

# COMMUNICATING THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
A TRANSNATIONAL  
COMMUNICATION HISTORY  
OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS  
IN THE INTER-WAR PERIOD  
(1920–1938)

HISTORICAL SERIES N°4

EDITOR: ERIK KOENEN



United  
Nations



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# Table of content

*Erik Koenen, Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz and Arne L. Gellrich*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Communicating the League of Nations<br/>– an introduction</b> ..... | 5 |
|--|---|

*Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä*

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>“Collaboration of the press in the organisation of peace”<br/>The League of Nations as a catalyst for important intellectual trends</b> ..... | 21 |
|--|----|

*Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz*

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Discovering Open Diplomacy<br/>The League of Nations’ Information Section 1920-1932 and its external and<br/>internal communication</b> ..... | 59 |
|--|----|

*Arne L. Gellrich and Erik Koenen*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>In Search of the Geneva Journalist<br/>A biographical kaleidoscope of the journalistic sphere around the Assemblies of<br/>the League of Nations from 1920 to 1938</b> ..... | 133 |
|---|-----|

*Jürgen Wilke*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Cinematography as a medium of communication<br/>The promotion of research by the League of Nations and Rudolf Arnheim’s role<br/>in this context</b> ..... | 187 |
|---|-----|

*Emil Eiby Seidenfaden*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Locating the League of Nations’ communication world –<br/>a response</b> ..... | 213 |
|---|-----|

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Notes on Contributors</b> ..... | 224 |
|------------------------------------|-----|



*Erik Koenen, Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz and Arne L. Gellrich*

# Communicating the League of Nations – an introduction

## I. Aim and background of the book

This book documents the results of a research project on “Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations in the Inter-War Period (1920–1938). The institutional, professional and public spheres of journalism in the League of Nations in international comparison”, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) 2017–2022.<sup>1</sup> The project aimed at identifying and reconstructing the communication and media work of the League from the perspective of a transnational communication history of the League of Nations in the inter-war period 1920–1938 in three dimensions:

- a. *institutional sphere*: the League as an institutional context of the organization of information policy as well as press and public relations as external communication of the League of Nations;
- b. *professional sphere*: conference journalism as a profession and practice at the meetings of the League of Nations;
- c. *public sphere*: press coverage of these meetings as public reception of the League.

The founding of the League of Nations as an international organization in 1919/20 was a direct political consequence of the First World War. The League of Nations’ founding political idea was to replace violence and war as a means of resolving international and interstate conflicts by diplomatic instruments and political strategies for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Permanent peacekeeping, collective security and international cooperation were the explicit political goals of this “normative reordering”<sup>2</sup> of international relations by and within the League of Nations<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The project was headed by Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, who worked together with research assistants Erik Koenen and Arne L. Gellrich. It was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, Project ID AV 23/7–1), 2017–2022, see <https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/329640267?language=en&selectedSubTab=2>.

<sup>2</sup> Matthias Schulz, “Globalisierung, Regionale Integration oder Desintegration? Der Völkerbund und die Weltwirtschaft,” *Zeitschrift Für Geschichtswissenschaft* 54, no. 10 (2006): 842.

<sup>3</sup> See: Paul Kennedy, *Parlament der Menschheit: Die Vereinten Nationen und der Weg zur Weltregierung* (München: C.H. Beck, 2007); Mark Mazower, *Die Welt regieren: Eine Idee und ihre Geschichte* (München: C.H. Beck, 2013); Ruth Henig, *The League of Nations: The Makers of the Modern World* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010); Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2012); Margaret MacMillan, *Die Friedensmacher: Wie der Versailler Vertrag die Welt veränderte* (Berlin: Propyläen, Ullstein, 2015); Adam Tooze, *Sintflut: Die Neuordnung der Welt 1916–1931* (München: Siedler Verlag, 2015).

By accepting the Covenant of the League of Nations, each member state committed itself “to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security”<sup>4</sup>. With the parallel appeal to maintain international relations “by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations”<sup>5</sup>, the demand for a normative political reorganization of international relations was combined with that for a normative communicative reorganization of international politics.

Instead of the tradition of secret cabinet diplomacy, focused on the realization of national interests as one of the central causes of the dramatic escalation of the international political crisis that led to the outbreak of the war in 1914, a practice in foreign and international politics should be established by the League of Nations that, by consistently breaking with “secret diplomacy”, were defined as “open” or “public diplomacy”<sup>6</sup>. The “principle of publicity” guided the work of the League of Nations<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of international/transnational communication as “strategic communication”<sup>8</sup>, “open” or “public diplomacy” can be generally interpreted as a specific political communication strategy aimed at creating publicity for international politics on the one hand and the political ideas and goals of the League of Nations on the other.

Concerning the implementation and realization of the “principle of publicity”, the League of Nations saw itself in a pioneering role. Just as the Covenant demanded of every member state, the “activities” of the League of Nations were to take place in “the widest publicity”<sup>9</sup>. The information activities centred on the press as a mass medium with the highest degree of inter- and transnational interconnectedness and range. The League’s information strategists identified the press as a modern media information infrastructure that, although primarily organized in national media systems, nevertheless had an important global impact as a result of globally condensed and networked news flows<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the press should be used to mobilize “international public opinion” for the legitimacy of the organization of the League of Nations and its policies:

From the beginning, the guiding principle of the new organization has been to give the widest publicity to its activities, and nowadays publicity as a rule means the Press. The League works in public – that is to say, in the presence of and with the Press. The Press and publicity are part and parcel of the general conception of the League of Nations, and this has involved the establishment of relations which are entirely novel as between an official organisation and the independent newspaper world.

<sup>4</sup> League of Nations, “Covenant of the League of Nations” (League of Nations, April 28, 1919), <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/league-of-nations/covenant>.

<sup>5</sup> League of Nations, “Covenant of the League of Nations”.

<sup>6</sup> See: Christopher Clark, *Die Schlafwandler: Wie Europa in den Ersten Weltkrieg zog*, 21st edition (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2013); Henig, *League of Nations: Makers of the Modern World*; Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace*; MacMillan, *Die Friedensmacher*; Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919-1933*, Oxford History of Modern Europe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and the Press: International Press Exhibition, Cologne, May to October 1928* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1928), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/the-league-of-nations-and-the-press-2>, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Hartmut Wessler and Michael Brüggemann, *Transnationale Kommunikation: Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2012), 137 ff.

<sup>9</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and the Press*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> See: Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2000); Jane Chapman, *Comparative Media History: An Introduction: 1789 to the Present*, Illustrated edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); Frank Bösch, *Mediengeschichte: Vom asiatischen Buchdruck zum Fernsehen* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2011).

[ This close and almost constitutional link between the League, the Press and general publicity, gave rise to new forms of co-operation and imposed upon the League various duties.<sup>11</sup>

The new aspect of this conception of organized political public relations was that the press was no longer addressed as merely an audience for announcements, which indicates the innovation of an emerging participation-oriented transformation of the communication relations between politics and press in the organizational context of the League of Nations. The participatory information policy became, for example, manifest by the opening of League of Nations assemblies, conferences and meetings for the press:

[ The permanent attendance of the Press as a matter of course at such diplomatic conferences and international debates is the new and characteristic feature of League proceedings.<sup>12</sup>

These new communication tasks were given their own new structures within the League of Nations. At the Secretariat of the League of Nations in Geneva, a central Information Section was set up specifically for the organizational implementation of the information policy.<sup>13</sup> Beyond internal communication work it included constant official information for the press, which provided journalists with documents and press releases for free use, regardless of their presence on the ground in many parts of the world. Furthermore, the Information Section developed mechanisms of formal and informal personal briefings for journalists and provided necessary technical facilities for the press. Within this organizational context, the city of Geneva, as the League of Nations' headquarters, developed over the course of the 1920's "as a World press centre"<sup>14</sup>.

Before the start of the project, this side of the League's history was largely unexplored. There were only a few studies that dealt with the transnational history of the League of Nations. Pioneers were Finnish communication scholars Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, who in 1986 presented the first research paper on the League of Nations and mass media, aptly titled "The Rediscovery of a Forgotten Story".<sup>15</sup> The second researcher was Birgit Lange, who was the first to give a detailed account of the League's workings in information and communication matters.<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of institutional history, Lange's research focused on the organization and structures of the League of Nations' information policy. This study, which at the time of publication was the first to include the surviving primary source material, provided a compact overview of the institutions and organs of the League's relevant information policy.

<sup>11</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and the Press*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, 12.

<sup>13</sup> See: League of Nations. Secretariat, 9 ff; T.P. Sevensma, "Die Organisation des Auskunftsdienstes im Völkerbundsekretariat," *Die Friedens-Warte* 34, no. 5 (1934): 193–202.; Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), 201 ff.

<sup>14</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and the Press*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> The platform was the XV Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR/AIERI) in New Delhi, August 1986, available at [https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the\\_league\\_of\\_nations\\_and\\_the\\_mass\\_media.pdf](https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the_league_of_nations_and_the_mass_media.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Birgit Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991).



In recent years, more specialized research – mostly rooted in the disciplines of global and international history and political science rather than communication studies – has been added to the field. This includes Emil Seidenfaden’s thesis on the “Public Legitimization Strategies of the League of Nations”.<sup>17</sup> Seidenfaden added much that is new to Lange’s institutional perspective, especially with regard to the actors, organization and processes of the League’s information policy. In this context, also Isabella Löhr and Madeleine Herren presented recent studies that focus on a central protagonist of the Information Section.<sup>18</sup> Their biographical case study on the American, Arthur Sweetser, second director alongside the Frenchman Pierre Comert, exemplifies the League’s information officers as mediating the “principle of publicity”, national loyalties and state sovereignty in a multi-layered manner and, to that extent, as influential actors in the League’s strategic public relations and press work.

This book-project on “Communicating the League of Nations” builds on all these pioneers in League research. Nevertheless, beyond the institutional view on the League of Nations’ information policy, the profession and practice of League of Nations journalism, its interaction with the League’s public relations work and its public impact is still widely unexplored. More seriously, the history of League of Nations journalism had rarely appeared on the research agenda of League history. Even basic questions remained unanswered: Who were the journalists and correspondents that covered the League of Nations and its assemblies? Which press media did they represent? How did they shape journalistic self-understanding and practice within the context of the environment organized by the League of Nations, and what did they report on? How did they react to the information policy goals of the League of Nations?

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<sup>17</sup> Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva: The Public Legitimization Strategies of the League of Nations and Their Legacy, 1919-1946” (PhD Thesis, Aarhus University, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Isabella Löhr and Madeleine Herren-Oesch, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik: Arthur Sweetser und die Mediendiplomatie des Völkerbunds,” *Zeitschrift Für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62, no. 5 (2014): 411–24; Madeleine Herren and Isabella Löhr, “Being International in Times of War: Arthur Sweetser and the Shifting of the League of Nations to the United Nations,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 25, no. 3–4 (July 4, 2018): 535–52.

## 2. The approach of the book: exploring a communication studies perspective for the transnational communication history of the League of Nations

In terms of disciplinary perspectives, the fields of global and international history and political science have so far dominated the historical research on the League of Nations.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, all of the six authors of this book come from the field of communication studies and are rooted in a milieu of “Communication History”<sup>20</sup>. Our goal – and that distinguishes our project and this volume from its predecessors – is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the League of Nations as an international organization with complex transnational communication relations from our perspective as communication researchers. In this sense, the project developed a genuine communication studies perspective and focused on the reconstruction of internal communication processes within the Information Section as well as its strategies of external public communication. In this regard, also collective biographies of some national cohorts of Geneva conference journalists and patterns of this form of transnational journalism were explored and reconstructed.

A central piece of our theoretical framework was the concept of “co-evolution” of journalism and public relations as developed by Philomen Schönhagen and Mike Meissner.<sup>21</sup> Journalism and public relations were also studied in relation to each other in the context of our project. The League of Nations and its conference journalism differentiated in a complementary way. Thus, we interpret the League of Nations as a cross-border communication context with specific conditions for the organized production of public communication. The complex relationships between organized information practices of the Information Section and the profession and practices of League of Nations’ journalism can be understood as a “co-evolution”<sup>22</sup> of journalism, public relations and press work. By the normative guidelines of the “principle of publicity” and the concept of “open diplomacy” media-mediated public communication, preferably via the press, was defined as an important factor for the legitimization of the organization and politics of the League of Nations. In this sense, it sought to initiate and realize cross-border communication processes between international diplomacy and politics on the one hand and journalism, the press and the public on the other hand by means of institutionalizing an exclusive information policy.

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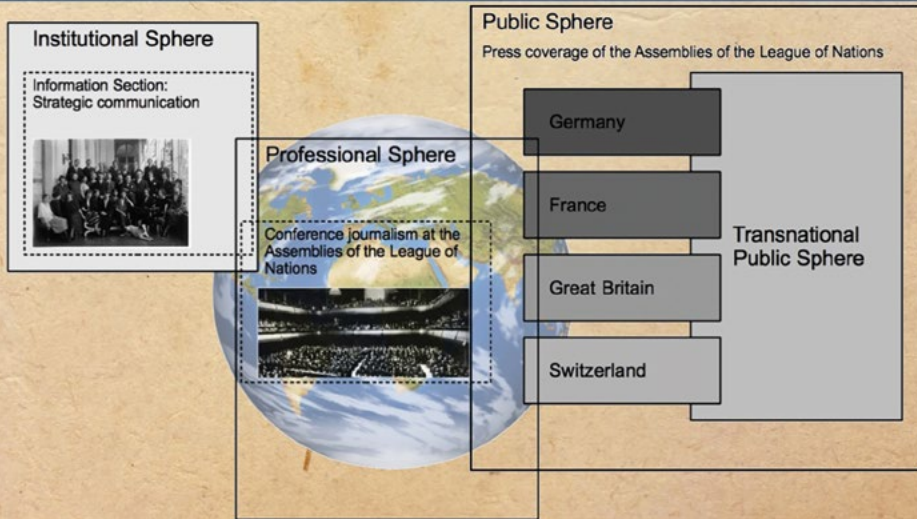
<sup>19</sup> See: Madeleine Herren, *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865. Eine Globalgeschichte der internationalen Ordnung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009); Haakon A. Ikonomou and Karen Gram-Skjoldager, eds., *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019); Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert, eds., *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Löhr and Herren-Oesch, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik”; Herren and Löhr, “Being International in Times of War”; Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva: Public Legitimization”; Emil Eiiby Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration with an ‘International Public’, 1919–1939,” *Contemporary European History* 31, no. 3 (August 2022): 368–80.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Simonson et al., *The Handbook of Communication History* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Philomen Schönhagen and Mike Meissner, “The Co-Evolution of Public Relations and Journalism: A First Contribution to Its Systematic Review,” *Public Relations Review* 42, no. 5 (December 1, 2016): 748–58.

<sup>22</sup> Schönhagen and Meissner, “Co-evolution of public relations”.

# Research Dimensions



*Research concept: the League of Nations as an organized cross-border communication context, with the dimensions of institutional and professional as the scope of research. (Erik Koenen)*

In view of the close interrelation of practices and professions surrounding the League of Nations' information policies we propose a holistic point of departure. Building on observations put forward by Schönhagen and Meissner<sup>23</sup> on the co-evolution of journalism and public relations, we conceptualise the transnational communication history of the League of Nations as a "co-evolutive" process of two main spheres with specific constellations of actors: the institutional sphere, including League of Nations officials, information officers as well as diplomats and politicians, specifically their work for the Information Section, and the professional sphere of journalists reporting on the League of Nations. As the illustration of our research concept in the figure above shows, these dimensions describe the League of Nations as a complementarily entangled research context.

In addition, we used Heidi Tworek's<sup>24</sup> description of League of Nations journalists as an "epistemic community" as a basis for our conceptualization of an epistemic project which describes informal and formal, sometimes conflictual negotiation processes between and within the constellations of actors surrounding the realization of the League of Nations' information policies. This also applies to the negotiation of the ideal of "open diplomacy" across a disparate constellation of actors. This constellation of actors refers to a) journalists accredited to the League of Nations,

<sup>23</sup> Schönhagen and Meissner.

<sup>24</sup> Heidi J. S. Tworek, "Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations," *Medien & Zeit* 25, no. 4 (2010): 16–28.

b) diplomats and League of Nations officials, and centrally, c) those who worked at the League of Nations Information Section, and their discussion of specific normative problems – especially those concerning the criteria, norms and standards of diplomatic and journalistic communication.<sup>25</sup> What started as a normative (if at times incoherent) prescription from the institutional side was mirrored and carried onwards by a (no less incoherent) journalistic endeavour that went beyond the actions of the institution. Contrary to Tworek, we highlight the unintended co-evolution of “openness” in the fields of diplomacy, journalism and public relations. The involved constellations of actors were not one “epistemic community” in the narrower sense but a loose network with different aims and strategies, dealing with norms of autonomy, openness and transparency in the field of communications, not least regarding transnational journalism. We estimate that, accordingly, the League’s Information Section – a body which was directly reporting to the League of Nations’ Secretary General – as well as the related journalistic network have to be understood as the nexus point of spill-over effects between professional milieus in the field of public communication.

As Tworek claims, in Geneva, “journalists of different nationalities met and interacted and began to develop a more cohesive (or more contested?) vision of what journalism was and what it could achieve for the League of Nations”<sup>26</sup>. The public character of the League of Nations, Tworek continues, provided “space for creation of this epistemic community”<sup>27</sup>. The concept of an epistemic community, introduced by Peter Haas<sup>28</sup>, has also been employed (albeit in a slightly different interpretation) by Madeleine Herren<sup>29</sup>, who suggests that League of Nations journalists and League of Nations officials formed an epistemic community supporting free speech and transparent diplomacy. Haas’ original concept presupposes a certain coherence and homogeneity among the members of the community, such as common goals and policies.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the Information Section and League of Nations journalists, actors from both the professional and the institutional sphere represented very heterogeneous groups, yet together they contributed to advancing the co-evolving nexus of public relations and news reporting. The professional sphere included correspondents from all over the political spectrum and even individuals critical of the League of Nations or its ideals. Albeit with different motives and agendas, they all contributed (willingly or in unintended consequence) to the epistemic project of supporting free access for the press, freedom of speech and ostracising hateful speech and fake news.<sup>31</sup> Borrowing from Haas’s theoretical groundwork, we conceptualise this phenomenon as an epistemic project under the above-mentioned horizon of a “co-evolution” of the constellation of actors within the League of Nations.

<sup>25</sup> Arne Lorenz Gellrich, Erik Koenen, and Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, “The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy and the League of Nations: Co-Evolution between Diplomacy, PR and Journalism,” *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 2020): 607–21.

<sup>26</sup> Tworek, “Peace through Truth?”, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Tworek, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Peter M. Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (January 1992): 1–35.

<sup>29</sup> Herren, *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865*.

<sup>30</sup> Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities”, 19.

<sup>31</sup> See: Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*.

### 3. The chapters of the book

The book understands itself as a collective work by communication scholars who, closely connected, have been working on the League's transnational communication history. Supplemented by texts by Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä as well as Jürgen Wilke, the volume is intended to present several steps and years of project research. Kaarle Nordenstreng and Jürgen Wilke participated intensively in conferences and workshops of the DFG-project in 2019 and 2021, held at the Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research (ZeMKI) of the University of Bremen.<sup>32</sup> Both Nordenstreng and Wilke have been pioneers in communication studies research on the League of Nations since the 1980's. Wilke initiated and supervised the above mentioned first academic thesis in Germany on the media policy of the League of Nations.<sup>33</sup> He also dealt with the involvement of German law expert und ministerial official Kurt Häntzschel in the League of Nations's efforts to enhance international communication.<sup>34</sup>

The **first chapter**, by Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, presents a review of the League of Nations's resolutions and other decisions concerning "collaboration of the press in the organization of peace", "moral disarmament" and "modern means of spreading information utilized in the cause of peace" between 1925 and 1936. Despite the several conflicting ideologies of the time, the League of Nations succeeded with giving shape to an historical trend towards an international order based on multilateralism and peaceful co-operation. This intellectual heritage was vital for the post-war United Nations, while its 'soft' arm, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an immediate successor of the League of Nations' International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation. However, the continuity of this trend in the United Nations was also challenged and almost derailed by the Cold War. It survived nevertheless, as the League of Nations also provided a forum for the emerging principles of solidarity and pluralism, along with the decolonization process and calls for a new international order. The chapter ends with discussing the continued relevance of the League's heritage in the contemporary world and its media.

Stefanie Averbek-Lietz discusses in the **second chapter** the pioneering role of the League of Nations in the field of diplomatic communication and information policy. Beyond external communication with international journalists and – via them – to the world's publics, the League of Nations was a hub for establishing new forms and routines of internal communication flows, routines and rules at the heart of the first international organization. This double context of internal and external communication framed by the normative goal of "open diplomacy" is the topic of the chapter. Based on the registry files of the Information Section at the UN Archives Geneva Archives, it argues that the communicative practices of the constellation of involved actors (information officers, diplomats, journalists) evolved not in one direction but in several and diverse, even contradictory manners. Compromise between actors was one dimension, communicative power was another one. The practices and routines as described in the archival documents of the Information

<sup>32</sup> Universität Bremen, "Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations: Results, Problems, Perspectives (Internal Project Workshop)," November 21, 2019, [https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fachbereiche/fb9/zeMKI/docs/conferences/Flyer\\_Transnationale-Kommunikation\\_Workshop.pdf](https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb9/zeMKI/docs/conferences/Flyer_Transnationale-Kommunikation_Workshop.pdf); Universität Bremen, "Communication History of International Organizations and NGOs: Questions, Research Perspectives, Topics (International ZeMKI Conference 2021)," April 22-23, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*.

<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Wilke, "Im Dienst von Pressefreiheit Und Rundfunkordnung. Zur Erinnerung an Kurt Häntzschel Aus Anlaß Seines Hundertsten Geburtstages," *Publizistik* 34, no. 1 (1989): 7–28.

Section (memoranda, pamphlets and letters) are highly interesting from the perspective of communication history. They show evolving practices of public and organizational communication which a hundred years ago pre-figured the modern-day communication management of international organizations. In this sense, the chapter outlines case studies on internal and external communication guided by the archival material. One focus is on the debate on “open” versus “private meetings” with regard to the Council of the League of Nations, which was never fully open in its communication but tried to inform the journalists at Geneva effectively and swiftly, predominantly via minutes. Interestingly enough, communication values such as transparency and trust, highly relevant to this day, were vividly discussed. The archives at Geneva reveal: “open diplomacy” – often prominently claimed in brochures and books by the League of Nations – was contested across a diverse constellation of internal League actors as well as journalists covering the League of Nations. Especially the letters between protagonists show heated discussions about questions if, how and why which type of meeting of which of the League of Nations’ organs and sections should be “open” and finally should address which types of actors or publics. Such internal discussions about the ideal of “open diplomacy” fostered a new style of diplomatic communication. Concrete practices of external communication revealed by the archival material are – in the terminology of modern communication and public relations studies:

- communication management and planned strategic communication: to address economic, cultural and political elites, nations, interest groups, ‘the people’ via own publications and via the press
- systematic (long term) lobbying (“liaison work”) of stakeholders such as women-, peace-, education-, health-, scientific-, labour organizations worldwide
- supporting national League of Nations organizations with a constant flow of information
- establishing enduring, stable and controllable press relations (press releases, press conferences, ‘meet the press’ as special instruments)
- evaluation of the journalistic output about the League of Nations and related (national) public opinions with regard to the League of Nations via press clippings and press summaries

The **third chapter**, by Arne L. Gellrich and Erik Koenen, reconstructs the institutional and professional sphere of Geneva journalists based on collective biographies of accredited journalists at League of Nations assemblies. They are able to characterize for France, Germany and Great Britain the collective of Geneva journalists by the dimensions of generation, gender, professional status, working experience, academic background, milieu, groups or parties, and their ideological and professional positions in their respective national media and political culture. Enriched by focus biographies related to the journalistic work of single actors, they show whether individuals may indeed be seen as representatives of an epistemic project of transnational open diplomacy. Even if there are hints of strong nationalistic partisanship among League of Nations journalists, they participated in the overall evolution of transnational journalism. This was pushed by a constellation of actors in Geneva, it established and developed over the years not least by the journalists’ struggle for more autonomy from the League of Nations, and it was institutionalized by the “International Association of Journalists Accredited to the League of Nations” in 1920.

Jürgen Wilke deals in the **fourth chapter** with Rudolf Arnheim and the role of film for the League's media policy. The League of Nations was not only concerned with the printed press in the 1920's but was also interested in the potential new media such as film and radio offered as communication media. It paid particular attention to the use of film for educational purposes. The chapter is dedicated to this topic and describes the activities of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI), founded in 1928. It was based in Rome and came into being as a result of an offer from the Italian government under Mussolini. It must be emphasized that this institute specifically applied empirical methods to film research. A key member of staff was Rudolf Arnheim, who, as a Jew, had to flee Germany in 1933 after the seizure of power by the Nazis. He was a psychologist and had already before conducted research on the perception of film. While working at the IECI, he also initiated the plan for a first international encyclopaedia of cinematography. In 1938, however, Arnheim had to leave Rome under pressure from the Fascists and arrived in the United States via London. There he found a connection to American communication research and published several studies that have become classics. His field of work expanded, making him one of the most renowned art psychologists of the 20th century. In this career the Institute of Educational Cinematography, sponsored by the League of Nations, had formed an important stage. The chapter is an updated version of an earlier article, for which the relevant literature published in the meantime has been taken into account. In addition, the original letter where Arnheim replied to that article is documented.

For the **sixth** and **final chapter**, we invited Emil Eiby Seidenfaden to place our research on transnational communication histories of the League of Nations back into the currently booming research on the history of the League of Nations. In doing so, Seidenfaden not only acknowledges the results of our research, but also sketches out perspectives for connecting to and continuing our research. In this sense, we hope that this volume will not only draw attention to communication and media as a hitherto blind spot in League of Nations research and provide initial important research in this regard, but that it will also stimulate and inspire further research on the transnational communication history of the League of Nations in the future.

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• 17

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*The first Assembly of the League of Nations in the Salle de la Réformation, Geneva, 15 November 1920. (watercolour rendering, based on original image material by Geneva photographer F. H. Jullien, Arne Gellrich)*







Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä

## “Collaboration of the press in the organisation of peace”

### The League of Nations as a catalyst for important intellectual trends

#### I. Introduction

The first draft of this chapter was presented as a conference paper already nearly 40 years ago.<sup>1</sup> It was the United Nations International Year of Peace 1986, and the conference was entitled “Communication and Peace: The Role of Media in International Relations”. A broader context was the rise of the “Third World” or “Global South”, with the United Nations calling for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The forgotten story of the League of Nations and the mass media turned out to be surprisingly topical for ongoing debates on international communication, which throughout the 1980s were concerned with global media policies, including calls for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).<sup>2</sup>

The reason making Nordenstreng look at media-related activities of the League of Nations was his book on the history of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), under preparation in the mid-1980s.<sup>3</sup> The book was intended to be a normal celebratory volume for the 40th anniversary of the IOJ, but the prehistory of the Organization since the first-ever journalists’ conference in Antwerp in 1894 proved so fascinating that it occupied the whole book, making it Part I of a three-volume series entitled *Useful Recollections*. A separate book was published 30 years later, presenting a full history of the international associations of journalists.<sup>4</sup> Seppä, for her part, focused on international organizations in her studies in the 1980s and also served as a secretary for social sciences at the Finnish National Committee for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This naturally led to topics of moral disarmament and the League of Nations<sup>5</sup> and also to her later interest in the United Nations<sup>6</sup>.

Accordingly, in 1986 the topic attracted considerable attention among international communication researchers as well as among journalist union leaders. However, little further research

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<sup>1</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, “The League of Nations and the Mass Media: The Rediscovery of a Forgotten Story” (XV Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR/AIERI), New Delhi, 1986), [https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the\\_league\\_of\\_nations\\_and\\_the\\_mass\\_media.pdf](https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the_league_of_nations_and_the_mass_media.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See: Seán MacBride, *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order (Report by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems)*, Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow (London, New York: K. Page; Unipub, 1980); George Gerbner, Hamid Mowlana, and Kaarle Nordenstreng, eds., *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall, and Renewal*, The Communication and Information Science Series (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Jiri Kubka and Kaarle Nordenstreng, *Useful Recollections Part I: Excursion into the History of the International Movement of Journalists* (Prague: International Organization of Journalists, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng et al., *A History of the International Movement of Journalists: Professionalism Versus Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Tarja Seppä, “Moraalisesta aseidenriisunnasta ja sen merkityksestä rauhanturvaamiselle [in Finnish: On Moral Disarmament and Its Meaning to Peace Keeping],” *Rauhantutkimus* 2, no. 3 (1986): 57–75.

<sup>6</sup> Tarja Seppä, *Responsibility to Protect as a United Nations Security Council Practice in South Sudan* (Tampere: Tampere University, 2019), <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/115336>.



followed on the topic, and even the present authors were engaged in other issues, Nordenstreng reverting to the topic only occasionally<sup>7</sup> and indirectly in his project on the history of the international movement of journalists.<sup>8</sup> After all, our paper of 1986 was just an offshoot of a broader study on doctrines of international communication – not a project itself focusing exclusively on the League and the media. It took until the late 2010s for a research program at Bremen University to raise the topic in its own right.

Our early exercise led us to discover historical material under three subtitles:

- “Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace” – activities related to the general operative conditions of the press, with landmarks such as international expert conferences in Geneva (1927), Copenhagen (1932) and Madrid (1933).
- “Moral Disarmament” – activities related to the first Disarmament Conference in Geneva (1932-33).
- “Modern Means of Spreading Information Utilised in the Cause of Peace” – activities related to cinema and broadcasting, including the 1936 landmark Convention on the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace.

These will be revisited below. Then we review the context and the heritage of the League of Nations for the post-war world and its media. First, however, we summarize the main characteristics of the League of Nations.

## 2. The Idea of the League

After World War I, with its horrors still fresh in people’s minds, it was believed that a new era was to begin in international relations. Power politics and covert diplomacy were regarded as major reasons for the outbreak of war. Now the time had come to replace them with *international cooperation*, *collective security* and *open diplomacy*.<sup>9</sup>

The Covenant of the League of Nations was part of the Treaty of Versailles. The formulation of the Covenant was the work of a special committee established by the Paris Peace Conference. The committee was chaired by the President of the United States (US), Woodrow Wilson, who wanted the drafting of the Covenant and the establishing of the League to be an integral part of the whole Peace Conference, giving it priority over other difficult problems<sup>10</sup>. Peace was to be the supreme value and goal. The League used “peace propaganda” – a positive phrase at the time – as a means to world peace.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng, “The Forgotten History of Global Communication Negotiations at the League of Nations,” in *The World Summit on the Information Society: Moving from the Past into the Future*, ed. Daniel Stauffacher and Wolfgang Kleinwächter (New York: UN Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (ICT Task Force Series 8), 2005), 119–24, <https://sites.tuuni.fi/kaarle/nordenstreng-publications/>.

<sup>8</sup> Nordenstreng et al., *History of the International Movement*.

<sup>9</sup> On the organization of this so-called open diplomacy by the Information Section of the League, see the chapter by Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz in this book.

<sup>10</sup> Inis L. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1971); George Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Tomoko Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda: The Information Section of the League of Nations and its Tokyo office,” in *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations*, ed. Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi J. S. Tworek (London: Routledge, 2018), 70–71.

Activities related to peace were multilateral and were intended to shape “norms of global governance”<sup>12</sup>. The Covenant has been described as “a testament to the aspiration of man to govern his affairs by reason, to assert the concept of justice into the settlement of international disputes and to enshrine the collective interest of all nations a supreme above the interests of any group of nations or of any individual nations”<sup>13</sup>. In the preamble:

The High Contracting Parties,  
in order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security,  
by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war,  
by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations,  
by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and  
by the maintenance of justice and scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another,  
Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.

*Disarmament* also emerged after World War I as a principal objective and was recorded in the Covenant’s Article 8, which begins as follows:

The Members of the League recognize that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.

Disarmament was not considered to entail only material disarmament but also moral disarmament.<sup>14</sup> Moral disarmament was to be achieved through education, intellectual collaboration, legislation, cinema, broadcasting and the press. Especially the latter three could be used to influence public opinion.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Preserving peace was an established objective in international thinking long before the League. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 was a predecessor of international organizations, followed by the Concert of Europe, meeting from 1830 to 1884. Finally, the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 strove to regulate the laws of war as a means to preserve peace. See Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe, and Roger A. Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 4th ed. (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2004), 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and Intellectual Co-Operation* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1927), <https://archives.unige.ch/the-league-of-nations-and-intellectual-co-operation>, 43.

<sup>15</sup> James Fry and Saroj Nair, “Moral Disarmament: Reviving a Legacy of the Great War,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 40, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 1–45.



One of the leading ideas was that the League should work in public and give wide publicity to its activities, thereby marking the dawn of open diplomacy. The League relied upon the impact of public opinion in international relations. Wilson called the League “the court of public opinion”<sup>16</sup>.

It was natural, then, that the League assigned quite a new role to the mass media – it was indeed possible to speak of a “close and almost constitutional link between the League, the Press and general publicity”, as noted in a booklet *The League of Nations and the Press*, presented at the International Press Exhibition PRESSA in Cologne in 1928<sup>17</sup>. This publication begins with the following characteristic statement:

It was the clear intention of the founders of the League of Nations that it should mark the beginning of a new era in international relations; and it was equally clear that in their minds one of the essential conditions was a complete departure from the old methods of secret diplomacy. From the beginning, the guiding principle of the new organisation has been to give the widest publicity to its activities, and nowadays publicity as a rule means the Press. The League works in public – that is to say, in the presence of and with the Press. The Press and publicity are part and parcel of the general conception of the League of Nations, and this has involved the establishment of relations which are entirely novel as between an official organisation and the independent newspaper world.

The role of the press was stressed already at the Paris Peace Conference, but no measures were taken at that time.<sup>18</sup> It was through the League that the press achieved a new and institutionalized role in international relations, reflected by developments such as the gathering of foreign correspondents at the League.<sup>19</sup> The press was indeed incorporated into the system of international relations in an unprecedented manner – comparable only to the step, taken much earlier, when the press assumed its central role in liberal democracy by operating as the fourth power next to the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Claude, *Swords into Plowshares*, 52.

<sup>17</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and the Press: International Press Exhibition, Cologne, May to October 1928* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1928), <https://archives.unige.ch/the-league-of-nations-and-the-press-2>, 7; Stephanie Seul, “Trägerin des europäischen Gemeinschaftsgedankens – lebendige Magna Charta des Friedens: Die politische Dimension der PRESSA Köln 1928 und ihr Widerhall in der zeitgenössischen deutschen und internationalen Presse,” in *Die Pressa: Internationale Presseausstellung Köln 1928 und der jüdische Beitrag zum modernen Journalismus*, ed. Susanne Marten-Finnis and Michael Nagel, Band 1 (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2012), 57–104.

<sup>18</sup> See United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information, “The Freedom of the Press: Some Historical Notes” (E/CONF.6/4, February 11, 1948). The proposals of 1918–19 originated from President Wilson’s chief communication advisor, Walter S. Rogers, whose papers were published in 1944, in Report of the Team of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University in New York.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Franklin Douglass and Karl Bömer, “The Press as a Factor in International Relations,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 162 (1932): 241–72.

<sup>20</sup> See Birgit Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991). For the journalistic body and its traits, see the chapter by Arne L. Gellrich and Erik Koenen in this book.

### 3. “Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace”

• 25

On 16 September 1925 the delegate for Chile, Eliodoro Yanez, addressed at the 12th plenary session of the League Assembly:

We must stimulate among the people that new spirit which the war produced and which the League of Nations is trying to spread throughout the world. (...)

I can conceive no more effective method of forming this new spirit than by influencing the minds of peoples through the Press and moulding the future generations in the schools.

With regard to the Press, I suggest for your consideration the idea of unifying its directive action on public opinion and its moral influence over Governments.

Journalism has in every country but one meaning in its spirit and in its essence, because it is and should be the reflection of the ideas of liberty, progress and morality.

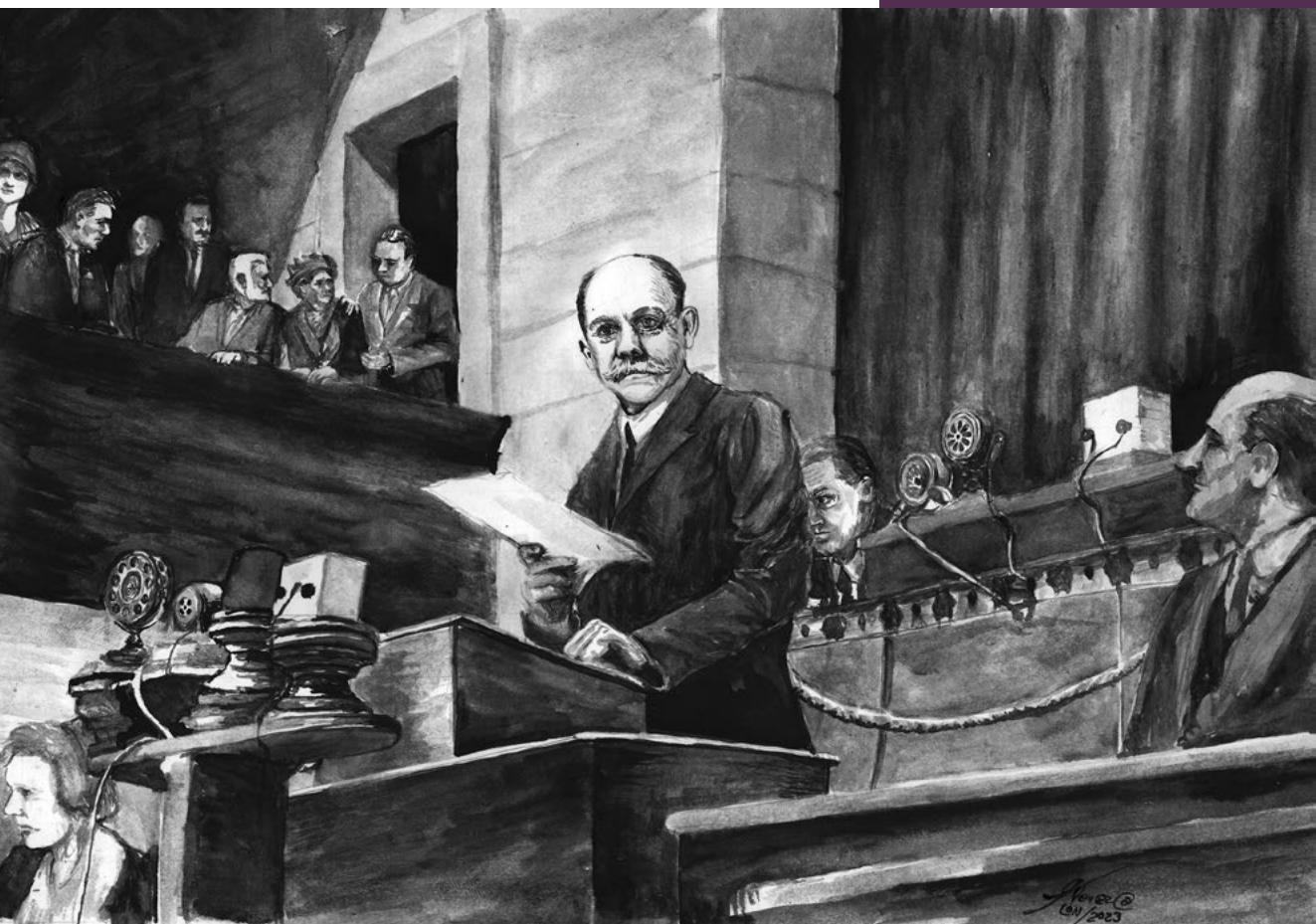
A universal bond of feeling unites all men and all peoples on the question of peace and the welfare of the working classes. The Press is the vanguard of these ideas, and that is why I submit the following draft resolution to the Assembly. (...)

I wonder if this idea can be considered as coming within the scope of the action and mission of the League? Can the League call upon the Press of the entire world to collaboration in the work of world fraternity, in that powerful intellectual movement which will be the best guarantee of security, disarmament and arbitration? I believe it can.

If the League of Nations is not legally entitled to do so, it at least possesses the moral authority to take this step, and I think it should do so.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> League of Nations, “Co-Operation of the Press in the Organization of Peace: Resolution of the Sixth Assembly” (C.611.M.196.1925, October 12, 1925), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/co-operation-of-the-press-in-the-organisation-of-peace-resolution-of-the-sixth-assembly>. All the following quotations are from original League documents (however without giving references in each case). We have used the codes of original documents copied from the physical archives in 1986, while nowadays the documents can be found at <https://archives.ungeneva.org/lontad>.



*The Chilean delegate Eliodoro Yanez speaking before the Assembly. (reconstructive watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs, Arne Gellrich)*

The initiative was welcomed by a number of delegations – Spain, Uruguay, the British Empire, France, China... Among the interesting details in the debate on the Chilean proposal (in the sixth Committee of the Assembly, dealing with political questions) was the intervention by the Hungarian delegate, Albert Apponyi. According to the proceedings he

recalled that at the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference which took place in Paris in 1900, he had sponsored a similar proposal which had been submitted to that meeting. That attempt had entirely failed, because it had been too ambitious. It had aimed at imposing a certain guidance on all organs of the Press; this was contradictory to the very nature of the Press, the organs of which were jealous of their freedom.

In appealing to the Press to collaborate in the work of universal conciliation, care must be taken not to repeat this mistake; no attempt should be made to dominate the Press or to make it dependent on any organ of the League of Nations, but it should have access to the sources of information at the disposal of the League. If the Chilean proposal were applied in this sense, it might bear fruit.

The Belgian delegate, Paul Hymans, was entrusted with summarizing the results of this debate to the full Assembly on 25 September 1925. He wrote in his report:

I need not emphasise here the part played by the Press in international life. The newspapers are fundamental to all the judgements which public opinion in each country passes on the other nations of the world. It is for this reason that the Press can exercise a considerable influence in favour of the establishment of better international relations and can contribute more effectively perhaps than any other institution to that moral disarmament which is the concomitant condition of material disarmament.

The Chilean proposal is undoubtedly a bold one. The Press, like all great Powers, is rightly jealous of its independence. We must therefore approach the vast and delicate problem raised by this resolution with great circumspection. I wish to make it clear at the outset that the League of Nations does not wish to interfere in the affairs of the Press, and will only interest itself in them if the journalists themselves consider that its assistance would be valuable. (...)

The following is the text of the resolution which I ask you to adopt:

The Assembly,

Considering that the Press constitutes the most effective means of guiding public opinion towards that moral disarmament which is a concomitant condition of material disarmament;

Invites the Council to consider the desirability of conceiving a committee of experts representing the Press of the different continents with a view to determining methods of contributing towards the organisation of peace, especially:

(a) By ensuring the more rapid and less costly transmission of Press news with a view to reducing risks of international misunderstanding;

(b) And by discussing all technical problems the settlement of which would be conducive to the tranquillisation of public opinion.

This *Resolution on Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation on Peace* – a slightly modified version of the original Chilean proposal – was adopted unanimously on the same day. It was the first resolution on the role of the mass media to be adopted by the League Assembly – indeed the first overall position regarding the mass media that has ever been taken by the international community through its multilateral organization.

It is a remarkable resolution not only because of its historic nature but also due to its political and professional substance. It sets the agenda for the deliberation of technical problems, not only in loose relation to a political context but explicitly subordinated to the overall objective of peace and international understanding. In this respect, it can be seen as an early version of the 1978 Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO – a shorter but more outspoken version than had been produced by the international community 53 years later.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the 1925 resolution combines press and disarmament – two topics which, over time, have become increasingly controversial.

The resolution was followed by a round of consultations with various countries and international associations (replies from more than 25 countries by March 1926), a meeting of 16 news agencies in August 1926, a meeting of press bureaux of 17 countries in October 1926, as well as an ad hoc committee drawn from the members of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations in January 1927.

On the basis of these preparations, the League Council decided at its 44th session in March 1927 to convene a *Conference of Press Experts in Geneva in August 1927*<sup>23</sup>. The Conference, according to its declaration,

brought together sixty-three experts, twenty assessors, and thirty-five technical advisers, from thirty-eight countries, Members or non-Members of the League, representing not only the different continents of the world but also the different categories within the Press itself, of newspaper proprietors, news-agency representatives, journalists, and directors of official Press bureaux.

The declaration went on to express the appreciation of the Conference among other things “of the principle laid down by the Council and Assembly of the League that there should be no interference whatsoever with the independence of the Press”. At the end of the declaration the Conference

<sup>22</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng and Lauri Hannikainen, *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*, Communication and Information Science (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub. Corp, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> The Final Report of this Conference of Press Experts was published as League of Nations document: League of Nations, “Conference of Press Experts: Geneva, August 1927: Final Report” (Conf.E.P13, October 25, 1927), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/0000676844-d0015>. See Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor: The League of Nations and the Combating of ‘False Information,’” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon Ikononou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 188–99; Heidi J. S. Tworek, “Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations,” *Medien Und Zeit* 25, no. 4 (2010): 16–28.

Adopts the following programme in order that journalists may have every facility in residing, travelling, securing news and improving their professional equipment, and that news itself may be free at the source, expediated in every possible way in its transmission, protected before and after publication against unfair appropriation, and given the widest possible dissemination, to the end that the work of the Press may be made more effective in its responsible mission accurately and conscientiously to inform world public opinion and hence to contribute directly to the preservation of peace and the advancement of civilisation;

And adopts the following special resolutions, based on technical, professional, and international considerations, as the first steps towards carrying this programme into effect.

The resolutions cover, mostly in great detail, more or less technical questions such as press rates, the coding of press messages, the improvement of communications, the transport of newspapers, postal subscriptions to newspapers, the protection of news, the professional facilities of journalists (with 10 sub-points) and censorship in peace time. But among “Miscellaneous Resolutions” there are also two which directly address the politically sensitive content of the mass media:

#### *Publication or Distribution of Tendentious News*

Fully cognisant of the fact that the publication or distribution of obviously inaccurate, highly exaggerated, or deliberately distorted news or articles is calculated to cause undesirable misunderstandings among nations and suspicions detrimental to international peace;

And desiring to promote among people the growth of mutual understanding, necessary to world peace;

This Conference expresses the desire that the newspapers and news agencies of the world should deem it their duty to take stringent measures to avoid the publication or distribution of such news or articles, and should also consider the possibility of active international cooperation for the attainment of this purpose, which is in conformity with the spirit of the League of Nations.

#### *Moral Disarmament*

The Conference makes a warm appeal to the Press of the world to contribute by every means at its disposal to the consolidation of peace, to combat hatred between nationalities and between classes which are the greatest dangers to peace, and to prepare the way for moral disarmament.

The latter of these was adopted unanimously (as was the case with most of the resolutions), but the former was adopted by 27 votes to two. Here is an early indication of the controversy surrounding the role of the media in international relations – in particular with respect to the content of communication. However, the dominant feature of this Conference was harmony in the spirit of the League, as is aptly articulated by the closing words of the President, Lord Harry Burnham, proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*:

Public opinion is, in the long run, the sovereign power in the government of men. As the trustees of public opinion, we Pressmen have a heavy and constant responsibility to our fellows. All I can hope and pray is that this Conference has deepened and enlarged our consciousness – not a class consciousness, but a general consciousness – of what we owe to mankind, still in the making and re-making, in giving such light and leading as we can to concord and collaboration for the common good.

The results of the Conference were welcomed by the League Council at its subsequent 46th session in September 1927. One of the speakers on that occasion was Sir Austen Chamberlain:

It is obvious that the large body of resolutions passed by this important gathering merit, and must receive, the closest attention of the Governments. (...) There is, however, one resolution which has not yet been mentioned, which I read as a promise of cooperation with the Members of this Council and with all men of goodwill in all parts of the world. I refer to the resolution entitled “Moral Disarmament” (...) I am sure that the collaboration of the Press in such a work is of equal consequence, and may be of even greater influence than anything that statesmen can do, and I welcome this assurance and this pledge that the Conference is prepared to devote its energies to this work.

The Council referred the most technical issues to the Organisation for Communications and Transit, while other resolutions including those on the protection of news and on the professional facilities of journalists were followed up by the Council in consultation with different governments. No spectacular achievements seem to have resulted in this area in the course of the following few years.

The next major step was taken in the early 1930s, in the context of the 1932-33 World Disarmament Conference – and a deteriorating international situation. The *Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press was convened in Copenhagen in January 1932*. The scope of this Conference was less technical than that of the 1927 Geneva Conference and its main resolutions were concerned with inaccurate news reporting, the rest covering follow-up of the Geneva Conference and cooperation of official press bureaux.<sup>24</sup> The resolutions on inaccurate news include, among others, the following:

The Committee of Heads of Official Press Bureaux believes it its duty to proclaim that the campaign against the dissemination of inaccurate news is one of the necessities of international life, and, as regards the methods of pursuing this campaign, to formulate the following observations:

One of the most effective means of combatting inaccurate information is the rapid spread of accurate and abundant information through the agency of the Press Bureaux. Should accurate news not be forthcoming, there is the risk that the Press may show a tendency to seek its information at other and less well-informed sources and to accept, without verifying it, information which is often inaccurate and sometimes tendentious (...).

<sup>24</sup> The Final Document of this Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press was published as document: League of Nations, “Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace” (C.96.1932, January 25, 1932), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/collaboration-de-la-presse-a-lorganisation-de-la-paix-collaboration-of-the-press-in-the-organisation-of-peace>.

(Committee of Press Representatives),

Solemnly confirming to the Conference that the international Press, while maintaining its integral right to a fully justified liberty, intends to play its part as distributor of information by propagating only news which, in good faith, it regards as accurate and truthful;

Considering that the most effective means of combating the dissemination of false or inaccurate news is for the Official Press Bureaux, as far as their information is concerned, to furnish authentic news as quickly as possible (...).

(Committee of International Organisations of Journalists),

The Committee considers that the measures that may be taken to avoid the dissemination of inaccurate news should never affect the freedom of the Press, but that this freedom involves the responsibility of journalists as its necessary corollary.

In this spirit, the Committee notes that the international federative organisations represented at the Conference guarantee the intention of their national sections to enforce the observance of the code of honour of journalism by their members and, in the event of serious infractions, to exclude the guilty persons from the said associations and to deprive them momentarily of their status as members of these groups.

The Committee notes the existence of an International Court of Honour, founded by the International Federation of Journalists as a result of the joint initiative of that Federation and the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations (...).

The Copenhagen Conference was followed by the *Second Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press, convened in Madrid in November 1933*.<sup>25</sup> It was convened on the basis of the hope expressed by the 13th Assembly of the League of Nations that definite proposals might be made with a view to “giving effect to some of the principal suggestions offered by the Press Organizations during the enquiry into the problem of the spread of false information which might threaten to disturb the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations”.

The Madrid Conference reviewed the action taken under the Copenhagen resolutions and considered various related problems, such as the right to correct false information in the international field, the intellectual role of the press, broadcasting and international relations, and the status of press correspondents in foreign countries. According to the Conference Report, the discussions “showed that all those who participated remained faithful to the spirit of the resolutions adopted by the Copenhagen Conference of 1932”. The Madrid conclusions also “noted that certain progress had been made on the lines indicated in the principal resolutions of the Copenhagen Conference.” Two main ideas were emphasized as a particular result of the Copenhagen Conference, “namely, freedom of the press, full authentic information communicated as soon as possible to the press”. Eleven interesting resolutions followed, with a number of reservations and pronouncements by individual delegates. Among the unanimously adopted resolutions were the following two, relating to the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation, founded in 1926 as the technical secretariat and executive body to the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation of the League:

<sup>25</sup> Second Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press, Madrid 1933, see League of Nations, “League of Nations Official Journal,” (vol. XV, no. 2 (Part II), 1934).



The Conference,

having noted the first and very notable volume published by the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation concerning the “intellectual role of the press”, which it hopes will be translated into several languages and be circulated as widely as possible.

Addresses its warmest congratulations to the Institute on the successful initial results of this enquiry.

And trusts that the enquiry will be continued with the same success in order to develop, through the press, a better mutual understanding between the nations.

The Conference,

having noted the results of the enquiry carried out by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation on broadcasting and international relations.

Considers it desirable that the broadcasting services in the various countries should be maintained in such a way as not to affect the good understanding between nations.

And regards it as particularly necessary, in respect of information services, that the agency, newspaper, or official organization responsible for such services should always be indicated by the transmitting station.

Another resolution concerned the continuation of these conferences:

The Conference,

gratified by the results already achieved in the meetings at Copenhagen and Madrid,

expresses the desire that such meetings should be periodical and that a Committee, appointed for the purpose for each Conference, should be responsible for preparing the organization of the new Conference in agreement with the Government of the inviting country and with the cooperation of the Information Section of the Secretariat of the League of Nations after previous consultations with the various press groups concerned.

However, this resolution was never implemented. The mounting contradictions in the international political atmosphere brought these activities to a halt.

#### 4. “Moral Disarmament”

From the very outset, questions related to disarmament assumed a prominent role at the League of Nations. As early as during the war Woodrow Wilson had demanded that disarmament be made an essential part of the coming peace order. There were many prominent men at the League who thought that the most important question was to secure the implementation of the pledges of Article 8 and that the League would probably not survive unless the arms race could be ended, and the level of world armaments reduced.<sup>26</sup>

Also, from the beginning, moral disarmament<sup>27</sup> was understood to be an essential aspect of the general concept of disarmament. Thus, for example, the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, founded in 1922<sup>28</sup>, set itself the aims “to work for moral disarmament and international reconciliation by developing intellectual co-operation among countries through the world and to assist scientific work and place intellectual life on a higher level by that co-operation”.<sup>29</sup>

The League started to prepare a World Disarmament Conference in 1925 – the year of the first mass media resolution. In December 1925 the Council set up a body, a Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, to prepare a draft treaty on which the Conference would begin its work. The Council had advised the Commission to concentrate solely on the technical problems of disarmament. The obvious problem was that disarmament was not and is not a technical issue. This had already been noted at the First Assembly of the League (1920) which pointed out to the necessity of considering the whole series of political, social and economic problems.<sup>30</sup>

It was not before 1930 that the Commission produced a Draft Convention for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments. This was intended to provide a framework by means of which the limitation and reduction of armaments might be achieved. It was not an approved document; the disagreements were not just between the countries but also within them. But this gave the coming Conference freedom to consider any other text or proposal which might be submitted.

At the last session of the Preparatory Commission on 9 December 1930 the Polish delegation drew the Commission’s attention to the particular aspect of security: the achievement of general moral disarmament.<sup>31</sup> The connection between material and moral disarmament was stressed – a point already made in the press resolution of 1925 – and a “moral detente” was considered necessary both for relations among nations in general and also specifically for the success of the coming

<sup>26</sup> Philip Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference 1932-33: And Why It Failed* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), 54.

<sup>27</sup> See “League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation Research Guide: Moral Disarmament,” United Nations Archives Geneva, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lonintellectualcooperation/moraldisarmament>.

<sup>28</sup> See “League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation Research Guide: Initial Steps and Institution of the ICIC,” United Nations Archives Geneva, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lonintellectualcooperation/ICIC>.

<sup>29</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and Intellectual Co-Operation*, 43. On this committee, see also the chapter by Jürgen Wilke in this book.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, 189-190. See also League of Nations, “League of Nations Official Journal,” (no. 2, February 3, 1932), 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> League of Nations, “Documents of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference Entrusted with the Preparation for the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Series X. Minutes of the Sixth Session (Second Part) of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference” (C.4.M.4.1931.IX, January 15, 1931), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/documents-of-the-preparatory-commission-for-the-disarmament-conference-entrusted-with-the-preparation-for-the-conference-for-the-reduction-and-limitation-of-armaments-series-x-minutes-of-the-sixth-session-second-part-of-the-preparatory>, 415-416.

Disarmament Conference. The Polish delegation further pointed out to the obvious contradictions between demands for the reduction of armaments or demands for total disarmament and increasingly violent propaganda of hatred tending to promote disorder and even war – false information about other countries appearing in the press. The demand was that by and with the press world public opinion must be convinced of the absolute necessity of practical results in moral disarmament:

It would certainly be possible, by mutual undertaking, to arrest the hate-inspired propaganda; it would certainly be possible to compel States to rectify false information about other countries which is current in public opinion or appears in the Press or in literature; it would certainly be possible to have war propaganda recognised as a crime by the law of all countries. Many other measures could also be contemplated.

The Swedish government also brought this problem and the question of the press to the attention of the Special Committee for the preparation of a Draft General Convention to improve the Means of Preventing War in a letter, dated 25 April 1931.<sup>32</sup> The letter stressed the function and influence of the press during periods of international crisis:

It is impossible to exaggerate the danger that may arise in such cases from irresponsible press campaigns and the publication in the newspapers of inaccurate or biased reports regarding international relations, and real value might attach to a formal condemnation of such journalistic methods by the Governments. I realise, of course, how dangerous it is to give any impression of wishing to interfere with the principle of the freedom of the press; this principle is one of the foundations of Swedish public law, and the Swedish Government holds that it should in no case be violated. At the same time, there are circumstances in which aggressive propaganda against a foreign Power may take such offensive forms, and assume such a threatening character, as to constitute a real danger to peace. In such cases the Council of the League, when endeavouring to settle the conflict, should be able to discuss what steps can be taken to put an end to such propaganda. This idea has been suggested to me by the President of the Swedish Red Cross, and I think it is worthy of consideration.

As a basis for the Special Committee's discussions, the Swedish Government submitted the following proposal which may have been embodied in the Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War:

The High Contracting Parties undertake to give wide publicity, in the cases referred to in Article 2 of the present Convention, to the Council's recommendations for the maintenance of peace and the settlement of the dispute, and to the statements on the dispute published by the Council.

<sup>32</sup> League of Nations, "Special Committee Appointed to Prepare a Draft General Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War. Communication from the Swedish Government" (C.268.M.123.1931.VII/C.P.G.2, April 30, 1931), <https://archives.unige.ch/special-committee-appointed-to-prepare-a-draft-general-convention-to-strengthen-the-means-of-preventing-war-communication-from-the-swedish-government>.

They further undertake to endeavour, so far as their national laws permit, to suppress all verbal or written propaganda designed to prevent a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

The aim of this proposal was to prevent the general public from receiving information from one side only. The Committee basically agreed with the Swedish proposal but considered that the second paragraph could not be inserted into the Convention in view of the diversity of national press laws and the absence of common legislation.<sup>33</sup> The Drafting Committee adopted on 14 May 1931 the following text as one of the Articles prepared for the “Preliminary Draft General Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War”:

The High Contracting Parties undertake to provide, by the means at their disposal, such publicity as the Council may recommend for its deliberations and recommendations when a dispute is brought before it in the cases contemplated by the present Convention.

The Polish delegation took up the Swedish proposal on the same day (14 May 1931) and submitted to the Committee the following resolution<sup>34</sup>, which was adopted and further submitted to the Assembly:

The Special Committee,  
 Being aware of the danger which, in the event of an international crisis, may arise from irresponsible Press campaigns and publicity given in the Press to inaccurate and tendentious information;  
 Recognising that aggressive propaganda against a foreign power may in certain circumstances constitute a veritable threat to the world;  
 Requests the Assembly to consider the problem and examine the possibilities of finding a solution.

The Spanish delegation, at the 12th session of the Assembly, on 10 September 1931, also touched on the problem of moral disarmament from the point of view of the press. The proposal of the Spanish delegation was largely based upon the same considerations as those of the Swedish and Polish delegations: the press could have a great influence on relations between the peoples, and it was in the interest of peace that the press should receive and disseminate information as correctly and impartially as possible.<sup>35</sup>

The Assembly decided to refer the Spanish draft resolution, which also concerned the co-operation of women in the organization of peace, to the Third Committee for scrutiny. After due consideration, the Third Committee decided to address these two questions – women and the press – separately and submitted the following draft resolution on the Press<sup>36</sup> to the Assembly:

<sup>33</sup> League of Nations, “Minutes of the 63rd Session of the Council,” in *League of Nations Official Journal*, vol. XII, no. 7, 1931, <https://archives.unige.ch/league-of-nations-official-journal-12th-year-no-7-july-1931>

<sup>34</sup> League of Nations, “Special Committee for the Preparation of a Draft General Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War” (C.P.G./Comité de Réd./P.V.2, 1931), <https://archives.unige.ch/kpqt-5n3f-ty68>.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding the notion and concept of “propaganda” as discussed among the inner circles of the League, see the chapter by Stefanie Auerbeck-Lietz in this book.

<sup>36</sup> Resolution A.48.1931, see League of Nations, “Records of the 12th Ordinary Session of the Assembly. Plenary Meeting. Text of Debates”, in *League of Nations Official Journal: Special Supplement*, no. 93, 1931; see also League of Nations, “Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Committee for Moral Disarmament. The Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace” (Conf.D/CDM/3, March 15, 1932), <https://archives.unige.ch/0000676634-d0003>.

The Assembly;

Considering that the organisation of peace demands an international spirit freed from all prejudices and misconceptions;

Convinced of the necessity of ensuring that Press information shall be as impartial and complete as possible;

Requests the Council to consider the possibility of studying with the help of the Press, the difficult problem of the spread of information which may threaten to disturb the peace or the good understanding between nations.

The Assembly adopted this text, which in its own roundabout way came to signify how the international situation had begun to deteriorate. It was on the basis of this resolution that the Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press was convened in Copenhagen in January 1932.

This landmark resolution – the outcome of Polish, Swedish and Spanish initiatives – was followed by another landmark document: a Polish Memorandum on moral disarmament.<sup>37</sup> Dated 23 September 1931 and addressed to the delegations of the Disarmament Conference, it pointedly emphasized the value and urgency of moral disarmament and suggested that the question in its entirety be examined at the Conference. As the memorandum concerned the practical attainment of moral disarmament in its suggested spheres, namely the press, education, broadcasting, theatre and cinema, it raised the question: “How to counteract movement against peace and assure a moral detente by concerted action of the Governments.” The aim of moral disarmament was not merely to disarm people’s minds but to transform them with a view to establishing a firm psychological basis for the future development of the international community.

Concerning the role of the press in the attainment of moral disarmament, the Polish Government referred to the earlier resolutions on this matter and stated further that the press might exert, during times of crisis but also in daily life, if it so desires, a salutary influence by calming people’s minds or then play a disastrous role by causing hatred and mistrust. It suggested some remedies in the latter case: punishment for a person publishing a report containing false and biased information; the right of reply; the setting up of an international disciplinary tribunal for journalists to combat press excesses; establishing an international information bureau to prevent false representations of the international situation.

Moral disarmament had long been discussed in the League. It was nothing new, but as stated in the Polish Memorandum: “Moral disarmament will make no headway if we rest content with words. What is needed is action.”

The Disarmament Conference started its work in February 1932. The General Commission of the Conference had decided to refer the question of moral disarmament to the Political Commission of the Conference, which in turn decided to set up a committee to study the question of moral disarmament.

<sup>37</sup> League of Nations, “Moral Disarmament: Memorandum from the Polish Government” (C.602.M.240.1931.IX., September 23, 1931), <https://archives.unige.ch/memo-of-17th-sept-1931-from-the-polish-delegation-at-geneva-on-moral-disarmament>. See also League of Nations, “League of Nations Official Journal,” (no. 38, March 16, 1932), 293-295.

The first task of the Committee on Moral Disarmament was to define the various fields it should explore. For this purpose, it instructed a sub-committee to prepare the agenda of its work. Having approved its proposals, the Committee established its agenda<sup>38</sup> as follows:

1. Questions concerning intellectual co-operation and technical means of spreading information, including the problems of education, utilisation of cinematography and broadcasting;
2. Questions concerning the co-operation of the Press;
3. Questions of a legal character.

The Committee appointed sub-committees to study each of these questions. Finally, in November 1933, the Committee produced a Preliminary Draft concerning moral disarmament for insertion in the General Convention for the Limitation of Armaments, which was submitted for examination to the General Commission of the Conference. The text consisted of a preamble and four articles.

The preamble of the draft text reads as follows:

The High Contracting Parties,

Considering that moral disarmament is one of the essential aspects of the general work for disarmament;

Considering that the reduction and limitation of armaments depend to a large extent upon the increase of mutual confidence between nations;

Considering that as far as public opinion is concerned a sustained and systematic effort to ease tension may contribute to the progressive realisation of material disarmament;

Considering that the inter-dependence of States calls not only for their co-operation in the political sphere, but also for an effort of mutual understanding between the peoples themselves;

Being resolved to do whatever lies in its power to induce the nationals to display in any public discussion a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect;

Being convinced that the success of the measures adopted in one country to ensure moral disarmament is largely dependent on the application of similar measures in other countries;

Recognising that the League of Nations has placed at the disposal of the various states the Intellectual Co-operation of certain tasks connected with moral disarmament, although a different procedure may have to be adopted to meet special situations.

<sup>38</sup> See League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 38, March 16, 1932), 295; League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 39, March 17, 1932), 304; League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 55, April 26, 1932), 441-442; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Moral Disarmament" (Conf.D/CDM/24, July 25, 1932), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/0000676634-d0025>. See also League of Nations, "Conference for The Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Political Commission. Committee for Moral Disarmament. Agenda of the Committee. Report By M. Szumakowski" (Conf.D/CDM/9, April 25, 1932), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/0000676634-d0010>.

The four articles cover questions which made up item 1 of the Committee's agenda: questions concerning education, broadcasting, cinematography and the co-operation of the intellectual world – only one aspect of the problem of moral disarmament. It was stated that when the Committee addressed items 2 and 3 – press questions and legal issues – articles related to these can always be added to the existing text.<sup>39</sup>

The Press Sub-Committee met in June 1932. On 28 June 1932 the Polish delegation submitted a draft resolution concerning the assistance the press might render the work of moral disarmament. In the draft resolution the part played by the press in the development of international relations was recognized, and the convening of an international conference of qualified representatives of the press was proposed for the purpose of considering the problem of moral disarmament, as far as it concerned the press.

The Sub-Committee adopted the Polish draft resolution as a basis of discussion and wanted to consult the representatives of international journalists on this matter. After this exchange of views, the Sub-Committee proceeded to prepare a preliminary statement to be submitted to the Committee on Moral Disarmament as soon as it would be ready.<sup>40</sup>

However, in December 1933 the Committee was still expecting to consider the question of the co-operation of the press in the work of moral disarmament. It seems that this consideration was never properly processed, although the necessary data had been collected. Yet in various statements and resolutions the role of the press was given great importance in the work for moral disarmament, notably in relation to public opinion; the press was seen not only as the embodiment but at the same time as a great motive power of public opinion.

Towards the end of the Disarmament Conference the international situation was constantly deteriorating, and what happened outside the League had dire effects on the fate of the Conference. Philip Noel-Baker, the British statesman and Nobel Prize winner who at that time was Personal Assistant to the President of the Disarmament Conference and later wrote a book about the Conference and on the reasons why it failed, stated that the chances of success for the Conference had been held much greater if the time for it had been earlier, in 1931 or even 1930.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> League of Nations, "Moral Disarmament. Text Adopted by the Moral Disarmament Committee of the Disarmament Conference" (Conf.D/CDM/36, November 20, 1933), <https://archives.unige.ch/moral-disarmament-text-of-convention-adopted-by-the-moral-disarmament-committee-of-the-disarmament-conference>. See also League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Committee for Moral Disarmament. Report on the work of the Committee. (Rapporteur: M. Komarnicki, Poland)" (Conf.D/CDM/37, December 1, 1933), <https://archives.unige.ch/t2w8-newp-5fsx>; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Political Commission. Committee on Moral Disarmament" (Conf.D/CDM/19, May 30, 1932), <https://archives.unige.ch/0000676634-d0020>. For the whole process, see Conf.D/CDM/15-39. Regarding the role of cinematography in the media ensemble of the League, see also the article by Jürgen Wilke in this book.

<sup>40</sup> See League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 98, June 30, 1932), 790-792; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Political Commission. Committee for Moral Disarmament. Documentation of the Committee" (Conf.D/CDM/2, March 15, 1932), <https://archives.unige.ch/0000676634-d0002>; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Moral Disarmament" (Conf.D/CDM/24, July 25, 1932), <https://archives.unige.ch/0000676634-d0025>.

<sup>41</sup> Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, 59.

The same assessment was confirmed at the symposium “The League of Nations in retrospect” in 1980, where it was stated that “the Disarmament Conference came far too late” and that “the collapse of the Disarmament Conference cannot be imputed to the League of Nations”.<sup>42</sup>

As pointed out by Noel-Baker, in many countries there were people who thought the League and disarmament were utopian nonsense, since “whatever you do, war will come”<sup>43</sup>. Such an attitude was apparent among certain circles both within and outside governments. It was not only a spontaneous stance but also something deliberately mobilized by anti-disarmament lobbies. For example, in Britain some private arms manufacturers were keen to support and re-arm Hitler, and this support of the military-industrial complex had the effect of creating an illusion of public support for the militarist ministers in the government.

The same occurred in France: since before the First World War the most important French newspaper, *Le Temps*, was under the control of the Comité des Forges – the Private Arms Manufacturers of France. In 1930 the Comité bought control of *Le Journal des Débats*, one of the most important organs of political opinion in France. The Comité also acquired control of most of the other Parisian newspapers and journals. According to Noel-Baker<sup>44</sup>, through these organs of the press the Comité waged a merciless campaign against the League and its Disarmament Conference in France. A similar testimony is given by Thomas Davies.<sup>45</sup>

In Germany, the Hugenberg Konzern bought more than half of all the daily newspapers; it bought all the press advertising agencies; it bought *Die Woche* and the other leading weekly and monthly periodicals; it bought the German movie enterprise UFA and the new Radio Broadcasting Service. This all was used against the Treaty of Versailles, against the League and against disarmament. And it worked. As Noel-Baker noted, in this struggle the internationalists won all the arguments, but the bureaucrats and militarists won all the material victories that count.<sup>46</sup>

## 5. “Modern Means of Spreading Information Utilised in the Cause of Peace”

The “modern” methods utilized in the cause of peace gained favor in the League of Nations at the beginning of the 1930s, along with the general development of movie and broadcasting media. The first manifestation of these media emerging outside the conventional press was the attention devoted to the educational use of “cinematography”. The movie was thus not primarily considered a political factor related to peace but rather a method of education within the overall framework of “intellectual co-operation”. Obviously, up to then cinema as an entertainment and artistic medium had not yet proven a cause of any major international concern, although its moral implications at the national level were fully appreciated from the outset – film censorship being one of the consequences.

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<sup>42</sup> Zara Steiner, “Introductory Essay,” in *The League of Nations in Retrospect / La Société des Nations: Rétrospective* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 4–5.

<sup>43</sup> Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, 60–61.

<sup>44</sup> Noel-Baker, 62–63.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Davies, “France and the World Disarmament Conference of 1932–34,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 770.

<sup>46</sup> Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, 4.



As far as the particular aspect of educational movie at the League is concerned, it was not just an incidental question but became an institutionalized part of the broader area of the activities in intellectual co-operation, for which a technical unit had been established, the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation<sup>47</sup>, based in Paris – along with those for health, communication and transit, and economy and finance. In addition, a separate International Educational Cinematographic Institute<sup>48</sup> was established in Rome to “encourage by means of useful action and suggestions the production, distribution and exchange of educational films”.<sup>49</sup>

Radio – or “broadcasting” as it came to be called by the 1930s – was the real “modern means” that gained ground in international politics at the League. Here, too, a point of departure was the educational application of the medium: on 24 September 1931 the League Assembly passed a resolution relating to intellectual co-operation, in particular to an enquiry being carried out by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation on the educational aspects of broadcasting, and this resolution recommended that the enquiry “should cover all the international questions raised by the use of broadcasting in regard to good international relations”. The source of inspiration for this extension was obviously the consideration of moral disarmament within the framework of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, in particular the Polish Memorandum quoted above (dated on 23 September 1931 – the day before the adoption of the League Assembly resolution on intellectual co-operation).

The Assembly resolution of 24 September 1931, backed by the consideration of moral disarmament, launched a five-year process which culminated, on 23 September 1936, in the adoption and signing by the plenipotentiaries of 28 states of the *International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace*. An authentic account of the preparations between 1931 and 1936 is to be found in the League of Nations document<sup>50</sup> which served as the basis of the diplomatic conference convened in Geneva to adopt the Convention.<sup>51</sup> Its essence finds expression by the first four articles, after a preamble recognizing “the need for preventing, by means of rules established by common agreement, broadcasting from being used in a manner prejudicial to good international understanding” and prompted by “the desire to utilise, by the application of these rules, the possibilities offered by this medium of intercommunication for promoting better mutual understanding between peoples”:

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<sup>47</sup> See United Nations Archives Geneva, “League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation Research Guide: Initial Steps and Institution of the ICIC.”

<sup>48</sup> See League of Nations, “International Educational Cinematographic Institute. Report to the Council on the Second Session of the Governing Body of the Institute” (C.3.M.1.1930.XII, December 17, 1929), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/international-educational-cinematographic-institute-report-to-the-council-on-the-second-session-of-the-governing-body-of-the-institute>.

<sup>49</sup> On this institute, see the chapter by Jürgen Wilke in this book.

<sup>50</sup> See Annex of League of Nations, “Preliminary Draft International Convention on the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace” (C.L.44.1936.XII, March 17, 1936), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/preliminary-draft-international-convention-on-the-use-of-broadcasting-in-the-cause-of-peace>.

<sup>51</sup> The Convention was signed by 28 states, including the United Kingdom and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). By August 1938 it was ratified by 25 states, with accessions by 13 states. See “International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace,” accessed November 8, 2023, [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280046246&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280046246&clang=_en).

**Article 1.**

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to prohibit and, if occasion arises, to stop without delay the broadcasting within their respective territories of any transmission which to the detriment of good international understanding is of such a character as to incite the population of any territory to acts incompatible with the internal order or the security of a territory of a High Contracting Party.

**Article 2.**

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to ensure that transmissions from stations within their respective territories shall not constitute an incitement either to war against another High Contracting Party or to acts likely to lead thereto.

**Article 3.**

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to prohibit and, if occasion arises, to stop without delay within their respective territories any transmission likely to harm good international understanding by statements the incorrectness of which is or ought to be known to the persons responsible for the broadcast.

They further mutually undertake to ensure that any transmission likely to harm good international understanding by incorrect statements shall be rectified at the earliest possible moment by the most effective means, even if the incorrectness has become apparent only after the broadcast has taken place.

**Article 4.**

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to ensure, especially in time of crisis, that stations within their respective territories shall broadcast information concerning international relations the accuracy of which shall have been verified – and that by all means within their power – by the persons responsible for broadcasting the information.

The adoption of the Broadcasting Convention was no doubt a landmark, both with regard to the mass media and to the League itself against the background of the deteriorating international relations. However, in reality it was too little too late, while international propaganda over the radio escalated especially in Nazi Germany but also elsewhere, reaching its height during World War II. After the war there followed the Cold War from 1948 on and the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (1949), followed by that of the Warsaw Pact (1955), and the radio remained the main platform of foreign propaganda, with its own stations in the US (Voice of America, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe), the United Kingdom (UK) British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, Germany (Deutsche Welle) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Radio Moscow).<sup>52</sup> The Convention of 1936 remained in force but was increasingly forgotten.

<sup>52</sup> For an example, see Nelson Ribeiro and Stephanie Seul, "Revisiting Transnational Broadcasting: The BBC'S Foreign-Language Services during the Second World War," *Media History* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 365–77.

Yet it survived until the new millennium, by which time television had largely superseded the radio as the main channel of international communication.<sup>53</sup>

In general, we may subscribe to the words of Egon F. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, who, after serving at the League Secretariat, wrote a book about it, putting the League activities in the field of the mass media in the following perspective:

In later years, when mounting international dangers loomed more and more in the foreground, the accent shifted from technical and professional questions to the broader implications of the work of the press. The discussions centred chiefly around the possibility of combating and rectifying inaccurate news “the dissemination of which may disturb the maintenance of peace and the good understanding between the peoples” without in any way impairing the freedom of the press. In the later stage these deliberations were extended to include the role of broadcasting in international relations. The abandonment of democratic government by an increasing number of countries, and with it the progressive destruction of the liberty of the press and of the professional independence of journalists after 1933, cut short the plans for a continuation of these activities by the League.

These efforts to secure a proper status to international journalists and closer collaboration between official and unofficial elements, and to emphasize the responsibility in the preservation of peace of all those charged with the spreading of news, may not have led to tangible results. But they were part of a great endeavour to strengthen the forces actively engaged in the maintenance of peace. Like similar efforts in other fields of the League’s activities, they were not strong enough to prevent the headlong rush to the abyss the moment the accumulated danger elements tended toward open military conflict.<sup>54</sup>

Our paper of 1986 ended here. Meanwhile other overviews have been presented of the League’s achievements as seen by scholars in political history and political science, notably Pedersen<sup>55</sup> and Ikonomou and Skjoldager<sup>56</sup>. The following is our view of the overall context of the League’s story and its heritage in today’s world – in general and in the media world in particular.

<sup>53</sup> Formally, the Broadcasting Convention remains to this day a valid part of international law – one of the 33 treaties originating from the League of Nations, see United Nations, “League of Nations Treaties,” accessed November 8, 2023, [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/LON.aspx?clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/LON.aspx?clang=_en). After having been transferred to the United Nations, it has received a dozen more ratifications and also some denunciations, notably by Australia, France, Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The number of states which still formally adhere to it in the 2020s is over 40 (some of them with reservations). See “International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace, Geneva, 23 September 1936”, United Nation Treaty Collection, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDGS/Volume%20II/LON/PARTII-1.en.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), 213–214.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091–1117.

<sup>56</sup> Haakon Ikonomou and Karen Gram-Skjoldager, eds., *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019).

## 6. The context and heritage of the League of Nations

At the time of the League in the 1920s and 30s the world was very different from today: a population of about two billion living in less than 80 independent states, compared to today's population of nearly eight billion in almost 200 states. The number of territories under colonial rule was several dozens, and the total population living in them can be estimated to be up to one billion, accounting at the time for half of humanity. This is shown graphically in an animated map on the rise and fall of the European colonial empires.<sup>57</sup>

Let us not forget the political and intellectual climate prevailing in the (Western) world in the early years of the League. Nordenstreng's presentation<sup>58</sup> at the Bremen project workshop in November 2019 listed the context after World War I as follows:

- *Parliamentary democracy* prevailed, as in the Weimar Republic
- *Radicalism* proceeded in liberal ideologies
- *Progressivism* promoted social reforms, including trade unions (International Labour Organization/Office, ILO)
- *Modernism* flourished in culture and beyond
- *Pacifism* accompanied peace movements against militarism
- *Idealism* figured in politics and political science
- *Decolonization* was gaining momentum in Asia, Africa and Latin America (precipitated by Japan's unprecedented victory over Russia in 1905)

These are only a few aspects of a complex political and cultural context which, moreover, changed above all with the rise of fascism in Germany and elsewhere. However, the list serves as a reminder of the importance of the context for the activities in the League.

In a longer development perspective from the League to the post-World War II United Nations, certain megatrends shape the world. Decolonization was an obvious one, but equally fundamental was an international order based on multilateralism and peaceful co-operation. The League provided a forum for this, with emerging norms and principles of solidarism and pluralism. Global norm-setting took different ways and forms.<sup>59</sup> The two major contextual trends are briefly revisited below.

<sup>57</sup> Zack Beauchamp, "500 Years of European Colonialism, in One Animated Map," *Vox*, January 16, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2014/5/8/5691954/colonialism-collapse-gif-imperialism>.

<sup>58</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng, "'Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace: Guiding Public Opinion Towards Moral Disarmament' The League of Nations Promoting a Vital Intellectual Trend" (Workshop on Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations, Bremen, 2019), <https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2020/02/3010fb58-bremen-presentation-slides-update.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> See Tomoko Akami, "Beyond the Formula of the Age of Reason: Experts, Social Sciences, and the Phonic Public in International Politics," in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon Ikononou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 161–72.

## Decolonization

Decolonization is a historical megatrend in both the political and intellectual sense. It is worth noting that in spite of general support for moral disarmament, the Disarmament Conference made only little progress in this field. As states continued to invest in military purposes, fewer resources were available for economic and social development, although the connection between disarmament and development was accepted and also subsequently endorsed by the United Nations.<sup>60</sup>

However, some justice-related issues in the economic and social fields were successful. As Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss<sup>61</sup> state, both the League (1920) and the ILO (1919) were “ahead of the curve”<sup>62</sup>. The League of Nations Mandate System<sup>63</sup> was established under Article 22 of the Covenant<sup>64</sup>:

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The mandates thus established were turned into United Nations trusteeships.<sup>65</sup> As Adam Roberts notes, although, like the Covenant, the United Nations Charter makes no mention of “decolonization”, there was “an implicit assumption that the days of European colonialism were numbered”<sup>66</sup>. This continued the process originating in Article 22 of the League Covenant.

In December 1960 the United Nations General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples<sup>67</sup>:

<sup>60</sup> Fry and Nair, “Moral Disarmament: Reviving a Legacy”, 38–39.

<sup>61</sup> Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly, and Thomas George Weiss, *Ahead of the Curve?: UN Ideas and Global Challenges* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 206.

<sup>62</sup> See also Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 1108–1112; Akami, “Beyond the Formula of the Age.”

<sup>63</sup> The League of Nations Mandate System has been called a second phase in the history of colonization and its decline. The first phase was marked by the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–1885. The third one found expression by the United Nations Charter, chapters XI, XII, XIII (see Nele Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship,” *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 47–95, note 11). For the critique of the League of Nations’ Permanent Mandate Commission (PMC), see Florian Wagner, “Naturism, the Permanent Mandates Commission and the Denial of the Violent Nature of Colonialism,” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikononou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 78–89.

<sup>64</sup> See also Denys P. Myers, “The Mandate System of the League of Nations,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 96, no. 1 (July 1921): 74–77; Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System”; Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, 1099–1107; Taina Maarit Tuori, “From League of Nations Mandates to Decolonization: A History of the Language of Rights in International Law” (Helsinki, University of Helsinki, 2016), 31–80.

<sup>65</sup> Tuori, “From League of Nations Mandates”, 5; Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System.”

<sup>66</sup> Adam Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations,” in *Order and Justice in International Relations*, ed. Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell (Oxford University Press, 2003), 57.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution, “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” (A/RES/1514(XV), 1961), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/206145>.

The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.

This declaration shows how justice and order are related. More of the kind was to follow.<sup>68</sup>

The United Nations Charter mentions human rights several times. Taina Tuori has discussed the League of Nations Mandate System and its rights language: how and when human rights notions appeared in the language concerning mandates.

The struggle for rights is a matter of global development with a large cast of actors with often contradictory motives. Idealists, old colonial hands, politicians and international lawyers operated under rapidly changing global circumstances and public opinions in different countries negotiating, manipulating and bargaining through the epochal changes from the rule of colonial empires towards decolonization and rights.<sup>69</sup>

The League had paradoxical responsibilities. As Pedersen remarks: “On the one hand, the League was to promote emerging norms related to trusteeship and human rights; on the other, it was to do so without undermining the principle of state sovereignty”<sup>70</sup>.

### **Idealism, solidarism, pluralism**

Woodrow Wilson’s famous “Fourteen Points Speech” to Congress in January 1918 introduced his idealism.<sup>71</sup> Wilson’s idealism reflects liberal ideas in international relations and political theory: a world at peace would be based on co-operation between democratic states able to resolve their disputes by peaceful means and with liberal democratic faith in public opinion. The League of Nations was an attempt to institutionalize international political problems on a rational basis.<sup>72</sup> Through idealism there came rationalist thinking which could bring to the fore ideas of change: people can make their own institutions and a new order.<sup>73</sup> However, as indicated by the need to establish the Mandate System, the world was not an equal place for all peoples; there was a need to change the colonial system to ensure a more peaceful world.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations”, 57-62. See also “United Nations and Decolonization,” United Nations, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/about>.

<sup>69</sup> Tuori, “From League of Nations Mandates”, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, 1107.

<sup>71</sup> Yale Law School, “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed November 10, 2023, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp). See also Fei Huang, “The 1919 Moment Revisited: Two Versions of Self-Determination and the Background of League of Nations” (Communication History of International Organizations and NGOs, Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research, University of Bremen, 2021), <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/zemki/events/conferences/communication-history-of-international-organizations-and-ngos>. She refers to two competing versions of self-determination, namely the Wilsonian version and the Leninist version. She argues how Wilson’s “Fourteen-point principle” was a response to Lenin’s “Peace Decree principle”. She argues further how these two versions of national self-determination are intertwined and could be called the Lenin moment and the Wilson moment.

<sup>72</sup> Akami, “Beyond the Formula of the Age”, 166-167.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1984), 28-36; Osmo Apunen, *Kansainvälisen politiikan metodologiset perusteet: oppihistoriallisia ääriiviivoja erään tieteenalan vaiheista* [in Finnish: *The methodological foundations of international politics: Contours of the history of a discipline*], Julkaisu / Tampereen yliopisto, politiikan tutkimuksen laitos, rauhan- ja kehitystutkimuksen yksikkö 44 (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1991), 102-123.

<sup>74</sup> Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System”; Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations.”

This also reflects normative ideas, and the League was intended to work to that end. The League has been much criticized for this idealism or utopianism.<sup>75</sup> As E.H. Carr has said: “Rationalism can create utopia, but cannot make it real”<sup>76</sup>. And further: “The utopian makes political theory a norm to which political practice ought to conform. The realist regards political theory as a sort of codification of political practice.”<sup>77</sup> Most studies on the League published after 1946 have been realistic analyses of its “decline and fall”, thus mainly ignoring the normative aspect.<sup>78</sup>

The idea that a system of states can be based on “a true ideology” in all states, that conflicts of interest are no longer important and order is achieved in this way differs from the solidarist idea of international society, which is based on the idea that there are still conflicts of interest among states but that these are resolved by common rules and norms. However, the idea that states sharing the same ideology would be more peaceful, as they have no conflicts of interest over ideology, differs from the idea that the very ideology they have would eliminate conflicts of interest.<sup>79</sup> Wilson envisaged the League according to a solidarist idea but also saw it as a league of democratic states, thus combining these two. The same is reflected in the United Nations Charter.<sup>80</sup>

International society is also a specific approach in international relations theory, the so-called “English School Approach”<sup>81</sup>, based on rules, norms and institutions, meaning that it is “a norm-governed social arrangement, rather than simply the expression of power and interest”<sup>82</sup>. Such an idea of international society is reflected in the Covenant of the League of Nations (1919), The Kellogg-Briand Pact/The Paris Pact (1928), the United Nations Charter (1945) and the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg (1945).<sup>83</sup>

When theorizing on international society, concepts like pluralism and solidarism emerged, referring respectively to *order* and *justice*. Pluralist and solidarist conceptions differ in their perceptions of the institution of war, sources of international law and the status of individuals.<sup>84</sup> In different historical times they may be different.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*; Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Machiavellian Utopia,” *Ethics* 55, no. 2 (January 1945): 145–47.

<sup>76</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Carr, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, 1091; Akami, “Beyond the Formula of the Age.”

<sup>79</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995), 236–237. The so-called liberal peace theory refers to the idea that democratic states do not fight each other but can fight non-democratic states, see e.g. Michael Doyle, *Liberal Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 236–237.

<sup>81</sup> Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Chris Brown, *International Society, Global Polity: An Introduction to International Political Theory* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015), 77.

<sup>83</sup> Hedley Bull, “The Grotian Conception of International Society,” in *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, ed. Herber Butterfield and Martin Wight, First Edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), 51.

<sup>84</sup> Bull, “Grotian Conception of International Society”, 52–53; Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

<sup>85</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 39, 49.

However, pluralism and solidarism are not irreconcilable but rather two sides of the same coin, as they reflect the restrictions and opportunities in international society.<sup>86</sup> As international society is a norm-governed social arrangement, it is not based solely on power and interest and thus differs from a realist conception.<sup>87</sup>

Martin Wight<sup>88</sup> has discussed international theory on the basis of three traditions, namely realism (a system of states), rationalism (international society) and revolutionism (a world society) and sees them as being interdependent. However, from the point of view of this book, the international society aspect is the most relevant. The United Nations Charter tries to bridge solidarist and pluralist aspects of international society.<sup>89</sup> Such an idea can also be found in the League of Nations Covenant.<sup>90</sup>

The practices of intellectual co-operation were already familiar before the League<sup>91</sup>, as the League in its entirety would not have been possible without pre-existing international intellectual life. The contribution of the League activities in this field were the co-ordination of previously established organizations and associations.<sup>92</sup> The International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation and its executive organ, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, can be considered a precursor of UNESCO. As Alvin LeRoy Bennett notes, there is a world unity in international co-operation, “in the inseparability of political, economic, and cultural aspects of closer international relationships”<sup>93</sup>.

However, intellectual co-operation is not the only way to world peace<sup>94</sup>, but it has its place. The aim of moral disarmament was not merely to disarm people’s minds<sup>95</sup> but also to establish a basis for the future development of the international community.

The Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments – Disarmament Conference (1932-33) – adopted a broad definition on disarmament and moral disarmament and was an essential part of it. Fry and Nair state how “moral disarmament” refers to ethical obligations to disarm, but also to how moral considerations go beyond this meaning: “a focus on disarmament through society’s development, both economically and from a human dimension”<sup>96</sup>. They take moral disarmament to be a human-centred concept like the concept of human security, which means the security of people,

<sup>86</sup> Buzan, *Introduction to the English School*, 84; Bull, “Grotian Conception of International Society”; Hedley Bull, *Justice in International Relations*, 1983–84 Hagey Lectures (University of Waterloo, 1984).

<sup>87</sup> See Seppä, *Responsibility to Protect as a United Nations Security Council Practice in South Sudan*, 48-66.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, ed. Gabriele Wight, and Brian Porter (Leicester: Leicester University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991).

<sup>89</sup> James Mayall, ed., “Introduction,” in *The New Interventionism, 1991–1994: United Nations Experience in Cambodia, Former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, LSE Monographs in International Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4-5; Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations”, 53-56.

<sup>90</sup> Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations”, 49, 55.

<sup>91</sup> Alvin LeRoy Bennett, *The Development of Intellectual Cooperation under the League of Nations and United Nations* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI University Microfilms International, A Bell & Howell Information Company, 1950), 1-13.

<sup>92</sup> Bennett, 261-262.

<sup>93</sup> Bennett, 268-269.

<sup>94</sup> Bennett, 269.

<sup>95</sup> See UNESCO, “Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution>.

<sup>96</sup> Fry and Nair, “Moral Disarmament: Reviving a Legacy”, 4-5.



in their daily lives, and not only the security of states.<sup>97</sup> The Disarmament Conference defined moral disarmament as broadly as human security is defined.

Moreover, moral disarmament was defined as “a concept that bridged the League’s efforts within disarmament and the press”<sup>98</sup>. Likewise, the press was clearly seen “as an arm of disarmament”<sup>99</sup>.

## 7. Subsequent developments in media and communication

At the time of the League, media meant the printed press – newspapers, magazines, books – and its electronic corollary, radio broadcasting as well as cinema. Television became a mass medium only in the 1950s, mainly in the industrialized countries, but it expanded rapidly, so that in the last quarter of the 20th century it was the dominant medium around the world, accompanied by video recorders and satellite transmissions.

With the new millennium, the media sector went through a “digital revolution”, whereby the transmission and recording capacities of audio-visual media grew exponentially, boosted by the Internet and smart mobile phones. The whole concept of one-way mass communication has been revolutionized by user-generated content and all sorts of social media. The information and communication technology (ICT) became a new global infrastructure of an “information society”.

Nevertheless, mass media and journalism at its core have retained a central place in this new era of “media ecology”. Hence, it is possible and indeed important to examine the intellectual heritage of the League’s media policies in the post-war United Nations. Here we only present an overview of relevant developments.

The first special sessions of the new United Nations, the United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information convened in Geneva in March–April 1948, became a reservoir of proposals, following up the League’s work in the media field within a post-war freedom of information context.<sup>100</sup> The Conference adopted over 40 resolutions and three draft conventions: the so-called “US Convention” on the Gathering and International Transmission of News, the “French Convention” on the International Right of Correction, and the “British Convention” on the General Principles of Freedom of Information.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the Conference initiated a Draft International Code of Ethics for Information Personnel.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> See S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History*, United Nations Intellectual History Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor”, 193.

<sup>99</sup> Tworek, “Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations”, 17.

<sup>100</sup> John B. Whitton, “The United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information and the Movement Against International Propaganda,” *American Journal of International Law* 43, no. 1 (January 1949): 73–87.

<sup>101</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council Resolution, “United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information” (E/RES/152(VII), 1948), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/212470>; Whitton, “The United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information and the Movement Against International Propaganda”, 74.

<sup>102</sup> See Lars Bruun, *Professional Codes in Journalism* (Prague: International Organization of Journalists, 1979), 94–95.

However, most of these were frozen by the Cold War which actually erupted around the Conference, leading to escalating antagonism between the US-led West and the USSR-led East.<sup>103</sup> A major permanent outcome remains Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), drafted in the Conference and approved as part of the Declaration in December 1948.<sup>104</sup> The only outcome at the level of international law was the Convention on the International Right of Correction (1952).<sup>105</sup> Unlike Article 19 of the UDHR, it proclaims peace and international understanding as the supreme values. However, this 1952 Convention had no lasting significance, due to a minimal number of ratifications; like the 1936 Broadcasting Convention, it remains a curiosity in international law. In short, the 1948 United Nations Conference largely expunged the peace and moral disarmament heritage of the League.

The same orientation towards freedom rather than peace dominated the media policies of UNESCO in the 1950s and 60s. Its Communication Sector also became increasingly involved in promoting media and literacy in developing countries – a policy in line with the geopolitical interests of the US.

Yet, in the 1970s UNESCO began to follow up the idea laid down in the preamble to its Constitution of 1945, that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. A major achievement was the 1974 *Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*<sup>106</sup>. This comprehensive tool of UNESCO’s Education Sector had no equivalent in the Communication Sector. Yet the same spirit was given some prominence in the 1978 *Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*<sup>107</sup> and in the 1980 Report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>103</sup> The burgeoning tension between East and West led to a split in the international movement of journalists, which was widely united at the founding of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) in 1946 but became bitterly embroiled in the Cold War; see Nordenstreng et al., *History of the International Movement*, 125–42.

<sup>104</sup> “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. For background, see Kaarle Nordenstreng, “International Communication, Media and Journalism Research in the Light of 70 Years of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights” (Symposium, University of Passau (Germany), 2018), <https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2020/06/b2c9f70c-passau-presentation-by-nordenstreng-on-15-november-2018-1.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution, “Convention on the International Right of Correction” (A/RES/630(VII), 1953), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/211445>.

<sup>106</sup> “Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-Operation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,” UNESCO, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-education-international-understanding-co-operation-and-peace-and-education>. See Kaisa Savolainen, “Education as a Means to World Peace: The Case of the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation,” *Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research*, no. 398 (2010).

<sup>107</sup> “Declaration on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War,” UNESCO, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/declaration-fundamental-principles-concerning-contribution-mass-media-strengthening-peace-and-> See Nordenstreng and Hannikainen, *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*.

<sup>108</sup> MacBride, *Many Voices, One World*; Kaarle Nordenstreng and Juan Somavia, “Revisiting 45 Years of History in Communication Policies,” *Media Development* 67, no. 2 (May 15, 2021): 5–10.

At that time UNESCO and the United Nations followed the trend of the NWICO – a miscellany of ideas and policies stemming from the geopolitical interests of the Non-Aligned countries in the South and the Socialist countries in the East. Media issues also achieved a higher profile through the *United Nations Committee on Information*.<sup>109</sup>

However, a neo-liberal turn boosted by private media corporations in the West succeeded in halting these developments in the 1980s, and by the end of the millennium UNESCO's Communication Sector had practically nothing left from the heritage of the League and its Institute of Intellectual Co-operation – indeed, little remained from the constitutional objective of peace. These topics were relegated not only by Western political interests guarding the free flow of information but also by another megatrend: the ICTs leading to Internet governance becoming the main topic at the historical World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).<sup>110</sup>

The developments in the first two decades of the new millennium have again signified a change of course, while increasing hate speech and fake news, facilitated especially by the social media and accompanied by the concentration of Internet-based platforms into the hands of a few private giants, have created concern about the toxicity of communication, with an “infodemic” alongside the pandemic, threatening to disrupt relations between people. Paradoxically, these developments are bringing back normative considerations into media policies and imbuing the heritage of the League with new relevance.

## 8. Conclusion

The main objective of the League of Nations was to consolidate peace:

Firstly, the League represented Wilson's idealism: a world at peace was “to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war” (preamble to the League Covenant). Furthermore, “peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety” (Article 8).

Secondly, the League reflected a broad concept of peace with disarmament as an integral part, entailing not only material disarmament but also moral disarmament. This was to be achieved through education, intellectual collaboration, the press, broadcasting and cinema by disarming people's minds. It was moreover intended to transform them with a view to establishing a firm psychological basis for the future development of an international society. What mattered most was security for people in their daily lives and not only the security of states.

<sup>109</sup> “Committee on Information,” United Nations, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/coi/>.

<sup>110</sup> “World Summit on the Information Society,” International Telecommunication Union, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.itu.int/net/whsis/>; “World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS),” UNESCO, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/whsis>. For an overview, see Robin Mansell and Kaarle Nordenstreng, “Great Media and Communication Debates: WSIS and the MacBride Report,” *Information Technologies & International Development* 3, no. 4 (June 1, 2006): 15–36.

Thirdly, the League applied its normative approach to various fields of international life, including the mass media. This provided a controversial heritage for media policies under Cold War conditions: any normative articulation of the media, especially its content, was viewed in the Capitalist West as a potential threat to freedom, while for the Socialist East and the Non-Aligned South normativity was natural. The League's heritage had its ups and downs at UNESCO, but throughout the years its essence remained relevant – not least in the contemporary “post-truth” era.

In short, the League represented idealism for peace and co-operation. It came under criticism from the rising school of realism in international relations but stood for the emerging principles of solidarism and pluralism, reflecting decolonization, justice and order. These elements furnished the idea of an international society which evolved with the League and prevails to this day.

The League was no historical failure: while failing to prevent World War II, it did lay the foundations for the United Nations and the post-war international order.

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## Discovering Open Diplomacy

### The League of Nations' Information Section 1920-1932 and its external and internal communication<sup>1</sup>

It must be regarded as axiomatic that the League of Nations depends not merely for its success but for its existence, on public opinion.  
*Wilson Harris, President of the International Association of Journalists, 8 January 1922<sup>2</sup>*

Open doors. [...]. The League's main force is publicity, in the sense of public discussion and public documents by which world opinion may judge the results [...]. The League, then, works in public. That is the first principle.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to describe the information and communication work across the League focusing on its Information Section, a kind of in-house public relations-office, and its role of organising and managing the League's internal and external communication. For both types of communication, external and internal, there were no pre-established role models or pre-formulated concepts, but only a "vague"<sup>4</sup> mandate.

In the first part of this chapter the League's communication practices are mainly traced from historical literature, in the second part this perspective is enriched by the analysis of archival documents from a hundred years ago as provided by the United Nations Library and Archives at Geneva. From both perspectives – a) sources which had been published and b) archival sources which had not been published – the concept of "Open Diplomacy" will be discovered as a prominent self-narrative of the League and as a conflicting object in the internal debate of League actors. "Open Diplomacy" became the contrast term to secret diplomacy and to propaganda. In many ways the concept of Open Diplomacy prefigured the modern days understanding of transnational, mediatized diplomacy.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written in the context of the DFG-Project Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations in the Inter-War Period (1920-1938). The project ran from 2017 until 2022 and was headed by the author of this article. Dr. Erik Koenen and Arne Gellrich, who are both contributors to this book, were involved in the project as post- and pre-Doc-researchers (DFG-Project-Number 329640267). With grateful thanks to Kaarle Nordenstreng, Tarja Seppä and Jürgen Wilke for their helpful comments on this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Publicity of the Proceedings of the Council: Memorandum by Mr. Wilson Harris, 8 January 1922, United Nations Archives Geneva (UNAG), R1431/27/18507/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-council-meetings-mr-wilson-harris-president-of-the-international-association-of-journalists-accredited-to-the-league-of-nations-memorandum-dealing-with-the-question-of-publicity-of-the-proceedings-of-the-council-and-assembly>. In the following, all archive sources with "R" relate to the Registry Files of the League of Nations related to the Information Section.

<sup>3</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation: Foreword by Sir Eric Drummond* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1930), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/ten-years-of-world-co-operation>, 402.

<sup>4</sup> Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, "Legitimizing International Bureaucracy: Press and Information Work from the League of Nations to the UN," in *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikononou, and Torsten Kahlert (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 131.

## 1. On the relevance of League research: reconstructing the concept of “Open Diplomacy” and its traces in the League’s communication practices

Nowadays, the overall historiographic frame of the League of Nations is changing from a “failure”-narrative in the post-Second World War Era to a more positive evaluation which focuses on the League as the forerunner of the United Nations<sup>5</sup> and nowadays diplomatic communication<sup>6</sup>. International relations-scholar Karen Gram Skjoldager described this change of perspective as moving “inside the League by shifting the analytical gaze from ideas towards practice”<sup>7</sup>. This chapter proposes doing both: to reflect on the idea and the practices of the then new, ambiguous concept of Open Diplomacy from a communication studies perspective. What was the contribution of the League, the so called “machinery”<sup>8</sup> when it comes to information and communication?

The League and particularly its Information Section had to fulfil several obligations:

- a. to establish a communication and information-order for a new inter-/transnational body of diplomacy and discourse,
- b. to establish stakeholder-relations and the correlated information policies to address very different inter-/transnational publics and potential stakeholders, like women- and peace- or educational organisations<sup>9</sup>. This as such was a huge but never clearly formulated task.

Between 1930 and 1933, Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer (1894-1957)<sup>10</sup> was himself an official of the League’s Information Section and called this section the “Key to the League’s Public Relations”<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, this section was “key” to organising communication across the League. It was one of the largest sections of the Secretariat<sup>12</sup>, a body of people which grew to about twenty members in 1932<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Ludovic Tournès, *Les États-Unis et la Société des Nations (1914-1946) : le système international face à l'émergence d'une superpuissance* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2016), 3-5; David Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies: The League of Nations and the Beginnings of Global Governance*, Understanding Governance (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Blandine Blukacz-Louisfert, “Drei Fragen an Blandine Blukacz-Louisfert,” *Vereinte-Nationen* 6 (June 2019): 246.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Gram-Skjoldager, “Introduction to: Inside the League: Part 1,” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikonomou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 18.

<sup>8</sup> H. Wilson Harris, *What the League of Nations Is* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1925), 14; Max Beer, *The League on Trial: A Journey to Geneva* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1933), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva: The Public Legitimization Strategies of the League of Nations and Their Legacy, 1919-1946” (PhD Thesis, Aarhus University, 2019); Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor: The League of Nations and the Combating of ‘False Information,’” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikonomou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 188–99. See also Wilke in this volume regarding the International Film Institute.

<sup>10</sup> See “Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer”, LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed November 28, 2023, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/4890>. Ranshofen-Wertheimer worked also in other positions, at the Economic Section and at the one being in charge of Opium and Traffic until 1940. Later he joined the United Nations as a Commissioner for Korea, Somalia and Eritrea. Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 296.

<sup>11</sup> Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), 201.

<sup>12</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, 208.

<sup>13</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 172; Seidenfaden, “Legitimizing International Bureaucracy”, 131-133.

From Ranshofen-Wertheimer we borrow the term public relations – fully aware that “public relations” in the 1920s is not the same as nowadays and that there are a lot of discussions on the terminology of early institutionalized communication work, not least when it comes to international comparison<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the following chapter will outline that the Information Section established much more than public relations work in a narrow sense. In fact, there was a double context of internal/external needs, challenges and processes. Public relations-work and communication management in the sense of planned communication processes were not given, instead they had to be developed and (re)invented for the new transnational setting.

Pierre Comert (1880-1964) was the one who, together with Arthur Sweetser (1888-1962) and Georg H. Mair (born 1887),<sup>15</sup> built this Information Section<sup>16</sup>. Not by accident, the Secretary General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond (1876-1951), choose two former journalists, French Pierre Comert – knowing him since wartime<sup>17</sup> – and US-American Sweetser, as formative figures of the Information Section. Both had been carefully selected due to their professional backgrounds in the journalistic field. In fact, the majority of the staff members of the Information Section had previously been working as professional journalists<sup>18</sup>.

The two introductory quotes to this chapter (see above) tell us: The International Association of Journalists accredited at the League of Nations<sup>19</sup> being “the competent body representing the interests of League journalists”<sup>20</sup> and the Secretariat of the League both claimed “Open Diplomacy”<sup>21</sup>. However, even if it might look like, such claims were not at all unanimous. This chapter reveals what the League’s multiple actor constellation of diplomats, politicians, journalists and public relations officials understood by this still today famous but fuzzy term Open Diplomacy.

<sup>14</sup> Stefan Wehmeier, Oliver Raaz, and Peggy Hoy, “PR-Geschichten. Ein systematischer Vergleich der PR-Historiographie in Deutschland und den USA,” in *Historische und systematische Kommunikationswissenschaft: Festschrift für Arnulf Kutsch*, ed. Stefanie Auerbeck-Lietz, Petra Klein, and Michael Meyen (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2009), 309–33; Peter Szyszka, “Zwischen Propaganda und Kommunikationswettbewerb. PR-Arbeit als Teil der Kommunikations- und Mediengeschichte,” in *Historische und systematische Kommunikationswissenschaft: Festschrift für Arnulf Kutsch*, ed. Stefanie Auerbeck-Lietz, Petra Klein, and Michael Meyen (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2009), 527–557.

<sup>15</sup> Georg Mair left the Information Section early in 1922, see “George Herbert Mair”, LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed November 28, 2023, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/5044>.

<sup>16</sup> Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva.”

<sup>17</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 208; Isabella Löhr and Madeleine Herren, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik. Arthur Sweetser und die Mediendiplomatie des Völkerbundes,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62, no. 5 (2014), 417.

<sup>19</sup> For details regarding this organization: Christine Manigand, *Les Français au service de la Société des Nations*, L’Europe et les Européens (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 93–98; Heidi J. S. Tworek, “Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations,” *Medien & Zeit* 25, no. 4 (2010): 25–28; Frank Beyersdorf, “First Professional International: FIJ (1926–40),” in *A History of the International Movement of Journalists: Professionalism Versus Politics*, ed. Kaarle Nordenstreng et al., Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 80–124.

<sup>20</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 212.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Sweetser, *The League of Nations at Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 187–204; League of Nations, ed., *Völkerbund und Presse: ein Beitrag zur Internationalen Presseausstellung Köln* (Genf: Informationsabteilung des Völkerbundsekretariats, 1928), 17; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 407.

Prominently fixed in the Covenant, as formulated in the Charta of the League, the notion of Open Diplomacy claimed transparent and trustful interstate communication:

[ The members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to warlike purposes.<sup>22</sup>

Former journalist and then League's public relations-official Max Beer<sup>23</sup> related his own understanding of Open Diplomacy directly to the above cited Article 8 of the Covenant. Other contemporary actors tell us: One crucial aim was to find "most effective methods of collaboration", to bring forward the future of "international collaboration" and "cooperation" between governments.<sup>24</sup> Historian Haakon Ikonomou highlights the goal of "setting up a system of direct interchange of information between groups and countries"<sup>25</sup> which was not least a task of inter-institutional and interpersonal communication.

Cooperation was a highly politically and legally connoted term, framed by the League's Charta of 1919 in its opening paragraph:

[ The High Contracting Parties, in order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security [...].<sup>26</sup>

In a subsidiary way the notions of "collaboration" and "co-operation" were claimed in a lot of League publications<sup>27</sup> with regard to the then starting transnational working routines: the staff members of the League's different Sections should not be recruited according to national backgrounds but to expertise<sup>28</sup>. In fact, that was not always the case, as we will see throughout this chapter.

Today, the pioneering role of the League of Nations in the field of diplomatic communication for "new communicative forms of international politics"<sup>29</sup> is highlighted in the broader context of United Nations history<sup>30</sup>. Schulz stresses that the new communicative forms – of the League and of the United Nations – contributed to the concept of "preventive diplomacy" with its first goal to avoid

<sup>22</sup> League of Nations, "Covenant of the League of Nations," Article 8, April 28, 1919, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/league-of-nations/covenant>.

<sup>23</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 104.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum of Sweetser to the Secretary-General, January 1940, UNAG, S889/194/3415, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-sweetser-arthur>.

<sup>25</sup> Haakon A. Ikonomou, "The Administrative Anatomy of Failure: The League of Nations Disarmament Section, 1919–1925," *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 3 (August 2021), 331.

<sup>26</sup> League of Nations, "Covenant of the League of Nations."

<sup>27</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 400; Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 10, 125; Beer, *The League on Trial*, 7, 389.

<sup>28</sup> Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Matthias Schulz, "Laboratorium für eine friedlichere Welt," *Zeitschrift für die Vereinten Nationen und ihre Sonderorganisationen* 6/2019 (October 12, 2019): 245.

<sup>30</sup> See also Nordenstreng/Seppä in this book.

war.<sup>31</sup> Already in the early years, League officials assessed the League's transnational communication work as being "revolutionary" in contrast to national communication work in foreign policy:

[ The position of that [Information] Section transcended that of corresponding national services, and its status reflected the fact that a quasi-revolutionary change in the relationship between a diplomatic body and the public had taken place.<sup>32</sup>

Peace became a crucial normative and empirical topic of this new kind of diplomacy and its public communication.<sup>33</sup> This was not least a highly emotional topic, since "internationalism"<sup>34</sup> itself was based on values like "benevolence, cooperation and compromise"<sup>35</sup>, values which are generically intertwined with communicative practices and trust-building.

One hope and goal had been that communication could be a useful and effective tool for establishing self-commitment of national leaders to their own words and plans (regarding peace) if they would have to legitimize themselves in front of the publics of the world<sup>36</sup> – and consequently would have to integrate inter- and transnational relations as basic concerns of their plans and actions:

[ Publicity alone will enable the League of Nations to extend a moral sanction to the contractual obligations of its members.<sup>37</sup>

But there were voices stressing dangers for such proper communication. Beer sceptically looked at moods and feelings responding to former war experiences and hate propaganda:

[ Halt! Beware of blind idealism, beware of mystical demagoguery, when turning the pages and reading the words of the Covenant, beware of haste and bitter feelings.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Schulz, "Laboratorium für eine friedlichere Welt", 245; in the same sense, see Ingrid A. Lehmann, "Die UNO aus kommunikationswissenschaftlicher Perspektive," in *UN Studies: Umrisse eines Lehr- und Forschungsfeldes*, ed. Manuel Fröhlich (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008), 161–76; William R. Keylor and Ross A. Kennedy, "Wilson's Project for a New World Order of Permanent Peace and Security," in *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson* (Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 470–91; Beer, *The League on Trial*, 7, 60–66 on the "jargon of peace".

<sup>32</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 201.

<sup>33</sup> See Nordenstreng and Seppä in this volume.

<sup>34</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*.

<sup>35</sup> Ilaria Scaglia, *The Emotions of Internationalism: Feeling International Cooperation in the Alps in the Interwar Period* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 17.

<sup>36</sup> The "world" meant the *addressed* world, which for the most part was the "Western", liberal world. Katharina Rietzler, "From Peace Advocacy to International Relations Research: The Transformation of Transatlantic Philanthropic Networks, 1900–1930," in *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*, ed. Davide Rodogno, Bernhard Struck, and Jakob Vogel (Berghahn Books, 2022); Stephen Wertheim, "Reading the International Mind: International Public Opinion in Early Twentieth Century Anglo-American Thought," in *The Decisionist Imagination: Sovereignty, Social Science, and Democracy in the 20th Century*, ed. Daniel Bessner and Nicolas Guilhot (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 30–37. The Communist world of that time met predominantly in the quite different transnational context of the *Comintern*, also established after World War I, see Hans Poerschke, *Das Prinzip der Parteiliteratur: Partei und Presse bei und unter Lenin, 1899–1924* (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2020).

<sup>37</sup> Sweetser, *The League of Nations at Work*, 191.

<sup>38</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 170.



Beer's argument went in the direction that communication in the inner circles of the League was not naïve or neutral but structured by past experiences and pre-structured power relations.<sup>39</sup> He related this argument to a critique of the powerful Council of the League built up by the Allied Forces in 1919 and dominating the inner structure of the League. Beer vividly denounced the "superiority of the Council over the Assembly"<sup>40</sup>. Beer addressed to the publics of the world with these open words in 1933, the moment he quit the League, in his book titled "The League on Trial". But even when fulfilling his role as an information officer Beer had a sceptical view of the League's achievements. Nevertheless, other contemporaries observed that the Information Section officers generally had "a profound belief in the League"<sup>41</sup>.

The head of the Information Section, Pierre Comert (1880-1964), was a French former journalist and also a former university lecturer for German Language at the University of Göttingen. He was widely experienced with organisational and strategical information work. From 1916 onwards he served as a press officer at the French Embassy in London.<sup>42</sup> Remarkable – whereas not exceptional compared to other Information Section members – were his multilingual and inter-/transnational experiences.<sup>43</sup> As a journalist and public relations-official communicating and reporting from one country to another, his background can be described as being transnational. His profile as an international agent of communication was strongly developed before joining the League – which is also true for many of the public relations-agents at the League of Nations Information Sections.<sup>44</sup>

Comert headed the Information Section for the long period of nearly 15 years. He focused on press-relations.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the League also brought radio and film<sup>46</sup> into play, not least to attract younger and more transnational publics. After World War II, Ranshofen-Wertheimer<sup>47</sup> evaluated the strong orientation at the medium of the press as "a weakness" of the Comert era. In fact, in the Registry Files of the Information Section, it is the press which represents the dominant medium of internal discussions and ambitions. Radio and film were mostly the target media of other League institutions, like the Organisation of Intellectual Cooperation as a predecessor of the UNESCO.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Beer openly expressed pro-German feelings against France. Beer, *The League on Trial*.

<sup>40</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 170-171.

<sup>41</sup> Paul F. Douglass and Karl Bömer, "The Press as a Factor in International Relations," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 162 (1932), 200.

<sup>42</sup> Leaving the League after 1933, Comert became the head of the Information and Press Service of the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Pierre Comert: French Journalist", accessed November 30, 2023, <https://peoplepill.com/i/pierre-comert>; "Pierre Comert", LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed November 30, 2023, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/5359>.

<sup>43</sup> Some of the League Information Section members showed exceptional linguistic talents, e. g. Konni Zilliacus was "fluent" in English, French, German, Swedish and Russian, with some additional Polish, Italian, Norwegian and Danish language skills. Mr. ZILLIACUS (Konni) Personal Notes, 15 October 1938, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>44</sup> For Arthur Sweetser, see Löhr and Herren, "Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik."

<sup>45</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund Und Presse*, 7; Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Birgit Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991), 40-57, 105; Helle Strandgaard Jensen, Nicolai Schulz, and Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, "Film-Splaining the League of Nations," in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikononou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 201-10; Pelle van Dijk, "Internationalism on the Big Screen: Films on the League of Nations," *Studies in Communication Sciences* 23, no. 1 (April 24, 2023): 51-66.

<sup>47</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 202, 214.

<sup>48</sup> Wilke, Nordenstreg and Seppä in this book; Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*, 44-57, 88-93.

With the end of the Comert era, the Information Section began to arrange “radio talks” on the League’s work and discussed establishing a “radio division”, but “too late and with insufficient means”<sup>49</sup>.

Comert was displaced from his leading position after Germany had joined the League, not accepting – with then Joseph Avenol (1879-1952) succeeding Eric Drummond – two Frenchmen in such power positions.<sup>50</sup> Comert’s personnel file at Geneva reveals this partly, in the form of “secret files”: It was Comert himself who officially asked for demission which became effected the 1st January 1933.<sup>51</sup> This step may be considered to be face guarding and not at all “open” or transparent.

Archival files show Comert as an ambitious advocate for the new concept of Open Diplomacy, nevertheless acting under the conditions of relatively strong organisational constraints personalized not least by the Secretary General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond.<sup>52</sup>

## 2. Source critical reflexions: The Registry Files of the Information Section and a view at secondary literature

Types and processes of communication at and beyond the League are not much reflected by the secondary literature up to now. Secondary literature in the field of League research is dominated by the disciplines of history and of political science, not by communication studies. This chapter contributes a deeper look into the *internal and external information and communication* processes beyond the League as well as their strategic and/or situation-related contexts.

The League’s communication practices are documented by archival sources, namely memoranda, statements, letters and, not to be neglected: handwritten notices and annotations. Such were often directly applied to such documents, however with a certain delay of a few days, sometimes even weeks. The notices reveal the sharing and annotating practices of the League’s Registry: The names of the persons who had a file at hand or on his/her desk – sometimes weeks after having returned from a journey – are transparently documented in each file. Such *formal practices of file circulation* (whereas the handwritten notices often seem to be quite informal) are interesting, as they show the dynamic practices of public and organisational communication in the making. Such practices pre-formed later ones, such as those of the United Nations and, more generally, internal/external information and communication flows and cycles of the communications work of international organisations in general.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, this chapter is able to outline *case-studies on internal and external communication* by archival material with a focus on the Information Section holding the key-position of a kind of in-house communication bureau.

<sup>49</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 207, 215.

<sup>50</sup> Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration with an ‘International Public’, 1919–1939,” *Contemporary European History* 31, no. 3 (August 2022), 10.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Pierre Comert to the Secretary General Drummond, 22 December 1932, UNAG, S745/50/797, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-comert-pierre>. Notice of the Personnel Office, 23 December 1932. UNAG, S745/50/797, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-comert-pierre>.

<sup>52</sup> See paragraph 5.1. of this chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt, “International Organizations ‘Going Public’? An Event History Analysis of Public Communication Reforms 1950–2015,” *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (December 1, 2018): 723–36.

The aim of this chapter is to learn from primary sources not least about the informal voices of the past revealed by:

1. The *Information Section's Registry Files* during the Comert era 1920-1932 hosted at the United Nations Archives at Geneva which store several thousand pages. The Registry was the central internal administrative service responsible for the circulation, indexing and distribution of files to the civil servants.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally

2. Once again, several thousand pages of personnel files originating from the files of the Personal Office of the League were under focus concerning some of the main Information Section protagonists: *Max Beer, Pierre Comert, Reginald Cummings, José Plá, Julien Nogueira, Arthur Sweetser and Konni Zilliacus*. Partly the analysis of their personnel files refers to years after 1933 (but only if relevant retrospectively for the Comert era).

The above-named selection of Personnel Files is no coincidence, it corresponds to exactly those actors who were closely involved in the debate on Open Diplomacy as it is documented and analysed here in this chapter via the Registry Files. As a first step, the author of this chapter selected and analysed the Registry Files and then – thus based – in a second round the Personnel Files. The aim was to provide a deeper understanding of the constellation of actors and their motives.

The main instrument to research primary sources in terms of archival material was the original finding aid of the Registry Files of the Information Section of the League<sup>55</sup>. In 2014 and – two times – in 2018, Erik Koenen and Arne L. Gellrich stored the files as provided by the United Nations Archives via digital photography and, with the aid of student assistants Nathalie Schuckenböhmer and Gina Franke, transformed them into PDFs. They were then analysed by the author of this chapter with a focus on debates on Open Diplomacy. When our research team stored the archival files at Geneva, the recent UN Archives' League digitizing project, the LONTAD project,<sup>56</sup> was in its preparatory stages and was still in progress when this article was written.

In sum, the communication history of the Information Section presented by this chapter is reconstructed along:

- a. Sources which had *not been written for the purpose of being published*: A lot of Registry Files had been declared "private" or "secret"<sup>57</sup>.
- b. Other sources under analysis, like *Memoranda* written by League sections and/or external actors (like the international journalist organisation), were addressed to the yearly Assembly of the League, which means to an expert public. The Assemblies' debates on their part

<sup>54</sup> Anique H. M. Van Ginneken, *The A to Z of the League of Nations* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 9, 160.

<sup>55</sup> United Nations. League of Nations Archives, "Fonds du Secrétariat, Section d'information," in *Répertoire général 1919-1946 [des archives de la Société des Nations]*, 1:318-34, Geneva: United Nations, 1969. <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/leagueofnationsarchives/FindingAids>.

<sup>56</sup> With the new database provided by the United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, any research of the League's history will be done much easier: "LONTAD: Total Digital Access to the League of Nations Archives," accessed December 1, 2023, <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lontad/introduction>.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations. League of Nations Archives, "Fonds du Secrétariat, Section d'information."

attracted the journalists accredited at the League in their role as mediators to reader publics in different parts of the world: "The Assembly is a talking body"<sup>58</sup>.

- c. In addition, it is possible to take into consideration another corpus: the strategically published "*League at work*" book series and, later on, the 'remembering the League' literature which had been published by the Secretariat itself (often as a collective author) and/or by (former) officials<sup>59</sup>. This 'genre' of League literature documents and frames the League.<sup>60</sup>
- d. With regard to secondary literature, this chapter takes into account books, articles and chapters about the League and its communication policies and strategies from various scientific disciplines, like early newspaper studies, history, nowadays communication studies and political science<sup>61</sup>. The scientific literature under focus is the one which *especially regards the Information Section of the League*<sup>62</sup> which still is rare.

Which constellations of actors and which communicative practices can be discerned from the archives and from experiences shared in the Leagues remembering literature? Interestingly enough, both represent the overall British-French dominance of the International Secretariat. Accordingly, the Information Section was headed by French Pierre Comert and was much influenced, informally

<sup>58</sup> Wilson 1919, quoted in J. Michael Hogan, *Woodrow Wilson's Western Tour: Rhetoric, Public Opinion, and the League of Nations* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Sweetser, *The League of Nations at Work*; Inazō Nitobe, *What the League of Nations Has Done and Is Doing* (Brussels: International University of Brussels, 1920); Raymond B. Fosdick, *The League of Nations Starts: An Outline by Its Organisers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920); H. R. Cummings, "The League of Nations at Work," *The Sociological Review* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 1923): 180–88; League of Nations, *Völkerbund Und Presse*; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*; Beer, *The League on Trial*; T.P. Sevensma, "Vorwort," in *Das Arbeitsmaterial des Völkerbundes. Führer durch seine Veröffentlichungen*, ed. Arthur Carl von Breycha-Vauthier (Berlin: C. Heymann, 1934); Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*; Julián Nogueira, *La Sociedad de las Naciones y las Naciones de la Sociedad: de Ginebra a Dumbarton Oaks* (Buenos Aires: Mundo Nuevo, 1945); Frank Paul Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

<sup>60</sup> Christiane Sibille, "LONSEA – Der Völkerbund in neuer Sicht. Eine Netzwerkanalyse zur Geschichte internationaler Organisationen," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 8 (2011): 475–83. As early as in 1928 the German brochure "Völkerbund und Presse [The League of Nations and the Press]" labelled this type of publication "Völkerbundliteratur", which means literature *on* the League of Nations. League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*.

<sup>61</sup> Douglass and Bömer, "The Press as a Factor"; Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, "The League of Nations and the Mass Media: The Rediscovery of a Forgotten Story" (XV Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR/AIERI), New Delhi, 1986), [https://sites.tuuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the\\_league\\_of\\_nations\\_and\\_the\\_mass\\_media.pdf](https://sites.tuuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the_league_of_nations_and_the_mass_media.pdf); Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*; Manigand, *Les Français au service*; Tworek, "Peace through Truth?"; Margaret MacMillan, *Die Friedensmacher: Wie der Versailler Vertrag die Welt veränderte* (Berlin: Ullstein Ebooks, 2015); Keylor and Kennedy, "Wilson's Project for a New World"; Löhr and Herren, "Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik"; Haakon A. Ikonomou, "An International Language: The Translation and Interpretation Service," in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikonomou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 30–39; Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert, eds., "Introduction," in *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 1–13; Seidenfaden, "Message from Geneva"; Seidenfaden, "From the Gallery to the Floor"; Seidenfaden, "Legitimizing International Bureaucracy"; Wertheim, "Reading the International Mind"; Carolyn N. Biltorf, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>62</sup> Nordenstreng and Seppä, "The League of Nations and the Mass Media"; Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*; Ute Lemke, "Ein Beitrag zur 'Entgiftung der öffentlichen Meinung der Welt': Völkerbund, Presse und PRESSE," in *Die Pressa. Internationale Ausstellung in Köln 1928 und der jüdische Beitrag zum modernen Journalismus*, ed. Susanne Marten-Finnis and Michael Nagel (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2012), 105–19; Löhr and Herren, "Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik"; Seidenfaden, "Message from Geneva"; Seidenfaden, "From the Gallery to the Floor"; Seidenfaden, "Legitimizing International Bureaucracy"; Pelle van Dijk, "The Information Section in the Member States: Case Studies on the League of Nations and Public Opinion," in *Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations: Results, Problems, Perspectives* (Project Workshop (DFG), Bremen: ZeMKI, Universität Bremen, 2019); Arne Lorenz Gellrich, Erik Koenen, and Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, "The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy and the League of Nations: Co-Evolution between Diplomacy, PR and Journalism," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 2020): 607–21.

as well as directly, by British protagonists.<sup>63</sup> European power hierarchies were represented and reproduced after the Great War.<sup>64</sup> The League's European power house was early on reflected by some staff members of the Information Section.<sup>65</sup> The dominance of Western powers in information and communication flows is visible all over the archival material. Some other world regions, not least Latin America, were especially addressed.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, the Latin American colleagues in the Information Section were in a way 'exotic', especially hired to address the world regions and languages they represented.<sup>67</sup>

The Information Section's Registry Files at the UN Geneva Archives do in no way tell the whole story. It is difficult to get insight into communication and decision processes which happened one hundred years ago. There are very interesting documents to find, but often they are de-contextualised or in other words: *There are no complementary sources* which contextualize and/or explain the full sense of a document, not least in case of often single letters with no replies to them to be found at the archives. For this reason, this article exclusively presents findings *which can be traced across several sources or documents*.<sup>68</sup> This is relevant not least to reconstruct the volatile *processes* of communication. Regarding documents and archival files, we have to bear in mind that often they represent the last step of informal communication which is not documented at all:

[ They [the diplomats] dictate, they talk, they translate, they duplicate, and talk and talk again, without respite and without end.<sup>69</sup>

Not least LONSEA, the "League of Nations search engine"<sup>70</sup>, a data base first hosted at the University of Heidelberg, now Basel and headed by Professor of European and Global History Madeleine Herren-Oesch, was of enormous help when researching the institutional and actors' constellation of the League and when contextualizing the relevance of actors with regard to this kind of archival material.

<sup>63</sup> Gellrich, Koenen, and Averbeck-Lietz, "The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy."

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen: Lateinamerika und der Völkerbund, 1920-1936* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 180-182; Jonas Brendebach, Herzer Martin, and Heidi Tworek, eds., "Introduction," in *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 4; Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikonou, "The Construction of the League of Nations Secretariat. Formative Practices of Autonomy and Legitimacy in International Organizations," *The International History Review* 41, no. 2 (2017), 276.

<sup>65</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 198; Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen*, 194.

<sup>66</sup> Anne-Isabelle Richard, "Competition and Complementarity: Civil Society Networks and the Question of Decentralizing the League of Nations," *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (July 2012): 233-56.

<sup>67</sup> See paragraphs 5.3. and 6.2. of this chapter.

<sup>68</sup> The need of complementary sources to write communication history is discussed by Rudolf Ströber, "Historische Methoden in der Kommunikationswissenschaft. Die Standards einer Triangulation," in *Handbuch nicht standardisierte Methoden in der Kommunikationswissenschaft*, ed. Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz and Michael Meyen, Springer Nachschlagewissen (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2016), 307.

<sup>69</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 197.

<sup>70</sup> Sibille, "Der Völkerbund in neuer Sicht."

### 3. Conflicting goals or: Trust *versus* transparency and the propaganda “taboo”

This chapter does not focus on the diplomatic negotiation of international contracts but on journalists and public relations professionals in their mediating role between diplomacy and the broader public.<sup>71</sup> In accordance with the recent observation by Stephen Wertheim, this chapter shows that

[...] one must not accept the self-presentation of the League as an unprecedented leap from secret diplomacy to a New Diplomacy guided by public opinion.<sup>72</sup>

Complementary observations are to be found in Charlotte A. Lerg's<sup>73</sup> book on the history of “Science Diplomacy”: Addressing ‘the’ public (a public of national or transnational elites, a specialized public of politicians and/or journalists, a broader public...) was a step-by-step process involving a lot of different actors, institutions and their constellations. Lerg<sup>74</sup> also highlights that as early as in 1917 “propaganda” became a no-go-term with official statements by the US-government. This was an effort of the Creel commission and its related “Committee on Public Information”, established under the Wilson administration. The internal debates of the League reveal a similar effort to avoid the term propaganda but *not* the overall function of propaganda in terms of persuasive communication.

Open Diplomacy can be understood as a fluid, often informal, more or less ‘hidden’ “epistemic project”<sup>75</sup> enhancing the communication and agency of a constellation of actors across journalists, diplomats and public relations-officials.

Whereas the following paragraph 3 of this chapter is mostly based on contemporary “League literature” and on current secondary literature, the complementary paragraph 5 delves deeper into this question along the archived traces of the League's internal debate on gradual “openness” and not least *closeness*, which means questions of transparency in transnational diplomacy.

<sup>71</sup> See also Nordenstreng and Seppä in this book.

<sup>72</sup> Wertheim, “Reading the International Mind”, 37.

<sup>73</sup> Charlotte A. Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie: Wissenschaft und Prestige in den Transatlantischen Beziehungen 1890-1920*, Transnationale Geschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).

<sup>74</sup> Lerg, 381.

<sup>75</sup> Gellrich, Koenen and Averbeck-Lietz conceptualize the “epistemic project” not “epistemic community” (like Tworek in “Peace through Truth?” does) since the idea of “openness” evolved during *conflicting debates* across a *heterogeneous actor* constellation. Gellrich, Koenen, and Averbeck-Lietz, “The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy.”

### 3.1 The League's overall narrative of "Open Diplomacy" and opinion building

Whatever the League was doing, its policies and politics had to be addressed, told and narrated via the daily press<sup>76</sup>. *Facts* not least regarding the statistics the League's sections collected and worked with<sup>77</sup> as well as opinions in favour of or against the League had to be managed and mediated<sup>78</sup>.

The League's Secretariat was well aware of the difficulty of opinion building across nations on the one hand while on the other hand addressing more or less limited *specialized publics of experts*<sup>79</sup>. "News value" was difficult to achieve, as "interest in the League is split up into groups"<sup>80</sup>. Such reflections come close to findings by communication research of the late 1940s or even 1950s, with Katz's and Lazarsfeld's<sup>81</sup> work on personal influence being filtered by group relations criss-crossing media influence. The League addressed "the press and other organs of public opinion" at "a time when in many countries public opinion toward the League was still in a formative stage"<sup>82</sup>. Seemingly, when Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet<sup>83</sup> conceptualized the opinion-leader-concept on the basis of social research, there had been at least two decades in the course of which practitioners of political public relations had become well aware of their own reinforcing role in international affairs<sup>84</sup>.

One aim of the 28th US-American President Woodrow Wilson's (1856-1924) famous 14-points plan for post-war Europe,<sup>85</sup> which pre-conceptualized the League, had been to establish *Open Diplomacy* in the sense of *international contracts* no longer being negotiated behind closed doors at so called "private" meetings of the "old diplomacy" with its "secret negotiations"<sup>86</sup>. For such ideas the Europeans – at least those convinced of internationalism as a basis for peace in Europe – celebrated Wilson as a new "Messiah", "a personality half scholar and half prophet"<sup>87</sup>.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the US-President's "demand for 'open covenants openly arrived at' was never fully implemented" into the League's diplomatic communication, as former League official Ranshofen-Wertheimer stated.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>76</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 398-414.

<sup>77</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*; Sevensma, "Vorwort."

<sup>78</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 33.

<sup>79</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 405.

<sup>80</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, 403-404.

<sup>81</sup> Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (New York: Free Press, 1955).

<sup>82</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 203.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944).

<sup>84</sup> H. R. Cummings, "Propaganda," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Cambridge: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., January 1, 1926).

<sup>85</sup> An introduction to "Wilsonianism" is given by Kennedy. Ross A. Kennedy, ed., *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson* (Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

<sup>86</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 58; Keylor and Kennedy, "Wilson's Project for a New World", 473.

<sup>87</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 33, 74.

<sup>88</sup> The former journalist and League's Information Officer Max Beer retrospectively described that the League – even if emerging in the context of the Wilsonian ideal of a new world order – was an institutionalisation *of its own* which had to invent *itself* beyond its US-American roots. Beer characterised Wilson ambivalently, calling him "the weak prince of peace from America" and, no less cynically, calling the League officials "Wilson's pale inheritors". Beer, 68, 87. Quite similar words for the "naïve, idealistic, former colleague professor" Wilson are conveyed by economist John Maynard Keynes. Keylor and Kennedy, "Wilson's Project for a New World", 473.

<sup>89</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 201.

The broader background was represented by the Paris Peace Conference, where in 1919 “for months the leaders met privately in Paris, shut off from journalists and shutting out delegates from small states and colonial peoples”<sup>90</sup>. Or as Keylor observes, insisting in “top-secret meetings in Paris”<sup>91</sup> was not at all congruent with the “high-minded principle ‘open covenants of peace, openly arrived at’” of Wilson’s 14-Point speech from 1918.<sup>92</sup> During the Peace Conference negotiations on justice, peace and reparations before the eyes and ears of world press were an option discussed but not yet realized.<sup>93</sup> The Paris Peace Conference mainly worked behind closed doors, excluding the international press from crucial debates.<sup>94</sup> Given such arcan decision-making processes, it was common practice that *diplomats were leaking to the press*<sup>95</sup>. Even lies seemed to be useful for ‘good reasons’:

[ The secret diplomacy model presents a difficult dilemma for officials who may have to lie to the media and the public in order to ensure that the negotiations remain secret. [...] Is it permitted to lie to the media and the public in the cause of peace?<sup>96</sup>

Beyond all idealistic means, “Openness” was also a *strategic* narrative, early on pushed by Wilson’s press secretary Ray Stannard Baker (1870-1946),<sup>97</sup> once again a former journalist.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, in many of his speeches after World War I Wilson vividly stressed that political rhetoric, controversial debate and deliberation had to be legitimated by public opinion.<sup>99</sup>

The attitude of the Information Section officials with regard to Open Diplomacy was relatively clear and stable: For the League’s Information Section the Paris Peace Conference represented a mostly negative scenario – of *things should not be done*.<sup>100</sup> And even if Wilson may have been personally convinced of the need to address the mass media publics –the “man in the street”<sup>101</sup> – enhancing a future, peaceful world<sup>102</sup>, institutionally other processes and ideas, namely *to convince*

<sup>90</sup> Wertheim, “Reading the International Mind”, 37.

<sup>91</sup> Keylor and Kennedy, “Wilson’s Project for a New World”, 473.

<sup>92</sup> The whole wording of the first of 14 points in Wilson’s famous speech was: “The program of the world’s peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this: I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view [...]” U.S. Congress, “Woodrow Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points Speech,’” Congressional Record, 65th Congress, 2nd Session (U.S. Congress, 1918), [https://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/gna/Quellensammlung/07/07\\_woodrowwilsonsspeech\\_1918.htm](https://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/gna/Quellensammlung/07/07_woodrowwilsonsspeech_1918.htm).

<sup>93</sup> Susanne Brandt, *Das letzte Echo des Krieges: Der Versailler Vertrag* (Ditzingen Stuttgart: Reclam, Philipp, jun. 2018), 188; see Nordenstreng and Seppä in this book.

<sup>94</sup> Verena Steller, “Zwischen Geheimnis und Öffentlichkeit. Die Pariser Friedensverhandlungen 1919 und die Krise der universalen Diplomatie,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 3 (2011): 350–72.

<sup>95</sup> Brandt, *Das letzte Echo des Krieges*, 188 and examples from the archives in paragraph 5.3.

<sup>96</sup> Eytan Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy: A Theoretical Framework,” *Communication Theory* 10, no. 3 (August 1, 2000), 549.

<sup>97</sup> Baker wrote an eight volumes Wilson biography Pulitzer Price-awarded in 1940, see “Ray Stannard Baker”, NNDB, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://www.nndb.com/people/536/000113197/>.

<sup>98</sup> Keylor and Kennedy, “Wilson’s Project for a New World”, 473-474.

<sup>99</sup> Hogan, *Woodrow Wilson’s Western Tour*, 21-25, 50-52.

<sup>100</sup> Notes on the Second Meeting of the Council, Minutes urging more publicity, less speech-making, 18 February 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/notes-on-the-second-session-of-the-council-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-urging-more-publicity-and-less-speech-making>.

<sup>101</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 199.

<sup>102</sup> Some arguments in this direction in Beer, *The League on Trial*; Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy”; Wertheim, “Reading the International Mind”; Keylor and Kennedy, “Wilson’s Project for a New World”, 475-476.



*via the press and liaison work towards national and transnational elites* governed the work flows of the League's Information Section<sup>103</sup>.

Over the years "his [Wilson's] name was destined to be mentioned rarely in the League Assemblies, and rarely to inspire their deliberations"<sup>104</sup>. The League evolved via other constellations of actors and rules and not always reached to transcend nationalisms.<sup>105</sup> Criticizing nationalist ideologies and behaviour, Information Section public relations official Beer stated:

[...] behind their sound-proof doors they [national delegations] are deciphering the secret instructions of their governments which have reached them by the latest couriers; or else they are dictating their trusty secretaries, male or female, sworn officials, [...] who have to take down the secret diplomatic report which is expected at home [...].<sup>106</sup>

Wilson's normative ideal was to implement the League as a kind of "global parliament"<sup>107</sup>, but the outcome was more ambivalent, as the "Covenant [the Charta of the League] described a new machinery that answered first and foremost to states, not their publics"<sup>108</sup>. Therefore, my argument in this chapter is less optimistic than that of Nordenstreng and Seppä<sup>109</sup> or Macfadyen and Davies et al.<sup>110</sup>:

The League's communication widely enabled front- and backstage-dynamics. *Openness was gradual*. Both journalists (as external players) and members of the Information Section (as internal players) were often *structurally excluded* from the so-called *private meetings* of the politicians at the backstage.<sup>111</sup> "Private" in this sense does not relate to privacy in the meaning of the everyday use of the term, it means *diplomatic privacy* in terms of closed-door meetings.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, there were different and multiple overlapping back-stages beyond the League. Its yearly Assembly during September saw dynamic interpersonal exchanges between journalists and diplomats and/or members of the Information Section, so to say highly informal constellations of actors.<sup>113</sup> We can imagine such back-stages as fluid interpersonal communication circles, as a "permanent system of oral information and personal traffic"<sup>114</sup>, like the Information Section described in a functional way.<sup>115</sup> Christine

<sup>103</sup> See Richard, "Competition and Complementarity" and paragraph 6.2. of this chapter.

<sup>104</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 83.

<sup>105</sup> Richard, "Competition and Complementarity", 2012.

<sup>106</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 201.

<sup>107</sup> Ludovic Tournès, "American Membership of the League of Nations: US Philanthropy and the Transformation of an Intergovernmental Organisation into a Think Tank," *International Politics* 55, no. 6 (November 1, 2018), 33, 856. The notion "Weltparlament [parliament of the world]" is documented also in historical sources. League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Wertheim, "Reading the International Mind", 37.

<sup>109</sup> Nordenstreng and Seppä, "The League of Nations and the Mass Media"; see also Nordenstreng and Seppä in this book.

<sup>110</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 169-175.

<sup>111</sup> See paragraph 5 of this chapter.

<sup>112</sup> Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 26; Gilboa, "Mass Communication and Diplomacy."

<sup>113</sup> This is empirically pre-figuring what Günter Bentele and others later called an "interrefication-effect", i. e. the functional dependency of the two fields, journalism and public relations on each other. Günter Bentele, Tobias Liebert, and Stefan Seeling, "Von der Determination zur Intereffikation. Ein integriertes Modell zum Verhältnis von Public Relations und Journalismus," in *Handbuch PR: Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und Kommunikations-Management in Wirtschaft, Verbänden und Behörden.*, ed. Günter Schulze-Fürstenow and Bernd-Jürgen Martini (Neuwied, Krefeld: Luchterhand, 1997).

<sup>114</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 30.

<sup>115</sup> "[...] ein System der laufenden mündlichen Informierung und des persönlichen Verkehrs [a system of oral information and personal traffic]". League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 30.

Manigand highlighted the fruitful “promiscuité”<sup>116</sup> between the French politicians and journalists at Geneva meeting at dinners and talking to each other. During the Disarmament Conference, “one of the most significant social contacts is the luncheon each Wednesday noon of the Anglo-American Press Association [...] meet for an informal discussion of the conference”<sup>117</sup>. Often journalists had to “piece together” information by “whether formal or informal channels”, by even “pipelines of personal friendships” and they struggled with “frank efforts to persuade” also by Information Section members “seeking to influence the point of view of the reporters” and to force them to put on the “Geneva glasses”, i. e. a certain worldview<sup>118</sup>. We will come back to the role of interpersonal communication between diplomats, in-house press officers and journalists throughout this chapter by examples from the archives.

### 3.2 The propaganda “taboo”

With regard to the overall League’s communication policies, one rule often occurred in the archival files as well as in the “League-of-Nations-at-work” literature: The League should carefully avoid any assumption that its external communication could be understood as *propaganda*<sup>119</sup>. In a very early phase of its existence the information section was called “Publicity Section”<sup>120</sup>. The denomination “Information Section” might have sounded more neutral and trustful<sup>121</sup>. “At no time” the League should act as a “propagandist”<sup>122</sup>:

Propagandas was taboo.<sup>123</sup>

This meant not least trying to provide “unpolitical” information for journalists, no matter if they were “pro- or anti-League”<sup>124</sup>. Or, as the academics Karl Bömer (1900-1943) and Paul F. Douglass (1904-1988)<sup>125</sup> observed, that at least in public the League ignored “differences of opinion” and highlighted “the cooperative congeniality and results of League activity”<sup>126</sup> – whereas the journalists while covering the League did not always follow this perspective.

<sup>116</sup> Manigand, *Les Français au service*, 94.

<sup>117</sup> Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor”, 259.

<sup>118</sup> Douglass and Bömer, 257, 260.

<sup>119</sup> See also Strandgaard, Schulz, and Seidenfaden, “Film-Splaining the League of Nations”; Dijk, “Internationalism on the Big Screen.”

<sup>120</sup> Letter from Eric Drummond, Secretary-General, to Pierre Comert, 15 July 1919, UNAG, S745/50/797, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-comert-pierre>.

<sup>121</sup> Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration”, 5.

<sup>122</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 405; League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 32; Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 203.

<sup>123</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 203.

<sup>124</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 27, 33.

<sup>125</sup> In their jointly written report Bömer and Douglass describe the communication and information work beyond the First Disarmament Conference. At the time Bömer headed the Foreign Press Division of the Newspaper Research Institute at Berlin. After 1933, Bömer changed as an expert of foreign press to a high position in Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda. Douglass made a career as the principal of the American University. In the years before, during the early 1930s, Douglass had been a fellow in Political Science at the University of Berlin and came in contact to Newspaper Studies. See “Bömer, Karl”, German biography, accessed January 29, 2022, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz5047.html>; “President Paul F. Douglass Papers”, American University, accessed January 29, 2022, [https://www.american.edu/library/archives/finding\\_aids/douglass\\_fa.cfm](https://www.american.edu/library/archives/finding_aids/douglass_fa.cfm). Concerning Bömer, see Lutz Hachmeister, *Der Gegnerforscher: Die Karriere des SS-Führers Franz Alfred Six* (München: Beck, 1998), 97-102.

<sup>126</sup> Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor”, 257.

Propaganda was a discredited notion after the Great War. Nevertheless, in its in-house wording the League, and its Information Section as well, still used the notion in the sense of “propaganda for the League”<sup>127</sup>. The finding aid of the Registry Files of the Information Section<sup>128</sup> documents wordings like “propaganda to women’s organisations”, “propaganda to workers organisations” or to certain states like “propaganda to Germany” or “League propaganda in Switzerland”. In the same sense Beer spoke of “Wilsonian propaganda” and “propaganda” by visual symbols, such as maps showing League member states or the “semi-official colour” of the League, the “hopeful blue of the star-spangled banner”<sup>129</sup> introduced by Wilson’s entourage at the Paris Peace Conference becoming an unofficial symbol of the League.<sup>130</sup> Political scientist Harold D. Lasswell (1902-1978) highlighted Wilson’s propaganda efforts:

[ The foreign policy of the country [the United States] was made by President Wilson, and it happened to have great propaganda value.<sup>131</sup>

From a modern-day perspective, the ambivalent use of the term propaganda in the League’s inner circles prefigured a *planned strategic communication management* with regard to stakeholders<sup>132</sup>. In the same direction, Tomoko Akami states:

[ Aligned with this philosophy of openness, the League produced and disseminated information about the League for the public and called such operations ‘propaganda’ [...]. Similarly, the League used the term ‘peace propaganda’ positively.<sup>133</sup>

We know from other research that the notion of propaganda in interwar times reflected a plethora of meanings, from advertisement (the market-liberal version) to education (the Leninist version) as far as to illegitimate forms like war and hate propaganda<sup>134</sup>. In the 1920s the notion of propaganda was not yet fused with concepts of totalitarianism as it was the case after Nazism and Stalinism.

<sup>127</sup> See also Nordenstreng and Seppä, “The League of Nations and the Mass Media.”

<sup>128</sup> United Nations. League of Nations Archive, “Fonds du Secrétariat, Section d’information.”

<sup>129</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 74.

<sup>130</sup> For Beer (1933-258), this kind of propaganda meant “blue-washing” the world in terms of European domination: “We could then entitle the whole coloured picture [of mapping the League]: ‘Political Map of Europe and its relations to the rest of the world’”. Beer is prefiguring the “West-Rest”-metaphor coined by Stuart Hall. Beer, *The League on Trial*, 255; Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays*, Vol. 2: *Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>131</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927), 29.

<sup>132</sup> See also paragraph 6 of this chapter.

<sup>133</sup> Tomoko Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda: The Information Section of the League of Nations and its Tokyo office,” in *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations*, ed. Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi J. S. Tworek (London: Routledge, 2018), 70.

<sup>134</sup> Thymian Bussemer, *Propaganda: Konzepte und Theorien* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005); Stefanie Averbeck and Arnulf Kutsch, eds., *Zeitung, Werbung, Öffentlichkeit: Biographisch-Systematische Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Kommunikationsforschung*, Theorie und Geschichte der Kommunikationswissenschaft 2 (Köln: H. von Halem, 2005).

The notion of propaganda did not *per se* contradict the notion of Open Diplomacy.<sup>135</sup> For the League, “propaganda” meant a very fluent notion, in the sense of Lasswell’s “management of opinions and attitudes” or “control of opinion by significant symbols”<sup>136</sup>. This could refer to strategic communication in a wider sense, like advertising, political communication, lobbying with stake holders (“liaison work”<sup>137</sup>) to convince and persuade on the basis of solid information (like statistics), also by way of “social communication”, “stories”, “reports” and “pictures”<sup>138</sup>.

### 3.3 Closed versus Open Diplomacy: “Private Meetings” as decisive meetings

Diplomacy scholar Eytan Gilboa defines “Open diplomacy”, in the tradition of Wilsonianism, as referring “to negotiations that are readily accessible to the media and to public scrutiny and debate”<sup>139</sup>. Gilboa highlights that the closer it comes to debates on “political, strategic, security and trade issues”<sup>140</sup>, the more otherwise open doors get closed for external actors like journalists.

It was not at all the yearly Assembly, and it were not so much the six Permanent Committees<sup>141</sup> of the League which posed the problem of openness versus closeness or transparency versus non-transparency. They were usually open for journalists, the Assembly from the beginning, the Committees since 1921.<sup>142</sup> The League’s *Council*, the genuine political arm of the League, posed the crucial problem.<sup>143</sup> Until 1921 the “discussions of the Council have been entirely withheld from publication”, whereas its “decisions have in fact always been accessible for publication [by journalists] at latest on the last day of each session of the Council”.<sup>144</sup> Discussions were secret and only “circulated, after approval by individual members of the Council, to the Governments of all members of the League”,<sup>145</sup> and *decisions* were addressed to the journalists of the world by way of summaries and minutes. This was the reason why journalists had to look for close contacts to members of governments and national delegations to learn more about the closed-door discussions.

<sup>135</sup> See also Nordenstreng and Seppä in this book and their quotations of Lord Cecil.

<sup>136</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 9.

<sup>137</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 412–14.

<sup>138</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 9.

<sup>139</sup> Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy,” 286.

<sup>140</sup> Gilboa, 297.

<sup>141</sup> Following Van Ginneken the six *permanent* committees were: 1. Constitutional Organisation of the League, 2. Economic, Social and Technical Questions, 3. International Justice/Permanent Court of Justice, 4. Organisation of the Secretariat, Budget and Finances of the League, 5. Admission of New Member States, 6. Political Questions, Armaments, Mandates and Minorities. Van Ginneken, *The A to Z of the League of Nations*, 9. The *non-permanent* committees were volatile and the denomination “committee” or “commission” not clear cut. See League of Nations, “The Committees of the League of Nations”, and also a listing of numerous committees in: League of Nations, “Committees of the League of Nations. Note by the Secretary-General” (C.8.1938, January 7, 1938), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/committees-of-the-league-of-nations-note-by-the-secretary-general>.

<sup>142</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 14; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 406.

<sup>143</sup> See paragraph 5 of this chapter with examples from the archives.

<sup>144</sup> Publicity of Proceedings at Meetings of the Council: Memorandum by the Secretary General, 25 January 1921, UNAG, R1431/27/10588/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-proceedings-at-meetings-of-the-council-secretary-general-various-suggestions-as-to-the-best-means-of-carrying-out-the-resolution-of-the-assembly-on-this-subject-the-best-solution-appears-to-be-the-daily-distribution-to-the>.

<sup>145</sup> Publicity of Proceedings at Meetings of the Council, UNAG, R1431/27/10588/2938.

Diplomacy with regard to the Council can be described – referring to Gilboa’s distinction of “secret”, “open” and “closed door diplomacy”,<sup>146</sup> as the latter type. According to Gilboa’s typology, secret diplomacy targets enemies, closed door diplomacy antagonists and open doors diplomacy allies.<sup>147</sup> Even if this typology, which Gilboa did not sketch for the League but for US-diplomacy in the 20th century, seems static, it has some plausibility. Obviously, the League tried to *address allies* in their aim of international collaboration. But still *enemies* and *adversaries* excluded each other, not least *by ignorance and non-communication*. Max Beer witnessed old rivalries under the surface of peace-talk: “[...] the late enemies had forgotten nothing and wished to forget nothing”<sup>148</sup>.

In 1920 the Council brought together the coalition of the four permanent member states: France, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom. Later, in 1930, there were five permanent and nine temporary members. Until 1930, *most* meetings of this central political organ of the League were held in public<sup>149</sup>, meaning: *open for selected journalists*. But this was definitively not the case for *all* Council meetings.<sup>150</sup> A common practice was to organise “public” meetings in front of journalists which followed “private” ones bringing together diplomats talking behind closed doors.<sup>151</sup>

In 1920 the Council met eleven times; later this institution usually met 4 to 5 times a year, apart from (many) emergency meetings.<sup>152</sup> In 1931 the Assembly met 13 times, the Council sixty-five times.<sup>153</sup> The Council was the *only* central organ of decision-making with regard to “politically sensitive issues”<sup>154</sup> like the status of the City of Danzig or the Saar territories. Not least in the early years of the League the Council was “the sole instrument of work at the League’s disposal”<sup>155</sup>. A highly critical voice on the dominant role of the Council representing a power house compared to the deliberating Assembly was once again Beer.<sup>156</sup> In fact, the Council had to decide unanimously with one voice.<sup>157</sup> This practice made decision-making difficult.

The status and the kind of the Council’s “openness” and/or of communicating its decision-making to broader publics had been intensively contested across a constellation of multiple actors. League officials seemed to consider openness or transparency in information and communication less an honest promise but, at last for some of them, *an incalculable irritation and risk* not least concerning a highly responsible organisational body like the Council.<sup>158</sup> For the League as a corporate actor, publicity was *not a goal as such* but had to be carefully weighed against other goals and related values like trust and face-work between the council members:

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<sup>146</sup> Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy.”

<sup>147</sup> Gilboa, 290.

<sup>148</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 71.

<sup>149</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 406.

<sup>150</sup> Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 26; League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 15.

<sup>151</sup> Fosdick, *The League of Nations Starts*, 12.

<sup>152</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 13–14; Beer, *The League on Trial*, 95.

<sup>153</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 95.

<sup>154</sup> Van Ginneken, *The A to Z of the League of Nations*, 9; Wertheim, “Reading the International Mind”, 38.

<sup>155</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 14.

<sup>156</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 91–98.

<sup>157</sup> Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 26.

<sup>158</sup> See paragraph 5 of this chapter.

[ The advantage of secrecy is that a government can make a concession without any fear that in doing so it is lowering its dignity or authority in the eyes of its own nationals.<sup>159</sup>

Not least national home populations seemed to be unpredictable in their opinions on League activities. A good example is Germany where, from the political left to the right, publics and politicians discredited the Versailles treaty as a betrayal.

We must have in mind that establishing publicity by *publishing what happens* is a crucial normative aspect of journalism ('All has to be published'). Journalists claim *autonomy* when it comes to decide why and what to publish.<sup>160</sup> This is not least true for a Western understanding of journalism as a counterbalancing and controlling institution in parliamentary democracies.<sup>161</sup> Against this normative background, the *broadier public, the people*, are the main addressees of journalists, as the German professor for newspaper science Erich Everth mentioned early on during the 1920s.<sup>162</sup>

Contrary to this journalistic self-understanding, in the eyes of diplomats and information officers' transparency or openness do not *per se* count as general tasks, goals or rules, but trust and compromise to communicate effectively with counterparts or even enemies who might *not* share one's own value structure.<sup>163</sup> Public Relations and Public Diplomacy scholars stress that "secrecy"<sup>164</sup> or "opacity"<sup>165</sup> and not transparency may sometimes support and formalize a (more or less) trustful talk between negotiating parties and underpin decision-making. The Information Section's Registry Files at Geneva show this schism between the norms of journalism (*transparency* in particular) and of diplomatic communication (*opacity* or *gradual openness*) in an almost paradigmatic manner.<sup>166</sup> The diplomatic field at Geneva understood and handled openness in a situation- and context-specific way.

Since the early days of the League, the regular and swift publication of decisions by way of *minutes* was supposed to substitute for full openness.<sup>167</sup> The goal was to offer prompt and reliable information to the journalists and via them to the national publics. Producing and distributing minutes was a task of the Distribution Section of the League, not of its Information Section:

<sup>159</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 377.

<sup>160</sup> Horst Pöttker, "Öffentlichkeit kann wichtiger sein als religiöses Empfinden. Zehn Thesen zum Karikaturenstreit aus berufsethischer Sicht," in *Der Karikaturenstreit und die Pressefreiheit*, ed. Bernhard Debatin (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2007), 74.

<sup>161</sup> Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Communication, Society and Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>162</sup> Erich Everth, "Die Zeitung im Dienste der Öffentlichkeit. Eine Begriffliche Grundlegung," *Archiv Für Buchgewerbe Und Gebrauchsgeschichte* 65, no. 4 (1928): 1–30; Erik Koenen, *Erich Everth - Wissenstransformationen zwischen journalistischer Praxis und Zeitungskunde: Biographische und fachhistorische Untersuchungen* (Berlin Münster: LIT Verlag, 2019).

<sup>163</sup> Gilboa, "Mass Communication and Diplomacy"; Steller, "Zwischen Geheimnis und Öffentlichkeit."

<sup>164</sup> Eytan Gilboa, "Secret Diplomacy in the Television Age," *International Communication Gazette* 60, no. 3 (June 1, 1998): 211–25.

<sup>165</sup> Peter Winkler and Kerstin Thummes, "Ein Recht auf Opazität, Agonismus und Reartikulation: Paradoxe Prinzipien verantwortungsvoller Public Relations," *MedienJournal* 44, no. 3 (January 13, 2021): 30–49.

<sup>166</sup> See paragraph 5 of this chapter.

<sup>167</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 15.

Most of the Council meetings are public. Private meetings are attended by the representatives of States members and the competent officials of the Secretariat. The minutes of the Council proceedings, whether private or public, are subsequently printed and published.<sup>168</sup>

The notion of “private” meant planned, structured closed-door meetings of interpersonal exclusive expert-talk.<sup>169</sup> In this diplomatic context, *privacy* can be characterised in terms of *close elite meetings* which were *communicated* ex post and top down from diplomats to journalists. Parallel to this there was informal follow-up communication which was rather uncontrolled by interpersonal communication. Such informal talks between journalists and officials were often dominated by rumour.<sup>170</sup> Ernst Feder (1881-1964), accredited at Geneva on behalf of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, described the atmosphere of waiting behind closed doors and subsequent informal talks:

Nachmittags geheime Ratssitzung. Unruhiges Hin und Her und Warten der Hunderte von Journalisten. Ulk mit [Fritz] Klein: ‚Bei Chamberlain sollen heut Abend auch sechs deutsche Journalisten eingeladen sein. Sind Sie eingeladen? – Nein – Vielleicht sind nur Chefredakteure darunter? – Das bin ich ja auch – [...] mit solchen Schuljungenspäßen vertreibt man sich die Zeit [In the afternoon a secret Council meeting. Anxious toing and froing among the hundreds of journalists. Joking with (Fritz) Klein: ‘There’s a rumour that this evening six German journalists will be invited to Chamberlain. Have you been invited? – No – perhaps it’s only chief editors? – Well, that’s what I am – (...) We are killing time by help of such schoolboy jokes].<sup>171</sup>

Often the journalists did “shared work”:

Wir verabreden Arbeitsteilung: Bermann soll zu [Edvard] Benesch gehen, [Willy] Ruppel zu den Engländern und Italienern, ich das Übrige [We agreed on work-sharing: Bermann shall see (Edvard) Benesh, (Willy) Ruppel shall see the British and Italians, I shall do the rest].<sup>172</sup>

The circles were well established: Feder<sup>173</sup> met “Beer-Genf” during a breakfast organized by the editor in chief of the publisher *Mosse*, Martin Carbe, inviting Beer, Feder and Georg Bernhard, chief editor of *Vossische Zeitung* on an October’s day in 1927. Beer highlighted that there were nodes of informal talk, and those were often *not* transnational but *national*:

They are gathered together, and yet they are separated. Where one Frenchman is, there you will find another and close by there is a fourth, a tenth a twelfth. Where there is an Englishmen, there is England. They form groups and cliques [...].<sup>174</sup>

<sup>168</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 14; League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 7–8.

<sup>169</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 402.

<sup>170</sup> Ernst Feder, *Heute sprach ich mit: Tagebücher eines Berliner Publizisten 1926-1932*, Veröffentlichung des Leo Baeck Instituts (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1971), 50.

<sup>171</sup> Feder, 47. All translations from German to English by Mirko Wittwar and from English to French by Stefanie Averbek-Lietz.

<sup>172</sup> Feder, 45.

<sup>173</sup> Feder, 141.

<sup>174</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 198.

In the official image brochure of the Information Section's interpersonal communication is documented more distanced but in a highly metaphorical diction:

[ Neben [...] organisierten Presseveranstaltungen entspinnen sich oft [...] improvisierte Pressebesprechungen in den Wandelgängen des Völkerbundsekretariats“ [Apart from (...) organised press meetings, there frequently (...) happen improvised press meetings in the halls of the League of Nations' Secretariat].<sup>175</sup>

At the *Hôtel Beau-Rivage* there developed an informal exchange of Journalists [“eine Journalistenbörse”]<sup>176</sup>. On dancing events during the yearly Assembly the journalists, diplomats and officials came together.<sup>177</sup> The *Bar de la Presse*, close to the seat of the Information Section, was one meeting point for journalists and Information officers.<sup>178</sup>

Are such narrations by contemporaries like Feder and Beer valid reflections of their own professional lives and merits? Interestingly, the archives reveal complementary findings on informal meetings, talks, telephone calls and telegrams between different protagonists, regarding a plethora of issues and events and even more: frank debates and discussions on Open Diplomacy.<sup>179</sup>

#### 4. The constellation of actors and its dynamics discovered by the archives

This paragraph presents findings from the archives which reveal traces of a once vivid organizational body. The chapter presents examples of constellations of actors and their communication practices documented by the archival files. This illustrates the kind of institutional body we are dealing with: a *mixed* constellation of actors, structured by strong *and* by weak ties.<sup>180</sup> Such ties established formal and informal bridges between professional fields. Taking this into account seems to be crucial for understanding the historical debates on Open Diplomacy.<sup>181</sup> The notion of a *constellation of actors* is conceptualized with regard to the concept of a “figuration” in the sense of Norbert Elias and its micro- (interpersonal), meso- (organisational) and macro- (society, culture) levels at the same time.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>175</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Feder, *Heute sprach ich mit*, 45.

<sup>177</sup> Feder, 44.

<sup>178</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 103.

<sup>179</sup> See paragraph 5 of this chapter.

<sup>180</sup> Robert K. Merton, “Patterns of Influence: Local and Cosmopolitan Influentials,” in *Readings in Reference Group Theory and Research*, ed. Herbert H. Hyman and Eleanor Singer (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 287–89.

<sup>181</sup> Especially in paragraph 5 of this chapter.

<sup>182</sup> Andreas Breiter, Uwe Hasebrink, and Andreas Hepp, eds., *Communicative Figurations: Transforming Communications in Times of Deep Mediatization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Alexander Frame, “Communication et interculturalité : pour une approche sémiopragmatique en SIC” (Thèse doctorale, Dijon, Université de Bourgogne - Dijon, 2021).



## 4.1 The role of Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond

Across the Registry files of the Information Section, the dominating role of the Secretary-General, Sir Eric Drummond, becomes visible. Beyond staff politics<sup>183</sup>, Secretary-General Drummond was a central player informally constructing the still unstable rules for the internal and external communication of the League. “Dialogue and conciliation”<sup>184</sup> counted among his personal strengths and professional aims. This made him a respected and trusted personality at the heart of the League.<sup>185</sup> Trust is a crucial dimension of interpersonal as well as organizational communication.<sup>186</sup>

Drummond’s decisions affected the workflow and the communication habits and practices of the Information Section. His handwritten notifications on different types of documents (letters, telegrams, memoranda) show: Drummond frequently had the last word to solve a problem. As archival files show troubled situations,<sup>187</sup> uncertainties on how to act or how to communicate properly were often regulated by fast, seemingly spontaneous top-down decisions made by the Secretary General. In the early days the League provided no clear action patterns, no “broad rules”. “Individual problems” were dealt with “one by one”.<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, the League’s staff acted on the basis of an ever-growing broad experience with doing communication work.

When Drummond joined the League in 1919, he looked back on 19 years as an official at the British Foreign Office.<sup>189</sup> He was widely experienced with administrative work and handling conflicting interests. He had to invent and stabilize processes of the new international organization and to *perform* “leadership”<sup>190</sup> and consequently also *internal communication*:

[ The Secretary-General is ultimately responsible for all communications with the Assembly, Council and Governments.<sup>191</sup>

Taking Drummond’s power role into regard, it is not so astonishing that in most cases<sup>192</sup> he opted *against* open door-strategies. He had to mediate and to rule, also to protect an international organization. He was not an idealistic advocate of transparency like Pierre Comert or Arthur Sweetser with their strong journalistic background and their constant contacts to the journalistic field.

<sup>183</sup> Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou, “The Construction of the League of Nations”, 23.

<sup>184</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 16.

<sup>185</sup> Macfadyen et al., 14–23.

<sup>186</sup> Günter Bentele and René Seidenglanz, “Vertrauen und Glaubwürdigkeit,” in *Handbuch der Public Relations: Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und berufliches Handeln. Mit Lexikon*, ed. Romy Fröhlich, Peter Szyszka, and Günter Bentele (Wiesbaden: VS, 2005), 346–61.

<sup>187</sup> See examples also in Lemke, “Ein Beitrag zur Entgiftung der öffentlichen Meinung”, 110; Gellrich, Koenen, and Averbek-Lietz, “The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy.”

<sup>188</sup> See Thomas Richard Davies citing Noel Baker (1920). Thomas Richard Davies, “A ‘Great Experiment’ of the League of Nations Era: International Nongovernmental Organizations, Global Governance, and Democracy Beyond the State,” *Global Governance* 18, no. 4 (2012): 408.

<sup>189</sup> Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 75.

<sup>190</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 18–31.

<sup>191</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 212.

<sup>192</sup> Examples below in paragraph 5.

## 4.2 Personal-professional contacts across the fields of journalism and public relations: The Wolffs Telegraphisches Bureau (WTB), Comert and Beer – an example from the archives

The information section officer Max Beer takes us back to Geneva as a crossing field between actors:<sup>193</sup>

As for those [...] whose profession it really is to provide information, whose life is divided between diplomats and journalists, whose function it is to be journalists among diplomats and diplomats among journalists, and whose time is occupied in cross-tacking between them – we can sympathize with their difficulties, the more so because we can discover more than one secret candidate for a better future League among them.<sup>194</sup>

A file from the Geneva Archives named “Results of Press Conference 1927 – Correspondence with the Agence Wolff”<sup>195</sup> demonstrates the mutual interaction and observation between the journalistic, respectively the news agency field and the Information Section of the League. Beer was involved.

In a letter dated November 1927, Dr. Heinrich Mantler (1861-1937), Director of *Wolffsches* the WTB thanked Pierre Comert for the conference and the initiatives of the League to improve the conditions of international journalism. In return Comert, head of the Information Section, thanked for a press release disseminated by the WTB about the conference of press experts in *Wolff's Night Report* of Nov. 14, 1927. “Mit großer Spannung [with great suspense]” - trilingual Comert wrote in German - he expected how the conference of press experts<sup>196</sup> would be covered by the German Press. Comert wrote to Mantler that “mon ami, le docteur Beer” had drawn his attention to Wolff's Depeche on the conference of press experts.<sup>197</sup> The incriminated WTB – *Nachtausgabe*, Vol. 78, No. 1969 of November 14, 1927 is documented in the Geneva Archives. This news agency report covered the conference of press experts enthusiastically and appreciated its results, not least the announced facilities for the press with regard to international newspaper transfer, business travel via railway, visa facilities, an international press card and reduced costs of telephone and telegraph for the journalists at Geneva.<sup>198</sup>

This exchange of letters between the Information Section and the WTB documents the League's aim to establish and to bring forward *media relations*. The context was a liberal-democratic ideal of press freedom and “free speech”<sup>199</sup> which prefigured later United Nations discussions.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>193</sup> See also Gellrich and Koenen in this book.

<sup>194</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 367.

<sup>195</sup> Results of Press Conference, 1927: Correspondence with the Agence Wolff, 1927-1928, UNAG, R1355/22/63264/63259, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/qen6-p5n4-mse9>.

<sup>196</sup> For details of this conference see Nordenstreng and Seppä, “The League of Nations and the Mass Media.”

<sup>197</sup> Letter from Pierre Comert to Heinrich Mantler, 16 November 1927, UNAG, R1355/22/63264/63259, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/qen6-p5n4-mse9>.

<sup>198</sup> Results of Press Conference, 1927, UNAG, R1355/22/63264/63259; see also Beer, *The League on Trial*, 183 on the “sleeping-car” from Paris.

<sup>199</sup> Beer, 228–29; Keylor and Kennedy, “Wilson's Project for a New World,” 274.

<sup>200</sup> Lehmann, “Die UNO aus kommunikationswissenschaftlicher”, 173; Nordenstreng and Seppä, “The League of Nations and the Mass Media”; see also Nordenstreng and Seppä in this volume.

Information Section member Max Beer (1886-1965) was a formerly accredited journalist at the League of Nations (from 1920-1927 for the *Kölnische Zeitung*). In 1927 the Vienna born German journalist Beer – supported by a commendation letter by Gustav Stresemann (1878-1929)<sup>201</sup> – signed up with the League's Information Section. Like Sweetser, Comert and many others he switched between the fields of journalism, public relations and diplomacy. The International Organisation of Journalists accredited at the League highlighted Beer as the first German journalist who achieved a high position close to the Secretariat.<sup>202</sup> In this role, Beer was involved in the organization of the conference of press experts of 1927 and the self-presentation of the League at the International Cologne Press Exhibition "Pressa" in 1928.<sup>203</sup>

Beer worked for the Information Section until 1930. He left for personnel and professional reasons, one of them was that he did not believe in further career opportunities as a German official at the League and saw himself in competition with Sweetser or at least with his functional role as an Assistant Director of the Information Section.<sup>204</sup> Beer switched back to journalism in 1931, to *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (DAZ), and later worked for French and Swiss journals after having been fired from the DAZ for being Jewish. After World War II he joined the Public Information Department of the United Nations and worked as an *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) correspondent in New York.<sup>205</sup>

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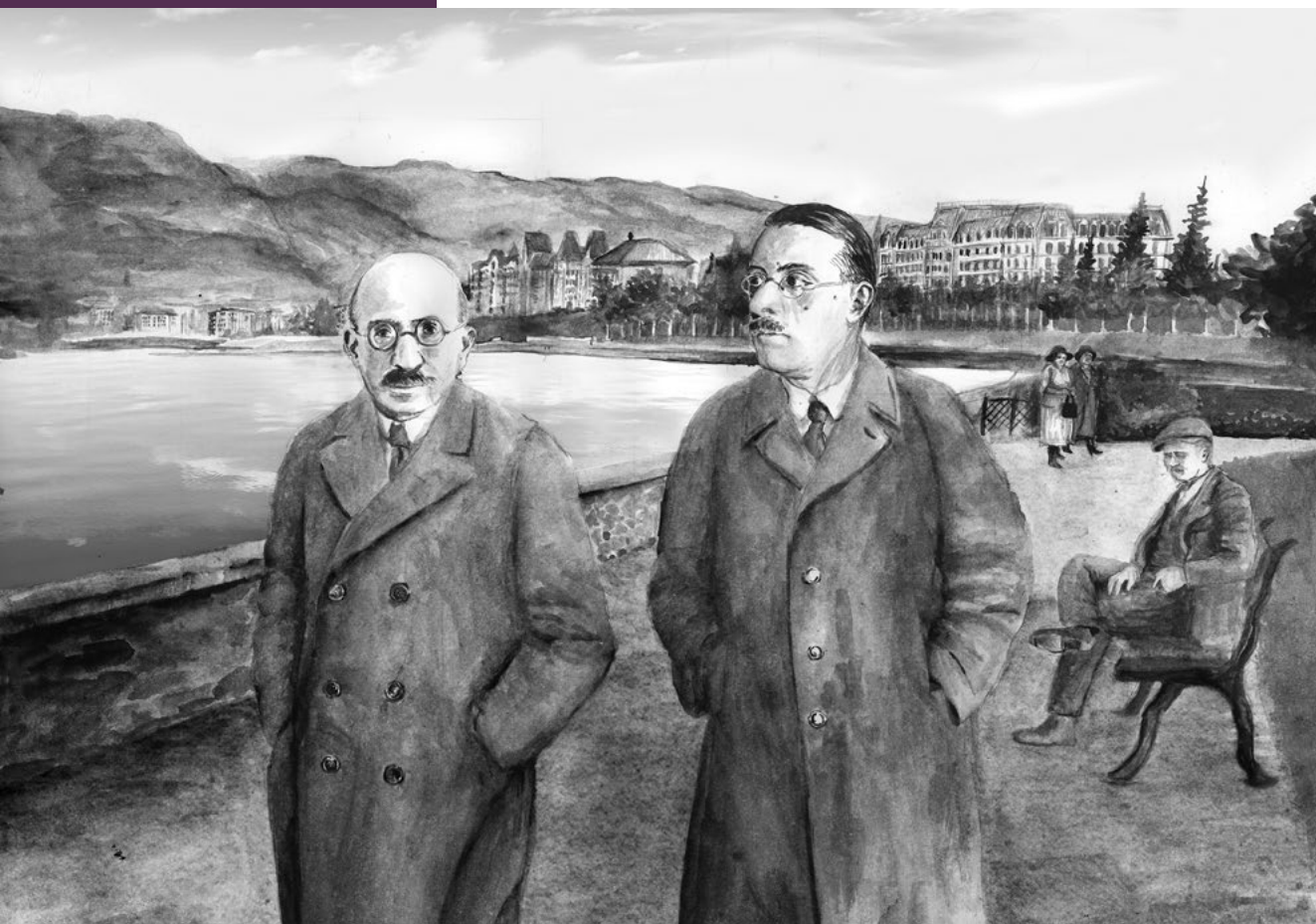
<sup>201</sup> Personnel File Max Beer, Letter from [Gustav] Stresemann, Auswärtiges Amt, to Sir Eric [Drummond], 20 July 1927, UNAG, S715/20/267, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-beer-max>.

<sup>202</sup> Activités de la Société des journalistes internationaux accrédités auprès de la League des Nations pendant les années 1926-1927: Rapport du président en fonction, M.[onsieur] Georg Bernhard, 1927, UNAG, IAJ/Pp8-15, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/association-internationale-des-journalistes-international-association-of-journalists>.

<sup>203</sup> For details on Beer's Pressa activities, see Lemke, "Ein Beitrag zur Entgiftung der öffentlichen Meinung".

<sup>204</sup> Personnel File Max Beer, Letters between Beer, Comert and Drummond, 1927-1931, UNAG, S715/20/267, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-beer-max>; also Michael Jonas, "An Uneasy Relationship: German Diplomats and Bureaucrats in the League of Nations," in *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikononou, and Torsten Kahlert (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 171-76.

<sup>205</sup> Werner Röder et al., eds., "Bd. 1. Politik, Wirtschaft, Öffentliches Leben," in *Biographisches Handbuch der Deutschsprachigen Emigration Nach 1933* (München; New York; Detroit, Mich.: K.G. Saur ; Distributed by Gale Research Company, 1980), 585.



*Max Beer and Pierre Comert taking a promenade at Parc Mon Repos, Geneva in the 1920s. In the background to the right: The Palais Wilson, at the time the headquarters of the League of Nations. (reconstructive watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs, Arne Gellrich)*

### 4.3 The moral demarcation line between journalism and public relations for the League: The case of Sweetser

Arthur Sweetser (1888-1968) made an outstanding career. He joined the League as early as in September 1919 and stayed until the last days of December 1942, to then change to the United Nations Information Office (UNIO) for the next 11 years.<sup>206</sup> Contrary to his important role for the sectional work of the League, like so many others he worked on “temporary contracts”.<sup>207</sup> This might have triggered his ambition to freelance between the different spheres of journalism and organisational communication: In January 1920 Arthur Sweetser signed a paid contract about 500 \$ with the *New York Evening Post* for a serial of eight articles. From early on they were planned as the groundwork for a book which was published that same year with The MacMillan Company (“The League of Nations at Work” authored by Sweetser in 1920). By the newspaper articles Sweetser aimed to reach the broader North American public.<sup>208</sup> This was planned external public relations work for the League. Later, when looking back to his years with the League, Sweetser highlighted his vision of dense transatlantic contacts.<sup>209</sup> Historians describe Sweetser as a figure with strong political aims, an “internationaliste américain”, representing the affiliations between the League and the United States.<sup>210</sup>

Nevertheless, in the early years of the League Sweetser’s publication plan caused internal struggles after his third press article had been published: Should an Information Section member (and former journalist) publish *like a journalist* in the *New York Evening Post*? This was not only a question of property rights and the right to be paid for articles while representing the League, as Herbert Ames (1863-1954),<sup>211</sup> the head of the Financial Section insinuated.<sup>212</sup> It was also a question of *how* to address a broader public *in a legitimate way* to gain visibility and to strengthen *trust* into the League as an autonomous institution.

<sup>206</sup> Isabella Löhr and Madeleine Herren-Oesch, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik: Arthur Sweetser und die Mediendiplomatie des Völkerbunds,” *Zeitschrift Für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62, no. 5 (2014): 411–24; Torsten Kahlert, “The League Is Dead. Long Live the United Nations. The Liquidation of the League and the Transfer of Assets to the UN,” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikonomou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 263; Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 296. For an overview on his lifelong activities with different international organizations, the League, the United Nations and the International School Foundation see his short biography in “Arthur Sweetser Papers. A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress”, accessed February 12, 2022, <http://rs5.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxmlmss/eadpdfmss/2013/ms013059.pdf>.

<sup>207</sup> Personnel File Arthur Sweetser, Certification by H. Villete, Head of Personnel Office, 29 May 1946, UNAG, S889/194/3415, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-sweetser-arthur>; Notice by [Jost] van Hamel, 16 May 1942, UNAG, S889/194/3415; Letter from Sweetser to Drummond, 25 July 1932, UNAG, S889/194/3415.

<sup>208</sup> Public information concerning the League of Nations, Letter from Sweetser to Ames, 8 February 1921, UNAG, R1332/22/2999/252, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/public-information-concerning-the-league-of-nations-mr-arthur-sweetser-informs-that-he-is-writing-a-series-of-long-articles-on-the-league-of-nations-at-work-for-the-new-york-evening-post-which-he-will-put-in-a-book-for-foreign-distrib>; Letter from A.[rthur] S.[weetser] to Drummond, 24 January 1920, UNAG, R1332/22/2999/252.

<sup>209</sup> Personnel File Arthur Sweetser, Memorandum to the Secretary General, undated, UNAG, S889/194/3415, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-sweetser-arthur>.

<sup>210</sup> Tournès, *Les États-Unis et la Société des Nations*, 14; Löhr and Herren-Oesch, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik.”

<sup>211</sup> See “Ames”, LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/10823>.

<sup>212</sup> Public information concerning the League of Nations, Memorandum by H.[erbert] B.[rown] Ames to E.[ric] D.[rummond], 18 February 1920, UNAG, R1332/22/2999/252, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/public-information-concerning-the-league-of-nations-mr-arthur-sweetser-informs-that-he-is-writing-a-series-of-long-articles-on-the-league-of-nations-at-work-for-the-new-york-evening-post-which-he-will-put-in-a-book-for-foreign-distrib>.

The final decision on the Sweetser case was communicated by Drummond and Comert to the relevant members of the Secretariat in a memorandum after an intense, mostly bilateral exchange of letters between Drummond and Comert: *Section members of the Information Section should not individually write paid press articles*. After this decision Sweetser offered to transfer (but at least he had no obligation to do so) the money he had made from the journal articles and *MacMillan* to the League. From today's point of view both, the articles and the book, may be framed under the horizon of *public diplomacy*: A leading Section Member of a transnational organisation, Sweetser, aimed to tell the story of the League of Nations to the US American publics.

To document this case of misguided publishing and as misguided internal communication more precisely, we reprint Pierre Comert's position which he wrote to Drummond in detail:

It is desirable that no member of the [Information] Section should write articles on subjects connected with the League without the assent of the Director [of the Information Section]. Any article on a subject dealing with international politics which is approved may be published, provided that it is not signed by a Member of the Section [of the Information Section], and that no payment is received from a newspaper.<sup>213</sup>

Staff members of the Information Sections should not be paid like journalists for doing public relations work for the League. The Secretary-General himself, a person of "careful attention to detail"<sup>214</sup>, formulated "some clear ruling" via a memorandum called "Articles to the Press" which aimed to manage communication and information work with the press and referred to his intense letter exchange with Comert on the topic. This Memorandum said that *author and speaker opportunities* should be organised and managed exclusively by the Information Section:

In future therefore, should members of the Secretariat be approached to write articles for the press or wish to do so on their own initiative, such articles should be handed to the Information section.<sup>215</sup>

The same day this memorandum was sent out to the members of the Secretariat, Sweetser's serial in the *New York Evening Post* was stopped and framed as an "exceptional measure" by a telegram to Sweetser ordered by Drummond: The article serial should be "stopped" since "serious consequences" might result from such individual initiatives of publishing in the printed press.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Public information concerning the League of Nations, Letter from E.[ric] Drummond to [Pierre] Comert, 25 March 1920, UNAG, R1332/22/2999/252.

<sup>214</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*.

<sup>215</sup> Public information concerning the League of Nations, 1920, UNAG, R1332/22/2999/252, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/public-information-concerning-the-league-of-nations-mr-arthur-sweetser-informs-that-he-is-writing-a-series-of-long-articles-on-the-league-of-nations-at-work-for-the-new-york-evening-post-which-he-will-put-in-a-book-for-foreign-distributors>; Public information concerning the League of Nations, Memorandum signed E.[ric] D.[rummond], 21 February 1920, UNAG, R1333/22/3185/3185, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mrhb-7bfb-m6mb>.

<sup>216</sup> Public Information concerning the League of Nations, Telegram ordered by "Sir Eric" to Sweetser, 21 February 1920, UNAG, R1332/22/2999/252.



*Information officer and journalist Arthur Sweetser at the Palais Wilson.  
(reconstructive watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs,  
Arne Gellrich)*



Another case has to be re-evaluated in the light of the case of Sweetser: Konni Zilliacus (1895-1967), member of the Information Section for the long period of 1920 to 1938,<sup>217</sup> freelanced under pseudonym for the *Manchester Guardian*<sup>218</sup> while “knowingly breaking the Leagues rules” to “advocate on behalf of the League”.<sup>219</sup> The League’s archives reveal that Comert’s successor Adrianus Pelt (1892-1981) criticized Zilliacus for showing an “attitude which was not always compatible to an official”:

[ An official might have his own convictions as to the policy of the League, but it was another matter when he tried to propagate those convictions in the press and among the public in defiance of the decisions of the Council and the Assembly.<sup>220</sup>

His superiors characterised Zilliacus as being “impatient of any compromise”.<sup>221</sup>

#### 4.4 The invention of functions and posts - the professionalization of the League’s communication management

During the Comert era, some technical terms were invented or fixed to describe functions and posts, not only the “Information Officers” working in the “Information Section” but also the “post of European Public Relations Officer” representing the League in European capitals and establishing press relations in favour of the League.<sup>222</sup> Or, in 1931 the then new function of “Counsellor” lent *ad persona* to Information Section members Henry Vigier, H. Reginald Cummings and Julian Nogueira.

The “status of Counsellor” or “Counsellor of the Information Section” typified a certain mediating and advice-giving role to the head of the Information Section.<sup>223</sup> This denomination was lent by Drummond on behalf of the “Committee of the Thirteen”,<sup>224</sup> a committee dealing with international security, to each of the three men, namely Cummings, Vigier and Nogueira, to reward their seniority in advising the League regarding different national and/or world-regional questions. The example of Julien Nogueira (born 1880) is well detectable by the archives:

<sup>217</sup> See LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed January 8, 2022, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/4931>.

<sup>218</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 31.

<sup>219</sup> Macfadyen et al, 173.

<sup>220</sup> Personnel File Konni Zilliacus, Second Meeting of the Appointments Committee, 23 May 1938, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>221</sup> Septennial Report on K. Zilliacus signed Arthur Sweetser, 28 December 1933, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>222</sup> Personnel File Henry Reginald Cummings, Letter from Secretary-General H. Avenol to Director of Staff Administration, 15 May 1939, UNAG, S750/55/875, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-cummings-henry-reginald>.

<sup>223</sup> Letter from Vigier, Nogueira and Cummings to E. Drummond, Secretary-General, 14 September 1932, UNAG, S750/55/875, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-cummings-henry-reginald>.

<sup>224</sup> The “Committee of Thirteen set up for the purpose of proposing methods to render the League Covenant more effective in the organisation of collective security” brought together 13 nations for a permanent Committee on peace questions. See League of Nations, “Committees of the League of Nations. Note by the Secretary-General”, 13.



After having been a member of the delegation of Uruguay to the League, Julian Nogueira worked for the information Section since March 1921 and – beyond his broad diplomatic experience at the Paris Peace Conference with the American Delegation – had a solid background in journalism due to his work for the Argentinian Newspaper *La Nación*.<sup>225</sup> Once again it was the Secretary General himself who recruited the Uruguayan Nogueira via his personnel US-network. Drummond's reasons were functional: Nogueira had been chosen for his background rooted in Latin America and his double experience in the fields of journalism and of diplomacy.<sup>226</sup> He came from Uruguay, which had been an ally of Great Britain and France in World War One. Nogueira was close to the Wilson government and was familiar with the political situation of big Latin American players like Argentina. Nogueira benefited from a transnational background due to his European experience before joining the League.<sup>227</sup> At the League, for years Nogueira had been in charge of "Liaison Work" with a "number of Latin American countries", Latin American elites, newspapers and correspondents. Beyond these tasks he assisted with Spanish translations of the Leagues Monthly Summary and took responsibility for liaison work in Spain.<sup>228</sup>

The new title of "Counsellor" aimed at honouring the Senior Staff members not least for their networking and their merits with stabilizing the League's communication flows – but it was a *non-salaried* title of honour. This fact was not appreciated by those honoured, Cummings, Nogueira and Vigier, who hoped for an augmentation of their salaries.<sup>229</sup> Not only ideals, also salaries ruled the daily work of the League and sometimes caused conflictual situations:

My dear Nogueira, as you are aware, the Assembly at its last session approved the proposal of the Committee of the Thirteen for the creation of a limited number of special posts of Counsellors which should be open to Members of Section with certain seniority in the Secretariat possessing exceptional merit [...]. I have decided to appoint you to one of the new posts that for the time being the title carries with it no financial benefit.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>225</sup> Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen*, 194; Fabián Herrera León, "La Sociedad de Naciones y el problema del distanciamiento mexicano: la misión internacional de Julián Nogueira en México, agosto-septiembre de 1923," *Tzintzun*, no. 57 (June 2013): 125–53. The same information in Personnel File Julian Nogueira, Note by E.[ric] D.[rummond], 1 December 1919, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>; Personnel File Julian Nogueira, Renseignements demandés pour les passports, filled out by Nogueira in 1923, UNAG, S843/148/2629.

<sup>226</sup> Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen*, 194.

<sup>227</sup> Fischer, 192–194.

<sup>228</sup> Personnel File Julian Nogueira, Annual Report regarding the work performance of Julian Nogueira by Pierre Comert, 30 June 1930, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>; Annual Report by Pierre Comert, 15 November 1924, UNAG, S843/148/2629.

<sup>229</sup> Letter from Eric Drummond to Henri Vigier, 19 September 1932, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>; Letter signed by Vigier, Nogueira and Cummings to Drummond, 14 September 1932 UNAG, S843/148/2629.

<sup>230</sup> Letter from Secretary General E.[ric] Drummond to Julian Nogueira, 2 April 1931, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>.

Some letters in Nogueira's personnel file reveal that there were seniors like Nogueira himself or Sweetser who shaped the communication work of the League over a period of more than twenty years. Nevertheless, their posts were not for life but mostly 5- to 7-year contracts which had to be re-legitimized after a certain time span. For "over-seas" staff members like Nogueira, temporary contracts were once again more common than for Europeans,<sup>231</sup> and even if Nogueira served in highly responsible positions. He was often in charge of "representing" the Secretary General at conferences in Latin America.<sup>232</sup> In 1930, Comert unsuccessfully tried to offer Nogueira a more stable "long term contract". Seen from Comert's perspective, this step might have been not only a personal reward for Nogueira but also a possibility to stabilize the Information Section over time. This offer failed for administrative reasons, Nogueira did not get a more stable contract.<sup>233</sup>

## 5. The debate on openness of the Council Meetings reconstructed from the archives

In the following, we can *not* observe that journalists were pro and diplomats were against Open Diplomacy, it is a mixed picture of different positions regarding the question of "openness", reflecting professional experience, positions in the hierarchy and the different value systems of public relations and journalism, as mentioned above.<sup>234</sup> Many diplomats were favouring more though not complete transparency, and – not so much astonishing – nearly all voices visible in the archives coming from the field of journalism opted against close door meetings excluding the media from direct sources.

### 5.1 Voices in the debate about Open diplomacy: Information Section Officials and League diplomats

A central figure with a lot of commitment and initiative when it came to promoting transparency of the League's internal communication was Arthur Sweetser. Sweetser had been involved in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 in an exceptional position: as the assistant of US-President Wilson.<sup>235</sup> Wilsonian talk was quite common for him:<sup>236</sup>

Will the League be able to destroy secret diplomacy and establish open diplomacy? Of all the questions before the League, this is far and away the greatest.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>231</sup> Letter from Eric Drummond to Julian Nogueira, 21 January 1922, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>.

<sup>232</sup> Report on [Julian] Nogueira signed Arthur Sweetser, 27 December 1933, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>.

<sup>233</sup> Letter from Pierre Comert to the Chairman of the Appointment Committee, 18 October 1930, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>.

<sup>234</sup> See above paragraph 3.3.

<sup>235</sup> Löhr and Herren, "Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik, 411."

<sup>236</sup> Much later in 1955 he was a Member of the *Woodrow Wilson Centennial Commission*. See "Arthur Sweetser Papers. A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress", accessed February 12, 2022, <http://rs5.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxmlmss/eadpdfmss/2013/mss013059.pdf>.

<sup>237</sup> Sweetser, *The League of Nations at Work*, 187.

Personally, Sweetser understood the term Open Diplomacy in a much broader sense than inter-governmental interaction, but with regard to an overall publicity addressing “the men on the street”<sup>238</sup>. His several times reprinted book “The League of Nations at Work”, originally dating from 1920, includes an overwhelmingly enthusiastic chapter on Open Diplomacy, coming to this point:

“The main necessity is to see that whatever decision is taken is taken publicly.”<sup>239</sup>

Sweetser’s idea was: Openness, so that *transparency* of meetings would provoke a power shift, as then politicians and diplomats would have to legitimize their decisions *expressis verbis to a broader public mediated by the press*. In this sense, Sweetser hoped for publicity as an instrument of pressure to prevent national interests from becoming too dominant and instead to strengthen transnational politics.<sup>240</sup> This was in line with the upcoming modern “belief that public opinion could discipline governments”<sup>241</sup>. Or, as Huntington Gilchrist (1891-1975), then a member of the Administrative and Minorities Section of the League, puts it:

“Everyone seems agreed that there should only be privacy for the proceedings of the Council in case it is necessary to ensure efficiency and reasonable freedom of action. Publicity is essential for public support, and it is generally admitted that the League cannot achieve results expected of it without that support.”<sup>242</sup>

Nevertheless, this ‘agreement’ on openness pointed out by Gilchrist was more of informal than formal value.

Contrary to the aim of openness, in that same year, 1920, Arthur Salter (1822-1975), head of the financial section of the League, highlighted that the so-called “private meetings” of the Council were increasing again instead of getting less relevant. Even if they should better be “in principle in public like the first was”. Salter submitted a long statement on “Publicity and the Council of the League of Nations” to the Secretary General, the Council members and the Information Section. He directly referred to US-President Wilson’s famous notion of “Open Diplomacy”.<sup>243</sup> Salter was one of those internal League agents with a progressive view on transparency: Mediated by the journalists accredited at Geneva, the publics of the world should be addressed. Even the Council Meetings of the League should be open to journalists. Staff members from the League’s translation and documentation service like Humbert D. Parodi (1878-1953) and Anthony Buxton (1891-1970)<sup>244</sup> supported this position. Parodi stated that nothing could be more against the “spirit of the League”

<sup>238</sup> Sweetser, 187.

<sup>239</sup> Sweetser, 198.

<sup>240</sup> Sweetser, 191.

<sup>241</sup> Ikonomou, “An International Language”, 38.

<sup>242</sup> Council meetings and publicity: General observation, Huntington Gilchrist, 25 February 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, <https://archives.unige.ch/notes-on-the-second-session-of-the-council-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-urging-more-publicity-and-less-speech-making>.

<sup>243</sup> Suggestions for Organisation of future Council Meetings, Memorandum “Publicity and the Council of the League of Nations”, A.[rthur] Salter to the Secretariat, 21 January 1920, ANUG, R1431/27/2822/2822, <https://archives.unige.ch/suggestions-for-organisation-of-future-council-meetings-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-on-publicity-and-other-topics>.

<sup>244</sup> Biographic information for Parodi and Buxton see LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed September 9, 2021, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/4963> and [http://www.lonsea.de/pub/search\\_person?utf8=%E2%9C%93&action=search\\_person&name=Buxton](http://www.lonsea.de/pub/search_person?utf8=%E2%9C%93&action=search_person&name=Buxton).

than “unofficial meetings” (or so called private meetings) which were presented as “official” ones.<sup>245</sup> But exactly this became more and more common, since

[ [...] cardinal feature of the procedure followed at the second meeting of the Council was the division into private and public sessions.

The consequence was that

[ The public sessions were used merely to register decisions which had already been arrived at. They therefore gave no more publicity, as defined above, that would have been given by the issue of a full press bulletins.<sup>246</sup>

Or: “the publicity was a sham” and the public sessions then pure “boredom” or “waste of time”, as Philipp John Noel-Baker (1889-1982) argued.<sup>247</sup>

In 1920, Noel-Baker was a member of the League’s Mandates Section – a section which only sporadically accepted journalists directly at their table,<sup>248</sup> not least with regard to the “critical” relevance of decision-making in this section.<sup>249</sup> The scenario described by Information Section member Beer was even worse for the consultative Mandates Committee’s meetings, a body advising the Mandates Section:

[ The Mandates committee defied the principle of publicity inherent in all the League debates and habitually met behind locked doors and closed windows [...].<sup>250</sup>

More generally, Noel-Baker lamented private and secret meetings for reasons of their unproductivity: The public meetings repeated the secret meetings, no real and lively discussion was possible in the public sessions afterwards.<sup>251</sup>

For Comert, head of the Information Section, the interventions by Noel-Baker – and of the same tenor by Huntington Gilchrist – to fully open the Council meetings for the press, seemed to be provocative:

[ I regret to say, that they are not my views.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>245</sup> Handwritten notice by Humbert Denis Parodi, Translation Service, undated, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/notes-on-the-second-session-of-the-council-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-urging-more-publicity-and-less-speech-making>.

<sup>246</sup> The Council and publicity, comment by Noel-Baker, 16 February 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, 6 pages, p. 2.

<sup>247</sup> The Council and publicity, comment by Noel-Baker.

<sup>248</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 406; League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 17, 23. Arne L. Gellrich is currently working on the communication and information habits and practices of the Mandates Section in his dissertation project.

<sup>249</sup> See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 65.

<sup>250</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 357.

<sup>251</sup> A lament of the same kind is by Huntington Gilchrist is to be found in: Suggestions for Organisation of future Council Meetings, Memorandum on the first Council meeting by Lord Gilchrist, 22 January 1920, ANUG, R1431/27/2822/2822, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/suggestions-for-organisation-of-future-council-meetings-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-on-publicity-and-other-topics>.

<sup>252</sup> Minutes urging more publicity and less speech making, Handwritten notice by [Pierre] Comert regarding Noel-Bakers comments of 16 February 1920, 23 February 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/notes-on-the-second-session-of-the-council-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-urging-more-publicity-and-less-speech-making>.

Gilchrist saw dangers of the “privacy” of the Council meetings if

[...] agreements will be reached and made practically binding without the knowledge and sometimes against the will of the people of the Nations who compose the League and whose wishes the Council members are, in a large sense, expected to interpret.<sup>253</sup>

Gilchrist introduced some more theoretical reflections, he systematically differentiated between “public”, “private” and “secret” meetings.<sup>254</sup> Doing so, he referred to the gradual openness of communication circles and of only relative access to information. According to Arthur Salter and with reference to Noel-Baker, he wanted all of the Council meetings to be published *ex post to the journalists in the form of minutes*, if not now then at least as soon as possible. Additionally, “valid decisions” should be taken only in such Council meetings which transparently presented their debates to the public. Like Sweester, the US-American Gilchrist was more in favour of transparency than many others.

Eric Drummond in a handwritten annotation stated much more modestly than Gilchrist when referring to the same debate between the diplomats Salter, Baker, Gilchrist and others:

[ We all wish to secure the same subject, it is simply a question how it can be done.<sup>255</sup>

Drummond’s scepticism towards full transparency might have been influenced by his experiences during his years as Lord Balfour’s private secretary at the British Foreign Office.<sup>256</sup> Or, as Lord Balfour (1848-1930)<sup>257</sup> put it:

[...] there were often delicate questions on which the Council had not itself made up its mind.<sup>258</sup>

Further reasons given in favour of private meetings were “confidence, freedom and conciliation” between member states.<sup>259</sup>

<sup>253</sup> General observation by Lord Gilchrist, 25 February 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/notes-on-the-second-session-of-the-council-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-urging-more-publicity-and-less-speech-making>.

<sup>254</sup> General observation by Lord Gilchrist, 25 February 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822. Interestingly enough, Gilchrist’s systematic reference to “openness” shows similarities with the one Gilboa sketched more than 70 years later. Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy.”

<sup>255</sup> Handwritten annotation from Eric Drummond, 13 March 1920, UNAG, R1431/27/3108/2822, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/notes-on-the-second-session-of-the-council-members-of-the-secretariat-minutes-urging-more-publicity-and-less-speech-making>.

<sup>256</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, XXV.

<sup>257</sup> Balfour participated as a representative of the British Delegation in some of the League’s Assemblies, see LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed September 13, 2021, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/430>.

<sup>258</sup> Publicity of Council Meetings, Minutes of the Council, 19th Session, Second Meeting (private), 19 July 1922, UNAG, R1431/27/22292/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-council-meetings-council-of-the-league-of-nations-extract-from-the-minutes-of-the-second-meeting-of-the-19th-session-of-the-council-july-1922-containing-a-letter-from-the-president-of-the-association-of-journalists-accredi>.

<sup>259</sup> Publicity of Council Proceedings, Report presented by Mr. Hymans adopted by the Council on the 21st of February, 21 February 1921, UNAG, R1431/27/11163/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-council-proceedings-council-of-the-league-of-nations-12th-session-paris-report-presented-by-mr-hymans-and-adopted-by-the-council-on-the-21st-february-1921>.

Wilson Harris named another obstacle:

[ It is clearly impossible, for example, when some important appointment is being made, to discuss the personal merits and demerits of the different candidates in public.<sup>260</sup>

Closed doors, “opacity”<sup>261</sup> or “isolating the negotiation”<sup>262</sup> from the media aims at guaranteeing an atmosphere of trust while discussing diverging options and opinions *at first internally*. This is not least a face-guarding strategy. It seems that the elder League generation (for example Lord Balfour was born in the mid-19th century) had more reservations towards ideas of transparency. Lord Balfour might have considered his own experiences: The famous Balfour Declaration of 1917 resulted from traditional closed doors diplomacy.<sup>263</sup>

After having left the League, the always critical Beer spread the cynical word that

[...] despite the inscription ‘Press Office’ the secret and obscure diplomatic work is done.<sup>264</sup>

## 5.2 Voices in the debate about Open Diplomacy: Journalists and their representative body

With regard to TV-journalism Eytan Gilboa states that “journalists obviously welcome the open diplomacy model because they regularly receive a flow of information about the talks, and thus they participate more in the negotiation process”<sup>265</sup>. This was also true some eighty years before, in the context of quite a different media environment of the press: Journalism matters, namely the professional self-understanding of journalists in their so called watchdog role.

At Geneva, the journalistic field intervened with the debate on Open Diplomacy via the outstanding figure of Lord Robert Cecil (1864-1951), former representative of the British Empire at the Paris Peace Conference and then Honorary President of the Association of Journalists Associated to the League as well as the head of the International Peace Campaign of the League. He brought a note regarding “Publicity of Proceedings of the Council” to the Assembly<sup>266</sup> which was appreciated by the Assembly as a future task when unanimously stating:

<sup>260</sup> Harris, *What the League of Nations Is*, 26.

<sup>261</sup> Winkler and Thummes, “Ein Recht auf Opazität.”

<sup>262</sup> Gilboa does not refer to the League but to Bill Clinton’s closed-door strategies 1995 during the Dayton meeting to make an effort to end the war in Bosnia. And Gilboa refers to communication policies of *states*. May be an international organization like then the League has much better reasons to be transparent like a national state. An inter-/transnational organization finds itself *per se in a mediator role*. Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy”, 283.

<sup>263</sup> See “About Balfour 100”, accessed September 13, 2021, <http://www.balfour100.com/about/> and <http://www.balfour100.com/declaration/>; “The Guardian: Backing Balfour Declaration among our ‘worst errors of judgment’”, *The Times of Israel*, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/guardian-backing-balfour-declaration-among-papers-worst-errors-of-judgment/>.

<sup>264</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 367.

<sup>265</sup> Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy”, 288.

<sup>266</sup> Publicity of Proceedings of the Council. Motion proposed by Lord Robert Cecil, 8 September 1921, UNAG, R1431/27/15663/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-council-meetings-lord-robert-cecil-puts-forward-a-motion-welcoming-on-behalf-of-the-assembly-the-efforts-made-by-the-council-to-secure-greater-publicity-for-its-proceedings-and-expressing-the-hope-for-further-progress-in-t>.

[ The text of the resolution on Publicity adopted by the Assembly on November 23rd, 1920, is as follows: 'That the Council be requested to take into consideration the means for securing greater publicity for their discussions and decisions'.<sup>267</sup>

Some decades later, Frank P. Walters (born 1888), then member of the political section, highlighted:

[ The journalists steadily pressed for publicity.<sup>268</sup>

Walters once accompanied Lord Cecil during the Paris Peace Conference as the latter's private secretary. Once again the traces of the broader League milieu led back to Paris,<sup>269</sup> where the "length and hardship of the negotiations create[ed] bonds that are hard to dismiss"<sup>270</sup>. Bonds created by interpersonal communication.

Historians regard Lord Cecil (1864-1958), the lawyer and diplomat in favour of Open Diplomacy<sup>271</sup>, as one of the "architects" of the League. In 1937 Cecil was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. In 1946 he opened the final Assembly of the League, then announcing the United Nations.<sup>272</sup>

Adopting Cecil's idea that the Council would sit only "exceptionally in private", British journalist Henry Wilson Harris (1883-1955) in his presidency of the International Association of Journalists introduced the technical terms of

- a. "passive" anti-secrecy in the sense of the "mere elimination of secrecy" and
- b. "active" anti-secrecy in the sense of the management of information with stakeholders by "taking of definitive measures to secure the worldwide dissemination of information of importance"<sup>273</sup>.

By the Harris Memorandum, no single journalists were reclaiming transparency but the *representative body of the accredited Geneva-correspondents* which clearly stated that the Council's meetings should be *generally open to journalists* and the proceedings of any closed meeting should be published via the in-house services to the journalists *promptly after the Council had met*.

<sup>267</sup> Publicity of Proceedings at Meetings of the Council, Memorandum by the Secretary General, 25 January 1921, UNAG, R1431/27/10588/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-proceedings-at-meetings-of-the-council-secretary-general-various-suggestions-as-to-the-best-means-of-carrying-out-the-resolution-of-the-assembly-on-this-subject-the-best-solution-appears-to-be-the-daily-distribution-to-the>

<sup>268</sup> Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 88.

<sup>269</sup> Later on, Walters served the League in different high administrative positions till 1940. See LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed December 12, 2019, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/4880>.

<sup>270</sup> Scaglia, *The Emotions of Internationalism*, 57.

<sup>271</sup> See also Nordenstreng and Seppä in this book.

<sup>272</sup> Kahlert, Torsten. "The League Is Dead", 263.

<sup>273</sup> Publicity of the Proceedings of the Council, Memorandum from Mr. Wilson Harris, President of the International Association of Journalist accredited to the League of Nations, 8 January 1922, UNAG, R1431/27/18507/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-council-meetings-mr-wilson-harris-president-of-the-international-association-of-journalists-accredited-to-the-league-of-nations-memorandum-dealing-with-the-question-of-publicity-of-the-proceedings-of-the-council-and-assembly>. See reprint of the Harris-Memorandum at the end of this chapter.

If for special reasons a Council meeting is held in private, it is of the utmost importance that communiqués should be issued promptly and should take the form not of a bare statement of fact but of a full and lucid précis of the proceedings [...]. It is suggested that a competent member of the Information section should always be at hand at public meetings of the Council to inform journalists of the significance of the proceedings.<sup>274</sup>

The then following demand

[...] that at nearly all secret sessions the Director of the Information Section be present<sup>275</sup> failed.

Information Section Director Pierre Comert was never systematically present at Council meetings as Sweetser had proposed to Drummond. Doing so, Sweetser referred to the Memorandum of the association of the League's journalists of 1922, signed by Wilson Harris and addressed to the Assembly and all members of the League, which had already stated the same: That a competent Information Section member should mediate between the Council and the journalists.<sup>276</sup> But there was no common view to be achieved.

### 5.3 No common view to be achieved: Private Council Meetings and their dysfunctions

In fact, only the Secretary General himself as the head of the Secretariat had regular access to the Council meetings.<sup>277</sup> Drummond stated a negative evaluation on the topic, while “fully appreciating” the “points made by Mr. Sweetser” and others for more openness of the Council:

It is, as you know, nearly impossible for me, to secure the agreement of the Council that any member except myself should be there.<sup>278</sup>

Obviously, the Information Section was appreciated as a public relations body – but had to stay in front of closed doors when it came to Council Meetings. This made internal (in the inner circles of the League as an organisational body) *and* external communication (to the journalists) difficult. Communication still seemed to be underestimated as a factor of global politics. After 1946 this was one main point criticized when the upcoming United Nations organized their public relations body. After World War II, one argument during the *Carnegie* meetings discussing the structure of the United Nations

<sup>274</sup> Publicity of the Proceedings of the Council, UNAG, R1431/27/18507/2938.

<sup>275</sup> Publicity respecting private meetings of the League Council and Committees, Letter from A.[rthur] S.[weetser] to Secretary-General, 29 January 1926, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/3cdw-t968-xbg7>.

<sup>276</sup> Memorandum from Mr. Wilson Harris, President of the International Association of Journalists accredited at the League of Nations, 8 January 1922, UNAG, R1431/27/18507/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-council-meetings-mr-wilson-harris-president-of-the-international-association-of-journalists-accredited-to-the-league-of-nations-memorandum-dealing-with-the-question-of-publicity-of-the-proceedings-of-the-council-and-assembly>.

<sup>277</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 34.

<sup>278</sup> Letter from E.[ric] Drummond to P.[Comert], 2 February 1926, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/3cdw-t968-xbg7>.



in the presence of former League members like Sweetser and Adriaan Pelt (1892-1981),<sup>279</sup> who had headed the Information Section after Comert, was that the forthcoming United Nations must be provided with a more autonomous communication work. Emil Eiby Seidenfaden documents this.<sup>280</sup> Much earlier, in 1945, Eugen Ranshofen-Wertheimer outlined this discussion in his book on the “International Secretariat”, a book which was published and funded not coincidentally by the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, an active player in European Peace Building in the context of transatlantic liberalism.<sup>281</sup>

During the Comert era, in the debate on publicity and openness of the council meetings, there was no common view to be achieved. The minimum consensus was that *decisions* made by the Council were not operationalized before but *after* informing “the public”.<sup>282</sup> This public meant the crowd of international correspondents often waiting in front of the doors to be handed the Council’s minutes after its sessions. This practice was seen as being congruent with Article 18 of the Covenant:

[ Every treaty or international engagement entered into hereafter by any Member of the League shall be forthwith registered with the Secretariat and shall as soon as possible be published by it. No such treaty or international engagement shall be binding until so registered.<sup>283</sup>

This “important article” 18 of the Covenant – as Frank P. Walters explains –

[...] was based on an US-American proposal and was an effective step towards carrying out the first of Wilson’s Fourteen Points— that which called for open diplomacy in the future. Treaties registered with the Secretariat were published in the League Treaty Series, which filled over 200 volumes and has been continued without a break by the Secretariat of the United Nations.<sup>284</sup>

Nevertheless, Sir Drummond tried to achieve a compromise “to comply with the Assemblies request for greater publicity [of Council Meetings]” which came up after Lord Cecil’s memorandum in favour of more publicity of the Council. Also, Drummond argued for openness, but not *if only one member of the Council would disagree* in case of a meeting. And: Publicity did *not* mean general publicity to ‘the man in the street’ but was clearly defined as openness towards the accredited journalists to empower them for their mediation work to the broader public by “full and prominent reports in the newspapers of the world.”<sup>285</sup> Exactly this was the compromise: Closed doors insofar as

<sup>279</sup> The Dutchman Pelt was once again a journalist by profession (during World War I for *De Telegraaf*) and achieved high positions with the United Nations (Vice Secretary-General of the United Nations 1946-1949, United Nations Commissioner in Libya 1949-1952, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva 1952-1957 and Head of the European Office of the United Nations). See “Pelt, Adrian”, Dodis, accessed December 5, 2021, <https://dodis.ch/P164>; Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 298.

<sup>280</sup> Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva”; Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor”; Seidenfaden, “Legitimizing International Bureaucracy.”

<sup>281</sup> Rietzler, “From Peace Advocacy.”

<sup>282</sup> Sweetser, *The League of Nations at Work*, 198.

<sup>283</sup> See “The Covenant of the League of Nations”, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed December 5, 2021, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp).

<sup>284</sup> Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 54.

<sup>285</sup> Publicity at meetings of the council, Memorandum by the Secretary General, 25 January 1921, UNAG, R1431/27/10588/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-proceedings-at-meetings-of-the-council-secretary-general-various-suggestions-as-to-the-best-means-of-carrying-out-the-resolution-of-the-assembly-on-this-subject-the-best-solution-appears-to-be-the-daily-distribution-to-the>.

Council members regarded this as being useful. Not only the Council meetings, also the preparation for the Disarmament Conference posed the problem of (in)transparency.

According to the diplomatic body<sup>286</sup> again, often US-American journalists opted against close door policies. Like the journalist Clarence Streit (1896-1986) who had experience as a World War I correspondent and from the Paris Peace Conference, then later representing the international organisation of journalists at Geneva as a *New York Times* correspondent who opted against private meetings and for openness.<sup>287</sup>

## 5.4 The Preparation of the Disarmament Conference: Journalists denouncing lacking access to information

Disarmament was a crucial topic of the League and for its publics.<sup>288</sup> With regard to this topic, US journalist Joseph Sharkey (1877-1958), a Geneva based Associated Press correspondent, wrote an extensive letter to Pierre Comert. Sharkey denounced the League for making it difficult for the journalists to get first-hand information on the preparation of the Disarmament Conference: "Journalistic work is becoming more difficult at Geneva" [...] due to "the growth of the secret sessions of the Council", especially those preparing the Disarmament Conference:

Dear Mr. Comert, an experience of several years at close quarters in reporting the activities of the League of Nations shows that the so-called secret sessions of the Council are becoming more and more important from a journalistic view, because it is at these meetings that decisions of great importance to the international public are taken. As an example of this I might cite the decision during the December session to invite the United States and Russia to participate in the Disarmament Conference, and the agreement of the Council concerning the Mossul question.<sup>289</sup>

Sharkey describes that a lot of information was reaching the journalists more or less "in a roundabout fashion", often incomplete, even false and then "promptly cabled to all quarters of the earth."<sup>290</sup>

Not least the US-press, which had no diplomatic counterparts in the inner circles of the Council, had problems with access to information:

The American journalists accredited to the League of Nations have no American member of the Council to whom they could possibly turn for such information [...].<sup>291</sup>

<sup>286</sup> See paragraph 5.2.

<sup>287</sup> Bilotto, *A Violent Peace*, 108-109.

<sup>288</sup> See Nordenstreng and Seppä in this book; Lemke, "Ein Beitrag zur Entgiftung der öffentlichen Meinung"; Ikonou, "The Administrative Anatomy of Failure."

<sup>289</sup> Letter from Joseph Sharkey, *The Associated Press*, to Pierre Comert, 23 January 1926, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/3cdw-t968-xbg7>.

<sup>290</sup> Letter from Joseph Sharkey to Pierre Comert, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990.

<sup>291</sup> Letter from Joseph Sharkey to Pierre Comert, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990.

Sweetser presented “the point made in Mr. Sharkey’s letter” to the Secretary General.<sup>292</sup> He marked deficits: With the Disarmament Conference, once again news and consequently journalism become more important. Meetings become more secret and more nationalistic:

1. The news is becoming very much more important and delicate.
2. The meetings are becoming increasingly secret as regards official publication, and
3. There is an increasing tendency for the issuing of news along nationalistic lines.<sup>293</sup>

The press politics of the League became dysfunctional. Sweetser complained:

[ I cannot myself see any reason with the Armaments Preparatory Committee should not meet in public. What happens now is that each member takes his own press off and acquaints it with his own national point of view.<sup>294</sup>

Sweetser, the former journalist and now a leading Officer of the Information Section in the hierarchy immediately below Comert, argued in the same direction as *Associated Press* journalist Sharkey. Similar criticism concerning the Disarmament Conference was expressed by Max Beer.<sup>295</sup>

## 5.5 Leaking the League: The case of Kaufmann and others

Dealing with secrecy was not easy for the journalists:

[ Hush! Let us close the door. We will observe discretion. [...] Can it be that we have discovered some secret report being written in this hidden spot [...].<sup>296</sup>

Max Beer, the public relations official, placed these prosaic words to encourage a more proper search for information. His counterpart from the field of journalism, Ernst Feder, described similar situations:

[ Stresemann war natürlich noch doch bei Briand, was verheimlicht und dementiert wurde, von mir aber trotzdem gemeldet wurde“ [“Of course, Stresemann was meeting with Briand, which was concealed and denied, yet still I did report it].<sup>297</sup>

<sup>292</sup> Letter from A.[thur] S.[weetser] to the Secretary-General, 29 January 1926, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990.

<sup>293</sup> Letter from Joseph Sharkey to Pierre Comert, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990.

<sup>294</sup> Letter from Joseph Sharkey to Pierre Comert, UNAG, R1345/22/48990/48990.

<sup>295</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 305-307.

<sup>296</sup> Beer, 367-368.

<sup>297</sup> Feder, *Heute sprach ich mit*, 135.

One dis-function of the only gradually open League communication was *leaking* – often to the journalists' benefit but sometimes with heavy consequences, like in the case of Austrian journalist Dr. Kaufmann, a journalist of *Die Börse*, Vienna. From then on, he was excluded from the League's assemblies on initiative of the Information Section. Kaufmann illegally sneaked information by faking his identity, pretending to be a diplomatic member of the Austrian Delegation, to get some pre-information from the Leagues' publication service. Kaufmann was no longer allowed to remain a "journaliste accrédité auprès de la League".<sup>298</sup>

There are other examples of leaking to be found in the secret (!) files of the Information Section. With regard to such secret files: Obviously, *Leaking the League* was not a topic the League wanted to be discussed overtly.<sup>299</sup>

In 1933, no less than Arthur Sweetser came under suspicion of leaking, which finally turned out to be a bizarre accusation without legitimation.<sup>300</sup> Beyond the cases of Kaufmann and the supposed one of Sweetser, the archives reveal a case of leaking during the Emigration Conference in Rome in 1924, related to a situation where "Journalists had no access, under any pretext whatever, to the rooms where the personnel of the League was installed".<sup>301</sup>

Regarding the Rome conference, where correspondents again had no access to the private diplomatic meetings, Julian Nogueira stated that:

Un Correspondant spécial ne viendra pas à Genève ou n'ira pas à Rome, à Bruxelles ou à Prague pour avoir les mêmes renseignements que ceux que le Secrétariat peut donner à tous les journalistes. Ceci explique que les Correspondants spéciaux préfèrent assister aux réunions privées ou secrètes car ils prennent alors avoir la chance de savoir ce que le Secrétariat ne peut pas dire [A correspondent will not come to Geneva, Rome, Brussels or Prague for getting the same informations like those the Secretariat is offering to all the journalists. This explains why the special (League) correspondents prefer to participate in private or secret interventions for having a change to know what the Secretariat cannot (officially) say].<sup>302</sup>

<sup>298</sup> Confidential Dossier: Publications dans la presse des documents secrets de la Société des Nations, Note confidentielle, signed A. [drianus] Pelt, 11 June 1924, UNAG, R1340/22/36523/34961, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/8f2z-nyhs-8r8s>.

<sup>299</sup> Confidential Dossier: Publications de la presse des documents secrets de la Société des Nations, 1924, UNAG, R1340/22/36523/34961.

<sup>300</sup> Löhr and Herren, "Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik", 422.

<sup>301</sup> Documents secrets publiés dans la presse de la Société des Nations, Confidential statement by José Pla, 3 April 1924, UNAG, R1340/22/34961/34961, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/7wnm-g94f-g552>.

<sup>302</sup> Letter from Julien Nogueira to Pierre Comert, 27 February 1924, UNAG, R1340/22/34961/34961.

This would be truer again for non-European journalists, such as from the about seventy newspapers and journals which represented the politically diverse countries in Latin America. Addressing this Latin American diversity, Nogueira accused the League of not at all taking it into consideration. In fact, the Latin Americans in the League felt often isolated and lost when being confronted with Eurocentric perspectives<sup>303</sup>, not least those considering Latin America one big “region” at the peripheries of Europe, the presumed center of the League.<sup>304</sup>

Public relations official José Plá (born 1879) summarized the Rome conference and the leaking affairs with an ironic undertone. Obviously, the leaks got *publicity* even if afterwards they were documented in the annals of the League in “secret” archival files. Plá highlighted private and secret diplomatic meetings regarding

[ Upper Silesia, Austrian Reform Scheme, Finance committee’s meeting, and report on Hungary and now the Rome Conference – all the essential facts are somehow placed in the possession of journalists. [...] Thus, secret meetings result sometimes in more publicity than those held in public.<sup>305</sup>

Plá worked for the Information Section between 1922 and 1939. His “senior” status<sup>306</sup> might have encouraged him to speak frankly. In the later years of the League, Plá often represented Adrianus Pelt in the role of the head of the Information Section.<sup>307</sup>

A kind of ‘boreout’ concerning the meeting-culture had been confirmed by other observers, here again Lord Cecil:

[ The one all-important reason why the reporters of Council proceedings have been so uninteresting up to date has been that the Press, instead of watching the actual deliberations of the Council and gaining thereby a personal and colourful interest, has been forced to sit about outside in the corridors and wait for the delivery of a very cold and uninteresting official communiqué.<sup>308</sup>

This was no kind of external communication appreciated by the journalists. Inevitably, it resulted in informal talk, rumours and strategic leaking.

<sup>303</sup> Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen*, 191-222.

<sup>304</sup> Richard, “Competition and Complementarity”, 241, 255.

<sup>305</sup> Confidential statement by José Pla, 3 April 1924, UNAG, R1340/22/34961/34961.

<sup>306</sup> Personnel File José Plá, Report on official’s work during past years, signed A.[drianus] Pelt, 30 July 1937, UNAG, S856/161/2869, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-pla-jose>.

<sup>307</sup> Copy Report, signed A.[drianus] Pelt, 17 July 1936, UNAG, S856/161/2869.

<sup>308</sup> Publicity of Council meetings, Memorandum “Proposals for League Publicity” by Lord Robert Cecil, 13 September 1921, UNAG, R1337/22/15852/15852, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/t3m4-zq9m-3wyq>.

## 6. Practices and routines of managing and communicating the League

The Leagues' officials reflected and wrote pretty much about Open Diplomacy, the role of newspapers and the mediator role of journalism<sup>309</sup>, thus: *its external communication*. On the contrary, reflecting on *internal* organisational communication was not yet common – or: it was daily practice, indirectly visible via the archival files of the League via letters and handwritten notices. The involved protagonists were obviously not well trained in observing dimensions of their own communication work.

The internal communication of the new type of international organisation had to be established, planned and refined *on the job*. New daily work- and communication routines were invented and established. *Information Flows*, e. g. the distribution of information by brochures and pamphlets and the like, had mostly been operated by the Distribution Section of the League<sup>310</sup>, which is no focus of this book. Relations of a more communicative nature, not least *the formal and informal relations to the journalists*, were predominantly operated by the Information Section.<sup>311</sup> Instead, the distribution department had a more functional character. Often its members were female copyists, stenotypists, “verbatim reporters” or “English Précis writers” in minor positions in terms of hierarchy.<sup>312</sup> Nevertheless, with regard to the *dissemination of information* these women were highly relevant.<sup>313</sup> Members of the Distribution Department served in Council meetings to support information flows, whereas the Information Section members were not allowed to take part in the same meetings.<sup>314</sup>

<sup>309</sup> Sweetser, *The League of Nations at Work*, 187-202; League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*; Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 199-222.

<sup>310</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 219.

<sup>311</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*.

<sup>312</sup> League of Nations, 21; Myriam Piguet, “Gender Distribution in the League of Nations. The Start of a Revolution?,” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikononou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 62–73; Haakon Ikononou, “Underpaid and Overperforming: Interwar Disarmament,” *History Matters*, University of Sheffield (blog), February 2, 2022, <https://historymatters.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/blog-archive/2022/underpaid-and-overperforming-interwar-disarmament>. This was hard work: Overnight work was standard. League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 22.

<sup>313</sup> See the listed staff members of the Distribution Section: LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed September 9, 2021, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/org/1222>; in relation to this section's participation in the Council: LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed September 9, 2021, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/org/1281>.

<sup>314</sup> See above paragraph 5.1. of this chapter.



*Administrative staff at the League of Nations. (watercolour rendering based on material from the 1937 public relations film "The League of Nations at Work", Arne Gellrich)*

## 6.1. The materiality of information work: (media) technology in a time-space setting

It was not only the normative goal of transparency or Open Diplomacy which fostered the evolution of internal and external communication and pushed the flow of information as such, it was also technology and materiality rapidly transforming the public space and the public sphere.<sup>315</sup> The journalists described time pressures as being structural:

Ich bleibe in einer Hetze. Zum Hotel zurück. Um halb vier zum Rat zurück" [I'm constantly in a hurry. Back to the hotel. Half past three: back to the Council].<sup>316</sup>

Sie melden ihre Telefongespräche an, während sie ihren Artikel beginnen, sprechen schnell ihre Meldungen in die ferne Redaktion hinüber und sind schon wieder im Sitzungssaal, um bald darauf die nächste Meldung, unter Vermeidung alles unnötigen Zeitverlustes, ihren heimischen Lesern hinüber zu drahten. Gleichzeitig übergeben die Journalisten, deren Dienst telegrafische Berichterstattung erfordert, den im Sitzungssaale bereit stehendem Boten des Sekretariats von ihren Plätzen aus ihr Telegramm, das sofort, derweil sie schon an der nächsten Depesche schreiben, durch die Rohrpost in das Telegrafenamnt befördert wird [They announce their telephone calls while starting to write their articles, hastily they give their reports to the far-away editorial office, and back they are at the meeting hall, to soon again wire the next report, while avoiding any unnecessary loss of time, to their readers at home. At the same time, those journalists whose service requires telegraphic reporting pass their telegrams to the messengers of the Secretariat, who are readily waiting in the meeting hall, and at once the telegram is sent to the telegraph office via the tube mail, while they are already writing their next dispatch].<sup>317</sup>

Time pressure was perceived as being strong, especially with news agency journalism.<sup>318</sup> The challenge of technical support to speed up information processes was obvious.<sup>319</sup> To give an example: in-house communication work was simplified by the "Roneo".<sup>320</sup> This Roneo was a hectographic machine speeding up information flows. Telegraphy<sup>321</sup> and early copying machines were tools for mediatizing global diplomacy.<sup>322</sup>

<sup>315</sup> Gabriele Balbi and Andreas Fickers, eds., *History of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU): Transnational Techno-Diplomacy from the Telegraph to the Internet*, Innovation and Diplomacy in Modern Europe, volume 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020); Erik Koenen, "Experimentalsysteme und epistemische Dinge. Anregungen für eine Geschichte von Materialität und Praxis der Kommunikationswissenschaft," *Medien & Zeit* 35, no. 3 (August 5, 2020): 30–34; Bilotto, *A Violent Peace*, 17–22.

<sup>316</sup> Feder, *Heute sprach ich mit*, 47.

<sup>317</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 40.

<sup>318</sup> League of Nations, 27.

<sup>319</sup> Bilotto, *A Violent Peace*, 17–22.

<sup>320</sup> Disposal Sheet, 1924, UNAG, R1431/27/15663/2938, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/publicity-of-proceedings-at-meetings-of-the-council-secretary-general-various-suggestions-as-to-the-best-means-of-carrying-out-the-resolution-of-the-assembly-on-this-subject-the-best-solution-appears-to-be-the-daily-distribution-to-the>.

<sup>321</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 39.

<sup>322</sup> Regarding the time/place/space-dimensions of historical mediatization processes with regard to the "wave" of "electrification" see Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 34–121.



“The doors are open, the typewriters rattle, the telephone shrills”<sup>323</sup> and “[...] at the press tables the telegrams fly into the hands of the waiting messengers”.<sup>324</sup>

A good example of the routines of information work and the thus connected need to establish an infrastructure *to realise* it is the prioritizing of telephone calls for public relations officials *and* for journalists. Bernardo B. Attolico (1880-1942),<sup>325</sup> the then Director of the Communication and Transit Section, achieved for his negotiations with Swiss officials at Bern that

[...] any communication of an official nature, emanating from our Press Bureau (Information Section), will be entitled priority and that the Press should also (during, of course, the Assembly period) enjoy the privilege of telephonic priority.<sup>326</sup>

Eric Drummond wrote handwritten note addressed to Comert:

[ Attolico had achieved admirable results.<sup>327</sup>

“Press cabins” with telephones were installed.<sup>328</sup> In the early 1930s, phone calls from Geneva to Washington were made possible “within ten minutes from the time the correspondent gave his number to the operator”<sup>329</sup>.

The League was nothing without materialized communication and information technologies.<sup>330</sup> Vice versa, those had been pushed forward by the League’s needs from the first month of its existence: Geneva got connected. A brochure for the International Press exhibition at Cologne in 1928 shows that the League pre-figured highly modern forms of transport fostering rapidity of information also *locally*: Bicycle-couriers were driving between the hotels, the residences of visiting journalists and the Geneva League headquarters.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>323</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 355.

<sup>324</sup> Beer, 388.

<sup>325</sup> For Attolico see LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/5092>.

<sup>326</sup> Priority of Telephone Calls for the Secretariat and Press and Improvement of Railway Communications during the Assembly, Letter from [Bernard] Attolico to the Secretary-General, 11 November 1920, UNAG, R1365/26/8597/8597, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/priority-of-telephone-calls-for-the-secretariat-and-press-and-improvement-of-railway-communications-during-the-assembly-professor-attolico-reports-discussion-with-conseiller-federal-mr-haab-at-berne-of-questions-on-this-subject-submitt>.

<sup>327</sup> Handwritten notice by E.(ric) D.(rummond), undated, UNAG, R1365/26/8597/8597.

<sup>328</sup> Dossier concerning Telephonic Installation at the Hotel Victoria for the Assembly, Letter from Administration des Télégraphes et des Téléphones Suisses to Guillaume Fatio, 12 January 1921, UNAG, R1365/26/12355/12355, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/dossier-concerning-telephonic-installation-at-the-hotel-victoria-for-the-assembly-1920>.

<sup>329</sup> Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor”, 252.

<sup>330</sup> Biltoft, *A Violent Peace*.

<sup>331</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 26.

## 6.2 Daily practices and routines

The narrative of Open Diplomacy was confronted with ambivalent communicative needs. Such were: *creating attendance for the League, informing, networking, convincing, planning, managing, operating, controlling and evaluating*. The dimensions of

- a. *place/access* (for the journalists at Geneva),
- b. *space/publicity* (media content of and about the League in the transnational public space) and
- c. *time/rapidity* of information flows and working routines

were structural elements either of the journalistic work or of the public relations work.

From a nowadays communication management perspective we are able to discern by the archival materials, complementary to the findings from secondary literature, the following practices:

- “Propaganda for the League”: Performing and managing communication about and for the League, addressing economic, cultural and political elites, nations, interest groups, the journalists and the people or publics.<sup>332</sup> This “good propaganda” as a type of “proactive” information and communication work was later a topic discussed regarding the communication work of the United Nations.<sup>333</sup>
- “Liaison work”: Systematic lobbying with stakeholders (women-, peace-, educational-, health, scientific, labour organisations...)<sup>334</sup>, which was an “exclusive task” of the Information Section<sup>335</sup>. This was also targeting organisations which were not as close to the League’s aims as the International Socialist Movement<sup>336</sup> and other organisations which, from today’s point of view, count as international non-governmental organisations like the Red Cross.<sup>337</sup>
- Communication and information work with the National League Branch Offices (at Paris, London, Rome, Tokio and Berlin)<sup>338</sup> and the National League Societies across Europe and overseas.<sup>339</sup>

<sup>332</sup> Davies, “A Great Experiment”, 408; Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva”; Seidenfaden, “Legitimizing International Bureaucracy”; Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration.”

<sup>333</sup> Mark D. Alleyne, *Global Lies? Propaganda, the UN and World Order* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Lehmann, “Die UNO aus kommunikationswissenschaftlicher”, 164.

<sup>334</sup> Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva”; Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor”; Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration”; Anne-Isabelle Richard, “Between Publicity and Discretion: The International Federation of League of Nations Societies,” in *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikononou, and Torsten Kahlert (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Wilke in this book.

<sup>335</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 201.

<sup>336</sup> Report on officials work during past year 1928, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>337</sup> Davies, “A Great Experiment.”

<sup>338</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*, 12; Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda”; Pelle Van Dijk, “Internationalism on Display: Case Studies on the League of Nations in the Member States” (Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations: Results, Problems, Perspectives (Internal Project Workshop), Bremen, 2019), [presented paper]; Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration”, 6.

<sup>339</sup> Richard, “Competition and Complementarity”, 245-247.

- Establishing stable and controllable press relations by way of press releases, press conferences, meet the press events<sup>340</sup>
- and additionnally by way of visual material like photographs of prominent heads of the League, like Cecil or Drummond and/or contemporary famous figures showing pro-League attitudes like Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein or Marie Curie, arranged in “scenes of deliberation”<sup>341</sup>.
- Establishing professional role models like the “Counsellor”<sup>342</sup>.
- Negotiating facilities for the press and the journalists on a transnational level, not least for those journalists accredited at Geneva with regard to the needed infrastructure and the cost level of transportation (railway), telegraphy, telephone, even tele-printers for fast telegrams.<sup>343</sup>
- “Moral Disarmament” by the Conference organising press experts (1927-1933) with debates on “fake news”, ethics in journalism, press freedom and conflict coverage.<sup>344</sup> Some members of the Information Section, like Max Beer and Konni Zilliacus<sup>345</sup>, worked part-time for the Disarmament Conference.<sup>346</sup>
- Relation management with countries: to address different nations of the world via press and elite groups and persons to sensitize them for the League.<sup>347</sup>
- “Cooperative Publicity”: Cooperating with other trans-global players for example at women’s rights conferences or exhibitions (examples to be found all over the Registry Files of the Information Section).
- Evaluation of communication strategies and reputation management<sup>348</sup>, which prefigured the systematic media resonance analysis the United Nations later on organised to evaluate its public image.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*; Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor”; Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*; Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva”; Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration.”

<sup>341</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 227.

<sup>342</sup> See paragraph 4.4. of this chapter.

<sup>343</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*; Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*; Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*; Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*; Nordenstreng and Seppä in this volume.

<sup>344</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*; Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*; Lemke, “Ein Beitrag zur Entgiftung der öffentlichen”; Tworek, “Peace through Truth?”; Seidenfaden, “Legitimizing International Bureaucracy”; Biloft, *A Violent Peace*; see also Nordenstreng and Seppä in this volume.

<sup>345</sup> Lemke, “Ein Beitrag zur Entgiftung der öffentlichen”, 109-111.

<sup>346</sup> Letter from Joseph Avenol to Arthur Sweetser, 23 September 1933, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>347</sup> Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva”; Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor.”

<sup>348</sup> Via press clippings, see below; also Arne L. Gellrich, “A ‘Careful Study’ on Public Opinion. An Exemplary Investigation of Media Monitoring through Press Clippings Collections in the League of Nations’ Information and Mandates Sections,” *Studies in Communication Sciences* 23, no. 1 (March 7, 2023): 67–84.

<sup>349</sup> For the United Nations: Lehmann, “Die UNO aus kommunikationswissenschaftlicher”, 167.

### 6.3 Liaison work with (national) elites and organisations

Information Section public relations officials had to fulfil overlapping, various liaison tasks. José Pla was responsible for liaison work with Spain, namely Spanish officials and the Spanish press.<sup>350</sup> Also Portugal counted among his field of responsibility.<sup>351</sup> Furthermore, between 1924 and 1928 Plá was responsible for “liaison with the disarmament section and responsible for its publications.”<sup>352</sup> Additionally, the relations with the Minority Section and the Latin American Office of the League were partly on his desk.<sup>353</sup>

Liaison work affected the triangle of diplomacy, journalism and public relations.<sup>354</sup> Beer denounced liaison for a hidden nationalistic agenda hindering internationalism:

Fortunately, everything is explained by the one word liaison. Is this word meant to denote the necessary nexus between Germany and French, Romanians and Hungarians, Italians and Yugoslavians? Far from it. It means, that, in the interest of the Secretariat, the Lithuanian officials establish liaison with Lithuania, the Germans with Germany and the French with France.<sup>355</sup>

In fact, we find notices in the archives saying that the world was ‘divided’: Certain members of the Information Section did liaison work with regard to certain countries and/or world regions: Nogueira and Plá for Latin America and Spain; Zilliacus for Finland and the Baltics, Cummings for “the British Empire”.<sup>356</sup> Zilliacus left the League in 1938, not least for – in his eyes – the League’s failure in internationality. The idea of the League should have been that officials are “not responsible to individual governments”, he wrote.<sup>357</sup> In fact, job descriptions of the League sometimes split “national” from “international” liaison work.<sup>358</sup> Some historians highlight that *transnationality* was not the League’s primordial aim: “Sovereignty remained the basis for the network of international relationships”<sup>359</sup>.

Retrospectively seen, “liaison”-work was more than affiliating national interests – it was at the heart of diplomatic *communication*<sup>360</sup> addressing the uprising *transnational* impact of non-governmental organizations (NGO) like the International Committee of the Red Cross or the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>361</sup> Also other contemporary organisations, like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, established liaison and lobbying in an international arena often entangled with the League.<sup>362</sup>

<sup>350</sup> Reports on official’s work during past year, signed A. [drianus] Pelt, 9 July 1934 and 9 July 1935, UNAG, S856/161/2869, <https://archives.unige.ch/mr-pla-jose>.

<sup>351</sup> Report on official’s work during past year, signed Pierre Comert, 26 June 1929, UNAG, S856/161/2869.

<sup>352</sup> Report on official’s work during past year, signed Pierre Comert, 15 August 1924 and 28 June 1928, UNAG, S856/161/2869.

<sup>353</sup> Septennial report on Plá, 5 May 1936, UNAG, S856/161/2869.

<sup>354</sup> See also Richard, “Between Publicity and Discretion” for the League’s liaison with national League organizations.

<sup>355</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 199–200.

<sup>356</sup> Report on Zilliacus, 1926, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.unige.ch/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>357</sup> Letter from [Konni] Zilliacus to [Joseph] Avenol, 9 August 1938, UNAG, S912/217/3863.

<sup>358</sup> Certificate Zilliacus 1923, signed Pierre Comert, 30 November 1923, UNAG, S912/217/3863.

<sup>359</sup> Van Ginneken, *The A to Z of the League of Nations*, 7.

<sup>360</sup> Seidenfaden, “Message from Geneva”; Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor.”

<sup>361</sup> Davies, “A Great Experiment”, 409.

<sup>362</sup> Rietzler, “From Peace Advocacy”; Tournès, *Les États-Unis et la Société des Nations*, 28.

In 1934 alone, the League had been in contact with about 200 international organisations.<sup>363</sup> These contacts were mostly organised by the Information Section.<sup>364</sup> For a big part this was networking with elites, not least by way of travelling.<sup>365</sup>

When Information Section officials Pierre Comert and Henry Reginald Cummings (born 1886)<sup>366</sup> visited London in 1927 for eight days, they “saw a number of members of different parties”, e. g. political parties but also journalists, including French correspondents in London. Cummings, the later representative of the London Branch Office of the League, was a former journalist and fluent in French.<sup>367</sup> During his eight days in London, Cummings met 37 people who were journalists and editors from twelve newspapers, marketing professionals and politicians. He reported on the voyage to Drummond in an eight pages long letter on “the situation in England”, closing with the words:

[ In a general way I am more than ever impressed with the value of as frequent visits as possible from Geneva to London in order to keep various leaders of opinion, either in political life or in the press in touch with the League work. They themselves value the chance of meeting people from Geneva [...].<sup>368</sup>

Cummings knew that this was a sensible task which required

[ [...] that care is taken to avoid the slightest attempt at propagating any particular policy within the League.<sup>369</sup>

Cummings received a “life contract” at the League’s Information Section in 1931.<sup>370</sup> He was a primordial figure in building stable international relations not least with the British Empire.<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless, he had to quit his long-term post in March 1939, after 19 years of service for the League, for reasons of constraints in resources.<sup>372</sup> During the 1930s the Information Section lost resources and support. Cummings sent kind of a warning to Avenol:

<sup>363</sup> Seidenfaden, “The League of Nations’ Collaboration”, 7.

<sup>364</sup> Richard, “Between Publicity and Discretion”, 152.

<sup>365</sup> See also Max Beer describing his voyages. Beer, *The League on Trial*.

<sup>366</sup> For Cummings, see the biographical note in LONSEA - League of Nations Search Engine, accessed February 15, 2022, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/12089>.

<sup>367</sup> Formal sheet “Career in Secretariat”, 15 May 1939, UNAG, S750/55/875, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-cummings-henry-reginald>.

<sup>368</sup> Visit by M. Comert and Mr. Cummings to England, November, 1927, Letter from Cummings to Drummond “Note on the situation in England”, 30 November 1927, UNAG, R1355/22/63327/63327, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/8xbs-caat-kngx>.

<sup>369</sup> Visit by M. Comert and Mr. Cummings to England, UNAG, R1355/22/63327/63327.

<sup>370</sup> Handwritten notice III, May 1939, UNAG, S750/55/875, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-cummings-henry-reginald>.

<sup>371</sup> Letter from Secretary Avenol to R.[eginald] Cummings, 11 March 1939, UNAG, S750/55/875.

<sup>372</sup> Letter from Secretary Avenol to Cummings, UNAG, S750/55/875.

I shall sorry to leave the department [Information Section] that during fourteen years I have helped to build up from nothing of its in the world, but also one that despite criticism – often misconceived – has made a vital contribution to the work of the Secretariat and the League as a whole [...] I cannot help fearing that the dispersal of its functions, as proposed by the Supervisory Commission, may weaken the influence of the Secretariat in its general relations with public opinion, and lead to some administrative confusion.<sup>373</sup>

After 1945 Cummings made a career working for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).<sup>374</sup>

## 6.4 International press reviews and press clippings

During the 1920s and 1930s, systematic opinion polls to evaluate the League's performance were not yet available.<sup>375</sup> Instead, press clippings had to fulfil informational *and* evaluative tasks. League officials used them to collect and spread information on certain issues in-house. Furthermore, the League issued itself via clippings wanting to know how the League was covered by the world's press. In this sense, press clippings were a primordial element of communication management.<sup>376</sup>

Professional “readers” – these were official staff members of the Information Section – were in charge of reading the international press, according to their individual language skills, to compile press articles, as Konni Zilliacus was doing for some time.<sup>377</sup> But this ‘in house’ reading service had limitations when having to cope with masses of press articles. Douglass and Bömer report that the League's internal newspaper clipping department “cuts from 800 to 3,500 items daily to be distributed to the various sections concerned where they are carefully studied”<sup>378</sup>. Over 200 daily newspapers were systematically read and analysed.<sup>379</sup>

Clipping bureaux grew with the idea of planning, spreading, controlling and evaluating information. From August 1919 onwards, the League's information and communication work was supported by private clipping and cutting services like Geneva based Argus Suisse. In 1921, the Argus Suisse de la Presse delivered 165.000 press-clippings to the League, an enormous corpus.<sup>380</sup>

<sup>373</sup> Letter from R.[eginald] Cummings to the Secretary-General H.[ubert] Avenol, 19 September 1939, UNAG, S750/55/875, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-cummings-henry-reginald>.

<sup>374</sup> Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, 293.

<sup>375</sup> Hogan, *Woodrow Wilson's Western Tour*, 169. Interesting in the broader context of the history of media research is that polls in media research were operated by League affiliated institutions like the International Educational Cinematographic Institute in the 1930s regarding effects of film (see Wilke in this book).

<sup>376</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 413.

<sup>377</sup> Certificate, 1 November 1927, UNAG, S912/217/3863, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-zilliacus-konni>.

<sup>378</sup> Douglass and Bömer, “The Press as a Factor”, 261.

<sup>379</sup> Certificate 1 November 1927, UNAG, S912/217/3863.

<sup>380</sup> Editor of Argus Suisse offers to supply bibliographical information regarding League of Nations Activities, Letter from Argus Suisse de la Presse to Pierre Comert, 17 January 1922, UNAG, R1332/22/571/571, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/editor-of-argus-suisse-offers-to-supply-bibliographical-information-regarding-league-of-nations-activities-supply-of-press-cuttings-by-argus-suisse>.

The rise of press clipping offices in Europe as well as in the US, beginning with the first bureau established in Europe in Paris in 1879<sup>381</sup>, witnesses the historical “co-evolution”<sup>382</sup> of journalism and PR. In addition, in this professional sector the shift from journalism to public relations, including the upcoming field of professional clipping (but obviously mostly not the other way round, not from public relations to journalism), was common. This is true for the League’s Information Section public relations officials, as it becomes obvious throughout this chapter. Many successful founders of press clipping bureaux were former journalists or editors.<sup>383</sup>

It is more than a detail of an evolving clipping market<sup>384</sup> to look at an organisation with a supposed global reach like the League of Nations. Consequently, Georg H. Mair, Information Section official, wrote to Sir Herbert Ames (1863-1954) of the Financial Section that the League was “absolute dependent on the Service” by Argus Suisse, even if a huge amount of money had to be invested (in 1921: 10.000 Swiss Francs). Mair rejected any idea that an in-house team could be as effective with selecting and delivering press cuttings.<sup>385</sup> Obviously, the Information Section had to legitimize this kind of outsourcing and successfully managed to normalize and institutionalize information work as one routine of an international organisation.<sup>386</sup> This had transnational dimensions: Julian Nogueira cut and pasted a rich catalogue of press clippings from the “New World” and Latin America<sup>387</sup>, and it seems that League officials also collected material beyond Geneva at the liaison offices in London and Tokyo, for example.<sup>388</sup>

## 7. Conclusion: a gradual and relative degree of “Open Diplomacy”

From today’s perspective, we are able to highlight and appreciate the “radical transformation” of international diplomacy reclaimed by the League.<sup>389</sup> But this was only half the story. As this book chapter shows, *full open diplomacy was not achieved* - and it may have been unachievable. Generally, with public relations and diplomacy, “opacity”<sup>390</sup> can be meaningful to save trust, face and the ability to act cooperatively behind closed doors. The ethical values of 21st century public diplomacy agents are supposed to be “credibility, dialogue, openness, respect and trustfulness” within the frame of

<sup>381</sup> Irene Hertha Schmidt, *Die wirtschaftliche Bedeutung und Organisation der Zeitungsausschnitte-Büros* (Berlin: im Selbstverlag, Phil. Diss. Universität Freiburg, 1939), 19.

<sup>382</sup> Philomen Schönhagen and Mike Meissner, “The Co-Evolution of Public Relations and Journalism: A First Contribution to Its Systematic Review,” *Public Relations Review* 42, no. 5 (December 1, 2016): 748–58.

<sup>383</sup> Richard K. Popp, “Information, Industrialization, and the Business of Press Clippings, 1880–1925,” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (September 1, 2014), 431–432.

<sup>384</sup> Anke te Heesen, *The Newspaper Clipping: A Modern Paper Object*, trans. Lori Lantz (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014).

<sup>385</sup> Letter from George Herbert Mair to Sir Herbert Ames, 13 May 1921, UNAG, R1332/22/571/571, <https://archives.unige.ch/argus-suisse-offers-to-supply-bibliographical-information-regarding-league-of-nations-activities-supply-of-press-cuttings-by-argus-suisse>.

<sup>386</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 203–205.

<sup>387</sup> Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen*, 194.

<sup>388</sup> See Gellrich, “A Careful Study on Public Opinion.”

<sup>389</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*, 405.

<sup>390</sup> Winkler and Thummes, “Ein Recht auf Opazität.”

“advocacy”<sup>391</sup>, meaning loyalty to and representation of their organisations and/or governments<sup>392</sup> - similarly this can be observed a hundred years ago with the League’s officials.

Not least for reasons of self public relations, the League told the “strategic narrative”<sup>393</sup> of *how well* Open Diplomacy was integrated into its work. In self-publications like the one for the Cologne World Press exhibition<sup>394</sup>, *no* obstacles and problems of organising information and communication flows were discussed. But they were there.

Some League information officials especially those who had to travel a lot and abroad, reported to their superiors an “extreme fatigue” after years in service. During the yearly Assembly of the League no rest was possible.<sup>395</sup> Doing communication work for the League was intense and often stressfull. This is the other side of the coin of the so called vivid “spirit of Geneva”<sup>396</sup> or Geneva as “an Eldorado for the press”<sup>397</sup>. Nevertheless, the Geneva “spirit of optimism”<sup>398</sup> prefigured global communication ethics:

[...] permit me to say that twenty years with the League convince me that the League, or something very like it, is utterly essential to any civilized world, where men do not tear themselves periodically to pieces. The norms may, and indeed should, change with changing circumstance, but the principles of community rather than antagonism of interest, of cooperation rather than of conflict, of ordered legal progression rather than of hacking by brute force, remain permanent.<sup>399</sup>

Apart from the personnel and functional level of holding an Information Service position with the League: Can we speak of the beginnings of transnational public diplomacy at the crossroads to public relations aiming at “public diplomacy goals”<sup>400</sup> and/or at “cultural diplomacy”<sup>401</sup> when evaluating the League’s strategic communication? If we take into account the reflection by Guy

<sup>391</sup> Hua Jiang, “Ethical Values of Public Diplomacy in International Public Relations,” in *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Communication and Engagement*, ed. Guy J. Golan, Sung-un Yang, and Dennis F. Kinsey (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 172-173.

<sup>392</sup> Daniel Ostrowski, *Die Public Diplomacy der deutschen Auslandsvertretungen weltweit: Theorie und Praxis der deutschen Auslandsöffentlichkeitsarbeit* (Wiesbaden: Springer-Verlag, 2010), 20-22.

<sup>393</sup> Alistair Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, Routledge Studies in Global Information, Politics and Society (New York ; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013).

<sup>394</sup> League of Nations, *Völkerbund und Presse*; League of Nations. Secretariat, *Ten Years of World Co-Operation*.

<sup>395</sup> Letter from Nogueira to M. Walters, 26 September 1938, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>.

<sup>396</sup> The notion of the international, open, ‘new’ “Spirit of Geneva” as a “center point of global diplomacy” is used till today. Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies*, XXVII; 101-104.

<sup>397</sup> Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 209.

<sup>398</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 332.

<sup>399</sup> Memorandum to the Secretary-General, January 1942, UNAG, S889/194/3415, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-sweetser-arthur>.

<sup>400</sup> Nancy Snow, “Public Diplomacy and Public Relations: Will the Twain Ever Meet?,” in *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Communication and Engagement*, ed. Guy J. Golan, Sung-un Yang, and Dennis F. Kinsey (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 73.

<sup>401</sup> Benjamin G. Martin and Elisabeth Marie Piller, “Cultural Diplomacy and Europe’s Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939: Introduction,” *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 2 (May 2021): 149–63.



J. Golan that “public diplomacy is a subset of political public relations”<sup>402</sup>, the League pre-figured Public Diplomacy - surely not in terms of nation-branding but in the young field of *multilateralism*.

The League systematically created films, photos, posters and brochures to be sold and shown to citizens of Europe and abroad. This meant the production of cultural goods for mass consumption.<sup>403</sup> Akami sees this as a clear sign of willingly addressing broader publics.<sup>404</sup> Or take the example of sports, not least the International Football Federation FIFA (founded in 1904) and its Vice President Enrique Eduardo Buero (1891-1975) were targets for the League to move closer to the world publics.<sup>405</sup> Student and pupil exchanges, summer schools<sup>406</sup> and intellectual cooperation<sup>407</sup> were enhanced and supported by the League. Such efforts can be classified as early Cultural Diplomacy.<sup>408</sup>

Relationships with ‘ordinary people’ can also be witnessed by the “Letters to the League”. Nineteen servants from different League sections carefully answered letters coming in from anybody.<sup>409</sup> But again, the League reached more or less educated middle-class publics, contrary to its own ambitions of targeting “all classes”<sup>410</sup>. Overall, most efforts to bring the League to the public debate did not primarily address “a foreign people”<sup>411</sup> but *foreign elites* in their mediator or opinion leader-role.<sup>412</sup> Furthermore, the journalists accredited at Geneva – a target of the League’s public relations – were *themselves elite communicators* exclusively sent from their home media.<sup>413</sup>

Open Diplomacy, prominently claimed, was contested across a constellation of a variety of diverse actors. The often-heated internal discussions on if, how and why to make accessible which kind of meeting of a League’s organ to whom, especially to which (professional) actors, brought forward the evolution of a new style of diplomatic communication. Open Diplomacy was a highly normative orientation not preventing factual close door politics. The politics of representation and the politics of decision-making<sup>414</sup> were not congruent. Secrecy had its place in diplomatic communication. And still today journalism is the professional system to make such secrecy visible.

<sup>402</sup> Guy J. Golan, “An Integrated Approach to Public Diplomacy,” in *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Communication and Engagement*, ed. Guy J. Golan, Sung-un Yang, and Dennis F. Kinsey (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 418.

<sup>403</sup> See also Dijk, “Internationalism on the Big Screen.”

<sup>404</sup> Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda”, 75.

<sup>405</sup> Letter from Nogueira to M. [Seymour] Jacklin, 11 May 1931, UNAG, S843/148/2629, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mr-nogueira-julian>; Note by L. [Louis ?] Simon to Miss [?] Williams to indicate a voyage of Nogueira with Mr. Buero to Marseille, 11 December 1934, UNAG, S843/148/2629.

<sup>406</sup> Eckhardt Fuchs, “Der Völkerbund und die Institutionalisierung transnationaler Bildungsbeziehungen,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 54, no. 10 (2006): 888–99; Scaglia, *The Emotions of Internationalism*, 59–70.

<sup>407</sup> Lemke, “Ein Beitrag zur Entgiftung der öffentlichen Meinung”; see also Wilke and Nordenstreng in this volume.

<sup>408</sup> Martin and Piller, “Cultural Diplomacy and Europe’s Twenty.”

<sup>409</sup> Carl Bouchard, “Towards Peace and Reconciliation after the Great War. Letter-Writing to the League of Nations,” in *Peacebuilding, Memory and Reconciliation: Bridging Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches*, ed. Bruno Charbonneau and Geneviève Parent, Studies in Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding 4 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 176–94.

<sup>410</sup> Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda”, 76.

<sup>411</sup> Löhr and Herren, “Gipfeltreffen im Schatten der Weltpolitik”, 414.

<sup>412</sup> Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda”, 76; Seidenfaden, “Legitimizing International Bureaucracy”, 133; Richard, “Between Publicity and Discretion”, 153.

<sup>413</sup> See Gellrich and Koenen in this volume.

<sup>414</sup> Ulrich Sarcinelli, *Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland: Medien und Politikvermittlung im demokratischen System*, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011).

To sum it up: Open Diplomacy was

• 113

- a. normative goal,
- b. diplomatic practice (but not yet a very routinized one) and
- c. strategic narrative of the League to legitimize itself internally and externally.

The constellation of actors beyond the League involved diplomats, public relations agents and journalists from newspapers as well as from news agencies. Verbally and in their daily working routines they struggled about what Open Diplomacy *was supposed to* mean (as a norm) and what it *could* mean (as a practice). Contemporaries described this process as being novel and future oriented. Optimism is expressed even by the sceptical Max Beer:

[ Before the League there was nothing; the League offers us something that had never existed before.<sup>415</sup>

This included the organisation of transnational communication by functional differentiation, specialisation by expertness, professionalization and divided working routines.

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<sup>415</sup> Beer, *The League on Trial*, 172.

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**Memorandum by Wilson Harris, dealing with the Question of  
Publicity of the Proceedings of the Council and Assembly**

*Publicity of the Proceedings of the Council:  
Memorandum from Mr. Wilson Harris.  
(United Nations Archives Geneva)*

Distributed to COUNCIL, and Secretariat.

27  
of State 12 Jan. 1922.

[Communiqué au Conseil  
et aux Membres de la Société.]

C. 19. M. 4. 1922



GENÈVE,  
le 8 janvier 1922.

27/18507/2938

Société des Nations.

## PUBLICITÉ DES DÉBATS DU CONSEIL

MÉMOIRANDUM DE M. WILSON HARRIS,  
PRÉSIDENT DE L'ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES JOURNALISTES  
ACCREDITÉS AUPRÈS DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DES NATIONS

League of Nations.

## PUBLICITY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM FROM Mr. WILSON HARRIS,  
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS  
ACCREDITED TO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

## PUBLICITÉ DES DÉBATS DU CONSEIL

MÉ MORANDUM DE M. WILSON HARRIS

*Note du Secrétaire général :*

La lettre suivante, adressée au Secrétaire général par M. Wilson Harris, Président de l'Association internationale des Journalistes accrédités auprès de la Société des Nations, ainsi qu'un mémorandum relatif à la publicité des débats du Conseil et de l'Assemblée, sont soumis à l'examen des Membres du Conseil et communiqués aux Membres de la Société à titre de renseignement.

[Traduction.]

LONDRES, le 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 1922.

Monsieur le Secrétaire général,

Vous vous souviendrez que, lors de la session ordinaire du Conseil de la Société des Nations, présidée par Son Excellence le Dr Wellington Koo, pendant la deuxième Assemblée, le Conseil a reçu une députation de l'Association internationale des Journalistes accrédités auprès de la Société des Nations et s'est déclaré tout disposé à examiner ultérieurement un mémoire que l'Association avait l'intention de rédiger sur la publicité des débats de la Société.

J'ai l'honneur de vous transmettre ci-joint le mémoire en question et de vous exprimer l'espoir que le Conseil pourra, au cours de sa prochaine session, examiner la chose avec toute l'attention qu'elle mérite. Nous reconnaissons que certaines des suggestions émises ressortissent à des questions de détails administratifs plutôt qu'à des questions d'ordre général — les seules que l'on puisse raisonnablement demander au Conseil d'examiner — mais il nous a paru bon de présenter nos suggestions dans leur ensemble plutôt que d'essayer de les répartir en différentes catégories.

J'ajouterai que quelques membres du Comité exécutif de l'Association seront vraisemblablement à Genève lors de la prochaine session du Conseil et que certains d'entre eux, sinon tous, se tiendraient à l'entière disposition du Conseil ou du Secrétariat, au cas où l'on croirait devoir faire appel à leurs services pour résoudre les questions qui viendraient à être soulevées.

Veuillez agréer, etc...

(Signé) H. WILSON HARRIS,  
Président de l'I.A.J.A.S.N.

A l'Hon. Sir Eric DRUMMOND, K.C.M.G.,  
Secrétaire général de la Société des Nations.



LEAGUE OF NATIONS

**PUBLICITY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COUNCIL**

MEMORANDUM FROM MR. WILSON HARRIS

*Note by the Secretary-General:*

The following letter to the Secretary-General from Mr. Wilson Harris, President of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, together with a Memorandum dealing with the question of Publicity of the Proceedings of the Council and of the Assembly, is circulated for the consideration of the Council and for the information of the Members of the League.

LONDON, January 1st, 1922.

Sir,

It will be within your recollection that at the last regular meetings of the Council of the League of Nations, held under the chairmanship of His Excellency Dr. Wellington Koo during the sessions of the League Assembly, the Council received a small deputation representing the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations, and expressed its readiness to take into consideration at a later date a memorandum which the Association proposed to draft on the question of publicity for the proceedings of the League.

I have the honour to forward herewith the memorandum in question and to express the hope that the Council may find it possible to give to the matter such attention as it may seem to merit in the course of the forthcoming sittings. It is recognised that certain suggestions put forward fall rather under the head of routine administration than of broad principle, such as the Council might reasonably be asked to take into consideration, but it has been thought well to present the suggestions as a whole rather than to attempt to divide them into different categories.

I may add that some members of the Executive Committee of the Association are likely to be in Geneva during the forthcoming Council meetings, and any or all of them would be entirely at the disposal of the Council or Secretariat should any question be raised in regard to which they might be of service.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

[Signed] WILSON HARRIS,  
President I.A.J.A.S.N.

The Hon. Sir Eric DRUMMOND, K.C. M.G.,  
Secretary-General of the League of Nations.



## MÉ MORANDUM.

1. Il peut être posé en axiome que non seulement le succès, mais l'existence même de la Société des Nations dépendent de l'opinion publique.

2. Cela étant, il est essentiel que toutes les informations touchant l'une quelconque des branches de l'activité de la Société, non seulement soient accessibles à ceux qui s'efforcent de les obtenir, mais reçoivent la plus large diffusion dans le monde entier.

3. Il est donc nécessaire que la Société recherche de façon constante et délibérée ce qu'on pourrait appeler une publicité à la fois active et passive: en comprenant, par publicité passive, la simple suppression du secret, et par publicité active, l'adoption de mesures bien définies destinées à assurer aux nouvelles importantes une diffusion universelle.

4. La publicité active et passive se combinent de façon parfaite lorsque les débats de la Société, par leur nature et par la façon dont ils sont conduits, attirent aux séances les journalistes de tous les pays et que ceux-ci jouissent de toutes les facilités requises pour l'accomplissement de leur tâche.

5. L'Association internationale des Journalistes reconnaît que la Société a déjà beaucoup fait dans cette voie et c'est pour cela, plutôt que pour le plaisir de se plaindre ou de faire des critiques captieuses, qu'elle se sent poussée à émettre certaines suggestions en vue de réaliser de nouveaux progrès dans ce sens.

## CONSEIL.

6. Il est de la plus grande importance que les séances du Conseil de la Société soient, en règle générale, publiques et ne soient privées que dans des cas exceptionnels. Seule, l'adoption de ce principe peut assurer aux séances du Conseil la présence régulière de journalistes venus de centres tels que Londres, Paris et Rome. La récente réunion du Conseil, pour l'examen de la question albanaise, a donné l'occasion de constater combien il est facile et avantageux de tenir des séances publiques. Il y a lieu de rappeler que ce qui intéresse le public, c'est un débat vivant, c'est-à-dire non pas simplement un sec exposé des divergences de vues, mais l'expression nette et sans apprêt des différentes opinions. En conséquence, si l'on veut que les comptes rendus des séances du Conseil intéressent l'opinion, il faut que ces séances évitent l'apparence d'une mise en scène et qu'elles soient publiques, même au risque d'incidents imprévus. C'est l'imprévu qui stimule l'intérêt du public.

7. Si, pour des raisons particulières, une réunion du Conseil a lieu à huis clos, il est de la plus grande importance que les communiqués de la séance soient publiés promptement, qu'ils ne revêtent pas la forme d'un simple exposé des faits, mais qu'ils présentent un résumé complet et clair des débats. Les communiqués des commissions à la récente Conférence de Washington offrent de bons exemples à cet égard, de même d'ailleurs que la plupart des comptes rendus des sous-commissions de l'Assemblée de la Société (siégeant à huis clos) publiés dans le *Journal* de la dernière Assemblée.

8. Nous proposons:

- a) Qu'un membre compétent de la Section d'information, lors des séances publiques du Conseil, soit toujours à la disposition des journalistes pour leur donner les explications nécessaires sur les débats. Peu de journalistes sont suffisamment au courant des détails de l'activité de la Société pour être en mesure de suivre sans aide les délibérations du Conseil à n'importe quel moment.

## MEMORANDUM.

1. It must be regarded as axiomatic that the League of Nations depends, not merely for its success but for its existence, on public opinion.

2. That being so, it is essential that information as to every branch of League activity should not only be available to painstaking seekers, but be widely disseminated throughout the world.

3. It is therefore necessary that the League should persistently and deliberately cultivate what may be termed both active and passive publicity: by passive publicity being understood the mere elimination of secrecy, and by active publicity the taking of definite measures to secure the world-wide dissemination of information of importance.

4. Active and passive publicity merge ideally when the proceedings of the League are of such a character and are so conducted as to attract to its meetings the journalists of all nations, and when the latter are given all the facilities requisite for the pursuit of their vocation.

5. The International Association of Journalists recognises that the League has already gone far in this matter, and it is that fact rather than any spirit of complaint or captious criticism that encourages it to make certain suggestions for further progress in the same direction.

## COUNCIL.

6. It is of the highest importance that the League Council should sit habitually in public, and only exceptionally in private. Only the adoption of that principle can secure the regular attendance at Council meetings of journalists from such centres as London, Paris and Rome. The recent meeting of the Council on the Albanian question shows both how practicable and how valuable public sessions can be. It has to be remembered that what interests the public is active controversy, *i.e.*, not merely a dry exposition of divergencies of view, but the sharp unstudied expression of difference of opinion. Consequently, sessions of the Council, if reports of them are to engage popular interest, must avoid the appearance of having been staged, and must be public even where there is risk of the unexpected. It is the unexpected that stimulates popular interest.

7. If for special reasons a Council meeting is held in private, it is of the utmost importance that communiqués should be issued promptly and should take the form not of a bare statement of fact but of a full and lucid précis of the proceedings. The communiqués of the committees of the recent Washington Conference are good examples of what is needed. So also were most of the reports of (private) sub-committees printed in the Assembly Journal at the last Assembly of the League.

8. It is suggested:—

(a) that a competent member of the Information Section should always be at hand at public meetings of the Council to inform journalists of the significance of the proceedings. Few journalists are sufficiently familiar with the details of League activities to be able to follow unaided the deliberations of the Council at any given moment.



- b) Qu'un compte rendu sténographique des délibérations du Conseil, tiré si possible feuille par feuille, soit remis aux journalistes le plus tôt possible après chaque séance publique. C'est là le procédé de publicité ordinaire pour les séances publiques aux Etats-Unis, ainsi qu'en France pour les séances du Parlement et de la Haute-Cour.

#### L'ASSEMBLÉE.

9. Au point de vue de la publicité, tant active que passive, les mesures prises pour les débats de l'Assemblée ont répondu à tous les vœux. La distribution aux journalistes des comptes rendus sténographiques des débats et la rapidité avec laquelle cette distribution se fait sont en tous points admirables.

#### COMMISSIONS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE.

10. L'importance du travail effectué par les commissions de l'Assemblée et le fait que, d'ordinaire, trois d'entre elles siègent en même temps font qu'il est pratiquement impossible à un seul journaliste de suivre tous les débats. Il est donc nécessaire de demander sur ce point que la publicité active s'ajoute à la publicité passive si sagement instituée lors de la dernière Assemblée. L'Association désire en conséquence soulever la question de savoir s'il serait possible de fournir des comptes rendus sténographiques des débats des commissions, comme il a été suggéré plus haut pour les séances publiques du Conseil. Il serait, en outre, très utile qu'un membre de la Section d'information fût présent à toutes les séances publiques des commissions pour renseigner les journalistes qui désirent rester en contact avec deux, ou plus de deux commissions, siégeant simultanément.

11. Nous demandons qu'une table soit mise à la disposition de la presse aux séances publiques du Conseil et des commissions.

12. Que, pendant l'Assemblée, tous les communiqués et autres notes à la presse soient affichés en même temps au Secrétariat et à l'Hôtel Victoria, les devoirs professionnels des journalistes les obligeant à faire la navette entre ces deux points.

#### CONSIDÉRATIONS GÉNÉRALES.

13. La décision de créer des bureaux annexes de la Section d'information à Paris, Londres et Rome ne saurait, de l'avis de l'Association, être louée trop hautement. Rien ne montre mieux combien il importe à la Société que des membres de la Section d'information se trouvent à demeure dans de tels centres d'informations, que le travail admirable effectué par le représentant de cette Section à Paris, au moment de la réunion dans cette ville de la Commission des crédits de secours à l'Autriche.

- (b) that a stenographic report of the Council's deliberations, issued if possible sheet by sheet, should be available to journalists at the earliest possible moment after a public sitting. This is a regular publicity feature of public meetings in the United States, as well as of the French Parliament and High Court of Justice.

#### THE ASSEMBLY.

9. Both from the standpoint of active and passive publicity the policy of the League with regard to debates in the Assembly has been ideal. The distribution to journalists of stenographic reports of debates and the speed with which such distribution is accomplished are altogether admirable.

#### ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES.

10. The importance of the work transacted by the committees of the Assembly and the fact that three of them are usually sitting at the same moment make it virtually impossible for an individual journalist to follow all the proceedings. Here, therefore, it is necessary to ask that active publicity be added to the passive publicity so wisely instituted during the recent Assembly. The Association accordingly desires to raise the question whether stenographic reports of committee discussions could be provided, as has been suggested in the case of public meetings of the Council. It would further be of great service if a member of the Information Section were present at all public sittings of committees to supply information to journalists who desire to keep in touch with two or more committees sitting simultaneously.

11. It is requested that a Press table be provided at public sittings of the Council and of committees.

12. During the Assembly all communiqués and other Press notices should be posted in duplicate at the Secretariat and at the Hotel Victoria. Journalists' duties require them to be sometimes at the one place and sometimes at the other.

#### IN GENERAL.

13. The decision to establish branch offices of the Information Section at Paris, London and Rome cannot, in the opinion of the Association, be too highly praised. As an example of the value to the League of the presence of members of the Information Section in such news centres as these cities it is worth while citing the admirable work done by the representative of the Section in Paris at the time of the meeting there of the commission dealing with the question of Austrian Relief Credits.



## In Search of the Geneva Journalist

### A biographical kaleidoscope of the journalistic sphere around the Assemblies of the League of Nations from 1920 to 1938

#### I. Introduction

The first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be read as something like a coming-of age era for professional journalism: The introduction of journalism as an academic discipline at Western universities<sup>1</sup> and its centrality in the conceptualisation of the central organ of global governance of the time, the League of Nations,<sup>2</sup> demonstrate its acceptance. According to Frank Beyersdorf, the “internationally recognized” profession of journalism officially gained that status only in 1925, when the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as a result of dedicated lobby activity by the International Association of Journalists Accredited to the League of Nations (IAJA), “sent a questionnaire to 60 press associations in 33 countries in Europe, the Americas and Australia”, probing “the status of the press, wages, forms of contracts, working hours, holidays, insurance, recruitment and dismissal practices as well as press organizations”.<sup>3</sup> This not only puts 1920s Geneva in the focus of journalistic professional history but, more specifically, the collective of international journalists that reported from the League of Nations.

The chapter investigates this collective through its three largest national cohorts, the English, French and German journalists and media accredited to the Assemblies of the League of Nations during its active years from 1920 to 1938.<sup>4</sup> The underlying research is based on the information that can be reconstructed thanks to the accurate bureaucracy of what League veteran Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer famously called the first “Great Experiment in International Administration”<sup>5</sup>: In the League of Nations Official Journal, Special Supplement (LNOJSS), where the minutes of the Assembly have been published by the League, the names of accredited journalists have been recorded meticulously, organised according to country and media organisation, giving information on their recorded gender and even their place of residence in Geneva (cf. figure on the next page).

<sup>1</sup> Svennik Høyer and Epp Lauk, “Frames and Contradictions of the Journalistic Profession,” in *A History of the International Movement of Journalists: Professionalism Versus Politics*, ed. Kaarle Nordenstreng et al., Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 22.

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter by Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Beyersdorf, “First Professional International: FIJ (1926–40),” in *A History of the International Movement of Journalists: Professionalism Versus Politics*, ed. Kaarle Nordenstreng et al., Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 82; Jürgen Wilke, “Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen von Journalisten im internationalen Vergleich. Die Pionierstudie des Internationalen Arbeitsamts (1928) und ihre Replikationen,” in *Demokratie braucht Medien*, ed. Melanie Magin, Uta Russman, and Birgit Stark (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2021), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Subsequent mentioning of these nationalities, unless specified otherwise, refers to the ‘nationality’ as it is assigned in the lists published in the League of Nations Official Journal, Special Supplement LNOJSS. As we shall see throughout the chapter, these assignments are at times incoherent, as they sometimes refer to a person’s actual nationality, while on other occasions they refer to that of the publication they represent. As is especially striking in the case of the United Kingdom, these national cohorts sometimes include colonies autonomous overseas territories or Dominions such as New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa, Canada or the Irish Free State, while these are sometimes listed separately. The same goes for members of the Jewish and Russian diaspora, for which separate lists exist for single years, while in other years they appear as members of their respective home or host countries.

<sup>5</sup> Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945).

IX. LISTE DES JOURNAUX ET REPRÉSENTANTS DE LA PRESSE A L'ASSEMBLÉE.  
IX. LIST OF PAPERS AND PRESS REPRESENTATIVES ATTENDING THE ASSEMBLY.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Brooklyn Eagle</i> : M. Hickok, Hôtel Richemond.   | FINLANDE. — FINLAND.   |
| <i>Chicago Daily News</i> : M. A. R. Decker, Hôtel Victoria.                                      | <i>De Locomotij</i> : M. A.B. Cohan Stuart, Hôtel Beau Séjour. |
| <i>Detroit News</i> : M. W. K. Kelsey, Hôtel de la Paix.  | FRANCE.  |
| <i>The Christian Work</i> : M. H. E. Jaquith, Hôtel des Familles.                                 | <i>Agence Centrale</i> : M. H. Bessemer, 21, rue de Malagnou.  |
| <i>Foreign Press</i> : M. A. Hodges, Hôtel d'Angleterre.  | <i>Agence Radio</i> : M. Jean Bauler, Cercle de la Presse.     |
| <i>Los Angeles Times</i> : M. Courtney, Hôtel de l'Ecu.   | <i>Agence Havas</i> : M. Henri Ruffin, 62, rue du Stand.       |
| <i>Newspaper Enterprise Assn.</i> : (Cripps Mercy League): M. Milton Bronner, Hôtel d'Angleterre. | <i>Le Drapeau Bleu</i> : M. Lagonico, Hôtel Touring & Balance. |
| <i>New York Evening Post</i> : M. Charles Selden, Pension Mathey.                                 | <i>L'Echo de Paris</i> : M. A. Géraud.                         |
| <i>New York Herald</i> : M. Laurence Hills, Hôtel d'Angleterre.                                   | <i>L'Eclair</i> : M. Maleroff, 3, rue Versonnex.               |
| <i>New York Tribune</i> : M. Arthur S. Draper, Hôtel de l'Ecu.                                    | <i>L'Information</i> : M. E. Taponier, Hôtel de l'Ecu.         |
| <i>Philadelphia Public Ledger</i> : M. C. W. Ackerman, Hôtel Bellevue.                            | <i>Agence Fournier</i> : M. De Toledo, 41, Route de Chêne.     |
| <i>Public Libraries, Chicago</i> : M. E. C. Richardson, Hôtel de la Paix.                         | <i>L'Illustration</i> : Mme N. Roger, 36, Chemin des Cottages. |
| <i>World Outlook</i> : Miss F. L. Robinson, c/o American Consu-                                   | <i>Journal des Débats</i> : M. E. Bauty, Grand-Lancy, Geneva.  |

*Snapshot from the 1920 Journal of the League Assembly. (United Nations Archives Geneva)*

Based on these lists, we record prosopographic information derived mainly from archival and online research.<sup>6</sup> As with most historical research, the sources on which this chapter is based are incomplete and haphazard. As it stands, the chapter relies mostly on cross-referenced information available online and on additional literature research for specific cases and contextual information. While, given time and additional resources, a more extensive and detailed picture could certainly be obtained, the retrieved information is clearly sufficient for recognising and reconstructing patterns, common characteristics and for choosing and conducting individual biographical case studies.

## I.1 Point(s) of departure

When the Salle de la Réformation was officially opened for the first Assembly of the League of Nations on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1920, around 200 media representatives filled its upper ranks (see illustration p. 22-23). As the Information Section of the League secretariat stated in its brochure for the organisation's pavilion at the 1928 *Pressa*, the International Press Exhibition in Cologne, "the press and publicity are part and parcel of the general conception of the League of Nations, and this has involved the establishment of relations which are entirely novel as between an official organisation and the independent newspaper world"<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, and although such public accessibility of League business was a struggle and an ongoing project rather than an unquestioned principle<sup>8</sup>, the annual League Assembly was open to accredited visitors from the press and attracted crowds of international reporters from the very beginning (cf. figure on the opposite page).

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the prosopographic method, see Lawrence Stone, "Prosopography," *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (1971): 46–79; Diana K. Jones, "Researching Groups of Lives: A Collective Biographical Perspective on the Protestant Ethic Debate," *Qualitative Research* 1, no. 3 (December 1, 2001): 325–46.

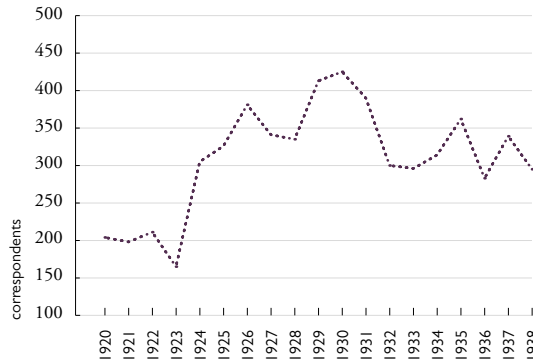
<sup>7</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and the Press: International Press Exhibition, Cologne, May to October 1928* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1928), 7, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/the-league-of-nations-and-the-press-2>.

<sup>8</sup> Arne Lorenz Gellrich, Erik Koenen, and Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz, "The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy and the League of Nations: Co-Evolution between Diplomacy, PR and Journalism," *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 2020): 607–21. See also the chapter by Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz in this volume.



## Total number of correspondents accredited to the Assembly 1920–1938

(Arne Gellrich)



Compiling and consolidating the lists for our three cohorts from the LNOJSS renders a total sample of 759 names which were investigated individually. Personal information beyond represented media organisation, full name and (in most cases) gender has been obtained for 418 of these individuals, which is the information on which most of the present chapter is based. All three national cohorts are of roughly comparable size, with a total of 299 names of journalists listed as French, those designated as British numbering a total of 256, and those listed as German a total of 200. In the process it quickly became clear that, carefully kept as the lists were, they contain a number of mistakes, some of which are of systemic nature. For example, there seems to have been no universal rule as to whether nationality was assigned according to the journalists' place of birth, residence, or the origin of the represented media organisation. Accordingly, the "French" and "British" lists contain some individuals (and newspapers) from the francophone parts of Belgium and Switzerland, from British dominions such as Australia and New Zealand and even from the United States (US) (although all these dominions and countries are also separately listed in the LNOJSS). These discrepancies notwithstanding, we have taken the lists as they are, without further reducing the sample.

But who were these reporters; who were the actual people behind this mysterious figure of the *Geneva Journalist*? League officials had very clear expectations of them, which they formulated in said brochure:

*Geneva journalists* "have to be acquainted with disarmament, mandates, economic and financial problems, international law, etc., and, without being specialists strictly speaking in these particular subjects, they have to study them with much closer attention than the ordinary journalist. They have to specialise in treating problems all of which have an international bearing. They have to acquire an understanding of the play of international relations, which is facilitated by their opportunities of regular contact with journalists, delegates and officials from other countries. Certain qualities are obviously required for this work, not the least of which is a large measure of versatility. The variety of the League's activities requires not only a trained journalistic mind, but also a well-



developed journalistic technique. The successful Geneva journalist must be conversant with all the branches of his profession. The League organisation is in itself a new technique, and the journalist, in adapting himself to it, has to bring to his task the qualities of a Parliamentary or Conference writer, a commentator, and a faithful interpreter to his countrymen of international diplomatic reactions if he is to fulfil his mission. It involves also wide experience in obtaining and correlating facts, and, with this, a certain amount of diplomatic skill. He works all the time in an atmosphere of keen competition and, as every journalist knows, this necessitates rapidity, resource and a thorough acquaintance with the quickest technical means of news transmission if he is to keep pace with the requirements of present-day conditions. In any case, the influence of his work on international relations cannot be exaggerated”<sup>9</sup>.

League correspondents, in other words, were expected by the institution to adhere to what Svvennik Høyer and Epp Laug describe as “the core of professionalism in journalism,” namely “understanding society and knowing where important information and relevant opinions are found, and then of knowing how to make this information public and easily understandable”<sup>10</sup>.

## 1.2 Overall demographics

Apart from the questionable assignments to national cohorts, there is a certain degree of cosmopolitanism, albeit not as pronounced as could perhaps have been expected from a collective of international correspondents reporting from what at the time was the largest and most broadly accepted forum of voices from around the globe. For some of them, nationality was a matter of interpretation. The Jewish German-Alsacian Salomon Grumbach (Alias: “Homo”), in Geneva for the *Quotidien* (1924–1926) and *Populaire* (1928–1931), identified himself as an Alsacian rather than as a Frenchman<sup>11</sup>, and the British cohort contained eight Scots, five Welshmen, and one journalist from Northern Ireland, Noel Panter of the *Daily Telegraph*, who reported from Geneva in the late 1930s<sup>12</sup>. Others were exiles, for example the Russian émigrés Princess Marina Chavchavadse and Alexander Werth (father of the French historian Nicolas Werth)<sup>13</sup>. Both were born in Saint Petersburg and had fled from the Bolsheviks at a young age, and both visited the Geneva Assembly in the early 1930s, for the *Review of Reviews* and the *Guardian* respectively<sup>14</sup>. The German athlete Alexander Natan fled from the rise of German Fascism in 1933, and Carlo A’Prato, until his expulsion in 1937, lived as a political refugee in Geneva<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and the Press*, 1928, 41–42.

<sup>10</sup> Høyer and Laug, “Frames and Contradictions,” 10.

<sup>11</sup> Fritz Wertheimer, “Salomon Grumbach,” in *Von Deutschen Parteien und Parteiführern im Ausland* (Berlin: Zentral-verlag, 1930).

<sup>12</sup> Andrew O’Brien and Linde Lunney, “Panter, George William,” in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James Quinn (Royal Irish Academy, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> L.V. Kriloye, “Александр Верт (Werth),” in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия 1970–1978*, ed. Alexander Prokhorov (Moscow: Большая советская энциклопедия, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Rodzianko, *Tattered Banners: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2018), 185.

<sup>15</sup> Nanda Torcellan, “Per una Biografia di Carlo a Prato,” *Italia Contemporanea* 27 (1976): 2–48.

Beyond these (at times forcibly) transnational biographies, cosmopolitanism was also reflected on the professional level, with journalists producing content for various media in more than one language. A'Prato, for example, between 1927 and 1938 wrote for the *Agence Information*, the *Agence Sud-Est*, the *Journal des Nations*, the *New York Times*, the *Daily Herald*, *Paris-Midi*, *Paris Soir* and the *Echo de Paris*, or the Latvian Georgij Konstantinovich Popov who wrote in German and Swedish for a large number of papers from Germany, Latvia, Sweden and Finland.

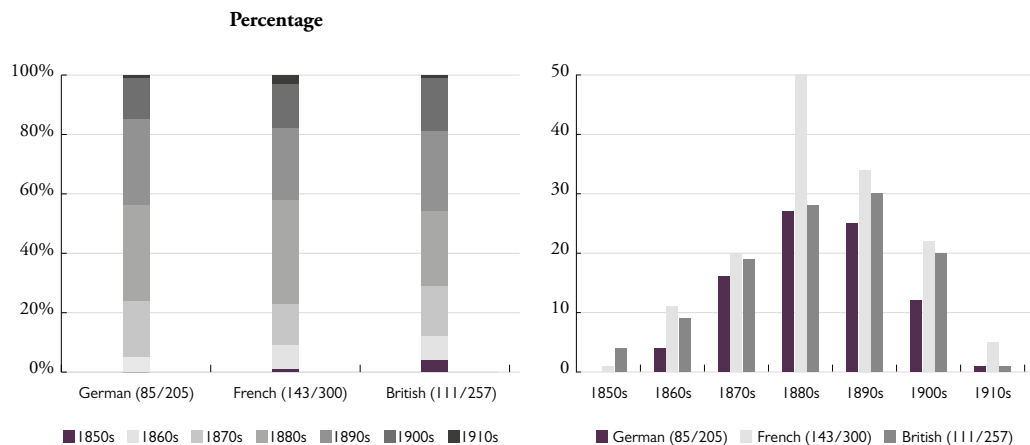
Our data concerning birthdates remains especially patchy. However, based on this limited information, it seems that in all three cohorts the journalists sent to the League Assemblies tended to belong to an older generation and had had ample time to establish themselves in their jobs and functions. Most of the male members were at fighting age during the First World War and had therefore probably seen armed action as soldiers, and some, like *Reuters* correspondents William H.G. Werndel and Fergus J. Ferguson, had been “attached” to allied troops as war correspondents. Both had served as attached correspondents with the British and French Forces in the Eastern Mediterranean during the First World War.<sup>16</sup> Also the German national conservative journalist Wilhelm Nikolaus Doerkes-Bobbard was at the front, and his last assignment was being in charge of the war newspaper of army group Scholz in Macedonia there. As opposed to their situation in the Second World War, women had not yet gained the right to serve as soldiers in any of the main combatants' armies. Still, as we shall see later on, a number of the female correspondents had also been to the battle fields in various roles.

There are long-term correspondents and one-time visitors from all generations. For most regular visitors no clear age-pattern can be determined. The birthdates of four of them, Willy Ruppel of *Berliner Tageblatt*, Henri Ruffin of *Havas*, Tony Roche of *Journal de Paris* and André Glarner of *Exchange Telegraph* and *Excelsior* remain unknown, but it may safely be assumed that they were at least in their 40ies or 50ies by 1920. *Temps'* François Laya, born in 1890, and *La Gironde's* Geneviève Tabouis, born in 1892, fall right in the middle of the most prominent generation, while their colleague Edouard Bauty, born 1874, is 16 years older. The largest portion of correspondents accredited with the League at some point or other, across all three countries, is made up of those born in the 1880s and 1890s. This goes especially for the French and German journalists, among whom, furthermore, there is no clear pattern of a generational shift. While the average birthdate for journalists appearing in Geneva during the late thirties is slightly increased from that of the early twenties, this effect is much less pronounced among these two cohorts. In contrast, the portion of the British cohort with known birthdates is more evenly distributed across the birth generations. It even features four correspondents born in the 1850s, but also a comparatively large portion of young journalists. It is to be expected that this translates to a large share of less-experienced personnel in addition to the veteran reporters, editors and patrons that are common in all three cohorts.

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<sup>16</sup> This information is taken from several issues of the internal *Reuter Service Bulletin* of 1916, 1917 and 1920, provided by David Cutler, Reuters Archive.

138 • **Known birthdates among League correspondents**  
(Arne Gellrich)

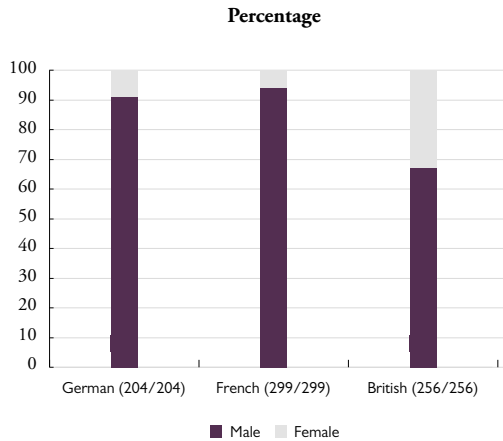


Given the chronological context, it is little surprising that women (or individuals identified as female according to the historical sources) were very much in the minority. Only 18 each, out of 204 German and 299 French correspondents respectively, have been identified as female, making up eight percent and six percent respectively. This makes the British cohort stand out, as it includes 52 female correspondents out of the total of 257 – more than a fifth. This divergence, like the slightly younger average age among the correspondents, speaks of a different culture in the United Kingdom, one which on the whole was probably closer to the philosophy of the League project (which was heavily influenced by Britain), resulting in both different traditions and pathways of the professionalisation of journalism, and a (for the time) comparatively progressive stance on the rights and social status of women.<sup>17</sup> A distinct difference in the age distribution among female and male journalists respectively cannot be identified in any of the three cohorts.

<sup>17</sup> Although suffrage in Britain came only one year before its introduction in Germany, female professionalisation and access to higher education predated similar developments in France and Germany by years, even decades. The University of London had awarded degrees to women since 1878, while in Germany women were not even able to regularly matriculate as students before 1900. University of London, “Leading Women 1868–2018,” October 16, 2019, [https://issuu.com/universityoflondon/docs/leading\\_women\\_magazine](https://issuu.com/universityoflondon/docs/leading_women_magazine); Marco Birn, “Ein Naturrecht auf höhere Bildung. Die Anfänge des Frauenstudiums in Deutschland,” *Die Hochschule : Journal für Wissenschaft und Bildung* 28, no. 2 (2019): 109–23.

## Gender distribution among correspondents

(Arne Gellrich)



### CASE STUDY 1: A permanent presence I – Geneviève Tabouis (1892–1985)

Beating the odds, given the small number of female correspondents as well as the small number of long-term correspondents, Geneviève Tabouis visited the Assembly every single year from 1926 onwards and, in 1938, was elected vice president of the Geneva-based IAJA. Geneviève was born in Paris, 1892, as the daughter of the painter Fernand Lequesne and the niece of diplomat brothers Cambon.<sup>18</sup> An interest in world politics and formalised diplomacy was therefore not an unlikely trait. Educated in archaeology at the Ecole du Louvre, Geneviève, by then married to the director of the French telegraphic radio company, Robert Tabouis, launched her career in journalism in 1922, because, as she would state in a radio interview in 1952, “my professors of archaeology [...] were anti-feminists”<sup>19</sup>. The decision was rebellious in more than one way, as her biography as a Geneva journalist stands in stark contrast to the image sold by the Information Section. Quite the contrary of the journalist with “the qualities of a Parliamentary or Conference writer, a commentator, and a faithful interpreter to his countrymen of international diplomatic reactions” described by the Section<sup>20</sup>, she (like many of her female and very few of her male colleagues) openly stated that she started her career as a diplomatic correspondent without any knowledge of the profession of her colleagues and that she “knew nothing about politics”<sup>21</sup>. According to her own account, this was as early as in 1922, four years before her first official listing as an accredited journalist in the LNOJSS, and purely through her personal contacts.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Coston, ed., “Geneviève Tabouis,” in *Dictionnaire de la politique française* (Paris: La Librairie française, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> Radio France, *Geneviève Tabouis: “Je suis devenue journaliste parce qu’en 1914, mes professeurs étaient antiféministes”* (Paris: Recorded May 1952, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and the Press: International Press Exhibition, Cologne, May to October 1928* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1928), 41, <https://archives.unige.ch/the-league-of-nations-and-the-press-2>.

<sup>21</sup> Radio France, *Geneviève Tabouis*.

Her uncle, French ambassador Jules Cambon, had offered to take her on his trips “to the League of Nations and other international conferences”, writing “some reports for some journals”<sup>22</sup>. She then started writing for the regional newspapers *Petite Gironde* and *Petit Marseillais*<sup>23</sup>. These papers’ political leaning to the right, which is evident from their closeness to the philosophy of Charles Maurras and their later support for and cooperation with Pétain’s régime and the German occupiers between 1940 and 1944<sup>24</sup>, is clearly not aligned with her self-description as a principled anti-Fascist.<sup>25</sup> In 1930 she became editor of the Socialist newspaper *L’Œuvre* but also continued writing as a diplomatic correspondent for *Petite Gironde* and *Petit Marseillais*. She stayed in those functions until 1940, when she fled to New York, where she befriended Eleanor Roosevelt and founded *Pour la Victoire*, the first French language American journal.<sup>26</sup> After the Second World War she returned to Paris, working for, among others, *La France Libre*, the agency *Information*, and as an editor for *Radio Luxembourg*<sup>27</sup>. In 1958 she published a book on the League of Nations, in which she looked behind the scenes of diplomatic decorum and, as a German journalist put it<sup>28</sup>, showed them “in their underwear”<sup>29</sup>. Geneviève Tabouis died in 1985, aged 93.

<sup>22</sup> Radio France.

<sup>23</sup> “Geneviève Tabouis,” in *Dictionnaire biographique français contemporain : Supplément* (Paris: Pharos, 1954).

<sup>24</sup> Donna Evleth, *The Authorized Press in Vichy and German-Occupied France, 1940-1944: A Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999), 21, 52.

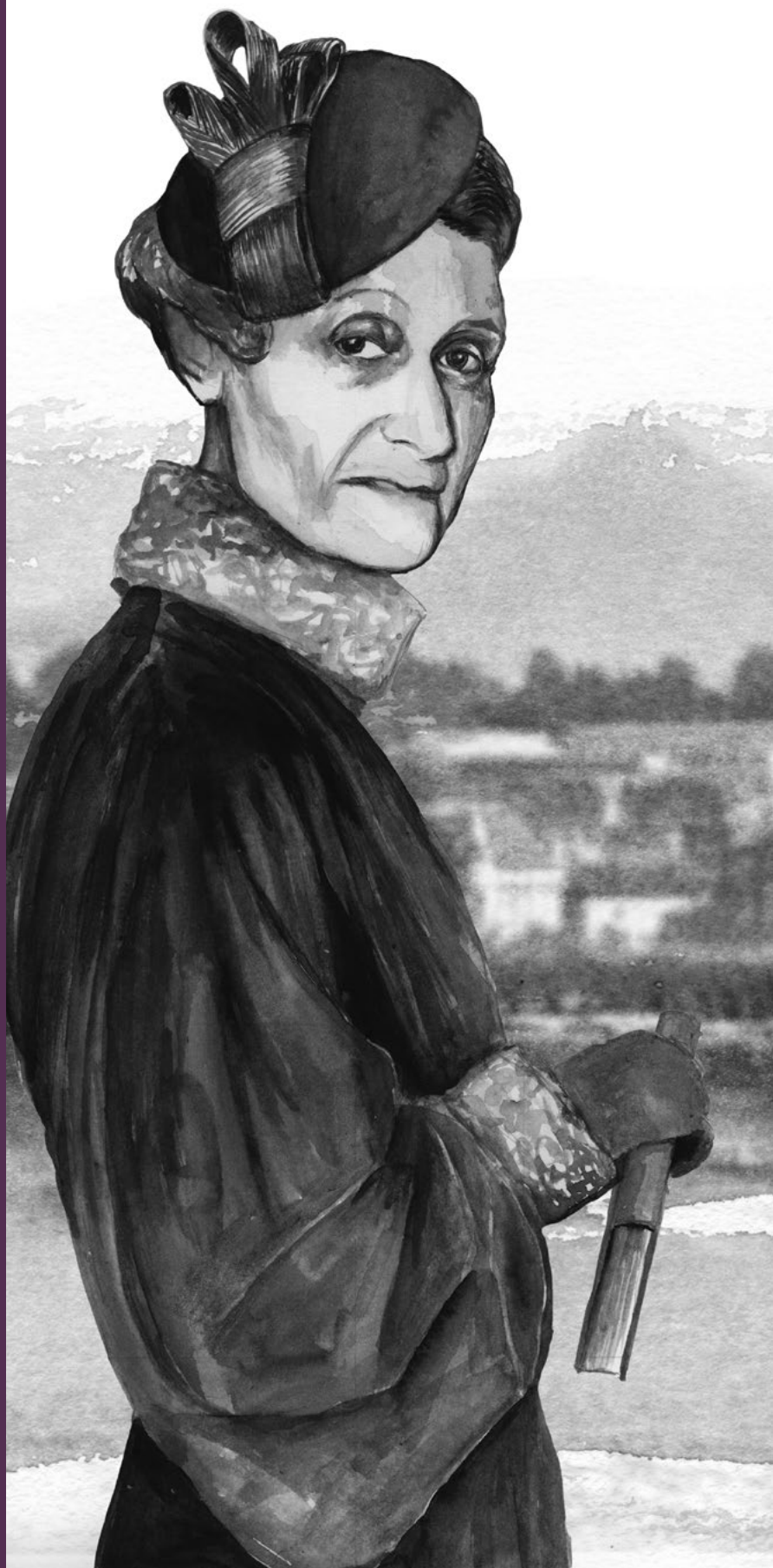
<sup>25</sup> Geneviève Tabouis, *20 ans de suspense diplomatique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958).

<sup>26</sup> “Geneviève Tabouis.”

<sup>27</sup> Coston, “Geneviève Tabouis.”

<sup>28</sup> Tabouis, *20 ans de suspense diplomatique*.

<sup>29</sup> Jose Müller-Marcin, “Madame Tabouis plaudert,” *Die Zeit*, April 17, 1958.



*Geneviève Tabouis, ca. 1936.  
(reconstructive watercolour  
rendering based on  
contemporary photographs,  
Arne Gellrich)*

Different cultural backgrounds in the three cohorts are not only evident from age and gender distribution but also from social status, education, and, as we will discuss further below, political orientations. Travelling to and living in Geneva then, as now, was not cheap. Perhaps even more importantly, we can assume that access to the diplomats beyond official press briefings was not exactly a sure-fire success. As we will see later on, the great majority of correspondents had not been sent to Geneva as part of a long-term commitment by one of the major papers or agencies, meaning that they needed both the funds and the cultural sophistication to fit in during the social events that took place in addition to the official diplomatic meetings and during which contacts were established and sustained, and information exchanged.<sup>30</sup> It is thus no surprise that, even without detailed studies of individual biographies, a large share of all three cohorts appears to belong to the respective country's higher social strata. This is visible especially when it comes to academic merit. Over a quarter of the German correspondents in Geneva held academic degrees, as did over a fifth of their French and around (at least) a sixth of their British colleagues. The difference in proportions does not necessarily mean much considering the patchy nature of the data, nor does the fact that, as a result of the different academic systems, all of the German degrees were doctorates, whereas the French and British merits contained a greater variety of degrees. A notable cultural difference, however, is that almost all Germans with a degree had it noted down in the official lists published in the LNOJSS. Less frequent, but notably present were other markers of social distinction, such as military titles, a small but significant number of knighthoods or peerages in the British sample, and titles as well as prefixes like 'von' and 'de' in German and French, which, while not a reliable predictor of noble birth, tend to suggest aristocratic heritage.

## 2. Routines of Media Representation in Geneva

Quite naturally, the League's official image of the Geneva journalist cited in the introduction mingles the empirical reality with expectations and normative presuppositions. Discrepancies between the two may have been consciously ignored by League officials – but it is not at all unlikely either that they did not even notice them given that the Information Section was in close and regular contact only with those journalists that fit the description. The cooperation of long-term correspondents like Edouard Bauty, Robert Dell and Henry Ruffin (Sr.) in League public relations products such as the 1935 documentary short film from the *League of Nations at Work* series supports that assumption.<sup>31</sup> While the frequency with which correspondents visited the Assembly plays no explicit role in the above definition, it was clearly assumed that Geneva journalists were, like Bauty, permanent representatives of their organisations or, at the least, like Dell and Ruffin, frequent visitors. In its eagerness to present Geneva and the League as “an international Press centre, almost unique of its kind”<sup>32</sup>, the Information Section stressed in 1928 that “today there are 99 Press representatives permanently

<sup>30</sup> Christine Manigand, *Les Français au service de la Société des Nations*, L'Europe et les Européens (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 94; Joëlle Kuntz, *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism: A History* (Geneva: Zoé, 2011), 47–68; Paul Franklin Douglass and Karl Bömer, eds., “The Press as a Factor in International Relations,” in *National and World Planning*, 162 vols., 162 (Philadelphia: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1932), 241–72. See Averbeck-Lietz in this volume. For a fictionalized account see the 1928 novel *The Death of a Diplomat* by *Times* correspondent and Information Section official Vernon Bartlett and his Swedish colleague Per Jacobsson, a member of the League's Economic and Financial Section, under the shared pseudonym Peter Oldfield, which describes several such events in detail. Peter Oldfield, *The Death of a Diplomat* (London: Constable, 1928).

<sup>31</sup> “The League of Nations at Work”, 1935. For more on the *League of Nations at Work* series see Averbeck-Lietz, for more on League of Nations films see Wilke, both in this volume; for more on films on the League see Pelle van Dijk, “Internationalism on the Big Screen: Films on the League of Nations,” *Studies in Communication Sciences* 23, no. 1 (April 24, 2023): 51–66.

<sup>32</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and the Press*, 1928, 40.

resident in Geneva”<sup>33</sup> – a bold claim, which is, however, not totally unrealistic, considering that 43 correspondents from the three most numerous national cohorts reported from at least 9 Assemblies between 1920 to 1938. By far the largest portion of the accredited journalists, however, appeared in Geneva only once: 434 of the 759 journalists that make up the three cohorts are such one-timers.

## 2.1 Correspondents’ roles

The collective of journalists in Geneva is composed of both official correspondents and independent collaborators and freelancers, all of whom are simply listed by their media affiliation, not further distinguishing between these roles. Only five correspondents, all of them from the French cohort, visited Geneva every single year from 1920 to 1938: Edouard Bauty (*Journal des Débats*, *Marseille-Matin*, *Figaro*, *Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel*, *Svenska Dagbladet*), François Laya (*Le Temps*), Tony Roche (*Le Journal*), Henry Ruffin Sr. (*Havas*)<sup>34</sup> and André Glarner (*Exchange Telegraph*, *Excelsior*). Interestingly, biographical information on the majority of these long-term correspondents is not easily obtained. The fact that all of these five were Frenchmen (or at least recorded as French by the League officials) is most likely explained by relative geographical proximity and linguistic and cultural advantage.

### CASE STUDY 2: A permanent presence II – Edouard Bauty (1874–1968)

Born 1874, in Aigle, Canton of Vaud in Switzerland, Edouard Bauty attained a licentiate in theology from the University of Lausanne in 1897, with the aim of becoming a pastor like his father.<sup>35</sup> He then, however, changed plans and studied at a Munich artists’ college for two years, already producing individual articles for papers published in Geneva and Lausanne. After finishing his studies in Germany, he moved to Paris to work for several French newspapers, before returning to Switzerland in 1906, aged 32, to work in Bern as a correspondent for, among others, the French *Illustration* and *Journal des Débats*, *Petit Parisien* and the New York-based *Sun*.<sup>36</sup> In 1911 Bauty moved to Geneva to take on the editorship of the *Tribune de Genève*. He was accredited with the League for the entire 25 years of its existence and after its demise kept on reporting on Geneva sessions of the World Health Organization (WHO) and various United Nations organs.<sup>37</sup> At the League he was accredited for the Paris-based *Journal des Débats*, but also authored articles for other papers, including the Swedish *Svenska Dagbladet* and the Swiss *Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel*. From 1940 to 1945 he served as the president of the Swiss foreign correspondents’ association, Association de la Presse Etrangère en Suisse et au Liechtenstein (APES)<sup>38</sup>, and from 1911 until his death in 1968 was a member of the Geneva local press association.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and the Press*, 1928, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Concerning *Havas*-correspondent Henry Ruffin, this is an educated guess, since his son, Henry Ruffin Jr., evidently accompanied him from 1936 onwards, making it close to impossible to distinguish the two from the paper trail alone. There is, however, no evidence that Henry Ruffin Jr. ever came to Geneva on his own.

<sup>35</sup> Ministère des affaires étrangères, Direction des archives, Département de l’instruction publique et des cultes, *Compte-rendu pour 1897* (Lausanne: Imprimerie Adrien Borgeaud, 1898), 27.

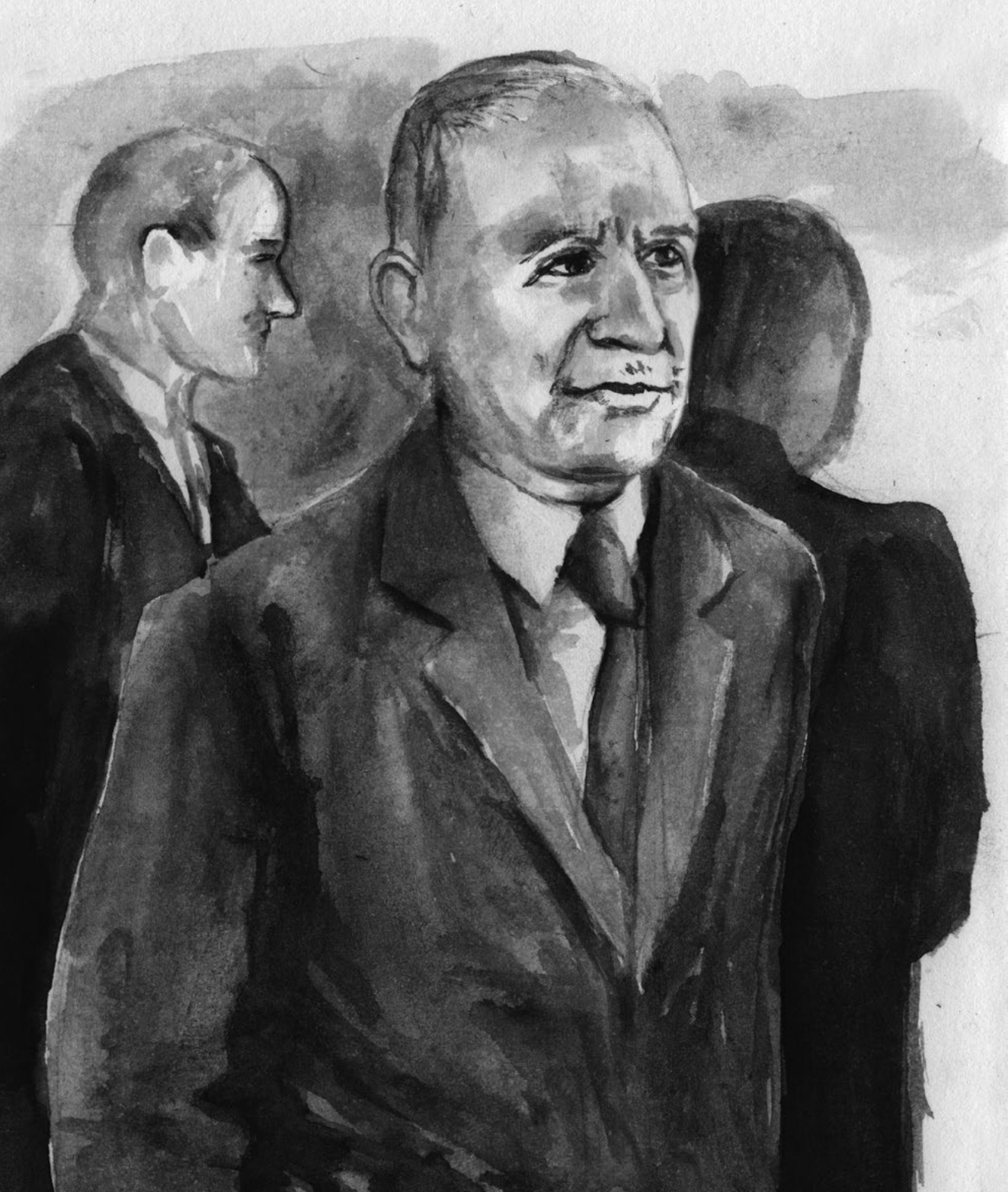
<sup>36</sup> ATS (Agence Télégraphique Suisse), “Notre correspondant Edouard Bauty fête son 90<sup>me</sup> anniversaire,” *Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel*, April 13, 1964, [www.e-newspaperarchives.ch/?a=d&d=EXR19640413-01.2.93](http://www.e-newspaperarchives.ch/?a=d&d=EXR19640413-01.2.93).

<sup>37</sup> A.R., “Edouard Bauty,” *Journal de Genève*, September 7, 1968.

<sup>38</sup> APES, “Les présidents de l’APES,” Association de la Presse Etrangère en Suisse et au Liechtenstein, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.apes-presse.org/fr/les-presidents-de-lapes/>.

<sup>39</sup> ATS (Agence Télégraphique Suisse), “Notre correspondant Edouard Bauty.”





*Edouard Bauty in Geneva, 1935. In the background: New York Times' correspondent Clarence Streit and other colleagues. (watercolour rendering based on images from the 1935 League of Nations public relations film 'The League of Nations at Work', Arne Gellrich)*

Frequent visitors often worked in teams. *Le Journal's* Tony Roche, for nine out of his nineteen visits in Geneva, was accompanied by Louis de Saint-Blancard (alias Saint Brice). Edouard Bauty teamed up with *Journal des Débats'* editor Auguste Gauvin for six years between 1924 and 1930. Another frequent visitor, Carlo A'Prato, writing for the *Daily Herald* joined his fellow anti-fascist George Slocombe for three years from 1925 onwards, keeping on with the paper after Slocombe had left. A correspondent's presence in Geneva was not only dependent on company policy. Many, like Edouard Bauty, came from the region or had moved there; some simply travelled there on a regular basis. Many of these Genevois offered their services to a varying selection of employers. Writing for French publications, such locals included the liberal Protestant pastor Henry Dartique who wrote for *Christianisme Social* from 1924 to 1933 and 1935 to 1936, and, sporadically throughout the 1920s, *Progrès de la Haute-Savoie*, and Edouard Sommer, director of the *Journal des Nations* and leading member of the local paper *Genevois* and the Geneva edition of *La Suisse*, who, among others, corresponded for *Le Matin* in the mid-1920s and throughout the 1930s, as well as the agencies *Central News* in 1920 and 1921, *Fournier* (1937) and *Agence Radio* (1938). For the British cohort, they were Constance and Julian Grande for the *Birmingham Post* (1920), the *Westminster Gazette* (1921), the *Sunday Express* (1934), the *Observer* (1921, 1922) and the *Daily Telegraph* (1923–1932).

### CASE STUDY 3: The Summiteers – Imperialist journalists Constance (1872–1922) and Julian Grande (1874–1946)

“Constance Alice Barnicoat”, writes Julian Grande in 1925, “was one of the most gifted spirits whom the Dominion of New Zealand has given to the British Commonwealth of Nations. English by parentage, colonial by birth and education, Christian in faith, she grew up passionately loyal and Imperialist in sentiments and convictions, and her patriotism shaped her career”<sup>40</sup>. Born in Richmond in 1872, on New Zealand’s South Island as the daughter of a local councillor, Constance Barnicoat received a Bachelor of Arts in languages from Canterbury University College and worked as a secretary for the Conservative Member of Parliament Francis Henry Dillon Bell in Wellington.<sup>41</sup> In 1879 she moved to Europe where she continued her studies in modern languages and was soon employed by William T. Stead for the staff of the *Review of Reviews*. She understood herself as a colonialist in the tradition of her emigrant grandfather and took her Imperial zeal into “conquering” iconic peaks in New Zealand, the Alps and the Caucasus (and in several cases she was the first woman to do so) and travelled remote regions in the Americas, Scandinavia and the Middle East. During her travels Constance also became a friendly acquaintance to many political heavyweights, including Lenin and Trotsky.<sup>42</sup>

Two years Constance’s junior, her husband Julian Grande was born into a Jewish family in Romania but was educated in Ireland and became a British citizen. Julian, too, was an

<sup>40</sup> Julian Grande, *Constance Grande: War Correspondent, Traveller, Alpinist and Imperialist* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1925), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Julian Grande, “A Husband’s Tribute,” *Evening Post*, 1925; Janet McCallum, “Barnicoat, Constance Alice,” in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 1996); Joy Stephens, “Constance Barnicoat,” *The Prow*, May 5, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> McCallum, “Barnicoat, Constance Alice”; Annabel Schuller, “Getting to Know Constance Grande,” ed. Sally Bodkin-Allen, *Southern Institute of Technology Research Report 2019*, 2019, 8–9; Bee Dawson, *Lady Travellers: The Tourists of Early New Zealand* (Auckland, N.Z.: Penguin Books (NZ), 2001), 201.

ardent mountain climber and lectured on mountaineering.<sup>43</sup> The Grandes probably met through this shared passion and married in 1911, celebrating their union with an extended mountaineering trip to Lugano.<sup>44</sup> The couple soon settled in Switzerland and built a reputation for their war reporting during the First World War as well as exploits in anti-German counter-propaganda.<sup>45</sup> Julian, who had reported from Switzerland for the *New York Times* and been foreign correspondent of the London *Times* until 1916, Swiss correspondent for the *Sheffield Telegraph* and the *Birmingham Post* from 1910 to 1923 and Geneva correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* from 1922 to 1923, covered the League of Nations for conservative English papers throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Constance, who had been diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1915 and had since then been suffering from decreasing health<sup>46</sup>, was only accredited to the very first session of the League Assembly, reporting for the *Birmingham Gazette*. She tragically died in 1922, aged 50. Bearing witness to the persistent discrimination of women, her very brief obituary distributed by the *Australian-New Zealand Cable Association*, describes Constance as “Madam Julian Grande, wife of the litterateur and daughter of Hon. J.W. Barnicoat, M.L.C., New Zealand legislator,” her first name remaining unmentioned – an ironic circumstance given her lifetime fame and the fact that information about her husband today survives almost exclusively through sources by Constance.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.2 Organisational practices

It is hard to extrapolate and reconstruct the policies and routines of specific media organisations from biographical information alone. This goes especially for those representing news agencies. Since agency reports are never published under their authors’ names, these correspondents hardly ever share the fame of some of their colleagues and accordingly leave fewer traces from which to reconstruct their biographies. From the LNOJSS lists alone, however, it can be seen that the British news agency *Reuters* usually sent a team of two to Geneva, having a longer-term fixed correspondent, specifically the already mentioned William H.G. Werndel (Geneva correspondent for *Reuters* 1922–1932) and Fergus J. Ferguson (his successor 1933–1937), joined by a second journalist. *Reuters*’ German counterpart, *Wolffs Telegraphisches Bureau* (WTB), also had its permanent correspondents, Max Beer (1920–1924), Bernhard Scheffer (1924–1929) and Wilhelm Klein (1930–1933). When the agency was collectivised by the Nazis and rebranded as *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (German News Bureau, DNB) in 1934, it seemingly changed its practice by no longer sending (mostly) just one but, like *Reuters*, two correspondents: Ernst Reibstein, who replaced Klein in 1934, was joined first by Wilhelm Hack (1934, 1935) and a certain V. Bernus (1936–1938). The main French news bureau, *Havas*, displays a similar pattern, relying on a single correspondent, Henri (or Henry) Ruffin from 1920 to 1934, and teaming him up with his son, Henri Ruffin Jr. and the Spaniard Ramon de Alderete from 1935 to 1938.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis Griffiths, “Julian Grande (1874–1946),” in *The Encyclopedia of the British Press, 1422–1992* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> “Personal Notes from London,” *Otago Witness*, May 10, 1911, Allied Press Ltd edition.

<sup>45</sup> McCallum, “Barnicoat, Constance Alice”; Anja Huber, *Fremdsein Im Krieg: Die Schweiz als Ausgangs- und Zielort von Migration, 1914–1918*, 2 (Zürich: Chronos, 2018), 223.

<sup>46</sup> McCallum, “Barnicoat, Constance Alice.”

<sup>47</sup> Quote from *Australian-New Zealand Cable Association* (1922).

By comparison to the well-structured approach of these agencies, the representation of the press seems at times somewhat haphazard. For example, the London-based *Times* is represented in the list published in the LNOJSS for 17 out of the 19 Assemblies (with the notable exceptions of 1931 and 1935), by a large and varying cast of correspondents. A logical pattern as to who these correspondents were and why they were assigned the Geneva job, seemingly at random, is not conceivable from their biographies, but their seniority suggests that, where *Reuters*, *Wolff* and *Havas* relied on a fixed squad of veteran reporters to guarantee the homogenous quality reporting expected from them, the *Times* saw the Assemblies as social events in which its distinguished staff could partake, creating and upholding personal networks and prestige.

#### CASE STUDY 4: A Veterans' Club: London Times correspondents in Geneva

The *Times*, as one of the leading conservative newspapers, was one of the most frequently present media organisations in Geneva. However, why its correspondents did not appear as accredited correspondents in the LNOJSS for 1931 and 1935 is unclear. In both years, members of its staff may indeed have shown up in Geneva in other functions: Arthur Richard Burrows, also known as the first British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) newsreader and broadcaster under his nickname Uncle Arthur<sup>48</sup>, registered as a *Times* journalist in Geneva sporadically in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Throughout this period he also served as an expert and “specialist advisor” on the League’s Paris-based *Committee on Intellectual Cooperation* (which would later turn into the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) and the *Committee on Communication and Transit* in Geneva and facilitated the first League of Nations broadcast.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore well possible that he reported for the *Times* without being officially registering as a journalist with the League. Similarly, another BBC member, Vernon Bartlett, was on the staff of the League’s Information Section as the head of the London Branch Office. He had reported for the *Times* from the Assemblies of 1920 and 1922, before his official engagement with the League and, to the dismay of his Geneva superior Pierre Comert, he is known to have kept on writing for the paper while being on the League payroll.<sup>50</sup> A frequent guest in Geneva, he also would have had access to the Assembly and may well have served as an unofficial *Times* correspondent or informer.<sup>51</sup>

All five one-time visitors working for the paper were already well-accomplished journalists before coming to Geneva. A visit to the League of Nations was clearly not a rite of passage for young correspondents: Italian-born trained teacher Christopher Lumby had been with the paper since 1914 and a foreign correspondent in Warsaw from 1919, before he transferred to Cairo in 1931 and to Rome in 1937 (where he would later identify the corpse of his personal acquaintance, Benito Mussolini) before serving as a war correspondent in the Netherlands

<sup>48</sup> BBC, “History: 1920s,” About BBC News, accessed April 5, 2023, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/aboutbbnews/spl/hi/history/noflash/html/1920s.stm>; Anne Pimlott Baker, “Burrows, Arthur Richard (1882–1947),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/57389>.

<sup>49</sup> Pimlott Baker, “Burrows, Arthur Richard.”

<sup>50</sup> Gellrich, Koenen, and Averbeck-Lietz, “The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy,” 613.

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the penmanship of League officials like Arthur Sweetser or Konni Zilliacus for non-League actors is a recorded fact and is known to have, at the time, caused smaller and larger scandals within the organization. See Averbeck-Lietz chapter in this volume and David Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies: The League of Nations and the Beginnings of Global Governance*, Understanding Governance (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 31, 171.

and the Middle East.<sup>52</sup> Harold Williams, born in Auckland, New Zealand, visited Geneva in 1925 at the age of 49, during his tenure as the paper's foreign director.<sup>53</sup> He was a veteran correspondent, having reported to the *Times*, the *Guardian* and other British papers from Russia from 1903 to 1918. He had a doctoral degree in Slavic languages and is said to have been a polyglot, commanding up to 52 languages including such unlikely candidates as Hausa and Tagalog.<sup>54</sup> According to one source, he must have been busy during his single visit to Geneva, reportedly addressing "every delegate in [their] own language"<sup>55</sup>. Arthur E. Barker, whom Isaiah Berlin called a "demented & revolting creature, [that] is more unctuous & reactionary than the Morning Post"<sup>56</sup>, was the *Times*' Vienna correspondent until at least 1934. It is unclear, though, whether he still held the position (that of the Vienna correspondent, not that of the "revolting creature") in 1936, when he represented the paper in Geneva. The nephew of a Scottish newspaper owner, Iverach McDonald<sup>57</sup>, while only aged 28 upon his 1937 Geneva correspondence, was already well established in the journalistic field, having started his career while still at school. He went on to become the *Times*' foreign editor in 1952 and the paper's managing Editor in 1965 and a strong proponent of European integration.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Sir Colin Reith Coote was a war veteran, wounded at the Battle of the Somme, who for six years had been a liberal Member of Parliament at the British House of Commons until 1922, elected at the age of 20 as its youngest member. Coote came to Geneva in 1923 at the age of thirty and during his tenure as the *Times*' Rome correspondent. He would go on to leave the paper in 1942 and become the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1950 to 1964.<sup>59</sup>

A combination of the agency model of long-term correspondents and the *Times*' practice of parachuting distinguished staff members to the Assembly can be identified for the French newspapers, especially *Le Temps*. Its permanent correspondent François Laya, who visited every single League assembly from 1920 to 1938, was joined by a varying cast nearly every year. These co-correspondents share a certain proximity to diplomacy or international administration. They include Jean Herbette, the paper's foreign editor, and French Ambassador to Soviet Moscow from 1924 to 1931 and to Madrid from 1931 to 1937<sup>60</sup>, the theologian Wladimir d'Ormesson, who became the French ambassador to the Holy See in 1940 and again from 1948 to 1956, and to Argentina in 1945<sup>61</sup>, and André Ganem, who succeeded Herbette in his role as editor in 1929 and simultaneously

<sup>52</sup> Brian P.D. Hannon, "Story behind the Stories: British and Dominion War Correspondents in the Western Theatres of the Second World War" (PhD Dissertation, The University of Edinburgh, 2015), 54, 92, 305.

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Arthur Gillespie, "WILLIAMS, Harold," in *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, ed. A. H. McLintock (Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga, 1966).

<sup>54</sup> Jeanne Vronskaya and Vladimir Chuguev, "Harold Whitmore Williams," in *The Biographical Dictionary of the Former Soviet Union: Prominent People in All Fields from 1917 to the Present* (London: Bowker-Saur, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Gillespie, "WILLIAMS, Harold."

<sup>56</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Letter to Sheila Grant Duff, March 1934," in *Flourishing: Letters 1928 - 1946*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Random House, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> "Iverach McDonald," *The Times*, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> "Iverach McDonald"; Martin Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-Journalism, 1950s–1970s*, Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 166–67.

<sup>59</sup> Dennis Griffiths, "Sir Colin R. Coote (1893–1979)," in *The Encyclopedia of the British Press, 1422–1992* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>60</sup> Yves Denéchère, *Jean Herbette (1878–1960): Journaliste et Ambassadeur*, Collection "Diplomatie et Histoire" (Paris ; Bruxelles ; New York: Direction des archives, Ministère des affaires étrangères P.I.E.-P. Lang, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> "Wladimir d'ORMESSON," Académie française, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/wladimir-dormesson>.

entered the service of the League of Nations Information Section, where he stayed throughout the organisation's active phase. Like their colleagues at the *Times*, all of these correspondents already held elevated positions when they visited Geneva, which means that they are not likely to have served as mere aides to François Laya, nor would the paper have required a second senior correspondent at Laya's side. This could be interpreted as journalists using their accreditation to gain access to specific events, diplomatic or social circles without necessarily doing actual reporting.

Other media reported from Geneva as frequently, as, for example the *Times* or *Le Temps*, yet without fixed correspondents. An example is the feminist weekly *Time and Tide*, which was represented by Betty Archdale, Monica Whately, Vera Brittain, the paper's editor Margaret Rhondda and her successor Winifred Holtby. These women are recorded by the LNOJSS to have visited Geneva in a seemingly random order. However, their activism for women's rights, peace and disarmament, and other social issues (which will be discussed further below) makes it likely that reporting from League Assemblies, while a near constant feature on *Time and Tide* from 1923 to 1930, was only one of several errands that these women ran in Geneva. Due to their involvement in civil society organisations such as the British League of Nations Union (LNU), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) or the Equal Rights Initiative (ERI) these women travelled to Geneva much more frequently than recorded in the LNOJSS.

Geneva was also a meeting place for newspaper functionaries. Some of them held senior or editorial positions at the newspapers they represented or were even editors-in-chief of a newspaper or magazine. Many journalists reported from the meeting in their capacity as specially assigned foreign, special or diplomatic correspondents. Some of the British, Fergus Ferguson and William Werndel for *Reuters*, Julian Grande for the *Daily Telegraph*, and Victor Lusinchi for the *Exchange Telegraph*, held special titles as Geneva or League of Nations correspondents. Also, among the French, four have been found to have similar job titles: Geneviève Tabouis ("diplomatic correspondent" of *Petite Gironde* and *Petit Marseillais*)<sup>62</sup>, Claude Jeantet, "Head of the Diplomatic Service" at *Petit Journal*<sup>63</sup>, Carlo A'Prato, "Head Editor" for *Journal des Nations*<sup>64</sup>, and James Donnadiou, "diplomatic chronicler" for *Le Figaro*<sup>65</sup>. One of the Germans was Julius Becker, who represented *Ullstein* and *Vossische Zeitung* as foreign representative in Geneva. Comparable functions were held, among others, by Max Beer as the Geneva correspondent of the WTB or Victor Schiff as the editor for foreign affairs of *Vorwärts*.

This information, of course, is quite possibly incomplete, given the patchy source situation. Yet, firstly, since editors and individuals in similar positions are quite likely to be better documented and recorded than lowly correspondents, this information on this area is likely more complete than on others, and secondly, it still demonstrates, among other things, cultural differences in the structures and hierarchies of media organisations in the three countries. It can only be surmised that, given the higher proportion of editors and directors in the French cohort, there League business was seen to be more of a top-level job than in German and English publications.

<sup>62</sup> "Geneviève Tabouis."

<sup>63</sup> Henry Coston, ed., "Claude Jeantet," in *Dictionnaire de la politique française* (Paris: La Librairie française, 1967).

<sup>64</sup> Mauro Cerutti, "Carlo Emanuele A Prato," in *Dizionario Storico della Svizzera (DSS)* (Accademia svizzera di scienze umane e sociali, August 21, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> "James Donnadiou," in *Who's Who in France: 1959-1960*, 4th ed. (Paris: Editions Jacques Lafitte, 1953).

Last but not least, European media organisations did not only send writers to Geneva. The sample includes at least one photographer, Louis Piston for the French illustrated magazine *Excelsior* (1921), and three sketch artists: The League's official cartoonist, Hungarian born Alajos Deszö, also known under his pseudonym "Derso" (*Tribune des nations* 1935), the official illustrator of the British Independent Labour Party's *New Leader* magazine, Peggy Smith (*New Leader* 1931; *Star* 1934), and alpinist François Roget, who illustrated for the British *Spectator*, though it remains unclear if it was in that function that he visited the League assembly for that magazine from 1922 to 1926.

### 3. Worldviews

Geneva was a magnet to individuals from all political and cultural backgrounds who had the resources to reach it. Quite naturally, this included critics and supporters of the League itself, proponents of all forms of government and followers of a number of different belief systems. While this variety is naturally reduced in our sample of (overwhelmingly) Western European individuals, the politically tumultuous interbellum and the ideological diversity that delivered more than enough potential for the escalation of conflict in the 1930s is also clearly visible in our journalistic collective.

#### 3.1 Religion, faith and spirituality

Given the secular nature of Western European official records of the time, information on the religious affiliations of the journalists is hard to come by, apart from clerics, authors of explicitly religious publications, religious extremists, like Dame Christabel Pankhurst who, in her later years, became an ardent Evangelist<sup>66</sup>, and those that adhered to faiths considered so exotic that the chroniclers of the time believed them to be especially worth mentioning. Examples are Frenchman Félix Rougier and Swiss Adèle Erath-Tissot, who were known as esoteric occultists and spiritists, or Cincinnati-born Laura Dreyfus-Barney, a follower of the Persian Bahá'í faith. The peace activist, anti-racist, sociologist and correspondent for *La Française* (1925) and, for many years, appointed member of the *International Council of Woman* had even interviewed the religions spiritual leader Abdu'l-Bahá during his imprisonment in Acre in 1904.<sup>67</sup>

Unsurprisingly, however, the overwhelming majority of the Geneva correspondents representing British, French or German papers adhered to some form of Christianity, including four members of the Society of Friends, nowadays known as Quakers, whose religious convictions seem especially closely connected to their political engagement for peace and humanitarian issues. The second-largest religious community were Jews, especially among the French press representatives. Due to the contemporary issues of Zionism and mandate policy in Palestine, as well as enduring and escalating anti-Semitism in Europe, even these individuals tend to appear in political contexts. Whether this represents an actual pattern is hard to say, since biographic information is obviously most abundant for those individuals who, through activism or for other reasons, have been considered to be of special interest by their chroniclers. Similarly, due to anti-Semitism, adherence to the Jewish faith is more likely to be recorded than other faiths which may even be observed on the part of the League itself. The LNOJSS for some years even recorded Jewish journalists in a separate category, independent of their nationalities.

<sup>66</sup> Pat Thane, "Christabel (Harriette) Pankhurst," in *Cassell's Companion to Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Cassell & Company, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> Baharieh Rouhani Maani, "'Some Answered Questions' and Its Compiler," *Lights of 'Irfán* 18 (January 1, 2017): 437.

### CASE STUDY 5: Two Souls alas! The beliefs and missions of Father Yves de la Brière (1877–1941)

As an example of how faith may inspire political worldview and social engagement, Father Yves Leroy de la Brière stands out as an especially interesting case, uniting seemingly irreconcilable elements of religiously inspired humanitarianism and universalism with conservative nationalism. Born in Vif, Département Isère, in 1877, as the son of publicist and former Subprefect of Baugé, Leon Leroy de la Brière, he joined the Society of Jesus aged 23, in 1894.<sup>68</sup> The young priest immersed himself in the study of the humanities and authored a great number of books on ecclesiastic history, receiving three separate licentiates in philology, history and law. In 1909 he became an editorial member of the widely read Jesuit journal *Études*, where he consolidated his uncompromising pacifism.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, when Pope Benedict XV sought to mediate between the belligerent parties on all sides of the First World War, Brière took the Papist side in what became a major internal conflict for the Catholic Church.<sup>70</sup> Since the beginning of the interwar order, he was a strong supporter of the League of Nations and the institutionalisation of Human Rights and in 1920 was made Professor on the Christian origins of human rights at the Institut Catholique de Paris by Cardinal Alfred Baudrillard and, in subsequence, frequently invited as a guest expert by international institutions such as The Hague Academy of International Law and the European Carnegie Centre.<sup>71</sup> Belonging to the older generation of French Geneva correspondents, he was accredited to the League Assembly as a correspondent for *Études* and, in 1923 and 1926 respectively, for *Libre Parole* and *Semaine Sociale*. For *Études* he returned to Geneva eleven times over the 1920s and 1930s and also wrote a longer text on the 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly of 1932. In 1932, 1933 and 1937 he was also a member of the French delegation.<sup>72</sup>

However, despite his internationalist and legal humanitarian engagement, Brière also showed a certain openness towards the neo-royalist, anti-Semitic and racist-nationalist philosophy of Charles Maurras and his *Action Française* movement and was a friend of fellow priest and documented Maurras-admirer Pedro Descoqs.<sup>73</sup> Although Maurras and his followers were not, strictly speaking, Fascists, *Action Française* had a favourable view of totalitarianism in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Hungary, of German anti-Semitism, and, later, the Vichy regime.<sup>74</sup> This casts a new light on Brière's pacifism and the total absence of information on his whereabouts and activities around 1940. Cutting short this, admittedly brief, but relevant final part of the priest's life, Paul Duclos in his entry for Brière in the encyclopaedia for "the religious world in contemporary France" simply writes that "the war shattered his efforts for peace and,

<sup>68</sup> Paul Duclos, "La Brière, Yves Leroy De," in *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine*, ed. Yves Marie Hilaire and Jean Marie Mayeur (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985); Céline Lambert, "Les sous-préfets de Baugé," in *Les préfets de Maine-et-Loire*, ed. Jean-Luc Marais, Histoire (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Duclos, "La Brière, Yves Leroy De."

<sup>70</sup> Duclos; Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Duclos, "La Brière, Yves Leroy De."

<sup>72</sup> Yves de La Brière, *La 12e Assemblée de la Société des Nations (septembre 1931)* (Anvers, 1931).

<sup>73</sup> Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism*, 213; Pedro Descoqs, *A travers l'oeuvre de M. Maurras* (Paris: Beauchesne et Cie, 1911).

<sup>74</sup> Pierre Milza, *Fascisme français: passé et présent* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 54–56, 119–21, 228–30.



[ during a lecturing tour in Latin America, it was sudden death”.<sup>75</sup> Brière died of unknown causes in San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina, in February 1941.

### 3.2 Political affiliations

Logically, correspondents’ political affiliations are on record in cases where they had political functions or were otherwise outspoken about their leanings. In some cases, however, political views can be derived from the papers the journalists worked for, although this information must be considered to be less reliable, as demonstrated by the example of the liberal feminist Geneviève Tabouis, who wrote for the right-wing *Petite Gironde* and *Petit Marseillais*, or the anarchist Jean Goldschild, who frequently reported from Geneva for several French outlets, including the Fascist Paul Ferdonet’s agency *Prima Presse*, which has been described to have channelled propaganda content created by the Germany Nazi-government.<sup>76</sup>

Among the journalists with safely recognised political leanings, Socialists and Social Democrats, along with left-wing liberals make up the largest group. Beyond this (admittedly quite widely defined) group, political leanings strongly diverge depending on their national contexts. Only two French correspondents, Bertrand de Jouvenel and Richard Chapon, have been identified as liberals, as opposed to the British cohort, where liberals make up the second largest grouping. Among the French, this second place (albeit only consisting of 13 individuals) is instead made up of right-wing extremists.<sup>77</sup> Among the British cohort only two individuals seem to share similar convictions without reservations: *Daily Mail* reporters Harold Cardozo and George Ward Price. The German case, of course, is different in this respect. Before 1933 German media organisations represented in Geneva were mostly of a moderately conservative nature, followed by liberal and Social Democratic or Socialist publications. With the Nazi *Machtergreifung* in 1933 German journalism became officially “*gleichgeschaltet*”, meaning that editorial departments that were not in line with the political premises of the Nazi government were closed down or put under direct control of the Ministry for Propaganda. As a result, from 1932 onwards the numbers of German press representatives in Geneva kept dwindling, with only supporters of the Hitler government remaining and the original collective of correspondents being almost completely replaced by 1934. Where in the early 1920s the official lists of accredited journalists published in the LNOJSS had included a separate category for Russian journalists exiled by the Bolsheviks, German exile journalism is remarkably absent from the League after 1933, perhaps mirroring the hesitancy to alienate Germany (which was relevant politically as well as in sheer numbers) that also pervaded the international journalists’ organisation Fédération Internationale des Journalistes (FIJ).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Duclos, “La Brière, Yves Leroy De.”

<sup>76</sup> Pascal Ory, *Les collaborateurs, 1940-1945* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 17.

<sup>77</sup> Though this tally of political factions among the Geneva correspondents represents a basis for the biographical case studies, it should here be noted that they may be biased by the conservation and availability of source material as well as by the research approach. Left-wing and specifically moderate Socialist organisations have put considerable effort into recording the exploits of their erstwhile adherents and also into making that information publicly available. This is less true for extremist organisations, especially, for obvious reasons, those of the far right, and specifically those active in continental Europe during the 1930s; but it also seems generally less common among right-wing movements overall, including mainstream conservative parties. In the case of France, clear distinctions are complicated further since proven and convicted collaborators with the Nazi occupiers or the authoritarian régime under Philippe Pétain have been classified as right-wing (though not necessarily as extremists). While French anti-Fascists would probably agree with that assumption, it should be noted that it may be unfair in individual cases and prone to skew the numbers, inflating the radical right-wing faction among the French correspondents.

<sup>78</sup> Beyersdorf, “First Professional International.”

For many of the journalists, specific political positions beyond the party spectrum have been identified. These include feminism, which will be discussed in more detail later on, anti-Fascism, anti-nationalism and anti-totalitarianism, and pacifism. All national cohorts also include a small number of vocal Zionists. Those, along with most of the pacifists and anti-Fascists, are based, broadly speaking, in the left-wing political spectrum. Of course, even here there are certain national differences to be expected. For example, where anti-Fascism in the British Empire generally had its roots in left-wing political movements, in France it paired as easily with conservatism as with Socialism, a phenomenon that would be amplified later through the politically heterogeneous resistance to the German occupation and the Vichy government. However, there are also less expected political pairings, such as conservative feminism like that of Christabel Pankhurst or Margaret Rhondda, or right-wing pacifism, as embodied by Yves de la Brière. Even the originally Zionist idea of a Jewish state in Palestine finds adherents among conservative anti-Semites, a notable example being that of the former *Times* editor and, at the time, editor of the otherwise comparatively progressive *Review of Reviews*, Henry Wickham Steed, who reported from Geneva himself, for his *Review of Reviews* during the second half of the 1920s, and also occasionally for the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times*.

#### 4. Political engagement

The League was not least a transnational project of liberalist self-assertion, against the newly-arisen Bolshevism of the Soviet empire and, later and less successfully, against Western European Fascist ideologies.<sup>79</sup> Yet, as we have seen, visitors to the Geneva Assembly represented more or less the entire political spectrum. The special form of diplomacy that developed over the years, uniting the original ideals of Wilsonian “open diplomacy” in public meetings with the continued discussion of delicate political issues in powwows behind closed doors,<sup>80</sup> it foreshadowed the situation in Cold War non-aligned states that fuelled the imagination of writers like Ian Fleming and John le Carré. The political neutrality of Geneva did, of course, at times prove fragile, as when, in 1937, it expelled the exiled Italian anti-Fascist Carlo Emanuele A’Prato, who had been reporting regularly from the League Assembly for ten years for a variety of newspapers, including several Parisian papers, the *Journal des Nations*, the *Daily Herald* and the *New York Times*. A’Prato had enjoyed political asylum in the city, under the condition that he did not engage in any political activity that could negatively influence Swiss foreign relations.<sup>81</sup> “The pretext,” as Italian historian Nanda Torcellan puts it, “was trivial”: apparently, financial support from the Spanish Consul that A’Prato had accepted in the name of the Geneva-based *Journal des Nations* had been interpreted by the authorities as political corruption.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003), 82; Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, 12–13.

<sup>80</sup> For a more detailed analyses of diplomatic communication and its institutional conceptualisation in the League apparatus, see Averbeck-Lietz in this volume.

<sup>81</sup> Letter addressed to Giuseppe Motta from Clarence Streit, 31 December 1936, United Nations Archives Geneva (UNAG), IAJ/Pp14/16, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/hwfg-rkzt-xzsc>.

The protest of his prolific colleague Clarence Streit of the *New York Times* and other journalists remained unsuccessful against the determination of the right-wing conservative foreign minister Giuseppe Motta.<sup>82</sup>

But the Geneva of the 1920s and 1930s still allowed individuals from opposing camps to meet and mingle. Journalists, especially, frequently appearing under pseudonyms, not only used this exchange to research stories to report home but also to lobby officials and diplomats in political contexts. The seat of the League was a stage for political satirical stunts such as exiled Alexander Natan interviewing Joseph Goebbels, disguised as a British admirer<sup>83</sup>, and served as a backdrop for the spy novels of a certain Peter Oldfield, a pseudonym for League officials Per Jacobsson and Vernon Oldfield Bartlett.<sup>84</sup> It was also the site of the actual or alleged real-life agent activity, as in the case of Charles Howard-Ellis, a former Vice-Consul in Berlin who, under the cover of writing for the *Morning Post*, worked as an agent for British foreign intelligence in Turkey and across the Balkans, as well as in Paris, Geneva and Vienna throughout the 1920s.<sup>85</sup> Though he also authored a book on *The Origin, Structure and Working of the League of Nations*<sup>86</sup>, at the League Assembly he is accredited only once, in 1929, as a correspondent for *Central Press*. Another prolific personality worthy of literal fame was *Daily Herald* foreign editor, husband of fellow league correspondent Monica Ewer, and co-founder of the British Communist Party, William Norman Ewer. Having reported from the Peace Conference and returning to Geneva as a regular from 1932 to 1938, Ewer, under the pseudonym Kenneth Milton, has been described as “a prime mover in a Russian intelligence organisation in London”<sup>87</sup>. Even Ewer’s predecessor at the *Daily Herald*, George Slocombe, who reported from the League Assemblies from 1925 through 1930, was implicated. Apparently, however, Slocombe’s involvement was never proven.

Indeed, actual or alleged political affiliation among journalists at times clashed. An especially well-documented case of conflict between two veteran reporters occurred in 1933: Max Beer a member of the League Information Section, who had had been reporting from the Geneva for the German agency WTB and several conservative German newspapers, had clearly been deeply hurt by his fellow journalistic veteran Henry Ruffin of the agency *Havas* (WTB’s main competitor alongside British *Reuters*).<sup>88</sup> Ruffin, Beer ragingly complains to the IAJA, had spun “most odious intrigues” against him and should hence be excluded from the association.<sup>89</sup> It turns out that Ruffin, who denied the accusation, had allegedly suggested that his colleague was clandestinely working

<sup>82</sup> Torcellan, “Per una Biografia di Carlo a Prato,” 14; Letter addressed to Giuseppe Motta from Clarence Streit, 31 December 1936, UNAG, IAJ/Pp14/16.

<sup>83</sup> Andreas Meyhoff, “Alex Natan: Der jüdische Weltrekordler, der die Nazis ausspionierte,” *Der Spiegel*, January 21, 2020, sec. Sport.

<sup>84</sup> Oldfield, *The Death of a Diplomat*; Peter Oldfield, *The Alchemy Murder* (London: Constable, 1929). Bartlett, in turn, was also accredited to the Assembly as a journalist.

<sup>85</sup> James Cotton, “‘The Standard Work in English on the League’ and Its Authorship: Charles Howard Ellis, an Unlikely Australian Internationalist,” *History of European Ideas* 42, no. 8 (November 16, 2016): 1089–1104.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Howard Ellis, *The Origin, Structure & Working of the League of Nations* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1928).

<sup>87</sup> “William Norman EWER”, The National Archives, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11090321>.

<sup>88</sup> It stands to reason to assume that the person in question was Henry Ruffin senior rather than his homonymous son, given that the latter only joined the *Havas* team in 1936.

<sup>89</sup> Letter addressed to Jean Guignebert from Max Beer, 9 November 1933, UNAG, IAJ/Pp12/1, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/correspondence-with-members-1932-1934>.

for the Nazi authorities. Whether Ruffin was indeed excluded as a result of the quarrel remains undocumented, but it seems unlikely given his explicit apology and the friendly tone employed by the General Secretary of the Association, Jean Guignebert, who, unusually, addresses Ruffin with the amicable *tu* instead of the formal *vous*.<sup>90</sup>

### CASE STUDY 6: Merchant, civil servant, propagandist – The case of Mano Maleroff<sup>91</sup>

During the first half of the 1910s Mano Maleroff, born to a Jewish family in Bulgaria, had belonged to the sizable Bulgarian diaspora in France, where he lived as a merchant trading in wines and spirits. In March 1912 he had been assigned the title of honorary commercial attaché to the Bulgarian Legation in Paris, without any remuneration and without the right to claim even expenses for accommodation.<sup>92</sup> According to an internal memoir signed by the Director of the Political Department at the ministry in autumn 1915, his services apparently included helping Bulgarian citizens to escape France after Bulgaria had joined the war on the side of the Axis Powers. He was accordingly promoted to the post of Honorary Bulgarian Vice-Consul in Paris.<sup>93</sup> Apparently, however, this nominal upgrade was not enough to secure Maleroff's allegiance to the Bulgarian cause: At least from February 1916 onwards Maleroff turned into an informant for the French intelligence service<sup>94</sup> and, dodging his draft, later that year moved to neutral Geneva. Trading in Spanish wines and under the pretence of being about to become a Bulgarian consul to Geneva, Maleroff then, according to a confidential diplomatic report, conspired with the dubious Bulgarian dissident Leon Savadjian,<sup>95</sup> providing information about Bulgarians living in Switzerland to the French intelligence and authoring anti-Bulgarian war propaganda which was then distributed via Savadjian's *Agence Balkanique*.

Though his original motivation is unclear, Maleroff's anti-Bulgarian positions survived the war and the Peace Treaty and find expression by his contributions to the newspaper *Éclair*, for which he was accredited to the Assembly in the early 1920s. In an article published in *Éclair* during the first Assembly of the League Maleroff takes position against the new Bulgarian government and the country's League membership and declares he was going to present a memorandum to the effect that the Third Commission delayed its decision until a new

<sup>90</sup> Letter addressed to Henry Ruffin from Jean Guignebert, 9 November 1933, UNAG, IAJ/Pp12/1, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/correspondence-with-members-1932-1934>; Letter addressed to Jean Guignebert from Henry Ruffin, 10 November 1933, UNAG, IAJ/Pp12/1.

<sup>91</sup> The authors extend their sincere thanks to Maya Nyagolova in Sofia, Bulgaria, for researching this case.

<sup>92</sup> Personal file of Mano Maleroff, 1912, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Cults, F 176 k, Op. 18, N 740; see also Mano Maleroff, "La situation véritable de la Bulgarie," *L'Éclair*, November 5, 1920.

<sup>93</sup> Bulgarian Legation in Paris, F 382 k, Op. 2, N 489, 1/21.

<sup>94</sup> G. D. Shkundin, *Разделяй и властвуй! Вопрос о сепаратном мире с Болгарией в политике держав Антанты (октябрь 1915 - март 1916 г.)* (Moscow: National Committee of Russian Historians, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> According to official reports, Savadjian offered his services to almost all Balkan governments during World War I. It is well documented that he was paid by the Greek and the Serb governments and tried to squeeze money from the Bulgarian government as well in order to publish favourable articles in his *Agence Balkanique*. Details about Savadjian's role and work during the war are documented in Ivan Ilchev, *Родината ми, права или не! външнополитическа пропаганда на балканските страни, 1821-1923* (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press., 1995).

government would be formed.<sup>96</sup> His efforts clearly remained futile since Bulgaria joined the League in 1920.

As Bulgarian researcher Maya Nyagolova comments, at the time there were dozens of Bulgarians (journalists, politicians, artists, scholars) who, during World War I and the interwar period, contributed articles to newspapers from France, Great Britain, Austria, Germany, Belgium, and the US, some of them as formal correspondents. Maleroff may be considered one of them, although he was not as prominent as many others. While part of his political activity seems to be of an opportunistic nature, he was probably genuinely opposing the government of the left-wing Bulgarian Agrarian National Union Party (in government 1920–1923) and its Prime Minister, Aleksandar Stamboliyski, which led to his opposition to Bulgarian League membership and his reaching out to the responsible committee and distributing his article amongst the national delegations to the League.<sup>97</sup>

#### 4.1 Activism, lobbyism and international civil society

Associations in support of the League were an important institution for many of the correspondents; and this goes especially for the British League of Nations Union, which significantly predated the League itself and was rooted in even older predecessor organisations, the League of Nations Society and the Free Nations Society.<sup>98</sup> British journalists especially travelled up and down the country and even abroad to lecture on the League system and its organs and workings. One of the most relevant civil society organisations for journalists active in Geneva was the IAJA which, in close cooperation with the League Secretariat, facilitated mutual exchange and the situation and infrastructure for the collective of Geneva journalists. In cooperation with the ILO and the League's Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation, it also paved the way for the FIJ as the first international journalists' union.<sup>99</sup> It is especially the later functionaries of the IAJA, members of the old guard like Robert Dell (*Guardian* correspondent in the early 1920s and throughout the 1930s and IAJA president in 1936), Harold C. James (*Daily Mail* correspondent 1923 to 1938 and IAJA Vice President 1938), Honorio Roigt (correspondent for the *Havas* South Americas service 1931–1934, member of the World Press Conference preparatory committee and IAJA president 1936–1938) and Jean Guignebert (correspondent for the *Petit Journal* 1924–1931) that best fit the League's 1928 characterisation discussed above. But journalistic civil society went beyond membership with professional organisations. Politically active individuals, like Rvd. John H. Harris (who frequently visited the Assembly from 1922 to 1938 for *Court Journal* and the religious publications *Christian World*, *The Friend and Truth*) of the *Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society*,<sup>100</sup> or A. E. Blackburn (reporter in Geneva for *Akkari* in 1924 and 1925 and the *Ceylon Daily News* 1928 and 1929) from the International Federation for the Protection of Native Races Against Alcoholism. A group that

<sup>96</sup> Maleroff, "La situation véritable de la Bulgarie."

<sup>97</sup> Maya Nyagolova, "Re: Mano Maleroff (League of Nations Project)," e-mail to A. Gellrich, September 4, 2019.; see also Mari A. Firkatian, *Diplomati, mechtateli, patrioti: Bŭlgariia i Evropa prez pogleda na semeistvo Stanchovi (Diplomats and Dreamers: The Stancioff Family in Bulgarian History)* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2009), 282.

<sup>98</sup> Helen McCarthy, "Leading from the Centre: The League of Nations Union, Foreign Policy and 'Political Agreement' in the 1930s," *Contemporary British History* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 533.

<sup>99</sup> Beyersdorf, "First Professional International."

<sup>100</sup> Harris, a former missionary who had returned from the Congo horrified and politicised by Belgian colonial brutality, was a frequent petitioner to the League's Mandates Commission, as an advocate for the rights of colonised peoples. Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 78–80.

proved especially active and visible were the feminists involved in civil society organisations, such as Equal Rights International (ERI) for the Geneva-based WILPF.<sup>101</sup> Notably, not all feminist League correspondents were female. Examples are the British-American Golf champion, war correspondent and editor Henry James Wigham, who reported from the 1935 Assembly for the American *Scribner's Magazin*, and the teacher, Liberal Member of Parliament and *League of Nations Union* member Geoffrey Le Measurer Mander, the first United Kingdom (UK) industrialist to introduce the 40-hour week and Geneva reporter for *Express and Star* in 1926 and 1930.<sup>102</sup> As the home base of WILPF as well as the Red Cross, the League and its affiliates, the ILO, the League of Nations Health Office (LNHO; the predecessor of the WHO), and the Nansen Office (predecessor organisation of the UN High Commission for Refugees), Geneva became a hub for humanitarians to network and drive on their agenda with politicians, diplomats and civil society figures from (more or less) all over the world.

### CASE STUDY 7: The tireless humanitarian – Dr. Hilda Clark (1881–1955)

Hilda Clark was born as the daughter of women's rights activist Helen Priestman Bright and William Stephens Clark, of the *Clarks* shoe dynasty, in 1881, in Street, Somerset, South-West England. She was raised a principled Quaker and, through her mother's side, a third generation liberal. At a time when respected universities like Oxford still barred women from most study programmes and, before 1920, would not allow them to graduate, Clark studied medicine in Birmingham and London, earning a degree and qualifying as a doctor in 1908.<sup>103</sup> She made a name for herself early on, conducting a study on tuberculosis and working as a medical officer in tuberculin dispensaries in Street and Portsmouth. Around the same time she also became house surgeon of the Birmingham Maternity Hospital, which is likely where she met her lifelong friend and close companion,<sup>104</sup> the midwife Edith Pye, whom Clark lovingly called

<sup>101</sup> For a detailed account of feminists and equal rights initiatives and progress in the League framework, see Carol Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality: Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 219–45; Susan Zimmermann, "Equality of Women's Economic Status? A Major Bone of Contention in the International Gender Politics Emerging During the Interwar Period," *The International History Review* 41, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 200–227.

<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Mander, "Last of the Midland Radicals: Sir Geoffrey Mander, Liberal MP for Wolverhampton East 1929–45," *Journal of Liberal History* 53 (2006): 26–32.

<sup>103</sup> Marion Shaw, *The Clear Stream: A Life of Winifred Holtby* (London: Virago, 1999), 98; Jenny Uglow, Frances Hinton, and Maggy Hendry, eds., "Hilda Clark (1881–1955)," in *The Northeastern Dictionary of Women's Biography*, 3rd ed (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999).

<sup>104</sup> A number of independent biographical sources on British feminists of the time refer to shared accommodation – in itself a less remarkable feature, that is, however, at times accompanied by more or less explicit suggestions of romantic aspects. Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain are known for their close friendship and long-term co-habitation, and Hilda Clark, before meeting her soul-mate Edith Pye, shared accommodation with Kathleen D'Olier Courtney. Margareth Rhondda shared a London flat first with Helen Archdale and later with Theodora Bosanquet. While it is arguably of subordinate importance how these relationships may be referred to, it should be kept in mind that given the social norms of the time, women would have found it quite hard to find male companions who accepted and fully appreciated them as equals, socially and intellectually. Indeed, Monica Whately openly lived and promoted Lesbianism as a dimension of female emancipation. In other cases, however, interpretations may well be warped by the fantasies of male historians or even the attempt to discredit female cultural or intellectual contributions. Archie Potts, "Monica Whately (1889–1960)," in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. Keith Gildart and David Howell, vol. XIV (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Alison Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Catherine Clay, "Re-Visiting the Friendship of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby: A 'Trade' in Work and Desire," *Women's History Review* 12, no. 2 (December 20, 2006): 309–28; Shaw, *The Clear Stream*; Cheryl Law, *Women, a Modern Political Dictionary* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 42, 147.

her “Twin-soul”.<sup>105</sup> As war broke out, Pye and Dr. Clark, who were both pronounced pacifists, lobbied with the Society of Friends (the organised Quaker community) for the establishment of the “Friends’ War Victims’ Relief Committee” to organise humanitarian aid for the civilian population of France. Both women then travelled to Northern France and established the emergency maternity hospital in Châlons-sur-Marne.<sup>106</sup> As the war ended, the suffering in its aftermath continued. Consequently, Clark and Pye turned their tireless attention from France to war-ravaged Austria, organising famine relief and medical services for children in Vienna until 1922, reportedly working for 15 hours a day, and continuing with similar projects for refugees in Poland, Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Yugoslavia throughout the 1920s.<sup>107</sup>

From 1927 until mid-1935 Dr. Clark frequently visited the League of Nations, reporting from the Assembly for the WILPF publication *Newssheet*, the *Birmingham Gazette* and the *Farnham Herald*, while lobbying with diplomats for disarmament and collective security and serving as chairperson of WILPF’s Anti-Opium Committee<sup>108</sup>. As the Spanish civil war broke out, in 1936, her resources were once more invested in active help, this time assisting Edith Pye on the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees, and, after 1938, in organising escape routes for Austrian Jews fleeing the German occupants.<sup>109</sup> Clark died of Parkinson’s in 1955. Edith Pye, who died in 1965, was buried in the same grave.<sup>110</sup>

## 4.2 Women activists in Geneva

Since few women made it to positions where they could openly report in newspapers on world political events, these few were often especially active and outspoken. Yet, where at least 17 of the 51 women from the British cohort may fairly be labelled “feminists”, only four of their French and two of their German counterparts can reliably be categorised as such. Some of these women belonged to the first or second generation of suffragettes and suffragists who had campaigned for peace, civil rights and women’s suffrage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as Helena Swanwick or Helen A. Archdale. Others belonged to a separate, younger generation, who either, like Betty Archdale or Christabel Pankhurst, were the daughters of suffrage-veterans or, like Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, had been politically activated through first-hand experience of the first World War. Indeed, as nursing was one of the first officially recognised and condoned legitimate professional employments of women, the war, somewhat tragically, played an important role with the empowerment of female employees.<sup>111</sup> In the UK especially, feminist journalists had been engaged in civil society organisations, agitating on both sides of the pacifist-bellacose divide:

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Clark to Pye, 1910, as quoted in Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, 6; “Hilda Clark,” in *The Medical Who’s Who* (London: London & counties press association, ltd, 1914).

<sup>106</sup> Sybil Oldfield, “Hilda Clark,” in *Women Humanitarians: A Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active between 1900 and 1950: Doers of the Word* (London: Continuum, 2001), 44.

<sup>107</sup> Oldfield, 45–46; Uglow, Hinton, and Hendry, “Hilda Clark (1881–1955),” 128.

<sup>108</sup> Oldfield, “Hilda Clark,” 47; Uglow, Hinton, and Hendry, “Hilda Clark (1881–1955),” 128.

<sup>109</sup> Oldfield, “Hilda Clark,” 48.

<sup>110</sup> Oldfield, 48.

<sup>111</sup> It should here be noted that, in contrast to the common narrative of the war perpetuating women’s rights at home, it also contributed to further delaying the introduction of democratic franchise. Kerstin Wolff, “Noch einmal von vorn und neu erzählt. Die Geschichte des Kampfes um das Frauenwahlrecht in Deutschland,” in *Frauenwahlrecht: Demokratisierung Der Demokratie in Deutschland Und Europa*, ed. Hedwig Richter and Kerstin Wolff (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2018), 35–56.

Christabel Pankhurst supported the British war effort<sup>112</sup>, while Ethel Snowden remained an ardent pacifist until the end.<sup>113</sup>

Rather than a formal profession, journalism was often a natural part of political activism, and Geneva a frequently visited place for many of these women, even if (according to the LNOJSS) they only infrequently showed up in their function as correspondents. Instead, politically active women journalists would lobby with League delegates and employees for peace, disarmament, women's rights and empowerment<sup>114</sup>, or even working for the League. Among them were Helena Swanwick, the British delegate and first woman ever to speak before the Assembly, Antoinita Barry, who was a delegate at least at one ILO conference as well as working for and with both the Permanent Mandates Commission and the Temporary Commission on Slavery as an unaffiliated contributor, and Laura Dreyfus-Barney who for many years served on the International Institute on Educational Cinematography<sup>115</sup> and on the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. Dreyfus-Barney, too, had been a nurse with the American Ambulance Service and a delegate for the American Red Cross, responsible for refugee services in Southern France during World War I and, as a founder of, and campaigner and liaison officer for several civil society organisations, poured much energy into her diplomatic engagement with the League. The central organisation for women activists in Geneva, beside the ILO and the League itself, was of course WILPF, which had been co-founded by Kathleen D'Olier Courtney, a co-organisier (amongst other humanitarian exploits) of Hilda Clark's and Edith Pye's work for refugees in Austria, Poland and Greece<sup>116</sup>, and a correspondent at the Assembly for WILPF's *News Sheet* in the late 1920s and for the *Wilts, Hants and Berks Gazette* in the late 1930s. WILPF would later be presided over by Kathleen Innes and Gertrud Baer, both also accredited journalists to the League.

In France, Britain and Germany alike, women's political activism was not an exclusive domain of the political left and, although there were outspoken socialists like Winifred Holtby, Hungarian activist Vilma Glücklich (who reported from Geneva for the German feminist journal *Die Frau im Staat*), or Alice La Mazière (League reporter for *Paris-Midi* in 1925) in France, the core clientele of women's political struggles could be found among Liberal bourgeois circles like those of the cosmopolitan Antonina Vallentin, born in Polish Lwów (today Lviv, Ukraine) in 1894, who reported from Geneva from 1926 to 1928 for several German news agencies, worked at Gustav Stresemann's foreign ministry, and was married to French Liberal Politician and League civil servant Julien Luchaire, the father of Vallentin's fellow League journalist (and later Vichy collaborator) Jean Luchaire. There were also notable conservative personalities, such as Christabel Pankhurst, who reported from Geneva for the *Sunday Chronicle* in 1927 and was a member of the British Conservative party. Others, like *Time and Tide* editor Margaret Mackworth (Viscountess Rhondda) turned increasingly conservative after their primary aim of democratic franchise had been achieved.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Thane, "Christabel (Harriette) Pankhurst."

<sup>113</sup> Law, *Women, a Modern Political Dictionary*, 135–36.

<sup>114</sup> Carol Miller, "'Geneva – the Key to Equality': Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 219–45.

<sup>115</sup> See the chapter of Jürgen Wilke in this volume.

<sup>116</sup> Sybil Oldfield, "Kathleen D'Olier Courtney," in *Women Humanitarians: A Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active between 1900 and 1950: Doers of the Word* (London: Continuum, 2001), 52.

<sup>117</sup> Shaw, *The Clear Stream*, 141–44.



### CASE STUDY 8: A Testament of Friendship – Vera Brittain (1893–1970) and Winifred Holtby (1898–1935)

As female journalists of the 1920s go, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain certainly belong among the more prominent, though today they are rather known for their literary than their journalistic exploits. Part of the second generation of feminists, who consisted of women too young to have played an active role in the struggle for suffrage, they had both profited from a liberal upbringing in different parts of the British countryside. Their political activation came with the cataclysm of the world war. Having lost both her brother and her fiancé in the war and, subsequently, having her own traumatising experiences as a nurse at field hospitals in Salonika and France, Vera Brittain contributed much to British and international commemorative culture through her war memoir *A Testament of Youth*, published in 1933.<sup>118</sup> Winifred Holtby, though less directly hit by the tragedy of the war, also volunteered as a nurse, though her sojourn in France was much shorter. Along with, among others, Dorothy L. Sayers, both were also among the first women allowed to matriculate at Somerville College, Oxford, from where they graduated in history shortly after the war. Having met at university, the two women famously developed a close friendship and for many years shared a household,<sup>119</sup> even after Brittain's 1925 marriage to political scientist George Gordon Catlin (who in 1927 also reported from Geneva for the *Yorkshire Post*, based in Holtby's home district).<sup>120</sup> Besides writing for a number of newspapers, chiefly the *Guardian* and the feminist paper *Time and Tide*, for which Brittain reported from Geneva in 1923, 1924, 1926, and 1929 and Holtby in 1925, both women were also very active in civil society organisations, specifically the *League of Nations Union*, for which they went, as Brittain put it, "piping for peace"<sup>121</sup>, travelling across Europe, lecturing on the League and connected issues. Untypically for the overwhelmingly liberal pro-League movement, Holtby and Brittain became committed Socialists.<sup>122</sup> They passionately engaged with British feminism as, among other commitments, members of the *Six Point Group* initiated by *Time and Tide* founder and League journalist, Margaret Mackworth who, though reportedly disliked by Brittain, was also a close friend of Holtby's.<sup>123</sup> Inspired mostly by observations during her 1926 trip to South Africa, Holtby (and, later also Brittain), was unusually progressive in her denunciation of imperial oppression and active in the fight for colonial independence, Bantu labour rights and the abolition of racial policies.<sup>124</sup> Diagnosed in 1931 with chronic nephritis (then referred to as Bright's disease), a consuming kidney inflammation that at the time remained largely untreatable, Winifred Holtby died aged 37 in 1935, leaving a legacy of modern literary classics and her organisation Friends of Africa. Vera Brittain went on to become a cultural celebrity and a prolific supporter of nuclear disarmament. She died in 1970, aged 83, in Wimbledon.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925* (London: Virago, 1933).

<sup>119</sup> It should be noted that Vera Brittain explicitly refuted the suggestion that her relationship with Winifred Holtby was of a romantic nature.

<sup>120</sup> Shaw, *The Clear Stream*, 97–127.

<sup>121</sup> Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 490–556.

<sup>122</sup> Brittain, 528.

<sup>123</sup> Shaw, *The Clear Stream*.

<sup>124</sup> Susan Pedersen, "Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations," *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (October 1, 2008): 188–207.

<sup>125</sup> Law, *Women, a Modern Political Dictionary*, 34.

a.



*Winifred Holtby (left) and Vera Brittain in the early 1930s. (watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs, Arne Gellrich)*

After the interbellum years many feminists remained politically engaged and involved in political activism and humanism. To give some examples, Laura Dreyfus-Barney became the Information Officer of the American War Hospital Committee during the Second World War<sup>126</sup>, Hebe Spaul helped Czech journalists to escape Nazi terror<sup>127</sup>, and Louise Weiss went underground in France as a member of the *Résistance* and later became an active politician.<sup>128</sup> Like the war of the late 1910s, the Second World War and its aftermath induced female emancipation in many places, as resources and male labour power were bound (and consumed) in the conflict. By the 1940s, women's rights, at least in the Anglophone hemisphere, had increased to such a degree that second-generation feminist and famed cricket champion Betty Archdale served as an officer with the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) in Singapore, Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), Kenya and the Persian Gulf.<sup>129</sup> But, once more, such developments came at the great cost of war, costs which had to be paid for, to even higher degree than earlier, by civilians.

### 4.3 Careers in politics, diplomacy and civil service

For three years, from 1935 to 1938, Ramon de Alderete reported from Geneva for the French agency *Havas*. But the Spanish aristocrat had another, much more prolific task: He served as a special secretary to hearing-impaired erstwhile heir to the Spanish throne, Don Jaime de Borbón.<sup>130</sup> Don Ramon was not the only French correspondent in Geneva also playing a political role. Indeed, many of his colleagues pursued careers in politics or diplomacy or had done so before they switched over to journalism. Bertrand de Jouvenel, for example, had been private secretary to Edvard Beneš<sup>131</sup>, and Fernand de Brinon, a personal friend of von Ribbentrop's and one of the few foreign journalists to interview Hitler, went on to become the ambassador of France's authoritarian head of government.<sup>132</sup> While de Brinon may be deemed the most controversial Geneva correspondent to serve France as Ambassador, he was not the only one. The French journalistic cohort contains four more from the diplomatic staff. Wladimir d'Ormesson was named Plenipotentiary Ambassador to the Holy See in 1940 and would, interrupted by the occupation and the Vichy-Régime, keep that role until 1956.<sup>133</sup> To his staff in Rome there belonged another League journalist, the Dominican priest Joseph Delos.<sup>134</sup> Examples of diplomats and civil servants from an older generation were Corsican economist Etienne Antonelli (born in 1879), correspondent in Geneva in 1924 for *Lyon Républicain*, who had been an attaché to the French embassy in Russia in 1917/1918 and also a French delegate to the Colonial Committee at the Paris Peace Conference<sup>135</sup>, and Wolf von Dewall (born in 1882), present at the Assemblies almost constantly from 1924 to 1931 for the conservative *Frankfurter Zeitung*, who, as a result of European involvement in Chinese politics after the Sino-British wars, had served as a civil

<sup>126</sup> "Laura Dreyfus Barney," in *Biographical Encyclopedia of the World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Institute for Research in Biography, 1946).

<sup>127</sup> Bruno Martuzāns, "Hebe Spaul," ROOTS=SAKNES, 2002.

<sup>128</sup> European Union, "Louise Weiss: Lifelong Champion of European Values and Women's Rights," European Union, EU pioneers.

<sup>129</sup> Law, *Women, a Modern Political Dictionary*, 15.

<sup>130</sup> José María Zavala, "Eulalia de Borbón y la Gestapo," *La Razón*, July 31, 2015, sec. Actualidad.

<sup>131</sup> Sneha Girab, "Bertrand de Jouvenel," in *Alchetron - Free Social Encyclopedia*, August 18, 2017.

<sup>132</sup> Corinna Franz, *Ferdinand de Brinon und die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen 1918–1945* (Bonn: Bouvier-Verlag, 2000).

<sup>133</sup> "Wladimir d'ORMESSON."

<sup>134</sup> Marie Monnet, "DELOS Joseph-Thomas," *Dictionnaire biographique des frères prêcheurs. Dominicains des provinces françaises (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, March 21, 2016.

<sup>135</sup> "Étienne Antonelli," in *Nouveau dictionnaire national des contemporains, 1961–1962* (Paris: Le Nouveau dictionnaire national des contemporains, 1962).

servant in China during the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, building up the country's postal system in 1914 and representing China at the Universal Postal Congress in Madrid, before turning to journalism during the First World War.<sup>136</sup> Being ten years younger, another German, Hans Huyn (born in 1894), already belonged to the next generation of journalists as well as diplomats: Hyun reported for WTB from the Assembly of 1925, and while also working as chief editor for the Westphalian *Münstersche Zeitung* from 1928, he became a diplomat in Warsaw in 1927, first for Austria, then Germany. Distancing himself from the Nazi government in Germany, he reaffiliated with Austria in 1934 and was sent to London, where he worked until 1938, when Austria was annexed by Germany. From his English exile he engaged in German language programmes by the BBC and helped organising the emigration of Austrian dissidents. In 1940 Huyn emigrated to Brazil. After the war he returned to Germany and served as a foreign relations advisor for the German conservative Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) parties.<sup>137</sup>

Illustrating the co-evolutive professionalisation of public relations and journalism<sup>138</sup>, a number of the correspondents also worked in administrative jobs in institutional public communication. René Kraus, for example, who reported for the *Dr. R. Dammert* publishing house from the 1928 Assembly, also worked as a press officer for German foreign minister and former Chancellor Gustav Stresemann and, later, as public relations councillor for the Austrian government.<sup>139</sup> His colleague Felix von Eckard, born in 1903, correspondent for WTB and *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* in 1927 and 1929 respectively, served as a press attaché for the German legation in Brussels from 1929 to 1932 and, after working as a film author for the Nazi Ministry for Propaganda<sup>140</sup>, would later become Germany's federal chief of press and personal councillor to chancellor Adenauer in the 1950s and, as a member of the CDU, served one term in the German parliament, representing the municipality of Wilhelmshaven.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, it seems that particularly among the younger generations political interest was first explored through journalism, to be later followed by political and diplomatic careers. Walter Reichold, for example, born in 1904, studied law in Heidelberg, Würzburg, Munich and Geneva, receiving a doctorate in 1927. From 1925 to 1928 he reported from the League Assembly for *Landauer Anzeiger*, a local newspaper from his home city of Landau in the Palatinate. He then worked as an advisor for the ILO in Geneva for some time, before, having become an NSDAP party member in 1940, joining the diplomatic service. He went on to becoming German ambassador to Spain in 1944. After the liberation and re-democratisation of Western Germany he remained with the foreign office, serving in the French West African colonies in the 1950s and in the 1960s became ambassador in the newly established republics of Senegal, Mauritania, Ghana and the Republic of the Congo.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>136</sup> "Wolf von Dewall," in *Munzinger Online/Personen-Internationales Biographisches Archiv* (Munzinger Archive GmbH, September 21, 1959).

<sup>137</sup> "Hans Huyn," in *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933–1945* (München: K. G. Saur, December 19, 2016).

<sup>138</sup> Philomen Schönhagen and Mike Meissner, "The Co-Evolution of Public Relations and Journalism: A First Contribution to Its Systematic Review," *Public Relations Review* 42, no. 5 (December 1, 2016): 748–58.

<sup>139</sup> Eduardo Weinfeld, ed., "René Kraus," in *Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana: El Pueblo Judío en el Pasado y el Presente, su Historia, su Religión, sus Costumbres, su Literatura, su Arte, sus Hombres, su Situación en el Mundo*. (México: Editorial Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, 1951).

<sup>140</sup> "Die hellgraue Eminenz," *Der Spiegel*, February 5, 1957, 6/1957 edition, sec. Politik.

<sup>141</sup> Andreas Grau, "Felix von Eckardt," *Geschichte der CDU*, accessed October 27, 2015, <https://www.kas.de/en/web/geschichte-der-cdu/biogram-detail/-/content/felix-von-eckardt-v1>.

<sup>142</sup> Viktor Carl, "Walter Reichhold," in *Lexikon Pfälzer Persönlichkeiten*, 3rd ed., Palatina (Edenkoben: Hennig Verlag, 2004).

For others, like Liberal politician Walther Schücking, journalism seems to have been more of a side project. A former member of the German delegation in Versailles and an ardent pacifist, and former vice-president of *Deutsche Liga für den Völkerbund*, the German League of Nations association<sup>143</sup>, Schücking reported for *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft* (German Peace Society) from the 1925 Assembly. Five years later, he was appointed the first German judge at the Hague International Court of Justice.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile Abraham Cohen who, apart for his correspondence for the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1922, had also been a delegate to the League Assembly for the Zionist Organisation and a diplomatic officer with the ILO, was engaged with the League's High Commission for Refugees in Geneva.<sup>145</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the permeability between journalism and engagement in the League project itself was greatest at the Information Section of the League Secretariat. At least eleven journalists from our three cohorts also worked for the Information Section. Due to the strict prohibition of League employees to produce journalistic output,<sup>146</sup> there are few cases of journalists reporting from Geneva while also working for the League. It is notable, however, that in most cases they had visited Geneva as journalists before their employment. This suggests that journalism was a way into the League apparatus. Max Beer was a frequent visitor for WTB until 1927, when he entered the service of the Section, and the Egyptian, Geneva-based Paul-Edouard Ganzoni-Lanzone reported for the French *Journal des Débats* once, in 1920, and then worked for the Section for 16 years. Jost Terhaar also reported from the Assembly only once, for *Westdeutsches Volksblatt* in 1927, and from 1928 to 1933 was employed as the head of the Information Section's newly opened Berlin office. Being the heads of the regional offices in London and Paris, Vernon Bartlett and Pierre de Lanux were both also accredited League journalists, with Bartlett reporting for the *Times* in the early 1920s and the *News Chronicle* in the 1930s and de Lanux for French magazines *Vu* and *Europe Nouvelle* in 1934 and 1935. In 1946 de Lanux would be a member of the French delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco.<sup>147</sup>

### CASE STUDY 9: Geneva, Paris, Strasbourg – The undefiable spirit of Louise Weiss (1893–1983)

Louise Weiss was born in Arras, Pas-de-Calais, to a Jewish-Protestant Alsatian family, in 1893, which makes her part of the largest generational cohort of Geneva journalists. Her life represents the perfect example of politically active journalists that came to the League at around the same time as they started their professional careers. Coming from a well-to-do public servant's family, she studied humanities at the Collège Sévigné in Paris and Somerville College, Oxford. Like many of her female compatriots, Louise Weiss volunteered as a nurse during the First World

<sup>143</sup> Martin Otto, "Briefe von Walther Schücking aus Versailles," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 23, 2019; Andreas Thier, "Schücking, Walther Max Adrian," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 23 (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 2007).

<sup>144</sup> Thier, "Schücking, Walther Max Adrian."

<sup>145</sup> Joëlle Zagury, "Albert Cohen, un Hébreu en Helvétie," in *Cahiers Albert Cohen: La géographie imaginaire d'Albert Cohen*, ed. Philippe Zard (Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2013).

<sup>146</sup> See also Averbeck-Lietz in this volume.

<sup>147</sup> Patrick de Lanux, "Pierre de Lanux, un diplomate," Famille de Lanux, accessed January 29, 2022, <https://delanux.fr/pierre-de-lanux-un-diplomate/>.





*Louise Weiss (left) with an unnamed compatriot at a suffrage rally in Paris, 1936. (watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs, Arne Gellrich)*

War and at the same time started writing for *Le Radical* under the pseudonym Louis Lefranc.<sup>148</sup> Straight back from the battlefield, and aged only 25, she founded and directed the newspaper *L'Europe Nouvelle*, for which she later reported from the League Assembly in Geneva from 1924 to 1931.<sup>149</sup>

Deeply engaged in politics, Weiss frequently travelled to Czechoslovakia, where she developed personal ties to Eduard Beneš and Thomas Masaryk, as well as a romantic relationship with the diplomat Milan Stefanik. On a trip to Moscow, where she interviewed Leon Trotsky, she reportedly organised the evacuation of “over 100 French governesses who found themselves trapped in the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution”.<sup>150</sup>

A strong believer in the ideals of the League of Nations, Weiss grew increasingly sceptical in the 1930s. At the time, her main focus lay on the fight for the female suffrage, founding the feminist organisation *La Femme Nouvelle*, and by her engagement for the increasing numbers of refugees fleeing Nazi terror in Central Europe. Not originally in open opposition to the Vichy régime, she cooperated with its humanitarian mission to obtain children's medicine from the US in 1940 but eventually had to go underground to escape the Gestapo. As a member of the *Résistance* from 1942 to 1944 she published the dissident journal *Nouvelle République*.<sup>151</sup>

While her conservative stance on abortion, among other issues, put her at odds with post-war feminisms, Weiss, who had been a sympathiser of the Paneuropa-movement of the 1930s, remained keenly interested in European unification as a secure base for peace. In 1979, almost fifty years after these ideas were first discussed at the League, she would be elected to the European Parliament as a member of Jacques Chirac's conservative Gaullist party.<sup>152</sup> To honour her life-long activism and Europeanism, the parliamentary building in Strasbourg erected in 1999 was named after her.<sup>153</sup>

## 5. League Journalists and the coming war

Though the League of Nations ceased its activity as war broke out once more in Central Europe, the cataclysmic events were foreshadowed by the rise of ultra-nationalist powers in, among other countries, Italy, Poland, Austria, Germany and Spain, as well as internationally condemned but largely inconsequential acts of aggression, notoriously the Japanese and Italian endeavours in Manchuria and Ethiopia. These events impacted even the journalistic environment of the League. For example, the French right-wing journalist and editor of *Action Française*, Claude Jeantet, who reported for the paper *Petit Journal* from the League Assembly in 1935, fell out with the former Director of the League Information Section, Pierre Comert (who, by then, had returned to his old post as Information Director at the Quai D'Orsay), about the journalistic framing of the Nazi

<sup>148</sup> Robert Cornevin, “Louise Weiss (1893–1983),” in *Hommes et destins : dictionnaire biographique d'outre-mer*, ed. Académie des sciences d'outre-mer, Tome 5 (Paris: Académie des sciences d'outre-mer, 1984); Vicki Caron, “Louise Weiss,” in *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women* (Jewish Women's Archive, June 23, 2021).

<sup>149</sup> Cornevin, “Louise Weiss.”

<sup>150</sup> Caron, “Louise Weiss.”

<sup>151</sup> Caron.

<sup>152</sup> Caron.

<sup>153</sup> European Parliament, “EP Buildings to Be Named after Well-Known European Figures,” News report : 18-11-98, *European Parliament*, 1998.

*Machtergreifung* in Germany.<sup>154</sup> The case of the political asylum first granted to the Italian Antifascist Carlo A'Prato and later redrawn by the city of Geneva further illustrates the degree to which realities changed as Europe kept drifting further into the maelstrom of genocidal warfare. Transnational journalism in the 1920s and 1930s included individuals from the entire range of political ideology – and just like the rest of society, it was made up of people that would soon after turn into victims, perpetrators, those resisting and those collaborating with the horrors to come.

## 5.1 The consolidation of the extreme right

As civil war broke out in Spain in 1936, League journalists found themselves on opposite sides of what had suddenly become a bloody conflict. A number of (chiefly British) left-wing correspondents travelled to Spain to report from the pro-Republican side: Freda White of the British League of Nations Union and its publication *Headway*, Monica Whatley of *Time and Tide*, Claud Cockburn (pseudonym: “Frank Pitcairn”), founder of the *Week* and Geneva reporter for the Communist *Daily Worker*, Sefton Delmer and William “Willie” Downie Forrest of the *Daily Express*, George Catlin (Vera Brittain’s husband) of the *Yorkshire Post* and Victor Schiff, formerly of the German Social Democratic Party publication *Vorwärts*. On the right, we only know of the *Daily Mail*’s Harold Cardozo, who reported on what he, in a propagandist book published in 1937, would pompously refer to as *The March of a Nation*<sup>155</sup>. Cardozo also later earned the dubitable honour of being one of the first foreign journalist to be accredited both by the totalitarian government of Spain and by the German authorities in Paris after the fall of France to the Nazi invaders<sup>156</sup>. The British extreme right, which had found its mouthpiece in Lord Rothermere’s *Daily Mail*, had long held sympathies for Fascist movements across Europe, and specifically for the German Nazis, with whom it shared its deeply rooted antisemitism. Yet even ardent admirers of the German dictator, like George Ward Price (who had reported from the Peace Conference in 1919 and visited the League Assembly in 1935) would turn away from Hitler when Germany started bombing UK targets. Prussian evil, it was assumed, had once more gained the upper hand over the more modern and more agreeable German state under the Nazis and Hitler who, consequentially, could no longer be trusted.<sup>157</sup> In continental Europe, populism and militarism rose to new heights during the 1930s, which contributed to the growth of nationalist extremisms in France, not least the royalist *Action Française* movement (whose eponymous newspaper, was present at the League Assemblies of 1924, 1926, 1930, 1933 and 1935, represented by fighter pilot and passionate anti-communist José Le Boucher), and a distinct form of Fascism which, however, was less pronounced as that of its neighbours Germany or Italy.<sup>158</sup> The war and the German occupation confronted French journalists particularly with the choice of collaboration, exile or clandestine resistance. The contradiction between French nationalism and Nazi sympathies seemingly did not pose larger problems for well-established journalistic personalities like Fernand de Brinon, political editor and in the early 1930s Geneva correspondent for *L'Information*, who also conducted interviews with Hitler and Joachim von Ribbentrop and later served as Pétain’s

<sup>154</sup> Coston, “Geneviève Tabouis.”

<sup>155</sup> Harold G. Cardozo, *The March of a Nation: My Year of Spain's Civil War* (New York: R.M. McBride & Co, 1937).

<sup>156</sup> Carlos García Santa Cecilia, “Corresponsal en España. Carlos García Santa Cecilia,” Centro Virtual Cervantes. Corresponsales en la Guerra de España, 1997; Harold G. Cardozo, *France in Chains* (London: Hutchinson, 1940).

<sup>157</sup> Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 137.

<sup>158</sup> Albert Marty, *L'Action française racontée par elle-même* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1968), 278; Milza, *Fascisme français*, 116.



ambassador in Berlin. Brinon would in 1947 be executed as a collaborator.<sup>159</sup> At least 16 of the former French League correspondents were later proven or alleged to have collaborated with the Vichy government or the Nazi occupiers. These include prolific figures: the above-mentioned Claude Jeantet became Pétain's head of the Foreign Press Service. Jean Luchaire, a former left-wing liberal, anti-Fascist and pacifist, who in 1930 had reported from Geneva for *Notre Temps*, a paper under his own direction that advocated European unity, and, in 1930 and 1931, for *Volonté*, would sell out to the Vichy régime and later even be appointed Information Commissioner in Pétain's government-in-exile after the liberation of France.<sup>160</sup>

### **CASE STUDY 10: A Nazi functionary in occupied France – Friedrich Alexander Bran (1904–1994)**

Born in Mannheim in 1904, Friedrich Alexander Bran was present at the Assembly only once as a journalist. He represented *Karlsruher Zeitung* there in 1927. Politically, in the early 1930s he was involved in the so-called “Sohlberg”-circle, which sought a rapprochement between France and Germany, and was chief editor of its magazine. Bran joined the NSDAP in 1933 and was since 1935 employed at “Dienststelle Ribbentrop” and managing director of “Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft” (Franco-German Society). After a short period of military service in 1939/40 he became a scientist at the German Foreign Office, where he was head of the department for cultural politics in the occupied countries of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as for Canada, the French colonies and Switzerland. In this context, he was part of a group of German Romanists and Francophiles who, under the leadership of German ambassador Abetz, wanted to promote French collaboration with Nazi Germany. His main task was the editorship of *Deutsch-Französische Monatshefte*. After the German occupation of France, he supervised German propaganda magazines for French prisoners of war, civilian workers, and forced labourers in Germany, with the goal of making the French compliant to German leadership and “accustoming as many Frenchmen as possible to German leadership”.<sup>161</sup> His duties also included speaking tours through France to promote work in Germany.

Nothing is known about Bran's denazification. After 1945 he worked for the local government and in 1963 became director of the *Staatlichen Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung* (State Academy of Teacher Training) in Calw. He also continued to work for Franco-German relations and, despite his prominent role as a Nazi functionary, was even awarded the Order of Merit 1<sup>st</sup> Class of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1971.

<sup>159</sup> Franz, *Ferdinand de Brinon und die deutsch*.

<sup>160</sup> Henry Coston, ed., “Jean Luchaire,” in *Dictionnaire de la politique française* (Paris: La Librairie française, 1967).

<sup>161</sup> Barbara Unteutsch, *Vom Sohlbergkreis zur Gruppe Collaboration: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutsch-französischen Beziehungen anhand der Cahiers franco-allemands, Deutsch-französische Monatshefte, 1931 - 1944* (Münster: Kleinheinrich, 1990), 150.

German journalists got to feel the radical curtailment of plurality much earlier than their colleagues in the neighbouring countries which were soon to be occupied by Nazi invaders. After the transition to Fascist rule in 1933 the German press was collectivised, raising extremist media like *Völkischer Beobachter* to the level of a state medium, uniting the formerly competing largest agencies, WTB and the Telegraphen-Union, as the state-controlled *Deutsches Nachrichtenbureau*, and having newspapers either closed down or put under the control of the Ministry for Propaganda.<sup>162</sup> Soon the German press corps was largely replaced by loyal journalists towing the party line. Still, even among the old guard of German journalists in Geneva, a considerable number proved equally accordant with Nazism, including Rolf Brandt, correspondent in Geneva for *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* in 1926, 1927 and 1931<sup>163</sup>, Max Walther Clauss (*Europäische Revue*, 1928 and 1936, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1936)<sup>164</sup>, and Rudolf Kötter (*Fränkischer Kurier*, 1929).<sup>165</sup> Otto Kriegk, anti-Communist and a harsh critic of the League system and correspondent in Geneva for *Weser-Zeitung* (1924), *Berliner Illustrierte* (1926–1928, 1935), *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (1934, 1935), and *Der Montag* (1935) remained with minister Goebbels until the bitter end, reportedly being one of the five envoys that delivered Germany's official capitulation to the Red Army in Berlin in 1945.<sup>166</sup> Kriegk paid for his misguided devotion when he was arrested and later probably executed by the Soviets, a fate he shares with Theodor Adrian von Renteln who had reported from Geneva for *Rostocker Anzeiger* in the mid-1920s. A member of the NSDAP since 1928, a functionary of the party and its affiliated organisations, a member of the Reichstag from 1932 onwards, and military governor of Lithuania from 1941, von Renteln was executed by the Red Army in 1946. Jost Terhaar, former head of the League's Berlin office and 1927's League correspondent for *Westdeutsches Volksblatt*, was interrogated by the Nuremberg tribunal concerning his position at *I.G. Farben*, the chemical firm that had provided the poisonous agent used for the Genocide.

### CASE STUDY 11: Misguided Martyr – The story of Hans Mosberg (1896–1952?)

Born in Berlin in 1896, Hans Adolf Mosberg belongs to the second largest generation of Geneva correspondents, which meant that he was just old enough to actively participate in the First World War. Consequently, his law studies in Würzburg were cut short when he was called to the front.<sup>167</sup> Mosbach made a swift career in the military, was wounded eight times and interned as a prisoner of war in Latvia.<sup>168</sup> After his release in 1919 he completed his studies of international law in Geneva and Königsberg (modern-day Kaliningrad), where he became a member of the

<sup>162</sup> Heidi Tworek, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945*, Harvard Historical Studies 190 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 183–186.

<sup>163</sup> Ernst Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer War Was Vor und Nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2007), 72.

<sup>164</sup> Rainer Blasius, "Nicht Churchill prägte 'Eiserner Vorhang'," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 19, 2015, sec. POLITISCHES SCHLAGWORT.

<sup>165</sup> Helmut Beer, "Fränkischer Kurier," *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*, May 14, 2012.

<sup>166</sup> Otto Kriegk, *Hinter Genf Steht Moskau* (Berlin-Leipzig: Nibelungen-verlag, 1936); Heinz Rein, "Kriegsende vor 75 Jahren: Die Kapitulation Berlins," *Der Tagesspiegel Online*, May 3, 2020.

<sup>167</sup> Astrid Freyisen, *Shanghai und die Politik des Dritten Reiches* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 370.

<sup>168</sup> Kurt Gerdau, "Statt Wiedergutmachung Verhaftung: Ein Preußischer Jude 'Unser Mann in Shanghai' – Mosberg Ergänzt Ostpreussische Geschichtsschreibung," *Preussische Allgemeine*, Jahrgang 44 -Folge 45, November 6, 1993, [https://archiv.preussische-allgemeine.de/1993/1993\\_11\\_06\\_45.pdf](https://archiv.preussische-allgemeine.de/1993/1993_11_06_45.pdf).

nationalist organisation *Heimatbund Ostpreußen* and co-founded several local paramilitary organisations.<sup>169</sup> Mosberg married in 1923 and, later that year, as part of his organisation's delegation, visited Adolf Hitler in Munich, a meeting that left him deeply impressed. For the right-wing newspapers *Ostpreußische Zeitung* and *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, Mosberg, who was keenly interested in League policies concerning German minorities in Eastern Europe, reported from the League Assemblies in 1927, 1929–1931 and 1934.<sup>170</sup>

Mosberg, born into a Jewish doctor's family, had been baptised aged five, yet, despite his nationalist convictions and his wartime patriotism, the terrorist government of Germany over time murdered 15 of his relatives and expelled him from the Reich for his family roots. As the Nazis took power, he and his family first moved to the Free City of Danzig (modern-day Gdansk), later to Warsaw. From there the exiled Mosberg, far from denouncing his convictions, then reported to the German military foreign intelligence service, the *Abwehr*, motivated both by his misguided patriotism and to protect relatives that had remained in Germany.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, despite his racial status as a "Half-Jew", which for others meant deportation and death, Mosberg's son, Helmuth, was a member of the Hitler Youth and even got to study foreign policy at Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Berlin (today renamed Humboldt University).<sup>172</sup>

After the war had ended Hans Mosberg, who had escaped to Shanghai, was sentenced to twenty-years of imprisonment as a war criminal by an American tribunal and incarcerated. He was returned to Germany in 1957 to spend his remaining sentence at the Landsberg prison.<sup>173</sup>

## 5.2 Journalists under the Nazi regime

With the Nazi power-seizure and the subsequent collectivisation, as ideologization of the mediasphere and growing repression against intellectuals, Jews, homosexuals and others deemed undesirable by the regime, many journalists chose (or were forced into) emigration. They included, among many others, Alexander Natan who, despite his academic interest in League matters, would only appear in Geneva after his migration, for the British Communist paper *The Week*<sup>174</sup>, and Edgar Stern-Rubarth, former WTB correspondent in Geneva in 1926 and 1927, who, despite his personal ties to Hitler's Minister for Economics, Hjalmar Schacht, lost his job in 1933 and fled to the UK in 1936. In a tragic but not uncommon turn of fate, Stern-Rubarth was later interned as an enemy alien in a camp on the Isle of Man.<sup>175</sup> Pre-empting the events of 1933, the German Alsatian and French citizen René Schickele, who had reported from Geneva for the cultural magazine *Neue Rundschau* in 1928, emigrated to Southern France, where he died of heart failure shortly before the German assault on France.<sup>176</sup> After the invasion an exodus of French journalists followed that of their German

<sup>169</sup> Freyzeisen, *Shanghai und die Politik des Dritten Reiches*; Gerdau, "Statt Wiedergutmachung Verhaftung."

<sup>170</sup> Gerdau, "Statt Wiedergutmachung Verhaftung."

<sup>171</sup> Freyzeisen, *Shanghai und die Politik des Dritten Reiches*, 372.

<sup>172</sup> Gerdau, "Statt Wiedergutmachung Verhaftung."

<sup>173</sup> Gerdau. According to an alternative account, Mosberg returned to Germany a few years earlier and, released from imprisonment, died in a work accident in Recklinghausen in 1952. "Ein Nachruf," *Das Ostpreußenblatt*, Folge 23, August 15, 1952.

<sup>174</sup> Meyhoff, "Alex Natan."

<sup>175</sup> "Edgar Stern-Rubarth," in *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933–1945* (München: K. G. Saur, December 19, 2016).

<sup>176</sup> "Biografie René Schickele (1883-1940)," *Glotzi Verlag - Verlag Für Schöne Literatur und Essayistik* (blog).

colleagues, including the priest Joseph Delos, Geneva correspondent for *Vie Intellectuelle* in 1931 and 1933, the diplomat and 1926 *Temps* contributor Wladimir D'Ormesson, the anti-Fascist and former reporter for *Petit Parisien* (1927–1932 and 1936) Élie-Joseph Bois, and League regular for *Petit Gironde* and *Œuvre*, Geneviève Tabouis.

### CASE STUDY 12: Racing reporter: The story of Alec Nathan (1906–1972)

Born in 1906 under the name Heinz Alexander Nathan to a middle-class Jewish family in the Berlin borough of Schöneberg, Alec Nathan studied in Berlin, Heidelberg, Paris and Munich and, according to some sources, worked on a doctoral thesis on *Southwest Africa as a C Mandate of the League of Nations* in 1930.<sup>177</sup> Despite his academic and political interest, his contemporaries in the 1920s and early 1930s would mainly have known him for his exploits as an athlete: “Germany’s fastest Jew”, as he was proudly referred to by some, won 4 national titles as a relay runner, including a world record in 1929 (4x100m in 40.8 sec.).<sup>178</sup> Excluded from his local sporting association in 1931, probably for his homosexuality (apparently, the official reason was formulated as “unpatriotic behaviour and filthy lack of character”<sup>179</sup>), he made a name for himself as – a remarkably critical – sports reporter for several media outlets, most prominently the liberal union newspaper *Welt am Montag*.<sup>180</sup> Nathan criticised, among other things, the hypocrisy of pretended amateurship in sports and the resources wasted on sending a German team to the 1932 Olympic Games in the midst of the financial crisis.<sup>181</sup> When that paper was closed down after the Nazi power grab in early 1933, Nathan fled to Zurich and later travelled on to Geneva, apparently on his own motivation, where he posed as an English journalist. Under his fake identity he reportedly interviewed Joseph Goebbels, coaxing him into giving an autograph to the assumed British admirer of the German art of propaganda. Though it seemingly was not until later that he met his fellow League journalist Claud Cockburn, whose paper, *The Week*, employed him for several years afterwards<sup>182</sup>, the LNOJSS of 1933 already lists “H. A. Natan” as a *Week* correspondent.

Nathan’s professional interest in League politics seems evident, yet he is registered by the LNOJSS only that one year. He did, however, return to Germany under a false name in 1934 and, according to his own portrayal, and despite his otherwise pacifist-republican ideals that contrasted the nationalist militarism of the conspirators,<sup>183</sup> played a minor role in the preparation of the failed so-called *Röhm-Putsch*.<sup>184</sup> The undertaking, of course, resulted in further consolidation of Hitler’s power as the sole head of the Nazi state apparatus, the execution of prominent conservative rivals – and Nathan’s rushed final emigration to the UK.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Kay Schiller, “Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands”. Sport, Moderne und (Körper-)politik im bewegten Leben Alex Natans (1906–1971),” *STADION* 43, no. 2 (2019): 185–218; Manfred Koch, “Heinz Alexander Nathan (Alias Alex Natan) – Stadtdlexikon,” Stadtdlexikon Karlsruhe, 2014.

<sup>178</sup> Meyhoff, “Alex Natan.”

<sup>179</sup> Schiller, “Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands,” 6.

<sup>180</sup> Schiller, 11; Meyhoff, “Alex Natan.”

<sup>181</sup> Schiller, “Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands,” 5–6.

<sup>182</sup> Meyhoff, “Alex Natan.”

<sup>183</sup> Schiller, “Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands,” 7.

<sup>184</sup> Meyhoff, “Alex Natan.”

<sup>185</sup> Meyhoff; Schiller, “Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands,” 13.

As a *Rockefeller Assistant for International Relations* at London University's School of Economics (LSE) 1935–1937<sup>186</sup> and later co-founder of the *Anglo-German Association*, he continued his academic career and was engaged in humanitarian issues, specifically an organisation helping Jewish refugee children fleeing Germany after 1938.<sup>187</sup> However, fate would tragically catch up with him in 1940 when, after an unsuccessful application for citizenship, he was interned for three years, part of that time in a camp in Quebec, as a homosexual, enemy alien and suspected spy.<sup>188</sup> This blow notwithstanding, Nathan remained true to his new British home and became a history teacher and lecturer at King's College in Worcester after his release in 1943.<sup>189</sup> He died of heart failure in 1972.

The journalistic fight against Nazism outside Germany took different forms. Underground newspapers like Louise Weiss' *Nouvelle République*, published by the Résistance within Pétain's puppet state, engaged in internal counter-propaganda, while other efforts abroad, like the propagandistic work of André Maurois (who had reported from Geneva in 1929 and 1930 for *Nouvelle Revue Française*), Geneviève Tabouis in the US, Maurice Schuman (*Havas'* correspondent in Geneva 1937), Hans Huyn and Sefton Delmer (*Daily Express* correspondent in 1920) in the UK.

But journalists were also directly involved in the political and armed fight: The philologist and diplomat Marcel Ray, a constant visitor in Geneva from 1924 to 1931 for *Petit Journal*, was a member of Charles de Gaulle's Committee for French National Liberation<sup>190</sup>, and the youngest correspondent in our sample, US-born Helen Kirkpatrick, who had been only 11 years old when the League was inaugurated and had reported from the Assembly in 1936 for the British *Daily Telegraph*, was to become the first ever recorded female US war correspondent embedded with the Allied troops during the liberation of France. In Germany we know of few cases of active opposition, which may be due to the non-compromising brutality of the totalitarian apparatus. One out of few (that we know of) is Richard Kuenzer, member of the conservative *Zentrum* party and retired diplomat with a service record in Paris, Zanzibar and Cape Town. Having reported from Geneva for the party publication *Germania* in 1927, he retired in 1933. He seems to have been involved in several failed plots against the Hitler regime from 1938 on, though we have little specific information on his exact role. Incarcerated and tortured by the Gestapo in Ravensbrück in 1944, Kuenzer was murdered in Berlin in 1945, during a mass-execution in the aftermath of the failed Stauffenberg coup.<sup>191</sup> Among his colleagues and compatriots in the opposition that were ultimately caught and murdered by the regime there are also Richard Lehmann, in Geneva for *Neue Leipziger Zeitung* 1926, and Georg Bernhard, the *Vossische Zeitung's* chief editor and Geneva correspondent in 1925–1928.

<sup>186</sup> Desider Stern, *Bücher von Autoren Jüdischer Herkunft in Deutscher Sprache: Eine Ausstellung der B'nai B'rith Wien, 5.-14. März 1967 Im Künstlerhaus, Wien* (Wien: Brüder Rosenbaum, 1967), 171.

<sup>187</sup> Schiller, "Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands," 14.

<sup>188</sup> Schiller, 14.

<sup>189</sup> Wilhelm Sternfeld and Eva Tiedemann, *Deutsche Exil-Literatur 1933-1945: Eine Bio-Bibliographie* (Heidelberg: L. Schneider, 1970), 239; Schiller, "Der Schnellste Jude Deutschlands," 2.

<sup>190</sup> Bernard-Marie Garreau, "Notice biographique: Marcel Ray," Projet EMAN (CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne Nouvelle), Archives Marguerite Audoux (Archives Marguerite Audoux, Bernard-Marie Garreau (Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes, CNRS-ENS) ; projet EMAN (CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne Nouvelle)).

<sup>191</sup> Uwe Schellinger, "Dr. Richard Kuenzer," in *Zeugen für Christus: Das deutsche Martyrologium des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmut Moll (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006).

Gustav Kauder, vice chief editor of *B.Z. am Mittag*, who reported from the Geneva Assembly from 1925 to 1927, was expelled by the authorities and, having found refuge in the ČSR, ultimately took his own life in Prague, 1942<sup>192</sup>; Franz Mariaux, foreign correspondent for *Kölnische Zeitung*, who visited the Assemblies of 1928 and 1929 and, according to his own claims after the war, had been involved in anti-Nazi plots in Paris and Lisbon<sup>193</sup>, was incarcerated by the Gestapo in 1934. He was ultimately released and after the war served as an occasional press advisor to German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.<sup>194</sup> Franz B. Zons, who had evidently stuck out the first phase of collectivisation, as he reported from Geneva for *Münstersche Zeitung* as late as in 1934, when many of his colleagues had already lost their jobs or been forced underground or into exile, survived the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and later, in 1951, would head the main office of *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk* (NWDR) in Hanover.<sup>195</sup>

French resistance members who were caught and imprisoned by the Vichy police or the Gestapo include Charles Lussy (in Geneva 1924 for *Paris Soir*), Gérard Boutelleau (in Geneva 1937 for *Le Figaro*) and Léon Rollin (in Geneva 1929 for *Le Temps*). Given the large numbers of journalists about whom we have no detailed data, we can only guess how many of them would eventually fall victim to German state terrorism between 1938 and 1945. The information we do have suggests that it is a sizable number. Relatively well documented are the fates of journalists involved in the French resistance and ultimately murdered by their Fascist pursuers. Gabriel Péri, who for many years in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s had reported from the Assembly for the Communist publication *L'Humanité*, was shot by the Wehrmacht in 1941.<sup>196</sup> A number of his colleagues were to perish in the death camps, including Herrmann Bessemer of *Agence Centrale*, for which he had reported on the League's 1920 inaugural Assembly<sup>197</sup>, Louis Thomas of the Socialist *Le Peuple* (present at the Assemblies of 1928, 1930 and 1936)<sup>198</sup>, Georges Lapierre (*Bulletin de la Fédération internationale des instituteurs*, 1929)<sup>199</sup>, and Jules de Tesson who had reported on the League Assemblies of 1924 and 1925 for *Dépêche de Toulouse* and returned as a delegate of France to the Assembly in 1932, 1933 and 1937.<sup>200</sup> German victims, apart from those who survived and made careers in post-war West Germany, are not as systematically documented as their French colleagues. The only secure information we have found concerns a pioneer of female journalism: Born in Breslau

<sup>192</sup> Fabian Jauss and Jürgen Wilke, "B.Z. am Mittag", Deutschlands Erste Boulevardzeitung," *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte* 14 (2012): 58–96; Nina Skřidlovská, "Ženská mezinárodní sionistická organizace (WIZO) v období První republiky (1918–1938)" (Diploma Thesis, Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Faculty of Arts, 2015), 74.

<sup>193</sup> Peter Fuchs, "Kölnischer Kurier: Die Zeitung der Besatzungsmächte und Adenauers Alternativprojekt," *Jahrbuch des Kölnischen Geschichtsvereins* 66, no. 1 (December 1995): 184.

<sup>194</sup> Fuchs, 183–86.

<sup>195</sup> ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), "Nebenstelle Hannover Unter Neuer Leitung," Chronik der ARD, 2022, [http://web.ard.de/ard-chronik/index/7462?year=1949&clra\[\]=38](http://web.ard.de/ard-chronik/index/7462?year=1949&clra[]=38).

<sup>196</sup> Claude Penetier, "Gabriel Péri," Musée de la Résistance en Ligne 1940–1945, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/media5814-Gabriel-PA>.

<sup>197</sup> Ilse Köpke, "Hermann Bessemer," Wiener Kunstgeschichte Gesichtet, accessed April 5, 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220629120416/https://www.univie.ac.at/geschichtegesichtet/h\\_bessemer.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20220629120416/https://www.univie.ac.at/geschichtegesichtet/h_bessemer.html).

<sup>198</sup> Jean-Louis Panné, "Thomas Louis, Antoine dit HARMEL Maurice," in *Le Maitron: Dictionnaire biographique, mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social* (Paris: Maitron/Éditions de l'Atelier, November 30, 2010).

<sup>199</sup> Jacques Girault, Claude Penetier, and Guy Putfin, "LAPIERRE Georges, Anatole," in *Le Maitron: Dictionnaire biographique, mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social* (Paris: Maitron/Éditions de l'Atelier, June 27, 2018).

<sup>200</sup> Archives départementales de Seine-et-Marne, "François de Tesson (1883–1944)," Archives départementales de Seine-et-Marne; Jean Jolly, ed., "Jules de Tesson," in *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français: notices biographiques sur les ministres, députés et sénateurs français de 1889 à 1940*, Vol. 5–6, Dictionnaire des parlementaires français (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968).

(modern-day Wrocław) in 1869, and thus part of the oldest generations of League correspondents, Elise Münzer worked as a “Rédactrice” and as a foreign correspondent for the papers of the publisher *Ullstein*, including *B.Z.* and *Berliner Morgenpost*, for which she reported on the 1925 Assembly in Geneva. Münzer, who had been barred from journalism in 1934, was murdered in the Treblinka death camp in 1942.<sup>201</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The ideal Geneva journalist described by the League of Nations in its 1928 *Pressa* brochure did not exist. The Geneva journalist expected by the League should be not only a respected expert of international affairs and politics, an internationalist and cosmopolitan, highly politicized and polyglot, but he should also be an all-rounder, familiar with all the branches of his profession. If one contrasts this description of the typical League journalist with those of the actual League of Nations journalists, a dazzling and multi-layered biographical kaleidoscope emerges instead. Overall, our results suggest that a very specific professional milieu of journalism with a specific sense of its role and self-esteem arose in the context of the League. The biographies we have examined show that they did not see themselves simply as opponents or supporters of the League but rather developed a very unique understanding of themselves as League journalists, especially against the background of their national, political and professional circumstances.

Through the interplay of biographical case studies and collective biographical patterns we have thus attempted to draw a panorama of this important field of international journalism in the interwar period. Admittedly, this panorama has its limits. It only refers to the journalistic representatives of three countries, even though these, together with the US, are among the big four of press representatives at the League in Geneva. In addition, we were only able to select exemplary cases from the large number of journalists with documented life traces. If one goes beyond our (collective-)biographical mode of research and representation and looks to further explore the field of League journalists, two perspectives in particular are promising: On the one hand, a more in-depth examination of the preserved sources would allow for a closer look at the journalistic practices as they developed in this field. On the other hand, it is important to find out how the original understanding as a League journalist found expression by journalistic reporting. With this in mind, we hope that research on League of Nations journalism will continue.

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<sup>201</sup> Christophe Hamann, “Die Redaktrice,” in *Orte des Erinnerns, Bd. 2: Jüdisches Alltagsleben im Bayerischen Viertel*, ed. Schöneberg Museum and Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1995), 148–49.

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# Cinematography as a medium of communication

## The promotion of research by the League of Nations and Rudolf Arnheim's role in this context

### I. Preface

The following article is a reprint of a study that was first published in the *European Communication Journal* in 1991.<sup>1</sup> At the time, it was written in connection with the first study on the media policy of the League of Nations to be conducted in Germany, which the author had initiated and supervised in the context of the journalism course at the Katholische Universität Eichstätt.<sup>2</sup> As it had turned out, the medium of film, which was still young in the 1920s, had also become the focus of the League of Nations' interest. And if, after many years, research on this institution, which was so important for the peace initiatives of the 20th century, is now being revived at the Zentrum für Medien-, Kommunikations- und Informationsforschung (ZeMKI) in Bremen, it is also worth taking another look at the early study reprinted here. It is updated by a look at the research literature that has been published in the meantime. And at the end, the commentary is added by which Rudolf Arnheim, who is at the heart of the study, responded to it at the time. The study pursued a primarily scientific-historical intention and was designed to show which (empirical) research approaches of modern communication and media research resulted ultimately from initiatives by the League of Nations.

In the 30 years since the study was first published, essentially, three studies have been published that touch on its subject matter. Maltby in his essay pursued "the involvement of the League of Nations in the Americanisation of world cinema from a dream of cultural resistance to an engineered acquiescence"<sup>3</sup>. He reveals the US-American attempts to minimise the culturally motivated drive of the League of Nations and to secure their own economic interests in the movie sector. There is no mention of Rudolf Arnheim and his activities around this topic, and therefore any reference to my study is missing.

In the same year as Maltby, Christel Taillibert presented a comprehensive and excellent study on the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI) established by the League of Nations, based on a broad evaluation of primary sources. The study contextualises this institution, illuminates its background, describes its human and material resources and systematically documents the activities and effects it triggered. This goes far beyond the scope of an essay. However, the author did not take note of my study either, but mentions Arnheim only three times<sup>4</sup>, which does not adequately appreciate his significance.

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Wilke, "Cinematography as a Medium of Communication: The Promotion of Research by the League of Nations and the Role of Rudolf Arnheim," *European Journal of Communication* 6, no. 3 (September 1, 1991): 337–53.

<sup>2</sup> Birgit Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Maltby, "The Cinema and the League of Nations," in *Film Europe and Film America: Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939*, ed. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 106.

<sup>4</sup> Christel Taillibert, *L'Institut international du cinématographe éducatif: Regards sur le rôle du cinéma éducatif dans la politique internationale du fascisme italien* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1999), 318.

Zoë Druick's study, published in 2007, provides a twenty-page overview of the League of Nations' Educational Cinematographic Institute, based on the literature available up to that time, including the Arnheim-study reprinted here. Druick does not bring anything new to bear, but at best endeavours to see the subject matter – following Foucault – “as another manifestation of the materialization of the film and education discourse that preoccupied administrations of mass societies [...] in the inter-war period”<sup>5</sup>. She declares Italian Fascism to be the origin of this manifestation.

## 2. The League of Nations: its foundation and its goals

After World War I had come to an end, the hostility between the victors and the vanquished persisted for years and was difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, there were efforts to construct a new international peace order, and the League of Nations was founded for this purpose. The initial idea had arisen during the war and was promoted mainly by the American President Woodrow Wilson.

The League of Nations was founded on 10 January 1920, after the enforcement of the Treaties of Versailles. Its statutes described its tasks as the negotiation of international conflicts, and the promotion of international co-operation. In addition to securing peace and understanding, it was supposed to pursue humanitarian, social and economic goals<sup>6</sup>. Yet it suffered many ups and downs. Even though many countries joined the League in the 1920s, some quickly seceded again. The highest number of members (58) was reached in 1936. Germany, having lost the war, was excluded at first, and not admitted until 1926. It then participated for only a few years, since the Nazis withdrew immediately after their takeover in 1933, and officially seceded in 1938. In the course of the conflicts of the 1930s, culminating by the Second World War, the ideals of the League of Nations dissipated, even though it lasted formally until 1946. It was not dissolved until the foundation of the United Nations.

The League of Nations launched a number of media-political initiatives, which are studied in other parts of this book. The League was particularly interested in promoting international political communication. It pursued an active information policy, and its own radio station (Radio Nations) in Geneva. In addition, it worked on international agreements to encourage communication links, curb the abuse of media, improve the protection of the independence of news, and facilitate the work of journalists.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the conference of press experts in Geneva in 1927, and the Broadcasting Treaty of 1936 were of exceptional importance.<sup>8</sup> To a greater extent than has been realized so far, the League started an international communication policy that was partially adopted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) after World War II.

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<sup>5</sup> Zoë Druick, “The International Educational Cinematograph Institute, Reactionary Modernism, and the Formation of Film Studies,” *Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 93.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Paul Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1952); Elmer Bendiner, *A Time for Angels: The Tragicomic History of the League of Nations* (New York: Knopf, Random House, 1975); Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*; Haakon Ikonomou and Karen Gram-Skjoldager, eds., *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Arne Lorenz Gellrich, Erik Koenen, and Stefanie Auerbeck-Lietz, “The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy and the League of Nations: Co-Evolution between Diplomacy, PR and Journalism,” *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 2020): 607–21.

<sup>8</sup> Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*, 94–98.

### 3. Cinematography

The League of Nations was founded at a time when a new medium of communication became a mass attraction: the film or cinematography. This medium had developed sufficiently for public reception in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The growth of filming began before the First World War. During the war, the film was used for propaganda by both sides. In the 1920s it became a medium for entertaining the masses. The enchantment of “Motion pictures” quickly drew a mass audience. It also drew criticism, mainly from pedagogues who were concerned about a threat to the moral and social development of children. Even before the First World War, there was a cinema-reform movement in Germany<sup>9</sup>. The debate about the values and dangers connected to the cinema continued in Europe and in the United States throughout the 1920s.

Considering this background, it is not surprising that the League of Nations turned its attention to cinematography.<sup>10</sup> At first this became manifested by the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), a sub-organization of the League. The first international congress of film experts took place in Paris in 1926, to debate the use of film to promote international understanding. A year later, the Italian government offered to establish an IECI at its own cost for the League. This Institute was opened in Rome on 5 November 1928, by an inauguration ceremony at Villa Falconieri at Frascati, from where its headquarters soon moved to Villa Torlonia in Rome<sup>11</sup>. According to the statutes:

[ Its *object* is to encourage the production and dissemination of educational films. Its *spirit* is the spirit of the League of Nations, and the Institute must accordingly work to promote international understanding. The *methods* employed will be practical and scientific.<sup>12</sup>

The Institute was headed by an administrative council representing different countries.<sup>13</sup> Luciano de Feo, an Italian who was experienced in educational films, became director. The Institute was divided into five sections: agriculture, vocational training, health instruction, school education and the use of film in science, literature and art.

Activities of the Institute are covered in annual reports of the administrative council, and in other publications. In addition to special monographs, the *International Review of Educational Cinematography (IREC)* deserves mentioning. This journal appeared monthly, from July 1929 onwards in English, French, Italian, German and Spanish. It documents the IECI's efforts and made them known to a larger public.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Fritz Terveen, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Schulfilmbewegung in Deutschland* (Emsdetten: Lechte, 1959).

<sup>10</sup> Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*, 88–90.

<sup>11</sup> Taillibert, *L'Institut international du cinématographe éducatif*, 77–114.

<sup>12</sup> League of Nations, “International Educational Cinematographic Institute. Report to the Council on the Second Session of the Governing Body of the Institute” (C.3.M.1.1930.XII, December 17, 1929), <https://archives.unige.ch/international-educational-cinematographic-institute-report-to-the-council-on-the-second-session-of-the-governing-body-of-the-institute>.

<sup>13</sup> Initially the administrative council consisted of twenty-one members from different countries. Its president was Italian Minister of Justice and later Dean of the University of Rome, Alfredo Rocco. Internationally known members were French film pioneer Louis Lumière, French Art Historian Henry Focillon, and Argentinian poet Gabriela Mistral.

<sup>14</sup> The German version of the journal, which was renamed *Intercine* at the beginning of 1935, ceased publication in the middle of that year. The international edition appeared until the end of 1935.

The IECI expired as political conditions in Europe became more acute from the middle of the 1930s on. Germany's withdrawal had had a negative effect, but the existence of the Institute was not threatened until Italy invaded Ethiopia 1934/35, thus openly breaching the League's peace principles. When Italy seceded from the League of Nations in 1937, the founding agreement of the IECI lapsed. Since the agreement did not allow for a simple dissolution, the Italian employees handed in their notice, and the others followed. Like other enterprises of the League of Nations, the IECI had become a victim of global political events.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. The activities of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI)

Even though the IECI did not have a large staff<sup>16</sup>, it initiated a wide range of activities within the first year of its existence, including an international catalogue of educational films and a collection of all film patents registered in Germany, England, and the United States since 1890. It established contacts with other international organizations and began to review legal regulations on film in different countries, including censorship and copyright. The *IREC* published a series of reports on different countries which allowed for an international comparison of film law.<sup>17</sup>

Another question the Institute worked on for several years was that of custom rates for educational films.<sup>18</sup> The IECI saw changing this as a major objective in order to promote the dissemination of educational films and probably achieved its greatest success in this field. After several years of preparation by an IECI expert committee, the League convened an international conference which signed a convention in October 1933<sup>19</sup>, abolishing customs on educational films. However, the convention also contained paragraphs permitting censorship and the protection of national film markets, so it partially contradicted its own main objectives. The journal of the IECI published numerous contributions dealing with technical, artistic, sociological and pedagogical aspects of films. Articles in the *IREC* recommended that film should be used to promote hygiene and for other social purposes such as preventing accidents, improving school classes and teaching languages. Educational films should also become part of agricultural communities, for example to help improve living conditions on the country. There were also articles on military and religious films. Understandably, optimism about film as a means of progress in education and learning dominated the *IREC*, so that the potential dangers and side-effects of this young medium were overlooked.

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<sup>15</sup> Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*.

<sup>16</sup> Initially the regular personnel of the Institute consisted of the director, a head of department, a financial clerk, eight editors and eight other employees. Apart from this, nine people were entrusted with special functions outside the Institute. International Educational Cinematographic Institute, ed., *International Review of Educational Cinematography* (Rome: International Institute of Educational Cinematography, League of Nations, 1929).

<sup>17</sup> Taillibert, *L'Institut international du cinématographe éducatif*, 171–212.

<sup>18</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, ed., *International Review of Educational Cinematography* (Rome: International Institute of Educational Cinematography, League of Nations, 1930), 707–16.

<sup>19</sup> Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*, 88–90.

The IECI considered whether it should participate in the production of commercial films, but decided against, since it viewed itself as an advisory and research institute, not a film producer. Finally, the Institute was entrusted “with the collection of information on television and broadcasting”<sup>20</sup>. Radio broadcasting had happened in several countries for some years, but television was still in its infancy. Its future was not yet predictable,<sup>21</sup> but several years later, technological progress had been so great that the IECI set up a committee for “educational television”.

In that same year, 1934, an international conference discussed the relationship between television and cinema, the stage of development of television in different countries, and the possibilities offered by television for educational purposes to promote international understanding. This was the incentive for founding the Centre International de Télévision, established by the IECI in 1935.<sup>22</sup> There is even mentioning of the Centre's periodical publication (*Cronache de Televisione*), although this cannot be located in bibliographies and never seems to have appeared.

## 5. Empirical methods in film research

In addition to these activities, the IECI was involved in research into film, using methods from empirical social science. An empirical research tradition had earlier existed in Europe, and it was revived in the late 1920s, particularly by the so-called School of Vienna, which is closely connected to the name of Paul F. Lazarsfeld<sup>23</sup>. Yet the use of empirical techniques for the investigation of film is hardly known.

There are also clear parallels to the work done in the United States. The research of the IECI started almost at the same time as the Payne Fund Studies, one of the largest projects ever carried out in communication science.<sup>24</sup> The motivations for these scientific investigations were similar. The Payne Fund Studies were a response to fears which had arisen in America in reaction to Hollywood's movies of the 1920s. These fears centered on the moral and social impact of cinema on children and youths. In this context, the Payne Fund Studies are a milestone in research history.<sup>25</sup> Using a variety of methods, even psycho-physiological ones, the content of the movies and their reception,

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<sup>20</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1930, 159.

<sup>21</sup> So the Institute narrowed its own approach: “The Institute should not concern itself with television and broadcasting except as regards the collection of information on scientific progress in these spheres”, and it noted that “television is still in the stage of laboratory investigation, but that the sound film has progressed further”. International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1930, 159.

<sup>22</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, ed., *Intercine*, English ed (Rome: International Institute of Educational Cinematography, League of Nations, 1935), 195–99.

<sup>23</sup> Horst Reimann, “Die Anfänge der Kommunikationsforschung,” in *Massenkommunikation: Theorien, Methoden, Befunde*, ed. Max Kaase and Winfried Schulz, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie Sonderhefte (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1989), 28–45; Wolfgang R. Langenbucher, ed., *Paul F. Lazarsfeld: die Wiener Tradition der empirischen Sozial- und Kommunikationsforschung* (München: Ölschlager, 1990); Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes*.

<sup>24</sup> Werrett Wallace Charters, *Motion Pictures and Youth: A Summary* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933); Garth S. Jowett, “Social Science as a Weapon: The Origins of the Payne Fund Studies, 1926–1929,” *Communication* 13, no. 3 (1992): 211–25.

<sup>25</sup> Willard D. Rowland, *The Politics of TV Violence: Policy Uses of Communication Research, People and Communication*, v. 16 (Beverly Hills, Calif: Sage, 1983); Ellen Wartella and Byron Reeves, “Historical Trends in Research on Children and the Media: 1900–1960,” *Journal of Communication* 35, no. 2 (1985): 118–33; Jowett, “Social Science as a Weapon.”



particularly by children, were studied. They have been overlooked or underappreciated by scholars when reconstructing the development of American communication research.<sup>26</sup> The two research institutes had little knowledge of each other's work. Only an occasional footnote in the *IREC* refers to the Payne Fund Studies.

The IECI mainly used questionnaires for its empirical investigations. One of the first issues of the *IREC* reported a study on cinematography at schools in Neuchâtel, Lausanne and Geneva, which was conducted in 1914/15.<sup>27</sup> In order to analyse the "effects of cinema", children from these three cities were asked how often, when and with whom they went to a cinema, and which films they liked best. Demographic data were also collected. The results – presented in absolute numbers and as percentages – showed clear differences between boys and girls as far as the frequency and time of cinema going was concerned, as well as preferences of films: "The girls like funny scenes, whereas the boys prefer topical news".

### **The IECI surveys had a definite empirical focus:**

[ Once again the I.E.C.I is aiming at a genuinely practical method of enquiry [...]. We repeat that the Institute's wish is to ascertain the right lines of future film policy, on a basis not of pure theory but of data drawn from practical experience.<sup>28</sup>

### **Other statements show a similar approach:**

[ Theories have their uses and are often necessary. But they need to be supplemented by the practice of daily life; in other words, various important factors enable theories to be illustrated and exemplified through the first-hand evidence of persons concerned and through statistics.<sup>29</sup>

The polls conducted by the IECI naturally lacked the methodological rigor achieved in later years. Today they seem to be amateurish, which is not surprising in view of the state of methodology development then. The questionnaire technique was simple and direct. The IECI was content with self-assessment by the respondents where more complicated methods would be used now. Particularly lacking was the principle of sampling. The ingenious techniques that allow for drawing conclusions from small groups of respondents chosen randomly from large populations were still unknown. Thus, the IECI conducted large expensive surveys. For a poll among children in Italy, 24,000 questionnaires were returned, but "only" 15,000 could be evaluated. Nevertheless, this was, as the Institute itself admitted,

<sup>26</sup> Everett M. Rogers, *A History of Communication Study: A Biographical Approach* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley, eds., *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1929, 570–92.

<sup>28</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, ed., *International Review of Educational Cinematography* (Rome: International Institute of Educational Cinematography, League of Nations, 1931), 265.

<sup>29</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1930, 1378.

[ an enormous task, and yet it had to be carried out quickly and systematically, since the value of an enquiry consists of its actuality, that is in the speed with which its results can be set out and made available<sup>30</sup>.

This poll was also conducted in other countries. In Belgium, some 10,000, and in Romania more than 5000 questionnaires were collected. Questionnaires were even distributed in South and Central American countries (Uruguay, Mexico). The international feedback was delayed, so that results from Italy were evaluated first.

In 1930 the IECI started three large surveys. At that time, this was pioneering and unparalleled in media studies in Europe. As mentioned above, the first survey was among school children and the questionnaire contained more than 100 questions. The results were presented in several publications by the IECI, and quantitatively presented by way of tables, since “it is important to consider the extent of a phenomenon before building up a theory upon it”<sup>31</sup>. A second poll, conducted among teachers, was carried out in higher quality. In Italy alone, more than 3000 responded. Their answers were presented in numerous, exact quotations.<sup>32</sup> A third poll aimed at the “mothers, to discover their opinion if the effects of film on the mental and moral development of young people”<sup>33</sup>. Few traces of this poll can be found in the publications.

The poll among school children had a particularly broad design. In the first part, it tried to determine the effects of film on fatigue.<sup>34</sup> Physiological effects were also studied; once again resembling the Payne Fund studies.<sup>35</sup> The IECI study differentiated between various indicators of fatigue. For example, only one-third of the children and youths reported eye fatigue after watching a film. The following quotation shows which other criteria were included into the analysis:

[ The highest averages of those experiencing visual fatigue are found among schoolchildren, and the proportion of ‘eye-sore’ girls is higher than those of boys.<sup>36</sup>

Further questions asked about symptoms of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. Results showed that:

[ Although the visual problem calls for action by responsible organisations and individuals, since an evil complained of by a good third of the children is one that must be, if not be eradicated, at least reduced to the smallest dimensions, physical, cerebral and moral fatigue are not sufficiently potent factors for justifying alarm and consternation on cinematographical circles.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1930, 1380.

<sup>31</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 1381.

<sup>32</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1931, 397–408, 479–90, 619–24, 695–716, 827–40, 917–23, 1013–21.

<sup>33</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, ed., *International Review of Educational Cinematography* (Rome: International Institute of Educational Cinematography, League of Nations, 1932), 236.

<sup>34</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1930, 1379–94.

<sup>35</sup> On the connections between cinema visits and sleep, see Samuel Renshaw, Vernon Lemont Miller, and Dorothy P. Marquis, *Children's Sleep* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1933).

<sup>36</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1930, 1393.

<sup>37</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1931, 174.

A second part of the poll dealt with emotions evoked among school children by war movies.<sup>38</sup> These questions naturally were of particular importance for an institute working in the spirit of the League of Nations. They found that the overwhelming majority of Italian youths approved of war and even regarded it as heroic action. Though this finding caused much concern, most scientists tried to explain it in terms of the experiences of the youths. Even though the data indicated that war movies evoked emotions favouring the glorification of war, there were also contradictory responses, and war movies were also seen as being instructive. This led to the conclusion that only specific types of war-films would be suitable for children and youths (e.g. documentaries instead of feature films).

Another part of the poll tried to determine how often, when and under what circumstances children went to a cinema. The author of the study noted “that ‘the depth of effects of film’ actually depended on the frequency of cinema visits”<sup>39</sup>. The results showed that only a few schoolchildren went to a cinema less than twice per month, and that the frequency of cinema visits rose with age. There was also a connection with social class: “The most frequent cinema-goers can be found among the children of people of free professions”<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, once again there were differences between boys and girls.

Reasons for going to the cinema were also studied. Almost all respondents stated that they enjoyed going to the cinema. Finally, children’s opinions about the use of film for school purposes were of interest.<sup>41</sup> In sum, the result was:

[ Using film gives classes more variety and makes them more appealing than just using oral instruction; it shows objects and phenomena in a clearer and more impressive manner, allows for deeper understanding, and transmits the feeling of greater proximity to reality.<sup>42</sup>

The responses by the schoolchildren were compared with those of the teachers, who were asked not only about usage of films in classes, but also about the potential dangers of movies for young people. Naturally, they had stronger reservations against films.

Apart from the polls conducted by the IECI, the *International Review of Educational Cinematography* published other empirical studies. The psychologist Leone Cimatti conducted one among 2800 children from Piedmont<sup>43</sup>, to determine the frequency and popularity of cinema attendance. He also asked about the most popular films and compared cinema-going to other leisure activities. Douglas Fairbanks was the most popular actor, followed by Rudolf Valentino (particularly among girls) and Charlie Chaplin.

<sup>38</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1932, 37–48, 121–134, 273–284, 357–370.

<sup>39</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 1932, 861.

<sup>40</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 869.

<sup>41</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 504–17, 603–12, 693–99.

<sup>42</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 511.

<sup>43</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 494–502, 600–12.

Finally, one should mention an American study published in the journal. It investigated the impression the film *The Thief of Baghdad* made on 107 schoolchildren. Mary Allen Abbott and Cecile White Flemming conducted the study at Columbia University.<sup>44</sup> This one had a quasi-experimental design. It included

a report of audience reactions at the showing of the film 'The Thief of Baghdad'; a discussion of the answers to the fact questions on a test given four days after the showing of the film; a comparison of the scores for the test with mental ability and other factors; and an analysis of the opinions of the children, as expressed in their answers to the judgement questions on the test, as to what was exciting, funny, scary, cruel, and too silly in the film, and what were the qualities to be admitted, and what to be disliked in the main characters of the story<sup>45</sup>.

The study was thus psychologically oriented: seeking to investigate connections to intelligence apart from merely testing success in learning and the increase of knowledge. The recorded mass reactions were clapping and laughing, but also signs of disdain. Among other things, the study identified a correlation between ability and the comprehension and retention of film contents.

## 6. Rudolf Arnheim as a member of the IECI's research staff

These activities by the IECI suggest that it played more than a minor role in the studying of film and the development of empirical communication science in the twentieth century. This impression is reinforced by an aspect of the history of the IECI, involving its most important scientist, Rudolf Arnheim.

Arnheim was from Germany. Born in Berlin in 1904, he studied psychology, art and music history there in the 1920s. His work was influenced by his contact with the psychologists Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Lewin. In 1928, Arnheim wrote a PhD thesis on "Experimentell-psychologische Untersuchungen zum Ausdrucksproblem" ("Experimental Psychological Studies on the Problem of Expression"). This study examined the association of people's characteristic handwriting to their portraits, the results of the positive associations were statistically analysed; and the errors were qualitatively analysed. Furthermore, the process of reception during these experiments was analysed.

While he was still at university, Rudolf Arnheim had started writing film reviews for the satirical magazine *Das Stachelschwein*. In 1928 he became "editor of the cultural part" of *Weltbühne*, a well-known German magazine published by Carl von Ossietzky. The magazine promoted Socialist and pacifist ideas, which caused Ossietzky to be interned at a concentration camp in 1933. He died there in 1938, after having received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1936. Rudolf Arnheim was spared a similar fate, even though he was in danger, being a Jew. He managed to leave Germany a few months after the Nazis had come to power.

<sup>44</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 1931, 69–84, 169–176, 265–88, 505–18.

<sup>45</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 65–66.

Arnheim had published a book in 1932 in which he combined his observations as a film-critic with the scientific analysis he was familiar with ("Film als Kunst"). This book was one of the first to systematically establish a film theory based on receptive psychology. In his opinion, the supposition that film mechanically reproduced reality was a major error. He elaborated distinctions between "film image" and "world image" resulting from the projection process and film cuts. He pointed out to the specific aesthetic possibilities offered by this technique. Arnheim dealt with the various technical possibilities of film, but also considered its preferred contents. His book is a lasting contribution to film literature. An English translation was published in London in 1933, a US-edition of its important parts appeared in 1957, and several new editions have followed in different languages since then.

When Arnheim emigrated from Germany in 1933 he went to Rome, where he received an appointment at the IECI. Since the appearance of "Film als Kunst" ("Film as Art"), he seemed predestined to do research there. Politically, it seemed to be possible for him to work in Italy even though it was also ruled by Fascists.<sup>46</sup> Arnheim worked at the IECI for five years, until it was dissolved in 1938. Italy became too dangerous for him and he was again forced to emigrate, this time to London, where he worked as a translator for the German language service of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). When his long desired American visa arrived, he moved to the United States.

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<sup>46</sup> The magazine *Film Culture* claimed in an article in 1934 that the IECI was an "undercover" propaganda service of Mussolini. Rudolf Arnheim explicitly rejected these allegations against the Institute in 1935. This put him in the strange position of seeming to defend the Italian fascists: "I have been working for over a year in the Institute. I am a foreigner and believe myself unbiased. In all cases I have been in a position to observe that it was Luciano Feo's endeavour to secure the collaboration of outstanding men in all countries and to make use of the material supplied by them in the true spirit of international objectivity. Why, in spite of all this, should the Italian Government find it worth subsidizing the Institute? Well, in my opinion, because it would enhance Italy's prestige if so important a factor in modern life as the film had its international headquarters in Rome." Rudolf Arnheim, "I.C.E. – A Reply to G.F. Mixon," *Cinema Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1935), 97.



*Rudolf Arnheim in front of the Villa Torlonia, Rome. (reconstructive watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs, Arne Gellrich)*

Despite the distress of exile, it seems that nothing better could have happened to Arnheim than the opportunity to conduct film research at the IECI. He was a member of the editor's committee of the monthly journal *Intercine* in 1935 and was responsible for German translations. He wrote several articles and film reviews for it, as well as a regular column which contained a summary of topical articles on problems of expression in film. In his years in Rome, Arnheim also wrote articles for the Italian film magazines *Cinema* and *Bianco e Nero*. *Cinema* was founded by the IECI in 1936 as a popular film magazine.

But Arnheim's main project at the IECI was to prepare a large encyclopaedia of film.<sup>47</sup> The plan to systematically collect all knowledge of film had always been one of the main aims of the IECI. It was not until Rudolf Arnheim took over that the project progressed considerably. In 1935 *Intercine* announced the intended design of the encyclopaedia and carried an article by Arnheim on the progress achieved thus far, the problems regarding contents and the great expense involved.<sup>48</sup> The whole project was without precedent. Up to this point, there had been no general terminology, and the available data were not reliable. The set-up was to include forty-eight subjects, and thousands of annotations. It turned out to be difficult to present the different aspects of film – economic, technical, intellectual, artistic, historical, scientific, sociological and political – in a connected manner. Many experts from different countries became contributors (see figure on the facing page).

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<sup>47</sup> Taillibert, *L'Institut international du cinématographe éducatif*, 347–48.

<sup>48</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *Intercine*, 130–38; Rudolf Arnheim, *Die Seele in der Silberschicht: Medientheoretische Texte. Photographie – Film – Rundfunk*, ed. Helmut H. Diederichs (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004), 221–28.

# THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE CINEMA

## GENERAL PLAN

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>GENERALITIES:</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aesthetics in general (11).</li> <li>Mechanics in general (21).</li> <li>Optics in general (31).</li> <li>Chemistry in general (41).</li> <li>Electro-acoustics in general (51).</li> <li>Electro-technics in general (61).</li> </ul>   |
| <b>GENERAL CLASSIFICATIONS:</b>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History and Evolution (71).</li> <li>The cinema in different countries (81).</li> <li>Film content (91).</li> <li>Style and means of representation (101).</li> <li>Relations of the cinema with... (141).</li> <li>The scientific film (151).</li> <li>The educational film (161).</li> </ul>   |
| <b>PRODUCTION &amp; PRODUCERS (171):</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Preparation of the film:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raw stock (181).</li> <li>The scenario (191).</li> <li>Cinematographic music (201).</li> </ul> </li> <li><i>Making pictures (211):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Production establishments (221).</li> <li>Mise en scène. Scenic (art) directors (231).</li> <li>The actors (241).</li> <li>Scenography. Scene Technique (251).</li> <li>Lighting (261).</li> <li>Make-up-Costume (271).</li> <li>The Motion Picture Camera and use (281).</li> <li>The Sound Film; Sound registering (331).</li> <li>Exteriors (341).</li> </ul> </li> <li><i>Laboratory:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cadragé; Distance for making shots; Formats (291).</li> <li>Photography (301).</li> <li>Trick Work (311).</li> <li>Mobility of motion picture cameras (321).</li> <li>Development and Printing (351).</li> <li>Mounting; dubbing; sub-titles (361).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution (371).</li> <li>Television (381).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>PROJECTION HALLS-PROGRAMMES (391).</b>                           |   |
| <b>PROJECTION (401):</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Projection Cabin (411).</li> <li>The Projector and its use (421).</li> </ul>   |
| <b>LEGISLATION; SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS; THE PUBLIC (431).</b> |   |
| <b>INSTITUTES AND ORGANIZATIONS (441).</b>                          |   |



Unfortunately, this encyclopaedia – intended to comprise several illustrated volumes – never appeared. Before the work was completed, the IECI was dissolved, leaving the ambitious project unpublished. Arnheim had not only supervised the encyclopaedia of film – which was supposed to appear first in German, then in Italian – as co-editor, but had also written several articles himself.<sup>49</sup> The articles for the encyclopaedia developed ideas already existing in Arnheim's film masterpiece, such as motion in film, style, painting and film, symbols, lighting, asynchronism, etc. Obviously, film was a reproductive medium, but it had its own means of design, so that film was or could become art.

Oddly enough, the first substantial contribution Arnheim wrote for the monthly journal of the IECI, dealt with television ("Seeing afar off"). He explained the physiological and technical principles of this new, developing medium. He considered the relationship of film, radio and television. He even called television a "marriage between radio and cinema"<sup>50</sup>. Arnheim believed television would greatly increase the horizon of human experience: "Television signifies a new, immense victory of our senses over space and time, and will amazingly enrich our sensory capacity"<sup>51</sup>. But he was uncertain, even sceptic, about the means of visual design offered by television. This was partially because the common notions of the possibilities offered by television were still rather primitive. Nevertheless, Arnheim thought television was a threat to cinema, particularly since cinema was increasingly becoming a commercial medium for entertainment and information.

## 7. Arnheim's contributions to communication research in the United States

Rudolf Arnheim's work at the IECI had prepared him to become one of the founding fathers of modern communication research. When he got to the United States in 1940, he quickly made contact with other immigrants who had been trying for some time to bring together research traditions they had brought from Europe with those of America, and then to develop these further. Of particular importance in this context was Paul F. Lazarsfeld, who stayed in the United States and did not return to Vienna in the mid-1930s.<sup>52</sup> He had established contacts with academic institutions, but he also had come in contact with commercial research. Together with Hadley Cantril and Frank Stanton, Lazarsfeld inaugurated the Princeton Radio-Research Project, which was transformed into the famous Office of Radio Research at Columbia University, New York, in 1940.

Arnheim had the good fortune to get a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation, and with its help he was appointed to the Office of Radio Research. The fact that his psychological training was empirical helped gain him the appointment, even though he never rejected aesthetic aspects of broadcasting. Another immigrant among his colleagues was Theodor W. Adorno. Lazarsfeld's

<sup>49</sup> They were published later on in the American Journal *Film Culture* (1957/58), as an appendix to the American edition of Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), in Germany in a collection of his smaller film essays (Rudolf Arnheim, *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film* (München: C. Hanser, 1977)), and in several other languages, too.

<sup>50</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, *Intercine*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> International Educational Cinematographic Institute, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Kurt Lang, "The European Roots," in *American Communication Research: The Remembered History*, ed. Everette E. Dennis and Ellen Wartella, LEA's Communication Series (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1996), 21–28.

relationship to Adorno was – because of personal temperament as well as different research conceptions – full of tensions.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to this, Lazarsfeld later wrote about his contacts with Arnheim:

[ I take some comfort from the fact that not all contacts with German experts on aesthetic matters misfired. Rudolf Arnheim had written sensitive essays on movies as a form of art. [...] I remember the collaboration with him as enlightening for me and useful for the projects.<sup>54</sup>

In his memoirs, Lazarsfeld mentions Arnheim's essays on "Film as Art" "that showed much understanding for the topic"<sup>55</sup>.

Even more significant for research within the Office was Arnheim's book on radio, which had appeared in English in London in 1936. In this book he tried to elaborate the basic reception-psychological and expressive problems of the audio medium, using principles of figural psychology. The absence of the picture provided the radio with certain unique means of expression, based on sound only. Arnheim even spoke of the "praise of blindness" that formed the essence of radio.

Prompted by Lazarsfeld, Arnheim conducted two research projects at the Office of Radio Research in the early 1940s. In the course of the first one he analysed foreign language programmes of local American radio stations.<sup>56</sup> The central question was to what extent these programmes, mainly for immigrants, helped their integration into American society.

He did this by way of a quantitative content analysis of questionnaires filled out by selected listeners at 59 different places in the United States on about 800 hours in German, Italian, Polish, Lithuanian and Spanish programmes. The proportion of music, news, commercials and other features was determined, as well as the contents of the programmes – whether they functioned as a connection to the country of origin or as assimilation to the new environment. Even though there were great differences between the various foreign language programmes, Arnheim and his co-author noted that there was

[ a tendency to maintain the status quo of the listener's assimilation or even to drive him back into his setting of life which he had left beyond the ocean many years ago<sup>57</sup>.

And they added a critical remark:

<sup>53</sup> David E. Morrison, "Kultur and Culture: The Case of Theodor W. Adorno and Paul F. Lazarsfeld," *Social Research* 45, no. 2 (1978): 331–55.

<sup>54</sup> Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "An Episode in the History of Social Research. A Memoir," in *The Varied Sociology of Paul F. Lazarsfeld: Writings*, ed. Patricia L. Kendall (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 61.

<sup>55</sup> Lazarsfeld, 61.

<sup>56</sup> Rudolf Arnheim and Martha Collins Bayne, "Foreign Language Broadcasts over Local American Stations. A Study of a Special Interest Program," in *Radio Research*, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton, *Perennial Works in Sociology* (New York: Duell, Sloane & Pearce, 1941), 3–64.

<sup>57</sup> Arnheim and Bayne, 58.

At a time when the solidarity of the people of this country must be considered a matter of vital interest, it seems opportune to examine the question of what should be done about radio programmes which, by their present policy, may hamper the further amalgamation of larger groups of immigrants.<sup>58</sup>

The second research project – published in 1944 under the title “The World of the Daytime Serial” – was of even greater general value<sup>59</sup>. It has become a classic of communication research. Arnheim’s name has remained in the annals of early communication research mainly through this study. Basically, it was a content analysis of American radio serials. Locales, the social status of main characters, daily problems, their causes and solutions were categorized and counted. The results were then presented by tables. Besides this quantification, more specific features were illustrated qualitatively by typical quotes. In addition, Herta Herzog collected data on female listeners. Forty-three radio serials were analysed, differentiating between the social setting of the plot, the problems and especially the characters presented. The results showed that next to “good” and “bad”, “soft” characters played a prominent role, since they were preferred figures of identification for female listeners. In general, Arnheim identified rather uniform structures for the formation and solution of conflicts in radio serials. He interpreted his results social-psychologically and explained the success of the serials in terms of their ability to satisfy the needs of female listeners in a rather simple manner. Thus, Arnheim became one of the founders of functional analysis in communication research and laid the foundations to the approach that was later labelled “uses and gratifications”.

<sup>58</sup> Arnheim and Bayne, 58.

<sup>59</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, “The World of the Daytime Serial,” in *Radio Research 1942-43* (New York, NY: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1944), 34–85.



*Rudolf Arnhem c. 1940.  
(reconstructive watercolour rendering  
based on contemporary photographs,  
Arne Gellrich)*

The Office of Radio Research helped Rudolf Arnheim become established in the United States, but it could not hold him forever. In 1943, he became a member of the Faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, a leading liberal arts college at Bronxville (New York), where he taught until 1966. From 1968 to 1974 he was Professor of Art-Psychology at Harvard University. Then, he was a visiting professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he led a course until his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday.

These biographical data indicate that he left communication research in a narrow sense when he left the Office of Radio Research. He then rather turned to art-psychological studies in general and became one of the most prominent authors in this field. The book “Art and Visual Perception”, first published in 1954, became his *opus magnum*. The scientific work of the second part of his life cannot be detailed here for reasons of space, but its value is uncontested, as verified by translations into many languages. Many of his essays on the psychology of art deal with processes of the perception and decoding of sign-systems, expressed in his book “Visual Thinking”<sup>60</sup>, can clearly be applied to all visual media. In the early days in Berlin, during his stay at the IECI in Rome, and during his work in the United States, Arnheim had never seen aesthetics as a matter of esoteric art, but as something that forms all practical, everyday design.

## 8. Epilogue

As announced in the Preface, in the following I will document how Rudolf Arnheim responded to the study presented here. I had sent him the manuscript at the beginning of 1990, incidentally before I presented it at the annual conference of the International Association of Mass and Communication Research (IAMCR) in Dublin (24.6.-29.6.). In a letter dated 12 May 1990, the then almost 87-year-old replied. He acknowledged the presentation as being “well informed” and added some supplementary remarks. This letter was written in German, Arnheim’s mother tongue. It is reproduced here in its original facsimile and also by an English translation. One must be aware that this is *not* the literal use of language by Rudolf Arnheim himself. In another short letter of 10 October 1991 Rudolf Arnheim expressed his thanks for the offprint of the article, meanwhile published in the *European Journal of Communication*. Arnheim died on 5 June 2007, at his long-time domicile in Ann Arbor, after dementia had unfortunately afflicted him in the last years of his life.

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<sup>60</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

## Appendix: Letter of Rudolf Arnheim to Jürgen Wilke, 12 May 1991

Dear Mr. Wilke,

Thank you for sending me your very interesting and astonishingly well-informed essay; and of course I am very grateful for the appreciation of my contribution to communication research.

I will content myself with individual remarks in the following. My work at the Institute was almost not at all related to actual educational film work, except at the beginning, when I helped with the German translations, which were not very good. Then, however, I worked as a collaborator and editor of the magazine *Intercine*, later on *Cinema*, and above all on the *Encyclopaedia*. The relationship of the League of Nations Institute to Fascism is worth mentioning. Mussolini had given the Institute its headquarters in one of the two Renaissance villas that stand in the park of Villa Torlonia. The other one Mussolini used as his private apartment. But we employees had no relationship with him. On the other hand, our director, Luciano de Feo, was a personal friend of Mussolini. However, no politically motivated coercion was ever imposed on me, and my work had nothing whatsoever to do with the ideology of the regime.

[Regarding p. 14], it should be noted that the warlike character of the Italian youth is, of course, inseparable from Fascist youth education and the organizations analogous to the Hitler Youth to which the children had to belong.

[Regarding p. 18], although the complete original version of my 1932 film book is included in the 1933 English translation, I reduced the content to the essential theoretical chapters in the 1957 American version, which I produced and revised, and supplemented the book with some essays from the Italian period. This version provides the basis for all further English editions as well as for all translations into a dozen languages. The original German version therefore exists only in German.

The encyclopaedia was to be published by Hoepli in Milan. Apart from my many contributions, I also produced about 1000 pages of pagination of text and illustrations. All my essential keyword essays were then published in this or that way in later years.

[Regarding p. 22], it was not Lazarsfeld who got me the Rockefeller Fellowship, but it was, conversely, the Rockefeller Foundation that gave me the fellowship and then placed me with the places it subsidized, primarily just the Office of Radio Research, but also the film library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. My first work for the Radio Institute cannot be separated from the war situation at that time. One of our tasks had to do with the political attitude of the local radio stations. Among the German minority, of course, there was an ambiguous attitude during the war; on the one hand, people were patriotic Americans, especially when America intervened in the war, but on the other hand, most were still German enough to feel a sense of satisfaction when the German army won its initial victories. So one wanted to know in what spirit these foreign-language local stations treated the war news.

Herta Herzog's work was a parallel to mine, not a part of it. My data came about through a group of Columbia University students who kept accurate records of a particular broadcast every day for a month. Herta (Lazarsfeld's wife) collected her own data by interviewing listeners. I edited the broadcasts, she edited the listeners.

The formula I derived from the serials referred to two main types I found almost universally, namely, on the one hand, a weak female character, her confusion, life complications, and so on corresponded to the private problems of the typical female listeners, with whom they could thus realistically identify. In addition, however, each programme had its ideal figure, an energetic leader, who guided the destinies of the sad housewives, and it was precisely this double identification that made the programs so successful.

[Middle of page 24], it was after I retired from Harvard that I moved to Michigan, where I then taught one course a semester for another ten years until I was 80.

So much just as a comment. Best wishes for your speech in Dublin, and again my thanks for your appreciation.

Your

Rudolf Arnheim

RUDOLF ARNHEIM  
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ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48103  
TELEPHONE (313) 666-6483

Sehr geehrter Herr Wilke

12 Mai 1990

Ich danke Ihnen für die Übersendung Ihres sehr interessanten und erstaunlich gut-informierten Aufsatzes; und natürlich bin ich Ihnen für die Widmung meines Beitrages zur Kommunikationsforschung sehr dankbar.

Ich will mich im Folgenden mit Einzelbemerkungen begnügen. Meine Arbeit am Institut war so gut wie gänzlich auf die eigentliche Lehrfilmarbeit bezügl., ausser allenfalls in der ersten Zeit, als Mithilfe an den deutschen Übersetzungen, mit denen es nicht sehr gut bestellt war. Dann aber war ich als Mitarbeiter und Redakteur an der Zeitschrift *Ingereine*, später an *Cinema*, und vor allem an der *Enzyklopädie* beschäftigt.

Die Beziehung des Völkerbunds-Instituts zum Faschismus ist der Erwähnung wert. Mussolini hatte dem Institut seinen Sitz in einem der zwei Renaissancevillen gegeben, die im Park der Villa Torlonia stehen. Die andere benutzte Mussolini als seine Privatwohnung. Doch hatten wir Angestellten mit ihm keinerlei Beziehung. Hingegen war unser Direktor, Luciano de Feo, ein persönlicher Freund von Mussolini. Doch ist mir niemals irgendeine politische motivierter Zwang auferlegt worden, und meine Arbeit hatte mit der Ideologie des Regimes nicht das Geringste zu tun.

Zu S. 14 ist zu bemerken, dass der kriegerische Charakter der italienischen Jugend natürlich untrennbar von der faschistischen Jugenerziehung ist und den der Hitlerjugend analogen Organisationen, denen die Kinder angehören mussten.

Zu Seite 18. Die vollständige Originalfassung meines Filmbuches vom Jahr 1932 ist zwar in der englischen Übersetzung von 1933 enthalten, doch reduzierte ich den Inhalt in der von mir herausgegebenen und überarbeiteten amerikanischen Fassung von 1937 auf die wesentlichen theoretischen Kapitel und ergänzte das Buch durch einige Aufsätze aus der italienischen Zeit. Diese Fassung liegt allen weiteren englischen Ausgaben zugrunde wie auch allen Übersetzungen in einem Dutzend Sprachen. Die deutsche Urfassung gibt es also nur auf deutsch.

Die *Enzyklopädie* sollte beim Verlag Hoepli in Mailand erscheinen. Abgesehen von meinen vielen Beiträgen stellte ich auch etwa 1000 Seiten Umbruch von Text und Illustrationen her. Alle meine wesentlichen Stichwortaufsätze sind dann in späteren Jahren auf diese oder jene Weise veröffentlicht worden.

Zu S. 22. Es war nicht Lazarsfeld, der mir das Rockefeller-Stipendium verschaffte, sondern es war umgekehrt die Rockefeller Foundation, die mir das Stipendium gab und mich dann bei den von ihr subventionierten Plätzen unterbrachte, vor allem eben das Office of Radio Research, aber auch die Filmbibliothek des Museum of Modern Art in New York. Meine erste Arbeit für das Radio-Institut ist von dem damaligen Regimesituation nicht zu trennen. Seine unsere Aufgaben hatte es mit der politischen Haltung der Lokal-

-2-  
rundfunkstationen zu tun. In der deutschen Minderheit gab es natürlich während des Krieges eine zweideutige Haltung: einerseits war man patriotischer Amerikaner, zumal als Amerika in den Krieg eingriff, andererseits aber waren die meisten noch deutsch gemutet, um eine Befriedigung zu empfinden, als die deutsche Armee ihre anfänglichen Siege erkämpfte. Man wollte also wissen, in welchem Geiste diese fremdsprachigen Lokalstationen die Kriegsnachrichten behandelten.

Herta Herzogs Arbeit war eine Parallelarbeit zu der meinigen, nicht ein Teil von ihr. Meine Daten kamen durch eine Gruppe von Columbia-Studenten zustande, die täglich einen Monat lang genaue Aufzeichnungen über eine bestimmte Sendung machten. Herta (Lazarsfelds Frau) sammelte ihre eigenen Daten durch Interviews von Hörern. Ich bearbeitete die Sendungen, sie die Hörerinnen.

Die von mir aus den Serials abgeleitete Formel bezieht sich auf zwei Haupttypen, die ich fast durchgängig vorfand. Nämlich einerseits eine schwache Frauenfigur, deren Konfusion, Lebenskomplikationen, usw. den Privatproblemen der typischen Hörerinnen entsprach, mit der sie sich also realistisch identifizieren konnten. Dazu aber, ebenso wichtig, hat jedes Programm eine Idealfigur, eine tatkräftige Führerin, die die Schicksale der betrüblichen Hausfrauen lenkten, und es war eben diese Doppelidentifikation, die den Erfolg der Programme ausmachte.

Mitte Seite 24. Es war nach meiner Emeritierung von Harvard, dass ich nach Michigan zog, wo ich dann noch zehn Jahre lang einen Kursus pro Semester bis zu meinem 80sten Lebensjahr unterrichtete. Soviel nur als Kommentar. Die besten Wünsche für Ihren Vortrag in Dublin, und nochmal meinen Dank für die Widmung.

Ihr

Rudolf Arnheim

Letter of Rudolf Arnheim to Jürgen  
Wilke, 12 May 1991  
(private papers, Jürgen Wilke).



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## Locating the League of Nations' communication world – a response

“Here is the League of Nations at work”, said the voiceover of a well-known infomercial produced by Realist Film on commission of the League’s Information Section in 1937, “judge it for yourselves”. And indeed, the League was judged, in its own time and in the postwar era. Within academia, however, as Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz points out in her chapter of this volume, League scholarship has been “dominated by the fields of political science and history, not by communication studies”<sup>1</sup>. In fact, due to a widespread analysis stating that it was “a failure”, for a long time the League of Nations had not been very popular in history and political science either since the immediate postwar period. This started to change about a decade and a half ago, when Susan Pedersen celebrated (and pushed for) a new generation of scholarship and new approaches to the United Nations’ dishonored parent.<sup>2</sup> She observed that the cultural and institutional legacies of the League started to attract the attention of historians and social scientists after the end of the Cold War and in particular in the new millennium. Today, a wide range of works by scholars such as Carolyn Biltoft<sup>3</sup>, Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon A. Ikonomou and Torsten Kahlert<sup>4</sup>, Glenda Sluga<sup>5</sup>, Patricia Clavin<sup>6</sup>, Susan Pedersen<sup>7</sup>, Daniel Gorman<sup>8</sup>, Daniel Laqua<sup>9</sup> and many others bear witness to this revival. Most recently, the League of Nations Archives in the United Nations Office at Geneva is being completely digitized and recently boasts of a new, exciting digital research tool for coming generations of researchers to enjoy the archives in their full magnificence from the comfort of their homes, although Geneva and the archives in the *Palais des Nations* are definitely worth visiting.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Averbeck-Lietz chapter in this book.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091–1117.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn N. Biltoft, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert, eds., *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: University Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Gorman, *International Cooperation in the Early Twentieth Century*, New Approaches to International History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: University Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Laqua, *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, International Library of Twentieth Century History 34 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Haakon Ikonomou et al., “Visualizing the League of Nations Secretariat - a Digital Research Tool,” University of Copenhagen, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://visualeague-researchtool.com/>.

However, as the authors of the volume are well aware, some media scholars did in fact engage with the League's fascinating publicity ambitions before its historiographical renaissance.<sup>11</sup> The recent emergence of interest in these ventures<sup>12</sup> mark a breakthrough: the rediscovery of the League may be said to have begun with the media angle, and now it has returned to it.

Regrettably, most people know the League of Nations best for what it did *not* do, namely prevent the outbreak of the Second World War. Depending on one's position in international relations theory, either this objective was never realizable or the failure was due to the League's association to the victors of 1918 and the despised Treaty of Versailles, the abstention from membership by the United States (US) or the League's structural shortcomings in areas such as disarmament. However, besides issues of a traditionally diplomatic kind, the League pursued a wide array of other projects, such as international health, refugee aid, "financial stabilization" and the supervision of the Mandates System, several of which have seen pioneering works of scholarship emerge recently. League information policy is perhaps a "meta-topic" in this regard: to communicate to the press and the public is not something most people would locate at the heart of international organization. It has recently been argued that the endeavors of such institutions to rally mass support have often been based on "exorbitant expectations"<sup>13</sup>. So, what makes the League's publicity and information policies worthwhile as a field of study?

The answer, I would argue, is twofold. First, it has to do with the importance the League itself attributed to publicity and "open diplomacy". That this emphasis was real may be inferred from the words and prioritizations of League officials. As is clearly shown in the volume and elsewhere, including my own work, virtually everyone who was involved in planning, organizing and running the League, particularly during the 1920s, celebrated the idea of publicity, transparency and the power of public opinion. And it was not simply a rhetorical figure. As shown in the volume, the Secretariat – an officially international bureaucracy with about eleven policy sections in addition to an internal administration and several auxiliary bodies – came to include a very large Information Section. Its ambition was to offer a second-to-none press service, but also to build and nurture a completely new kind of relationship between international diplomacy and the public. Its officials shared these ambitions with people beyond the formal boundaries of the Secretariat: the Geneva press corps and League proponents all over the world. Within the League system, the idea of the power of public opinion as a democratic force was embedded in many other League endeavors besides publicity itself. As Haakon A. Ikononou has shown, attracting too much attention by

<sup>11</sup> Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, "The League of Nations and the Mass Media: The Rediscovery of a Forgotten Story" (XV Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR/AIERI), New Delhi, 1986), [https://sites.tuuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the\\_league\\_of\\_nations\\_and\\_the\\_mass\\_media.pdf](https://sites.tuuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the_league_of_nations_and_the_mass_media.pdf), Birgit Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Tomoko Akami, "The Limits of Peace Propaganda: The Information Section of the League of Nations and its Tokyo office," in *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations*, ed. Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi J. S. Tworek (London: Routledge, 2018), 70–90; Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, "The League of Nations' Collaboration with an 'International Public', 1919–1939," *Contemporary European History* 31, no. 3 (August 2022): 368–80; Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, "Message from Geneva: The Public Legitimization Strategies of the League of Nations and Their Legacy, 1919–1946" (PhD Thesis, Aarhus University, 2019); Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, *Informing Interwar Internationalism: The Information Strategies of the League of Nations*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2024); Arne Lorenz Gellrich, Erik Koenen, and Stefanie Averbek-Lietz, "The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy and the League of Nations: Co-Evolution between Diplomacy, PR and Journalism," *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 2020): 607–21.

<sup>13</sup> Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi J. S. Tworek, eds., *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations* (London: Routledge, 2018).

activists and interest groups to Geneva might have undermined the League's efforts to play a leading role with disarmament<sup>14</sup>, and recently Nicholas Mulder has shown how the effort to create a hard-hitting economic sanctions regime (an "economic weapon") under the auspices of the League rested on the alternative assumption about public opinion that, if the public in an aggressor state was starved enough, it would rise up and topple its government.<sup>15</sup> Public opinion was a cornerstone in a liberal democratic worldview and therefore in the League. Averbeck-Lietz, Koenen and Gellrich have argued that the endeavor to build the League's own internal and external communications regime – concentrated in the Palais Wilson (and later the Palais des Nations) but extending further – can be understood as a gradually emerging epistemic "project". This project combined the wish to instrumentalize information in specific political contexts of the diplomatically-minded official with the wish to ensure transparency and "get out the story" of the journalist (although there was never a clear-cut divide between the two groups). They build on this conceptual invention in their chapters in this volume, stressing that it should not be confused with understanding League information officials as an epistemic "community", because the actors involved did not constitute a homogenous group cooperating on a clearly defined, uniform mission<sup>16</sup>. Instead, League information practices were a complex negotiation between many different actors. Naturally, the maneuver of establishing a wider understanding of an epistemic community (proposed by Heidi Tworek as a descriptor of League journalistic spheres)<sup>17</sup> as an epistemic "project" runs the risk of conflating the analytical tool to a point where it is unclear what aims and values the actors shared. However, the authors make it clear that the way they see it, participants in the epistemic project, namely officials, journalists, observers and the likes "all contributed (willingly or in unintended consequence) to the epistemic project of furthering press access, freedom of speech and ostracizing hateful speech and false news". Is it possible to *unknowingly* contribute to a project or is a project a planned enterprise? If there is a paradox here, I am not innocent – in my own work I identify League information "strategies" without always being able to point to articulated plans. I believe the inference of strategy or "project" from the sources is a necessary maneuver in a situation like that of the Information Section which left so few internal documents. Besides, the ambition of the authors here is a broader one, namely to discuss systematically the preconditions for working with the League's information and public relations practices.

The second reason why League information work is worth studying is that the League's effort to anchor international governance in public support echoes today. The question of whether international organizations can count on popular backing to pressure national governments, or conversely, how vulnerable they are to the whims of public opinion is as relevant as ever. With Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine the muscle of the United Nations, not as a direct deliberative power, but as a forum for calling out aggression by a member state before the world, is in the spotlight. Equally, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union, although they are institutions which are quite different from the League (a military alliance and a supra-national organization) are put to the test: Does NATO have the public and political support to ensure that its member governments

<sup>14</sup> Haakon Ikononou, "The Administrative Anatomy of Failure: The League of Nations Disarmament Section, 1919–1925," *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 3 (August 2021): 321–34.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Gellrich, Koenen, and Averbeck-Lietz, "The Epistemic Project of Open Diplomacy."

<sup>17</sup> Heidi J. S. Tworek, "Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations," *Medien & Zeit* 25, no. 4 (2010): 16–28.



can maintain unity? Can the European Union build and maintain a strong enough mandate amongst its member states – and subsequently their publics – to make governments that breach European Union agreements pay a price? Thus, the public information practices of international organizations are still relevant because they connect to contemporary problems, and the League of Nations was the first such organization in existence that had a permanent Secretariat, a global ambition and an explicit mandate as a peacekeeper. Seen from this perspective, the fundamental challenge facing international organizations *vis à vis* the public has not changed substantially during the course of a century, and it is always relevant to study how the first such international communications strategists interpreted the problem.

In sum, the League's communications practices are interesting both because of their historical particularity and because of their timeless relevance. In what ways are the approaches to these practices taken by media scholars and historians of international cooperation different from each other? The short (and diplomatic) answer is that both have strong merits. Media scholars bring a careful approach to methodology and may evaluate the League's information work in terms of internal versus external communication. In this case, the authors draw on the very interesting theoretical framework of the co-evolution of two of the key practices present in the Information Section, which today are called public relations and journalism<sup>18</sup>. They are thus able to integrate the League's own theorizing on communications into the development of the field of communications studies. Another way of doing so in this volume is the way in which Averbeck-Lietz contextualizes the Information Section's endeavors *vis à vis* national elites, by showing that their experiences built up to ground-breaking realizations in the 1940s by Paul Lazarsfeld and others on the two-step flow of communications and the concept of opinion-leaders. This is a fascinating way of studying, in an international setting, the underpinnings of a new theory on public relations. Conversely, many elements of the League's experiences were not generalizable but clearly the products of specific historical circumstances. The organization was the product of a great historical trauma – the First World War. Interwar observers contrasted their visions of an open, publicly scrutinized kind of diplomacy to a "secret" diplomacy which, they argued, had catalyzed the First World War. Anything with the whiff of military strategy, such as the term "propaganda", was deeply controversial in the Secretariat exactly because of the war experience. Interestingly, some Information Section officials had been involved in producing war propaganda (such as the early assistant director of the Information Section, George Mair), and most of them had to be aware that creating a completely transparent diplomacy that would see decision-makers do diplomatic negotiations in full public view was unrealistic in the distrustful international atmosphere among the Great Powers at the time.

Next, I am going to briefly and chronologically discuss each of the book's chapters (which follow a brief but succinct introduction by Erik Koenen), drawing out some of their contributions, as I see it, to the field of the League of Nations' history of communications while considering the abovementioned balance between a particularist, context-driven approach and an ambition to gain general insights about League communication. Afterwards, I am going to draw out some common challenges and point the way forward in this common field of ours.

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<sup>18</sup> Philomena Schönhagen and Mike Meissner, "The Co-Evolution of Public Relations and Journalism: A First Contribution to Its Systematic Review," *Public Relations Review* 42, no. 5 (December 1, 2016): 748–58.

Chapter 1, by Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, studies the intellectual roots of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations efforts to secure peace through media cooperation across borders. The authors build on earlier work on the League's efforts to facilitate peace through "moral disarmament" and "collaboration of the press". This story of League-initiated conferences and conversations to instrumentalize the press for peacekeeping raises the question of whether controlling press reporting on international politics was a "good thing" or, conversely, a prerequisite for the censorship initiatives that immediately predated the war. The chapter's contribution is its observations of the transnational media discussions that paralleled the darkening of the international scene in Europe, covering the period from the 1920s to the 1930s. The authors show that as the threat of war loomed larger, so discussions of how to regulate the press gradually turned from "technical" questions to questions of the extent to which the media shared a moral responsibility for preventing war by stopping the spread of "false news". Nordenstreng and Seppä are probably those among the authors of the volume who demonstrate the strongest devotion to the League's own liberal self-image. As suggested by their title, they propose observing the League as a key catalyst of trends, such as moral disarmament, that set the stage for its "normative approach to various fields of international life" that in turn is traceable into the UNESCO.<sup>19</sup> Their assertion that the League "stood for solidarism and pluralism, reflecting decolonization" would probably be challenged by scholars like Mark Mazower, who has argued that key League institutions and figures upheld colonial ideas as much as they dismantled them<sup>20</sup>, or be nuanced by Susan Pedersen, who has shown that the publicity received by the League's Permanent Mandates Commission spurred a dynamic to occur that was not intended by the rather *status quo* protective setup, namely the appearance of a "moral" cost of imperial administration.<sup>21</sup>

In Chapter 2, Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz's verdict on the League's achievements is more mixed and, at times, even seems to come close to contradicting the theory of a common epistemic "project". Moving into the machine room of League information policy – the Information Section – she introduces the reader to a "layered" approach to the League's mission to facilitate an open diplomacy. She asserts that it may be understood on three levels, namely as a "normative goal" of the Information Section, expressed by its material and by its officials, as a "diplomatic practice" the League sought to realize through policies, and finally as a strategic narrative of the League that it operationalized to legitimize itself to the public. In particular this final point relates closely to my own understanding of the Information Section: Despite its shortcomings, the way Pierre Comert, Arthur Sweetser and other key information officials interpreted their mission gives a clear insight into what the "spirit of Geneva" looked like during the League's first decade. The author's focus on the official Max Beer, together with other valuable archival "nuggets", brings fresh material to the table. Beer's proclivity in speaking his mind and demonstrating a devoted internationalist outlook combined with a staunch skepticism towards its actual achievements is fascinating. Beer's apparent skepticism towards the Secretariat hobbyhorse of "liaison" is a fascinating finding. Liaison was an activity I consider instrumental in the Information Section's work to consolidate its embeddedness in public opinion, however Beer seemed to consider it an example of (almost) the opposite, namely parochial nationalist thinking which went contrary to the genuinely international quality of the

<sup>19</sup> See Nordenstreng and Seppä chapter in this book.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, Lawrence Stone Lectures (Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Pedersen, *The Guardians*.

Secretariat. Ultimately, what is most thought-provoking about the chapter is the way it underscores the porous new community created in the Information Section, of people thinking “like journalists” and others thinking “like diplomats”, and of how their wish to protect their prestige at times drove them to compromise their ideals. Whereas earlier scholarship, including my own, has illuminated the double role of these officials, none has conceptualized the achievements of the Information Section as being dependent on the ways and extent to which these people and their values combined into an “epistemic project”. Averbeck-Lietz understands the drive towards transparency as “half the story”. The League’s information officials needed to pay lip service to a vision of an open diplomacy, but in reality, they often came to enable the opposite. This illustrates well the book’s overall ambition of placing journalism at the heart of the study of League communication history. The point of departure for historians on the League has been to identify the League as the main actor, with an emphasis on the Secretariat’s leadership, circulars, rules and official documents. The volume’s ambition of “decentering” the bureaucracy in favor of more normative ideals of “journalism” is handled well by media scholars. It opens the door for an expansion of the Geneva-world from the Secretariat and onto the correspondents who reported from there, and sometimes found a job there, as illustrated in the next chapter we turn to.

In Chapter 3 Erik Koenen and Arne L. Gellrich ask: who were the Geneva journalists? Their answer is a panoramic overview of the correspondents who either resided in, or went on reporting missions to, the League’s headquarters in Switzerland. Whereas other chapters have the League organization as the initiator or producer of internationalism, their chapter rather treats the League as a facilitator or, in the words of Sandrine Kott, a “site” for internationalism.<sup>22</sup> With the community built up in Switzerland, the League came to form the backdrop to a constitutive chapter in the history of international journalism and, as Frank Beyersdorff has demonstrated, was a point of departure for the standardization and professionalization of the profession.<sup>23</sup> They delve into the three most substantial “cohorts” of the press corps who reported from Geneva, the British, the French and the Germans. Heavy with detail and topically organized, the text underpins the book’s project in its totality, showing again how the “Geneva world” cannot be reduced to, or contained in, either the institution of the League (the Secretariat, the Assembly and the Council) or the activists, experts, journalists, spies or onlookers that surrounded it. Although the chapter could be more assertive in its conclusions, it clearly shows that there were constant interaction between these spheres – for example the Information Section regularly recruited its officials from among the correspondents. Koenen and Gellrich combine the micro-destinies of various personalities of the press corps with the panoramic final chapters on the coming of war and the extreme right, thus contextualizing their subject historically in a more pointed way than the book’s other chapters.

In Chapter 4, the final one of the volume and being a reprint of an older article, supplemented with a correspondence with a main actor of the text, the film scholar Rudolf Arnheim, Jürgen Wilke illuminates the work done by the Italian-sponsored, League affiliated International Educational Cinematography Institute (IEIC). The scientific endeavors to categorize and theorize on the nascent

<sup>22</sup> Sandrine Kott, “Toward a Social History of International Organizations: The ILO and the Internationalisation of Western Social Expertise (1919–1949)”, in *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World*, edited by Miguel B. Jeronimo and Jose P. Monteiro, (London: Palgrave, 2018), 33–77.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Beyersdorff, “First Professional International: FIJ (1926–40)”, in *A History of the International Movement of Journalists: Professionalism Versus Politics*, ed. Kaarle Nordenstreng et al., Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 80–124.

media of film and broadcasting and the way the League of Nations came to be an overlooked pillar of communications research are a particular focus. The role of the League as both a regulator of international affairs and a producer of knowledge and discourse, thus engaging with its own historiography, is fascinating and is further highlighted by the reminiscing character of the text, as it reproduces Arnheim's own comments on the relations between the IEIC and the Mussolini regime. It would have been fruitful to hear more of the author's understanding of the place of cinematography in the League's communications efforts, of the closeness of the League's oversight of the institute and of the limits to the positivistic character of the scholarship produced by Arnheim and his colleagues there.

The volume pledges with its structure to demonstrate "several steps and years of project research", and so it does. With the help of a useful theoretical framework, Averbeck-Lietz, Gellrich and Koenen provide valuable models for thinking about League communication practices in a broader way. The ambition to study the external as well as the internal communication processes of the Information Section outlines the conflicts between the forces of information "management" in the Secretariat and those simply pushing for as much transparency as possible. Averbeck-Lietz documents a constant drive towards centralization during the early years, when awakened internationalists like Arthur Sweetser experimented with the boundaries for what journalistic action he could take while being employed at the Information Section. Sweetser was brought in line by Comert, who in turn had to answer to Drummond, a pragmatic bureaucrat.

In their introduction, the authors point out three dimensions along which their research project was originally meant to work: the institutional, professional and public spheres surrounding the League. The public sphere-elements deserve comment. It is not completely absent but implied in Koenen and Gellrich's chapter on the collective biographies of the Geneva press corps, and to some extent in other chapters too. However, the authors do not confront head on the question of whether and how the League's effort actually *worked*, how it resonated amongst the public. The absence of a chapter that specifically deals with the reception of League information practices is not really surprising. This is an ever-present challenge in our shared field, one that I avoided in my own work. Impact is notoriously hard to measure, and how should one approach it in the case of the League, an international institution that targeted a multitude of different audiences? The relationship between the mysterious force of public opinion and international diplomacy is difficult to characterize. Daniel Hucker attempted, in a recent monograph, to study the impact of public opinion on foreign policy and on European integration. Of course, this is not exactly the same as examining the effect of international organizations information policies, but the point is that few have ever managed to do so.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer and Heidi Tworek conceded in their 2018 discussion that it is "hard to measure the impact of communication efforts" but that international organizations communications have historically always been most effective when "the intended audience had the ability and the power to enact the aims of the international organization"<sup>25</sup>. Media representations, networks, institutionalization and so on remain important subjects, but the extent to which early 20th century communications strategies (or projects) work and have worked to persuade, mobilize or educate publics is still one of the underexplored ways forward in our shared field.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Hucker, *Public Opinion and Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Global Perspective*, New Approaches to International History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Brendebach, Herzer, and Tworek, *International Organizations and the Media*.

Another point to reflect on is that all chapters in the volume tend to treat their subject topically rather than chronologically. Arguably, the developments *across* the dramatic European interwar period are at the heart of what makes League projects fascinating in any area. The oscillating dynamic in international politics, from the tense early 1920s to the optimistic relaxation of the “Locarno-moment” and Germany’s admission to the League, followed by the abysmal series of crises towards 1933, constitute a kind of showroom for whatever area of work one is studying in which any particular effort is tested against different types of crises and disturbances. In the case of information policies, one sees that during the early years, despite the unstable political and economic situation in Europe, plentiful resources were granted the information officials to try to make good of the League’s vision for a new relationship to public opinion. As Averbeck-Lietz points out, officials were quickly dissuaded from actually letting reporters follow everything they wanted but as can be seen from the size of the Information Section and the range of its endeavors, this was a Golden Age. As a supplement to the authors’ conceptualization of an epistemic project valid throughout the period, a longer period of analysis would show that some key underpinnings of this project were taken away from the section after 1934, when the section was forcibly reduced to half its original size. The centralization of the Secretariat that Averbeck-Lietz identifies escalated after her period of analysis, namely after 1934, when the Information Section was stripped of much of its independence and subjected to internal control by other sections and the Secretary General, following a harsh evaluation by the Assembly’s Supervisory Committee. The most likely explanation for the fact that “technical” efforts, such as international health and economic work supplanted information dominance in the budget of the Secretariat during the 1930s, is a combination of fiscal considerations and a growing feeling that information no longer served the League’s interest, because the public was considered irrational, because Great Power member states were withdrawing, and because the League’s epic failures in Manchuria and Abyssinia were very hard to put a positive spin on. On the one hand, this underscores that the authors have chosen the most interesting parts of the League’s existence to focus on (the early phase), but it is also less clearly observed when applying a topical approach instead of proceeding chronologically.

Rather than being cantankerous, my point here is to show the strengths I still see in a chronological approach to the interwar period. The great international historian Zara Steiner divided the interwar period into three phases, labelling the middle one between the “Golden Age” and the collapse of stability in Europe the “hinge years”, indicating that these were years on which a multitude of further complex political developments “hinged”.<sup>26</sup> This emphasis on the unpredictability of historical development set a crucial scene for understanding what the League could (hope to) communicate at any given time. On the other hand, the present volume has provided a tremendous deep dive into the communications machinery of the League, the tensions inherent in it, and the personalities involved. It offers a broad perception of the actors involved, extending it beyond the departmental. The volume also tolerates and thrives on a variety of different methodological “tempers” when it comes to how to examine an object like the League of Nations. With the embracing interview of League ideas by Nordenstreng and Seppä, the thorough and schematic approach by Averbeck-Lietz, the encyclopedic mapping by Koenen and Gellrich, and the close niche-study by Wilke we are offered a kaleidoscopic view of League communication history which is indeed worthy of our emerging field.

<sup>26</sup> Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919-1933*, Oxford History of Modern Europe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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• 223

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*Cover:*

*The first Assembly of the League of Nations in the Salle de la Réformation, Geneva, 15 November 1920.*

*(watercolour rendering, based on original image material by Geneva photographer F. H. Jullien, Arne Gellrich).*

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The League of Nations is analyzed through its complex transnational communication relations, highlighting the co-evolution of journalism and public relations. The book explores three dimensions: the institutional sphere, examining the League's information policy; the professional sphere, focusing on conference journalism; and the public sphere, analyzing press coverage and public reception. The League's initiatives on press collaboration and moral disarmament from 1925 to 1936 are reviewed, showing their influence on international multilateralism and cooperation. The book also discusses the League's pioneering role in promoting "open diplomacy" for maintaining peace through transparent communication strategies. Additionally, it examines Geneva journalists accredited to the League and explores Rudolf Arnheim's significant contributions to the League's media policy, particularly in relation to film and other new communication mediums of the 1920s.