



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**THE WARTIME EXPERIENCE OF THE LEAGUE  
OF NATIONS, 1939-47**

by

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my own work.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Candidate)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the wartime experience of the League of Nations. It analyses the League's ability to serve as a touchstone for international political, economic and social cooperation in a period of intense crisis for liberal internationalism. It demonstrates that the League's political identity retained a relevance to a world at war, despite the failure of its diplomatic role. The thesis chronicles the efforts of League officials and of member states as they strove to maintain, in the League's international civil service, a nucleus of liberal idealism in contradistinction to fascist expansionism. It determines the impact of geo-political factors on the integrity of the League apparatus and documents how the League's ideological baggage determined its wartime social and economic work. The League did not remain a static entity in its final years and this work highlights the adaptation of League officials to an evolving political landscape with the League's wartime experience providing a bridge between pre-war internationalism and its post-war variant. The successes and failures of the League's political and technical organs were a reflection of the course of international affairs with its wartime history serving as a barometer of the diminished Eurocentrism and rising Atlanticism of international cooperation. This period was emblematic of the challenges of internationalism with the League's international civil service splintering under the weight of internal and external pressures. The League's wartime experience also underscored the reality that internationalism was a contested concept. The League's brand of internationalism, with its aim of universalising the values of liberal democracy, was increasingly out-of-step with a war-weary preoccupation with security. League officials fought to preserve technocratic unity between the old organisation and the U.N.O. within an international order increasingly dominated by the two emerging superpowers; neither of which enjoyed a straightforward relationship with the League of Nations.

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## List of Abbreviations

A.F.M.A.	Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
B.C.P.	British Cabinet papers
B.L.	British Library
CAB	British cabinet papers
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union
C.C.P.	Cecil of Chelwood papers (Personal papers of Viscount Cecil)
C.F.L.N.	French Committee of National Liberation
C.H.F	Swiss franc
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs files (Irish)
DO	Dominion Office (British)
D.S.B.	Drug Supervisory Body of the League of Nations
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations Organisation
E.E.C.	European Economic Community
E.F.O.	Economic and Finance Organisation of the League of Nations
E.U.	European Union
F.A.O.	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FO	Foreign Office files (British)
FP	Federal paper (Swiss federal archives)
<i>FRUS</i>	Foreign relations of the United States series
G.B.P.	Great British Pound
H.O.	Health Organisation of the League of Nations
H.C.	House of Commons
H.L.	House of Lords
I.C.I.C.	International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation
I.C.R.	International Committee on Refugees
I.I.C.	International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation
I.L.O.	International Labour Organisation
I.L.O.C.P.	International Labour Organisation, Century Project
I.R.	International relations theory
L.N.A.	League of Nations Archives, Geneva

L.N.U.	League of Nations Union of the United Kingdom
N.A.I.	National Archives of Ireland, Dublin
O.A.C.	Opium Advisory Committee of the League of Nations
O.I.C.	Organisation of Intellectual Cooperation
O.S.G.	Office of the Secretary-General files (Geneva)
PPA Agh	Private papers of Thanassis Aghnides (Geneva)
P.P.S.L.	Private papers of Seán Lester (Dublin)
P.S.O.B.	Permanent Central Opium Board of the League of Nations
S.L.P.	Seán Lester papers (Geneva)
SDD	Swiss diplomatic documents
T	Treasury Office (British)
T.N.A.	The National Archives of the United Kingdom (Kew)
U.C.D.A.	University College Dublin, Archives
U.N.	United Nations (alliance)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
U.N.H.C.R	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
U.N.O.	United Nations Organisation
UNOG	United Nations Office, Geneva (Library, Records and Archives Unit)
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
W.F.T.U.	World Federation of Trade Unions
W.H.O.	World Health Organisation

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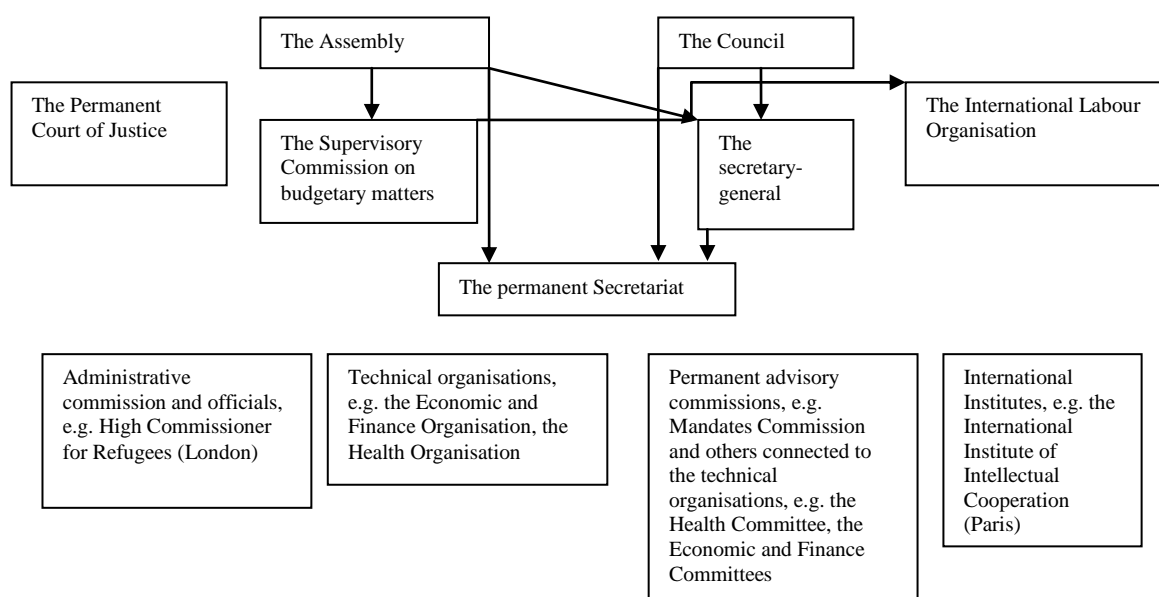
## Introduction

A product of the Paris Peace Conference (1919), the purpose of the League of Nations was to regulate international diplomacy and to serve as a forum where member states, through mutual and voluntary contract, agreed to abide by the terms of a Covenant. This Covenant, evoking the language of a sacred biblical promise, bound each state to respect and guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of its fellow member states. The League was intended as an alternative system to the closed-door and exclusive diplomacy practised during the antecedent Concert of Europe system; instead member states formally prescribed to ‘open, just and honourable relations between nations.’<sup>1</sup> The League Council, permanently composed of the great powers as well as smaller states through a revolving system of temporary membership, was intended to mediate and arbitrate international disputes. The League Assembly, where every member state enjoyed a single vote, served as a forum for multilateral debate on various international issues. The League encouraged disarmament and sought to impose supervision on how its member states governed minority groups and residents of the former German and Turkish colonies through its Minorities and Mandates Commissions. The League also strove to promote social, economic and humanitarian progress through both the specialised branches of its Secretariat and separate affiliated technical commissions and organisations. These technical bodies included the semi-autonomous International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.); the Economic and Finance Organisation (E.F.O.); the Health Organisation (H.O.); the Permanent Central Opium Board (P.C.O.B.); the Drug Supervisory Body (D.S.B.); the Advisory Committee on Social Questions; the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Organisation of Intellectual Cooperation (O.I.C).

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<sup>1</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, available from Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 April 2010).

**Fig 1: Structure of the League of Nations and its specialised bodies**



(Source: Informed by Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace* (Harlow, 2012), pp 1-19)

The League of Nations, although imbued with globalist aspirations, represented a very specific kind of internationalism which by no means dominated the landscape of international affairs. While the League owed its immediate existence to the desire to avoid the replication of the horrors of the First World War, its establishment marked the apogee of an older socio-political movement; liberal internationalism. Historians agree that the League was the product of mid-nineteenth century liberalism with the rhetoric of the Covenant was closely bound to the traditions of liberal democracy.<sup>2</sup> Liberal internationalism entailed a respect for democracy, sovereignty and free trade.<sup>3</sup> Liberal internationalists were motivated to strive for a peaceful international political and legal order while simultaneously (for the most part) respecting the rights of nation states.<sup>4</sup> As such the League system was unable and often unwilling to accommodate the other variants of internationalism prevalent on the European continent, especially those shaped by the more radical ideologies of fascism and communism.<sup>5</sup> However it was not only the rival

<sup>2</sup> F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: its life and times 1920-46* (Leicester, 1986), p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> John A. Thompson, 'Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept' in *International Affairs*, lxxxvi (2010), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> George W. Egerton, 'Collective security as political myth: liberal internationalism and the League of Nations in politics and history' in *The International History Review*, v (1983), p. 500.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Richard Davis, 'A "great experiment" of the League of Nations era: international nongovernmental organisations, global governance, and democracy beyond the state' in *Global Governance*, xviii (2012), p. 417.

internationalism of the extreme left and right that strickened the League's diplomatic machinery. Even among the liberal democratic countries at ease with the spirit of the Covenant the League was never the dominant means of conducting international diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> The challenges faced by the League, as a vehicle for liberal idealism trying to compete with *realpolitik*, reached crisis point during the Second World War. Susan Pedersen, in her 2007 article 'Back to the League of Nations', argued that historical understanding of the League remained incomplete with many research possibilities left unexplored more than sixty years after its dissolution.<sup>7</sup> Pedersen called on fellow historians to return to the chronically underused League archives in Geneva to 'examine more intensely the personnel, mechanisms and culture of that Geneva-centred world.'<sup>8</sup> This thesis contributes to the recent revival in League historiography by investigating the wartime preservation of the organisation during a crucial period for the evolution of internationalism.

The thesis opens in 1939 against the backdrop of a volatile political landscape and ends in 1947 with the liquidation of the League of Nations. Chapter one documents the reaction of the political organs of the League, its Assembly and Council, to the outbreak of the Second World War. It contrasts the policy of the Assembly and Council towards the German and Soviet invasions of Poland with the course of action adopted by member states following the U.S.S.R.'s invasion of Finland. The manner in which the Secretariat and technical officials justified their continued existence, adapted their work to the reality of the situation and assumed the role of guarantors of the League's Covenant on behalf of member states, is explored in chapter two. Secretary-General Joseph Avenol's controversial and contested actions in the lead up to his resignation are also documented in the light of new primary evidence. The motivation behind the transfer of selected missions of the League of Nations to the United States and to Canada is also discussed. Chapter three chronicles the wartime activities of the League's technical agencies. It identifies the various challenges to their work programmes and examines whether the League was able to preserve a semblance of institutional unity. Chapter four documents and discusses wartime relations between the League Secretariat and member states. It determines why certain states continued to ascribe importance to

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<sup>6</sup> Zara Steiner, *The lights that failed: European international history 1919-33* (Oxford, 2005), p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations' in *The American Historical Review*, cxii (2007), pp 1091-1117.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1112

League membership during the years of conflict and why others were anxious to relinquish it. Chapter four also documents how government attitudes to the League determined its contribution to the new international order that was slowly emerging. Chapter five outlines the processes involved in the dissolution and liquidation of the League. This chapter contributes to the scholarly debate on the construction of the United Nations Organisation and the influence of the League experience on this process.

In 2011 Patricia Clavin questioned the approach of traditional international histories in their acceptance that internationalism (in its pre-war form) ended with the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> The League's political organs were not dissolved until 1946; during the following year its remaining international civil service oversaw the liquidation of its financial assets and the transfer of its functions to the new United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.). Despite this reality, the wartime experience of the League of Nations is one that is traditionally accorded meagre attention by general histories of the organisation.<sup>10</sup> Where greater focus is accorded to this period it is usually confined to one or two dramatic episodes in the League's final years such as the resignation of Joseph Avenol and the grandiloquent speeches of its final Assembly in April 1946.<sup>11</sup> The most logical explanation for the historical neglect of the League's last years would be that nothing of significance occurred during that period to warrant investigation. This was true for the League's judicial organ, the Permanent Court of International Justice (located in The Hague), which assumed a nominal existence following the fatal disruption to its work by the German invasion of the Netherlands. However this project has found that the League's wartime experience is rich in episodes, publications, accounts and correspondence which not only document a pivotal period for the organisation itself but which have profound implications for the development and evolution of internationalism. This thesis challenges the common historiographical tendency to

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<sup>9</sup> Patricia Clavin, 'Introduction: conceptualising internationalism between the world wars' in Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Transnationalism reconfigured: transnational ideas and movements between the world wars* (London, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Clive Archer, *International organisations* (3rd ed., London, 2001); Ruth Henig, *Makers of the modern world: the League of Nations* (London, 2010); Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the organisation of peace* (Harlow, 2012); Northedge, *The League of Nations*; Paul Raffo, *The League of Nations* (London, 1974); George Scott, *The rise and fall of the League of Nations* (London, 1973); Frank Walters, *A history of the League of Nations* (London, 1952).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Elmer Bendiner, *A time for angels: the tragicomic history of the League of Nations* (London, 1975); George Gill, *The League of Nations from 1929 to 1946* (New York, 1996).

regard 1939 as the culmination of pre-war liberal internationalism. Instead it posits that the League's wartime experience reflected the problems of pre-war internationalism and anticipated the challenges of its post-war variant.

Biographies of the secretaries-general of the League have permitted a limited insight into the organisation's wartime history.<sup>12</sup> James Barros in his biography of the second secretary-general of the League, Frenchman Joseph Avenol, and both Stephen Barcroft and Douglas Gageby in their respective biographies of his successor, Irishman Seán Lester, documented their subjects' experience of this period as an episode in long and eventful international careers. Arthur Rovine's 1970 study *The first fifty years: the secretary-general in world politics* also provides an excellent insight into the potential and limitations of that office. These respective biographies are informative and commendable for their use (on Barros, Gageby and Barcroft's part) of Lester's personal papers and diary, otherwise neglected but astonishingly detailed sources on the League's history from the late 1920s until dissolution. The focus of these biographical narratives on the personal histories of the secretaries-general did not permit, within their pages, scope for meaningful investigation and analysis of the wartime preservation of the League. They were also produced at a time when access to pertinent national archive files on the war period, especially those related to the Vichy regime, was restricted. Furthermore this thesis has found that the efforts entailed in preserving the organisation were not confined to the person of the secretary-general. Rather it was a collective effort on the part of numerous high officials within the League Secretariat and technical services whose endeavours were supported by influential national statesmen, civil servants and diplomats. The contribution of these figures to this seemingly quixotic endeavour needs to be documented to further our understanding of what the future of internationalism signified to those who continued to work within an international apparatus and to those who would be responsible for shaping the post-war international order.

The neglect of the League's wartime existence can be attributed to the traditional fixation of historians on the League's poor record in the mediation of

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<sup>12</sup> James Barros, *Betrayal from within: Joseph Avenol and the League of Nations 1933-40* (New Haven, 1969); Stephen Barcroft, 'The international civil servant: the League of Nations career of Seán Lester, 1929-47' (PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1973); Raymond B. Fosdick, *The League and the United Nations after fifty years: the six secretaries-general* (Newtown, 1972); Douglas Gageby, *The last secretary-general: Seán Lester and the League of Nations* (Dublin, 1999); Arthur Rovine, *The first fifty years: the secretary-general in world politics* (Leyden, 1970).

international disputes. As earlier historians concluded that the League's collective security potential was spent by the mid-1930s there was little interest in documenting its final years, especially as the League's diplomatic organs, its Assembly and Council, were suspended in 1939 for the duration of the war. A.J.P. Taylor identified the culmination of the Abyssinian crisis in 1936 as the real end of the League while P. Raffo characterised the sanctions imposed by League member states on Mussolini's Italy during that crisis as constituting, 'nothing more than the death rattle of a dying organisation.'<sup>13</sup> George Scott's 1973 history of the League focused on the 'fall' of the organisation, characterising the dramatic episodes that marked the League's existence as 'sequences in a relentless theme of tragedy.'<sup>14</sup> Elmer Bendiner dubbed League headquarters a 'mausoleum of hopes' by the year 1938, haunted by three 'ghosts' who experienced invasion or internal turmoil without any assistance from the organisation: China, Ethiopia and Spain.<sup>15</sup> Contemporaneous to the publication of these highly critical histories there existed another school of League scholarship that sought to depict the organisation not as a failure, but as an important bridgehead in international cooperation. One of the most notable examples of this historiographical tradition was Frank Walters' *A history of the League of Nations* (1952) which was one of the first general histories of the organisation to appear in the aftermath of its dissolution. Walters argued that the League was worth studying as it constituted 'the most effective move towards the organisation of a world-wide political and social order.'<sup>16</sup>

In interacting with the existing corpus of League histories a thorough awareness is required that studies of the organisation have rarely been politically neutral. Even before the League's dissolution a theoretical battleground was spawned that had its roots in competing ideologies. During its lifetime the League tended to elicit extreme responses; attracting both ardent support and vehement condemnation. This bi-polarity resonated in the subsequent scholarship with various historians and political scientists going to great lengths to present the League as either a success or a failure. Sympathetic studies of the League tended to be

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<sup>13</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The origins of the Second World War* (London, 1963), p. 96; Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p.18.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, *The rise and fall of the League of Nations*, p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> Bendiner, *A time for angels*, p. 380.

<sup>16</sup> Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 1.

described as ‘idealist’ with its more critical counterpoints classified as ‘realist.’<sup>17</sup> Notable exponents of the ‘idealist’ position include Walters, a former deputy secretary-general, and politicians such as Viscount Cecil, one of the principal architects of the Covenant. ‘Idealists’ could not refute the League’s failure to fulfil its role as the guarantor of the sovereignty of its member states. However they were quick to absolve the spirit and practices of the organisation from blame. They argued that the League was betrayed by the intransigence of the great powers which refused to deploy the machinery of the League to collectively condemn and punish unprovoked acts of aggression.<sup>18</sup> Their position was perfectly encapsulated by Cecil’s famous observation: ‘The League of Nations has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found inconvenient and not tried.’<sup>19</sup> The ‘idealist’ interpretation was rooted in the western liberal tradition and was often inspired by progressive politics. League supporters and apologists viewed the League as a civilising, enlightening and unstoppable force; proof of the onward march of human progress.<sup>20</sup>

The ‘realist’ discourse in the study of international relations gained momentum as the League’s political mission stalled. Realist historians and theorists reject the position that international cooperation is the current of world history and that common interests morally bind member states to seek peaceful outcomes to disputes. Rather they accept that as states are confined ‘to a condition of international anarchy’, those states remain ‘self-interested, power-hungry and competitive actors’, thus limiting the scope of international cooperation in the political sphere.<sup>21</sup> Gerhart Niemeyer did not accept the argument that the failure to fully realise the collective security potential of the League could be attributed to great power arrogance. Rather he argued that the League’s political and diplomatic machinery ought to have been designed to accommodate the dynamics of great power relations and the inevitable prioritisation of national interests over international cooperation.<sup>22</sup> While the composition of the League Council reflected

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<sup>17</sup> For a summary of the idealist/realist debate and the development of such categorisations see David Armstrong, Lorna Lloyd and John Redmond, *From Versailles to Maastricht: International organisation in the twentieth century* (3rd ed., London, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> See Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 778.

<sup>19</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 8

<sup>20</sup> See Brian G. Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation: international security institutions, domestic politics and American multilateralism* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, *From Versailles to Maastricht*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhart Niemeyer ‘The balance sheet of the League experiment’ in *International Organisation*, vi (1952), p. 542.

Wilson's belief that some states were more equal than others, the great powers did not possess the exclusive right to veto diplomatic action and administrative changes; rather unanimity among all members of the Assembly and Council was required to give effect to League resolutions.

Clavin observed that historians have struggled to break free from the need to either exonerate or condemn the League for the breakdown in international diplomacy in the inter-war years.<sup>23</sup> Such polarising scholarship has increasingly been eclipsed by the shift in League historiography away from the 'popular caricature of its farcical disarmament programme' towards a greater focus on the League as a facilitator of transnational encounters that achieved considerable success in the social and economic spheres.<sup>24</sup> As Pedersen observed, these studies are less focused on what the League failed to do but on what it 'did and meant over its twenty-five year existence.'<sup>25</sup> This trend in League historiography corresponded to a sea-change in the study of international relations (I.R.), away from the binaries of the idealist and realist interpretation towards a 'middle-way' between the antagonisms of the two traditional theories. The 'neo-liberal institutionalist' theory of international relations accepts the realist argument that states are self-interested and jealous of their sovereignty but seeks to identify why states might, despite these limitations, continue to seek means of cooperation within international institutions such as the League.<sup>26</sup> International historians have made greater exertions to understand the League as a product of its time, the first comprehensive project in international cooperation, born in a period of intense and increasingly militant nationalism.<sup>27</sup>

This thesis strongly identifies with this newer historiographical tradition and benefits from the recent opening up of League scholarship. As the newer studies of the League's technical agencies are not engrossed by the League's political record they tend to be more alive to the organisation's wartime history. Historians such as Iris Borowy, Martin Dubin, Jill Jensen, William B. McCallister and Geert Van Goethen have discussed the wartime work programmes of the technical organisations.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Clavin, 'Introduction: conceptualising internationalism between the world wars', p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1092.

<sup>26</sup> Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, *International organisation in the twentieth century*, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> See for example Alan Sharp, *Makers of the modern world: the Versailles settlement, aftermath and legacy* (London, 2010), p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Iris Borowy, *Coming to terms with world health: the League of Nations Health Organisation* (Frankfurt, 2009); Martin David Dubin, 'Toward the Bruce Report: the economic and social programmes of the League in the Avenol era' in United Nations Library, Genera [henceforth



Economists such as Anthony Endres and Grant Flemming have also examined the theoretical modules and business cycles employed during wartime by both the Economic and Finance Organisation and the International Labour Organisation.<sup>29</sup> In her 2013 publication *Securing the world economy: the reinvention of the League of Nations 1929-1946* Patricia Clavin made the most significant contribution towards the integration of the wartime history of the League into the wider narrative of the organisation. Chronicling the efforts of the Princeton mission of the League's Economic and Finance Organisation, Clavin demonstrated how the E.F.O.'s lifelong commitment to supporting global capitalism was reflected in its wartime studies; studies which not only had an immediate influence on post-war relief and reconstruction measures but which also reverberated within new international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and even the European Economic Community.<sup>30</sup>

Pedersen pointed out that while studies of the League's technical organisations have become increasingly popular, these agencies are largely dealt with separately and there has yet to be a 'synthetic study' of the League's entire technical experience.<sup>31</sup> It is not within the scope of this thesis to offer such a 'synthetic study', however it does adopt a more holistic approach to the League's wartime history. It documents the institutional experience of the League's international civil service during the Second World War by focusing on how the disparate technical organisations related to one another and to the League's high direction and Secretariat. It is particularly concerned with the question of leadership and the ability or inability of the secretary-general to act as the administrative and political figurehead of the League. The thesis chronicles the difficulties experienced or self-imposed by the various League agencies in the maintenance of a common

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UNOG] (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: proceedings of the symposium* (Geneva, 1983), pp 42-73; Jill Jensen, 'From Geneva to the Americas: the International Labour Organisation and inter-American social security standards, 1936-1948' in *International Labour and Working Class History*, lxxx (2011), pp 215-240; William B. McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century: an international history* (London, 2000); Geert, Van Goethem 'Phelan's war: the International Labour Organisation in limbo (1941-8)' in Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodriguez Garía, Geert Van Goethem and Marcel ven der Linden (eds), *I.L.O. histories: essays on the International Labour Office and its impact on the world during the twentieth century* (Bern, 2010), pp 313-41.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony M. Endres and Grant A. Fleming, *International organisation and the analysis of economic policy, 1919-50* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 12, pp 42-54.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Clavin, *Securing the world economy: the reinvention of the League of Nations 1920-1946* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1108.

institutional identity and examines the relevance and impact of that identity within an evolving international order.

Demonstrating how the League's political identity defined its relationship with member states and shaped its contribution to wartime international affairs and post-war planning is also a central concern of this work. Pedersen argued that the League's security record is the one aspect of its existence in which a revisionist argument is hardest to uphold.<sup>32</sup> It is not the intention of the thesis to challenge the accepted consensus on the diplomatic failure of the League; such a position would be both empirically and theoretically unsustainable. However it contends that the vitality of its technical services can only partially explain the League's wartime preservation. The League's diplomatic role was suppressed by 1940 but the organisation retained a political relevance and presence. Member states as well as the governments of the United States, the U.S.S.R. and the Third Reich continued to attach political weight to the wartime existence and endeavours of the League of Nations. This thesis does not treat the League's diplomatic record as the 'elephant in the room' as so many of its supporters and technical officials were inclined to do during its final years. The League's security record profoundly impacted upon its wartime experience and post-war opportunities. As such this project highlights the organic relationship between the League's political identity and its technical role. League officials often made a firm distinction between what they described as the 'political' and 'technical' work of the international civil service.<sup>33</sup> The League's 'political' work included the Secretariat's efforts to support the operation and objectives of the Assembly and Council in the fields of disarmament, minority rights and the welfare of the mandated territories. Its political identity was predicated on liberal internationalism. The League's 'technical' work encompassed the efforts of the permanent Secretariat and of seconded experts and technocrats, e.g. economists and medical professionals, to promote social and economic progress. The establishment of the League's specialised agencies under the umbrella of the parent organisation reflected what later became known as the functionalist movement, although it was not described in those terms at the time. Functionalists argue that the process of collaborating in narrow, technical or 'functional' areas will eventually

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<sup>32</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1092.

<sup>33</sup> See for example *Daily Princetonian*, 2 Dec. 1941.

‘spill over’ into more sensitive political areas.<sup>34</sup> The technical organisations have been presented in historiography as a more enlightened and sophisticated means of encouraging peace.<sup>35</sup> They were regularly depicted as removed from the political controversies of the League’s diplomatic experience.<sup>36</sup> While certain League officials and apologists sought to impose an explicit distinction between the ‘technical’ and ‘political’ branches of the international civil service there was little to separate the League’s social and economic work from the organisation’s political identity.<sup>37</sup> As various historians have posited, League officials and technical experts were rarely ideologically neutral but rather sought to perpetuate democratic ideas, liberal economics and western learning through the medium of their various publications and international conferences.<sup>38</sup> This thesis explores how, far from distancing themselves from the loaded rhetoric of the League Covenant, the technical officials refused to divorce the League’s political ethos from their wartime social and economic work. This underscores the formal position of the thesis—that the League’s liberal identity permeated every aspect of its existence.

Pedersen described the Secretariat as the ‘beating heart’ of the League and lamented the fact that we know so little about how it influenced political developments because so much historiography has been written from the standpoint of national interests.<sup>39</sup> This thesis documents the central role of the League’s wartime international civil servants in the preservation of the organisation as a nucleus for future international cooperation. The League’s permanent Secretariat provided continuity between meetings of the Assembly, Council and various specialised committees of the organisation. This, coupled with the liberal democratic culture of the international civil service, has resulted in the depiction of League officials as the permanent embodiment of the League of Nations itself.<sup>40</sup> According to F.S. Northedge, League officials were overwhelmingly, though not exclusively,

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<sup>34</sup> Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, *International organisation in the twentieth century*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Housden described the League’s technical programmes as ‘a very modern idea of security’ in *The League of Nations and the organisation of peace*, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 1 and Arthur Sweetser, ‘The non-political achievements of the League’ in *Foreign Affairs*, xix (1940), p. 191.

<sup>37</sup> Clavin and Wessels, ‘Transnationalism and the League of Nations’, p. 466.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Endres and Fleming, *International organisation and the analysis of economic policy*, p. 13; Mark Mazower, *Governing the world the history of an idea* (London, 2012), p. 151; Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, p. 1110.

<sup>39</sup> Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, p. 1113.

<sup>40</sup> Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 19.

liberal multilateralists opposed to extreme nationalism.<sup>41</sup> The Secretariat of the League was envisaged as an impartial international civil service, removed from the quagmire of national politics and prejudices.<sup>42</sup> However, as Barcroft and Rovine argued, this did not mean that the League's international civil service and, in particular, its secretary-general, adopted an apolitical role.<sup>43</sup> League officials sought to exert political influence to advance the cause of internationalism rather than the interests of individual governments. Not all League officials were committed liberal internationalists. As Pedersen pointed out it was impossible to completely exclude opportunistic time-servers from the international civil service.<sup>44</sup> However as both Mark Mazower and Fred Halliday asserted, idealism is a crucial factor in the endurance of international organisations.<sup>45</sup> In documenting the professional shortcomings of Secretary-General Joseph Avenol this thesis will demonstrate the pre-eminence of idealism for the ability to provide pioneering leadership to a trailblazing international organisation.

While George Scott acknowledged that a few nations (forty-four by the end of the war) continued to 'make their genuflections' at Geneva, very little explanation has been offered as to why this was the case, without drawing on the success of the League's technical programmes. As the League's technical organisations were the wartime embodiment of the League's liberal democratic ethos, it follows that the organisation's political identity was a vital motivation behind its wartime preservation. This thesis contributes to bridging the gap between the recent historiography devoted to the League's technical experience and the earlier fixation on the League's diplomatic role. Drawing inspiration from those histories devoted to the technical organisations, this thesis determines what the League's preservation 'meant' to member states on a political level.<sup>46</sup> The thesis asserts that continued membership of the League of Nations served an important purpose for all states who wished to affirm their allegiance to the liberal democratic values of the Covenant.

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<sup>41</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 167.

<sup>42</sup> Salvador de Madariaga, *Morning without noon: memoirs* (Farnborough, 1974), p 36, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Barcroft, 'Irish foreign policy at the League of Nations 1929-36' in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, i (1979), p. 22; Barros, *Betrayal from within*, p. vii.

<sup>44</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1112.

<sup>45</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. xvii; Fred Halliday, *Rethinking international relations* (London, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1092.

States that did not share those values defined themselves against, rather than by, the League's political identity. As Mazower demonstrated, by the end of the nineteenth century 'the international had become the terrain upon which widely differing political groups and ideologies mapped their hopes and fears.'<sup>47</sup> While certain episodes within the wartime experience of the League of Nations were the direct result of the reality of war, many were emblematic of the organisation's inability to cope with differing political and cultural traditions among its member states. In the idealist tradition, the League's aspirations and endeavours were presented as universal, transcending all cultural and ideological differences. Walters argued that the League had served as the medium 'in which the common interests of humanity could be seen and served across the barriers of national tradition, racial difference, or geographical separation.'<sup>48</sup> Post-war interpretations of the League have been influenced by the rise in Marxist historiography and in that movement's rejection of imperialism and ethnocentrism. This led historians to criticise the undeniably Eurocentric tradition of the League Covenant, which they perceived as an attempt by the great powers to perpetuate western traditions. As Martin Kitchen argued, the League 'was created in the belief that the principles of liberal democracy would be accepted throughout the world and was powerless to deal with states which despised such ideas.'<sup>49</sup> F.S. Northedge argued that the League's expulsion of the U.S.S.R. served as a vindication of the old Soviet claim that the League was an alliance of 'robber capitalist nations' against the solitary socialist state.<sup>50</sup> The thesis determines what the attitudes of member states to Soviet membership of the liberal League reveal as to the nature of pre-war and wartime internationalism. The League's problematic wartime relationship with the world's first communist state serves as a useful reflection on the League's political identity and its place in the international landscape, foreshadowing the challenges of international cooperation in the Cold War era.

Lucian Ashworth recently argued that the scholarly urge to characterise earlier observations on the League as either idealist or realist tend to erode the complexities and subtle differences of opinion between various internationalist

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<sup>47</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. xv.

<sup>48</sup> Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Kitchen, *Europe between the wars: a political history* (New York, 1988), p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 274.

thinkers.<sup>51</sup> A recurring theme within this thesis is that internationalism was a relative concept; depending on their political background and foreign policy goals, member states expected different things from the first major project in international cooperation. These expectations often shifted over time in correspondence with changes in the political landscape; the League was not a static or inflexible form of internationalism. The smaller European states first expected the League to provide them with the protection of the great powers; later when it became clear that the great powers had no intention of activating the League's collective security potential, the League accommodated the gravitation of the small powers towards independent policies of neutrality. The presence of neutral powers in the League and their effect on the organisation's political efficacy is an important factor which has long been overlooked by historians of both interwar and wartime internationalism.<sup>52</sup> Neville Wylie, in alluding briefly to this topic, argued that the collective security ideals of the League had a 'corrosive' effect on neutrality.<sup>53</sup> This thesis argues that this was not the case; the League accommodated neutrality in contradistinction to post-war internationalism, so much so that neutrality almost had a 'corrosive' effect on the League's wartime potential and post-war prospects. The continued membership of neutral states sparked a debate within the international civil service on the organisation's moral position and political affinity within a polarising atmosphere of war.

Such difficulties reflected a wider problem; the League's role and purpose had never been explicitly defined or delineated. The organisation was conceived as an organic work in progress.<sup>54</sup> Throughout its history member states were reluctant to allow the League to develop into a giant, authoritative bureaucracy.<sup>55</sup> At the same time they permitted the League's international civil service to develop and expand

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<sup>51</sup> Lucian M. Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party* (London, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Commentary on the threat posed to neutrality by international organisations can be found in Aoife O'Donoghue, 'Neutrality and multilateralism after the First World War' in *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, xv (2010), pp 169-202 and in Stephen C Neff., *The rights and duties of neutrals: a general history* (Manchester, 2000). The significance of League membership is overlooked in Jerold Packard's investigation of wartime neutrality *Neither friend nor foe: the European neutrals in World War II* (New York, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Neville Wylie, 'Victims or actors? European neutrals and non-belligerents 1939-45' in Neville Wylie (ed.), *European neutrals and non-belligerents during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Sharp, *The Versailles settlement*, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 51.

without imposing any significant design on them.<sup>56</sup> As a result there was a significant disparity between the cautious internationalism of member states and the often ambitious internationalism of League officials. While various internationalist thinkers viewed the League as a stepping stone towards world government, among member states the League was valued as an affirmation of national sovereignty and legitimacy; as such national governments were not anxious to extend the influence of the League's international civil service.<sup>57</sup> Tension and jealousies between national interests and internationalist aspirations persisted during the war years when League officials sought to influence wartime relief measures and post-war planning. The Secretariat's relations with member states were further complicated by a burgeoning internationalism less infused with the traditions of liberal democracy than it was attuned to the language of security.

The lack of coherent aspirations for the future development and potential of the League enacted difficulties and divisions within the international civil service itself. Clavin demonstrated how the existence, within one organisation, of separate agencies devoted to various activities, was both a strength in that it permitted a collaborative approach to social and economic issues and a weakness in that it pulled the League in different directions.<sup>58</sup> The wartime experience of the League of Nations encapsulated the difficult and often contentious operation of an umbrella organisation trying to balance its political, social and economic responsibilities. The I.L.O. was the only affiliated agency of the League specifically prescribed by the Treaty of Versailles. The League and its secretary-general were placed hierarchically above the I.L.O. and its director; the I.L.O.'s budget was ultimately approved by the secretary-general and the League's Supervisory Commission on budgetary matters. However the secretary-general held no other authority over the I.L.O. whose director enjoyed considerably more autonomy than that of his League counterpart.<sup>59</sup> The dynamic first director of the I.L.O., Frenchman Albert Thomas, set the precedent for an executive style of leadership. Unlike the secretary-general (whose position was conceived as less of a political leader and more of an administrator) the director of

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<sup>56</sup> Victor-Yves Ghéballi, 'The League of Nations and functionalism' in A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor (eds), *Functionalism: theory and practise in international relations* (London, 1975), p. 154.

<sup>57</sup> For further information on contemporary supranationalist aspirations see de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 12; Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (trans. Richard Mayne, London, 1978), p. 85. Monnet would develop these ideas at a later stage whilst looking back on the League experience.

<sup>58</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 12.

the I.L.O. became an initiator of political action through the practise of placing various proposals before the delegations of the International Labour Conference.<sup>60</sup> The I.L.O. was based in Geneva and possessed its own constitution and Governing Body which elected the director, liaised with member states on labour matters and supervised the work of the independent secretariat, the International Labour Office. Martin Dubin argued that the relationship between the I.L.O. and the Secretariat of its parent organisation was often marred by rivalry.<sup>61</sup> The thesis demonstrates how the pressures of wartime and geographical separation exacerbated tensions between the disparate agencies and the Geneva-based Secretariat. It highlights the difficulty of maintaining institutional unity within an international organisation devoted to multiple international activities, where the difficulty lies not in the fact that their various tasks are utterly distinct, but were often extremely complementary as with the E.F.O. and the I.L.O. Internal divisions was as much a strain on the wartime survival of the League as external pressures.

The transfer of selected branches of the League's technical services to the United States and to Canada constituted an assault on the organisation's traditional Eurocentrism. Eric Hobsbawm singled out the recalcitrance of the United States for the organisation's ineptitude in mediating international disputes. According to Hobsbawm, in 'a world no longer Euro-centred and Euro-determined, no settlement not underwritten by what was now a major world power could hold.'<sup>62</sup> The American Senate's rejection of League membership led to a neglect, on the part of historians, of the interesting relationship that later evolved between the League and the U.S State Department. The dominant American role in the creation of the U.N. also effaced any interest in tentative American participation in the League. A minority of historians have attempted to overturn the traditional perception of the United States as completely apathetic to international collaboration before and during the Second World War.<sup>63</sup> Clavin's most recent publication demonstrates the

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<sup>60</sup> Carter Goodrich, 'The I.L.O: a going concern' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, ccilvi (1946), p. 114.

<sup>61</sup> Martin David Dubin, 'Transgovernmental processes in the League of Nations' in *International Organisation*, xxxvii (1983), p. 483.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes: the short twentieth century 1914-1991* (London, 1994), pp 34-5.

<sup>63</sup> See for example Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: understanding the work of its Economic and Finance Organisation' in *Contemporary European History*, xiv (2005), p. 482; Dubin, 'Transgovernmental processes in the League of



influence of the E.F.O.'s liberal, free-trade principles on the policies of the U.S. State and Treasury Departments.<sup>64</sup> This thesis also contends that the United States should not be presented as a spectator in the League drama but as a central player in its history. The establishment of technical missions in the United States demonstrated the declining geopolitical importance of Europe and the emerging hegemony of the United States in international affairs. Their transfer elicited interesting responses from the U.S. State Department, the British Foreign Office, Latin American member states and the League's international civil service. The complex attitude the Roosevelt administration entertained towards League also added another dimension to the internecine rivalries of the technical agencies. In previous scholarship the League is often depicted as ignoring the reality of the wider political landscape. E.H. Carr notably attacked the League's idealist paradigm as being out of touch with the current of world affairs.<sup>65</sup> This thesis demonstrates that the League's international civil service regularly adapted to new political realities, engaging in wider processes such as the evolution of American internationalism.

This thesis also contributes to the debate on the transition from the League to the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.). We can perceive from the existing historiography that the recognition of the U.N.O. as the heir to the League is commonplace. There is a general consensus among historians that the U.N.O. 'did not rise Aphrodite like from the Second World War.'<sup>66</sup> The specialised agencies of the United Nations owed much to their forbears within the League of Nations umbrella.<sup>67</sup> We must be careful however not to regard the transfer of the technical functions of the League to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the U.N.O. as the only possible outcome of negotiations between League and U.N. representatives. Mark Mazower conceded that the optimism associated with the endurance of international organisations tend to obscure the complexities inherent in the creation of such organisations.<sup>68</sup> Raffo also criticised the tendency among historians to depict a 'satisfying' and neat sense of continuity between the old

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Nations', pp 469-93; Gary Ostrower, 'The United States and the League of Nations' in UNOG (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: proceedings of the symposium* (Geneva, 1983), pp 128-44.

<sup>64</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 285.

<sup>65</sup> E.H. Carr, *Conditions of peace* (London, 1944), p. 165.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), p. 14

<sup>67</sup> Henig, *The League of Nations*, p. 181.

<sup>68</sup> Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, p. 7.

international organisation and the new.<sup>69</sup> Research into the dissolution of the League illustrates that any sense of continuity between the technocratic wing of the League and that of the U.N.O. (as opposed to the important political differences between the two organisations) was by no means a foregone conclusion. This thesis outlines the persistent tension that existed between the need to capitalise on the experience of the League Secretariat on the part of the United Nations powers and the tendency to assign officials associated with that failed enterprise a peripheral role. The difficulties, obstacles and downright hostility experienced by League officials during the transition period are quite telling. They serve as a useful indicator of the different political, cultural and ideological forces which were ignored or unforeseen by the League's founders but which, after 1945, formed the guiding principles of the new system of international cooperation.

Studies devoted to the transition from the League to the U.N.O. tend to regard the latter organisation as a maturation of internationalism and as an improvement upon the shortcomings of the League in the realm of security.<sup>70</sup> Ashworth deplored the tendency of historians and scholars of international relations to turn their works into 'Whiggish' histories of progress and such a pitfall is studiously avoided in this work.<sup>71</sup> Research findings illustrate that the United Nations was not universally regarded as new and improved League of Nations. The contemporary debate in the aftermath of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals and the San Francisco Conference demonstrate that there remained a dearth of agreement on what one should expect of an international organisation. This thesis contends that the United Nations was neither an improved nor a diminished League of Nations. It was the product of a different political climate and the reactions, among government figures, national civil servants and League officials to the creation of the U.N. and to the dissolution of the League, further emphasised the contested nature of internationalism.

This thesis is primarily a historical investigation into the final years of the League of Nations that benefits from the insights into the League experience offered by other scholarly traditions. It was from the disciplines of international relations (I.R.) and political science that concepts such as idealism, realism, functionalism and

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<sup>69</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> See for example Thomas Weiss, David P. Forsythe, Roger A. Coate and Kelly-Kate Pease, *The United Nations and changing world politics* (6th ed., Boulder, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 10.

supranationalism first emerged. Scholars such as Fred Halliday, U.V. Hirschhausen and K.K. Patel have all noted the traditional distrust with which diplomatic historians tend to regard such theoretical frameworks.<sup>72</sup> The thesis engages with various theories of international relations and political science where appropriate but does so on a firmly empirical basis. This project has found such concepts to be constructive rather than detrimental to the development of a historical understanding of the League of Nations.

This thesis offers an original and unique perspective on the wartime experience of the League through multi-archival and multi-lingual research, presenting findings from repositories in Dublin, London, Paris and Geneva. The League of Nations was a bureaucratic institution and the paper trail it left behind in its archives in Geneva is enormous. This thesis is replete with evidence from the League archives, drawing on the miscellaneous reports of the secretary-general, of the technical services and of the Supervisory Commission; on the extensive correspondence with national civil servants, politicians and representatives of various voluntary and philanthropic organisations; on reports of the liquidation committee of the League and on records of the negotiations between the League and the United Nations Organisation. The official documents of the International Labour Office are also consulted. Secretariat officials and technical experts adopted a transparent attitude to their work and were always eager to publicise the activities of the League. Figures such as Edward Phelan, the acting director of I.L.O., Alexander Loveday, the director of the E.F.O. and Arthur Sweetser the League's director of publicity, were particularly prolific in attempting to maintain wartime publicity for the organisation through speeches, lectures and journal articles. It is through the writings and speeches of these figures that an overview of the wartime social and economic work of the international civil service can be obtained as well as an appreciation of the League's impact on an evolving international landscape.

The private papers and records, preserved for posterity, of League officials, help illuminate the more politically sensitive aspects of the League's experience. The personal papers of Seán Lester (deputy secretary-general 1937-40, secretary-general 1940-7), his diaries, reports and correspondence, available through the United

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<sup>72</sup> Halliday, *Rethinking international relations*, p. 24; U.V. Hirschhausen and K.K. Patel, 'Europeanisation in history: an introduction' in Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (eds), *Europeanisation in the twentieth century* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp 1-18.

Nations Archives and the U.C.D. Archives (Dublin) offer an unrivalled insight into the League's wartime history. His diary and papers, while underused sources, are a gift to the historian, as Lester was a meticulous record keeper. He preserved intact not only a painstaking account of the experience of League officials in Geneva, but also important correspondence with leading political figures such as Anthony Eden and Charles de Gaulle. These letters shed light on the implications of wider wartime developments for the organisation as well as the formation of a new international body that still retained some influence of the old League Covenant.

With personal papers, over-reliance on a bare minimum of sources can distort or jeopardise the objectivity of a study and offer an incomplete and overly partial version of events. This thesis draws on the private papers of Joseph Avenol, deposited in the Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to document the League's immediate reaction and adaptation to the outbreak of war. Avenol's later political writings, undertaken in an effort to rehabilitate himself with his former colleagues, are assessed to determine whether the Frenchman was in fact an extreme right-wing ideologue or simply an opportunist responding to the political reality of a German-controlled Europe. The correspondence and papers of other senior members of the League Secretariat, figures such as Thanassis Aghnides, Alexander Loveday and Arthur Sweetser, located in the League's archives, are consulted to ensure that this thesis is representative of the experience of the entire League apparatus, including that of the transferred technical agencies. The thesis also calls upon the personal papers of Robert Cecil, the League's most steadfast apologist, to demonstrate the endurance of liberal internationalism in spite of the reality of war.

The governmental and diplomatic records of the United Kingdom, the Irish Free State, France, the United States and Switzerland are drawn upon throughout the thesis. Pedersen identified one of the weaknesses of existing League historiography as being overly reliant upon national archives, rather than League records.<sup>73</sup> This thesis consults both national and 'international' archives. Governmental records are essential as without them one could glean an overly optimistic account of the League's wartime experience from its officials. It could not be within the scope of this thesis to consult the national records of the League's entire wartime membership. The extensive diplomatic correspondence between the Office of the Secretary-

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<sup>73</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1113.

General and member states is presented within the course of the thesis insofar as it proves significant to the League's wartime experience. It also has to be acknowledged that the methodology of this thesis is Euro-focused, with a heavy reliance on European diplomatic and government records. However this conforms to the Eurocentric tradition of the League of Nations with European events and traditions enacting the most dramatic repercussions within the League's political organs and international civil service. The records of the British War Cabinet are particularly pertinent for the question of the League's wartime preservation and post-war fate. The records and correspondence of the Foreign and Dominion Offices also permit an insight into the attitudes other member and non-member states entertained towards the League. The records of the French (Vichy) Ministry of Foreign Affairs are a useful source to determine the veracity of both Joseph Avenol and Seán Lester's accounts of the internal crisis within the Secretariat in 1940. The Vichy records also provide an insight into the distant relations member states, falling within the German sphere of influence, were obliged to maintain with the League. The records of the Free French movements also serve as a useful indicator as to the political value of League membership for erstwhile governments-in-exile. The records of the Political Department of the Swiss federal government are extremely relevant for documenting the conditions in which the Geneva-based Secretariat operated during the war. Given the close trade relations between Bern and Berlin, the Swiss federal papers also serve as a useful medium through which we can glean the attitude of the Reich Chancellery of Foreign Affairs to the continued existence of the League. The *Foreign Relations of the United States* series has also been consulted to help chronicle the transition from the League to the United Nations Organisation and have proven a particularly useful method to trace the place of the League within the resurgence of American internationalism.

The vast collection of newspaper reports and analyses available on the League during the war years illustrate that a significant disparity exists between the contemporary interest in League affairs and the subsequent lack of historical investigation into the final years of the League experience. Newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* (British) and the *Journal de Genève* (Swiss), which tend to be more supportive of the League, have been consulted. Articles from *The Times* (British) and *New York Times* (American), which were usually less effusive, are analysed. Publications which were downright hostile to the League, such as the

Soviet organ *Pravda*, are also studied to achieve an appreciation of the varied perception of the League during this period.<sup>74</sup> The records of pressure groups such of the League of Nations Union serve as a valuable reflection of the endurance of liberal internationalism. Contemporary accounts from figures well acquainted with the world's first experiment in international cooperation, such as the journalist Robert Dell and the committed liberal internationalist Gilbert Murray, demonstrate the contested nature of the League's legacy. Contemporary articles, treatises, apologias and critiques from those removed from the League experience are also consulted to gain a wider perspective on both the League's wartime experience and on the evolution of internationalism.

Drawing on original research and building on the new wave of League historiography, the thesis avoids both the anachronistic fatalism and myopic optimism that characterised earlier accounts of the organisation and which led to a neglect of the League's wartime history. It asserts that the League's wartime experience is an important, though long overlooked, chapter in both the history of the organisation itself and in the wider narrative of internationalism.

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<sup>74</sup> English-translated versions of this newspaper as well as other foreign language publications of this period are available from the records of the British Foreign Office, The National Archives (T.N.A.), Kew.

## **Chapter one: The League's place in the international system upon the outbreak of war: its political identity and technical role.**

The news comes in that German troops have entered Polish territory at three points and that Polish towns are being bombed from the air. So it begins.<sup>1</sup>

This was the diary entry of Deputy Secretary-General Séan Lester for 1 September 1939 when the *Wehrmacht* crossed into Poland, exposing the severe disparity between the internationalist aspirations of the League system and the cold hard reality of international relations. The outbreak of war provided the fatal blow to the League's ability to mediate and arbitrate international disputes. The lofty objective of the League Covenant 'to achieve international peace and security' was further reduced to a mere formula of words.<sup>2</sup> It has been incontrovertibly proven by previous historians that the League never functioned as an effective agent of collective security.<sup>3</sup> This chapter permits an investigation into why member states chose to preserve the League of Nations during the war years, despite the paralysis of its diplomatic machinery. It determines why member states continued to 'make their genuflections at Geneva' and argues that their motivations were not completely and exclusively anchored in the success of the League's technical organisations.<sup>4</sup> Though the prestige and vitality of the technical agencies ensured the organisation a continued potential in the social, economic and even humanitarian spheres, the League was a fundamentally political organisation that retained a relevance to a world at war. Following the example of recent works devoted to the League's technical agencies, the chapter seeks to determine the League's place in the international landscape in 1939 by concentrating on what the organisation actually 'did and meant.'<sup>5</sup> It determines what member states expected from the first 'great

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Sep. 1939 (United Nations Office, Geneva, Library-Registry, Records and Archives Unit [henceforth UNOG], private archives, vol. 1, p. 317), available at (<http://biblio-archive.unog.ch/archivplansuche.aspx>) (20 May 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, available at Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 Apr. 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Most recently Zara Steiner, in her two volume history of the inter-war period, effectively demonstrated the paralyses of the League's security machinery, the potential of which was long spent before 1939. See Steiner, *The lights that failed* and Steiner, *The triumph of the dark: European international history 1933-1939* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Scott, *The rise and fall of the League of Nations*, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1092.

experiment' in international cooperation during the latter years of its existence.<sup>6</sup> This chapter argues that by 1939 the League's political identity mattered more to member states than its diplomatic role; thus the death of collective security was not the death of the League. The League's liberal identity politicised every aspect of its work, including its technical activities. Thus a thorough understanding of the League's wartime social and economic work cannot be achieved without an appreciation of its political significance to an evolving international landscape

### **The League and the outbreak of war in Europe**

The League's supporters and apologists originally celebrated the organisation as an alternative to the nineteenth century diplomatic system which had operated as the exclusive tool of the great powers.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the pre-1919 'entangling' defensive alliances 'the community circle of the League' was not intended to be closed but rather the League was meant to function as 'inclusive and encompassing, a truly global organisation.'<sup>8</sup> Woodrow Wilson hoped that the League Covenant would serve as a 'Monroe doctrine for the world that would reduce opportunism in international affairs.'<sup>9</sup> The stifling of the League's collective security potential in the inter-war period, when the League failed to effectively intervene in crises such as the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, convinced later historians that the League system did not constitute a new form of diplomacy. P. Raff and Zara Steiner notably dismissed the idea that member states, especially the great powers, were willing to practise diplomacy through recourse to the League alone. Raffo argued that the League was 'an additional piece of machinery, permanent and often useful, but never a replacement for the traditional methods.'<sup>10</sup> Steiner too concurred that 'the Geneva system was never a substitute for great power politics' but was rather 'an adjunct to it.'<sup>11</sup> In March 1939 as Hitler's armies moved beyond the Sudetenland to occupy the rest of Czechoslovakia, Lester mused in his

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<sup>6</sup> As Robert Cecil described the League. See Robert Cecil, *The great experiment: an autobiography* (London, 1941), p. 317.

<sup>7</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 13. See also the 'Draft resolution of the Birmingham branch of the League of Nations Union', 28 Apr. 1944 (The National Archives of the United Kingdom [henceforth T.N.A.], Foreign Office files [henceforth FO] 371/39307).

<sup>8</sup> Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Steiner, *The lights that failed*, p. 299.



diary on the absence of the League from the ill-fated diplomatic efforts to stem German expansionism, asking ‘are we to lie on the shelf?’<sup>12</sup> Lester’s diary perfectly encapsulates the diplomatic sidelining of the League, illustrating that the organisation was a spectator to, rather than an actor in, the drama that ultimately led to war.

Under the terms of the Covenant, the assumption of belligerent status on the part of one or more of its member states was deemed ‘a matter of concern to the whole League.’<sup>13</sup> On 9 September, almost a week after the Anglo-French declaration of war, Sir Alexander Cadogan (permanent under-secretary at the British Foreign Office) wrote to Secretary-General Joseph Avenol informing him of the state of war that existed between the United Kingdom and Germany.<sup>14</sup> He reminded the secretary-general that every diplomatic solution to ‘bring the violation of Polish territory by German forces to an end’ had been employed to no avail.<sup>15</sup> What is significant about this letter is that Cadogan stressed that everything the British government had tried to do for Poland was done ‘in conformity with the spirit of the Covenant.’<sup>16</sup> Cadogan thus sought to depict the Anglo-French attempts to guarantee Polish security and their joint declaration of war once that security was breached, as collective security in action.

Such a bold statement on Cadogan’s part validates Andrew Stedman’s previous arguments on the place of collective security in the British political system. Stedman demonstrated how the ‘high moral veneer’ of the language of the League Covenant was increasingly hijacked by British politicians and civil servants to conceal the pursuit of the opposite of this policy; the creation of defensive alliances.<sup>17</sup> As Martyn Housden has outlined, the term collective security included the following elements:

1. Public debate in the Council and the Assembly of actions carried out by statesmen.
2. Arbitration of disputes organised by the Council of the League.

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<sup>12</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 18 Mar. 1939 (U.N.OG., private archives, vol. 1, p. 206).

<sup>13</sup> See article eleven of the Covenant of the League of Nations, available at Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 Apr. 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Cadogan to Joseph Avenol, 9 Sep. 1939 (National Archives of Ireland, [henceforth N.A.I.], Department of Foreign Affairs [henceforth DFA] 241/82).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Stedman, “‘A most dishonest argument?’: Chamberlain’s government, anti-appeasers and the persistence of League of Nations’ language before the Second World War’ in *Contemporary British History*, xxv (2011), p. 88.

3. Economic sanctions applied against an aggressor state.
4. The possible supply of military units by members to stop war.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing on House's definition, there was nothing 'collective' about the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland. The course of events of the summer and autumn of 1939 was not determined by multilateral discussions at Geneva. Nor did the Allied Supreme Council deploy an expeditionary force to Poland. Though Cadogan assured Avenol that the British employed every diplomatic means at their disposal to avert war, the League itself was removed from Anglo-German affairs since the latter's withdrawal in 1933. To underpin his assertion that the League was dead by 1935, A.J.P. Taylor wrote that in September 1939 no one even bothered to inform the League that war had broken out.<sup>19</sup> The correspondence between Cadogan and the Office of the Secretary-General demonstrates that this was not the case. However it cannot be overlooked that the Foreign Office did not reach out to the League until 9 September, a full week after the outbreak of war. While the immediate pressures of mobilisation may be partly accountable, Cadogan's less than prompt communication revealed the deep-seated British disaffection with the League's diplomatic capabilities. Influential British politicians and Foreign Office officials did not appear, on closer inspection, to genuinely adhere to what Cadogan termed, the 'spirit of the Covenant'. Gladwyn Jebb, of the economic relations section of the Foreign Office, stated in the late 1930s that he personally believed that 'collective security was dead' and could not 'help feeling that it would be better to have no obligation at all.'<sup>20</sup> Cadogan's own diaries reveal that not even the man who dispatched the above note to the secretary-general believed that the League's version of collective security was viable. He conceded in 1938 that collective security was 'if not dead' then resigned 'to a state of suspended animation.'<sup>21</sup>

Yet at the same time the Foreign Office was careful not to slight the League completely. Cadogan's pains to associate the Anglo-French declarations of war with the liberal internationalism of the League Covenant were a strong indication that the organisation, while politically impotent, was not politically irrelevant. Steiner argued that while the League's efforts in disarmament and other security matters foundered,

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<sup>18</sup> Housden, *The League of Nations*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *The origins of the Second World War*, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Stedman, "A most dishonest argument?", p. 93. Jebb became the acting secretary-general of the United Nations Organisation in 1945.

<sup>21</sup> David Dilkes (ed.), *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M. 1938-45* (London, 1971), p. 66.

the League 'was able to create a long-lasting international regime and to establish norms of state behaviour that, though frequently breached, became part of the international fabric.'<sup>22</sup> The Covenant was an important touchstone for international law and order and the League, though lacking the supranational function to compel member states to abide by its terms, was able to influence codes of diplomatic conduct among its member states. Thus while the League was unable to embody a new form of diplomacy, its presence in the international landscape encouraged a greater self-consciousness, if not complete transparency, in how states conducted their respective foreign policies.

While the British were eager to associate League rhetoric with their own war aims, the invasion of Poland by both Germany and later, by the Soviet Union, drew forth no formal words of protest from the halls of the Assembly or Council rooms of League headquarters, the *Palais des Nations*. An article in the Swiss newspaper *Gazette de Lausanne* pointed out that the League had been created to prevent war and questioned why it did not, after the outbreak of such a war, raise a vengeful voice in condemnation of it.<sup>23</sup> Such seeming indolence understandably inspired the realist position on the political irrelevance of the organisation by this point.<sup>24</sup> Certainly the dearth of activity within the League Assembly and Council in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the outbreak of war does little to explain the League's wartime preservation. However while the League failed to respond to the Anglo-French declaration of war, that failure should not prompt historians to ignore what was going on both inside and outside the League apparatus. The League's internal and external relations during this period reveal that while the League was denied a role in these developments, it was not untouched by them. The relations between the League and member state function as a prism through which the international historian can derive a deeper appreciation of national foreign policies as well as of the course of international affairs.

The League's silence on the outbreak of war was largely determined by the postponement of the session of the League Council, due to convene on 11 September 1939. It was agreed by member states that a special commission could meet instead

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<sup>22</sup> Steiner, *The triumph of the dark*, p. 173.

<sup>23</sup> *Gazette de Lausanne*, 4 Nov. 1939.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 164.

and with the written approval of member states, devise the League budget for 1940.<sup>25</sup> This decision was influenced by the League's neutral Swiss hosts who were worried that criticism of the conduct of the war would provoke the ire of the Reich Foreign Ministry.<sup>26</sup> Just as the League influenced diplomatic behaviour it also altered the perception and practise of neutrality, an age-old concept within international affairs. John F.L. Ross illustrated the fundamental difference between neutral foreign policy and the collective security ideal expected, if not exactly forthcoming, from member states. Whereas neutrality 'implies abstention from conflict and assumes free choice', collective security operations require 'the common participation of most or all states in concerted enforcement measures (sanctions) if called for by a recognised international authority.'<sup>27</sup> Originally, the advent of the League led many political commentators to declare that neutrality was no longer a viable option in international disputes.<sup>28</sup> Such assertions in the early days of the League would not reflect the later reality. The League was a more sophisticated organisation than its many detractors would allow, permitting a form of multilateralism not attempted for many years after its dissolution; this was because the League had a notable ability to adapt to, if not to influence, the reality of international affairs. Neutrality was facilitated by the League Council from very early on in the organisation's existence. In 1920 special recognition was accorded to Swiss neutrality with Switzerland exempt from participating in any military sanctions that could be proposed by the Council.<sup>29</sup> The rise of independent policies of neutrality among League member states was emblematic of the small state experience of the organisation. Article sixteen of the Covenant was the clearest articulation of the collective security aspirations of the League. Under article sixteen, member states were accorded the right to expel any state which engaged in an unprovoked and illegal act of aggression against another. Such aggression would be considered an act of war against all member states of the League. All diplomatic and economic relations with the aggressor would be duly severed and member states would be bound to provide whatever military and

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<sup>25</sup> Report of the Federal Council on the twentieth session of the League Assembly, 31 Jan. 1940 (Swiss Federal Archives, [henceforth S.F.A.], federal paper, [henceforth FP] 10/089/117, p. 145), available at (<http://www.bar.admin.ch/archivgut/00945/00946/index.html?lang=en>) (1 Sep. 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 23 Oct. 1939 (T.N.A., Cabinet papers [henceforth CAB] 65/2/46, p. 197).

<sup>27</sup> John F.L. Ross, *Neutrality and international sanctions* (New York, 1986), p. ix.

<sup>28</sup> O'Donoghue, 'Neutrality and multilateralism after the First World War', p. 169.

<sup>29</sup> Declaration of London, 13 Feb. 1920 available from: Report by the Federal Council for the Federal Assembly on Swiss neutrality in relation to the League of Nations, 3 June 1936 (S.F.A., FP 10/088/558, pp 849-55).

humanitarian assistance they could muster to repel the invading force.<sup>30</sup> Such principles held a great attraction for the vulnerable smaller states who could, theoretically, call upon the great powers in the League for assistance in repelling illegal acts of aggression.

But by the late 1930s the small powers, with the fate of Abyssinia serving as a depressing example, could no longer expect the great powers to protect the weak. As a result the League was compelled to accord further recognition of the place of neutrality within the international framework. An interpretative resolution, the Declaration of Copenhagen, was accepted by the Assembly in 1938 which accorded member states the right to judge what action, if any, they were obliged to take under article sixteen.<sup>31</sup> This resolution was spearheaded by the Nordic countries and by the traditionally vulnerable low countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) as they sought to distance themselves from an increasingly likely war. Thus it was the political organs of the League themselves that sounded the death knell of collective security. In the summer of 1939 Halvdan Koth, the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, in a speech to the parliament in Oslo declared that while the League was engaged in useful technical work, article sixteen was 'sleeping so soundly there was no need to awaken it.'<sup>32</sup>

Marcel Pilet-Golaz, President of the Swiss Confederation (1940), insisted in the early months of the war that although Switzerland had obvious duties of hospitality towards the League, its neutral territory should not be used as an arena in which belligerents could launch oratorical battles.<sup>33</sup> As the war years wore on, the preoccupation of the Swiss Confederation with preserving its neutrality and sovereignty from hostile interference would easily claim precedence over its responsibility to the League. A crucial factor in the vulnerability of the League's position was that it was predicated on a rather loose agreement with the Swiss government. Article seven of the League Covenant established the seat of the League in Geneva. This article described the organisation's buildings and property as inviolable and stated that all officials and government representatives engaged in the

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<sup>30</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, available at Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 Apr. 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Communication from the British legation, Oslo, to the Foreign Office, 23 Nov. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 188/319).

<sup>32</sup> Cecil Dormer to Lord Halifax, 14 May 1939 (T.N.A., FO 188/319).

<sup>33</sup> Report of the Federal Council on the twentieth session of the League Assembly, 31 Jan. 1940 (S.F.A., FP 10/089/117, p. 146).

business of the League should enjoy full diplomatic privileges.<sup>34</sup> However this article had no legal basis and representatives of the League were obliged, in 1921, to come to an agreement, or *modus vivendi*, with the Swiss authorities. This agreement was eventually codified in 1926 when the Swiss federal government agreed to recognise that the League of Nations possessed an international personality and legal capacity and could not, in principle, be sued before the Swiss courts without its express consent.<sup>35</sup> No member of the Swiss public authorities was to enter headquarters without the express authority of the Secretariat. Property destined for League ownership was exempt from Swiss customs and fiscal immunity was granted to League assets, securities and salaries. League officials and government delegates were to enjoy varying degrees of immunity from civil and criminal prosecution in Switzerland unless those rights were waived by the secretary-general.<sup>36</sup> The presence of League headquarters in Geneva ultimately proved very beneficial for Switzerland with the periodic sessions of the Assembly and Council boosting the already well established tourism industry of Geneva and its environs. A report conducted by the Secretariat in 1935 concluded that the presence of League headquarters was worth an annual thirty eight million Swiss francs (C.H.F.) to the local economy.<sup>37</sup> The League was also an employer of a high number of Swiss nationals.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately the *modus vivendi* between the League and the Swiss Federal Council was not protected by international law; as a result the League's presence in Switzerland became increasingly precarious as German hegemony increased.

The fact that the neutral member states were not obliged to withdraw from the League indicates that collective security had assumed a secondary importance within an organisation designed to promote international peace.<sup>39</sup> This raises the question as to why states remained their membership of the League when there was an implicit understanding, both among small powers such as Switzerland and great

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<sup>34</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, available at Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 Apr. 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Foreign Office memorandum on the rights of the League of Nations in Switzerland, 2 Oct. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/3009).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Remarks on the importance of the League of Nations for the economy of the Canton of Geneva and for Switzerland as a whole, June 1935 (League of Nations Archives [henceforth L.N.A.], general, R 5773/29564).

<sup>38</sup> By 1943, out of the little more than a 100 League employees, at least twenty were Swiss. See Valentin Stencek to Marcel Pilet-Golaz, 13 Apr. 1943 (S.F.A., Swiss Diplomatic Documents [henceforth SDD] 60/006/632, pp 1092-3).

<sup>39</sup> Which supports Richard Veatch's assertion on the death of collective security in the League system. See Richard Veatch, *Canada and the League of Nations* (Toronto, 1975), p. 170.

powers such as the United Kingdom, that the League's collective security potential was spent. League membership had become less important for the impact it could make on the course of international affairs than for what it signified to the international community. The small states no longer clung to the League as a security safety net but rather as an affirmation of their cherished independence and sovereignty as well as an expression of a peaceful liberal democratic world view.<sup>40</sup> In the Assembly session of September 1934 Giuseppe Motta, a veteran Swiss politician and member of the Federal Council, outlined what his country hoped to achieve through participation in the League Assembly as well as its general approach to foreign policy:

A small country like Switzerland, who is neither able nor willing to play a role in high international policy, must necessarily pursue its own conceptions. We must deny ourselves the luxury of opportunities, even of the highest and most legitimate order. We can emulate other countries only in the arduous pursuit of moral values.<sup>41</sup>

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs approved of Motta's message to the Assembly and perceived Ireland's role at Geneva to be similar to that of Switzerland.<sup>42</sup> League membership imparted a sense of respectability and also denoted recognition of sovereignty. As Michael Kennedy illustrated, participation in a forum such as the League Assembly and the procurement of a semi-permanent seat on the Council, allowed small states to pursue a multilateral foreign policy that would otherwise been beyond their national means.<sup>43</sup> These were the perquisites of the League of Nations that member states were reluctant to discard. Before 1920 neutrality usually deprived a country of its ability to influence the course of international affairs. The League's acceptance of the various interpretative resolutions meant that the neutrals did not face the international isolation the Swiss Confederation experienced in the proceeding centuries, when it was described, by one observer, as a detached observer on 'the balcony overlooking Europe.'<sup>44</sup> A

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<sup>40</sup> The League's important role as a signifier of independence and sovereignty has been outlined by Michael Kennedy in *Ireland and the League of Nations 1919-46: international relations, diplomacy and politics* (Dublin, 1996), p. 257.

<sup>41</sup> Frank Boland to the secretary of the Department of External affairs, 11 Jan. 1935 (N.A.I., DFA 126/25).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Bergier Commission, [independent panel of experts], *Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War: final report* (Zurich, 2002), p. 22.

columnist in the *Irish Independent* noted that a frank discussion of the rights and wrongs of the invasion of Poland in the Assembly would induce the neutrals to resign from the already attenuated organisation.<sup>45</sup> The neutral powers were permitted to influence League policy in the autumn of 1939 which prevented the League Council being harnessed for the purpose for which it was intended: the denouncement of expansionism and the promotion of territorial integrity. The absence of any governmental desire on the part of the League's then forty six member states to oppose this policy indicated that the League had evolved into something drastically different from a collective security organisation.

This does not mean that the final years of the League's existence should be ignored by historians. The scholarly debates on the nature and practise of international cooperation through the mechanisms of the League of Nations serve as an invaluable aid to researching the events of 1939-40 and to determining their significance. The question of 'agency', a dominant theme within current historical discourse has a particular relevance to the events of this chapter. Gerhart Niemeyer, a prominent voice in the realist tradition of League historiography, tended to treat the League as an agent, rather than a vehicle for international cooperation, refusing to absolve the organisation itself for the breakdown in international affairs by holding the great powers solely accountable.<sup>46</sup> Clavin, coming from the more positive technocratic orientated historiographical tradition, asserted that the League was an important but much overlooked agent in international social and economic reform.<sup>47</sup> It is difficult to regard the League diplomatic organs, rather than its technical bodies, as decisive agents in international affairs as the League was not a world government and was deliberately lacking in any considerable supranational function. As Clavin argued, the League of Nations was designed to reinforce the authority of member states rather than to challenge it.<sup>48</sup> From its early days, there was significant support among League officials and supporters for the strengthening of the League's influence into some kind of supranational authority.<sup>49</sup> Former League officials Salvador de Madariaga and Jean Monnet came to the conclusion that the League could not hope to be effective unless member states surrendered a degree of

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<sup>45</sup> *Irish Independent*, 13 Nov. 1939.

<sup>46</sup> Niemeyer, 'The balance sheet of the League experiment', p. 540.

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Clavin, 'Defining transnationalism' in *Contemporary European History*, xiv (2005), p. 425.

<sup>48</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1116.



independence and sovereignty.<sup>50</sup> Other League apologists on the other hand, figures such as the renowned classicists Gilbert Murray and Alfred Zimmern, both of whom enjoyed association with the League's Organisation of Intellectual Cooperation (O.I.C.), argued that national sovereignty was the non-negotiable basis for international cooperation between states.<sup>51</sup> The League could not mobilise an international police force to give effect to its resolutions. It relied on the willingness of member states to recognise its moral authority. Commitment to the Covenant could not be forced and cooperation with the League was predicated on volunteerism. Given the success of the League's technical organisations Clavin's position is easy to support while the reality of the League's experience does not sustain Niemeyer's criticism of its diplomatic machinery. As Jean Siotis wrote:

Institutions facilitate the conduct of multilateral relations and they provide the necessary framework, for the elaboration and implementation of co-operative programmes; but left to themselves, in an environment characterised by growing heterogeneity, hostility and polarisation, they are of little avail as effective instruments for the maintenance of peace.<sup>52</sup>

The League was a vehicle rather than an actor in the diplomatic sphere. Its political impotence was a reflection less of its congenital weaknesses than of the conservative internationalism of its member states that were unwilling to threaten their sovereignty by according the League a direct role in the regulation of international affairs. As Arthur Sweetser, the League's dynamic director of publicity observed in 1940, the League's 'record is valuable both as an index of the stage which international life has at present attained, and as an augury of the course we may expect it to take in the future.'<sup>53</sup> Thus the League's political record should not be summarily dismissed as an unmitigated failure but harnessed as a means of chronicling the evolution of international cooperation. At the same time, as can be perceived by the decisive role played by the neutrals in the postponement of the Assembly, the League served as a distorted reflection of the reality of international

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<sup>50</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 12; Monnet, *Memoirs*, p. 85.

<sup>51</sup> Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without sword: idealist liberalism and the spirit of empire* (Princeton, 2005), p. 196.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Siotis, 'The institutions of the League of Nations' in UNOG (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: proceedings of the symposium* (Geneva, 1983), p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Sweetser, 'The non-political achievements of the League' in *Foreign Affairs*, xix (1940), p. 179.

affairs, failing to showcase the combined strength of the great powers but rather exposing the collective weakness of the small, vulnerable states.

During this period the disparity between the League's political impotence and its technical vitality was widening into a chasm. Responding to the failure of its diplomatic role a concerted and determined attempt was made to widen the League's agency in matters of social and economic concern. In the idealist strain of League historiography, its international civil service has assumed an almost mythic quality, held up as the perfect example of impartial, disinterested civil servants working tirelessly for the greater good.<sup>54</sup> In his memoirs, Salvador de Madariaga, a former Secretariat official and Spanish delegate to the League Assembly, presented those Secretariat officials and statesmen who championed the League, as 'civic monks', with internationalism their religion and the Covenant their 'sacred text.'<sup>55</sup> What is important to remember is that former officials of the Secretariat were effectively propagandists for the organisation, willing to propagate the image of a dynamic and talented civil service that embodied the very soul of internationalism, apostles of the 'spirit of Geneva.' In the wake of an explosion in hard-boiled nationalism from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the institution of an international character into the Secretariat was a novel endeavour. Upon being seconded to the secretariat or technical services, a new League official was obliged to take the following oath:

I solemnly undertake to exercise in all loyalty, discretion and conscience, the functions that have been entrusted to me as an official of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, to discharge my functions and to regulate my conduct with the interests of the League alone in view, and not to seek or receive instructions from any government or other authority external to the Secretariat.<sup>56</sup>

As Pedersen rightly acknowledged, for all its significance for the future development of international cooperation the League's Secretariat largely remains an unknown historical quantity.<sup>57</sup> To accept the depiction of the Secretariat as an impartial and even less convincingly, as an apolitical body, is to ignore the complexities of a once 700 strong pioneering institution. While Secretariat officials had a limited political

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<sup>54</sup> See for example Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, pp 36-43.

<sup>56</sup> Barcoft, 'The international civil servant', p. 212.

<sup>57</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1113.

role they were politically minded animals who could exert a certain influence. The Assembly and Council did not possess the necessary executive authority to compel member states to adhere to its resolutions and those of the Permanent Court. However the League derived a political agency through the actions and influence of its officials. League officials displayed a marked willingness to wade into political debates and sought to intervene in domestic social and economic policies.

Presiding over the entire administrative and technical structure of the League was the most political of all the secretaries-general of the organisation, Frenchman Joseph Avenol. Initially the great powers had hoped, in 1919, to appoint a major statesman to the apex of the international civil service to ensure motivational leadership for the League's diplomatic mission. In the absence of a suitable candidate such a political conception of the office of secretary-general was abandoned. Instead the secretary-general's brief was limited to that of figurehead and chief administrator of the Secretariat.<sup>58</sup> The League Covenant prescribed a modest role for the secretary-general. According to article seven the secretary-general could appoint staff to the Secretariat (with the approval of the Council) and could represent the Secretariat at all meetings of the Assembly and Council.<sup>59</sup> Avenol's controversial shadow loomed large in the League historiography of the 1970s.<sup>60</sup> Like the League's first secretary-general, Sir Eric Drummond, Avenol was not a statesman but a national civil servant. His appointment reflected the conservative interpretation of an office that was more 'secretary' than 'general'.<sup>61</sup> Having served as inspector of finances at the *Quai d'Orsay* and as a financial delegate to the French embassy in London, Avenol was seconded to the Finance Committee of the League of Nations in 1920. In 1924 he was promoted to deputy secretary-general, replacing his compatriot, the future architect of European unity, Jean Monnet. Though later regretting his replacement by his former assistant, at the time Monnet was confident that Avenol had done 'good work' at the League.<sup>62</sup> Avenol had played a prominent

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<sup>58</sup> Housden, *The League of Nations and the organisation of peace*, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, available from Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 April 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*; Barcroft, 'The international civil servant: the League of Nations career of Seán Lester, 1929-47'; Fosdick, *The League and the United Nations after fifty years*; Gageby, *The last secretary-general*; Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*.

<sup>61</sup> This distinction between the political and administrative dimensions of the office of secretary-general was made by Stephen M. Schwebel in *The secretary-general of the United Nations: his political powers and practices* (New York, 1952), p. 204.

<sup>62</sup> Monnet, *Memoirs*, pp 88-100.

role in the League's project of post-war economic reconstruction. He led missions to Austria and Hungary and to other countries who requested the League's advice on post-war financial rehabilitation.<sup>63</sup> Under Monnet the position of deputy secretary-general was one which came to be associated with overseeing the economic and social work of the League. Avenol continued this tradition, taking a special interest in the League's Economic and Finance Organisation. Secretary-General Drummond's desire, upon his retirement, to be succeeded by a small-state national was undermined by Lord Balfour's (British foreign secretary in 1919) previous assurance to the French government that while the first secretary-general would be British, he would be succeeded by a Frenchman.<sup>64</sup> Avenol's candidacy was predicated on his seniority and by the fact that his colleagues regarded him as 'objective as any Frenchman can be.'<sup>65</sup>

Despite his unanimous election by the Assembly of December 1932, reservations lingered as to the suitability of Avenol to the post; reservations that were not, at this time, predicated on the Frenchman's political convictions. James Barros, drawing on the testimony of Avenol's former colleagues at the *Quai d'Orsay* and within the Secretariat, described the Frenchman as anti-communist in his politics.<sup>66</sup> This political persuasion would not have alienated Avenol from the majority of his colleagues with both E.H. Carr and Martyn Housden noting the particular 'conservatism' of Geneva.<sup>67</sup> Avenol's appointment did not incur disapproval because he was too political; rather reservations were expressed that he was not political enough. The *New York Herald*, while acknowledging that Avenol was an expert in international finance, claimed that the Frenchman was 'conspicuous for his inactivity in League negotiations' and that he was 'as little known as any man in the League.'<sup>68</sup> Salvador de Madariaga was convinced that the selection of an uncharismatic technocrat, who was, in the Spaniard's view, the 'executor of other people's decisions', demonstrated the desire of the great powers to contain the political potential of the office of secretary-general.<sup>69</sup> De Madariaga's desire for a supranationalist League led him to state his preference for a more imaginative and

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<sup>63</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 Oct. 1932.

<sup>64</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. xvi; Housden, *The League of Nations*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> *New York Herald*, 16 Oct. 1932.

<sup>69</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 12.

forceful character to assume leadership of the Secretariat; specifically someone such as Avenol's compatriot, Albert Thomas, the first director of the I.L.O. Thomas died in 1932 but de Madariaga was adamant that someone of his ilk was required to halt the political decline of the League. According to de Madariaga, Thomas, unlike Avenol, would certainly have refused 'to remain a chief Rubber Stamp or a Grand Inkpot such as the powers would have wished him to have been, for he thought that the secretary-general should become what he would probably have made him to grow-a true world chancellor.'<sup>70</sup> The Geneva correspondent of the *Echo de Paris* regarded the selection of a former finance official for the post of secretary-general as confirmation that the League was turning away from its role as an arbitrator of disputes.<sup>71</sup> Avenol's election was interpreted as a sign that the great powers wanted the organisation to concentrate on less controversial and sensitive areas; the positioning of a technocrat at the head of the Secretariat would ensure that change in direction.<sup>72</sup>

As events unfolded in the period 1939-40 Avenol would demonstrate his willingness to be a very political secretary-general, despite the constitutional limitations to his office. However as the League Secretariat found itself having to confront the reality of war, all signs pointed to the League's technical organs superseding the work of the Assembly and Council. The establishment of technical sections within the Secretariat to study issues such as health, refugee affairs, drug trafficking, labour laws and economic matters was initially considered to be ancillary to the League's prime goal of the prevention of war.<sup>73</sup> Drummond was particularly reluctant to develop League initiatives along those technical lines, echoing the concerns of the British government which was fearful of the creation of giant bureaucracies that would swallow tax-payers money.<sup>74</sup> Monnet, as Drummond's deputy, strongly disagreed as did the extremely ambitious and capable personnel appointed to head the technical sections.<sup>75</sup> Compared with the stale and often fruitless meetings of the Assembly and Council, peace appeared more achievable by striving for social and economic parity and progress. The League's future director of the Economic and Finance Organisation, Britain's Alexander Loveday (a former

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<sup>70</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> *L'Echo de Paris*, 16 Oct. 1932.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Henig, *The League of Nations*, p. 174.

<sup>74</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1008.

War Office official), extrapolated upon the relationship between peace and prosperity in 1938 as storm clouds threatened the horizon:

I have had the privilege, and it is a privilege, of living in Switzerland for seventeen years. I do not think there is any country in the world where the general standard of living of all, in good years and bad, is so high. Why is it? Because they have had no wars for over a hundred years, and because they are really concerned about the standard of living of everyone. Their standard is high because they have had no wars; but because their standard is high the last thing in the world they want is war.<sup>76</sup>

As Victor-Yves Ghébalı demonstrated, the League pioneered a functionalist approach before the word itself was coined.<sup>77</sup> League officials did not describe their work as ‘functionalist’ but rather referred to their social and economic work as ‘non-political’ or ‘technical cooperation.’<sup>78</sup> David Mitrany was regarded as one of the founding theorists of functionalism, whose ideas reached maturity during the war years and its immediate aftermath. According to Mitrany:

If one was to visualise a map of the world showing economic and social activities, it would appear as an intricate web of interests and relations crossing and re-crossing political divisions-not a fighting map of states and frontiers, but a map pulsating with the realities of everyday life. They are the natural basis for international organisation.<sup>79</sup>

During the inter-war period the League’s technical organisations gave expression and encouragement to these transnational social and economic encounters among states and as the League’s political activities constricted, its functional work expanded. In February 1939 the Governing Body of the I.L.O. informed member states that it would be ‘wrong in principle to assume that those services must necessarily cease’, even if a number of states who took a leading part in its activities became involved in hostilities.<sup>80</sup> The officers of the Governing Body reminded

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<sup>76</sup> Alexander Loveday, ‘The economic and financial activities of the League’ in *International Affairs*, xvii (1938), p. 798.

<sup>77</sup> Ghébalı, ‘The League of Nations and functionalism’, p. 141.

<sup>78</sup> Sweetser argued that there was a notable distinction between the League’s political and technical work. See Sweetser, ‘The non-political achievements of the League’, p. 191. See also Waqar Zaidi, ‘Liberal internationalist approaches to science and technology in inter-war Britain and the United States’ in Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Transnationalism reconfigured: transnational ideas and movements between the world wars* (London, 2011), p. 30

<sup>79</sup> David Mitrany, ‘The functional approach of international relations’ in *International Affairs*, xxiv (1948), pp 358-9.

<sup>80</sup> Report by the officers of the Governing Body of the I.L.O., 2 Feb. 1939 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

government members that during the First World War the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome did not cease its activities.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, while a war had the potential to assume global proportions, the Governing Body predicted that ‘the great majority of the members of the organisation would not, in all events in its early stages, be actively engaged in hostilities.’<sup>82</sup> In January 1940, upon the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the League of Nations, the Secretariat’s Information Section issued a communiqué on Avenol’s behalf. The secretary-general shared his understanding of the contribution the League had made to social and economic progress and outlined the reasons why the outbreak of war did not reduce the organisation to a defunct entity:

[The League] has served as a centre of discussion and elaboration of a philosophy of international life and conduct which has had an effect on world relations immeasurably surpassing the modest material resources put at its disposal. [.....] it has created network of international agencies in nearly all fields of human interest which can hardly fail to be part of the foundations of the international life which must inevitably be created at the end of the present conflict, when mankind returns to the normal paths of peace.<sup>83</sup>

According to the secretary-general the international community could still derive benefit from such an organisation as the League in wartime. The League’s Secretariat and technical officials, through the results of their own work and because of the vast holdings of the League’s Rockefeller Library, had a wealth of relevant economic, social and humanitarian data and statistics to place at the disposal of afflicted governments. Loveday subscribed to the belief that the organisation’s value lay in its role as a ‘clearing house of ideas’, able to offer advice to member states on technical matters, based not on theory, but on what other countries had already achieved.<sup>84</sup> Clavin has argued in subsequent historiography that the League’s greatest contribution lay in the generation of sophisticated ‘epistemic communities’ that developed particular expertise and world views.<sup>85</sup> The experience of Secretariat officials in assisting post-war reconstruction polices in the aftermath of the First World War provided another strong argument for the League’s wartime

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<sup>81</sup> Report by the officers of the Governing Body of the I.L.O., 2 Feb. 1939 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Brief statement by the secretary-general on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the League of Nations, 19 Jan. 1940 (L.N.A., general, R 5806/39174, p. 1).

<sup>84</sup> Loveday, ‘The economic and financial activities of the League’, p. 795.

<sup>85</sup> Clavin, ‘Defining transnationalism’, pp 427-8.

preservation.<sup>86</sup> It is also significant to note that League officials did not simply draw upon the League's technical role as a justification for its wartime preservation. The central argument was that the League represented something bigger and better than the exclusive alliances which seemed to lead inexorably to war. As Avenol stated in January 1940: 'The word cannot go on indefinitely in conflict; a settlement must come sooner or later; and, when it does come, it will be found that there are certain perennial truths in the League which mankind cannot and will not forego.'<sup>87</sup> The League's technical activities were wrapped in its ethos of liberal idealism and its officials cited both its technical expertise and its political identity as testament to its continued relevance to a world at war.

As the political situation deteriorated a project was embarked upon from 1938-40 to enhance the scope and reach of the technical organisations. It traditionally fell to the Assembly and Council to approve the League's technical programme. The Office of the Secretary-General produced a report in June 1939 advocating the removal of the League's technocratic agenda from the remit of political organs as:

All the manifold subjects within the League purview come up for consideration simultaneously. These subjects have to compete with each other, for the time and attention of delegations whose interest is in any case chiefly turned towards political issues. No technical question or group of questions can get quite all the attention it deserves.<sup>88</sup>

The report argued that it was unfair to expect the Council to take anything other than a perfunctory interest in the work of the technical agencies as its members were 'politically minded persons.'<sup>89</sup> In attempting to sever the technocratic agenda from that of the League's political organs, League officials hoped to entice non-member states into greater collaboration with the technical organisations. This was partly inspired by the longstanding and fruitful collaboration the various technical agencies enjoyed with the great power that so dramatically rejected the League's diplomatic mission: the United States of America.

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<sup>86</sup> Brief statement by the secretary-general on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the League of Nations, 19 Jan. 1940 (L.N.A., general, R 5806/39174, p. 1).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Report by the office of the secretary-general on non-autonomous organisations, June 1939 (Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs [henceforth A.F.M.F.A.], private papers of Joseph Avenol [henceforth 6PAAP] /30, f. 140, p. 2).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*



President Wilson believed that the League's role should be confined to serving as an instrument for high politics.<sup>90</sup> Thus it was ironic that it was the success and vitality of the League's technical work which enticed the United States into the League sphere. The United States government participated in the League's economic work from 1927 onwards and cooperation increased with the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932.<sup>91</sup> Before assuming the presidency, Roosevelt played a leading role in the creation of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation which sought to promote the foreign policy ideals of the former president.<sup>92</sup> He was especially supportive of the technical work of the League. The inaugural conference of the I.L.O. took place in Washington DC in 1920. At that time Roosevelt held the office of assistant secretary to the navy and personally arranged for the provision of office space for the conference staff.<sup>93</sup> Roosevelt stood as the Democratic vice-presidential nominee for the election of 1920 on a pro-League ticket. With the subsequent Republican landslide and the growing realisation on Roosevelt's part that a continued commitment to the League would consign him to the political wilderness, he became more muted in his support for the organisation. As a Presidential candidate in 1932 Roosevelt declared that the League of Nations, as it was then, 'was not the League conceived by Woodrow Wilson.'<sup>94</sup> This was a rather prescient remark and even when in power, Roosevelt, the consummate practitioner of politics as the art of the possible, was never prepared to lend the League his equivocal support. This position impacted profoundly upon the League's wartime experience.

Roosevelt's secretary of state was more open in his support for the League. Cordell Hull served in the House of Representatives during Wilson's presidency and was a strong advocate for the League in its early days. According to his memoirs he regarded the congressional repudiation of the League Covenant as an act that would ultimately end in disaster.<sup>95</sup> As secretary of state Hull made it a point when receiving diplomatic representatives, especially from the smaller European countries, to encourage them to give as much support as they could to the League, in an attempt to

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<sup>90</sup> Ghébal, 'The League of Nations and functionalism', p. 142.

<sup>91</sup> Clavin and Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations', p. 472.

<sup>92</sup> Robert A. Divine, *The reluctant belligerent: American entry into World War II* (New York, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Edward J. Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation' in *Studies*, xliii (1954), p. 244.

<sup>94</sup> Thompson, 'Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept', p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Henry Thomas Berding (ed.), *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull: volume 1* (London, 1948), p. 112.

stress the importance he attached to the continuation of the League in a very difficult time in its history.<sup>96</sup> A clear sign of the international intent of the Roosevelt administration was given when the United States formally joined the I.L.O. The I.L.O. always maintained a branch office in Washington and from the beginning of Roosevelt's presidency American diplomats were sent as observers to I.L.O. conferences. On 20 August 1934 Roosevelt, exercising powers conferred on him by Congress, formally accepted an invitation from the International Labour Office and the United States became a fully participating member of the I.L.O. By 1939 the directorship of the I.L.O. was occupied by an American, John Winant, a former governor of the state of New Hampshire.

Conscious that any association with the United States, limited as it may have been to the technical activities, augured well for the League as a whole, there was an initiative within the Secretariat of the League to secure formal recognition of the collaboration of non member states. In addition to the United States, other states such as Brazil, Chile, Peru and Venezuela, having withdrawn from the League, continued to cooperate with the technical agencies in a limited fashion. In the Assembly of September 1938 a resolution was passed by member states in which they declared their desire to welcome any further collaboration with non member states, authorising the secretary-general to communicate this resolution to those states in question.<sup>97</sup> On 23 May 1939 Avenol addressed a sitting of the Council and proposed a committee to investigate ways and means of organising formal technical collaboration with non member states.<sup>98</sup> Four days later the Council approved Avenol's suggestion. Stanley M. Bruce, the former Australian prime minister and committed internationalist, was appointed to lead this committee which also considered proposals for according the technical organisations a greater role in sanctioning their own work programmes. The Bruce Report (published in August 1939) proposed a new Central Committee that would determine and coordinate the work of the technical services independent of the Assembly. It would consist of twenty-four states elected by the Assembly on the recommendation of its own bureau. The Central Committee, meeting once a year, would also have the power to elect

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<sup>96</sup> Adrianus Pelt to Avenol, 8 June 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/30, f. 132, p. 1).

<sup>97</sup> Cordell Hull to Avenol, 17 Oct. 1938 (*Foreign Relations of the United States papers series* [henceforth *FRUS*], diplomatic papers: the British Commonwealth and Europe 1939, f. 52, p. 1), available at (<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/Browse.html>) (1 Apr. 2013).

<sup>98</sup> Secretariat memorandum, June 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/30, f.153, p. 1).

more members including non League member states.<sup>99</sup> The proposals of the Bruce Committee effectively promised the technical organisations the same level of autonomy enjoyed by the I.L.O., the agenda of which was determined by its own Governing Body, while its budget was approved by the secretary-general and the Supervisory Commission. With the postponement of the September Assembly it was unclear when member states would be given the opportunity to consider such matters.

Thomas Weiss and Jean Siotis argued that the Bruce Report ‘was trying to make a virtue out of a necessity’ in strengthening the functionalist potential of the League just as its political mission lay in tatters.<sup>100</sup> However such an argument overlooks the subsequent mobilisation of the League’s political organs in December 1939 to expel a member state for the first and only time in League history. While this action was not inspired by altruism, the motivations behind and implications of such a course of action were politically significant for a Europe that was falling apart. Despite the attempts to re-orientate the League towards greater concentration on technical matters, this episode demonstrates that the League could not be de-politicised. The experience, motivations and reactions of member states to the Assembly and Council sessions of December 1939 provide a clear insight into what they hoped to achieve by continued membership of the League of Nations.

It was not the transgressions of Hitler’s Germany that pulled the League out of its lethargy and which inspired member states to act with uncharacteristic vigour and fervour. It was the actions of another member state, another *bête noire* of a polarised Europe: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. As Martin McCauley argued, the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 was the first decisive rejection of President Wilson’s assertion that the principles of liberal democracy and free market trade would become a universal reality.<sup>101</sup> The young Soviet state was not invited to attend the Peace Conference in 1919 and viewed the League with suspicion. Georgy Chicherin, commissar for foreign affairs (1918-30), was convinced that the ‘imperialistic’ League could never assume the role of impartial arbiter in Soviet

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<sup>99</sup> Further details on the Bruce Committee can be found in the following works: Clavin, *Securing the world economy*; Martin D. Dubin, ‘Toward the Bruce Report: the economic and social programs of the League of Nations in the Avenol era’ in UNOG (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: proceedings of the symposium* (Geneva, 1983), pp 42-73; Victor-Yves Ghébal, *La réforme Bruce, 1939-40: 50 ans de la Société des Nations* (Geneva, 1970).

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Weiss and Jean Siotis ‘Functionalism and international secretariats: ideology and rhetoric in the U.N. family’ in A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor (eds), *Functionalism: theory and practise in international relations* (London, 1975), p. 174.

<sup>101</sup> Martin McCauley, *The origins of the Cold War 1941-9* (3rd ed., Harlow, 2003), p. 3.

affairs.<sup>102</sup> Such prejudice and antagonism was not one-sided. The League's then secretary-general, Eric Drummond, perceived the League as a liberal democratic institution that was incompatible with communist ideology.<sup>103</sup> The colourful memoirs of de Madariaga, recording the Soviet experience of the 1932 disarmament conference, demonstrate the anti-communist culture of Geneva:

Contrary to what had by then become a tradition, the secretary-general did not receive [the Soviet delegates] either in his house or in his office; nor did he offer them any hospitality anywhere. The Bolshies were then still those awful people; less because of their already rough treatment of their adversaries than because of their proletarian ways. Their bosses (one could hardly call them leaders) went about as cloth-capped commissars, and had not yet become Homborg hatted ministers. So that when Litvinov [Soviet delegate and future commissar for foreign affairs] and Lunacharsky [another soviet delegate] turned up [.....] no one in the Secretariat would move to offer them a hand to shake.<sup>104</sup>

It was the collective security potential and most assuredly not the political identity of the League that enticed the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov (1930-9), to seek and acquire membership of the League in 1934. Litvinov was instrumental in convincing Soviet leadership that the U.S.S.R. could not isolate herself from the capitalist bloc and that the League would provide the means, (though not the only means), to protect Soviet borders and its sphere of influence from German and Japanese expansionism.<sup>105</sup> The great powers supported the Soviet entry out of similar pragmatism. It reinforced Franco-Soviet cooperation in containing German ambitions in Eastern Europe and the British government ultimately considered it wiser to include the Soviet Union in a framework for peaceful mediation of disputes.<sup>106</sup> The admittance of the Soviet Union to the League, its acquisition of a permanent seat on the Council and the prospect of the appointment of its citizens to Secretariat posts, caused considerable apprehension among the smaller European states at Geneva. Suspicion of the spread of communism and the Soviet Union's history of suppressing religious freedom

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<sup>102</sup> A.R. Peters, R.H. Haigh and D.S. Morris, *In search of peace: the Soviet Union and the League of Nations 1919-34* (Sheffield, 1981), p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 46.

<sup>104</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 72.

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the struggle for collective security in Europe, 1933-39* (London, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Dominion Office memorandum, 11 May 1943 (T.N.A., Dominion Office [henceforth DO] 5/1213, f. 5). The chargé in France to the acting secretary of state, 24 Dec. 1933 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-39, p. 53). *The Times*, 10 Sep. 1934.

prompted countries like Argentina, Portugal, Switzerland and the Netherlands to express their opposition to overtures being made to the U.S.S.R.<sup>107</sup> In the autumn session of the 1934 Assembly, Éamon de Valera president of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State and minister for external affairs, expressed the hope that the Soviet Union, in light of the ‘good faith’ member states had shown in accepting its membership, would undertake to uphold the ‘liberty of conscience’, i.e., religious freedoms, of its citizenry.<sup>108</sup> This statement encapsulates the original Wilsonian conception of the League as the embodiment of liberal progressivism. As J.A. Thompson argued: ‘in a world where such values as democracy, self-determination and human rights are not always and everywhere respected by governments, there is bound to be a tension between a commitment to promote them and participation in a comprehensive system of collective security.’<sup>109</sup> These tensions were only likely to increase as the security credentials of the League were diminished, with small states clinging to membership to reaffirm their liberal democratic, and even Christian values.

Reservations among both the Soviets and the western states over the former’s participation in the League’s technical activities demonstrate how intrinsic the political forces that moulded the Covenant were to every aspect of its existence, even to work traditionally described as ‘non political.’<sup>110</sup> Ghébali echoed Mitrany’s assertions on the benefits of a functionalist approach to international cooperation by arguing that the technical organisations were better at achieving their goals than their political counterparts because of common interests.<sup>111</sup> This position fails to recognise that internationalism itself is a relative concept with the Soviet aspirations for the League proving drastically different to that of their Western European counterparts. Furthermore, while transnational social and economic projects crossed national borders they often struggled to transcend political divisions. The Irish delegation to Geneva was in regular correspondence with the Holy See, reporting on developments and paying close attention to the role of the Soviet officials who were seconded to the Secretariat. When in 1935 the Soviet citizen Marcel Rosenberg was appointed under secretary-general, Éamon de Valera sought assurances from Joseph Avenol

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<sup>107</sup> *The Times*, 11 Sep. 1934.

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 19 Sep. 1934.

<sup>109</sup> Thompson, ‘Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept’, p. 29.

<sup>110</sup> As League officials such as Sweetser described the League’s technical work. See Sweetser, ‘The non-political achievements of the League’, p. 191.

<sup>111</sup> Ghébali, ‘The League of Nations and functionalism’, p. 157.

that Rosenberg would not be given any role in the Social, Minorities, Mandates or Intellectual Cooperation sections.<sup>112</sup> De Valera believed that those areas would have a direct bearing on the rights and activities of religious groups within member states and would also provide the opportunity for the dissemination of pro-Soviet propaganda.<sup>113</sup> Avenol was sympathetic to the Catholic bloc and assured anxious delegates that Rosenberg would not be given any such contentious role in the Secretariat.<sup>114</sup> This information was duly passed on by the Irish envoy to the Holy See to the Cardinal Secretary of State Giovanni Pacelli (the future Pius XII). While the news from Geneva was a source of relief, Pacelli remained extremely pessimistic that the Soviet Union was in a position to have its 'agents' within the League.<sup>115</sup>

The concerns of the Holy See and the Irish Department of External Affairs proved ill-founded as the U.S.S.R did not join the League to avail of its social and economic work. A study undertaken by the League Secretariat in 1944 noted that the Soviet Union had always exhibited 'a marked indifference' to the technical activities of the League.<sup>116</sup> Its contribution to the statistics of the League's Health Organisation and drug bodies was sporadic. Clavin wrote that whereas the League reflected middle-class concerns about the right to self government, the International Labour Organisation was designed to reflect proletarian interests and was intended to combat the pull of international communism.<sup>117</sup> The I.L.O. was a vehicle for social democracy rather than the more extreme form of proletarianism embodied by the Soviet Union.<sup>118</sup> The U.S.S.R. was understandably reluctant to be associated with the I.L.O. upon its assumption of League membership only to be informed that it was prerequisite to entry into the umbrella organisation. The International Labour Conference enjoyed a tripartite structure; national delegations were composed of government representatives, workers and employers on a ratio of 2:1:1. The same

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<sup>112</sup> Telegram from the Department of External Affairs to the Irish delegation to the League of Nations, 10 Jan. 1935 (N.A.I., DFA 126/25).

<sup>113</sup> Frank Boland to the secretary of the Department of External affairs, 11 Jan. 1935 (N.A.I., DFA 126/25).

<sup>114</sup> Memorandum on the Soviet under secretary-general of the League, 10 Jan. 1945 (N.A.I., DFA 126/25).

<sup>115</sup> Confidential communication from the Irish envoy to the Holy See to the Department of External Affairs, 19 Jan. 1935 (N.A.I., DFA 126/25).

<sup>116</sup> Memorandum on the participation of the Soviet Union in the technical activities of the League since 18 Sep. 1934, 3 Feb. 1944 (L.N.A., Office of the Secretary-General [henceforth O.S.G.], S 566/4).

<sup>117</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 9.

<sup>118</sup> Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Sweptston and Jasmien Van Daele, *The International Labour Organisation and the quest for social justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva, 2009), p. 2.

organisational structure was replicated in the Governing Body of the I.L.O. which was composed of representatives from the eight countries of chief industrial importance as well as other non-permanent representatives, elected by the International Labour Conference. The Soviet government dispatched an ‘observer’ to the 1935 International Labour Conference and then the following year upgraded that status to government ‘delegate.’ In 1937 a full Soviet delegation attended the conference in Geneva. However from 1937 onwards the U.S.S.R. ceased to be represented at the conference.<sup>119</sup> The U.S.S.R. was antagonistic to the tripartite formula of the Labour Conference due to its insistence of the primacy of workers’ rights over the venture capitalism of employers and entrepreneurs.<sup>120</sup> The U.S.S.R. was not represented in the discussions of the Bruce Committee.<sup>121</sup> Northedge observed that the social and economic agencies of the League sought to create a world dreamed of by Victorian captains of industry; where legislation to temper the excesses of capitalism would gradually lead to a coincidence of interest between entrepreneurs and workers to ensure fair conditions of life for all.<sup>122</sup> Technical organisations that sought to enhance rather than eradicate capitalism could never receive the long-term commitment of a state that eagerly anticipated the worldwide destruction of that system.

Instead the Soviet Union displayed a greater eagerness to realise the League’s collective security potential than any other great power at Geneva. The American ambassador to the Soviet Union reported that Litvinov confided to him his conviction that the League could have ‘no meaning at all unless it [stood] for collective security.’<sup>123</sup> Thus, contrary to the arguments of a minority of League officials and of subsequent historians and theorists, the League’s diplomatic mission was arguably less divisive than its technical role; the latter being predicated on the acceptance of liberal norms and values, the former on maintaining international peace and security whatever the cost.<sup>124</sup> The Soviet Union tried to use the League

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<sup>119</sup> Memorandum on the participation of the Soviet Union in the technical activities of the League since 18 Sep. 1934, 3 Feb. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/4).

<sup>120</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Mar. 1943.

<sup>121</sup> Ghébalí, *La réforme Bruce*, p. 32.

<sup>122</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> The ambassador to the Soviet Union to the secretary of state, 7 Mar. 1936 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general 1936, p. 212).

<sup>124</sup> For the argument that social and economic cooperation could transcend political division see for example Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 1; Ghébalí, ‘The League of Nations and functionalism’, p. 157.

Assembly to mobilise public opinion when the fate of Czechoslovakia hung in the balance during the Sudetan Crisis of 1938.<sup>125</sup> A later memorandum by the British Foreign Office concluded that, given previous Soviet suspicions of the League, its entry into the organisation constituted nothing more than a ‘marriage of convenience’ and that it would be ‘naive to conclude that she had been converted to the true principles enshrined in the Covenant.’<sup>126</sup> There is a certain level of hypocrisy in this statement as neither Britain nor France were prepared to utilise the League during the mid-1930s to deal with the worsening European diplomatic situation. While the Soviet Union could not adhere to the liberal spirit of the Covenant it was prepared, more than any other great power, to fulfil the League’s primary goal. In 1941 the journalist Robert Dell, the *Manchester Guardian*’s former Geneva correspondent, published *The Geneva Racket*. The book was a scathing attack on British and French League policy in which the author condemned the complete lack of international spirit on the League Council.<sup>127</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* argued that its journalist was ‘one of the disappointed enthusiasts who is entitled to “let off steam” because he himself gave so much to the cause that was betrayed.’<sup>128</sup> Dell argued that from 1934-9 the Soviet delegation was one of the most faithful to the principles of the Covenant and ‘had the policy of Litvinov been accepted by England and France’ the world would not then be at war.<sup>129</sup>

The U.S.S.R.’s experience at Geneva would prove, in the words of one historian of Soviet foreign policy, ‘an unmerciful boomerang’ with the Soviet Union finding itself the eventual antagonist of the very system it sought to rally.<sup>130</sup> The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939), in which the U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany agreed to carve up the territory of Eastern Europe, was the direct result of the still-birth of collective security and the refusal of Britain and France to include the Soviet Union in their ill-fated appeasement efforts. Never mistaking Hitler for a gentleman diplomat, Joseph Stalin sought to create a greater buffer area between Germany and

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<sup>125</sup> Dominion Office memorandum, 11 May 1943 (T.N.A., DO 5/1213, f. 8).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 5.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Dell, *The Geneva Racket* (London, 1941).

<sup>128</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Mar. 1941.

<sup>129</sup> Dell, *The Geneva Racket*, p. 9.

<sup>130</sup> Alexander Dallin, *The Soviet Union at the United Nations: an inquiry into Soviet motives and objectives* (London, 1962), p. 20.



the U.S.S.R. by invading Poland and pressurising Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into granting the Red Army use of bases in their territories.<sup>131</sup>

Soviet leaders then turned their attention to another state with which it shared historic links, it once constituting a grand duchy of Imperial Russia: the young republic of Finland. Lenin had granted Finland's independence in 1917 in the hope that *bourgeois* self-determination would intensify class struggle and result in a socialist revolution. However by 1939 this small state of three and a half million people was being governed by a coalition of social democratic and agrarian parties.<sup>132</sup> A pact of non-aggression was signed between Finland and the U.S.S.R. in 1932 but the dispute between the Soviet Union and Finland in June 1939 over the latter's refortification of the Åland islands was a portentous sign of what was to come the following winter.<sup>133</sup> In a communication to Secretary-General Joseph Avenol, the Finnish government emphasised that its entire foreign policy was directed towards remaining outside of the conflicting power blocs in Europe and that Finland could not constitute a threat to any power, especially the Soviet Union.<sup>134</sup> These assurances would not assuage Soviet security fears of the vulnerability of Leningrad, only thirty two kilometres from the Finnish frontier, to attack through the Gulf of Finland. An additional strategic advantage to the annexation of Finland was very apparent. Acquisition of Finland's port of Liinahamari on the northern shore of the Arctic Ocean, which remained ice-free in the winter months due to the gulf-stream, would have constituted an obvious boon for the Soviet navy.

The Finnish government dispatched a diplomatic delegation to Moscow in October 1939. By November talks had broken down due to excessive demands for territory on the part of the U.S.S.R. Events came to a head on 26 November 1939 when the Soviet Union manufactured a border incident and attempted to present, to a sceptical world, a Red Army training exercise as an attack on Soviet forces by Finnish troops. The U.S.S.R. tore up its pact of non-aggression with Finland and the Red Army launched an invasion force on 30 November. The first town to be captured was the small coastal settlement of Terijoki and it was here that the Soviets established a puppet Finnish government under O.V. Kuusinen. Soviet forces,

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<sup>131</sup> Martin McCauley, *The Soviet Union 1917-1991* (2nd ed., Harlow, 1993), p. 136.

<sup>132</sup> David Kirby, *A concise history of Finland* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>133</sup> The Åland islands was a Swedish-speaking autonomous archipelago in the Gulf of Bothnia which the League had previously ruled a Finnish possession.

<sup>134</sup> A communication from the Finnish government to the secretary-general of the League, 12 June 1939 (A.F.M.F.A. 6PAAP/32, ff 172-7).

suffering from the legacy of Stalin's purges on the officer classes of the Red Army, confusion and poor planning met with surprisingly fierce resistance on the part of a largely volunteer force accustomed to the harsh terrain.<sup>135</sup>

### **The League's response to the invasion of Finland**

Following the swift German-Soviet conquest of Europe, no one expected further fighting in Europe until the spring of 1940. Thus the Red Army's attack on Finland secured a rapt worldwide audience and quickly earned almost universal condemnation. According to the *Irish Times*, 'the conscience of the whole world has condemned Soviet Russia for its invasion of its tiny and peaceful neighbour.'<sup>136</sup> States such as Switzerland, which had long objected to the presence of a communist power in the League, felt a strong sense of vindication. According to the *Journal de Genève*, the U.S.S.R. had done nothing more than to reveal its 'true colours.'<sup>137</sup> A session of the Assembly and Council of the League would provide member states with the appropriate arena in which to articulate their vehement condemnation of Soviet policy. The League could do nothing however until an appeal was made by one of the parties in the dispute. On 3 December Secretary-General Joseph Avenol received a telegram from the Finnish delegate to the Assembly, Rudolf Holsti. In this communication Holsti declared that Finland had 'continually made every effort to live in peace' with the Soviet Union and invoked his country's right to appeal to the League for mediation under articles eleven and fifteen of the Covenant.<sup>138</sup> The Council and Assembly were accordingly convoked for 9 and 11 December respectively.

Records reveal that Finland did not approach the secretary-general of its own accord. Despite de Madariaga's concerns that Avenol would prove shy of political matters the League's experience of the Winter War demonstrated that the secretary-general was only too willing to wade into the realm of international disputes. Avenol confided to the American consul-general at Geneva, Harold Tittman, that the Finnish

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<sup>135</sup> For further information of the course of the Winter War see Oli Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War: between Germany and Russia* (Basingstoke, 2002).

<sup>136</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1939.

<sup>137</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 6 Dec. 1939.

<sup>138</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1939.

appeal would not have been forthcoming without his encouragement.<sup>139</sup> According to Tittman, Avenol was not motivated by an earnest desire to mediate between Finland and the U.S.S.R., or even by a genuine desire to secure assistance for the Finns. Avenol simply wanted to secure Soviet expulsion from the League as he felt that ‘such action would serve to increase immeasurably the prestige of the League.’<sup>140</sup> In contrast to the powers later conferred on the secretary-general of the United Nations Organisation, Avenol could not call matters to the attention of the League Council. He could only operate as an indirect agent and influence. Avenol’s course of action did not tally with his earlier response to an appeal for League assistance on the part of another invaded member state. In April 1939 Avenol refused to recognise the Albanian complaint against Italian aggression as a plea to the League because the Albanian government failed to communicate with the Secretariat either directly or through its accredited representative in Geneva; rather the letter was sent from the Albanian *chargé d’affaires* in Paris who informed the secretary-general that he was acting on the instructions of his government.<sup>141</sup> Avenol’s anti-communist outlook likely influenced his approach to the Finnish government: he was, according to the American consul-general, ‘most anxious’, for Soviet expulsion to take place.<sup>142</sup> While member states traditionally demurred from enhancing the political role of the secretary-general, Avenol was not likely to antagonise them at this point because his politics did not conflict with the anti-communist culture of Geneva.

Avenol dispatched a telegram to Moscow urging the Soviet Government to accept the mediation of the League in its war with Finland. Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov responded on behalf of his government, refusing the request. According to Molotov there was no justification for convocation of the Assembly and Council since the Soviet Union was not in ‘a state of war with Finland.’<sup>143</sup> Citing the newly installed Kuusinen government, Molotov insisted that government in the name of whom the Finnish delegate Holsti appealed to the League

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<sup>139</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 3 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 800).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Avenol to the Albanian *chargé d’affaires* in Paris, 12 Apr. 1939 (L.N.A., general, R 3691/37748).

<sup>142</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 3 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 800).

<sup>143</sup> The ambassador in the Soviet Union to the secretary of state, 5 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 802).

was not ‘the real representative of the people.’<sup>144</sup> The refusal of the Soviet Union to acknowledge the aggression or to dispatch delegates to Geneva would help realise Avenol’s desire for Soviet expulsion. Member states could not resolve a dispute in the absence of one party and so their task then became one of passing judgment on the illegality of the Soviet invasion of Finland.

Avenol’s assertion that a League response to the invasion of Finland would elicit a positive response was partly vindicated by the reaction of the international press. In France the *Petit Parisien* and *Le Temps* both commended the Finnish decision to appeal to the League and they demanded a general condemnation of Soviet policy.<sup>145</sup> Newspapers such as the *Journal de Genève* lauded this revitalisation of the League and urged the organisation to reclaim some of its honour and prestige on the world stage.<sup>146</sup> The press response provides a valuable insight into what contemporaries conceived of the League’s role. The emphasis was not on what the League could do for Finland but on what it meant for member states; the Assembly provided the opportunity for an expression of shared values. According to the Columbian newspaper *El Tiempo* the League of Nations was:

more the soul of internationalism than an organ..... an idealistic concept of what friendship between nations should be, and is saving, in these times, admittedly romantically, the rights of humanity that have been besmirched by the cowardly violence of the strong upon the weak.<sup>147</sup>

The *El Tiempo* article perfectly articulated the League’s continued public appeal. The League’s founders fervently believed that the mobilisation of international public opinion was vital to the survival of the organisation, although as Mark Mazower pointed out, this often transformed the Assembly and Council into an arena for theatrics rather than a platform for serious policy-making.<sup>148</sup> The was valued less for what it could do but for what it signified as a touchstone for peaceful cooperation between states and as an expression, however imperfect, of liberal internationalism.

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<sup>144</sup> The ambassador in the Soviet Union to the secretary of state, 5 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 802).

<sup>145</sup> *Petit Parisien*, 5 Dec. 1939; *Le Temps*, 5 Dec. 1939.

<sup>146</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 6 Dec. 1939.

<sup>147</sup> *El Tiempo*, 13 Dec. 1939, translation available from (T.N.A., FO 371/24796, p. 35). *El Tiempo* was owned by Eduardo Santos, the president of Columbia (1938-42). Dos Santos’ liberal politics rendered *El Tiempo* one of the more pro-League organs of the international press. See Yannick Wehrli, ‘Seán Lester, Ireland and Latin America in the League of Nations, 1929-46’ in *Irish migration studies in Latin America*, vii (2009), p. 41.

<sup>148</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 142.

While the press response to the convocation of the Assembly and Council was largely positive, the sudden mobilisation of the League's political organs elicited a more equivocal and varied response from governments. This demonstrated the disparity between the rhetoric of the Covenant and the practise of *realpolitik*. A columnist in the *Irish Times* noted the varied motivations and constraints among the government delegations due to convene in Geneva:

There are small countries, whose position is so remote that they have no incentive of self-interest; there are others, who are so close that the first blast of retaliatory fury would burst upon their heads; there are others, again, who have grievances against those with whom they would be expected to be comrades in arms.<sup>149</sup>

The Latin American member states of the League, the countries most remote from the European war zone, spearheaded the motion for Soviet expulsion. It was the presence of Latin American countries at Geneva that largely accorded the organisation an intercontinental dimension. At the same time the Latin American experience of the League of Nations exposed the organisation's inherent Eurocentrism. According to Erik Jensen, the League was unable to function as an effective organisation because 'its assumptions remained based on European value systems and notions of European dominance inherited from the world of before 1914.'<sup>150</sup> While the League aspired to universality it refused to dilute the Eurocentric focus of the organisation much to the disenchantment of the Latin American states, all of whom were members of the League though never at the same time. The vast majority of disputes brought to the attention of the League Council were European disputes and even when the organisation displayed some interest in resolving inter-American disputes, such as the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay, it deferred to the actions of the United States, a non League member state. This eroded the League's value to the Latin American states as a counterpoint to the growing hegemony of the United States in the western hemisphere.<sup>151</sup> From 1925 to 1938 Costa-Rica, Brazil, Paraguay, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Chile, Venezuela and Peru all formally withdrew from the League. Brazil's withdrawal was motivated

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<sup>149</sup> *Irish Times*, 11 Dec. 1939.

<sup>150</sup> Eric Jensen, 'The evolution of the United Nations' in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, ii (1986), p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> G. Pope Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system* (4th ed., Oxford, 1999), p. 244.

by the failure to establish a permanent seat for a Latin American state on the Council at a time when semi-permanent seats were created for two more European powers; Spain and Poland.

While the remaining Latin American member states appeared to mitigate the Eurocentrism of the League's composition it did not dilute the Eurocentrism of its political culture. Sharing a great deal of cultural heritage with Western Europe, the Latin American independence movement owed much to the traditions of liberal democracy.<sup>152</sup> The Chilean politician and diplomat, Don Agustín Edwards, argued in 1929 that the ideals of the League appealed to traditional Latin American sentiments, perhaps more so than to their European counterparts:

The Latin American nations sprang into existence in a common movement for independence. The very reason of their existence as independent nations is the solidarity which reigned amongst them when they resolved to obtain their freedom. International co-operation-the very essence of the League of Nations-is innate to them.<sup>153</sup>

Argentina was one of the main protagonists in the expulsion of the Soviet Union. In June 1939 Argentina's foreign minister José Maria Cantilo gave an interview to *La Razón* newspaper explaining why Argentina remained in the League. According to Cantilo, Argentina did not attempt to distance itself from Geneva as it was still 'faithful' to the Covenant.<sup>154</sup> Cantilo stressed that Argentina would maintain solidarity with Europe, because of its shared cultural traditions with that continent whose emigrants continued to shape the country.<sup>155</sup> Argentina was certainly quick to respond to a European crisis. On 4 December 1939 Cantilo telephoned Avenol personally. Cantilo argued that the unprovoked act of aggression on the Soviet Union's part justified its immediate expulsion from the League.<sup>156</sup> In this conversation traditional distrust of communism featured prominently. At that

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<sup>152</sup> Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin history of Latin America* (London, 1992), p. 318.

<sup>153</sup> Don Agustín Edwards, 'Latin America and the League of Nations' in *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, vii (1929), p. 135. This is a view that is endorsed by the historian G. Pope Atkins. Pope Atkins documented the collective push among Latin American countries for arbitration to become a necessary tool of international law: consequently, the League's method's of mediating disputes were received favourably by those states. See Pope Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system*, p. 244.

<sup>154</sup> Secretariat memorandum on José Maria Cantilo's interview with *La Razón*, 17 June 1939 (L.N.A., general, R 3691/5717).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1939.

moment in time Argentina was governed by a right-wing coalition of the military, anti-radicals and conservative landowning elites known as the *Concordancia*. The bold establishment of a puppet communist government in Finland rankled and served as a reminder that Soviet internationalism in the 1920s had been predicated on encouraging proletarian agitation within the sovereign territory of other states in order to ferment a worldwide socialist revolution.<sup>157</sup> According to Cantilo ‘the creation of organisations within other countries to facilitate expansion of communism constitutes a danger to which peoples cannot be indifferent who hold a reverence and respect for human life, conscience and liberty.’<sup>158</sup> It was clear that the Soviet Union was not being judged as if it was simply another expansionist state; indeed the fascist powers never experienced the same level of condemnation at Geneva. Rather the League Assembly was used as an opportunity to place the entire communist system on trial. Cantilo’s statement sought to underpin the contradiction between the spirit of the Covenant and communist ideology. This contradiction proved fatal to Soviet membership at a time when the League’s political identity was valued more than its security potential.

Latin American participation in the League was marked by the tendency among those states to exercise their traditional solidarity and form a solid voting bloc.<sup>159</sup> In the wake of the Argentinean communication the Panamanian government also wrote to the secretary-general calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities.<sup>160</sup> Uruguay also assured Avenol that it would be obliged to withdraw from the League unless the Council provided a strong response to Soviet aggression.<sup>161</sup> The willingness of Latin American states to pronounce upon an entirely European crisis, through the medium of the League, stood in sharp contrast to their most recent diplomatic efforts to neutralise the western hemisphere.<sup>162</sup> The Chilean ambassador expressed concern about a proposal, forwarded by other Latin American states, that the Union of American Republics (Pan-American Union)

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<sup>157</sup> For further details on the Comintern see Robert Service, *A history of twentieth century Russia* (London, 1998), p. 154.

<sup>158</sup> Record of a telephone conversation between José Maria Cantilo and Joseph Avenol, 4 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 215).

<sup>159</sup> Pope Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system*, p. 243. This practise increased after the establishment of the United Nations Organisation with the Latin American Caucus constituting the oldest regional grouping in the U.N.

<sup>160</sup> Narciso Garay to Joseph Avenol, 9 Dec. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/32, f. 188).

<sup>161</sup> *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1939.

<sup>162</sup> See Williamson, *The Penguin history of Latin America*, pp 324-5 for the evolution of Roosevelt’s ‘Good-Neighbour policy.’

should issue a resolution in support of Finland. He reminded the U.S. State Department that the prime object of the recent Panama Conference (September 1939), attended by American nations, was to ‘secure the neutrality of those nations in the European war and that the situation produced between Finland and the Soviet Union [was] a clear consequence of said war.’<sup>163</sup> The Latin American support for Soviet expulsion demonstrated that neutrality, during the Second World War, was less an ideological commitment than a pragmatic policy to remove small states from the firing line. The Soviet expulsion allowed Latin American member states to express their commitment to international law without incurring significant diplomatic repercussions. One of the criticisms contemporaries levelled against the League’s collective security aspirations was that they had the potential to make every war universal instead of keeping it localised.<sup>164</sup> In permitting the Latin American countries a determining voice in the expulsion of the Soviet Union, the League ignored the reality of geo-politics. While the expulsion of the Soviet Union would be easy to secure, assistance for Finland could only be achieved with the cooperation of its small and mostly neutral neighbours.

Those small states had to be especially wary of antagonising the Third Reich. The League Assembly could conceivably serve as a platform for denunciation of Germany. German newspapers claimed that the convocation of the League’s political organs would have ‘disagreeable repercussions’ for the neutral countries as proceedings were bound to be strongly influenced by the two belligerent powers (Britain and France).<sup>165</sup> The Swiss also expressed concern that the speeches and actions taken at Geneva would compromise the neutrality of the Helvetic Confederation.<sup>166</sup> Swiss diplomatic documents reveal that officials in the *Wilhelmstrasse* were watching events unfold in Geneva. The Swiss minister in Berlin, Hans Frölicher, wrote a letter to the head of the Political Department Giuseppe Motta, in Bern, communicating the attitude of Ernst von Weisäcker, the

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<sup>163</sup> The Chilean ambassador to the department of state (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the American republics 1939, p. 134). Argentina was a notable exception to this Pan-American neutrality in the early wartime period. The successive *Concordancia* governments felt a natural sympathy with Germany and later, with Italy, and was resentful of the historic dominance of Latin American resources by business interests based in the United States. See Williamson, *The Penguin history of Latin America*, p. 330.

<sup>164</sup> J.F. LaLive, ‘International organisations and neutrality’ in *British Yearbook of International Affairs*, xxiv (1947), p. 82.

<sup>165</sup> As noted in the *Gazette de Lausanne*, 7 Dec. 1939.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*



state secretary in the Reich Foreign Ministry.<sup>167</sup> Weisäcker was concerned that the Assembly would condemn German actions and questioned the wisdom of permitting the discussion of disputes, in which Switzerland was not directly involved, on Swiss territory.<sup>168</sup> Motta assured Weisäcker that he did not foresee any such difficulty with the December Assembly.<sup>169</sup> Weisäcker warned Motta that if the Swiss permitted the Assembly and Council sessions to function as a forum for Allied propaganda against the Third Reich, Germany would be within its rights to demand the Confederation to put its neutrality in order, a position that Motta did not dispute.<sup>170</sup> The Swiss economy was heavily dependent on trade with Germany and thus the government in Bern was extremely conscious of the dangers implicit in allowing any condemnation of German foreign policy on Swiss soil.<sup>171</sup> In fact the Swiss did not need to be prompted by Weisäcker to adopt a cautious approach, having already secured a guarantee from Avenol that there was to be no allusion to what was termed the wider 'European war' within the halls of the *Palais des Nations*.<sup>172</sup> The correspondence between the Swiss Political Department and the Reich Foreign Ministry demonstrated that while there was little confidence in the League's diplomatic influence that did not mean that the organisation was politically insignificant.

Switzerland was not the only neutral state anxious to stifle any condemnation of Nazi Germany. Avenol also received a communication from the delegations of Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden to the effect that they considered the Assembly to have been convened for a specific political object, the Finnish appeal, and that they would abstain from discussing any other political issues.<sup>173</sup> According to Neville Wylie, one of the most striking aspects of European neutrality was the neutrals failure to capitalise on their numerical strength.<sup>174</sup> Yet in this instance, neutrals were consciously using their collective influence to direct the course of League proceedings to accommodate their own cautious foreign policy.

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<sup>167</sup> Frölicher, has proven a controversial and much maligned figure in post-war Swiss historiography for his pro-German stance. See George-André Chevallaz, *The challenge of neutrality: diplomacy and the defence of Switzerland* (Lanham, 2001), p. 112.

<sup>168</sup> The head of the Political Department to the Swiss minister in Berlin, 12 Dec. 1939 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/050, pp 501-2).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Bergier Commission, *Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War*, p. 22.

<sup>172</sup> Aide-mémoire, 5 Dec. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A, 6PAAP/8, f. 241).

<sup>173</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 3).

<sup>174</sup> Neville Wylie, 'Victims or actors? European neutrals and non-belligerents 1939-45', p. 9.

The atmosphere of the League Assembly was more redolent of the sum of the fears of the small states than of the combined strength of the great powers.

Indeed, Britain and France failed to provide decisive leadership in the December Assembly. The British Foreign Office was quite supportive of the neutral's aim to limit the Assembly and Council sessions to a discussion of the Finnish question in order to contain any sensitive political issues that might cause embarrassment.<sup>175</sup> Foreign Office officials were aware that the Polish government-in-exile, then based in Paris, was likely to send delegates to the forthcoming Assembly session. The government decided that Britain would recognise those delegates since the basis of the Anglo-French declaration of war rested with the German violation of that country's sovereignty.<sup>176</sup> However, it was extremely anxious lest Czechoslovakia, the victim of both German aggression and Chamberlain's failed policy of appeasement, dispatched a delegation. At that point London did not recognise any Czechoslovak government. The British delegation to Geneva might have been compelled into the difficult position of refusing to recognise a Czechoslovak delegation to the Assembly.<sup>177</sup> The Foreign Office was convinced that the only line of safety lay in insisting, like the neutrals, that the Assembly should only consider the matter for which it was called and then stand adjourned for a more convenient session.<sup>178</sup> Thus a situation was created where the Soviet Union could be condemned for its invasion of Finland while its previous invasion of Poland, would be overlooked.

Elements within the British government and Foreign Office regarded the motion for Soviet expulsion a futile and damaging exercise. Both Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax were sceptical of the League's ability to produce a useful result for Finland.<sup>179</sup> Alexander Cadogan dubbed the decision to convoke the Assembly as 'inevitable but insane.'<sup>180</sup> The prospect of the imposition of economic sanctions on the offending Soviet Union was a controversial topic. The Foreign Office did not wish to burn their bridges with the greatest power in the Baltic through the severing of complete diplomatic and

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<sup>175</sup> Sir Orme Sargent to the Foreign Office, 3 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 173).

<sup>176</sup> Memorandum by A.W.G. Randall, 4 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 197).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 4 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., CAB 65/2/37, p. 296).

<sup>180</sup> *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p. 235.

commercial relations with the U.S.S.R.<sup>181</sup> The War Cabinet resolved to withhold support for any such sanctions within the Assembly.<sup>182</sup> While the British government did not instigate the motion for expulsion it was aware that failure to support it would damage its international standing. At this stage Italy had not yet entered the war and Britain was determined to limit the number of belligerents its war effort would have to contend with. According to the British ambassador to Rome, the Italians were taking the line that if Britain was serious about fighting aggression its delegation was obliged to take a serious line against the Soviet Union. If the British government failed to denounce the Soviet Union, Italy would be led to question its 'bona fides.'<sup>183</sup> Britain could not claim, as Chamberlain had vowed in his radio address to the nation on 3 September, that it was fighting against 'brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution' unless it was prepared to condemn a similar act of 'brute force' on the Soviet Union's part.<sup>184</sup> Richard Austen Butler, the British delegate to the Assembly, stressed that Britain needed to keep its 'moral position intact' and that for this reason support for Soviet expulsion was preferable to abstention from voting.<sup>185</sup> If obliged to support a motion for Soviet expulsion, the British perceived in the Assembly session an opportunity to equate the Allied war effort with the collective security ideals of the Covenant. Winston Churchill, in his capacity of first lord of the admiralty, informed his cabinet colleagues that Britain stood to:

reap some advantage from them meeting of the League since the discussion there would tend to focus the conviction that in the war we stood for the principles of humanity against barbaric aggression. There is also strong support in this country for international co-operation and some organisation for this purpose would be needed after the war.<sup>186</sup>

This evidence endorses Steiner's argument as to the League's role in establishing norms of state behaviour, with which states, publicly at least, sought to identify.<sup>187</sup> The determination of the French to support an expulsion motion was also

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<sup>181</sup> Memorandum by A.W.G. Randall, 4 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 200).

<sup>182</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 8 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., CAB 65/2/42, p. 358).

<sup>183</sup> *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p. 235.

<sup>184</sup> The transcript of Neville Chamberlain's declaration of war, 3 Sep. 1939, available at the B.B.C. Archives, (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7957.shtml?page=txt>) (1 Apr. 2010).

<sup>185</sup> *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, pp 235-6.

<sup>186</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 6 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., CAB 65/2/39, p. 313).

<sup>187</sup> Steiner, *The triumph of the dark*, p. 173.

a deciding factor in the British decision to endorse the resolution. The French were wary of provoking the Soviet Union but they were conscious that either rejection of the motion or abstention would alienate domestic opinion.<sup>188</sup> Influenced by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the French Communist Party's opposition to the war with Germany, the autumn and winter of 1939-40 was characterised as 'an orgy of anti-communist hysteria' when the Daladier government began the process of interning communists.<sup>189</sup> Charles Corbin, the French ambassador to London, informed his British allies that the French government's position was strongly influenced by the strength of public sympathy for Finland and antipathy for the Soviet Union. Corbin stated that the least his government could do was to support a motion for Soviet expulsion.<sup>190</sup> The French government dispatched a strong delegation to Geneva, including the former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, the seasoned senator Joseph Paul Boncour. Small power pressure (of the positive or the negative kind) was an important feature of the League's diplomatic experience but it did not determine the organisation's potential; delegates from the smaller nations could only influence League policy insofar as the great powers were prepared to listen to them.<sup>191</sup> While the motion to expel the Soviet Union was not initiated by the great powers, had the British and French, as permanent members of the League Council, refused to give their consent, the motion would have foundered. The reaction to the convocation of the League Assembly thus permits an overview of the domestic concerns and foreign policies of the great and small powers alike.

Meanwhile Finland shared almost the same trepidations about the Assembly as did the neutral countries. Finland was fighting a war which it was ultimately unlikely to win however valiant a resistance its troops could proffer against the Red Army in the short term. The Finnish historian Oli Vehviläinen went so far to claim that Finland did not support the League resolution for expulsion so as not to further antagonise an already formidable adversary.<sup>192</sup> The reality of the Finnish position was more complex. Finland was then a member of the League Council. However as Finland was a party to the dispute, under article fifteen of the Covenant its vote was

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<sup>188</sup> Memorandum by Sir Ronald Hugh Campbell [British ambassador to Paris], 5 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 187).

<sup>189</sup> Julian Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944* (Oxford, 2001), pp 114-5.

<sup>190</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 12 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., CAB 65/2/46, p. 397).

<sup>191</sup> For further analysis of the small power experience of the League see Sally Marks, 'The small states at Geneva' in *World Affairs*, clvii (1995) p. 192.

<sup>192</sup> Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, p. 49.

not required to secure the necessary unanimity for a Council resolution. Rudolf Holsti, the Finnish delegate to the League, reminded Under Secretary-General Thanassis Aghnides that his government might eventually be compelled to seek the most favourable conditions from the Soviet Union for the re-establishment of peace. Holsti confided to Aghnides that Finland would therefore not insist upon the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the League.<sup>193</sup> However Holsti gave an assurance that Finland would not in any way wish to obstruct the will of member states.<sup>194</sup>

Unfortunately for Finland, Chamberlain and Halifax were correct to predict that the result of the Assembly would have little or no impact on the course of the war. The emphasis in the press and among governments was more on condemnation than assistance. In his study of Europe between the wars, Mark Mazower argued that as the years progressed the League's influence shrunk until it was reduced to nothing more than a mere 'coalition of like-minded states', rather than the embodiment of a new international order.<sup>195</sup> The evidence clearly supports this view with that 'like-mindedness' predicated on a collective antipathy for communism. The British Foreign Office predicted that the Assembly would be a successful exercise in 'anti-Russian propaganda.'<sup>196</sup> However the transformation of the League's political function was not the accidental result of the failure of the League's diplomatic machinery. Rather it was a deliberate and self-conscious process as demonstrated by the earlier opposition to Soviet membership and participation in the League's technical activities. The League's political identity was also regarded, by the press and by government officials, as a positive feature of the League's experience. The *Irish Times* argued that the moral authority of League member states, uniting to condemn an act of aggression, would be an extremely uplifting exercise, boding well for the future development of international affairs.<sup>197</sup> On 3 December 1939 Sir Orme Sargent (deputy under secretary of state for foreign affairs) pressed on Lord Halifax the need to use the League as an expression of shared values and respect for international law. He argued that it would be unwise to stifle the League in its function as a 'forum of world opinion', despite the serious political consequences

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<sup>193</sup> Thanassis Aghnides to Joseph Avenol, 9 Dec. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/32, f. 190).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark continent: Europe's twentieth century* (London, 1998), p. 68).

<sup>196</sup> Memorandum by A.W.G. Randall, 4 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 196).

<sup>197</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1939.

liable to be enacted from an expulsion motion.<sup>198</sup> The Foreign Office also concluded that if the League did not allow an expression of protest against the Soviet Union it would have ‘shocked’ world opinion.<sup>199</sup> If the League was going to function for the rest of its days as an exclusive club in which its members expressed a common identity, there was no longer any room for a state so at odds with the dominant political culture of Geneva.

The eyes of the world turned on Geneva when the twentieth session of the League Assembly opened on 11 December 1939. As one columnist noted, there was a ‘touch of drama’ about this sudden resurgence of the League.<sup>200</sup> The organisation of League proceedings for this special session was rather abnormal. It was well within the Council’s mandate to tackle the Finnish appeal on its own; however Avenol had pushed for the simultaneous convocation of the Assembly. The secretary-general believed that a decision by the Assembly, in which every member state was entitled to exercise their vote, would carry greater moral authority and universality than if action was limited to a Council resolution.<sup>201</sup> This provided the means for the League to present itself as Sargent’s ‘forum of world opinion.’ Had matters been confined to the Council, the great powers would not have felt the same pressure to support Soviet expulsion. It was agreed that a special committee, composed of thirteen member states, would consider the Finnish appeal and make a recommendation to the Assembly. The committee was composed of delegates from Britain, Canada, Egypt, France, India, the Irish Free State, Norway, Sweden, Thailand, Uruguay, Bolivia and Venezuela with Portugal’s José Caeiro da Mata elected as chairman. On 11 December the special committee of the Assembly sent a telegram to Moscow urging the Soviet government to bring an immediate halt to hostilities and to open negotiations. The telegram stated that Finland had already indicated its willingness to accept such a request and it gave the Soviet government twenty-four hours to respond to the appeal.<sup>202</sup> The following day the Soviet Union responded with a terse refusal to the request.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Memorandum by Sir Orme Sargent, 3 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 173).

<sup>199</sup> Memorandum by A.W.G. Randall, 4 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 196).

<sup>200</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1939.

<sup>201</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 3 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 800).

<sup>202</sup> Telegram from the special committee of the Assembly to the government of the Soviet Union, 11 Dec. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/32, f. 203).

<sup>203</sup> Report of the special committee of the Assembly in relation to article fifteen, paragraphs four and five on the Covenant, 13 Dec. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/32, f. 206).

On 13 December a plenary session of the Assembly was held. As expected it was the Argentinean delegate Rudolfo Freye who spoke first and it was Freye who forwarded a motion for the expulsion of the Soviet Union. In a justification of the motion, Freye argued that as the League no longer possessed:

the strength it required for the application of economic and military sanctions, the passing of judgement, from the point of view of moral effect, was conceivable only if the intention was to influence non-member states. The League had no doubt lost all coercive force, but it could not refuse to make a gesture-the exclusion of Russia-unless it was prepared to resign its functions in a spirit of suicidal defeat.<sup>204</sup>

Freye's words reflect the League's role as the appointed standard-bearer of civilised international relations. They imply that the loss of coercive force was not the fault of member states but the result of the harsh reality of international affairs. However, theoretically, there was no impediment to member states if they wished to impose economic sanctions on the Soviet Union and provide Finland with military relief. Member states had already resigned the collective security potential of the League to 'suicidal defeat.' At the opening session of the Assembly, the Finnish delegate Eino Hosti stated that his government hoped the League would 'find means to transform the world sympathy into practical help.'<sup>205</sup> Holsti and his compatriots would be sorely disappointed. It was true that the plight of Finland elicited genuine sympathy from League member states. As the British delegate stated:

It was no wonder that there had been such a demonstration of public support for Finland. Though a small country, its whole record since it achieved independence had proclaimed a devotion to the cause of peace and to those ideals of social progress for which the League has always stood.<sup>206</sup>

Unfortunately for Finland the December Assembly functioned as forum for collective denunciation rather than as a launch pad for collective action. Prioritising the League's political identity over its diplomatic role permitted member states to project an image of peace without having to enforce it.

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<sup>204</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, pp 6-7).

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Freye argued before the assembled delegates of member states that the U.S.S.R. had placed itself outside of the Covenant by an illegal application of force against its peaceful neighbour; Soviet actions constituted an insult to all member states and therefore the exclusion of the U.S.S.R. from the League of Nations was the only course of action that could be contemplated by the Council.<sup>207</sup> Freye stated that Argentina would withdraw from the League if the Soviet Union remained a member. Latin American solidarity remained intact at the Assembly and the Mexican delegate used the opportunity to emphasise the 'great importance which it attached to the valuable collaboration of the states of the New World within the League of Nations.'<sup>208</sup> Once the Argentinean motion was forwarded the die was cast. The motion was adopted by majority vote among the members of the special committee and the report was presented to the Assembly on the morning of 14 December 1939. For the resolution to be accepted, no single state, great or small, could reject it. Abstention could not derail a League resolution. The Assembly passed by acclamation the resolution of the special committee with nine states out of the forty two assembled abstaining from voting. The countries who abstained from voting were: China, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Switzerland.

It was clear from the initial reaction to the convocation of the Assembly and Council that a unanimous resolution was out of the question. The impossibility of securing such unanimity serves as a clear reflection of the state of international relations at this time. The countries that declined to participate in the resolution were motivated by the constraints of their own national concerns. The Baltic countries were then falling rapidly under Soviet political and military influence. The Chinese ambassador to London, Dr. Quo Tai-Chi, informed the British that China's delegates would abstain from voting due to their difficult diplomatic position.<sup>209</sup> In previous Assembly sessions China spoke out against Japanese incursions into Manchuria. It had been the Soviet government who had given the Chinese the most assistance in their struggle against the invading forces.<sup>210</sup> During the Assembly proceedings other states that declined to participate in the resolution used the opportunity to articulate

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<sup>207</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 6).

<sup>208</sup> The consul-general in Geneva to the secretary of state, 14 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 805).

<sup>209</sup> Memorandum by Cadogan, 5 Dec. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 189).

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*



and emphasise their neutrality. The Swedish delegate, speaking on behalf of his own country as well as Norway and Denmark, informed the Assembly that they were compelled to abstain from assuming a position in regard to the resolution ‘insofar as it relates to a measure coming within the framework of the system of sanctions.’<sup>211</sup> The Swiss delegate outlined the same justification for abstention. He assured the assembled states that the Swiss government would not regard the League’s organisation of humanitarian assistance for Finland, on Swiss soil, as a violation of its neutrality.<sup>212</sup> According to the records of the Swiss Federal Council, the government was prepared to allow its delegation to express admiration for the bravery of the Finns while instructing it to abstain from the expulsion motion on the grounds of the Confederation’s perpetual neutrality.<sup>213</sup> The fact vulnerable member states such as Switzerland and Sweden felt secure enough, despite their precarious neutrality and the hostile attitude of the German press, to even attend the League session was quite telling. It was a clear indication that the December Assembly was never intended to serve as a genuine exercise in collective security. According to Neville Wylie, the League’s brand of internationalism had a ‘corrosive effect on neutrality.’<sup>214</sup> The proceedings of the December Assembly indicate that the League actually permitted the forceful and deliberate expression of neutrality. As demonstrated above, it allowed vulnerable neutral countries such as Sweden and Switzerland, to invoke their rights under international law before an international audience. The fact that they were not admonished by other member states for failing to participate in the expulsion motion indicates that neutrality was an accepted feature of League membership.

On the evening of the 14 December members of the Council considered the motion for Soviet expulsion.<sup>215</sup> A resolution was circulated to all member states in which the Council found ‘that by its act the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has placed itself outside the League of Nations’ and so it followed that the Soviet Union

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<sup>211</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 14 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 804).

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 804-5.

<sup>213</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Federal Council of 5 Dec. 1939, 9 Dec. 1939 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/044, p. 490).

<sup>214</sup> Wylie, ‘Victims or actors? European neutrals and non-belligerents 1939-45’, p. 8.

<sup>215</sup> The Council, at this time, was composed of fourteen states: Britain, France, Finland, The Union of South Africa, China, Greece, the Soviet Union, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Egypt, Iran, Yugoslavia and Belgium.

was 'no longer a member of the League.'<sup>216</sup> As with the Assembly resolution, the decision only achieved the necessary unanimity through the abstention of three states: China, Greece and Yugoslavia. Finland did not vote on a resolution in which it was directly concerned and the Soviet Union abstained from the meeting, as did Peru and Iran.

The Soviet government adopted a disdainful attitude to the League resolution, continuing to maintain that the U.S.S.R. was not at war with the legitimate Finnish government. Speaking through TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) the government claimed that the decision of member states was so absurd that it could only make a 'laughing stock of its ill-starred authors.'<sup>217</sup> The Soviet government wrongly identified Britain and France as the architects of the expulsion motion and attacked the hypocrisy of two imperialist countries in denouncing an act of aggression when they themselves were in control of vast empires.<sup>218</sup> In issuing such a statement the Soviet Union was reverting to its original perception of the League as a tool for the imperialist powers. Indeed the young Soviet state had initially viewed the League as a 'coalition of capitalist interests to be directed against the Soviet Union.'<sup>219</sup> This perception was not baseless; both Wilson and Lloyd George were prepared to consider the removal of the Baltic States, the Ukraine and the Caucasus from the U.S.S.R. so that they could become mandated territories under the supervision of the League.<sup>220</sup> In 1940 no great power was prepared to even contemplate harnessing the League's collective security potential to organise direct military action against the Soviet Union. However the League was being used as an instrument of anti-Soviet policy. The aversion expressed in the corridors of the *Palais des Nations* against the entire Soviet system demonstrate that the brief period of Soviet commitment to collective security (under Maxime Litvinov) had been nothing more than an artificial and premature détente within the anti-communist culture of Geneva. The Soviet Union's inglorious expulsion from the League heralded the end of the first major experiment in international cooperation between the liberal democracies and the solitary socialist state.

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<sup>216</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 14 Dec. 1939 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: the Soviet Union 1933-9, p. 805).

<sup>217</sup> *Tass*, 15 Dec. 1939 translation available from (T.N.A., FO 371/23696).

<sup>218</sup> *Moscow News*, 18 Dec. 1939.

<sup>219</sup> Peters, Haigh and Morris, *The Soviet Union and the League of Nations*, p. 4.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

Indeed, reactions to the Assembly and Council resolutions demonstrate that anti-communist prejudice was a determining factor in the expulsion of the Soviet Union. The chairman of the Assembly's special committee, José Caeiro da Mata, articulated the sense of vindication among those states that had opposed Soviet membership from the outset. He claimed that the actions of the U.S.S.R. represented 'no surprise and no disappointment.'<sup>221</sup> Da Mata argued that the expulsion of the U.S.S.R. expressed 'the feelings of millions who still believed in the triumph of spiritual values.'<sup>222</sup> The Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano* described Soviet attitudes and actions during this period as indicative of the 'contempt' in which it held 'natural rights.'<sup>223</sup> The same organ charged the Soviets as being an 'anti-God party' who sought by its invasions of Poland and Finland to 'carry the banner of atheism towards the west and the centre of Europe', threatening 'all religions especially Catholicism.'<sup>224</sup> Robert Dell was convinced that the Latin American states which demanded Soviet expulsion were 'more influenced by hatred of communism than by concern for the fate of Finland.'<sup>225</sup> Dell regarded the expulsion of the Soviet Union as 'justified', arguing that the fact that Germany, Italy and Japan escaped such a fate was 'no argument against it', it never being 'too late' for the League 'to make amends.'<sup>226</sup> However according to Dell, it was illogical to expel the Soviet Union without the application of sanctions; the only result was that the League lost the Soviet financial contribution to the budget.'<sup>227</sup> The Soviet Union violated the League Covenant. However the inconsistency inherent in the expulsion of the Soviet Union for a crime that had previously been committed with impunity by other League member states (then withdrawn) undermined the much celebrated 'moral effect' of the Assembly and Council resolutions.<sup>228</sup> This episode in the League's history illustrated that the problems of antagonism and prejudice between conflicting

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<sup>221</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 8).

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Osservatore Romano*, 6 Dec. 1939 translation provided in (T.N.A., FO 371/23696).

<sup>224</sup> *Osservatore Romano*, 20 Dec. 1939 translated in a letter from D.G. Osbourne, British legation to the Holy See, to Halifax, 20 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23696).

<sup>225</sup> Dell, *The Geneva Racket*, p. 303.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> For the 'moral effect' of the Council resolution see Rudolfo Freye's speech: Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, pp 6-7).

systems of government would have to be tackled to create a more cohesive security organisation in the future.

While the Soviet press identified Britain and France as the protagonists in the December sessions of the League's political organs, this episode was actually indicative of their failure to provide strong leadership at Geneva. What prompted the Anglo-French bloc to support the motion for expulsion was their need to be associated with the condemnation of any form of expansionism. When Richard Austen Butler, the British delegate, rose to speak in the Council session he declared that the 'strength of the general feeling in the world' on the Finnish invasion, derived from the 'realisation that another blow is being struck at the foundations on which the existence of all of us as independent nations is founded.'<sup>229</sup> Butler remained deliberately vague in his statements on the invasion, barely invoking the name of the Soviet Union. Butler rather strove to impress upon his audience the idea that the United Kingdom stood in the vanguard of the defence of the Covenant. Butler stated that 'wild movements have been loosed which seem to threaten the life of free peoples.'<sup>230</sup> The December Assembly allowed the British government and the neutral countries to justify their respective positions while permitting identification with a peaceful, egalitarian system of international relations.

The French government also used the Assembly to justify its own policies, drawing an analogy between the Allied war effort and the League resolution on Finland. During the Council session, Joseph Paul-Boncour told a nervous Geneva that he could not pass judgement on Stalin without denouncing 'the first and chief author of the present European upheaval.'<sup>231</sup> This was one of the few incidents during proceedings that raised the spectre of German retaliation against the neutral powers. Another was the speech by the representative of Polish government-in-exile (then resident in Paris) Sigismond Gralinski. Gralinski addressed the elephant in the room; the aggression that had already snuffed out Polish independence. Gralinski paid tribute to the Finns, claiming his compatriots would feel a natural sympathy for their plight as Poland had been the first country to oppose the 'march of terror and

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<sup>229</sup> *League of Nations Official Journal: minutes of the hundred and sixth and hundred and seventh session of the Council, 9 December 1939 and 14 December 1939* (T.N.A., FO 371/2440, p. 507).

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

destruction.<sup>232</sup> Gralinski did not condemn the League's failure to come to Poland's aid against both Germany and the Soviet Union but did speak of the 'terrible sufferings of the Polish people under the regime of occupation.'<sup>233</sup> Gralinski's presence underscored the League's role as a badge of sovereignty for those states who could no longer take such sovereignty for granted. It also exposed the contradictions and inconsistencies in the expulsion of the Soviet Union for its invasion of Finland while the League Assembly drew a shroud over the fate of Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Raffo dubbed the decision to expel the Soviet Union as a 'petty act' that 'did no credit to the organisation.'<sup>234</sup> While Soviet expulsion was undoubtedly motivated more by prejudice than altruism, the consensus among Secretariat officials, politicians and the press in late 1939, early 1940, was that it reflected well on both member states and the League. Avenol was particularly ebullient about the outcome of the session of the League's political organs. He argued that the expulsion of the Soviet Union had given the League 'a fresh and unexpected lease of life.'<sup>235</sup> Officials in the *Quai d'Orsay* were also pleased that the League Assembly was used to the advantage of the Allied war effort.<sup>236</sup> The press reaction was overwhelmingly positive. The *Journal de Genève* praised the League for its 'clear and courageous attitude'.<sup>237</sup> The Portuguese organ *Diário da Manhã* recognised the 'meaningful' collective action on the part of member states and the significance of their adherence to the Covenant.<sup>238</sup> As the *Irish Times* noted: 'the League was the one really constructive result of the last war. When the present war is over, the civilised world or what is left of it, may be very glad to have Geneva's organisation still in existence.'<sup>239</sup> The president of the Assembly optimistically closed proceedings with the following remarks:

The Assembly had tried to act upon the principles of law and equity, with natural hesitation but without ambiguity. A member State had applied to the

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<sup>232</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 10).

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 4.

<sup>235</sup> Sir Ronald Hugh Campbell to Richard Austen Butler, 23 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23696, p. 224).

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 15 Dec. 1939.

<sup>238</sup> *Diário da Manhã*, 15 Dec. 1939 translation provided by Professor Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses.

<sup>239</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Dec. 1939.

League for assistance and had not applied in vain. The flame had been kept alive in the storm of terrible events.<sup>240</sup>

It has often been the practise of post-war realist historians to dismiss such misplaced optimism on the part of League supporters and apologists when, in their eyes, the organisation had lost all political importance.<sup>241</sup> While a study of the December Assembly cannot sustain a revisionist reading of the League's security record, it does provide an insight into why member states chose to preserve the organisation through the war years. The Covenant's (albeit inconsistent and incomplete) ability to serve as benchmark in diplomatic conduct and as a counterpoint to both extreme ideologies and expansionism imbued the League with symbolic relevancy and a poignancy to a world at war.

### **The aftermath of the Assembly**

The twentieth session of the Assembly was not closed but adjourned indefinitely until such a time as member states could meet again. In his closing address, the President of the Assembly expressed his hope that when the Assembly met again, there would be proof that the modest efforts which had been made would not have been entirely in vain.<sup>242</sup> Member states were not placed under any obligation to help Finland. Rather they were exhorted to provide Finland with such material and humanitarian assistance as was in their power to give and to refrain from any action which might 'weaken Finland's power of resistance.'<sup>243</sup> As Mazower pointed out, the Secretariat of the League never carried any considerable executive power in its own right, but rather saw itself as interlocutor, helping individual governments fulfil their obligations under the Covenant.<sup>244</sup> This tradition was upheld during the Winter War. Avenol encouraged staff to devote their energies to relief efforts in the spirit of solidarity with and admiration for Finnish resistance efforts.<sup>245</sup> League official Bertil

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<sup>240</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 18).

<sup>241</sup> Taylor, *The origins of the Second World War*, p. 96; Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 18; Scott, *The rise and fall of the League of Nations*, p. 208.

<sup>242</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 18).

<sup>243</sup> Cabinet Memorandum, 11 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., CAB 66/4/44, p. 305).

<sup>244</sup> Mazower, *Dark continent*, p. 54.

<sup>245</sup> Memorandum by Avenol, 10 Feb. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 112).

Renborg (who was Swedish) was dispatched to Stockholm to establish a temporary branch office. Renborg made several trips to Helsinki where he received first-hand information on what Finland most urgently needed and the resulting lists were then wired to Geneva to be circulated among member states.<sup>246</sup> Information and statistics were supplied from the League's E.F.O. identifying which member states could reasonably supply the goods requested.<sup>247</sup> Medicine, food and warm winter clothes flowed into Finland and its government expressed its gratitude to the League for the latter's assistance.<sup>248</sup>

League officials were also aware of Finland's urgent need for military assistance: Renborg reported to Avenol that by January 1940 fifty per-cent of the productive population were engaged in the defence of the country amidst a growing realisation that time was running out.<sup>249</sup> Avenol sought to operate as an informal political agent when he assisted the Finnish legation in Paris in its petition for armed intervention from the French government and armed forces.<sup>250</sup> The lack of urgency in Allied military response caused anxiety among the small states of Europe. As a member of the neutral Greek Government enquired of his compatriot, Under Secretary-General Thanassis Aghnides:

Are those who are in a position to help doing enough to save Finland because, if that country succumbs there will be a great temptation, in fact an insuperable one, for the small neutral countries to argue that they need not be foolhardy in their attitude towards Germany and draw that country's thunders?<sup>251</sup>

Aware that the eyes of the world were upon them, the British government knew that if Finland fell, it would become 'another Abyssinia' in its diplomatic history.<sup>252</sup> One of the reasons for the failure of the League's political mission in the inter-war years was the tendency of Britain and France to pursue their own ends outside the framework of the Assembly and Council; this tendency was epitomised

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<sup>246</sup> Aghnides to Avenol, 26 Dec. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/32, f. 223).

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Renborg to Avenol, 14 Jan. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 26, p. 2).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., f. 16.

<sup>250</sup> Memorandum by Renborg, Feb. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 114).

<sup>251</sup> Aghnides to Avenol, 12 Feb. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 98).

<sup>252</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 23 Feb. 1940 (T.N.A., CAB 65/11/3, p. 286).

by the inauspicious Munich Conference of 1938.<sup>253</sup> Though both Britain and France participated in the League resolutions they demurred from using League machinery to organise military intervention in Finland. In February a plan was devised in which an Allied Expeditionary Force would land in Finland, not by air, but by land, having passed circuitously through neutral Norway and Sweden. Allied motivation lay less in relieving beleaguered Finland than in procuring the use of Scandinavian ports as well as the control of the coveted Swedish iron ore fields, to the detriment of the Germany war industry.<sup>254</sup> The Allied Supreme War Council concluded that the recent League resolution could be publicly invoked to justify the establishment of military bases in Norway and Sweden.<sup>255</sup> In reality Britain and France continued their policy of sidelining the League from their main diplomatic and military undertakings. When Avenol proposed making a personal call to the Foreign Office in order to ensure that all possible means of assistance for Finland were under consideration, he was rebuffed by Alexander Cadogan.<sup>256</sup> Britain and France used the League for rhetoric, not for *realpolitik*.

The Allied powers appealed to Norway and Sweden for permission to move an expeditionary force through their respective territories. They assured the Swedish and Norwegian government that if such an action provoked a German invasion, Britain and France would provide the necessary military assistance.<sup>257</sup> Sweden was a particularly vulnerable power of economic interest to both the Allied and the Axis bloc.<sup>258</sup> On 3 February the German Minister in Stockholm called upon the Swedish foreign minister and informed him that Germany would not remain inactive if Sweden sent regular troops into Finland.<sup>259</sup> Sweden could not afford to be indiscreet in providing assistance to Finland. Through the British embassy in Stockholm, the Swedish government informed Whitehall that they wished to avoid lending any credence to the idea that they were ‘participating in a common international action

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<sup>253</sup> Asa Briggs and Patricia Clavin, *Modern Europe 1789-present* (2nd ed., Harlow, 1997), p. 207; Henig, *The League of Nations*, p. 87.

<sup>254</sup> Paul A. Levine, ‘Swedish neutrality during the Second World War: tactical success or moral compromise?’ in Neville Wylie (ed.), *European neutrals and non-belligerents during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 312.

<sup>255</sup> Cabinet memorandum, 2 Feb. 1940 (T.N.A., CAB 66/5/21, p. 2).

<sup>256</sup> Cadogan to Avenol, 3 Jan. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f.1, p.1).

<sup>257</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 1 Feb. 1940 (T.N.A., CAB 65/12/41, p. 5); Reports by the chiefs of staff on the French proposals for Allied assistance to Finland, 2 Feb. 1940 (T.N.A., CAB 66/5/21, f. 116, p. 2).

<sup>258</sup> Levine, ‘Swedish neutrality during the Second World War’, p. 312.

<sup>259</sup> P. Hjelt to Avenol, 8 Mar. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 188, p. 2).



against Soviet Russia under the auspices of the League of Nations.<sup>260</sup> Despite this pressure, Sweden provided considerable clandestine assistance to Finland. A Finnish League official, P. Hjelt, informed Avenol that by the end of January 1940, up to 8,000 Swedish volunteers had already crossed into Finland and gifts amounting to more than eighty million Swedish crowns had been donated.<sup>261</sup> The prospect of becoming the battleground for the first major showdown between the great powers in Europe was consequently none too inviting for Sweden and Norway and they duly refused to grant permission for the passage of the expeditionary force. In all events, the significant delay on the part of the British and French in committing troops had already proved fatal for Finland. The Finns were aware that the Allied plan was too vague and unlikely to survive Swedish and Norwegian protestations. The British Cabinet eventually agreed on 2 March that it was not fair to offer Finland assistance it could not realistically provide.<sup>262</sup> On 12 March 1940 the Finnish government signed the Peace of Moscow with the Soviet Union. Finland consequently lost ten per cent of its territory with over 400,000 civilians living in the ceded territory being forced to move *en masse* bringing whatever possessions they could carry.

In the aftermath of the Peace of Moscow Halvdan Koht, the Norwegian foreign minister, was moved to respond to the accusations, especially from the French press, that Norway and Sweden had betrayed their Nordic neighbour.<sup>263</sup> Koht argued that ‘there would be no honour or moral gain in throwing a country into a fight which could lead to nothing but disaster, loss, and destruction.’<sup>264</sup> Koht squarely accused the British and the French of usurping the League resolution for their own ends:

As their enemy-Germany-had a pact of friendship with Soviet Russia, it was natural that the two western powers should gradually come to regard the war waged by Finland as a help rendered to themselves. I am sure that many people in those countries wished to go to the aid of Finland from idealistic motives. But I am as certain that it was a result of considerations connected with their own war that there developed among them a growing determination to reinforce the resistance of Finland.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Cabinet memorandum, 11 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., CAB 66/4/44, p. 311).

<sup>261</sup> Hjelt to Avenol, 22 Jan. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 45, p. 7-f. 46, p. 8).

<sup>262</sup> *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p. 258.

<sup>263</sup> For French denunciation of Sweden and Norway see for example *Le Temps*, 21 Feb. 1940.

<sup>264</sup> Radio address by Dr. Halvdan Koht, 14 Mar. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24795, f. 6, p. 3).

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 6, p. 4.

Koht's radio address highlighted the truth at the heart of an Assembly resolution that was invested with more symbolic meaning than decisive action. This symbolic meaning was predicated on the League's exclusive brand of liberal internationalism; the League's international civil service aspired to operate as the embodiment of that internationalism during the war years. Secretariat and technical services hoped to serve as a 'nucleus, however small, on which international life might be reorganised once the war [was] over.'<sup>266</sup> The Assembly inaugurated a special committee to consider the Bruce proposals and agreed to regard the reforms as experimental with their implementation postponed until the end of the war.<sup>267</sup> In reality a separate mechanism was introduced to oversee the work of the technical organs. The League's Supervisory Commission traditionally assisted the secretary-general in devising the budget for the Secretariat and the technical organisations (including the I.L.O.) for the approval of the Assembly and Council. The Supervisory Commission was composed of distinguished individuals, appointed by the Assembly, who served the League in an independent capacity and not as government representatives (though some such as Carl Hambro and Sir Cecil Kisch were national politicians and civil servants). The Supervisory Commission's power was enhanced during the war years when League member states agreed to accord it, in tandem with the secretary-general, full authority to approve the budgets and work programmes of the technical organisations in the aftermath of the indefinite adjournment of the twentieth session of the Assembly.<sup>268</sup> The Supervisory Commission acted for member states until the Assembly and Council could convene once more in Geneva.

The idea that the League could be confined to its technical role certainly did not meet with universal approbation. In the aftermath of the postponement of the Bruce proposals, Dell argued that the success of the technical organisations did not:

justify the existence of the League which is, and was intended to be, primarily a political organisation. The League was founded to preserve the peace of the world and to establish an international order and the rule of law in international affairs, not to deal with public health or prostitution or the opium traffic, although there is no reason why it should not deal with them

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<sup>266</sup> Loveday to Avenol, 31 Mar. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 11).

<sup>267</sup> It was deemed too difficult, in wartime conditions, to arrange the election and appointment of personnel to the Central Committee. See Martin Hill, *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations: a survey of twenty-five years experience* (Washington, 1946), p. 120.

<sup>268</sup> Report of the delegates of the United Kingdom on the twentieth Assembly of the League of Nations to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 8 Jan. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2443, p. 18).

[.....] if the activities of the League of Nations were restricted to such matters as these, as some people seem to desire, it would evidently have to be remodelled on quite different lines and be given a new title.<sup>269</sup>

While Dell was correct to assert that the League was primarily a diplomatic organisation he failed to identify the organic relationship between the League's political identity and its technical role. Certain technical officials such as Arthur Sweetser and Frank Walters sought to distinguish between the League's political and technical organs, sharing the same views as Mitrany and Ghéballi in arguing that social and economic cooperation could transcend the political divisions of the Assembly and Council.<sup>270</sup> However, as Clavin correctly asserted, this view was not universal to the League's international civil service; most League officials did not believe politics could or should be taken out of their technical work, but rather saw the value of their work in encouraging intergovernmental cooperation to effect real change.<sup>271</sup> Functionalism was not an alternative to political cooperation; rather it was a different means to achieve the same end. Martin Hill, a prominent member of the E.F.O., who wrote the first history of that agency in 1946, highlighted the fact that the work of the E.F.O. was inherently political-its ultimate objective being 'to contribute towards the consolidation of peace and the removal of causes of international conflict.'<sup>272</sup> John Winant, the director of the I.L.O., identified one of the primary roles of the organisation as working to 'strengthen the fabric of democracy.'<sup>273</sup> Reservations were even expressed within the League Secretariat against allowing non-League member states to participate in the organisation's technical activities if they would not formally accede to ideals of the Covenant. As one secretariat official argued in early 1939:

At the present time, when the retention of membership of the League has to be justified in so many countries by insistence on the value of the League's technical work, it would surely be inadvisable to undertake a reform, the very object of which is to enable a non-member to acquire all the powers and

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<sup>269</sup> Dell, *The Geneva Racket*, p. 24.

<sup>270</sup> Arthur Sweetser, 'The non-political achievements of the League', p. 191; Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 1.

<sup>271</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, pp 237-8, p. 249.

<sup>272</sup> Hill, *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations*, p. 5.

<sup>273</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Organisation', 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O. Archives, Geneva, [henceforth I.L.O.A.], I.L.O. Century Project [henceforth I.L.O.C.P.], official documents, p. 15), available at (<http://www.ilo.org/century/research/otherhistoryprojects/lang--en/index.htm>) (20 Dec. 2012).

advantages of League membership for the purpose of technical collaboration.<sup>274</sup>

The political League was never destined to eclipse the technical League as they were both intrinsic to one another. Its technical role was indistinct from its political identity as both were designed to reflect and promote the liberal capitalist ethos of their founders. This was reflected in the response of the I.L.O. to Soviet expulsion from the League. In February 1940 the Governing Body of the I.L.O. decided that the Soviet Union was no longer a member of the I.L.O.<sup>275</sup> According to a formal statement by the chairman of the Governing Body, the American Carter Goodrich (professor of economics at Colombia University), ‘just as the U.S.S.R. had become automatically a member of the I.L.O. when it entered the League in September, 1934, so by its expulsion from the League in December, it ceased to be a member of the I.L.O.’<sup>276</sup> As discussed, by this stage the Soviet Union had largely ceased to participate in the work of the I.L.O.<sup>277</sup> In expelling the I.L.O. the Governing Body was in uncharted territory; while member states which had withdrawn from the League were permitted to retain their membership of the I.L.O., Soviet expulsion was unprecedented. The Governing Body’s decision to follow the League’s example reflected the historic role of the I.L.O. as a social democratic counterpoint to international communism.

The reaction of the United States government to the proposals of the Bruce Committee reflected the impossibility of divorcing the League’s political mission from its technocratic agenda. The American consul in Geneva informed a Secretariat official that, at that present moment in time, with the result of the League’s political failure unfolding in Europe, it would be next to impossible to secure official congressional approval for the proposals of the Bruce Report.<sup>278</sup> As Clavin demonstrated, attempts to encourage American nascent internationalism during this period could easily backfire with Roosevelt’s ‘opaque’ foreign policy proving a frustration for all those who wished to encourage greater American participation in

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<sup>274</sup> Secretariat report on the Central Committee, 4 Mar. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f.8, p. 3).

<sup>275</sup> *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1940.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Memorandum on the participation of the Soviet Union in the technical activities of the League since 18 Sep. 1934, 3 Feb. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/4).

<sup>278</sup> American consul in Geneva to Avenol, 21 Feb. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 329).

the League.<sup>279</sup> The fact that the Roosevelt administration refused to drop its cautious approach to any formal association with the League, despite the suspension of the Assembly and Council, further demonstrated that governments could never be induced to view the League's activities through anything other than a political prism.

In conclusion the League's place in the international landscape in 1939 was predicated on its political identity. It served as an expression, if not as an enforcement, of liberal internationalism in a world where such ideals were being placed under intense pressure. Indeed, as the painful consequences of Soviet marginalisation attest, the League's political identity undermined its diplomatic role as an objective arbiter of international disputes. The League was a product of its time and a reflection of member state aspirations. This was the conservative internationalism of Geneva; an internationalism where greater emphasis was placed on the creation of a collective identity than the striving for collective security. If an effective security organisation was to be created in the future there needed to be a reversal in priorities. This could only be achieved if the great powers were prepared to lead and the small powers willing to follow. The mobilisation of member states to denounce Soviet aggression, while remaining passive in the face of fascist expansionism, can be explained by the strength of anti-communist feeling and the influence of geo-political factors: Continental European neutrals such as Switzerland had more to fear from the *Wehrmacht* than from the Red Army. The inconsistent approach of League member states to the two biggest threats to liberal democracy, fascism and communism, would enact important repercussions for both the League's wartime experience and its post-war prospects. The League's liberal democratic ethos would later prove a liability within a changed political landscape and a new balance of power dynamic. However in 1939 this ethos, married to the League's technical goals, provided a strong justification for its wartime preservation. As the war became a war of extremes, total in its reach and impact, an internal crisis within the League's international civil service threatened to shake the League from its liberal democratic foundations.

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<sup>279</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy: the reinvention of the League of Nations*, p. 239.

## **Chapter two: The impact of war on the Secretariat and technical organisations of the League, 1939-1940**

Although the League's international civil service was no longer obliged to act as a support to the Assembly and Council, it played a central role in the preservation of the liberal democratic ethos of the Covenant within an evolving political landscape. The activities and motivations of the Secretariat and technical officials permit a valuable insight into the impact of war on liberal internationalism and to the value of the League as diametrically opposed to the violent expansionism of the totalitarian powers. It has already been established that the League's agency was predicated on the ability of its international civil service to influence national policies.<sup>1</sup> This chapter discusses what League officials, in a time of intense crisis, were prepared to do with such influence. It fell to the League's Secretariat and technical agencies to preserve the organisation in the name of its member states. However, League officials did not always constrain themselves to the cautious internationalism of those states. This chapter also reveals the disparities and divisions within the Secretariat itself: with the ambitious internationalism of the lower ranks being frustrated by the conservatism of the secretary-general. Joseph Avenol's attempts to attune the international civil service to what he perceived as the realities of international relations are documented in the light of new historical evidence, unavailable to his previous biographers. The League was an organisation prone to identity crises; its place in the international landscape was never clearly defined. This chapter documents the tension that existed within the League apparatus between the inclination to align with the Allied war effort and the obligation to transcend the exclusivity of wartime alliances.

### **An exclusive alliance or a universal society of nations?**

While the floor of the Assembly in December 1939 did not feature a candid debate on the course of the wider 'European war', the League's international civil service reflected on its own position *vis-à-vis* the conflict. Previous historians have alluded to the fact that the League itself was misnamed: its French title *la Société des*

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<sup>1</sup> Clavin, 'Defining transnationalism', p. 425.

*Nations* was more appropriate for an organisation that sought to encourage multilateralism in a break with the militarist alliances and nationalist leagues of the past.<sup>2</sup> As discussed in chapter one, member states preferred to treat the organisation more as a ‘coalition of like-minded states’ rather than as a basis for a military alliance. For this reason the neutrals still had a place within the framework of membership. Alexander Loveday, the director of the E.F.O., stressed that if war broke out the League should remain at the disposal of all member states, neutral and belligerent alike.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Avenol, Loveday emphasised the importance of maintaining ‘the tradition of objectivity and scientific honesty’ which had always been ‘the essential condition’ for the success of the E.F.O.’s work.<sup>4</sup> The Governing Body of the I.L.O. was of a similar mindset.<sup>5</sup>

This was not a universal position among League officials and supporters. After all the future of peaceful internationalism depended on the ultimate defeat of fascist expansionism. In October 1939 F.L. McDougall (a British born Australian businessman and economic diplomat, closely associated with the policies of Stanley Bruce and the work of the E.F.O.) wrote to Loveday arguing that the expertise of the League’s technical officials should be placed at the disposal of the Allied war effort.<sup>6</sup> He claimed that the continuation and reform of the economic and social side of the League’s work should be supported as it would ‘carry to neutral and American opinion a sense of Allied confidence’ and would also underline the ‘international soundness of the Allied peace aims.’<sup>7</sup> Certain members of the international civil service were also anxious for the League and its technical agencies to operate as a moral compass and to align with those powers taking a stand against the Axis bloc. John Winant explicitly linked the I.L.O.’s quest to procure social justice with the struggle against totalitarianism.<sup>8</sup> Deputy Secretary-General Seán Lester, though an Irish national, did not believe in neutrality, regarding it as both impossible and immoral for individual states and for the League to feign impartiality.<sup>9</sup> A few months

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<sup>2</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Loveday to Avenol, 20 Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 48, p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Loveday to Avenol, 31 Mar. 1939 (A.F.M.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 2, p. 2).

<sup>5</sup> Report by the officers of the Governing Body of the I.L.O., 2 Feb. 1939 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

<sup>6</sup> F.L. McDougall to Loveday, 10 Oct. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 251, p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 23 June 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 319).

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 243. Lester did concede that neutrality was the most pragmatic policy for the young Irish State. Lester noted in his diary that it was ‘not so long ago since

before the outbreak of war Lester recorded in his diary that he prepared a note for Frank Walters (British deputy secretary-general) and for the British Foreign Office ‘suggesting the use of Geneva as a rallying point-in spite of its smash-alongside the alliance system they seem to be working on. But Avenol says “no” the League’s time is not yet.’<sup>10</sup> The transformation of the League into an Allied agency was not feasible during the Phoney War period as most member states remained outside of the fray. This divergence of opinion illustrates that even after twenty years of practise within the League of Nations there remained a lack of consensus on the appropriate role of an international organisation.

The different viewpoints abounding as to the League’s political role point not only to the disparity between the national interests of member states and the aspirations of the international civil service but also highlight the divisions within the Secretariat itself. Avenol’s reaction to Lester’s proposal to use Geneva as a rallying point signified that ambitious internationalism was very much a ‘bottom-up’ movement in the League’s international civil service. Traditionally the secretary-general proved an inhibiting influence on those League officials who oversaw the League’s emergence as a powerful technocracy. Robert Dell wrote that Eric Drummond was in ‘no sense a driving force but rather a brake. He did not stimulate the staff of the Secretariat, but rather restrained them if they showed signs of what appeared to him excessive zeal.’<sup>11</sup> Avenol trained as an economic diplomat and might have been expected to be more sympathetic to those who wanted to enhance the League’s technical role; his name being closely connected to the Bruce Report. Martin Dubin and Victor-Yves Ghébali, in their respective studies of the Bruce Report, identified Avenol as a driving force in the attempt to emancipate the work programmes of the technical agencies from the authority of the League’s political organs.<sup>12</sup> Raymond Fosdick, the former American deputy secretary-general of the League and director of the Rockefeller Foundation, conceded that the utility of the Bruce Report must be placed in the balance of any evaluation of Avenol’s career.<sup>13</sup> However Clavin recently argued that the movement for reform owed more to the

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Britain represented in the eyes of our people, nearly all that Nazi domination is to [Britain].’ See Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Sep. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 317).

<sup>10</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 15 Mar. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 306).

<sup>11</sup> Dell, *The Geneva Racket*, p. 329.

<sup>12</sup> Dubin, ‘Toward the Bruce Report’, p. 44; Ghébali, *La réforme Bruce*, p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> Fosdick, *The League and the United Nations after fifty years*, p. 65.



E.F.O.'s director, Alexander Loveday, who had been pushing for the re-organisation of the technical organisations since the early 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on the testimony of those who knew and worked with Avenol, Clavin's position is much more convincing. The British author, Hilary St. George Saunders, a former Secretariat official who had on occasion operated as Avenol's secretary, claimed to have known the secretary-general 'as intimately as it is possible for an Englishman to know an enigmatic Frenchman.'<sup>15</sup> According to British Foreign Office files, Saunders allowed that Avenol possessed a 'brilliant' mind for economics and finance but dubbed him a 'lazy man, accustomed to work in fits and starts.'<sup>16</sup> Avenol, though personally ambitious, was clearly not a devout internationalist. According to Saunders, when Avenol's name was first mooted as Drummond's likely successor he informed the French government, canvassing on his behalf, of his preference for a senior position in the Bank of France.<sup>17</sup> Salvador de Madariaga asserted that Avenol was not an ardent internationalist but a '*realpolitiker* with hardly any dose of world spirit.'<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to accept de Madariaga's depiction of Avenol as a *realpolitiker* given the poor political judgement he would later display, but his lack of 'world spirit' is corroborated by other well placed sources in Geneva. Dell, one of the most prominent journalists on the League's press corps, observed in 1941 that if 'Lord Perth [formerly Sir Eric Drummond] had little faith in the principles and aims of the League of Nations, M. Avenol has still less.'<sup>19</sup> Avenol's lack of internationalist fervour enacted important repercussions for his stewardship of the Secretariat during the greatest crisis of its existence.

While Avenol may not have been the most dynamic and inspiring head of the Secretariat, his eagerness to test the political limitations of his office was evidenced by his involvement in the expulsion of the Soviet Union. In his 1979 study of Seán Lester's international career, Stephen Barcroft wrote that by 1939 the 'old-non political' Secretariat was breaking down into left and right-wing factions.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on de Madariaga's memoirs and on the evidence of the 1939 Assembly it is easier to

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<sup>14</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, pp 231-4.

<sup>15</sup> Hilary Saint George Saunders to Sir Robert Vansittart, 10 July 1940 (T.N.A., Treasury files [henceforth T] 160/1353).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> Dell, *The Geneva Racket*, p. 330.

<sup>20</sup> Barcroft, 'Irish foreign policy at the League of Nations 1929-36', pp 224-5.

endorse James Barros and Arthur Rovine's assertion that the Secretariat was always a political entity.<sup>21</sup> Yet Barcoft's argument about left and right wing divisions raise an interesting point about the factors that render internationalism a relative concept. Political divisions tend to colour what governments, officials and apologists expected of the League and set different parameters as to the potential of the organisation. Those on the right of the political centre tended to value the League for its support of national sovereignty while those on the left tended to incline more towards the expansion of the League's influence on national governments. Robert Cecil (Viscount Cecil of Chelwood) was the most prominent supporter of the League in the United Kingdom. Cecil devoted his public life to the League of Nations from the organisation's inception. He served as the British representative to the Paris Peace Conference and contributed to the drafting of the Covenant. He represented both Britain and South Africa at the League Assembly and from 1923 to 1945, as chairman and president of the British League of Nations Union, rallied public opinion in support of the League. As Thompson demonstrated Cecil projected 'a moral fervour and sincerity essential for a leader of a public crusade.'<sup>22</sup> A life-long Conservative, Cecil was devoted to preserving national sovereignty as the basis of international cooperation.<sup>23</sup> He was also regretfully aware that his commitment to the League rendered him regularly out of step with Conservative foreign policy. He acknowledged in 1949 that attempts to 'carry out any obligations under the Covenant in their plain meaning' incurred considerable reluctance from his own party.<sup>24</sup> Cecil owned that greater support for the League came from the Liberal and Labour Parties, a position supported by Lucian Ashworth in his recent study of Labour foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> Reflecting on the historically determining role the French state played in the formation and development of the League, Seán Lester acknowledged that 'France's share in the League's work was never as full and sincere as when the Socialists were in power.'<sup>26</sup> Support for the League in the United States tended to be

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<sup>21</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*, p. vii; Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> J.A. Thompson, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the pacifists in the League of Nations Union' in *The Historical Journal*, xx (1977), p. 950.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Cecil, *All the way* (London, 1949), p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159; Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 188. The creation of an international organisation such as the League had been advocated in Britain by political groups such as the Fabian Society since the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>26</sup> Note on France and the League of Nations by the acting secretary-general, 12 Mar. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

elicited from Democrats and philanthropic organisations who advocated greater state intervention in matters of social and economic concern.<sup>27</sup>

Within the international civil service itself the most ambitious technical officials tended to lean to the left; including Frenchman Albert Thomas, the former Socialist minister for munitions in the French wartime government (1915-17) and the first director of the I.L.O., and the Pole, Dr Ludwik Rajchman, under whose directorship the work and influence of the League's Health Organisation expanded dramatically.<sup>28</sup> Avenol, on the other hand, leaned to the right. Drawing on the testimony of former colleagues, James Barros characterised Avenol, before 1940 at least, as extremely conservative, offering fragmentary evidence to suggest that the second secretary-general may have been a monarchist with little affection for the Third Republic.<sup>29</sup> The question of the extremity of Avenol's right-wing views has engrossed his biographers. Rovine went so far as to accuse Avenol of showing sympathy 'for the dictators of the right' throughout his entire career as secretary-general.<sup>30</sup> Avenol certainly appeared anxious, in the mid 1930s, to prevent Mussolini's Italy from renouncing its membership of the League, despite its transgression of the Covenant. In the midst of the Abyssinian Crisis in 1936 he paid a visit to Rome to try and convince Mussolini and his foreign minister, Count Ciano, to resume relations with the League. The Italians were bitter about the Assembly's imposition of economic sanctions (however ineffectual) and the failure of the League to recognise the new Italian Empire.<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of the discussions Avenol informed the press that clarification had been sought and received concerning Italian grievances with the organisation and that he was confident Italy would resume its participation in due course.<sup>32</sup> However Avenol failed to foresee the reluctance of the Credentials Committee of the League Assembly to disqualify the Abyssinian delegation; this constituted a refusal, on the League's part, to fully recognise the new Italian Empire. Consequently on 11 December 1937 Italy gave notice of its intention to withdraw from the League of Nations. As the 1930s came to an end there were

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<sup>27</sup> Rathbun, *Trust in International Cooperation*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Iris Borowy, *Coming to terms with world health: the League of Nations Health Organisation 1921-46* (Frankfurt, 2009), p. 419; Martin D. Dubin, 'The League of Nations Health Organisation' in Paul (ed.), *International Health organisations and movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> Report of Avenol's meeting with Mussolini and Count Ciano, 7 Sep. 1936 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/29, f. 170, p. 2).

<sup>32</sup> *La Croix*, 20 Sep. 1936.

rumblings of discontent over Avenol's apparent reluctance to antagonise Italy and Germany. *The Times* charged Avenol with wanting 'to leave the door open for the totalitarian powers to return to the League.'<sup>33</sup>

While Avenol's right-wing sympathies may have inspired a conciliatory approach to fascist Italy and a vindictive attitude to the Soviet Union there is no overwhelming evidence to suggest that he was a right-wing extremist. After all most European governments feared the spread of communism more than the excesses of fascism with Lester observing in September 1939 that League member states had 'failed to see what the Nazi really was.'<sup>34</sup> Rather Avenol was simply aping the Anglo-French policy of appeasement. De Madariaga observed that Avenol did not question the lukewarm commitment of Britain and France to the enforcement of the Covenant because he relished mixing with 'the governments and bureaucracies of the great.'<sup>35</sup> Avenol's actions reflected the cautious diplomacy of the two most powerful members of the Council and paymasters of the League, both of whom continued to make overtures to Mussolini's Italy, even after the outbreak of war. Everything suggested that in the months leading up to the European conflict and during the period of Phoney War Avenol was instead trying to reconcile the political atmosphere of the *Palais des Nations* with the guarded landscape of international diplomacy. This entailed purging the Secretariat of those officials who criticised the foreign policies of Britain and France. In late 1938 Marcel Hoden, Avenol's long-term *chef de cabinet*, left the Secretariat. Hoden was a popular figure with the press and with the rest of Secretariat and was known for his outspoken opposition to the Munich agreement.<sup>36</sup> Hoden's departure was engineered by Avenol who was obliged to abolish the latter's position to effect his departure. The *Manchester Guardian* noted that there was a 'profound political divergence' between Hoden and Avenol, as the latter was an 'avowed partisan' of appeasement.<sup>37</sup> Avenol also refused, as the war approached, to extend the contract of Dr. Ludwik Rajchman. Rajchman denounced Mussolini and despite the reticence of the League Council on the Spanish Civil War, expressed his admiration for Republican forces.<sup>38</sup> *L'Humanité* charged

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<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, 28 Oct 1938.

<sup>34</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Sept. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1., p. 320).

<sup>35</sup> de Madariaga, *Morning without noon*, p. 280.

<sup>36</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Oct 1938.

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

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Clavin 'Europe and the League of Nations' in Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914-1945* (Oxford, 2007), p. 344.

Avenol with sacrificing Hoden and Rajchman in the ‘spirit of Munich’.<sup>39</sup> Due to figures such as Hoden and Rajchmann, and to a lesser extent Lester and Winant, the League’s international civil service, unlike its political organs, challenged rather than reflected the reality of international affairs. Avenol sought to eradicate this anomaly and to perpetuate the prevailing conservatism of member states within the League Secretariat by checking its more radical elements.

In the Assembly of December 1939 member states invested Avenol with the authority to ensure the continued functioning of the League’s administrative and technical organs. Swiss governmental records illustrate that Avenol did not entertain ambitious plans for a wartime international civil service. In March 1939 Avenol confided to Edouard de Haller (a former League official who would go on to represent the Swiss government in aid and humanitarian matters during the war) that he decided, in the event of war, to preserve only a small number of Secretariat officials and to evacuate all non-Swiss staff.<sup>40</sup> Avenol clearly did not keep his colleagues abreast of his future vision of the Secretariat or else was entirely inconsistent in his view. In a letter to the Foreign Office in April 1939 Frank Walters wrote that ‘the secretary-general considers that it will be his duty, if war should arise, to do his utmost to keep in being, so far as possible, the essential parts of the Secretariat machinery.’<sup>41</sup> Avenol’s previous plan to evacuate all non-Swiss staff did not materialise but he did embark on a policy of partial liquidation. The need to adapt the League Secretariat to suit the reality of budgetary constraints, while ensuring that it remained an effective instrument for technical cooperation, was arguably a thankless task. The League had been in a process of downsizing since early 1939 due to dwindling member state contributions; with every member state withdrawal the numbers employed in the *Palais des Nations* fell correspondingly. In the space of a year, from 1939-40, over three hundred staff left the League’s headquarters in Geneva, reducing the numbers working in the international civil service by fifty per cent.<sup>42</sup> Between 1939 and 1943 the number of League staff fell from 654 to 99 individuals.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *L’Humanité*, 16 Jan. 1939.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum by Pierre Bonna, 31 Mar. 1939 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/305, pp 137-8).

<sup>41</sup> Frank Walters to A.W.G. Randall, 6 Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 36).

<sup>42</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 12 Jan. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 285).

<sup>43</sup> Note by the acting secretary-general, ‘Some considerations on the expenditure of the Secretariat in the last four years’, 2 May 1944 (UNOG, private archives, Seán Lester papers [henceforth S.L.P.], p. 5).

Walters kept Roger Makins of the League of Nations Section in the British Foreign Office informed of Avenol's policies. According to Walters, Avenol was shaken by some criticisms being made in Paris against him. Avenol claimed that his compatriots were accusing him of extravagance in maintaining a large proportion of the Secretariat at a time when the Assembly and Council were no longer expected to meet.<sup>44</sup> At the prompting of Walters, the Foreign Office arranged a telegram of support from Foreign Secretary Halifax to the harried Avenol. Lord Halifax told the secretary-general that he was mindful of the 'special difficulty' Avenol was experiencing but was confident that the secretary-general was doing 'his best to preserve the Secretariat as a working organisation so far as circumstances permit.'<sup>45</sup> Walters, however, did not have confidence in the secretary-general's policy. Avenol tended to adopt a less than sophisticated approach to the problem of the termination of League contracts, leaving staff free to decide whether or not they wished to offer their services to their home governments.<sup>46</sup> Walters argued that this was an unwise course of action, risking the loss of the Secretariat's most able staff as well as impairing its representative character.<sup>47</sup> In trying to suppress the ambition of his colleagues in order to create the most minimal and unobtrusive international civil service, Avenol threatened to confer upon the League an irrelevancy it had so far avoided.

### **The threat to headquarters**

Apart from Avenol's policy of partial liquidation, the biggest threat to the League's wartime technical potential was the precarious location of League headquarters. By 1939 Switzerland was becoming increasingly encircled by the Axis powers, with the *Großdeutschland* of Germany and Austria to the north and east and Mussolini's Italy (which would not become a belligerent power until June 1940) to the south. The Swiss Federal Council, composed of a conservative coalition of centrist and centre-right parties such as the Christian People's Party, the Free Democracy Party and the Swiss People's Party, was determined to preserve the neutrality and security of

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<sup>44</sup> Walters to Roger Makins, 14 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>45</sup> Telegram from Lord Halifax to Avenol, 30 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>46</sup> Walters to Avenol, 6 Sep. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 113).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Switzerland above all other existing obligations.<sup>48</sup> There was a general consensus in the *Palais des Nations* that not only should the neutrality of Switzerland be respected but that in the event of an imminent invasion the international civil service would have to evacuate from Geneva.<sup>49</sup> Walters informed the Foreign Office that the last thing the Secretariat wanted to do was to give the Germans a pretext for a Swiss invasion.<sup>50</sup> By the spring of 1940 an evacuation plan was devised by the Office of the Secretary-General. The plan was not comprehensive; rather it was designed as a short term solution. If Switzerland was invaded by Germany the Secretariat and technical services were to relocate from Geneva to a temporary halting ground in southern France.<sup>51</sup> The inconsequential spa town chosen to be the temporary refuge of a fugitive Secretariat would not, as it transpired, acquire renown through any association with the League of Nations. Rather it secured a greater historical infamy as the site of the expiration of the French Third Republic and the birthplace of the authoritarian regime to which it would give its name.

The suitability of Vichy as a temporary haven for a refugee Secretariat was predicated on the same advantages that later recommended it to Marshal Pétain's government. As a popular and fashionable holiday destination it could boast enough accommodation for League officials and rooms in which a skeletal Secretariat could operate. In April 1939 Avenol dispatched a Secretariat official to identify suitable accommodation in Vichy with the proviso that the League could not afford any of the more luxurious hotels the town had to offer.<sup>52</sup> The French authorities proved most supportive and accommodating during the course of the Secretariat's investigation into the viability of Vichy. The officials of the *Quai d'Orsay* wrote to Avenol expressing solidarity with his efforts to take all precautionary steps to preserve the international civil service.<sup>53</sup> In the spring of 1940 copies of important League documents were forwarded to Vichy for safekeeping. Just as the I.L.O.'s wartime experience would provide an interesting comparison with that of the League, so too would its leadership. The I.L.O.'s director, John Winant, acted with greater

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<sup>48</sup> Report by the head of the Foreign Affairs Division of the Political Department, 4 July 1942 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/486, p. 671).

<sup>49</sup> Secretariat memorandum, Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 24); Walters to A.W.G. Randall, 6 Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 36).

<sup>50</sup> Walters to A.W.G. Randall 6 Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 36, p. 1-f. 37, p. 2).

<sup>51</sup> Walters to Makins, 14 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>52</sup> Avenol to Pierre Arnal, 13 Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 42).

<sup>53</sup> J.A.N. Patijn to Avenol, 6 May 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 64).

alacrity than Avenol to ensure a refuge for his office in the event of an invasion of Switzerland. Soon after the declaration of war Winant secured a lease on the *Pavilion de Sévigné* at Vichy and duplicates of I.L.O. files were sent there for safekeeping.<sup>54</sup>

These nascent evacuation plans were abruptly abandoned from May-June 1940 when the stupor of the Phoney War was shattered with the launch of Hitler's campaign in Western Europe. When France began to crumble Seán Lester took steps to ensure the rapid return of all important League documents from Vichy.<sup>55</sup> During the German invasion of France the *Pavillon de Sévigné* served, for a time, as a German military headquarters. German staff officers dined in the same rooms in which confidential and important I.L.O. files were stored. In the wake of the Armistice, as the German Army withdrew to the north, the I.L.O. was able to retrieve its transferred files which survived the general upheaval intact.<sup>56</sup> The chaos of May-June 1940 engendered a crisis deep within the Secretariat. Geneva looked increasingly threatened, given its strategic position near the French border. Lester's diary provides a valuable insight into the palpable fear of invasion that existed in wartime Switzerland. He wrote in June 1940 that reports were flooding Geneva of fresh German reserves moving into the Black Forest as if poised for a Swiss invasion.<sup>57</sup> The Swiss populace endured numerous invasion scares during the war. In May 1940 there was a temporary mass exodus from the northern cities of Basel and Zurich. As early as September 1939 Lester confided to his diary that 'there can be little confidence in talking to people not exactly sure in Geneva these days. Espionage is widespread.'<sup>58</sup> Winant gave the Swiss army permission to occupy I.L.O. buildings in the event of a German landing on the lake via hydroplane.<sup>59</sup> While a German invasion of Switzerland did not materialise, Secretariat officials could never be sure that the Alpine nation would remain outside of Hitler's expanding European empire.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation', p. 257.

<sup>55</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 22 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 467).

<sup>56</sup> Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation', p. 257.

<sup>57</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 10 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, pp 441-2).

<sup>58</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 8 Oct. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, pp 327-328).

<sup>59</sup> Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation', p. 259.

<sup>60</sup> Subsequent historiography would prove that Germany did indeed entertain plans for an invasion of Switzerland. 'Operation Tannenbaum' was organised during the summer of 1940 when the unexpectedly rapid advance of the Wehrmacht made it seem that the war in the west had been won. However with the British refusal to surrender the plan was shelved until the time when victory could



The German conquest of Northern and Western Europe pulled a significant number of League member states into the war, including many small states who forcibly expressed their neutrality in the Assembly of 1939. As a result calls to align the League with the Allied war effort became more pronounced. Following the rapid advance of the German army, Walters, in a letter to Makins, suggested the immediate evacuation of League headquarters to London. Although transfer to Portugal, another of the European neutrals, was briefly mooted, Walters believed that neutrality had already proven to be a stifling and inhibiting influence on the League's wartime endeavours.<sup>61</sup> He argued that the neutrals were too vulnerable to fend off invasion against superior forces and foresaw that as the war wore on the number of neutrals would diminish further.<sup>62</sup> A grand total of twenty two European countries declared their neutrality at the outbreak of war. As the war progressed however only five remained out of the conflict, the League's hosts being one of them.<sup>63</sup> Walters wrote that the 'protest of the American Republics', or Pan-American Union, against the German invasion of the neutral low countries made 'at least another dozen or so members of the League who have declared their moral solidarity with the Allies.'<sup>64</sup> Walters reasoned that the obvious corollary between Allied rhetoric and the language of the Covenant rendered the League's failure to publicly identify with the Allies redundant:

What therefore could be more natural than [that] the countries which are fighting for the same principle as those of the Covenant should, in virtue of that fact, frankly invite the remnants of the League machinery to function on their soil? I believe that there would be some political and moral advantage for the Allies if this should happen, though the main beneficiary would, for the moment, undoubtedly be the Secretariat.<sup>65</sup>

In a letter to Walters weeks earlier, Makins had outlined the British position on League headquarters. The Foreign Office expressed reservations as to the possible transfer of the League to France (before the German conquest) as it believed such a

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be assured and thus Switzerland quickly overrun. See Gerhard L. Weinberg, 'German Plans and policies regarding neutral nations in World War II with special reference to Switzerland' in *German Studies Review*, xxii (1999), p. 101.

<sup>61</sup> Walters to Makins, 21 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Wylie, 'Victims or actors? European neutrals and non-belligerents 1939-45', p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Walters to Makins, 21 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

move would alienate neutral member states.<sup>66</sup> Alliances and Allied agencies would become ubiquitous as the war wore on: the League remained unique as the only vehicle for multilateralism between neutral and belligerent alike. If Walters' proposal was adopted the League would no longer be a Society of Nations but would, in fact, be living up to the militarism of its Anglophone name. The transformation of the League into an Allied agency would be a regressive step, rolling back the years to the 'entangling alliances' of 1914.

Nevertheless the League's international civil service incurred a huge risk in remaining in Geneva. If League officials needed any indication of what would happen to their organisation in the event of a German invasion, the demise of the Paris based International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (I.I.C.) provided such a cautionary tale. The Institute was the executive organ of the League's Organisation of Intellectual Cooperation (O.I.C.), established in 1922. It owed its origin to the failure of the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation (I.C.I.C.), the advisory organ to the Secretariat on matters of educational, intellectual and cultural importance, to obtain the adequate funding to maintain a significant office in the *Palais des Nations*. With substantial financial assistance from the French government the I.I.C. was subsequently established in Paris and the Institute could boast the membership of several high profile luminaries of the scientific, artistic and literary world including Marie Curie, Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson.<sup>67</sup> Its experts believed that their mission lay in promoting greater intellectual cooperation between universities and institutes, in coordinating international scientific research, in documenting the cultural life of various countries and even in the creation of a new international language.<sup>68</sup> The O.I.C. also oversaw the work of national committees of intellectual cooperation established by the League's member states.

The collapse of France brought the work of the Institute to a halt. Its director, Henri Bonnet, did not take any steps to organise an evacuation plan. With the French army and the British Expeditionary Force stalling against the superior tactics of the *Wehrmacht*, Bonnet abruptly paid all his staff, gave them three months leave and managed to board an airplane bound for the United States before the Germans

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<sup>66</sup> Makins to Walters, 2 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>67</sup> F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 187.

<sup>68</sup> Gonzague du Reynold, *Mes memoirs* (Geneva, 1963), p. 390.

reached Bordeaux.<sup>69</sup> This development imperilled the overall future of the O.I.C. The likelihood that all members of the Committee for Intellectual Cooperation could meet to devise work programmes in the absence of the Institute and its director was decidedly slim. In addition, the work of the Institute could no longer be facilitated by the Secretariat's Intellectual Cooperation Section which no longer existed in the wake of Avenol's partial liquidation of the Secretariat. Instead a solitary Secretariat official dealt with member state queries on intellectual cooperation as they arose; this official was also charged with satisfying requests for information on the past work of the Mandates Commission.<sup>70</sup> Thus the League's wartime work on intellectual cooperation was so limited to be almost non-existent.

Gilbert Murray, the vice president of the O.I.C., refused to accept these developments as the end of the League's experiment in intellectual cooperation. Traditionally those involved in the work of the O.I.C. perceived its role as providing moral encouragement to the League's diplomatic mission.<sup>71</sup> The work of the Committee and the Paris based Institute was expected to provide the intellectual backbone to the League's disarmament programme.<sup>72</sup> The O.I.C., more than any other technical agency, demonstrated the organic relationship between the League and the forces of liberal democracy, providing an articulate, if sometimes esoteric, expression of the League's political identity. An esteemed Oxford classicist, Gilbert Murray appeared to embody the very principles of Western liberalism upon which the Covenant was founded.<sup>73</sup> Australian-born but British educated, Murray was a committed supporter of the British Liberal Party. Shortly after the League's foundation he was invited by Prime Minister Jan Christiaan Smuts to serve as South Africa's delegate to the League Assembly (1921-2), and was subsequently chairman of the League of Nations Union (1923-38). Murray wanted to preserve the role of I.C.I.C. members as the supposed apologists and intelligentsia of the League's political identity. Murray, like Lester, Walters and Winant, believed that that identity shared an elemental core with Allied peace aims. He urged the British government to

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<sup>69</sup> Gilbert Murray to James T. Shotwell, 1 July 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24439, f. 109).

<sup>70</sup> Note by the acting secretary-general on the Geneva staff of the Secretariat, 2 July 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/12, p. 2).

<sup>71</sup> J.A. Pemberton, 'The changing face of intellectual cooperation: from the League of Nations to UNESCO' in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, lviii (2012), p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L'UNESCO oubliée: la Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle 1919-46* (Paris, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> For further details on Murray's liberalism see Morefield, *Covenants without swords*, p. 24.

place more emphasis on the work of the national committees of intellectual cooperation. Murray argued that there was ‘certain advantage in showing that the League is alive and that Great Britain feels confident.’<sup>74</sup> He perceived a use for the I.C.I.C. as a mouthpiece for Allied propaganda and as a propaganda weapon against Nazi ideology. He wrote that:

The war is really a war of ideas and faiths, and the free movement of thought between groups and nations is essentially the thing in which we believe and which the Nazis and fascists deny. I would go so far as to say that without constant Intellectual Cooperation the free nations cannot hold together.<sup>75</sup>

Murray advocated the transfer of the Institute to a city in the United States, such as Boston or New York.<sup>76</sup> The Second World War was depicted as a struggle between the forces of democracy and totalitarianism. Consequently figures such as Murray, McDougall, Lester and Winant were tempted to invest the League with a wider political significance by fusing the stoic liberal internationalism of the Covenant with the bravura of the Allied war effort.

Ultimately the O.I.C. was not destined to transform into an Allied agency. The British government was indisposed to feel any considerable obligation towards an agency that was infused with more of a French, rather than British, spirit.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore the O.I.C. did not enjoy the same prestige as, for example, the E.F.O. and the I.L.O. Arthur Sweetser, getting completely carried away in hyperbole, attributed to the League of Nations the greatest responsibility for all the ‘profound changes’ in the organisation of intellectual life in the inter-war years.<sup>78</sup> In reality there was very little coordination of the work of the Committee and the Institute and its officials and experts never established an overall programme to determine what the activities of the O.I.C. should actually encompass. The reputation of the Institute suffered from its perception as a rarefied institution marred by high profile intellectual divisions between its members, most notably between Henri Bergson and

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<sup>74</sup> Murray to Makins, 2 June 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24439, f. 89).

<sup>75</sup> Murray to Shotwell, 1 July 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24439, f. 109).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> For the French influence on the O.I.C. see Pemberton, ‘The changing face of intellectual cooperation’, pp 34-5.

<sup>78</sup> Sweetser, ‘The non-political achievements of the League’, p. 179.

Albert Einstein.<sup>79</sup> A British post-war inquiry into its activities concluded that the O.I.C.'s attempt to embrace every conceivable form of artistic and intellectual activity and to reduce it to some form of 'documentation' was a waste of the time, finance and the considerable ability at the disposal of the Committee and the Institute.<sup>80</sup> Murray's proposal was not likely to win favour at the Foreign Office which was of the firm position that linking the organs of the League 'so plainly with His Majesty's government would hardly be a satisfactory solution' to diffusing the tensions between the League and Switzerland.<sup>81</sup> Makins enlightened Murray as to the outcome of a conversation he had shared with the exiled Bonnet. The Frenchmen informed Makins that he did not contemplate the transfer of the Institute to the United States.<sup>82</sup> Bonnet did not go the United States with League business in mind; rather he collaborated with other French exiles such as the one-time deputy secretary-general of the League, Jean Monnet, who sought to create a Free French alternative to the Vichy government.<sup>83</sup> Other officials of the Institute also returned to service in their national governments.

As the pressure on Swiss neutrality increased the Federal Council sought to exert a corresponding pressure on the Secretariat to remain discreet and unobtrusive. In July 1940 Avenol, ever accommodating to member states, bowed to Swiss pressure and decided that the remaining Secretariat officials should retreat to the Rockefeller Library and thus render themselves more 'insignificant' looking to the Germans.<sup>84</sup> The claustrophobic atmosphere of Geneva risked stifling the potential of the technical agencies. Communication in and out of Switzerland was proving increasingly difficult with frequent postal delays and increased censorship of letters and telegrams.<sup>85</sup> The success of the technical services depended on their ability to disseminate the results of their research and on their availability to advise governments on social and economic policy. As the future of international civil

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<sup>79</sup> Jimena Canales, 'Einstein, Bergson and the experiment that failed: intellectual cooperation at the League of Nations' in *M.L.N.*, cxx (2005), p. 1169.

<sup>80</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 1946 (University College Dublin Archives, [henceforth U.C.D.A], private papers of Seán Lester [henceforth P.P.S.L.], P 203/72/5, p. 13).

<sup>81</sup> Telegram from the Foreign Office to Kelly, 29 Oct. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>82</sup> Makins to Murray, 19 July (T.N.A., FO 371/24439, f. 112).

<sup>83</sup> Monnet, *Memoirs*, p. 202.

<sup>84</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 16 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 484).

<sup>85</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 6 Aug. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 523).

service became increasingly jeopardised it was North America that emerged as a likely place of wartime refuge.

Despite the refusal of the Roosevelt administration to formally endorse the proposals of the Bruce Report, the League continued to raise its profile in the United States during the Phoney War period. The League Secretariat had at its disposal a vast network of former League officials and supporters placed in positions of influence who were only too willing to exert that influence for the benefit of the organisation. As one columnist in the *Tribune de Genève* noted, the League was a ‘verifiable diplomatic, technical and social school’ for a good number of its former officials.<sup>86</sup> This network was especially important for the League’s relationship with the United States. The League Secretariat possessed several important contacts within influential research foundations, philanthropic organisations and academic institutions which lobbied for greater American participation in League affairs. These included the American League of Nations Association, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. These non-governmental organisations became important sources of funding for the organisation as League membership began to fall away and even exerted influence on the research and political agenda of the organisation.<sup>87</sup> According to Katharina Rietzler, the American philanthropic elite were so closely intertwined with the American internationalist movement that it was almost impossible to distinguish one group from the other.<sup>88</sup> Ivy League universities regularly hosted mock League of Nations Assemblies, especially during the early years, to stimulate interest among its students in the activities of the organisation.<sup>89</sup>

Frank Boudreau, an alumnus of the League’s Health Organisation, worked for the high-profile Millbank Memorial Fund, a New York based foundation engaged in research, analysis and communication issues of health policy and social medicine. When the Secretariat decided to erect a pavilion at the New York World Fair in 1939 Boudreau worked feverishly to facilitate a personal trip by Joseph Avenol to the United States and to Canada to coincide with the exhibition. He managed to solicit invitations for Avenol to pay a visit to the Rockefeller family (generous benefactors

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<sup>86</sup> *Tribune de Genève*, 18 Oct. 1951.

<sup>87</sup> Clavin, ‘Introduction: conceptualising internationalism between the world wars’, p. 7.

<sup>88</sup> Katharina Rietzler ‘Experts for peace: structures and motivations of philanthropic internationalism in the interwar years’ in Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Transnationalism reconfigured: transnational ideas and movements between the world wars* (London, 2011), p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> *Harvard Crimson*, 3 Oct. 1933.

of the League) at their country home in Virginia, to give an address at Yale University and to pay a visit to President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull in Washington.<sup>90</sup> Boudreau was left crestfallen when Avenol decided that he would not be in a position to make such an overseas trip in a time of grave political crisis and resolved to postpone it to a more opportune juncture. Avenol received a personal telegram from President Roosevelt expressing his regret that such a visit could not take place.<sup>91</sup>

The postponement of Avenol's American tour did not completely dispel the opportunity for greater American exposure to the aims, activities and operation of the League. The New York World Fair of 1939-40 served as an exercise in League self-publicity and as a reflection of the undaunted optimism of League officials and supporters in wartime. Deputy Secretary-General Seán Lester gave a radio address to the assembled crowd in October 1939, on the occasion of League of Nations Day at the fair. Lester sought to justify the preservation of a 'functional' League during wartime, arguing that the League still possessed 'a great deal of usefulness'.<sup>92</sup> During the course of his address Lester posited that the vast technical and humanitarian experience acquired by League officials and experts over the previous two decades was of immense value to governments as they devised their wartime social and economic policies and steeled themselves for the difficult process of post-war reconstruction. Lester also shared his understanding of the wider political significance of the League's wartime preservation, with the organisation representing

a better way of settling disputes than slaughter and butchery or the ruthless use of military force; unless something like it is given the necessary support, the world will never rise above a state of recurrent war and strife.<sup>93</sup>

The League's presence at the New York World Fair was overshadowed by the Fair Corporation's obstinate refusal to renounce its own role as a peacemaker, ensuring that the League pavilion was confined to a peripheral location.<sup>94</sup> Despite these local intrigues, the Roosevelt administration was willing to lend its support and good wishes to the League pavilion. Arthur Sweetser, a former war correspondent,

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<sup>90</sup> Dr. F.G. Boudreau to Avenol, 15 Apr. 1938 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/30, f. 77, p. 1).

<sup>91</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt to Avenol, 20 Apr. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/30, f. 65, p. 1).

<sup>92</sup> Seán Lester's speech to the New York World Fair, Oct. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 131, p.1).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Marco Dunatti, 'Utopia, nostalgia and world war at the 1939-40 New York World Fair' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, xli (2006), p. 676.

was the League's director of publicity and was the longest serving American member of the Secretariat, having been appointed in 1919. Dispatched to New York to oversee the work of the pavilion Sweetser was invited to lunch with the president while paying a flying visit to Washington, during which Roosevelt expressed his general approval of the League exhibit.<sup>95</sup> While Roosevelt was not in a position to pay a personal visit, he dispatched three members of his cabinet, who could relate to the technical activities of the League; the secretary for agriculture, the assistant secretary of labour and the surgeon-general. In April 1940 Dr. Mary Woolley, president of Mount Holyoke College and a former American delegate to the League's Disarmament Conference, formed a committee in the United States to support the 'non-political and humanitarian' activities of the organisation. Roosevelt wrote to her in support, stressing that the League's technical agencies were 'not only worthy, but definitely essential' in this time of crisis.<sup>96</sup> Though Roosevelt did not favour formal association with the League, his administration retained an important working relationship with its technical agencies.

The friendly relations cultivated between League officials and their supporters in the United States came to immediate fruition in the aftermath of the fall of France, when the future of the League appeared decidedly bleak. On 11 July 1940 Harold W. Dodds, president of Princeton University, on behalf of his own institution and of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and the Institute for Advanced Study (both located on the Princeton Campus), extended an invitation to the technical services to relocate from Geneva to the university in New Jersey. According to Dodds, the governing authorities of those three educational and scientific institutions were moved to extend such an offer to the League because of the 'great importance' they attached to the technical agencies.<sup>97</sup> The terms of the offer were extremely generous with the technical services offered access to suitable offices and other work stations rent-free. The authorities at Princeton kept the State Department informed of the invitation from the outset and it was made clear to President Dodds that the secretary of state would place no obstacles in his way.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Sweetser to Avenol, 22 Mar. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/30, f. 66, p. 6).

<sup>96</sup> Roosevelt to Dr. Mary Woolley, 4 Apr. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 146, p. 1).

<sup>97</sup> Harold W. Dodds to Joseph Avenol, 11 June 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 173, p. 1).

<sup>98</sup> Memorandum by Llewellyn Thompson [Division of European Affairs, the U.S. State Department], 26 June 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 319).



Much to the astonishment and consternation of his colleagues Avenol rejected Dodd's invitation outright, claiming that for legal reasons he could not contemplate transfer of any agencies of the League away from headquarters unless the entire organisation was obliged to evacuate from Geneva.<sup>99</sup> Such a refusal confounded his colleagues at a time when the League's technical potential was threatened by the wider political situation.<sup>100</sup> Avenol's dismissal of Dodd's generous invitation was actually just one episode of a wider crisis within the Secretariat. In the summer of 1940 the secretary-general faced unprecedented charges of trying to sabotage the League's liberal democratic identity by offering to place the staff and the services of the organisation at the disposal of the Axis bloc.

### **The battle between idealism and opportunism**

The sensationalism of Joseph Avenol's resignation attracted the attention of historians in the three decades following the League's dissolution.<sup>101</sup> Avenol was charged with espousing pro-Vichy, Anglophobic sentiments, betraying pro-German sympathies and threatening to commandeer the League's technical potential for the Axis reconstruction of Europe.<sup>102</sup> Stephen Schwebel, in his 1952 publication *The secretary-general of the United Nations: his political powers and practices*, devoted a brief appendix to the murky questions surrounding Avenol's resignation. Schwebel was able to interview Avenol in August 1951 about a year before the latter's death. Schwebel referred to the above accusations levelled at Avenol and permitted the former secretary-general to robustly deny their validity.<sup>103</sup> Schwebel did not include the testimony of Avenol's former colleagues who were privy to the events of 1940 and whose relations with the secretary-general had, by that point, descended into acrimony. Later works by James Barros, Arthur Rovine and Stephen Barcroft drew heavily on the diary and papers of Seán Lester and on the personal recollections of Thanassis Aghnides. While anecdotal testimony is colourful and valuable in its own right, Aghnides' personal papers reveal his reservations as to the accuracy of his

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<sup>99</sup> Avenol to Dodds, 15 June 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 175, p. 1).

<sup>100</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 25 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 469).

<sup>101</sup> See for example Barros, *Betrayal from within*; Barcroft, 'The international civil servant'; Bendiner, *The tragicomic history of the League of Nations*; Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*; Gageby, *The last secretary-general*; Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*.

<sup>102</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 219.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

recollections. In a 1965 letter to Louis H. Starr, director of the oral history department of Columbia University, Aghnides qualified these reservations on the basis that he kept no diary at the time and that consequently he felt a ‘gnawing uneasiness’ as to reliability of ‘impressions, particularly in respect of dates, but not solely of dates.’<sup>104</sup> Aghnides confided to Starr that Avenol tried to use him as ‘a cat’s paw’ in his schemes but acknowledged that he had become hazy about what happened in ‘1941’ despite the fact that these events took place in 1940.<sup>105</sup> Aghnides’ personal papers and his correspondence with the British Foreign Office, dated from the wartime period, provide a more direct and reliable account of the events of 1940.

The biographical efforts of Barros and Rovine have proven an excellent foundation for later historians upon which to develop an understanding of Avenol’s personal politics and controversial actions. However these historians were obliged to work amidst a paucity of archival material. Rovine, in his 1970 study of the office of the secretary-general, conceded that greater knowledge of the incumbents of that post would only be achieved with the release of more pertinent files from the various national archives.<sup>106</sup> Apart from Douglas Gageby’s biography of Lester (published in 1999) there has been no significant attempt to chronicle Avenol’s actions since the 1970s.<sup>107</sup> Even then Gageby’s work was preoccupied with Lester’s experience of events and drew almost exclusively from the latter’s diary and personal papers to document the story of Avenol’s resignation. A more comprehensive understanding of Avenol’s resignation can only be achieved through multi-archival research. The greater availability and accessibility of British, American and particularly French governmental records and diplomatic correspondence since the 1970s warrants a contemporary effort to re-examine the motivations behind, and significance of, Avenol’s actions. This primary material combined with a greater historical appreciation of the period permits a new perspective on this crisis within the Secretariat with its implications for the office of secretary-general within the overall narrative of international organisations.

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<sup>104</sup> Aghnides to Louis H. Starr, 11 Sep. 1965 (L.N.A., private papers of Thanassis Aghnides [henceforth PPA Agh] 3/24).

<sup>105</sup> Aghnides to Starr, 11 Sep. 1965 (L.N.A., PPA Agh 3/24).

<sup>106</sup> Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 12.

<sup>107</sup> George Gill drew on the existing literature to summarise the issues surrounding Avenol’s resignation. See George Gill, *The League of Nations from 1929 to 1946* (New York, 1996), pp 101-3.

Lester's diaries, upon which previous histories have been heavily reliant, appear as a damning indictment of the secretary-general. Lester depicted Avenol as calm and collected in the wake of the French defeat and the imminent disintegration of the Third Republic; he noted that the secretary-general believed that 'decent terms could be got' with the Germans.<sup>108</sup> According to Lester, Avenol 'spoke with complacency of a new state when the glory of the old one was being mangled under the tanks of the invader.'<sup>109</sup> Lester's colleagues also confided to him the details of their conversations with Avenol. Benoit Marius Viple, a Frenchman and senior official with the I.L.O., informed Lester that he had been called to Avenol's office on 5 July 1940. According to Lester's diary Avenol spoke to Viple on the subject of a 'new France, which was to be given a new soul in collaboration with Germany and Italy [to] keep the British out of Europe'.<sup>110</sup> Avenol asked Viple to go and see Pierre Laval (who was Viple's former foster-brother) on his behalf. Viple, like most of his colleagues, refused to cooperate with his superior and berated Avenol, opining that 'anyone who had anything to do with French affairs would be well advised to keep out of France for a considerable time' and that Avenol should not 'soil the honour both of France and himself in view of his position.'<sup>111</sup> In the past Avenol had been derided by his compatriots for being '*la domestique des Anglais*'.<sup>112</sup> Lester's diaries depict Avenol's apparent dramatic transformation into a hardened Anglophobe in the aftermath of the British sinking of the French Mediterranean fleet at Mers-el-Kébir on 3 July 1940. According to Lester, Avenol was overheard telling anyone who would listen that Britain's international prestige would fade, that it should be 'kept out of Europe and driven out of the Mediterranean.'<sup>113</sup> The secretary-general was also accused of trying to engineer the complete dismissal of all British League officials. The most serious of all charges levelled against Avenol was that he tried to place League machinery at the disposal of the 'New Order' in Europe. On 6 June 1940 Lester wrote in his diary that Avenol:

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<sup>108</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 14 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 440).

<sup>109</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 8 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 478).

<sup>110</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 5 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 475).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Marius Viple reminded Avenol of that epithet when the latter tried to convince Viple to approach Laval on his behalf. Diary of Seán Lester, 5 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 473).

<sup>113</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 25 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 501).

made a note on the possibility of league machinery in Europe being used in an unnatural way in the interest of certain powers, envisaging also a possible league of European states using our name and acting under the dictation of certain non-members for the future conduct of the war.<sup>114</sup>

According to Lester Avenol tried unsuccessfully to convince staff to approach the German consul in Geneva, Dr. Wolfgang Krauel, in order to share the secretary-general's novel, if vague, proposals for the future use of the international civil service with the German diplomatic corps.<sup>115</sup> During the midst of this supposed intrigue Avenol suddenly announced his resignation to member states on 27 July 1940.<sup>116</sup> However in the proceeding weeks Avenol showed no sign of quitting Geneva and, according to Lester, continued to extrapolate on his vision for the League as a tool of the Axis bloc. Under the terms of the previous Assembly resolution Avenol was expected, at a time when member states were unable to convene, to exercise his authority in tandem with the Supervisory Commission. Despite Lester's pleas the secretary-general refused to call a meeting of that body to either consider his resignation or to approve a budget for the forthcoming year.<sup>117</sup>

If Lester's depiction of the events of 1940 was correct it meant that Avenol politicised his office to an unprecedented degree and attempted to perpetuate a political culture within the Secretariat that was wholly at odds with both the liberal democratic ethos of the Covenant and the cautious internationalism of member states. However it would not be wise to employ Lester's diary as the sole means of chronicling the events leading up to Avenol's resignation. Relations between the latter and the secretary-general broke down irrevocably during this period with Avenol refusing to meet with his deputy and with Lester consequently obliged to rely on second-hand information from his colleagues, particularly from Aghnides.<sup>118</sup> That is not to say that Lester's testimony should be discounted; however it should be tested against the evidence provided by other League officials, British diplomats and by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vichy). It is only through the medium of multi-archival research that a clear and balanced interpretation of Avenol's actions and character can emerge. According to the papers of Thanassis Aghnides the fall of

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<sup>114</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 26 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 471).

<sup>115</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 3 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 472).

<sup>116</sup> Communication from the secretary-general to the members of the League of Nations, 27 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 8).

<sup>117</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 8 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 475).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

France led to an escalation of Avenol's ongoing efforts to pare down the Secretariat. On 15 June 1940 Avenol circulated a memorandum calling on all officials who were contemplating leaving Geneva at some time in the future to offer their resignations before 30 June 'in the interests of everyone'.<sup>119</sup> British Foreign Office records reveal the apprehension of Whitehall and of British diplomats at what appeared to be Avenol's attempt to liquidate the Secretariat, discriminate against British staff and refuse the Princeton offer. Alexander Loveday expressed his concerns to Sir David Kelly, the British minister in Bern, that Avenol showed signs of trying to dismiss the remaining British technical experts without the authority of the Supervisory Commission.<sup>120</sup> Kelly used Loveday as the medium through which to inform Avenol of the views of the British government. Loveday informed Avenol that the London government was alarmed at his apparent dismissal of the Princeton offer and relayed its concern that the secretary-general appeared to be 'virtually dissolving technical organs of the League of Nations on his own responsibility.'<sup>121</sup>

On 27 June Kelly, accompanied by Harry Livingstone (the United Kingdom's consul in Geneva), called on Avenol in the *Palais des Nations*. At this meeting Avenol argued, as he had done in the spring of 1940, that the diminished status and mandate of the League no longer warranted a large international civil service. He claimed that he had '200 employees doing nothing' and that he planned to slash that number by half as he could not agree that they 'should be paid for doing nothing'.<sup>122</sup> Avenol defended his policy to Schwebel in 1951. Avenol told Schwebel that he did not want to maintain, as the symbol of the League, 'civil servants discredited by their idleness and uselessness.'<sup>123</sup> However Avenol exceeded his authority in trying to organise the summary dissolution of the international civil service and ignored the previous directive from member states to preserve the Secretariat and the technical services as a wartime nucleus of international cooperation. Furthermore his policy of liquidation could not be justified on financial grounds considering steps had already been taken to cope with the financial shortfall from the previous years.<sup>124</sup> Schwebel sympathised with Avenol's actions, posing the

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<sup>119</sup> Note by the secretary-general, 15 June 1940 (L.N.A., PPA Agh 2/15).

<sup>120</sup> Telegram from Sir David Kelly to Lord Halifax, 20 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Telegram from Kelly to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the Treasury, 27 June 1940 (T.N.A., T160/1353).

<sup>123</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 220.

<sup>124</sup> See for example: Diary of Seán Lester, 12 Jan. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 285).

question: ‘What may be expected of the secretary-general when his organisation is in fact-politically dead-when it gives no hope of meeting the crisis successfully?’<sup>125</sup> That is rather a weak argument considering the League had never really faced any major political crisis successfully and that was not the point of the League’s wartime preservation. While member states did not regard the League as a useful diplomatic tool they continued to value its political identity and technical potential.<sup>126</sup> It was not for Joseph Avenol to suddenly decide its irrelevancy to a world at war. His actions were contrary to the spirit of the Bruce Report which sought to enhance, rather than diminish, the League’s technical potential.

The British Foreign Office was particularly disturbed at the idea that the League’s British staff were facing undue discrimination. According to Foreign Office records there was no compelling evidence to support that accusation. David Kelly asked the League’s treasurer, Seymour Jacklin, about the veracity of such accusations. Jacklin denied that Avenol was discriminating against British League officials, informing Kelly that most of the British staff leaving Geneva ‘were very anxious to go.’<sup>127</sup> Kelly regarded this as an unwelcome development as he did not have any positions to offer departing British staff within his own legation and was mindful that the entire British foreign service was in danger of oversubscription.<sup>128</sup> However Vichy records demonstrate that Avenol was indeed given to Anglophobic remarks during this period. On 25 July Avenol wrote to Paul Baudouin, the Vichy minister of foreign affairs, blaming the decline of the League on British influence and complaining that former League officials who had left Geneva were organising a campaign against him in London, accusing him of trying to destroy the Secretariat.<sup>129</sup> Indeed in **October 1940** former, unnamed, League officials gave an interview to the *Christian Science Monitor* denouncing Avenol’s involvement with Vichy and his anti-British campaign within the Secretariat.<sup>130</sup> In his letter to Baudouin, Avenol also wrote disrespectfully of British determination to preserve the League when that power, according to Avenol, incurred a large share of responsibility for the League’s

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<sup>125</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 223.

<sup>126</sup> See for example the telegram from Lord Halifax to Avenol, 30 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440).

<sup>127</sup> Telegram from Kelly to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the Treasury, 27 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>128</sup> Telegram from Kelly to the Foreign Office, 20 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>129</sup> Avenol to Paul Baudouin, 25 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 18).

<sup>130</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 Oct. 1940.

diplomatic shortcomings.<sup>131</sup> In their interview with the secretary-general on 27 June, Kelly and Livingstone passed on their concerns to Avenol that the process of reducing the Secretariat, at that precise moment, raised the prospect of a difficult and dangerous journey home across the European warzone for many former officials. Their dismissal from the international civil service would also entail an immediate loss of special diplomatic immunities at the moment in which they were most needed.<sup>132</sup> Avenol conceded that this was unfortunate and made a vague assurance that he would try to organise some kind of ‘evacuation train.’<sup>133</sup> The secretary-general was clearly unconcerned about maintaining a working international civil service, thereby vindicating Walters’ previous lack of confidence.<sup>134</sup>

Kelly and Livingstone also confronted Avenol on his rejection of the Princeton invitation. Lester had attributed Avenol’s attitude to what he perceived as the secretary-general’s growing antipathy for all things Anglo-Saxon.<sup>135</sup> However when Kelly and Livingstone urged Avenol to reconsider, the secretary-general was able to offer a more sophisticated and reasonable explanation for his refusal. Kelly informed Avenol that Britain would sponsor the transfer of selected missions of the technical agencies to the United States.<sup>136</sup> Avenol responded that this altered his position somewhat but emphasised his reservations concerning the League’s technical officials going to New Jersey without being accorded official recognition by the U.S. State Department. According to Avenol, only official recognition would enable them to call on foreign governments for collaboration.<sup>137</sup> Dodds’ invitation was, after all, offered in a private capacity on behalf of three independent academic institutions, rather than from the Roosevelt administration or the State Department. Avenol informed Kelly and Livingstone that if the technical experts wanted to go to the United States in the capacity of private individuals he would accord them leave. A few months later, in September 1940, Avenol told Carl Hambro, the chairman of the Supervisory Commission and president of the League Council, that he could not countenance the transfer of technical organisations to New Jersey purely as a means

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<sup>131</sup> Avenol to Baudouin, 25 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 18).

<sup>132</sup> Telegram from Kelly to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet, 27 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Walters to Avenol, 6 Sep. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 113).

<sup>135</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 17 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 488).

<sup>136</sup> Telegram from Kelly to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet, 27 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

of securing refuge for a few distinguished League officials.<sup>138</sup> Avenol asked Harold Tittman, an American diplomat then based in Geneva, if the State Department could issue an official invitation to the technical agencies. Tittman consulted Secretary of State Hull who replied that his department did not think it was possible, at that present moment, to assume an obligation towards an intergovernmental organisation of which the United States was not a member.<sup>139</sup> According to Hull there was:

a number of political questions associated with the League of Nations and the activities of the United States government in connection therewith. These questions are of such a nature that, in spite of the great interest of this government in the technical and non-political work of the League, serious doubt is held in the Department that the transfer of the technical sections to this country would be entirely understood and approved by members of the Congress and by large sections of the people of the United States.<sup>140</sup>

This correspondence further demonstrated that the League, despite the suspension of the Assembly and Council, was still perceived as a fundamentally political organisation. Gary Ostrower wrote that in the 1930s the Roosevelt administration was obliged to keep the League enthusiasts in the State Department on a tight rein 'lest they upset the cart.'<sup>141</sup> Tittman's response demonstrates how the League remained, in 1940, a delicate issue in American foreign and domestic policy. Avenol's reservations about establishing informal technical missions in the United States were entirely valid. The League Secretariat was experiencing enough difficulties with the Swiss Federal Council, despite the existence of a *modus vivendi*. As Dodds issued his invitation in a private capacity he could not offer any diplomatic safeguards to the League's technical agencies. However Avenol could not hold out against the mounting tide of opposition to his refusal of the Princeton offer. On 28 June he informed Tittman that he would accept Dodds' invitation.<sup>142</sup>

The accusation that Avenol entertained pro-Vichy sympathies is easier to uphold. The reverberations felt within the *Palais des Nations* by the fall of France, demonstrated how intrinsic Europe was to the League. The fate of France was bound to have an impact upon the Secretariat of the League of Nations with France

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<sup>138</sup> Avenol to Hambro, 9 Sep. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 84, p. 2)

<sup>139</sup> Hull to Avenol [via the American consulate in Geneva], 30 June 1940 (A.F.M.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 193).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ostrower, 'The United States and the League of Nations', p. 135.

<sup>142</sup> Telegram from Harry Livingstone to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet, 28 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).



traditionally regarding itself as a central player in the organisation's history.<sup>143</sup> According to Avenol's personal papers, the secretary-general's initial reaction to the German invasion was a conventional one. On 27 May 1940 he wrote a letter of support to General Maxime Weygand, who had recently replaced Maurice Gamelin as the supreme commander of the armed forces, sending him his best wishes in this undertaking.<sup>144</sup> Although Weygand would become one of the more vocal advocates for an armistice, the significance of this letter should not be overstated, given that the general was then engaged in organising the defence of France. France was the most powerful state to succumb to the armies of the Third Reich. It would also be the only one which would seek an end to hostilities by asking for an armistice. It was a popular move at a time when 125,000 French citizens lost their lives in the weeks from May to June and 1.6 million taken as prisoners of war.<sup>145</sup> While defeatist in military matters, Pétain's regime remained optimistic in the face of uncompromising armistice terms. The Vichy government would adopt the motif of renewal as it sought to return to 'traditional values' in the wake of the dissolution of the 'decadent' Third Republic.<sup>146</sup> Such aspirations were in line with Avenol's social and political conservatism.<sup>147</sup> Prominent members of Pétain's cabinet also came to believe that France could become an associated power and play a prominent role in the coming New Order.<sup>148</sup> The question is whether such a controversial view percolated within the League's international civil service.

It is the records of the Vichy government that provide the greatest insight into Avenol's motivations and aspirations in the summer of 1940. Though previous historians were aware that Avenol was in touch with Vichy, they did not enjoy the same access to the most pertinent records.<sup>149</sup> Bendiner supposed that the Vichy government decided Avenol's future for him, instructing the secretary-general to tender his resignation as a means of placating the German conquerors.<sup>150</sup> However the records attest that Avenol was not a mere pawn of Vichy and in fact instigated

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<sup>143</sup> Christine Manigand, *Les Français au service de la Société des Nations* (Bern, 2005), p. 72.

<sup>144</sup> Avenol to General Weygand, 27 May 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/37, f. 237).

<sup>145</sup> Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: power and prejudice in the Vichy France regime* (London, 2004), p. 63.

<sup>146</sup> Alain-Gérard Slama, 'Vichy était-il fasciste' in *Vingtième Siècle*, xi (1986), p. 42.

<sup>147</sup> Avenol's conservatism was outlined by Rovine in *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 103.

<sup>148</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: old guard and new order* (New York, 2001), p. 101.

<sup>149</sup> This was true for those historians of the 1960s and 1970s who devoted the most attention to Avenol's activities in the summer of 1940: Rovine, Barros and Barcroft.

<sup>150</sup> See for example Bendiner, *A time for angels*, p. 400.

the process that led to his resignation. Avenol sent a letter as early as 4 July 1940 (only twelve days after the signing of the Franco-German Armistice) to Paul Baudouin, Pierre Laval's predecessor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Avenol asked Baudouin to inform Marshal Pétain of his full support.<sup>151</sup> Avenol also expounded on the need to encourage order and sacrifice among the populace in order to rejuvenate the social and political organisation of France; this policy, Avenol felt, would help articulate France's place in the world, forming the most effective foundation for the future conduct of its foreign policy.<sup>152</sup> Avenol also expressed his desire, in this letter, to serve his country and offered to resign if the new government thought it fit for him to do so. Avenol assured Baudouin that he would offer his resignation 'without hesitation' and without waiting for a 'treaty of peace' to decide the fate of the League if that was what the new government desired.<sup>153</sup> In his interview with Schwebel Avenol acknowledged that he had chosen 'to adhere to the Pétain faction at Vichy.'<sup>154</sup> As demonstrated by the December 1939 Assembly, Avenol was anxious to exert some influence on the governments of member states and he displayed the same directness with his own. He was obliged to wait almost two weeks for Baudouin's reply and would not announce his resignation to member states until the 27 July 1940.

Avenol's support for the Vichy regime inspired antipathy among his colleagues in the Secretariat and attracted the criticism of later historians. According to Kelly's reports to the Foreign Office, Thanassis Aghnides was disturbed that Avenol's sympathies, during this period, were '100% French.'<sup>155</sup> It is difficult to know where else Aghnides expected Avenol's sympathies to lie at a time of intense national crisis. Subsequent historians have often used strong language to attack Avenol's supposed sympathies. Zara Steiner described Avenol as 'devious' and both Rovine and Barros' studies seek to condemn Avenol, with Barros dedicating his work to Seán Lester, in recognition of the 'steadfastness and courage' he displayed in opposing his superior.<sup>156</sup> Bertram Gordon observed that it is common, when engaging in a retrospective analysis of Vichy, for 'accusatory passion' to replace

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<sup>151</sup> Avenol to Baudouin, 4 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6 f. 1).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 217.

<sup>155</sup> Telegram from Kelly to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet, 28 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>156</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*, see dedication; Steiner, *The triumph of the dark*, p. 107.

historical analysis.<sup>157</sup> Schwebel wrote that Avenol's previous support of appeasement was compounded by his later sympathies with Vichy which unjustly turned Avenol into 'a whipping boy for the sins of the pre-war period, though his role in them was actually subsidiary.'<sup>158</sup> Avenol was eager to stress in 1951 that his support lay firmly with the 'anti-Laval faction.'<sup>159</sup> Pierre Laval, Pétain's minister of state, has been depicted in French historiography as 'the quintessential embodiment of manipulative politics and intrigue', the personification of the excesses of the Vichy regime and the arch collaborator.<sup>160</sup> Avenol, while not denying his support for Vichy, was anxious to dissociate himself with the political controversies which led to Laval's execution for treason in October 1945. Just as the fatalism of League historiography anachronistically expects League officials to predict the organisations post-war dissolution, historians have likewise attacked Avenol for failing to anticipate the reality of Vichy. The crisis within the Secretariat in the summer of 1940 occurred against the backdrop of early days in Vichy before the regime's complicity in the Final Solution introduced the elements of persecution and criminality into the new French state. As Jean Paul Sartre wrote of the public reaction to reaction to armistice and occupation; 'We never quite new whether we were doing right or doing wrong; a subtle poison corrupted even our best actions.'<sup>161</sup> In the post-war period Charles de Gaulle encouraged the myth that France was a nation of wartime résistants and that the Vichy regime was an illegal aberration.<sup>162</sup> This was not the case. Vichy was the legal government voted into existence by the French Chamber of Deputies and its leaders were recognised, by the international community as the legitimate representatives of France.<sup>163</sup>

In 1942 Seymour Jacklin felt it incumbent to mitigate the stigma of the secretary-general's pro-Vichy sentiments. Jacklin was aware that Avenol wrote to Vichy offering his services, indicating his intention to resign if it was the wish of the French government. Jacklin states that it was quite correct for Avenol to have done so.<sup>164</sup> The independent character of the Secretariat was a much celebrated feature of

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<sup>157</sup> Bertram M. Gordan, 'The "Vichy syndrome": problems in history' in *French historical studies*, ixx (1995), p. 497.

<sup>158</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 217.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>160</sup> Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy*, p. 66.

<sup>161</sup> Ian Ousby, *Occupation: the ordeal of France 1940-44* (London, 1997), p. 153.

<sup>162</sup> Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy*, p. 3

<sup>163</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p. 90.

<sup>164</sup> Memorandum by F.K. Roberts, 7 Feb. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/31009).

the League's experience; but like every aspect of the League's existence it had its limitations. For all the 'world-spirit' figures such as de Madariaga recognised within that institution, it cannot be overlooked that the first impulse of many Secretariat officials, including its most senior figures, was to return to national service in a time of crisis. Both Seán Lester and Frank Walters placed themselves at the disposal of the Irish Department of External Affairs, and the British Foreign Office respectively, with Walter leaving Geneva at the end of the summer. In his 1946 article on the international civil service of the future, Egon F. Ranshoffen-Wertheimer (a former Secretariat official) made the following observation; 'nationalism is a potent irrational impulse. If it is pitted against international loyalty even an essentially decent international official may falter.'<sup>165</sup> For Frenchmen, facing a grave national trauma, the only available government in the summer of 1940 (before the establishment of any credible 'Free French' movement) was the one headed by the eighty-four year old hero of Verdun.

The gravest accusation laid against Avenol was that he tried to transform the League into a vehicle for Axis collaboration. No evidence can be found in Avenol's personal papers or in the Vichy files to suggest that the secretary-general made any approach to the agents of the Third Reich. In 1951 Avenol vehemently denied the charge that he was pro-German. He described the rumour of his approaching the German consul as 'absolutely false! Not a word of truth! Never had I a relation with Hitler! [.....] and never anything with Mussolini after 1936.'<sup>166</sup> His colleagues and certain national civil servants thought otherwise. On 30 June, Livingstone learned (through Lester) that Avenol, believing Aghnides to be on his side, gave the impression to his Greek under secretary-general that he wanted to see himself as secretary-general of a new League based on a new order.'<sup>167</sup> Lester reported to Kelly that Aghnides was fearful that Avenol was 'trying to make him do something dishonourable'.<sup>168</sup> A British official, attached to the embassy in Washington, was informed by Carter Goodrich, the American chairman of the I.L.O.'s Governing Body, that Avenol had been in contact with the German consul in Geneva.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Egon F. Ranshoffen-Wertheimer, 'The international civil service of the future' in *International Conciliation*, xxiv (1946), p. 74.

<sup>166</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 219.

<sup>167</sup> Harry Livingstone to Lord Halifax, for general distribution to the War Cabinet, 30 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>168</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Sept. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 317).

<sup>169</sup> Neville Butler to Makins, 7 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

According to Jacklin's 1942 evidence to the Foreign Office Avenol denied that he was an Axis stooge and informed the League treasurer that while he expected Germany to win the war, he 'could not possibly, even if he were so inclined, do a deal with the Germans since the Germans were not interested in him.'<sup>170</sup>

It is unclear how Avenol came to that conclusion. However simultaneous developments for the League's Organisation of Intellectual Cooperation demonstrate that the Germans were not committed to commandeering League machinery for their own ends. The diplomatic records of Vichy prove a useful source from which to glean information on the German attitude to the League at this time. In autumn 1940 Professor Friedrich Berber, an official of the Reich Foreign Ministry and an authority on international law, was appointed Reich commissar for intellectual cooperation. A rumour surfaced that the German authorities entertained designs on the Paris based Institute of Intellectual Cooperation.<sup>171</sup> In a visit to Geneva shortly after his appointment, Berber met with Professor Maurice Bourquin, a Belgian professor of jurisprudence at the University of Geneva, who was closely connected with the work of the League. Bourquin confided the finer details of his audience with Berber to Aghnides. Berber informed Bourquin that the German government was interested in maintaining the structure of intellectual cooperation. Berber claimed that his government was 'anxious to keep on the Paris institute', which 'must sever all connections to the League of Nations which was too much under British influence.'<sup>172</sup> According to Bourquin, Berber inferred that Germany wanted to use the Institute for propaganda purposes in South America. By December, when no such plans materialised, Murray, in a letter to Makins, mused on their viability. Murray knew Berber and dubbed him 'a Ribbentrop man and fairly intelligent. He will obviously be able to get members [to form a committee] from all or practically all the European nations, though perhaps not men of much intellectual eminence.'<sup>173</sup> The prospect of German interest in the I.I.I.C. became a subject of great interest to the French Foreign Ministry, the French government having been a major source of funding for the Institute.<sup>174</sup> It sought to ascertain the German position at the Wiesbaden Armistice Commission in late 1940. A delegation from the

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<sup>170</sup> Memorandum by F.K. Roberts, 7 Feb. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/31009).

<sup>171</sup> Livingstone to Foreign Office, 16 Sep. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24439, f. 114).

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Murray to Makins, 14 Dec. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24439, f. 116).

<sup>174</sup> Note on the German proposal for the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 2 Sept. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/13, f. 2, p. 3)

Reich Foreign Ministry denied entertaining any designs on the League's Paris-based Institute.<sup>175</sup> An organisation that sought to provide the intellectual stimulus to liberal internationalism could have no place in Hitler's new Europe which was, according to Mark Mazower, ideologically predicated on 'a violent fantasy of racial mastery, a demonstration of a martial elite breed to lord over hundreds of millions of subjects.'<sup>176</sup> As it transpired, while Berber took possession of the I.I.I.C., his actions were limited to the theft and removal to Germany of the Institute's files covering the inter-war International Studies Conferences.<sup>177</sup>

It is unlikely that Avenol approached the Germans with vague proposals for an Axis-controlled League (and vague they had to remain considering no one, not even the Germans themselves, had devised clear plans for a new European order based on German hegemony).<sup>178</sup> However there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that Avenol did entertain such views and shared them with the Vichy government.<sup>179</sup> René Charron, a Frenchman and member of the economic and finance research section of the League Secretariat, had many contacts in Vichy and was a close confidante of Avenol during the summer of 1940. While Avenol was waiting for the reply to his 4 July letter to Baudouin he sent Charron to Vichy. According to a communication dated 5 July, Avenol trusted Charron with a note advising the French government on their League policy. Avenol questioned whether it was wise for France to remain in a British dominated League of Nations in the aftermath of the British attack on the French Mediterranean fleet.<sup>180</sup> He informed Baudouin that the French government could announce its intention to withdraw from an organisation that could no longer serve as an 'Anglo-French association' and that in the two years it would take for such an action to take legal effect the French

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<sup>175</sup> Note on a possible Franco-German committee of intellectual cooperation, 5 Dec. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/13, f. 7, p. 1).

<sup>176</sup> Mark Mazower, *Hitler's empire: how the Nazis ruled Europe* (London, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>177</sup> Renoliet, *La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle*, p. 296. The International Studies Conferences were a series of annual conferences on international affairs held under the auspices of the League's I.I.I.C.

<sup>178</sup> For further information on the lack of a coherent German vision for the post-war reorganisation of Europe see Mazower, *Hitler's empire*, p. 555.

<sup>179</sup> That Avenol expressed pro-Axis sentiments and spoke about a new League under German and Italian control is corroborated by Lester, Aghnides, and British diplomats. See Diary of Seán Lester, 26 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 471); Aghnides to Starr, 11 Sep. 1965 (L.N.A., PPA Agh 3/24); Livingstone to Lord Halifax, for general distribution to the War Cabinet, 30 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353); Livingstone to Lord Halifax, for general distribution to the War Cabinet, 9 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353); Makins to S.D. Waley, 12 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>180</sup> Avenol to Baudouin, 9 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, ff 5-6).

government could still hope to influence League activities.<sup>181</sup> British Foreign Office records attest that Charron had also been tasked with sharing the secretary-general's views on a new League with the Vichy government. Charron informed Kelly that Avenol was shocked when he was told that the new government was not interested in the idea of placing League services at the disposal of the 'New Order' in Europe.<sup>182</sup> Thus while Avenol may not have taken any decisive action in relation to such controversial proposals, the evidence suggests that he had indeed entertained ideas of an Axis-controlled League.

On 13 July Avenol received a reply to his letter to Baudouin. He was informed that the Vichy government would welcome his resignation.<sup>183</sup> The government thought it wise for France to relinquish its leading role at Geneva; as such the resignation of a French secretary-general was regarded as the appropriate course of action.<sup>184</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expected Avenol to leave office in three weeks, once he had settled the question of his succession.<sup>185</sup> In the 1970s it was suspected, but not known by historians, that the Vichy regime intimated its desire to Avenol that the League should come to an end thus prompting the secretary-general to embark on what appeared to be a programme of sabotage.<sup>186</sup> Carter Goodrich, the chairman of the I.L.O.'s Governing Body, was also convinced that Pétain would pressure Avenol into either placing the League under the control of Germany and Italy or to liquidating the organisation entirely.<sup>187</sup> The Vichy records illustrate that this was not the case. While the French government was not eager to preserve its dominant role at Geneva, its intention, at this time, was to maintain the League as a potential common meeting ground with the United Kingdom; the government was also anxious to avoid the appearance of German dictation.<sup>188</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the armistice, the new French state was trying to determine to what degree it could practise an independent foreign and domestic policy and

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<sup>181</sup> Avenol to Baudouin, 9 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 6).

<sup>182</sup> Telegram from Kelly to the Foreign Office and the Treasury, 30 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>183</sup> Baudouin to Avenol, 13 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 14).

<sup>184</sup> Note for the minister of foreign affairs, 12 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 13).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> See for example Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 158.

<sup>187</sup> Telegram from N.M. Butler [British embassy, Washington] to Makins, 7 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>188</sup> Note by the office of the acting political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning a question posed by the vice-president of the council, 10 Apr. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12).

protect its population from the excesses of Nazi occupation.<sup>189</sup> League membership remained a potentially valuable diplomatic link with the world outside of Hitler's new 'Fortress Europe' and reflected the unlikely aspirations of the Vichy government for the re-establishment of French sovereignty.

On 27 July 1940, in the aftermath of his communication with the Vichy government, Avenol informed member states that he was relinquishing the post of secretary-general.<sup>190</sup> Baudouin's letter made no allusion to the prospect of Avenol entering the service of the Vichy government. However the secretary-general did not lose hope of obtaining a position and went to Vichy on 21 August 1940 to that end. While he was received by Pétain, Pierre Laval twice refused to see him, perhaps arousing Avenol's sympathies with those who opposed his growing influence in the process.<sup>191</sup> A Vichy memorandum noted that Avenol has been 'surprised, disappointed and saddened' by the readiness of his own government and those of other member states to accept his resignation and by the failure of those governments to mark the occasion with the traditional exchange of letters of congratulations and thanks for services rendered.<sup>192</sup> Avenol found himself not only bereft of his position of secretary-general but also deprived of his professional integrity, with no gain being derived from his avowal of support for this New Europe which had no place for him. Lester on the other hand recognised that the League's brand of internationalism could only be assured of a post-war renaissance in the event of a German defeat: 'The Nazis must be beaten if there is to be any decency in such life and civilisation as may survive.'<sup>193</sup> Avenol was not a liberal idealist but nor was he the *realpolitiker* de Madariaga described. For all his welcoming of the Armistice, Avenol did not recognise that it was this event which devalued his entire career. He failed to see that the League, so intimately associated with the traditions of liberal

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<sup>189</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p. 101.

<sup>190</sup> Communication by the secretary-general to the members of the League of Nations, 27 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 8).

<sup>191</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 2 Aug. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 518).

<sup>192</sup> Memorandum of the Vichy ministry of foreign affairs, 15 Sep. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 52).

<sup>193</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Sep. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 317). Unlike Avenol Lester had acquired personal experience of National Socialism. Lester served as the League's high commissioner for the Free City of Danzig (1933-7). As high commissioner, Lester had to contend with the harsh reality of Nazi rule on a near daily basis. The Danzig Nazis, supported by their parent party in Germany, embarked on a policy of terror, arresting and committing acts of violence against political opponents and journalists, engaging in intimidation tactics with voters, holding marches and rallies, bugging Lester's office and installing a German spy as his butler. See Paul McNamara, *Seán Lester, Poland and the Nazi takeover of Danzig* (Dublin, 2009).



democracy, could never be reconciled with the realities of totalitarianism. Its value lay in serving as counterpoint to such a system.<sup>194</sup>

In the absence of any other career prospects he showed no inclination to leave Geneva, much to the anxiety of his colleagues. As he could no longer formally assume the position of secretary-general he sought to retain informal authority over the Secretariat. As early as 12 July 1940 Roger Makins wrote that evidence was accumulating that Avenol was trying to double-cross member states in order to gain control of the League's liquid assets.<sup>195</sup> Avenol's former private secretary, the Briton, Hilary Saint George Saunders, was tasked by the Foreign Office to prepare a report on Avenol's character and capabilities for the perusal of Sir Robert Vansittart, the chief diplomatic adviser to the British government. According to Saunders, Avenol was not to be trusted. Saunders pointed out the possibility that Avenol could be pressured by the Vichy regime to dispose of League funds for the benefit of the 'enemy' and Saunders thought him more likely to approach Italy than Germany.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, according to Lester, Avenol had admitted to his colleagues that he was not sure that Hitler would want the League but was convinced that Mussolini would as 'a counter-balance to German military power.'<sup>197</sup> Saunders believed that this would simply entail the transfer of League money from where a portion of it was held by Chase Bank in New York to another bank in the United States with German or Italian connections. To do this however Avenol would have to secure the signature of the League's treasurer, Seymour Jacklin. Saunders claimed that Jacklin (a South African of British parentage) was 'absolutely trustworthy and above suspicion' and proposed sending him a note to advise him to be on his guard.<sup>198</sup>

This was done through the medium of the British consulate in Geneva with the Foreign Office informing Jacklin that they relied on him to 'preserve financial orthodoxy.'<sup>199</sup> Jacklin's reply was dispatched on the 27 July with the South African offering assurances that he had thus far witnessed nothing but 'clean and orthodox financial administration' although he informed the Treasury that he might 'seek

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<sup>194</sup> See for example Anthony Eden to Lester, 28 May 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>195</sup> Makins to S.D. Waley [Treasury], 12 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>196</sup> Hilary Saint George Saunders to Sir Robert Vansittart, 10 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>197</sup> Telegram from British consulate, Geneva, to the Foreign Office and for special distribution to the War Cabinet, 9 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>198</sup> Hilary Saint George Saunders to Sir Robert Vansittart, 10 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>199</sup> Telegram from the Foreign Office to the British consulate, Geneva, 19 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

support or safeguards later.’<sup>200</sup> Two days later, following Avenol’s notice of resignation, the previously unruffled Jacklin began to register concern for the integrity of the League’s liquid assets. According to Jacklin, Avenol proposed retaining control of financial administration by inaugurating a ‘committee of three’ with himself as chairman, to administer League funds.<sup>201</sup> Avenol insisted that his input would still be required despite his official resignation. According to Avenol the political situation meant that there was no need to appoint a new secretary-general and even if a successor was installed he might not know anything about finance. Jacklin confided to the Foreign Office his view that Avenol’s arguments were not ‘logical, nor convincing, nor in accordance with precedent.’<sup>202</sup> Jacklin stated that he was not opposed to Avenol’s idea for the reorganisation of the Secretariat, ‘in principle’, despite being aware that the voice of the treasurer in such a triumvirate would most likely be in a minority. However he indicated that he would only be willing to go along with such a plan if he could trust Avenol’s successor or whomever was appointed to administer the Secretariat.<sup>203</sup> Avenol told Schwebel that he offered to ‘put himself informally at the disposal of the League, without salary or responsibility.’<sup>204</sup> This was untrue. Jacklin reported to Kelly that Avenol proposed drawing a salary of 2,000 C.H.F. per month for his services as a kind of secretary-general emeritus.<sup>205</sup> News of such proposals filtered out from the *Palais des Nations* with *The Times* reporting that Avenol was going to be replaced by a triumvirate of high officials.<sup>206</sup>

Jacklin became suspicious when Avenol gave orders for the transfer of League funds, deposited in American and English banks, to Switzerland for an unspecified reason. Jacklin informed Avenol that he would do so ‘over his dead body’ and saw to it that the money is divided into certain earmarked funds to limit the possibility of Avenol tampering with them.<sup>207</sup> In response to Avenol’s suspect financial dealings British Treasury Officials compiled a report as to the best course

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<sup>200</sup> Telegram from the British consulate, Geneva, to the Treasury and Foreign Office, 25 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>201</sup> Telegram from Seymour Jacklin, via the British consulate, Geneva, to the Treasury, 27 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 221.

<sup>205</sup> Telegram from Kelly to the Treasury, 30 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>206</sup> *The Times*, 27 July 1940.

<sup>207</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 5 Aug. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 522).

of action to mitigate the risk of misappropriation. According to the report, in 1939 the League's liquid assets amounted to about 3 million pounds, 700,000 of which was held in Lloyd's and National Provincial Bank in London in the form of gold, in addition to certain investments.<sup>208</sup> While the rest of the League's assets were held in Paris and New York, the London account could be made available in Geneva by the branch of Lloyds and National there. The Treasury thus advocated the complete removal of the League's financial administration from Switzerland. The continued operation of the Secretariat could be financed by local petty cash accounts in Geneva which could be supplemented by occasional transfers from the new financial headquarters of the League.<sup>209</sup>

It is not clear what Avenol hoped to do with League funds. Three million pounds of the League's liquid assets was unlikely to entice any German interest in Avenol's schemes at a time when the Third Reich had much greater financial interests in Switzerland. As has been well-documented, Switzerland allowed the Nazis to launder gold and other capital of questionable origin in its banks, purchasing nearly half of Berlin's gold reserve in the process, three quarters of which had been acquired by the Nazis illegitimately.<sup>210</sup> What is more likely is that Avenol, bereft of any opportunities from Vichy and obliged to resign, sought to retain control over the League's financial affairs in order to maintain some kind of position and prestige. Though not known for an imaginative style of leadership, Avenol was renowned for his authoritarian style. When he rose to the top of the Secretariat Avenol replaced Drummond's British 'bottom-up' method of administration with the French 'top-down' model. As a result the technical activities came more under the responsibility of the secretary-general with the technical directors losing a considerable amount of executive authority.<sup>211</sup> A Vichy government memorandum reported that Avenol hoped to exert indirect control over the Secretariat indirectly through his influence with members of the League's Supervisory Commission.<sup>212</sup> By August 1940 Avenol was still refusing to name a date for his departure from office

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<sup>208</sup> Treasury memorandum, 31 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353). According to the National Archives of the United Kingdom currency converter that amount would have the approximate value of £86,160,000 in the year 2005. (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>) (11 July 2013).

<sup>209</sup> Treasury memorandum, 31 July 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>210</sup> Wylie, 'Introduction: Victims or actors?', p. 22.

<sup>211</sup> Ghébali, 'The League of Nations and functionalism', pp 153-4.

<sup>212</sup> Memorandum by the Vichy Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 Sept. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A, War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 52).

and proposed the complete winding up of the Secretariat on 31 December 1940.<sup>213</sup> According to Lester Avenol's autocratic tendencies appeared to develop into megalomania in the summer of 1940, with Avenol reportedly declaring 'I am the League of Nations.'<sup>214</sup> While Avenol may have been the most senior international civil servant in Geneva, his cavalier attitude to the League's liberal democratic ethos made him the least likely personification of the League

By August 1940 Avenol's position was untenable. His colleagues refused to cooperate with him and had been deferring to the authority of his deputy, Seán Lester, since the announcement of his resignation on 27 July.<sup>215</sup> He had lost all credibility as an administrator and political figurehead; the British government and even the French government were anxious for him to leave office.<sup>216</sup> Avenol left the Secretariat on 2 September, having relinquished his authority on 31 August. He settled in France in a small village in Haute Savoie, not far from the Swiss border. Avenol's motivations during the summer of 1940 remain complex and thought-provoking. Lester took Avenol's optimistic reaction to the armistice as proof of his extremism.<sup>217</sup> Later historians agreed with Lester's conclusion. Barros argued that Avenol's conservatism eventually developed into sympathy for the extreme reactionary elements.<sup>218</sup> The sudden transformation of this cautious, conservative figure into a political extremist is not convincing. In her recent publication, Clavin acknowledged that it is difficult to identify any ideological consistency in Avenol's decisions if he decided to 'throw in his panicky lot with the dictators' considering his anti-communist tendencies should have been affronted by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.<sup>219</sup> Aghnides, who remained in close proximity to Avenol during the summer of 1940, did not believe the Frenchman to be a right-wing extremist. Rather he attributed Avenol's proposals to political opportunism. He confided to Livingstone his conviction that 'if the League survived [Avenol] would wish to keep in with His Majesty's Government but that [Avenol] really believed the League would be dead in three months.'<sup>220</sup> *Time Magazine* made the caustic observation in July 1940 that

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<sup>213</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 16 Aug. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 546).

<sup>214</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, Sept. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 502).

<sup>215</sup> *La Croix*, 28 July 1940.

<sup>216</sup> Foreign Office minutes on the future of the League of Nations, 3 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353);

<sup>217</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 8 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 478).

<sup>218</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*, pp 17-18.

<sup>219</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, pp 259-60.

<sup>220</sup> Livingstone to Lord Halifax, for general distribution in the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet, 28 June 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

‘as long as Joseph Avenol can keep himself employed, the League is not stone dead.’<sup>221</sup> Avenol’s personal papers also reveal his lack of ideological commitment. On 27 July 1940, two days after Avenol had disparaged the British government to Baudouin, he took it upon himself to personally inform Lord Halifax of his decision to resign from office, sending the following telegram;

Having decided offer my resignation consider my duty to inform you personally this decision [remembering] with emotion long years of mutual confidence. I wish to thank you personally and ministers and public officials and friends who have given me their support.<sup>222</sup>

Avenol was not a fascist ideologue: he was an opportunist. As Schwebel argued ‘intelligent idealism’ was essential to an international civil service.<sup>223</sup> It was the much ridiculed idealism of League officials and supporters that sustained them in their endeavour to keep the League alive in an increasingly hostile political environment. When Carl Hambro originally learned of Avenol’s intention to resign, unaware of his intrigue within the Secretariat, he wrote to urge him to reconsider. Hambro expressed his unshakable conviction, despite the then bleak prospects of the Allied war effort, that the continuation of the League was of vital importance to the future peace settlement.<sup>224</sup> South Africa’s premier, General Jan Christiaan Smuts, one of the original architects of the Covenant, also expressed regret at Avenol’s decision. He shared Hambro’s certainty that all the ‘great work has not been in vain and that the League will still prove the best foundation on which to rebuild the international order.’<sup>225</sup> Avenol did not share that conviction. In a letter to Frank Boudreau he confided his conviction that the League was over, that it had lost its ‘soul and its functions’.<sup>226</sup> When Avenol wrote to Carl Hambro in September 1940 he informed the latter that the rumours surrounding his actions the previous summer were nothing more than ‘the toxins of a dying bureaucracy.’<sup>227</sup> Avenol’s first response to the looming threat of war, was not that the Secretariat should be preserved as a nucleus for international collaboration, but that it should be pared

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<sup>221</sup> *Time Magazine*, 8 July 1940.

<sup>222</sup> Avenol to Lord Halifax, 27 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 13).

<sup>223</sup> Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, pp 223-4.

<sup>224</sup> Hambro to Avenol, 26 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 13).

<sup>225</sup> General Jan Christiann Smuts to Avenol, 29 July 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 32).

<sup>226</sup> Avenol to Boudreau, 9 Sep. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 84, p. 2).

<sup>227</sup> Avenol to Hambro, 2 Sep. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 80).

down to its most basic level.<sup>228</sup> While Lester pondered the possibility of ‘dissolution with dignity’ he regarded such a policy as a final measure to prevent the League falling into the hands of the Axis powers.<sup>229</sup> Avenol was not an unfit secretary-general because of his pro-Vichy sympathies or because he desired to serve the government of his homeland; after all Drummond had been appointed British ambassador to Rome upon his resignation as secretary-general. Avenol was an unfit secretary-general because he lacked all discretion, circumspection and a commitment to the international civil service over which he presided. A common charge levelled against League officials and apologists was that their idealism led them to misread the current of international affairs.<sup>230</sup> However Avenol spend his entire career as secretary-general trying to reconcile ambitious internationalism of the League Secretariat with the prevailing political landscape, with disastrous results. In 1940 he contemplated the transformation of the League’s political identity in an ill-conceived attempt to bring the organisation into conformity with what he recognised as the reality of a new European order. That Avenol’s career did not survive his espousal of such controversial views is indicative of the pre-eminence of the League’s liberal democratic identity to its wartime preservation. Avenol’s resignation also demonstrated the need for the secretary-general to embody both sound political-judgement and an idealistic commitment to the peaceful internationalism. As Fred Halliday has shown, such traits were not mutually exclusive.<sup>231</sup> Pedersen described the ‘spirit of Geneva’ as a unique ‘blend of pragmatism and hope.’<sup>232</sup> Avenol did not possess this necessary mix of pragmatism and idealism to lead an international civil service through the war years.

### **The transfer of technical missions of the League to North America**

As we shall see in chapter three, Avenol’s actions left an indelible mark on the Secretariat and enacted repercussions for its future operation. However his attitude to the Princeton offer did not prove fatal for the transfer of the technical organisations.

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<sup>228</sup> Memorandum by Pierre Bonna, 31 Mar. 1939 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/305, pp 137-8).

<sup>229</sup> N.M. Butler to Makins, 7 Aug. 1940 (T 160/1353).

<sup>230</sup> See for example Niemeyer ‘The balance sheet of the League experiment’, pp 537-558 and Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 164.

<sup>231</sup> Halliday, *Rethinking international relations*, p. 10.

<sup>232</sup> Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nation’, p. 1113.

It was decided that it would be Alexander Loveday's Economic and Finance Organisation that would transfer a select group of personnel to Princeton. The gradual process of transferring officials began when Loveday and seven of his principal collaborators, together with their families, left Geneva on 6 August 1940.

John Winant's leadership of the I.L.O. in the summer of 1940 continued to contrast sharply to that provided by Avenol. Following the fall of France Winant took action to secure a transfer of the Labour Office away from Geneva. Winant did not wait to be invited by an American academic institution but approached the State Department directly. In June 1940, through the American Consul in Geneva, he wrote to Cordell Hull requesting a transfer of I.L.O. officials to the United States.<sup>233</sup> Winant received the briefest of replies from Hull informing him that the United States government was not in a position to extend such an invitation.<sup>234</sup> Undaunted, Winant persisted in his request, trying to appeal to the shared democratic tradition of both the I.L.O. and the United States:

I ask for your help and the help of the United States in continuing the organisation and [in] conserving the specialised personnel who have been devotedly loyal to the principles and practises of democracy and who are authorities in national and international social legislation and procedure.<sup>235</sup>

Winant, refused to depoliticise the work of his agency and sought to reinforce the idea that the I.L.O.'s pursuit of social justice was sustained by the liberal, democratic principles on which the League was founded. However Hull was unmoved and once again refused the request, becoming more explicit as to why. Hull did not feel he could secure the necessary congressional approval to safeguard the international status and autonomy of the I.L.O. if it operated on American soil but hoped that his refusal would not be taken as any reflection upon the I.L.O. or the director's administration of it.<sup>236</sup> Refusing to be deterred, Winant actually departed Geneva for the United States, hoping that his physical presence would help convince the Roosevelt administration of the I.L.O.'s dire need for assistance.

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<sup>233</sup> Tittman to Hull, 14 June 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 317).

<sup>234</sup> Hull to Tittman, 18 June 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 318).

<sup>235</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 23 June 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 319).

<sup>236</sup> The secretary of state to the consul-general at Geneva, 1 July 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 321).

Winant only got as far as London before he altered his plans entirely. He established contact not with Roosevelt, but with William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada. Due to its expanding economy, Canada had a sophisticated labour movement and was receptive to the I.L.O.'s campaign for more equitable labour laws.<sup>237</sup> King intimated to Winant that there would be many Canadian universities eager to assist the I.L.O. and left the director free to make his choice.<sup>238</sup> Winant settled on McGill University, Montreal, on the basis that Montreal, with its mixed English and French speaking populations, was well equipped for printing documents in the two official languages of the organisation. Unlike the scruples of the U.S. State Department, the Canadian government proved 'ready to take all the measures necessary to ensure that the [Labour] Office should be given its full status and independence as an international institution.'<sup>239</sup> Around forty staff members of the International Labour Office joined Winant in Montreal in the initial transfer period. Others remained in Geneva, while some returned to their own countries as the I.L.O.'s national correspondents or were attached to the organisation's various branch offices in order to supply, from there, material on social questions of interest to the Office.<sup>240</sup> This was a significant reduction in staff. At its height in the 1930s the Labour Office was composed of some 450 officials, encompassing thirty seven nationalities, who had the ability to read and write in almost fifty languages.<sup>241</sup>

Though he ensured the immediate survival of the I.L.O., Winant was not destined to lead it through the war years as shortly after the arrangements with McGill were made he was appointed American ambassador to the United Kingdom. Whereas Avenol's attempt to serve the government of his homeland was regarded as controversial, perhaps unfairly so, by his colleagues, Winant's resignation was not shrouded in subterfuge and recrimination. Winant was called into the service of what was then an officially neutral state, whose sympathies, like the majority of League

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<sup>237</sup> F.H. Soward, 'International Organisation' in George William Brown and Edgar McKinnis Berkely (eds), *Canada* (Berkeley, 1950), p. 550.

<sup>238</sup> Edward J. Phelan, 'The I.L.O. sets up its wartime base in Canada' in *Studies*, xlv (1955), p. 152.

<sup>239</sup> *The I.L.O. and reconstruction: report by the acting director of the International Labour Office for the Conference of the International Labour Organisation* (Montreal, 1941), pp 33-4 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>240</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Organisation, 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 10).

<sup>241</sup> Edward J. Phelan, 'How the International Labour Organisation operates' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, clxvi (1933), p. 4.



member states, lay with the Allied cause. It is also difficult to attribute to Winant the same self-interested opportunism practiced by Joseph Avenol. Unlike the former secretary-general, Winant was an idealist on both a national and international level. Winant regarded the war as an almost apocalyptic battle between the forces of democracy and totalitarianism. In his director's report of 1941 he informed member states that he was called into service by the President of the United States to serve as an ambassador 'where the age-old fight for democracy has reached its climax.'<sup>242</sup> His deputy, Edward Phelan, observed that in accepting the diplomatic post his chief wanted to be 'where the bombs were falling, to give the encouragement of his presence, if he could give no more to those whose sacrifice and courage all at the moment depended.'<sup>243</sup> Winant's leadership of the I.L.O. enhanced his reputation as a social democrat and directly led to his appointment to the crucial diplomatic post at a time when the United States was beginning to extend economic assistance to the British war effort. Winant was not the obvious choice for ambassador but Roosevelt wanted to plant in London someone who was in step with his own New Deal social policies and perceived that Winant's appointment would be received favourably by the British Labour Party, a party whose influence Roosevelt correctly deemed to be on the rise.<sup>244</sup> Winant's appointment underscored both the affinity between the League Covenant and Allied war effort as well as the inherently political nature of its social and economic work.

While the sincerity of Winant's internationalism was not in doubt his resignation undermined an appeal by Phelan, in June 1940, for governments to respect the vital international work carried out by officials seconded to the technical services and not recall them for national service.<sup>245</sup> In its report of February 1939, the Governing Body of the I.L.O. emphasised that the office 'was not a kind of refuge for persons who were avoiding their military duties in a moment of grave national danger.'<sup>246</sup> However Phelan sought to remind the government members of the I.L.O. that civil servants were often exempt from military conscription as they

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<sup>242</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Office, 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 12).

<sup>243</sup> Phelan, 'The I.L.O. sets up its wartime base in Canada', p. 157.

<sup>244</sup> David Reynolds, 'Roosevelt, the British left and the appointment of John G. Winant as United States ambassador to Britain in 1941' in *The International History Review*, iv (1982), pp 394-6. Despite being a Republican, Winant was an enthusiastic collaborator on Democratic New Deal social policies during his time as governor of New Hampshire.

<sup>245</sup> Phelan to the Irish Department of Industry and Commerce, 17 June 1940 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

<sup>246</sup> Report by the officers of the Governing Body of the I.L.O., 2 Feb. 1939 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

were considered ‘already rendering national service’ and requested that the same principle be applied, on an international level, to the Labour Office.<sup>247</sup> At the same time, due to the downsizing of the secretariats of the League and of the I.L.O, arrangements could be made to negotiate with national governments over certain international officials.<sup>248</sup> The resignation of the I.L.O.’s director further vindicated Ranshoffen-Wertheimer’s argument: even the most committed international official could not resist the lure of national service in a time of war.<sup>249</sup> The League’s brand of internationalism was predicated on the inviolable sovereignty of member states and so national loyalties could not be precluded from its international civil service. In the aftermath of Winant’s departure for London, with inherent difficulties incurred in summoning an emergency meeting of the I.L.O.’s Governing Body, Winant’s deputy, Edward J. Phelan, assumed the acting directorship.

While the State Department was firmly opposed to the transfer of the I.L.O. to the United States it was receptive to the transfer of a mission from the Permanent Central Opium Board (P.C.O.B.). The Board was composed of eight experts, who operated independently of their governments. Its role it was to monitor the movement of drugs, through its Drug Supervisory Body (D.S.B). Should evidence suggest that any country was accumulating excessive quantities of a particular drug, the Board, through the secretary-general of the League of Nations, would request an explanation for this development from the country in question.<sup>250</sup> Herbert May, a serving member of the P.C.O.B., made it known to the U.S. State Department in 1940 that the League’s drug bodies felt they could operate more effectively in the United States, free from the restrictions on their mail and the difficulties in communication hampering their work in Geneva.<sup>251</sup> Whereas the I.L.O., with its concentration on sensitive labour and economic issues, was a large and potentially disruptive organisation, the P.C.O.B. proposed sending a much smaller delegation which concentrated on health related problems. Indeed the mounting problem of drug abuse and traffic of narcotics was a longstanding concern of various American philanthropic and scientific institutions and the United States was also a party to the

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<sup>247</sup> Phelan to the Irish Department of Industry and Commerce, 17 June 1940 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

<sup>248</sup> Report by the officers of the Governing Body of the I.L.O., 2 Feb. 1939 (N.A.I., DFA 241/41).

<sup>249</sup> Ranshoffen-Wertheimer, ‘The international civil service of the future’, p. 74.

<sup>250</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 1946 (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/80, p. 11).

<sup>251</sup> Breckenridge Long [assistant secretary of state] to Roosevelt, 3 Sep. 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 330).

many international agreements brokered by the Board.<sup>252</sup> According to the State Department, it was actually less difficult to offer assistance to a League agency, as a body seeking asylum, rather than to an organisation like the I.L.O. to which it was formally attached.<sup>253</sup> The League's drug officials would simply operate out of a branch office in Washington; such an arrangement would not need congressional approval. Accordingly, a mission of the P.C.O.B., the D.S.B. and the Opium Advisory Committee (which served as the link between governments and the League Secretariat on matters of drug control) established a branch office in Washington in early 1941. The League's Health Organisation remained in Geneva for the time being but it too was eventually destined to open a small branch office in the United States.

Following Avenol's dramatic departure it was not possible to hold a session of the Assembly and Council to elect a new secretary-general and so on 2 September 1940, Lester, with the written consent of the Supervisory Commission, was sworn in as acting secretary-general of the League of Nations. Lester's first task was to arrange a meeting of the Supervisory Commission so that a budget for 1941 could be organised, ensuring the immediate future of the League. The difficulties Lester faced were indicative of the fact that a functional League of Nations could still ignite political controversies. A meeting of the Supervisory Commission could attract press attention and raise the old fears of the League functioning as an anti-Axis forum. Marcel Pilet-Golaz, president of the Swiss Confederation, formally requested in August 1940 that the meeting of the Supervisory Commission not take place in League headquarters.<sup>254</sup> Permission was sought from and granted by the Portuguese government to hold the meeting in Lisbon. Portugal, on the Atlantic periphery of Europe, sharing ancient political and military ties with the United Kingdom, could adopt a bolder stance than the increasingly encircled Swiss.<sup>255</sup>

The selection of a new meeting ground did not dispel political anxieties. The British ambassador to Helsinki, Gordon Vereker, learned that the Finnish member of the Supervisory Commission, Harri Holma, was forbidden by his government to

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<sup>252</sup> William B. McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century: an international history* (London, 2000), p. 53.

<sup>253</sup> Sweetser to Loveday, 27 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 589).

<sup>254</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 15 Aug. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, pp 544-5).

<sup>255</sup> Jerold M. Packard, *The European neutrals in World War II* (New York, 1992), p. 289.

attend the session of the Supervisory Commission.<sup>256</sup> Vereker enlightened the Foreign Office as to the reasons for the Finnish démarche as related to him by the minister for foreign affairs in Helsinki. Minister Witting relayed his fears to Vereker that if Holma attended the meeting of the Supervisory Commission, Finland would become the target for a press campaign in Germany and Italy for being too subservient to Britain and the Allies.<sup>257</sup> In addition, the Finns did not want to render Holma's position as their diplomatic representative to the Vichy government more difficult than it already was. Although Vichy's position towards the League was more ambiguous than the Finns could have known, the French representative Yves Bréart de Boisanger (the governor of the Bank of France) could not attend as he had since been appointed a French representative to the Wiesbaden Armistice Commission.<sup>258</sup> Witting reminded Vereker that Finland was a small vulnerable country that could not risk drawing the thunders of Germany or any other of its unscrupulous neighbours (i.e. the U.S.S.R.) at a time when the German government was bringing strong indirect pressure to bear on Finland to withdraw from the League of Nations.<sup>259</sup> The Foreign Office strongly objected to such a development. It instructed Vereker to remind the Finnish government that members of the Supervisory Commission were not representatives of their governments but served in an individual capacity and to state that there was 'no reason why Finland should take up an attitude of this kind towards an organ of the League which did at least something to help it last year.'<sup>260</sup> The Finns eventually relented, allowing Holma to attend the meeting in Lisbon after an assurance was sought from the Foreign Office that as little publicity be accorded to his presence as was possible.<sup>261</sup> The League was no longer, if it ever really was, a threat to German expansionism but the Third Reich, like League's member states, refused to regard the organisation as a mere vehicle for social and economic cooperation.

A Secretariat delegation, led by Lester, was due to travel by bus to Lisbon, accompanied by the president of the Permanent Court of Justice, the El Salvadorian, José Gustavo Guerrero. How the League delegation was ultimately treated at the French-Spanish frontier must surely have brought home to Lester the dangers

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<sup>256</sup> Gordon Vereker to the Foreign Office and Treasury, 30 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Telegram from Yves Bréart de Boisnager to Lester, 26 Sep. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/13).

<sup>259</sup> Gordon Vereker to the Foreign Office and Treasury, 30 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>260</sup> Telegram from the Foreign Office to Gordon Vereker, 26 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

implicit in the League's strong association with the Allies. A Spanish official informed the League delegation that he had received instructions on 13 August that forbade the passage of any League official into Spain.<sup>262</sup> Fortunately, for the sake of the meeting, the slighted League officials were able to entrust budgetary documents bound for Lisbon to Norwegian diplomats crossing from France into Spain.<sup>263</sup> Lester later learned from Julio Lopez Olivan, a Spanish registrar of the Permanent Court, why the League delegation had been denied entry into Spain. Spain was, despite some overtures from Hitler, an officially neutral country during the war and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initially approved their entry. However the pro-German Minister of the Interior Serrano Súñer issued an order forbidding the passage of League officials through Spain.<sup>264</sup> The experience of League officials at the Spanish frontier would prove indicative of the entire wartime experience of the organisation. The growing Axis hegemony would impel many countries to slight an organisation which served as an embarrassing reminder of the Treaty that sought to contain the resurgence of German militarism.

After beating a hasty retreat to Geneva Lester managed to establish telephone communication with the rest of the Supervisory Commission. This was crucial as, given the wartime authority invested by League member states in the person of the secretary-general, the budget could not be considered legitimate unless it secured Lester's approval. The members of the Supervisory Commission present in Lisbon agreed that it was their responsibility to preserve the League as long as member states continued to support it; such was the reality of the political situation that the organisation was obliged to concentrate its activities to the social, economic and humanitarian spheres.<sup>265</sup> The resulting budget for 1941 was a stark indicator of the difficult times in which the League found itself. League officials would have to strive to meet the expectations of member states while working within the confines of an ever-diminishing budget. The Secretariat's budget for 1941 consisted of a paltry 3,729,302 Swiss francs (C.H.F.), a startling reduction since 1939 when just over twelve million was placed at its disposal.<sup>266</sup> This sum also had to accommodate

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<sup>262</sup> Lester to Hambro, 26 Sep. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 14 Oct. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 638).

<sup>265</sup> Report of the League Supervisory Commission, 4 Nov. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-46 Vichy, P 2805/7, f. 13, p. 2).

<sup>266</sup> Telegram from Sir Cecil Kisch [British member of the Supervisory Commission] to Lester, 2 Oct. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/13).

the work of the technical agencies (apart from that of the high commissioner for refugees and the P.C.O.B.). The I.L.O., enjoying separate budgetary arrangements, (subject to the approval of the secretary-general and the Supervisory Commission) was accorded just over three million C.H.F., a sixty per cent reduction since 1939.<sup>267</sup> As Housden demonstrated the League was always run on a shoestring budget.<sup>268</sup> However the war would bring its own unique financial hurdles; the League's technical directors were obliged to contend with these wartime difficulties in the hope of making a post-war impact.

Despite the ever worsening financial and political situation the League of Nations remained in existence. Due to the determination of officials such as Seán Lester, Thanassis Aghnides, Alexander Loveday, Seymour Jacklin and John Winant the League did not lose, as Avenol predicted, its soul or all of its functions. The League's experience of 1940; the collapse of its leadership; its treatment by the Swiss, Spanish and Finnish governments and the reluctance of the United States to accord the transferred technical missions official recognition demonstrated that a 'functionalist' League was still a very political League. Political considerations would determine its wartime experience as tensions between the League's Allied affinity and its obligation to the neutrals continued to mount. The Secretariat's position in Geneva and the transfer of various technical missions to North America would also serve as a reflection of the course of international affairs and provide an insight into the wartime evolution of internationalism

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<sup>267</sup> Report on the League's budget for 1941, 4 Nov. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-46 Vichy, P 2805/7, f. 8, p. 13).

<sup>268</sup> Housden, *The League of Nations*, p. 15.

### **Chapter three: Wartime challenges for a nascent international civil service: the League as a barometer of declining Eurocentrism and rising Atlanticism, 1940-3**

This chapter documents the impact of geo-political factors on the League's wartime technical activities and highlights the various challenges which beset the international civil service during the period 1940-3. The chapter contrasts the experience of the League's Geneva based Secretariat with that of the transferred missions in order to provide further insights into the character of the international civil service and that of its leadership. While the energies of the international civil service were primarily expended on what was traditionally described as its 'non-political' work, the vacuum created by the suspension of the League Assembly and Council lead to the increased politicisation of the technical organisations. Cut adrift from the inhibiting influence of the European neutrals, the transferred technical officials became increasingly bolder in adopting a pro-Allied stance; this undermined the place of the neutrals within the League apparatus while further demonstrating the importance of the League's political identity to a world at war. The Second World War is often identified by historians as a crucial period for the climax of European hegemony in international affairs when the great power void created by the crippling military and economic liabilities of Britain and France was filled by the United States as it prepared to create its *Pax Americana*.<sup>1</sup> The political implications of transferring selected missions of the League's technical agencies to North America is an aspect of the League's history that warrants further investigation for its significance to the evolution of both European and American internationalism. This was a period of crisis for the League's inherent and ingrained Eurocentrism when the outcome of the North American transfer risked undermining the League's historical affinity with the continent whose affairs so engrossed and determined the League experience. The growing 'trans-Atlantic' tendencies of the League's technical officials and their geographical separation from their colleagues in Geneva also permit an investigation into the ability to preserve institutional unity and an *esprit de corps* in the League apparatus.

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Marks, *The ebbing of European ascendancy: an international history of the world 1914-1945* (London, 2002), p. 410.

### **Lester and Phelan: two Irishmen as wartime leaders of rival secretariats**

Just as Joseph Avenol and John Winant provided contrasting leadership for their respective secretariats so too did compatriots Seán Lester and Edward J. Phelan. Their wartime relationship, often strained, was indicative of the historically fraught relationship between the I.L.O. and its parent organisation.<sup>2</sup> A native of Co. Waterford, Edward J. Phelan received his education and professional training in the United Kingdom, serving in the Board of Trade before his appointment as one of the principal secretaries of the British delegation to the International Committee on Labour Legislation at the Peace Conference in 1919. Intimately involved in drafting the I.L.O.'s constitution, Phelan was one of the innovators of the tripartite formula of I.L.O. representation.<sup>3</sup> One of Albert Thomas very first acts as director of the newly established I.L.O. was to appoint Phelan chief of the Diplomatic Division of the International Labour Office. The ascent of Phelan and Lester to the highest ranks of the international civil service was a historical moment for the development of international organisations. Calls from within the Assembly to appoint small state nationals to the most senior positions in the Secretariat and the technical services had been growing since the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> In 1940 this was achieved by accident. Lester and Phelan's respective wartime leaderships of the League and the I.L.O. would serve as a testing ground for the ability of small-state nationals to steer international organisations through a stormy political climate.

The presence of two citizens of a small, neutral state in the highest echelons of the international civil service was not universally regarded as a positive development.<sup>5</sup> When discussing Phelan's leadership potential, the historian Geert Van Goethem argued that the I.L.O. required someone with a higher profile who could act as a 'leading light'; a quality he judged to be lacking in Phelan who did not enjoy a strong public profile.<sup>6</sup> However while Phelan's name may not have entered into mainstream consciousness, his colleagues regarded his encyclopaedic knowledge of labour matters and twenty year career in the top ranks of the I.L.O. as

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<sup>2</sup> Dubin, 'Transgovernmental processes in the League of Nations', p. 483.

<sup>3</sup> Seán Lemass, 'Foreword' in Julie Wolf and Jasmien Van Daele (eds), *Edward Phelan and the I.L.O.: the life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009), p. iv.

<sup>4</sup> Barros, *Betrayal from within*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Geert Van Goethem, 'Phelan's war: the International Labour Organisation in limbo (1941-8)' in Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodriguez Garía, Geert Van Goethem, Marcel ven der Linden (eds), *I.L.O. histories: essays on the International Labour Office and its impact on the world during the twentieth century* (Bern, 2010), p. 316.

<sup>6</sup> Van Goethem, 'Phelan's war', p. 313.



essential advantages to his wartime leadership. C. Wilfred Jenks (director-general of the I.L.O. 1970-3) who served under Phelan during these years of crisis, described the Irishman's defining influence on the I.L.O. over the course of its twenty five year existence: 'the magnetism of his influence was known and felt throughout the office and there were few important files in which the initials E.J.P. did not constantly recur.'<sup>7</sup> Events will show that Phelan's occasional difficulty in acting as a 'leading light' was determined less by his nationality or ability than by an uncertain political climate.

Seán Lester's colleagues did not doubt his ability to steer the Secretariat through this tense period. In a letter to Robert Cecil in August 1940 Frank Walters wrote that Lester was 'capable of doing the work if he was prepared to accept it', that while the Irishman was 'not quick in decisions', his heart was in the right place.<sup>8</sup> Lester was a former journalist turned diplomat having moved from the Irish Department of External Affairs to Geneva where he served as the Irish Free State's permanent representative to the League (1929-3) before he was seconded to the League Secretariat as the League's high commissioner for the free city of Danzig (1933-7). Lester's career as secretary-general was unique among all the incumbents of that post. He was simultaneously more of an isolated figure and less an independent leader than either Drummond or Avenol. At first glance his authority appeared to be enhanced by the verifiable power vacuum in the Secretariat, with the organisation bereft of the majority of its professional elite due to the heavy reductions in personnel. The duties and responsibilities of the office of secretary-general were traditionally supported by the deputy and under secretaries-general. Of the two deputy secretaries-general, Lester received a sudden promotion and Frank Walters, owing to his rapidly deteriorating sense of hearing, quit Geneva for London.<sup>9</sup> Under Secretary-General Thanassis Aghnides remained the highest ranking official to remain in his post after 1940.<sup>10</sup> However Lester was aware that the Greek government-in-exile hoped to recall Aghnides to national service.<sup>11</sup> The immediate

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<sup>7</sup> C. Wilfred Jenks, 'Introduction', in Julie Wolf and Jasmien Van Daele (eds), *Edward Phelan and the I.L.O.: the life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Walters to Cecil, 6 Aug. 1940 (British Library [henceforth B.L.], Cecil of Chelwood Papers [henceforth C.C.P.], MSS 5114, f. 133, p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> Walters to Makins, 3 May 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24443, f. 62).

<sup>10</sup> The other under secretary-general, the Soviet Union's Vladimir Sokoline, had been pressurised to leave the Secretariat, despite his desire to stay as a liaison between the League, the Red Cross and the U.S.S.R. See Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 258.

<sup>11</sup> Aghnides to Lester, 18 Mar. 1942 (L.N.A., PPAgh 6/42)

realisation of this goal was impeded because of a delay in securing the necessary visa from the Spanish embassy to facilitate Aghnides' passage to London, via Lisbon. In 1942 Aghnides was finally appointed permanent under secretary of state for foreign affairs in the cabinet of the Greek government-in-exile before assuming the position of ambassador to the United Kingdom at the end of that year. Aghnides served as Lester's trusted ally in his opposition to Avenol in the summer of 1940. Following the suspension of Aghnides' secondment to the League he wrote to Lester in 1942, articulating the ardent internationalism that Avenol clearly lacked:

You and I were meant to work together and to fight for the same ideals. It gives me immense satisfaction to be able to place on record that we did work together for a common cause and that we did fight together against the same odds.... and foes.<sup>12</sup>

That left the League's treasurer, the South African Seymour Jacklin. As discussed, the British Foreign and Treasury Offices were anxious to remove Jacklin from the Secretariat's nucleus in Geneva in order to establish a temporary financial headquarters for the League in London.<sup>13</sup> It was judged that Jacklin's presence in the British capital would enable him to keep a proper check on League finances across the globe, as he could better communicate with the transferred missions by paying occasional visits to Princeton and Montreal.<sup>14</sup> Jacklin would also be in a position to exert influence on representatives of the Dominion countries and on the governments-in-exile established in London to ensure payment of the sorely needed member state contributions to the League budget. Jacklin left Geneva for London in 1941.

Lester thus became the sole member of the League's high direction to remain in the *Palais des Nations* for the duration of the war. The acting secretary-general was depicted in the *Spectator* as 'the keeper now of the tiny flickering light, all that remains of the flaming torch of the great hopes and ideals.'<sup>15</sup> Arthur Rovine, drawing on the later testimony of Arthur Sweetser, painted a brief picture of Lester's wartime leadership as being marked 'with a curious uncertainty which showed itself

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<sup>12</sup> Aghnides to Lester, 2 Apr. 1942 (L.N.A., PPAgh 6/42).

<sup>13</sup> Sir Cecil Kisch to P. Waterfield, 5 Nov. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Press clipping from *The Spectator* kept in the pages of the Diary of Seán Lester, Nov. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, vol.1, p. 679).

especially during and after his virtual imprisonment in Geneva.’<sup>16</sup> There was very little to inspire confidence in Lester. He was the ‘acting’ rather than the ‘elected’ secretary-general; his mandate to oversee the entire League apparatus came not from member states but from the consent of the Supervisory Commission. Nor did he share the autocratic tendencies of Joseph Avenol. As the Supervisory Commission had actually been appointed by the League Assembly, Lester felt it his duty to defer to the judgement of its influential chairman Carl Hambro.<sup>17</sup> Increasingly isolated in Geneva, he lacked the traditional support system upon which the head of the Secretariat usually relied.

### **The work of the Geneva Secretariat 1940-3.**

Historical commentary on the experience of the Geneva nucleus of the international civil service has been meagre and tends to be overshadowed by the more publicised work of the transferred missions.<sup>18</sup> The League’s wartime presence in Geneva has been dismissed in later scholarship as ‘residual’ with some historians even incorrectly asserting that the *Palais des Nations* was ‘locked down’, leaving the transferred missions of the E.F.O. and of the I.L.O. as the only functioning components of the League apparatus during the final years of its existence.<sup>19</sup> Though Lester’s isolation in Geneva was very real, it would be a gross injustice to posit, as Rovine did, that the acting secretary-general ‘headed a moribund League during the war and had little to do.’<sup>20</sup> The evidence from the League’s archives and from various national repositories reveal that this was not the case. The local press observed that while there were few sights more melancholy in Geneva than that of an almost empty *Palais des Nations*, League headquarters remained an important hive of technical work; work which was at once less spectacular but more fruitful than the Secretariat’s suspended efforts to facilitate the League’s political and diplomatic

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<sup>16</sup> Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 183.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Lester to Hambro, 14 July 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>18</sup> For a list of the publications of the League’s entire international civil service, in both Geneva and abroad, see *League of Nations publications January 1<sup>st</sup> 1940-March 31<sup>st</sup> 1945: Publications Department League of Nations* (Geneva, April 1945) available from (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 565).

<sup>19</sup> See Archer, *International organisations*, p. 21; Stefan Hall, *Siam and the League of Nations: modernisation, sovereignty and multilateral diplomacy, 1920-1940* (Bangkok, 2010), p. 78; Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> Rovine, *The secretary-general in world politics*, p. 12.

activities.<sup>21</sup> Avenol's policy of partial liquidation limited the breadth and scope of the work undertaken by the Geneva Secretariat. The work of the Political, Minorities and Disarmament Sections almost entirely disappeared. This work was fundamentally intergovernmental in character and depended on regular meetings of the Assembly and Council so that pressure could be exerted on any government guilty of reneging on its obligations to the Covenant and the peace treaties. However the Secretariat maintained correspondence with governments on these issues. Reports on the mandated territories continued to be sent to Geneva and the Secretariat duly prepared the appropriate memoranda on the contents of those reports.<sup>22</sup> While the League's work on the protection of minorities was also suspended, the Geneva Secretariat continued to update the relevant documentary material.<sup>23</sup>

No longer expected to provide the administrative support for the League's political work the Geneva Secretariat was every bit as technical in character and spirit as the transferred missions of the specialised agencies. The Social Section of the League Secretariat continued to operate in Geneva, on a reduced level. The League's social work comprised meetings of various advisory committees which investigated and made proposals on matters of common international concern, mostly relating to the welfare of woman and children.<sup>24</sup> During the war the advisory committees could not meet but the Social Section of the Secretariat drew up studies on subjects such the traffic of women and children, child welfare, suppression of brothels, age of consent, legitimacy and on the effects of the Depression on a child's life.<sup>25</sup> Of the three first class officers concerned with this work before the war only one remained who could supervise the collection of reports and statistics in this field.<sup>26</sup> While staff may have been depleted, a determined effort was made to document all the measures adopted in certain states to safeguard the welfare of children. The Secretariat forwarded the most important administrative and legislative

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<sup>21</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 25 Nov. 1943.

<sup>22</sup> Note by the acting secretary-general on the Geneva staff of the Secretariat for the attention of the Supervisory Commission, 2 July 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/12).

<sup>23</sup> Lester to Loveday, 24 Feb. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 559/5).

<sup>24</sup> Carol Miller, 'The Social Section and Advisory Committee on Social Questions of the League of Nations' in Paul Weindling (ed.), *International Health organisations and movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1995), pp 156-8.

<sup>25</sup> Lester to Loveday, 24 Feb. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 559/5).

<sup>26</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 19 Feb. 1945 (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/5, pp 12-13).

texts on child welfare to governments and national charities; this entailed significant translation work.<sup>27</sup> The Secretariat was also able to satisfy individual queries on social issues from governments, charities and organisations by drawing on the vast statistical and analytical collections of the League's Rockefeller Library.<sup>28</sup>

The Health Organisation retained a crucial presence in Geneva. The League of Nations Health Organisation was created by the fourth session of the Assembly in 1923. It consisted of a General Advisory Health Council, composed of twenty government representatives, whose role it was to draft and secure international agreements on health questions. The organisation's Health Committee, composed of international experts (specialists in the field of medical and public health questions), devised the programmes which directed the League's health work. Unlike the members of the Advisory Health Council, the experts of the Health Committee did not serve as the representatives of their various countries; rather they were seconded for their knowledge and abilities in the manner of the P.C.O.B. The Health Section of the organisation was composed of Secretariat officials who supported the work of the Advisory Health Council and the Health Committee while embarking on various specialised studies.<sup>29</sup> In March 1940 the Health Organisation called an emergency sub-committee to Geneva to discuss health problems arising from the evacuation of populations from the war zone. At this session the Health Section confirmed that it had already held preliminary discussions with public health departments of governments most likely to be affected and encouraged those governments to make use of the information the Secretariat could place at their disposal.<sup>30</sup> This information included health and demographical statistics as well as crucial epidemiological data. From 1 November 1939 to 31 January 1941 the Health Section in Geneva received eighty-four separate information requests from governments on health matters.<sup>31</sup> These included queries on healthcare, maternal mortality, infant

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<sup>27</sup> Aghnides to Lester, 2 Oct. 1941 (L.N.A., general, R 4569/41266).

<sup>28</sup> Henri Vigier to Lester, 25 Sep. 1941 (L.N.A., general, R 4569/41266).

<sup>29</sup> See Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 1946 (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/80, pp 9-10). For further reading on the development of the Health Organisation see Martin D. Dubin, 'The League of Nations Health Organisation' in Paul Weindling (ed.), *International health organisations and movements 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1995), pp 56-80 and Iris Borowy, *Coming to terms with world health: the League of Nations Health Organisation* (Frankfurt, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Communication to member states: Emergency Sub-Committee of the Health Section of the League of Nations concerning problems of public health and sanitation connected with the movements of civilian populations, 4 Mar. 1940 (N.A.I. DFA 231/105).

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum on the activity of the Health Section during 1940, 22 Mar. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War: 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/7, f. 36, p. 7).

mortality, diphtheria, dysentery, yellow fever, typhoid, typhus, tuberculosis, cancer and syphilis. The Health Organisation also had an important role in encouraging the international standardisation of various medicines and sera. About midway through the war, the Health Organisation's Permanent Commission on Biological Standardisation managed to broker an agreement on the international standardisation of penicillin.<sup>32</sup>

In a communication from the acting secretary-general of the League in September 1940 member states were assured that the Secretariat was anxious to remedy, as far as possible, the more or less complete isolation that had befallen many countries as a result of the escalation of hostilities.<sup>33</sup> To this end the Health Organisation aspired to keep up its role in broadcasting, to the international community, vital information on outbreaks of contagious and communicable diseases. This included providing news of its spread of disease as well as monitoring local and transnational efforts to contain outbreaks. In June 1940, as a result of the reduction in staff, the Health Organisation suspended the publication of its monthly and annual epidemiological reports.<sup>34</sup> However it fought to retain its position as a vital intelligence source on the state of global health by continuing to publish its weekly bulletin of epidemiological information. Traditionally the Health Organisation broadcast its weekly health bulletin from Geneva and from its Far-East Office in Singapore. Political factors had an adverse effect on the operation of the Eastern Bureau. By 1941 French and British colonial authorities were wary about the possibility of the League's health publications exposing their vulnerability to the enemy and increasingly refused to provide certain statistics to the Singapore station.<sup>35</sup>

With the escalation of the war in Asia the Health Organisation, was obliged to close its Singapore Office a week before the launch of the Japanese invasion in February 1942. It was suggested that the director of the Singapore Office, Charles Park, should set up base in India as that country was arguably the most important territory in the entire epidemiological survey of Asia. However the Indian authorities took a very severe view of the potential importance of epidemiological statistics to

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<sup>32</sup> *Report of the work of the League 1943-4 submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 5, available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/4).

<sup>33</sup> Communication to the members of the League from the acting secretary-general, 19 Sep. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 559/5).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Lester to Boudreau, 20 Feb. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/4).

the countries with which they were at war.<sup>36</sup> Lester accepted Park's proposal that he should go instead to Australia and shortly after his arrival the Australian government sent him an invitation to establish a temporary bureau. This afforded Park the opportunity to operate within the South Pacific zone, an important area for gathering intelligence on tropical diseases.<sup>37</sup> Not long after the establishment of his Australian zone Park informed Lester that the results he had managed to obtain were disappointing and expected that it was not enough to justify the extension of his contract with the League.<sup>38</sup> In November 1942 the activities of the Australian bureau were suspended.<sup>39</sup>

The Health Organisation was thus obliged to adopt a Eurocentric approach to the problems of public health. The Geneva nucleus of the Health Organisation felt a special obligation to provide advice and information to the national and international medical services attempting to bring medical relief to the war-torn continent and to that end produced an extensive polyglot glossary of communicable diseases.<sup>40</sup> The steady stream of information the Health organisation was able to supply on surgical and other medical matters was deemed especially useful to mobilised countries.<sup>41</sup> Since its foundation, the League's Health Organisation had been unable to establish its own laboratories for medical research; however it developed a working relationship with designated international laboratories at the National Institute of Medical Research in London and at the State Serum Institute in Copenhagen.<sup>42</sup> During the war it was able to retain its links with the London laboratory and the League's Health Section continued to publish its specialised studies on topics such

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<sup>36</sup> Lester to Loveday, 17 Aug. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Report on the work of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 65. Park later came under criticisms from elements in the League Secretariat for his failure to take measures to safeguard vital League archives but he was later vindicated by the admission of senior British military officers that they were as surprised as Park by the fall of Singapore. See Lenore Manderson, 'Wireless wars in the eastern arena: epidemiological surveillance, disease prevention and the work of the Bureau of the League of Nations Health Organisation, 1925-42' in Paul Weindling (ed.), *International Health organisations and movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> Lester to Maurice Bourquin, 12 Oct. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/6).

<sup>41</sup> League of Nations: report of the Special Contributions Committee, 22 Mar. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/7, f. 36, p. 7).

<sup>42</sup> Weindling, 'Introduction: constructing international health between the wars', p. 7.

as gangrene, malaria, typhus, tetanus, famine disease, neo-natal health and nutrition.<sup>43</sup>

The work of the League's high commissioner for refugees, Sir Herbert Emerson, was severely impeded by the very war which rendered his services all the more vital. The League established the High Commission for Refugees in 1921 under the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen. The High Commission provided both material assistance as well as legal protection for refugees. In the early years of its existence it provided assistance to Russian and Armenian refugees in particular. Following Nansen's death in 1930 the High Commission was abolished and replaced with the Nansen International Office for Refugees which was staffed directly from the Secretariat. As the number of German refugees fleeing Nazi persecution rose, the League established the High Commission for Refugees Coming from Germany in 1933. The two refugee authorities were dissolved at the end of 1938 and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees under the Protection of the League was established with its headquarters moved to London. During the early years of the war the Axis occupation of most of continental Europe meant Emerson's office was restricted in the assistance it could render newly afflicted refugees.

The frustrating wartime experience of the London-based high commissioner was not necessarily unique in the history of the League. Due to his paltry budget and the independent lines often taken by national governments in relation to refugee policy, the high commissioner traditionally experienced considerable difficulty in responding to various crises on an *ad hoc* basis.<sup>44</sup> When the opportunities to offer direct assistance to refugees were limited the commissioner adopted a more advisory role, with Emerson placing information at the disposal of more proactive bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.<sup>45</sup> Nor was it in Emerson's mandate to concern himself with the refugee problem generally. As per previous agreements the League's high commissioner incurred a special responsibility for a select group of refugees known as the Nansen refugees. The Nansen refugees included Russian, Armenian and Saar refugees; groups which had experienced displacement in the general upheavals during and after the First World War. During the Second World

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<sup>43</sup> *League of Nations publications January 1<sup>st</sup> 1940-March 31<sup>st</sup> 1945: Publications Department League of Nations* (Geneva, April 1945) available from (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 565).

<sup>44</sup> Housden, *The League of Nations*, pp 72-3.

<sup>45</sup> *Report of the work of the League 1943-5: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 69, available from (T.N.A. FO 371/50639).



War these groups experienced further displacement and the high commissioner was unable to maintain appropriate communication with them or to obtain the necessary intelligence on their situation and condition.<sup>46</sup>

Outside of Europe, the high commissioner was able to operate his pre-war mandate for the settlement of former Iraqi based Assyrians in Syria.<sup>47</sup> Emerson was better able to keep abreast of general developments in government policies towards refugees in his capacity as director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (I.C.R.), attending the meetings of that body in a consultative capacity. This agency was established in 1939 on the initiative of Franklin D. Roosevelt to coordinate intergovernmental efforts to resettle refugees from Nazi Germany and to prepare for the resettlement of future German emigrants.<sup>48</sup> Emerson's ability to adopt a more proactive role in European refugee affairs would not improve until the liberation of occupied Europe began in 1944.

The jewel in Geneva's functionalist crown and its greatest claim to utility was its Rockefeller Library. The League Library was the result of a 1927 endowment by the American philanthropist and Standard Oil heir John D. Rockefeller jnr. Rather than the overly esoteric and rarefied O.I.C., the Rockefeller Library was arguably the League's real instrument of intellectual cooperation. It provided pertinent information support and services to the Secretariat and technical agencies. By 1940 the Library held approximately 340,000 bibliographical units and volumes of periodicals, in addition to general works of reference on history, geography, economics, finance, transport, law, politics, medicine, public health, and colonial administration.<sup>49</sup> Apart from being of general academic use, all League publications were archived in the Library and could be made available to requesting governments. The League Library was open to public access and had formed a special working relationship with the Graduate Institute of International Studies located in Geneva, placing new microfilm reading technology at the disposal of its readers. League librarian Arthur de Brechya-Vuathier and his six staff members continued to receive an enormous amount of national publications from governments and received

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<sup>46</sup> *League of Nations international assistance to refugees: report submitted by Sir Herbert Emerson, high commissioner for refugees* (Geneva, 1946), p. 2, available from (T.N.A., FO 371/57822).

<sup>47</sup> Communication to the members of the League, 19 Sept. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 559/5).

<sup>48</sup> *Report of the work of the League 1943-5: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 67, available from (T.N.A., FO 371/50639).

<sup>49</sup> Report on library facilities, May 1940 (L.N.A., library section files, S 1682, p. 1).

corresponding requests from many of those governments for League publications or for older general publications archived by the Library.<sup>50</sup>

Bendiner wrote that few readers availed of the Library's services during the war.<sup>51</sup> In fact the evidence from the League archives attest that its considerable collection continued to be placed at the disposal of various legations and consulates in Bern and Geneva, government departments and organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Institute of Transport in London.<sup>52</sup> During the war it did everything in its power to provide the U.S. Library of Congress with important European publications, some of which the United States government were only able to procure through the League's agency.<sup>53</sup> Over the two decades of its existence the Rockefeller Library established valuable contacts with government ministries and national libraries in order to obtain desired publications through a gift or exchange system. This system continued for a time during the war with the Library even able to source the publications of governments hostile to the Covenant. It received as gifts, or through an inter-library loan system, statistical volumes from Japan, Hungary, Romania, Spain, and the U.S.S.R.<sup>54</sup> The Library was able to obtain a certain amount of Italian statistics by purchasing government publications from Rome. It also purchased German publications from the occupied territories of Poland, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark. Through the German consulate in Geneva it even continued to receive the official publications of the Third Reich.<sup>55</sup>

The ability of the Rockefeller Library to procure and preserve such a wide range of government publications was crucial to the League's wartime technical programmes. League publications traditionally printed information on not only the economic and social conditions of member states but also on as many other countries and colonies as was possible to record. As many as eight-five countries could be represented in the League's publications. Two of the League's most important statistical publications were its *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* and *Statistical Yearbook*. These publications carried information on employment and unemployment, agricultural, mineral and industrial production, international trade,

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<sup>50</sup> Arthur de Brechya-Vauthier to Avenol, 10 June 1940 (L.N.A., library section, R 1682).

<sup>51</sup> Bendiner, *A time for angels*, p. 401.

<sup>52</sup> Library report, 10 May 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 564/3/1).

<sup>53</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 25 Nov. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 564/3/1).

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum by de Brechya-Vauthier on the League of Nations' Rockefeller Library in 1940, 18 Feb. 1941 (L.N.A., library section, R 1682).

<sup>55</sup> Library memorandum, 2 June 1942 (L.N.A., library section, R 5260/10947).

currency and banking, interest rates, prices and public finance as well as on numerous other social issues such as housing, nutrition, drug production and other health related matters. Traditionally member states sent their official government publications to the League Library in Geneva where Secretariat officials were able to collate and arrange figures for comprehensive statistical tables. The technical organisations also received more detailed information for their publications by sending out specific questionnaires to government departments of member states and to other countries that traditionally cooperated with them, such as the United States. However as the war progressed mobilised countries became increasingly reluctant to forward sensitive statistical data, especially of the economic kind, via this method.<sup>56</sup> As a result the Rockefeller Library's vast and ever growing collection of government publications was increasingly drawn upon to create more internationally comprehensive statistical surveys. Despite the difficulties in procuring certain information, Martin Hill, an official of the E.F.O., pointed out that the League's wartime statistical work, especially its *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* and *Statistical Yearbook*, were 'unique as a history in figures of the demographic, the economic and the financial developments of the world during the war.'<sup>57</sup> The Rockefeller Library played an important role in allowing the League to operate, even during wartime, as the 'clearing house of ideas' of Loveday's description.<sup>58</sup>

### **The work of the League's technical missions in North America 1940-3**

Wartime conditions enacted grave difficulties for the work of the Permanent Central Opium Board. The problem of the creation of new centres of drug production, a common wartime crisis, was compounded by a practical breakdown in communications with certain parts of the world.<sup>59</sup> However the Drug Trafficking Section of the Drug Supervisory Body clung to survival in Washington D.C. as countries that remained parties to the various international drug conventions continued to provide it with information and the Allied countries in particular continued to monitor drug production as much as was practically possible. These

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<sup>56</sup> *Statistical yearbook of the League of Nations* (Geneva, 1941).

<sup>57</sup> Hill, *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations*, p. 124.

<sup>58</sup> Loveday, 'The economic and financial activities of the League', p. 795.

<sup>59</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 1946 (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/80, p. 12).

countries then forwarded information concerning the production of drugs as well as the traffic and seizure of illegal narcotics in various international ports; however the P.C.O.B. was not in a position to challenge governments when the various opium conventions were breached.<sup>60</sup> Due to difficulties in communication and the reluctance of governments to share sensitive data such as shipping routes, the war meant that there was a decided limit to the intergovernmental functions of the League's drug control bodies. Instead their efforts were channelled into devising recommendations for the post-war re-introduction of drug control in countries where it had lapsed.<sup>61</sup> This suppression of the production, consumption and trafficking of opium consumed the League's drug control bodies from the moment of their births; a mission that had been riddled with setbacks due to the reluctance of states to stifle a lucrative industry.<sup>62</sup> While various measures were introduced to limit production, with varied results, consumption remained another matter entirely. During the war the secretariat of the D.S.B. and the P.C.O.B. advocated tighter restrictions on the production and consumption of opiates among the Allied powers. In 1943 the British and Dutch governments announced the adoption of a complete prohibition on opium smoking in all their territories in the Far-East, then under Japanese occupation. According to these respective declarations, once colonial authority over these areas was re-established there would be no attempt to re-introduce the traditional opium monopolies operating therein.<sup>63</sup>

The two most successful and high profile of the League's technical agencies were the semi-autonomous I.L.O. and the E.F.O. F.S. Northedge asserted that the war 'rang down the curtain' of the I.L.O.'s work.<sup>64</sup> This was manifestly not the case; the war years were a crucial period for the evolution of the I.L.O. Following the meeting of the Supervisory Commission in Lisbon in September 1940, Acting Director Phelan joined the forty or so I.L.O. officials who had already taken up residence at McGill University, Montreal. Under Phelan's leadership the I.L.O. continued to document labour conditions and sought to push itself forward as the

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<sup>60</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 1946 (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/80, p. 12).

<sup>61</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 90.

<sup>62</sup> McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century*, p. 77.

<sup>63</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), pp 97-8.

<sup>64</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 181.

principal advisory organ on the social and economic problems that were destined to result from a sudden cessation of fighting and the subsequent rapid demobilisation of the armed forces. To this end studies were carried out and regularly disseminated, largely through official bulletins and through the *International Labour Review*, which documented the effects of war on wage levels, on working hours, on social insurance, on the payment of pensions and on sick pay; with special reports devoted to analysing relations between industry and governments in wartime. In the inter-war years various I.L.O. conventions were ratified by member states as part of the organisation's advocacy for every worker to enjoy decent labour conditions and access to social welfare. The war posed the greatest challenge to this social progression. As one I.L.O. official noted:

In countries nearer to the scene of conflict, the immediate effect of war was largely to reverse the trend of social advance and to suspend many measures intended to protect workers from exploitation and to guarantee them certain minimum standards.<sup>65</sup>

This was at a time when individuals were expected to place their own rights and needs behind those of the motherland, to accept, at the very best; conscription into the armed forces, longer labour hours in munitions and other factories, a lower standard of living, and at the very worst; slave labour, incarceration, persecution and annihilation. The I.L.O. never had the executive authority, or even the ability, to ensure that the labour conventions produced by its various tripartite conferences were upheld. For instance in the inter-war period the British government refused to ratify the I.L.O. convention to limit the working day to eight hours.<sup>66</sup> In September 1941 Phelan noted that in many countries previous labour measures, often inspired or encouraged by the I.L.O., were relaxed with workers regularly performing twelve hour shifts or longer.<sup>67</sup> The I.L.O. could not prevent governments circumventing labour norms in a time of war. What the Labour Office hoped to achieve was a role in ensuring the re-introduction of appropriate labour conditions in the post-war period; the Office would provide the wartime inspiration for a re-invigorated

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<sup>65</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Organisation, 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 13).

<sup>66</sup> Zara Steiner, *The triumph of the dark*, p. 173.

<sup>67</sup> *The I.L.O. and reconstruction: report by the acting director of the International Labour Office for the Conference of the International Labour Organisation* (Montreal, 1941), pp 33-4 available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

international campaign against social injustice. Winant wrote in 1941 that the International Labour Office would strive to assemble as complete documentation as possible for the various authorities upon whom the responsibility for rebuilding the social order after the war would fall.<sup>68</sup> Phelan was also adamant that the greatest threat to the future of the I.L.O. was the prospect of member states ceasing to make use of its advisory role.<sup>69</sup> The I.L.O. mission in Montreal continued to regularly receive requests from governments for technical assistance in the formulation and development of social policy and legislation.<sup>70</sup>

In a reflection of its success, the E.F.O. was the largest non-autonomous technical organisation of the League. The E.F.O. enjoyed a staff of sixty-five in Geneva in 1938, a number equal to the combined staff of the Health, Communication and Transit (merged with the E.F.O. in 1939), Drug Control and Social Questions agencies of the League.<sup>71</sup> Avenol's policy of liquidation severely depleted the numbers employed by the E.F.O., but as the number of projects taken on by Loveday's Princeton mission increased so too did staff numbers. By the summer of 1945 the total personnel of the Princeton mission numbered just less than forty individuals.<sup>72</sup> The Princeton mission of the E.F.O. marketed itself as the ideal knowledge bank on which to base post-war economic reconstruction. As Lester had argued in his 1939 speech to the New York World Fair, the League's production of regular economic and financial statistics assumed an even greater importance in wartime, with the need, on the part of the international community, to 'know how trade is running and to have data upon the broad currents of world economy, particularly on the crises which always accompany and follow war.'<sup>73</sup> When the League was first founded its interest in the world of economics and finance was limited. However as Clavin demonstrated, the League was forced to respond to the political and social crises caused by the post-war slump and later by the Great Depression when its E.F.O. began to grow into its role as a 'pathfinder', using its

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<sup>68</sup> John G. Winant, 'The I.L.O. looks ahead: A note from the director' in *International Labour Review*, xlii (1941), p. 173.

<sup>69</sup> Edward J. Phelan, 'The I.L.O. turns a corner' in *Studies*, xlv (1956), p. 162.

<sup>70</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Organisation, 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P, official documents, p. 11).

<sup>71</sup> Hill, *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations*, p. 4. For further reading on the early development of the E.F.O. see Yann Decorzant 'Internationalism in the Economic and Finance Organisation of the League of Nations' in David Laqua (ed.), *Transnationalism: transnational ideas and movements between the world wars* (London, 2011), pp 115-34.

<sup>72</sup> Hill, *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations*, p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Seán Lester's speech to the New York World Fair, Oct. 1939 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/9, f. 132).

expertise driven research to monitor the performance of the world economy, encourage a return to liberal capitalism and to document the lessons of the past for national governments and other policy-makers.<sup>74</sup> The Princeton mission was committed to illustrating the link between economic hardship and war. Loveday was adamant that the failure of the Allied powers to prepare an appropriate response to the various economic challenges that followed the end of the First World War resulted in the Great Depression.<sup>75</sup> In turn the Depression created the appropriate conditions for the rise of the totalitarianism that spawned the Second World War. As Loveday wrote in 1943:

There will always be men ready to seize power for their own aggrandisement. But if we can prevent another major depression after this war, we can prevent at least such an opportunity for power politics from arising.<sup>76</sup>

A 50,000 dollar grant from the Rockefeller Foundation was utilised to fund extensive studies on inter-war economic and financial policies and on the Depression so that lessons could be learned from past mistakes.<sup>77</sup> As Endres and Fleming demonstrated, the wartime work of E.F.O. was preoccupied with the impact of a sudden international shock, i.e. the immediate cessation of hostilities, on macroeconomic issues such as price levels and employment.<sup>78</sup> Loveday wrote that almost ‘all the ills which beset the world in years 1919 and 1939 were due to the first two years after the Armistice’; arguing that peace would be lost unless the Allies devised the appropriate economic policies.<sup>79</sup> He believed the E.F.O. had an important responsibility to serve as an advisory organ to the economic planners of the various national administrations.<sup>80</sup>

The ability of the E.F.O. and the I.L.O. to influence post-war planning depended on the extent to which the relevant governments were prepared to listen to them. Loveday used the press to attract publicity for the work of the Princeton

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<sup>74</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 3 July 1943.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Loveday, ‘The economics of transition’ in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, lxxxvii (1943), p. 190.

<sup>77</sup> League of Nations: report of the Special Contributions Committee, 22 Mar. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/7, f. 34, p. 4).

<sup>78</sup> See Anthony M. Endres and Grant A. Fleming, *International organisation and the analysis of economic policy, 1919-50* (Cambridge, 2002), pp 42-3.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 3 July 1943.

<sup>80</sup> Loveday, ‘The economics of transition’, p. 189.

mission on post-war reconstruction.<sup>81</sup> When League officials first arrived in Princeton the State Department made it known that they desired the E.F.O. to be ‘very discreet.’<sup>82</sup> However Loveday knew that discretion was detrimental to the success of his mission, writing that he expected ‘the support we receive, moral and financial, will depend largely on the extent to which we show ourselves active and creative.’<sup>83</sup> The work of the publicity *maestro* of the League, Arthur Sweetser, was rendered difficult by Avenol’s almost total destruction of the League’s press service. As director of publicity Sweetser complained to Lester ‘you cannot have publicity without either news or staff.’<sup>84</sup> The Axis encirclement of Geneva meant that Sweetser was better able to maintain contact with the international press and to orchestrate a publicity blitz on the behalf of the organisation by operating in the United States.

Sweetser launched his American press campaign by criss-crossing the country, attending the meetings, symposiums and conferences of various philanthropic organisations and academic institutions, managing to create a considerable amount of publicity in the process.<sup>85</sup> In a letter to Lester he reflected that while many politicians and even former international civil servants such as Avenol’s former *chef de cabinet* Marcel Hoden, dismissed the League as ‘dead’, the organisation seemed to be forever ‘breaking into the news.’<sup>86</sup> Not all of these news spots were positive however and some sought to reinforce the perception of the League as a pathetically moribund organisation. In the wake of the Princeton transfer an article in traditionally League-sceptic *Time Magazine* claimed that ‘the dying League of Nations sank to a single spark of life.’<sup>87</sup> Sweetser was moved to write to the editor of the *New York Times* in November 1941 protesting against the growing impression that ‘the League of Nations and its many activities have passed from the scene and are now entirely out of the picture.’<sup>88</sup> According to Sweetser, that impression was not only ‘wholly wrong’ but could be

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<sup>81</sup> Loveday to Lester, 10 Sep. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 584).

<sup>82</sup> Loveday to Lester, 10 Sep. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 584).

<sup>83</sup> Loveday to Lester, 11 Nov. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/1)

<sup>84</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 20 Sep. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/3/2).

<sup>85</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 16 Oct. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/3/2).

<sup>86</sup> Marcel Hoden, ‘Europe without the League’ in *Foreign Affairs*, xvii (1939), p. 28; Sweetser to Lester, 27 July 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 588).

<sup>87</sup> *Time Magazine*, 5 Aug. 1940.

<sup>88</sup> Sweetser to the editor of the *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/3/2).



challenged by many who cannot accept the totalitarians' constant claim that all mankind's gains in the last war have been swept into the discard. Despite all discouragement, difficulty, even apparent abandonment, a nucleus of eighty officials is on duty in the magnificent building which is the sole common possession of the nations. It is surely worthy of note that this outpost of decency has been maintained in the heart of stricken Europe. The world is less poor than it thinks. Amid all the present destruction there remains the seeds from which a new world-life can spring.<sup>89</sup>

Sweetser's defence of the League further articulated the political significance League apologists, officials and member states ascribed to the wartime survival of the technical agencies. However the League required an international audience to demonstrate that liberal internationalism was not a spent force. Meetings and conferences were employed by the League's transferred missions to showcase the organisation's potential for the post-war period. This was one of advantages of the North American transfer that could not be shared by those working in the *Palais des Nations*. The United States and Canada afforded the technical organisations a safe environment to develop and exchange ideas on the future of internationalism. In September 1941 League officials such as Arthur Sweetser and Bertil Renborg, figures connected with the operation of the organisation such as Carl Hambro and Henri Bonnet, as well as former officials such as Frank Boudreau, participated in a conference inaugurated by the Institute on World Organisation at the American University, Washington D.C. This conference discussed the contribution of the League with a view to learning what was needed for the post-war period.<sup>90</sup> The E.F.O. attempted to make its presence in the United States felt with the participation of its various officials in public debates, lectures and seminars. Though unable to hold conferences on the scale the E.F.O. had been accustomed to, Loveday's section improvised by making contact with the New Jersey and Pennsylvania branches of the League of Nations Association who agreed to convene on the Princeton Campus.<sup>91</sup> Representatives from the Drug Supervisory Body, as well as from the I.L.O. were dispatched to the Institute of Advanced Study to participate in these meetings and to discuss the work of their various sections. Not one to miss the opportunity, Loveday

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<sup>89</sup> Sweetser to the editor of the *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/3/2).

<sup>90</sup> Agenda of 'A balance sheet of the first great experiment', conference held at the Institute on World Organisation, American University, Washington D.C., 2-13 Sep. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/3/2)

<sup>91</sup> *Daily Princetonian*, 26 Nov. 1941.

also used the meetings as a platform to outline the recommendations drawn up by his staff for post-war reconstruction.<sup>92</sup>

The war prevented regular meetings of the League's specialised technical committees and sub-committees such as the Economic and Finance Committee and the Health Committee. In the League Assembly of December 1939 it was decided to prolong the appointment of experts to all technical committees until the political organs could meet once more. Only three of the six sub-committees of the Economic and Finance Committee were able to convene during the war period, while none of the Communications and Transit committees sat.<sup>93</sup> In 1942 a joint session of the Economic and Finance Committee of the League met in one of the most important meetings of the war period. The session was broken up to include meetings in London in April and in Princeton the following August to ensure the participation of as many of the members of the two committees as was possible. During the course of the various meetings the participants sought to emphasise that a great deal of the instability of the inter-war period arose from the inadequate relief measures hastily constructed after 1918.<sup>94</sup> The committees aligned themselves with Roosevelt's 'Four Freedom's' speech of January 1941 and with the president's avowed aspiration to bring about the fullest international collaboration to secure improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security.<sup>95</sup> The committees of the E.F.O. declared their conviction that if such conditions were realised twenty years before 'the economic dislocation and tension of the inter-war period might well have been sensibly alleviated.'<sup>96</sup> The publication of the proceedings of the various meetings of the E.F.O. provided the opportunity for Loveday's mission to throw down the gauntlet to the international community in order to encourage wider engagement with the issue of post-war reconstruction. In the early years of the war, when the

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<sup>92</sup> *Daily Princetonian*, 1 Dec. 1941.

<sup>93</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 19 Feb. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007, p. 8). The League's Communication and Transit Organisation was merged with the E.F.O. in 1939.

<sup>94</sup> *League of Nations Economic and Finance Committee: report to the Council on the work of the joint session, London 27 April-1 May 1942, Princeton 7-8 August 1942* (Geneva, 1942), pp 5-6, 31 Aug. 1942 available from (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/8).

<sup>95</sup> Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms' were articulated in an address on 6 January 1941. The four freedoms identified by the president as fundamental rights included freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear; *League of Nations Economic and Finance Committee: report to the Council on the work of the joint session, London 27 April-1 May 1942, Princeton 7-8 August 1942* (Geneva, 1942), p. 9, 31 Aug. 1942 available from (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/8).

<sup>96</sup> *League of Nations Economic and Finance Committee: report to the Council on the work of the joint session, London 27 April-1 May 1942, Princeton 7-8 August 1942* (Geneva, 1942), p. 9, 31 Aug. 1942 available from (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/8).

Allied powers were more engrossed by military goals, the League's technical officials were operating within an intergovernmental vacuum. The ability of E.F.O. to operate as an effective advisory organ for post-war economic planning would not be tested until the great powers were prepared for greater public engagement with this issue.

### **The League's technical organisations as vehicles for Allied propaganda 1940-3**

As discussed in chapter two it was through the League's officials, rather than its Assembly or Council, that the organisation derived its political agency. While Avenol used this influence to threaten the League's liberal democratic ethos, the remaining technical officials sought to strengthen it. They also sought to align the League's political identity with Allied peace aims. It was also significant that the League's technical organisations promoted their wartime work programmes and propagated their ideas for post-war reconstruction from a North American base. While the Roosevelt administration refused to accord the League's transferred missions official status on political grounds, it was during this period that the League's technical work was politicised to an unprecedented level. The work of previous historians to dispel the pervasive perception of American (U.S.) indifference to the League serves as a valuable foundation from which to re-assess the place of the League in American internationalism.<sup>97</sup> The United States did not feature among the League's official cast of characters; however as a result of its growing political, military and economic importance, the Roosevelt administration was effectively the stage manager of League affairs during the Second World War.

It was a source of great pride to the I.L.O. that it succeeded where its parent organisation had failed in securing American membership.<sup>98</sup> Engaged in self-preservation it wanted to advertise the fact that the I.L.O. was then the largest international organisation to which the United States was attached. Shortly after the transfer to Montreal, Phelan approached Prime Minister King to determine if his government was willing to host an I.L.O. conference in Montreal in 1941. King was amenable but advised Phelan that it would be far more beneficial for the I.L.O.'s

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<sup>97</sup> See for example Clavin and Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations', p. 482; Dubin, 'Transgovernmental processes in the League of Nations', pp 469-93; Ostrower, 'The United States and the League of Nations', pp 128-44.

<sup>98</sup> Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation', p. 248.

prestige and publicity if the United States agreed to host the conference.<sup>99</sup> Canada's experience of the Second World War was marked by its growing confidence in its status as a 'middle power', conscious of both its prominent and increasingly independent status within the British Commonwealth and enjoying its improved relations with its once threatening southern neighbour.<sup>100</sup> By virtue of the Ottawa government's unique ability to see both the British and American point of view, King often served as a valuable intermediary between Churchill and Roosevelt.<sup>101</sup> King, bearing the considerable influence and esteem he had acquired in Washington, suggested to Roosevelt that the United States should host the New York Conference and the president accepted the proposal.<sup>102</sup> The conference opened on 27 October 1941 on the campus of Columbia University in New York.

This meeting could not constitute a formal session of the International Labour Conference. A number of its member states were unable to attend and thus the conference did not have the power to adopt conventions provided for under the terms of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation. Rather it could hope to make informal recommendations to sympathetic governments and to inspire future labour legislation.<sup>103</sup> While the conference was not universally representative, 102 delegates and ninety three advisors hailing from thirty-four countries, mostly from North and South America, the Commonwealth and from exiled governments in London, made the journey to New York. Twenty-two of those states managed to retain the traditional tripartite composition of their delegations, with representatives of governments, employers and workers able to participate in proceedings.<sup>104</sup> The conference was granted a certain amount of authority and legitimacy by the presence of various high profile cabinet ministers, such as Clement Atlee (United Kingdom), Frances Perkins (United States) and Jan Masaryk (Czechoslovak government-in-exile). The officials of the International Labour Office feverishly prepared for the conference, arranging their studies on the impact of war on labour and social issues. The International Labour Organisation was considered the heir to the pre-war

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<sup>99</sup> Phelan, 'The I.L.O. turns a corner', p. 173.

<sup>100</sup> Adam Chapnick, *Middle power project: Canada and the founding of the United Nations* (Vancouver, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London, 2006), p. 59.

<sup>102</sup> Phelan, 'The I.L.O. turns a corner', p. 173.

<sup>103</sup> Edward Phelan, 'The social objective in wartime and world reconstruction, the New York Conference of the International Labour Organisation' in *International Labour Review*, xlv (1942), p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

movement for international labour legislation; the ‘social conscious of mankind’, a forum for the ordinary man in world affairs and the means to achieve social justice through non violent methods.<sup>105</sup> This tradition was upheld in New York. One of the most important developments at this meeting was the workers’ delegates claiming the right of representation at any future peace conference.<sup>106</sup>

The political climate of the United States had a crucial bearing on the I.L.O. Conference. The New York Conference unfolded against a backdrop of congressional debate on the repeal of the Neutrality Act.<sup>107</sup> By this time the tone of Roosevelt’s speeches and public statements was one of ‘unrestrained belligerency.’<sup>108</sup> It was clear that the United States would soon, by one means or another, enter the war. The United States used the I.L.O. Conference, just as Britain and France used the League Assembly in December 1939, as a means of projecting a commitment to liberal democracy as well as the soundness of its post-war aspirations. Frances Perkins, Roosevelt’s Secretary of Labour, was elected by the conference to preside over the proceedings. It was the American delegates who instigated an I.L.O.’s resolution of support for the specific provisions of the Atlantic Charter (1941) which called for improved labour standards, economic advancement and the extension of social security.<sup>109</sup> The Atlantic Charter was drafted by Britain and the United States (before the latter had even entered the war) outlining their commitment to a just peace at the cessation of hostilities. The Charter also made a fleeting reference to ‘the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security.’<sup>110</sup> Roosevelt invited the conference to hold its closing session in the White House on 6 November 1941. The post-war survival of the I.L.O. appeared secure when Roosevelt made the following declaration in a speech to the assembled delegates:

We must plan now for the better world we are to build. In the planning of such international action, the International Labour Organisation, with its

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<sup>105</sup> C.J. Ratzlaff, ‘The International Labour Office of the League of Nations: its significance to the United States’ in *The American Economic Review*, xxii (1932), p. 453.

<sup>106</sup> Phelan, ‘The social objective in wartime’, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>108</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American foreign policy since 1938* (New York, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> Ethel M. Johnson [wartime director of the Washington branch of the I.L.O.], ‘The I.L.O. and the future’ in *World Affairs*, cv (1942), p. 22.

<sup>110</sup> The Atlantic Charter, 14 Aug. 1941 available from Yale Law School, the Avalon Project (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>) (1 Feb. 2010).

representations of labour and management, its technical knowledge and experience, will be an invaluable instrument for peace.<sup>111</sup>

Reflecting on Roosevelt's speech, Roger Makins of the British Foreign Office wrote that it showed very clearly 'the importance which the United States government attach to the Labour Office', observing that 'the leadership of the United States in a conference of this kind is a development of extreme importance for the future.'<sup>112</sup> Eric Hobsbawm identified the refusal of the United States to ratify the Treaty of Versailles as the primary reason for the League's inability to regulate international relations.<sup>113</sup> Without the support of the United States the international framework that would emerge from the ashes of the Second World War would be as artificial as that which was constructed in 1919. Makins judged that the conference's resolutions were inspired by the fact that Americans were reluctantly making up their minds that their entry into the war was inevitable and one of their main preoccupations of the Roosevelt administration was to prevent their efforts leading once again to a 'a lost peace.'<sup>114</sup> Makins attributed the U.S. government's strong attachment to the I.L.O. to its distinction as the only large international organisation through which it could engage in international cooperation, 'it being politically impossible for them join the League or attempt at this stage to fashion some new institution.'<sup>115</sup> According to Ostrower, the United States government always went to great lengths to distinguish the I.L.O. from the political work of the League.<sup>116</sup> However through the mechanisms of the I.L.O. the Roosevelt administration was able to participate in back-door multilateralism, using a technical front to achieve a very political end in laying the groundwork for a post-war order. This further demonstrates that the distinction imposed on 'political' and 'technical' international cooperation by the U.S. government was artificial but expedient.

As member states were unable to convene during the war years the League of Nations was bereft of its intergovernmental character and thus possessed no direct link with the course of international affairs. The I.L.O. did not share this fate. As a result of the New York Conference the I.L.O. became intimately connected with

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<sup>111</sup> Phelan, 'The I.L.O. turns a corner', pp 185-6.

<sup>112</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>113</sup> Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes*, pp 34-5.

<sup>114</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Ostrower, 'The United States and the League of Nations', p. 135.

wider political developments. Subsequent to the New York Conference the Emergency Committee of the I.L.O.'s Governing Body convened in London in April 1942 to coincide with the joint sessions of the Economic and Finance Committees. The Governing Body decided to establish a committee composed of individuals of 'wide experience in the light of whose advice the Governing Body could feel that its own decisions were formulated with security and autonomy.'<sup>117</sup> This committee was tasked with devising the relevant proposals for the realisation of the social objectives of the Atlantic Charter. A contemporary observer to the New York Conference, the American civil servant and future diplomat R. Smith Simpson, noted that the debate on the director's report to the New York Conference provided the first opportunity, since the outbreak of the European conflict, for a general and popular discussion of war aims and reconstruction.<sup>118</sup> The I.L.O. was operating in the vacuum created by the suspension of the League's political organs and by the wider dearth of diplomatic conferences. Despite the protestations of the United States that the I.L.O. was distinct from the political League, it was the I.L.O. and not its parent organisation that functioned as a vehicle for intergovernmental cooperation during the war.

In 1939 attempts to transform the League into an Allied satellite agency was resisted on the grounds that too few member states were directly involved in the war. By early 1942 more than half of League member states were drawn into the conflict and the territory of twenty-four of them was under occupation.<sup>119</sup> Within the polarising atmosphere of mobilised Canada and confronted by the growing interventionism of the United States, the technical missions increasingly orientated their work towards Allied war aims. While not forsaking the scientific and statistical nature of their methods, the public speeches, forums, reports and studies of the technical organisations became increasingly pro-Allied in tone. The League was never a static entity and underwent several transformations in its lifetime such as the erosion of its security role and the expansion of its technical activities. To remain politically relevant to the countries in which they were based, the transferred

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<sup>117</sup> *League of Nations Economic and Finance Committee: report to the Council on the work of the joint session, London 27 April-1 May 1942, Princeton 7-8 August 1942* (Geneva, 1942), p. 21, 31 Aug. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/8).

<sup>118</sup> R. Smith Simpson, 'The International Labour Conference' in *The American Political Science Review*, xxxvi (1942), p. 102.

<sup>119</sup> *Report on the work of the League 1941-2: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1942) (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

technical missions needed to align themselves with the nascent Allied peace aims of the Atlantic Charter.

The meetings held in the Institute of Advanced study, attended by League officials and the League of Nations Association, featured frank discussions on American policy and concluded that the United States ‘must take its full share of leadership’ in post-war international cooperation.<sup>120</sup> According to Frank Boudreau, the League of Nations Association was devoting practically all its resources to rallying the Roosevelt administration as well as the American public into ‘giving the greatest possible assistance to Britain.’<sup>121</sup> Sweetser too was explicit as to why his sympathies as a League official should lie with the United Kingdom. According to Sweetser, the ‘Germans have not the political wisdom to govern a far flung empire similar to the British Commonwealth. They think all men can be reduced to the same level of civilisation, and yet at the same time cannot deal with others on equal terms.’<sup>122</sup> Sweetser’s observation corresponds with the conclusions of various historians that Wilsonian self-determination as well as the League’s championship of sovereignty was never designed to be universally applied.<sup>123</sup> Mark Mazower noted that what was shocking about Nazi expansionism was that it was the first time Europeans found themselves the victims rather than the protagonists of colonial and racial policies.<sup>124</sup> The League facilitated the survival of imperialism through its Mandates Commission but Hitler’s growing European empire was shocking to a Eurocentric organisation predicated on the inviolable sovereignty of its member states.

Like his predecessor Winant, Phelan was enthusiastic about lending support to the Allied and later United Nations powers. The New York Conference was certainly an exercise in Allied propaganda. In his speech to the assembled delegates, Phelan declared that the democracy of the I.L.O. stood in ‘contradistinction to the kind of world we should have if these principles were destroyed and not only individuals but countries were compelled to shape their lives and institutions to an imposed pattern.’<sup>125</sup> The Argentinean worker’s delegate (considerably more partisan than Argentina’s government delegate) was equally explicit on the ideological

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<sup>120</sup> *Daily Princetonian*, 1 Dec. 1941.

<sup>121</sup> Boudreau to Lester, 29 Nov. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/4).

<sup>122</sup> *Daily Princetonian*, 6 June 1941.

<sup>123</sup> Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, p. 23; Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, p. 1099.

<sup>124</sup> Mazower, *Hitler’s empire*, p. 557.

<sup>125</sup> Phelan, ‘The social objective in wartime and world reconstruction’, p. 2.



affinity of the I.L.O. Constitution with the Allied war aims: 'Here we have two systems confronting each other; on one side the regime of the dictators, headed by Nazism and Fascism, and, on the other side, liberal and democratic opinion in the world.'<sup>126</sup> Wilfred Jenks, serving as an I.L.O. official during this period, claimed that the one of the distinctive characteristics of the organisation was the manner in which it transcended ideological conflicts, differences of party and divergences of economic interest.<sup>127</sup> However, the New York Conference constituted a form of ideological and propaganda warfare. A workers' resolution was adopted unanimously in which the I.L.O. urged 'all free peoples to contribute to the uttermost limit of their power for the victory of China, Great Britain, Russia, and their Allies by supplying all the arms which their country can produce.'<sup>128</sup> Whereas the League Assembly functioned as a coalition, the I.L.O. was taking on the aspects of an alliance.

The increased partisanship of the transferred technical missions undermined the League's ability to provide an inclusive form of wartime internationalism, for neutral and belligerent alike. Its wartime experience served as a useful bridge between pre-war and post-war internationalism when neutrality became a less accepted feature of international organisations. The Argentinean government delegation to the New York Conference was obliged to abstain from the I.L.O.'s resolution of support for the Allies 'in view of its political character'.<sup>129</sup> Makins, contemplating the political significance of the conference, told Lester that the resolution rousing all member states to the Allied banner constituted a 'demonstration, not only by the belligerent powers; it gave an excellent platform to the representatives of the smaller European countries.'<sup>130</sup> The smaller European powers present were representatives of the governments-in-exile of the countries under occupation. The fate of those states hinged on an Allied liberation of Europe and thus their attendance could arouse little political controversy. The only European neutral to send a delegation was the Irish Free State.<sup>131</sup> The continental European

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<sup>126</sup> Phelan, 'The social objective in wartime and world reconstruction', p. 7.

<sup>127</sup> Jenks, 'Edward Phelan: the man and his memories', p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> Phelan, 'The social objective in wartime and world reconstruction', p. 17.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>131</sup> *Conference of the International Labour Organisation: record of proceedings* (Montreal, 1941), p. xiv, (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

neutrals were not represented as they, according to an I.L.O. spokesman, ‘feared to arouse Nazi disfavour.’<sup>132</sup>

The unabashed partiality displayed by the North American missions of the technical organisations did not earn a rebuke from the acting secretary-general. This was significant considering that these pro-Allied sympathies afforded the Swiss government the pretext to renege on its duties of hospitality to the League; a policy that was intensified in the aftermath of the North American transfer of the I.L.O., the E.F.O. and the drug bodies. Adolfo Costa du Rels, president of the League Council and Bolivian minister plenipotentiary to Switzerland and the Vatican, met with Pierre Bonna of the Swiss Political Department on 15 August 1940. The latter expressed surprise at the decision to transfer selected missions of the League away from Switzerland. Bonna added significantly that if League services left Geneva there could be no question of accusing Switzerland of deserting the organisation.<sup>133</sup> Bonna confirmed that there would be no provision in the forthcoming federal budget for the financial contribution owed by Switzerland to the League Treasury for 1941.<sup>134</sup> He could not guarantee that League officials and delegates would retain their diplomatic immunity and stated that no fresh appointment of government delegates would be recognised. Bonna stated that he saw no reason why the League should not remain in Geneva, provided it worked ‘inconspicuously’ and did not ‘engage in activities of a political nature.’<sup>135</sup> He categorically denied that Germany was placing any pressure on Switzerland to renounce the League. According to Bonna, as per latest correspondence with the *Wilhelmstrasse*, at that moment in time the German attitude to the League was one of ‘indifference.’<sup>136</sup> Evidence from the Swiss archives demonstrates that Bonna was not being truthful with Costa du Rels. Correspondence between Bonna himself and the Swiss minister in Berlin, Hans Frölicher, dated ten days prior to his conversation with Costa du Rels, appear to contradict his assertions of German ‘indifference.’ Prompted by Frölicher, Bonna used the minister as an intermediary to assure the Germans that the League was defunct as a political entity.<sup>137</sup> He tried to convince the Germans that the Secretariat

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<sup>132</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Oct. 1941.

<sup>133</sup> Telegram from Livingstone to the Foreign Office and the Treasury, 15 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Pierre Bonna to Hans Frölicher, 6 Aug. 1940 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/209, pp 873-5).

was in a state of liquidation following the departure of Avenol. Bonna claimed that with the resignation of Edouard de Haller and Carl Burckhardt (the last League high commissioner for Danzig) there was no longer any senior Swiss official seconded to the Secretariat or the I.L.O. Finally he sought to assure the Germans that the Federal Council had no intention of contributing to the League's 1941 budget.<sup>138</sup> This was in keeping with the overall Swiss policy to ensure that the Geneva Secretariat did not attract significant publicity. Much to Lester's exasperation, a newsreel was shown in Swiss cinemas in October 1940, supposedly showing 'the last of the [League of Nations] officials leaving Geneva.'<sup>139</sup>

This correspondence between Bonna and Frölicher implies that the Germans continued to deeply distrust the League and identified it as a pro-Allied institution. According to a 1942 report by the Swiss Political Department, the Confederation reneged on its financial responsibilities to the League because the bulk of the League's funding came from the Allied countries of Britain and its Commonwealth.<sup>140</sup> However the Political Department believed that Avenol and Lester had done commendably well in preventing the activities of the Geneva Secretariat from enacting any serious complications for Swiss neutrality.<sup>141</sup> In reality Lester was not as eager as Avenol to allow the Swiss Federal Council to turn the League into 'a prisoner of war.'<sup>142</sup> Frank Walters informed Robert Cecil in August 1940 that while Ireland was neutral, Lester's opinions were not.<sup>143</sup> When Sir Clifford Norton was appointed British minister to Bern in 1942 he paid Lester a courtesy call in Geneva. Norton wrote that he found the political views of the acting secretary-general on the progress of the war to be 'as sound as anyone [i.e. London] could wish' and that if he expressed the same opinions to others Norton could very well regard the former member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood 'as a first class British diplomatic agent and propagandist.'<sup>144</sup> However Lester could not hope to be as political a figurehead as Phelan in expressing support for the Allied cause in his reports to the governments of member states; the Geneva nucleus of the Secretariat

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<sup>138</sup> Pierre Bonna to Hans Frölicher, 6 Aug. 1940 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/209, pp 873-5).

<sup>139</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 15 Mar. 1939 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 306).

<sup>140</sup> Report by the head of the Foreign Affairs Division of the Political Department, 4 July 1942 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/486, p. 671).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> As Bendiner described it in: *A time for angels*, p. 395.

<sup>143</sup> Walters to Cecil, 6 Aug. 1940 (B.L., C.C.P., MSS 5114, f. 133, p. 2).

<sup>144</sup> Clifford Norton to Makins, 13 July 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

was in too delicate a position with the Swiss Confederation. In a letter to Sweetser in 1941 he wrote:

It is simply impossible for me at this present time, especially while holding headquarters here in Europe, to write it on the basis of broad lines and free spirit which you can conceive to be desirable; it could not be aimed at stirring the imagination or at moving popular interest..... If it gives the impression that the organisation is alive, is working and holds all its potentialities, we have reached something.<sup>145</sup>

The growing dissatisfaction with projecting an objective attitude in respect of the war, while understandable, risked hampering the League's role as an indiscriminate gatherer and disseminator of social and economic intelligence. The increased gravitation of the transferred missions to the Allied sphere was not and could not be universal to the entire international civil service. The work of the Health Organisation and of the P.C.O.B. and D.S.B. sparked controversy due to their willingness to correspond not with the governments-in-exile of occupied member states, but with the local administrations installed by the Axis powers.<sup>146</sup> This was the most effective means of procuring the relevant statistics. The Swiss Political Department noted, with interest, that both Germany and Italy provided the League's statistical publications with information on drug control, epidemics and public hygiene.<sup>147</sup> In return for providing German authorities with its weekly epidemiological report the Health Organisation received the German weekly health bulletin.<sup>148</sup>

Within this impartial tradition the League Librarian, Arthur de Brechya-Vauthier, emphasised the need to keep the Rockefeller Library open to consultation for all groups and individuals. The Library was of particular value in the centre of war-torn Europe and its inter-library loan system allowed its often rare collections to be shared with requesting governments, academic institutions and humanitarian organisations.<sup>149</sup> As the Rockefeller Library held certain volumes not to be found elsewhere in Switzerland, or even in Europe, de Brechya-Vauthier stressed the negative impression that would be created if the League became precious about

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<sup>145</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 1 Aug. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 823).

<sup>146</sup> Borowy, *Coming to terms with world health*, p. 429.

<sup>147</sup> Report by the head of the Foreign Affairs Division in the Political Department, 4 July 1942 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/486, p. 673).

<sup>148</sup> Lester to Makins, 20 Oct. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 823).

<sup>149</sup> de Brechya-Vuathier to Sweetser, 10 July 1941 (L.N.A., library section, R 1682).

whom it permitted to consult its vast collections of texts that were of social, economic and humanitarian value.<sup>150</sup> He perceived the continued operation of the Rockefeller Library as a counter-argument against critics who (correctly) charged the League with approaching technical questions from a political angle.<sup>151</sup> In a letter to Roger Makins in 1942 Lester defended the Rockefeller Library's contact with the Axis powers, arguing that it provided the Secretariat and technical services with crucial statistical data.<sup>152</sup> He owned that the League librarian himself was a German with an Austrian passport, waiting for the process of Swiss naturalisation to be completed. Lester emphasised that de Brechya-Vuathier was utterly reliable and that the Library could not exist without him.<sup>153</sup> The Rockefeller Library's connections with the Axis bloc did not mean the League was formally recognising their authority in the occupied territories; rather it was an essential measure in the Library's role as a vital repository for the most up-to-date government publications, even if that government authority was installed by an illegal act of occupation. In this instance League officials could not allow the organisation's liberal democratic identity to undermine its technical role of providing the highest quality information services to member states.

The pro-Allied elements of the League's international civil service took a dim view of this record of information sharing with the traditional enemies of the Covenant. After 1942, following the complete Axis encirclement of Switzerland, two versions of the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* were published; one in Princeton and the other in Geneva, for distribution in different areas.<sup>154</sup> The remnants of the Economic and Finance Section of the League Secretariat that remained in Geneva were mostly focused on gathering the necessary European statistical data for the publication of the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* as well as for the *Statistical Yearbook* while the Princeton mission tended to produce more descriptive and analytical studies.<sup>155</sup> The very prospect of League publications falling into the hands of the Axis bloc impelled Alexander Loveday to argue for the cessation of all

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<sup>150</sup> de Brechya-Vuathier to Sweetser, 10 July 1941 (L.N.A., library section, R 1682).

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Lester to Makins, 20 Oct. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 823).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Lester to Frances B. James [of the American Red Cross], 15 July 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/6).

<sup>155</sup> *Report on the work of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 24.

publications of League statistics in Europe'.<sup>156</sup> Loveday argued that it would prove more economical and would make things easier on his own branch if it was no longer expected to collaborate with the League's Geneva Secretariat on the statistical publications.<sup>157</sup> Lester was reluctant to relinquish Geneva's role as a publishing hub. The small nucleus of staff working on the European section of the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* and *Statistical Yearbook* continued to have access to 'well maintained and even improved' sources of information in the countries of neutral and occupied Europe.<sup>158</sup> Lester asserted that the restriction of the publication of League documents to North America and the production of exclusively English language versions would hardly prevent the Axis powers getting their hands on League statistics if they were determined to do so.<sup>159</sup> Loveday's arguments can be perceived as a wider process, begun with the transfer of the technical services to the North America, to adopt a less Eurocentric and more Atlanticist approach to League endeavours.

### **The struggle between the old world and the new: the clash of Eurocentism and Atlanticism 1940-3**

During this period there was a growing school of opinion, particularly in the United States, which asserted that Europe, by becoming embroiled once more in war, had forfeited its leading role in international affairs.<sup>160</sup> The transfer of the technical missions to North America led to the effacement of the traditional Eurocentrism of the League by a growing preoccupation with American affairs. Alexander Loveday did not see any wisdom in maintaining a League presence in continental Europe. Writing to Makins in early 1941 Loveday dubbed Geneva a 'rat trap' and, mindful of the ever growing difficulties in communication, insisted that it would be 'pure madness' to remain in Switzerland when it was still possible to get out.<sup>161</sup> Loveday expressed doubt as to the benefits of leaving League officials to carry on working on the shores of Lake Geneva, fearing that 'after all they had been through their will

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<sup>156</sup> Loveday to Lester, 17 Feb. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.); Lester to Loveday, 28 May 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>157</sup> Lester to Loveday, 28 May 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>158</sup> Lester to Loveday, 22 Jan. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 559/1).

<sup>159</sup> Lester to Loveday, 28 May 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>160</sup> Sally Marks, *The ebbing of European ascendancy*, pp 409-10.

<sup>161</sup> Loveday to Makins, 1 Feb. 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

power may be weakening through sheer weariness.’<sup>162</sup> Makins was not prepared to allow Loveday’s remarks to change the policy of the Foreign Office towards the location of League headquarters. He informed the director that it was the British view that the Secretariat’s permanent base should remain in Geneva ‘as long as possible.’<sup>163</sup> Makins was quick to point out to Loveday that Lester’s sometime isolation from Princeton did not mean that the secretary-general was bereft of the support and confidence of Whitehall, with the Irishmen, in turn, keeping the Foreign Office well abreast of his decisions.<sup>164</sup> This episode demonstrated the difficulty experienced by the isolated Lester in maintaining his authority, from Geneva, over the entire League apparatus.

While Loveday’s concerns did not elicit the response he hoped for from Whitehall, the director of the E.F.O. was correct to assert that the Secretariat’s work in Geneva incurred considerable hardship. Since the summer of 1940 Lester was deprived of official communication with the Swiss government in Bern. The Federal Council shunned Lester upon his assumption of the mantle of acting secretary-general. Lester offered to make a courtesy *acte de presence* at Bern either by visit, or to spare embarrassment, by letters. Both these suggestions were ignored by the Federal Council.<sup>165</sup> In April 1941 Thanassis Aghnides received confirmation from official channels at Bern that the Swiss government had adopted a policy of non-collaboration with the League.<sup>166</sup> In June 1941 a Swiss official was dispatched to the *Palais des Nations* to inform Lester that the government was not in a position to reply officially to his correspondence and that it had no intention whatsoever of paying the Swiss contribution to the League budget of 1942.<sup>167</sup> The official informed Lester that the Swiss Political Department was obliged to contend with German and Italian objections to the League’s presence within the Confederation and reminded the acting secretary-general that the organisation was supported by Britain and its allies.<sup>168</sup> The Federal Council was anxious to avoid any over identification with the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries of the British Empire.<sup>169</sup> On the subject of contributions

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<sup>162</sup> Loveday to Makins, 1 Feb. 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>163</sup> Makins to Loveday, 5 Feb. 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Lester to Makins, 28 Dec. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>166</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 22 Apr. 1941 (U.N.O.G., private archives, vol. 1, p. 775).

<sup>167</sup> Telegram from Lester to Makins, 24 June 1941 (T.N.A. FO 371/34519).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Report by the head of the Foreign Affairs Division in the Political Department, 4 July 1942 (S.F.A., SDD 60/006/486, p. 671).

Lester noted that while the federal government may have decided to withhold its payment of what was owed, Swiss officials and ex-officials were receiving in salaries and pensions nearly three times the amount of the annual Swiss contribution to the budget.<sup>170</sup> These payments to Swiss nationals were then financed by other member states, many of whom, such as the governments-in-exile, were facing greater financial hardship than the affluent Swiss.<sup>171</sup> Lester also claimed that the League itself was not involved in a war and that it occupied a 'neutral position.'<sup>172</sup> This argument was not particularly convincing given the reality of League membership and in light of the public pronouncements of its transferred technical officials.

Ultimately Lester could do little to change the policy of the Federal Council, not being given permission to discreetly and unofficially call upon Pilet-Golaz at the Political Department until late 1942.<sup>173</sup> Avenol was eager to accommodate the Swiss at the expense of the League's prestige, moving the depleted Secretariat into the library wing of the *Palais des Nations* so that the institution would appear less of the active presence that it was. The Swiss Confederation could not ask Lester to evacuate his staff from League headquarters without damaging its reputation; however the actions of the Federal Council suggested that a League withdrawal from Geneva would not have been unwelcome. The British Foreign Office had no intention of resolving the matter for the Swiss government. Whitehall:

.....saw no particular reason to make things easy for the Swiss government by taking any initiative in regard to the League. There is a good deal to be said for preserving at Geneva the headquarters of the League in conformity with the Covenant and to leave it to the Swiss government to incur the odium of asking the secretary-general to go.<sup>174</sup>

Lester came to view the Swiss attitude towards the League in a very unforgiving light, even going so far in 1943 as to accuse the Federal Council of 'failing the League.'<sup>175</sup> Like the British Foreign Office and unlike Avenol, he was unwilling to assist the Swiss federal authorities as they reneged on their responsibilities to the League. The official residence of the secretary-general, *La Pelouse*, remained

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<sup>170</sup> Telegram from Lester to Makins, 24 June 1941 (T.N.A. FO 371/34519).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Lester to Makins, 28 Dec. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>174</sup> Telegram from the Foreign Office to Kelly, 29 Oct. 1940 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>175</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 19 Nov. 1943 (U.N.O.G., private archives, vol. 2).



unoccupied in the aftermath of Avenol's departure in September 1940, mostly for reasons of economy. In response to 'the continuance in local circles of a deplorable campaign' against the League, Lester decided to move into *La Pelouse* in March 1941 as a 'quasi-political, quasi-moral' response to the hostile attitude of the Federal Council.<sup>176</sup> His message to the Swiss was clear: he was not going to abandon headquarters unless he was utterly compelled to do so.

Despite Lester's show of defiance the communication difficulties incurred by the preservation of headquarters in Geneva provided adequate ammunition to those who questioned his policy. Lester was informed that the Swiss government was obliged to abolish stamps bearing pictures of League buildings about which Germany had complained but was assured that the Secretariat and the International Labour Office would be permitted to use ordinary stamps and to continue to make use of the Swiss postal system.<sup>177</sup> This assurance could do nothing to lessen the delays in postal communication as a result of the war conditions and the strict censorship imposed in continental Europe. In 1942 average postal time between Switzerland and the United States was twenty to thirty days. Prior to American entry into the war it was between nine and fourteen days.<sup>178</sup> The postal time for the dispatch of League documents from Geneva to the United Kingdom varied widely from twenty to ninety days during the year 1941.<sup>179</sup> In 1943 post to and from North and South America to Switzerland was held up as much as six months.<sup>180</sup> Lester's Secretariat also had to be wary of sensitive League material passing through hostile territory; when letters eventually arrived in Geneva they were often stained with the orange and blue smears from the German chemical test for sympathetic ink.<sup>181</sup>

In trying to counter the delays in postal communication from Switzerland to countries outside of continental Europe, the Secretariat often forwarded its material to a branch office of the I.L.O. in Lisbon. Care was taken to avoid undue attention from the censors of various European states by using blank paper without the League of Nations heading.<sup>182</sup> The French censors granted a global visa for all League studies and reports that were in regular publication since before the end of August

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<sup>176</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 12 Mar. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>177</sup> Lester to Makins, 28 Dec. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>178</sup> Record of a meeting of the Secretariat, Mar. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/9).

<sup>179</sup> Secretariat memorandum, 20 Mar. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/9).

<sup>180</sup> Lester to Loveday, 2 July 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>181</sup> *The Times*, 27 Aug. 1945.

<sup>182</sup> Memorandum by the acting secretary-general to all staff, 10 Mar. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/4).

1941. All other publications were submitted to the chief censor at Annemasse who granted a special visa for each edition.<sup>183</sup> The American legation in Geneva also permitted Lester to forward certain statistical information for the Princeton mission through its diplomatic post bags to the State Department.<sup>184</sup> Whenever the Geneva Secretariat could not make use of the American consulate's diplomatic post-bag, the material usually travelled through France and Spain to Lisbon and was then carried on American ships to the United States. This process became more complicated when the American entry into the war led to a decrease of American ships calling at Lisbon. To mitigate this shortfall, Swiss federal authorities upheld their promise to place their postal system at the complete disposal of League, allowing the organisation to use the Swiss bi-monthly shipping service between Lisbon and North America.<sup>185</sup> This mail travelled between Geneva and Lisbon in Swiss lorries.

The North American-based technical officials were thus obliged to rely on the painstakingly slow postal system in order to obtain European statistics for the Princeton publication of the *Statistical Yearbook*. The E.F.O. suspended the publication of its *Yearbook* for two years (from 1942-1944) until communication between Switzerland and the rest of the world improved dramatically and it could once again compile the most comprehensive study through the collaboration of both its Geneva and Princeton based officials. The evident disparity between the stifling atmosphere of Geneva and the liberation of the technical organisations in North America convinced Loveday of the folly of preserving headquarters where it was clearly not wanted. Writing to Janet Smith, who ran the tiny London branch office of the League, Loveday asserted:

Here one feels in command of one's work, able to find cooperation in carrying it out. In Geneva all this was impossible and the people I have met who came out recently all look as though they emerged from the bottom of a pit.<sup>186</sup>

Trapped in Switzerland, League headquarters could no longer act as a conductor for the more ambitious projects in international cooperation embarked upon by the E.F.O. and the I.L.O. Pedersen argued that the technical organisations

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<sup>183</sup> Memorandum by F.R. Hapgood, 12 Mar. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/9).

<sup>184</sup> Lester to Paul C. Squire, [American Consul at Geneva], 20 Feb. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>185</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 14 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>186</sup> Loveday to Janet Smith, 10 Mar. 1942 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

had long succeeded in mitigating the organisation's inherent Eurocentrism by enticing new countries into League membership to collaborate in social and economic fields of common interest.<sup>187</sup> The transfer of missions of the technical organisations to North America was regarded by some as another timely assault on this Eurocentrism. As discussed in chapter one, Latin American member states often experienced frustration at the League's Council's tendency to overlook political developments in the western hemisphere. When the prospect of transfer was first mooted the president of the League Council, Adolfo Costa du Rels, informed an American diplomat attached to the consulate in Geneva that the Latin American countries would look favourably on any possibility of League services operating in North America.<sup>188</sup> The diminished Eurocentrism of the League's technical work did not mean that the liberal idealism of League officials became less pronounced in favour of other cultural norms and values as a result of their presence in North America. The optimism of the League's technical officials shared a considerable affinity with the culture of American progressive politics, particularly with the conviction of President Wilson that liberal democracy drove social and economic advancement.<sup>189</sup> Working in the United States, the Economic and Finance Organisation, located on the grounds of the university over which Wilson himself once presided, was not in any way breaking new ground, but was, in a fashion, coming home.

Neither can it be claimed that the transfer of the technical missions to North America greatly enhanced the League's universal and intercontinental capacities—rather it constituted the potential swapping of one regionalist tendency for another. In a letter to Roger Makins in April 1941 Lester confided his suspicion that 'interest in transferred Labour and League Organisations is being partly developed at the expense of interest in European headquarters.'<sup>190</sup> The E.F.O.'s mission in Princeton established relations with various inter-American organisations such as the Inter-American Statistical Development Commission and the Inter-American Statistical Institute; from 1943 a member of the Princeton staff represented the E.F.O. at

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<sup>187</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1110.

<sup>188</sup> The consul-general at Geneva to the secretary of state, 15 Aug. 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 328).

<sup>189</sup> For more on the progressive tradition of American politics and the relationship of the Democratic Party to the idealist strand of internationalism see Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, p. 58, p. 66.

<sup>190</sup> Lester to Makins, 4 Apr. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 745).

various technical meetings of the Statistical Institute.<sup>191</sup> In May 1944 a representative of the Princeton mission served as an observer at the first Conference of National Commissions of Inter-American Development. The E.F.O. was also represented at other important continental and regional conferences including the Inter-American Demographic Congress (Mexico City, 1943) and the Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations (1943 and 1945). The E.F.O. was increasingly called upon to advise many U.S. government agencies such as the Foreign Economic Administration, the Office of Strategic Services and the U.S. Treasury and was consulted by White House aides.<sup>192</sup>

The Second World War was a crucial period for pan-American cooperation with the United States, early on in the conflict, directing the neutrality of the western hemisphere, to the exclusion of Canada and British colonial possessions in the Caribbean. In the wake of Pearl Harbor, the United States attempted to galvanise pan-American support for the Allied cause.<sup>193</sup> With the notable exception of Argentina, from 1942 onwards the Latin American states severed diplomatic relations with the Axis powers with many assuming formally belligerency. The Axis occupation of most of Europe greatly diminished the League's ability to cultivate its Eurocentric practices but provided the opportunity for League organs to function as agents in the development of pan American regionalism. As Jensen demonstrated, the Roosevelt administration had long identified the I.L.O. as a useful vehicle for pan American cooperation.<sup>194</sup> Growing inter-American cooperation led to the development of regional conferences of the I.L.O. The second I.L.O. regional conference of American countries met in Havana, Cuba, at the end of November 1939. The resulting Declaration of Havana recommended a role for the I.L.O. as a social liaison agency between American countries and democratic European nations.<sup>195</sup> The Havana Conference permitted an expression of pan American

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<sup>191</sup> Hill, *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations*, p. 142.

<sup>192</sup> Patricia Clavin, 'Old ideas and new bodies' in Joachim Lund and Per Øhrgaard (eds), *Return to normalcy or a new beginning: concepts and expectations for a postwar Europe around 1945* (Copenhagen, 2008), p. 27.

<sup>193</sup> For a discourse of Latin American cooperation with the United States during the Second World War see Pope Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system*, p. 246 and Williamson, *The Penguin history of Latin America*, p. 330.

<sup>194</sup> Jill Jensen, 'From Geneva to the Americas: the International Labour Organisation and inter-American social security standards, 1936-48' in *International Labour and Working Class History*, lxxx (2011), p. 219.

<sup>195</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Organisation, 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 7).

solidarity for ‘the continuance with unimpaired vigour of the efforts of the International Labour Organisation.’<sup>196</sup> The American nations dominated the New York Conference. The emergence of the Americas from the shadow of the old world was reflected in the push for the recognition of Spanish as an official language of the I.L.O. at the New York Conference, only for the resolution to be ultimately defeated.<sup>197</sup>

During the war period American states cooperated and interacted with League officials in a way most European countries could not. The I.L.O. was better able to act as an agent in inter-American, rather than intercontinental cooperation. I.L.O. officials devoted a considerable portion of their work programmes to the study of North and South American economies, societies and labour conditions during the Second World War. The I.L.O. allowed its officials to serve as consultants within the United States, at the request of the State Department. One of its economists also sat on the Joint Bolivian-United States Labour Commission which was undertaking a study of labour conditions in Bolivia, particularly in relation to mining, on the invitation of the Bolivian government.<sup>198</sup> The first session of the Inter-American Conference on Social Security was held in September 1942 in Santiago de Chile at the invitation of the Chilean government and under the auspices of the International Labour Office.<sup>199</sup> The conference adopted a ‘Statute of Permanent Agency’ of inter-American cooperation to act in concert with the Labour Office in the promotion of social security in the Americas.<sup>200</sup> At the request of the Canadian and U.S. governments, the Labour Office organised several meetings between representatives of the governments, employers and workers of those two countries to discuss various labour and manpower questions arising out of the organisation of the war economy.<sup>201</sup> Though by 1943 British and Dominion powers sat in on the meetings they remained primarily inter-American in focus. The Labour Office provided technical assistance and sent various missions to American nations (including

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<sup>196</sup> Report to the governments, employers and workers of member states of the International Labour Organisation, 14 Feb. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 7).

<sup>197</sup> Gaston Henry Haye to Admiral Darlan, 7 Nov. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 59).

<sup>198</sup> Hull to Phelan, 30 Mar. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519); Carter Goodrich, ‘The developing programme of the I.L.O.’ in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, ccxxiv (1942) p. 183.

<sup>199</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-sixth session: director’s report* (Montreal, 1944), p. 74, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Costa-Rica, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico and Venezuela) assuming a position of direct influence on American social and labour policy.<sup>202</sup>

The I.L.O. also strengthened its branch office in London during this period. This initiative did not, however, enhance the organisation's contact with continental Europe. The branch office became the organisation's normal channel of communication with all the governments-in-exile established in Britain, with the British and Allied trade union movements and with the British, Belgian and Dutch colonial authorities.<sup>203</sup> As Keith Robbins argued, historically Britain tended to be 'a witness of European angst rather than fully sharing in it.'<sup>204</sup> The Second World War confirmed Churchill's view that Britain was 'with Europe, but not of it.'<sup>205</sup> Lester's Geneva Secretariat provided the last remaining direct link to continental Europe. The unique position of the Geneva Secretariat was strengthened after the German occupation of the Netherlands caused an abrupt cessation to the work of the Permanent Court of Justice in The Hague.<sup>206</sup> The fall of France appeared to signify the end of the League's work in intellectual cooperation on the European continent. However, despite Makins' previous assertion that Bonnet had no wish, in late 1940, to continue the work of intellectual cooperation, a very limited work programme was embarked upon in the western hemisphere. The Second Conference of American National Committees of Intellectual Cooperation was held in Havana in November 1941.<sup>207</sup> The conference was attended by members of the League's Committee of Intellectual Cooperation but the acting secretary-general was not kept informed of the outcome of this conference or Bonnet's role in it.<sup>208</sup> The Secretariat did not even have a forwarding address for Bonnet and did not share any communication with

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<sup>202</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-sixth session: director's report* (Montreal, 1944), pp 76-7, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>203</sup> The I.L.O. and reconstruction: report by the acting director of the International Labour Office to the conference of the International Labour Organisation, New York, 11 Sept. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 80).

<sup>204</sup> Keith Robbins, *Britain and Europe 1789-2005* (London, 2005), p. 240.

<sup>205</sup> Jorgen Sevaldsen, 'With Europe, but not of it': British thoughts on future Anglo-European relations' in Joachim Lund and Per Øhrgaard (eds), *Return to normalcy or a new beginning: concepts and expectations for a postwar Europe around 1945* (Copenhagen, 2008), p. 49.

<sup>206</sup> The president of the Court, José Gustavo Guerrero, and the court registrar went to Geneva. There a book was published, funded by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, elaborating on the rules of the Court. See *Report on the work of the League 1942-3: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1943), p. 7, available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/3).

<sup>207</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 19 Feb. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007, p. 14).

<sup>208</sup> Julián Nogueira to Aghnides, 22 Apr. 1942 (L.N.A., general, R 4048/41541).

him.<sup>209</sup> This development demonstrated how the separation of the League's agencies and the difficulties in wartime communications led to the erosion of a cohesive League apparatus.

The apparent dislocation between the Geneva Secretariat and the I.C.I.C. encouraged an approach to intellectual cooperation that was independent of the League. In the wake of the Havana Conference it was suggested that the I.C.I.C. would provide an appropriate vehicle for inter-American collaboration. Julián Nogueira, the Uruguayan delegate to the League Assembly, former Secretariat official and participant in the work of the I.C.I.C., expressed his opposition to this continentalisation of the work of intellectual cooperation. Nogueira was opposed to the creation of an exclusively American organisation for intellectual cooperation arguing that such work was essentially an international and universal issue, rather than a purely regional, concern.<sup>210</sup> Regional organisations, such as the Pan American Union already existed. This desire to preserve the universalist features of League organs was mirrored in the refusal of the British Foreign Office to co-opt those organs as Allied agencies. Though never universal in composition or in practise, the League provided the greatest potential, however flawed, for large-scale international cooperation between states. Ultimately the full Americanisation of the I.C.I.C. never occurred as soon after the Havana conference its work lost its impetus.<sup>211</sup> The I.C.I.C. subsequently ceased all activity until 1945.

Lester did not approve of what the Foreign Office described as the 'trans-Atlantic tendencies' of the transferred technical missions.<sup>212</sup> Nor was he prepared to countenance a formal transfer of headquarters from Geneva. Under article seven of the League Covenant, the headquarters of the League could not be established elsewhere without the consent of the Council.<sup>213</sup> Lester was highly conscious of the important role the English speaking countries of the United States and the British Commonwealth were destined to play in the post-war settlement.<sup>214</sup> However for Lester and for the British Foreign Office, the League's Eurocentrism actually

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<sup>209</sup> Peter Anker to A. Rosenberg, 23 June 1942 (L.N.A., general, R4048/4151).

<sup>210</sup> Nogueira to Professor Miguel Ozorio de Almeida, 21 Apr. 1942 (L.N.A., general, R 4048/4151).

<sup>211</sup> *Report on the work of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 126.

<sup>212</sup> Makins to Lester, 5 Sep. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>213</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, available from Yale Law School, the Avalon Project ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) (20 April 2010).

<sup>214</sup> Lester to Loveday, 28 May 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

assumed a greater symbolic purpose during wartime. The maintenance of headquarters in Geneva served as a mark of solidarity with the embattled continent. Writing to Frank Boudreau, Lester claimed that in ‘the end [it] may well be that the moral (or if you like political) question of standing by at headquarters will later show out as even more important than the actual maintenance of elements of the technical services.’<sup>215</sup> In a letter to Makins Lester wrote that he was not prepared to remove headquarters from Geneva as he could not contemplate any further weakening of the League’s relationship with Europe.<sup>216</sup> That would entail demeaning the importance of many states that had supported the League over its twenty year existence.

Makins agreed with Lester’s reasoning. He argued that the removal of headquarters from Geneva would constitute a ‘breach of the Covenant and would detract from the moral and symbolic importance of keeping headquarters in its rightful place in Europe.’<sup>217</sup> For Makins and for Lester the Eurocentrism of the League was nothing to be ashamed of but was rather the reality of the League’s history. The organisation’s fate was tied to that of the continent which nursed it through its early years. Now was not the time for the League to completely abandon Europe in favour of the country that had rejected it in infancy. The removal of League headquarters from Geneva would entail a tacit acknowledgment of the permanence of German hegemony and constitute a propaganda victory for the totalitarian powers. As Anthony Eden put it succinctly in a letter to Lester in 1942:

The fact that you are still keeping the flag flying in Geneva has, quite apart from the technical work which the Secretariat can still usefully do, a moral and political significance which could perhaps only be accurately measured if you were ever obliged to haul it down. It is an outward sign of the hollowness and transience of the German “New Order” and I therefore hope that you will find conditions not too intolerable to enable you to carry on your rather thankless task for as long as you can.<sup>218</sup>

There was some opposition to this policy in the British civil service. In August 1942 Sir Kingsley Wood (a Treasury official) wrote to Eden advocating the

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<sup>215</sup> Lester to Boudreau, 16 Apr. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/4). Stephen Barcroft in his biography of Lester argued that the preservation of headquarters in Geneva served as a symbol of hope and continuity for the future. See Barcroft, ‘The international civil servant’ p. 256.

<sup>216</sup> Lester to Makins, 4 Apr. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>217</sup> Note on the political aspects of the work of the Supervisory Commission by Makins, 14 July 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>218</sup> Eden to Lester, 28 May 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).



transfer of headquarters to London. Wood argued that there was ‘something very unreal’ about keeping staff in Geneva and that a London based Secretariat would have greater access to Allied governments who were the main contributors to the League’s budget.<sup>219</sup> Eden was not prepared to budge on the issue, reiterating to Wood his position that a transfer away from Geneva would prejudice the moral position of the League.<sup>220</sup> While the liberal idealist paradigm never pervaded the often frustrating meetings of the Assembly and Council, it attained a new importance during the war as the antithesis of the Axis war machine. Due to the political constraints imposed by the neutrality of the Swiss Confederation, Lester’s Secretariat could not attack German or Italian policy; however the League’s continued presence in Geneva constituted an act of protest in itself.

### **A divided international civil service**

Apart from the political importance of maintaining League headquarters in Europe, there was no reason to expect that the Roosevelt administration would be amenable to the transfer of Lester’s Secretariat to the United States. It had, after all, refused to grant the technical missions official status, which had an adverse impact on the *esprit de corps* of the international civil service. In 1940 Sweetser sought to remind the world of one of the advantages of the League; it permitted those working in the field of one activity to ‘cross professional lines and obtain assistance from those engaged in cognate fields’, resulting in a more complementary approach to technical cooperation.<sup>221</sup> The I.L.O. and the Health Organisation developed a particularly strong tradition, in the inter-war years, of cooperation in studies of mutual interest which explored the relationship between economic conditions and public health.<sup>222</sup> When the League’s P.C.O.B. and D.S.B. were transferred to the United States, Lester hoped that they could be established in Princeton so that they could they could

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<sup>219</sup> Sir Kingsley Wood to Sir Anthony Eden, 4 Aug. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>220</sup> Eden to Wood, 18 Aug. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>221</sup> Sweetser, ‘The non-political achievements of the League’, pp 190-1.

<sup>222</sup> Sunil S. Amrith, *Decolonising international health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930-65* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 27; Paul Weindling, ‘Social medicine at the League of Nations Health Organisation and the International Labour Office compared’ in Paul Weindling (ed.), *International Health organisations and movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 139.

function as an administrative unit with Loveday's group.<sup>223</sup> The U.S. State Department, on the other hand, wanted to avoid the implication that the organs of the League of Nations were functioning on American soil with the formal consent of the government; rather it insisted that the various agencies should be split up so that they could operate through branch offices as independent bodies.<sup>224</sup> This stood in stark contrast to Canada where Prime Minister King afforded the International Labour Office full status and independence as an international institution.<sup>225</sup> The Foreign Office recognised that the U.S. attitude to the transferred missions tended 'to give the League the status in the United States of any semi-private body, rather than of one aspiring to universality and invested with authority by governments.'<sup>226</sup> Lester was informed that the policy of the State Department was to 'obviate any question of the administrative functioning in the United States of America of international organs operating under conventions to which the United States was not a party.'<sup>227</sup> When in 1941 Seymour Jacklin travelled from London to visit the transferred missions in Canada and the U.S.A. he was requested by the State Department to refrain from engaging in any administrative work on behalf of the League.<sup>228</sup> The U.S. government clearly viewed the League, like Lester and Makins, a product of European political culture and history with which it was reluctant to associate. These developments actually vindicated Joseph Avenol's particular reservations as to the effect of the American transfer on the international status of the technical organisations.

As can be perceived from the debate about League headquarters, the physical dislocation between the technical organisations and the Secretariat resulted in often fraught relations between the various groups. The Geneva and the North American branches of the international civil service had very different experiences of the war years. Economic matters inevitably played the most important role in driving a wedge between the disparate sections at a time when the salaries and expenses of

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<sup>223</sup> Lester to Loveday, 29 May 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>224</sup> Telegram from Lester to Makins, 2 May 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353). For more details on the wartime difficulties, isolation of and tensions between the Drug Supervisory Body and the Permanent Central Opium Board see William B. McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century: an international history* (London, 2000), pp 139-44.

<sup>225</sup> The I.L.O. and reconstruction: report by the acting director of the International Labour Office, conference of the International Labour Organisation, New York, 11 Sep. 1941 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 74).

<sup>226</sup> Michael Wright to F.K. Roberts, 7 Apr. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

<sup>227</sup> Hull to Tittmann, 23 Dec. 1940 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general and Europe 1940, p. 332).

<sup>228</sup> Memorandum by Makins, 20 May 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

League officials were reduced. Loveday pressed for his Princeton mission to be granted a cost of living allowances and for the twenty per cent pay cut imposed on all staff at the outbreak of the war to be refunded.<sup>229</sup> He argued that Princeton was an incredibly expensive town, being in fact the second most expensive town in the United States, opining that it would be in the interest of the League's reputation to improve the salaries of its transferred officials.<sup>230</sup> The tax rate was considerably higher in Princeton than in Geneva with Loveday's missions experiencing heavy duties on necessary expenses such as gasoline.<sup>231</sup> Jacklin had previously informed the transferred missions that they could only claim refunds from the League Treasury for income tax paid to federal and state authorities.<sup>232</sup> By February 1942 Lester had formally decided, with Hambro's concurrence, that while the League could refund income tax paid, it was not in a position to refund tax on officials' personal income and properties, which constituted the majority of tax paid.<sup>233</sup> Loveday tried to paint a pathetic picture of E.F.O. officials attempting to live within their means. He bemoaned the fact that he was obliged, because of the high rents in Princeton, to dwell in a four roomed flat and wondered to Lester whether 'this modesty' would 'prove rather damaging to the League.'<sup>234</sup>

Lester was unmoved by Loveday's pleas. The acting secretary-general viewed it as his duty to 'try to look after staff who have been standing by us here, and especially those who are isolated, either from an invaded country or otherwise.'<sup>235</sup> The transferred staff, removed from the claustrophobic atmosphere of Geneva, enjoyed excellent working conditions. Loveday's group received a royal welcome from the Princeton authorities. The headquarters of the mission was situated in the brand new building of the Institute for Advanced Study and the E.F.O. enjoyed state of the art facilities. The building housed a comfortable assembly room and nearly twenty offices with separate rooms for typists. The Institute provided the transferred mission of the E.F.O. with additional administrative officers, bought them books and provided heat, light and telephone operators at no additional charge

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<sup>229</sup> Loveday to Lester, 10 Sep. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., pp 582-3).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Loveday to Lester, 14 Sep. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/1).

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Feb. 1942 (L.N.A. O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>234</sup> Loveday to Lester, 14 Sep. 1940 (L.N.A, O.S.G., S 558/4/1).

<sup>235</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 19 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 437).

to the League.<sup>236</sup> Loveday also established a small library for his mission at Princeton which was financed by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>237</sup> The International Labour Office was equally fortunate in its Canadian host. McGill University undertook to carry out renovations of two houses on the campus to the sum of 25,000 Canadian dollars while only charging the I.L.O. 5,000 dollars per annum for their use.<sup>238</sup>

Meanwhile, in Geneva, Valentin Stencek (the director of personnel and internal administration of the League Secretariat) experienced great hardship in securing the necessary heating and maintenance for the sprawling *Palais des Nations* to prevent that stately pile falling into disrepair.<sup>239</sup> League officials were also more isolated from the more high profile work of their transferred colleagues and from the supervision of the technical directors. Lester was not impressed by Loveday's tendency to refer to those officials of the E.F.O. remaining in Geneva as the 'rump' of his department.<sup>240</sup> Mazower reproduced this language when he posited that a 'rump Secretariat remained under wraps in Geneva.'<sup>241</sup> As discussed, this was not the case with the Geneva headquarters playing an important role in documenting the European wartime experience. Lester appointed himself as a buffer between Loveday and his Geneva staff when the director of the E.F.O. sent messages to them, which, in the words of the acting secretary-general, 'scorched the wires.'<sup>242</sup> He urged Loveday to give his staff greater signs of his appreciation for their work on the *Yearbook* and the *Monthly Bulletin*.<sup>243</sup> The Geneva staff also had to come to terms with the fact that the Germans were 'within ten minutes easy walk' of the *Palais des Nations*.<sup>244</sup> This was a source of great anxiety for some League officials, particularly for its Treasurer Seymour Jacklin who left Geneva for London in 1941. Following Jacklin's departure, an English bank manager in Geneva confided to Lester that while he remained in the Swiss city, Jacklin had experienced 'the jitters with stories

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<sup>236</sup> Loveday to Janet Smith [ran the London branch office of the League], 10 Mar. 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>237</sup> Loveday to Sir Cecil Kisch, 4 Jan. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26656).

<sup>238</sup> Phelan, 'The I.L.O. sets up its wartime base in Canada', p. 152.

<sup>239</sup> Report by Valentin Stencek on the minimum cost for the upkeep of the League's main building if unoccupied, 30 Dec. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/3).

<sup>240</sup> Lester to Loveday, 10 Sep. 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>241</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 193.

<sup>242</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Jan. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>243</sup> Lester to Loveday, 10 Sep. 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>244</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Jan. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

about the Gestapo following him.’<sup>245</sup> Though it is unlikely that these stories had any basis in reality, Jacklin’s experience was indicative of the tense and uncertain psychological climate of Switzerland at the time.

Victor-Yves Ghébali wrote that the secretary-general was the ‘real master’ of the technical organisations during the inter-war period, who retained ultimate authority over activities and personnel, even if he did not share the same interests and drive of the technical directors.<sup>246</sup> This was not the case during the war years. The transfer of the technical missions to North America fatally undermined Lester’s authority as secretary-general. On the other hand it enhanced the autonomy of the technical organisations who adopted an increasingly independent line from their parent organisation. As Van Goethen argued, the war presented an ideal opportunity for the I.L.O. to escape the guardianship of the League.<sup>247</sup> Though it could determine its own work programmes, the I.L.O.’s funding was collected by the League Treasury; the secretary-general and the Supervisory Commission also needed to approve the I.L.O.’s budget. As Lester observed in January 1941; ‘after all the years of effort for complete autonomy, the only link remaining is the financial one.’<sup>248</sup> The League budget was dramatically reduced during the war years. Expressed as percentages of the 1939 budget, the budgets for 1940 and subsequent years showed the following variations:

1939:	100 per cent
1940:	66.55 per cent
1941:	33.07 per cent
1942:	29.93 per cent
1943:	35.4 per cent
1944	31.25 per cent. <sup>249</sup>

As League funds steadily dwindled, the various elements of the international civil service were obliged to vie for the biggest proportion of the budget. Phelan was able to exploit Lester’s isolation in Geneva to get what he wanted from the Supervisory Commission which met on the I.L.O. turf in Montreal from the years 1941-4. In June 1941 Sir Alexander Cadogan, stating the position of the British Foreign Office, wrote to Lester advising him not to travel to the forthcoming meeting

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<sup>245</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Sep. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, pp 827-28).

<sup>246</sup> Ghébali, ‘The League of Nations and functionalism’, p. 151.

<sup>247</sup> Van Goethem, ‘Phelan’s war’, p. 319.

<sup>248</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 18 Jan. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>249</sup> Note by the acting-general for the perusal of the Supervisory Commission on the expenditure of the League of Nations from 1940-4, 2 May 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

of the Supervisory Commission, to remain in Geneva and to delegate his authority to some other League official who was in a position to travel.<sup>250</sup> There was a very real danger that while Lester could get out of Europe, he might not be able to get back in. In a letter to Hambro in September 1940 Lester expressed his reluctance to leave Geneva but at the same time he did not want his post to become 'useless.'<sup>251</sup> Ultimately Lester was not able to leave Geneva until 1944. He was thus not in a position to challenge the Supervisory Commission when it agreed to impose greater economies on the Secretariat than on the I.L.O. In 1942 the Secretariat's share of the budget (including Loveday's section, but excluding the refugee and drug bodies) was just over 3.4 million C.H.F., while the I.L.O. was accorded 3.1 million.<sup>252</sup> From 1943-5 the I.L.O.'s share of the budget was, at least, half a million greater than that of the Secretariat.<sup>253</sup>

Lester concluded that his confinement to Geneva and the greater degree of personal contact between the Supervisory Commission and the technical organs meant that certain members of the Commission had derived the impression that 'nothing mattered that was not on the American continent.'<sup>254</sup> As he complained to Sweetser:

two entirely different standards have been applied to the I.L.O. and the Secretariat; they are comparatively comfortable and well off, the Secretariat is chivvied; and the more reductions made the more are demanded; then a moment will come when I shall be calmly asked to provide staff and studies which may be impossible. I think a tremendous difficulty has arisen from the separation between the Supervisory Commission and myself.<sup>255</sup>

By 1941-2 the contrasts between Lester and Phelan's leadership was stark. Lester was isolated; Phelan was able to mix with foreign ministers and presidents, operating as a leading light in international cooperation. The future of Lester's Secretariat was constantly imperilled by its location in war zone; the future of Phelan's Labour Office appeared secure. Lester became highly resentful of Phelan: Roger Makins observed that nothing could 'eradicate [Lester's] suspicion off his

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<sup>250</sup> Cadogan to Lester, 23 June 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 808).

<sup>251</sup> Lester to Hambro, 26 Sep. 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., pp 623-4).

<sup>252</sup> Telegram from Sir Cecil Kisch to Lester, 2 Oct. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/13).

<sup>253</sup> Reports of the various meetings of the Supervisory Commission 1941-4 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/3, S 563/2/9, 563/2/11).

<sup>254</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 4 Oct. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 843).

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

fellow Irishman.’<sup>256</sup> Lester accused Phelan in particular of adopting a cavalier attitude towards the budget, of acting on the principle that his work was so vital that ‘funds would be found for him.’<sup>257</sup> Demonstrating the same initiative as Winant, Phelan was more than willing to adopt a proactive approach to securing the necessary funding for the work of the Labour Office. The independent streak, long prevalent in the I.L.O., manifested itself clearly when Phelan requested that member states be permitted to make separate contributions to the League and the technical services. According to Phelan, greater financial autonomy from the League was not sought until the war years as until then the financial arrangement was convenient for member states when making their contributions.<sup>258</sup> Phelan later came to the conclusion that there were several Latin American nations as well as Canada, the I.L.O.’s host country, which desired to support the technical activities alone, to the exclusion of the contribution owed to the League Secretariat.<sup>259</sup> This proposal contravened traditional protocol, undermining the cohesion of the League apparatus as well as the ultimate financial authority of the League over the I.L.O. Though Phelan’s proposal was not accepted it was indicative the I.L.O.’s historic struggle for emancipation from its parent organisation.

Tensions came to a head at the meeting of the Supervisory Commission in Montreal in August 1942 where Phelan was placed under an intense amount of pressure from the League’s treasurer, Seymour Jacklin, to make economies. However Phelan responded, quite reasonably, that the I.L.O. was receiving more and more requests for work; in fact, according to Phelan, as the I.L.O. was obliged to work with a reduced staff on an expanding programme of post-war reconstruction studies, the Labour Office was arguably busier than ever.<sup>260</sup> Instead Phelan proposed that the instalment of funds to the I.L.O. be spread out more so that it would not fall within the budget of 1943. This was accepted by a weary Supervisory Commission despite the objections from Jacklin that this constituted no sacrifice on Phelan’s part.<sup>261</sup> René Charron observed of the confident wartime approach of the International Labour Office; ‘these people know what they want and they go at it

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<sup>256</sup> Note by Makins, 11 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>257</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 11 Nov. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 885).

<sup>258</sup> Phelan, ‘Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation’, p. 255.

<sup>259</sup> Lester to Makins, 4 Apr. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 745).

<sup>260</sup> Phelan, ‘After Pearl Harbor: I.L.O. problems’ in *Studies*, xlvi (1957), p. 204.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

boldly.’<sup>262</sup> These developments exposed the limitations to Lester’s wartime administration of the League apparatus and demonstrated that he was losing the battle to keep the entire structure intact. Lester’s leadership was not so encumbered because of his nationality or because of any shortcoming in his personal qualities. Rather his already difficult task was compounded by the fact that the League apparatus was already splintering by the time he assumed office due to physical separation and mounting rivalry.

Phelan on the other hand was able to expand his authority over the I.L.O.’s budget precisely because of the growing dissonance between the Secretariat and the technical services. The confidence of the I.L.O. was also enhanced by the certainty derived from the New York Conference that it enjoyed strong political support. Makins conceded to Lester that the acting secretary-general could be forgiven for regarding the effect of the New York Conference as upsetting ‘the balance between the institutions of the League’ and enhancing ‘the position of the Labour Office out of all proportion to that of the [League] Secretariat.’<sup>263</sup> However, like the Supervisory Commission, the Foreign Office favoured the prioritisation of the I.L.O. over the League’s international civil service. Makins wrote that ‘it may well be that if further economies are made they should be made in the Secretariat and Princeton organisations rather than in the International Labour Office. Such a course of action would be justified by the fact that the I.L.O. is able to do more active work in wartime than the League itself.’<sup>264</sup> The I.L.O. was arguably the largest organ of intergovernmental cooperation during the war whose Secretariat was able to directly assist and advise national governments. Though the Geneva Secretariat remained an important link with continental Europe, with its Rockefeller Library continuing to function as a vital channel for social and economic intelligence, it could not match the level of publicity and governmental support enjoyed by the League.

Jacklin claimed that as the I.L.O. enjoyed such powerful political backing its officials felt that ‘they can get anything and do anything.’<sup>265</sup> This included the encroachment of the I.L.O. on the work of Loveday’s group in Princeton. Clavin pointed out that while the manifold activities of the League allowed it to pursue a

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<sup>262</sup> Lester to Loveday, 13 July 1942 (L.N.A. O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

<sup>263</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>264</sup> Note on the political aspects of the work of the Supervisory Commission by Roger Makins, 14 July 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>265</sup> Lester to Makins, 3 Nov. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).



more comprehensive programme of international cooperation, these activities risked pulling the organisation in different directions.<sup>266</sup> In addition, the division of labour between the League's various agencies was often porous and indistinct. This was partly due, as Ghébali pointed out, to the fact that the League's technical organisations were allowed to grow for twenty years without any coherent design being imposed on them.<sup>267</sup> The Bruce Committee constituted a belated attempt to impose greater definition and cohesion onto the League's technical work but it was too late to influence the wartime relations of the disparate technical organisations. While this fluid division of labour could result in collaborative efforts as mentioned above, it could also result in tense demarcation disputes. Early on in the war Loveday confided his fears to Lester that, as a result of their closer relationship with the I.L.O., the Washington and Ottawa governments might conspire to 'blow out the candles' on the E.F.O.<sup>268</sup> This would allow Phelan to direct studies on economic policy that were traditionally the provenance of Loveday's group and of the League Secretariat. Loveday could be assured that the Foreign Office was not anxious to engage in a wartime re-structuring of the international civil service. Roger Makins was adamant that, while the I.L.O. enjoyed a broader base of support, every effort should be made to ensure that the administration of the League's agencies was conducted 'on prudent and constitutional lines' and that the pre-war structures were preserved and the 'legality of operation' observed as long as it remained possible to do so.<sup>269</sup>

To address the mounting tensions, I.L.O. officials were dispatched to the 1942 London and Princeton meetings of the Economic and Financial Committees of the League. An informal agreement was brokered recognising the division of labour between the E.F.O. and the I.L.O. in reconstruction studies. The I.L.O. consented to limit itself to labour issues and to the social implications of economic reconstruction in order to avoid 'friction or duplication' with the work of Loveday's group in both Princeton and Geneva.<sup>270</sup> Whatever the assurances of the British Foreign Office and of the I.L.O., it was the attitude of the United States that determined the future role of Phelan's organisation. The U.S. government favoured the extension of the I.L.O.'s

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<sup>266</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy: the reinvention of the League of Nations*, p. 5.

<sup>267</sup> Ghébali, 'The League of Nations and functionalism', p. 154.

<sup>268</sup> Loveday to Lester, 11 Nov. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/1).

<sup>269</sup> Note on the political aspects of the work of the Supervisory Commission by Roger Makins, 14 July 1941 (T.N.A., T 160/1353).

<sup>270</sup> Phelan to Lester, 12 May 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/4/5).

mandate in the economic field as it was then the only large organisation through which it could develop its ideas on post-war planning.<sup>271</sup> Clavin recently demonstrated how the different priorities and methods of the E.F.O. and the I.L.O. reflected the divisions in the United States Congress. The policies of Loveday's group appealed to the advocates of liberal free-market economics while Phelan's group enjoyed stronger ties with the labour union supporting 'New Dealers.'<sup>272</sup> It was difficult to predict which group would enjoy the ultimate ascendancy until the U.S. government became more explicit in its post-war economic and social policies.

In conclusion the League retained a significant technical presence in the years 1940-3. Geo-political factors played a central role in defining the scope and character of the work of both the Geneva and North American branches of the international civil service. Throughout its history the League was forced to adapt to and reflect the course of international affairs; during the Second World War its international civil servants tried to come to terms with the growing international influence of the United States. Just as the League of 1939 was not the same League as 1920, the League of 1943 was different again. As discussed, internationalism was a relative concept; member states and indeed League officials often expected different things from the 'great experiment.' For some League officials the international organisation was an objective data source, an inclusive Society of Nations; for others it was a moral and ideological support to a wartime alliance, an exclusive League. While the disparate agencies continued to share the same funding and liberal democratic identity, the institutional unity of the League of Nations was fatally undermined during the period 1940-3. The disagreements over the League's political (or apolitical) role, the location of headquarters and the division of the budget demonstrate that there was no such thing as a single, unified League of Nations. By 1943 the League was really a collection of increasingly autonomous agencies. In the early years of the war, these technical agencies were broadcasting their post-war plans within an official vacuum. National governments, particularly those of the great powers, would not begin to exchange coherent ideas on post-war planning and reconstruction until late 1943 at the earliest. The extent to which the technical organisations would succeed in influencing the type of peace destined to emerge depended on the extent to which governments were willing to include them

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<sup>271</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>272</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 270.

in that process. The technical organisations carried the ideological baggage of their parent organisation and were often very happy to do so. This ideological baggage assumed a greater complexity within the emerging international order, presaging a further assault on the institutional unity of the League of Nations.

#### **Chapter four: The League's wartime relations with member states and its place in a shifting international landscape, 1940-4**

The League of Nations could not function as an intergovernmental organisation during the war. However it did not exist independently of the will or the influence of its member states whose aspirations for peaceful internationalism, however conservative, continued to be invested in the League's international civil service. The League of Nations was an organisation that insisted upon the inviolable sovereignty of its member states. Thus membership remained of significant value and constituted a badge of independence to those insecure states and erstwhile governments of uncertain legitimacy. This chapter examines the impact of the domestic and foreign policies of both member and non-member states on the operation of the League of Nations during the years 1940-4. Though sustained through the war by the support of its members, a quartet of states would have the most profound impact on the League's wartime experience and post-war prospects: the United Kingdom, France, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The United Kingdom and France formed the old guard of the Geneva system, determining the policy of the League Council in the inter-war period. After 1940 the League relied heavily on the support of the British Empire as it came to grips with wartime curtailment of French influence on the world stage. League officials also had to contend with the emerging titans of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., as they strove to preserve some technocratic continuity between the old international system and the new. As discussed, realist accounts of the League's history tend to depict the organisation as hopelessly out of touch with the hard reality of international relations.<sup>1</sup> In fact League officials were very much alive to the complexities of international affairs as they sought to influence policies on post-war planning and reconstruction. That is not to say that the League's technical directors were as prepared as Avenol to erase the liberal ethos of their work. However they became increasingly aware that the new international order that was beginning to emerge needed to present a profound break with the League's ignominious political record. The structural weakness and congenital flaws within the Geneva system hung like a

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Niemeyer, 'The balance sheet of the League experiment', pp 537-58 and Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 164.

millstone around the neck of every League official who sought to influence and advise national and international policy. Under these conditions the League's technical organisations were obliged to project an artificial dissonance between their work and that of the 'political' League. This exercise would prove unsuccessful, demonstrating that while the League was presenting the international community with many faces by 1943, all of them were infused with the same political identity.

**League membership as an indicator of the vicissitudes of both the national experience and international relations 1940-4.**

As discussed in chapter one, public professions of support for the League, while not painless for the neutral member states, allowed governments to project an association with peaceful internationalism without having to fulfil the accompanying responsibilities. As the League's diplomatic organs were suspended during the war, League membership would require even less political commitment from member states. All that was required was the necessary moral and financial support to ensure that the international civil service remained an important agent in the social and economic spheres. Although the League was never quite as exacting on the treasuries of member states as its successor, certain countries, facing wartime occupation or austerity, found it difficult to justify continued payment to the League budget.<sup>2</sup> While two thirds of member states kept up their contribution to League income, they did not always do so by the deadline of each financial period and this compounded the problem of the mounting arrears faced by the League Treasury.<sup>3</sup> By 1945 the total number of arrears had accumulated to 4,241,042 C.H.F.<sup>4</sup> From 1940-5, as contributions steadily dwindled, the Treasury of the League resorted to a greater reliance on its working capital fund.<sup>5</sup> This was money member states invested into the League and which the League Treasury held in trust for them. As discussed in chapter three, the growing paucity of funds compounded the sense of rivalry between

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<sup>2</sup> By 1950 the combined budget of the entire United Nations Organisation was fourteen times that of the League. See Arthur Sweetser, 'Perspectives on the United Nations' in *World Affairs*, cxiv (1952), p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Note prepared by the Treasury of the League of Nations, 15 Feb. 1945 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum by the acting secretary-general 'Financial situation on 31 Dec. 1940', 8 Jan. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/1).

the disparate technical agencies, undermining the institutional unity of the international civil service.

The failure on the part of member states to meet their financial obligations cannot be solely attributed to the wartime reductions in national expenditure. Member state contributions were by no means set at an exorbitantly high rate and the fiscally conservative Supervisory Commission was never eager to increase contributions.<sup>6</sup> In an increasingly polarising wartime climate, it was political considerations that determined the relations between the League and its member states. As Patricia Clavin argued, because the nation state played a decisive role in defining and shaping transnationalism, transnational encounters in the inter-war years often reveal much about the domestic contexts and conditions within those states themselves.<sup>7</sup> Within the heightened atmosphere of global war, this maxim proved even more compelling. The manner in which states reacted to the League during the war serve as a clear reflection of the evolution of world affairs and the changing fortunes of the war. In turn, the national experience conditioned the wartime experience of the international organisation. Domestic disorder, shifting alliances and crises of sovereignty among member states impacted heavily upon the League apparatus.

As discussed in chapter three, membership of a perceived pro-Allied League impelled neutral Switzerland to withhold its contribution to the organisation. Sweden was also in a precarious situation where the League was concerned, with its foreign policy placed under intense scrutiny by the Axis powers.<sup>8</sup> Sweden had been obliged to disassociate itself from the League resolutions of December 1939 to avoid increasing tensions with Germany.<sup>9</sup> In August 1940 Sweden's minister for foreign affairs stated that the government 'did not feel justified' in paying a contribution to the League budget, as in its eyes, 'the League of Nations today has ceased to function.'<sup>10</sup> The political implications of such a move were not lost on the Swedish press. The following day the *Social-Demokraten*, the organ of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (the party of Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, then leading a broad coalition government) expressed its opposition to the idea of Sweden turning

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<sup>6</sup> Secretariat memorandum, 29 Oct. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>7</sup> Clavin, 'Conceptualising internationalism between the world wars', p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Levine, 'Swedish neutrality during the Second World War', p. 312.

<sup>9</sup> See for example P. Hjelt to Joseph Avenol, 8 Mar. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/33, f. 188, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> British legation, Stockholm, to Lord Halifax, 23 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24443).

its back on the League and all that it stood for.<sup>11</sup> According to the newspaper, for countries sharing the same democratic traditions as Sweden, voluntary cooperation, through the mechanisms of an international organisation, was the most appropriate means of promoting peace.<sup>12</sup> This article further underscores the value of the League as a barometer of liberal democracy. The *Social-Demokraten* stated that it was not overly important if Sweden left the League should the country be willing to participate in a new system of international cooperation after the war. However ‘after the action of Romania and the Baltic states at this time [countries no longer associated with the League and which were under the influence of Germany and the Soviet Union respectively], Sweden’s resignation might be misinterpreted.’<sup>13</sup>

Neutral states such as Sweden and Switzerland were obliged to maintain a precarious balance as their appeasement of the Axis powers, from whom the threat of invasion loomed prominently, risked the complete alienation of the Allied bloc whose war aims shared a clear affinity with the Covenant. As Lester wrote to Professor Oaten Unden, a leading Swedish academic and long-term supporter of the League: ‘It has seemed very evident to me therefore that the payment of contributions would not have been regarded as an un-neutral act; on the contrary it might even seem that the refusal to do so took that character.’<sup>14</sup> The League’s relations with the European neutrals was thus complex; the lack of clear consensus on whether the League should function as an Allied satellite organisation or an objective vehicle for technical cooperation resulted in the increasingly ambivalent place of neutrality within the League apparatus. Of the five European countries that maintained their neutrality during the Second World War, four retained their membership of the League of Nations. Franco’s Spain withdrew in May 1939, but out of the remaining European neutrals-Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal and the Irish Free State-the fulfilment of financial obligations was confined to the last two states, who shared closer political, economic and military ties to the United Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> The Irish Free State was not prepared to renounce League membership as *Taoiseach* Éamon de Valera believed that while neutrality had isolated the state, renunciation of

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<sup>11</sup> *Social-Demokraten*, 17 Aug. 1940, translation available from (T.N.A., FO 371/24443, f. 94, p. 2).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Lester to Professor Oaten Unden, 16 Jan. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 556/7).

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of both Portuguese and Irish foreign policy during the Second World War see Packard, *The European neutrals in World War II*, p. 261, p. 289.

League membership would isolate it further.<sup>16</sup> This is indicative of the inclusive internationalism practised in the League Assembly of 1939 that was imperilled by the pro-Allied policies of the transferred missions. As a result of their closer trade and cultural ties to Germany, Sweden and Switzerland could not afford to offer their unreserved support to the League.<sup>17</sup> Nor, however, as the *Social Demokraten* and Lester observed, could they sever links completely with an organisation whose Covenant articulated the cherished democratic traditions of their respective states. As Swiss federal papers indicate, the Bern government, while deciding to adopt a certain reserve towards the League, recognised that it could not withdraw entirely from the organisation if it wished to avoid overt identification with the Axis powers.<sup>18</sup> Formal renunciation of League membership on the part of Sweden and Switzerland never transpired as it risked compounding the controversies of an already biased neutrality. The League Covenant amounted to an almost religious consecration of national sovereignty, a concept of great importance to states with a proud history of independence. As a columnist in the *Journal de Genève* argued, the adoption of neutrality by the Swiss Confederation would be meaningless in the absence of full and complete sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> By retaining its membership Switzerland was able to demonstrate that its foreign policy was its own to decide.

The neutral states had to bear in mind the significant pattern of withdrawals from the League on the part of governments whose domestic and foreign policies were undergoing dramatic evolutions. In the years 1939-40, the following countries notified the League of their intention to terminate membership: Albania (April 1939), Hungary (April 1939), Peru (April 1939), Spain (May 1939) and Romania (July 1940).<sup>20</sup> This spate of withdrawals inspired *Time Magazine* to dub the League ‘the League of leftovers.’<sup>21</sup> Apart from Peru, whose withdrawal reflected the inter-war disenchantment of Latin American states with the Eurocentric League, the above countries were either, during this period, moving into the Axis sphere or were

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<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 245.

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of both Swiss and Swedish relations with the Axis bloc during the Second World War see Levine. ‘Swedish neutrality during the Second World War’, p. 306 and George Kreis, *Switzerland in the Second World War: responding to the challenges of the time* (Zurich, 1999), p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Report by the head of Foreign Affairs Division of the Political Department, 4 July 1942 (S.F.A., SDD, 60/006/486, p. 671).

<sup>19</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 23 Oct. 1942.

<sup>20</sup> Foreign Office memorandum, 15 July 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24443, f. 91).

<sup>21</sup> *Time Magazine*, 24 Apr. 1939.



transforming into totalitarian states.<sup>22</sup> Those powers whose foreign policies were increasingly orbiting Berlin were eager to publicly disavow their affinity with the League. It has already been demonstrated that the 1939 Winter War inspired member states, assembled within the walls of the *Palais des Nations*, to launch passionate tirades against the Soviet Union, but failed to extract the necessary military intervention to safeguard Finnish territory. In the ultimate indictment of the impotence of the League's political organs and the intransigence of members of the Council, Finland was obliged to seek help from one of the traditional antagonists of the Covenant. In June 1941 the Finnish army, under General Mannerheim, launched the Continuation War against the Soviet Union in cooperation with Hitler's Operation Barbarossa. In the week leading up to mobilisation, the Helsinki government released the following statement to parliament:

Finland considers that the activity of the League had ceased to be manifested in the course of the war, apart from some technical sections. In 1940 neither the Assembly nor Council had met. In the same year the secretary-general had abandoned the League at the moment when it was giving signs of dissolution. Taking account of these facts the Finnish government had decided to suppress the League Section in the Ministry. Finland had no further reason to continue to pay its contributions. Relations between Finland and the League had thus found their natural end.<sup>23</sup>

Then an erstwhile co-belligerent with Germany, Finnish association with a body whose ideals conflicted so dramatically with the tenets of Nazi expansionism was no longer possible. As discussed in chapter one, member states were more inclined to uphold the League's political identity than its diplomatic role. This meant that vulnerable states such as Finland were forced into an uncomfortable marriage of convenience with the power described by the French delegate in the Assembly of 1939 as the 'the first and chief author of the present European upheaval.'<sup>24</sup>

The outcome of German and Italian offensives in Western and Southern Europe also influenced the League's relationship with member states. Unlike Finland,

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Atkins, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the international system*, p. 244. The Peruvian government, in tendering its notice of withdrawal, expressed the country's continued devotion to the ideals of the Covenant and willingness to cooperate with the League's technical organisations. See telegram from the Peruvian minister for foreign affairs to the secretary-general, 8 Apr. 1939 (L.N.A., general, R 3691/37692).

<sup>23</sup> Note by Lester quoting the Finnish parliamentary speech from 17 June 1941, 25 Oct. 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>24</sup> *League of Nations Official Journal: minutes of the hundred and sixth and hundred and seventh session of the Council*, 9 December 1939 and 14 December 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/2440, p. 507).

which voluntarily opted to become a co-belligerent with Germany, for countries unwittingly caught in the net of Hitler's expanding empire, League membership constituted an important form of protest; an affirmation, in Eden's words, 'of the transience of the German "New Order".'<sup>25</sup> The Secretariat established contact with the London-based governments-in-exile of Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Greece and Yugoslavia.<sup>26</sup> Michael Kennedy argued that six years of war 'effectively destroyed the benefits of League membership' for neutral states such as the Irish Free State.<sup>27</sup> Whereas neutrality was facilitated within the League framework, even during the war, this would not prove the case within post-war internationalism. However, for those small states whose neutrality was violently breached by the Axis bloc, wartime membership of the League served as an important bridge between pre-war and post-war international cooperation.

Continued association with the League, the mouthpiece of international law, was a useful mechanism through which the governments-in-exile could insist that their homelands remained legal entities. With the suspension of the Assembly and Council there lacked a platform through which the governments-in-exile could affirm their loyalties to the Covenant. This was mitigated by an initiative on the part of the British government. It became the practise of the Foreign Office to arrange meetings between British civil servants and representatives of the governments-in-exile in advance of the budgetary sessions of the Supervisory Commission.<sup>28</sup> They were presided over by Sir Cecil Kisch, the British member of the Supervisory Commission, and Seymour Jacklin, then resident in London. At a 1942 meeting, held at the British Ministry of Fuel and Power, the Czechoslovak delegate stated that 'his government was attached to the principles of international co-operation for which the League stood.'<sup>29</sup> The Belgian representative echoed the British and American attitude when he declared that 'the League organisation should be kept going', positing that it would be 'unwise to let the existing machinery fall until something

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<sup>25</sup> Eden to Lester, 28 May 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum by the acting secretary-general on the financial situation on 31 December 1941, 8 Jan. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/1).

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 250.

<sup>28</sup> Note by Makins, 11 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>29</sup> Notes on a meeting between British and Allied governments representatives of the League of Nations, held at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 28 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

definitely better had been set up.’<sup>30</sup> The Yugoslav representative, reflecting on the continued potential of the organisation, declared that he was ‘confident that the League would again become an important agency for world cooperation.’<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the cautious and parsimonious attitude of the Swiss and Swedish governments, the governments-in-exile were eager to publicise their financial contributions to the League budget. Due to the economic hardships incurred by the occupied territories and governments-in-exile, the League Treasury reduced the contributions payable by these states, sometimes by as much as fifty per cent.<sup>32</sup> The representatives of the Allied governments-in-exile, present at the 1942 meeting, stated that although they could not afford to pay the full amount owed to the League Treasury, token contributions would be made to the budget.<sup>33</sup> The Polish and Czechoslovak contribution to the budget was cancelled by the League at the beginning of the war but both governments undertook to make token payments.<sup>34</sup>

In his 1975 history of the League of Nations, Elmer Bendiner posited that the wartime nucleus of the Secretariat ‘holed up in the empty *Palais*’ resembled ‘the monks who illuminated ancient texts during the dark ages, oblivious to the barbarism that raged around them.’<sup>35</sup> This is an inaccurate representation of the League’s wartime history; national and international developments informed, inspired and challenged the social and economic programmes of the Geneva Secretariat and shaped the working conditions of League officials.<sup>36</sup> As discussed in chapter two, the fall of France sparked an intense internal crisis in the Secretariat. However it did not immediately result in French withdrawal from the League. The actual moment of withdrawal blind-sided the Secretariat. Until early 1941 the French contribution to the League budget was duly paid by the Vichy government. In keeping with the fiscal policy devised for invaded territories it was agreed by the Supervisory Commission to reduce the set French contribution by fifty per cent in view of the

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<sup>30</sup> Notes on a meeting between British and Allied governments representatives of the League of Nations, held at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 28 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>31</sup> Notes on a meeting between British and Allied governments representatives of the League of Nations, held at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 11 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>32</sup> Note by the acting secretary-general, 29 Oct. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/5).

<sup>33</sup> Notes on a meeting between British and Allied governments representatives of the League of Nations, held at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 28 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>34</sup> Notes on a meeting between British and Allied governments representatives of the League of Nations, held at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 11 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

<sup>35</sup> Bendiner, *A time for angels*, p. 401.

<sup>36</sup> See the *Report on the work of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945) for more details on the various studies produced by the international civil service which were of immediate relevance to a world at war.

harsh austerity incurred by defeat and occupation.<sup>37</sup> The Vichy government used French funds deposited in the United States to meet their financial obligation to the League. For these funds to be de-blocked Vichy needed to secure the permission of the United States Treasury Department. In February 1941 Lester undertook to write to the U.S. government in order to assure the Americans that the funds were sought by the Pétain regime on good faith and for legitimate purposes and would not be used for purposes contrary to American policies of neutrality.<sup>38</sup> The approach to the United States was an agreed collaborative effort between the Vichy and the Secretariat. At this time there was no indication from Vichy that the government would, in less than two months, announce its intention to withdraw from the League.

While Pétain's government initially upheld membership of the League and the financial responsibilities incurred by it, it was locked in tense negotiations with a power that was occupying two thirds of its metropolitan territory.<sup>39</sup> At the meetings of Franco-German Armistice Commission held in Wiesbaden in autumn 1940, considerable pressure was applied on the Vichy representatives to interfere in the activities of seconded French international civil servants. Winant's decision to transfer I.L.O. officials to Canada, a belligerent country within the British Commonwealth, confirmed German prejudices towards the League for its pro-Allied sympathies. The president of the French delegation to the Armistice Commission wrote to the French minister of national defence on 19 August 1940, outlining the German position. According to this communication, the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that the I.L.O.'s parent organisation observed 'a hostile attitude towards Germany.'<sup>40</sup> Indeed Carter Goodrich wrote that one of the motivations for Winant's transfer of the I.L.O. to Canada, a country at war with the fascist powers, was to ensure that no one could mistake the 'democratic orientation' of the Labour Office.<sup>41</sup> For this reason the German delegation to Wiesbaden advised their French counterparts that it would be 'opportune' to recall the transferred French officials to Geneva.<sup>42</sup> This communication caused considerable consternation at Vichy and the

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<sup>37</sup> Memorandum by the acting secretary-general on the contribution of France to the expenses of the League of Nations, 29 Oct. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/5).

<sup>38</sup> Lester to R. de la Baume, 28 Feb. 1941 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>39</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> President to the French delegation to the armistice commission to the minister of national defence, 19 Aug. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 7, p. 2).

<sup>41</sup> Goodrich, 'The developing programme of the I.L.O.', p. 185.

<sup>42</sup> President to the French delegation to the armistice commission to the minister of national defence, 19 Aug. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 7, p. 2).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not keen to weaken its involvement with the I.L.O. A Ministry memorandum on the subject cited the long history of French involvement in the formation and development of the I.L.O. and the reluctance on the part of the Vichy government, at this stage, to abdicate 'her place in the concert of nations that she has always occupied.'<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless the French were not in a position to protest too strongly. The need to placate Germany during these years assumed a far greater importance than the struggle to preserve France's international influence; although for erstwhile collaborationists such as Pierre Laval, those two objectives were not irreconcilable.<sup>44</sup>

Accordingly, the Vichy government forwarded a communication to Phelan protesting against the transfer and demanding the return of all officials of French nationality to Geneva.<sup>45</sup> Adrien Tixier, a French I.L.O. official, wrote to René Cassin, the commissioner for public instruction in de Gaulle's embryonic London-based government-in-exile, complaining that the French consulate in Geneva had been instructed to deny visas to any French I.L.O. official intending to travel to Canada.<sup>46</sup> This development placed Phelan in a dilemma. He was aware that Vichy's prohibition would create a conflict of interest for French members of staff between their national and international loyalties. However if the I.L.O. halted the transfer of French officials it would constitute a 'humiliating surrender of its independence and authority.'<sup>47</sup> Phelan wrote to the French government outlining the right of the I.L.O. to send its staff to wherever, in the director's judgment, they could render the best service; however Phelan accepted that French officials could not be sent to Montreal. French officials would either remain in Geneva or work in the small I.L.O. branch office in Washington, where close links could be maintained with their colleagues in Canada.<sup>48</sup> The Vichy government did not pursue the matter further. Vichy's anxiety to retain its involvement in the I.L.O., during this period at least, jarred with its evolving domestic policies. When the Vichy Labour Charter introduced corporatism, suppressed trade unions and the right to strike, I.L.O. officials denounced Pétain's

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<sup>43</sup> Memorandum concerning French relations with the I.L.O., 3 Sep. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 26).

<sup>44</sup> See Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944*, p. 227

<sup>45</sup> Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation', p. 266.

<sup>46</sup> Adrien Tixier to René Cassin, 30 Aug. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 London, P 1708/161, f. 4).

<sup>47</sup> Phelan, 'Some reminiscences of the International Labour Organisation', p. 266.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

government in the *International Labour Review*.<sup>49</sup> Indeed the *International Labour Review* became increasingly preoccupied with describing labour conditions in areas of authoritarian and totalitarian rule.<sup>50</sup> However as the Ministry memorandum demonstrated, I.L.O. membership provided a limited means by which France could retain its 'place in the concert of nations'.<sup>51</sup> This is indicative of role of international organisations as important touchstones for independence and prestige.

Between the summer of 1940 and the spring of 1941 political infighting and intrigue at Vichy would result in the rise to prominence of Pierre Laval only for him to be summarily, if temporally, replaced by Admiral François Darlan. On 19 April 1941 the admiral, in his capacity of minister of foreign affairs, dispatched a curt telegram to Geneva announcing that France was invoking its prerogative to 'retire from the League', and reserved the right to pronounce upon its membership of the I.L.O. at a later date.<sup>52</sup> Lester received this news with some surprise. About six weeks prior to the notice of withdrawal, one of Lester's colleagues in the Secretariat made a visit to Vichy and attempted to acquire some clarification on recent rumours surrounding French membership. The Secretariat official consulted with Pierre Arnal, the acting political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had previously spent many years in charge of League matters at the *Quai d'Orsay*. Arnal informed him that France had no intention of withdrawing from the League. According to Arnal such a move would be contrary to the general policy being followed by France which was to 'await developments' before any action was taken.<sup>53</sup>

The records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs demonstrate that Arnal had not tried to deceive the Secretariat as to French intentions. According to these sources, while the decision to withdraw from the League may have been a long term goal, its eventual execution was swift and resulted from a personal directive from Admiral Darlan. According to Arnal, since the summer of 1940, the prospect of French withdrawal from the League was raised twice by the government. The first time was

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<sup>49</sup> Jaci Leigh Eisenberg, 'Laquelle était la vraie France ? France and the I.L.O. during the Second World War' in Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodriguez Garia, Geert Van Goethem, Marcel ven der Linden (eds), *I.L.O. histories: essays on the International Labour Office and its impact on the world during the twentieth century* (Bern, 2010), p. 346.

<sup>50</sup> Goodrich, 'The developing programme of the I.L.O.', p. 185.

<sup>51</sup> Memorandum concerning French relations with the I.L.O., 3 Sep. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 26).

<sup>52</sup> Admiral Darlan to the acting secretary-general of the League of Nations, 19 Apr. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 47).

<sup>53</sup> Lester to Hambro, 21 Apr. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

in the aftermath of Avenol's leaving office; however the government felt that the resignation of a French secretary-general made it clear that France did not seek to be as active in League affairs as it once had been.<sup>54</sup> This attitude is emblematic of the early stage of the Vichy regime. The original intent of the Vichy government was to retain as much of the independence the armistice allowed them and to make tentative efforts to salvage some of that which was lost. However with the ascendance of Laval and then later of Darlan, the intent, among some, but by no means all, members of Pétain's cabinet, was to secure a prominent place for France and its empire in the German 'New Order'.<sup>55</sup> This would entail going above and beyond the provisions of the armistice in terms of the concessions offered to the Germans; such a policy sealed the fate of French membership of the League.

According to Arnal, the second time the question of French withdrawal from the League was raised was under Laval's first ministry (1940-1). As Jackson has shown, Laval was 'never idealistic about the League of Nations.'<sup>56</sup> The controversial Hoare-Laval Pact of 1935, which ignored the diplomatic role of the League in the Abyssinian crisis, attested to this. Under Laval a text, intended for the Secretariat, was prepared in late 1940 informing member states of French intentions. It was agreed in principle that France would eventually withdraw from the League but the government decided to postpone notification and continue to meet its financial obligations.<sup>57</sup> This decision reflects the heightened predilection for a foreign policy more exclusively concerned with Franco-German relations during the Laval era. The temporary replacement of Laval with Darlan did nothing to reverse the collaborationist course of the Vichy government. Darlan, at this time at least, was convinced of an inevitable German victory and 'shared with his colleagues the delusion that Hitler would make France "his leading vassal state"'.<sup>58</sup> Barely two weeks after Arnal's note revealed that the government was in no hurry to expedite withdrawal, the Secretariat in Geneva received notification that France desired to

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<sup>54</sup> Note by the office of the acting political director of the Ministry of Foreign affairs concerning a question posed by the vice-president of the council, 10 Apr. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12).

<sup>55</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p. 51.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944*, p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> Note by the office of the acting political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning a question posed by the vice-president of the Council, 10 Apr. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12).

<sup>58</sup> Robert L. Melka, 'Darlan between Germany and Britain 1940-41' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, viii (1973), pp 59-60.

leave the League. According to one insider at Vichy in touch with his French peers in the *Palais des Nations*, the decision to formally quit the League was not the result of an ultimatum from the occupying power but was entirely Darlan's own initiative.<sup>59</sup> Darlan returned to Vichy from Paris in the middle of April, requested the League dossier and gave instructions for a notice of withdrawal, showing 'personal, passionate views on the subject.'<sup>60</sup> This supposed antipathy for the League on Darlan's part tallies well with his public utterances of the subject. In August 1941, on the occasion 650<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Helvetic Confederation, Darlan sent his hearty congratulations to the Swiss, informing them that the presence of the League of Nations in Geneva was the only fault he could find with their country.<sup>61</sup> Darlan also claimed that when he visited League headquarters in 1930 to view the construction of the new *Palais des Nations*, he prophesied that 'when this palace is finished the League will be dead.'<sup>62</sup>

The *laissez-faire* approach of the French Foreign Ministry to the conundrum of League membership, indicates that it was under no pressure from Berlin to quit the organisation. Arnal was keen to stress this and affirmed, in his note of the 10 April that at 'no time' did the Germans request the French to retire from the League.<sup>63</sup> It was the French themselves who were determined to sunder a previously valued link with a world that lay outside the German sphere. Such developments correspond to Paxton's judgement of those French government officials who envisaged France as a potential helpmate of the German 'New Order': 'Collaboration was not a German demand to which some Frenchmen acceded, through sympathy or guile. Collaboration was a French proposal that Hitler ultimately rejected.'<sup>64</sup> Vichy's renunciation of French liberal internationalist traditions was not the result of coercion but rather pure initiative. In 1940 Avenol had been astonished to learn that the French government was not interested in his vague proposals for the transformation of the League into an instrument of the new European order. Darlan however did not fail to recognise the incompatibility of the

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<sup>59</sup> Lester to Hambro, 21 Apr. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *Gazette de Lausanne*, 28. Aug. 1941.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Note by the office of the acting political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning a question posed by the vice-president of the Council, 10 Apr. 1940 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12).

<sup>64</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p. 51.



liberal democratic League with that new order. Indeed, it cannot be incidental that the notice of withdrawal was issued against the backdrop of increased Franco-German cooperation. A few days after Darlan issued the notice of withdrawal from the League, Vichy began to support Hitler's African campaign by agreeing to provide Rommel's army in North Africa with 1,100 lorries and 300 liaison vehicles.<sup>65</sup>

Germany may not have been the instigator of French withdrawal but it was the inspiration. As the incident with the I.L.O. transfer to Montreal indicated, Germany was not apathetic to the League and took notice of the Frenchmen working at the heart of the organisation. Berlin, like certain technical officials, identified the League as a satellite agency of the Allies and its international civil servants as an intelligence source for the enemies of the Reich. In August 1941, a few months after Darlan's notice of withdrawal, the German ambassador to France, Otto Abetz, wrote to Fernand de Brinon, Vichy's representative in the occupied territory, singling out André Ganem of the League's Information Section and Benoit Marius Viple of the I.L.O.'s nucleus which remained in Geneva. According to the German ambassador, Ganem was devoted to 'Gaullist propaganda'.<sup>66</sup> Abetz charged Viple with being in contact with prominent leaders of the former Popular Front such as Leon Blum and accused the I.L.O. official of making frequent trips to non-occupied France so that he could pass on information to the British consul in Geneva.<sup>67</sup> This was in fact true on Viple's part and he provided a useful link between the Secretariat and de Gaulle's 'Free French' movement in London.<sup>68</sup> Abetz identified both Ganem and Viple as being Jewish and requested that they be relieved of their functions. Darlan attempted to assure the Germans that the matter was not serious, that Ganem had in fact been suspended like so many other officials during Avenol's campaign of partial liquidation in the summer of 1940.<sup>69</sup> Thus Ganem held no official position in Geneva; the League was no longer responsible for his political activities.<sup>70</sup> According to Darlan, Viple was not in fact Jewish but from 'a family of old stock in the D'Auvergne'.<sup>71</sup> The admiral had no denial for Viple's obvious sympathies with the

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<sup>65</sup> Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944*, p. 181.

<sup>66</sup> Otto Abetz to Fernand de Brinon, 20 Aug. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 69).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Viple to Lester, 5 Mar. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>69</sup> Darlan to de Brinon, 17 Sep. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 75).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Free French but sought to remind the Germans that the personnel of the I.L.O. were expected to remain ‘aloof from ideological controversies.’<sup>72</sup> In the I.L.O.’s case those expectations were far removed from reality. With its social democratic orientation, the I.L.O.’s officials and delegates pitted the organisation as the ideological antithesis to the authoritarianism and corporatism of Vichy.

Under the terms of the Covenant, following a notification of withdrawal, two years had to elapse for that withdrawal to be given legal effect. This gave member states ample time to meet all outstanding financial obligations to the League and allowed them to reverse the decision if they so wished. French withdrawal from the League was due for legal activation in April 1943. By that time the Allied Operation Torch led to the loss of Vichy control of North-West Africa and the occupation of France’s entire metropolitan territory by the *Wehrmacht*. The growing rivalry between London-based General Charles de Gaulle and Algiers-based General Henri Giraud over leadership of a nascent Free French authority also enacted important repercussions for French membership of the League.<sup>73</sup> From 1942 onwards there was a push to reconcile General de Gaulle’s National Committee in London with General Giraud’s North African Administration. The League’s involvement in that process was indicative of the reality of its wartime experience as an ostensibly functionalist organisation prone to arousing political and diplomatic controversy.

Against the backdrop of the French domestic situation, the acting-general recognised an opportunity to secure some positive propaganda for the League. In March 1943 Lester wrote that did not want to see the historic link between the League and France sundered ‘in the humiliation of to-day.’<sup>74</sup> On 13 February 1943 Lester wrote to William Strang in the British Foreign Office stating that he was ‘naturally concerned to maintain the League membership as strongly as possible and particularly that France should not leave as a result of Darlan’s rather irresponsible action.’<sup>75</sup> Lester outlined to the Foreign Office several initiatives which he believed could rescind Darlan’s notice of withdrawal. Lester argued that a declaration issued either jointly or separately by de Gaulle and Giraud renouncing the validity of

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<sup>72</sup> Darlan to de Brinon, 17 Sep. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2805/6, f. 75).

<sup>73</sup> For further information on the Vichy and Free French elements during this period see Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944*, pp 447-59.

<sup>74</sup> Note on France and the League of Nations by the acting secretary-general, 12 Mar. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>75</sup> Lester to William Strang, 13 Feb. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

Darlan's notification, might have the desired effect.<sup>76</sup> According to Lester, a mutual declaration on the part of the generals would be beneficial to France and to the purpose of creating a recognised provisional government-in-exile. He argued that the 'outlook [was] generally sympathetic to any joint action likely to smooth the path for fuller co-operation between Giraud and de Gaulle.'<sup>77</sup> However this was the difficulty in leaving the initiative with the two generals-neither carried any legitimate governmental authority and neither could claim to speak for the whole of France.

In his communication of 13 February Lester also mooted the possibility of the United Kingdom and other League governments declaring that 'until the French are in a position to freely decide' France would 'have her place in the League.'<sup>78</sup> This scenario would set an unusual precedent as in the past the League permitted authoritarian governments to speak as the legal representatives of their respective countries. For instance the Secretariat never challenged Francisco Franco when he curtailed Spanish membership of the League in 1939 and followed the example of Britain and France in treating the new regime as the legal government of Spain.<sup>79</sup> According to Lester, the latter approach in regard to the preservation of French membership could be approved by de Gaulle and Giraud and 'would have the advantage of another political reassurance to the people of France that free nations were acting as a kind of trustee of France's future international position.'<sup>80</sup> The fact that Lester was ready to overlook League protocol in order to safeguard French membership of the organisation was a reflection of the historic importance of France to the creation and development of the League of Nations.

On 2 March 1943 William Strang wrote to Lester outlining his government's position. According to Strang, as far as the British were concerned, the legal position was that 'Darlan was entitled to speak for the French government' at the time in which notification was given and that 'no declaration by de Gaulle or Giraud or both could legally be held to cancel the French government's note of 1941.'<sup>81</sup> The crucial factor determining the British position was that in 1941 the vast majority of member states, including the United Kingdom, accorded the Vichy regime recognition as the legal government of France, even if they did not retain diplomatic relations with the

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<sup>76</sup> Lester to William Strang, 13 Feb. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Lester's note to the Supervisory Commission, 30 Apr. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>80</sup> Lester to Strang, 13 Feb. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>81</sup> Strang to Lester, 2 Mar. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

regime.<sup>82</sup> There was thus no compelling case for the nullification of Darlan's note in either 1941 or 1943. Furthermore, the League was not in a position to recognise the authority of Generals Giraud or de Gaulle whose faltering attempts at forming effective government or military command in exile, either jointly or independently, failed to inspire confidence in Britain or the United States. Dependent as he was upon British support, Lester had no choice but to heed Whitehall's advice and drop the matter. Lester, like Avenol, learned that there was a crucial limitation to the political influence of the office of secretary-general. While the secretary-general could advise governments, the League's lack of supranational function meant that he could not achieve his political ends if they were not prepared to listen to him.

While the secretary-general could not embark on any attempt to preserve French membership, it was clear that some of his French colleagues could not be induced to ignore this matter and they found willing collaborators among members of de Gaulle and Giraud's retinues. One such figure was the I.L.O.'s Marius Viple, previously under the suspicion of the Reich Foreign Ministry. Viple has been characterised in previous historiography as being anxious to accommodate Vichy within the I.L.O., despite its controversial labour practices, so as to ensure some semblance of French participation in the organisation.<sup>83</sup> However, by 1943 Viple supported the efforts of the Free French.<sup>84</sup> He was in close contact with René Massigli, the one-time head of the League of Nations section at the *Quai d'Orsay*, who went to London in January 1943 to serve de Gaulle, first as commissioner for foreign affairs, then as his ambassador to the United Kingdom. According to Viple, several suggestions on the subject of French membership of the League had already reached 'our friend Massigli' by March 1943 who was reportedly 'anxious' for something to be done on the subject.<sup>85</sup> Former League officials were prominent in the Free French movement. Among de Gaulle's first followers in London was René Cassin, one of the future architects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Cassin served as the French delegate to the League of Nations from 1924-38 and strove to transform the Assembly from a forum of world peace to a juridical

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<sup>82</sup> Strang to Lester, 2 Mar. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>83</sup> Eisenberg, 'Laquelle était la vraie France?', p. 360.

<sup>84</sup> Benoit Marius Viple to Lester, 5 Mar. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Assembly.<sup>86</sup> Cassin was determined that de Gaulle's Free French movement should usurp Vichy as the recognised government of France.<sup>87</sup> In addition, Avenol's predecessor as deputy secretary-general, Jean Monnet, operated as an advisor to President Roosevelt. By 1943 Monnet was trying to entice Giraud away from his past loyalties to Pétain and to stir the general into healthier relations with the Allies.<sup>88</sup> The political expediency of retaining a connection between France and the League, as a means of challenging Vichy's authority, could not be lost on those figures trying to create a rival government authority.

Events came to a head with the intensification of efforts on the part of Frenchmen, in both London and Algiers, to bring de Gaulle and Giraud into a closer working relationship. Robert Murphy, Roosevelt's representative in North Africa, informed General Georges Catroux, De Gaulle's envoy to Giraud, that the U.S. government thought it opportune for France to retain a connection with the League and the I.L.O.<sup>89</sup> Without recognising any government of France, Murphy predicted that continued French commitment to peaceful internationalism would have positive implications for the post-war international order.<sup>90</sup> With American support acting as the catalyst, both Generals Giraud and de Gaulle dispatched telegrams to the secretary-general on 16 April 1941. In his telegram Giraud informed the secretary-general that:

Frenchmen at present free to express their will cannot accept as effective the notification which was given to you on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1941, without having allowed the French people [who were] deprived of the possibility of expressing [their] sovereignty through their legitimate representatives, of expressing their wishes and opinion about France's position towards the League of Nations. In consequence I beg you to grant your kind consideration to the fact that this notification, given under foreign pressure, cannot be validated [and] that France continues to be a member of the League of Nations.<sup>91</sup>

De Gaulle's telegram contained the same message and expressed his own administration's practical commitment to League membership. The general

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<sup>86</sup> Jay Winter, *Dreams of peace and freedom: utopian moments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century* (New Haven, 2006), p. 107.

<sup>87</sup> René Cassin, 'Vichy or Free France?' in *Foreign Affairs*, xx (1941), p. 106.

<sup>88</sup> Monnet, *Memoirs*, p. 186.

<sup>89</sup> Maurice Dejean to the Foreign Office, 14 Apr. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Telegram from General Henri Giraud to the acting secretary-general, 16 Apr. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

reminded Lester that his London-based National Committee had always kept the League informed of the measures taken with regard to the territories entrusted to France in the Cameroons and the Levant (which fell to Allied and Free French forces in 1941) under the Mandates Commission.<sup>92</sup> Both generals denied the legitimacy of Vichy, its right to speak for the French people and claimed that the decision to withdraw was made under duress from Berlin. As we have seen this was not the case but it was the presence of an occupying power in France and the pressure it was exerting on the French government and economy which allowed the Free French to deny Vichy's legitimacy. This was the motivation René Cassin's 1941 declaration that Free France was the 'true France': 'the Vichy government is both illegal and illegitimate. The fact is important both from a legal and a moral point of view.'<sup>93</sup> While the generals sent separate communications, in each of the telegrams both men acknowledged that they were acting in concert with the other. The British Foreign Office learned that the Catroux mission was 'entirely satisfied with the announcement' which was 'in exact accordance with the texts agreed between Generals Giraud and de Gaulle.'<sup>94</sup> Lester's vision of the League acting as the medium to bring greater cooperation between de Gaulle and Giraud came to pass. The telegrams were issued before de Gaulle's departure for Algiers to establish, with Giraud, the new French Committee of National Liberation (C.F.L.N.) and marks one of the first examples of cooperation between the London and Algiers administrations. When the C.F.L.N. was formally established in June 1943, the secretary-general received a formal communication from the Committee, outlining its political and social objectives.<sup>95</sup>

The League of Nations was an intergovernmental organisation devoid of supranational function. As such its international civil service did not have executive authority to take important political decisions for its member states. While the secretary-general and the Supervisory Commission could act for member states in matters of League procedure and administration during the war years, the de Gaulle-Giraud telegrams raised a delicate political conundrum. Lester and the Supervisory Commission could not afford unreserved acceptance of the de Gaulle-Giraud

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<sup>92</sup> Telegram from General Charles de Gaulle to the acting secretary-general, 16 Apr. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6). By this time the Free French had gained military control over these areas.

<sup>93</sup> Cassin, 'Vichy or Free France?', p. 106.

<sup>94</sup> Telegram from Lord Duncannon to the Foreign Office, 17 Apr. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>95</sup> Telegram from the C.F.L.N. to Lester, 17 June 1943 (A.F.M.A., War 1939-45 London, P 1708/160, f. 14).

communications lest it alienate the vast majority of member states, who, if they recognised any French authority at all at this stage, it was unlikely to be the fledgling C.F.L.N.<sup>96</sup> Thus Lester and the Supervisory Commission were obliged to remain discreet and adeptly avoided any pronouncements on the legality of the Free French declarations. Rather the text of the telegrams was disseminated on 20 April 1943 for the ‘information of member states.’<sup>97</sup> In a letter to the generals Hambro simply acknowledged receipt of the telegrams. He praised the Free French adherence to the terms set by the League’s Mandates Commission (which had been unable to meet in the war years) as an example of the ‘spirit of the finest traditions of France’ which gave ‘faith in a future of international honour and responsibility.’<sup>98</sup> In the aftermath of the de Gaulle-Giraud telegrams, the British concluded that there should not be any difficulty in agreeing to Free French involvement in League affairs so long as they did so as representatives of the territories which were in their control, rather than as representatives of the government of France.<sup>99</sup> In this way, by alluding to those territories in the Cameroons and in the Levant which were no longer in the control of the Vichy government, the Supervisory Commission was able to acknowledge and encourage the Free French commitment to internationalism without recognising its right to speak for metropolitan France.

The problem of the French contribution to the League budget would not be so easily parried. Without procuring the express permission from member states to do so, accepting contributions from regimes of uncertain legitimacy risked embroiling the League in a diplomatic quagmire. Denmark and Latvia caused similar problems for the Supervisory Commission. Denmark was unique among the countries occupied by Germany, permitted as it was to retain control of its own government and police; thus the Secretariat addressed all Danish correspondence to the legal government in Copenhagen. On 29 August 1940 Lester received a communication from a Danish diplomat, announcing Copenhagen’s decision to ‘recall its representation to the League of Nations, close down the office of the delegation in

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<sup>96</sup> For example, the British government, for example, did not recognise the C.F.L.N. until August 1943 and in May 1944 de Gaulle annoyed Roosevelt by changing the name of the C.F.L.N. to the Provisional Government of the French Republic (G.P.R.F.). See Julian Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944* (Oxford, 2001), p. 459, p. 543.

<sup>97</sup> Lester to Livingstone, 20 Apr. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>98</sup> *The Times*, 26 Apr. 1943.

<sup>99</sup> Harold McMillan to Eden, 21 May 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

Geneva, and cease to contribute to the League.’<sup>100</sup> In the summer of 1943 Carl Hambro was approached by Henrik De Kauffmann, Denmark’s former minister to Washington, who expressing his conviction that the Danish government would soon ‘pay all arrears in full.’<sup>101</sup> De Kauffmann was dismissed by his government in 1942 after signing, without permission, an agreement with the United States for the military protection of Greenland and amidst worsening U.S.-Danish relations was recognised in Washington as a virtual one-man government-in-exile.<sup>102</sup> As member states still recognised the democratically elected Copenhagen government, Hambro advised de Kauffmann that ‘the most discreet course would be not to bring the matter up’ at that moment in time.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, in 1943 the Latvian Minister in Washington paid a token contribution to the League budget covering the years 1941-3, as well as some of the arrears owed for the 1940 financial period into the League’s account at the Banker’s Trust Company of New York.<sup>104</sup> Baltic ministers and consuls, while still recognised by the United States at this time, were no longer recognised by the vast majority of League member states following the Sovietisation of the Baltic states in 1940. Hambro consulted with the British Foreign Office to determine the appropriate action to take and it was agreed that the League ‘ought to abstain from any action which might prejudice future decisions and which might embarrass loyal member states.’<sup>105</sup> Thus it was decided that the money deposited by the Latvian minister should not be touched but rather left in a suspense account and could be withdrawn by Minister Bilmanis if he so wished. The intent of renegade diplomats to make a contribution to the League was emblematic of the League’s role as a signifier of legitimacy and sovereignty.

At a meeting in New York in June 1943 the Supervisory Commission agreed that it could not accept contributions from any source which was not regarded, by a consensus of member states, as a legal government authority.<sup>106</sup> The Supervisory Commission decided to obviate any political controversy with the C.F.L.N. and with

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<sup>100</sup> The Danish minister, Port-of-Spain, to the acting secretary-general of the League of Nations, 29 Aug. 1940 (T.N.A., FO 371/24443, f. 105); *Gazette de Lausanne*, 20 July 1940.

<sup>101</sup> Minutes of a preparatory session of the Supervisory Commission held in New York, 9 June 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/12).

<sup>102</sup> Bo Lidegaard, *A short history of Denmark in the 20<sup>th</sup> century* (Copenhagen, 2009), pp 155-6.

<sup>103</sup> Minutes of a preparatory session of the Supervisory Commission held in New York, 9 June 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/12).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Minutes of a preparatory session of the Supervisory Commission held in New York, 9 June 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/12).



member states by deciding that while France would still be included within the organisation's official list of member states, no contribution would be shown against this state.<sup>107</sup> In this way the Supervisory Commission could recognise French membership without recognising any of the rival government that claimed to speak for the French people.<sup>108</sup> This same measure had been applied to Ethiopian membership in the wake of the Italian conquest.

The dilemma of the French contribution further underlined the difficult working relationship between the League and the I.L.O. with Phelan adopting a different position to that of the League's Supervisory Commission. In Darlan's 1941 communiqué to the acting secretary-general, the Vichy government reserved the right to pronounce upon the fate of French membership of the I.L.O. As no subsequent communication was received, Phelan insisted that there was no cancellation of French membership, with which the British Foreign Office concurred.<sup>109</sup> In official documents the I.L.O. continued to list the French contribution. According to Phelan, 'very considerable importance was attached in Washington to maintaining continuity' of French membership and actual payment of its contribution to the I.L.O.'s budget was considered of secondary importance.<sup>110</sup> Lester confided to Jacklin that he resented Phelan's tactics, attributing them 'to another stage in their separatist policy-an attempt to establish the membership of France of the I.L.O. as something independent and distinct from France's membership of the League.'<sup>111</sup> Lester commented that there was 'a deuce a lot of politics about this question' as Phelan's decision entailed recognising Darlan's right to make the decision while embarking on a seemingly opposing relationship with the Free French.<sup>112</sup>

In fact the I.L.O., always one step ahead of the League Secretariat, had been cooperating with the Free French since the New York Conference of October-November 1941. With the encouragement of the French I.L.O. official Adrien Tixier and with the support of the British Government, the Governing Body permitted

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<sup>107</sup> Minutes of the ninety-second meeting of the Supervisory Commission, 27 July 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Roberts to Sir Frederick Leggett [British government representative to I.L.O.], 29 June 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>110</sup> Telegram from Phelan to Leggett, 24 June 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34517).

<sup>111</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 23 July 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Henry Hauck, de Gaulle's Socialist director of labour, to serve as an unofficial observer to the conference.<sup>113</sup> According to French archival sources, Hauck recognised the political significance of the New York Conference and was determined that the Free French should participate in such an important demonstration for social justice.<sup>114</sup> France's official government representative to the New York Conference was Vichy's Francois de Panafieu, an advisor to Pétain's ambassador to the United States, Gaston Henry-Haye. De Panafieu was compelled to agree to Hauck's addressing the conference on the condition that the latter made no direct attack on the government of Marshal Pétain.<sup>115</sup> Hauck, when granted permission by Frances Perkins to address the assembled delegates, refrained from a direct denunciation of Vichy but wasted no time in proclaiming de Gaulle's London-based National Committee as the 'true France.'<sup>116</sup> Such a declaration was already in keeping with the pro-Allied atmosphere of the New York Conference. The I.L.O. was never likely to appease the Vichy government when it had already publicly attacked it for its prohibition of organised labour. Regarding the I.L.O.'s condemnation of its labour policies as 'provocation', Vichy, unlike the Free French, did not field a tripartite delegation with no worker or employer representatives present in New York.<sup>117</sup> Hauck reported that delegations, particularly the American delegation, were extremely sympathetic to the Free French and expressed their admiration for the heroism of French workers engaged in the Resistance.<sup>118</sup> The Free French movement shared an ideological affinity with the I.L.O. which was later strengthened by the C.F.L.N. When Adrien Tixier left the Labour Office to become the commissioner for social affairs of the C.F.L.N., he requested the assistance of the I.L.O. in the framing of social measures for the territory under the Committee's control.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Henry Hauck to Maurice Dejean, 7 Nov. 1941 (A.F.M.A., War 1939-45 London, P 1708/161, f. 27).

<sup>114</sup> Hauck to Phelan, 18 Apr. 1941 (A.F.M.A., War 1939-45 London, P 1708/161, f. 3).

<sup>115</sup> Francois de Panafieu to Gaston Henry-Haye, 7 Nov. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 59).

<sup>116</sup> Eisenberg, 'Laquelle était la vraie France', p. 350.

<sup>117</sup> De Panafieu to Henry-Haye, 7 Nov. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., War 1939-45 Vichy, P 2804/12, f. 59); *Cairns Post*, 31 Dec. 1941.

<sup>118</sup> Telegram from Hauck to the commissariat of foreign affairs, 1 Nov. 1941 (A.F.M.A., War 1939-45 London, P 1708/161, f. 26)

<sup>119</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-sixth session: director's report* (Montreal, 1944), p. 78, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P, official documents).

It is important to note that cooperation between France, the League and the I.L.O. remained largely informal in the manner of the past participation of the United States in many of the League's technical activities. By July 1944 representatives of Free French in North Africa were participating in the meetings of the Economic and Finance Committee of the League. Officials under the control of the C.F.L.N. provided information to the Health Section. The League's publications were also transmitted, either from Geneva, or from Princeton, to the C.F.L.N. in London.<sup>120</sup> Victor Yves Ghébalí claimed that by 1943 Free France became the representative of France in all existing international organisations, including the League and the I.L.O.: Jaci Leigh Eisenberg claimed that it happened much earlier because of the ideological rupture between Vichy and the I.L.O.<sup>121</sup> In reality, Free France, even after the formation of the C.F.L.N., was not recognised by the League hierarchy as a legitimate governmental authority representing all French citizens. Had recognition actually been conferred on the C.F.L.N. it would have constituted a profound break in the character and procedures of the League and the I.L.O. The League was not a supranational body with the power to speak on behalf of member states: rather member states had the right to speak through it. As it transpired the League did not treat de Gaulle as the rightful leader of France until the general became the president of the internationally recognised Provisional Government of the French Republic in August 1944. On 25 October 1944 Jean Paul Boncour, a former French delegate to the League Assembly, was dispatched by his minister for foreign affairs to 'renew relations and cooperation with the Secretariat.'<sup>122</sup> Boncour informed Lester that he was instructed by the new French government to declare to the secretary-general that 'France remained loyal to the principles and ideals of the League' and that, in its view, French membership of the League remained 'unbroken.'<sup>123</sup> This had been the ultimate goal of the Supervisory Commission-an 'unbroken' tradition of French cooperation with the League until the moment formal association could be resumed.<sup>124</sup> The Provisional Government made a contribution to the League budget in late 1944.

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<sup>120</sup> Memorandum by the acting secretary-general, 14 July 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

<sup>121</sup> Victor Yves Ghébalí, *La France en guerre et les organisations internationales 1939-45* (Mouton, 1969), p. 125; Eisenberg, 'Laquelle était la vraie France?', p. 360.

<sup>122</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 25 Oct. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/5).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Minutes of the ninety-second meeting of the Supervisory Commission, 27 July 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/6).

As discussed in chapter two, the French national experience enacted deep repercussions within the international civil service; repercussions that did not immediately fade with Avenol's departure from Geneva. Lester wrote in November 1941 that:

the Secretariat and the League still suffer from the moral bankruptcy of the Unspeakable Joseph. Not only did he fail us completely in all that is looked for in a chief, but he plunged us at a critical time into an internal struggle for decency and (forgive me!) honour. For some months there was not one action of influence of his that was not undignified, unmoral and destructive.<sup>125</sup>

Indeed Avenol continued to prove a complicating and disruptive influence, making an unwelcome return to the pages of Lester's diaries in May 1942. Lester learned from Charron that Avenol had approached him and shown him a letter which he had proposed sending to Pétain. According to Charron, the letter argued that the future of France lay in collaboration with the Germans whose victory was inevitable.<sup>126</sup> Yet Avenol continued to lack any form of ideological consistency. The previous year he attempted to build bridges with the Foreign Office, writing to Anthony Eden in January 1941. He expressed his admiration for the 'endurance, the tenacity and the heroism' of the British fighting spirit and sought to justify his own attempts to ingratiate himself with Vichy to the British Foreign Office, assuring Eden that he had simply been led by a desire to be loyal to his country.<sup>127</sup> This was the closest Avenol came, in all of his correspondence, to acknowledging his accountability for the summer of 1940. Eden thanked Avenol for his sentiments and pointedly expressed his confidence that France would once more show 'herself to be worthy of her great traditions.'<sup>128</sup>

Avenol returned to the environs of Geneva on the last day of 1943. He wrote to the American legation claiming that he was compelled to leave France after having incurred a private warning from the French police upon their discovery of clandestine pro-Resistance literature in his house; the former secretary-general was consequently worried that the Germans might deport him.<sup>129</sup> Lester subsequently

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<sup>125</sup> Lester to Makins, 3 Nov. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>126</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 27 May 1942 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 2, p. 407).

<sup>127</sup> Avenol to Eden, 5 Jan. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 90).

<sup>128</sup> Eden to Avenol, 30 Jan. 1941 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 92).

<sup>129</sup> Note by Lester, 7 Feb. 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P); Schwebel, *The secretary-general of the United Nations*, p. 215.

heard that Avenol had in fact been threatened by local members of the Resistance.<sup>130</sup> He conceded that with Avenol anything might be true. Edouard de Haller of the Swiss Political Department informed Lester that Avenol was granted permission by the federal government to reside in Switzerland on the condition that he abstained from all political activity.<sup>131</sup> That would be no easy request of such a politically-minded figure as Avenol.

The legacy of Avenol's actions bred divisions within the Secretariat. As de Gaulle's Free French movement gained greater prominence, accusations of betrayal were slung at colleagues who had previously sympathised with the architects of Vichy. In May 1944 René Charron, Avenol's former confidante, was charged by Dr. Yves Biraud of the Health Section of having 'been ready to in 1940 to join with Avenol in selling the League to the *Boches*.'<sup>132</sup> Loveday also refused to trust Charron and warned Lester that he was 'walking into a trap' where the Frenchman was concerned.<sup>133</sup> Charron reacted vehemently to these accusations pointing out that Biraud himself had actually offered his services to the Vichy government in the aftermath of the armistice.<sup>134</sup> Lester sought to do what he could to 'soften the bitter feelings between French members of staff' in the hope that the 'whole thing could be worked out and forgotten.'<sup>135</sup> Lester was personally completely antipathetic to Vichy but reserved his ire for those who went above and beyond the terms of the armistice to become 'vehement collaborationists.'<sup>136</sup> The acting secretary-general would not condemn those League officials who continued to be loyal to what was, technically, the legal government of France. As Jackson has argued, in the early days of Vichy 'disobeying the regime caused a greater crisis than obeying it.'<sup>137</sup> Lester informed the two warring Frenchmen that firstly, he did not believe Charron to be pro-German and that secondly, it was perfectly understandable of a doctor of Biraud's standing to want to assist his country in its hour of need. Lester was aware that René Charron, despite his past loyalty to the former secretary-general, had broken off entirely with Avenol upon the latter's return to Geneva and that Charron, because of his useful

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<sup>130</sup> Note by Lester, 7 Feb. 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>131</sup> Note by Lester, 23 Feb. 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>132</sup> Note by Lester, 8 May 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>133</sup> Loveday to Lester, 30 Oct. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 858).

<sup>134</sup> Note by Lester, 8 May 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Note by Lester, 3 Feb. 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>137</sup> Jackson, *France: the dark years 1940-1944*, pp 134-5.

contacts in France, had been passing on information and intelligence to American diplomats in Geneva.<sup>138</sup> Lester's Geneva Secretariat was an international civil service that was arguably badly scarred from divided national loyalties.

#### **The League and the internationalist debate 1940-4**

With France too engrossed in the crisis of its own sovereignty to fulfil its traditionally dominant role in League affairs, it fell to the other half of the inter-war double-act, the United Kingdom, to champion the organisation through the war years. In his report to member states on the work of the League during the period 1940-1, Lester paid tribute 'to those states which, although directly affected by the war, have not failed to carry out their financial obligations.'<sup>139</sup> Britain and its Dominions provided the bulk of financial support to the League during its final years and the British government largely covered the immediate costs of transferring the League's technical missions to the United States.<sup>140</sup> Despite the pressures of wartime economies, the financial contribution from Britain soon represented almost thirty per cent of League income and the combined contributions of the Empire and Commonwealth represented over sixty per cent of the total amount extracted from member states.<sup>141</sup> At Geneva, up until the suspension of the Assembly, Britain and its Dominions worked together to present a united front within the League apparatus; at the same time membership of the League allowed the Dominion governments to project their growing independence.<sup>142</sup> This tradition was upheld during the war years with regular meetings taking place between the representatives of the Dominion states and the British Government on League matters. During these meetings the work of the League's technical organisations were spoken of approvingly.<sup>143</sup> The League's budget was routinely discussed but there was no need

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<sup>138</sup> Note by Lester, 8 May 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.); Lester to Loveday, 3 Jan. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>139</sup> *Brief statement on the activities of the League of Nations and its organs in 1940 and 1941: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1941), p. 7, available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/1).

<sup>140</sup> Official record of conversation between Avenol and Kelly at the *Palais des Nations*, Geneva, 27 June 1940 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 464).

<sup>141</sup> Foreign Office memorandum, 1 Aug. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26644).

<sup>142</sup> Sally Marks, 'The small states at Geneva' in *World Affairs*, clvii (1995), p. 191.

<sup>143</sup> Minutes of the meeting between British and Dominion representatives of the League of Nations held at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 27 July 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/30988).

to raise the subject of arrears since it was the Dominion states that proved the most steadfast in their financial support for the organisation.

There was some parliamentary opposition in Britain to the government's commitment to the League and its role as one of its main sources of capital in straitened times. This disapproval was augmented by the failure of other member states to meet their obligations. In a session of the House of Commons in November 1943 one M.P. rejected the notion that a defaulting member state should still be allowed to remain in the League and argued that an Imperial Conference would serve a more useful purpose than continued membership of moribund organisation.<sup>144</sup> Facing the enormity of years of conflict and the massive breakdown in international relations, London might have been forgiven for jettisoning its connections with Geneva in order to employ the Commonwealth as its sole vehicle for multilateral cooperation. After all the British war effort depended on the pooling of imperial resources, the combined might of all the armed forces, as well as cooperation in industry, trade and food production.<sup>145</sup> However Richard Law, the parliamentary under secretary of state for foreign affairs, dismissed such an idea and any other which might be seen to 'weaken an institution to which it is obvious His Majesty's Governments in all the Dominions attach so much importance.'<sup>146</sup> The British Commonwealth was predicated on a shared imperial history and operated on the assumption of common legal and political traditions. The League, while certainly not culturally relativist, was a less exclusive club that could facilitate transnational encounters of a more varied kind.

Without British financial and moral support the League's wartime mission would have foundered and there would be no prospect of preserving a technocratic continuity between pre-war and post-war international cooperation. The two most prominent figures in government, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, were eager to engage in a public defence of the League's reputation. In a national broadcast on 21 March 1943, Churchill made the following declaration:

I hope we shall not lightly cast aside all the immense work which was accomplished by the League of Nations. Certainly we must take as our

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<sup>144</sup> House of Commons debate [hereafter H.C. deb.], 10 Nov. 1943, vol. 393, c. 1124.

<sup>145</sup> Chapnick, *Canada and the founding of the United Nations* (Vancouver, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>146</sup> H.C. deb., 10 Nov. 1943, vol. 393, c. 1124.

foundation the lofty conception of freedom law and morality which was the spirit of the League.<sup>147</sup>

Eden too hoped that the experience of the League would provide some foundation for any new experiment in international organisation. The foreign secretary was always ready, in the House of Commons, to praise the vitality and usefulness of the technical services and cited their relevance for the future project of reconstruction.<sup>148</sup> Such public declarations were firmly in step with the long-term aspirations of League apologists.<sup>149</sup> While such signs were encouraging for the acting secretary-general, the vagueness and uncertainty surrounding the organisation's future as well as the career prospects of his staff were a constant source of anxiety, with the Secretariat 'living from week to month' when the future was 'dark and unknown.'<sup>150</sup> Lester did not even know for what purpose he was keeping the League intact. In 1939 member states had suspended the Assembly and Council and as the war wore on the reconstitution of the League of Nations, in its pre-war form, became an increasingly unlikely prospect. In 1942 an article in *The Observer* opined: 'no one expects the League of Nations to resume its larger activities after the war with its constitution and general organisation unchanged. But to keep the League alive as the basis on which the international structure of the future may be based is elementary wisdom.'<sup>151</sup> In 1942 Sir Cecil Kisch, the British member of the Supervisory Commission and the assistant under secretary of state for India, conceded in a letter to Lester that his task was not an enviable one and that no one yet knew the precise form internationalism would take at the war's end:

It is not an easy thing to keep the League in being during this period of crisis, and what you are doing by remaining in Geneva and by directing the operations outside is an essential factor in the matter and must make in the end a powerful contribution to the eventual revival of international co-operation in whatever form this may come about.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> A report of the executive committee to the General Council of the League of Nations Union for the year ending, 31 Dec. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/40489).

<sup>148</sup> H.C. deb., 2 Dec. 1942, vol. 385, cc 1181-260.

<sup>149</sup> See for example Donald Hall to K.I. Hancock, 19 May 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/39307, f. 18).

<sup>150</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 1 Jan. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, pp 672-3).

<sup>151</sup> *The Observer*, 24 May 1942.

<sup>152</sup> Kisch to Lester, 10 June 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).



Roger Makins informed Lester in 1942 that the post-war reconstitution of the League was unlikely; rather ‘an international administration not differing in essentials from the League’ would be created, ‘dressed up in a new form.’<sup>153</sup> Makins outlined what return he thought member states expected of the wartime preservation of the international civil service: ‘With the increasing scale and momentum of the conflict, neither the Labour Office, nor the Secretariat, can do much more than safeguard their institutions and traditions, carry on their limited resources and prepare, as far as they are able to prepare, to assist in the solution of immediate post-war problems.’<sup>154</sup> While the League was not destined to serve as the vehicle for post-war international cooperation, its wartime activities could still provide inspiration for governments and serve as an important bridge between the old international order and the new.

From 1942 onwards, in the aftermath of the United Nations Declaration, it was clear that the new international order would, in the event of an Allied victory, be determined by the three great powers of the United States, the U.S.S.R. (which became an Allied power upon the breach of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact when German forces invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941) and the United Kingdom through the framework of the ‘United Nations’ alliance.<sup>155</sup> The United Nations powers identified themselves as ‘engaged in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to subjugate the world.’<sup>156</sup> By April 1942 the Foreign Office had an established goal ‘to substitute the more organic conception of the United Nations for the old political structure of the League, but to work into this new organism the I.L.O. and the tried technical services of the League.’<sup>157</sup> With the Moscow Declaration of October 1943 the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China affirmed that they recognised ‘the necessity of establishing, at the earliest possible date, a general international organisation, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace-loving states, and open to membership by all such states, large and small, for the maintenance of international

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<sup>153</sup> Makins to Lester, 2 Jan. 1942 (T.N.A., FO 371/26656).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Cabinet conclusions, 27 Nov. 1942 (T.N.A., CAB 65/28/31, p. 182).

<sup>156</sup> Declaration by the United Nations (1942), available at Avalon Project, Yale Law School, ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/decade03.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade03.asp)) (26 Mar. 2012).

<sup>157</sup> Brief prepared for the secretary-of-state’s visit to the United States of America, entitled ‘His Majesty’s Government’s policy towards the League of Nations’, 3 Apr. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34513, f. 109).

peace and security.<sup>158</sup> The intent of Washington, London and (later and to a lesser extent) Moscow was to construct a new international organisation. Pressed with the more immediate object of winning the war, this project was not initially invested with the same degree of urgency and clarity.<sup>159</sup> This lack of clarity among the United Nations powers was another compelling factor that sustained the wartime preservation of the League. Winston Churchill told his cabinet colleagues that it ‘was important not to make any public statements underrating the conception or the achievements of the League of Nations’ until the British government was ‘in a position to make positive suggestions for something to put in its place.’<sup>160</sup> The Foreign Office was also at pains to assure League supporters that there would be no attempt to dissolve the organisation until an adequate replacement emerged.<sup>161</sup> Premature dissolution of the League of Nations was regarded as an unwelcome prospect in Washington for the same reason.<sup>162</sup>

While some League officials, national civil servants, public figures and intellectuals were eager for the League to retain a relevance to a post-war international order, others were anxious to see a profound break with the assumptions and principles that had underpinned the internationalism of the past. In the aftermath of the previous cataclysmic war, ardent internationalists hoped that the moral obligations of the Covenant constituted sufficient encouragement for the maintenance of peace and security.<sup>163</sup> Other more realistic observers were impressed with the need to reform the League apparatus, almost from the moment of its birth.<sup>164</sup> The totality of the war demonstrated that a new system of international cooperation would simply have to accommodate modern realities. E.H. Carr’s seminal *Conditions of Peace* (1944) notably attacked the idealist paradigm of the League of Nations as being insufficient to deal with inter-state tensions, particularly between those countries possessing different systems of government.<sup>165</sup> According to Carr:

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<sup>158</sup> The Moscow Conference, October 1943: Joint Four-nation Declaration, available from Yale Law School, the Avalon Project (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/moscow.asp>) (5 Mar. 2010).

<sup>159</sup> Anthony Eden, *The memoirs of Anthony Eden Earl of Avon: the reckoning* (Boston, 1965), p. 423.

<sup>160</sup> Cabinet conclusions, 27 Nov. 1942 (T.N.A., CAB 65/28/31, p. 183).

<sup>161</sup> Donald Hall to K.I. Hancock, 19 May 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/39307, f. 18).

<sup>162</sup> Makins to Lester, 5 Sep. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>163</sup> J. Martin Rochester, *Fundamental principles of international relations* (Philadelphia, 2010), pp 19-20.

<sup>164</sup> Sharp, *The Versailles settlement*, p. 1.

<sup>165</sup> Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 165.

the tradition of the League of Nations is one of frustration and-more fatally still-of association with the interests of a particular group of powers; and its ideology was also derived from nineteenth century political traditions which have already proved inadequate to solve our modern problems.<sup>166</sup>

Cohesion between the great powers on security matters was more important than achieving ideological conformity. Upon his award of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation medal in December 1943, Field Marshal Smuts shared his views on the organisation he helped to create in 1919, in a broadcast to the United States. He did 'not agree that the League went too far or attempted too much, but it was perhaps true that its founders were dominated by idealistic expectations sadly out of tune with the hard realism of the times, and it was this hard won realism which finally exploded the idealism.'<sup>167</sup> In his 1942 report to member states, Lester conceded that security should be the prime focus of post-war internationalism: 'Between nations there must be law, there must be justice; but there must be force, economic and military, behind that law and justice.'<sup>168</sup> John A. Thompson noted that while Wilsonianism remained a feature of American foreign policy in the war years, commitment to the principles of equality between states, self-determination and the extension of democracy was less wholehearted.<sup>169</sup> A war-weary world could not be asked to accept an international organisation that was better at projecting liberal democracy than maintaining peace and security. Leo Amery, the British secretary of state for India, offered the following words of caution to his cabinet colleagues in January 1943, following the United Nations Declaration:

What I do regard as dangerous and likely to lead to disaster, for ourselves and for the world, is to delude ourselves once again by publicly proclaimed announcements of a new world structure of permanent peace based on ignoring all the stubborn realities in the varying outlook and behaviour of those intensely individualistic entities which we call nations, and in doing so neglect the more practical measures for promoting peace and prosperity of the world which can be achieved by recognising those realities.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 165.

<sup>167</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Dec. 1943.

<sup>168</sup> *Report on the work of the League 1941-42: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1942), p. 12, available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/2).

<sup>169</sup> Thompson, 'Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept', p. 41.

<sup>170</sup> Memorandum by the secretary of state for India on the United Nations plan, 25 Jan. 1943 (T.N.A., CAB 66/33/39, f. 160, pp 3-4).

Cordell Hull echoed these sentiments in a note for Roosevelt when he asserted that technical organisations, such as those organised under the League umbrella, were ‘unlikely to survive as effective instruments in a world from which reasonable security is absent.’<sup>171</sup> Hull, like Eden, was anxious for the experience of the League to be utilised.<sup>172</sup> However as the League never functioned as an effective security organisation, a different model was clearly needed.

The problem was the lack of consensus on what that model should look like. The United States was the first of the Big Three to devote serious study to a new international organisation. The State Department began contemplating a new organisation as early as 1941, before the United States had even entered the war and was circulating internal proposals by 1943; this as Mazower pointed out, ensured that the United States played the leading role in the eventual construction of the United Nations Organisation.<sup>173</sup> Roosevelt came to advocate a new international organisation based on the reality of great power politics. The president pressed for the continuation of the wartime alliance of the United Nations, a system in which the great powers of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China would act as the ‘four policemen’ in enforcing the peace.<sup>174</sup> In Britain, Conservative members of the government began to favour strong regional organisations. Churchill favoured a ‘Council of the World’ dominated by the great powers, with the smaller states represented by a number of regional councils.<sup>175</sup> Churchill was particularly anxious to create a west-European alliance to balance the growing power of the Soviet Union. As Meisler demonstrated, Stalin’s post-war vision was actually closer to that of Churchill’s than to Roosevelt’s.<sup>176</sup> Stalin intended to create an East-European buffer belt that would stave off any future attack on the U.S.S.R. The federalist argument that powerful regional councils should replace the League model of a universal world organisation was also championed by Sumner Welles, Roosevelt’s energetic under-secretary of state. However this initiative died when Welles’ dismissal was engineered by the more conservative Cordell Hull. Hull and

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<sup>171</sup> Note from Hull to Roosevelt, ‘Plan for the establishment of an international organisation for the maintenance of general peace and security’, 23 Dec. 1943 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general 1944, p. 672).

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 675.

<sup>173</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 198.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>175</sup> Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, p. 142.

<sup>176</sup> Stanley Meisler, *The United Nations: the first fifty years* (New York, 1995), pp 3-4.

his *protégé*, Leo Pasvolsky, wanted a global organisation in reach and power; a League of Nations with stronger security machinery.<sup>177</sup>

Seventeen of the twenty-six signatories of the original Declaration by the United Nations (January 1942) were League member states and before the end of the war ten more members would join them. However the new international order would be determined by the Big Three. The United Kingdom, as part of the old guard of the League, had to adapt to an evolving balance of power dynamic. There was a very real possibility that the British government would be compelled to sacrifice its aspirations for securing the long-term legacy of League so as not to alienate the two emerging superpowers of the United States and the U.S.S.R., neither of whom enjoyed a straightforward history with the League of Nations. It cannot be denied that the realist tradition of League historiography was correct to assert that states were guided by self-interest and jealously guarded their sovereignty within the international framework.<sup>178</sup> Yet while the British government was certainly guided by its own foreign policy constraints, it continued to recognise the value of League membership, both for its own reputation and the future of international cooperation. Within the wider political system and within influential pockets of society there remained a genuine commitment to the preservation of the League and a near-religious attachment to the articles of the Covenant. A number of well placed League devotees marshalled support through participation in an organisation which, for more than twenty years, invested a great deal in the education of the public on League affairs-the League of Nations Union (L.N.U.).<sup>179</sup> Founded in 1918 the L.N.U. became the largest society in the British peace movement and played an important role in inter-war politics and education. The man most responsible for shaping the Union into an effective pressure group, which lobbied for a greater British commitment to the League of Nations, was Britain's most famous League apologist: Viscount Robert Cecil. The Executive Committee of the L.N.U. comprised of other figures who devoted a great deal of their professional lives to the League, including the O.I.C.'s Gilbert Murray and the former secretary-general Eric Drummond (1920-32) who had since inherited the earldom of Perth.

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<sup>177</sup> David L. Bosco, *Five to Rule them all: the U.N. Security Council and the making of the modern world* (Oxford, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>178</sup> Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, *International organisation in the twentieth century*, p. 12.

<sup>179</sup> For more information on the L.N.U. see Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union* (Oxford, 1981) and by the same author 'The League of Nations Union and collective security' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, ix (1974), pp 131-59.

In the early days of the war, the leadership of the L.N.U. remained remarkably optimistic about the viability of the League and continued to inform the public about the activities of the Geneva based organisation. Its journal, *Headway*, publicised the achievements of the League's technical services and documented their cooperation with United Nations bodies in the field of post-war reconstruction. The L.N.U. also persevered in its interaction with education in both schools and colleges throughout the war. In 1939 the Union established the Council for Education in World Citizenship which sought to prepare 'the hearts and minds' of those who would 'have to carry out the work of transition from war to peace and operate the new international system.'<sup>180</sup> Both Viscount Cecil and the Earl of Perth used their seats in the House of Lords to stage a defence of the League. As establishment figures (Perth was serving as chief adviser to the Ministry of Information) and men of considerable international standing, their defence of the League, from within the Palace of Westminster itself, helped to counterbalance Britain's role as wartime champion of the organisation. In addition, the L.N.U. could count members of the House of Commons among its membership. Churchill served as honorary president during the war years while Eden was president of the Warwickshire and Birmingham Federal Council of the L.N.U.<sup>181</sup> The speeches that Cecil and Perth made to their fellow peers in the House of Lords, were very much in the 'idealist' tradition, roundly rejecting the idea that fundamental flaws in the spirit and principles of the Covenant paralysed the League's diplomatic machinery. In an address in June 1942 Perth shared his conviction that had 'the League as originally conceived, come into being, it would have fulfilled all the hopes and all the aspirations of its founders'.<sup>182</sup> Cecil too used the sessions of the Lords to express his unshakable conviction in the valuable lessons learned from the League and argued that the new international organisation should be founded on the same principles of 'freedom, law and morality.'<sup>183</sup>

The L.N.U. also rejected the notion that an international organisation could not successfully create both a liberal world order and a stable system of international security. One of its most prominent members of the L.N.U., Gilbert Murray,

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<sup>180</sup> A report of the executive committee to the general council of the League of Nations union for the year ending 31 December 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/40489).

<sup>181</sup> *Headway* [journal of the L.N.U.], June 1944, available from (T.N.A., FO 371/39307).

<sup>182</sup> House of Lords debate [henceforth H.L.] deb., 2 June 1942, vol. 123, cc1-68.

<sup>183</sup> H.L. deb., 14 Apr. 1943, vol. 127, cc 171-222.

specifically condemned E.H. Carr for his attempts to infect ‘those sections of British opinion, on the extreme left and extreme right, who hate the whole liberal tradition which is the result of our long security and peace.’<sup>184</sup> For Murray, peace could not exist in the absence of liberal democratic principles. Carr on the other hand believed that the liberal spirit of the League Covenant ignored irreconcilable political differences between potentially warring states. He derided the notion that ‘the problem of the government of mankind, which has defied human wit and human experience for centuries, can be solved out of hand by some paper construction of a few simple-minded enthusiasts.’<sup>185</sup> For Lucian Ashworth the arbitrariness of the ‘idealist’ and ‘realist’ classification rests on the fact that so called idealists were very much aware of the realities of international relations when trying to address the failings of the world as it was.<sup>186</sup> Ashworth also observed that the political beliefs of so-called realists such as E.H. Carr were more idealistic than those of their opponents.<sup>187</sup> League supporters were correct to recognise the League’s liberal democratic identity as a vital aspect of its appeal. The wartime experience of the League, beset as it was by financial difficulties and political controversies, also demonstrates that League officials were extremely conscious of and had to contend with the constraints of international cooperation.<sup>188</sup> However, as discussed in chapter one, the League’s political identity impeded its diplomatic role, with states possessing contrasting systems of government, such as the Soviet Union, unable to overcome anti-communist prejudice in order to stir collective action to maintain international security. Carr was wrong to dismiss League supporters as narrow-minded thinkers incapable of forming a sophisticated and complex understanding of international relations. In turn, Murray failed to recognise that a liberal democratic ethos was an inadequate and antagonistic foundation for a universal security organisation.

While the L.N.U. may have eventually found itself swimming against the current of nascent post-war internationalism, it is through the actions and interventions of such well-connected figures as Cecil and Perth that we can glean the

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<sup>184</sup> Gilbert Murray, *From the League to the United Nations* (Oxford, 1948), p. 7. This book constitutes a collection of Murray’s speeches from the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>185</sup> Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 164.

<sup>186</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 10-11.

<sup>188</sup> For instance the problems of Swiss recalcitrance, the American refusal to accord the transferred missions official status as well as the crises of sovereignty and independence among its member states.

long-term intentions of the British and Allied government towards the League of Nations. In May 1941 Cecil tried to persuade Anthony Eden into committing to the use of the League of Nations in the post-war settlement. Eden, at this time of uncertainty, could not be induced to make such pledge as, according to the foreign secretary, while sentiment among the Allies for a system of international collaboration was still strong, there was 'little enthusiasm' for the re-constitution of the League of Nations 'as it was.'<sup>189</sup> While having to concede, by 1943, that a complete revival of the League was no longer possible, the leadership of the L.N.U. vigorously promoted the absorption of the League's traditions and machinery into a new system of international cooperation. The executive of the L.N.U. produced a 'draft pact' in 1943 for public perusal. The pact was steeped in the traditions of liberal internationalism, with its opening preamble declaring that 'the welfare of the whole community of nations is the concern of all of them' and that 'the territorial integrity and political independence of all nations should be respected.'<sup>190</sup> The pact closely followed the League model, with an Assembly where each member would exercise a single vote and a Council in which the United Kingdom, the United States, the U.S.S.R. and China would enjoy permanent seats.<sup>191</sup> The draft pact even proposed the preservation of the League's unanimity rule so that any member of the Council and Assembly could prevent a League resolution by voting against it. In an attempt to address the critical question of security the pact proposed the creation of a defence committee, to be composed of the permanent members of the council, but did not specify what measures they could employ to enforce the peace.<sup>192</sup>

According to one Foreign Office official, the immediate reaction of his colleagues to the draft pact was that it 'seemed to try to recreate too closely the form and phraseology of the Covenant. But this act was partly due to the necessity of keeping in good heart the supporters of the League of Nations Union, still a numerous and influential body.'<sup>193</sup> Other high profile members of the L.N.U. became increasingly disenchanted with the movement's refusal to adapt to new political realities or to engage with the fundamental problems that resulted in the inertia of the League's security machinery in the first place. Alfred Duff Cooper, the Conservative

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<sup>189</sup> Eden to Cecil, 23 May 1941 (B.L., C.C.P., MSS 51083).

<sup>190</sup> Draft pact for the future international authority, 11 Oct. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/40746), p. 1.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> J.G. Ward to Michael Wright, 14 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40746).



M.P. and former secretary of state for war, resigned as vice-president of the Westminster branch of the L.N.U. in June 1943 because he had come to recognise that the League proved a ‘complete failure.’<sup>194</sup> Duff Cooper informed the L.N.U. that while he was still an internationalist he was ‘opposed to any revival of the League as such or as a similar body based on the same principles’ as those principles were ‘fundamentally wrong.’<sup>195</sup> The Executive Council of the L.N.U. furnished Eden with a copy of the draft pact and the foreign secretary invited influential members of that body, including Lord Lytton (a high-ranking former colonial civil servant and chairman of the League commission that investigated the 1931 war between Japan and China), Viscount Cecil and Lord Perth to a meeting in Whitehall on 13 January 1944. Eden informed the representatives of the L.N.U. that while the League would not be reconstituted at the end of the war, the government’s view was that ‘something like the machinery of the old League of Nations would be required’ with a greater emphasis placed, within the new organisation, on the predominant role of the great powers and the need for greater coordination in security measures.<sup>196</sup> This amounted to an acknowledgment on Eden’s part, that the language of security and not of morality would drive the next international project.

Eden’s exchanges with the L.N.U. also provide an insight into the evolving landscape of international affairs and the League’s precarious place in it. The members of the L.N.U. sought to impress upon Eden that the European countries were looking towards Britain to take the lead in determining the future of international collaboration.<sup>197</sup> In the January meeting, Eden argued that while Europe may have been looking to London, London now had to look to Washington, such was the reality of the new world order. Eden confided to the L.N.U. leaders that, in light of Anglo-American talks on the subject, he was convinced that the United States would not accept Geneva as the headquarters of an international organisation to which it belonged and that the Americans wanted the new organisation to be presented as something ‘quite new.’<sup>198</sup> This meeting was intended to impress upon the Executive Council of the L.N.U. the absolute necessity of U.S. support for the

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<sup>194</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 June 1943.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Foreign Office minutes, 25 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40746).

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

success of a new international organisation; a truth that the League's technical organisations had already recognised.

The Foreign Office suffered diplomatic complications in the past due to the determination of the L.N.U.'s leadership to vigorously defend the reputation of the League of Nations. Lord Perth, driven by loyalty to an organisation he himself led for more than ten years, wrote an article in 1941 which he intended to publish in the United States. In this document Perth placed a great deal of blame on American reluctance to join the League for that organisation's failure.<sup>199</sup> Eden wrote to Perth in May of that year asking him not to air his censure of the Americans. According to Eden while this blame might partly have been deserved, it was 'hardly timely to rub it in' and he asked Perth to refrain from publishing his article to which the former secretary-general reluctantly agreed.<sup>200</sup> Without the support of the United States the post-war international system would suffer from the same artificiality as Hobsbawm ascribed to the League system.<sup>201</sup> As Eden reminded the former secretary-general, 'rightly or wrongly, Americans in general intensely dislike the League of Nations and this has become a traditional national sentiment which will never be dispelled by arguments.'<sup>202</sup> Roosevelt shared his views on the League with the British ambassador, Lord Halifax, during an informal audience in 1941. Halifax informed Alexander Cadogan that when the president referred to Viscount Cecil's autobiography he said 'we mustn't have the League of Nations again, at least in any form like that.'<sup>203</sup> Halifax informed the Foreign Office of his certainty that the British government should allow American opinion to 'form itself' on the subject of a new international organisation.<sup>204</sup>

Even if the political organs of the League were not reconstituted at the end of the war, there was no reason to expect that the technical organs would not survive. As discussed in chapter one, the technical organisations sought to embrace the growing Atlanticism of international cooperation. By 1943 Loveday and Phelan believed that they stood in high favour with the U.S. government. Loveday thought that Sumner Welles appreciated the work of the Economic Section of the Secretariat and claimed to be 'on excellent terms' with Leo Pasvolsky, Hull's trusted and

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<sup>199</sup> Lord Halifax to Cadogan, 3 June 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26656).

<sup>200</sup> Eden to Lord Perth, 14 Apr. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26656).

<sup>201</sup> Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes*, pp 34-5.

<sup>202</sup> Eden to Lord Perth, 14 Apr. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26656).

<sup>203</sup> Lord Halifax to Cadogan, 3 June 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26656).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

influential aide.<sup>205</sup> Phelan assured William Strang in the Foreign Office that he was confident that the I.L.O. ‘enjoyed the support and good opinion of Secretary Hull.’<sup>206</sup> Despite the predilection in the United States towards the creation of a new international organisation, the L.N.U.’s draft pact was circulated among influential figures in the State Department. In the summer of 1942 Arthur Sweetser, the League’s director of publicity, left his post to serve in the United States Office of War Information. Sweetser wrote to Lester that he was able to do more for the ‘common interests’ of League supporters ‘on the outside’ than he could possibly have achieved ‘in the somewhat isolated position’ he occupied on the ‘inside.’<sup>207</sup> Sweetser consequently placed the draft pact at the disposal of those State Department officials who were working on proposals for a new international organisation.<sup>208</sup> Mazower also documented State Department officials finding Jan Smuts’ 1918 pamphlet on the League as ‘surprisingly apt.’<sup>209</sup> In 1943 Secretary of State Hull drafted a memorandum for President Roosevelt on the establishment of a new international organisation, advising that the experience of the League should be utilised and its functions transferred to the new organisation.<sup>210</sup> These developments created the impression among League officials and supporters that the organisation was being used, both in Washington and in London, as a blueprint for the future international organisation. As Sweetser wrote to Cecil: ‘It makes one feel how invaluable has been the experience at Geneva and how great a part it can play in the future.’<sup>211</sup>

While the League may have provided some inspiration to preparations for a new international organisation, Eden’s observation to the L.N.U. that the Americans wanted the new organisation to be presented as something ‘quite new’ was a prescient remark. As Gary Ostrower argued, while both Roosevelt and Hull have long been considered internationalists, their foreign policy in respect of Geneva was characterised by inconsistency.<sup>212</sup> The Roosevelt administration was quite happy to draw from the League’s experience but overt association with the League needed to

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<sup>205</sup> Minute by Gladwyn Jebb, 23 Mar. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

<sup>206</sup> Phelan to Strang, 5 Apr. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

<sup>207</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 17 June 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 564/3/1).

<sup>208</sup> Sweetser to Cecil, 9 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40746).

<sup>209</sup> Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, pp 14-15.

<sup>210</sup> Hull to Roosevelt, 23 Jan. 1943 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general 1944, p. 675, p. 917).

<sup>211</sup> Sweetser to Cecil, 9 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40746).

<sup>212</sup> Ostrower, ‘The United States and the League of Nations’, p. 134.

be avoided if the new project, yet to be unveiled, was to avoid the tinge of past failures. As discussed in chapter two, it was the League's transferred technical missions, rather than Lester's Geneva-based Secretariat, that acted as the wartime embodiment of the League's political identity. The League's liberal democratic identity served as one of the most compelling justifications for its wartime preservation. However it became problematic in a world more alive to the adverse impact of this identity on the League's diplomatic role. This impelled the technical organisations, much to the growing annoyance of Lester, to emphasise their separation from Geneva and to contrast the vitality of their technical work with the supposed inertia of the 'political' Secretariat. Lester resented Phelan's assertion, in the latter's director's reports, that by its transfer to North America the I.L.O. 'escaped death by paralysis' as, according to the acting secretary-general, 'one can draw an inference' from this statement.<sup>213</sup> Lester was frustrated by the attitude of the Supervisory Commission which continued, despite all evidence to the contrary, to treat the technical organs as apolitical bodies and used that as a pretext to impose greater economies on the Geneva Secretariat. At a 1941 meeting of the E.F.O. and the L.N.A. in Princeton, Hambro articulated his understanding of the differences between the 'political' and 'technical' League:

A careful distinction must be made between the League as a passive international clearing-house for the dissemination of information through the International Labour Office, or the economic department, or the Health Section, and the League as a football game of power politics ensuring the status quo, snubbing Russia and working to keep Europe divided.<sup>214</sup>

The acting secretary-general, like Loveday and Winant, did not believe that the League's technical work could be separated from its political work.<sup>215</sup> He completely rejected Hambro's distinction arguing the following in a letter to Makins in 1941:

the fact is that the I.L.O., particularly in its staff and some of their activities, can be described as much more political and definitely non-technical than our present organisation here. Although we of course still present the political idea that is not reflected in our present organisation and expenditure in the same way as it is with the other institution.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Lester to Jacklin, 11 Nov. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>214</sup> Daily Princetonian, 2 Dec. 1941.

<sup>215</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Oct. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>216</sup> Lester to Makins, 3 Nov. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

Indeed the Geneva office tended to concentrate more on statistical work, publishing and data collection with little scope to make the same political impact as the I.L.O.'s ambitious New York resolutions. The acting secretary-general duly noted the efforts undertaken at the New York Conference to avoid mention of the words 'League of Nations.'<sup>217</sup> According to Gladwyn Jebb of the British Foreign Office, the I.L.O. was 'conducting a pretty vigorous intrigue against the League' as it attempted to ingratiate itself among the Allied powers at the expense of the parent organisation.<sup>218</sup> The Geneva suffered in the publicity stakes as a result. Following the New York Conference of the I.L.O., the American civil servant Smith Simpson wrote in *The American Political Science Review* that the I.L.O. was the only general international institution which was continuing to function during the war.<sup>219</sup>

Lester was also disappointed at Phelan's failure to keep in contact as his compatriot appeared to be doing all he could to avoid association with the League of Nations. Though they had disagreed profoundly upon the question of headquarters, Loveday's relationship with Lester was considerably more amiable and both tried to maintain correspondence even when their letters touched upon points in which they disagreed. Lester wrote to Loveday towards the end of the war expressing his gratitude for the latter's efforts to keep in contact and praising the quality of the Princeton mission's work: 'You have been doing a hell of a job and doing it well and I keep being amazed at the creative and imaginative creativity of your stuff, even though I should probably want to argue with you about some things.'<sup>220</sup> The E.F.O. was far more integrated with the League Secretariat than the I.L.O.; however it too pulled away from Geneva when it could. The Geneva Secretariat became anxious that the Princeton mission was beginning to assume the authority of League headquarters. The League librarian, Arthur de Brechya Vauthier, protested at the use of Loveday's library in the Institute of Advanced Study of the title 'League of Nations Library, Princeton.'<sup>221</sup> According to de Brechya Vauthier such usage risked creating the false impression that the Rockefeller Library was no longer working at Geneva. This hampered the efforts made on the Library's part to maintain all

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<sup>217</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 17 Dec. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 925).

<sup>218</sup> Note by Gladwyn Jebb, 23 Mar. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

<sup>219</sup> Simpson, 'The International Labour Conference', p. 104.

<sup>220</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Jan. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>221</sup> de Brechya-Vauthier to Lester, 17 July 1941 (L.N.A., library section files, R 1682).

possible connection with academic intuitions and repositories in foreign countries, especially among those located in the western hemisphere.<sup>222</sup> De Brechya Vauthier already noticed a creeping tendency among governments to dispatch official publications to Princeton, rather than to Geneva. In interviews with the American press and in their writings, Loveday's staff also gave the impression that they were collecting all the statistical information for Europe and were simply sending the information via telegraph to Geneva, which was depicted as a mere centre for publishing, which was not the case.<sup>223</sup>

The ambitious and high profile work of the transferred missions risked effacing the important (and non-political) work of the Geneva Secretariat. As Frank Boudreau wrote to Lester, 'what we have to combat is the feeling that the League is dead; many of my friends who know something of Europe express great surprise when I tell them how many League officials are still employed and how much work is still going on.'<sup>224</sup> As Rasmus Skylstad (a former League official then in the employment of the Norwegian government-in-exile) wrote to Lester in May 1941; 'I tell everybody that the work is still going on in Geneva and they all seem surprised.'<sup>225</sup> Even when the League's one man publicity machine was still seconded to the organisation he risked tarnishing the overall image of the organisation. Sweetser delighted in contrasting the vitality of the technical work with the torpor of the League's political mission. As a result he created the impression of an indolent Geneva-based Secretariat earning a rebuke from the acting secretary-general:

I know that mental picture is a very great temptation: I doubt if it is entirely sound. I would see no objection to quote "the deserted Council chamber", but it should be offset by a picture of quiet steady work, actual services maintained and being rendered, readiness for future, fate [of which] not yet decided-and also for the United States not so much emphasis on the reductions and economies enforced, as on what is still maintained. Reflect upon this angle and I think you may agree with me that we should avoid anything smacking of sentiment over the sepulchre.<sup>226</sup>

The push to disassociate the technical agencies with the politics of Geneva resulted in an internal conflict in the League's various drug bodies. Differences arose

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<sup>222</sup> de Brechya-Vauthier to Lester, 17 July 1941 (L.N.A., library section files, R 1682).

<sup>223</sup> *Daily Princetonian*, 27 Mar. 1941.

<sup>224</sup> Boudreau to Lester, 29 Nov. 1940 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 551/4).

<sup>225</sup> Rasuius Skylstad to Lester, 4 May 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 792).

<sup>226</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 1 Aug. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 825).

between the Permanent Central Opium Board and Drug Supervisory Body, staffed by various experts, and the League-centred Opium Advisory Committee (O.A.C.) which was led by Bertil Renborg and directly staffed from the League Secretariat.<sup>227</sup> Renborg was intent on promoting the interests of the League, which figures such as Leon Steinig, de facto head of the Drug Supervisory Body and chairman of the Permanent Central Opium Board, viewed as damaging to the potential of the drug bodies, particularly to its relationship with the United States.<sup>228</sup> Renborg was also apt to take the political role of his office seriously, pushing for direct intervention in the domestic affairs of opium producing states which flew in the face of the cautious diplomatic environment of Washington. According to another member of the Secretariat, Renborg had thought only of personal interests in departing Geneva for the safety of the United States and had failed to prepare a plan for the work of his group once they arrived.<sup>229</sup> Lester wrote to Arthur Felkin, the secretary of the P.C.O.B., in 1944, reminding him that as the representatives of the three drug bodies were unable to meet it was important to ‘avoid any misunderstandings and discrepancies in the preparatory work pursued in connection with reconstruction problems.’<sup>230</sup> A projection of disharmony within the technical organisations risked further damage to the League. Steinig and Felkin managed to marginalise Renborg whom Lester recognised as a disturbing presence and recalled to Europe, assigning him administration work in London.<sup>231</sup> Like Phelan, Steinig and Felkin perceived the futility of clinging to the old structures and practices of the League as they strove to prove the potential of their agencies to the task in hand.

The attitude of the United States government vindicates the judgement of those officials who viewed association with the ‘political’ League as a disadvantage to the post-war prospects of the technical organisations. In 1943 the Foreign Office attempted to sound out the American State Department on its willingness to include the League in the process of post-war reconstruction. The British were informed that while the State Department had not developed, by 1943, any clear ideas on this

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<sup>227</sup> See McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century*, p. 142. The Opium Advisory Committee was the political body that helped determine the League’s drug policy. It was traditionally staffed by government representatives, rather than by the experts that determined the procedures and actions of the drug control bodies, the P.C.O.B. and the D.S.B.

<sup>228</sup> McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century*, p. 142.

<sup>229</sup> Diary of Seán Lester, 21 Feb. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, vol. 1, p. 718).

<sup>230</sup> Lester to Felkin, 1 Mar. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/1/1).

<sup>231</sup> McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century*, p. 143.

problem, it was certain that it 'would be easier to use the I.L.O. than the League Secretariat in view of the fact that the United States was a member of the I.L.O. whereas the League of Nations still aroused a certain amount of political feeling.'<sup>232</sup>

As a result of the New York Conference a greater deal of promise was invested in the I.L.O. than in the other technical organisations. As the I.L.O. was held, largely because of its own grandstanding, to a higher standard, it had farther to fall. Despite the support that the United States was willing to accord the Labour Office, there were many who, in the aftermath of the New York Conference, believed the I.L.O. to have been overtaken by its own momentum. At the New York Conference delegates confidently proclaimed the organisation's right to a voice in matters of post-war reconstruction but by 1943 very little effect had been given to this resolution. The committee established to consider measures to make possible the social objectives of the Atlantic Charter had not made any progress and Phelan, in particular, was blamed for this lethargy.<sup>233</sup> Jef Rens, a member of the Governing Body and the secretary of the Belgian Commission for the study of post-war problems, criticised the failure of the I.L.O. to establish such a working committee and characterised this failure as indicative of the 'slow and difficult' communications between the Montreal office, Washington and London.<sup>234</sup> As Carter Goodrich (the American chairman of the Governing Body) recollected in 1946: 'No one who has lived intimately with the work of the I.L.O. can fail to recognise that there have been opportunities missed as well as opportunities taken.'<sup>235</sup> In the House of Commons Richard Law was compelled, in 1943, to counter criticisms that the I.L.O. was becoming too 'sidetracked.'<sup>236</sup> Law gave an emphatic assurance that it was the British government's desire to associate the I.L.O., in every practical way, with the work of post-war reconstruction.<sup>237</sup> In December of 1943 Eden further stressed to his fellow parliamentary members that he wanted to

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<sup>232</sup> Note by Strang, 7 Apr. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

<sup>233</sup> Van Goethem, 'Phelan's war', p. 321.

<sup>234</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Mar. 1943.

<sup>235</sup> Carter Goodrich, 'The I.L.O: a going concern' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, ccilvi (1946), p. 112.

<sup>236</sup> The report of the Executive Committee of the General Council of the L.N.U. for the year ended 31 Dec. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/40489, p. 12).

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*



see the I.L.O. 'become the main instrument for implementing article five of the Atlantic Charter.'<sup>238</sup>

Despite its failure to live up to the aspirations of the New York Conference the I.L.O.'s future appeared more assured because of the strong governmental support it enjoyed. The British government made allowances for the fact that the fortunes of the Allies had undergone a dramatic transformation since the New York Conference. Ernest Bevin, speaking to a meeting of the Governing Body in London in 1943, pointed out the fundamental shift in the position of the Allied powers since the Body's last meeting two years previously: 'Then, we were struggling for existence. Today, the military position is very different, so that without letting up in the fight for complete victory over the enemies of democracy, we can find some moments to look ahead to reconstruction and the course which humanity must follow.'<sup>239</sup> According to Clavin, in the aftermath of the New York Conference the I.L.O.'s position became more precarious with U.S. congressional elections in 1942 resulting in stronger representation from Republicans and conservative Democrats who rejected the New Deal; the policy with which the I.L.O. shared a considerable affinity.<sup>240</sup> Phelan sought to remind member states that at the New York Conference the United States was a non-belligerent power that could afford to invest greater priority to international social reform through the I.L.O. The acting director offered the following defence in his director's report of 1944:

In assessing the progress achieved thus far, it should be borne in mind that the setback of Pearl Harbor and of all that followed prior to the entry of United Nations forces in North Africa completely altered the political conditions under which the New York resolution was adopted, and that reconstruction, like peace itself, of which it is the first place, is a continuous process.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> The report of the Executive Committee of the General Council of the L.N.U. for the year ended 31 Dec. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/40489, p. 12). Article five of the Atlantic Charter (1941) called for improved labour standards, economic advancements and social security. The Atlantic Charter, 14 Aug. 1941 available from Yale Law School, the Avalon Project (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>) (1 Feb. 2010).

<sup>239</sup> *International Labour Office: minutes of the ninety first session of the Governing Body held in London 16-20 December 1943* (Montreal, 1944), p. 7, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>240</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 276.

<sup>241</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-sixth session: director's report* (Montreal, 1944), pp 71-2, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

According to a 1944 report, the Governing Body, having met in Montreal, regarded itself as entirely satisfied that the Labour Office was already associated with the work of several bodies engaged in question of post-war reconstruction, through which the organisation could work towards its social objectives.<sup>242</sup> What the report failed to mention was that these achievements were shared by the League's other technical agencies who did not enjoy the lion share of funding accorded to the I.L.O. by the Supervisory Commission. Van Goethem characterised Phelan, during this period, as nothing more than 'a pawn on the chessboard of world politics.'<sup>243</sup> This judgement is rather harsh ignoring the reality that international organisations such as the I.L.O. were predicated on volunteerism. Their strength always depended on the degree to which the great powers were prepared to use them. The same limitations were faced by the successive secretaries-general of the League. Under Phelan the I.L.O. managed to maintain a significant presence and profile on the international scene and was an unrelenting advertiser of its own potential. However the I.L.O.'s eventual post-war survival could be less attributed to the value of its work programme than to the support of its powerful friends. As a favoured international vehicle for American social and democratic values, it enjoyed a permanent safety net.

During this period the United States began taking a more direct role in trying to determine the policy and procedures of the I.L.O. A frequent expression that was bandied about during the Second World War was that America had 'come of age.'<sup>244</sup> The idea that the United States had reached a climactic point in its history grew more prevalent, with the dawning realisation that the seat of power had finally transferred from the old world to the new.<sup>245</sup> According to this theory, the United States inherited the supreme position, previously occupied by earlier civilisations such as the Romans, the Spanish and most recently by the British Empire. With this privilege came the responsibility of spreading good government across the globe and Americans were able to contrast their supposedly non-imperialist credentials against those of their successors and against the regressive old world governments fallen to

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<sup>242</sup> 'Relations of the International Labour organisation with new international bodies' in *Official Bulletin*, xxvi (1944), p. 128.

<sup>243</sup> Van Goethem, 'Phelan's war', p. 313.

<sup>244</sup> Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, p. xiv.

<sup>245</sup> Donald White, 'History and American internationalism: the formulation from the past after World War II' in *Pacific Historical Review*, lvii (1989), p. 147.

communism and fascism.<sup>246</sup> Clavin argued that critiques of American ‘irresponsibility’ in the inter-war period, articulated by bodies such as the League, helped to reshape American foreign policy after the war’s end.<sup>247</sup> During the war itself, the platform provided by League agencies such as the I.L.O. allowed the United States to become more confident in its leading international role. By 1943 the State Department was most anxious for the convocation of a formal session of the International Labour Conference in order to provide an international forum for the formulation of post-war labour and social policy on the part of the United Nations powers.<sup>248</sup> The U.S. government proceeded to invite Phelan to hold the I.L.O. Conference in the United States and suggested Philadelphia as an appropriate destination.<sup>249</sup>

The increasingly bold internationalism of the United States was tempered by conservatism of the United Kingdom, the veteran pacesetter of international cooperation. The British government remained committed to existing procedures in international organisation and to keeping structures and practises intact. Within the League’s wartime experience it had been an American envoy that provided the bold encouragement for the de Gaulle-Giraud declarations while the more cautious British Foreign Office demurred from any aberration in protocol. As preparations for the new I.L.O. Conference were underway, the British government sought to remind the United States that the time and place of the conference was for the Governing Body, and not for individual governments to decide. While it was the wish of most delegates, especially the workers and employers, to hold the session in June 1944, the U.S. government decided instead that the conference should convene in April so that it would not clash with the American presidential election.<sup>250</sup> The Foreign Office, speaking to Hull through Ambassador Winant, the former director of the I.L.O., stressed that the worker and employer groups within the tripartite structure were very jealous of their rights in such matters and would greatly resent any action by the governments which tended to suggest their willingness to dominate the worker’s

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<sup>246</sup> White, ‘History and American internationalism’, pp 152-5.

<sup>247</sup> Clavin, ‘Old ideas, new bodies’, p. 23.

<sup>248</sup> The secretary of state to the *chargé* in the Soviet Union (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1010).

<sup>249</sup> The secretary of state to Phelan, via the American embassy in London, 16 Dec. 1943 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1013).

<sup>250</sup> Memorandum by the minister of labour and national service instructing delegates for the International Labour Conference, Philadelphia, 13 Apr. 1944 (T.N.A., CAB 24/260, f. 264, p.1).

groups.’<sup>251</sup> Such was the emboldened international impulse of the U.S. government that this advice went unheeded.

The preparations for the Labour Conference demonstrated the differing approaches of the administrations of the ‘Big Three’ to international organisations. If it was Britain that ensured the wartime survival of the League, it was the United States that determined its functions and traditions would be transposed to a new organisation at the war’s end. In turn, it was another emerging great power that ensured once and for all that the United Nations Organisation could not be characterised as a resurrected League. The I.L.O.’s fractious relations with the Soviet Union came back to haunt it in the later stages of the war. By 1943 the U.S.S.R. enjoyed considerably more political and military leverage than in 1939 when League member states, as well as the Governing Body of the I.L.O., contrived to banish it from the established international framework. The Soviet Union, through enormous human sacrifice, was making the largest contribution to the liberation of Europe. After the Battle of Stalingrad (1942-3) the Soviet Union became more confident, secure in the knowledge that it was the Red Army that was doing the most to push the *Wehrmacht* back to Berlin.<sup>252</sup>

With the obvious necessity of establishing a new system of international organisation, the cooperation of the most powerful United Nations power on the continent of Europe was required to ensure its success. Roosevelt wanted Stalin to work with him ‘for a world of democracy and peace.’<sup>253</sup> As the Philadelphia conference loomed, the United States, in a pre-Cold War burst of good feeling towards the U.S.S.R, invited the Soviet government to field a delegation so that that it could avail of an unrivalled opportunity to discuss the problems of post-war planning and reconstruction.<sup>254</sup> The Governing Body of the I.L.O., at the suggestion of the worker’s group, agreed that the Soviet Union should be invited to participate in the conference and that it should be allotted a seat among the eight states of chief industrial importance.<sup>255</sup> The Governing Body also agreed that should the Soviet

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<sup>251</sup> Winant to Hull, 26 Nov. 1943 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1012).

<sup>252</sup> McCauley, *The Soviet Union 1917-1991*, p. 171.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>254</sup> Hull to the U.S. *chargé d'affaires* in the Soviet Union, 25 Sep. 1943 (*FRUS*, general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1008).

<sup>255</sup> The ambassador in the United Kingdom to the secretary of state, 19 Dec. 1943 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1013).

Union take its place at the conference, the question as to whether its membership of the I.L.O. had ever lapsed would not be raised.<sup>256</sup>

In the event of the Soviet Union's acceptance of this invitation, the attendance of Finland would become a thorny issue. Finland never formally withdrew from League or, by extension, from the I.L.O. In 1943, with the diminished likelihood of a German victory on the Eastern Front, the Finns sought to re-establish relations with the League Secretariat. Despite the liquidation of the League diplomatic corps by the Swiss federal government in 1940, Lester often had the opportunity of informal meetings with government representatives passing through Geneva.<sup>257</sup> Two such visits were paid by the Finnish minister to Switzerland who was both times accompanied by the former Finnish minister to Paris and one-time foreign minister, Oscar P. Enckell, a personal friend of General Mannerheim, the commander in chief of Finnish defence force. Enckell was a member of a committee in Finland which was interesting itself in post-war arrangements and foreign policy, including Finnish relations with the League. On the first visit in April 1943 Enckell admitted to the acting secretary-general that there was a great deal of anxiety in his country about Finland's position if it was still a co-belligerent in German eastern offensive at the end of the war; his government was aware that Finland's 'big capital of sympathy' with western countries would soon be spent.<sup>258</sup> Lester came to the conclusion that one of the reasons for their calling on him was to stimulate 'sympathy and appreciation' for the difficult political situation in which Finland had found itself.<sup>259</sup>

On their second visit in October 1943 the Finns addressed the awkward subject of Finnish membership of the League. The Finns indicated to Lester that while an official declaration of support for the League was not possible at that present juncture, as Finnish military supplies were heavily reliant upon Germany, the government was interested in improving its relations with the League in the near future.<sup>260</sup> This softening of Finland's policy towards the League culminated in 1944 with the re-establishment of official relations with the League. The government informed Lester in January of that year of its intention to pay its contribution to the

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<sup>256</sup> The secretary of state to the ambassador in the Soviet Union, 15 Jan. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1015).

<sup>257</sup> See Jaromir Kopecky to Jan Masaryk, 8 Jan. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/26651).

<sup>258</sup> Note by Lester, 20 Apr. 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P).

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Note by Lester, 25 Oct. 1943 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P).

League budget for a period covering all years until 1943. This was a sizeable sum, amounting to 423,000 C.H.F. Lester informed Jacklin that this initiative was 'entirely Finnish' and that the government asked for the matter to be treated as confidential.<sup>261</sup> At this moment in time Finland was still fighting on the eastern front and the issue of membership of the League was a sensitive topic. The League's liberal democratic identity became attractive and expedient once more to Finland at a time when it was anxious to gravitate away from the German sphere; this further demonstrates the political significance of League membership during the war years.

As it remained an official member of both the League and the I.L.O., Finland was automatically issued an invitation to the Philadelphia Conference. The U.S. State Department, realising that the presence of Finland at the conference would be deeply unpopular not just with the Soviet Union, but with the rest of the Allied powers, took it upon itself to request the Finnish government to abstain from the conference.<sup>262</sup> Finland, a member of the I.L.O. for a considerably longer period than the United States, took to this suggestion with ill-grace. Responding to the State Department's request, the Finnish government expressed the following sentiments:

Finland had received invitation to I.L.O. Conference with great satisfaction because it has always been considered in this country that international collaboration, both political and economic, is the best means to secure permanent peace and justice. Furthermore, this country has been particularly interested in I.L.O. work and has been a member of Organisation since 1919. In the future it intends to continue its participation.<sup>263</sup>

While clearly offended, the Finnish government relented to American pressure and abstained from the Philadelphia Conference. American efforts to keep Finland away from Philadelphia indicate that the U.S. government was treating the International Labour Conference as an extension of its own foreign policy. This presaged what Rietzler described as the post-war tendency of the State Department to transform 'international organisations like UNESCO into a mouthpiece for American policies.'<sup>264</sup> In the aftermath of the American rebuff of Finland Anthony Eden was

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<sup>261</sup> Telegram from Lester to Jacklin, 20 Jan. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S553/2).

<sup>262</sup> The secretary of state to the minister in Finland, 7 Feb. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1016).

<sup>263</sup> The chargé in Finland to the secretary of state, 11 Feb. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1016).

<sup>264</sup> Katharina Rietzler, 'Before the cold wars: American philanthropy and cultural diplomacy in the inter-war years' in *Historical Research*, lxxxiv (2011), p. 150.

reminded in the House of Commons that the I.L.O. was ‘not an American institution but an international institution.’<sup>265</sup> Eden intimated to his parliamentary colleagues that the action of the United States government was not taken in cooperation with his own.<sup>266</sup> While opinion, even among the British trade unions, concurred that Finland could not take its appointed place in Philadelphia, the idea that an international organisation could be commandeered to express the foreign policy of an individual government was not a popular one.<sup>267</sup> This attitude was somewhat hypocritical given the British intention, in the winter of 1939-40, to exploit the terms of an Assembly resolution (in respect of the very country excluded from the I.L.O. Conference of 1944) in order fulfil its own war aims. However in this respect at least, Britain better understood that a certain level of etiquette needed to be maintained. When a great power wanted to exploit an international organisation to achieve a purpose for which it was not designed, greater discretion was required.

Ultimately the Soviet Union had no intention of attending the Philadelphia Conference, declaring that it had no further association with any agency of the League and that it did not regard the I.L.O. as endowed with the sufficient authority to coordinate international cooperation in labour matters.<sup>268</sup> Even a personal intercession from Roosevelt to Stalin did not result in a Soviet delegation to Philadelphia.<sup>269</sup> Stalin wrote that participation with the I.L.O., under League auspices, was impossible. However, he did declare the Soviet Union open to future participation with the I.L.O. should that agency enter into a formal relationship with the United Nations powers.<sup>270</sup> Roosevelt’s response imparted to Stalin the following expectations he had for the future of the I.L.O.: ‘I hope that the coming meeting of the International Labour Organisation will make it clear that it is no longer an organ of the League of Nations and that it will become affiliated with the United Nations.’<sup>271</sup> Eden, speaking through Ambassador Winant, counselled the United

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<sup>265</sup> *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1944.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 Feb. 1944.

<sup>268</sup> The ambassador in the Soviet Union to the secretary of state, 8 Mar. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1017).

<sup>269</sup> Roosevelt to the chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union [Joseph Stalin], 20 Mar. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, pp 1019-20).

<sup>270</sup> Stalin to Roosevelt, 25 Mar. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1020).

<sup>271</sup> Roosevelt to Stalin, 31 Mar. 1944 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1021).

States government not to pursue the matter with the Soviet Union any further as it has always seemed to the British ‘that in view of past events the Soviet government would prefer not to return to the existing bodies but, as a matter of self respect, [would] resume their connection with these international activities as a founder member of a reconstituted organisation.’<sup>272</sup> This episode demonstrated that there was a definite limit to the I.L.O.’s ability to escape association with its parent organisation. Its own political identity, as an alternative to international communism, also proved problematic to an international system anxious to accommodate the U.S.S.R.

In the pages of its magazine, *Headway*, the L.N.U. attacked the Soviet refusal to attend the Philadelphia Conference and referenced the ‘savage denunciation’ of the I.L.O. in *Izvestia*, the official Soviet journal.<sup>273</sup> The article in *Izvestia* dismissed the I.L.O. as a bankrupt organisation, a charge that was repudiated by Frances Perkins who led the American delegation to the Philadelphia Conference. Perkins reminded other delegates assembled in Philadelphia that the I.L.O. was already associated with the United Nations powers and quoted Roosevelt’s hope that it would eventually become part of a permanent U.N. organisation.<sup>274</sup> *The Daily Worker*, (later to be re-named the *Morning Star*) the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, defended the Soviet Union’s stance on the I.L.O. The newspaper heavily criticised the organisation for issuing an invitation to the ‘Hitlerite satellites, Finland, Romania and Hungary.’<sup>275</sup> According to the article the I.L.O. had proven its irrelevancy by operating as an international organisation which offered a certain refuge to the countries ‘seeking a common language with the fascist countries’ rather than as an organ of the United Nations alliance.

The depiction of the I.L.O. as a protector of Axis sympathisers was ironic, considering the organisation’s tradition of outspoken support for the Allied cause. This tradition was upheld at the Philadelphia Conference when delegates expressed ‘the conviction that the heroic resistance of the occupied countries is one of the essential factors in the struggle of the United Nations against the common enemy.’<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Winant to Hull, 7 Apr. 1944 (diplomatic papers: general economic and social matters 1944, p. 1022).

<sup>273</sup> *Headway*, Mar. 1944, available from (T.N.A., FO 371/39307).

<sup>274</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Apr. 1944.

<sup>275</sup> *Daily Worker*, 26 Apr. 1944.

<sup>276</sup> Resolutions adopted by the twenty sixth session of the International Labour Conference, Philadelphia, 1 June 1944 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 8).



In the lead up to the conference the American chairman of the Governing Body, Carter Goodrich, expressed his desire for the I.L.O.'s pre-Conference proposals to be described as the 'present and post-war policy of the United Nations' but the British representative succeeded in getting it amended.<sup>277</sup> While the British were eager to present the results of the Conference as 'a manifestation of their [United Nations powers] clear desire to apply the principles of democracy to the future ordering of the world' it did not want to appear to be excluding non-United Nations members of the I.L.O.<sup>278</sup> However, the amended text continued to heavily reference the United Nations with the resulting alienation of the Portuguese government which declared its intention to abstain from Philadelphia, despite a direct appeal from Frances Perkins.<sup>279</sup> Apart from the Portuguese objection, the British effort to present the I.L.O. as less of an Allied satellite agency helped ensure more universal representation at Philadelphia. The so called 'Hitlerite' countries, while they may have been invited, did not attend but unlike in 1941 Sweden and Switzerland joined the Irish Free State as European neutrals prepared to send a delegation to the Labour Conference.<sup>280</sup>

The twenty-sixth session of International Labour Conference opened on 20 April 1944 at Temple University, Philadelphia. The resulting Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) laid the foundation for a new constitution (adopted in 1946) and the ideals of social justice articulated in its pages became a model for the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration called on all governments to strive to achieve conditions in which all men and all women could pursue their material well-being and spiritual development in freedom and dignity.<sup>281</sup> Delegates in attendance at Philadelphia approved several resolutions directly urging the United Nations powers to safeguard the well-being and development of peoples within the dependent (colonial) territories, to apply various international labour conventions to these territories and even to make a periodical report to the I.L.O. on

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<sup>277</sup> Memorandum of minister for labour and national service giving instructions to British delegates to the I.L.O. Conference, 13 Apr. 1944 (T.N.A., CAB 66/48/47, f. 266, p. 5).

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 265, p. 4.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 266, p. 5.

<sup>280</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-sixth session, Philadelphia 1944: record of proceedings* (Montreal, 1944), pp xv-xxiv, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>281</sup> Declarations concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation (Philadelphia Declaration), International Labour Conference, record of proceedings, twenty-sixth session, Philadelphia, 10 May 1944 available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

social policy within these areas.<sup>282</sup> The conference also recommended the use of Spanish and Portuguese as official languages of the I.L.O. ‘largely because of the longstanding support of Central and South America for the organisation.’<sup>283</sup> By 1944 the I.L.O. Conference was not tainted by any awkward standoffs between the Free French and Vichy. The former I.L.O. official Adrien Tixier was invited by Phelan and the Governing Body to lead a tripartite delegation to the conference.<sup>284</sup> This invitation did not mean the I.L.O. was conferring official recognition on the C.F.L.N; rather Phelan made it clear to Tixier that he was welcomed as a representative of Free France and that the I.L.O. was mindful of the fact that ‘a great majority of the French people were still in a position which prevented them from exercising their free will in the choice of their government.’<sup>285</sup> The conference showcased the expanding ambitions of the I.L.O. when, through the medium of a resolution, delegates attributed to the organisation the responsibility to ‘examine and consider all international economic and financial policies and measures’ likely to have a bearing on labour matters.<sup>286</sup> The I.L.O.’s special Advisory Committee on the Economic Conditions of Post-War Reconstruction was also established which expressed its openness to collaborating with the United Nations powers in the construction of a new organisation. By the close of the Philadelphia Conference the inclusion of the I.L.O. into the new international framework, yet to emerge, was a foregone conclusion.

The emergence of that new system of international cooperation was a painstakingly slow process. Roosevelt did not want to make the same mistake as Wilson in committing the United States to too much too fast, resulting in the alienation of Congress. He believed that the best course of action was to adopt a gradualist approach to greater international cooperation.<sup>287</sup> The first step in this process was the Hot Springs Conference of May 1943 which established the basis for the Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O). The League furnished the

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<sup>282</sup> Resolutions adopted by the twenty sixth session of the International Labour Conference, Philadelphia, 1 June 1944 (I.L.O.A, I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 6).

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>284</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-sixth session: director's report* (Montreal, 1944), p. 67, available from (I.L.O.A, I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> Eddy Lee, ‘The Declaration of Philadelphia: retrospect and prospect’ in *International Labour Review*, cxxxiii (1994), p. 471.

<sup>287</sup> John Lamberton Harper, *American visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kennan and Dean C. Acheson* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 107.

representatives of the United Nations powers, assembled in Hot Springs, with the pertinent information and statistics on world nutrition; information which formed 'the documentary backbone of the conference.'<sup>288</sup> The director of the E.F.O. was subsequently invited to participate in the deliberations of the F.A.O.'s Interim Commission and to nominate experts to assist in devising a programme of statistical investigation and research into the challenges facing the new organisation.<sup>289</sup> It is important to note that the League was never an official observer to the conference. Rather it served in an advisory capacity in a reflection of the inclination of the United States to retain a political distance from the League while benefiting from the fruits of its technical work.

The question of how great a role the League should play in post-war planning and reconstruction absorbed the Secretariat, its supporters and national civil servants. Arthur Sweetser conceded that the changing political situation would complicate the League's ability to participate in wartime relief and post-war planning, but remained convinced that its officials were the best suited to these crucial activities:

It is going to be a tough job to hold the lines when the present emergencies pass, new allegiances develop, and people slip back into the inevitable exhaustion. We certainly have the very best of claims for a front line position, claims which are justified by a very long and successful experience, but we are going to find that many new people and new methods will have come into the picture, and that we can get a seat only if we stake out a claim considerably in advance and arrive at the right moment with invaluable material.<sup>290</sup>

Others were less convinced that the League should occupy a 'front line position.' The Foreign Office was initially reluctant to recognise the League as the most appropriate body to tackle such a complex and delicate questions. Roger Makins wrote in 1941 that the League had neither the 'funds of the staff to make any serious impression in this field. There is already too much cerebation on insufficient data.'<sup>291</sup> Makins was not convinced by the bold resolutions of the New York Conference, demanding a role for the organisation in post-war planning. Rather he

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<sup>288</sup> The report of the Executive Committee of the General Council of the L.N.U. for the year ended, 31 Dec. 1943 (T.N.A., FO 371/40489, p. 11).

<sup>289</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 39.

<sup>290</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 5 Feb. 1942 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 564/3/1).

<sup>291</sup> Memorandum by Makins, 19 Sep. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

believed that the problem of post-war reconstruction should be best left to an inter-Allied organisation and that I.L.O. officials should not overextend themselves by doing more than collecting such data as was available to them.<sup>292</sup> Within the League apparatus itself there was an awareness that the international civil service would not be in a position to direct reconstruction projects when the time came but rather should confine itself to offering information and guidance to the relevant Allied authorities. Leon Steinig believed that the League's drug control service was 'numerically unable to face the task of helping to re-establish promptly any controls in liberated countries.'<sup>293</sup> According to Steinig it was

important that, while responsible control be squarely placed on occupying power to whom it belongs, the League Secretariat should, in replying to the [requests of the] United States, express willingness to send suitable officials to help with advice as and when occupying powers became responsible for handing over control to adequate re-established national administrations.<sup>294</sup>

Thus the directors of the League's technical organisations could not be overly ambitious in pushing their agencies forward as the most competent body to directly address the manifold problems engendered by the sudden cessation of hostilities. However, as the experience of the technical organisations attested, the Allied powers were eager to derive the benefits of the extensive intelligence and statistical data gathered by the League. League officials did not ignore the scruples of governments where the League was concerned, but rather sought to achieve as much as they could within the confines of the wider political climate.

During this period the E.F.O. continued to make a significant contribution to the preparations for post-war economic reconstruction. A special delegation was formed in 1943 on economic depressions and the fruit of the group's labours was a study published under the title; *The Transition from War to the Peace Economy* which discussed the need to provide universal employment to prevent post-war unrest.<sup>295</sup> Various government bodies including the White House and the State Department drew on this E.F.O. publication in their own studies of post-war

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<sup>292</sup> Makins to Leggett, 18 Sep. 1941 (T.N.A., FO 371/34519).

<sup>293</sup> Leon Steinig to Loveday, 21 Feb. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 559/1/2).

<sup>294</sup> Telegram from Steinig to Loveday, 25 Mar. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/1/1).

<sup>295</sup> *Report on the work of the League 1943-44: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 5, available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/4).

reconstruction.<sup>296</sup> An E.F.O. official also produced *The League of Nations reconstruction schemes in the inter-war period* which reminded the world of the financial and economic advice and assistance the League had given individual governments in the aftermath of the previous war. Before this study was officially published by the League it was made available to the U.S. and British governments.<sup>297</sup> Loveday attended the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods in July 1944, accompanied by his colleague Ragnar Nurkse who authored the study *International Currency Experience* which was distributed at the conference.<sup>298</sup> In her recent work Clavin demonstrated how that the inter-war League loan system, offered to countries facing a banking crisis, and the financial missions the League dispatched to the less developed economies of Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece set a precedent for the agencies which emerged from Bretton Woods-the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank).<sup>299</sup>

At the request of the American government a special study was prepared in 1942, by the League's drug experts, on the narcotic situation in the part of continental Europe under Axis occupation. In 1943 the League's drug control service drew up various monographs on the drug situation in twenty-seven different European and Far-Eastern countries with a view to providing information and assistance to the United Nations forces that would likely occupy those countries upon the cessation of hostilities.<sup>300</sup> The London branch office of the League was used to forward important League statistics on drug stocks and estimated requirements for Sicily and Southern Italy in the wake of the Allied landings there in the summer and autumn of 1943.<sup>301</sup> In the spring of 1944 a series of meetings were held between representatives of the United Nations powers and with the chairman and vice-chairman of the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Drug Supervisory Body. As a result of these meetings the League's drug bodies were able to

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<sup>296</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 289.

<sup>297</sup> Harrison to Lester, 22 Feb. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 565/1).

<sup>298</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 40.

<sup>299</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 305; Anthony Endres and Grant Flemming also noted how the E.F.O. was well suited to support the Bretton Woods institutions. See *International organisation and the analysis of economic policy, 1919-1950* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>300</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 91.

<sup>301</sup> Leland Harrison to Lester, 13 Mar. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/1/1).

recommend an appropriate policy on drug control during periods of Allied military occupation.<sup>302</sup>

Despite the reluctance of the British and the American governments to create the impression that they were about to embrace a revived League of Nations, the technical organisations were able to establish a steady working relationship with various Allied organisations and agencies. In doing so, the technical organisations not only underscored the value of their work and combined experience but also vindicated the wartime preservation of the League's social and economic agencies. One of the most pivotal moments of inter-Allied cooperation in the war period was the foundation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1943. Jessica Reinisch argued that UNRRA's relief work provided the testing ground for renewed international cooperation following the demise of the League.<sup>303</sup> In reality UNRRA was able to function partly because of the continued existence of the League's technical organisation, upon whom it relied significantly. At the first meeting of UNRRA in Atlantic City in November 1943 the Council of that body agreed to invite the League and the I.L.O. to send observers to participate in its future meetings and committee sessions. The E.F.O. of the League was subsequently represented at all session of the UNRRA Council.<sup>304</sup> UNRRA also benefited from the expertise of former League officials. Arthur Salter, a former head of the Economic and Financial Section of the League Secretariat, was appointed assistant director of UNRRA. Ludwik Rajchman, the former director of the Health Organisation, served as the Polish representative to UNRRA and helped draft its medical programme. Royall Tyler, another former official of the E.F.O., was appointed to serve as an UNRRA representative in Europe. He was accorded special facilities in the *Palais des Nations* by Lester so that he could avail of the extensive information services the League could place at his disposal.<sup>305</sup> From 1944 onwards

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<sup>302</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), pp 92-3.

<sup>303</sup> Jessica Reinisch, 'Internationalism in relief: the birth and death of U.N.N.R.A' in Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch and David Feldman (eds), *Post-war reconstruction in Europe: international perspectives 1945-9* (New York, 2011), p. 263.

<sup>304</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 40.

<sup>305</sup> Telegram from Lester to Jacklin, 21 June 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/39293).

League officials also provided UNRRA with information on the consumption of narcotic drugs in German-occupied Europe.<sup>306</sup>

The Health Organisation enjoyed a particularly close working relationship with UNRRA. In March 1944 when the health division of U.N.N.R.A was under development the Administration's director general, Henry H. Lehman (a former governor of New York), formally requested of Lester the co-operation of the League's Health Organisation. Lehman wanted to capitalise on the experience of the League's health and medical experts without incurring the risk of duplication of effort.<sup>307</sup> The acting secretary-general duly obliged and the League's Health Organisation began its work as a research unit in Washington in May 1944. This research unit included the former head of the Epidemiological Intelligence Service as well as the former statistician of the Singapore Bureau. The Health Organisation's technical unit in Washington served as an official link between the League and UNRRA.<sup>308</sup> It provided the health division of UNRRA with a weekly survey of the health situation in Europe, in parts of Africa and in Indo-China. In December 1944 Lehman, impressed by the work of the League's Health Organisation, wrote once again to Lester citing the need of UNRRA to form an Epidemiological Intelligence Service of its own. In view of the 'excellent work' carried out by the League's research unit in Washington, Lehman requested that its staff be placed at the direct disposal of the health division of UNRRA so that it could 'form the nucleus of such a service.'<sup>309</sup> Lester assented and the transfer of those officials from the League to UNRRA took effect on 1 January 1945.

While League assistance and League personnel provided an invaluable foundation for UNRRA, the older organisation had to be careful to ensure its own influence was not effaced by the high profile work of the new body. Dr. Raymond Guatier of the Health Section was opposed to the complete absorption of the League body by UNRRA. Gautier argued that the autonomy of the Health Organisation should be safeguarded until it could form part of the new international organisation, rather than used for the exclusive benefit of UNRRA, itself operating on a temporary

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<sup>306</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 94.

<sup>307</sup> Herbert H. Lehman to Lester, 21 Mar. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 556/1/2).

<sup>308</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 19 Feb. 1945 (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/5, p. 10).

<sup>309</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 68.

basis.<sup>310</sup> When UNRRA was first established it was predicted that many of the League's technical functions would be assumed by that body.<sup>311</sup> By 1944 the idea that UNRRA should form the basis of new world health organisation had already been abandoned.<sup>312</sup> In addition, given the nature of its composition and foundation, UNRRA could not hope to maintain an intelligence network with non-belligerent and non-Allied powers as practised by the Health Organisation. For this reason the League's Health officials, as the tide of war turned in the Allies favour, were reluctant to relocate to where they could embark on a closer working relationship with the United Nations powers. Guatier counselled against the transfer of the entire Health Organisation of the League to London. Guatier argued that while the Health Organisation was eager to collaborate with Allied services, if it abandoned its Geneva base the principle of reciprocity of information with Axis and neutral countries would have to be abandoned.<sup>313</sup> Throughout the war maintenance of headquarters in Geneva had allowed the Health Organisation to gain a more complete picture of the European health situation than would have been possible from an Allied country or from a base in the western hemisphere. The maintenance of a League nucleus in Europe imbued the preservation of headquarters on the shores of Lake Geneva with a practical advantage that complemented its symbolic importance.

In conclusion, the League's wartime experience serves as a clear reflection of an evolving world order. Far from being irrelevant, membership of the League of Nations retained a political significance for many states. Member states maintained their membership to affirm their sovereignty or courted it to prove their legitimacy. Others renounced it when their national policies became incompatible with the ethos of the Covenant. The efforts of the League's technical agencies to participate in post-war planning and the responses such activities also demonstrated the delicate position of the League in the evolving international landscape. Every member of the alliance of the Big Three ultimately recognised the imperative of a new organisation that eschewed the pitfalls of the League. For Britain and even for the United States, tradition remained just as important as innovation; even if those states were not quite transparent about the huge debt new U.N. agencies such as the F.A.O. and UNRRA

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<sup>310</sup> Dr. Raymond Gautier to Lester, 23 Nov. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/7).

<sup>311</sup> Henri Vigier to Lester, 11 Oct. 1943 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 556/1/2).

<sup>312</sup> Reinisch, 'The birth and death of UNRRA', p. 285.

<sup>313</sup> Gautier to Lester, 23 Nov. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 558/7).



owed to the League. For the Soviet Union, eager to brush off the indignity of the past, a clean break was crucial. The organic relationship between the ‘political’ and the ‘technical’ League became an impediment to the League’s social and economic work when the great powers began to contemplate a stronger security organisation more attuned to *realpolitik* than to the rhetoric of liberal democracy. The League’s haunting past placed its post-war legacy in jeopardy; the structural weakness and congenital flaws within the Geneva system proved a compelling obstacle to League officials as they strove to make a contribution to the construction of a new international system. As a result, the League underwent another identity crisis, with the transferred missions seeking to artificially differentiate between their work and that of a supposedly moribund relic of the political League; the Geneva Secretariat. However, as the Soviet Union’s refusal to attend the Philadelphia Conference demonstrated, the technical organisations, having served as the most forceful expression of the League’s liberal democratic identity during the Second World War, could not escape the ideological underpinnings of the Geneva system. The course of international affairs ultimately determined the League’s post-war dissolution but the ever-growing dissonance between the various branches of the international civil service meant that by 1944 the League was already undergoing a process of self-dismantlement.

## **Chapter five: The dissolution of the League of Nations and the transfer of assets and functions to the United Nations Organisation, 1945-7**

In the summer and autumn of 1944 concrete plans for a new world organisation eventually began to materialise. The establishment of the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.) prompted increased contemporary debate on the experience of the League and its lessons for post-war internationalism. This debate has never ceased and has proven a fertile discussion ground for historians and scholars of international relations as they strive to explain the League's failure to function as an effective security agent and to attribute to it a legacy within the overall narrative of international cooperation. This final chapter draws on the writings and correspondence of Secretariat officials, of League supporters and critics, of politicians and of civil servant during the period leading up to and immediately following the organisation's dissolution in order to make a contribution to this worthwhile debate. This chapter asserts that the transition from the League to the U.N.O. was not an organic process; nor was it a clean break with the internationalist traditions of the past. The League and the U.N.O. were the products of a shared international heritage as well as differing political climates. The contemporary reactions to the Dumbarton Oaks proposals, to the San Francisco Conference and to the final Assembly of the League of Nations demonstrate that internationalism remained a ubiquitous but divisive subject. This chapter chronicles the political obstacles and controversies faced by League officials and supporters as they endeavoured to preserve some semblance of technocratic continuity between the old and the new international civil service. It was indicative of the League's tendency to reflect the current of international affairs that the dissolution of the Eurocentric League presaged the post-war eclipse of Europe in the United Nations Organisation.

### **The League of Nations and Dumbarton Oaks**

In a note Lester prepared for the League's Supervisory Commission in May 1944 he outlined what he perceived as the significance and value of the wartime preservation of the League:

In spite of unparalleled preoccupations with the terrific tasks imposed on them by the world war, [member states] have looked beyond their turmoil:

they have not only assessed the real value of substantial immediate services being rendered but have made it materially possible for the three organs of the League of Nations-the Secretariat, the International Labour Organisation, and the International Court-to remain as a beacon and as a guide until the peoples of the world had again found faith in a future of ordered peace and justice [and] had the opportunity to consider the best means of reorganising international cooperation for these objects.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to the secretary-general in June 1944 Alexander Cadogan asserted that the time was clearly approaching when the League would be substituted for a new world organisation.<sup>2</sup> He reminded Lester that the Soviet Union would not forget its expulsion from the League as its refusal to even participate in the I.L.O. Conference indicated. While this was a complicating factor, Cadogan relayed his government's confidence that the preparatory work for 'the new world order' would 'draw on the immense and valuable experience of the League of Nations' with the new organisation eventually assuming the functions of the old, especially its technical activities.<sup>3</sup> It is easy to validate Stedman's assertion that the British government was inclined to exploit the rhetoric of the League and to ignore its obligations to the League's diplomatic machinery in order to pursue its own diplomatic ends.<sup>4</sup> However when the moment of crisis came for the League, it was British moral and financial support that largely carried the organisation through the war years. The establishment of the League of Nations in 1919 marked the culmination of the liberal internationalist traditions of its member states. Mazower argued that British influence on the League Covenant is often unfairly overshadowed by Woodrow Wilson's more public championship of the document.<sup>5</sup> It was Robert Cecil who produced the most comprehensive proposals for a world organisation in the lead up to the Paris Peace Conference; these proposals were then supported and enlarged by South Africa's General Smuts.<sup>6</sup> The League Covenant was arguably a derivative of British internationalist and peace movements, owing much to the early studies of groups such as the Fabian Society and was as much the product of British history as

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<sup>1</sup> Note by the acting secretary-general, 'Some considerations on the expenditure of the Secretariat in the last four years', 2 May 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 10).

<sup>2</sup> Telegram from Cadogan to Lester, 15 June 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Stedman, 'A most dishonest argument', p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Cecil, *All the way*, p. 142.

its inter-war governments.<sup>7</sup> Due to its close connections to establishment figures such as Cecil, the League was an intrinsic feature of the British political landscape at a time when the British position in the wider international landscape was shifting. Kenneth Morgan posits that it would be premature to depict the immediate post-war years as the period in which Britain lost its world power status.<sup>8</sup> Until the Suez Crisis of 1956 many British politicians, particularly Churchill and Eden, believed that the country could still recover its antebellum position once its economy had recovered from the devastating effects of total war.<sup>9</sup> However in the immediate post-war period it was the United States which emerged with its economy booming and with its global power enhanced rather than diminished.<sup>10</sup> As the junior partner in the alliance of the 'Big-Three', the United Kingdom could not hope to enjoy the same dominance at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference as it had in Paris in 1919 with Churchill often sidelined by Roosevelt in the president's negotiations with Stalin.<sup>11</sup> A commitment to securing continuity between the League and the new international system arguably provided the means of sustaining the British internationalist tradition.

The Dumbarton Oaks Conference (August-October 1944) prefigured the establishment of an international organisation devoted to the maintenance of peace and security. The negotiations of the Big Four (the United States, the U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom and China) conducted in the historic Georgetown estate outside Washington D.C., presaged the creation of a General Assembly, a Security Council and an International Court of Justice. An Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was to be created to direct international cooperation in the economic, humanitarian and social fields.<sup>12</sup> While the publication of the proposals indicated that the new organisation would retain some of the features and functions of the old, they also signalled a new departure in the measures employed to maintain security, to avert war and to contain and punish illegal acts of aggression. The most crucial of these measures was the Security Council through which the Big Four and France would oversee matters which threatened the peace of the world. A subsidiary body of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party* for the early development of British internationalism and its influence on later government policy.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power* (Oxford, 1983), p. 283.

<sup>9</sup> Bosco, *The U.N. Security Council and the making of the modern world* (Oxford, 2009), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> White, 'History and American internationalism', p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Eden, *The reckoning*, p. 593.

<sup>12</sup> See full list of proposals in 'The Dumbarton Oaks Conference' in *Bulletin of International News*, xxi (1944), pp 907-16.

Security Council, the Military Staff Committee, would plan U.N. military action and assist in the regulation of armaments. The proposals echoed the earlier pronouncements of the British and U.S. governments; the new organisation was to function first and foremost as a security organisation. Brought into being in a world still at war, the purpose of the new organisation was to ensure that when peace was declared the United Nations possessed the appropriate machinery by which to keep it.

The publication of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals in autumn 1944 inevitably inspired contemporary comparisons to be made between the new world organisation and the League. Comparing and contrasting the League and the United Nations Organisation has proven a popular pursuit of both historians and scholars of international relations over the past seventy years. It is essential however that international historians do not become over-zealous in providing an overly simplified grand narrative for internationalism. The political scientist Lucian Ashworth recently argued that international relations as a discipline often fell prey to ‘Whiggish’ practises in that the past was interpreted only as it related to the present.<sup>13</sup> The League and the United Nations are often depicted as chapters of the same story and League officials were among the first erstwhile historians to impose this ‘Whiggish’ interpretation of the League experience. Writing in 1952, Arthur Sweetser insisted that the U.N. was what the League would have been had it been given a normal chance of development.<sup>14</sup> Sweetser’s assertion oversimplified the important differences in the political landscape between 1919 and 1945. Writing in the 1970s, Paul Raffo asserted that the transition from the League to the United Nations Organisation was not the neat narrative that figures such as Sweetser sought to present.<sup>15</sup> This chapter does not seek to simplify the transition from the League to the U.N. It demonstrates that this transition was a complex process, riddled with complexity and inconsistency.

Some liberal internationalists welcomed the creation of the new organisation by falling into a teleological trap. After pursuing the details of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals, Sweetser, ever the Wilsonian idealist, expected the new organisation to build upon the old as proof of the progress of civilisation. He observed that ‘it would be an affront to human intelligence to think that mankind, in a second effort, after a

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<sup>13</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Sweetser, ‘Perspectives on the United Nations’, p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 27.

quarter century of experience, and a second world war, could make no improvements upon a document drafted without experience in a little over a dozen evening sessions totalling over fifty hours.’<sup>16</sup> Sweetser’s progressive reading of history was the natural accompaniment to his liberalism. It is important for League scholars to identify this optimism among League officials and apologists as an essential driver of the League’s history; however it is also essential to heed Mazower’s warning to fellow historians not to confuse the Utopianism of their subject with that of their object and to avoid the presentation of internationalism and globalisation as the current of modern history.<sup>17</sup> The chapter records the optimism that remained prevalent within the League’s international civil service but also documents the opposition League officials and apologists incurred as they struggled to find a place for the League tradition in the apparatus of the U.N.O. Furthermore, the new international organisation was not universally regarded as an improvement upon the old. Just as the League was riven by the lack of consensus on what it could be and do, the great and small states, as well as members of the old international civil service, entertained different expectations of its successor.

The United Nations Organisation is often portrayed as the maturation of inter-war internationalism with the impotence of the League’s political organs juxtaposed against the political and military authority of the Security Council.<sup>18</sup> Scholars have observed that the League Covenant did nothing more than simply establish the illegality of unprovoked acts of aggression, while the organisation proposed under Dumbarton Oaks was specifically designed to possess the authority and the means to enforce peace through diplomatic, economic and if necessary, military action.<sup>19</sup> However a study of the Covenant demonstrates that member states did have the necessary authority and machinery at their disposal to enforce the peace. Article sixteen of the League Covenant called for the immediate suspension of all diplomatic and economic relations with an offending state, the imposition of economic sanctions and authorised the Council to recommend the provision of military assistance to the afflicted state.<sup>20</sup> Robert Cecil wrote that ‘the want of ‘teeth’ with which [the League] was reproached was not so serious a defect as is

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Sweetser, ‘Comments on Dumbarton Oaks Proposals’ in *World Affairs*, cvii (1944), p. 252.

<sup>17</sup> Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, pp 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Weiss, Forsythe, Coate and Pease, *The United Nations and changing world politics*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> *The Covenant of the League of Nations* available from the Avalon project, Yale Law School, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp) [20 Apr. 2010].

sometimes alleged, since such “teeth” as it had were never fully used. From its birth it even had to fight against the indifference or hostility of the official bureaucracies.’<sup>21</sup> Thus it would be incorrect to assert that the League did not have the means to function as a security organisation. The fact that it did not can be less attributed to congenital weaknesses in the League apparatus than in the dearth of motivation for doing so.

As discussed in chapter one, the great powers showed little inclination to allow the League to function as an effective security agent. In 1946 the *Harvard Crimson* identified the ‘inability to understand that an assembly of states is only a tool which must be used by its members’ as ‘the flaw which destroyed Wilson’s dream.’<sup>22</sup> The Dumbarton Oaks proposals did not differ from the League system because they advocated security machinery. What distinguished the proposals from the Covenant was that they sought to directly tackle the problem of great power intransigence. The 1944 proposals laid the groundwork for more exclusive leadership from the great powers, a feature that was so seriously lacking in the League. Under the Dumbarton Oaks plan all decisions on matters of peace and security were to be the preserve of the Security Council and any initiative could be swiftly halted by the execution of the veto by any one of the five permanent members.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on the irrefutable failings of the League system, the Big Four sought, through the Dumbarton Oaks proposals, to enshrine the hegemony of the great powers into the very heart of the new organisation. The new organisation was not predicated on liberal internationalism but on *realpolitik*; the proposed Security Council recognised that it was the dynamics of great power politics that largely determined international security. Within existing scholarship, supposed ‘realist’ and ‘idealist’ interpretations are presented as diametrically opposed to one another.<sup>24</sup> In fact, instead of binary opposition among two schools of international thought, there is a common strand of agreement among historians and scholars of I.R. that the League’s diplomatic role foundered because the great powers failed to make use of it. The difference lies instead in the various explanations offered for such neglect with disagreement over whether it was great power arrogance or congenital weakness in

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<sup>21</sup> Cecil, *All the way*, p. 158

<sup>22</sup> *Harvard Crimson*, 22 Oct. 1946.

<sup>23</sup> The Big Four would eventually be joined by France as the permanent members of the Security Council.

<sup>24</sup> For a summary of the idealist/realist debate and the development of such categorisations see Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, *From Versailles to Maastricht*.

the League's diplomatic machinery which led to the League's peripheral role in the conduct of international relations.<sup>25</sup> The design of the Security Council was arguably a response to both these critiques with the Big Four seeking to reconcile the operation of *realpolitik* with the goals of peaceful internationalism. As the veto system obviated the risk that the political organs of the new organisation could threaten the interests of the great powers, it followed that they were less likely to discard it. The machinery of the League was designed to prevent hasty over-reaction such as that which had spawned the First World War.<sup>26</sup> The machinery of the Security Council, especially the Military Staff Committee, was designed to prevent the great power inaction that led to the Second World War.

This innovation did not meet with universal approval and threatened to breed resentment among those powers accustomed to the greater equality of the League voting system where every member of the Assembly and Council ostensibly possessed the power of veto.<sup>27</sup> While the new organisation was designed to be a vehicle for security, there was to be nothing 'collective' about that security. This led to accusations of regression from prominent figures such as the jurist Edwin Borchard who asserted that the proposed new organisation 'hardly seems to enhance the protection of the weak.'<sup>28</sup> Thanassis Aghnides, then Greek ambassador to London, also bemoaned the fact that the League principle of juridical equality of all member states was virtually ignored by the Dumbarton Oaks proposals.<sup>29</sup> Gilbert Murray argued that the price of the admittance of the two 'recalcitrant powers', the United States and the Soviet Union, into a system of international cooperation was considerable. Murray pointed out that the veto accorded the great powers 'full privilege of isolation for themselves and secondly a power of coercion over' the smaller states.<sup>30</sup> However as argued in chapter one, the League's semblance of 'juridical equality' allowed the great powers to abdicate their responsibilities turning the Assembly and Council into a reflection of collective weakness rather than

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, p. 778 and Niemeyer 'The balance sheet of the League experiment', p. 542.

<sup>26</sup> See Henig, *The League of Nations*, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> As articulated later by William C. Johnstone, 'The San Francisco Conference' in *Pacific Affairs*, xviii (1945), p. 217.

<sup>28</sup> Edwin Borchard, 'The Dumbarton Oaks proposals' in *The American Journal of International Law*, xxxix (1945), p. 98.

<sup>29</sup> 'Some impressions of the San Francisco conference' a lecture given by Thanassis Aghnides at Greek House, London, 24 Oct. 1945 (L.N.A., PPA Agh 3/17, p. 3).

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert Murray, *From the League to the U.N.* (Oxford, 1948), p. 157.



collective strength. Sweetser disagreed with the pessimistic reading of Dumbarton Oaks, reflecting the traditional lack of consensus among liberal internationalists. Sweetser asserted that the Security Council and the Military Staff Committee 'sharpened' the ability of the new organisation to enforce the peace.<sup>31</sup> The Dumbarton Oaks proposals acknowledged the determining role of great power relations in international affairs. They also acknowledged the reality of geo-politics in recommending a role for regional organisations in the mediation of disputes under the overall authority of the world organisation.<sup>32</sup> The Assembly of December 1939 failed to take geo-political factors into account when the Latin American motion for Soviet expulsion placed the Scandinavian states in a diplomatic quandary.

While the measures proposed in the field of security constituted an important departure from the League experience, there was no revolutionary overhaul in the guiding principles of international cooperation. The Dumbarton Oaks proposals reflected the conservative internationalism of the inter-war and wartime periods as the new organisation was to be predicated on the 'sovereign equality of all peace-loving states.'<sup>33</sup> In this instance the League had clearly served as a benchmark for the new world organisation. There would be no immediate post-war introduction of the radically different systems of international cooperation mooted during the war such as federalism or the regional security arrangements initially favoured by Churchill.<sup>34</sup> Defending the decision, on the part of the great powers, not to employ a different foundation for international cooperation, Sweetser conceded that the new organisation would not constitute 'the dawn of a wholly new experiment in human affairs, but rather the assimilation into an already tried system of organised international cooperation of the two great isolationist states of the inter-war period, the United States and the Soviet Union.'<sup>35</sup> Sweetser justified the retention of the older model by arguing that the incorporation of the United States and the Soviet Union into a new system of international organisation constituted a 'big enough hurdle without attempting any great innovation in principle as well', tactfully

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur Sweetser, 'The United States, the United Nations and the League of Nations' in *International Conciliation*, xxiv (1946), p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Robert C. Hildebrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: the origins of the United Nations and the search for postwar security* (Chapel Hill, 1990), p. 164.

<sup>33</sup> Memorandum by the secretary of state for dominion affairs, 31 Mar. 1945 (T.N.A., CAB 66/64/5, f. 21).

<sup>34</sup> See Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, p. 142.

<sup>35</sup> Sweetser, 'Perspectives on the United Nations', p. 71.

ignoring the fact that the Soviet Union was actually a veteran of the pre-war experiment.<sup>36</sup>

This outcome reinforced the idea among League officials, observers and later scholars that the development of the new organisation was the product of evolution, not revolution.<sup>37</sup> As its structure was broadly similar to that of the League, there were questions raised as to why the Big Four were so anxious to create a new organisation with a new name, rather than simply reform the League. Cecil still maintained, by 1949, that it would have been more prudent 'to have amended and confirmed the Covenant rather than start a new document.'<sup>38</sup> In his report to member states in 1943 Lester considered what reforms of the League system would be necessary to ensure its place in the post-war landscape: 'It may be that a change of name would facilitate the adhesion of certain powers to the post-war institution. No person could question any such proposal if it is needed to widen membership and authority.'<sup>39</sup> In a letter to the acting-secretary general J.V. Wilson, the assistant director of research of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and a former senior official in the League Secretariat, shared Cecil and Lester's viewpoint but offered his understanding of why a new organisation was ultimately necessary:

If this were a world without passions and prejudice I suppose we should agree that we should not change the name unless we very radically changed the thing. But is it not the case that so rational a world would probably be a world which would not have again become embroiled in war? The ordinary vulgar feeling against having too much to do with what has been classed a 'failure' is strong, and I suppose it is these political feelings and prejudices which will decide things in the long run, though those who have to think out these problems concretely and consider various alternatives naturally take a more conservative view.<sup>40</sup>

This 'conservative view' manifested itself in the continued deference to the sovereignty of member states exhibited in the Dumbarton Oaks proposals. Despite the innovation of the Security Council, reservations about a giant world bureaucracy, interfering in matters of domestic concern persisted. As Benn Bongang argued, the

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<sup>36</sup> Sweetser, 'Perspectives on the United Nations', p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> See for example Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, pp 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Cecil, *All the way*, p. 158.

<sup>39</sup> *Report on the work of the League 1942-3: submitted by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1943), p. 23, available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/3).

<sup>40</sup> J.V. Wilson to Lester, 2 June 1944 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

Roosevelt and Truman administrations had to be careful to craft a new instrument of world politics consistent with both the conservatism of its own Congress as well as the conservatism of the other big powers in matters of security.<sup>41</sup> The Soviet diplomat and future statesman Andrei Gromyko wrote in his memoirs that the Soviet Union was prepared to resist any attack, through the new international organisation, on national sovereignty so as to prevent other states or even the organisation itself from meddling in the domestic affairs of other member states.<sup>42</sup> David Mitrany later reflected on the apparent contradictory insistence of the Soviet Union on the sanctity of state sovereignty. Mitrany conceded that many contemporaries found it ‘puzzling’ that the ‘most revolutionary of all governments, which ideologically believes in world unity and in the proscription of the state, at the United Nations, and on every possible occasion, insists on a strict observance of national sovereignty.’<sup>43</sup> However as Alexander Dallin argued, Soviet policy did not remain static, with state interest often having to supersede communist ideology as the Soviet Union tried to enhance its great power status.<sup>44</sup> As the U.N.O. was intended to reflect great power hegemony it followed that those powers would be unlikely to accord the organisation supranational functions.

League officials had long encountered such scruples during the inter-war period as they sought to promote international economic and social reform. National obduracy persisted in the war years with the League’s technical officials experiencing a deliberate limitation to their autonomy in wartime relief and post-war planning. Even when internationalism experienced an upsurge in the latter days of the war, the British government was eager to remind the League not to exceed its functions. When Alexander Loveday wrote to the British Foreign Office in February 1944 outlining his suggestions on the structure of a new international organisation, he met with a cool response. Though the title of Loveday’s report suggested that he was modestly limiting himself to making proposals on the establishment of a specialised United Nations economic agency to follow the F.A.O., he also offered

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<sup>41</sup> Benn L. Bongang, *The United States and the United Nations: congressional funding and U.N. reform* (New York, 2007), p. 77.

<sup>42</sup> Andrei Gromyko, *Memories: from Stalin to Gorbachev*, (trans. Harold Shukman, London, 1989), pp 156-7.

<sup>43</sup> Mitrany, ‘The functional approach of international relations’, p. 353.

<sup>44</sup> Dallin, *The Soviet Union at the United Nations*, pp 6-7.

various suggestions on the structure and procedures of a new general organisation.<sup>45</sup> Loveday's proposal that all member states be accorded equal voting rights did not impress the Foreign Office. According to its officials it was preposterous to suggest that small countries such as El Salvador or Liberia should carry the same influence as the great powers.<sup>46</sup> In fact the Foreign Office regarded Loveday's ideas as dangerous; 'dangerous because they are the type of idea which would appeal to the small nations and encourage in them the delusion that they may be in a position to control the big international economic bodies [i.e. agencies such as the I.M.F.] whose regulation if they are to function, must be the primary concern of the big powers.'<sup>47</sup> Loveday had previously expressed his disappointment that representation on the Central Committee of UNRRA was confined to the Big Four, believing that the relief agency would have incurred greater public support if 'some democratic principle had been employed.'<sup>48</sup> The Foreign Office, while noting certain points of similarity between their ideas and Loveday's proposals for a new organisation, wrote to the director of the E.F.O. to remind him that such ambitious proposals could not be presented prematurely and resolved to keep in contact with the him so that his views would be 'kept on the right lines.'<sup>49</sup> Although Loveday was permitted little direct influence in the creation of the new organisation, E.F.O. policies enjoyed significant currency in post-war Europe. According to a recent study by Clavin, E.F.O.'s ideas on how to moderate and shape trends in the open market to prevent severe fluctuation in price and demand resonated in the E.E.C.'s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).<sup>50</sup> These developments demonstrate that while League officials were not permitted to operate as direct agents, their work still found a way to profoundly influence national and international policy.

The I.L.O. also faced opposition when it sought to expand its work programmes into the sensitive economic sphere, rather than limiting itself to making recommendations on the social consequences of labour practices. Though the high words of the Declaration of Philadelphia ambitiously proclaimed the right of the

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<sup>45</sup> Note on international economic organisation by Alexander Loveday, 9 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40747).

<sup>46</sup> Foreign Office memorandum, 29 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40747).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Loveday to Sir Frederick Leith Ross, 22 June 1943 (T 160/1353).

<sup>49</sup> William Eady to N.B. Ronald, 22 Mar. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40747); Roberts to Loveday, 28 Mar. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40747).

<sup>50</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, pp 336-7.

I.L.O. to examine all matters of economic policy likely to influence labour matters, in practise member states were not prepared to accord it greater authority. In December 1944 an article appeared in *The Economist* attacking the I.L.O.'s ambitious attempt to regard the entire international system of economic relations as its province.<sup>51</sup> The article rejected the notion that the I.L.O. should have participated in the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods. According to the *Economist* it would have constituted a 'serious mistake' to allow the I.L.O. a role in matters of 'highest policy':

It is unlikely in the extreme that governments will be content to deal with [economic issues] through the mechanism of the I.L.O. And if they did, the I.L.O. would immediately become what, to its great advantage, it had hitherto avoided being-a political organisation. The I.L.O. will be well advised to leave the high politics of economic affairs to other agencies. Its particular function is to see that labour in each country gets its fair share of national income of that country.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the assertion of the article, the I.L.O.'s work and its pronouncements were incredibly political, especially during the war. Philip Noel-Baker, the minister of state for foreign affairs in the post-war Labour government, argued that any division between politics and diplomacy on the one hand and social, cultural and economic welfare on the other was, by 1945 'unreal and out-of-date.'<sup>53</sup> Speaking at a London meeting of the Governing Body in January 1945, Ernest Bevin posited that the technical work of the I.L.O., with governments, employers and workers collaborating to remove social and economic evils could very well prove 'the road towards an international parliament in the wider field.'<sup>54</sup> Bevin's words are reflected in A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor's arguments on functionalism; they, like Bevin, expected intergovernmental cooperation to procure greater welfare benefits for individuals and to provide the means to 'undermine popular loyalties to the state through the creation of a working peace system and the satisfaction of felt needs on a non-national basis.'<sup>55</sup> Bevin's observation on technical cooperation is noteworthy considering the later evolution of the European Coal and Steel Community into the

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<sup>51</sup> *The Economist*, 25 Dec. 1944.

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

<sup>53</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, pp 190-1.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the ninety-fourth session of the Governing Body held in London on 25-31 Jan. 1945, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 11).

<sup>55</sup> A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor, 'Functionalism and international relations' in A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor (eds), *Functionalism: theory and practise in international relations* (London, 1975), p. 1.

political and economic integration embodied by the European Union. Jean Monnet wrote in his memoirs:

Looking back I can see more clearly how the League of Nations prefigured supranationality-through underlying agreements among men who enjoyed widespread influence in their own countries, so that awareness of the general interest was communicated to the places where national decisions were reached.<sup>56</sup>

In this way the League set an important and influential precedent. However while Bevin's statement was prophetic, he was speaking of the future and regarded the conferral of supranational function on technical organisations as overly ambitious and premature. At the January 1945 meeting of the Governing Body, Bevin, echoed the opinion of *The Economist* article. He emphasised that the I.L.O. would 'stand or fall by what it does in its own proper sphere.'<sup>57</sup> The Dumbarton Oaks proposals failed to make any specific allusion to the I.L.O., much to the disappointment of the Governing Body.<sup>58</sup> The British government wanted to ensure that the I.L.O.'s supremacy in labour was not corroded. However it did not want to grant the Labour Office the emancipation from an overall umbrella organisation it had craved. Bevin informed the Governing Body that it was 'important, both in its own interest and in the interest of the new world organisation, that it should not be completely independent of that organisation' but rather that it should form 'a definite part of the organisation in its constructive work for peace.'<sup>59</sup> That did not mean that Bevin was anxious for the I.L.O. to 'make itself too cheap' by surrendering its acquired autonomy and traditions. Rather, according to Bevin, the organisation ought to work in parallel to the proposed Economic and Social Council.<sup>60</sup> This became one of the chief concerns of the I.L.O. in this period-to secure and maintain a degree of elasticity and independence within the framework of the new organisation.

As the terms of Dumbarton Oaks were digested and debated League officials eagerly anticipated the opportunity to collaborate with the new organisation and pushed for their technical activities to be assumed by the proposed Economic and Social Council. The ECOSOC eventually consisted of eighteen states elected

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<sup>56</sup> Monnet, *Memoirs*, p. 85.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the ninety-fourth session of the Governing Body held in London on 25-31 Jan. 1945, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 9).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

annually in groups of six for staggered three year terms. It was to have the power to initiate studies and reports on international social and economic matters and to make recommendations to the General Assembly as well as to the specialised agencies. It could also call international conferences when it saw fit to do so. The ECOSOC has often been cited by historians as the realisation of the Bruce proposals of the League.<sup>61</sup> The League's wartime experience served as a stark illustration of the need for a sophisticated system for regulating the relations between the various technical organisations as well as the need for a clear definition of the relationship between the parent organisation and the disparate agencies. Lester wrote in January 1945 that he had noticed 'again and again a strong desire for autonomy in every section and organisation inside the Secretariat or associated with it even in staff and administrative questions.'<sup>62</sup> He quoted a letter he received from Felkin where the latter cited the strong desire within the opium bodies that their work 'should not be classed internationally or administratively integrated under the Dumbarton plan in social, or least of all, health work; but, having many aspects, be treated separately as in the past and linked directly with the Economic and Social Council.'<sup>63</sup>

In the dying days of the war there was some awareness that the autonomy sought by the various technical organisations, rather than enhancing their respective work programmes, actually impaired them. As Lester wrote to Loveday in early 1945: 'a lot of trouble has arisen from the diverse points of view which have grown up in the different branches of the disparate Secretariat, not unmingled I fear with a good deal of envy the feeling that everyone else has had advantages or has not had intelligent and friendly consideration.'<sup>64</sup> At the January 1945 meeting of the Governing Body of the I.L.O. the Belgian member criticised the isolation the I.L.O. traditionally imposed on itself in relation to the work of the League's E.F.O.<sup>65</sup> He advocated greater efforts to ensure collaboration with other bodies operating in the economic and financial fields. Consequently, at the next session of the Governing Body, the government, employer and workers representatives heard from Loveday

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<sup>61</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 352; Northedge, *The League of Nations*, p. 191; Ghébal, *La réforme Bruce*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Lester to A.D.K. Owen, 5 Jan. 1945 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/4).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Jan. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of the ninety-fourth session of the Governing Body held in London on 25-31 Jan. 1945 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 28).

himself on the subject of economic depressions.<sup>66</sup> In his February 1944 proposals for a new world organisation Loveday echoed the Bruce proposals, emphasising the need for the economic and social agencies of the new international body to function as a coherent whole. According to Loveday:

If the special organs [were to be] projected into a world without any machinery for the coordination of their policies, confusion will result. But more is required than the prevention of inter-organisational rivalries or contradictory policies. It is necessary to assure that all organs work toward a common objective or common objectives, and have a sense of unity of purpose. That unity of purpose postulates some constitutional unity and some common form of discussion.<sup>67</sup>

Loveday anticipated the terms of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals by suggesting that a special council or commission should be formed from the assembly of the new organisation to coordinate and initiate policy.<sup>68</sup> The lack of institutional cohesion in the League apparatus during the Second World War justified the creation of the Economic and Social Council.

In late 1944 Lester was finally able to leave Geneva, travelling to London to meet Foreign Office officials and to attend a meeting of the Supervisory Commission. The acting secretary-general was given the good news that the British government was fully committed to transferring as much of the assets and 'non-political' activities of the League to the new organisation as was practical.<sup>69</sup> According to Foreign Office records, during informal discussions with American and Chinese officials at Dumbarton Oaks 'there was a broad measure of agreement on the desirability of taking over these [technical] activities.'<sup>70</sup> The Foreign Office stressed that the value of League records and archives for the new organisation 'needed no emphasis' and that it was 'desirable that the transfer of both staff and records should be arranged so that there is no break in the continuity of the work.'<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Minutes of the ninety-fifth session of the Governing Body held in Quebec on 21-27 June 1945 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 28).

<sup>67</sup> Note on an international economic organisation by Alexander Loveday, 9 Feb. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40747).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Armistice and post-war committee: memorandum by the minister of state on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 5 Mar. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/50636).

<sup>70</sup> Report of the committee on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 19 Feb. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007, p. 6).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



Even one of the League's sternest critics, E.H. Carr, allowed that there was considerable support for the survival of its technical organisations.<sup>72</sup>

When Hitler's Fortress Europe began crumbling in the summer and autumn of 1944 the League's technical programmes were invested with a new urgency. Many of the practical and political obstacles to the realisation of their wartime goals began to recede. With the restoration of normal postal communications in certain areas the League's Epidemiological Intelligence Service gradually re-established contact with the countries from whom it had been cut off, such as the Balkan countries of Albania, Yugoslavia and Greece. It also collaborated with the Allied military authorities in the provision of information concerning typhus fever among prisoners in the occupied areas of Germany.<sup>73</sup> During the process of liberation an American military official, experienced in matters of drug control, was attached to Allied Supreme Headquarters in Europe to coordinate measures for the re-establishment of such control in liberated areas. The secretariat of the League's drug bodies remained in close contact with that officer.<sup>74</sup>

The decision to preserve a League nucleus in the heart of Europe was vindicated in the aftermath of the Allied landings as it served as an important intelligence source for those engaged in immediate relief work. The Geneva branch of the Secretariat accumulated important data on the narcotic situation in Europe. In March 1944 the American State Department expressed disappointment that the information passed onto UNRRA from the missions of the P.C.O.B. and the Drug Supervisory Body, established in Washington, was incomplete in terms of statistical information on the European situation. Lester reminded the American minister to Switzerland, Leland Harrison, that American censorship controls prevented the Geneva Secretariat from transmitting information to Washington concerning conditions in European countries with which the United States was at war or which were under Axis occupation.<sup>75</sup> To circumvent this problem the State Department permitted the Geneva branch of the Secretariat to forward important statistical information to Washington in the diplomatic post-bag of the American consulate.<sup>76</sup> This episode further underlines the Allied reliance on the League's ability to amass

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<sup>72</sup> Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 165.

<sup>73</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), pp 74-5.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>75</sup> Lester to Harrison, 1 Mar. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/1/1).

<sup>76</sup> Lester to Harrison, 12 May 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 566/1/2).

and disseminate crucial statistical data, highlighting the practical working relationship between the State Department and the League Secretariat.

It was during this time that the League's high commissioner for refugees was finally able to fulfil his traditional role. Following the liberation of France and Belgium Sir Herbert Emerson and his deputy high commissioner visited these countries, helping to re-establish the legal protection and status of refugees.<sup>77</sup> The office of the League's high commissioner of refugees had enjoyed a close working relationship with the French Third Republic. France was one of the League member states that traditionally sold the 'Nansen stamp', the proceeds of which were allocated to the high commissioner for refugee relief. During occupation the stamp was replaced by another bearing a different name and the revenue was no longer forwarded to Emerson's office. With the establishment of a new provisional government in France in August 1944 the stamp was restored and the funds that were withheld during occupation were allocated to the high commissioner, a sum amounting to two million francs.<sup>78</sup> During the war the Vichy government also annulled a 1928 agreement in which the French state agreed to recognise the role and duties of high commissioner as well as the various conventions relating to the international status of refugees. The Provisional Government of the French Republic subsequently cancelled the Vichy decisions.<sup>79</sup> A pre-war arrangement was reactivated in both France and Belgium which allowed quasi-consular authority to be accorded to any appointed representative of the League's high commissioner.

Emerson was also to re-establish contact with the Nansen refugees. In the aftermath of Franco-Belgian liberation the Central Offices for Russian and Armenian refugees was reconstituted under the joint control of the League High Commission and the French Foreign Ministry. The high commissioner devoted himself in 1944-5 to the repatriation of French and Belgian Nansen refugees who experienced forced labour and depredation during the war.<sup>80</sup> Many of these came from central Europe and those who were hidden by the Resistance also needed fresh papers. Emerson was

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<sup>77</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 112.

<sup>78</sup> G. Bidault to Lester, 16 Oct. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 553/5); *League of Nations international assistance to refugees: report submitted by Sir Herbert Emerson, high commissioner for refugees* (Geneva, 1946), p. 2, available from (T.N.A., FO 371/57822).

<sup>79</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 112.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

aware that the eventual collapse of Germany itself and the subsequent Allied occupation of the country would throw the refugee crisis into even sharper relief. He insisted that any new refugee authority should continue the League's legacy of providing legal status and protection for refugees and that the High Commission should not be dissolved until a competent body was ready to take its place.<sup>81</sup>

### **The League and the San Francisco Conference**

Such a competent body could not be created until the formal establishment of the proposed new international organisation. An international conference was convoked for that purpose and was due to convene in San Francisco from April-June 1945. Two weeks before the opening of the conference its host country was plunged into mourning upon the death of President Roosevelt. Harry S. Truman cited his affirmative answer to the White House press secretary's question as to whether the conference would go ahead as planned as the first decision he made as president of the United States.<sup>82</sup> In preparation for the conference the British Foreign Office sought to secure some commitment to the transfer of the technical functions of the League to the new organisation. The British favoured the passing of a suitable resolution at the conference indicating a willingness, on the part of the United Nations, to assume these functions as well as certain assets and liabilities.<sup>83</sup> The Foreign Office confided to the State Department its fears that if the League was kept in 'an ignominious state of uncertainty' it might result in the 'disintegration of the Secretariat and the breakdown of the useful work which it is now doing.'<sup>84</sup> Before the establishment of the specialised agencies of the new organisation certain number technical organisations of the League retained a monopoly in their field of work. Unless an agreement was reached between the old and the new organisations on the assumption of functions, the dissolution of the League would result in an interregnum for international cooperation in vital areas of social and economic concern.

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<sup>81</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), pp 114-5.

<sup>82</sup> Meisler, *United Nations: the first fifty years*, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> Armistice and Post-war Committee: memorandum by the minister of state on the liquidation of the League of Nations, 5 Mar. 1945 (T.N.A, FO 371/50636).

<sup>84</sup> Telegram from the British Foreign Office to the U.S. State Department, 26 Mar. 1945 (T.N.A, FO 371/50636).

While later Cold War tensions would eventually render the Truman administration less equivocal in its support for the U.N.O., the late wartime and early post-war period was marked by Washington's determined leadership of the new international system.<sup>85</sup> Within this political climate the U.S. government was prepared to spare some kind words for the League and to offer a *mea culpa* for the country's failure to join the organisation. In January 1945, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first session of the League Assembly, Sumner Welles issued the following statement:

We will not fail to admit that the greatest obstacle in the way of its success was the failure of the people of the United States to take part in it. And yet as we look back, the Covenant of the League of Nations remains, and will remain, a high water-mark of constructive human endeavour.<sup>86</sup>

The idea that it was the United States' refusal to join the League which doomed the organisation's political mission to failure proved enduring and was echoed in the subsequent historical scholarship.<sup>87</sup> Cecil lamented in 1949: 'If only the United States had been willing to join the League, how much suffering and destruction might have been saved.'<sup>88</sup> J.P. Dunbabin dismissed the idea that the League would have been more of an effective organisation if it enjoyed the membership of the United States. According to Dunbabin that would only have proven the case if the United States had been willing to serve as an activist member; if it had joined the U.S. would have proven just as prone to Britain 'to restrict and play down the League's coercive aspects.'<sup>89</sup> The United States certainly demonstrated the conservative internationalism of League member states during the Second World War when it refused to accord the transferred missions officials status and when it played down the political nature of the I.L.O.'s work.

While the League's experience helped shape the post-war internationalism of the United Nations, the influence of current and former international civil servants was not overtly publicised. As Patricia Clavin argued, the American inclination to limit the League's role to that of an 'observer' at the various conferences for post-

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<sup>85</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, pp 203-4.

<sup>86</sup> Sweetser, 'The United States, the United Nations and the League of Nations', p. 58.

<sup>87</sup> For example see P.M.H. Bell, *The origins of the Second World War* (Harlow, 1988), p. 42 and Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes*, p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Cecil, *All the way*, p. 149.

<sup>89</sup> J.P. Dunbabin, 'The League of Nations' place in the international system' in *History*, lxxviii (1993), p. 428.

war planning, with League officials being obliged to ‘use the tradesmen’s entrance at large public events’, should not be over-exaggerated, considering the League Secretariat always lived in the ‘shadows of international relations.’<sup>90</sup> By allowing the United States to participate in the warmly received technical activities, while it abstained from the League’s political debacles, the League had afforded American diplomats and officials a risk-free experience of international cooperation. The United States was able to embark on the United Nations project untainted by the futile efforts of the League Assembly and Council to maintain peace. Huntington Gilchirst, a former American member of the League Secretariat, wrote in 1945 that American membership of the League would provide the opportunity, denied to the League, for the new organisation to function effectively.<sup>91</sup> Other long-term supporters of the League such as James T. Shotwell, a member of Wilson’s foreign policy advisory group and future president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote that the revival of popular internationalism through the Dumbarton Oaks proposals and American support of it was almost ‘too good to be true.’<sup>92</sup> The absence of the United States from the League of Nations also provided League apologists with their strongest weapon with which to defend the League’s legacy. In a wartime address to the House of Lords the League’s first secretary-general reminded his fellow peers to:

remember that the League which failed was not the League envisaged by President Wilson, by General Smuts, by the noble Viscount himself, and by other statesmen. That League was based on the intimate participation in its inner councils of the United States of America. That League has never been tried, and has never failed.<sup>93</sup>

The new organisation was to be the first of its kind to secure American political commitment and as a result it was imbued with a sense of progress and optimism. The idea pervaded that the United Nations was breaking new ground and this was an asset that the State Department was reluctant to dilute. Leo Pasvolsky informed British Foreign Office official Gladwyn Jebb that while he agreed that certain steps should be taken in the future to ensure the transfer of activities from the

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<sup>90</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, pp 296-7; Clavin, ‘Europe and the League of Nations’, p. 352.

<sup>91</sup> Huntington Gilchirst, ‘Political disputes: Dumbarton Oaks and the experience of the League of Nations’ in *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, xxi (1945), p. 136.

<sup>92</sup> James T. Shotwell, ‘Comments on Dumbarton Oaks Proposals’ in *World Affairs*, cvii (1944), p. 249.

<sup>93</sup> H.L. deb., 2 June 1942, vol. 123, c. 10.

League to the new organisation, he feared that a formal resolution, at San Francisco, would ‘open the flood-gates.’<sup>94</sup> Other British diplomats received the same noncommittal response. Orié Gerig, a State Department official and past employee of the League Secretariat, informed his British counterparts that while there was general support for the winding up of the League and the assumption of any useful functions, in the build up to the conference it had not been possible to ‘give this subject much attention at a high level.’<sup>95</sup> The new organisation, not the old, was to be the natural priority of the United States government at San Francisco.

That being the case the League’s position *vis-à-vis* the San Francisco Conference was an awkward one. On 4 March 1945 Lester informed Hambro that he did not believe the United Nations powers would want the League to dispatch official representation to San Francisco. If the Secretariat should receive an invitation to attend the conference, Lester thought it would likely be in the capacity of observer with League officials simply being asked to look over certain drafts and to offer informal advice to delegations, as it had done in the past with organisations such as UNRRA and the F.A.O.<sup>96</sup> With the conference looming there was little sign of such an invitation, much to the consternation of Lester who doubted his ability to prepare an appropriate delegation in time for proceedings. On 12 April 1945, twelve days before the conference was due to convene, the acting secretary-general reflected that he found the entire situation ‘extremely unsatisfactory.’<sup>97</sup> Lester stated that, in the event of the arrival of an invitation he was

torn between a strong personal disinclination to go and a feeling that for any subsequent developments and negotiations, it may be very useful, especially when the conference comes to the point of inviting the old League to dissolve and negotiate the transfer of activities.<sup>98</sup>

The next day, 13 April, Lester received a letter from his former colleague Ambassador Winant, who requested, on behalf of his government, the presence of the secretary-general and two or three other League officials at San Francisco. According to Winant, the U.S. government, as the host of the conference, believed it would be ‘useful and helpful’ if the League was ‘unofficially’ represented at the

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<sup>94</sup> Telegram from Gladwyn Jebb to Roger Makins, 29 Mar. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/50636).

<sup>95</sup> Telegram from Lord Halifax to the Foreign Office, 29 Mar. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/50636).

<sup>96</sup> Lester to Hambro, 4 Mar. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>97</sup> Note by Lester, 12 Apr. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

conference so that it would be available for consultation on matters which would ‘be of particular concern to the League.’<sup>99</sup> This equivocal invitation confirmed Lester’s expectations of what would be asked of League officials at the conference and he reflected that the invitation was ‘somewhat back-handed.’<sup>100</sup> Despite the fact that the Supervisory Commission was ‘not very pleased’ with the manner in which the League was asked to participate, it was agreed that Lester should field an unofficial delegation to San Francisco.<sup>101</sup>

In 1944 former League official J.V. Wilson was commissioned by the Royal Institute of International affairs at Chatham House to compose a report on a prospective ‘international secretariat of the future.’ He perfectly captured the tensions that would exist between the old and new organisation during the transitional period when the United Nations Organisation remained under construction. Wilson wrote that ‘politically a balance must be struck’ between the disadvantages ‘associated in the public mind with efforts that were not always either popular or successful’ and the possible advantages of working with those who still believed that the ‘resolute application of the Covenant might have established the peace of the world on a firm basis.’<sup>102</sup> As Sweetser observed to Lester in November 1944 ‘what seems like new ground to many is old and familiar ground indeed to a handful of us.’<sup>103</sup> In a letter to Hambro (then working in the United States) Sir Cecil Kisch, the British member of the Supervisory Commission, wrote: ‘When I see the messages that come along from your side of the Atlantic I cannot resist a smile at the efforts to construct the same thing under another name and to conceal the fact at the same time.’<sup>104</sup> During this transitional period between the publication of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals and the dissolution and liquidation of the League of Nations there existed a curious tension between the need of the United Nations powers to glean as much information and assistance from the League’s international civil service as was possible and the inclination to banish the old embattled organisation to the periphery.

Upon their arrival in San Francisco the League delegation found that no arrangements had been made for them to obtain credentials for the conference or

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<sup>99</sup> Winant to Lester, 12 Apr. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>100</sup> Post-script to 12 Apr. note by Lester, 13 Apr. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> J. V. Wilson, ‘Problems of an international secretariat’ in *International Affairs*, xx (1944), p. 554.

<sup>103</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 7 Nov. 1944 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 564/3).

<sup>104</sup> Kisch to Hambro, 7 June 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/39293).

even to obtain admission to the buildings. They were obliged to lodge in a third class hotel. It was not until three days after their arrival that they were able to obtain the necessary credentials. Just one ticket for the opening ceremony of the conference arrived a half an hour before it was due to begin and this was for the upper gallery.<sup>105</sup> Their very presence of the League's unofficial delegation was objected to by the Soviet Union. In a pointed allusion to Lester, Molotov claimed that it 'should have been clearly understood that only citizens of one of the United Nations could be invited to the conference.'<sup>106</sup> The composition of the San Francisco Conference demonstrated that the new organisation was destined to be more of a 'League' than its predecessor ever was. Dunbabin observed that it was not commonly noted in historiography that the United Nations Organisation was originally a wartime coalition.<sup>107</sup> Sweetser argued, with justification, that the United Nations Organisation was 'more reflective of the atmosphere of war' in which it was inaugurated, than the League had been.<sup>108</sup> Alger Hiss, the American secretary-general of the conference (who three years later would be accused of being a Soviet spy), was anxious to diffuse tensions and advocated the reform of the League delegation so as to only include nationals of United Nations powers.<sup>109</sup> Lester did receive this suggestion as a personal slight but he was determined to stand his ground. As Lester put it:

In view of the principle involved, the international character of League officials, for which we had fought for many years and firmly established, and secondly and less [importantly], the right of the organisation to choose its representatives, I could not and would not take any initiative unless I knew this was the wish of the sponsoring governments, and even then [after] having sought the authority of the Supervisory Commission which had authorised our delegation and its presence in 'Frisco.'<sup>110</sup>

The fixation of Molotov on the nationality of the League delegation demonstrated the different internationalist impulses at work in the old organisation and the new. The new organisation was less the embodiment of liberal internationalism than it was, in Mazower's words, the 'return to principles of

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<sup>105</sup> Douglas Gageby, 'Seán Lester' a lecture for the military history society, 10 Apr. 1997, available from (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>106</sup> Minutes of the first four power preliminary meeting on questions of organisation of and admission to the San Francisco conference, 23 Apr. 1945 (*FRUS*, general: the United Nations, p. 371).

<sup>107</sup> Dunbabin, 'The League of Nations' place in the international system', p. 429.

<sup>108</sup> Arthur Sweetser, 'Comments on Dumbarton Oaks' in *World Affairs*, cviii (1944), p. 252.

<sup>109</sup> Note by Lester, 5 May 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

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



Concert diplomacy.’<sup>111</sup> Hambro, as chairman of the Supervisory Commission, reacted vehemently to this regressive attitude to an international civil service. Hambro emphatically declared that an ‘international official was international’ and advised Lester that in absolutely no circumstances should he contemplate giving way on the matter.<sup>112</sup> The League and I.L.O. contingent were the only groups to be comprised of nationals of non-United Nations countries. Molotov’s protestation at the presence of non-United Nations nationals in the League delegation can be interpreted as an attempt to highlight the League’s growing irrelevancy to an international order that practised a different kind of exclusivity than its post-war variant.

Never failing to assume its position as champion of League interests it was the United Kingdom which rose to the defence of Lester’s delegation. In reacting to Molotov’s protestations, Eden stressed that the League officials were not attending the conference as nationals of their own countries but as unofficial representatives of their organisation.<sup>113</sup> While informing the acting secretary-general that they would never contemplate telling him what to do in this situation, the British delegation expressed the hope that Lester would not withdraw his name from the delegation.<sup>114</sup> According to Eden, the British deliberately chose not to adopt as prominent a role in the San Francisco Conference, believing that the United States should take the lead in its own country. The British foreign secretary, bearing in mind the ultimate fate of the League Covenant, regarded the United Nations charter as having the best chance of success if embraced and championed by the United States.<sup>115</sup> As Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond observed, ‘whereas the Covenant was more British than American, the Charter was the reverse.’<sup>116</sup> J.V. Wilson mused in 1944: ‘I expect that Great Britain will be less at ease in the new than in the old Zion: it will be less her show.’<sup>117</sup> Thanassis Aghnides was present in San Francisco, as a member of the Greek delegation. Aghnides noted the strong shift in power and influence to the United States and its implications for the small European states. In a lecture he gave

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<sup>111</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 196.

<sup>112</sup> Note by Lester, 5 May 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>113</sup> Minutes of the first four power preliminary meeting on questions of organisation of and admission to the San Francisco conference, 23 Apr. 1945 (*FRUS*, general: the United Nations, p. 371).

<sup>114</sup> Note by Lester, 7 May 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>115</sup> Eden, *The reckoning*, p. 619.

<sup>116</sup> Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, *International organisation in the twentieth century*, p. 40.

<sup>117</sup> Wilson, ‘Problems of an international secretariat’, p. 550.

in London in October 1945, Aghnides shared the impressions of the delegates of the smaller European nations on what he described as the ‘eclipse of Europe’: ‘How deeply we felt it. The only Western European voice which had vigour and warmth was the voice of England. These islands thus appeared to us as the last repository of European civilisation.’<sup>118</sup> Britain and France’s permanent seats on the Security Council meant that Europe still had a role to play in high politics at the United Nations but it would clearly not enjoy the same global ascendancy. Marks argued that by 1945 ‘the surviving former European great nations became greybeards, elder statesmen full of advice and possessing some influence but not much far ranging authority.’<sup>119</sup> The San Francisco Conference revealed to the world that the United Nations organisation, responding to the reality of a changed world order, would reflect the dominance of the United States. As the League was shaped by a political order that no longer existed, its role in the San Francisco Conference was destined to be minimal.

While Lester could not take an active part in proceedings that did not mean that the League was irrelevant to the San Francisco Conference. As he followed the proceedings of the conference, Sweetser noted that League experience and precedent were cited continuously during the various meetings, not least by the United States delegation.<sup>120</sup> An invitation was dispatched for a League official to attend, in an advisory capacity, a sub-commission of the steering committee of the conference and Lester, erring on the safe side, nominated the British national Alexander Loveday.<sup>121</sup> Loveday was called upon to speak several times at the meetings of the commission and Lester wrote that the director was able to have an indirect influence on proceedings through his behind-the-scenes consultation with several national delegations.<sup>122</sup> As Clavin argued, this was what League officials did best; they operated in the shadows, using indirect means to influence national and international policy. The experience of League officials at San Francisco was indicative of the League’s entire wartime experience. Technical directors such as Loveday could enjoy less complicated interaction with delegates; the acting secretary-general and

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<sup>118</sup> ‘Some impressions of the San Francisco conference’ a lecture given at Greek House, London, 24 Oct. 1945 (L.N.A., PPA Agh, 3/17, p. 7).

<sup>119</sup> Marks, *The ebbing of European ascendancy*, p. 426.

<sup>120</sup> Arthur Sweetser, ‘The United States, the United Nations and the League of Nations’ in *International Conciliation*, xxiv (1946), p. 52.

<sup>121</sup> Note by Lester, 9 May 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>122</sup> Note by Lester, 15 May 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

the treasurer, Seymour Jacklin, as representatives of the supposedly ‘political’ Secretariat, could not. Jacklin produced a draft report on methods of financing the Interim Commission and Secretariat of U.N.O so that the ‘odium’ of making proposals on the question of finance could be avoided by delegations.<sup>123</sup> However Jacklin, as well as representatives of the I.L.O., were neglected by the financial committee of the conference, being obliged to wait several hours in the lobby outside the meeting room until the session was almost complete.<sup>124</sup> Jacklin regarded his treatment as a politically charged ‘studied insult.’<sup>125</sup>

Proceedings at San Francisco were marred by a lack of leadership and administrative expertise with inexperienced and ill-informed chairmen often allowed to conduct committees.<sup>126</sup> As Jacklin commented drily to Lester, some of those he encountered in San Francisco used to hand his papers to him in Geneva.<sup>127</sup> The conference secretariat was primarily recruited from the civil service in Washington and locally in San Francisco. Until a few weeks before the conference the secretariat remained under-subscribed and so the International Labour Office responded generously to requests for temporary staff.<sup>128</sup> However the staff of the I.L.O. represented only a small fraction of the overall conference secretariat. Of the hundreds of staff employed less than half a dozen had served in the League and only two had enjoyed permanent employment in the old international civil service.<sup>129</sup> Contemporary observers concluded that the absence of a recruitment drive for former staff of the League Secretariat constituted a failure to ‘to capitalise upon this rich experience in international administration.’<sup>130</sup>

It would be remiss in pointing out the shortcomings of San Francisco not to concede that the conference itself was a highly ambitious and challenging project. The organisational difficulty in managing such a huge conference was reflected in the fact that its closing ceremony, during which almost two hundred delegates affixed their signatures to the draft charter, would take an estimated eight hours to

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<sup>123</sup> Note by Lester, 15 May 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Grayson Kirk and Lawrence H. Chamberlain, ‘The organisation of the San Francisco Conference’ in *Political Science Quarterly*, xxviii (1945), p. 326.

<sup>127</sup> Note by Lester, 15 May 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>128</sup> Kirk and Chamberlain, ‘The organisation of the San Francisco Conference’, p. 330.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

reach its conclusion.<sup>131</sup> The Charter of the United Nations was first activated on 24 October 1945 and by the following December it had been ratified by all of its fifty-one member states. Arthur Sweetser, a member of that generation of American internationalists who had been bitterly disappointed by U.S. abstention from the League, was fittingly present in the Senate gallery when Senators voted overwhelmingly to ratify the U.N. Charter by eighty-nine votes to two. Sweetser wrote to Lester, articulating the optimism and determination characteristic of the most idealistic of League officials, who believed that the survival and expansion of international organisations was the current of world history: ‘I thought of you several times that day and since, feeling that the objective to which we both of us have given so much of our lives has now been brought increasingly nearer.’<sup>132</sup> Amidst all the drama of San Francisco, measures were adopted to begin the process of transferring the functions and activities from the League to the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.). Before the close of the conference, the United Nations powers agreed to enact a steering committee to negotiate, with League representatives, the transfer of the assets and functions of the old organisation to the new. Lester was also able to make use of his transatlantic crossing to pay a visit to the League missions in Princeton and Montreal. The fate of the League was sealed but despite the ignominy of the San Francisco Conference its influence was not effaced. As the British Foreign Office official Hugh McKinnon Wood wrote in a report on ‘The dissolution of the League of Nations’:

When the fifty-one original members of the United Nations, including the great majority of the League’s own members, signed the charter of the United Nations on 26 June 1945, they rendered the early dissolution of the League inevitable. At the same time they reaped the benefits of the wise policy which had refused to allow it to collapse and had on the contrary maintained its structure, equipment and finances intact and continued its non political activities.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *The Times*, 21 June 1945.

<sup>132</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 4 Aug. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>133</sup> Hugh McKinnon Wood, ‘The dissolution of the League of Nations’, p. 317, available from his letter to Lester, 8 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

### **The League's ongoing technical programmes 1944-5**

Even in the wake of the San Francisco Conference the technical work of the League did not come to a halt and continued to adapt to new political and military realities. During the final months of war Lester reported that the American diplomats and officials stationed in Switzerland were 'getting a good deal of value' out of the Rockefeller Library.<sup>134</sup> In the summer of 1945 the work the E.F.O.'s Committee of Statistical Experts, disrupted by the war, resumed. Its work, particularly on the international balance of payments, was considered to be of particular pertinence to the proposed International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.)<sup>135</sup> The League's health and opium bodies continued to produce surveys and to collaborate with UNRRA.

Following V.E. day, the work of the League's high commissioner for refugees gained a new momentum. With the Allied occupation of Germany Nansen was able to focus on procuring papers and assistance for the Nansen refugees among the displaced persons of the former Greater Reich. Emerson secured the services of Captain Yves le Vernoy, who had enjoyed distinguished service in the French Resistance, to liaise, on behalf of the high commissioner, with the Allied military authorities and with UNRRA from his headquarters in Munich.<sup>136</sup> By March 1946 almost 25,000 Nansen refugees were found within those parts of Germany occupied by the western Allies and of Austria, having being transported from central and southern Europe as well as from their former residences within the borders of Greater Germany. The office of the high commissioner began the process of registering the Nansen refugees and Captain le Vernoy secured the permission of the French government for the admission of a small number of 'detached' children and a few adults.<sup>137</sup> Otherwise, by March 1946, the problem of the resettlement of the Nansen refugees had barely begun. Emerson regarded it as his particular duty to ensure that responsibilities to the League's Nansen refugees were assumed by the new organisation.<sup>138</sup> As regards the wider refugee crisis, Emerson gave evidence to the Joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry and suggested measures for the

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<sup>134</sup> Lester to Loveday, 3 Jan. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>135</sup> *Work of the League during the war: report submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* (Geneva, 1945), p. 39.

<sup>136</sup> *League of Nations international assistance to refugees: report submitted by Sir Herbert Emerson, high commissioner for refugees* (Geneva, 1946), p. 2, available in (T.N.A., FO 371/57822).

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

repatriation, absorption and settlement of displaced persons within various countries.<sup>139</sup>

The latter period of the war constituted a rude awakening for the I.L.O. as there appeared a marked disparity between its ambition and its achievement. In his 1945 director's report Phelan wrote that those 'who were familiar with the I.L.O.'s record of achievement and, in consequence, convinced of its potentialities for the future, not unnaturally experienced some disappointment at the failure to associate the I.L.O. more fully with the discussions at San Francisco concerning the new economic and social machinery.'<sup>140</sup> Phelan attributed this omission on the part of the United Nations powers to the necessity of concentrating, at the conference, on the most crucial issue of security and to the unpredictability of political and military developments leading up to and during the conference.<sup>141</sup> According to State Department records, the U.S. government's representative to the ninety-fifth session of the Governing Body, held in Quebec in June 1945, noticed that 'the experience of the I.L.O. representatives in San Francisco appears to have had a chastening effect. Numerous statements were made to the effect that the I.L.O. must stick more strictly to its own affairs and do a good job in this field.'<sup>142</sup> While the British proposed that immediate action concerning the I.L.O. should be taken in the aftermath of the conference, the organisation remained in a certain limbo.

As discussed in the previous chapter, before the Philadelphia Conference the I.L.O. was criticised for becoming complacent in its work programmes and for losing its momentum after the high point of the New York Conference. By 1945 the I.L.O. could not afford its past complacency as increasingly, in the aftermath of the San Francisco Conference, it was no longer the largest international organisation to boast the membership of the United States. In his 1945 report Phelan denied that the I.L.O. felt in any way threatened by the new World Federation of Trade Unions (W.F.T.U.) established in October 1945, which united trade unions under the umbrella of one organisation and replaced the International Federation of Trade

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<sup>139</sup> *League of Nations international assistance to refugees: report submitted by Sir Herbert Emerson, high commissioner for refugees* (Geneva, 1946), p. 4, available in (T.N.A., FO 371/57822).

<sup>140</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Paris 1945: director's report* (Montreal, 1945), p. 111, available from (I.L.O.A, I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 111-2.

<sup>142</sup> Report on the ninety-fifth session of the Governing Body of the I.L.O. by the chief of the Division of International Labour, Social and Health Affairs, June 1945 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general the United Nations 1945, p. 1535).

Unions. According to the acting director, the W.F.T.U. was not in any sense a rival to the I.L.O., as the tripartite I.L.O. possessed a different function. Rather the I.L.O. had a complementary function to the W.F.T.U. 'as an instrumentality through which trade unionism cooperating with governments and employers, exercises official responsibility for an important sector of international policy [and] has valuable opportunities for influencing policy in a wider field of action.'<sup>143</sup> While its own position may not have been implicitly threatened, the I.L.O. would have to prove it could hold its own within a climate of increased international cooperation. From January to October 1945 its specialised committees and commission on maritime affairs, on employment, on work safety, on the protection of children and young workers in the workplace and on social insurance met with increasing regularity.<sup>144</sup> The I.L.O. also re-introduced its Committee of Experts to examine the annual reports submitted by member states outlining their adherence to ratified labour conventions. The Committee found that while the machinery of reports never ceased to function during the war, such literature could not adequately depict 'the dislocating effect of the abnormal conditions created for all countries at war upon their ability to carry out their obligations under labour conventions.'<sup>145</sup> The I.L.O. hoped to advocate the re-introduction of approved labour practises under the umbrella of the United Nations Organisation.

During the war years it became the practise of the transferred technical missions to prioritise North and South America in their studies and surveys, leaving the Lester's Geneva-based nucleus to look after Europe. With the liberation of Europe this was partly remedied by the I.L.O. The Labour Office sought to resume the closest contact with continental Europe, dispatching emissaries to Paris, Brussels, Bern, Lisbon, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Luxembourg.<sup>146</sup> In October 1945 the I.L.O. Conference made a symbolic return to Europe, convening in the French capital. Phelan declared it fitting that Paris should be the site for the first post-war conference of the I.L.O. as the city had 'served as cradle for the I.L.O. and the liberties of Europe alike.'<sup>147</sup> At this sitting the I.L.O. adopted an instrument of

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<sup>143</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Paris 1945: director's report* (Montreal, 1945), pp 133-4, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p 110.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>146</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Paris 1945: director's report* (Montreal, 1945), p. 124, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p 123.

amendment the object of which was to sever all constitutional ties of the League of Nations. This instrument came into effect when it received ratification by three-fourths of its membership and by the members of the I.L.O. who were also members of the League Council.<sup>148</sup> Phelan partly attributed the sluggishness of the United Nations powers to incorporate the I.L.O. into the framework of the new organisation to the historic antipathy of the Soviet Union towards the League of Nations. Phelan believed that jettisoning the League connection would enable closer relations with the Soviet Union thus paving the way for formal relations with the United Nations.<sup>149</sup> At Paris the International Labour Conference admitted two new members to the organisation: Guatemala and Iceland. The new democratic republic of Italy was re-admitted to the I.L.O. 'not only because of pre-fascist Italy's wholehearted collaboration with the Organisation, but also as an earnest of the interest of the organisation in the reconstruction problems of Europe.'<sup>150</sup> As was the case with the League and Finland, the I.L.O. played an important role in the international rehabilitation of a state that had previously orbited the Third Reich.

### **Negotiations with the U.N. Preparatory Commission**

Meanwhile in late 1945-early 1946 the United Nations Preparatory Commission, working from its London base, deliberated the transfer of the assets and functions of the League to the new organisation. There is general agreement, within the historiography devoted to this period of Soviet history, that the U.S.S.R. resented any initiatives for the new international organisation that deflected attention from its primary security function.<sup>151</sup> During the Dumbarton Oaks negotiations the Soviet representative argued that one of the reasons for the failure of the League was the multiplicity of its tasks.<sup>152</sup> Alexander Dallin asserted that the Soviet delegation made a paltry contribution to the work of the Preparatory Commission and seemed to attribute little importance to its work.<sup>153</sup> Despite the assertion that the U.S.S.R. was

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<sup>148</sup> Note by Henri Vigier, 11 Dec. 1945 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 565/2/3).

<sup>149</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Paris 1945: director's report* (Montreal, 1945), pp 112-3, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>151</sup> See for example Richard N. Gardner, 'The Soviet Union and the United Nations' in *Law and Contemporary Problems*, xxix (1964), p. 845 and Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, p. 147.

<sup>152</sup> Dallin, *The Soviet Union at the United Nations*, p. 22.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.



apathetic to the cause of international social, economic and cultural cooperation, records illustrate that the Soviets were not eager to allow the western powers, operating within the Preparatory Commission, a free hand to mould the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. in the image of the League's technical services. After all, it had been the League's technical agencies that had proved the most enduring embodiment of its liberal democratic ethos.

The British government was of the position, supported by other government representatives of the U.N. Preparatory Commission, that given the recognised necessity of avoiding any disruption to the useful work of the League's technical services, a general transfer, on terms to be agreed between the two organisations, was the most logical step.<sup>154</sup> The Soviets rejected this proposal. The American delegate confided to the secretary of state that the Soviet view on the liquidation of the League was that the League should remain in existence until the U.N. finished picking and choosing which of its services it wanted to retain.<sup>155</sup> Soviet representatives dismissed any inference that the United Nations Organisation was the successor of the League of Nations. In order to avoid giving this impression, the Soviet representatives insisted that the Preparatory Commission of the U.N.O. should avoid the implication that these activities would be 'transferred' to the new organisation. The Soviets reasoned that the term 'transfer' connoted the complete preservation of League agencies under the direction of the United Nations. Rather, according to the Soviets, it should be stated that those League activities would be 'assumed' by the Economic and Social Council of U.N.O. which would then proceed to organise, re-shape or even discontinue those activities as it saw fit.<sup>156</sup> A sub-committee was formed to study the problem. As no suitable compromise could be found by the sub-committee between the Soviet proposal and the previously accepted course of a general transfer, the motion was put to a vote. The proposal of a general transfer of assets and functions was accepted by a majority of the committee with the Soviet Union rejecting the motion and Czechoslovakia abstaining.<sup>157</sup>

Notwithstanding the approval of the majority of the sub-committee for a general transfer, the Soviet objection, considering its power of veto on the Security

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<sup>154</sup> J.G. Ward to Martin Hill, 24 Oct. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/50646).

<sup>155</sup> Adlai E. Stevenson to Edward Stettinius jnr., 1 Nov. 1945 (*FRUS*, diplomatic papers: general the United Nations 1945, p. 1473).

<sup>156</sup> Lester to Loveday, 18 Dec. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>157</sup> Loveday to Lester, 11 Oct. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

Council, proved too great an obstacle to overcome. Consequently the original plan of the Preparatory Commission was altered. The Preparatory Commission would only enter into negotiations with the League on the subject of the transfer of assets. The ECOSOC would be asked to survey the League's technical activities and determine which of those should be assumed by the new organisation. If the dissolution of the League was effected before that process was completed then the ECOSOC would be empowered to continue, provisionally, the work being carried out by all League agencies. Once the ongoing programmes of the League's technical agencies were completed the ECOSOC would then determine what technical activities would be continued and what direction they would take.<sup>158</sup> The wartime projects of the technical services would be completed and their recommendations for post-war reconstruction would be disseminated to governments. The U.N.O. had already expressed interest in the statistical work of the Economic and Finance Organisation as well as in the work of Health section, the Social section and that of the P.C.O.B.<sup>159</sup>

Once the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations clarified its position on the transfer of assets and functions, it was able to enter into negotiations with the League of Nations. Lester sought and received the approval of member states for the Supervisory Commission to be invested with the necessary authority to negotiate on behalf of all member states.<sup>160</sup> During the last months of the League's existence, when Lester left Geneva, he was able to provide a degree of leadership denied to him during the war years. Rather than each individual technical agency entering into separate negotiations with members of the U.N.O., Lester and the Supervisory Commission were able to reassert some kind of administrative control over the entire League apparatus and negotiated on behalf of all the League's technical organisations, except for the semi-autonomous I.L.O.

League representatives entered negotiations with their U.N. counterparts with certain objectives. One of those objectives was to try and secure some kind of an assurance that the staff of the Secretariat would, upon dissolution of the League, be able to secure opportunities of employment with the new, as yet unformed, permanent Secretariat of the U.N.O. Between 1939 and 1943 the number of League

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<sup>158</sup> Lester to Loveday, 18 Dec. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 19 Nov. 1945 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 564/3).

staff had fallen from 650 to 100 individuals. After 1943 when the technical activities escalated their efforts in post-war planning, certain staff were re-engaged and by the time of the final Assembly the number had risen to 130.<sup>161</sup> Lester was reluctant to pare down the Secretariat until orderly dissolution and liquidation of the organisation was effected. However Hambro was anxious to dispel the ‘unpleasant gossip’ amongst government officials that League officials were simply trying to hold on to their jobs.<sup>162</sup> Lester informed his staff that their contracts would be terminated on 31 July 1946 but that those officials whose services would be required for the process of liquidation would be retained on temporary short-term contracts.<sup>163</sup> The Preparatory Commission of the U.N.O. emphasised that it could not undertake to agree to an *en-bloc* transfer of League officials to the U.N. Secretariat. The recruitment of officials to the new international civil service was to be entirely the prerogative of the U.N. secretary-general but as the intention was to create the most professional and capable international civil service, applications from League personnel would be most welcome.<sup>164</sup> As the Preparatory Commission, due to Soviet scruples, was denied the authority to negotiate the transfer of League activities to the U.N.O., the Supervisory Commission secured a commitment from that body that it would press the Economic and Social Council to make a formal pronouncement on the matter.<sup>165</sup>

The League had accrued significant liquid assets over the course of its history with over 561 million C.H.F. contributed to the League budget by member states. By 1945 the total liquid assets of the League amounted to 15,238,792.32 C.H.F.<sup>166</sup> During negotiating proceedings the Supervisory Commission pointed out to the U.N. Preparatory Commission that the League had remained solvent throughout its history, even during the war years, and that no serious obstacle should hamper the

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<sup>161</sup> Provisional minutes of the twenty-first session of the Assembly: first meeting of the Second Committee, 8 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57003, pp 5-6).

<sup>162</sup> Note by the acting secretary-general, 25 July 1945 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 565/2/7).

<sup>163</sup> Provisional minutes of the twenty-first session of the Assembly: first meeting of the Second Committee, 8 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57003, p. 6).

<sup>164</sup> Record of the second joint meeting of the United Nations Committee on the transfer of League of Nations Assets and the League Supervisory Commission, 17 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>165</sup> Record of the first joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 8 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>166</sup> Lester to Ernest Bevin, 4 Aug. 1947 (T.N.A., FO 371/67575). According to the exchange rate set by the Bretton Woods agreements the equivalent in U.S. dollars was approximately of \$3,539,616.49. According to ‘Measuring worth.com’ a website established by Laurence H. Officer, professor of economics at the University of Illinois and Samuel H. Williamson, Emeritus professor of economics from Miami University, the relative value of that amount today ranges from \$36.1 and \$45.1 million. (<http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/relativevalue.php>) (1 Aug. 2013).

procurement of ‘an equitable and businesslike solution satisfactorily to all parties.’<sup>167</sup> In briefly alluding to the League’s wartime experience David L. Bosco wrote that most of the League’s member states stopped their payments to the League budget.<sup>168</sup> In reality thirty-seven out of the total forty-four member states of the League continued to make contributions to the budget.<sup>169</sup> By December 1945 League accounts could testify that since the organisation’s creation over ninety per cent of contributions had been received, 4.5 per cent cancelled and about 1.5 per cent consolidated into payments over a period of years (to asset defaulting member states). This left only four per cent of contributions outstanding.<sup>170</sup> While the League Treasury was in regular receipt of contributions, by the time of the final League Assembly in April 1946 only thirteen member states were completely up to date on their payments.<sup>171</sup> The Supervisory Commission allowed that the United Nations should not be obliged to assume the liabilities of the League as well as its assets.<sup>172</sup> To this end it would be the responsibility of the League to resolve the issue of arrears in member state contributions during dissolution and liquidation proceedings. The liquid assets of the League would not be gifted to the U.N.O. but rather divided among member states, with each state receiving a sum proportionate to the amount it had contributed.

From the birth to the dissolution of the League approximately fifty million C.H.F. (derived from member state contributions) was converted into tangible material assets, such as the sprawling *Palais des Nations*.<sup>173</sup> The total value of League buildings, fixtures and fittings was estimated at 2,750,000 G.B.P.<sup>174</sup> The League and the United Nations authorities agreed that a full indiscriminate transfer of material assets was the best course of action. Although the material assets of the League were to be transferred to the U.N.O., they were strictly speaking the property

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<sup>167</sup> Record of the first joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 8 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>168</sup> Bosco, *The U.N. Security Council and the making of the modern world*, p. 12.

<sup>169</sup> H.C. deb., 18 Apr. 1946, vol. 421, c. 2891.

<sup>170</sup> Minutes by Hugh McKinnon Wood, 26 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007).

<sup>171</sup> H.C. deb., 18 Apr. 1946, vol. 421, c. 2891.

<sup>172</sup> Record of the first joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 8 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>173</sup> See Appendix 1 for list of material assets of the League.

<sup>174</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Apr. 1946. According to the National Archives of the United Kingdom currency converter that amount would have been the approximate value of £71,362,500 in the year 2005. (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>) (11 July 2013).

of member states. As a result it was agreed that credits would be granted in the books of the U.N.O. to those powers who were members of the League upon its dissolution. However upon the final moment of dissolution there would be four such countries who were not yet members of the U.N.O; Switzerland, Portugal, Ireland and Finland. Rather than depriving them of their rightful share in the material assets it was found that there would be sufficient funds left over from the divided liquid assets of the League to apportion an additional cash payment to those states to cover their share in the material assets.<sup>175</sup> It was agreed that the deadline for the transfer of all material assets of the League should be 1 August 1946 but that it was necessary to provide some 'degree of elasticity' in the event of a delay to prevent 'embarrassment for the administrations concerned.'<sup>176</sup> As it was likely that the ECOSOC would only be ready to assume the non political functions of the League in various stages, the Supervisory Commission agreed to provide full use of League buildings to the U.N.O. before legal transfer was effected in order to ensure a smooth transition without any break in the continuity of the technical work.<sup>177</sup> The U.N.O. likewise agreed to extend the same rights to League officials, after the buildings of the old organisation became the property of the new, until liquidation proceedings, likely to take some months, were completed.

The eventual fate of League headquarters was of great interest to the old international civil service. Over the course of the League's history and especially during the war years, its officials and supporters were always anxious to encourage greater participation of the United States in the activities of the organisation. That did not mean that they were anxious to oversee, what Aghnides referred to as the 'eclipse of Europe.'<sup>178</sup> By 1945 the question of where to locate the headquarters of the U.N.O. had not been resolved; the decision would have a massive impact on operation and influence of the new international civil service. The Swiss federal

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<sup>175</sup> Record of the second joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 16 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8); Extract from parliamentary debate held on 30 Apr. 1947 (N.A.I., DFA 340/12/19).

<sup>176</sup> Record of the fourth joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 25 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>177</sup> Summary record of the second joint meeting of the United Nations Committee and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission on the transfer of League of Nations assets, 17 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>178</sup> 'Some impressions of the San Francisco conference' a lecture given at Greek House, London, 24 Oct. 1945 (L.N.A., PPA Agh, 3/17, p. 7).

government hoped that Geneva would remain an important seat for international institutions.<sup>179</sup> According to the *Gazette de Lausanne* Geneva was one of the likely locations alongside other European cities such as London, Brussels, Luxembourg and Vienna with the Soviets favouring Prague.<sup>180</sup> At a Commonwealth meeting in April 1945 the British coalition government recommended that the best location for the new U.N.O. would be in Europe, outside the territory of a great power, ideally retaining the old League headquarters in Geneva.<sup>181</sup>

The transfer of power in Britain from the Conservative led coalition to the Labour government of Clement Atlee in July 1945 did not undermine the League's currency with the British government; as discussed in chapter two support for the League was traditionally strong among the British left.<sup>182</sup> During the deliberations of the United Nations Preparatory Commission the minister of state for foreign affairs of the new Labour government, Philip Noel-Baker, continued to advocate Geneva as the potential headquarters of the new organisation. Noel-Baker had served as Cecil's assistant when the League Covenant was first drafted in Paris. He was seconded to the League Secretariat in 1920, serving as an assistant to Drummond. In 1945 Noel-Baker emphasised the advantages of Geneva as the location for an international organisation; it possessed purpose-built amenities and accommodation while the neutrality of Switzerland which would obviate the risk of any undue opportunities or influence being accorded to a great power.<sup>183</sup> He argued that Soviet scruples against both the League and Swiss neutrality would likely be removed by the liquidation of the League as well as the full internationalisation of the territory on which headquarters stood so that it fell outside Swiss jurisdiction.<sup>184</sup> Noel-Baker acknowledged that Geneva was associated with the failure of the League, but asserted that the location of U.N. headquarters on the site of past ignominy would

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<sup>179</sup> Max Petitpierre to Swiss legations and general consulates, 23 Apr. 1945 (S.F.A., SDD 60/007/156, p. 1068).

<sup>180</sup> *Gazette de Lausanne*, 20 Oct. 1944.

<sup>181</sup> Memorandum by the minister of state, 14 Sep. 1945 (T.N.A., CAB 129/2, p. 1).

<sup>182</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 188; Cecil, *All the way*, p. 159.

<sup>183</sup> Memorandum by the minister of state, 14 Sep. 1945 (T.N.A., CAB 129/2, pp 1-2). Due to necessity, a considerable number of staff would have to be recruited locally and if the new organisation was located within the territory of a great power the question of undue influence on the international civil service could arise.

<sup>184</sup> Memorandum by the minister of state, 14 Sep. 1945 (T.N.A., CAB 129/2, pp 1-2).

demonstrate how the United Nations powers were ‘facing the challenges of this failure.’<sup>185</sup>

This view, though not without support, was not shared by all members of Atlee’s government who recognised the need to place some political and even geographical distance between the old organisation and the new.<sup>186</sup> In his 1941 publication Robert Dell had argued that Geneva was an unsuitable location for an international organisation. According to Dell the League should have been located ‘in an important city where the members of the staff would have a large and varied society outside the League to mix with and would not be obliged, so to speak, to take in one another’s washing.’<sup>187</sup> J.V. Wilson also observed that ‘it was sometimes argued against Geneva that it was removed from the mainstream of affairs, not being in itself an active centre of political life. Perhaps it was somewhat too idyllic a place to be fully suited to its purpose.’<sup>188</sup> Geneva was certainly isolated from mainstream events during the war and was exposed as a poor choice of headquarters for any international organisation aspiring to a political role. The retention of headquarters in Geneva would also be incompatible with the Soviet determination for a clean break with the past. During the debates of the first General Assembly in January 1946 Gromyko firmly expressed the view of the Soviet Union on the permanent location of U.N. headquarters:

I wish to say that the Soviet government has a definite negative attitude towards Geneva as a possible place for the United Nations Organisation. The Soviet Government considers that the United States would be the proper place for the United Nations Organisation. The United States is located conveniently between Asia and Europe. The old world has had it once, and it is time for the new world to have it.<sup>189</sup>

The ultimate selection, by the 1946 General Assembly, of New York as the headquarters of the U.N.O. served as a backdrop for the substitution, within international organisations, of the worn out hegemonies of western Europe for the post-war predominance of the United States. The idea that the stately *Palais des Nations* could be forsaken and the attempt of the Soviets and other hardened critics

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<sup>185</sup> Memorandum by the minister of state, 14 Sep. 1945 (T.N.A., CAB 129/2, p. 2).

<sup>186</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 4 Oct. 1945 (T.N.A., CAB 128/1, p. 138).

<sup>187</sup> Dell, *The Geneva racket*, p. 337.

<sup>188</sup> Wilson, ‘Problems of an international secretariat’, p. 554.

<sup>189</sup> John N. Hazard, ‘The Soviet Union and the United Nations’ in *Yale Law Journal*, lv (1946), pp 1026-7.

of the inter-war system to consign the League to the dustbin of history appalled its supporters and officials. The League's dying days were marked by the determination of League officials and supporters to fight for their own history. Those who had devoted a great deal of their life to the service of the League believed that the Secretariat of the League was an institution which deserved 'to leave some permanent trace behind it'.<sup>190</sup> Figures such as Frank Walters, the former deputy secretary-general, were convinced of the historical value of League records which documented major political, economic and social development over the previous twenty-five years. Walters was adamant that the League's archives should become a permanent institution and vehemently opposed the indiscriminate transfer of files to the new (as yet un-built) headquarters of the U.N.O. Reflecting on the intentions of the U.N. to assume full ownership and right of disposal of all League archival material he concluded that such a move would be;

profoundly wrong, short-sighted, un-generous, destructive and an offence against history. If anything of this sort is carried out, it will mean that all visible and material records of the League of Nations will, for practical purposes, be wiped out-scattered, merged into a mass of material in which they lose all separate identity, removed from the place and setting in which they properly and historically belong.<sup>191</sup>

Loveday also believed that the transfer of the League's Rockefeller Library to New York would be 'a tragic error' and a 'serious loss to the cause of international understanding'.<sup>192</sup> Loveday argued that everything should be done to 'maintain some centre of international work in Europe.'<sup>193</sup> Despite the assertion of Walters that the archives of the League should serve as a kind of memorial to the old international civil service, the organisation's complete collection of files and publications were too valuable to the U.N. Secretariat to be preserved in a kind of mausoleum. During negotiations with League representatives in January 1946, the U.N. Preparatory Commission emphasised the importance it attached to the League Library and to the transfer of its archives to the new organisation.<sup>194</sup> The Preparatory

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<sup>190</sup> Walters to Hambro, 8 Dec. 1945 (B.L., C.C.P., MSS 51114, f. 155, p. 3).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>192</sup> Loveday to Sweetser, 15 Nov. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Record of the first joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 8 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).



Commission asserted that the U.N.O. would need to have full right of disposal of the archival material but assured the League representatives that they regarded those archives as a most valuable material asset.<sup>195</sup>

During the final months of the League's existence its officials were obliged to come to terms with the fact they were no longer in the vanguard of peaceful internationalism; rather they were increasingly regarded as relics of times passed. The League's liberal democratic ethos was relevant during the war as a counterpoint to totalitarianism and fascism. However in a post-war world of greater political realism, the League was beginning to lose the relevance it fought so hard to keep. In November 1945 at a meeting of the U.N. Preparatory Commission a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* observed an incident that perfectly encapsulated the difficult position in which League officials and supporters found themselves at the end of the war:

Our attention was attracted by Mr. Noel-Baker suddenly leaving his place and greeting a stranger in the gangway. It was Viscount Cecil, a little more bowed and frail than Geneva knew him but with fire still in his eye. He came in, just at the moment when the words 'seat of the U.N.O.' were being frequently heard in a committee in which the name 'Geneva' apparently must not be pronounced. Across the passage the League of Nations Committee was engaged in winding up that first world organisation with which he was so completely identified. It was only a step or two to go in, but he did not take them.<sup>196</sup>

### **History closing in: the final Assembly of the League of Nations**

When the 'common plan' for the transfer of assets and functions, brokered by the U.N. Supervisory Commission and the U.N. Preparatory Commission, secured the necessary approval from the U.N. General Assembly, Lester could return to the *Palais des Nations* to make the necessary preparations for the dissolution of the League of Nations. The acting secretary-general, about to embark on his final duties, received some recognition in late 1945. Arthur Sweetser, then president of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, wrote to Lester informing him that the directors of the

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<sup>195</sup> Record of the second joint meeting of the committee of the United Nations Preparatory Commission and the League of Nations Supervisory Commission to discuss transfer of League assets, 17 Jan. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 563/2/8).

<sup>196</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Nov. 1945.

foundation wished to confer upon him the Woodrow Wilson award for ‘distinguished service in maintaining throughout World War II the traditions and the organisation of the League of Nations.’<sup>197</sup> In an official letter to the foundation Lester accepted the award ‘on behalf of all my colleagues wherever they served, as a recognition of the steadfastness of those who, when the cause of free cooperation between free nations seemed almost a forlorn hope, would not yield their integrity nor allow force or the threat of force to mould their conduct.’<sup>198</sup> Lester informed his old colleague Sweetser that he was touched that the Foundation chose ‘to honour a bit of wartime service, obscurely performed and by no means in the public eye.’<sup>199</sup> Lester confided to Eden that what sustained him ‘in his personal disinclination to quit’ just because things ‘were difficult’ was the conviction that the preservation of the League would prove to ‘have been worthwhile.’<sup>200</sup> Unlike his successor, Lester was an ardent internationalist. His idealism sustained him in his pragmatic preservation of a nucleus of international cooperation in the heart of continental Europe.

While Lester was receiving a Woodrow Wilson award, Joseph Avenol was trying to exculpate himself from accusations of wrong-doing. Like many of those associated with the League experiment Avenol disseminated his views on the post-war international situation. In his 1944 publication *L'Europe Silencieuse* he suggested the creation of a Council of Europe type organisation.<sup>201</sup> In this book all vestiges of his pro-Axis sympathies were effaced by his admiration for the Allied war aims and for the Resistance efforts of the occupied countries.<sup>202</sup> In terms of the wider historiography of Vichy, Avenol can be recognised as one of the many *Vichy-résistants*, men who had been early adherents to Vichy only to switch allegiance in response to the reversal in fortunes of the Axis bloc.<sup>203</sup> Avenol was an opportunist who would not concede that he had failed in his duties as secretary-general. He dispatched a vehement letter to the editor of the *Tribune de Genève* in April 1946 refuting an assertion that Lester was compelled to assume leadership of the

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<sup>197</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 5 Oct. 1945 (L.N.A, General, R 5814/43437).

<sup>198</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 4 Dec. 1945 (L.N.A, General, R 5814/43437).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Lester to Eden, 22 June 1942 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>201</sup> Joseph Avenol, *L'Europe Silencieuse* (Neuchâtel, 1944), p. 65.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., pp 13-14.

<sup>203</sup> Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy*, p. 3.

Secretariat when it was left in the lurch.<sup>204</sup> He wrote beseeching letters to Hambro wanting to know the exact nature of the charges his colleagues laid against him.<sup>205</sup> As the last Assembly approached Avenol made it known to Hambro that he would be prepared to justify himself to the Supervisory Commission and to pass onto that organ whatever information, explanations or opinions it required of him.<sup>206</sup> Hambro, extremely preoccupied with the task at hand, neatly side-stepped any unnecessary digression into the events of 1940 and politely reminded Avenol that he had, whatever the circumstances surrounding it, left the Secretariat in ‘very difficult conditions’.<sup>207</sup>

Avenol lacked both an idealistic attachment to the Covenant and a realistic understanding of the political landscape. Lester was both a disciple of the Covenant and, having in his own worlds, ‘received more kicks than halfpence’ during his wartime stewardship of the Secretariat, acquired a shrewd understanding of the realities and limitations of international cooperation.<sup>208</sup> In 1944 Anthony Eden discussed with Lord Lytton the prospect of conferring upon the secretary-general of the new organisation the power to call the attention of the Council to matters which threatened the peace of the world. Eden observed that ‘in such a case much would depend on the personality of the secretary-general [.....] we cannot be certain that he will always be the man to be entrusted with those powers.’<sup>209</sup> Avenol’s tenure as secretary-general served as a significant warning against placing at the head of an international secretariat a figure so lacking in political prudence and circumspection.

Lester was, even before the San Francisco Conference, adamant that the League should not be pressurised into dissolution and liquidation on anything other than its own terms.<sup>210</sup> He came under increased pressure to call the League’s suspended political organs into session to obviate the inconvenience of the simultaneous existence of two international organisations. In August 1945 he rejected the proposal for the convening of an Assembly as early as November 1945.<sup>211</sup> This risked the possibility of effecting the League’s dissolution before

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<sup>204</sup> *Tribune de Genève*, 12 Apr. 1946.

<sup>205</sup> Avenol to Hambro, 23 Apr. 1945 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 109, p. 1).

<sup>206</sup> Avenol to Hambro, 4 Apr. 1946 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 135, p. 1).

<sup>207</sup> Hambro to Avenol, 23 May 1945 (A.F.M.F.A., 6PAAP/3, f. 110, p. 1).

<sup>208</sup> Note by Lester, 5 May 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>209</sup> Eden to Lord Lytton, 13 Mar. 1944 (T.N.A., FO 371/40746).

<sup>210</sup> Lester to Loveday, 6 Aug. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

member states had been given the opportunity to agree to the transfer of assets and functions to the U.N.O. In a letter to the Foreign Office Gladwyn Jebb, then the acting secretary-general of the United Nations, expressed his frustration with Lester's insistence that the League Assembly should be held in Geneva, as per tradition, rather than in London.<sup>212</sup> London was a more convenient location for the U.N.O. (than operating in that city) which was expected to send observers to the final League Assembly. He also indicated his preference that the last Assembly of the League should be a 'quiet affair' but that Lester was insisting that the occasion be marked by an '*enterrement de premiere classe* complete with funeral speeches' and the establishment of various committees to study the proposals of the common plan.<sup>213</sup>

Lester's desire for dissolution with dignity was an objective supported by Ernest Bevin, then foreign secretary. Bevin stressed that while the League should not try to compete with the United Nations in any way, the last Assembly should not constitute 'an undignified shovelling away of a corpse into a pauper's grave, such as the Russian's may desire us to give it.'<sup>214</sup> Consequently the British government fielded an impressive delegation to the Assembly. Viscount Cecil, whose attempts to galvanise public opinion in defence of the League Covenant never flagged, even during the war years, was accorded his place in the delegation and the final Assembly fittingly marked the end of Cecil's active public life.<sup>215</sup> The delegation was led by another League enthusiast, Philip Noel-Baker. The French too sent their seasoned diplomats and statesmen to dissolve the League. The aged Joseph Paul-Boncour once more led the French delegation to Geneva, serving as a reminder of the prominent role of Third Republic in the formation and development of the League. The staff of the Geneva Secretariat, unlike their counterparts in the transferred technical services, had spent almost six years in relative obscurity as they persevered with their wartime work programmes. In April 1946 the eyes of the world would turn once more to Geneva as the League Assembly emerged from self-imposed hibernation.

The Supervisory Commission asked the British Foreign Office to take the initiative at the Assembly in advancing the motion for dissolution, a responsibility

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<sup>212</sup> Gladwyn Jebb to the Foreign Office, 11 Aug. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/50636).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Memorandum by the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 7 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>215</sup> Cecil, *All the way*, p. 240.

which was accepted.<sup>216</sup> In preparing for the Assembly Lester was faced with the diplomatic conundrum of who exactly to invite to participate. While the League functioned as an anti-communist coalition, the U.N.O. practised a more tangible form of exclusivity it being composed of the members of the wartime alliance. The Assembly Hall of the League of Nations would not only be populated by delegations from neutral member states but also by those powers which had fought alongside Germany, Italy and Japan. Finland, Bulgaria and Thailand fell into this bracket and the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the Assembly convened before formal peace treaties were signed between those powers and the representatives of the Allied governments. The British Foreign Office reflected that the prospect of sitting down at the same table with countries with which the United Kingdom was still technically at war was not desirable but it conceded that it could not stop Lester issuing invitations to those powers.<sup>217</sup> As it transpired, neither Bulgaria nor Thailand attended the Assembly. Finland, which had already begun its rehabilitation with the League through the payment of its contribution, did send delegates. While the Assembly of April 1946 might have been the last session in the history of the League of Nations, it provided one of the first opportunities of international collaboration, between ex-enemy states. Finnish, British and French delegates served together on important sub-committees at the April Assembly.

By 1946 official League documentation listed forty-four states as members of the League of Nations.<sup>218</sup> However the massive political upheavals engendered by war meant that in reality a handful of those states had completely lost their sovereignty or were bereft of a legitimate, internationally recognised government. Lester could not contemplate issuing a formal invitation to the Baltic states as the majority of member states no longer recognised their independence.<sup>219</sup> Another state whose status was considered uncertain was Albania. As discussed in chapter one, Avenol ignored the Albanian appeal to the League in April 1939. In the wake of the complete Italian conquest of Albania the same month the newly installed puppet government of Shefqet Vërlaci telegraphed the secretary-general of the League notifying him as to the immediate withdrawal of Albania.<sup>220</sup> As this government had

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<sup>216</sup> Minutes by Hugh McKinnon Wood, 1 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>217</sup> Foreign Office notes, 6 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>218</sup> See appendix 2 for list of member states of the League in 1946.

<sup>219</sup> Foreign Office memorandum, 24 Feb. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>220</sup> Shefqet Vërlaci to Avenol, 13 Apr. 1939 (L.N.A., general, R 3691/37748).

not yet secured the recognition of member states, the notification was considered invalid and Albania continued to be listed on League documentation.<sup>221</sup> Likewise in 1946, the uncertain and largely unrecognised status of the new People's Socialist Republic of Albania, led by the former partisan Enver Hoxha, impelled Lester to withhold an invitation to an Albanian government.<sup>222</sup> As was customary, the Assembly inaugurated specialised committees to investigate the matters which would come before it. The League's Credentials Committee was appointed the task of approving and sanctioning the presence of member state delegations. Even as proceedings were ongoing the diplomatic problems posed by those states whose membership of the League was regarded as having lapsed or whose legitimacy was considered dubious, did not disappear. A representative of the former Latvian republic tried to obtain admission to the Assembly on the grounds of his credentials from the 1939 session.<sup>223</sup> He was refused by the Credentials Committee.

The status of Austria also presented an original problem for the high direction of the League. Prior to a session of the Assembly in 1938 a formal communication was received from Germany informing the League of Austria's union with the Third Reich. The League's Committee on Contributions insisted that this communication constituted a formal notice of withdrawal and the Legal Committee upheld this view as, in the aftermath of the Anschluss, Austria could no longer be regarded as an independent state.<sup>224</sup> With the collapse of the Third Reich a representative of the new provisional Austrian government approached Lester to express an interest in participating in the final Assembly.<sup>225</sup> Ultimately it was considered 'legally incorrect' to allow Austria a seat in the Assembly, especially as that right was being denied to the Baltic states whose membership was also deemed as to having lapsed due to a loss of sovereignty.<sup>226</sup> The British Foreign Office, in particular, did not want to raise complicated questions in view of the complete authority the Allied Control Council was exercising over Austrian foreign relations at that moment in time.<sup>227</sup> However an Austrian representative presented himself at the Assembly in the

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<sup>221</sup> Note by J.G. Ward, 28 Feb. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Conclusion of a British delegation meeting, 7 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57003).

<sup>224</sup> Note by Hugh McKinnon Wood, 4 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>225</sup> Note by Ward, 28 Feb. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>226</sup> Note by Wood, 4 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>227</sup> Note by Ward, 8 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

manner, according to *Time Magazine*, of a 'poor, estranged relative.'<sup>228</sup> Robert Cecil argued that it would be an injustice for the Assembly to fail to recognise a newly independent Austria and suggested its re-admittance as a new country.<sup>229</sup> Hambro, as president of the League Assembly, announced that Austria would be admitted to the Assembly as an official observer in recognition that the country had been the 'first victim of Nazi aggression' which once again desired to 'collaborate with the free peoples of the world.'<sup>230</sup> Denmark too was quick, during this period, to discharge all its outstanding financial obligations to the League before the organisation's formal dissolution. In this way Austria and Denmark followed in the footsteps of France and Finland in using the League as the means to re-establish relations with members of the international community from whom they were estranged.

In December 1939 the League Assembly decided not to close its twentieth ordinary session but to adjourn it. Lester believed, with the approbation of member states, that the best course of action would be for the Assembly to resolve itself into a new session.<sup>231</sup> It was agreed by member states that the Council would not be convoked but that the League Assembly carried the necessary executive authority to dissolve the organisation. The twentieth Assembly was formally opened by its president, Hambro, on 8 April 1946 in order to formally close it and announce the opening of the twenty-first session. The last time member states convened in a League Assembly they confined themselves to condemning Soviet aggression in Finland while abdicating their responsibility to denounce German aggression elsewhere on the continent. With the war at an end Hambro declared that delegates could not meet once more in the *Palais des Nations* without dwelling:

for one solemn second on the untold suffering and sacrifice of millions, on the furious fighting, on the resolute and resourceful resistance, on the determination of nations, great and small, to die rather than to see prostituted and destroyed every idea for which they have been striving, in human frailty and futility, and every principle that makes life worth living trampled underfoot.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Time Magazine*, 22 Apr. 1946.

<sup>229</sup> Conclusion of a British delegation meeting, 9 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57003).

<sup>230</sup> Record of the fifth meeting of the twenty first ordinary session of the Assembly, 12 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 4).

<sup>231</sup> Annotated provisional agenda for the Assembly convened to meet in Geneva on 8 April 1946, 2 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57002).

<sup>232</sup> Provisional record of the twentieth Assembly: sixth meeting, 8 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57005, p. 1).

In recognition of his commitment to the League during the war years, Hambro was unanimously re-elected president of the Assembly. Lester too was recognised for his efforts. Humphrey Hume Wrong of Canada was one of many delegates to pay a warm tribute to Lester. According to Wrong, Lester assumed leadership of the Secretariat ‘in the darkest hours of modern history’ but persevered ‘in the midst of discouragement which would have made a lesser man resign in despair.’<sup>233</sup> The name of Lester’s predecessor was never invoked. The Czechoslovak delegate was the only speaker who made a veiled allusion to Avenol and his actions in 1940. Dr. Jaromir Kopecky argued that ‘had not a change occurred in 1940 in the person at the head of the Secretariat’ his country and the other occupied member states would not have been permitted to further associate themselves with the League of Nations.<sup>234</sup> The *Journal de Genève* also paid tribute to the League’s international civil service as a ‘model of efficiency and order’ and celebrated the League tradition of gathering competent and distinguished experts under one roof to work for social and economic progress.<sup>235</sup> On 26 March 1946 Lester had announced his intention to place his position as acting secretary-general at the disposal of the forthcoming Assembly.<sup>236</sup> On 18 April, the final day of proceedings, member states voted to formally confer upon Lester the full rights and responsibilities of secretary-general. The Assembly conferred the title retroactively so that Lester’s tenure as secretary-general was deemed to have begun in September 1940. Jacklin was also retroactively confirmed as under secretary-general.<sup>237</sup> Raymond Fosdick’s asserted that Lester’s appointment as secretary-general constituted nothing more than the conferral of a type of ‘honorary degree’; however this risks slighting Lester’s pivotal role in preserving a League nucleus in the heart of continental Europe and overlooks the esteem in which he was held by member states and by his colleagues.<sup>238</sup>

The League’s sobering experience of the San Francisco Conference created the impression that its political identity was no longer valued by the international community. However even when the League’s identity was no longer relevant to

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<sup>233</sup> Record of the third meeting of the twenty first session of the Assembly, 10 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 25).

<sup>234</sup> Record of the fourth meeting of the twenty first session of the Assembly, 11 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 7).

<sup>235</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 8 Apr. 1946.

<sup>236</sup> Lester to Hambro, 26 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57004).

<sup>237</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 19 Apr. 1946.

<sup>238</sup> Fosdick, *The League and the United Nations after fifty years*, p. 71.



member states they were not prepared, on the eve of dissolution, to treat their membership of the organisation as politically insignificant. The final Assembly continued to reflect the League's role as a badge of sovereignty and its value as a shared accord on international standards of behaviour. The refusal of member states to depoliticise the League, even on its deathbed, and their reluctance to summarily dissolve the organisation with little fanfare was demonstrated by the controversies generated within the special committees of the Assembly. The first day of Assembly proceedings was marred when the Argentinean candidacy for the vice-presidency of the Assembly was soundly beaten with most delegations preferring Mexico for the role.<sup>239</sup> This provoked an angry outburst from the Argentinean delegation which temporarily withdrew from all Assembly and committee meetings. A representative of the British delegation assumed the role of peace-broker and called upon his Argentinean counterparts. Argentina protested at the manner in which it was treated by the Assembly, viewing it as an affront to its 'national prestige' precisely at the time when it had just conducted 'genuine democratic elections.'<sup>240</sup> Argentina was pushing for an increase in the number of vice-presidencies and so the British delegation sounded out the attitude of their Dominion counterparts. Disapproval of the right-wing policies of the Argentinean government was running high and some of the dominion delegates, the Australians in particular, informed the British that if a move to increase the number of vice-presidencies was proposed on the floor of the Assembly they would move to oppose it.<sup>241</sup> The British then informed the Argentinean delegation that there was no hope for such a proposal, warning them that if they attempted any further initiative in this matter it would 'certainly produce a first class battle in the Assembly which would discredit both them and the League.'<sup>242</sup> The Argentinean delegation had no choice but to agree drop the matter and re-assumed its participation in the Assembly.

Crucially, one of the factors which rendered the prospect of an Argentinean vice-presidency of the Assembly so unattractive to other delegations was that country's bold stance on the Soviet Union in December 1939. Of all the member states that had supported the condemnation of the U.S.S.R. in December 1939, Argentina was the only one anxious to remind everyone of its previous anti-Soviet

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<sup>239</sup> British delegation to the Foreign Office, 9 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57004).

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

pronouncements. Its delegation claimed ‘a clear right’ to a vice-presidency in recognition of its prominent role in the Assembly of 1939.<sup>243</sup> A member of the British delegation informed his Argentinean counterparts that allusions to the 1939 Assembly ‘was exactly the kind of thing’ on which they ‘did not wish bitter remarks to be made in the Assembly.’<sup>244</sup> The legacy of the 1939 resolution haunted the special Assembly committees tasked with considering the League’s dissolution and liquidation.

The two most important of these committees were the General Committee and the Finance Committee. The General Committee studied the questions of transfer and dissolution. Lester pointed out to its members that the General Committee could not, in any way, consider how the League’s technical activities should be conducted within the umbrella of the new organisation.<sup>245</sup> All the member states of the Assembly could do was register their approval of the continuation of the social and economic activities of the League within the new organisation. The Permanent Court of International Justice was also to be dissolved in favour of the new International Court of Justice. The Permanent Court maintained its nominal existence but by early 1945 its judiciary had resigned their posts, most being offered positions within the new Court. José Gustavo Guerrero, the El Salvadorian president of the Permanent Court, who alongside Lester had been denied passage into Spain in 1940, was elected the first president of the International Court of Justice.

While the proposal for dissolution was relatively straightforward the liquidation of the League’s assets became a politically charged issue. In March 1946, with the Assembly looming, the Sovietised Baltic states officially requested Lester to add their share of the League’s assets to that of the U.S.S.R’s. At the same time he was approached by figures claiming to separately represent the old republics who invoked the individual financial rights of those countries vis-à-vis liquidation.<sup>246</sup> The U.K. delegation supported the inclusion of the Baltic republics in the list of member states entitled to a share in the League’s assets, mindful of the fact that the extent of arrears owed to the League Treasury by those three states would likely extinguish

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<sup>243</sup> British delegation to the Foreign Office, 10 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57004).

<sup>244</sup> Communication from the British delegation to the League Assembly to the Foreign Office, 10 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57004).

<sup>245</sup> *The Times*, 11 Apr. 1946.

<sup>246</sup> ‘Political questions arising out of the liquidation of the League: brief for the United Kingdom delegation’, 7 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., F.O. 371/57003).

their claims.<sup>247</sup> This was indeed the case. However the British Foreign Office resisted the suggestion that any state which had withdrawn from the League of its own volition should be entitled to a share in the organisation's assets. The Foreign Office felt that the remaining member states who had preserved the League machinery during the war years as an 'act of faith in international organisation' should not have to lose a portion of their shares in the assets to accommodate those countries which had discarded it.<sup>248</sup>

A country whose history had pitted it as an enemy of the Covenant tried to re-establish relations with the dying League of Nations. The new democratic republic of Italy sought to distance itself from the belligerent dictatorship of Mussolini, a dictatorship that sought to obliterate other League member states such as Ethiopia, Albania and Greece from the map. Hugh McKinnon Wood of the British Foreign Office was approached by an Italian diplomat who expressed his intention to write to Hambro claiming a share for Italy in the League's assets. The Foreign Office regarded such a claim as the 'height of impertinence.'<sup>249</sup> McKinnon Wood dissuaded the Italian diplomat from pressing his claim, advising him that such an application would be 'hopeless.'<sup>250</sup> However the new Italian republic remained keen to make some gesture to the League of Nations. On 8 April President Hambro read a message to the assembled delegations from the Italian government. The message expressed the hope that the ideals of the League would find in the United Nations 'a fertile soil for their development and their application' and reminded the Assembly of the role Italian nationals had played in the social and economic activities of the old organisation.<sup>251</sup> In return Hambro relayed the following carefully worded message to the young Italian republic: 'The Assembly hails the birth of a new democratic Italy, freed of that fascism which has done so much harm to the interests of all Italians and all mankind.'<sup>252</sup>

The issue of former member states staking a claim in the League's assets continued to complicate dissolution proceedings. The U.S.S.R., as the only state to

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<sup>247</sup> Political questions arising out of the liquidation of the League: brief for the United Kingdom delegation, 7 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., F.O. 371/57003).

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Note by J.V. Wilson, 7 May 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006).

<sup>250</sup> Minutes by High McKinnon Wood, 26 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006).

<sup>251</sup> Record of the fifth meeting of the twenty-first session of the assembly, 12 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 2).

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

have been expelled from the League, was in a unique position. A member of the Soviet delegation to the U.N. Assembly made a private approach to Hambro suggesting that the U.S.S.R. was entitled to a share in the League's assets.<sup>253</sup> The British Foreign Office refused to countenance such a proposal as it felt that any weakening on the issue would 'cast a shadow of appeasement over the League's final meeting' and 'would also gain no good-will from the Soviet Union, who would only despise the League for having way.'<sup>254</sup> The Polish and Czechoslovak delegations forwarded a motion in the meeting of the Second Committee of the Assembly (devoted to financial questions) that the Soviet Union should be accorded a share in the League's assets. The motion was predicated on the fact that the Soviet Union did not withdraw from the League of its own free will. The Poles and Czechoslovaks, then falling within the Soviet sphere of influence, argued that it would be 'equitable to associate with the final settlement, a nation whose contribution to the victory of free countries and the contribution of the world order has been outstanding.'<sup>255</sup> This motion was supported by the delegates of Finland, France and Yugoslavia. A sub-committee composed of delegates from Canada, Finland, France, the United Kingdom and Uruguay was formed to study the matter. While the majority of the sub-committee favoured the inclusion of the Soviet Union in the list of member states entitled to a share in the League's assets, it was agreed that such a move would 'create technical difficulties of so serious a character as to be practically insurmountable.'<sup>256</sup> At the suggestion of the Second Committee the Assembly approved the following resolution as a gesture to the U.S.S.R:

The Assembly desires to place on record its recognition of the fundamental contribution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the overthrow of the fascist enemies of civilisation and to the triumph of freedom, and to welcome the collaboration of the Soviet Union in building, on the foundations so successfully laid, the new edifice of international solidarity.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Political questions arising out of the liquidation of the League: brief for the United Kingdom delegation, 7 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., F.O. 371/57003).

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Minutes of the fifth meeting of the Second Committee of the League Assembly, 13 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 17).

<sup>256</sup> Report of the Finance Committee to the twenty first Assembly, 17 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 11).

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

The period under review by the thesis is bookended by two important Assemblies. Both of these Assemblies featured Soviet inspired resolutions and the stark difference in the tone and spirit of these resolutions serve as a dramatic reflection of an unprecedented shift in the international landscape. The words of gratitude and approbation sounding in the Assembly did not induce the Soviet press to construct flattering obituaries for the League of Nations. *Trud*, the organ of the Soviet labour unions, commented upon dissolution proceedings by dismissing the League as a ‘centre of Soviet intrigue.’<sup>258</sup> With the U.N.O. the Soviet Union had come once again to participate in an international organisation; but on its own terms. *Trud* expressed its hope that the ‘ignominious legacy’ of the League would be an adequate warning for ‘all who intend to follow the bankrupt policy of Geneva’.<sup>259</sup> The sense of continuity between the League and the U.N. while feted by League supporters was denied and dismissed by Moscow, despite the shared technocratic traditions of the two organisations.

It was this sense of continuity and optimism that characterised the final Assembly of the League of Nations. League officials and supporters were very possessive about the League’s history and tried to manage the organisation’s epitaph. The speeches of the final Assembly were characterised by the self-consciousness that this was a historic occasion and the final opportunity, on home ground, to justify the League’s existence and its wartime preservation. Lester articulated the traditional apologia of League supporters when he delivered his final report to the assembled delegates: ‘The League of Nations as an organisation no doubt had its faults, but it is dangerous nonsense to say that war came because of those faults. The League did not fail; it was nations which failed to use it.’<sup>260</sup> The survival and influence of the technical services contributed to a self-congratulatory atmosphere in Geneva. Robert Cecil proudly asserted that ‘the work of the League is purely and unmistakably printed on the social, economic and humanitarian life of the world.’<sup>261</sup> South Africa’s Leif Egeland criticised

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<sup>258</sup> *Trud*, 28 Apr. 1946.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> *Report of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the acting secretary-general* available from (U.C.D.A., P.P.S.L., P 203/72/5, p. 5).

<sup>261</sup> Record of the second meeting of the twenty-first session of the Assembly, 9 Apr. 1946 (B.L., C.C.P., MSS 51024, f. 65, p. 9).

the fashion to belittle the League of Nations, and to seek to make the League the scapegoat for the myopia of statesman or the apathy of peoples. In this Assembly, however, here in Geneva where through the years a vast and efficient international civil service was built up, it is fitting that tribute should be paid to a great experiment, which despite its failure to avert Armageddon, did achieve many positive successes and solid contributions to human progress, particularly in the less spectacular field of its work.<sup>262</sup>

The League's traditional critics in the press dismissed what they regarded as mawkish and inaccurate recollections of the Geneva experience. *Time Magazine* dubbed figures such as Robert Cecil 'sentimental old-timers.'<sup>263</sup> *Pravda* sought to downplay the grandiosity of the final Assembly by claiming that the League was buried in an 'unattended last-rite at which its last president Doctor Hambro read the funeral service and [Joseph] Paul Boncour in the role of deacon pronounced the Amen, and said a few words for decency's sake.'<sup>264</sup> Rather than defending the League's legacy, in the tradition of Cecil and Lester, *Pravda* accused the League of being 'chatterly like a magpie and cowardly like a hare', being presided over by the 'high-priests of imperialism', who transformed the organisation into an 'arena for international intrigue and back-stage diplomacy.'<sup>265</sup> This debate, which resonated within subsequent scholarship, demonstrates that internationalism, a movement intended to foster peace, prosperity and solidarity, more often than not inspired bitter and entrenched political and ideological division.

The type of history League officials and supporters were engaged in was of the 'Whiggish' variety described by Ashworth.<sup>266</sup> What sustained those gathered at Geneva was the belief that the United Nations represented not the end of the League but a continuation of its ideals within a stronger framework. Nothing embodied that sense of continuity more than the presence, within the new U.N. Secretariat, of former League officials. During the first session of the Assembly, Hambro, in welcoming the official United Nations delegation, pointed out the presence of Adriannus Pelt, the personal representative of the U.N. secretary-general. Hambro was eager to allude to the fact that in December 1939 Pelt had sat in the Assembly as the director of the League Secretariat. Thus the Dutchman, according to Hambro,

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<sup>262</sup> Record of the second meeting of the twenty-first ordinary session of the Assembly, 9 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57005, p. 28).

<sup>263</sup> *Time Magazine*, 22 Apr. 1946.

<sup>264</sup> *Pravda*, 26 Apr. 1946.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> See Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 10.

embodied ‘that continuity which must be preserved.’<sup>267</sup> Hambro also argued that League headquarters should not become ‘an impressive grave for mourned and regretted ideas.’ Rather League member states hoped that it would ‘soon team with life, as a centre of fruitful and creative activity.’<sup>268</sup> He told the correspondent of the local *Journal de Genève* that the spirit of the League of Nations was not dead and that those assembled for the last time in the *Palais des Nations* were not ghosts.<sup>269</sup> The President of the Council, Adolfo Costa du Rels, spoke of the ‘sacred trust’ being passed from the League to the United Nations.<sup>270</sup> Robert Cecil was also keen to emphasise the continuity and tradition that existed between the League and the United Nations:

Shorn of its imperfections and transplanted under better conditions, the League Experiment will start a new lease of life in a new human endeavour to achieve peace and security through the United Nations [.....] The League is dead: Long live the United Nations!<sup>271</sup>

As can be concluded from the negotiations between the League and the U.N. Preparatory Commission and even from the often frustrating experience of the League’s technical organisation as they sought to influence post-war planning, the United Nations Organisation, though not a clean break with the past, certainly did not constitute the second attempt at the Geneva experiment. While the goals and some of the equipment remained the same, the world had been too badly burned by the frustration of the League’s collective security potential not to employ new methods and ideas. The United Nations Organisation would be called on to preside over an era of rapid decolonisation and its General Assembly would provide the forum for an ideological clash between east and west as Cold War Tensions escalated. Such divisions enabled a resurgence of a liberal internationalist approach on the part of the United States and its allies when they engaged in cultural warfare

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<sup>267</sup> Record of the first meeting of the twenty first ordinary session of the Assembly, 8 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57005, p. 6).

<sup>268</sup> Record of the seventh meeting of the twenty-first session of the Assembly, 18 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57006, p. 46.)

<sup>269</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 26 Mar. 1946.

<sup>270</sup> Record of the second meeting of the twenty-first ordinary session of the Assembly, 9 Apr. 1946, (T.N.A., FO 371/57005, p. 7).

<sup>271</sup> Record of the second meeting of the twenty-first ordinary session of the Assembly, 9 Apr. 1946, (B.L., C.C.P., MSS 51624, f. 68, p. 16).

with the communist bloc.<sup>272</sup> These tensions and the inability to juggle different political systems would subject U.N. machinery to the same crippling inertia as experienced by the League, demonstrating the enduring challenges of international and intergovernmental cooperation. However, while the western powers may have already come to suspect and resent Stalin's intentions in Eastern Europe, the immediate post-war era, the period with which this thesis is concerned, was marked by the aspiration that the Big Five could work together to effectively police the world; this would require the toleration of the radically different political, cultural and economic structures of the U.S.S.R.<sup>273</sup> After 1945 international cooperation could no longer be predicated on the maxim that the principles of liberal democracy, still being espoused within the walls of the last Assembly, would soon become a universal political reality.

In the closing session of the Assembly on 18 April the reports of the committees and their recommendations were presented to member states. The terms of the common plan for the transfer of assets from the League to the United Nations were unanimously approved. League member states directed Lester to 'afford every facility for the assumption by the United Nations of such non-political activities, hitherto performed by the League, as the United Nations may decide to assume.'<sup>274</sup> The terms proposed for the liquidation of the League, its dissolution and the dissolution of the Permanent Court of Justice were formally approved by Assembly resolutions. Thus on the afternoon of 18 April 1946 the League of Nations ceased to exist. All that remained was a small band of officials to liquidate its assets and oversee the assumption of its functions by the United Nations Organisation.

### **The transfer of functions to the U.N.O. and the liquidation of the League**

Once all the grandiose ceremonies had been completed and delegates scattered for the last time, Lester and his remaining staff could concentrate on their relations with the U.N.O. and the process of liquidation. In May 1946 a negotiating committee from the United Nations arrived in Geneva to discuss the transfer of property with

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<sup>272</sup> See Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, 162; Thompson, 'Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept', p. 28; Rietzler, 'Before the cold wars', p. 150.

<sup>273</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 212.

<sup>274</sup> Report of the first committee to the twenty first session of the Assembly, 17 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 271/57006, p. 5).



the high direction of the League. During their stay they were given the opportunity of touring the facilities offered by the *Palais des Nations* and of assessing the potential of the buildings in relation to conference services and as potential office space for the U.N.'s technical agencies. The aspirations of the final Assembly appeared likely to be realised as the U.N. committee came to the conclusion that in the *Palais des Nations* the United Nations Organisation had 'acquired a valuable asset which could play an important role in facilitating future international meetings of every description.'<sup>275</sup>

The U.N. delegation also busied themselves in negotiations with the Swiss authorities. The U.N. confirmed certain rights of usage the city of Geneva enjoyed on the former League site in the Ariana Park. They also negotiated the diplomatic immunities and privileges which their staff were to enjoy in Switzerland. The new 'Interim arrangement for the privileges and immunities of the United Nations in Switzerland' explicitly formalised the international status of all its officials and delegates leaving no room for the manipulation and interference which had been endemic during the war.<sup>276</sup> At the final Assembly Max Petitpierre, head of the Swiss Political Department, expressed his government's satisfaction that the relations with the League 'have been so pleasant and so cordial.'<sup>277</sup> In reality the difficult attitude of the Federal Council undermined the potential of the wartime nucleus of the Geneva Secretariat. In a communication to Swiss diplomats in April 1945 Petitpierre had stated that while Switzerland would not seek an invitation to the San Francisco Conference, the Swiss people, in adhering to the League Covenant, had given clear proof of their understanding of international solidarity, both before and during the war.<sup>278</sup> Lester recognised that there was less inclination to accommodate the scruples of neutral powers in the new international system as there had been during the League's time and believed that Switzerland had been over-hasty in disassociating itself from the old organisation at different times during its wartime history.<sup>279</sup> At a luncheon hosted by the Geneva municipal authorities to welcome the United Nations

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<sup>275</sup> Report of the negotiating committee of the League of Nations, 1 May 1946 (T.N.A., FO 57321, p. 8).

<sup>276</sup> Negotiating Committee on League of Nations assets: report on the negotiations with the Swiss authorities, 1 May 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57321).

<sup>277</sup> Record of the seventh meeting of the twenty-first session of the Assembly, 18 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007, p. 35).

<sup>278</sup> Max Petitpierre to Swiss legations and general consulates, 23 Apr. 1945 (S.F.A., SDD 60/007/156, p. 1066).

<sup>279</sup> Lester to Hambro, 6 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

delegation to the city, Lester could not resist the temptation, on this occasion, to say to an old Swiss acquaintances 'that it was rather a pity Geneva seemed to have entirely forgotten what the League of Nations meant to the city during the last twenty-five years.'<sup>280</sup> The League's wartime experience of Swiss neutrality served as a useful lesson for the development and organisation of the United Nations with U.N. headquarters and its future European headquarters of the *Palais des Nations* enjoying formal extra-territorial privileges.

On 1 August 1946 Lester and Włodzimierz Moderow, the European director of the U.N.O., carried out the formal signature for the legal transfer of League buildings and other material assets to the United Nations. This entailed signing three documents, two of them bilateral with the United Nations and one which registered the new ownership in the records of the Genevese cantonal and municipal authorities. From this day the remnants of the League Secretariat were no longer the hosts of the United Nations but their guests. Lester was disappointed by Moderow's insistence that they carry out the formalities on 1 August 1946 when the new secretary-general of the U.N.O. was due to arrive in Geneva the following morning and whose signature would surely prove more significant than that of his representative.<sup>281</sup> Lester learned from members of the United Nations delegation that Moderow, a former advisor to the Polish government on the Danzig question, had not made the best impression on his chief as the Pole was deemed 'a trifle fussy and a trifle over-anxious to expand and develop his personal position.'<sup>282</sup> As the League experience demonstrated, the management of a large international civil service was fraught with many tensions and professional in-fighting; such problems were clearly not dispelled with the creation of the new U.N. Secretariat.

U.N. Secretary-General Trygve Lie arrived in Geneva on 2 August. Moderow originally arranged for the secretary-general's first official call in Switzerland to be made to the Swiss authorities but Lie's political advisers thought it more fitting for Lie to go straight to the what was, since the previous day, the former headquarters of the League of Nations.<sup>283</sup> Lester greeted Lie on the steps of the *Palais des Nations* and the two secretaries-general enjoyed a brief conversation and photo opportunity. Lie then left for Bern to conduct talks with the Swiss federal authorities. A few days

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<sup>280</sup> Lester to Hambro, 6 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

later Lie returned to Geneva and was given on a tour of League buildings by Moderow. Moderow was keen to exclude all League officials from the tour of the *Palais des Nations* which was reserved for United Nations officials only. However, Moderow's attempt to belittle the League was undermined by the presence of at least four former League officials in the U.N. delegation.<sup>284</sup>

As the League was in the process of liquidation it was remarkable that Moderow bothered to project a sense of rivalry between the old international civil service and the new. He continued to behave with hostility to League staff at a dinner in Geneva that same week. At this rather exclusive event the only non United Nations officials present were Lester and Valentin Stencek, the director of personnel and internal administration of the League Secretariat. In proposing a toast to Lie's health Moderow claimed that this was a 'family party' and with the 'exception of two' present, everyone wished Lie well in his work.<sup>285</sup> Such discourtesy did not recommend itself to the U.N. secretary-general. Lie regarded Moderow's speech as 'provocation' while Lester merely regarded it as 'some kind of jealousy' and an apparent need to emphasise the 'outsider position' of League officials on Moderow's part.<sup>286</sup> As the U.N. Secretariat was still cutting its teeth, contact with such veterans of international cooperation, who had, in Philip-Noel Baker's words, shown the word during the last Assembly 'how well the job of an international secretariat can be done', ought to have been encouraged.<sup>287</sup> League officials were however accustomed to being on the outside and to having their work eclipsed by those enjoying stronger governmental support. The work of the League in the technical sphere tended to be overlooked when the ECOSOC continued to find its feet. Carl Hambro wrote to Lester in August 1946, reflecting on how much the League was failing at publicity during this time:

We were doing work-and nobody commented on it. The U.N.O. people don't do any work. And nobody comments upon it, because they are giving press conferences every day.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Lester to Hambro, 8 Aug. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/3); Note by Lester, 5 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>285</sup> Note by Lester, 5 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Philip Noel-Baker to Lester, 30 Apr. 1945 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007).

<sup>288</sup> Hambro to Lester, 14 Aug. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/3).

In cooperating with UNRRA during this period, Guatier felt that that the Administration was benefitting from a one-sided flow of information from the remnants of the League's Health Organisation while UNRRA excluded Gautier from crucial meetings and placed him in charge of topics no one else wanted.<sup>289</sup> In the period immediately preceding the transfer of League assets to the U.N., the League Secretariat played host to UNRRA which held a Council session in the *Palais des Nations* in August 1946. In what seemed like a repeat of San Francisco Lester was issued an invitation to sit in the hall with representatives of other international organisations during the opening session of UNRRA's 1946 conference. Lester, in one last burst of professional pride, declined the invitation as he 'was not entirely satisfied with the arrangement made. The place of one of the six Swiss officials on the platform (representing a non-member state) might better have been left to us who had been hosts of UNRRA for three weeks and been responsible for an absolutely invaluable assistance.'<sup>290</sup> In making a speech to the assembled delegates gathered in the old League Assembly hall, UNRRA's director-general Fiorello LaGuardia (the former mayor of New York) remarked 'how pleased he was that the United Nations had taken over the buildings to wipe away the cobwebs.'<sup>291</sup> Such a remark could be considered ill judged considering how indebted UNRRA was to the work of the Geneva branches of the League's Secretariat and technical services. The short-lived experience of UNRRA itself reflected the various pitfalls of international cooperation. Resentment at the American dominance of UNRRA and a split between western European member countries and those of central and Eastern Europe caused the decision to be taken at the Geneva meeting to terminate UNRRA upon the realisation that the budget for 1947 would not be forthcoming.<sup>292</sup> Ultimately, UNRRA did not long out-live the League with its relief operation wound down towards the end of 1946 and its last staff appointment terminating in 1949.

The assumption of the U.N.O. of the activities of the League of Nations was a painstaking affair. The U.N.O., like the League before it, was initially intended as a security organisation first and foremost. Mitrany observed in 1948 that it was unfortunate that political schemes had been paramount to the creation of the new international organisation, rather than a promotion of economic and social

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<sup>289</sup> Borowy, *Coming to terms with world health*, p. 434.

<sup>290</sup> Lester to Hambro, 6 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Jessica Reinisch, 'The birth and death of UNRRA', p. 285.

cooperation as a means of promoting peace and prosperity.<sup>293</sup> As a result of its preoccupation with security matters, most the League's technical agencies outlived the political organs by many months. In December 1945 the U.N. Preparatory Commission established a Commission on Narcotic Drugs (C.N.D.) which League opium officials such as Steinig and Felkin came to lead.<sup>294</sup> The Interim Commission of the new World Health Organisation (WHO) established an office in the *Palais des Nations* in 1946 and former officials of the League's Health Organisation were among the first members of its administrative and technical staff.<sup>295</sup> Dr Yves Biraud was appointed executive secretary of the Interim Commission providing continuity and contacts between the new health organisation and the old.<sup>296</sup> The opium and health functions of the League's technical services were transferred to the U.N.O. on 1 September 1946 and the library services were handed over the following month. The activities of the League's Social Section, its reports into the traffic of women and children, the prevention of obscene publications and child welfare were also assumed by the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. in autumn 1946.

As many of the League's technical services were transferred to the U.N. while certain work programmes were still being pursued, their resulting studies were published by the League under its name though paid for by the United Nations Organisation.<sup>297</sup> Sir Hugh Emerson devoted a great deal of time to advising the ECOSOC on the creation of a new refugee organisation to replace that of his office. Emerson helped draft a budget for the first year of the new international refugee organisation, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (U.N.H.C.R.).<sup>298</sup> This body assumed responsibility for the League's Nansen refugees.<sup>299</sup> Claudena Skraan argued that the U.N.H.C.R.'s politically neutral approach and its emphasis on the authority of the high commissioner bear the imprint of the League's first high commissioner and one of its most influential international civil servants, Fridtjof Nansen.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Mitrany, 'The functional approach of international relations', p. 361.

<sup>294</sup> McAllister, *Drug diplomacy in the twentieth century*, p. 154.

<sup>295</sup> Walter R. Sharp, 'The new world health organisation' in *American Journal of International Law*, xli (1947), p. 511.

<sup>296</sup> Borowy, *Coming to terms with world health*, pp 443-4.

<sup>297</sup> Lester to Hambro, 6 Aug. 1946 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>298</sup> Emerson to Lester, Aug. 1946 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/3).

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Claudena Skraan, *Refugees in inter-war Europe: the emergence of regime* (Oxford, 1995), p. 296.

Following the legal transfer of the material asserts of the League to the U.N.O., the fate of the League archives still weighed heavily upon Lester's mind. In February 1947 Lester wrote to Moderow expressing the hope that at an appropriate time in the future, the authorities of the United Nations might consider ways and means of arranging the League archives to be so disposed so that serious students of international affairs would be permitted, with all proper precautions, to make use of them.<sup>301</sup> The permanent Secretariat of the U.N. was still being constructed at this time and Moderow stressed that the priority was to maintain open access to files which assisted it in its work.<sup>302</sup> A former League official, Bertil Renborg, then in the employ of the U.N., was eager to assure Lester that the records of the old organisation would be looked after. According to Renborg, the U.N.O. was extremely mindful of the fact that the records of the League constituted an 'irreplaceable and invaluable record of the history of international co-operation between the two world wars' as well as being of great use to the specialised technical agencies of the U.N.<sup>303</sup> As the *Palais des Nations* became the headquarters for most of the successors of the League's technical agencies it became easier to ensure the integrity of League archives. Arthur de Brechya-Vauthier retained his position in the Rockefeller Library and by 1959, as U.N. librarian, received full custody, for the Library, of all League archives.<sup>304</sup> The establishment of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the survival of the Rockefeller Library demonstrated that while Europe had lost its geo-political supremacy, it remained an important location for international endeavours.

Ultimately the I.L.O., having severed its connection with the League, was not adopted by a new parent organisation until the winter of 1946. In Phelan's 1946 report, submitted to the Montreal meeting of International Labour Conference, he reminded delegates that the League had largely 'acted as the I.L.O.'s banker' from whom overdrafts were available when necessary; when the relationship between the I.L.O. and its parent organisation was ended the I.L.O. was obliged to devise new

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<sup>301</sup> Lester to Moderow, 17 Feb. 1947 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/1).

<sup>302</sup> Moderow to Lester, 24 Feb. 1947 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/1).

<sup>303</sup> Note concerning the transfer to the United Nations, Lake Success, of League of Nations registry files by Bertil Renborg, 24 Feb. 1947 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/1).

<sup>304</sup> Sweetser's tribute Seán Lester upon the latter's death, 10 July 1959, available from (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

means to manage its own finances.<sup>305</sup> During the process of the dissolution and the liquidation of the League, Jacklin provided assistance to the new finance committee of the I.L.O. as it came to grips with its new level of financial autonomy. The I.L.O. had continuously acted out against the authority of its parent organisation throughout its history, especially during the war years. However in his 1946 report Phelan took the time to thank the League, especially its Supervisory Commission, for its role in the post-war survival of the I.L.O. and in protecting the assets of the organisation during negotiations with the U.N. Preparatory Commission:

As the I.L.O. takes over many new financial responsibilities, it does so with a sincere sense of gratitude to those who for many years carried these burdens with courage and efficiency on its behalf, and in particular to Mr. Carl Hambro, the Chairman of the SC, to Sir Cecil Kisch, its vice-chairman and Reporter, and to the secretary-general of the League, Mr. Seán Lester, and the Treasurer, Mr. Seymour Jacklin.<sup>306</sup>

In his 1946 director's report, Phelan also offered a retrospective on the often commented rivalry between his office and the League. Phelan owned friction between the League and the I.L.O. was sometimes prevalent but claimed that such stories 'had their origin perhaps in echoes of the liveliness of the discussions which ignored the mutually satisfactory results to which those discussions led.'<sup>307</sup> Lester's wartime exasperation with the preferential treatment accorded to the I.L.O. by the Supervisory Commission and the tensions between Loveday's Princeton office and Phelan's Montreal branch was completely devoid of any semblance of 'mutual satisfaction.' The League asked too much of the U.N. Preparatory Commission in the winter of 1945-6 by requesting an *en-bloc* transfer of functions and staff when its technical organisations showed no inclination to be treated as such a bloc. In his 1946 report Phelan lamented the lack of an international organisation competent to take decisions in the economic sphere that would complement the I.L.O.'s actions in the social sphere.<sup>308</sup> By failing to allude to Loveday's E.F.O. in his 1946 report,

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<sup>305</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Montreal 1946: director's report* (Montreal, 1946), p. 78, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>306</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Montreal 1946: director's report* (Montreal, 1946), pp 81-2, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> *International Labour Conference thirtieth session, Geneva 1947: director-general's report* (Geneva, 1947), p. 3, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

Phelan demonstrated the complete lack of organisational unity which facilitated the piecemeal transfer of the technical functions of the League to the U.N.O.

Ultimately Phelan was appointed director-general of the I.L.O. in September 1946 and the title was conferred upon him retroactively, from the moment he assumed the duties of acting director. In this way Phelan provided continuity for the I.L.O. between the League of Nations era and that of the United Nations. At the 1945 session of the International Labour Conference delegates had approved a draft agreement drawn up by a negotiating committee of the I.L.O. and its counterparts in the ECOSOC of the U.N.<sup>309</sup> In May 1946 the agreement was endorsed by the leadership of the United Nations and of the I.L.O. in which the two organisations agreed to collaborate in the fullest extent in matters of finance and administration with steps taken to incorporate the budget of the I.L.O. into the general budget of the U.N. Phelan insisted in his 1946 report that the agreement prefigured a relationship of partnership, but not of subordination.<sup>310</sup> This agreement was submitted to the General Assembly of the U.N. in December 1946 where it was approved. The I.L.O. thus became the first specialised agency of the U.N. under article fifty-seven of the Charter. Trygve Lie informed the delegates of the International Labour Conference, assembled in Montreal in 1946 that the ‘successful experience of the International Labour Organisation was the most important single factor in developing the new idea of specialised agencies.’<sup>311</sup> Despite its wartime promise the I.L.O. found it difficult to adjust to the post-war climate; much to its disappointment the language of social justice as articulated by the Philadelphia Declaration was eclipsed by ‘a more constrained approach to social rights in an international order that privileged the rights of the market.’<sup>312</sup> As it transpired the Soviet Union did not return to the I.L.O. until 1954.<sup>313</sup> Unlike with the League system, membership of the I.L.O. was no longer automatic upon entry into the U.N.O. In some respects this distinction conferred a greater sense of autonomy on the I.L.O. but also risked its ability to work as a universal and extensive network for international labour reform.

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<sup>309</sup> Minutes of the 100<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Body held in Montreal on 7-8 Oct. 1946 (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents, p. 14).

<sup>310</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-seventh session, Montreal 1946: director's report* (Montreal, 1946), p. 83, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>311</sup> *International Labour Conference twenty-ninth session, Montreal 1946: record of proceedings* (Montreal, 1948), p. 54, available from (I.L.O.A., I.L.O.C.P., official documents).

<sup>312</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 343.

<sup>313</sup> *The Times*, 3 June 1954.



Once the material assets of the League had been disposed Lester then oversaw the financial liquidation of the League in 1946-7. Defaulting member states such as Mexico, Panama, Cuba, Ecuador, Argentina, Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Thailand, Bulgaria, Bolivia, Luxembourg, Ireland, Sweden and Portugal cleared their arrears before formal liquidation.<sup>314</sup> The United Kingdom, in reflection of the role it played in bearing a great deal of the financial burden of keeping the League alive during the war years received the largest share in League assets. The U.K's share amounted to seventeen per cent of the whole, followed by France with almost twelve percent.<sup>315</sup> Ultimately the only states whose arrears proved too great to allow for a share in assets were the following: Albania, Bulgaria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Paraguay and Spain.<sup>316</sup> Lester wound up the activities of the League's Board of Liquidation in August 1947.

In December 1945 Lester had written to Frank Walters complaining that 'a few ill-bred bounders have not been lacking who may think I am hanging around with my eye on a job.'<sup>317</sup> However Lester clearly did not entertain any serious ambitions for further international and diplomatic service. Once Lester's tenure as secretary-general had successfully been completed he was offered diplomatic posts in New York, Brussels, Stockholm and Pretoria by the Irish Department of External Affairs but none of these positions excited his interest.<sup>318</sup> Trygve Lie continued to correspond with Lester and expressed his gratitude for 'the helpfulness and patience' the latter exhibited during transfer and liquidation proceedings. Lie identified himself as Lester's successor and promised the former League chief that he would do his utmost to 'carry on the task of secretary-general to the best of his ability.'<sup>319</sup> Demonstrating the esteem and respect in which he was held by his peers, in 1948 Lie personally requested Lester to act as his representative as head of a commission established by the Security Council to deal with the India-Pakistan border dispute in

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<sup>314</sup> Lester to Hambro, 28 Jan. 1947 (L.N.A., O.S.G., S 567/3). For example since the financial period 1941-2 the Irish government was one year in arrears of payment. Following the League's dissolution the Department of Finance approved the necessary sum to fulfil all outstanding obligations to the League Treasury as evidenced in 'Estimate for the League of Nations 1946/47', 17 July 1946 (N.A.I., DFA 422/12).

<sup>315</sup> See Appendix 3 for member states' share in League assets.

<sup>316</sup> *The Times*, 5 Aug. 1947.

<sup>317</sup> Lester to Walters, 6 Dec. 1945 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>318</sup> Note by Ann Gorski [Lester's daughter], 4 Apr. 2005 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>319</sup> Trygve Lie to Lester, 27 Aug. 1947 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

Kashmir. Lester declined this position due to personal reasons.<sup>320</sup> Lester would later decline another United Nations post with the Palestine Conciliation Commission. Upon the liquidation of the League, Lester was approaching his sixtieth birthday and was worn out by the exertion and exile of the previous few years.<sup>321</sup> He retired to Ireland to indulge his passion for trout fishing. He died in Connemara in 1959.

While it is important to take account of the important political and organisational difficulties between the League and the U.N.O. it is also worth emphasising that the secondment of former League officials into the U.N. Secretariat provided the new organisation with a tradition of international civil service dating back to 1919. The experience and perspective former League officials could bring to the new organisation was unique, helping to build upon what was useful and discard what was outmoded. Arthur Sweetser was personally asked by Trygve Lie to come to New York to assist with the construction of a permanent secretariat. Sweetser wrote that, due to his past League experience, five members of the Security Council called him by his first name and stressed that the whole 'web and network of experience' accrued during the twenty-six years of the 'first experiment' could not be discarded.<sup>322</sup> In a speech about the transition from the League to the United Nations, Sweetser claimed that 'he felt like man on his second honeymoon who is asked to speak about his first wife.'<sup>323</sup> The professional jealousies and rivalries between the former League officials and their colleagues began to disappear when the U.N. Secretariat became more comfortable in its own skin and more receptive to the voice of experience. As Sweetser wrote to Lester in 1949 'the U.N. boys are beginning to realise they have not got all the answers and that others have done good work in this field before.'<sup>324</sup>

Within this promising new international civil service Sweetser was not the only high profile former League official to make an invaluable contribution; there are many notable examples. Alexander Loveday assisted in the construction of the ECOSOC of the U.N. and by 1946 was advising the U.N. economic and employment department. Loveday was never seconded to the U.N. Like Lester he was overworked and decided instead to go into academia becoming a fellow of Oxford's

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<sup>320</sup> Lester to Lie, 9 June 1948 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>321</sup> Gageby, *The last secretary-general*, p. 259.

<sup>322</sup> Arthur Sweetser, 'From the League to the United Nations' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, ccxlv (1946), p.7.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>324</sup> Sweetser to Lester, 22 Apr. 1949 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P.).

Nuffield College in 1946 and then warden in 1950.<sup>325</sup> He was replaced as head of League mission in the United States by Angsar Rosenberg who wound up the Princeton Office of the E.F.O.<sup>326</sup> Adrianus Pelt, the former officer of the League Secretariat who represented the U.N. at the League's final Assembly, rose to succeed Moderow as director of the European office of the United Nations in Geneva. The former director of the League's Health Organisation, Dr. Ludwik Rajchman, became the first chairman of UNICEF. Alfred Zimmern, a former contributor to the League's work in international cooperation, played a role in formation of UNESCO.<sup>327</sup> Valentin Stencek was also seconded to the World Health Organisation. Frank Walters spent several months in New York in 1952 as an independent chairman of the commission inaugurated to determine which members of the U.N. Secretariat should be granted permanent contracts. Veterans of the League's international civil service, Thanasis Aghnides, Irishman Martin Hill and Frenchman Henri Vigier held the distinction of having served under the authority of six secretaries-general, from Sir Eric Drummond of the League to U-Thant of the United Nations.

In conclusion, the transition from the League to the United Nations cannot be characterised as either a clean break or as the direct transplanting of the liberal internationalist tradition from the old organisation to the new. The abandonment of juridical equality among all member states and the moves to limit overt League influence on the creation of the new organisation reflected the different political landscapes that shaped the two international institutions. The League experience was shaped by Eurocentrism; the United Nations experience would be characterised by the rivalry of the two superpowers. The continued predication on state sovereignty and the transfer of personnel from the League to the U.N.O. demonstrated that the same national anxieties persisted as well as the same international aspirations. Though the end of the League was in sight by late 1944, member states refused to de-politicise it and its last Assembly was the scene for traditional diplomatic controversies and in-fighting among member states of an organisation that struggled to reconcile national ambitions with international cooperation. Despite the various obstacles Lester and his staff achieved an orderly dissolution and liquidation. The I.L.O. and the other technical organisations, with much difficulty, ensured arguably

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<sup>325</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Dec. 1949; Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, p. 339, p. 354.

<sup>326</sup> *Daily Princetonian*, 27 Mar. 1946.

<sup>327</sup> Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, p. 22.

the most tangible post-war legacy for the first experiment in international cooperation. Though the U.N. was not the natural child of the League it was its technocratic heir, expanding the old organisation's tradition of international civil service.

## Conclusions

Considerable progress has been made in recent years in shattering both the narrow dismissal of the League of Nations as a failure in security and rejecting the ‘popular caricature of its farcical disarmament programme.’<sup>1</sup> However historical understanding of the League will remain incomplete as long as insufficient credit is accorded to its wartime record. The wartime preservation of the League of Nations was not a hollow or perfunctory act. This thesis documents the political value and technical potential member states continued to invest in the League as a vehicle for liberal internationalism in a time of war. It particularly illuminates the challenges confronted by a pioneering international civil service engaged in international diplomacy. Though certain events and episodes within the League’s wartime experience were unique to this particular period, the vast majority reflected or were indicative of the historic challenges it faced as an organisation predicated on national sovereignty, trying to facilitate international cooperation. This thesis demonstrates that the period 1939-47, traditionally accorded little priority in League historiography, must now begin to be integrated within historical accounts of the organisation itself as well as within the wider narrative of international cooperation. As this thesis attests, such an approach allows the historian to appreciate the residual problems of inter-war international cooperation and to anticipate the mounting challenges of post-war internationalism.

The League of Nations maintained a political presence to complement its technical role during the Second World War. Previous historians have shown a marked indifference to the last years of the League on the grounds that its collective security potential had foundered by the mid-1930s; thus the League’s wartime experience has been ignored by general histories of the organisation and of international relations.<sup>2</sup> However as the League never functioned convincingly as a security organisation this constitutes an inadequate justification for the neglect of the League’s wartime history. The significance of the sessions of the League Assembly and Council in December 1939 underline the prematurity of presenting the League as

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<sup>1</sup> See Clavin, ‘Conceptualising internationalism between the world wars’, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Taylor, *The origins of the Second World War* p. 96; Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p.18; Scott, *The rise and fall of the League of Nations*, p. 208.

politically irrelevant. That is not to say that the significance of this episode is predicated on its diplomatic outcome. Bearing in mind the wise words of caution offered by Susan Pedersen on the difficulty in offering a revisionist reading of the League's security record, it was not the intention of this project to serve as an apologia for the League's failure in the diplomatic sphere.<sup>3</sup> Few historians, apprised of the reality of the League's experience, could endorse Robert Cecil's often-quoted defence of the organisation: 'The League of Nations has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found inconvenient and not tried.'<sup>4</sup> The problematic decision, on the part of League member states, to expel the Soviet Union demonstrated that League machinery when tried, could be found wanting. The resulting League resolutions were more an exercise in collective anti-communism than collective security; it did little to help Finland, ignored the reality of geo-politics, risked compounding the vulnerability of the small states and was later hijacked by Britain and France for their own war aims. Yet while the Assembly and Council resolutions were an incomplete exercise it does not follow that this exercise was politically insignificant. This thesis demonstrated that historians do not have to prioritise the technical League over its political counterpart to obtain a fresh perspective of its history. However the approach of the new wave of technical histories provided the inspiration for a more nuanced reading of the League's political record so that the thesis could determine what the League 'meant' to member states on a political level.<sup>5</sup>

Within this paradigm this thesis has determined that the League Assembly and Council sessions of 1939 are significant for their articulation of what member states hoped to derive from continued association with the organisation. This thesis endorses Steiner's assertions that the League's political organs never really functioned as executive agents in their own right.<sup>6</sup> The League was not a supranational organ but a reflection of the international aspirations of its member states. As a result the organisation underwent several transformations in correspondence to the wider changes in the international landscape. By 1939, following years of appeasement and the practise of exclusive diplomatic conferences

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<sup>3</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1092.

<sup>4</sup> Raffo, *The League of Nations*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Pedersen discussed the need to focus not on what the League failed to do but on what it 'did and meant' in the article 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1092.

<sup>6</sup> Steiner, *The lights that failed*, p. 299.

on the part of the great powers, the League was not expected to function as a decisive instrument in international affairs. It was valued less by member states for what it could do than for its symbolism as an international organisation predicated on sovereign equality and peaceful cooperation. The League's political identity superseded its political role and, in consequence, fatally undermined the League's ability to operate as an objective diplomatic agent. This process was inevitable and deliberate in an organisation so imbued with the liberal democratic ethos of its founders that was born, as Henig argued, into a world not really prepared for its security potential.<sup>7</sup> It functioned less as a collective alliance than as what Mazower described as a 'coalition of like-minded states.'<sup>8</sup> It was not a collective military alliance but a shared accord on international standards of behaviour. During expulsion proceedings the League was presented by sympathetic elements as a 'forum of world opinion' but this opinion was confined to those who shared the same cultural conceptions of government.<sup>9</sup> As Kitchen argued, the League was powerless to deal with states who despised the principles of liberal democracy.<sup>10</sup> The Soviet Union had ignored the League's liberal ethos in 1934 on the grounds of its security potential but by 1939 that potential was spent. League member states could not agree to collective action to save Finland in the Assembly of 1939 but could agree on at least one central element of the League's political identity: a shared distrust of communism.

The League sought to universalise liberal democracy but it certainly did not create a framework for universal membership. The League's political identity helped secure the organisation's wartime preservation but when the Soviet Union emerged as a key player in the international landscape that same political identity determined the organisation's post-war dissolution. The Soviet experience of the League of Nations foreshadowed the ideological showdown between east and west in the United Nations General Assembly. While the United Nations Organisation was predicated more on *realpolitik* than the rhetoric of liberal democracy, the growing bipolarity of the General Assembly by the 1950s further demonstrated that international cooperation was a relative and ideologically driven concept.

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<sup>7</sup> Henig, *The League of Nations*, pp 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Mazower, *Dark continent*, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> As the exercise was dubbed in a memorandum by Sir Orme Sargent, 3 Dec. 1939 (T.N.A., FO 371/23694, p. 173).

<sup>10</sup> Kitchen, *Europe between the wars: a political history*, p. 50.

Within the League apparatus member states and League officials did not always entertain the same expectations of and aspirations for the organisation. As long as member states were comfortable within the liberal atmosphere of Geneva, the League offered a remarkably malleable and protean form of internationalism; the League could be many things to many people. The League's predication on liberal democracy ensured that it could never be apolitical; however during the war there was considerable debate as to whether or not the organisation should take sides in the fray or remain neutral. The European neutrals were not excluded from the League system despite their refusal to participate in the Assembly resolutions of 1939. Though they declined to engage with the League's political activities they did not absent themselves from the proceedings of the League's political organs or renounce their membership. This was indicative of the League's role as an important barometer of independence and sovereignty. Whereas Wylie asserted that the League had a 'corrosive' effect upon neutrality, this thesis demonstrates that the League's accommodation of neutrality corroded the League's ability to serve as a mouthpiece in international law, prevented as it was, from denouncing 'the chief author' of the wider European crisis.<sup>11</sup> Lester's Secretariat was held ransom by the scruples of the Swiss Federal Council, unable to denounce the repressive excess of the Axis occupation of Europe or to speak out against the violent appropriation of the sovereign territory of League member states.<sup>12</sup> It is ironic but perhaps ultimately fitting that the League's wartime history should be shaped more by the principles of neutrality than the tenets of collective security. The growing ambivalence of the neutrals towards League membership, as the disparate technical organisations became increasingly aligned with the Allied bloc, foreshadowed the eventual incongruity of neutrality within the post-war international system; an international system that was less 'a coalition of like-minded states' than the continuation of the wartime alliance.

As the wartime activities of the international civil service were largely confined to the technical sphere, it is significant that membership continued to pose problems for the neutral member states. Whereas the Geneva-based nucleus of the

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<sup>11</sup> As Germany was described by Joseph Paul Boncour, the French delegate to the League Assembly of 1939. *League of Nations Official Journal: minutes of the hundred and sixth and hundred and seventh session of the Council, 9 December 1939 and 14 December 1939* (T.N.A., FO 371/2440, p. 507).

<sup>12</sup> Lester to Sweetser, 1 Aug. 1941 (UNOG, private archives, S.L.P., p. 823).



League was deprived of a political voice, the transferred technical organisations were vocal supporters of the Allied war effort. As the League's wartime history demonstrated, the acceptance of a division between the League's technical work and its political agenda must surely be regarded as a redundant concept by historians and scholars of international organisations.<sup>13</sup> Member states certainly made no distinction with most of the European neutrals failing to dispatch delegates to the New York Conference of the I.L.O. in 1941. The refusal of the United States to accord the transferred missions official status further demonstrated the symbiosis of the 'political' and 'technical' League. The successive conferences of the I.L.O. as well as the writings and public speeches by other League officials such as Alexander Loveday and Arthur Sweetser, invoked the moral judgment of the Covenant at a time when the League's political organs could not. The organic relationship between the League's political foundations and the activities of its technical agencies demonstrated that while Lester's Geneva-based nucleus may have striven for objectivity, it was ultimately an elusive goal, within an organisation encumbered with considerable ideological baggage.

It was remarkable that the League did not become an inter-Allied organisation considering its parentage and *raison d'être*. The League functioned as an expression of liberal internationalism against the backdrop of a war that was characterised, by Allied propaganda, as a showdown between the forces of totalitarianism and democracy. The fact that the League did not become an inter-Allied agency cannot solely be attributed to the scruples of its host country and to those of the other European neutrals. The neutrals were, after all, small states dependent upon the whims of the great powers. Their continued membership of the League was certainly not a painless exercise from a diplomatic point of view with the Reich Foreign Ministry subjecting the Swiss, Swedish and Finnish governments to awkward questions on their respective League policies. The Geneva-based nucleus of the Secretariat and technical organisations was, in turn, reluctant to sever useful links within the countries of occupied and neutral Europe so as not to diminish the League's role as the source and disseminator of crucial social and economic data. Furthermore the British government was actually reluctant to undermine the League's role as a vehicle for international cooperation between the

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<sup>13</sup> The frailty of this concept was already exposed by Clavin in 'Europe and the League of Nations', pp 337-8.

Allies and the neutral powers. Thus continued British membership and championship of the League was designed to demonstrate to the world that the United Kingdom was not simply driven by its own commercial and colonial interests. The language of the Covenant proved useful to all those states that sought association with a liberal democratic system and the peaceful ordering of international affairs. In this way, states whose national sovereignties were under threat, or who sought to distance themselves from expansionist regimes, ascribed a particular importance to wartime membership of the League of Nations. Retaining headquarters in Geneva and providing information services to neutral and belligerent alike, afforded the League a special distinction in the polarised atmosphere of war and stood in stark contrast to the early exclusivity of the United Nations Organisation.

The League's Eurocentrism was challenged during the war but was not defeated. Initially, the transfer of its technical agencies to the United States reflected and foreshadowed the diminishing geo-political importance of Europe. The transfer led the directors of the technical organisations to concentrate their work programmes more on American issues, with the League's technical agencies operating as vehicles for pan-American cooperation. The opposition provoked by such a development from the secretary-general and the British government, ostensibly on the basis that the League should not renounce its intercontinental ambitions, betrayed the real anxiety that its European parentage and practices would be effaced; for in reality, despite its globalist aspirations, the League had always functioned as a regionalist organisation. The League's Eurocentrism was not regarded as a fault; rather the maintenance of League headquarters in Geneva served a symbolic purpose as a repudiation of the permanence of Hitler's European empire. The technical officials courted the United States and were gratified by its attentions. However the dismay of League officials upon their realisation that the New World was not simply going to be incorporated into the new international framework, but was likely to eclipse the Old World within it, demonstrated that they deemed the internationalist tradition to be firmly welded to European political and cultural traditions. Identifying the processes that lead to the distillation of the European influence on the United Nations Organisation and chronicling the evolution of a more internationally representative Secretariat, while beyond the scope of this thesis, would add a fascinating dimension to the history of international cooperation. Clavin's recent investigation of the similarities between the economic policies of the E.F.O. and

CAP opens up an exciting and original avenue of research; it raises an interesting question as to whether League historians should consider the Eurocentric League, despite its notable lack of supranational function, as having a greater affinity with the E.E.C. and E.U., than with the globalist U.N.O.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis has found that the League's wartime experience reflected (though, as discussed above, it did not always emulate) the growing Atlanticism of international affairs. The wartime history of the League of Nations permitted a further insight into the relationship between the United States and the League of Nations. Before the outbreak of war, American foreign policy was certainly not untouched by the League or the League by American interests.<sup>15</sup> The transfer of the technical agencies of the League to American soil marked the culmination of a long and often overlooked record of informal collaboration between the organisation and elements in the United States. This working relationship intensified as the war wore on with former and current League officials making a significant contribution to post-war planning; influencing the development of Allied agencies such as the F.A.O. and UNRRA as well as the State Department's plans for a new world organisation. The I.L.O. enjoyed a special distinction because of U.S. membership of the organisation. During the war years the United States used the platform of the International Labour Conference to pledge its commitment to post-war reconstruction and to signal its willingness to take a leading role in international affairs; so much so that the U.S. government, by the time of the Philadelphia Conference, was treating the I.L.O. as an extension of American foreign policy.

Indeed, this thesis endorses Dunbabin's rejection of the argument that American membership of the League would have resulted in a more proactive organisation, with the United States less likely to pursue a self-interested foreign policy outside the bounds of the Covenant or to manipulate the League to achieve its own ends.<sup>16</sup> The United States, as a non-member state, proved just as willing as the European great powers, to exploit the machinery of the League. The Roosevelt administration presented a bogus and self-serving dissonance between the League's technical activities and the political ethos of the Covenant. It reaped the benefit of the various studies of the technical organisations while denying the transferred

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<sup>14</sup> Clavin, *Securing the world economy*, pp 336-7.

<sup>15</sup> As demonstrated by Clavin and Wessels in 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations', p. 482.

<sup>16</sup> Dunbabin, 'The League of Nations' place in the international system', p. 428.

missions official status. Its officials and diplomats availed of the resources of the League's Rockefeller Library and of the expertise of its former and current officials in the preparations for a new world organisation, but failed to accord the old organisation a prominent position at the San Francisco Conference. American engagement with the League's technical mission allowed the U.S. government to serve an informal apprenticeship in international cooperation before it spearheaded plans for a new organisation; in doing so it enjoyed the special distinction as the only member of the Big Four untainted by the past ignominies of the League's diplomatic mission. The United States government drew on the twenty-six year experience of the League of Nations in order to present the United Nations organisation as a new and groundbreaking project.

This thesis cannot posit that American influence on the United Nations Organisation forms part of a neat narrative where the ambitions of Woodrow Wilson are finally brought to realisation by the U.S congressional approval of the United Nations Charter.<sup>17</sup> While historians of U.S. foreign policy should continue their efforts to chronicle American engagement with the League it would be unwise to exaggerate the Wilsonian tradition within the Roosevelt administration or over-emphasise the League's influence on American foreign policy. Roosevelt's earlier statement that the League of Nations, by the 1930s, 'was not the League conceived by Woodrow Wilson' was a telling insight into his administration's complex attitude towards the organisation.<sup>18</sup> Despite the nature of its conception, the League was never really the embodiment of Woodrow Wilson's particular branch of internationalism. The absence of the United States from the League meant that the organisation could not be used, as Wilson hoped, as the means to bring the vibrant ideals of the new world to improve upon the stale standards of the old.<sup>19</sup> The refusal of the United States to participate in a formal system of international cooperation meant that Britain and France were able to artificially prolong the Eurocentrism of international affairs. The profound repercussions of the fall of France and Vichy's withdrawal from the League demonstrated how intrinsic French foreign and domestic policy was to the League experience. The reliance of the League on the wartime support of the British Empire and Commonwealth pointed to the important,

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<sup>17</sup> As Sweetser believed: See Sweetser to Lester, 4 Aug. 1945 (L.N.A., private archives, S.L.P.).

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, 'Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept', p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Rathbun, *Trust in international cooperation*, p. 58, p. 68.

even pre-eminent, position of Britain within the liberal internationalist tradition. After twenty-six years of Anglo-French dominance the League could not be resurrected to preside over the era of European political decline. By 1945 the United States was no longer willing to engage in internationalism as a leader among equals, but as a superpower was poised to act as the driving force of international affairs. Instead of congressional intransigence, this time round it was the presence of the Soviet Union that prevented the new world organisation becoming a vehicle for American exceptionalism.

The discord between the various technical organisations and their isolation from Lester's Geneva nucleus cannot be blamed entirely on the attitude of the Roosevelt administration. The ambiguity of American foreign policy towards the League facilitated and compounded the dissonance between the disparate elements of the international civil service, but it was not the initial cause of that disharmony. Upon the eve of war the proposals of the Bruce Committee demonstrated that institutional incoherence was already a problem within the League apparatus, a problem that was exacerbated by the practical pressures of separation during the war years. There can be nothing but agreement with the various scholars who cited the League's technical organisations as the most successful features of its existence.<sup>20</sup> However just as the flaws of the League's security credentials have been laid bare by generations of historians, the faults within the League's technical agencies also need to be understood. Centripetal forces were as important a factor in the dissolution of the League as centrifugal pressure with the secretary-general unable to preserve the institutional integrity of the League apparatus. The dissonance wilfully imposed between the technical agencies and the Geneva Secretariat meant that the League's international civil service was taking itself apart before the process of dissolution and the transfer of functions had even begun.

The League's wartime experience also permits additional insights into the character of its international civil service. League officials were not the 'civic monks' as depicted by de Madariaga but a collection of political animals.<sup>21</sup> In a time of extreme politics the League's Secretariat was subject to extreme pressure. The impact of the fall of France on the League's administrative and technical organs during the summer of 1940 demonstrate the fallacy of depicting the organisation as

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<sup>20</sup> See for example Pemberton, 'The changing face of intellectual cooperation', p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> For de Madariaga's depiction see *Morning without noon*, pp 36-43.

being untouched by the reality of the conflict.<sup>22</sup> The position of secretary-general required a combination of skills rarely united in the one person; that of a politician and a technocrat. While League member states may not have traditionally desired the secretary-general to assume a political role within the Assembly and Council, that did not mean that he lacked political influence or that his personal politics would have no bearing on relations with member states or on the activities of the international civil service. In the summer of 1940 the controversial actions of Joseph Avenol illustrated the political sensitivity of the office of the secretary-general. It underscored the need to ensure that the secretary-general, no matter how able an administrator or technocrat, displayed sound political judgement. Joseph Avenol's dramatic fall from grace also demonstrated the centrality of liberal idealism to the *esprit de corps* of the Secretariat; Avenol was certainly one of the 'opportunistic time-servers' of Pedersen's description.<sup>23</sup> As a result of the growing isolation of Geneva and because of the delicate relations between the League and the Swiss Confederation, Avenol's pro-Allied successor, Seán Lester, experienced a curb to both the administrative functions and political influence of the office of secretary-general. However through his participation in negotiations with the U.N. Preparatory Commission and by his dignified and orderly handling of dissolution, despite many obstacles and potential controversies, Lester settled the question as to whether a small-state national could meet the responsibilities of secretary-general. The League's wartime experience also demonstrated the need for the secretary-general and for the directors of the technical organisation to operate as pragmatic optimists, within a political climate not always amenable to the survival or the expansion of international cooperation.

The League's wartime experience demonstrated that it was not just the position of secretary-general that could have a determining impact on the fate of the international civil service. Lester's isolation allowed the other personalities within the League umbrella to assume a more prominent place. Carl Hambro the chairman of the Supervisory Commission was instrumental in securing the necessary budgetary arrangements to ensure the League's wartime survival. The League's treasurer Seymour Jacklin ensured the League's continued solvency, facilitating a straightforward transfer of assets from the League to the U.N. Alexander Loveday's

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<sup>22</sup> As argued by Bendiner in *A time for angels*, p. 401.

<sup>23</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', p. 1112.

proactive leadership of the E.F.O. allowed it to fulfil its potential and to make an invaluable contribution to U.N. agencies. Through their wartime collaboration with United Nations agencies, figures such as Hugh Emerson and Raymond Guatier ensured a technocratic continuity between the League's technical organisations and bodies such as the U.N.H.C.R. and WHO. While the post-war survival of the I.L.O. within the U.N. umbrella can be attributed to the significant governmental support the organisation enjoyed, Edward Phelan's often combative directorship ensured that the I.L.O. retained the sufficient funds and presence to make a post-war impact.

Within the League apparatus sovereignty was regarded by national politicians as the basis, rather than as the obstacle, for international cooperation. There was no question of conferring upon the League supranational functions with the organisation's ambitions for international social and economic reform often road-blocked by nervous member states.<sup>24</sup> Though internationalism experienced a *renaissance* during the latter period of the war, the same apprehension about a world government persisted and undermined the ability of the League's technical organisations to make a domestic impact on post-war planning. Many League officials were aware that national ambitions and the goals of international cooperation could never be reconciled as long as sovereignty remained a sacred cow. On the other hand, the technical organisations made the greatest inroads into the domestic affairs of member states than the political organs could ever hope to.<sup>25</sup> During the war national parliaments and governments continued to request statistical information and assistance from the League's 'clearing house of ideas.' Despite the scruples of national governments towards endowing the League with executive authority in political matters, the technical organisations were thus able to achieve a domestic and international impact by the back door. While the technical officials could not operate as direct agents in wartime relief and post-war reconstruction measures, their work influenced that of national governments and resonated within the new Economic and Social Council of the U.N.

Ashworth's assertion that historians and scholars of international relations should avoid interpreting the past only as it related to the present and should not

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<sup>24</sup> Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. xvi.

<sup>25</sup> As argued by Pedersen in 'Back to the League of Nations' p. 1110 and Markku Routsila in *The origins of Christian anti-internationalism: conservative Evangelicals and the League of Nations* (Washington, 2008), p. 1.

succumb to Whig histories of progress, has been a guiding principle of the work.<sup>26</sup> As the episodes and developments within the period 1939-47 illustrated, it would be an overly problematic exercise to engage in a narrative on the 'progression' from the League to the present day United Nations. Indeed many contemporaries regarded it as a regression, a betrayal of liberal internationalism in favour of nineteenth century-style diplomacy dominated by the chancelleries of the great powers. The new organisation was, in Mazower's words, the 'return to principles of Concert diplomacy.'<sup>27</sup> In fact, as the diplomatic sidelining of the League in the 1930s attests, the great powers had never truly abandoned concert diplomacy; the United Nations Organisation constituted a more honest attempt to reconcile international cooperation with the reality of great power relations. However, due to the residual influence of liberal internationalism, the establishment of the U.N.O. was not universally regarded as a maturation of the practise of international cooperation. It aroused significant criticism for its veto and exclusivity and retained the trappings of sovereignty as the foundation of international cooperation. However the United Nations was a product of the evolution of international affairs, when the political and military cooperation of the great powers, rather than shared moral values and cultural codes, was considered the essential precondition for international security. In this way the United Nations was a product of both the 'idealist' and the burgeoning 'realist' interpretations of international relations. The creation of the Security Council constituted an effort to tackle the type of great power intransigence criticised by Cecil and Walters while the exclusivity of that organ was a clear, if not universally popular, reflection of the reality of international affairs. The transition from the old organisation to the new was marked by continuities in tradition as well departures in practice. While internationalism was still a divisive subject, there remained an enduring acceptance that the goals of peace, security and social justice should be pursued through the mechanisms of international organisations. The transfer of functions from the U.N.O. to the League was not an organic process but the significant number of League personnel within the U.N. Secretariat ensured that a level of technocratic continuity was maintained between the old organisation and the new. The transition from the League to the U.N.O. demonstrated that this tradition of international civil service, characterised and sustained by its remarkable

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<sup>26</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Mazower, *Governing the world*, p. 196.



optimism and idealism, was sobered but not beaten by its greatest challenge; the Second World War.

In conclusion, this thesis sought to avoid the bipolarity of the traditional narratives of the League's history. As Lucian Ashworth argued, the terms realist and idealist are misnomers when applied to complex and varied attitudes of League apologists and critics.<sup>28</sup> The abandonment of the realist and idealist epithets allows the history of the League to open a multiplicity of interpretations. The flawed logic of League officials as they defended the Eurocentric and universalist tradition of the old organisation when faced with the innovation of the new, coupled with their pragmatic approach to the League's preservation, demonstrate that the history of the League contains more nuance than can be explained within the realist/idealist debate. The lack of unity within the League's international civil service and the dearth of consensus within the wider internationalist debate illustrate the intricate and chimerical qualities of international organisations. The abandonment of the traditional approach to League historiography permitted this thesis to become less focused on whether the organisation was a positive or negative force so that its complexities and impact are studied for their own significance. At the same time this thesis is more overtly concerned with the political aspects of the League's existence than the new wave of technical-focused histories usually allow. By reconciling aspects of these disparate historiographical traditions, this thesis has been able to present a more holistic study of the League's wartime experience by examining the political motivations and impact of the League's wartime technical programmes. The wartime experience of the League of Nations allows a bridge to be made between the pre-war traditions of internationalism, dominated by the chancelleries of Europe and its post-war evolution, determined by the emergence of two global superpowers. The primary sources attest that, due to the wartime preservation of the League, liberal internationalism was not a spectre of the interwar years; neither was there any interregnum in international organisation between 1939 and 1945. It is now time for historians to cease imposing such an artificial interlude within the narrative of international cooperation.

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<sup>28</sup> Ashworth, *International relations and the Labour Party*, p. 3.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### List of material assets of the League (in Swiss francs, C.H.F.).

Property, League headquarters	38, 576, 958.78 <sup>29</sup>
League library	Donated by John D. Rockefeller jnr. (cost of building 5,564,206.22)
Real estate belonging to the League	2,889, 453.45
Furniture, fittings, typewriters, etc., in League headquarters and in branches offices	1, 886, 522.81
Furniture, fittings, typewriters, etc. in the buildings of the Permanent Court in the Hague.	199,900.20
Stocks of stationary, office supplies, printing paper and equipment in League headquarters and branch offices.	132, 831.17
Publications: stocks at headquarters and in hands of agents (estimated market value).	50,000.00
Books, stocks of stationary, printing paper, publications, office supplies and equipment at the Permanent Court in the Hague.	55, 562.35
Gifts	Donated by member states (estimated value 1,234,640.00)
Library (value of books according to inventory)	1,913, 404.10
<b>Total material assets</b>	<b>45,704,632.80</b> Not including gifts and donations.

**Source:** General report of the finance committee to the assembly, 17 Apr. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57007, p. 17).

<sup>29</sup> According to the exchange rate set by the Bretton Woods agreements the equivalent in U.S. dollars was approximately \$8,960,528.75. According to 'Measuring worth.com' a website established by Laurence H. Officer, professor of economics at the University of Illinois and Samuel H. Williamson, Emeritus professor of economics from Miami University, the relative value of that amount today ranges from \$72.9-92.1 million. (<http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/relativevalue.php>) (1 Aug. 2013).

## Appendix 2

Final assembly of the League of Nations: list of present members of the League, March 1946.

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan          | 23. Iraq                  |
| 2. Albania              | 24. Iran                  |
| 3. Argentinean Republic | 25. Ireland               |
| 4. Australia            | 26. Latvia                |
| 5. Belgium              | 27. Liberia               |
| 6. Bolivia              | 28. Lithuania             |
| 7. Bulgaria             | 29. Luxembourg            |
| 8. Canada               | 30. Mexico                |
| 9. China                | 31. Norway                |
| 10. Colombia            | 32. Netherlands           |
| 11. Cuba                | 33. New Zealand           |
| 12. Czechoslovakia      | 34. Panama                |
| 13. Denmark             | 35. Poland                |
| 14. Dominican Republic  | 36. Portugal              |
| 15. Egypt               | 37. Siam (Thailand)       |
| 16. Ecuador             | 38. Sweden                |
| 17. Estonia             | 39. Switzerland           |
| 18. Ethiopia            | 40. Turkey                |
| 19. Finland             | 41. Union of South Africa |
| 20. France              | 42. United Kingdom        |
| 21. Greece              | 43. Uruguay               |
| 22. India               | 44. Yugoslavia            |

**United Nations Department 23 March 1946  
Foreign Office S.W.1.**

**Source:** Foreign office memorandum, 23 Mar. 1946 (T.N.A., FO 371/57003)

### Appendix 3

Final share of member states of the U.N.O. in material and liquid assets of the League.

State	Share in material assets (Swiss francs)	Share in liquid assets (Swiss francs)	Total share	Percentage of total assets
<b>1. Afghanistan</b>	35,170.80	8,408.06	43,578.86	0.07 %
<b>2. Union of South Africa</b>	1,471,978.70	351,895.49	1,823,874.19	2.96%
<b>2. Argentinean Republic</b>	1,789,895.	426,702.04	2,211,597.04	3.59 %
<b>3. Australia</b>	2,364,469.47	565,256.72	2,929,726.19	3.76 %
<b>4. Belgium</b>	1,315,141.43	314,401.41	1,629,542.84	2.65%
<b>5. Bolivia</b>	137,395.71	32,846.22	170,241.93	0.27%
<b>6. United Kingdom</b>	8,601,392.44	2,056,273.13	10,657,665.57	17.34 %
<b>7. Canada</b>	3,116,503.54	745,040.10	3,861,543.64	6.28%
<b>8. China.</b>	1,984,442.59	474,406.43	2,458,849.02	4%
<b>9. Cuba</b>	441,453.72	105,535.17	546,988.89	0.89%
<b>10. Denmark</b>	911,603.17	217,951.97	1,129,645.14	1.83%
<b>11. Dominican Republic</b>	54,143.51	12,943.71	67,087.22	0.10%
<b>12. Egypt</b>	314,004.77	75,066.87	389,071.64	0.63%
<b>13. Ecuador</b>	15,971.41	3,818.19	19,789.60	0.03%
<b>14. France</b>	5,827,834.75	1,393,218.63	7,221,053.38	11.75 %
<b>15. Greece</b>	504,225.36	71,276.55	575,501.91	0.93%
<b>16. India</b>	4,633,454.36	1,107,686.67	5,741,141.03	9.34%
<b>17. Iraq</b>	131,081.64	31,336.72	162,418.36	0.26%
<b>18. Iran</b>	286,583.09	-	286,583.09	0.46%
<b>19. Luxembourg</b>	95,000.16	22,711.01	117,711.17	0.19%

<b>g</b>				
<b>20. Mexico</b>	317,348.46	-	317,348.46	0.51%
<b>21. Norway</b>	742,162.87	177,423. 54	919,586.41	1.49%
<b>22. New Zealand</b>	778,800.16	186,182. 15	964,982.31	1.57%
<b>23. Panama</b>	103,022.39	24,628.80	127,651.19	0.2%
<b>24. Netherlands</b>	1,707,428. 33	408,182. 64	2,115,610. 97	3.44%
<b>25. Poland</b>	1,166,876. 26	518,019. 55	2,684,895. 81	4.37%
<b>26. Siam (Thailand)</b>	612,129.94	146,339. 90	758,479. 84	1.23%
<b>27. Sweden</b>	1,659,574. 77	396,742. 61	2,056,317. 38	3.34%
<b>28. Czechoslovakia</b>	1,910,650. 75	456,765. 56	2,367,416. 31	3.85%
<b>29. Turkey</b>	436,938.72	104,455. 80	541,394. 52	0.88%
<b>30. Uruguay</b>	367,005.31	87,737. 30	454,742. 61	0.74%
<b>31. Yugoslavia</b>	1,365,785. 71	89,359.10	1,455,144. 81	2.36%

**States not members of the U.N.O. at the moment of liquidation.**

<b>State</b>	<b>Share in material assets (Swiss francs)</b>	<b>Share in liquid assets (Swiss francs)</b>	<b>Total share</b>	<b>Percentage of total share</b>
<b>33. Finland</b>	-	926,184.20	926,184.20	1.50%
<b>34. Ireland</b>	-	940,118.84	940,118.84	1.53%
<b>35. Portugal</b>	-	859,204.66	859,204.66	1.39%
<b>36. Switzerland</b>	-	1,900,674.58	1,900,674.58	3%

**Source:** Report of the liquidation committee of the League of Nations, 4 Aug. 1947 (T.N.A., FO 371/67575).

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