

Gaelic American Savarkar Case Articles

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Background

The *Gaelic American* was an Irish Catholic newspaper published in the United States which was, along with the *Irish Nation*, owned by John Devoy. A weekly publication of the Sinn Fein, it was amongst the foremost Irish ethnic newspapers till the Great Depression—when its readership declined. At various times, its editors were George Freeman and John Devoy. In its early years, the paper collaborated extensively with the Indian nationalist organizations in Britain and United States, most notably in the India House, London. It reprinted articles from the *Indian Sociologist* and the editor George Freeman was a close associate of Shyamji Krishnavarma. In 1910 the paper also developed close cooperation with Taraknath Das and its facilities were used for printing Das's nationalistic political journal, Free Hindustan. Given below are some articles published in the Gaelic American following Savarkar's re-capture at Marseilles.

Gaelic American, July 23, 1910

Vinayak Savarkar

(from London *India*, July 8.)

The Indian law student Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, whose extradition to Bombay upon charges of sedition has been ordered, started on his voyage to India on Friday last (July 1), under circumstances which the *Daily Mail* describes as “strange”:

“In order to prevent any demonstrations the greatest care was taken to keep the movements of the prisoner secret. Savarkar was removed from Brixton Prison on Thursday evening and lodged in a cell in Cannon Row Police Station. On the following afternoon he was taken by Detective-Inspector Parker and two officers of the Indian Police to Westminster Pier, which is only about 200 yards from the police station. Here the party embarked in a small steam launch and was taken down the river Tilbury, where the P. and O. liner *Morea* was lying out in the river. The *Morea* sailed during the afternoon, with Savarkar and the police officials on board.”

Just before going to press the Gaelic American learns from Marseilles in France that while the steamer *Morea*, on which Savarkar was being taken to India, was lying in that port, he jumped overboard and swam to shore. The French police, however, were apprised of his escape and soon succeeded in arresting and returning him to the ship. The Paris newspaper *L'Humanite* expresses great indignation at this action of the French Government.

Gaelic American, July 30, 1910

Vinayak Savarkar

The Gaelic American has received from Marseilles, France, the details regarding the attempt of the Indian political prisoner, Vinayak Savarkar, referred to last week to escape from his police escort on the British steamer, *Morea*, at that port. It appears that when his escape was discovered cries of “Voleur! Voleur!” (“Thief! Thief!) were raised by the British police who set out in chase. This caused all the French police to join in and the prisoner was finally caught after a hard run that quite exhausted him. Our correspondent sends a sketch map showing the course followed from the steamer dock to the point of capture.

After capture by the French police, the Quartermaster of the Marseilles Maritime Police, instead of taking him to the Prefecture to be dealt with according to International usage, he having been captured by foreign police on French soil, allowed him to be taken away on board the British steamer. The matter was taken up by his friends in Paris, and is now under consideration of the French government, in whose hands they have left it.

We are informed that the French police received “gratification” from the British Consul of Marseilles for acting as they did.

Gaelic American,, August 6, 1910

The Savarkar Case

The French Government Asks For Release of Hindu Political Prisoner

Or Return To France.

(From London *India*, July 22)

Remarkable developments are prompted in connection with the recent attempt at escape which was made by Mr. Savarkar during the stay at Marseilles at the steamer *Morea* in which he is being conveyed to Bombay. It now appears, according to the French journal, *La Liberte*, that the French Government has addressed to the British Foreign Office a note asking that Savarkar should be set at liberty or else handed over to the French authorities. In other words----to quote the Paris correspondent of the *Times*----the persistence with which M. Jaures urged the fugitive's cause has induced the French Government courteously to request the British Government to stay proceedings until all the documents in the case has been submitted to the French authorities. The point taken is that the handing over of Savarkar to the English detectives by the Sergeant of the gendarmes who arrested him after he swam ashore was illegal. The surrender, it is argued, ought to have been made to the Chief of the Marseilles harbor police.

The *Daily Telegraph* says that M. Jaures has had an interview on the subject with M. Barthou, Minister of Justice, who has candidly admitted to him that a blunder has been committed. The *Temps* has followed this up by advancing the position that, according to International Law, Savarkar ought to be brought back to France in order that the French authorities may have cognizance of his case, inasmuch as the English Government had not (1) informed the French Government of the transit of a man accused of political offense, and (2) had lost its rights over Savarkar through the fact of his landing on French soil.

The Savarkar Case International

The developments in the case of the Hindu student, Savarkar, who escaped from the custody of his police escort on board the British steamer *Morea*, while the vessel was lying in dock at Marseilles, France, on her way to India, have raised the matter of his unauthorized restitution by a sergeant of gendarmes to the British police, to the status of an international question. This was admitted in the British House of Commons on July 21 by the Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, who, in reply to a question by a member, admitted that the British Government had been “approached” by the French Government on the subject, but that he could not make any statement till the facts and points involved had been considered.

Later information says that the French press has taken the matter up very warmly, and, from the Socialist paper, *L’Humanite*, to the highly conservative *Journal des Debate*, has expressed the opinion that Savarkar must be returned to France and set at liberty. “This,” the latter paper says emphatically, “is necessary to the credit of Great Britain, which was the first of all the European States to offer shelter to political refugees.” The *Siecle* which, with the *Temps*, has generally condemned British action in Egypt and in India, whilst encouraging the leading Nationalist of both nations, comes to the same conclusion, but in continuing its comments says that the Savarkar affair is a sharp reminder of the international importance of the Indian question. It proceeds:

In Europe we do not look upon things from quite the same point of view as in England or in India. We do not ask when it may be that the Hindus may defeat Great Britain, but we attempt to discover whether four or five years when the superiority of the British navy over that of Germany will have become slight, India may not be able to keep fully occupied the whole of the expeditionary force of which Mr. Haldene speaks, so that it would be difficult to guarantee the defense of British territory, and radically impossible for the British army to intervene on the continent...For the safety of the British domination in India we must wish for something else than pitiless repression. The policy of the “big stick” is good only for the nations without ideals, for a tyranny can last only so long as it creates victims.

The *Éclair* speaks of British rule in India being maintained by brutal repression, summary convictions and executions, and goes on to say:

We may disapprove of such employment of force: it is not our business to prevent it. But we must not afford help to Britain in her police persecution. Now, unhappily, it seems a mistake has been made in recent affair, that of the arrest on French territory of a Hindu Nationalist, Mr. Savarkar.....We gather from the various statements relative to the affair that the English detectives seeing Savarkar swimming away in the harbor, cried out, “Thief!” At the refitting dock a sergeant of the maritime gendarmerie arrested him and gave him back to the detectives when he should have handed him over to the Special Commissary of the Port.

The sergeant of the gendarme in question committed a grave error; he is not in the service of foreign detectives; and it is inadmissible that on a false accusation of theft, a French official should authorize the extradition of a foreigner, above all when it concerns someone who is persecuted for his political opinions, and whose sole crime is that he desires his country to free itself from the tyranny of England.

The *Temps*, which may be regarded as the leading paper in Paris, if not also in France, after some hesitation was obliged to admit that in surrendering Savarkar to his pursuers, the French police had violated the Right of Asylum, attributing their action at the same time to ignorance. The Socialist paper, *L'Humanite*, while severely criticizing this qualifying of the police error, expresses its satisfaction that the *Temps* and itself stand on the same ground on the question of the Right of Asylum.

The action of the French Government in the matter seems to have been of such a character that the British Government, much as it would like to gratify its savage instincts, will feel compelled to accede to the French demands, if only to prevent a breach in the *entente*, which is one of England's props in international affairs.

In concluding we cannot omit to notice the suppression of all reference to this Savarkar affair in New York papers. It almost looks as if the word had gone out from the office of the Hebrew Under Secretary for India in London to the American press agencies and the London correspondents of American papers to shut down this incident.

Gaelic American,, August 27, 1910

Vinayak Savarkar

The Indian political refugee who escaped from the steamer *Morea* in Marseilles harbor last month, and was illegally restored to his English escort by a French Gendarmerie official, arrived at Bombay on the morning of July 22 on the steamer *Salsette*.

The prisoner was landed at the Government dockyard and driven in a taxi-cab to the Victoria Terminus, where he was placed in a prisoner's third-class carriage attached to the Delhi Express Mail. The train reached Nasik at noon, where Savarkar was to be detained pending trial by the Special Tribunal on a charge of abetment of murder.

The arrangements made for Savarkar's landing and his dispatch to Nasik were kept strictly secret. The intention of the British Government is apparently to railroad the trial and conviction while the demand of the French Government for his surrender is being held up.

Gaelic American,, September 3, 1910

The Savarkar Case

The French democracy, which has always defended Russian refugees against the continual machinations of its great ally, is not at all disposed to be more complaisant towards themselves. Partly from a genuine love of liberty, partly from a proper national pride, partly also from a profound distrust of the French police, the advanced parties in France will fight this case with all the passion and vivacity which they favorably bring to bear on simple human issues. We must be prepared, if we insist on refusing to surrender Savarkar, to see ourselves pilloried day by day in the friendly French press. That would be no argument for yielding if we were right; but most clearly we are in the wrong-----*The Nation*, London, England

Gaelic American,, November 5, 1910

To Arbitrate Savarkar Case.

The British and French Governments have agreed to submit the international question involved in the escape and re-capture of Savarkar at Marseilles to arbitration. Pending the decision, no sentence passed upon Savarkar shall have any effect beyond his retention in custody. The Special Tribunal at Bombay has decided that the jurisdiction of the Indian Court to try Savarkar is not affected by any questions of the legality of his re-arrest at the French port.

Gaelic American,, March 25, 1910

Savarkar Surrendered.

What chance a political prisoner has before the Hague Tribunal of Arbitration when the parties in interest have a friendly alliance is exemplified in the case of Vinayak Savarkar. The majority of the court was favorable to Great Britain and it was unanimously decided that France had no claim on the prisoner.

Savarkar, an Indian subject of Great Britain, was arrested on his arrival in London on march 13, 1910, charged with sedition and ordered to be extradited to India for trial. When the vessel on board of which he was being taken home stopped in Marseilles harbor Savarkar crawled through a porthole and swam ashore. He was captured in Marseilles by the French police as he was running through the streets and calling out that he be taken to a magistrate. He was turned over to British detectives and taken on to Bombay for trial.

French Socialists raised the question whether the surrender of the man to the British officers after he had set foot on French soil and appealed as best he could for refuge as a political prisoner was just.

The case excited so much controversy that the government of Great Britain and France exchanged notes on the subject and last fall agreed to submit the question to The Hague Tribunal.
