

Towards a Labour Policy for the Empire?
The Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions
Between the Two World Wars (1918-1940)

At the end of the First World War, different departments, committees and sub-committees were set up within the Labour Party to elaborate policies regarding important political issues. Among these, a very active one was the Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions, constantly headed by Leonard Woolf. This committee and its members produced a large amount of material and did a lot to encourage the LP and its leaders to act in favour of a real Labour's colonial and imperial policy, both on global and specific issues. Focusing on the interwar years, this communication has several aims. It will first study the place and the evolution of the committee in the post-war Party's structure and policy-making process. The way the committee worked in concrete terms will be examined too. Secondly, this talk will focus on the Party's "experts" who gathered in the committee, and will portray them as a group. Nevertheless, it will also focus on particular individuals who stamped their mark on the committee's work. Furthermore, this communication will shed the light on the reformist ideas and positions professed by the committee and its members, in order to determine what was advocated about topics such as administration, economic and social development, race relations, and so on. Finally, the intent is to assess the influence and the effectiveness of the committee's work over the Party's official policy, both when it was in the opposition and when it was in office. By analysing the different aspects of this committee, the wider purpose of this presentation is to contribute to define the specific, evolving and above all complex relationship between the Labour Party and the British Empire during the interwar years. Besides, this relationship could also appear as a relevant issue to look at the 1945-51 period with new eyes.