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Both aims are natural products of the fact that this publication started out as a research blog. Three years ago (2016), Karen Gram-Skjoldager initiated the research project *The Invention of International Bureaucracy – The League of Nations and the Creation of International Public Administration, c. 1920-1960*. As one of her postdocs, Haakon A. Ikonomou was tasked with editing a small research blog on the project and relevant research conducted elsewhere. The blog soon became a lively site for all types of research on the League, and since we welcomed small pieces on ongoing research, it developed into a fine tool for sensing new trends and currents within the field. Having gathered, curated and published nearly 30 excellent blogs – cutting-edge research delivered in an accessible and poignant manner – we decided to develop a selection of these into a broad, easy-access outreach book to showcase recent approaches to and findings in League of Nations research. The format of the edited volume allows us to place the contributions in their historiographical, methodological and current political contexts.

This book is published on the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which also marked the birth of the League of Nations. It is our own small contribution to the centennial celebration of the creation of the League. In a time of international political crisis and disintegration, it seems fitting to foreground the many ways the first global international organisation shaped its times and continues to shape our world – and the many ways historians have used this complex international creation to re-shape International History as an academic discipline.

PART 1

# INSIDE THE LEAGUE

**THE** boom in historical scholarship on the League of Nations in recent years has been closely tied to the transnational turn in history. The majority of researchers working on the League have focused on particular aspects of the League's work – such as economy, health, trafficking or refugees – and used the organisation as an analytical entry point to access and map the networks of individuals, associations and ideas that came to shape perceptions and policies on these issues across borders and continents. Patricia Clavin aptly captures this approach in her seminal study of the League's economic and financial policy, *Securing the World Economy. The Reinvention of the League of Nations 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), when she describes the organisation as “a site where a plurality of views about global and regional coordination and cooperation were generated” (7). In Part 2 of this book, we present a selection of studies that practice and develop this approach.

In Part 1, by contrast, we address one of the underexplored dimensions in recent transnational historiography on the League. Often studies within the transnational tradition have shown only limited interest in the institutional infrastructure of the organisation, approaching it as they do from a perspective of networks and ideas rather than institutions. In ‘Inside the League’, we present some of the insights that can be gained by viewing the League of Nations not only as an arena and a ‘dot-connector’ for various new transnational forms of expertise and policy-making, but also as an object of study in its own right.

In other words, venturing ‘Inside the League’ means taking it seriously as an institution with its own distinct set of professional norms, procedures and practices that can and should be explored as constituting a distinct social and political world. Going ‘Inside the League’ also means shifting the analytical gaze from ideas and policy agendas towards *practice*. The five contributions in this section are in tune with the recent ‘practice turn’ in International Relations Theory, brought forth by among others Emanuel Adler and Victor Pouliot (“International practices”, *International Theory* 3 (1), 2011, 1-36), since they focus on the everyday administrative procedures and professional routines that structured, reproduced and gradually transformed the League as an institutional entity. Finally, looking ‘Inside the League’ involves a change of analytical scale. The chapters in this section do not focus on the major political turning point decisions that set out the parameters of the League’s work; neither do they address the long-term shifts in political agendas and global governance structures that played out in and around the League. Instead, they adopt a micro-scale approach that investigates the everyday practices through which different actors ‘did’ international organisations – be they politicians, leading members of the Secretariat, female staff or translators and interpreters.

*Karen Gram-Skjoldager*

Torsten Kahlert and  
Karen Gram-Skjoldager

# THE MEN BEHIND THE MAN

## Canvassing the Directorship of the League of Nations Secretariat

When Kofi Annan passed away on 18 August 2018, it was a global news story. Newspapers, TV and radio around the world reported on Annan's passing, and commentators discussed and assessed his achievements and shortcomings as UN Secretary-General from 1997 to 2006. This massive media response is telling of the importance we ascribe to Secretaries-General as symbolic representatives of the international organisations they head and for international order and cooperation more broadly.

However, Secretaries-General do not run international organisations alone. The current UN Secretary-General António Guterres, like his predecessors, has the help of dozens of Division Heads that hold the day-to-day responsibilities for the UN Secretariat's many tasks, ranging from disarmament and public information to social and economic affairs. In much the same way, the League of Nations' first Secretary-General, Sir Eric Drummond, ensured that a group of Directors was put in charge of the League's many different policy areas from the very beginning.

In this chapter, we scrutinize this small administrative elite and ask: who were these 'men behind the man'? What were their social, professional and national characteristics, how did they end up in these leading roles and how did the Secretariat leadership evolve over time? In asking these questions, we adopt an approach that is becoming



increasingly popular in the study of international organisations, namely to move past the formal structures and procedures and focus on the people populating the organisation, either through biographical or – as in this case – prosopographical studies.<sup>1</sup> As we will demonstrate, mapping central group characteristics such as education, nationality and age for an influential group of people over time can offer fruitful analytical insights into the defining social and political qualities of an organisation and how they evolved over time.<sup>2</sup>

### THREE GENERATIONS

The Secretariat of the League of Nations existed from 1919 to 1946. Seen from today, these 27 years may seem like a short life span, but the Secretariat was not a static unit. Starting out with a mere three employees when Drummond set up his first small office in London, the Secretariat went through a rapid process of expansion, professionalisation and differentiation. The League's personnel peaked in 1931 with around 650 people working in the Secretariat and 115 higher officials, including 12 Directors running the large bureaucratic operation. During the 1930s, economic depression, political conflicts and setbacks together with the withdrawal of several member states and the relatively disastrous Secretary-Generalship of Joseph Avenol led to a steady decline in the size of the League Secretariat.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by a dramatic scaling down of the organisation with the onset of the Second World War.

We will show that three different 'generations' of Directors led the Secretariat – each with distinct characteristics in terms of age, national and professional backgrounds, career trajectories and gender.<sup>4</sup> The changing norms for the kind of people who were able to land these positions in the higher echelons of the Secretariat mirrored both the professionalisation of the administration and the changing powers of, and limits on, the Secretariat defined by member states. By way of conclusion, we will offer a few examples of the types of careers that the League Directors had after their service in the League, thereby reflecting on the role of this group in postwar multilateralism.

**A children's tea party in an East End Street in London, celebrating the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. While the First World War had ended in 1918, the official peace celebrations took place after the Treaty of Versailles had been signed on 28 June 1919. This kind of children's celebration was held all over the British dominions, marking the end of the global war on a global scale.**





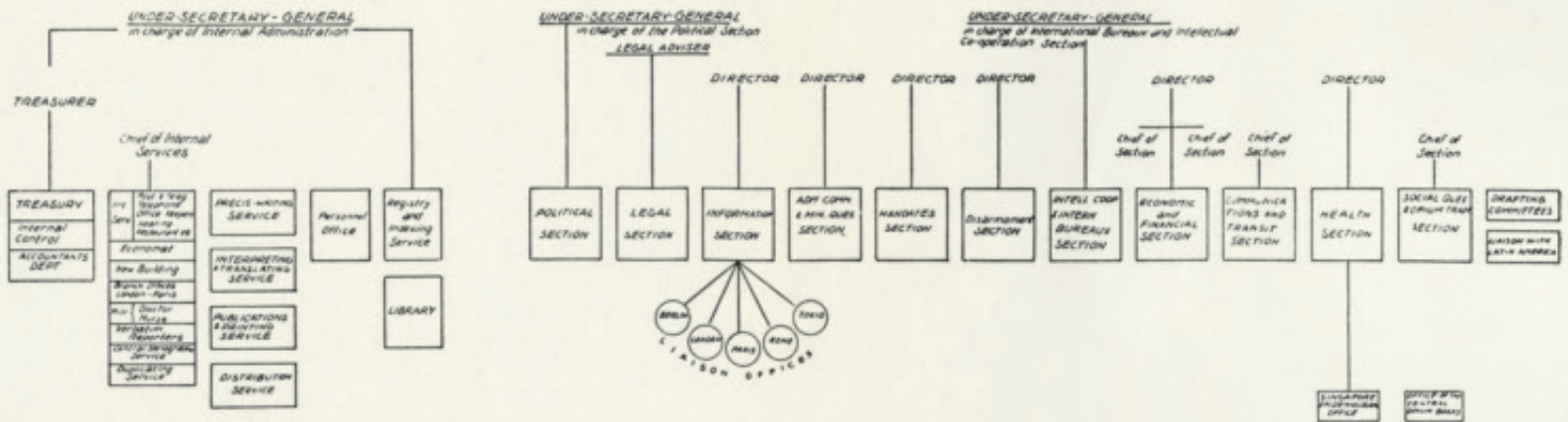
## THE DIRECTORS IN THE INSTITUTIONAL SETUP OF THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat was organised around a basic structure of 9 to 12 functionally defined Sections and three hierarchical Divisions.<sup>5</sup> The Directors belonged to the top division in this tiered hierarchy. The Sections were the most important units of the Secretariat, each charged with managing a particular policy area – be it Health, Economy and Finance, Mandates or Minorities. Each section included officials from all three divisions.



(1930)

ORGANISATION OF THE SECRETARIAT  
SECRETARY-GENERAL  
DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL



**REFUGEES SECTION :** The central services of the High Commissioner have been placed for one year and as an experiment under the administrative authority of the Secretary-General.

Directorships in the League of Nations Secretariat were hard-won, prestigious positions. Together with the Secretary-General and the Deputy- and Under-Secretaries-General, the Directors made up the Secretariat's leadership and were decisive in shaping the rules and practices of the new administrative body, while also defining the image of the international civil servant through their practices.

Directorships were supposed to be temporary and over the course of the League's existence, the Secretariat's Directorship counted 31 Directors from 15 different countries. None of the Directors held the position for the entire lifespan of the Secretariat (1919-1946), though some had long careers; a striking example of this is Ludwik Rajchman, the Director of the Health Section from 1921 to 1939.

The organisational chart is taken from Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer's book on the Secretariat of the League of Nations from 1945. The chart represents the Secretariat's organisational form around 1930 and showcases the functional work's division into sections. It also highlights how the League developed the basic structure of international administration as we know it today.



## FOUNDING FATHERS – THE FIRST GENERATION (1920-1927)

After his appointment as the first Secretary-General, Sir Eric Drummond made two decisions that came to shape the Secretariat's work throughout the interwar period. The first was to build the Secretariat along functional rather than national lines, as described above. The second was to organise the administration as an international civil service in which, in theory, a person of any nationality could fill any position. At least on paper, meritocracy was the ideal.

According to the Covenant, the League's constitution, all decision-making power in terms of staffing lay exclusively with the Secretary-General. This was crucial, especially for the first, founding generation of Directors. After his appointment in the spring of 1919, Drummond was working on a very strict time schedule; the Council and the Assembly were supposed to meet for the first time in the autumn of that year. As Ikonomou argues in chapter 11, the first group of leading personnel was therefore recruited in an informal and improvised manner, through Drummond's personal networks and connections to various foreign services. These pioneers, moreover, were left to recruit their own Section staff, with relatively little meddling from the Secretary-General, before the Secretariat settled its bureaucratic practices.

The result was a relatively heterogeneous group in terms of education and professional backgrounds, ranging from diplomats, like the Norwegian Eric Colban or the Italian Bernardo Attolico, to the French journalist Pierre Comert, the Dutch lawyer Joost van Hamel, the British economist Arthus Salter and the French historian Paul Mantoux. The early Secretariat leadership also included one woman: Dame Rachel Crowdy, who led the Social Questions and Opium Traffic Section. Though professionally diverse, the early Secretariat leadership had a strong *esprit de corps* based on their recent war experience. Several of the Directors had worked in the Inter-Allied War Councils, and many had been involved in the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference.

In terms of national background, the early Directors were less diverse. In an international organisation, nationality is a potential

resource and source of legitimacy. With two British and two French directors, and one each from Italy and Japan, Drummond had given a dominant position to the Great Powers that created the organisation. Following the American decision not to join the League, Drummond believed that keeping the major member states well represented was pivotal.<sup>6</sup> Apart from this privileged position of the major member states, there was also a strong North European dominance in the Secretariat; the other Directors came from Allied or neutral countries such as the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and Poland. This composition of the Secretariat Directorship persisted throughout the first half of the 1920s, shaping the Secretariat's administrative rules and practices as the new organisation was moulded on British Foreign Office principles and procedures.

The composition of the Directorship became an object of criticism almost immediately. During the Second General Assembly, Drummond received harsh criticism from smaller and non-European countries for the British/French dominance of the Secretariat and the Directors and Under-Secretaries-General in particular. During the 1920s a gradual internationalisation of the Secretariat's recruitment practices took place.<sup>7</sup>

## THE INSIDERS – THE SECOND GENERATION (1928-1932)

Between 1927 and 1932, all Directors apart from Rajchman in the Health Section were replaced and a second generation of Directors with a slightly different profile took over the leadership of the Secretariat. The second generation had a more homogenous professional background, with university degrees in law and professional experience from the diplomatic services.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, most of them were older (three years on average) and promoted from *within* the Secretariat to their Director positions, rather than appointed from the outside. This was a reflection both of the professionalisation of the Secretariat as a bureaucratic administration and of the gradual recognition that international administration required a particular international professional skill-set that was being developed and acknowledged in the organisation.

The importance of qualifications obtained inside the organisation had already been acknowledged in the first set of Staff Regulations in 1922, which states that higher positions in the Secretariat should “as far as possible be filled by the promotion of officials already serving Secretariat” (article 16).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, discussions in the so-called Appointments Committee, a deliberative internal body headed by Drummond in which all major decisions regarding recruitment and promotions were debated, reveal how hiring someone from the ‘outside’, particularly for higher positions, was considered a distinct risk.<sup>10</sup>

However, the focus on internal promotions to the Directorships was also a conservative rule that benefited League officials from member states that were already strongly represented inside the organisation. It is therefore unsurprising that, with the second generation of Directors, the national composition diversified only slightly. Most remarkably, the first South American – Juan Antonio Buero – entered the Directorship, as head of the Legal Section. Likewise, the Greek Thanassis Agnides became the first Director from the Balkan region, heading the Disarmament Section. Simultaneously, however, the minimal gender diversity that the Secretariat could boast in its higher echelons in its early years disappeared, as Dame Rachel Crowdy’s contract was not extended – triggering widespread criticism from female employees and women’s organisations alike.<sup>11</sup>

The homogenisation and professionalisation that characterised the second generation of Directors was supported at the political level by the so-called Committee of Thirteen, which issued a report in 1930 that recommended that the career of an international civil servant be made as similar to that of a national civil servant as possible by strengthening their workers’ rights and developing a proper pensions scheme. However, a minority report was also issued. This report, promoted by Germany and Italy, argued that the Secretariat be reorganised into a system of national delegations of bureaucrats seconded to Geneva for shorter periods of time in order to secure stronger membership control over the new and independent political institution.<sup>12</sup> While this was a minority viewpoint, it was a telling indication that support for the League was waning and conflicts around the Secretariat were escalating.

## THE THIRD GENERATION (1933-1946)

The third generation (1933-1946) was very similar to the generation before it. The new Directors had a slightly higher average age but the majority were still trained diplomats and there was a predominance of internal promotions, all indicating a continued professionalisation of the League's recruitment and promotion practices.

At first glance, the national diversity of the group did not change significantly. However, one shift did take place; among the ten Directors recruited from 1933, six were from small European countries. Adrianus Pelt, who became Director of the Information Section in 1934, was Dutch, while Edouard Rodolpho de Haller, who headed the Mandates Section from 1935, was Swiss. During this period, no British Directors were appointed. This shift can be seen as a reflection of the rising influence of the Assembly, with its large and diverse membership, on the Secretariat's personnel policy and the growing relative weight of small/neutral states, especially from Europe, towards the end of the League's existence.<sup>13</sup> It is also reasonable to assume that it was a reflection of the League's waning political status and influence by the mid-1930s.

Finally, it should be pointed out that across all three generations of Directors, there was one notable absence: the defeated powers in the First World War were systematically excluded. Germany entered the League in 1926 and while there were as many German Members of Section as British ones during the following two years, no Germans ever landed a Director's position. Germany was represented among the Under-Secretaries-General. However, though this was a higher-ranking post, it was a less hands-on position within the Secretariat, with a certain ambassadorial streak to it. The only time Drummond offered a Director's post to a German, it was part of a larger trade-off scheme: Drummond offered the politically uncontentious position of Director of Social Questions and Opium Traffic Section to the German Dr. Gertrud Bäumer in order to position a Briton as head of the Disarmament Section. The deal fell through though, and the Swede Erik Ekstrand was appointed to head the Social Section.<sup>14</sup>







## CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES – AFTERLIVES

Where did the Directors go when they left the Secretariat and the newly invented profession of international civil servant? Though a lot more research is needed here, we know that many Directors (re)joined their national foreign services and became ambassadors in major capitals. Eric Drummond's career was in this sense typical, as he became ambassador to Rome following his 13-year stint as Secretary-General. While he considered this post a demotion – he would have preferred the post as Ambassador in Washington<sup>15</sup> – for others, such as the Norwegian Erik Colban, who left the Directorship of the Disarmament Section to become minister of the Norwegian Embassy in Paris, their ensuing diplomatic careers were considered prestigious and successful.<sup>16</sup> Others, particularly Directors from the small and neutral countries, went on to work for the UN after the Second World War. Examples include the Dutch head of the Information Section Adriaan Pelt and the Greek Director of the Disarmament Section Thanassis Aghnides. A third and smaller group that included the British Director of the Financial Section & Economic Intelligence Service Alexander Loveday, and the Spaniard Salvador de Madariaga, took up posts in academia.<sup>17</sup>

However, much still remains to be understood about the characteristics, professional practices and career trajectories of the League Directors. Historians have only recently begun to uncover the broader patterns and significance of these ‘men behind the man’. As the earlier monographs on Secretaries-General are steadily complemented by in-depth studies of the officials surrounding them, a more nuanced, balanced and not least interesting picture will emerge. The brief survey of the Directorship of the League of Nations presented here should prepare the ground.

### The second generation of Directors:

- ❶ Pablo de Azcárate (1890-1971), Spain
- ❷ Thanassis Aghnides (1889-1984), Greece
- ❸ Pietro Angelo Stoppani (1879-1968), Italy
- ❹ Vito Catastini (1879-?), Italy
- ❺ Erik Ekstrand (1880-1958), Sweden
- ❻ Salvador de Madariaga (1886-1978), Spain.