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Rediscovering Internationalism

GLENDA SLUGA

Centenaries are occasions that invite both historical complacency and a rewarding curiosity. In the midst of the abundant arguments about the causes of the First World War (should we blame one nation, individual leaders' lapses, or an alliance system?), the conflict's consequences are worth contemplating. Seen from the perspective of its end, the war's devastating legacy was the unbearable cost of a modern total war—nearly 40 million military and civilian casualties. These were the accumulating statistics that drove wartime governments and their publics to take international governance seriously, and culminated in the twin tenets of peacemaking in 1919: the principle of nationality and the League of Nations.

After a long hiatus, historians are only now beginning to take the League idea as seriously as nationality, by returning to the study of the streams of international political thought that made both tenets possible. The familiar term "Wilsonianism" captures some of this international legacy. But it tends to focus our attention too simply on the role of US President Woodrow Wilson, including his Fourteen Points, presented to the American Congress in January 1918 as the aims of war and terms of peace, with the final point outlining the League: "A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."

Wilson's intervention cemented the legitimacy of a future league and, unintentionally, inspired all manner of national independence movements.

However, restored to his transnational social and intellectual context, Wilson turns out to have been the strong link in a long chain of interest in the creation of a league. The earliest historian of the peace process, the Cambridge don Harold Temperley, speculated that the League's architecture was a consequence of "[t]he practical experience gained" from wartime "international bodies": the Supreme War Council, the Inter-Allied Food Council, the Inter-Allied Munitions Council, the Inter-Allied Council on War Purchases and Finance, and the Allied Maritime Transport Council.

We know too that in the decades before the war, intergovernmental organizations and administrative bodies (or "public international unions") such as the International Telegraph Union or the Universal Postal Union, had mushroomed to meet commercial needs for transborder communication and transport. The rapid expansion of international bodies in turn spread the complementary concept of a "new internationalism," with its vision of international governance and the inevitable evolution of a more pacific era.

This new internationalism was on well-publicized display at the 1899 and 1907 Hague peace conferences, where Western delegates met in the presence of a few invited representatives of the Middle and Far Easts to discuss international laws that might deter war, or at least inhibit war's worst cruelties. These meetings worked through newly professionalized networks of international lawyers, as well as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a remarkable organization devised by bureaucrats and parliamentarians from France, Britain, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Liberia, Spain, and the United States to encourage arbitration in a world of alarming military stockpiling.

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Schemes and Societies

Just as importantly, the Hague conferences drew the close attention of concerned journalists, bankers, and oil barons, along with middle-class feminists. Even as Marxists or socialists continued to identify with a nineteenth-century class-based internationalism, by 1919, Temperley could describe the stakeholders in the new internationalism as statesmen who "knew from experience what was, and what was not, possible in international cooperation, or at any rate how international official bodies actually tended to work." He cited "the many jurists, publicists, and professors who in all countries drafted schemes often of great logical and theoretical perfection."

During the war, many of these same individuals, whether professors or politicians, British, French, or American, mobilized support for the idea of a league. Their league societies are the other side of wartime stories of the dramatic breakup of international associations under the national pressure of patriotic call-ups. The British example of the League of Nations Union (LNU) is the one we know best, thanks to the historian Helen McCarthy, who has delved deep into its records.

Created in 1918, the LNU brought together two separate societies that had been started three years earlier, as well as academic and political networks led by men such as the Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray, the Fabian Leonard Woolf, and parliamentary figures Edward Grey and Robert Cecil. According to McCarthy, the LNU's initiatives were supported by "broad sections of the population" in favor of "a collective system of international relations." Its call to arms urged study circles, public meetings, pageants, garden parties, and letters to members of Parliament.

In 1920 the LNU had around 60,000 members and 417 branches. Its executive body was dominated by men, but women held their ground in the membership base. If one includes corporate affiliates (including the Jewish Women's Union, Church Army Girls Clubs, and the Council of the Girls' Friendly Society) and postwar expansion, the numbers are more impressive. By 1921, membership had grown to 151,031, with 665 branches. The war's legacy was still apparent in 1931, when the LNU's growth peaked with 406,868 members and 3,036 branches.

The UN's limits were faithful to the compromises of the original League.

The *Association française pour la Société des Nations*, the French version of the LNU, also set up in 1918 by a similar mix of academic and political figures, accrued only about 20,000 adherents in the first years of its operation. In other ways it bore the hallmarks of this wartime trend. Its leaders imagined their league activities as part of a longer tradition of French political pacifism, and they presumed the compatibility of a future league with the principle of nationality, and of international government with the right of people to self-determination.

In the United States, prominent progressives including Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Fannie Fern Andrews, and the president of Stanford University, David Starr Jordan, belonged to the Central Organization for Durable Peace, based in The Hague. It had a broader brief than the LNU, as a "worldwide" society devoted to pacifism, the abolition of secret treaties, popular control of foreign policy, reduction of armaments, freedom of the seas, and guarantees of religious liberty. As with the other League-specific societies, this international program comfortably accommodated the self-determination of aspiring nationalities from within the Habsburg, Russian, French, Ottoman, and even British empires.

This twin agenda made personal sense to a transatlantic black elite, including W.E.B. Du Bois, and to many women who invested in the international aspirations as a means of improving their dismal political and legal status in existing nations. Writing on internationalism and nationalism in the American press in 1916, the popular Swedish feminist Ellen Key connected "woman's" role as "mother of humanity," cultivating "an international spirit," with "equal rights in politics, in nationality, in marriage, and, as parents, equal pay for equal work, and equal moral standards, equal training and opportunities, and the endowment of maternity."

State and Utopia

Wartime discussions in print, public meeting rooms, or correspondence anticipated a postwar order in ways that held the idea of the state (as the political form that protected nations and empires) in precarious tension with supranational sovereignty (as a necessary dimension of a viable and modern international community). At times, the

balance tipped in favor of the international half of the combination.

The Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts helped found the conservative League to Enforce Peace, and eventually became an opponent of Wilson's plan for a League of Nations. Yet he was convinced as early as June 1915 that although the idea of "a union of civilized nations in order to put a controlling force behind the maintenance of peace and international order" might sound utopian, "it is through the aspiration for perfection, through the search for Utopias, that the real advances have been made." Lodge's associate Theodore Marburg went so far as to propose the "surrender of a measure of sovereignty, for there is set up a will higher than the will of the nation." But he drew the line at the United States' "sovereign right to decide alone and for ourselves the vital question of the exclusion of Mongolian and Asiatic labor."

There is no doubt that the national corners of internationalism, and the ambiguities inherent in the relationship between these ideas, forced idiosyncratic conceptual permutations. The LNU's Australian-born Gilbert Murray, for example, conceived of the British Empire as a microcosm of an international society and a practical transitional nursery for new nations. Léon Bourgeois, the former French president, insisted that France had foreseen a *Société des Nations* at the Hague conferences, just as other French advocates of a postwar international "society" traced its heritage back to the universal principles of the French Revolution.

The social and intellectual purchase of the League idea and its various interpretations might matter less if many of the individuals engaged in its promotion were not so close to the decision-making seats of wartime governments. The British Political Intelligence Department employed LNU supporters such as Murray's son-in-law, Arnold Toynbee (later a professor of Greek and Byzantine history at King's College London). Murray was appointed to the British Advisory Committee on the League of Nations and had a long career promoting international values on the imperial model. He became director of the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation.

Temperley worked at the War Office preparing papers on the historical, political, and statistical background of the various territorial disputes in the Balkans. Later, he was at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and an adviser at the League. James Headlam-Morley, professor of Greek and ancient history at Queen's College in London, also made it to Paris. He supported the League on the basis that it would give representation in international politics to smaller states. Writing in 1919, he said, "We have had enough nationalism, and we want the tide to begin flowing in the other direction." Bourgeois was a delegate to the peace conference, and later president of the League Council. During the war he presided over a collection of historians, geographers, and philosophers in the French government's *Comité des études*.

The American government was just as enamored of the research model and set up the famous study group known as "The Inquiry." Based at the American Geographical Society in New York, its director was Isaiah Bowman, who was close to Wilson, and it comprised mainly Yale, Harvard, and Princeton historians and social scientists. Bowman taught at Yale (later he would become president of Johns Hopkins University), and Walter Lippmann, the journalist and drafter of Wilson's Fourteen Points, was a Harvard man with links to LNU circles.

NATIONAL INTERNATIONALISM

Historians (including myself) have studied these wartime research bodies to fathom their influence over the postwar principle of nationality. Yet we are becoming increasingly aware that the record of their activities and ideas is only the tip of a relatively submerged social and intellectual history of the liberal internationalism underwriting the League idea. It is no coincidence that in his influential template for a future league, Leonard Woolf proposed the "extraordinary and novel spectacle of international voluntary associations" as the basis of "true international Government." Or that the well-known Belgian internationalist Paul Otlet's *Ligue pour une Société des Nations* started out as the League for Peoples for World Conciliation.

The picture this kind of evidence leaves us with is not of popular baying for blood in Europe, on the one hand, and, on the other, Woodrow Wilson single-handedly bestowing the enlightened message of the benefits of a League. Rather, it alerts us to the impression made (perhaps even on Wilson himself) by broad-based social and intellectual activity concerning the compatibility of nationalism and internationalism, shaping how the postwar liberal and democratic world was imagined, and pointing out the lessons that needed to be learned if future wars were to be

avoided. This history also informs our evaluation of the war's long-term legacy, disrupting any simple division between the presumed realism of the principle of nationality and the idealism of internationalism.

If we look to the first side of the legacy equation, we find the experts brought together to provide advice on the borders to be carved out of the defeated empires, and on the status of their colonies, floundering in the uncertainties of the principle of nationality. Was nationality determined by geography or language? History or will? Was a river a point of national demarcation, or did it unite communities who used it as a shared resource? The answers in all these cases varied depending on the case at hand, and the expert's particular bias.

Could an Italian-speaking Slovene choose to be Austrian? Usually, no. When a mosaic of religious or linguistic evidence could not be aligned to fit a national border, should populations be transferred instead? The surprising answer was yes. When no one could agree on a border, what about an international city-state? In Danzig/Gdansk and Fiume/Rijeka, the answer defied the dominant race logic of nationality altogether. Should Arabs or Africans who had fought with the Allies on the promise of independence have their claims recognized? Certainly not.

What should be done when imperial stereotyping did not match the political demands for self-determination made by colonial subjects? The peacemakers answered this question by adopting cultural typologies of the stages of national development, arguments that abetted the territorial claims of old and new empires over existing colonies in the Middle East, the Pacific, and Africa. By contrast, many of the questions that surrounded the establishment of the League of Nations seemed more, and certainly not less, straightforward.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS

The world ended up with a League that simultaneously normalized international government and privileged the nation-state as the normative form of political sovereignty. It boasted a dual-chamber structure, in a weak imitation of a parliamentary system. Power was shared among members of a self-appointed Council (comprising the victorious Allies: France, Britain, Italy, and Japan), a model of exclusivity that would be copied in the making of the United Nations. The addition of a General Assembly with 42 founding member states and non-sovereign entities—ranging alphabetically from Afghanistan to Venezuela—implied a kind of international democratic representativeness. The permanent secretariat in Geneva, tasked with serving the assembly, councils, and committees, copied existing forms of state administration and the wartime allied military bodies.

These were the administrative foundations that gave the League responsibility for matters newly co-opted by international government: Political, Legal, Financial and Economic Affairs, Transit and Traffic, Minorities and Administration, Mandates, Disarmament, Health, Social Questions, and Intellectual Cooperation. There was even an Information section for selling the League's international purpose to a wider public. If these organizational forms and concerns sound familiar to us, as characteristic of the UN, credit is due to the feats of imagination and resolve required in the midst of wartime to organize, write, and argue for the necessity of international governance.

The submissions rejected by the committee of victor states that designed the League in 1919 offer us a useful guide to the surprising (in retrospect) spectrum of wartime political imaginings, and the variety of national models that inspired them. The Swiss called for a league in the federal image of their "indissoluble alliance of states,"

From *Current History*'s archives…

"The formal birth of the League on Jan. 10, 1920, could not have been expected to stem the tide of war, hatred, selfishness and supernationalism surging through the world. The actual entry into force of the League Covenant was only a promise, a ray of sunshine in a darkened sky. No one who knew human beings could expect that any magic key to sudden world quiescence had been found; but what they could and did hope was that political machinery was being constructed which would, at first slowly, but later at accelerated speed, serve as the means of improving international relations."

Arthur Sweetser "What the League of Nations Has Accomplished," September 1922

HISTORY IN THE MAKING
100 years
1914 – 2014

requiring some sacrifice of state sovereignty and a proportional system of representation that would, in practice, give populous China more influence than France, Germany, Italy, or Japan. The new German republic outlined a plan for a "world parliament" on the federal model of the Bundesrat.

Influence over League members' military policies or the size of contingents that could be contributed to an international force, the right to enforce conscription to achieve those numbers, the international distribution of foodstuffs and raw materials: These were all imagined as legitimate roles for a League of Nations. In 1919, they ended up on the high heap of cast-off political ambitions. Yet they continued to exert influence throughout the twentieth century over debates about the nature and purpose of international government and the grounds for international intervention.

Even counting the disillusionment of League supporters such as the American epidemiologist Alice Hamilton—who wrote to her sister complaining about the ways in which its limitations had betrayed the hopes of women—some of the enthusiasm for this experiment survived in the postwar "spirit of Geneva." The upper-class British diplomat Harold Nicolson wrote about a "League temperament" to his wife: "If the League is to be of any value it must start from a new conception, and involve among its promoters and leaders a new habit of thought." Nicolson was in part being playful, but he took seriously a view of League-focused internationalism invested in a supranational outlook.

Women and other marginalized groups had unprecedented opportunities for influence.

It was in the same spirit that League associations took deeper root during the interwar years in Europe, as well as in the Pacific, often working through local networks. In faraway Australia, LNUs ran membership campaigns, gave out badges, encouraged international pen pal friendships, organized "treasure hunts" and international balls, sponsored singing, set off fireworks, sent members to the Brussels World Peace Congress, and invited students to "imagine Geneva" and dress in national costumes expressive of the world's cultural diversity.

SOCIAL QUESTIONS

By the interwar years, the sketchier structures of internationalism were filled out by the "facts on the ground" of the international system of institutions built up around the League. The establishment of the Permanent Court of International Justice encouraged a greater codification of the rules of international law. The formation of the International Labor Office (ILO) as a noncommunist focus for labor discontent, comprising a tripartite representation of trade union, employer, and government representatives, was premised on the universality of labor standards, social security, and workers' rights. The emphasis in the ILO's constitution on the "supreme international importance" of the "well-being, physical, moral, and intellectual, of industrial wage-earners" for the aversion of future wars may have been motivated by the fear among 1919 peacemakers of the example set by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. But that does not alter the fact that their own binding document exhorted "sentiments of justice and humanity" as the foundation of the new international order.

We might also consider it as almost inevitable that the League system would harbor an International Health Organization, built on the back of nineteenth-century intergovernmental efforts to manage transnational health crises. This was the precursor to today's indispensible World Health Organization, and undertook the work we now would expect of such a body: managing epidemics in the ravaged landscapes of broken postwar communities, as well as helping standardize vaccinations for diphtheria, tetanus, and tuberculosis. In the 1920s, a few women such as Hamilton even served as operational advisers.

The League's special division for Social Questions, dealing mainly with the drug trade and trafficking of women and children, also continued a prewar trend. Its bureaucracy was led by Rachel Crowdy, the only woman in the League's upper echelons. Women from nonstate organizations found an easier home here as lobbyists for these issues, and for other causes that were added in the interwar era, such as the rights of married women to their own nationality. All their projects carried over, in turn, to the UN agenda, as did the more criticized practice of treating the humanitarian arena as particularly feminine. Although there was no provision for aid to refugees in the original organization, we can trace back to this postwar

moment the invention of some of the League's key administrative structures, namely a High Commissioner and eventually an International Office to deal with that fundamentally transborder problem of refugees.

CHECKERED HISTORY

The ambiguities of the war's legacy were more controversially borne out in the League's mandate system. This saw the colonial territories of the defeated empires divided among the victors and brought under the limited purview of the League Mandates Commission. The result was a League of Nations that stood for the internationalization of colonies and the principle of nationality, as well as the perpetuation of empires. By grading the relative political right to self-determination on the basis of lazy (to put it kindly) racial and cultural stereotyping, the peacemakers were able to institute an international system of colonial oversight that rewarded Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa with all but absolute control of the colonized resources and peoples in question. Yet it is also true that as slight as the League's powers were, its offices emboldened some colonial subjects to voice their complaints through petitions.

The League's checkered history when it comes to race and gender has led some historians to write it off as a new institutional version of nineteenth-century international politics, whether the "Concert of Europe" or capitalist imperialism. The recovery of the social and intellectual dimensions of wartime and interwar internationalist thought, however, brings to our notice a burgeoning cast of modern nonstate actors and the range of imperatives, expectations, and structures that informed the distinctive nature of twentieth-century international political life. According nonstate actors consultant status at the League, for example, meant that women—including the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a mostly middle-class wartime grouping that set up shop in Geneva—and other marginalized groups had unprecedented opportunities for influence, however limited, in an expanding international public sphere.

Although the Covenant specified that women had an equal right to employment opportunities in the League bureaucracy, the peacemakers of 1919 rejected general demands by mainly middle-class international women's groups to consider women's self-determination a universal matter as relevant to international fora as national self-determination. Led by Wilson, the Council of Ten deciding on the terms of the peace unanimously agreed that dominion over women's political status was a definitive national prerogative. Race equality as a principle worthy of inclusion in the League's charter fared only marginally better: The majority favored it, but was overruled by Wilson.

Of course, legacies are never uncomplicated and rarely follow a straight line. For all the involvement of American politicians and intellectuals in the wartime promotion of a league, the United States never joined the League of Nations. In the interwar years, Washington's influence on the League bureaucracy was exerted through American employees and individuals who acted as friends of the League in maintaining connections with US organizations and government offices.

The refugee crisis that required new management to handle it was created not only by the displacement of war, but also by the peacemakers who turned to mass population transfers as a means of implementing the principle of nationality. In the 1940s, the French jurist René Cassin—the reputed father of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights—complained that the web of international laws and provisions introduced as part of the League system protected national state sovereignty to the extent of preventing international intervention in humanitarian crises. Ultimately, an organization founded to assist disarmament and keep the peace proved damningly ineffectual in preventing either the atrocities inflicted by member states under its watch or the outbreak of another world war.

The national and international were profoundly entangled.

THE RETURN

In the darkest hours of the Second World War, internationalism returned like a beacon illuminating discussions about the future direction of humanity. This time its social and intellectual hub was the United States, where a former Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie, promoted "One World" cooperation (with President Franklin D. Roosevelt following him), and federalist world government became the cause of East Coast lawyers, politicians, phi-

lanthropists, anticolonialists, and feminists alike.

The United Nations Organization, constructed over months of highly public international talks in San Francisco in early 1945, continued and expanded the League's precedents for international government and its normatively national domains. This time, though, the spectrum of internationalism was more intense, highlighting the importance of granting representation to individuals as well as nationalities and states. Where the League had sought permanent peace by collapsing social justice into a focus on the principles of nationality or labor, the UN Charter famously confirmed "fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion," and introduced its signature concept of "human rights."

"International problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character" became the UN's raison d'être, even as the scope of the organization's actual capacity to address these problems was subject to the structural confines imposed by its charter. These limits were faithful to the compromises of the original League, including the privileging of nationality and state sovereignty, as well as the reprisal of the mandate system, which was renamed "trusteeship."

Created as a body that represents member states, and is represented by nation-state delegates, the UN has maintained most of these characteristic structures for more than half a century, even as it has kept evolving. While its (unelected) General Assembly has swelled with new state members, its exclusive Security Council, reflecting the international power relations of the mid-twentieth century, is still able to use a veto to influence politics in ways not possible at the League (in 1945, this was the price for US and Soviet participation). The UN's declarations and resolutions remain unjusticiable, just as the legitimacy of its international machinery (including the World Court) has no basis in compulsory jurisdiction or judicial review authority. The UN's most international aspects are its bureaucracy and its role as an international forum.

DISTANT HORIZON

In the twenty-first century, the most respected of UN functions—from peacekeeping to human rights, economics to climate change—are subject to widespread political cynicism. It is no coincidence that the accelerating growth in the number of intergovernmental bodies through the second half of the twentieth century plateaued post-9/11. More strikingly, the social energy that compelled the promise of international government during the First World War is now almost nonexistent. Ambitions for permanent peace, like the term "internationalism," have been all but abandoned. Where once the national and international were profoundly entangled, the principle of nationality alone survived the twentieth century with its legal and cultural status intact, and not always for good reasons.

Against this background, the point of remembering the international legacy of the First World War is not a matter of ignoring the evidence of nationalism—however we may decide to pin down that amoeba-like concept—as a cause or consequence of the war. Remembering the place of internationalism in the evolution of political, economic, social, and cultural modernity maps out a new way of thinking about the twentieth century overall. It brings into sharper focus the distant wartime horizon of international expectations, when the necessary and inevitable compatibility of the principle of nationality and international government occupied the political mainstream, shaping twentieth-century politics in ways that have already receded far from what we can imagine in our own twenty-first-century world. ∎