Baldwin argues that the comparative method is essentially concerned with causality,<sup>15</sup> whereas Haupt and Kocka maintain that comparative history "deals with similarities and differences". They go on to separate this from transnational history, which they describe as dealing with

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-222.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Baldwin, 'Comparing and Generalizing: Why All History is Comparative, Yet No History is Sociology', in Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Conner (eds.), *Comparison and History, Europe in a Cross-National Perspective* (New York, 2004), p. 18.

“transfer, interconnection, and mutual influences across boundaries.”<sup>16</sup> The transnational method is more concerned with interconnectivity. This study will look at comparisons mostly, but combines both comparative and transnational approaches. This thesis will identify similarities and differences between British reactions to the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre, but also draw connections between these responses, recognising how the Indian and Irish cases interlock.

A variety of primary sources will be utilised throughout this thesis. Parliamentary debates make up a substantial amount of this material, as well as official documents such as Cabinet memoranda. These sources will provide insight into the Government's reactions to both massacres, and the numerous arguments presented in Parliament. Newspapers will also be analysed in this study. For example, the *Morning Post* will be used to understand the right-wing stance, and *Daily Herald* to demonstrate the views of the Labour Party. Other under-utilised sources such as the *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland* will also receive sufficient attention.

## Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss literature on Amritsar and Croke Park, and comparative and connected studies on India, Ireland and imperial violence. This chapter will introduce debates that are central to this study, highlight gaps in the existing scholarship, and identify where this thesis is positioned within these historiographies.

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<sup>16</sup> Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, ‘Preface’, in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka eds., *Comparative and Transnational History, Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York, 2009), p. vii.

Chapter 2, 'Constructing the British Government View of Amritsar and Croke Park', will analyse the initial Government response to both massacres, and the nature of the subsequent inquiries into these atrocities. This chapter will show how the official portrayals of the massacres were constructed, and how the Government view was defended in Parliament. Chapter 2 is significant as the reactions and representations discussed in the remaining chapters are continuously juxtaposed with the official responses.

The third chapter of this thesis will address the right-wing defence of General Dyer. Less attention will be given to this topic as it pervades existing scholarship. However, new connections and comparisons will be drawn between the right-wing response in Parliament and the press, and the Government's portrayal of Croke Park. The right-wing defence of Dyer also provides contrast to the final chapter of this thesis on the Labour Party.

Chapter 4, 'The Labour Party Response to Amritsar and Croke Park', will focus on the views presented in the Labour press and by Labour MP's in the House of Commons. Similarities and differences between Labour perspectives in both cases will be identified, and comparisons will be made with the right-wing stance and official representations of the massacres. This chapter will provide insight into the left-wing reaction to Amritsar and Croke Park which has thus far been neglected by historians.

Each chapter of this thesis focuses extensively on the language used in public and political discourse to ascertain British attitudes to these atrocities. These individual chapters have been chosen as they provide interesting comparisons, and shed light on areas which have previously been ignored. There are several other areas that warrant investigation, for example, the response of the Independent Liberals who sat in

opposition to the Government, and women's perspectives on the massacres. However, these topics were beyond the scope of this research. This thesis aims to demonstrate the contrasting responses of two political extremes in Britain, in relation to the Government's reactions, and highlight the connections and comparisons between the varying portrayals of these two episodes of British imperial violence.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter outlines relevant historiographies to provide context for the discussions found in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. The previous scholarship highlighted here will be addressed in two parts. The first covers general studies on the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre, outlining the debates over what happened at the Jallianwala Bagh and Croke Park, and why. This thesis is less concerned with the 'truth' of these events as argued by historians and more with varying perceptions of the shootings as understood and promoted at the time. Nonetheless, it is important to reflect upon this literature as it not only provides a backdrop for this study, but the arguments presented by these historians are rooted in contemporary portrayals of the massacres. The subsequent section of this chapter on comparative and connected studies gives focus to the work of historians who have taken comparative or transnational approaches to investigating India, Ireland and colonial violence. This thesis is positioned in relationship to the content, methodologies and conclusions of this scholarship.

#### **General Studies on Amritsar and Croke Park**

British scholarship on the Amritsar Massacre has presented contending views since the 1960s. Key debates focus on why General Dyer opened fire, whether his decision was warranted, and to what extent his actions were representative of the British imperial administration. Several British historians have attempted to justify Dyer's actions.

Rupert Furneaux explains that General Dyer suffered from arteriosclerosis, which impeded Dyer's judgement causing him to misunderstand the situation at Amritsar.<sup>1</sup> Brian Bond argues that India was in a state of open rebellion and that Amritsar was "the outstanding trouble spot".<sup>2</sup> He maintains that Dyer was only doing his duty by restoring order. Bond also defends Dyer's person, claiming that "his long military career provides no sinister indications of latent irresponsibility or a liking for bloodshed."<sup>3</sup> This echoed a popular contemporary British portrayal of General Dyer as a valiant colonial officer committed to doing his duty, who suppressed a rebellion that could have seen a "repetition of the miseries and cruelties" of 1857.<sup>4</sup> This sympathetic portrayal and defence of Dyer is also upheld by Alfred Draper in his 1981 publication. He describes Dyer as "the simple soldier motivated by a deep sense of duty and thrown to the wolves because of it."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Nick Lloyd argues that Dyer "continued to fire for one simple reason: there were still people in the Jallianwala Bagh and it was his duty to disperse them."<sup>6</sup> Again, the notion of 'duty' is emphasised. Lloyd also maintains that the shooting was *not* premeditated; Dyer simply panicked upon seeing the size of the crowd. These arguments mirror those of right wing contemporaries who supported Dyer in the aftermath of Amritsar.

In contrast, Nigel Collett emphasises General Dyer's personal culpability.<sup>7</sup> However, whilst challenging the defensive interpretations presented by Furneaux, Bond, Draper and Lloyd, his inclination to place full blame on Dyer involves presenting the crisis as

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<sup>1</sup> Rupert Furneaux, *Massacre at Amritsar* (London, 1963), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Bond, 'Amritsar, 1919', *History Today*, vol. 13 (1963), p. 667.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 669.

<sup>4</sup> A letter written by Anglo-Indian women, Miss Sherwood, who was beaten by Indian men in the days preceding the Amritsar Massacre. Quoted by Edward Carson, House of Commons, 08 July 1920, vol. 131, c. 1757.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Draper, *Amritsar, The Massacre that Ended the Raj* (London, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Lloyd, *The Amritsar Massacre: The Untold Story of One Fateful Day* (London, 2011), p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (New York, 2005).



resulting from the exceptional actions of one man. As Shereen Ilahi puts it: "focusing on the personality and judgements of General Dyer typically results in a narrative that depicts the Amritsar Massacre as anomalous."<sup>8</sup> This 'singularity argument', which considers the massacre as an isolated event, was put forward by both pro-Dyer and anti-Dyer groups in 1920, and is upheld by most other British works that have been written specifically on Amritsar. Considering the massacre in isolation means that the shameful event can be set apart from the mainstream of British imperial – and national – history.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the 'singularity argument' has also been persistently challenged by Indian nationalist discourse. For example, V. N. Datta insists that the massacre was not an isolated incident, but an "expression of a confrontation between the ruler and the ruled."<sup>10</sup> To Indian nationalists, Amritsar was far from a-typical, and thus the imperial administration should be held responsible for the massacre, as opposed to General Dyer alone. As we will see in chapter 4, this argument featured in the Labour Party's response.

As well as attempting to explain what happened at Amritsar in April 1919 and condemning or defending General Dyer's actions, previous scholarship has also considered contemporary reactions to the massacre to an extent. Furneaux clearly writes from a pro-Dyer perspective by only discussing the response of the pro-Dyer press in his short outline of the controversy.<sup>11</sup> Ilahi offers a more holistic contribution, outlining the Indian reaction as well as the British response, and discussing the subsequent parliamentary debates. Yet, her coverage of the media reaction is brief and

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<sup>8</sup> Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2016) p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Sayer, 'British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', *Past & Present*, vol. 149 (1991), p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> V. N. Datta, *Jallianwala Bagh* (Ludhiana, 1969), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Furneaux, *Massacre at Amritsar*, p. 142.

she gives more attention to Dyer's supporters than to his opponents. Similarly, Derek Sayer's article identifies differing versions of events relayed by British MP's and by the press during the Dyer debate. However, the left-wing reactions are beyond the scope of his article.<sup>12</sup> The stance taken by the Left in the aftermath of Amritsar was significant, especially when drawing connections to the Irish case. Sayer does recognise the Irish connection but fails to provide detail on the situation in Ireland or any comparative conclusions. Ilahi also recognises the "Irish subtext" during the Dyer debate, arguing that attitudes towards unrest in Ireland influenced British reactions to Amritsar.<sup>13</sup> This is considered throughout chapter 2.

In a similar way to the discussions on Amritsar, the key debates on the Croke Park Massacre focus on why Crown Forces started shooting and who should be held accountable. Irish nationalist historians argue that British forces went to Croke Park with murderous intentions, maintaining that the RIC fired into the crowd to avenge the assassinations of British soldiers committed by the IRA that morning.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, imperial apologists such as Charles Townsend, are supportive of the British Government's official account of the massacre.<sup>15</sup> This position maintains that British forces went to search the crowd, were fired upon by IRA insurgents, and returned fire in self-defence. Unfortunately, bystanders were injured and killed in the crossfire or in the subsequent stampede caused by the panicked crowd.

In the aftermath of what was to become known in Ireland as the first 'Bloody Sunday', two military courts of inquiry were conducted. The documentation of these enquiries

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<sup>12</sup> Derek Sayer, 'British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire' in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Townsend, *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies* (Oxford, 1975), p. 130.

was withheld from the public for over 80 years, and was unavailable to historians such as Townsend who had commented on Croke Park prior to their release. David Leeson is one of few historians who have utilised these sources to date. He argues:

These documents make it clear that, while neither critics nor apologists have been completely correct, the critical version of the massacre is more accurate than its rival. The police raid on Croke Park did not begin as a reprisal. The plan really was to stop the match and search the crowd. Once they reached the Park, however, the police began shooting without provocation. There were no rebel gunmen outside the Park, and there was no return fire from the crowd. The Croke Park Massacre was a *battue*, not a battle.<sup>16</sup>

In his view, this new evidence demonstrates that the Croke Park Massacre *was* unprovoked, but that it was not premeditated, it was not a reprisal. Nevertheless, it was still a “*battue*”, which refers to indiscriminate shooting on a defenceless crowd.

Moreover, in his rejection of the argument that the Croke Park Massacre was a reprisal, Leeson offers alternative explanations for why the Crown Forces started shooting. He suggests that they may have acted out of fear, going as far to say that “these men may have been almost as frightened as the spectators they attacked.”<sup>17</sup> Another reason Leeson puts forward is that the first shots fired by the British were unintentional, maintaining that “accidental fire was common”. This accidental fire would have “caused panic among police and spectators alike, leading to further wild firing”.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Leeson proposes that in the eyes of the British forces, fleeing spectators could have been construed as a guilty crowd, which, “in the minds of fearful and angry police”, gave them

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<sup>16</sup> David Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 38 (2003), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

a “license to kill”. Hence, several spectators received bullet wounds in the back.<sup>19</sup> These explanations somewhat resemble those presented by apologist historians and contemporaries who have attempted to defend the events that occurred at Amritsar. The pro-Dyer camp tried to justify the troops shooting without warning or provocation by claiming that Dyer's forces were fearful of being overwhelmed by the crowd, and accepted that Dyer's forces shot at those attempting to flee, because in the eyes of Dyer and his supporters, the Indian civilians attempting to escape were guilty.

Ilahi challenges Leeson's explanations. She clarifies that the eyewitness testimonies suggest that “the police entered Croke Park with guns blazing.”<sup>20</sup> The evidence implies that they had started firing before entering the ground, and before the crowd began to flee. She maintains that the Croke Park Massacre was not a result of panic, fear, incompetence, or misunderstanding, as Leeson proposes; it was a reprisal for the IRA assassinations conducted earlier that day. She maintains that Croke Park was just another example of a reprisal conducted by Crown Forces during the Irish War for Independence, and highlights numerous cases that resemble Croke Park in order to illustrate this. Ultimately, Ilahi concludes that this campaign of reprisals was a result of an even wider issue: a culture of collective punishment and violence inherent to the British Empire.<sup>21</sup> Ilahi draws connections between British rule in India and Ireland in order to substantiate this claim. Her arguments also resemble those of the Labour Party in 1920. Clearly, the debate over why the Croke Park Massacre occurred remains controversial.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 146.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

General historiography of these massacres is important to discuss, as continuities may be discerned between the debates outlined by historians and contemporary attitudes towards these events. Previous scholarship on Amritsar has explored contemporary attitudes to some extent. However, in the case of Croke Park, existing literature provides little analysis of the political, media, and public reactions that this massacre caused in Britain. In addressing this gap in the existing scholarship, attention will be paid to important primary sources such as British newspapers and the *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, which have thus far been under-utilised by historians.<sup>22</sup> Ilahi has begun the work of outlining the political reaction to Croke Park and she offers brief discussion on a selection of viewpoints from the British and Irish press. This thesis will build on her work, examining representations of Croke Park by politicians and the press in additional detail, as well as extending the scope to evaluate British perceptions of the victims and the perpetrators.

### Comparative and Connected Studies

Despite similarities between the massacres being noted from the beginning, Ilahi's recently published work is the only publication so far that examines both Amritsar and Croke Park together in any detail. Ilahi makes connections between the campaign of reprisals conducted in Ireland by British forces during the Irish War for Independence, and British enforcement of martial law in the Punjab in 1919. She interprets these approaches to colonial rule in a transnational context in order to demonstrate that a mind-set of martial law, a culture of collective punishment, and a skewed understanding

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<sup>22</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 45.

of the minimum force doctrine, were characteristic of the British imperial administration.

This scholarship on British imperial violence in India and Ireland supports Indian nationalist interpretations of Amritsar, by challenging the idea that events such as Amritsar and Croke Park were atypical. Ilahi strongly contests the 'singularity argument' by highlighting numerous cases of collective punishment that were conducted in the Punjab in 1919, and several examples of violent reprisals against civilians in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War. Her transnational approach to discussing imperial violence in Ireland and India demonstrates that events such as these (whilst conceived under differing circumstances), were examples of an empire-wide practice. She uses this Indo-Irish comparison and the cases of Croke Park and Amritsar specifically to exemplify a much broader debate over the nature of British rule after the First World War.<sup>23</sup> She explains that this culture was particularly aggressive after the Great War, due to the turbulent global political climate at the time.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Ilahi criticises Townsend's perspective that the British avoided martial law across Ireland in 1920 because the Government disapproved of using unnecessary force.<sup>25</sup> Townsend's view echoes that of contemporary politicians who condemned Dyer's actions, by claiming it was not "the British way of doing business".<sup>26</sup> Ilahi argues that the culture of collective punishment was in fact facilitated by Government policy, maintaining that "once the government identified a full scale rebellion, whether real or imagined (as in the Indian case), martial law and collective punishments became

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<sup>23</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>26</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 c. 1730.

legitimate strategies in the official mind."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Ilahi highlights that the tradition of persistently framing the British Empire as a power of "civility, democracy and justice", both by contemporaries and historians such as Townsend, has caused cases of British imperial violence to be whitewashed.<sup>28</sup> This thesis will contribute to this discussion. By analysing the language used in public and political discourse, this thesis will discuss the extent to which the British Government tried to frame themselves and their empire as a force for good in the aftermath of Amritsar and Croke Park, and to what degree this view was accepted, or indeed criticised.

Whilst Ilahi is the only other historian to have focused on both Amritsar and Croke Park specifically, broader connections have been made between the violence in India and in Ireland in the inter-war years. Susan Kingsley-Kent analyses the Amritsar Massacre and the policy of reprisals in Ireland from 1919-1920, alongside several other cases of imperial violence. Kingsley-Kent argues that Britons suffered from a national state of 'shell shock' after the trauma of the Great War, which caused a crisis of British identity that needed to be resolved. Repairing the 'British psyche' required a unified national identity, thus a narrative of 'Englishness' was constructed. However, the notion of 'Englishness' depended upon a contrast of 'Un-Englishness', against which it "could be defined."<sup>29</sup> Understanding national belonging required understanding of who *did not* belong.<sup>30</sup> Kent argues that a "shattered psyche" of the British people, the desire for "wholeness" and the construction of 'Englishness', caused endemic violence against colonial subjects after WWI.<sup>31</sup> However, whilst the psychological fallout of the Great War and the potential brutalisation of British society are notions that should be

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<sup>27</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Kingsley-Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma 1918-1931* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-35.

considered, as these provide insight into the much broader context of the time, here they are potentially being over played. Perhaps it is more useful to consider the psychological impact of war as another contributor to the catalytic context, in addition to the political and ideological threats of 'imperial crisis'.

It is essential to highlight the importance of the broader context of 'imperial crisis' here. First conceived by John Gallagher in the latter decades of the twentieth century, the concept of imperial crisis views the turmoil experienced in the aftermath of the First World War, by both the losers and victors, as transnational and connected.<sup>32</sup> Essentially, the trauma of the war that was experienced across the globe resulted in the legitimacy of empire being called into question. Wilsonian ideas of self-determination, anti-colonial nationalisms, pan-Islamism and Bolshevism all gained traction. This threatened the structures of British imperialism, and influenced the way in which the British responded to situations in Ireland and India, including the massacres at Amritsar and Croke Park. While Susan Kingsley-Kent does not neglect to mention the broader crisis of empire and its influence on the numerous cases of violence across the globe which she addresses, she still identifies the psychological scars of war as the central cause of violence in the Empire, a conclusion which may be a little far-fetched.

Indeed, Jon Lawrence suggests that historians may "have rather overdrawn" ideas of post-war brutalisation.<sup>33</sup> In his article he addresses Amritsar and reprisals in Ireland as well as discussing the urban riots in Britain in 1919. He argues whilst the war may have contributed to increased violence, "it would be a mistake to attribute the riots of 1919

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<sup>32</sup> John Gallagher, 'Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire, 1919-1921', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 15 (1981), pp. 355-368.

<sup>33</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 75 (2003), p. 563.



solely to the brutalizing effects of war.”<sup>34</sup> Lawrence recognises that imperial rule relied upon “the willingness ruthlessly to deploy the imperial power’s superior force of arms” and considers this “the traditional mechanics of imperial rule.”<sup>35</sup> Hence, imperial violence in India and Ireland cannot be explained solely by the notion of post-war brutalisation. However, Lawrence also insists that we should not underestimate the *fear* of brutalisation felt by contemporaries.<sup>36</sup> He maintains that this fear was reason for the narrative of ‘Englishness’ that was present throughout the Dyer debate. Lawrence argues that this narrative of ‘Englishness’ was constructed in order to reassure Britons that they were a peaceable people, who had turned their back on militarism,<sup>37</sup> rather than being a narrative that fostered violence in the way that Kingsley-Kent suggests. This thesis will recognise how ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’ was used to bolster the arguments presented by the Government and its challengers during both controversies.

The historiographies outlined here highlight key debates and concepts that underpin this study. Previous scholarship on Amritsar and Croke Park specifically is important to acknowledge as it illustrates the contentious nature of the massacres, and reflects the contrasting representations of these events that were advocated and criticised by contemporaries at the time. The comparative and connected studies on India, Ireland and imperial violence also feed in to this thesis. Ilahi's work, which connects martial law in the Punjab with the policy of reprisals in Ireland in order to demonstrate that 'ruling by the sword' was inherent to British imperialism, is fundamental to the political reactions discussed across the following chapters. In addition, the context of imperial crisis is central to this thesis and its influence will be highlighted throughout. Jon

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 572.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 576.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 563.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 587-588.

Lawrence's notion of 'peaceableness' and his understanding of post-First World War British identity will also be considered. This thesis will evaluate the connections between the ideas and conclusions presented by this existing scholarship, and contribute to comparative and connected studies on India, Ireland and imperial violence, as well as to general studies on Amritsar and Croke Park.

## Chapter 2

### **Constructing the British Government View of Amritsar and Croke Park**

This chapter will discuss the British Government's portrayals of the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre, as they were constructed and presented in the aftermath of these two crises. Firstly, initial responses to each massacre will be analysed, and comparisons will be drawn between these. Then, the Government's approach to investigating the events at Croke Park and Amritsar will be addressed. This section will compare the nature of the inquiries conducted and contrast the ways in which the British Government utilised the results of these inquiries in order to construct and promote their official representation of the events. Finally, the chapter will establish the British Government's official view and consider the language used to promote this view and defend it in Parliament. This chapter aims to bring to light the similarities and differences between the Government response to and representations of the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre, and suggest reasons for and connections between these reactions to both cases. Before exploring the reactions of the Government, however, an overview of the organisation of British rule in India and Ireland will be provided for contextual purposes. The relationship between the Liberal-Conservative Government and the Indian and the Irish imperial administrations was the framework in which these crises were managed, and official views of the events were developed. Hence, these structures are important to highlight here.

Two key political figures were central to the construction and defence of the official representations of the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre: The Secretary of State for India and the Chief Secretary for Ireland. Both found themselves targets for

scrutiny after the shootings. The Secretary of State for India was head of the India Office, and in his Cabinet position was responsible for imperial policy relating to India, which was then communicated from London and carried out by the Government of India under the Viceroy. The Viceroy was responsible for the administration of the Provinces of British India, which in turn were controlled by Governors or Lieutenant-Governors. Indian involvement in the administration of the Raj was limited at this time. The Government of India, the Viceroy, and the Governors of the Provinces were all under the authority of the Secretary of State for India, and through him, British Parliament. During the Amritsar Massacre and the subsequent inquiry and debates, the Secretary of State for India was Coalition Liberal MP, Edwin Montagu.<sup>1</sup> Lord Chelmsford was the Viceroy of India from 1916 until 1921,<sup>2</sup> and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab was Sir Michael O'Dwyer,<sup>3</sup> who retired shortly after the massacre in May 1919. These administrative figures beneath the Secretary of State also played key roles in the aftermath of Amritsar.

The structures of the Irish administration and its relationship with the British Government were different to that of British India. Unlike India, Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom, was represented in Parliament by Irish MPs, and administrators from the Government of Ireland sat in the House of Commons. This is important to note, as the presence of Irish MPs in British Parliament may have affected how the Government dealt with the Croke Park Massacre. In the Amritsar case however, there were no Indian

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Edwin Montagu see, Chandrika Kaul, 'Montagu, Edwin Samuel (1879–1924)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2012, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35074>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Lord Chelmsford see, P. G. Robb, 'Thesiger, Frederic John Napier, first Viscount Chelmsford (1868–1933)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36465>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Sir Michael O'Dwyer see, Philip Woods, 'O'Dwyer, Sir Michael Francis (1864–1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35292>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

MP's in office in 1919 and 1920 who could have potentially exercised this sort of influence. Nonetheless, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood,<sup>4</sup> played a similar role to Montagu in the Irish context. Greenwood was a Liberal MP at this time, but took the Conservative Whip in 1922. Nominally, the Chief Secretary was subordinate to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, who was also known as the Irish Viceroy. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British administration in Ireland, metonymically known as 'Dublin Castle', was run by the Chief Secretary who, like Montagu, sat in the British Cabinet. The Chief Secretary controlled Government policy for Ireland, just as the Secretary of State directed policy in India. Both were responsible, more than anyone, for the administration of Ireland and India respectively, and both were accountable to British Parliament. These Cabinet roles put Edwin Montagu and Hamar Greenwood at the centre of the Amritsar and Croke Park controversies. The composition of the British Government and its relationship with the Government of India and the Government of Ireland remained unchanged throughout the massacres and their aftermath.

### Initial Response: Amritsar

There was no immediate dramatic response from the British Government regarding the Amritsar Massacre. The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, was aware that rioting had occurred throughout the Punjab, but initially he had little knowledge of the shooting at the Jallianwala Bagh. A War Cabinet Memorandum described that "grave disorders had occurred in various parts of India... The trouble occurred principally in

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on Hamar Greenwood see, Martin F. Seedorf, 'Greenwood, Hamar, first Viscount Greenwood (1870–1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2009, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33545>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

the Punjab, particularly at Amritsar... Troops, were called in to restore order, and there were casualties on both sides... order has been restored in the areas of disturbance."<sup>5</sup> Official reports to the British Government from the Government of India such as these described the riots preceding the massacre, stating that casualties had occurred and order reinstated. However, there was no mention of the shooting on a crowd of 25,000 unarmed civilians, let alone any objection to this action. In fact, evidence shows that some officials in the Government of India initially approved of Dyer's actions.

General Beynon, Dyer's military superior, agreed with the decision to fire on the crowd,<sup>6</sup> as did the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer. During the subsequent inquiry into the Punjab disturbances, he stated: "I approved of General Dyer's action in dispersing by force the rebellious gathering."<sup>7</sup> However, little had been done by the Government of India in order to ascertain what actually happened and whether the firing was indeed necessary or justifiable; hence, this approval was perhaps a little premature. This was to be a criticism made by Indian members of the Hunter Commission, which was set up in October 1919 by the Government of India as requested by Montagu. The Indian members who produced a Minority Report for the Commission stated: "It does not appear that any steps were taken by the Government of the Punjab for a long time to ascertain the real facts about so serious an occurrence."<sup>8</sup> In fact, General Dyer was not required to provide a statement on his actions at Amritsar to the Government of India until August 1919,<sup>9</sup> and the Government of India only agreed to hold an inquiry into the uses of excessive force in the Punjab six months after the

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<sup>5</sup> National Archives, CAB/24/153, British Empire and Africa Report No. 115, 16 April 1919.

<sup>6</sup> British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1661, File 2005, Cutting from *The Times*, 09 February 1920.

<sup>7</sup> The Majority Report of the Hunter Commission, 1920, in Tim Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre: General Dyer in the Punjab 1919* (Guilford, 2000), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Minority Report of the Hunter Commission, 1920, in Tim Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre: General Dyer in the Punjab 1919* (Guilford, 2000), pp. 79-80.

<sup>9</sup> National Archives, PRO 30/30/18, General Dyer's Report to General Staff, 25 August 1919.

event, on the British Government's request. It would appear that the Government of India were happy for this massacre at Amritsar to be overlooked.

This initial silence from the Government of India was sustained by harsh press censorship which was imposed in the Punjab during the disturbances. The media had become something that had to be respected rather than ignored by governments and officials,<sup>10</sup> as there was now little doubt of "the potency of media influence on the 'masses'".<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, governmental manipulation of the press became a formal strategy incorporated into the administration of the Empire.<sup>12</sup> News management became an imperative part of governing India, especially in the context of imperial crisis. Sir Michael O'Dwyer's press policy was particularly strict during this period. For example, Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle* and Labour Party member, Benjamin Horniman, who was sympathetic to the Indian nationalist cause, was exiled from India for circulating "inflammatory propaganda" in May 1920.<sup>13</sup> Kaul described this as "an indication of the extent to which the Government was prepared to suppress reporting in India."<sup>14</sup> This strict censorship restricted information regarding the massacre reaching Britain. Arguably, this kept Montagu and thus the British Government ignorant to the extent of the atrocity committed at Amritsar.

Nonetheless, the Indian National Congress sent emissaries to London to give information directly to the Secretary of State for India about the treatment of Indian civilians during the Punjab disturbances, and to ask him to investigate allegations of excessive force. By June 1919, public demands for the Government of India to set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry were starting to emerge. In July, Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair,

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<sup>10</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press in India, C.1880-1922* (Manchester, 2003), p. xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory, An Introduction* (London, 1994), p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> National Archives, CAB/24/153/24, British Empire and Africa Report No.118, 07 May 1919.

<sup>14</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 206.

who had recently resigned from the Viceroy's Executive Council due to the Viceroy's lack of response to violence in the Punjab, went to London to petition for an inquiry.<sup>15</sup> This pressure for an investigation into the Punjab Disturbances was also supported by the Labour Party, as detailed in chapter 4. Eventually, these Indian allegations persuaded Montagu to concur that an official inquiry into the events of April 1919 was indeed necessary. The Hunter Commission of inquiry was set-up by the Government of India in October that year,<sup>16</sup> during which reports on the massacre finally began to surface in the British press. It was from these newspaper articles published in autumn 1919 that Montagu would claim that he learned the true nature and extent of General Dyer's actions at Amritsar. He insisted that he only learned of the details of the Amritsar Massacre once they were printed in the *Daily Express* after the Hunter Commission had begun its investigation. Montagu maintained this claim in his private correspondence to the Editor of the *Express*, Ralph Blumenfeld.<sup>17</sup>

However, Montagu's claim of ignorance was contested by the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer via private correspondence, and later by statements from O'Dwyer in the press.<sup>18</sup> In a letter sent to Montagu in December 1919, he maintained that he had provided the Secretary of State for India with full information of General Dyer's actions six months earlier in June.<sup>19</sup> Still, even if O'Dwyer had provided Montagu with full details of the massacre at this point as he claimed, it was still almost 2 months after the shooting. Nonetheless, writing to the Viceroy a month later, Montagu insisted that

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<sup>15</sup> Nigel Collet, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (London, 2005), pp.322-324

<sup>16</sup> Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2016), p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> Parliamentary Archives, BLU/14/MONT/4, Letter sent by Montagu to Blumenfeld, 30 December 1919.

<sup>18</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 214.

<sup>19</sup> Copy of a letter sent by Michael O'Dwyer to Edwin Montagu dated 30<sup>th</sup> December 1919, House of Commons Debate, 05 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1023-4.



O'Dwyer's reports had been unclear about the fatalities and how they were caused.<sup>20</sup> He claimed that the following important details of Dyer's orders had not been made known to him by O'Dwyer: "That the crowd might have dispersed without his firing on them, that he fired without warning, and that he stopped firing because his ammunition was exhausted."<sup>21</sup> It was these details which were to become the grounds for the censure of General Dyer by the British Government.

Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, Sir T. Holderness, supported Montagu and agreed that the India Office in London had not been fully informed about events at Amritsar. He also criticised the Government of India for failing to initially provide sufficient information to the British Government. Holderness claimed:

If I had been called upon during the summer or autumn of 1919 to prepare a statement for publication regarding the Jallianwala Bagh incident, and had framed it on the information verbally received by Sir M. O'Dwyer and on scanty information transmitted by the Government of India, the narrative would have been of a completely different complexion from the account of the facts...<sup>22</sup>

Holderness held the "scanty information" provided by the Government of India as partly responsible for the initial silence and passivity over the Amritsar Massacre in Britain. Moreover, Holderness defended Montagu's initial ignorance as he too had been unaware of the nature of the events. He wrote to Montagu stating that "you were as

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<sup>20</sup> Collet, *Butcher of Amritsar*, pp. 322-323.

<sup>21</sup> Copy of a telegram sent by Edwin Montagu to the Viceroy dated 02 February 1920, presented to House of Commons, 05 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1023-4.

<sup>22</sup> Copy of a letter sent by Sir T. W. Holderness to Edwin Montagu, 30th June 1920, presented to House of Commons, 05 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1023-4.

impressed as I was with the inadequacy of our knowledge of what really happened at Amritsar".<sup>23</sup>

These letters between Montagu and these key civil servants were private communications which eventually came into the public domain during the debate on the massacre in the House of Commons in July 1920. It is hard to determine exactly how much Montagu knew initially about the precise nature of events at Amritsar but the evidence suggests he was not fully informed either by Sir Michael O'Dwyer or by the Viceroy. The *Daily Herald* highlighted this in December 1919, stating that "the military in India must have deliberately kept Mr. Montagu in ignorance of their crime."<sup>24</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* also drew this conclusion.<sup>25</sup> It was for this reason, perhaps, that the Secretary of State for India did not immediately force the Viceroy to initiate an enquiry. It was only upon being pressured by Indian nationalists and the Labour Party that a general inquiry into the Punjab Disturbances was agreed to, and only upon the commencement of the Hunter Commission Inquiry and the subsequent publishing of reports in the British press, did Montagu realise the true circumstances and consequences of General Dyer's actions.

### Initial Response: Croke Park

In the case of the Croke Park Massacre, there was, in contrast, no dispute over whether or not the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, knew the details of the shooting from the very beginning. Thus, Greenwood managed to avoid much of the *personal* scrutiny that Montagu faced during the Amritsar controversy. One reason for

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Herald*, 17 December 1919, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 210.

this is that, in contrast to their response to the massacre at Amritsar, the British Government were quick to respond to the shooting at Croke Park and to provide information to the British public. A short statement was circulated by Dublin Castle within hours of the event. This ensured that the story was picked up immediately by the British press. These initial reports were very brief, but by the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1920 newspapers were printing more detailed accounts of the Croke Park Massacre.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, it had taken months for accounts of the shooting at Amritsar to become public knowledge, and this lack of circulation of information to the public was a key reason why Montagu had been criticised in the Indian case.

Under the headline, "Battle on Football Field", the *Manchester Guardian* relayed the first official account, stating:

The official report says that when the military arrived they were fired on by some of the crowd. They returned fire, and there was a general stampede. In which some people were crushed... Several thousand people were searched and a few revolvers found.<sup>27</sup>

The *Daily Mail* also reported this initial statement.<sup>28</sup>

The first official account from Dublin Castle was scant, but a second, more detailed official account of the massacre came immediately afterwards and was much more widely reported.<sup>29</sup> This representation was delivered by the Chief Secretary to the House of Commons on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1920, the day after the shooting. However, it appears that the Government had hoped to keep discussions over Croke Park to a

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<sup>26</sup> David Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 38 (2003), p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1920, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 November 1920, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 51.

minimum, or at least keep Parliament's focus on the assassinations committed by IRA operatives on the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> November instead. Greenwood went into explicit detail in the House about the assassinations of the British officers, reciting graphic and emotive descriptions of each man's death. For example, he described the murder scene at the Gresham Hotel: "Bed saturated, body and especially head horribly disfigured. Possibly hammer was used as well as shots to finish off this gallant officer."<sup>30</sup> However, he did not mention Croke Park in his lengthy opening statement to the House. In response to this, Irish nationalist politician, Joseph Devlin,<sup>31</sup> turned to the Prime Minister. He asked:

I want to know from the Prime Minister why the House of Commons has not been made acquainted, in the recital of these other things that have occurred, with the onrush of the military into a football field, with fifteen thousand people, indiscriminate shooting, and ten men killed? Why was the House not told that when the other story was being told?<sup>32</sup>

Devlin criticised Greenwood for providing extensive details on the assassinations of the British officers, but omitting the shooting at Croke Park, which he argued was part of the whole story.<sup>33</sup> It was in response to Devlin's criticism that Greenwood proceeded to relay the Government's second statement on the Croke Park Massacre.

The second official account was merely an extension on the first. The key points of the Government representation remained the same. Greenwood maintained that "the authorities had reason to believe that Sinn Fein gunmen came into Dublin", that they

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<sup>30</sup> House of Commons Debate, 22 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 37-8.

<sup>31</sup> For more information on Joseph Devlin see, A. C. Hepburn, 'Devlin, Joseph (1871-1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32802>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>32</sup> House of Commons Debate, 22 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 39-40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 40-41.

carried out the morning's assassinations, and may have been hiding amongst the crowd at the football match. For this reason, British forces went to the playing fields "to search for arms".<sup>34</sup> He then claimed:

This force was fired upon and they fired back, killing 10 and wounding others. About 3'000 men were searched. Thirty revolvers and other firearms were found on the field. I regret to say that a woman and a man were crushed to death in the crowd.<sup>35</sup>

This second statement incorporated several key points central to the official representation of Croke Park, which was being constructed in the immediate days after the shooting in an attempt to relinquish the Government of accountability. These points include accusations that the crowd were suspected of concealing Sinn Feiners, the crowd were armed with revolvers, the crowd fired at the British authorities first, and that deaths resulted from a stampede. These themes continued to be upheld in the third and most detailed portrayal of events, which was presented by the Chief Secretary to the House of Commons on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1920. This final official representation of the Croke Park Massacre will be discussed below.

The immediacy of the British Government's response to the Croke Park Massacre was clearly dissimilar to the initial response to Amritsar. The differences in the structures of British rule in India and Ireland are relevant here. The Secretary of State for India relied on the Viceroy for information, which hindered his ability to fully realise and react promptly to the Amritsar case. The Chief Secretary was both the administrative head of Dublin Castle (in practise) and first point of call within the British Cabinet on issues

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 41-42.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

regarding Ireland. Unlike Lord Chelmsford with Montagu, the Viceroy of Ireland could not limit information communicated to Greenwood. Hence, Greenwood was able to respond immediately. Other reasons for these contrasting initial reactions could also include the fact that press censorship was heavily enforced in India during the Punjab Disturbances, whereas censorship was much more relaxed in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish conflict. Ilahi clarifies: "Unlike the Indian press, the Irish press was not heavily censored... as long as newspapers did not incite violence outright or engage in false reporting, Dublin Castle remained willing to allow them such freedom." The press in Britain put pressure on the Government to uphold this lenient policy, as did the Labour Party.<sup>36</sup> As previously discussed, press censorship in India ensured that initially, British politicians and the British press remained uninformed about Amritsar. With Ireland however, proximity to England made the transfer of information faster and easier, and the press was relatively free. This limited the Government's ability to suppress any unsavoury news in the same way that they had been able to on the subcontinent after the Punjab Disturbances. Nonetheless, this did not prevent the Government from actively trying to counter negative reporting. The Government had established a propaganda department within Dublin Castle by August 1920, with the purpose of counteracting "the plethora of adverse news reports with suppression or if suppression be either undesirable or impossible, the neutralisation, so far as possible, of the unfavourable factors in news".<sup>37</sup> In the case of Croke Park, the Government did attempt to 'inform' newspapers in the Government's favour with some initial success, by whitewashing "unfavourable factors" from official statements. For example, the *Daily*

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<sup>36</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 153.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

*Mail's* first reports relayed the official statements regarding the shooting without question.<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, it was not just the differing nature of administrative structures and censorship policies which resulted in contrasting initial responses from the British Government. The different national contexts in which these episodes of imperial violence occurred must also be acknowledged. The Irish War for Independence had been waged for over a year and public and political opinion in support of Britain's policy in Ireland was very fragile, much more so than opinion over British policy in India had been prior to the massacre at Amritsar. Indeed, the Government had persistently been under fire from the Labour Party and Independent Liberals in the months preceding Croke Park, over violence committed by Crown Forces.<sup>39</sup> Numerous campaigns protesting against violence and promoting peace in Ireland were also active, including the Peace with Ireland Council and the Anti-Reprisals Association.<sup>40</sup> The increasingly hostile situation in Ireland was at the forefront of British politics and had been for years prior to, and during the First World War. Whilst the political landscape in India was posing new challenges for Britain and the Empire, these were not as long-standing or on the same scale as the outright violent conflict that was waging in Ireland in 1920, despite fears on the right that India was equally rebellious. Hence, it appeared imperative that British and Irish public opinion on the situation in Ireland was managed as effectively as possible. Perhaps it is for this reason the Government reacted so quickly and constructed an official representation of the events at Croke Park within

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 November 1920, p. 9, and 23 November 1920, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> House of Commons Debate, 20 October 1920, vol. 133 cc. 925-1039.

<sup>40</sup> Parliamentary Archives, BL/ 102/6/10, Letter sent from the Anti-Reprisals Association to Bonar Law, November 1920.

days of the massacre, and stuck with this portrayal regardless of the findings of the subsequent military courts of inquiry.

### Inquiry: Amritsar

After demands from Indian nationalists, increasing pressure from the left in Britain, and resulting requests from Montagu, the Government of India finally set up the Hunter Commission on 14th October 1919. Its remit was “to investigate the recent disturbances in Bombay, Delhi and Punjab... their causes, and the measures taken to cope with them”.<sup>41</sup> The Committee included three Indian members, four European members, and it was headed by Scottish judge and former Liberal MP, Lord William Hunter. All held positions within the Government of India or the High Court.<sup>42</sup> A letter from Lord William Hunter explained the process by which the inquiry was conducted:

The Committee heard evidence of witnesses on 8 days at Delhi, on 29 days at Lahore, on 6 days at Ahmedabad, and on 3 days at Bombay. All the witnesses, with the exception of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, General Hudson, Mr. Thomson, and Sir Umar Ayat Khan, who gave their evidence in camera, were examined in public.<sup>43</sup>

The Commission were rigorous in gathering evidence, so much so, that Sir Michael O'Dwyer became offended by the proceedings of the investigation, and held a “grudge” against the Commission for years after the controversy had subsided.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> British Library, IOR/L/MIL/17/12/42, Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab, 8 March 1920, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>44</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 76.



The Hunter Commission produced two reports based on their findings. The Majority Report, which was produced by the European members of the Commission, and the Minority Report which was written by the Indian members. Although the Minority Report does take a much harsher stance towards Dyer, overtly censuring his actions, the only point the reports significantly differed on with regards to Amritsar specifically was their discussion of the treatment of the dead and wounded. The Majority Report does not acknowledge this point, unlike the Minority Report which states that Dyer "immediately left the place with his troops and did not do anything to see that either the dead or wounded received help. He did not consider it to be 'his job'"<sup>45</sup> Other than this, both reports which were published in May 1920 covered the same key points, with the Majority Report being used as the official grounds for General Dyer's censure by the Government of India and the British Government.<sup>46</sup>

Firstly, the reports concluded that the proclamation banning assemblies was not sufficiently made known to Indians (both locals and visitors), who were in Amritsar that day. The Majority Report stated that "it is evident that in many parts of the city the proclamation was not read."<sup>47</sup> The Minority Report verified this. Dyer himself admitted to the Hunter Committee that he knew it was possible that some people at the meeting may not have heard the proclamation.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, the reports stated that the crowd were peaceful and unarmed.<sup>49</sup> Thirdly, the committee found that General Dyer gave no warning to the crowd before firing, and violated the minimum force doctrine by continuing to fire on the dispersing crowd. This conclusion was drawn based on Dyer's

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<sup>45</sup> Majority Report, in Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre*, p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> National Archives, CAB 24/105/40, Memorandum circulated by the Secretary of State for India, 06 May 1920.

<sup>47</sup> Majority Report, in Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre*, p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45, and Minority Report, in Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre*, p. 63.

own military report of events.<sup>50</sup> The fourth conclusion the Commission made was that Dyer had misunderstood his duty. Rather than dealing with the issue at hand, General Dyer aimed to teach the Punjab as a whole a lesson in submission. In General Dyer's report, he stated: "It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect, from a military point of view, not only on those who were present, but more specially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity."<sup>51</sup> General Dyer also said that he "was going to give them a lesson...was going to punish them."<sup>52</sup> This supports Metcalf and Metcalf's analysis that "for many among the British, the massacre confirmed widely held assumptions about how Indians ought to be governed... Indians, like children, when naughty needed to be severely punished."<sup>53</sup> The notion that Indian people were like children was popular in Anglo-Indian thought, and was often used to deny the Indian people self-government and legitimise British rule. Indians, like children, were incapable of governing themselves.

The conclusions of the Hunter Commission's Majority Report became central to the Government's portrayal of the Amritsar Massacre, and were used to censure General Dyer and maintain that that censure was right and justified. A Memorandum circulated by the Secretary of State for India on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1920 recommended General Dyer for censure by the British Government, based on the Commission's findings.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> National Archives, PRO 30/30/18, General Dyer's Report to General Staff, 25 August 1919.

<sup>51</sup> Majority Report, in Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre*, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 169.

<sup>54</sup> National Archives, CAB 24/105/40, Memoranda circulated by the Secretary of State for India, 06 May 1920.

### Inquiry: Croke Park

Demands for an investigation into reprisals against Irish civilians were raised by MPs a month before the Croke Park Massacre, but were rejected as the Government insisted that there were no grounds for inquiry. A Commons debate was also held on 20<sup>th</sup> October to discuss the motion moved by Labour MP Arthur Henderson,<sup>55</sup> to censure reprisals by Crown Forces and investigate the “causes, nature, and extent of reprisals” in Ireland. This motion was overwhelmingly rejected.<sup>56</sup> The Government argued that systematic reprisals were not taking place and any violence committed by soldiers and police in Ireland was accidental or justified.<sup>57</sup> However, the shooting at Croke Park stimulated another call for inquiry, akin to that conducted by the Hunter Commission, which would consider the events of 21<sup>st</sup> November 1920 specifically, alongside other reported episodes of violence committed against Irish civilians and their property. Even so, the Government still insisted that a public inquiry into the actions of the RIC and Auxiliaries was not necessary, for the same reasons an investigation had been rejected a month prior. Greenwood called some of the reported cases of reprisals “hideous and monstrous falsehoods” and “simply untrue” in his refusal, and thus a public investigation into cases of violence in Ireland against civilians, including Croke Park, was denied.<sup>58</sup> Conservative MPs such as John Pennefather supported the Government's stance and their refusal to hold an inquiry in the aftermath of Croke Park. Pennefather argued that an inquiry would be essentially pointless as evidence could not be guaranteed as impartial.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Government representations of the events, despite the

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<sup>55</sup> For more information on Arthur Henderson see, Chris Wrigley, ‘Henderson, Arthur (1863–1935)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2011, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33807>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>56</sup> House of Commons Debate, 20 October 1920, vol. 133 cc. 925-1039.

<sup>57</sup> House of Commons Debate, 21 October 1920, vol. 133 cc. 1048-51.

<sup>58</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 496-499.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 561-562.

demands of Irish nationalist MPs, Independent Liberals and the Labour Party, were not subject to scrutiny through a public investigation.

Instead, two military courts of inquiry in lieu of inquests were held within days of the Croke Park Massacre. They commenced on 23<sup>rd</sup> November under the instruction of the commander of the British forces in Dublin, Major-General Boyd, and were held at the Mater Hospital and the Jarvis Street Hospital, Dublin.<sup>60</sup> They were held with the purpose of "taking medical evidence, evidence of identification, and other evidence that may be brought forward"<sup>61</sup> regarding the deaths of the civilians killed. Evidence was taken anonymously from thirty-five witnesses who were either part of the RIC and Auxiliary forces, or who had been spectators at the football match.<sup>62</sup> The nature of the inquiries was very different to that held by the Hunter Commission in the Punjab. They were military inquiries held in a closed court without presence of the media. The proceedings were never published and the records of the proceedings were kept in closed files. However, in November 1999 folder WO 35/88 was released by the Public Records Office.<sup>63</sup> The proceedings of these military courts of inquiry are now accessible to historians, but they have only been utilised by a few.<sup>64</sup>

The individual witness statements in file WO 35/88 show that the testimonies provided to both inquiries contradicted each other on several occasions.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, David Leeson has conducted a thorough analysis of the witness statements which builds up a convincing picture of the sequence of events at Croke Park. He concludes that the Black

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<sup>60</sup> National Archives, WO 35/88B, Proceedings of the Jarvis Street Hospital Inquiry, 23 November 1920., and National Archives, WO 35/88B, Proceedings of the Mater Hospital Inquiry, 23 November 1920.

<sup>61</sup> National Archives, WO 35/88B, Proceedings of the Jarvis Street Hospital Inquiry, 23 November 1920.

<sup>62</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> House of Commons Debate, 25 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 627-8.

<sup>64</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, and Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920'.

<sup>65</sup> National Archives, WO 35/88B, Proceedings of the Jarvis Street Hospital Inquiry, 23 November 1920., and National Archives, WO 35/88B, Proceedings of the Mater Hospital Inquiry, 23 November 1920.

and Tans were not fired on first, that no weapons were found on any of the civilians searched, or at the scene, and that Crown Forces rushed in to Croke Park and started shooting without provocation. This contradicts the Government's contemporary public portrayal of events, which Leeson labels "disingenuous"<sup>66</sup> Leeson's conclusion highlights that evidence collected during both inquiries had the potential to discredit the official representation of the massacre. Both inquiries maintained that the firing was "carried out without orders and exceeded the demands of the situation,"<sup>67</sup> and Major Boyd's personal conclusions dubbed the firing "indiscriminate, and unjustifiable".<sup>68</sup>

Major E L Mills, commander of the Auxiliary Division contingent at Croke Park, sent a report to the Adjutant of the Auxiliary Division the day after the massacre that would have brought the Government view into further disrepute. This report can also be found in file WO 35/88. Mills explained in his report that the police were "excited and out of hand." He stated: "We found no arms on any of the people attending the match... I did not see any need for any firing at all".<sup>69</sup> This report was sent prior to the Government issuing its final statement on the massacre. Mills' version of events clearly contradicts the initial two statements presented to the public and reported in the press, and, as we will see, it contradicted the third statement even further. The report was received by the Adjutant General, but was not produced at the courts of inquiry. Even if this report had been considered by the inquiry, it still would have remained hidden for as long as the files remained closed.

Unlike with the Hunter Commission Inquiry, the results of this investigation were in no way used to inform, reinforce or amend the Government's construction of events.

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<sup>66</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> National Archives, WO 35/88B, Proceedings of the Jervis Street Hospital Inquiry, 23 November 1920.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> National Archives, WO 35/88B, Report from Major E L Mills ADRIC to Adjutant ADRIC, 22 November 1920.

Throughout the investigation into the Punjab Disturbances, the Secretary of State for India urged Parliament, the press, and the people, to reserve judgement until the commission had completed their investigation. He maintained that an official decision and a course of action would not be made until the Hunter Commission had drawn their conclusions.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, General Dyer was not censured until after the reports were published, over a year after he had ordered his forces to fire on the crowd. In the Irish case however, the Government immediately provided their official representation, then proceeded to conceal and disregard the results of the subsequent inquiries which ultimately exposed this version as false. Instead, the Chief Secretary of Ireland continued to uphold the Government stance, which had been constructed through three official statements by the time the inquiry concluded. Unlike the findings of the Hunter Inquiry, which were of use to the British Government, the evidence collected by the Mater Street Hospital and Jarvis Street Hospital inquiries, was not. The court files make it clear that the findings of the inquiry could have completely discredited the Government view. It is thus not surprising that the results of the inquiry remained closed for almost 80 years,<sup>71</sup> despite pressure from the left and centre in the following months for the findings to be released.<sup>72</sup> This secrecy had been made possible by the Chief Secretary successfully rejecting the requests from the Opposition for an investigation that was public.

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<sup>70</sup> British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1641, File 7912, Protests from UK borough councils and other organisations against the shooting of an unarmed crowd of Indians by troops at Amritsar, Dec 1919-Jun 1920.

<sup>71</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 43.

<sup>72</sup> House of Commons Debate, 02 December 1920, vol. 135 cc. 1419-20.

## The Government View and its Defence in Parliament: Amritsar

A Cabinet Memorandum from June 1920 informed that General Dyer had been censured by the Army Council, and thus the British Government, and forcibly retired from the Indian Army. It also stated that these decisions were based on the conclusions of the Hunter Commission Inquiry.<sup>73</sup> The official stance was made clear and over a year after the Amritsar Massacre, a decision on who was to blame had finally been made. The British Government condemned General Dyer's actions and held him solely responsible for the shooting at Amritsar.

However, whilst the Government maintained throughout the Amritsar controversy that their decision to censure General Dyer was based on the reports of the Hunter Inquiry, and Montagu had urged that judgement be reserved until the inquiry had been completed,<sup>74</sup> it appears that the Government's stance and the intention to censure General Dyer were to some extent already being formulated prior to the publication of the Hunter reports. In December 1919 – six months before publication of the reports, the British Prime Minister was already placing sole blame on General Dyer, representing the massacre as an isolated event, and attempting to divert any potential accountability away from the imperial administration. Lloyd George described Dyer to the House of Commons as “the principal actor”, stating that “the thing must be put right.”<sup>75</sup> The Prime Minister was already establishing Dyer as the key perpetrator who should be held accountable. He used emotive phrases such as “bleeding to death” and “heap of dead and dying” in an early attempt to get MPs into the anti-Dyer camp. More

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<sup>73</sup> National Archives, CAB 24/167, Cabinet Memorandum, 'The Amritsar Disturbances', 7 July 1920, p.260A

<sup>74</sup> British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1641, File 7912, Protests from UK borough councils and other organisations against the shooting of an unarmed crowd of Indians by troops at Amritsar, Dec 1919-Jun 1920.

<sup>75</sup> House of Commons Debate, 22 December 1919, vol. 123 cc. 1230-1231.

importantly however, he claimed that “there has never been anything like it before in English history.”<sup>76</sup> This is probably the first instance in which the singularity argument, the argument upheld by the British Government throughout the Parliamentary debates in 1920, can be noted in official public discourse. Thus, despite the claim that the Government’s decision to censure Dyer was based on the Commission’s recommendations, in December 1919, it is clear that the Prime Minister at least, was already willing to charge General Dyer with sole responsibility for the massacre.

The Government were under pressure from local councils, trade unions and other organisations across Britain throughout the course of the Hunter Inquiry, as these groups were expressing protest against the Amritsar affair prior to the Commission reports being published. Perhaps this pressure may have encouraged the Government to find blame in a singular culprit outside of the administration early on. Letters to Montagu dating back to December 1919 were calling for the persons responsible to be punished, and the reputation of the Empire to be restored.<sup>77</sup> For example, a letter to Montagu from the Borough of Greenwich Town Clerk demanded that the Government “bring the culprits to justice, and to redeem as much as possible the name and honour of this country”. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom urged “the recall of General Dyer”, and the Rhonda Miners' Federation went as far to say on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1919, that “the Officer responsible for this atrocity should be brought to trial for murder.”<sup>78</sup> The responses to these letters maintained that the Government were waiting for the results of the Hunter Inquiry before making a judgement on the incident

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., cc. 1231-1232.

<sup>77</sup> British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1641, File 7912, Protests from UK borough councils and other organisations against the shooting of an unarmed crowd of Indians by troops at Amritsar, Dec 1919-Jun 1920.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



and issuing punishment.<sup>79</sup> However, as demonstrated by Lloyd George's speech to the House of Commons, the victims and perpetrators of the Amritsar Massacre and the course of action necessary to relieve the British administration of blame, were to some extent already decided. This pressure may nevertheless have reaffirmed to the Government that identifying a sole culprit was a necessity.

The findings of the Hunter Inquiry and the way the Government pinned the blame on Dyer angered many politicians and the conservative press, who strongly objected to Dyer's treatment. The main objectors, their defence of Dyer, and their criticism of the Government view will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The extremely contentious nature of the Amritsar affair led to demands from both pro-Dyer and anti-Dyer groups for a special parliamentary debate. This debate was held on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1920, and in it the Government had to defend their representation of, and response to, the Amritsar Massacre. The Government's portrayal of Dyer as the sole perpetrator of an atrocious but a-typical event was central to this debate. As well as this, the case of General Dyer instigated a broader discussion over how Britain should maintain control of its empire.

Montagu, as Secretary of State for India, opened the debate on behalf of the Government, arguing that Dyer's actions were based on "the doctrine of terrorism". Rather than linking the censure of Dyer to the findings of the Hunter Commission however, Montagu immediately raised the broader question of the nature of the British Raj. He asked the House: "Are you going to keep your hold upon India by terrorism, racial humiliation, and subordination, and frightfulness, or are you going to rest it upon the goodwill, and the growing goodwill, of the people of your Indian Empire?"<sup>80</sup> This question of whether or not Britain should rule its empire by the sword remained

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1707-1709.

significant throughout the Amritsar debate, and is also seen throughout discussions on the Irish question. Montagu argued the British rule in India and across the Empire could only be preserved through partnership. He stated that domination would lead to the British being “driven out of the country by the united opinion of the civilised world.” Moreover, Montagu implored that if Britain wished to uphold the Indian Empire through “justice and partnership” then General Dyer had to be condemned by the British Government. Montagu believed in prolonging British rule in India by acting “in accordance with the canons of modern love of liberty and democracy”, not with “callousness about Indian honour and Indian life.”<sup>81</sup> Montagu promoted the idea of a ‘Britishness’ that encapsulated collaboration, respect, and peace, rather than militarism. Jon Lawrence explains that during imperial crisis, many politicians peddled the notion that the British were a peaceable people who embodied values of justice and civility. Here, Montagu was asking the House to conform to this post-war national identity that was frequently promoted in public discourse in the immediate inter-war years.

Winston Churchill was the next politician to address the house on behalf of the Government as Secretary of State for War. However, Churchill’s argument focused explicitly on the sole culpability of General Dyer. The singularity argument, first introduced in the Commons by Lloyd George in 1919, is clearly promoted here in Churchill’s defence of the Government. Churchill maintained that the Amritsar Massacre was “an episode which appears to me to be without precedent or parallel in the modern history of the British Empire... It is an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation.”<sup>82</sup> By placing the blame solely on Dyer and stressing the exceptional character of the event, the Amritsar Massacre could be

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1707-1709.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1725-1726.

reduced to a cruel error of judgment by one man, and not seen as a direct consequence of the inherently oppressive character of the Raj, or part of a broader problem regarding the nature of British colonial rule.

Furthermore, in order to further shield the Empire from scrutiny, Churchill continuously attempted to frame British rule as a force of justice and partnership, particularly in comparison to other global powers. He stated that only governments who have stolen power through violence have to resort to terrorism to maintain control. Churchill claimed that "such ideas are absolutely foreign to the British way of doing business." His representation of the righteous British character in contrast to "foreign" unlawful and violent character of 'others' is clear. Dyer had to be censured if this perception of British character was to be preserved. He insisted that "we have to make it absolutely clear, some way or another, that this is not the British way of doing business".<sup>83</sup> Churchill's argument foreshadows those of historians such as Charles Townsend, who insist on the atypical nature of the Amritsar Massacre and that the Empire avoided excessive violence.

A Cabinet Memorandum from the Foreign Office produced in January 1920 stated: "Recent events in Ireland and Egypt, together with the reports of the evidence heard by Lord Hunter's enquiry into the Punjab riots arouse voluminous discussion. The general opinion is that these events have openly exposed the barbarity of Imperialism."<sup>84</sup> Churchill was highly aware of this unfavourable exposure. Hence, the Secretary of State for War and the British Government had to demonstrate an aversion to "barbarity" or "terrorism". Thus, for the sake of preserving the reputation of the Empire and its

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., cc. 1730-1731.

<sup>84</sup> National Archives, CAB/24/156/11, British Empire Report No. 8, 07 January 1920.

legitimacy, Churchill had to assert that the governing of India was rooted in partnership as Montagu implored that it should be, and Dyer had to be censured.

Conservative Party Leader and Leader of the House, Andrew Bonar Law, recognised the "difficulties" faced by General Dyer, but also argued on behalf of the Coalition Government that General Dyer's censure was an appropriate consequence of his actions. He argued that Dyer's actions were wrong and thus "the government of this country and of India is bound to declare that, in its opinion, it was wrong."<sup>85</sup> He condemned the fact that Dyer did not give prior warning before firing and continued shooting unnecessarily, as highlighted in the Hunter Commission Reports. Bonar Law closed the debate by asserting that Britain needed to avoid action that gave any potential enemies in India "the right to say that we are treating Indians less fairly than we treat other British subjects."<sup>86</sup> Again, the Government's agenda became clear; the representation of the Empire as fair and just must be preserved, and thus Dyer must be condemned.

The House of Commons debate ended with a vote in favour of the Government, but it is important to note that 120 Unionists voted against them.<sup>87</sup> This demonstrated a serious lack of support for the censure of General Dyer among the Coalition Government's majority party. Whilst Montagu aimed to present a united front, it is clear that disagreement over the official stance was present. Additionally, it was not only the House of Commons in which the 'official view' of the Amritsar Massacre required defending. The Government's representation and censure of General Dyer was also scrutinised by the House of Lords. Viscount Finlay, who had been Lord Chancellor of

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<sup>85</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1809-1810.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1814-1815.

<sup>87</sup> Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/22/4/6, Letter sent from Frederick Smith to Lloyd George, 09 July 1920.

Great Britain until January 1919, moved a motion of censure to the House of Lords on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1920 that stated: "This House deplores the conduct of the case of General Dyer as unjust to that officer." The debate resulted in a vote against the Government, with 129 votes cast in support of the motion.<sup>88</sup> The right-wing defenders of Dyer who voted *against* the Government will be discussed in the following chapter.

Despite this majority sentiment in the Lords, however, several of the Lords did defend the Government stance. Language regarding the righteousness of the British rule was also prevalent throughout their defence, as seen in the House of Commons. For example, the Secretary of State for Colonies, Viscount Milner,<sup>89</sup> argued that Dyer's conduct at Amritsar constituted a policy "which no civilised Government, least of all the British Government with its high standards of justice and humanity, could do otherwise than repudiate."<sup>90</sup> Similarly, former Liberal MP Lord Buckmaster,<sup>91</sup> maintained that if force across the Empire is deemed necessary, "its only sanction is the administration of justice, and the welfare and benefit of the people whom it rules."<sup>92</sup> The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Earl Curzon of Kedleston and former Viceroy of India,<sup>93</sup> concurred. He insisted that should the Lords vote in favour of General Dyer, they "shall lower our own standards of justice and humanity" and "debase the currency of our national honour."<sup>94</sup> Again, the idea of the civility and justice of Britishness and the

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<sup>88</sup> House of Commons Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 222-223.

<sup>89</sup> For more information on Viscount Milner see, Colin Newbury, 'Milner, Alfred, Viscount Milner (1854–1925)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35037>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>90</sup> House of Commons Debate, 20 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 316-317.

<sup>91</sup> For more information on Lord Buckmaster see, William Goodhart, 'Buckmaster, Stanley Owen, first Viscount Buckmaster (1861–1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32159>, accessed 5 Sept 2017]

<sup>92</sup> House of Lords Debate, 20 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 344-345.

<sup>93</sup> For more information on Earl Curzon of Kedleston see, David Gilmour, 'Curzon, George Nathaniel, Marquess Curzon of Kedleston (1859–1925)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2011, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32680>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>94</sup> House of Lords Debate, 20 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 366-367.

British Empire is dominant, insisting that Britishness was based on a moral superiority that had to be preserved.

This idea of moral superiority and the virtuous nature of British rule was further accentuated through a comparison with Germany made by Viscount Milner. He asked: “Does anyone really doubt that Prussian methods of repression are more effective... than our milder British methods?”<sup>95</sup> This statement also equated Dyer’s actions with Prussianism, in line with the Hunter Commission Reports and other parliamentary rhetoric. During this time of imperial crisis, the British strived to portray themselves as peaceful people who ruled their empire in a fair and nonviolent way, in contrast to other European powers, particularly Germany. This representation of the British and their empire as ‘peaceable’ attempted to distinguish them as a legitimate and just imperial authority in a post-war milieu where anti-imperialist ideologies were rapidly expanding. This tactic was also used in debates on violence in Ireland. In addition, comparing Dyer’s actions to Prussianism also employed residual British nationalist sentiments from the First World War in order to garner further support and reinforce the Government’s argument.

This view of Britain as a moral force and protector only reinforced the lens of “paternalistic” imperialism through which Indians were often viewed.<sup>96</sup> For example, Lord Meston,<sup>97</sup> who had been the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh from 1912 to 1918, maintained that “British traditions of fair dealing and of

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 314-315.

<sup>96</sup> Derek Sayer, ‘British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920’, *Past & Present*, vol. 149 (1991), pp. 139-140.

<sup>97</sup> For more information of Lord Meston see, F. H. Brown, ‘Meston, James Scorgie, first Baron Meston (1865–1943)’, rev. Francis Robinson, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2012, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35000>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

humanity and justice to weaker people were broken".<sup>98</sup> He promoted the idea that British traditions were supposedly beneficial to "weaker peoples", or at least they were until General Dyer 'broke' them. This notion also resonated throughout the defence of the Government and the Empire given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Thomas Davidson. He stated:

It is commonplace, a truism, to say that there is nothing greater in the life of our Empire than the story of our rule in India. It is a story of great things greatly done, wise leaders and rulers growing constantly in experience and knowledge of peoples alien to their own, among whom they were sent to rule, using that gathered experience and knowledge with far-seeing statesmanship, with great sympathy, with stimulating leadership, and sometimes fatherly care.<sup>99</sup>

The Archbishop's use of the term "fatherly care" is a good example of paternalist imperialism, as Derek Sayer has discussed in his article.<sup>100</sup> The Archbishop went on to hark back to justifications of imperialism as a 'civilising mission'. He argued that Britain, as a moral Christian force, had been able to "promote the intellectual emancipation of the Indian peoples" and had been working to change "their habits of thought, their religious ideal and their moral level." Thus, like Lords Meston, Buckmaster and Milner, and like Churchill, the Archbishop's argument in support of the Government was based on maintaining the supposed moral greatness of the British Empire. In this context, General Dyer's actions had to be condemned.

It is also striking that several officials who defended the Government stance did so by requesting that members of both Houses consider what their reaction would have been

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<sup>98</sup> House of Lords Debate, 20 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 350-351.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 320-322.

<sup>100</sup> Derek Sayer, 'British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', *Past & Present*, vol. 149 (1991), pp. 139-140.

had the Amritsar Massacre happened elsewhere. Conservative MP and Lord Chancellor, Frederick Smith, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Birkenhead, argued:

Suppose this assembly had consisted of Irishmen, or suppose the Canadian Government were dealing with the revolutionary mob which overpowered Winnipeg and held it for days, or that authorities were dealing with the mobs which in Glasgow defeated law and order - who is here bold enough to defend him if General Dyer went to Glasgow, or Winnipeg, or Belfast, and shot down, as long as he had shot left in the rifles of his soldiers, 300 or 400 persons? No one!<sup>101</sup>

Birkenhead contended that if Dyer's actions would not be considered acceptable in Ireland, Canada or Scotland, then they should not be considered acceptable in India. Inherent in his argument was the suggestion that those who argued in favour of actions like Dyer's when they took place in India but opposed them when they were directed against white people were opponents of the "true view" of the Empire, which supposedly ensured that any citizen, "whatever his colour and creed, whatever his geographical location, can look to justice."<sup>102</sup> Lord Sumner, John Hamilton, who had been a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, combated this argument by insisting that "any part of our country- in Limerick, in Glasgow, or anywhere else" was too civilised to experience violent disturbances similar to those seen in the Punjab, and thus Dyer's actions would never be necessitated there.<sup>103</sup> This assertion is surprising, given that the Irish War for Independence was well underway. However, the Marquess of Crewe retorted that some MPs in the House considered the Indian life "less

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<sup>101</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 279-280.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> House of Lords Debate, 20 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 338-339.



important” than the European. He exclaimed: “For “India” read “Ireland... for “Amritsar” read “Limerick” ... who will say that it would be wise, or right, or possible to open fire on a crowd of that kind listening to a speech... you must take the Irish parallel and see what would be said supposing indiscriminate shooting took place in the same way in an Irish town.”<sup>104</sup> Of course, firing on an unarmed crowd was in fact soon to become a focus of attention in relation to Ireland.

### The Government View and its Defence in Parliament: Croke Park

The Government representation of the Croke Park Massacre had to an extent already been constructed and made known to the British public by the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1920. The first two official statements had been presented prior to the commencement of the courts of inquiry, and set the tone for the final Government account of the shooting. As Leeson explains, all three of these official statements “were essentially similar, but each was more evasive than its predecessor on the subject of civilian casualties.”<sup>105</sup> The initial reports admitted to the police firing at the football field, “killing 10 and wounding others”<sup>106</sup>, but the third report indicated that it was a stampede of the crowd that was predominantly responsible for the casualties. This third and final official statement was presented by Sir Hamar Greenwood to the House of Commons on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, and remained the Government’s stance on the massacre, despite being consistently challenged by the press and opposition MP’s. The Chief Secretary stated that the account had “been compiled from the report made by police and military, after very

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<sup>104</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 263-264.

<sup>105</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 51.

<sup>106</sup> House of Commons Debate, 22 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 38-43.

careful investigation."<sup>107</sup> However, the courts of inquiry investigating Croke Park had only begun that day, and did not conclude until December 1920.<sup>108</sup>

The final Government statement was constructed around two dominant themes: That the crowd at Croke Park were in some way criminal, and that the crowd were somehow responsible. First of all, the statement vilified the spectators by maintaining that among them were Sinn Feiners who had conducted the assassinations of British officers that morning. Greenwood argued that it was "their presence and their efforts to escape" that caused "fatal consequence to a number of innocent people"<sup>109</sup>, rather than the indiscriminate firing on the crowd by the RIC. The account criminalised them further by falsely stating that "a considerable number of men among the football crowd were carrying arms" and that a large number of these weapons were found at the scene. Greenwood insisted this was a point "proven beyond doubt",<sup>110</sup> although evidence from Mills' report and the courts of inquiry suggest otherwise.<sup>111</sup> The Chief Secretary also maintained that the police were fired upon first, again, criminalising the spectators, as well as attempting to justify any shooting that was "returned" by the authorities.

Lastly, the third statement emphasised that casualties were predominantly caused by a stampede. It explained that during attempts to escape, "a number of people were crushed."<sup>112</sup> However, medical evidence from both courts explained that most victims died as a result of bullet wounds. Still, the Government persisted with this version of events and continued to divert blame onto the crowd. Greenwood closed the statement by explicitly renouncing any accountability on behalf of the British authorities, and

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<sup>107</sup> House of Commons Debate, 23 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 199-202.

<sup>108</sup> Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', p. 54.

<sup>109</sup> House of Commons Debate, 23 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 199-202.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> National Archives, WO 35/88B, Report from Major E L Mills ADRIC to Adjutant ADRIC, 22 November 1920.

<sup>112</sup> House of Commons Debate, 23 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 199-202.

maintained that responsibility "rests entirely upon those assassins whose existence is a constant menace to all law-abiding persons in Ireland."<sup>113</sup> By referring to these "culprits" as assassins, he is again associating the crowd with the assassinations committed against British officers on the morning of 21st November.

The final version of events was upheld with the intention of freeing the Crown Forces and thus the British Government from all accountability. This is comparable to the Government's underlying intentions to protect the imperial administration from scrutiny via the censure of General Dyer, although no single scapegoat was available to blame in the case of Croke Park. As with Amritsar, the Government view was challenged by British politicians and by reports in the press, so it became necessary to discuss the Croke Park Massacre in Parliament. This instigated a fresh debate in the House of Commons over the broader issue of reprisals in Ireland at this time. During this debate held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1920, the Chief Secretary was forced to defend the Government stance on the massacre, as well as to address the broader issue of the use violence against civilians in Ireland. The motion put forward by the Leader of the Liberal Party who sat in opposition to the coalition Government, Herbert Asquith, stated that the House "deplores and condemns the action of the Executive in attempting to repress crime by methods of terrorism and reprisals which involve the lives and property of the innocent."<sup>114</sup> This was a direct challenge to the Government's portrayal of Croke Park, and to its broader representation of the nature of British rule in Ireland at this time.

After Asquith's critical speech that argued that reprisals *were* happening, were deliberate, and were systematic, Greenwood rose to begin the Government's defence. He immediately brought attention to the events of the morning of Bloody Sunday. He

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 487-488.

stated: "I want, first, to say to the house that all those wounded officers whose murder was attempted on Sunday last are progressing favourably." He went on to describe the assault on British officers conducted on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> November 1920 as a "massacre", and "one of the most horrible tragedies in the history of Ireland or of the world."<sup>115</sup> He was trying to keep focus on the assassinations of British officers, rather than give attention to the victims of Croke Park, or the victims of other reprisals committed by the RIC. He described the assassinations as "cruel and savage massacres... cold-blooded and carefully planned atrocities", committed by an "organised band of assassins". He then charged the mornings assassinations as "one of the most awful tragedies in the history of our Empire".<sup>116</sup> Throughout the debate Greenwood persistently recalled the various attacks on British police and soldiers that had occurred so far throughout the Irish War for Independence, and attempted to avoid discussing the Irish civilians who had suffered at the hand of the British authorities. Moreover, when Greenwood did give focus to the crimes committed by Crown Forces, he refused, on behalf of the Government, to accept any blame. He stated:

The consequential outrages that follow from a state of civil war such as exists in Ireland are not outrages for which the government or any government has responsibility. The responsibility is on the shoulders of those who, by a method of murder, are attempting to set up an independent Ireland.<sup>117</sup>

Consistent with his final statement about the massacre at Croke Park, the Chief Secretary insisted that blame should rest on those who supposedly have defied British authority, not British troops or the administration.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., cc. 494-496.

<sup>116</sup> House of Commons Debate, 22 November 1920 vol. 135 cc. 34-38.

<sup>117</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 495-496.

Furthermore, shielding the Government from blame required Greenwood to unequivocally defend the RIC against the accusation that reprisals were deliberate and taking place in Ireland on a systematic scale. Similarly to the Amritsar Massacre, the Croke Park Massacre had to be presented as atypical, unlike Amritsar however, no one person could be scapegoated in order to avert criticism from the Government. Hence, Greenwood needed to find justification for any violence against civilians that had already occurred, and in turn defend and justify the actions of the Crown Forces at Croke Park. In order to do this, Greenwood maintained the two initial lines of argument that were dominant in the previous official statements: That the victims were in some way criminal and that they were ultimately to blame. However, he also adopted a new line of defence in an attempt to exonerate British forces and thus the Government from further scrutiny over the frequent and indiscriminate violence that had been reported from Ireland.

The Chief Secretary's new line of defence continually framed the RIC and the Auxiliary Division as heroes to Britain and the Empire, as well as the true victims of violence in Ireland. Greenwood lionised the British forces by describing them as "the cream of the ex-service", most of which he claims have "decorations for valour".<sup>118</sup> He stirred the memory of the Easter Rising in attempt to represent the RIC as heroes through history, arguing that they "helped to save this country during the rebellion of 1916".<sup>119</sup> Moreover, in an attempt to justify imperial violence, specifically burning of creameries, Greenwood depicted an ambush at a creamery in Kerry. In his narrative of the attack, Irish nationalists were vilified to the extreme and the RIC and Auxiliary forces were persistently portrayed as heroes. He explained that Crown Forces went to the house of

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., cc. 501-502.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., cc. 505-506.

the manager of the creamery from which they had just been fired upon. He stated that "they found a wounded Sinn Feiner inside, and naturally, being chivalrous British soldiers, they did not touch the house".<sup>120</sup> The notion of the "British way of doing business"<sup>121</sup> as recalled by Churchill during the Dyer debate, resonated in this portrayal of "chivalrous British soldiers" showing mercy and using minimum force.

Greenwood described another incident in which Crown Forces came under attack in an attempt to present them as both disciplined heroes and victims of violence. He explained:

The Auxiliary Division found one of its members with his arms trussed up behind him, tied together, who had been brutally murdered, and drowned in the river Liffey. There was no reprisal! How many of us could have stood the strain as well?... there is no case in the history of our empire, with all its stress and struggle, in which discipline has been so sternly maintained under such frightful provocation.<sup>122</sup>

Greenwood also described a reprisal that occurred in Dublin, reciting how "the men collapsed and fell down crying", how their officer had "been murdered at very close range", and how "they were all crying and were so upset" and how "the men became mad".<sup>123</sup> Greenwood insisted that after this event, only a few windows were smashed, to which Joseph Devlin MP, exclaimed: "Nonsense!"<sup>124</sup> Through these stories, the Chief Secretary was attempting to demonstrate to the House how the Crown Forces were strong and disciplined in the face of "frightful provocation", but also how the situation in

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., cc. 501-502.

<sup>121</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1730-1731.

<sup>122</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 501-503.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., cc. 503-504.

Ireland and the violence of the IRA could on occasion lead to some retaliation; but this retaliation was understandable.

The Chief Secretary for Ireland closed his defence of the Government by asking the House: "Who is for Ireland and the Empire, and who is for the assassin?"<sup>125</sup> In the context of imperial crisis, this was a shrewd move. Fear of the empire's deterioration among right wing was very real at this time. Greenwood explained that there was an organised conspiracy in Ireland, "which has as its object the smashing of the British Empire". He argued: "After the experience of Sunday, how anyone can suggest that the Irish Republican Army is incapable of tackling Manchester and Liverpool".<sup>126</sup> The Chief Secretary was calling on this fear to validate his policy in Ireland, and garner support for taking control in Ireland with a firm hand. Paranoia over the end of empire was also visible in the right wing reaction to Amritsar. Notably, this paranoia is not visible in the official position on Amritsar. This is arguably due to the fact that the situation in India was much less serious than that in Ireland at this time. Ireland was in open rebellion, at war, with the intention of overthrowing British rule; India was not, and had not been in April 1919, despite cries from British and Irish Unionists that the Punjab Disturbances had been a revolutionary uprising potentially equal to the one occurring in Ireland.

Conservative politician, Lieut. Colonel Croft,<sup>127</sup> who strongly opposed Irish home rule, was next to speak in defence of the Government over the situation in Ireland. He charged those who criticised the actions such as those taken at Croke Park and intended to vote against the Government, were in fact censuring "all the ranks of the Army and the Royal Irish Constabulary in Ireland." Similarly to Montagu's speech on Amritsar,

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., cc. 512-513.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., cc. 507-508.

<sup>127</sup> For more information on Lieut. Colonel Croft see, Andrew S. Thompson, 'Croft, Henry Page, first Baron Croft (1881-1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32633>, accessed 11 Sept 2017].

Croft made suggestions on how the British should rule Ireland. In contrast to Montagu, however, Croft insisted that maintaining control in Ireland required a firm hand, rather than collaboration and partnership. He upheld the Government construction of the Crown Forces as both heroes and victims, insisting that "our soldiers and police are suffering from a state of affairs far worse than any war." Similarly to Greenwood, Croft described instances of the IRC being assassinated. He asked the House to "imagine the position of these soldiers and police in these terror stricken areas", and called for them "to back these men up".<sup>128</sup> This notion of "backing your men" also resonated throughout the pro-Dyer argument during the Amritsar controversy. As well as this, Croft showed his extremist position by stating that he condoned reprisals against civilians, believing that: "the soldiers by hitting back have at any rate put a certain amount of fear in the enemies of the law and order in Ireland".<sup>129</sup> This notion of the legitimacy of striking fear in the innocent in an attempt to punish the guilty had also been advanced by Dyer's defenders in 1920, when they refused to censure his attempt to produce "a moral effect" across the Punjab.

John Pennefather, Conservative MP for Liverpool Kirkdale, also mounted a nationalistic defence of the British Government, labelling those in Parliament who reprimanded the actions of the Crown Forces and who questioned the accounts given by the Government with criticism, as "defenders of the Sinn Fein".<sup>130</sup> He argued that criticism of British soldiers and police was unfair, framing them as victims of parliamentary scrutiny. He claimed:

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<sup>128</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 525-527.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 532-533.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 556-558.



Some members of this House have 'Black and Tan' on the brain. You hear them gibe repeatedly at those ex-service men, and suggest, some of them - it is a terrible thing - that those ex-service men, those British soldiers who are now in Ireland in the police or in the military forces, are really inhumane brutes.<sup>131</sup>

Pennefather found the criticism of the British forces in Ireland abhorrent, and accused the House of "blackening their reputation".<sup>132</sup> He repeatedly highlighted that they were British ex-servicemen who had fought in the First World War, and that their treatment by the Opposition was thus especially unjust and objectionable.

Finally, Liberal Coalition MPs, Lieut. Colonel J. Ward and Major General Seely rose to defend the Government.<sup>133</sup> Like Croft, Colonel Ward asked the House to 'back your men'. Ward emphasised the necessity to 'support the man on the spot', arguing that "it is all very well" to decide what should have been done afterwards, but you have to "decide in the moment".<sup>134</sup> At the same time, both MPs denied that the Crown Forces could have committed the deliberate attacks on civilians of which they were accused, including the attack at Croke Park. Ward insisted: "It is impossible for an English soldier or a British soldier, in whichever way you describe him, to perform the atrocities that has been alleged against him."<sup>135</sup> The notion of the righteous British character is again central here. The fact that these soldiers were "English" or "British" seemed proof enough that the "accusations" surrounding reprisals were unfounded, and the fact these soldiers were British, makes their (supposed) victimisation even more preposterous to

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., cc. 558-559.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., cc. 560-561.

<sup>133</sup> For more information on Lieut. Colonel J. Ward see, Marc Brodie, 'Ward, John (1866-1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36733>, accessed 7 Sept 2017], and for Major General Seely see, Roger Fulford, 'Seely, John Edward Bernard, first Baron Mottistone (1868-1947)', rev. Mark Pottle, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2011, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36007>, accessed 7 Sept 2017].

<sup>134</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 582-583.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., cc. 584-585.

Ward, as it had been for Pennefather. 'Britishness' also fed into the further lionisation of the Crown Forces. Ward stated: "Of all the heroic figures the world has ever seen I think the most heroic, the most chivalrous, the most honourable is the ordinary British Tommy".<sup>136</sup> This does raise the question, why did the Coalition Government have little problem criticising Dyer. The difference in the context in which the Amritsar Massacre took place is relevant in that Ireland was in a state of civil war where the Government had to stand up for its own side, India was not. Additionally, Dyer was a military commander who had ordered the British troops to fire. This enabled the Government to frame it as a single atrocity committed by a single man. The Croke Park Massacre, however, was another example in a long list of reprisals committed by the same police and military forces, and no single scapegoat was available in the Irish case as no officer had given the order to fire. Ilahi explains: "The entire system of law and order would have to be called into question if the Government could not justify the shooting to the public."<sup>137</sup>

The Government and its supporters defended the RIC and Auxiliary Division by emphasising that they were under constant attack by the Irish Republican Army, and by framing them as heroes for remaining in Ireland and fighting for peace. They argued that these "gallant soldiers" remained disciplined despite the difficulties they faced, and that reprisals were not deliberate or systematic but "in some cases they were completely justified."<sup>138</sup> They presented the British police and soldiers as heroes and the true victims of the conflict, as well as the victims of criticism from opposition MPs. Through this representation, the Government hoped that criticism could be averted regarding their policy in Ireland and episodes of imperial violence such as the Croke

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., cc. 584-585.

<sup>137</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 145.

<sup>138</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 499-500.

Park Massacre. However, as will be explained in Chapter 4, the Government continued to face challenges from the Labour Party in Britain over their response to, and portrayal of, the shootings at Croke Park. Nevertheless, the Chief Secretary continued to maintain to the House that “the firing by the Crown forces was fully justified in the exceptional circumstances of the situation.”<sup>139</sup>

Ultimately, in the aftermath of both Croke Park and Amritsar, the Government responded in a way they thought would be most beneficial to British rule in India and Ireland, and their position in Britain. This required the Government in both cases to avoid culpability. However, in response to Croke Park and the other reprisals in Ireland, the Government and its supporters could not allocate blame to a single perpetrator such as General Dyer. Thus the Government fully defended the Crown Forces in the aftermath of Croke Park, framing them as both heroes and the victims. They attempted to justify their actions by criminalising the spectators, and blaming the deaths of civilians on the crowd. Instead of placing full blame on one man, as in the case of Amritsar, the Government blamed the excessive and indiscriminate force inflicted by British soldiers and police in Ireland on the Irish.

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<sup>139</sup> House of Commons Debate, 25 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 652-3W.

## Chapter 3

### The Right-Wing Defence of General Dyer

The Government response to the Amritsar Massacre was heavily criticised by British and Irish Unionists in Parliament, who defended General Dyer throughout the Amritsar controversy. This chapter will address this right-wing reaction to General Dyer's censure by the British Government. As explained in chapter 1, existing scholarship has given significantly more attention to the right-wing response to the Amritsar Massacre than that of the Left. One reason for this is that much of the pro-Dyer historiography that has emerged since the 1960s,<sup>1</sup> mirrored, or is rooted, in the defence of Dyer that was constructed by conservative contemporaries in 1919 and 1920. Brian Bond, for example, argued that General Dyer was doing his duty to suppress a widespread rebellion that was raging across the Punjab.<sup>2</sup> Alfred Draper argues that he was "thrown to the Wolves" for carrying out this duty.<sup>3</sup> These notions of Dyer 'doing his duty', 'saving the Punjab', and being "thrown to the wolves because of it"<sup>4</sup> were dominant throughout pro-Dyer political discourse in the aftermath of the atrocity. Another reason for this attention could also be because the right-wing reaction to General Dyer's censure challenged the British Government, as highlighted across existing historiography on Amritsar. This was especially significant as many of the Government's challengers came from within the Coalition itself, which was composed of a heavy Unionist majority.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rupert Furneaux, *Massacre at Amritsar* (London, 1963), Brian Bond, 'Amritsar, 1919', *History Today*, vol. 13 (1963), Alfred Draper, *Amritsar, The Massacre that Ended the Raj* (London, 1981) and Nick Lloyd, *The Amritsar Massacre: The Untold Story of One Fateful Day* (London, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Bond, 'Amritsar, 1919', pp. 667-669.

<sup>3</sup> Draper, *Amritsar*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, this previous historiography has done little to demonstrate the connections between the right-wing defence of General Dyer and the Government defence of the Croke Park Massacre. Ilahi discusses how the situation in Ireland in 1920 influenced the defence of Dyer, a point which will be maintained here, but this chapter will also consider in depth the specific discourse used to construct Dyer's defence, and how this paralleled with the language used to excuse the actions of the Crown Forces after Croke Park. This has yet to be highlighted by existing scholarship. First of all, the reactions of right-wing politicians will be addressed by considering the arguments delivered during the key Parliamentary debates. The reporting of the Amritsar controversy in a number of conservative newspapers will then be considered. The defence of General Dyer by right-wing politicians and the press will then be discussed in relation to the Croke Park Massacre, and connections and comparisons will be made.

### Defending Dyer in Parliament

The pro-Dyer camp strongly contested the official portrayal of General Dyer as the perpetrator to blame for the shooting at Amritsar. Thus, a defence was constructed by right-wing politicians who contested this official representation of events. Three lines of argument can be identified throughout political discourse which attempted to defend and justify Dyer's actions. The first two foreshadowed the perspectives of the pro-Dyer historiography, claiming that General Dyer was a hero and portraying him as the true victim in the aftermath of Amritsar. The third insisted that the Indian civilians were to blame for being fired upon and attempted to demonise the Indian victims. These notions were upheld by right-wing politicians during the House of Commons debate that was held on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1920 and the House of Lords debate which convened 10 days later.

Sir Edward Carson was the key protagonist who had sought to defend General Dyer to the House of Commons. Carson was Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) which was formally linked to the Conservative Party in Britain, and whose MPs took the Conservative Whip at Westminster.<sup>5</sup> As leader of the UUP, Carson's view of Ireland served to motivate his support of Dyer. Unionist MPs such as himself likened the growth of nationalism in Ireland to that in India, and for Carson, how the Government responded to threats in India indicated their ability to maintain their hold over Ireland.<sup>6</sup> According to Carson and other pro-Dyer right-wing politicians, it was men like General Dyer and their harsh and decisive action against any threat to authority that were needed in Ireland, just as they were needed in India. Hence, the war in Ireland in 1920 influenced the Dyer debate. Historians Ilahi and Sayer also recognise this "Irish subtext", as did contemporaries. In a letter to the Prime Minister, Liberal MP Frederick Guest noted the significance of Edward Carson, with his Irish connection, leading the defence of General Dyer.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Irish influence was significant, and an example of how the context of imperial crisis affected the right-wing response. Ilahi clarifies: "It was no coincidence that almost all those who voted against Dyer's censure were Irish Unionists."<sup>8</sup>

Carson was first to criticise the Government's management of the Amritsar crisis during the Commons debate. He began his speech by framing Dyer as a British hero, "a gallant officer of 34 years' service – without a blemish on his record."<sup>9</sup> This image of Dyer as a

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<sup>5</sup> For more information of Sir Edward Carson see, D. George Boyce, 'Carson, Edward Henry, Baron Carson (1854–1935)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2014, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32310, accessed 5 Sept 2017]

<sup>6</sup> Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (New York, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/22/2/6, Correspondence between Lloyd George and Friederick Guest, 09 July 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2016), p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1712-1713.

“gallant officer” was continuously promoted by the pro-Dyer camp. Central to this heroisation of Dyer was the understanding that a planned large scale rebellion was occurring at the time of the Amritsar Massacre, which vindicated the shooting. Carson used phrases such as “seething with rebellion and anarchy” and “precursor to a revolution”<sup>10</sup> to try to excuse Dyer’s decision to fire on the crowd. Conservative MP, William Joynson-Hicks,<sup>11</sup> supported this notion. He stated: “If there was a real rebellion, as I submit there was... then General Dyer’s actions were justified.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Carson used the memory of the 1857 Indian Rebellion to reinforce his claims that General Dyer might have saved the Punjab from a violent revolution. He suggested that:

It may have been that [the shooting] which saved the most bloody outrage in that country, which might have deluged the place with the loss of thousands of lives, and may have saved the country from a mutiny to which the old mutiny in India would have appeared small.<sup>13</sup>

Recalling the 1857 rebellion was a tactic used frequently by Dyer’s right-wing advocates to garner support during the Amritsar debate.

Whilst riots had taken place throughout the Punjab in the days preceding the massacre, order had been restored in the city and across the region by April 13<sup>th</sup>. Both the findings of the Hunter Committee Inquiry and existing scholarship on Amritsar reject the claims that a widespread rebellion was occurring in the Punjab, or was about to take place, in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., cc. 1713-1715.

<sup>11</sup> For more information of William Joynson-Hicks see, F. M. L. Thompson, ‘Hicks, William Joynson- , first Viscount Brentford (1865–1932)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2010, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33858>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>12</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1758-1759.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., cc. 1714-1715.

the spring of 1919.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the *fear* of a rebellion and the potential long-term consequences for the Empire was real for many Unionists. Carson explained to the House of Commons that "the revolutionary elements of India, Ireland, Egypt, and other nations have shaken the supposed invulnerability of England."<sup>15</sup> Hence, the notion that any challenge to British imperial authority, whether it was in "Londonderry, or Dublin, or London, or India"<sup>16</sup>, should be met with force, underpinned the right-wing defence of Dyer in Parliament. In their view, a firm hand was needed for the maintenance of Britain's authority in India, Ireland, and across the globe. Therefore, Dyer's actions were right and justified.

The lionisation of General Dyer and the persistent defence of his actions as necessary and justified due to a rebellion qualified the second line of the right-wing argument: That Dyer was the true victim in the Amritsar controversy. For Dyer's supporters, he was "the man who had saved the Punjab",<sup>17</sup> yet he had been censured by the British Government and forced to retire. Dyerists recognised this as an attempt to scapegoat the officer. As discussed in chapter 2, the British Government did indeed present Dyer as the sole perpetrator in order to deflect blame to an extent, and Edward Carson in particular objected to this. He stated that officers should not suppose "that if they do their best... that they will be made scapegoats of and be thrown to the wolves to satisfy an agitation such as that which arose after this incident."<sup>18</sup> – An "agitation" driven by Indian nationalists. As previously noted, the idea of Dyer being "thrown to the wolves" is also upheld by some historians. Lieut. Colonel James, another prominent Irish

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<sup>14</sup> See the Hunter Commission Reports in Tim Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre: General Dyer in the Punjab 1919* (Guilford, 2000), and Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, and Derek Sayer, 'British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', *Past & Present*, vol. 149 (1991), pp. 130-164.

<sup>15</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1718-1719.

<sup>16</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 284-285.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 234-235.

<sup>18</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1715-1716.



Unionist politician, also supported this notion insisting that the Hunter Commission Inquiry was only held “to find a scapegoat or to whitewash somebody in authority.”<sup>19</sup> Lord Amphill also argued that Dyer was scapegoated in an attempt to satisfy radical Indians.<sup>20</sup> By identifying Dyer as a scapegoat and victim of the Hunter Inquiry and the British Government, his supporters challenged the official representation of the Amritsar Massacre which was founded on the insistence of Dyer’s personal culpability. Moreover, presenting Dyer as a scapegoat was an attempt, perhaps, to blame parts of the administration such as the Secretary of State for India, who were, in their view, too reluctant to use the ‘iron fist’ approach preferred by British and Irish Unionists, and appeared too willing to appease Indian nationalists’ demands.

Furthermore, the pro-Dyer faction in both Houses attempted to portray the officer as a victim by highlighting that he was in a difficult situation in Amritsar, and was censured without having had a ‘fair trial’. For example, Carson described the position in which men such as Dyer are placed as a “terrible responsibility.”<sup>21</sup> He asked the Commons, “before you break him, and send him into disgrace: Is he going to have a fair trial?”<sup>22</sup> Dyer's supporters found it an outrage that he would suffer forced retirement without having been tried in court. Carson utilised the idea of ‘Britishness’ to further this attack on the Government’s ‘unfair’ censure of Dyer. He stated:

You talk of the great principles of liberty which you have laid down. General Dyer has a right to be brought within those principles of liberty. He has no right to be

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., cc. 1751-1752.

<sup>20</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 288-298.

<sup>21</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1712-1713.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., cc. 1712-1713.

broken on the ipse dixit of any commission or committee, however great, unless he has been fairly tried.<sup>23</sup>

Carson proceeded to call out the treatment of General Dyer by the British Government as “un-English.”<sup>24</sup>

Lord Ampthill, Governor of Madras from 1900-1906,<sup>25</sup> also maintained this argument in the House of Lords. He stated: "No Englishman will dare to deny that any man, who is accused or suspected of an offence, is entitled to a fair trial before he is condemned and punished... That is a fundamental principle of the laws of England".<sup>26</sup> Again, the notion that ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’ was a power of justice was promoted, just as it had been during the construction of the British Government’s view of Amritsar. Whilst Winston Churchill used this idea of ‘Britishness’ to censure General Dyer the pro-Dyer right-wing utilised this notion to argue that he had been treated unfairly. However, there was a clear hypocrisy in the conservative view over the right to a fair trial under British justice. For example, this right was denied to Indian men and boys who General Dyer had flogged without trial for assaulting a European woman in the days preceding the massacre.<sup>27</sup> But this did not concern Dyer’s supporters, to them this right to British justice and fair trial only applied to “gallant” British officers, not Indian civilians. Churchill counter-argued against claims that Dyer had the right to a civilian trial by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., cc. 1719-1720.

<sup>25</sup> For more information of Lord Ampthill see, Katherine Prior, ‘Russell, (Arthur) Oliver Villiers, second Baron Ampthill (1869–1935)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35874>, accessed 5 Sept 2017]

<sup>26</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 289-290.

<sup>27</sup> See Minority Report, in Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre*, pp. 82-86.

outlining the distinctive procedures for misconduct in the military. He noted that “the procedure is well understood”, including by General Dyer, who did not dispute it.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the right-wing defence of General Dyer was not only based on the portrayal of him as both a hero and a victim. The pro-Dyer camp also attempted to demonise and blame the real victims of Amritsar; the hundreds of civilians who were shot down by unprovoked rifle fire. They associated the crowd at the Jallianwala Bagh with the riots that had occurred several days earlier, accusing them as a whole as guilty of those crimes committed prior to the gathering taking place. General Dyer himself saw the crowd as a guilty collective, describing them as “a defiant, organised, and rebellious mob, with a record of at least two days of outrage and treason behind it”.<sup>29</sup> In support of this, Lord Ampthill described the Indian assembly as “human masses, bent on violence, who have already tasted blood.”<sup>30</sup>

The fact that crowd were gathered 'unlawfully' was also emphasised in an attempt to criminalise them further. Despite the Hunter Commission Reports evidencing that Dyer's proclamation which had prohibited public gatherings had not been read out sufficiently, Dyer's defenders disagreed. Ampthill maintained:

Anybody who has even paid a visit to India knows that news of any kind goes like wildfire round an Indian city... Anyone who knows anything about India is aware that every single man of that crowd knew of the Proclamation and, in fact, was there in order to defy it.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1721-1722.

<sup>29</sup> Statement from General Dyer sent to Secretary of State for War, 03 July 1920, in Tim Coates ed., *The Amritsar Massacre: General Dyer in the Punjab 1919* (Guilford, 2000), pp. 82-86.

<sup>30</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 289-290.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 297-298.

For Amptill, the nature of Indian cities and their populations meant that reading the proclamation out more widely than had been done, was unnecessary. The Indians at the Jallianwala Bagh knew one way or the other that their gathering was prohibited, but they chose to assemble regardless.

In addition to this, many of Dyer's supporters attempted to argue that the crowd were armed with dangerous weapons.<sup>32</sup> The Hunter Commission found that the crowd were gathered peacefully, and that only some were 'armed' with sticks. Nonetheless, Lieut. Colonel James argued to the Commons that the crowd were dangerously armed, "not with rifles or pistols, but with lethal weapons of considerable strength, and they were opposed by a mere handful of fifty men."<sup>33</sup> For James, these sticks could have been lethal if used against Dyer's small force. Furthermore, the size of Dyer's force was persistently contrasted with the size of the crowd, portraying the Indian people as a giant mob against a few British soldiers. Joynson-Hicks emphasised this in the Commons by stating that "the mere impact of the crowd would have swept General Dyer and his force absolutely out of existence if they had attacked him"<sup>34</sup>, as did Earl of Middleton in the Lords,<sup>35</sup> who claimed that "the mere weight of the crowd would have annihilated it."<sup>36</sup> Dyer's force was indeed small compared to the size of the crowd, but as explained by the Hunter Reports, these civilians were gathered peacefully, most were sitting down, and their 'sticks' were little threat in the face of rifles. This idea of a small number of British troops facing a large armed Indian mob was another attempt to demonise the crowd, and ultimately frame the victims of the Amritsar Massacre as the perpetrators.

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<sup>32</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1762-1763.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1753-1754.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1761-1762.

<sup>35</sup> For more information of Lord Midleton see, J. B. Atkins, 'Brodrick, (William) St John Fremantle, first earl of Midleton (1856-1942)', rev. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32085>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>36</sup> House of Lords Debate, 19 July 1920, vol. 41 cc. 252-253.

Dyer's right-wing defenders failed to win the majority of votes in the House of Commons and the debate resulted in a vote in favour of the Government. However, 129 MPs voted against the Liberal-Conservative Coalition, 92% of which were Unionists. Leader of the Conservative Party, Andrew Bonar Law, commented: "We got through, but half our party voted against us."<sup>37</sup> The Government only gained a majority due to support from the Opposition. Without the support of Independent Liberals and the Labour Party, the pro-Dyer British and Irish Unionists would have won the debate. In addition, the defence of General Dyer in the House of Lords debate resulted in success for the right-wing Dyerists, and a vote against the Government.

#### The Defence of Dyer in the Right-Wing British Press

Due to heavy press censorship in the Punjab, news on the Amritsar Massacre was not widely reported in Britain until the final months of 1919. Kaul explains that initial reports of unrest in the Punjab were strictly based on official telegrams from the Government of India, which "made little attempt to present an informed picture of the general situation".<sup>38</sup> News of repression by the Government in the Punjab did not go completely unreported, for example, the bombing of Gujranwallah that occurred at this time was reported in the press in London. However, the massacre at Amritsar "was largely absent from the news." The *Bombay Chronicle* later described that the Indian press had been "gagged", and only "pro-government versions of the trouble" were

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<sup>37</sup> Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/85/8/8, Correspondence between Lloyd George and Ernest Evans, 9 July 1920.

<sup>38</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, C. 1880-1922* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 199-200.

produced.<sup>39</sup> This policy of news management in India had been recognised prior to the Amritsar crisis, with *The Times* criticising Montagu for "bottling up information about India".<sup>40</sup> However, Montagu himself appeared frustrated by the lack of information and delays in communications from India around this time.<sup>41</sup> As explained in chapter 2, this led to a delay in an official response to the Massacre in London, and delays to any investigative action taken by the Secretary of State.

Nonetheless, once the Hunter Commission began its inquiry reports became much more frequent and high profile. The right-wing press who supported Dyer were especially vocal in run up to the Hunter reports being published. The notions of Dyer being a victim and hero, and the Indian people as criminal, and to blame, resonated in a number of reports. For example, the *Daily Mail* helped to heroise General Dyer, quoting that he shot to quell "seditious conspiracies"<sup>42</sup> and "to save the British Raj".<sup>43</sup> The newspaper maintained that the majority of Englishmen in India believed that if it was not for Dyer, "the whole of the Punjab would have been consumed by the flame of anarchy."<sup>44</sup> This was also maintained by the *Daily Telegraph*, which described Amritsar as "the effectual suppression of a most dangerous uprising."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the *Daily Express* argued that if Dyer had not fired immediately, it might have "led to violence recalling the horrors of the Mutiny."<sup>46</sup> The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was referred to frequently throughout the public discourse defending Dyer. The *Express* proceeded to state: "We hold India by the sword, and we are there to rule and govern"<sup>47</sup> - a contentious notion central to the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Mail*, 04 May 1920, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Mail*, 10 May 1920, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1920, in Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 86.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Express*, 22 April 1920, in Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 203.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Amritsar controversy. In addition, the *Daily Mail* emphasised that the massacre was a "story" of a "tiny loyal force against a great crowd of Indians"<sup>48</sup>, just as many politicians would do in Parliament in the following months, when attempting to justify why General Dyer fired without warning.

The *Mail* also framed Dyer as a victim by endorsing the idea that the Massacre was his "horrible dirty duty"<sup>49</sup>, similarly to how politicians would emphasise the 'difficulty' of Dyer's situation to both Houses. This specific article criticised the Government treatment of Dyer, by stating that "while the authorities had been 12 months making up their minds about him he only had 30 seconds in which to decide what to do at Amritsar."<sup>50</sup> Again, this promoted the notion that Dyer had been forced to deal with a very difficult situation which he was now being condemned for. The *Daily Telegraph* also insisted that it "would be wrong and cruel to underestimate his difficulties."<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the *Daily Mail* also tried to criminalise the crowd, persistently describing them as a "mob". The newspaper purposefully drew attention to the attacks on Europeans which had occurred during the riots in the days preceding the massacre, just as right-wing politicians did in an attempt to associate the crowd at the Jallianwala Bagh with these crimes.<sup>52</sup> The *Mail* also tried to place blame on the victims of the Amritsar Massacre by explaining that Dyer had issued a proclamation which had prohibited public gatherings, and insisting that "notwithstanding these proclamations the Indians gathered in large numbers", causing General Dyer to command fire.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Daily Mail*, 04 May 1920, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 09 July 1920, in Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Mail*, 04 May 1920, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Interestingly however, upon the Hunter reports actually being published, even the *Daily Mail* recognised that Dyer "cannot escape the suspicion that his decision in a moment of grave crisis was influenced by personal feeling", and came to the conclusion (albeit alongside further reproach of the administration) that he "was justly condemned".<sup>54</sup> Equally, the *Daily Express* stated that "the judgements passed on a most unfortunate officer cannot be impugned."<sup>55</sup> These admissions would never have been heard from Dyerists such as Carson in Parliament. The conservative press *did* maintain their criticisms of the Government into the summer of 1920, but surprisingly, despite taking a pro-Dyer line which mirrored the right-wing political rhetoric that defended Dyer throughout the Hunter Inquiry and in the Parliamentary debates, eventually the British press generally agreed (in print) that General Dyer had, at the very least, made an error of judgement.<sup>56</sup>

The *Morning Post* was an exception, and remained a beacon for Dyer's defenders as they upheld their pro-Dyer stance fiercely throughout the entire controversy. They described Dyer as "the man who saved India"<sup>57</sup>, again, portraying him as a hero by claiming that he crushed "a conspiracy against British rule"<sup>58</sup>. The *Post* strongly condemned the censure of General Dyer and criticised the British Government and the Government of India by stating that they had chosen "to sacrifice General Dyer to the susceptibilities of the native agitators". They echoed Carson's defence of Dyer and criticisms of the India Office and Government of India across their pages. The *Morning Post* also argued: "These methods will lose India, just as they are losing in Ireland."<sup>59</sup> The *Morning Post* were

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<sup>54</sup> *Daily Mail*, 27 May 1920, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Express*, 27 May 1920, in Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 220.

<sup>56</sup> *Morning Post*, 28 May 1920, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> *Morning Post*, 09 July 1920, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Morning Post*, 28 May 1920, p. 6.



clearly in favour of the 'iron-fist' approach to imperial governance and saw a connection between the Amritsar debate and the situation in Ireland, just as the right-wing politicians who defended Dyer in Parliament did.

Moreover, it was not just in articles and editorials where the *Post's* support for Dyer and opposition to the Government response to the Amritsar Massacre was demonstrated. The *Morning Post* initiated a public collection fund the day after the House of Commons debate to show support for Dyer and their objection to his censure. In an appeal to its readers, the newspaper stated:

A great wrong is being done to a man who served his country well – who by his courage and decision in a moment of dangerous crisis, averted an immeasurable calamity. For this service the reward is – a broken career... He is not only broken but financially crippled... We forthwith propose to open a General Dyer fund.

The fund raised over £10'000 within a week, with Edward Carson and Sir Michael O'Dwyer being some of the first contributors. The final total reached £26'317, "which Dyer received along with a golden sword and the title 'Defender of the Empire'."<sup>60</sup> The Editor of *The Morning Post* was sent waves of letters containing contributions which demonstrated that a large number of British people, a third of whom were Anglo-Indian, believed like the newspaper itself and the pro-Dyer faction in Parliament that the General was being victimised for saving the Raj.<sup>61</sup> For example, a letter stating that the treatment of Dyer was "unjust" was sent by Sir George Burton Hunter, a prominent shipbuilder from Sunderland, with a donation of £10.10.0d enclosed.<sup>62</sup> The enthusiastic

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<sup>60</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 90.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> The National Archive, WO 32/21403/36A, Letter from G. B. Hunter to the Editor of *The Morning Post*, 15 July 1920.

response to the Dyer fund demonstrated a strong support for Dyer from members of the British public, as well as from this organ of the right-wing press.

### Connecting the Defence of General Dyer to the Croke Park Massacre

What is particularly interesting about the defence of General Dyer within the context of this thesis, is that the key lines of argument used by British and Irish Unionists and promoted by the right-wing press which *challenged* the British Government's decision to censure General Dyer for the Amritsar Massacre, foreshadowed those used *by* the British Government in their defence of the Crown Forces after the shooting at Croke Park. As explained in chapter 2, the final account of the Croke Park Massacre that was presented to Parliament on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1920 by the Chief Secretary of Ireland was constructed around the idea that the crowd at Croke Park were in some way criminal, and that the spectators were somehow responsible. The debate held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1920 to discuss the shooting and the broader issue of reprisals also maintained these notions. In addition, this debate saw two other aspects of the defence of Crown Forces come in to play: The portrayal of British forces in Ireland as heroes, and the portrayal of British forces in Ireland as victims.

The official statements on Croke Park vilified the spectators by maintaining that many were Sinn Feiners who were responsible for the assassinations of 14 British Officers that morning. The Government attempted to associate the crowd with these assassinations, just as the pro-Dyer camp and General Dyer himself had associated the crowd at the Jallianwala Bagh with the riots and attacks on Europeans in the days preceding the shooting at Amritsar. In addition to this, the Government insisted that

many in the crowd at Croke Park were armed, just as right-wing supporters of Dyer had argued to be the case at Amritsar. However, evidence suggests that this was an exaggeration with regard to Amritsar, and simply untrue in the case of Croke Park. Both crowds, Irish and Indian, were demonised to an extent in order to justify the unprovoked shooting by British forces on native civilians, without warning.

The British Government also persistently focused on the morning's assassinations throughout political discourse after Croke Park as part of their construction of the Crown Forces as the true victims. Other examples of British troops and police being ambushed across Ireland were also recalled in Parliament for this purpose. Greenwood argued that the RIC was in an impossible situation in Ireland, similarly to how General Dyer's position had been described "difficult and most objectionable"<sup>63</sup> by his supporters. Moreover, Colonel Croft criticised those who disapproved of the Crown Forces' attacks on civilians by stating that these men did not have the luxury of deciding what to do afterwards, they had to decide in the moment, and Parliament should stand by that decision. Carson maintained a thought akin to this during the Amritsar debate, stating to the Commons "it was impossible [for Dyer] under the circumstances calmly to make up his mind in the way you would do".<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, the Chief Secretary presented the forces responsible for the shooting at Croke Park as heroes by describing them as "gallant soldiers"<sup>65</sup> with "decorations for valour"<sup>66</sup>, just as Dyer had been described as a "gallant officer", "without a blemish on his record"<sup>67</sup>. Greenwood maintained that soldiers such as those at Croke Park were

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<sup>63</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1805-1806.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1719-1720.

<sup>65</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 496-497.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 501-502.

<sup>67</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1712-1713.

fighting for peace in Ireland – suppressing the revolutionary force of the IRA Using this to try and justify the shooting at Croke Park echoed the right-wing argument that Dyer's orders to fire were excusable as he had suppressed a revolutionary force at the Jallianwala Bagh. Moreover, Greenwood also recalled the Easter Rising in order to bolster his portrayal of the RIC as heroes, stating that they "helped to save this country during the rebellion of 1916"<sup>68</sup>, just as right-wing politicians and the right-wing press had recalled the Indian Rebellion in order to reinforce their defence of General Dyer.

A connection between the reporting of both atrocities within the conservative press is notable. Just as newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* had promoted pro-Dyer rhetoric, they supported the Government's official representation of Croke Park – even exaggerating official accounts on occasion. The *Daily Mail* claimed that it had been a “battle between troops and Sinn Fein suspects”, in which “10 Sinn Feiners were killed, and a man and woman were crushed to death when the crowd stampeded.”<sup>69</sup> The *Daily Mail's* initial reports sought to vilify the victims of the shooting, accusing them of being members of Sinn Fein and blaming the crowd for the casualties. The newspaper also maintained the false notion that many spectators were armed,<sup>70</sup> presenting the victims as perpetrators in the same way the pro-Dyer right wing had portrayed the victims of Amritsar. The *Morning Post* focused extensively on the assassinations of the British Officers that had occurred on the morning of 21<sup>th</sup> November 1920 but very little on Croke Park, in the same way Greenwood did in Parliament. This also parallels with the Dyerist press and politicians who persistently emphasised the riots preceding the Amritsar Massacre rather than the shooting itself. An article titled "DUBLIN VICTIMS"<sup>71</sup> only discussed the

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<sup>68</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 505-506.

<sup>69</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 November 1920, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> *Daily Mail*, 23 November 1920, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> *Morning Post*, 23 November 1920, p. 7.

British casualties of Bloody Sunday, excluding the Irish civilians shot dead. One of the only reports in the *Morning Post* that covered the Croke Park Massacre in any detail strongly promoted the Government view under the headline: "Lives Lost During Search For the Assassins".<sup>72</sup> The *Morning Post* remained resolutely on the side of the British Forces rather than the victims, as it had done in the case of the Amritsar Massacre.

Finally, it is interesting and important to note that unlike in the case of the Amritsar Massacre, the Government view of the Croke Park Massacre received much less criticism from right-wing politicians in Parliament and the right-wing British press. The few right-wing MPs who *did* criticise the Government after Croke Park were mostly concerned with the fact that this violence was committed 'unofficially', without orders. Thus, they took it as an opportunity to push for martial law in Ireland so that reprisals could be considered 'legitimate' and an official part of Government policy.<sup>73</sup> This call for martial law was supported by the *Morning Post*, which despite supporting the Government in their portrayal of Croke Park, still expressed desire for a firmer approach in Ireland.<sup>74</sup> On December 10<sup>th</sup> 1920 the demand for martial law was granted across Cork, Tipperary, Kerry and Limerick. Arguably, this was due to pressure from Unionists who pressed for a firmer line. However, Lloyd George was initially reluctant to impose martial law. Ilahi argues that this was because the Government were desperate "to avoid another public controversy like the one Dyer brought to light", and criticisms of them for again using force as a means to maintain authority.<sup>75</sup> The Labour Party's criticism of this policy will be discussed in the following chapter. In a similar fashion, this spectre of negative opinion in the aftermath of Amritsar may have

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<sup>72</sup> *Morning Post*, 24 November 1920, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 148.

<sup>74</sup> *Morning Post*, 23 November 1920, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, pp. 118-119.

influenced the Government response to reprisals such as Croke Park. Conversely, however, it was fear of a backlash from the right wing as seen during the Amritsar controversy, rather than criticism from anti-Dyer groups who opposed using martial law, which directed their response. At a time when the situation in Ireland was increasingly difficult, Government policy needed support from the majority party in Parliament: the Unionists.

Moreover, in response to Croke Park the Government took a more 'Dyerist' approach, and avoided the challenges that the British and Irish Unionists had presented in the Amritsar case. For the political right, both the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre were examples of "gallant" British men attempting to suppress revolutionary forces, whether they were Indian nationalists or the IRA. Both crowds at Amritsar and Croke Park were at the very least associated with crimes against British officials or civilians that had occurred prior to each shooting, and the British authorities responsible for the shooting were considered both the victims of difficult circumstance and the heroes who were needed to preserve the British Empire. After Amritsar, the British Government censured a British officer for this. After Croke Park, however, the RIC were defended by the Government and even praised for their conduct by some. Ultimately, the Government view of Croke Park exhibited that they backed "their men" and approved of ruling by the sword, as the Unionists demanded they should have in the case of General Dyer. Hence, the Government received support for their reaction to Croke Park after it had been denied by the pro-Dyer right wing after Amritsar, as their preferred approach to governing their 'empire in crisis' was appeased in the Irish case.

To conclude, the Government response to the Amritsar Massacre was challenged by a number of right-wing politicians and pressmen who sought to portray General Dyer as

both a hero and a victim, and frame those killed at the Jallianwala Bagh as perpetrators. After the Croke Park Massacre, however, it was the Government who maintained that the Crown Forces were both heroes and victims in Ireland, and that the crowd at the football match on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1920 was to an extent criminal. As outlined in chapter 2, however, the Government needed to blame Dyer in order to mitigate damage to Britain's reputation in India, and Dyer alone could be held responsible. In the Irish case, the Government needed to stand by the IRC, not only because the situation in Ireland and the challenges to British authority appeared much more severe than that in India at this time, but no one man could be singled out to blame for the shooting at Croke Park. In addition, the Government needed to keep the British and Irish Unionist's onside, and feared a backlash similar to that seen after Amritsar. Thus, they supported the I.R.C in the aftermath of Croke Park and demonstrated that they were agreeable with maintaining authority in Ireland via a policy of force; an approach which the right wing, particularly those who had defended Dyer, thoroughly supported.

## Chapter 4

### The Labour Party Response to Amritsar and Croke Park

The left-wing response to the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre has been particularly neglected by previous scholarship, as literature on both massacres has tended to give more attention to the right-wing response. For example, whilst Sayer and Collett acknowledge that the left-wing response contrasted the right-wing defence of General Dyer, discussion of the Labour Party is beyond the scope of their work.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ilahi recognises that the perspectives of Labour MPs contrasted with the Government's representations of both events, but her focus remains primarily on those on the right who defended the perpetrators of these atrocities.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Leeson looks specifically at Croke Park and employs the *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland* as a source to an extent, but his article fails to provide an understanding of the left-wing response in Britain.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of Leeson's article remains in line with much of existing scholarship on the massacres, which debates what happened and why. This chapter will contribute to existing literature on Amritsar and Croke Park and address this gap in the historiography by analysing the perceptions of the British Labour Party, and employing previously under-utilised sources.

The Labour Party was made up of trade unions, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) which encompassed all Labour MPs, socialist societies such as the Independent Labour

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<sup>1</sup> See Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (New York, 2005), and Derek Sayer, 'British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', *Past & Present*, vol. 149 (1991), pp. 134-164.

<sup>2</sup> See Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> David Leeson, 'Death in the Afternoon: The Croke Park Massacre, 21 November 1920', *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 38 (2003), pp. 43-67.



Party (ILP), and other affiliated bodies which represented a broad range of views.<sup>4</sup> It emerged from the 1918 coupon election as the main opposition to the Liberal-Conservative coalition with 57 seats, increasing to 61 by 1920. However, the coalition's overwhelming majority made it difficult for Labour to impact policy, even with the support of the Independent Liberals and Irish nationalists in Parliament.<sup>5</sup> Still, the Labour Party challenged the Government in the Commons over policy in India and Ireland, as seen in the aftermath of Amritsar and Croke Park.

Due to the multifaceted nature of the Labour Party, opinions over India, Ireland and the Empire often differed. For example, the more radical ILP had advocated complete Indian and Irish independence from 1917,<sup>6</sup> whereas the PLP generally sought more moderate solutions to satisfy anti-colonial nationalist movements, such as Dominion home rule.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, both advocated self-government in one form or another for all imperial subjects, and objected to violent repression as part of imperial policy. This view of Empire was encompassed by Chairman of the Labour Party Executive, W. H. Hutchinson, in a speech to the 1920 Labour Party Conference. He declared: "For an Empire held together by force I have no use... I believe the day is coming when no people will be content to rule another or be ruled by another, and for that day the British Labour Movement works."<sup>8</sup> This address was received with applause. It also introduces key themes around Labour's stance on imperial governance that underpin the arguments in this chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate, History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars* (New York, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Phillips, *The Rise of the Labour Party 1893-1931* (London, 1992), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars – a Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918* (New York, 2011), p. 274.

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Gibbons, 'The British Parliamentary Labour Party and the Government of Ireland Act 1920', *Parliamentary History*, vol. 32 (2013), p. 514. (506-521)

<sup>8</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23 June 1920, p. 6.

The Labour Party was dominated by the trade unions both in membership and financial terms at this time. However, trade union influence was largely directed at safeguarding their members' interests as workers rather than seeking to determine the overall direction of Labour Party policies.<sup>9</sup> Hence, this chapter will give predominant focus to the views of the PLP and the ILP, who actively steered and influenced the political wing of Labour in 1920. Matthew Worley highlights that "the Labour Party from 1918 actually comprised of hundreds of local parties informed by far more than the political priorities and perspectives voiced from the front benches of parliament".<sup>10</sup> However, investigating attitudes towards the massacres on a local level and the individual views of the numerous affiliated Labour organisations is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, by focusing on the stance of Labour MPs, who contested the right-wing view in Parliament, and on the ILP, who was often more radically left-wing in its ideas, alongside the views of two leading Labour newspapers, new light will be shed on Labour's reactions to both massacres. This will illuminate the views of those who were at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the right-wing defenders of imperial violence, a perspective previously largely ignored by historians.

The first section of this chapter will address Labour's reactions to Amritsar. It will discuss news reports published in the *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald*. The *Leader* was the official weekly newspaper of the ILP which was edited by prominent party member, Katharine Glasier.<sup>11</sup> It was purchased from the party's first chairman and MP, Keir Hardie, in 1906.<sup>12</sup> The *Herald* was independently owned and edited by George

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<sup>9</sup> Phillips, *Rise of the Labour Party*, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on Katherine Glasier, see Chris Wrigley, 'Glasier, Katharine St John Bruce (1867–1950)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/42338>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>12</sup> Deian Hopkins, 'The Left-Wing Press and New Journalism' in Joel H. Weiner ed., *Papers for the Millions, The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914* (Westport, 1988), p. 232.

Lansbury,<sup>13</sup> who, after witnessing divisions in the Labour Party during the First World War, strived to ensure the newspaper was inclusive of the views of the whole of the Labour movement.<sup>14</sup> The *Herald* was not *officially* owned by Labour until Lansbury passed his proprietorship and editorship to the party in 1922, but it had still been the mouthpiece for the Labour Party since the paper was established in 1912.<sup>15</sup> The outcomes of the annual Labour Party conference held in June 1920 will also be discussed in this section, as well as the views expressed by Labour MPs during the Dyer debate, and the challenges these presented to the British Government.

The second section of this chapter will examine Labour's perceptions of the Croke Park Massacre. This section will also utilise articles from the *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald* and consider the contributions made by Labour politicians during the Parliamentary debate held after the massacre. Similarities between Labour's stance and that of Irish Parliamentary MPs will be considered. The IPP was the minority Irish nationalist party after only retaining 7 seats in the 1918 election, with the majority of Irish seats going to Sinn Fein. However, Sinn Fein's boycott of Parliament meant that they were the only Irish nationalists to sit in the Commons in 1920.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, which investigated Croke Park and discredited the Government's representation of events, will be discussed. The sources in this section have been particularly neglected by historians. This chapter will show that the Labour Party deplored both atrocities, and illustrate how Labour challenged the official

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on George Lansbury see, John Shepherd, 'Lansbury, George (1859–1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2015, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34407>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>14</sup> Huw Richards, *The Bloody Circus, The Daily Herald and the Left* (London, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Malcom Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History 1867-1990, Democracy and Decline* (London, 1992), p. 219.

representations, showed support for Indian and Irish nationalists, and criticised the British Government's approach to imperial rule in India and Ireland in 1920.

### The Amritsar Massacre

From May 1919, the Labour Party and its associated organisations showed support for Indians and their abhorrence towards the approach employed to assert British authority in the Punjab that April. Working alongside Indian activist B. G. Tilak and the London Congress Committee, whose purpose was to raise awareness of Indian issues in Britain, Labour pushed the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, to set-up a public investigation into the Punjab disturbances and their suppression.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the Labour Party and the Indian Committee of Workers Welfare League held a public meeting in London at which they circulated 10'000 copies of a pamphlet describing "butchery in India"<sup>18</sup>, in an attempt to alert the British public of the violence used to quell the unrest. This mounting pressure from Indian nationalist organisations, who, with the assistance of the Labour Party expressed their concerns in Britain, eventually resulted in the formation of the Hunter Commission which was tasked with investigating the unrest in India. Labour's initial response to the Punjab Disturbances demonstrated solidarity with Indians and bolstered Indian nationalists' demands for a public inquiry.

Disgust towards the repression seen in the Punjab that Spring increased during the Hunter Commission's investigation. The strict press censorship that had been imposed by Sir Michael O'Dwyer earlier that year could no longer muzzle the story of the

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<sup>17</sup> Collett, *Butcher of Amritsar*, p. 301.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

shooting, and details regarding the Amritsar Massacre specifically finally came to light in Britain. Hence, by December 1919 organs of the Labour Party were expressing their objection to Secretary of State for India and demanding that the perpetrators of the massacre be punished. For example, a letter sent to Montagu by the Southampton and District Trades and Labour Council and Labour Representation Committee stated that they unanimously viewed "with horror and indignation the massacre of Indians at Amritsar". They demanded "the immediate recall and impeachment of General Dyer and those associated with him in the ghastly outrage of defenceless people".<sup>19</sup> Another letter sent to Montagu in December 1919 from the Kingston-upon-Thames Labour Party expressed "horror and disgust" at the shooting, and called upon the Government "to severely punish those responsible for this outrage."<sup>20</sup> The members of the Derby Independent Labour Party also protested to "the brutal massacre".<sup>21</sup> By the year's end, Labour's opposition to the treatment of Indians at Amritsar and across the Punjab was already clear.

Furthermore, the *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald* published numerous articles in the run up to the publication of the Hunter Reports, which maintained Labour's anti-Dyer stance. These newspapers did not accept that General Dyer was the sole perpetrator, as the British Government would have the public believe. By March 1920, the *Labour Leader* was blaming the British imperial administration as a whole for the Punjab Disturbances and the Amritsar Massacre. The *Leader* described how the implementation of the Rowlatt Acts and arrest of Indian nationalists had sparked the

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<sup>19</sup> British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1641, File 7912, Protests from UK borough councils and other organisations against the shooting of an unarmed crowd of Indians by troops at Amritsar, Dec 1919-Jun 1920.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

riots in April 1919.<sup>22</sup> The *Daily Herald* agreed, stating that "there was no 'mob' movement until the arrest of well-known Indian political leaders".<sup>23</sup> The *Leader* went on to denounce O'Dwyer's governance as a "Reign of Terror".<sup>24</sup> The newspapers also demanded that the Viceroy be recalled and that the Governor of the Punjab be sent back to Britain with General Dyer to be tried. The *Leader* and the *Herald* insisted that Dyer be punished alongside his superiors, not in isolation.

When the Hunter Commission reports were finally published in May 1920, the *Leader* and the *Daily Herald* reacted with further criticism. The *Herald* described the Majority Report as an "amazing endeavour to whitewash all British officials concerned".<sup>25</sup> On June 3<sup>rd</sup> the *Leader* headline read: "THE HUNTER REPORT. - How It Hides the Ugly Truth of the Punjab Terror."<sup>26</sup> These descriptions of the report challenged to the official representation of Amritsar, as the Government's narrative was based on the findings of the Commission. The *Herald* claimed that the effects of the report in India would be "most grave"<sup>27</sup> due to its lenient judgements of Dyer and the Government of India. The *Leader* explained how the Amritsar Massacre had alienated Indians from Britain, and how the leniency of the Majority Report would potentially worsen this estrangement. In addition, the *Leader* and the *Herald* printed the opinions of V. J. Patel, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress, to reveal his thoughts on the Hunter reports (another example of solidarity with Indian nationalists). In line with the *Labour Leader* and *Daily Herald*, Patel stated that the Viceroy and the Governor of the Punjab, as well as General Dyer, needed to be held to account; otherwise there would never be reconciliation

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<sup>22</sup> *Labour Leader*, 11 March 1920, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily Herald*, 05 May 1920, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Labour Leader*, 11 March 1920, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Herald*, 27 May 1920, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Labour Leader*, 03 June 1920, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 May 1920, p. 1.

between the British and the Indian people.<sup>28</sup> Patel aimed much of his criticism at O'Dwyer,<sup>29</sup> claiming that the arrest of national leaders under his orders was a deliberate provocation of unrest.<sup>30</sup> Patel stated: "his determination to put down constitutional agitation against the Rowlatt Act" was reason for the violence against Indian civilians. By holding additional authorities responsible, Indian nationalists and the Labour press challenged the official view that the Amritsar Massacre was the fault of one man.

In contrast to the Government narrative Labour represented General Dyer's actions as symbolic of Britain's harsh approach to maintaining authority in India. Dyer was a representative example, not an anomaly. The *Herald* argued:

The terror in the Punjab was but the logical consequence of the methods of administration which Sir Michael O'Dwyer practised and which Lord Chelmsford approved. It was the inevitable outcome of their policy of ruling India as a conquered country to be kept in submission by the sword.<sup>31</sup>

Labour were against ruling by oppression as they considered this to be neither an effective nor a just way of governing the Empire, especially at a time when colonised peoples were increasingly questioning the Empire's legitimacy. Hence, they denounced ruling by violence throughout the Amritsar controversy. Under the headline, 'Harvesting Hate: The Madness of the Rulers of the British Empire'<sup>32</sup>, the *Leader* described numerous challenges to British authority including those in India and Ireland during imperial crisis. The article explained: "Daily the foundations of Brute Force in the British Empire are being more clearly exposed", and called its readers to "influence the

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Herald*, 27 May 1920, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Herald*, 27 May 1920, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Labour Leader*, 03 June 1920, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Herald*, 28 May 1920, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Labour Leader*, 19 January 1920, p. 5.

minds of their fellow citizens that a final end could be made of this worn out dream of military Empire".<sup>33</sup> The *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald* showed aversion to ruling by the sword, and encouraged its readers to promote this stance.

Moreover, as well as opposing Britain's harsh approach to imperial governance, the *Herald* and *Leader* also promoted self-determination for both India and Ireland. The term 'self-determination' in this context refers to nationally conscious peoples controlling their own state and choosing their own Government. Although the term had been used since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the principle of self-determination gained traction after WWI as it was listed in President Woodrow Wilson's 14 point plan for peace. The *Labour Leader* argued for the ILP: "India and Ireland - When a Nation has made up its mind to attain its freedom, there is no power on earth, no, not even Great Britain, which can stand in her way."<sup>34</sup> Here, the paper not only recognised self-determination for India (and Ireland) as inevitable, but acknowledged the similarity between the Indian and Irish situation. The *Daily Herald* concurred that "violence cannot repress forever the just claims of a people for the right to self-government".<sup>35</sup> The *Leader* called for the Labour movement to actively demonstrate their condemnation of "the entire policy of oppression given such terrible and dramatic expression in the Amritsar Massacre" and demand "the unreserved right of self-determination" for India.<sup>36</sup> The issue of self-determination remained prominent for Labour throughout both controversies.

However, it should not be assumed that Labour's understanding of self-determination was homogenous. In fact, it became clear in 1920 that the extent of what Labour meant by this principle needed clarifying for party members. Did self-determination mean self-

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Labour Leader*, 11 March 1920, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 November 1920, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Labour Leader*, 03 June 1920, p. 1.



government within the Empire, or self-government without reservation? The ILP and the *Labour Leader*, for example, considered self-determination to mean without limits, but the majority of Labour opinion equated self-determination for India with home rule. As explained below, the ambiguity of the term caused confusion and division at the 1920 Labour Party Conference during discussions on Ireland. Nevertheless, the Labour Movement seemed in agreement that both India and Ireland had the right to decide their own government, whether that was under the condition of remaining within the Empire or otherwise.

The attitudes expressed in the *Daily Herald* and *Labour Leader* in 1920 towards 'ruling by the sword' and 'self-determination' were maintained throughout discussions at the Labour Party Conference in June that year. The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Labour Party Conference in Scarborough was the largest that had ever been held in the history of the British Labour movement. The conference addressed a number of issues regarding colonial policy, and the *Manchester Guardian* reported that "In the field of Imperial politics" the conference "found abundant material for framing a strong indictment of the Government."<sup>37</sup> Labour MP and ILP member, Benjamin Spoor,<sup>38</sup> moved a resolution on India. He insisted on the "full and frank application" of the principle of self-determination, demanded that the current Government of India be disbanded, and that they take responsibility for violence in the Punjab including the shooting at Amritsar.<sup>39</sup> Sir Michael O'Dwyer was personally criticised by Spoor, who blamed the governor's policy of repression for the outbreaks of violence which climaxed at Amritsar, just as the *Daily Herald* and the

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<sup>37</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1920, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> For more information on Benjamin Spoor see, Mel Johnson, 'Spoor, Benjamin Charles (1878–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2014, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/107141>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>39</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1920, p. 8.

*Labour Leader* had done. He argued that O'Dwyer and the Viceroy should be returned to Britain.<sup>40</sup>

Former Labour MP and longstanding ILP member, Ramsay MacDonald,<sup>41</sup> supported Spoor's demands, describing every day the Viceroy remained in India a "disgrace".<sup>42</sup> In addition, MacDonald explained that the civil authorities in India had handed their responsibilities to Dyer who had "made a mess of it", and was now being saddled with the consequences.<sup>43</sup> Essentially, MacDonald saw Dyer as being scapegoated to a degree for the broader failings of the Anglo-Indian administration. This is one of the scarce examples where Labour and Unionists, to an extent, agreed. Still, in stark contrast to the Unionist position, Macdonald also made it clear that ruling by force was not a legitimate approach to imperial governance. He stated: "the moment we could not maintain our relations in India on a civil basis, our position in India ceased to have any shred of justification."<sup>44</sup> This echoed the view of W. H. Hutchinson, Chairman of the Labour Party Executive. <sup>45</sup> The Labour delegates at the conference unanimously supported the resolution which called for self-determination in India, criticised the administration, and condemned the "cruel and barbarous" actions of British officers in the Punjab.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, by 8<sup>th</sup> July 1920 when a Parliamentary debate was called to discuss the case of General Dyer, the Labour Party had clarified its stance on the Amritsar Massacre. Ilahi appropriately summarises that the "Labour Party came out decisively against Dyer...

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<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, 25 June 1920, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on Ramsay MacDonald see, David Marquand, 'MacDonald, (James) Ramsay (1866–1937)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2015, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34704>, accessed 5 Sept 2017].

<sup>42</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1920, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 25 June 1920, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23 June 1920, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party: 1920*, (London, 1920).

but, characteristically, pointed a finger at the entire administration."<sup>47</sup> In addition to this, Labour had criticised the Hunter Report as a whitewash, called for the punishment of all Anglo-Indian authorities, condemned the oppressive nature of the British Raj, and demanded self-determination for the Indian people. This stance was maintained by Labour MPs in the House of Commons.

Benjamin Spoor was the key protagonist for the left in this debate, and was first to speak for the Labour Party. He reiterated the criticisms of Sir Michael O'Dwyer which he had voiced during the Labour conference, and his allocation of blame to the Government of India for inciting violence. While Spoor agreed that Dyer should be censured as his actions were unjustifiable, he also agreed with Ramsay MacDonald that the British Government and the Government of India were using General Dyer as a scapegoat to deflect criticism, and maintain the official portrayal of the Amritsar Massacre as an isolated incident.<sup>48</sup> Spoor also condemned using force across the Raj and the Empire as a whole. Speaking on behalf of the Labour Party, he supported Edwin Montagu's perspective in that India could not, and should not be ruled by the sword.

In recognising Dyer as a scapegoat, Spoor rejected the Government's 'singularity argument'. He challenged the official narrative that insisted that Amritsar was a-typical by stating in Parliament that it "is not an isolated event any more than General Dyer is an isolated officer."<sup>49</sup> Fellow MP and ILP member, Colonel Wedgwood,<sup>50</sup> concurred. He argued to the House that it was imperial system in India as a whole that was at fault, not

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<sup>47</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 93.

<sup>48</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1715-1719.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1739-1740.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on Josiah Wedgwood see, See, C. V. Wedgwood, 'Wedgwood, Josiah Clement, first Baron Wedgwood (1872–1943)', rev. Mark Pottle, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2009, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36812>, accessed 1 Sept 2017].

just Dyer personally.<sup>51</sup> Wedgwood proceeded to quote Gandhi to the House to clarify his argument. He had stated: "We do not want to punish Dyer... we want to change the system that produces General Dyer."<sup>52</sup> This further demonstrated solidarity with Indian nationalists.

Spoor bolstered this challenge to the official narrative with the claim that the Amritsar Massacre was in part the result of "a certain mentality that some men seem to possess in India in a most extraordinary degree."<sup>53</sup> He believed that the attitudes in of Anglo-Indians were partially responsible both for the riots and the massacre, and encouraged the Government of India's repressive approach to rule. As Ilahi notes "Spoor hinted that Dyer, O'Dwyer... and many other officers who administered martial law were actually racist."<sup>54</sup> Undeniably, a mentality of 'Us' and 'Them' was inherent to the Raj, and was fostered by structural and cultural segregation. Sayer clarifies that an "unbridgeable distance was manifested in every detail of Anglo-Indian social life, from the prohibitions on 'miscegenation' to the architecture of civil lines."<sup>55</sup> These deep-rooted racial divisions only enabled violence against Indian civilians such as that seen at Amritsar.

This racial mentality was also raised by the Editor of the *Labour Leader*, Katharine Glasier, who stated:

The root of the whole trouble lies in the fact that British administrators in India regard themselves as the governors of an inferior subject race. So long as that idea dominates the British administration in India, there is no guarantee against

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<sup>51</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1787-1794.

<sup>52</sup> *Labour Leader*, 15 July 1920, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1739-1740.

<sup>54</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, p. 93.

<sup>55</sup> Sayer, 'British Reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920', pp. 139-140.

a recurrence of such deplorable incidents as the Punjab inquiry has definitely established.<sup>56</sup>

Ben Spoor reiterated Labour's view to the Commons that General Dyer was emblematic of the broader nature of imperial rule in India, and that a mentality among Anglo-Indians fostered a climate of opinion which would justify actions such as Dyer's.

The House of Commons debate was another occasion when Labour declared publically that equality, not oppression, was the best approach to governing the Raj and the British Empire, as it had done at the Labour Party Conference that June. Hence, Spoor concluded his argument by maintaining Labour's already established view that the only way to proceed in India was to move towards self-determination. Spoor argued that Britain needed to show the Indian people "that they are in the Empire on equal terms, so far as their ordinary rights are concerned, with every British citizen", otherwise there would be no hope for long-term peace. He argued that showing, "unmistakeably, that the policy of governing India by a military police had been abandoned", was central to this.<sup>57</sup> Wedgwood agreed, stating that if the British want to preserve their Empire, then they must do so through the co-operation of Indians.<sup>58</sup> J. R. Clynes MP,<sup>59</sup> who became Labour Leader in February 1921, also expressed the party's desire "to enlarge the freedom of the people of India, to associate them more and more with the conduct and determination of their own affairs."<sup>60</sup> For the Labour Party, self-determination was necessary in India, and indeed; inevitable. However, these arguments in Parliament do

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<sup>56</sup> *Labour Leader*, 08 June 1920, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1742-1743.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1787-1794.

<sup>59</sup> For more information on J. R. Clynes see, J. S. Middleton, 'Clynes, John Robert (1869-1949)', rev. Marc Brodie, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2012, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32461>, accessed 26 Aug 2017].

<sup>60</sup> House of Commons Debate, 08 July 1920, vol. 131 cc. 1805-1806.

suggest that the PLP were in favour of a moderate gradualist approach to achieving this, and defined self-determination as still keeping India within the British Empire.

The Dyer debate resulted in a win for the Government with all 35 Labour MPs in attendance voting in their favour.<sup>61</sup> However, this was a rejection of Edward Carson's pro-Dyer stance not a demonstration of support for the official view. In fact, the PLP put forward their own motion against the Government in the Commons on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1920 to protest the refusal to "impeach Sir Michael O'Dwyer, to recall Lord Chelmsford, and, most important of all, to repeal the repressive legislation in operation in India."<sup>62</sup> This was opposed by the rest of the House, but it was a formal rejection of the official stance that Dyer was solely to blame. Nonetheless, Labour agreed that General Dyer still deserved censure and were against the pro-Dyer camp who championed ruling by the sword, thus voting in the Government's favour. To an extent, therefore, the Government's approach to managing the Amritsar crisis was successful, as they got the Opposition onside and ultimately won the vote, despite facing hostility from Unionists.

The Labour Party's response to the Amritsar Massacre challenged the official view, stood in opposition to the right-wing defence of General Dyer, and demonstrated support for Indian nationalists and the victims of the Amritsar Massacre. A united Labour stance against General Dyer's actions was clearly articulated through the pages of the Labour press, the resolutions passed at the annual party conference, and the arguments presented in Parliament by Labour MPs. Nevertheless, Labour also considered Dyer's superiors as partially culpable for the massacre and the Punjab Disturbances as a whole, and asserted that they too should be punished. For the Labour Party, the Amritsar Massacre was not an isolated incident as the Government insisted,

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<sup>61</sup> *Labour Leader*, 15 July 1920, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

but characteristic of imperial despotism in India which was in part fuelled by entrenched racist and militarist attitudes among authorities. They spoke out against the oppressive nature of the British Raj and upheld the view that Indians should be granted the right to a form of self-determination.

There are several factors which may have influenced why the Labour Party responded to the Amritsar Massacre in this way. As discussed, Labour did not see ruling by the sword as an appropriate method of governance. Self-determination seemed unavoidable, and attempting to maintain authority through force would only serve to delegitimise British rule further. This stance could have been purely ideologically driven. The party constitution in 1918 formally accepted a socialist ideology,<sup>63</sup> and component of this was that imperialism was understood as the highest stage of capitalism, leading socialists into a critical stance towards Empire. Moreover, as the *Labour Leader* argued, militarism was "a capitalist not socialist method".<sup>64</sup> Hence, the militarist nature of rule in India was against Labour's principles. Whilst attitudes to Empire did differ within the Labour Party, this conflict of ideology would provide further reason for some Labour Party members to oppose the preservation of imperial power through force.

In addition, Labour's response may have had ulterior political motives, and the party might have been using the Amritsar Massacre for their own political advantage. A Home Office memorandum from December 1919 claimed that the Herald League, a socialist group made up of contributors, readers and supporters of the *Daily Herald*,<sup>65</sup> were

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<sup>63</sup> Phillips, *Rise of the Labour Party*, p. 30.

<sup>64</sup> *Labour Leader*, 08 April 1920, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> R. Holton, 'Daily Herald V. Daily Citizen, 1912-15: The Struggle for a Labour Daily in Relation to "the Labour Unrest"', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 19 (1974), pp. 368-369. (347-376)

"already making capital out of the Amritsar."<sup>66</sup> Another memorandum from January 1920 stated that the *Labour Leader* was emphasising "the usual Independent Labour Party moral that the British people are themselves responsible in so far as they permit the men who pursue a criminal policy to remain in power ... Ramsay MacDonald and William Stewart in *Forward* reason in the same strain, that the only solution is for the people to change their government."<sup>67</sup> This was an interesting time for Labour, who had "fared badly" in the coupon election, but had still emerged as the main opposition in Parliament.<sup>68</sup> They were keen to bolster their support among the newly expanded electorate, which had been increased threefold after the passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the Labour Party reacted so fervently to the shooting at Amritsar with the purposeful intention of publically undermining the Liberal-Conservative Coalition, which was becoming more frequently divided. This would have also been a good occasion to create unity within the Labour Party, which in turn would strengthen it as a political force.

Finally, Labour's response to the Amritsar Massacre would have been influenced by the context of imperial crisis. Domestic challenges to the British Government were as frequent as the imperial challenges that arose during the crisis of Empire. British workers strikes were prevalent, as were fears of how the Government would respond to them. The Labour Party feared that the British administration was innately inclined to deliver harsh treatment to anyone who challenged it, whether they were in Britain or India. Ilahi explains that Labour "certainly did not want a strike to be put down a la

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<sup>66</sup> National Archives, CAB/24/95/20 - Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, 18 December 1919.

<sup>67</sup> National Archives, CAB/24/156/11, British Empire Report No. 3, 24 November 1920.

<sup>68</sup> Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Pearce and Stewart, *British Political History*, p. 219.



Jallianwala Bagh, nor would they welcome the harsh repression of the Irish variety.”<sup>70</sup> As will be seen in the following section, Labour also criticised violence against civilians in Ireland. Moreover, Derek Sayer describes the resolution condemning General Dyer that was passed at the Labour Party Conference as "wider working class identification with the victims" of Amritsar. A shared identity between those oppressed by capitalism in Britain and those oppressed by British imperialism abroad, alongside the anxiety of domestic unrest being faced with violent suppression such as that displayed at Amritsar, gave more reason for the Labour Party to challenge the Government's stance and reject the 'singularity argument'.

### The Croke Park Massacre

Labour's response to the Croke Park Massacre was very similar to that seen in the aftermath of Amritsar. They demanded a public inquiry into violence in Ireland just as they had done after the Punjab Disturbances. The Labour Party argued against the perpetrators themselves and the Government's approach as a whole in Parliament after both cases. They also took the subsequent debates as an opportunity to express their aversion to militarism and belief in self-determination. Unlike with the Amritsar Massacre however, Labour's knowledge of and response to the shooting at Croke Park was much more immediate. British newspapers including the Labour press were publishing reports on the shooting immediately, and some began challenging the Government narrative that was being promoted by the Chief Secretary for Ireland. This official representation of events focused on the assassinations that took place in the morning, attempted to criminalise the crowd, blame the victims, and present the

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<sup>70</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, pp. 25-6.

perpetrators as the true victims of violence. However, reports in the *Daily Herald* and the *Labour Leader* told a different story.

Both the *Leader* and the *Herald* reported the assassinations that occurred that morning, but unlike the Government's narrative and reports from newspapers such as the *Morning Post*, the Labour press gave equal focus to the events that occurred at Croke Park. The *Herald* described "The Football Massacre"<sup>71</sup> as a reprisal, contesting Sir Hamar Greenwood's narrative outright. It stated that "on this huge mass of men women and children the now notorious reprisal tactics were tried."<sup>72</sup> The *Leader* described the massacre under the headline: "FRIGHTFULNESS! Another week of its work in Ireland."<sup>73</sup> The term frightfulness had also been used to describe General Dyer's actions. The report explained that "at least 27 people had been killed and from 50 to 100 people more wounded in Dublin on Sunday last" <sup>74</sup>, lumping the number of British and Irish casualties together. This showed that *all* the casualties inflicted were considered equally important, whether they be the British officers in the morning or the Irish civilians in the afternoon. The *Leader* described how the Crown Forces "fired one volley into the air... and without further warning fired into the packed crowd." It stated that the official claim that the crowd provoked the firing "is declared by people who were at the match to be a lie".<sup>75</sup> The *Daily Herald* concurred, insisting that "the only shots fired were those fired by the Black and Tans",<sup>76</sup> and completely contradicting the official portrayal of the massacre.

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<sup>71</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23 November 1920, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 November 1920, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Labour Leader*, 25 November 1920, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23 November 1920, p. 1.

In addition, Columnist for the *Labour Leader*, John Jacks, commented on Croke Park in his regular feature, 'The Maddening Crowd'. He had also written an article during the Amritsar controversy.<sup>77</sup> He criticised the press for peddling the Government narrative by focusing on the morning assassinations over the shooting at Croke Park. He also made an explicit connection between the Croke Park Massacre and the Amritsar Massacre. In criticising the reporting of the *Evening Standard* in particular, he stated:

This does not refer to the massacre of officers in their beds *and* to the massacre of people at their football match. It refers only to the former series of assassinations... Perhaps Amritsar has accustomed the *Evening Standard* to that sort of thing. After all, in Ireland the Irish are only "Natives" and the people on the football patch were probably "only working class!"... Sir Hamar Greenwood declares that the assassination of officers is the most awful tragedy in British history... But what about Amritsar, and Featherstone, and any number of colliery disasters where hundreds of men have been killed, not by pistols, perhaps, but by something equally deadly – dividends?<sup>78</sup>

In this opinion piece Jacks was attempting to evoke a sense of working class solidarity with the victims of Amritsar, the victims of violence in Ireland, and those British civilians who felt victims of capitalist exploitation at home in Britain. Just as a shared identity of the oppressed may have influenced Labour's response to the Amritsar crisis, it appears that it may have also played into responses to Croke Park and views on the broader situation in Ireland at this time. Whilst the extent of this broader working class identification is difficult to gauge on a grass-roots level, it is clearly acknowledged by Jacks and the *Labour Leader*, which officially propagated the opinions of the ILP.

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<sup>77</sup> *Labour Leader*, 12 February 1920, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Labour Leader*, 25 November 1920, p. 3.

Labour's broader condemnation of Government policy in Ireland after the Croke Park Massacre is also conveyed in the *Daily Herald* and the *Labour Leader*. Both newspapers blamed both the assassinations of British officers and the shooting at Croke Park on the Government and their "methods of terrorism".<sup>79</sup> The *Herald* argued that "what the Government's coercion leads to the terror in Dublin shows."<sup>80</sup> This parallels how Labour blamed the oppressive policies of the Government of India for unrest and violence in the Punjab, which resulted in the Amritsar Massacre. The *Leader* maintained that either the British Government could not control Crown Forces in Ireland, or these violent actions against Irish civilians were taken "under the instigation or under the connivance of the Government".<sup>81</sup> The newspaper suggested that the Chief Secretary for Ireland should resign, and that perhaps even the coalition Government as a whole should step down. It criticised Lloyd George personally for provoking additional problems in Ireland by "servile submission to the dictatorship of Carson".<sup>82</sup> It also charged Edward Carson, who was the main defender of General Dyer during the Amritsar debate, as a provocateur in the Irish situation. The *Daily Herald* also noted Carson's influence on Liberal MPs regarding the Irish situation.<sup>83</sup> The Labour press made clear its detestation of reprisals and of the Government policy in Ireland. The *Daily Herald* and the *Labour Leader* both slated the coalition as responsible for the endless cycle of outrage and reprisals of which the Croke Park Massacre was characteristic.

The stance taken by the *Herald* and the *Leader* in the aftermath of Croke Park paralleled that of Labour MP's in the Commons. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 1920 the House deliberated Herbert Asquith's motion that deplored and condemned "methods of terrorism and

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<sup>79</sup> *Labour Leader*, 25 November 1920, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 November 1920, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Labour Leader*, 25 November 1920, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 November 1920, p. 4.

reprisals which involve the lives and property of the innocent.”<sup>84</sup> With the debate focusing on violence directed at Irish civilians in general, less focus was given to the specific case of Croke Park by Labour MPs. Still, their objection to incidents of violence committed by Crown Forces against civilians such as the shooting at Croke Park was relentless, and the Members of Parliament who spoke on behalf of Labour persistently criticised the Government throughout the debate. In a similar fashion to that seen during the Amritsar debate, the PLP voiced their dissatisfaction with maintaining authority through force and pronounced their desire to see Ireland given freedom and control of its own political affairs.

J. R. Clynes, who had also spoken in the Commons on the censure of General Dyer, was the main speaker for the Labour Party on November 24th. First of all, he criticised the Government for suggesting that those who disapproved of the situation in Ireland were slow to condemn the violence of the IRA.<sup>85</sup> The Government was attempting to paint those who challenged the official view as demonstrating a lack of support for the Crown Forces, and lenience towards IRA violence. Clynes insisted this was not the case. Labour MP, Fredrick Roberts,<sup>86</sup> also argued that those who were against the Government were not necessarily against the IRC. He stated: "Neither do we agree that they are deserving of the epithets in which some people indulge, or should be regarded as savages or murderers."<sup>87</sup> Both Clynes and Roberts made it clear that the Labour Party were against violence on both sides, confirming Labour's opposition to the events of 'Bloody Sunday'. This contrasted the right-wing stance, which attempted to justify violence against

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<sup>84</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 487-488.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 513-515.

<sup>86</sup> For more information on Frederick Roberts see, Hansard, [<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-frederick-roberts/>, accessed 26 Aug 2017].

<sup>87</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 562-563.

colonial subjects, whether they were Indian or Irish, but considered violence against British authorities abhorrent.

Clynes proceeded to argue that the policy the Government was pursuing and had already pursued for generations in Ireland, was failing. Ruling by force had never, and would never work. He stated:

The Government falls back on the plan which in all tradition and history has so far failed, the plan of applying superior brute force to those who were provoked to use brute force in the first instance... I urge upon the right hon. gentleman [the Chief Secretary] not to entertain the delusion that he, by these methods, can succeed.<sup>88</sup>

Hence, for Clynes and the Labour Party, self-determination for the Irish people would be the only answer to the Irish question. He argued: "You can put an end to this painful Irish situation by throwing responsibility for Irish Government upon the vast majority of the Irish people who, it is admitted, have no sympathy with criminals."<sup>89</sup> Clynes insisted that the current Government policy in Ireland was not a long-term solution, just as Ben Spoor maintained that the censure of Dyer would not be an effective long-lasting resolution for the problems in India. He held Chief Secretary Greenwood as responsible, describing his approach to governance as reducing the situation in Ireland to "a mere affair of a competition in murder."<sup>90</sup> Roberts agreed, and blamed all the murder on both sides on the Government's refusal to grant the demands of the majority of Irish people who want "the right to determine their own affairs."<sup>91</sup> He maintained that the state of affairs in Ireland was the Government's responsibility, not simply the soldiers on the

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 515-516.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 516-517.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 518-519.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 563-564.

ground or the 'Dyers' of this story, as it was the Government who continued to enable repressive policies rather than concede self-determination.

It is important to point out here the diversity within the Labour Party's understanding of 'self-determination' for Ireland, which became evident at the 1920 Labour Party Conference. *The Times* reported that a resolution was moved by Labour member and leader of the Fabian wing of the party, Sidney Webb,<sup>92</sup> which criticised Government policy in Ireland and demanded that "the principle of free and absolute self-determination shall be applied immediately... confirming the right of Irish people to political independence."<sup>93</sup> However, it was requested by delegates that the resolution be redrafted as it did not clarify whether or not the conference would be approving of an Irish Republic, which some members were not willing to grant.<sup>94</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* explained that "the Irish problem brought the delegates face to face with the need for a more scrupulous definition for what they meant by self-determination".<sup>95</sup> The request to amend the resolution to mean self-determination within the British Empire was rejected. <sup>96</sup> The conference committed to *full* self-determination. Despite this, however, it was clear by November 1920 that "the leadership of the party preferred for there to be a meaningful constitutional link between the two countries."<sup>97</sup> This was clarified by Leader of the PLP, William Adamson,<sup>98</sup> in Parliament. The PLP stance comprised of the armed forces being withdrawn from Ireland, and the question of Irish

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<sup>92</sup> For more information on Sidney Webb see, See, John Davis, 'Webb , (Martha) Beatrice (1858–1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36799>, accessed 26 Aug 2017].

<sup>93</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party: 1920*, (London, 1920).

<sup>94</sup> *Daily Herald*, 25 June 1920, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1920, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party: 1920*, (London, 1920).

<sup>97</sup> Gibbons, 'The British Parliamentary Labour Party and the Government of Ireland Act 1920', p. 518.

<sup>98</sup> For more information on William Adamson see, See, David Howell, 'Adamson, William (1863–1936)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40218>, accessed 1 Sept 2017].

Government relegated to an Irish Constituent Assembly, which would be elected via a free vote and draw up a constitution. However, Adamson stated that Labour's support of this constitution depended on two conditions: The protection of minorities and the prevention of Ireland becoming a military threat. This position offered Ireland "the maximum of national self-government consistent with the unity of the Empire and the safety of the United Kingdom"<sup>99</sup>, and was supported by Labour's National Executive Committee.<sup>100</sup> The commitment to this conditional self-determination became party policy, but more radical ILP members remained supportive of self-determination without reservation. Hence, opinions on Ireland within the Labour movement remained varied.

Nonetheless, the response from the Labour Party to the Croke Park Massacre and the broader issue of reprisals in Ireland in 1920 challenged the British Government by demonstrating a level of support for the Irish nationalist cause, as they had done in the Indian case. Similarities between the attitudes of Labour and the view of Irish nationalist MPs were clear. For example, Irish Parliamentary Party MP and key protagonist for the Irish nationalists in Parliament, Joseph Devlin, blamed Edward Carson for the levels of hostility in Ireland,<sup>101</sup> as the *Labour Leader* did. Devlin also condemned as 'arrant hypocrisy' the fact that the Government only condemned the murders against policemen and not those against civilians.<sup>102</sup> In line with Labour's view Devlin stated, "I condemn all murders", and blamed Government policy completely for "every drop of the blood" shed.<sup>103</sup> He concluded that the main cause of trouble in Ireland was that the British would not let the Irish govern themselves, just as Clynes and

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<sup>99</sup> Gibbons, 'The British Parliamentary Labour Party and the Government of Ireland Act 1920', p. 518.

<sup>100</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, (London, 1921), p. 57.

<sup>101</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 534-536.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 535-536.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 540-541.



Roberts had done in their speeches. Additionally, like the Labour Party, despite all the violence committed against Irish civilians, Devlin did not necessarily lay the blame on the soldiers on the ground. He clarified: "I believe, in my heart, that the Royal Irish Constabulary hate so loathsome task." Devlin saw the fault as lying with the British Government who "have tried every method that human ingenuity and lack of humanity has inspired in dealing with the Irish question, but they have never once tried the right one."<sup>104</sup> Finally, Devlin called for an impartial judicial tribunal to look into the situation in Ireland to see whether it was the various press reports on reprisals that were lying to the British public, including those that debunked the Government representation of Croke Park, or whether it was the Chief Secretary.

Joseph Devlin's demand for an investigation into violence in Ireland during the debate following the Croke Park Massacre was also supported by Clynes and the PLP. Clynes criticised the Government for not holding an independent inquiry into reprisals, which he deemed a "necessity".<sup>105</sup> This was not the first time the request had been raised in Parliament. Whilst the Punjab Disturbances and the Amritsar Massacre sparked controversy about the nature of British rule in India, the Labour Party was already engaged in contentious discussion regarding the approach to governance in Ireland prior to Croke Park. In the months prior to the massacre numerous MP's had raised the issue of violence against civilians in Ireland and demanded answers. On 20<sup>th</sup> October 1920, Chief Whip for Labour, Arthur Henderson, introduced the following motion to the House of Commons:

This House regrets the present state of lawlessness in Ireland and the lack of discipline in the armed forces of the Crown, resulting in the death or injury of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., cc. 545-546.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., cc. 516-517.

innocent citizens and the destruction of property; and is of opinion that an independent investigation should at once be instituted into the causes, nature, and extent of reprisals on the part of those whose duty is the maintenance of law and order.<sup>106</sup>

All of the 43 Labour MPs in attendance supported this vote of censure and demand for an inquiry.<sup>107</sup> However, the motion was defeated by 346 votes to 79. It is unsurprising that the likes of Edward Carson and other pro-Dyer politicians voted against the motion.<sup>108</sup> However, the steadfast refusal by the Government and right-wing politicians to publically investigate reprisals and police brutality only served to motivate the Labour Party to send its own commission of inquiry to Ireland.<sup>109</sup>

The Labour Commission to Ireland, with Arthur Henderson MP as its Chairman, left for Dublin on the November 30<sup>th</sup> 1920 to "inquire into the whole question of reprisals and violence in Ireland."<sup>110</sup> The public nature of this inquiry and the fact the findings were to be published in a report was comparable to the Hunter Commission inquiry. In contrast, however, this inquiry was not ordered by the British Government and the investigative committee was made up of Labour Party members, not Government officials or members of the High Court. During their investigation the Labour Commission visited several sites where reprisals were reported to have taken place. This included Croke Park, where they reconstructed the scene and took evidence from eyewitnesses which contested the official accounts.<sup>111</sup> The results of Labour's inquiry discredited the official representation of the Croke Park Massacre, as well as the broader Government

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<sup>106</sup> House of Commons Debate, 20 October 1920, vol. 133 cc. 925-926.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1037.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland* (London, 1921), p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

narrative regarding imperial violence in Ireland that had been pushed by the Greenwood in the aftermath of the shooting. The findings of the military courts of inquiry that had taken place in the aftermath of the massacre, and the reports from these courts that contested the official portrayal of events were kept concealed from the British people. Unfortunately for the British Government, however, the *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, completed in December 1920 and published in 1921, was available to the public.

The first section of the report focused on reprisals and addressed the massacre at Croke Park, describing it as "one of the most important cases of shooting on a large scale" in Ireland.<sup>112</sup> The Labour Commission made the point that there were more casualties at the Croke Park Massacre than there were at Peterloo.<sup>113</sup> The notion of a shared experience of oppression among working-class British people and colonised people was again highlighted. The report also stated that the assassinations of British officers that occurred on the morning of November 21<sup>st</sup> had overshadowed the "equally callous murder" of those who suffered at Croke Park, thus stressing the equal humanity of Irish victims. This had already been argued by the *Labour Leader* and Labour MPs in the House of Commons.

The purpose of the Commission's investigation into Croke Park was to "secure reliable evidence on those points on which the official statements conflicted with unofficial versions or which the Government had categorically denied or glossed over or ignored."<sup>114</sup> The Commission concluded that whilst the shooting, in their opinion, was not a premeditated reprisal (as in the RIC went to Croke Park with the intention of

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

shooting at civilians), the assassinations that morning *would* have influenced the Crown Forces sent there that afternoon. The report also challenged the claims in the official accounts of the massacre that members of the crowd had fired first, just as the *Daily Herald* and *Labour Leader* had done. The report stated: "In light of the mass evidence available this charge would appear to be quite untrue."<sup>115</sup> None of the witnesses interviewed by the Commission corroborated this part of Greenwood's official statement. In fact, evidence collected by the Commission indicated that the British troops began firing as soon as their vehicles pulled up at the ground.<sup>116</sup> The Commission also noted that if Sinn Fein gunman had been stationed in or around the ground, then there would have been casualties among the Crown Forces, as well as the Irish civilians.<sup>117</sup> These findings denoted that British Forces fired without provocation and without warning, directly challenging the Government narrative which, as we have seen, attempted to demonise the victims and lionise the perpetrators.

The report of the Labour Commission acknowledged that a stampede had occurred at the football ground, as described in the Government's account. However, it described this as "natural" and condemned the "indiscriminate shooting of panic-stricken men" as unjustifiable, indefensible, and a result of incompetence. The report went on to criticise the intended plan to search the crowd to find the Sinn Fein gun men responsible for the morning's assassinations. The Commission argued that, in the circumstances, it "was manifestly folly to expect the crowd to disperse in an orderly fashion", thus placing fault on the authorities. Interestingly, Joseph Devlin made a similar point in the House of Commons, maintaining that had assassins actually been at the football match then the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

death toll could have reached 1,000.<sup>118</sup> The commission described the entire operation as "dangerous", and its execution as "a lamentable failure".<sup>119</sup> For the Commission, the authorities who ordered the search to take place made a severe error of judgement.

These findings by the Labour Commission to Ireland exposed numerous aspects of the official representation of the Croke Park Massacre as false, and disputed the narrative that the crowd were in some way criminal or in some way to blame. In addition, the report also challenged the Government's portrayal of the Crown Forces as the true victims of violence in Ireland; not only in the case of Croke Park, but more generally speaking. The report stated: "So far as we have been able to ascertain, the terrorisation of persons in some way connected with the RIC has not been carried out on a scale comparable with the terrorisation of the mass of Irish people."<sup>120</sup> The Commission recognised the official view as "untrustworthy". They went as far as saying that after investigating numerous reprisals their view was "diametrically opposed" to it with regards to these occurrences, and described statements made by the Chief Secretary as "characterised by a disregard for the truth."<sup>121</sup> The Labour Commission maintained that despite most of the evidence submitted in its Report having been collated from unofficial sources, it still "rings true", and resolved that "the statements made by the Government, on the other hand, do not carry conviction."<sup>122</sup>

The "main burden" of the report was explicitly stated as the condemnation of the Government's policy; a policy described as being one of militarism and violence.<sup>123</sup> In line with the attitudes of the Labour Party, the *Report of the Labour Commission to*

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<sup>118</sup> House of Commons Debate, 24 November 1920, vol. 135 cc. 541-542.

<sup>119</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, p. 42.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

*Ireland* held the Government, not just the men on the ground, culpable for reprisals taking place. The Commission also criticised the official defence, whitewash, and in some cases, complete denial of violence against civilians, for enabling the cycle of violence to continue. Ultimately, the Labour Commission argued that the only solution would be for the Labour movement and the British people to protest in "a united demand for the rescue of the Irish people from the rule of force and for the establishment of peace and freedom".<sup>124</sup> The Commission argued that the situation in Ireland could only be resolved through negotiating a political agreement with Irish nationalists. As with the case of Amritsar, Labour believed that oppression would only reinforce the spirit of revolt.<sup>125</sup> These sentiments echoed throughout Labour's response to the Croke Park Massacre in the Labour press and in Parliament. They also paralleled the push for self-determination and an end to ruling by the sword within the British Empire seen throughout Labour's response to the Amritsar Massacre.

Finally, it is important to consider why Labour took such a strong stance against the Government's policy in Ireland in 1920. In the case of its opposition to reprisals the economic impact was a key factor. Irish trade was suffering heavily due to the destruction by Crown Forces of property and machinery used for industry, "the general atmosphere of terrorism" and the suspension of railway lines.<sup>126</sup> The systematic burning of creameries which were estimated to garner £1,000,000 worth of business each year was having devastating effects on the Irish economy. In addition, this would also have had an economic impact in Great Britain. For Labour, a Government policy which enabled suffering through the loss of livelihoods was not acceptable. The Labour

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Party's concern regarding the economic effect that IRC violence had on Ireland and in Britain is contended in the Labour Commission's Report.

The economic effects of imperial violence were a more pressing concern for Labour in the Irish than in the Indian case. However, other concerns suggested in Labour's reaction to Croke Park were very similar to those they expressed in the case of Amritsar. Labour's response was again heavily influenced by a sense of imperial crisis, a sense of working class solidarity with other oppressed social groups, and the fear that working class unrest in England would be suppressed in a similarly violent manner. This fear of violent suppression had already been expressed by Sidney Webb prior to the Croke Park Massacre at the Labour Party Conference. He argued that "arbitrary suppression and interference" was "bad enough" in India, but "when they happened so near to home it meant that our liberties in England were also being attacked." He insisted that if this approach to maintaining authority over the masses could be enforced in Ireland, it could be enforced in England as well.<sup>127</sup> Another shooting of innocent civilians in Ireland, such as that seen at Croke Park, only aggravated these anxieties further.<sup>128</sup>

The British Labour Party strongly objected to both the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre, and challenged the Government's representations of both atrocities. Labour charged Anglo-Indian officials as equally responsible as General Dyer in the case of Amritsar, seeing the shooting not as an anomaly, but an example of the militarist methods that were inherent to the Raj. Thus, they rejected the 'singularity argument' advanced by the Government. After Croke Park, the Labour Commission investigated

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<sup>127</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party: 1920*, (London, 1920).

<sup>128</sup> Ilahi, *Imperial Violence*, pp. 25-6.

what really happened on that football field in Dublin on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1920, and their findings completely discredited the official narrative regarding Croke Park, as well as the systematic use of reprisals in general. In stark contrast to the right-wing reactions, Labour also demonstrated solidarity with Indian and Irish nationalists in both cases. The PLP and the ILP saw these incidents of imperial violence as a result of oppressive Government policy that was failing to maintain peace in the Empire. For Labour, giving the Indian and Irish people control over their own government was the only resolution. Hence, Labour Party members, their press institutions and their MP's, all called for self-determination, to one extent or another, and an end to the use of force in the aftermath of both crises. There are several potential ideological, political and economic explanations for this response. However, it is clear that at a time when discontent among the working class in Britain and unrest across the Empire was increasing simultaneously, the Labour Party hoped that the British imperial administration would turn away from ruling its citizens by the sword, whether they be in India, Ireland, or the metropole.



## **British Reactions to Amritsar and Croke Park: Connections and Comparisons**

### **Conclusion**

This thesis contributes to ongoing research that adopts comparative and transnational approaches to Indian and Irish history, as well as existing scholarship on the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre specifically. Previous literature on the massacres focuses predominantly on how and why the events took place, and who was to blame, whereas this thesis has addressed the British reactions to both shootings. Those few historians such as Ilahi who have considered some of the responses to Amritsar and Croke Park, centre their discussions on the views of the right wing. This thesis gives attention to the left-wing response that has previously been neglected. Moreover, this thesis also highlights new connections and comparisons between these two atrocities which have not yet received attention. For example, the similarities between the language used *against* the Government by the right to defend General Dyer, and that used *by* the Government after Croke Park to portray the victims and the perpetrators.

British reactions to the Amritsar Massacre 1919, and the Croke Park Massacre 1920, were diverse, and polarised to the extreme. There were similarities and differences between the reactions of different political groups to the individual massacres, and well as contrast in the responses between each case. The British Government's reaction differed between Amritsar and Croke Park. Initial reactions to Croke Park were immediate, whereas it took months for any significant action to be taken in response to Amritsar. The inquiries conducted to investigate these atrocities were also different. The Hunter Inquiry was a public investigation which published its findings to the public, and its conclusions were used as grounds for the censure of General Dyer and the

official stance of the British Government. In the case of Croke Park, however, the inquiries were private, and the findings were concealed from the public for decades. The conclusions of these military courts of inquiry did not support the Government narrative, unlike the Hunter Reports after Amritsar, which gave foundations to the Government's 'singularity argument'.

There are several reasons why the Government reactions differed between each case. The structures of the Indian administration and its relationship with the British Government meant that the response of the India Office was delayed; where as the Chief Secretary for Ireland could deal with Croke Park immediately. The censorship policies in the Punjab and in Ireland also contrasted, and the harsh nature of Michael O'Dwyer's censorship policy initially kept the Secretary of State for India and the British Government, ignorant to many of the details of the Amritsar Massacre. Moreover, after Croke Park there was no single scapegoat which could be blamed for the violence against civilians. Reprisals in Ireland were committed by Crown Forces as a collective, without orders. Censuring the IRC was not an option, especially when the country was at war, and there was no superior who gave the order to fire. On the other hand, censuring Dyer alone seemed relatively convenient. The varying political climates in India and Ireland also fed into this. Britain had to stand by their forces against the IRA, which had been overtly attempting to overthrow British rule. The IRC and Auxiliaries had to be portrayed as heroes defending Ireland from the 'murder gang'. In India however, there was no war, and Indian nationalists' had been optimistic during the war that they would be rewarded for their participation in the war effort, unlike the Irish nationalists, who had become increasingly agitated. Hence, the grievances of Indian nationalists had the potential to be soothed. For the Government, the whole Amritsar

affair could be gradually forgotten if the situation was managed effectively. However, the censure of General Dyer did not appease Indian nationalists and angered the right wing in Britain, although it was still successful to an extent, as it won over the Opposition during the Parliamentary debates.

Regardless of these differences between the Government reactions to Amritsar and Croke Park however, the motivations behind the official narratives of the events remained the same: To shield the Government and the imperial administration from scrutiny, and to protect the reputation of the British Empire. Hence, in both cases, the Government portrayed these atrocities as singular events. As well as this, the idea of 'Britishness' was employed to propel these motives, and claim that either the actions of General Dyer were wrong or to defend the Crown Forces. In July 1920, Dyer's actions were "not the British way of doing business", but in reaction to reprisals committed by the R.I.C in 1920, these "chivalrous British soldiers" were defending Ireland and the Empire from the republican assassin. These uses of 'Britishness' in official responses to Croke Park demonstrated that this discourse was not only driven by a fear of post-war brutalisation of British society, as Jon Lawrence argues. They also confirmed that British officials were anxious to maintain the illusion in India, Ireland, and the metropole, of a British Empire built on justice and civility.

However, the notion of 'Britishness' was also used to counter the official view of the Amritsar Massacre. The right wing used the idea of British justice to criticise the Government's treatment of General Dyer, claiming that his denial of a fair trial was "un-English". However, this was counter argued effectively by Churchill. Still, the right wing presented a significant challenge to the Government during the Amritsar controversy as the official view condemned "the man of the spot" rather than the crowd of Indians that

the right wing persistently demonised. This was significant, as the challenges came from within the majority party of the coalition. In contrast, the Government faced little criticism from British and Irish Unionists after Croke Park. This was because the Government took a more 'Dyerist' approach in the Irish case. They not only "backed their men" but lionised them, and shifted culpability on to the Irish. Arguably, the Government were more inclined to respond in this way, not only because of the reasons outlined above, but because they feared a backlash from Unionists similar to that seen in the aftermath of Amritsar. When the situation in Ireland was more hostile than ever before, and the Government was facing criticism from the Opposition over the Irish question, the Coalition needed its majority party onside.

The right were consistent in their response to both massacres in that they defended the British perpetrators, and disregarded the Indian or Irish victims of imperial violence. They constructed a skewed portrayal of Amritsar in which the victims were the perpetrators and the perpetrators were the victims, and propagated a similar view when it was constructed by the Government in the case of Croke Park. Whether this was through claims that the Indian and Irish crowds had been armed revolutionaries, or representations of Dyer and the RIC as British heroes doing their duty in the face of a difficult situation; the notion of British justice that the right wing championed, only favoured the British. The Indians and the Irish were held to different moral standards to their colonisers. For the right wing imperialists, violence from Indians or the Irish was interpreted as criminal without question, but violence committed by the state "was seen as a matter of obligation... made necessary by the unruliness of the colonised themselves."<sup>1</sup> Hence, when Dyer shot hundreds of unarmed civilians, he was a hero

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Owen, 'Facts are Sacred: The *Manchester Guardian* and Colonial Violence, 1930-1932', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 84 (2012), pp. 644-645.

doing his duty, but the victims of Amritsar were vilified for gathering unlawfully against a proclamation that most were probably unaware of,<sup>2</sup> and held accountable as a collective, without trial, for violence against British authority seen in the days preceding the massacre, which they did not necessarily commit.

These reactions to the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre brought to light contrasting views on how the Empire should be governed. This is clear in comparisons between the Labour Party view and that of Dyer's defenders. Whilst the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party protested ruling the Empire 'by the sword', the right wing pushed for a firmer line. Whilst the Labour Party showed support for Indian and Irish nationalists, and demanded that self-determination be granted (in one way or another), the right wing sought to tighten the grip. Similarly to the Unionists, however, Labour's response was consistent across both cases. They rejected the Government stance that both shootings were atypical events, and agreed with the Unionists that Dyer was, to an extent, held culpable for the broader failings of the Government of India. Nonetheless, unlike the right wing, and the Government in the case of Croke Park, Labour still considered General Dyer and the Crown Forces perpetrators of crimes, but recognised that higher authorities in the Indian and Irish imperial administrations, and the British Government, were also responsible.

Finally, it is clear that the political landscape in India, Ireland and Britain, had an influence on the Government's response to Amritsar and Croke Park. The broader geopolitical climate of the time also affected the right wing defence of Dyer. The reaction of the right was stimulated by the war in Ireland in particular, as well as other threats to imperialism across the globe such as Bolshevism and Pan-Islamism. Hence, the

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<sup>2</sup> Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar* (New York, 2005), p. 253.

Unionists supported General Dyer due to their desire for an iron fist approach in India, Ireland and the Empire. In contrast, the Labour Party demonstrated aversion to ruling by the sword. This was not only because maintaining authority by force went against Labour's principles, and opposed India and Ireland's rights to self-determination, but because it was considered a threat to the Labour movement itself. The post war milieu and the crisis of empire presented domestic troubles as well as international challenges such as the anti-colonial nationalisms that concerned the Unionists. The Labour Party were anxious that should the working class challenge British authority as Indians in the Punjab and Irish republicans had done, they may face a similar fate. British reactions to the Amritsar Massacre and the Croke Park Massacre were all connected by the overriding context of imperial crisis. For the two political extremes discussed here, this manifested as a fear of changes to the imperial status quo, or a fear of the consequences should the status quo be challenged in Britain.

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