

BETWEEN PUBLICITY AND DISCRETION: THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LEAGUE OF NATIONS SOCIETIES

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Introduction

After World War I, the 'Old Diplomacy' of secret bilateral treaties and power politics, seen to have caused the war, had to make way for the 'New Diplomacy': multilateral, democratic and proceeding in public view.¹ The League of Nations became the epicentre of this 'New Diplomacy.' As South African statesman and League supporter Jan Smuts pointed out: 'the League will never be a great success until there is formed as its main support a powerful international public opinion.'² Civil society networks surrounding the League eagerly and explicitly participated to make this happen. In turn, the League informally and more or less hesitantly drew on civil society actors.

Elsewhere in this volume, Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon Ikonomou take up Susan Pedersen's question of how the League worked. In her landmark article, *Back to the League of Nations*, Pedersen also argued that the League 'fed off and promoted

¹ Arno J. Mayer, *Political origins of the New Diplomacy 1917-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 58.

² Jan Smuts, *The League of Nations. A Practical Suggestion* (1918) 36.

popular mobilization’, calling for more attention to civil society networks.³ To answer Pedersen’s question and to understand how international public administration operated, this chapters argues that we also need to take civil society actors into account. For the League, both technical and general voluntary societies provided crucial support as well as scrutiny to its work. The International Federation of League of Nations Societies (IFLNS) is ideally suited to analyse the entanglement between the League Secretariat, states and civil society actors.

At the League, ‘NGO’s’ did not have an official status, like they do at the United Nations (UN). However, this did not prevent civil society from playing a significant role. (Partly) because of its unofficial status it complemented the neutral Secretariat and the overtly political League Council and Assembly. This was on the one hand due to the activities the IFLNS deployed and how for example states used the IFLNS as an alternative international venue. However, the most important factor for the role the IFLNS played were the actors involved. They moved from civil society organisations to the League Secretariat, from national and international politics to bureaucracies and from being experts to publicists and businesspeople and vice versa. The IFLNS played a central role in this network and could therefore function as an informal liaison as well as a testing ground, in addition to its more straightforward publicity work.

Building on pre-war organisations, in many countries societies were formed that supported the work of the League. In some countries these were unified societies such as the powerful British League of Nations Union⁴, or the Dutch Vereeniging voor

³ Susan Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, *American Historical Review*, 112, 4 (2007) 1091-1117, 1096-7, see also Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 8.

⁴ Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c. 1918-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), Gaynor Johnson, *Lord Robert Cecil. Politician and Internationalist* (Farnham: Ashgate 2013).

Volkenbond en Vrede.⁵ In other countries, such as France, a considerable number of peace or League societies cooperated in a national federation.⁶ At the international level, most of these national societies cooperated in the IFLNS.

The IFLNS saw itself as an ‘avant-garde’ to the League: it promoted its work, it maintained contact with societies in countries outside the League and investigated new or controversial topics. In this manner the IFLNS combined propaganda and policy work.⁷ Aiming to democratize international relations, the IFLNS sought to both shape and represent public opinion through propaganda and education work and ‘democratic’ oversight of League activities. The IFLNS provided an international platform for actors of all sorts, from liberal internationalists to a wide array of disenfranchised actors. In attempting to channel these sentiments the Federation aimed to go beyond popularising and explaining the League, and also to provide a form of political legitimacy to its work. Thus the IFLNS aspired to become an unofficial ‘third chamber’ to the League.⁸

However, in her abovementioned article Pedersen also highlighted the dangers of mobilizing public opinion. While public support and scrutiny were hoped to buttress collective security, it became clear that public opinion was not always ‘pacific nor (...) easily appeased’.⁹ Examining the IFLNS shows how a quest for the democratization of international society brought with it frictions between universal hopes and particularistic ends. At the IFLNS tensions between national and imperial interests,

⁵ Remco van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede: Nederland en het streven naar een nieuwe wereldorde, 1919-1946* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1999), Anne-Isabelle Richard, ‘Between the League of Nations and Europe. Multiple Internationalisms and Interwar Dutch Civil Society’, in: Ruud van Dijk et al eds., *Shaping the International Relations of the Netherlands 1815-2000. A Small Country on the Global Scene* (Abingdon: Routledge 2018), 97-116.

⁶ Jean-Michel Guieu, *Le rameau et le glaive: les militants français pour la Société des Nations* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2008), Christian Birebent, *Militants de la paix et de la SDN* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007).

⁷ Théodore Ruysen, ‘Un année bien remplie’, *Bulletin*, 1929, 1, p. 9.

⁸ Jan Smuts, 13 February 1919, Peace Conference Commission on the League of Nations. Felix Morley, *The Society of Nations* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1932): 116.

⁹ Pedersen, ‘Back to the League’, 1096-7.

international aspirations and transnational activities came together. At times, the public view required by the New Diplomacy and needed for the Federation's propaganda activities clashed with the discretion international relations and policy work often necessitated. Not only the IFLNS struggled with these issues, they applied to many other similar organisations and above all to the League itself.

While the literature has heeded Pedersen call for more attention for civil society networks around the League and an increasing number of national League societies is being researched, the IFLNS itself is only starting to be explored.¹⁰ The balancing act between publicity and discretion that characterised League internationalism however benefits from an analysis of the reciprocal relationship between the IFLNS and the League Secretariat. This approach simultaneously highlights the significance of civil society platforms in addition to official channels, as well as stressing the fact that the actors involved defy easy categorization as state, civil society or international agents. It is the networked character and the multitude of roles and contacts that gave these actors relevance and carries their interwar experiences in to the post-1945 period. This chapter claims no comprehensiveness; rather than detailing all the activities of the IFLNS, it will touch upon some of the substantive activities of the IFLNS related to 'Information' and Minorities, to illustrate the practice of internationalism the Federation developed between the League, the Secretariat, states and a global public.¹¹

¹⁰ For national societies beyond those cited above see for example: Kuniyuki Terada, *Actors in International Cooperation in Pre-war Japan. The Discourse on International Migration and the League of Nations Association of Japan* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), Tomoko Akami, 'Experts and the Japanese Association of the League of Nations in the International Context, 1919–1925', in Joy Damousi and Patricia O'Brien (ed.), *The League of Nations, Histories, Legacies and Impact* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2018): 158-178. On the IFLNS see Anne-Isabelle Richard, 'Competition and complementarity: civil society networks and the question of decentralising the League of Nations', *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (2012): 233-256, Jean Michel Guieu, 'La SDN et ses organisations de soutien dans les années 1920. Entre promotion de l'esprit de Genève et volonté d'influence', *Relations Internationales* 151, no. 3 (2012): 11-23, Thomas R. Davies, 'Internationalism in a divided world: the experience of the International Federation of the League of Nations Societies, 1919-1939', *Peace&Change* 37, no. 2 (2012): 227-252.

¹¹ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism* (Philadelphia 2013).

The organization of IFLNS Internationalism

How were the IFLNS and its national constituents from over thirty countries organised? Building on pre-war peace and women's movements and following inter-Allied contacts during the War, the IFLNS was established in Brussels in 1919 and was fully operational by 1921.¹² The organisational set-up of the Federation, and of many other similar organisations, largely mirrored that of the League. It had a General Assembly - meeting once a year in a major city- a Council, a Bureau drawn from the Council, and a Secretariat.¹³ There were initially four standing committees, also modelled on the League and International Labour Organization (propaganda and education; national minorities; international labour legislation, social and economic questions; political and legal questions).¹⁴ Theodore Ruysen, the doyen of the *Association de la Paix pour le Droit* and professor of philosophy in Bordeaux became Secretary-General. He retired in 1939 and was succeeded by the young British barrister, LNU activist and later president of European Free Trade Area, Frank Figgures. These careers on either side of the interwar period indicate the longer history and the connections between international civil society and international organisations. In 1923 an 'English-speaking Assistant Secretary-General' was appointed.¹⁵ From the outset there were close personnel ties between the League Secretariat and the IFLNS. In between serving in the

¹² *League of Nations Journal and Monthly Report*, February 1919, p. 72.

¹³ 'Session d'automne du Bureau', *Bulletin*, 1933, 5, p. 321.

¹⁴ League of Nations Archives, Geneva (henceforth LoNA), International Federation of League of Nations Societies (henceforth: IFLNS), P102, Interview Ruysen, Brussels, February 1931.

¹⁵ LoNA, IFLNS, P102, Note: Appointment of an English-Speaking Assistant Secretary-General, 18 December 1923. Early English translations make the need for an Anglophone Secretary clear, *Bulletin*, 3, p. 16 and pp. 28-29.

League Secretariat Political and Minorities Sections, William O'Molony functioned as the IFLNS English Secretary. In 1926 he was succeeded by Captain Lothian Small. From 1927 a germanophone Assistant Secretary-General was added, first Hermann Kirchhoff, then between 1928 and 1935 Albert von Bodman.

IFLNS leadership positions read as a who's who of interwar internationalists. Figures such as conservative politician and president of the British LNU Lord Robert Cecil (Viscount Cecil of Chelwood), the Belgian socialist and later president of the European Court of Human Rights Henri Rolin or German diplomat Count Johann Heinrich Bernstorff all served as President. They were supported by the Bureau that included an expanding group of prominent Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, until 1935 this was the Belgian lawyer, senator and founder of the Union of International Associations, Henri la Fontaine, a number of auditors and the Secretariat. The funding for the IFLNS came for about two-thirds from contributions from member organisations. They, in turn, were often (partly) funded by governments. Another part of the income of the IFLNS came from gifts from private individuals or foundations such as the Americans Theodore Marburg, James J. Forstall or the Carnegie Foundation.¹⁶ All of these actors were also involved with the League in other capacities as well, as national delegates, as experts, as funders etc, creating a tight network.

The number of women in significant posts, chairing committees and Bureau sessions, increased with the years and saw a spread across Europe.¹⁷ Particularly the 1930s saw women such as LNU heavyweight Lady Gladstone and future treasurer of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) Christina Bakker-van Bosse represented amongst the Vice-Presidents and the Honorary Members of the

¹⁶ *Bulletin*, 1929, 5, p. 3, and 1931, 4, p. 7, 1931, 5, p. 38.

¹⁷ LoNA, P102, Listes des personnalités féminines membres d'Associations pour la Société des Nations.

Council. Although the IFLNS probably did not go much beyond the League in ‘only partly fulfil[ing] the hopes of international feminists’, it nonetheless provided a parallel track to engage in International Relations as a woman.¹⁸

The IFLNS was explicitly made up of national organisations. Many interwar internationalists (and the IFLNS) conceived of internationalism as building on nationalism. Much like for the League, for the IFLNS international peace and understanding were clear aims, but patriotism was by no means rejected. Although national egoisms had to be overcome, ‘love of the fatherland was as honourable as love of humanity’.¹⁹ They often distinguished between ‘good patriotism and ‘bad nationalism’.²⁰ Despite the explicit possibilities to accommodate various forms of patriotism, participating societies could be explicitly nationalistic. This had repercussions for the room for manoeuvre for the Federation, since one of its overriding aims was to keep lines of contact open to as many associations as possible. Coupled with a sensitivity to state interests, the international platform the IFLNS provided was often used for national(istic) aims.

Within the IFLNS the British LNU was by far the largest member. The relationship between the organisations was not always smooth, something that also influences the LNU-based literature on the IFLNS. A continued source of debate between the LNU and the other members of the IFLNS was the location of the IFLNS secretariat. The LNU preferred Geneva, the others Brussels. It was cheaper and signalled the

¹⁸ Susan Pedersen, ‘Metaphors of the schoolroom: women working the Mandates System of the League of Nations’, *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (2008): 188-207.

¹⁹ LoNA, IFLNS, P93, Assembly files, General Assembly Lyon 1924, M.W.F. Treub.

²⁰ Anne-Isabelle Richard, ‘Huizinga, intellectual Cooperation and the Spirit of Europe, 1933-1945’, in: Mark Hewitson and Matthew D’Auria (eds.), *Europe in Crisis. Intellectuals and the European idea, 1917-1957* (Oxford: Berghahn 2012), 243-257, in particular 245, John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1993) 8, Patricia Clavin and Glenda Sluga, ‘Rethinking the History of Internationalism’, in *Ibid.*, *Internationalisms. A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017), 3-16, 10.

independence of the IFLNS from the League.²¹ Until 1934, when the LNU got its way and the secretariat moved to Geneva permanently, it moved to Geneva only in summer in the run up to the League General Assembly to ensure enough close contact.²² In Geneva it organised many (social) events for League and IFLNS delegates, contributing to the socializing effects of the ‘Geneva spirit’, and initiating delegates from non-member states into that spirit in preparation of their country joining the League.

The membership of the IFLNS peaked in the early thirties at about 1.5 million. Associate and corporate membership, that led to dissemination of League ideas in other bodies, such as trade unions or ex-servicemen leagues, would make this number significantly higher.²³ While the IFLNS comprised societies in 50 countries from Argentina to India and Japan and despite the declared universalism and global reach of the IFLNS, most League societies were European.²⁴ Like the League, the IFLNS sought to balance this situation by reaching out to societies outside the west – whilst upholding empire.²⁵ With some success they hoped to stimulate the creation of new associations through a worldwide correspondence, and by sending envoys.²⁶ Despite these efforts, most of the existing non-European societies relied on compatriots residing in Europe to represent them.²⁷

The Chinese and Japanese Associations recognised the relevance of the IFLNS early on and managed to set up durable organisations. In 1920 one of the founders of the Japanese League of Nations Association (JLNA), the diplomat Matsui Keishiro

²¹ Ruysen, ‘Les Associations pour la Société des Nations et leur Associations Internationales’, *Bulletin*, 1926, 1, pp. 2-14, p. 13

²² ‘Session d’automne du Bureau’, *Bulletin*, 1933, 5, p. 321. ‘Conference de Prague, Modification des statuts’, *Bulletin*, 1922, 4, p. 8.

²³ ‘Discours du Vicomte Cecil of Chelwood, Président de l’Union’, *Bulletin*, 1929, 1, p. 30.

²⁴ LoNA, IFLNS, P102, Interview with Ruysen, Brussels, February 1931.

²⁵ See also Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

²⁶ *Bulletin*, ‘Assemblée’, 1928, p. 25.

²⁷ *Bulletin*, 1935, 3, p. 165.

explained the importance of the IFLNS to Japanese foreign policy as follows: firstly, the members of European League societies were important politicians and scholars who could influence public opinion in their respective countries. Secondly, membership of the IFLNS gave Japan the opportunity to ‘see what other countries were planning [to discuss at the League of Nations] as well as show Japan’s eagerness to contribute to world peace.’²⁸ Keishiro highlighted how the IFLNS could function as a transmission belt to influence public opinion and to gather information on future policy.

In order to make the Federation more global, plans for an annual Assembly meeting outside of Europe circulated since the early 1920s. As part of its efforts to use international forums to strengthen their position vis-a-vis Japan, the Chinese society offered to host the Annual Assembly in the late 30s.²⁹ The IFLNS was an obvious choice given its standing but also its links to the International Peace Campaign, which was very strong on and in China.³⁰ However, given the circumstances in China in 1938-9, the IFLNS re-located the meeting to New York, where the World’s Fair took place in 1939-40. The US were not a member of the League, but the IFLNS hoped that having the congress take place in the US, would strengthen the pro-League and anti-isolationist tendencies amongst the American, leading to League membership.³¹ In the end, the 1939 Assembly never took place.³² The offers from non-European societies show the importance they accorded to an, unofficial, international platform and to being associated with the Federation and by extension the League, also in the late 1930s.

²⁸ Cited in Terada, *Actors*, 109: ‘Kokusai renmei Kyokai ni kansuru Matsui no iken [Ambassador Matsui’s opinion about the League of Nations societies], Japan Centre for Asian Historical Records: B04013930300,42.

²⁹ *Bulletin*, 1925, 4, p. 28; 3, 1934, p. 119; 1937, 4, p. 264-7. See also: Tsuchida Akio, ‘China’s ‘Public Diplomacy’ toward the United States before Pearl Harbor’, *Journal of American–East Asian Relations* 17, no. 1 (2010): 35–55.

³⁰ Ke Ren, ‘The International Peace Campaign, China, and Transnational Activism at the Outset of World War II’, in: Christian Philip Peterson, William M. Knoblauch, and Michael Loadenthal eds., *The Routledge History of World Peace Since 1750* (Abingdon: Routledge 2019), 359-370.

³¹ LoNA, IFLNS, P113, Circulars, Circular 170, 20 January 1939.

³² *Ibid*, Circular 173, 17 April 1939, Circular 176, 29 August 1939.

Most League societies were relatively elitist affairs. The British LNU was the only organisation that could claim genuine grass roots involvement with at its peak over 400,000 members.³³ Members of League societies often represented an educated public with an interest in foreign affairs. However, also pacifist, ex-servicemen and women's rights circles were well represented. In the later 30s a number of organisations joined, who, within the framework of the League, sought peace and international cooperation through slightly different means than the IFLNS. The *Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne* and the New Commonwealth Society both aimed for European cooperation, while the latter also favoured military force for peace.³⁴ When in 1937 the International Peace Campaign, led by IFLNS and LNU heavyweight Robert Cecil and French Popular Front minister Pierre Cot, joined the Federation, left wing groups became better represented – with fear of Communist involvement also strengthening.³⁵ The fact that all of the organizations that joined had a significant overlap in membership facilitated the affiliation. It is noteworthy that these actors, rather than leaving the IFLNS sought to supplement it with other approaches.

As mentioned before, the individuals involved in the IFLNS constituted a highly networked group, they played multiple, simultaneous roles in 'international society'. They often participated in a number of voluntary organizations, while also engaging in international society as national delegates to the League, (inter)national civil servants, experts, journalists or bankers.³⁶ Organising IFLNS Council meetings in Geneva around the time of the League General Assembly allowed for delegates to attend both.

³³ McCarthy, *The British People*, 4.

³⁴ *Bulletin Union Internationale des Associations pour la Société des Nations* (henceforth *Bulletin*), 1930, 5, p. 17; 1934, 4, p. 191; 1937, 5, p. 239-41. Richard, 'Competition', Christoph Ploß, *Die "New Commonwealth Society". Ein Ideen-Laboratorium für den supranationalen europäischen Integrationsprozess* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017).

³⁵ *Bulletin*, 1937, 5, p. 239-41, Ren, 'The International Peace Campaign'.

³⁶ On these networks see: Patricia Clavin, 'Defining transnationalism', *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 421–439.

Meetings in Geneva also facilitated attendance by, as well as informal contacts with, League Secretariat members. In turn, other organizations, such as the *Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne*, let their annual conference follow or precede the IFNLS annual conference for the same purpose. This networked character, which facilitated informal contacts and informal diplomacy, added to the impact of the IFLNS.

The Dane Ludvig Krabbe of the Information Section commented about the Federation Assembly in Geneva in 1930: ‘The fact that many of those who took part in the discussion were also delegates to the Assembly of the League (...), contributed to creating an impression that one was present less at a manifestation of representatives of public opinion of the various countries, than of a League Assembly in miniature which took place in calmer circumstances (...), far from the political passions.’³⁷ This qualifies the idea that the IFLNS just represented public opinion. In expressing Secretariat opinion, Krabbe drew attention to the position of the IFLNS in between the neutral Secretariat and the political turmoil of the Assembly. Civil society offered politicians another forum to debate the questions of the times away from the pressure of official representations, thus facilitating discussion.

The observation by Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels in relation to the Economic and Financial Section of the League Secretariat about ‘the degree to which internationalism, transnationalism and multi-nationalism coexisted within the same organization’, also holds for the IFLNS.³⁸ The IFLNS fashioned itself as a civil society actor participating in the New Diplomacy, who would propagate the League to a general global public and national publics as well as represent those publics, whilst not shying away from undertaking policy work. The practice of internationalism that the IFLNS

³⁷ LoNA, R3303, Report Krabbe, 14th General Assembly, Geneva 5-9 June 1930.

³⁸ Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, ‘Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of its Economic and Financial Organisation’, *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 465-492, 467.

came to style, nonetheless depended to a large degree on well-connected, high level actors, who tried to balance openness and discretion whilst warding off too blatant examples of power politics. In styling itself as the most official and most respectable of the private international organisations surrounding the League, the practice of internationalism of the IFLNS, to which we now turn, was not unlike that of the League Secretariat.

‘Cooperative publicity’: the IFLNS and the Information Section

‘Cooperative publicity’ was the term the American and second in command of the Information Section, Arthur Sweetser used in 1919 to describe how he envisaged the relationship between the Information Section and private international organisations.³⁹ The League Secretariat seems to have adopted this approach in other domains as well. The Disarmament Section for example also struggled with the need to publicise its work and the limits it faced in engaging in propaganda itself. Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Christian Lange suggested to Thanassis Aghnides of the Disarmament Section, that the Secretariat could communicate information to the various peace associations. These could then use this information in their propaganda efforts, so that arms limitations “may be imposed by peoples on Governments” as Aghnides put it in his proposal to Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League,

³⁹ Sweetser, ‘League of Nations publicity’, 27 May 1919, 2, quoted in Emil Seidenfaden, *Message from Geneva. The Public Legitimization Strategies of the League of Nations and their Legacy, 1919-1946* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aarhus 2019), 71.

who sanctioned the idea.⁴⁰ This highlights one of the tasks the IFLNS had set itself: educating and activating the global public.

How did the IFLNS go about this? It used a two-pronged strategy, reaching the public directly through propaganda and education activities, and reaching the public through national societies through the sharing of knowledge and best practices. The final aims of the IFLNS with this strategy were a widening of the support base for the League as well as putting pressure on national governments and the League to put questions on their agendas. Many of these activities came out of the Propaganda and Education Committee and can be divided in publications of various kinds (IFLNS Bulletin, pamphlets, posters, slide shows, radio, film, school textbooks) and events. Typical events included lectures by prominent members, campaigns around major events such as the world economic or disarmament conference, the highly publicised Annual Assemblies and summer schools.

The IFLNS did not undertake this task in isolation. It was one among two hundred international organizations the Secretariat had been in contact with by 1934.⁴¹ The Information Section was responsible for most of these contacts and in particular those with the IFLNS (although the IFLNS also maintained close contacts to a number of other Sections). Emil Seidenfaden calls the relationship to the IFLNS, the Information Section's 'most ambitious attempt to directly supervise propaganda activities for the League through private collaborators in a way that avoided overstepping the mandate of the neutral secretariat.'⁴² The Information Section struggled with balancing between

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Haakon Ikononou for drawing my attention to this reference. LoNA, R217, Aghnides-Drummond 3 April 1922, LoNA, R217, Aghnides-Drummond, 13 April 1922. Cited in Haakon A. Ikononou "The administrative anatomy of failure: The League of Nations Disarmament Section, 1919-1925", *Contemporary European History*, under review, 2019.

⁴¹ LoNA, PP, P191, Committees, Liaison Committee, Information Section, 'Memo on Liaison with International Organisations, 21 September 1933, 3. Quoted in Seidenfaden, *Message*, 72.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 81.

what was perceived as ‘neutral information’ and ‘propaganda’ and with how they could reach ‘the public’ and who that public was. Was it a general global public, an educated global elite, governments, national general or educated publics or all of these?⁴³ Since press contacts did not suffice: ‘a newspaper is more a means of advertisement than of propaganda’⁴⁴, the IFLNS and its members were a means through which the Information Section sought to get in contact with at least an educated global public.⁴⁵ These were initially informal contacts as the League ‘strove to use unofficial communication, and at times even semi-diplomatic activities, to compensate for its lack of muscle in terms of propaganda and its dogma of neutrality.’⁴⁶ The strategy of the Information Section seemed to be that they would provide the IFLNS with neutral information, while the IFLNS and League Associations would transform that into a propaganda effort toward national publics.⁴⁷ This section, which focuses on the mechanics of the relationship between the Secretariat and the IFLNS, instead of on their interaction (and cooperation) on substantial topics, aims to show that the relationship was a two way process with information, contacts and attempts at influencing flowing both ways.

In 1921, the Information Section appointed Lithuanian feminist Princess Gabriele Radziwill as liaison officer for the IFLNS. The Section followed the activities of the IFLNS closely. While generally not referred to in an active role in the minutes, Radziwill and others attended Bureau, Council, and Assembly meetings.⁴⁸ According

⁴³ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴ Report on the Information Section, 16 April 1921, 12 cited in Seidenfaden, *Message*, 76.

⁴⁵ See also: Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, Heidi Tworek eds., *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Exorbitant Expectations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁶ Seidenfaden, *Message*, 92, 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 71, 75, 76.

⁴⁸ For an overview see the delegates’ lists in the IFLNS Bulletin.

to Radziwill ‘much useful work was done at these meetings, mixed with a lot of irresponsible and useless discussion.’⁴⁹ Prior to an event, the IFLNS shared the agenda with the Information Section, to draw attention its work and to the topics it thought needed attention. The Information Section in turn circulated the agenda amongst the Secretariat, also to spot and ‘prevent, if possible, tendencies too radical or extremist.’⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the Information Section also provided the IFLNS and its constituents with information and speakers. Radziwill was for example instrumental in facilitating the yearly summer school the IFLNS organised in Geneva. Many prominent League figures spoke to the students year in year out. From 1921, representatives of the IFLNS were received by the Secretary-General of the League, and later also by Albert Thomas of the ILO. From 1923 IFLNS resolutions were presented to the Secretary-General and were subsequently included, for information, in the *Journal Officiel* of the League Assembly (as were the communications by many other private international organizations). Apart from their agendas and resolutions, the IFLNS furnished the Information Section also with news about developments and public opinion in various countries and thus made the flow of information a two-way process.⁵¹

Spanish official Joseph Plà succeeded Radziwill as liaison with the IFLNS in 1931. According to Seidenfaden, he was much less involved in the activities of the IFLNS and acted more as a conveyor of information.⁵² This approach corresponded to the official line from 1933. Apart from the ominous developments in the world; this year the Information Section was reorganized leading to significant cuts: to its budget, staff, mandate and concomitantly to its activities. This was both a result of the appointment

⁴⁹ LoNA R3302, Radziwill, Twelfth annual meeting of the League of Nations Unions (sic), 30 June-7 July 1928, The Hague, 30 July 1928.

⁵⁰ Pelt, ‘Information Section – Liste des associations privées, 1933’, 8, cited in Seidenfaden, *Message*, 79.

⁵¹ For example: LoNA, R5172, Small-Pelt, 17 January 1939.

⁵² Seidenfaden, *Message*, 157.

of Frenchman Joseph Avenol as new Secretary-General of the League, as well as cuts to the League budget as a result of withdrawals and Great Power displeasure, as Potter put it.⁵³ The Section became more and more a 'mere Press Bureau.'⁵⁴ In particular there was less scope for liaison activities and as a result, the concept of public opinion was more and more matched onto government opinion. By the late 1930s the League legitimization strategies were more geared toward the Great Powers and avoiding problems, than to legitimizing itself to the general public.⁵⁵ While the scope for the IFNLS could be argued to have increased as a result, it suffered from similar pressures on its resources.

Despite the fact that the Section had a smaller mandate and that there was undoubtedly less engagement for fear of attracting criticism, this did not mean that contacts between the Section and the IFLNS ceased. An episode relating to the Bombay branch of the League of Nations Union shows a very high level of involvement by Secretariat: the dossier went between the Information Section and its Director Pelt, Central Section and its Director V.G. Wilson, 2 Deputy Secretary-Generals, Frank Walters and Pablo de Azcarate, and others for over 2 years, with both Pelt and Wilson visiting Bombay personally.⁵⁶ Support for the League in India was not widespread. Some League of Nations associations existed, but they were scattered across the country.⁵⁷ A federation of these associations could lead to more cohesion and more effective activities. The driving force behind this idea was Manjapra Venkatkrishna

⁵³ Pitman B. Potter, 'League Publicity: Cause or Effect of League Failure?', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2, no. 10, (1938): 399-412, 406-407.

⁵⁴ Seidenfaden, *Message*, 138.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁶ LoNA, R5172, Bombay. Joseph McQuade, *Terrorism, Law and Sovereignty in India and the League of Nations 1897-1945* (Unpublished PhD Diss. Cambridge, 2017) 146.

⁵⁷ On the League in India see: *Ibid.*.

Venkatsewaran, the Secretary of the Bombay Branch of the LNU, who also worked for the League's Bombay Office.

A very close association in personnel or other terms between a League Association and the League or a government was not unheard of: as has been pointed out above, there was a lot of overlap in functions and numerous civil servants were prominent members of League Associations, the Delhi branch was located in premises owned by the Indian Government and the Japanese League of Nations Association was closely associated to the Tokyo Office of the League. Deputy Secretary-General Walters saw the advantages of having a close link between the Bombay Office and the LNU, since the League needed 'active connections at the key points scattered over the vast surface of India. The connections of course should primarily be official ones, but the help of active elements outside is desirable and indeed I should think almost indispensable.'⁵⁸ Whereas this approach was in line with the informal policy of the Information Section, which continued to draw on informal contacts despite its narrower official post-1933 mandate, in this case there was more to consider. Firstly, there were tensions between the Bombay branch and the others, particularly the Delhi branch, which felt it should lead an Indian federation.⁵⁹ Secondly, there were concerns over the personality of Venkatsewaran. If he had been more 'energetic, fair-minded and reliable', wrote Sudhindra Nath Ghose of the Information Section, the situation could be conceivable. However, he warned of Venkatsewaran's motives for proposing an Indian Federation, effectively under his leadership: this would give him 'greater opportunity for avoiding his routine work.'⁶⁰ Like Walters, Pelt appreciated that circumstances in India required more than 'normal' support for the branch, but agreed that it was not ideal to have a

⁵⁸ LoNA, R5172, Bombay, Walters-Pelt, 27 December 1934.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Sen-Ghose, 3 April 1935.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Ghose-Pelt, 8 January 1935.

League official in charge.⁶¹ Finally Professor D. Ghosh agreed to take over, in December 1936 – more than two years after the affair had started.⁶²

While the League and the Information Section seemed to have been comfortable with an informal arrangement that went beyond the official mandate, the danger of this backfiring and compromising the standing of the League seems to have been too large in this case. This goes a long way to explaining the extraordinary time and effort devoted by high-level League officials in this episode. However, this episode also showcases three other points. Firstly, the importance attached to events and the public outside of Europe as well as the difficulty in reaching those (colonial) publics. Secondly, it portrays once again the networked character of almost all of those involved in the IFLNS. Finally, this episode provides an insight into the relevance of personalities when dealing discretely with publicity. Everyone understood this to be a very delicate balancing act and Venkatsewaran could not be trusted to perform it.

The IFLNS and the League (particularly the Information Section), entertained a close relationship throughout the interwar period. Their contact was indispensable for both sides and both sides tried to influence and use each other for their own purposes. The answer to the question of how effective the IFLNS propaganda and education work was, depends to a large extent on the issue, the country and the year. Overall however, the IFLNS was relatively successful in raising awareness about the League and questions of internationalism among an educated elite across Europe (Germany was notoriously difficult as the Information Section did not cease to point out) and in the 1920s beyond that elite as well. The League became more cautious after 1933 in its contacts with private organisations. However given the political climate, the IFLNS in

⁶¹ Ibid., Pelt-Ram, 6 January 1937.

⁶² Ibid., Ram-Venkatsewaran, 7 January 1937, Ghosh-Ram, 11 December 1936.

many respects also adopted a more cautious attitude to remain a trusted interlocutor, as well as keep societies from countries that had left the League *in* the Federation. Already in 1930 Krabbe of the Information Section reported that ‘maybe one can even distinguish a certain weakness and excessive prudence in the way the Union treats problems. This became apparent during the discussion concerning the minorities, prudence which leads the Bureau to exclude from the discussion at the next meeting in Hungary any question that relates to that country.’⁶³ As the League was losing its appeal over the course of the 1930s, so too did the IFLNS amongst the general public. This did not mean that its more specific campaigns in the 1930s were unsuccessful. The ‘excessive prudence’ perhaps explains why quite a number of individual activists assumed that the affiliation of other organisations, such as the International Peace Campaign, was a useful, and more outspoken, support act for the IFLNS in the late 1930s.

Policy work between publicity and discretion

If it had been up to Cecil, the driving force behind the always critical British LNU, this chapter could have concluded here after the analysis of the propaganda activities of the IFLNS, which, according to him, were its main aim. Cecil thought the Federation concerned itself ‘too much with policy and too little with propaganda’.⁶⁴ This opinion was perhaps not unexpected given the grassroots character of the LNU which made propaganda work much more feasible. Regardless of the question whether the

⁶³ LoNA, R3303, Report Krabbe, 14th General Assembly, Geneva 5-9 June 1930.

⁶⁴ British Library, Add Mss 51111, Cecil Papers, Cecil-Drummond, 27 April 1929.

combination of propaganda and policy was a wise decision and regardless of the feasibility of doing just one, the combination was a difficult balancing act. Where the League also struggled to balance publicity and discretion, the tension between the openness needed to serve the global public and the discretion necessary to be taken seriously as a policy actor played a pivotal role throughout the life of the Federation, and probably found expression in Krabbe's observation about 'excessive prudence'.⁶⁵

Regarding its work in the policy field, the IFLNS compared its role to that of a legislature; it provided a form of democratic oversight to the League as well initiating policies. The activities of the IFLNS, and of other non-governmental organisations, can be categorised as agenda-setting, policy formulation and implementation.⁶⁶ In practice these activities and the audiences they served often overlapped. The agenda-setting activities of the IFLNS toward the 'public' and national societies have been touched upon above. In turning to activities towards governments and the League the liaison function of the IFLNS, that the Japanese LNA had already pointed out, becomes clear: the IFLNS was used as an alternative platform in what were otherwise often bilateral relations between states/minorities and the League.

Agenda-Setting: Influencing Governments and the League

Following the prescripts of the New Diplomacy, lobby work should take place in the public view, like education work. However, in practice, Federation activists often operated more 'diplomatically', using informal contacts without publicising all their activities. Given the networked character of the activists involved, who interacted in many different settings, this was an obvious approach.

⁶⁵ LoNA, R3303, Report Krabbe, 14th General Assembly, Geneva 5-9 June 1930.

⁶⁶ Peter Willetts, 'From "Consultative Arrangements" to "Partnership": The Changing Status of NGOs in Diplomacy at the UN', *Global Governance* 6, no. 2 (2000): 191-212, 196-197. See also Davies, 'A "Great Experiment"', 410.

The first aim of the Federation in its policy work was agenda-setting. Dossiers on the activities of the IFLNS and their assemblies passed through all League Sections.⁶⁷ This served the purposes of both sides: while the Secretariat drew on the information, got a sense of ‘public opinion’, and hoped to spot and subsequently prevent radical tendencies, the Federation hoped to influence decision making. This could take the form of discussing controversial topics, before the League, or governments, felt ready to discuss these questions. An example is the question of decentralising the League in 1927. The idea was that regional unions, such as a European, or Panamerican union, were a necessary step towards a truly universal League. While this resolution was rejected by the IFLNS Assembly at the time, the debate on the topic continued and was formally brought to the League by French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand in 1929.⁶⁸ Agenda-setting was not just geared toward the League, national governments were also explicitly targeted. A relatively straightforward example concerned Togoland, where the IFLNS Secretariat served as a liaison between the British LNU, which had collected material detailing ‘grave charges’ against Togoland officials, and the French League for the Rights of Man. They transmitted the documents to Radical *Deputé* Achille Rene-Boisneuf who questioned the French Minister of Colonies after which an investigation was ordered.⁶⁹

States also used the IFLNS to get their causes on the League agenda. Chinese and Japanese examples have already been mentioned. A less well-known example comes from Haiti. Dantes Bellegarde, Haitian delegate to the League, but also a representative of the Haitian League Society, used the IFLNS to protest against the American occupation of Haiti.

⁶⁷ For example the files in: LoNA, Information Section, R5177, R5178, R5179, International Federation of League of Nations Societies.

⁶⁸ LoNA, IFLNS, P93, XIst Plenary Congress Berlin, 26-31 May 1927, Richard, ‘Competition’.

⁶⁹ *Bulletin*, News from societies, France, 1922, 3, p. 16.

Another form of agenda-setting were the contacts with League organizations in countries which were not (yet or no longer) members of the League, such as the US, Japan or Germany. These contacts were on the one hand aimed at those states and publics, to draw them into the League, on the other to the League itself, in order to accept them. However, this was also a two-way process, as states tried to set the agenda of the IFLNS and the League. Although Germany did not join the League until 1926, the *Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund* was a member of the Federation from 1921. The aim of the *Deutsche Liga* was to fulfil a pioneering role in facilitating German accession to the League. This was geared on the one hand to the sceptical German public, which had lost much of its initial enthusiasm for a League after Versailles, but on the other hand to the League. In 1920 foreign minister Walter Simons put it as follows: ‘The *Liga* should as a matter of course pursue a different policy from the government and work more actively for the accession of Germany to the League, otherwise she would not have a right to exist. ... We want the League to come to us.’⁷⁰ This is a clear example of how the Federation had its agenda, but its interlocutors had theirs too. In this case, the goals of these agendas overlapped (the means perhaps less). The IFLNS, driven in particular by the French Federation, called for German accession to the League from 1921, when the *Deutsche Liga* had been admitted.⁷¹ When Germany was finally admitted to the League in 1926, the IFLNS decided to hold its next Annual Assembly in Berlin. According to Ruysen this was brilliantly organised by the *Deutsche Liga* and benefited from the cooperation with the German state. Chancellor Marx spoke at the opening and Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann at the closing ceremony. Ruysen

⁷⁰ Cited in: Jost Dülfer, ‘Vom Internationalismus zum Expansionismus. Die Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund’, in Wolfgang Elz and Sönke Neitzel, eds., *Internationale Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Winfried Baumgart zum 65. Geburtstag* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 251-266, 255.

⁷¹ Guieu, *Le Rameau*, 69-70.

was convinced that this was a sound basis for the further ‘development of the Federation and the education of the general public in the field of international politics.’⁷² Membership figures for the *Deutsche Liga* certainly increased significantly in the aftermath of the Berlin Assembly.

After Germany left the League, the successor to the *Deutsche Liga* named *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerrecht und Völkerbundfragen* remained a member of the IFLNS until 1938. Both organisations were under the influence of the *Wilhelmsstrasse*. However, the post-1933 organization was quite open in its disagreement with the ‘Geneva Spirit’ and for example refused to attend the Glasgow Assembly of 1936 because the persecution of Jews in Germany was on the agenda.⁷³ The Federation aimed to keep channels open, also to Associations that adopted quite opposite views.

This episode showcases the role the IFLNS played as a channel of contact with non-League member states, and as an agenda-setting organisation. However, it also highlights the question of the influence of national governments on civil society organizations who used the IFLNS. It thus shows how practices could be appropriated for different purposes: the pursuit of potentially nationalist goals through internationalist civil society means.⁷⁴

Policy formulation

The next step after agenda-setting was policy formulation, which was similarly geared toward both the League and national governments. The IFLNS used both its personal

⁷² Ruysen, ‘Avant-Propos’, *Bulletin*, 1927, Assemblée, p. 2-3.

⁷³ Dülffer, ‘Vom Internationalismus’.

⁷⁴ Jürgen C. Heß, ‘Europagedanke und nationaler Revisionismus: Überlegungen zu ihrer Verknüpfung in der Weimarer Republik am Beispiel Wilhelm Heiles’, *Historische Zeitschrift* 225, no. JG (1977): 572-622

contacts as well the more official channel of sending its resolutions to various League bodies as preparation for League discussions. In 1929, parts of a minorities resolution by the Dutch League delegation were adopted by the Member States in the League Assembly. This resolution had previously been discussed and accepted at the IFLNS Assembly.⁷⁵ This successful preliminary work to influence policy formulation led Ruysen to describe the Federation as an avant-garde of the League.⁷⁶ Thomas Davies details an example from the Disarmament Conference of where the resolutions adopted by the IFLNS Assembly in Budapest in 1931 became the common platform for the global disarmament movement and in turn ‘came to dominate the proceedings of the conference from first to last.’⁷⁷

Policy implementation

This leads to the final point; implementation. When the IFLNS felt that the League failed to live up to its task, it attempted to push the implementation of policies. One of the most far-reaching examples comes from the minorities’ question, where the Federation set up a procedure in parallel to the League. The League Minority Protection System, administered by the League Secretariat, has been criticised from many quarters, but has recently been more positively evaluated in the historiography, arguing that given the highly contentious situation, where minority states were resistant, minorities and their kin-states continually argued for change and the great powers above all wanted to avoid being dragged in, the Minority Section managed to create a system

⁷⁵ ‘Les Associations pour la Société des Nations et leur Union Internationale, *Bulletin*, 1929, 1, pp. 13-14; IISH, VvVeV, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Ruysen, ‘Une année bien rempli’, *Bulletin*, 1, 1929, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Thomas Davies, *The Possibilities of Transnational Activism. The Campaign for Disarmament between the Two World Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 94, 101. Philip Noel-Baker, *The First World Disarmament Conference, 1932–1934, And Why It Failed* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), 75, cited in: Davies, ‘Internationalism’, 242-3.

that kept all parties involved, talking and in some cases brought solutions. Eric Colban, the director of the Minorities' Section, secured a central role for the Secretariat.⁷⁸ The system was based on 'depoliticization through bureaucracy, secrecy and diplomacy' so as 'to resolve inherently political issues without fanfare or complaint.'⁷⁹ Nonetheless, it left many unsatisfied and the system was at odds with the precepts of the New Diplomacy. It was predicated on secrecy that kept petitioners in the dark about the outcome of their complaints and thus left the League open for attack as ineffective.

As a result, numerous private organizations entered the minority stage; writing about minority questions, visiting, gathering information, making contacts and engaging in reconciliation work. Some set up committees that received petitions. Willoughby Dickinson, frustrated at the perceived inability of the League to deal efficiently with this question, suggested that the Federation set up a Minorities' Committee. The novelty of this Committee, set up in 1923, was that the various minorities were engaged in the proceedings, which the League explicitly did not do.⁸⁰ Moreover, it also provided a platform for minorities that were not covered by a treaty, such as Germans and Slovenes in Italy. In principle, the Committee worked with League associations that were run by minorities as well as with national League organizations in minority and kin states. After these consultations representatives of the minority and majority groups were heard. The Committee avoided appearing to adjudicate, but rather sought to facilitate reconciliation or at the very least

⁷⁸ Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus*, 126, no. 2 (1997): 47-63, Martin Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den zwanziger Jahren* (Marburg, Herder Institut, 2000), Stefan Dyroff, 'Avant-garde or supplement? Advisory bodies of transnational associations as alternatives to the League's Minority Protection System, 1919-1939', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 24, no. 2 (2013): 192-208, Thomas Smejkal, *Protection in Practice. The Minorities Section of the League of Nations Secretariat, 1919-1934* (Unpublished Senior Thesis, Columbia University 2010).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57, 26.

⁸⁰ Dyroff, 'Avant-garde', Daniel Gorman, 'Ecumenical internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches', *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, 1 (2010): 51-73.

rapprochement between the parties involved.⁸¹ The outcome of such initiatives depended largely on local circumstances.⁸² The Federation also published a *Bulletin Minorités Nationales*. They were reluctant to publish too much information, often giving more general information or just circulating information amongst committee members in confidence (which was sometimes leaked to the press nonetheless). For its reconciliation work trips were very important, but also here publicity was by and large avoided. When the IFLNS decided to publish impressions from a carefully planned and executed trip by Bakker-van Bosse to Rumania, Yugoslavia and Italy in 1930, this immediately backfired and the report was used by all sides to add fuel to the fire.⁸³

As the IFLNS experienced the benefits of discretion, they became a trusted interlocutor for the Minorities Section. The League had followed the activities of private organizations, and in particular of the IFLNS Committee, closely from the start. As another example of the tight network, William O'Molony, the first Anglophone Assistant Secretary-General of the IFLNS now member of the Minority Section, was by 1930 charged to report on the work of the IFLNS. The relationship was reciprocal. The IFLNS for example provided the Section with the reports of their trips and checked about possible agenda points at meetings. Given that this system was based on trust, the Section occasionally, and only to certain people, gave feedback on why a petition did not succeed or gave advice on how to phrase petitions.⁸⁴

Considering the twin pillars of propaganda and policy work, IFLNS activities in the minority field constituted the most far-reaching policy work. Given the

⁸¹ Ruysen, 'L'activité de l'Union Internationale des Associations pour la S.D.N. en matière des minorités nationales', *Bulletin*, 1939, 1, pp. 39-53, 45.

⁸² Dyroff, 'Avant-garde'.

⁸³ *Bulletin*, 1930, 1-2, pp. 62-69, Christina Bakker-van Bosse, 'Voyage dans les Balkans', *Minorities Nationales* 3, 1930, pp. 1-9, 'Minderheiten in Sudost-Europa', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 9, 11, 13 February 1930. Dyroff, 'Avant-garde', 198.

⁸⁴ See Dyroff, 'Avant-garde', for examples.

circumstances and with a stronger focus on reconciliation and discretion than on publication, this system worked relatively well, in conjunction to the League Minority Protection System. The IFLNS certainly filled a gap by giving the minority and kin state a role in the process. Nonetheless, with time frustration at the lack of progress increased amongst the activists, many of whom at one point or another despaired along the lines of Ruysen who wrote in 1930 that minorities would always be victims.⁸⁵ As Dyroff points out however, the measure of success is perhaps best found in the ‘contribution to the creation of a climate that facilitated a peaceful exchange of views and search for compromises.’⁸⁶ As such, the IFLNS fulfilled its task as liaison between the League and states/minorities.

Conclusion

The IFLNS played a significant role in the network around the League. As one of the principal civil society players in the era of the New Diplomacy, it entered into a reciprocal relationship with the League Secretariat and functioned as a liaison between the supposedly neutral League and the more political states/minorities. While the Federation emphasised openness and the importance of public opinion, in practice its strategy was more refined. The propaganda and education work took place largely in public view and was geared to strengthening public opinion in favour of the League. In the work geared toward governments and the League itself publicity was important, but

⁸⁵ Cited in *Ibid.*, 201. Ruysen-E. Bovet, 26 February 1930, Ruysen II (1928–1931) Private Archives of the Bovet Family Lausanne.

⁸⁶ Dyroff, ‘Avant-garde’, 203.

informal contacts and discretion were equally, if not more, important and often more effective.

Part of the reason why the latter approach was more effective was the fact that it could be better controlled. The Federation as a platform was easily used for unintended purposes which more often than not did not promote international peace and understanding. Pedersen made this point regarding the League itself: public opinion, despite the best efforts, is not necessarily pacific.⁸⁷ In its efforts to maintain contacts between nations and organisations which came to believe in very different things, the IFLNS was, despite itself, sometimes used for un-pacific purposes.

In terms of propaganda and education the Federation lived up to its aspirations of acting as an avant-garde, although it probably did not manage to create the 'powerful international public opinion' Smuts had had in mind. In its efforts geared towards the League and governments the IFLNS was quite successful in terms of agenda-setting, whereas its endeavours toward policy formulation and implementation were perhaps a little more varied. 'Democratic oversight' also remained mostly an aspiration as the IFLNS exercised 'excessive prudence' and often bowed to state interest. However, being an unofficial organisation - more unofficial than today's NGO's with consultative status - the IFLNS had a certain leeway to table topics that were not yet ripe for official discussion. Given the generally high level of the activists, discussion at the IFLNS gave an idea of how certain topics might develop once they reached the official agenda. The fact that its activists were so well connected was the Federation's biggest asset, and the one that carried over its experiences to its successor the WFUNA and other international organizations in the post-1945 period.

⁸⁷ Pedersen, 'Back to the League', 1097.

Civil and official society were intimately entwined in terms of personnel, methods and objectives. The IFLNS mirrored and foreshadowed the League in many ways, in its organisation, its efforts to spur the League on; in its successes and its misfortunes. Where as Zara Steiner put it ‘the Geneva System was an [adjunct] to great power politics’⁸⁸, the IFLNS operated within and contributed to this system and as such took part in the governing of the world.

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⁸⁸ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that failed. European International History 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), 299.

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