The quiet death of the League of Nations, 1945-48

The quiet death of the League of Nations, 1945-48

Victoria Jane Mumby

Submitted for the degree of PhD

Birkbeck, University of London
2021

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented therein is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This thesis examines the closure of the League of Nations between 1945 and 1948. Rendered obsolete following the Allies' foundation of the United Nations Organisation, the League's final years unfolded behind closed doors, but further scrutiny contradicts the assumption that this time was without consequence or impact.

This thesis demonstrates that the League did not come to an end with its Final Assembly in April 1946, and instead suggests that this was when the closure process began, before the organisation slowly dissolved over the following two years. The liquidation took significantly longer than expected and was an uncharacteristically unstructured affair for an organisation known for its bureaucracy. This was the result of two factors: a lack of precedent for the closure of an intergovernmental organisation, and a presentism that sacrificed strategic dissolution planning in favour of a short-term, reactive approach. The League's Secretariat and the oversight group for closure, the Board of Liquidation, are a central element in understanding why these two years unfolded as they did. This thesis takes an actor-focussed approach to examine proceedings from the eyes of those enacting dissolution, demonstrating the impact of their choices on the process and vice versa. It also reveals the high esteem in which their experience of international administration was held, as many moved into new positions in the secretariats of the League's successors. The United Nations and the League were deeply entwined in Geneva in 1946-47, and the line between the end of one organisation and the start of the other is more distorted than previously thought. This thesis reveals how the League's often painstaking closure not only provides new insights into that organisation's history and the origins of the U.N., but also has a lasting impact on how we think about the end of international institutions.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Acronyms

D.S.B.	Drug Supervisory Body
E.F.O.	Economic and Financial Organisation
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
F.A.O.	Food and Agriculture Organisation
I.G.O.	Intergovernmental Organisation
I.L.O.	International Labour Organisation
LNA	League of Nations Archives
P.C.I.J.	Permanent Court of International Justice
P.C.O.B.	Permanent Central Opium Board
U.N.	United Nations
U.N.E.S.C.O	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
U.N.R.R.A.	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UNA	United Nations Archives
UNOG	United Nations Office at Geneva
U.S. / U.S.A.	United States of America
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
W.H.O.	World Health Organisation

Chapter One

Introduction

"We have no decorations to distribute, no opportunity of showing you in any tangible way how strongly we feel our indebtedness to you. But we want you to know how you have endeared yourself personally to those who have been working with you. Some people seem to grow smaller in times of distress. We have been glad and proud to see how dangers and difficulties have brought out the sterling qualities of your personality and have given bright distinction to a work which might otherwise have been sad."

Carl Hambro, Chairman of the League's Board of Liquidation, writing on behalf of his colleagues to Seán Lester at the end of their work, dated 16 October 1947.[1]

Opening proceedings in Geneva on 8 April 1946, Carl Hambro, the President of the League of Nations 21st Assembly, reiterated the purpose of this last congregation for the organisation: a younger, better-looking model had supplanted the League, and now the great international experiment needed to plan its own funeral.[2] Ten days later, after committee meetings and plenary sessions, the gathered diplomats and dignitaries agreed to close the organisation effective from the next day, and proceedings were brought to an end.[3] Despite this, member governments did not receive the closure report from the organisation until September 1947, the final Secretariat officials did not leave the League's employ until the end of October 1947, and League business was still conducted into the spring of 1948. Details of the two years between the Assembly and the final fragments of liquidation activity are largely unknown – scholars have thus far chosen to focus on other elements of the organisation instead – leaving the League's story unfinished, despite over seventy years having passed since it closed its doors.[4] This thesis restores these elusive two

[1] Seán Lester's Diary, 16 October 1947, letter from Carl Hambro to Seán Lester.
[2] League of Nations, *Official Journal Special Supplement No. 194: Records of the Twentieth (Conclusion) and Twenty-First Ordinary Sessions of the Assembly* (Geneva, 1946), p. 19.
[3] Ibid, p. 68.
[4] The Board of Liquidation's final report has a publication date of 31 July 1947 but was not distributed to members until 2 September, while Valentin Stencek – the last Secretariat official remaining – left his

years back to the organisation's story, and demonstrates that, contrary to opinion both at the time and in later literature, closing the League, an organisation with a wide remit and a broad membership, was a painstaking process for all those involved. Looking closely at these months and years reveals much that has been forgotten about the League of Nations, its liquidation, and its legacy: the perils of setting precedent, the commitment of officials in the face of personal and professional sacrifice, and the long-lasting impression the organisation made on the international institutions that followed.

The preparations for a new global organisation began while the Second World War still raged and while the League of Nations quietly kept the lights on in Geneva. Designed to take on many of the responsibilities the older organisation was then charged with, and the new superpowers of both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. committed to its creation, this new United Nations Organisation was the death knell for an already diminished League. In June 1945 the new body's founding members signed the United Nations Charter, ratifications followed over the following months, and in January 1946 the first U.N. General Assembly opened in London. A new global order emerged from the ashes of the Second World War and the League of Nations was not part of it.

Whilst many international organisations have come and gone over the past century, the League of Nations, with its global-focus, broad remit centred on both security and socioeconomic concerns, and numerous membership – albeit one dominated by white, Western countries and not on the same scale as the United Nations – is one of only a handful of institutions to have faced a large-scale dissolution. It is therefore an invaluable case study from which we can further infer how these organisations close, and the kind of challenges that might be expected should other international bodies follow suit in the future. This thesis examines the two-year period, from the

---

post on 25 October 1947. League of Nations, *Board of Liquidation Final Report, presented to States Members of the League of Nations in accordance with the requirement of the Final Article of the Resolution for the Dissolution of the League of Nations adopted by the Assembly on April 18th, 1946, at its Twenty-first Ordinary Session* (Geneva, 1947); League of Nations Archive, 2 September 1947, letter from Valentin Stencek to Trygve Lie, informing him that the Final Report was circulated to members that day, R5816.4 50/44023/43844. Stencek's leaving date can be found in his personnel file: LNA, Personnel File, Stencek, Valentin Joseph. As for continuation of the League into 1948, a number of issues remained outstanding and required action past the October 1947 shutdown. For an example, see a February 1948 letter from Valentin Stencek to Percy Watterson, written on official League of Nations headed paper: LNA, 9 February 1948, letter from Stencek to Percy Watterson regarding the U.S. Treasury decision on income taxes, C1784-4.

organisation's final Assembly to the culmination of its business in 1948, in significantly greater detail than it has up until now. It highlights the mechanisms put in place – or lack thereof – to manage closure, the pressurised schedule imposed by external forces, and the impact of decision-makers choices on those working as part of the organisation's Secretariat. The results of my research shed new light on a range of subjects, including the extent to which the League and the United Nations lived and worked side by side during this time, and the impact of not only the latter on the former's closure, but also how the end of the League is an important factor in the U.N. Secretariat's formation. This is alongside revelations about the complexities of the League's liquidation, the importance of precedent in the administration of international organisations, and how individuals could both make and break the closure process.

This thesis looks closely at the practical aspects of the League's closure and investigates why the process took twice as long as originally expected. This includes a review of the decision-making structures in place – specifically the Board of Liquidation created by the 21st Assembly – and the organisation's, ultimately unwise, choice to implement only a light framework for dissolution, essentially based on the same design as that used during the Second World War. Understanding the motivations behind some of the League leadership's more puzzling, and often counterintuitive, choices not only explains why closure unfolded as it did, but also demonstrates how decision-makers can be swayed by pridefulness and unwitting ignorance. The thesis also addresses the role of outside parties in the process, and how the rush to build a new United Nations Secretariat in 1946 had an unexpected impact on the League's ability to be proactive and methodical about its closure. The latter organisation's efforts to liquidate were, as this thesis concludes, hampered from the start by external timetables, a lack of strategic direction and, perhaps most importantly, the challenge of an unknowable task. No one had ever closed an organisation like the League of Nations before, and the shortage of practical advice or precedent proved a difficult task to overcome, even for a Secretariat as experienced as the League's.

Understanding the practical ways in which this organisation closed is important, but my research also demonstrates how these events impacted upon, and were viewed by, those working in and around the League's Secretariat, regardless of their

position in the organisational hierarchy. This thesis uses personal papers, diaries, and archive material to shed light on the closure of the organisation not just from the perspective of the senior leadership and officially published reports, but also from those working throughout the institution. Their experience and comprehension of the dissolution process was often significantly more extensive than the organisation's decision-makers, especially the Board of Liquidation set up to oversee proceedings. Although the latter group met over forty times between April 1946 and July 1947, these meetings were often conducted on consecutive days in small batches, and there was even a six-month gap between sessions in the latter half of 1946. While the proceedings of these meetings give us rare insight into how and why certain decisions were made, they do not provide the full story of what liquidation was like for those responsible for making it happen. This thesis reveals that the official picture of the League's liquidation, painted in the organisation's formal publications, represented only a fraction of the real story.

This thesis resists the inclination to portray the League as a faceless institution. A core collection of individuals stayed with the Secretariat during the Second World War and in the lead-up to the final Assembly – many others left in the late 1930s and 1940 – but as the organisation's end drew closer, a significant proportion left to join the U.N. or similar international institutions. Leaving the organisation before it was fully closed was understandable: some were disaffected knowing their work to keep the League going was in vain, many were frustrated with the uncertainty surrounding their roles, and others had no choice when their contracts were terminated. Yet despite the obstacles, a core group of dedicated officials stayed in Geneva, working alongside their replacements from the U.N., through 1947. The experiences of these individuals, their daily hopes and frustrations, and their relationships with one another, provide a vital insight into the social history of the League, away from the high-level world of committees, reports, and meetings.

The League's position as one of the only intergovernmental organisations (I.G.O.s) to ever close also helps us understand if the end of an institution like this indicates a repudiation of the form of internationalism that underpins it. The League of Nations is often presented as both the triumph, and downfall, of liberal internationalism, but this thesis shows that the death of the League did not necessarily equate to a death of internationalism. The commitment of the organisation's remaining members to the

continuation of international cooperation in technical areas, as well as to a carefully managed liquidation process, demonstrates that nation-states were not entirely ready to dismiss the League's brand of internationalism in 1946. Indeed, this thesis will demonstrate that the many links between the United Nations and the League – the shared personnel, resources, and obligations – and the impact of the latter on the former's foundation, are evidence of a global reaffirmation of the League's style of multilateralism.

This thesis challenges many of the assumptions held about the League's closure, the organisation as a whole, and its longer-term legacy. The process was not neat or straightforward, but instead it was drawn-out, frequently aimless, and conversely a great source of both pride and frustration for those involved. The death of the League of Nations may have been quiet, but it was also momentous, and its reverberations are still felt today.

The League of Nations in historical context

The League of Nations, officially formed in 1919, was both a step-change from, and a continuation of, the Great Power States System that dominated European diplomatic relations in the 19th century. As a permanent organisation, with an official headquarters and full-time Secretariat, it represented a significant departure from the intermittent conference structure that preceded it, and yet its reliance on arbitration, great power decision-making, and commitment to national sovereignty meant it was more evolution than revolution. The institution's central purpose was to anticipate and prevent future conflict, and it was specifically designed to address circumstances akin to those that led to the events of 1914. As a result the League was formed with a heavy emphasis on open treaty diplomacy, disarmament, and protection for minority groups following the creation of new states in central and eastern Europe.[5]

[5] The League Covenant specifies the organisation's central aims as the promotion of international cooperation and the achievement of international peace and security: Walters, F. P., *A History of the League of Nations* (London, 1952), p. 43.

The 1920s, initially dominated by a post-war optimism, were relatively positive for the new organisation. The Secretariat, under Secretary-General Eric Drummond, expanded to meet new demands, and membership of the organisation rose across the decade.[6] However, the global economic downturn that began in 1929 brought unwelcome financial consequences for governments around the world, and an increase in nationalist policies proved counter to the League's push for mediated international cooperation. Rising territorial aggression in Europe, Asia, and Africa from both members of the League and non-members alike, put the organisation's membership under pressure to take action. Nevertheless, faced with these uncertain times, the dominant members of the organisation decided the most prudent course was to avoid confrontation as much as possible, believing it might lead to further armed conflict.[7] This reluctance to act in defence of its own membership gave rise to a lack of faith in the organisation's effectiveness, further leading to state withdrawals – and thus reduced budgets – and the drawn-out demise of the security machinery across the latter half of the 1930s.[8]

The 1930s were a difficult time for the League's efforts to contain international aggression, but as the decade progressed it became clear the organisation excelled at a different aspect of international cooperation. By the early part of that decade the Secretariat's work coordinating international health, economics, dangerous drug control, intellectual cooperation, and modern slavery, amongst others, had overtaken that of its security apparatus. As this work was considered less political than the security elements of the organisation, non-members became actively involved in the technical committees, including the United States, and this was reflected in the increasing number of officials employed to oversee these areas.[9] In early 1939 Joseph Avenol, Drummond's successor as Secretary-General, invited

---

[6] At the end of 1920, there were 182 Secretariat officials in post. By late 1932, this number had increased to 700. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, Egon R., *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington D.C., 1945), pp. 241-242. Membership of the League also increased during this period, from 47 members in 1920, to 57 by the end of 1932. Walters, *History of the League*, pp. 64-65.

[7] Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London, 1994), p. 37; Northedge, F. S., *The League of Nations: its life and times, 1920-1946* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 256-270.

[8] Albania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Spain, Chile, Venezuela, and Peru are just some of the states that withdrew in 1938-39. Walters, *History of the League*, pp. 787-788.

[9] Steiner, Zara, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 368-371. The number of Secretariat officials employed in technical services almost trebled between 1923 and 1932, and it is estimated that the cost of the technical services rose from approximately 25-30% of the Secretariat budget in 1921, to over 50% by 1930 onward. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat,* pp. 160-161.

Stanley Bruce to form and lead a committee tasked with identifying a best route forwards for – and means of insulating from the security failings of the organisation – the League's technocratic apparatus. Non-members were invited to express their opinion on the subject, and the United States Government inferred it might be willing to increase its levels of collaboration should the Committee produce viable recommendations.[10] The Bruce Committee published its recommendations on 22 August 1939, unfortunately too late for its suggestions to be put into practice before fighting erupted in Europe, but the clear enthusiasm for organised international cooperation in the socioeconomic fields was a key motivation in ensuring the continuation of the League's work in this area throughout the war, and the transfer of many of these functions to U.N. agencies in 1946.[11]

In December 1939 an Assembly was convened to address Finland's plea for help following the Soviet invasion, and in spite of its previous inaction in both Manchuria and Ethiopia, the Assembly expelled the U.S.S.R. – a decision that would have unintended consequences for the League's fate.[12] It is possible the decision-makers in Geneva that December considered the expulsion a matter of principle in line with the Covenant, but to many, both at the time and more recently, it looked like racist hypocrisy – having refused to act for non-European states – and the Soviet Government's humiliation did not diminish with time. This lingering grudge would later cement the League's destiny during post-war planning and increased the pressure from the United Nations leadership in 1945-46 to dissolve the League as quickly as possible.

The expanse of war into north-western Europe in May 1940 brought an end to any complacency still lingering amongst the League's leadership. Axis or Axis-friendly forces surrounded Geneva on three sides, and the threat to the organisation and its staff became very real.[13] Committee meetings were postponed indefinitely, and staff left the organisation by the score. By the end of 1940, Secretariat numbers had

---

[10] Cordell Hull wrote to Joseph Avenol in early February 1939, stating that the US Government "looked forward to the development and expansion of the League's machinery for dealing with these problems, would continue to collaborate therein, and would willingly consider the means of making its collaboration more effective." Quoted in Walters, *History of the League*, pp. 760-761.
[11] Barros, James, *Betrayal From Within: Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 1933-1940* (New Haven, 1969), pp. 195-197.
[12] Walters, *History of the League*, pp. 806-807.
[13] Alexander Loveday recounted his difficulty in travelling to Portugal via France and Spain in a letter to Lester: Lester's Diary, 25 August 1940, letter from Alexander Loveday to Lester.

reduced to 108 from a high point of 707 in October 1931, with many leaving by choice to reunite with their families abroad, whilst others were forced to take either indefinite leave or have their contracts terminated in a policy imposed by Avenol.[14] Morale was at a low point – the atmosphere in Geneva was described by one official as having a lingering sense of "gloom" – with many staff in fear for both their careers and even their lives, and the actions of their Secretary-General only made matters worse.[15]

Avenol took over the role of Secretary-General in 1933 and his tenure, while not met with the same enthusiasm as that of Eric Drummond, was relatively controversy-free. By 1940 however, under pressure from the new Vichy regime as well as League members, the Frenchman was increasingly agitated and unnerved by events in Europe.[16] In the first six months of 1940, he threatened senior staff with dismissal, suggested closer liaison with Nazi Germany, and covertly despatched Secretariat files to France for 'safekeeping'. The decline of the Secretariat during the late 1930s had already dealt a blow to the organisation's spirits, and Avenol's refusal to set a budget for 1941 left senior officials such as Seán Lester, Alexander Loveday (Director of the Economic and Finance Organisation, or E.F.O.) and Thanassis Aghnides (Under Secretary-General) greatly concerned about the League's ability to survive.[17] Avenol eventually resigned in the summer of 1940 – albeit following some indecision on his part and not before further antagonising his colleagues – and was replaced by Lester, Deputy Secretary-General and previously the High Commissioner to Danzig.[18] A former journalist, politician, and Irish delegate to the League Assembly before joining the Secretariat, Lester had no prior ambition for the top job. However, as Joseph Avenol's increasing defeatism became a risk to the organisation's survival, he felt he had little choice in the matter. Profoundly dedicated to the League, he felt a moral compulsion to sustain the organisation through both the war and later into the post-war period.[19]

---

[14] Staff numbers are taken from Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat,* p. 242.
[15] Ibid, pp. 371-373.
[16] James Barros's 1969 account of his tenure as Secretary-General remains the most in-depth study of the Frenchman: Barros, *Betrayal From Within*.
[17] For an example of their concern, see this entry from Lester's diary in 1940: Lester's Diary, 22 July 1940, personal diary entry.
[18] Barros, *Betrayal From Within*, pp. 241-248.
[19] In a private journal entry dated 2 August 1940, recalling a conversation with Adolfo Costa du Rels about his taking up the post of Secretary-General, Lester wrote: "I explained my personal views, pointing out that the job was not an enviable one…I said I would think it over and I had never yet refused moral responsibilities…". Lester's Diary, 2 August 1940, personal diary entry.

In light of the physical danger and increasing communications problems in Geneva as a result of the war, the new Secretary-General and his colleagues were keen to preserve as much of the remaining Secretariat functions as possible. Lester was highly motivated by a desire to see the League's work preserved for a post-war world, and quietly hoped for a full resurrection of the organisation once hostilities ceased.[20] This aspiration and support for the League's technical functions resulted in the creation of several informal missions to cities around the world, some with the open backing of their new host states, whilst other governments were forced to keep their support unofficial. Elements of the E.F.O. and the Communications and Transit Department moved to the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies in New Jersey, the Treasury went to London, the International Labour Organisation to Montréal, and the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Drug Supervisory Body to Washington D.C.[21]

The small number remaining in Geneva – only 81 individuals at its lowest point in January 1943 – performed an impressive amount of work considering the restrictions placed upon them, and the espirit de corps present amongst the group was an indication of the camaraderie and determination which would later mark the closure period.[22] In spite of the problems resulting from communication issues and the dearth of regular strategic oversight, the Secretariat produced over 130 publications between 1939 and 1945, and while the largest proportion of these publications was created by the E.F.O. in New Jersey, the Printing and Publications Department responsible for managing this process stayed in Switzerland throughout the period.[23] The continued technical activity, and the global support for it, was both a blessing and a curse for the officials in Geneva from 1946. It was vindication of

---

[20] See Lester's opening statement in his report to members for the year 1943/44: League of Nations, *Report on the Work of The League 1943-1944, submitted by the Acting Secretary-General* (Geneva, 1945), p. 6.
[21] Walters, *History of the League*, p. 809; Lester's Diary, 4 June 1940, letter from Arthur Sweetser to Loveday.
[22] Staff numbers are taken from League of Nations Archive, January 1943, [unknown author], Listes des membres du secretariat de la societe des nations, R5357 18A/604/534. In addition to the reduction in staff, the budget for 1945 was only 3,126,817 CHF, a significant drop from even 1939's reduced figure of 16,188,063 CHF. From Annex 4, submitted to the Second (Finance) Committee at the Twenty-First Assembly: LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly,* p. 159.
[23] Walters, *History of the League*, p. 810. The number of publications comes from: League of Nations, *Report on the work of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the Acting Secretary-General* (Geneva, 1945), pp. 151-167.

their efforts, but in ensuring the continuation of so many technical functions, they also made closing the organisation a much larger and more complex task.

Rumours began to swirl as early as 1942 that the Allied leaders were planning some kind of international organisation for the post-war world, and work to design the shape and guidelines of a new intergovernmental organisation was secretly underway in both the U.S. and British governments. A pilot or test case for this post-war intergovernmental cooperation was soon underway in the form of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration or U.N.R.R.A., which was established formally in November 1943 with 44 member states. U.N.R.R.A. was founded before the United Nations Organisation, but its success in planning and organising relief in post-war Europe lent credence to the idea that multilateral collaboration, including both the United States and the Soviet Union, could flourish in the future.[24] While Lester and his colleagues were aware early on that discussions on the subject were taking place, it wasn't until early 1944, when planning became more official and open, that it became apparent a resurrected or evolved League was not an option, despite planners actively using the organisation as a template.[25] Clark Eichelberger, Executive Director of the U.S.-based Committee to Study the Organization of Peace, recalled a planning meeting in 1942 during which those in attendance used the League machinery as a basis from which to make their recommendations, identifying synonyms so as to avoid too many direct comparisons. For example the League Assembly became the General Assembly, and the Council became the Security Council.[26] What was clear was that the League would be replaced by something new, although it was not yet obvious what that was, what it would be responsible for, and what its creation would mean for the stalwart officials of the Secretariat.[27]

Following the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in September 1944, during which the technocratic functions of the U.N. were not discussed, Lester watched closely for

---

[24] See both: Reinisch, Jessica, 'Introduction: Relief in the Aftermath of War' in *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (Jul., 2008), pp. 371-404; Reinisch, Jessica, 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA' in *Past & Present* 210, Issue Supplement 6 (2011), pp. 258-289.
[25] Lester's Diary, [exact date unknown – catalogued as March 1944], personal diary entry in which Lester notes the lack of faith in the League's future.
[26] Eichelberger, Clark, *Organizing for Peace: A Personal History of the Founding of the United Nations* (London, 1977), p. 204.
[27] Mazower, Mark, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London, 2012), pp. 194-205; Claude, Inis L. Jr., *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organizations*, Fourth Edition (New York, 1984), pp. 57-65.

indications of the new organisation's plans.[28] The resultant San Francisco Conference of April-June 1945 was designed to be a historic affair, with delegations from every proposed member state, as well as interested lobby groups and the world's press. As only five of the League's remaining 35 member states were not part of the United Nations – Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland – the proceedings would give an indication of the attitudes of the League's own members. The foundation of a new organisation would mean at least some elements of the League would have to be liquidated – what these areas would be was a key question from the League leadership's perspective – and Lester was both optimistic and realistic about the extent of the answers from the Conference.[29] Despite his hopes for a positive outcome the Secretary-General was reluctant to attend in person but, following a last-minute unofficial invitation and recognising the value he and his colleagues might bring to proceedings, Lester travelled to San Francisco in April 1945 alongside Loveday and Seymour Jacklin (League of Nations Treasurer).[30] From their perspective however the trip was a largely wasted endeavour. The delegation's informal presence left them without the proper accreditation, standing outside meeting rooms for hours in the middle of the night, and stuck in the centre of deadlocks between government representatives.[31]

The United States government did not hide its ambition to keep the League, or anyone related to it, away from plans for its new organisation. The war was not yet over when the Conference began, and the U.N. was deliberately framed as a fresh start; they did not want to taint the events or the new institution with the League's supposed failure.[32] The same was true, to an extent, with the Soviet leadership. Still reeling from the government's expulsion from the organisation in 1939, the Soviet representatives made it clear they considered the League a failure, and raised

---

[28] Lester's Diary, 25 November 1944, letter from Loveday to Lester encouraging the latter to travel to the U.S. to observe the proceedings at Dumbarton Oaks in person.
[29] Schlesinger, Stephen C., *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations. A Story of Superpowers, Secret Agents, Wartime Allies and Enemies and Their Quest for a Peaceful World* (Boulder, 2003), pp. 113-118; Lester's Diary, 8 February 1945, letter from Lester to J.P. Walshe, Secretary of the Irish Government's Department of External Affairs.
[30] Lester relayed the events leading up to the Conference in a number of letters to Walshe: Lester's Diary, 8 February 1945, letter from Lester to Walshe; Lester's Diary, 12 April 1945, letter from Lester to Walshe. For the unofficial invitation, see: Lester's Diary, 12 April 1945, letter from John Winant (US Ambassador in London) to Lester.
[31] See the following: Lester's Diary, 30 April 1945, personal diary entry; Lester's Diary, 15 May 1945, personal diary entry; Lester's Diary, exact date unknown – listed as March 1945, letter from Lester to Hambro relaying details of a meeting with Anthony Eden.
[32] Plesch, Dan, *America, Hitler, and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (London, 2011), p. 168.

objections to Lester's presence at the conference as the citizen of a neutral, non-member state i.e. Ireland.[33] The issue was eventually settled after nearly three weeks, but it was a prophetic turn of events and a strong indication of the power dynamic that dictated both the plans for, and the progress of, the League's closure: the United Nations was now making the decisions and working to its own timetable, whilst the League's leadership had no choice but to sit at the bottom of the pecking order and wait.[34]

The eventual outcomes of the San Francisco Conference were not particularly useful for planning the dissolution process from the Secretariat's viewpoint. The possibility of transferring the functions, assets, and staff of the League to the new organisation was not discussed – the emphasis was on the new rather than the old – and instead the focal points of proceedings were the signing of the new Charter, and the interim arrangements established to set up the Security Council, Trusteeship Council, and Economic and Social Council (henceforth the ECOSOC) as well as planning for the first General Assembly. The body created to manage this process, the United Nations Preparatory Commission, had a large number of responsibilities beyond these primary tasks, only one of which was a pledge to consider a transfer of the League's non-political functions, activities, and assets.[35] Closing the League of Nations before the United Nations was fully-established was not an option – the shared membership of the two organisations wanted to see some degree of transfer between the two – so Lester and his colleagues were forced to remain in limbo whilst the new United Nations Organisation solidified its own strategy.

Unfortunately for those waiting in the Palais des Nations, decisions regarding League activities and possible transfer were not quick to arrive as the U.N. planners grappled with the intricacies of building a new intergovernmental organisation. The Preparatory Commission delegated much of the detail-heavy work of reviewing and making recommendations to an Executive Council; made up of representatives from

[33] Lester's Diary, 30 April 1945, personal diary entry relaying the treatment received by the League delegation in San Francisco, including Soviet opposition to Lester's presence.
[34] Lester's Diary, 15 May 1945, personal diary entry describing Jacklin as "very sore" following his treatment at a committee meeting, and Lester's personal desire to move on from San Francisco as soon as possible.
[35] LNA, 25 June 1945, official press communication from the US Office of War Information detailing the establishment of the United Nations Preparatory Commission, S565.

those states part of the Executive Committee at San Francisco, it further delegated recommendations to smaller sub-committees, each dedicated to a particular topic. Sub-Committee 9 produced recommendations focussed on the League, which were then approved by the Executive Council, then reviewed by a Preparatory Commission sub-committee, and further approved by the Preparatory Commission in December 1945. It was a lengthy, albeit understandably complex, process and it remained incomplete until said recommendations were agreed at the first General Assembly in February 1946.[36]

Representatives from the League of Nations Secretariat were not part of the review process. Documentation was frequently requested of, and provided by, Lester and other Secretariat officials, but the decisions made by the U.N. planners in regard to activity transfer were not the result of negotiation with the League's leadership. The various Preparatory Commission and Executive Committee sub-groups, focussed on what they wanted the new organisation to be, did not yet have the answers the League needed to begin closure planning and, as the new powerhouse of global governance, the U.N. had the ability to impose its own schedule on proceedings. The League's Supervisory Commission, to which members had delegated decision-making authority in 1938, did meet with another U.N. committee in January 1946 to agree terms by which League assets would be transferred to the new organisation – known as the Common Plan – but the Commission had little in the way of power to shape the format of those terms.[37]

Subsequently, despite pressure from the U.N. planners to close the League as quickly as possible, delays pushed the dissolution further into 1946. Decision-makers at both organisations were reluctant to admit the truth to their members: the creation and liquidation of intergovernmental organisations was complicated, especially when there were numerous interested parties with divergent agendas to contend with, and where precedent was non-existent. These tasks could not be affected quickly, especially when the liquidation of one body was dependent on the fully realised creation of the other. Consequently, despite the two-year gap between

[36] David Owen, supporting the Executive Committee of the UN Preparatory Commission, told Lester that they would need to face the "indefiniteness" for the foreseeable future: LNA, 20 February 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro recounting a recent meeting with David Owen, S565.
[37] The National Archives, 28 January 1946, 'Report of the Committee set up by the Preparatory Commission', FO 371/57248.

the initial indications the League would be replaced in 1944 and the final Assembly in April 1946, the League of Nations, through no real fault of its own, went into its official closure period quite unprepared for what lay ahead. A scheme for asset transfer and distribution had been agreed, but the logistics of administering these schemes, as well as the handover to the new ECOSOC of technical functions and activities, were an unknown. Add to this the concerns about staffing levels, the liquidation of the Nansen Office, the high levels of member contributions in arrears, the administration of League loans, and the organisation's final months were anything but smooth sailing. This thesis shows that the answers to those outstanding questions were not identified quickly or easily, and lingering issues such as staff disputes, pension funds, and income tax lawsuits prolonged the League's life a further two years.

The League of Nations in historiographical context

The League of Nations has long been the subject of academic scrutiny, both during its existence and in the years following its demise, but it is fair to say that the organisation has seen a renewal of interest from scholarly circles over the past twenty years. This thesis is inspired by this revival, in terms of both its acknowledgement of the League as a valuable case study of intergovernmental organisation and internationalism in action, but also in the current literature's dismissal of the League's liquidation as seemingly uninteresting or unworthy of in-depth examination.

To understand much of the recent discourse around the League of Nations, it is necessary to look back to the earliest scholarly assessments of the organisation. The decision to distance the United Nations from the League, and the dismissal of the latter's legacy in order to prop up the former, has had lasting repercussions for the way in which academics have addressed the organisation in the decades since it closed. Most of the earliest writings on the League were couched in terms of only either success or failure, without nuance or any alternative non-merit-based perspectives. This thesis explicitly rejects the balance sheet approach, and suggests the League is more complex and of interest than this traditional viewpoint allows for.

Individuals previously involved with the organisation, either as prominent supporters or as Secretariat officials, dominated those early writers both explaining and defending the League. Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer, who worked in several departments between 1933 and 1940, wrote *The International Secretariat* in 1945 which, although not the first text written by a member of staff, remains the most in-depth analysis of the League Secretariat and its inner workings.[38] The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace funded Wertheimer's work as part of a series dedicated to international cooperation during the League's lifetime and how lessons drawn from the organisation's experience might be applied in future. This provided a gateway for other former Secretariat officials to represent the League's legacy, including Bertil Renborg, formerly of the Drug Control Service, and Martin Hill of the E.F.O., who both compiled studies of their respective sections under the Carnegie banner, as did Manley O. Hudson (Permanent Court of International Justice), and Pablo de Azcárate (Minorities Section).[39] Another individual connected with the League – for a time at least – was Raymond Fosdick, a devotee of Woodrow Wilson and later Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, who held the role of Under Secretary-General for several months in 1919 before the U.S. government decision to decline membership. Fosdick did not have a lengthy relationship with the League, but his fondness for the organisation and its commitment to multilateralism was reflected in his writings throughout the 1960s and 1970s.[40]

A former senior official also wrote the most comprehensive history of the organisation. Frank Walters, part of the Secretariat for over twenty years before his departure in 1940, published *A History of the League of Nations* in 1952, and at over 800 pages it exhaustively covered the institution's history. Walters' connection with

---

[38] Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat.* For other, earlier, works written by League officials, see: Sweetser, Arthur, *The League of Nations at Work* (New York, 1920); Noel-Baker, Philip, *The League of Nations at Work* (London, 1926); Cecil, Robert, *A Great Experiment: An Autobiography* (London, 1941).

[39] There were seven works published by the Carnegie Endowment under this banner: Butler, Nicholas Murray, *The International Law of the Future: Postulates, Principles, Proposals* (Washington D.C., 1944); Hudson, Manley O., *International Tribunals: Past and Future* (Washington, D.C., 1944); Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*; Pastuhov, Vladimir D., *A Guide to the Practice of International Conferences* (Washington D.C., 1945); de Azcárate, P., *League of Nations and National Minorities: An Experiment* (Washington D.C., 1945); Hill, Martin, *The Economic and Financial Organization of the League of Nations: A Survey of Twenty-five Years' Experience* (Washington D.C., 1946); Renborg, Bertil A., *International Drug Control: A Study of International Administration By and Through the League of Nations* (Washington D.C., 1947).

[40] Fosdick wrote several books about his relationship with the League and its existence in more general terms, including: Fosdick, Raymond, *The League and the United Nations after Fifty Years: The Six Secretaries-General* (Newtown, 1972) and Fosdick, Raymond, *Letters on the League of Nations* (Princeton, 1966).

the League ran deep, and he was granted exclusive early access to the organisation's Archives in 1946 whilst liquidation work was still underway.[41] Like his former colleagues, he demonstrated a reluctance to overly-criticise the League's Secretariat, but his thoroughness and commitment to chronicling the organisation was, and is, unmatched. At a time when advocating for the League was considered unfashionable, Walters highlighted previously unknown areas of effort, especially the socioeconomic work of the Secretariat, whose work was lost in the wider public disparagement of the organisation.[42]

These favourable assessments of the League were not, however, sufficient to counter the predominant narrative of failure, bolstered as it was by the organisation's inability to prevent the Second World War. Whether apportioning blame to either the League's machinery or its membership, this undeniable fact ensured the negative perspective dominated much of the discourse for the rest of the 20th century. Eric Hobsbawm called it "an almost total failure" in *The Age of Extremes*, Mark Mazower suggested the League experience was a "failure", and, in his well-regarded story of the U.N.'s creation, Stephen Schlesinger referred to the League variously as a "fiasco" and "failed".[43] Thinking and writing about the League of Nations only in terms of success or failure meant this perspective permeated not only through academic literature, but also into contemporary public consciousness and politics. In 2005 Alexandru Grigorescu, in his work comparing the Iraq debates in the U.N. Security Council in 2003 to Nazi appeasement in the late 1930s, noted that U.S. President George W. Bush used this analogy and the "failures of the League of Nations" over forty times in the period leading up to the occupation of Iraq.[44] Grigorescu concluded that the analogy was not particularly relevant to the situation in 2003, but not because he believed the League had been unfairly maligned. Instead, demonstrating how the failure narrative had even permeated

[41] Lester wrote to Frederic Hapgood – formerly of the League Registry service and transferred to the U.N. at the end of August 1946 – confirming that he and Włodzimierz Moderow had agreed to grant Walters access to the Archives. LNA, 11 December 1946, memo from Lester to Frederic Hapgood, S568.
[42] Walters, *History of the League*.
[43] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes,* p. 34; Mazower, Mark, 'An International Civilization? Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century' in *International Affairs* 82, no. 3 (May, 2006), p. 564; Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*, pp. 9, 125.
[44] Grigorescu, Alexandru, 'Mapping the UN-League of Nations Analogy: Are There Still Lessons to Be Learned from the League?' in *Global Governance* 11, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 2005), pp. 25-26.

academic circles beyond the discipline of history, he suggested the situations should not be compared because the U.N. was not as "useless" as its predecessor.[45]

Over the past fifteen years however the League of Nations has seen increased attention from historians eager to revisit the organisation, moving away from topics of disarmament or sanctions against aggression, and instead focussing on the organisation's ostensibly non-political work facilitating international cooperation in socioeconomic fields.[46] However several of these accounts have used the merits of these functions and activities to counteract the prevailing fifty-year narrative of failure and, as a consequence, have compounded the view that the League can only be thought about in terms of success or failure. Iris Borowy, for example, noted that she would like the League of Nations Health Organisation to receive more praise than it previously had, and that its continued legacy via the World Health Organisation is testament to its success.[47] The choice to focus on the lesser-recognised achievements of the League's Secretariat in an effort to rescue the reputation of the institution continues to result in a scholarship still frequently focussed on its relative merits. This thesis has been inspired by the renewed interest in the League, and the eagerness to scrutinise lesser-known elements of its history, but it rejects the idea that its examination should only be made with the aim of assessing the organisation's supposed worthiness.

The narrow binary approach that has dominated scholarship on the League is not the only generalisation from which the organisation has suffered, and many of the most sweeping statements come from scholars for whom the League is tangential to their particular focus of study.[48] Both historians and scholars from other fields present the organisation as a stepping-stone in a wider, and supposedly more interesting, history of other institutions, or in the field of international politics. This is especially true of those interested in both international organisations in general, as

---

[45] Ibid, p. 39.
[46] For more information on the increasing interest in the League of Nations see Pedersen, Susan, 'Back to the League of Nations: Review Essay' in *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (Oct., 2007), pp. 1091-1117.
[47] Borowy, Iris, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation 1921-1946* (Frankfurt, 2009), pp. 462-463.
[48] Paul Kennedy refers to some of the League's actions as "pathetic" in the opening chapter of *Parliament of Man*, whilst Hinsley dismissed the League as doomed to failure from its inception. See Kennedy, Paul, *Parliament of Man: The United Nations and the Quest for World Government* (London, 2006), p. 21; Hinsley, F. H., *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations Between States* (London, 1963), pp. 311-321.

well as the United Nations, histories of which often tend to dismiss the League as either utterly irrelevant or as a fleeting preface to be discussed before moving on to more attention-grabbing subjects.[49]

One of the key findings of this thesis is the extent of the links between the League and the United Nations, and the interweaving of the former's liquidation with the latter's creation. Obviously the U.N. is a much larger, more complex, and now longer-lasting organisation than the League was – at the end of 2019 the U.N. Secretariat was made up of over 36,000 officials; at its peak in 1931, the League had 707.[50] However this research makes clear that very few of the League's remaining assets in 1946, physical and otherwise, were fully-liquidated; the vast majority became part, in one way or another, of the U.N. and its agencies. These links are not a complete unknown in scholarly circles, but most of those who do recognise the continuation between the two organisations, such as Reinalda's *Routledge History of International Organizations* and Hinsley's *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, seem reluctant to interrogate these connections with any rigour.[51] Another example is Evan Luard's *The United Nations: How it Works*, in which Luard acknowledged that the U.N. learnt lessons from the League and implemented them accordingly, but did not expand on these any further.[52] This thesis not only confirms the existence of the links between the two organisations, but also reveals the extent to which the League and the U.N. were entwined, especially during 1946, challenging many of the existing origin stories of the latter institution as well as the persistent idea that international organisations exist in delineated silos, entirely separate from one another. It also shows the willingness of the post-war institutions, away from the public eye, to take advantage of the resources the League of Nations had to offer, from physical assets to Secretariat officials' experience.[53]

---

[49] Meisler, Stanley, *United Nations: The First Fifty Years* (New York, 1995), p. 26.
[50] The U.N. Secretariat figures are taken from the United Nations Library website: http://ask.un.org/faq/14626 (retrieved 19 August 2021). The League figures for 1931 comes from Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, p. 242.
[51] Reinalda, Bob, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (Abingdon, 2009), p. 286; Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, pp. 338-341.
[52] Luard, Evan, *The United Nations: How it Works,* Second Edition (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 128.
[53] One recent exception to this trend can be found in the work of Gram-Skjoldager, Ikonomou, and Kahlert: Gram-Skjoldager, Karen, Haakon A. Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert (eds.), *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s* (London, 2020).

Like those historians focussed on the creation of the United Nations, scholars of international relations have, for the most part, been similarly unconcerned with the League's place in international organisation as a sub-discipline. The academic field expanded rapidly in the wake of the Second World War, but this was accompanied by the popularity of the realist school, which stressed the inherently selfish nature of the state and thus the inevitable conflicts between them. It was the dominant movement of the post-war academy, and the events of the 1930s through to the 1950s supposedly justified the argument that the League of Nations was an ill-conceived attempt to manifest a utopian world order. One of these academics was E. H. Carr, a British scholar and journalist, who remains one of the most quoted realist international relations theorists, despite his lack of interest in the field from the mid-1940s onwards. *The Twenty Years' Crisis* was initially published in 1939, the contents of which saw Carr launch a fiery criticism of the "abstract theory" that dominated the structures of the League of Nations and the unrealistic belief that states could be compelled to act for the wider greater good via the power of reason.[54] As the realist school of thought gained influence and exposure, the academy came to think of international organisations as wasteful fantasies and, as there was little point in studying institutions with no value, the League became an increasingly discarded topic in the field in the latter half of the 20th century.[55] This thesis refutes both the idea that the League's example provided nothing of interest to scholars, and that something is unworthy of examination or without significance because it ostensibly failed. On the contrary, the unique experience of the League's closure provides the opportunity to review an endeavour that had not been attempted before – and has not been attempted on the same scale since – and learn valuable lessons that might just as easily be applied to international organisations in existence today.

A further common simplification of the League's story, and one that specifically relates to the aims of this thesis, surrounds the means and timeline by which the organisation closed. The traditional fixation on security and balance of military power in the League's story means much of the earlier literature claimed the organisation

---

[54] Carr, E. H., *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (London, 2016), pp. 29-35. In his preface to the reissued edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in 2016, Michael Cox explained that Carr was not necessarily the conservative antagonist of all international organisations that he has been portrayed as by the academy.

[55] Rochester, J. Martin, 'The Rise and Fall of International Organization as a Field of Study' in *International Organization* 40, no. 4 (Autumn, 1986), p. 790.

was defunct by the start of the Second World War.[56] As many of the new studies of the past fifteen years have demonstrated, the League's security apparatus was only one element of the organisation, and the continuation of the technical functions and activities, which overtook the former in terms of Secretariat time and resources during the 1930s, was largely responsible for its survival throughout the conflict. However those more contemporary scholars arguing for the continued relevance of the League during the Second World War often fall into a different trap by reiterating the narrative put forth by the organisation's leaders at the time – something this thesis contradicts – specifically that the 21st Assembly in April 1946 marked the end of the institution. Susan Pedersen concluded *The Guardians* with the events of the Assembly, and both Patricia Clavin and Mazower claimed that "By 18 April 1946, everything was agreed" and "By this point, the handover had quietly been arranged" respectively.[57]

Accepting the version of events put forth at the time, either completely overlooking League activity post-21st Assembly or relegating the period to a few sentences, had another consequence: it made the organisation's closure look straightforward, uninteresting, and unimportant. Furthermore, it simplified the complexity inherent in the transfer of assets, activities, and people from one organisation to another. By restoring these events to public consciousness, this thesis contradicts this assumption and demonstrates how the League's own leadership underestimated the challenges of a process that had never been attempted before. The way in which existing literature has presented the League's closure suggests a neatness to proceedings that was missing from reality, and the results of this research shows how frustrating the experience often was for those working in the Secretariat from 1946-48. The orderliness projected by the League's leadership at the time, and in historiography since, hides the truth that both the U.N. and the League were entwined for much of 1946, occupying a grey area during which one organisation was not quite closed, and the other was not fully in place.

---

[56] Northedge, *The League of Nations,* p. 276; Scott, George, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (London, 1973), p. 401.
[57] See Pedersen, Susan, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015), p. 402; Clavin, Patricia, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations 1920-1946* (Oxford, 2013), p. 358; Mazower, *Governing the World,* p. 211.

Very few writers have addressed the post-April 1946 elements of the League's closure, and only four I have seen have make reference to the difficulties within the closure process that this thesis examines in depth. These can be found in Douglas Gageby's biography of Seán Lester, Victor-Yves Ghebali's review of the League and the I.L.O. during the Second World War, Torsten Kahlert's brief look at the transfer of estates and assets, and the unpublished doctoral thesis of Emma Edwards. Gageby merely alluded to the challenges by calling the closure process "a slow, onerous, slogging and pettifogging business", while Kahlert's review of asset transfer, by virtue of its brevity, does not interrogate the process in-depth.[58] Meanwhile, completed in 2013, Edwards' 'The Wartime Experience of the League of Nations, 1940-1947' went some way to rectifying the scholarly oversight of the organisation's closure but, by covering an eight-year period, did not feature the events following April 1946 in any detail. Edwards noted that assets were liquidated and functions transferred, but the particulars of how this took place, why decisions were made, and the long-term effects of these actions, were not part of her research.[59]

The most significant of the three works is Victor-Yves Ghebali's *Organisation Internationale et Guerre Mondiale: Le Cas de la Société des Nations et de l'Organisation Internationale du Travail Pendant la Second Guerre Mondiale*, edited and published in 2013 by his colleague Richard Kolb following Ghebali's death in 2009. The work was based on his 1975 thesis and is the only published study I have uncovered that touches on the closure of the League and, more specifically, the fate of the organisation's assets and activities as they were handed over to the new United Nations in 1946-47. Ghebali methodically reviewed each transferred function or service in turn, but his analysis came unquestionably from a U.N. perspective – supported by his primary use of U.N. Archives source material in this regard – and his focus was on transfer to the new organisation, which was only part of the League's closure work. Instead this thesis digs deeper into the actor-focussed elements of this story, examines these events from a League perspective, and uses

[58] Gageby, Douglas, *The Last Secretary-General: Sean Lester and the League of Nations* (Dublin, 1999), p. 256. Kahlert, Torsten, ' 'The League is Dead, long live the United Nations': The Liquidation of the League and the Transfer of Assets to the UN' in Ikonomou, Haakon A., and Karen Gram-Skjoldager (eds.), *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus, 2019), pp. 256-264.
[59] Edwards, Emma Mary, 'The Wartime Experience of the League of Nations, 1940-1947' (unpublished doctoral thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2013), pp. 296-310.

that information to explain why there was more to the League's dissolution than just transfer to the U.N., as well as why the process took so much longer than expected. Ghebali however stands out as one of the only scholars to acknowledge the significant efforts involved in bringing about the transfer between the League and the U.N., and this thesis builds on his foundations.[60]

Looking closer at the complexity of the League's closure, as this thesis does, brings a greater understanding of what is practically involved in the liquidation of an intergovernmental organisation. The end of institutions like the League of Nations are conspicuous by their absence from the academic fields of international organisation and international relations, a side-effect of the latter's struggles with explaining change, especially in peaceful times, although there have been more recent calls to grapple with this oversight.[61] In the meantime scholars have tended to take one of two approaches to both the end of international institutions and the specific League example, either ignoring the concept entirely or maintaining the position that, whilst international organisations often adapt to changing circumstances, they do not come to an end.[62] The extent to which the wider field has validated this approach is evidenced in Susan Strange's contribution to Reinalda and Verbeek's edited volume *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations*, titled 'Why do international organisations never die?'. The basis of Strange and others' argument centres on the idea that international organisations evolve rather than end, and that it is typically employees of these institutions who bring about this change.[63] Reinalda suggested this is borne out either by officials changing the organisation's remit, or by the same officials making themselves indispensable to the international community they serve, either consciously or unconsciously. Strange went even further and used the League as evidence for her

---

[60] See the section titled 'La SDN et l'OIT à l'épreuve de l'après-guerre' in: Ghebali, Victor-Yves, *Organisation Internationale et Guerre Mondiale. Le Cas de la Société des Nations et de l'Organisation Internationale du Travail Pendant la Second Guerre Mondiale. Édité par Robert Kolb* (Bruxelles, 2013).
[61] Change was the focus of a 2018 issue of *International Studies Review*; the following articles are particularly relevant: Paul, T.V., 'Assessing Change in World Politics' in *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 2018), pp. 177-185; Holsti, Kalevi, 'Change in International Politics: The View from High Altitude' in *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 2018), pp. 186-194; Sinha, Aseema, 'Building a Theory of Change in International Relations: Pathways of Disruptive and Incremental Change in World Politics' in *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 2018), pp. 195-203.
[62] Reinalda, *History of International Organizations*, pp. 756-758; Armstrong, David, Lorna Lloyd, and John Redmond, *International Organisation in World Politics,* Third Edition (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 10.
[63] Strange, Susan, 'Why do international organizations never die?' in Reinalda, Bob, and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations* (London, 1998), pp. 213-220.

theory. She asserted that following the termination of League staff contracts at the end of that organisation's life, and the controversy surrounding it, international civil servants were concerned these circumstances might recur in future positions. In order to avoid such a situation, these officials negotiated better terms and conditions in their new roles, making it significantly more difficult to terminate their employment. Strange's suggestion therefore is that the closure experience of the League of Nations is the reason why subsequent bodies have remained open.[64]

My research is predicated on the irrefutable fact that the League of Nations closed during 1946-48, and the unflinching stance of scholars like Strange only reinforces the argument that the dissolution of international organisations needs to be studied with greater rigour. This is a position backed up by the recent work of Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, who has looked at the lifecycles of intergovernmental organisations created since 1815 and shown that, in opposition to the prevailing opinion, these institutions can, and have, come to an end. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni's approach is primarily data-driven and her findings refute the argument of those such as Strange and Reinalda, revealing how these I.G.O.s close in a number of different ways and some of the more common characteristics of these ill-fated organisations. Interestingly the League of Nations does not necessarily fit some of Eilstrup-Sangiovanni's conclusions – that multi-remit organisations with a global membership are statistically less likely to close – but she also acknowledges that the end of the post-First World War institution is a prime illustration of what she calls "institutional succession", whereby one I.G.O. is replaced by another, and that closer historical study of these examples is needed. This thesis heeds the call made by Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and provides an in-depth case study of how both dissolution and "institutional succession" works in practice.[65] The men and women responsible for liquidating the League of Nations did not have the benefit of precedent to draw upon in their efforts – theirs was a unique challenge – but this thesis takes their experience and uses it to provide those that have followed in their footsteps with the knowledge and understanding of closure that they were unable to avail themselves of.

---

[64] Reinalda, *History of International Organizations*, pp. 756-758; Strange, 'Why do international organizations never die?', pp. 213-220. In addition, see chapter 2 of this thesis for more information on the League Secretariat's contracts in 1946.

[65] See Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette, 'Death of International Organizations. The organizational ecology of intergovernmental organizations, 1815-2015' in *The Review of International Organizations* 15 (2020), pp. 339-370.

Reinserting the closure of the League of Nations back into the wider story of the organisation also provides a fascinating insight into the start, middle, and end of multi-remit institutions like it. Scholars of organisational life cycles have tended to focus their studies on corporations – multinational or otherwise – and the continued lack of interest in international organisation has resulted in a dearth of research into how these life cycles might be applied to intergovernmental organisations.[66] Studies of organisational behaviour have also shied away from both intergovernmental organisations in general and the League of Nations as a specific example. Whilst some, including Boje, Parker, and Clegg, acknowledge international bodies as useful case studies, especially in regard to the effects of globalisation on organisational practice, they focus on institutions devoted to financial and economic management i.e. the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.[67] This reflects the field's origins as an area of study in business schools, but it also means both public and international organisations are often neglected as real-life examples from which theory can, and should, be drawn.

The same is true for those focussing on the culture of organisations, meaning the culmination of an institution's values, ethics, attitudes, and assumptions, and how this influences the internal management and day-to-day processes of an institution. The link between an organisation's culture and levels of efficiency and resilience first arose in the early half of the twentieth century but did not find success as a field of study until the 1950s and 1960s.[68] A closer examination of the mindset of League employees, and their experiences as a workforce embarking upon a one-of-a-kind change, brings new insight into the ways of working at international organisations. The ingrained working practices at the League of Nations – the commitment to established procedure, the positioning of public relations at the forefront of decision-making – did not evaporate because the organisation was in liquidation and instead had a significant impact on the progression, or lack thereof, of the closure process.

---

[66] Rochester, 'The Rise and Fall of International Organization as a Field of Study', pp. 795-798.
[67] Boje, David, 'Globalization Antenarratives' in Mills, Albert J., Jean C. Helms Mills, Carolyn Forshaw, and John Bratton (eds.), *Organizational Behaviour in a Global Context* (Peterborough, 2007), p. 511; Parker, Barbara, and Stewart Clegg, 'Globalization' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, Second Edition (London, 2006), p. 659.
[68] See Mills, Albert J., 'Introducing Organizational Behaviour' in Mills, Albert J., Jean C. Helms Mills, Carolyn Forshaw, and John Bratton (eds.), *Organizational Behaviour in a Global Context* (Peterborough, 2007), pp. 13-28.

In this regard, this thesis also builds on Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon Ikonomou's recent research on the Secretariat as an institution, its practices and characteristics, and specifically demonstrates how these were both changed by, and had an influence on, the organisation's closure.[69]

My research also looks at the social history of the organisation and its Secretariat. It is easy to become focussed on the institutional aspects of the League of Nations – it was a deeply bureaucratic organisation – but the "trivialities" of the Secretariat's daily life also play a major part in understanding the day-to-day realities of liquidation. The experiences of the ordinary people working at the League provide a real-world grounding to an area of research that might otherwise seem abstract or unrelatable.[70] Some of the recent studies from Clavin, Borowy, and Pedersen have all featured Secretariat officials, in part, as a means of illuminating commonality with the past. Clavin has taken this approach several times, highlighting key Secretariat figures such as Rachel Crowdy and Ludwik Rajachman in 'Europe and the League of Nations', and featuring Loveday and Ragnar Nurkse, an Estonian member of the E.F.O., in *Securing the World Economy*.[71] Borowy's review of the League Health Organisation used the experience of two of the remaining Secretariat officials in the department during the Second World War – Raymond Gautier and Yves Biraud – to illuminate those years but, like Clavin and others before her, was more interested in their role in proceedings as opposed to either the impact of these events on them or their perspective on the changes afoot.[72] This thesis employs these personal experiences as far as possible to do both: further our understanding of the liquidation by viewing it from all possible angles, as well as revealing the impact of the League's closure on its workforce.

The League's Secretariat officials, and the members of the decision-making Board of Liquidation, are a central part of this thesis. The prospect of future employment

---

[69] Gram-Skjoldager, Karen, and Haakon A. Ikonomou, 'Making Sense of the League of Nations Secretariat – Historiographical and Conceptual Reflections on Early International Public Administration' in *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Jul., 2019), pp. 420-444.
[70] Keith Hopkins suggested that social history's supposed "trivialities" can be used to infer broader conclusions than critics once thought, and Raphael Samuel noted the value of the discipline's concern with "real life rather than abstractions": Hopkins, Keith, 'What is Social History?' in *History Today* 35, no. 3 (Mar., 1985), pp. 38-39; Samuel, Raphael, 'What is Social History?' in *History Today* 35, no. 3 (Mar., 1985), pp. 34-38.
[71] See: Clavin, Patricia, 'Europe and the League of Nations' in Gerwarth, Robert (ed.), *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914-1945* (London, 2007), pp. 344-349; Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, pp. 308-319.
[72] Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health*, pp. 427-444.

with the U.N. or its agencies was uncertain – many career opportunities in the new secretariats were filled by the time the liquidation was complete – and with minimal prestige in working for an organisation publicly declared dead and globally decried as a failure, it might seem difficult to understand why anyone continued working for the League after 1946. This thesis shows that the loyalty demonstrated by these officials was due to a combination of factors, but most specifically a dedication to the concept of international civil service, and a sense of allegiance to colleagues with whom they had endured years of isolation and later repudiation in Geneva. These officials' concerns, their commitment to an institution cast aside by the international community, and their relationships with one another – both supportive and fractious – demonstrate how international organisations, away from the talk of bank accounts and buildings, work on an everyday basis.

The person in the Secretariat we know the most about, and one of the most prominent figures in this thesis, is Seán Lester, although overall he remains a perennially overlooked individual in the history of both the League and international organisations. Secretary-General for seven years – albeit with a significantly smaller budget and set of responsibilities than his predecessors – he, like the final years of the League, is often relegated to a passing mention at the end of a concluding chapter, even in those more recent works already mentioned.[73] The former League High Commissioner to Danzig has not been entirely forgotten by history, having been featured by both Raymond Fosdick and Arthur Rovine in their respective reviews of the League and U.N. Secretaries-General, but both of these accounts are now fifty years-old and were dominated by the turbulent events surrounding his succession to the role in 1940.[74] The only published work of note to focus exclusively on Lester was not written by an academic, but by renowned journalist Douglas Gageby in 1999. A former editor of the *Evening Press* and the *Irish Times*, Gageby was also Lester's son-in-law, and thus had privileged access to Lester's diary and personal papers, now entrusted to the U.N. Office at Geneva and

[73] As an example, Langrod discussed the continuation of the Secretariat during the Second World War, but he failed to mention Lester by name, instead referring to him only as "Avenol's successor": Langrod, Georges, *The International Civil Service: Its Origins, its Nature, its Evolution* (Leyden, 1963), p. 141.

[74] Fosdick's review and that of Rovine were published only two years apart, and the similarities between the structure of the two can be attributed to their previous working relationship: Rovine worked as Fosdick's research assistant on the latter's volume. Fosdick, *The League and the United Nations after Fifty Years*; Rovine, Arthur, *The first fifty years: The Secretary-General in World Politics 1920-1970* (London, 1970).

University College Dublin and also used throughout the course of my research. Lester's papers offer an in-depth look at his personal opinions on events, although the entries for the period beyond the summer of 1946 are sparser and, as a consequence, Gageby's work brushed over the final year of Lester's tenure.[75]

The other work of note to place Lester at the forefront is the 1973 unpublished thesis of Stephen Barcroft: 'The International Civil Servant: the League of Nations Career of Sean Lester, 1929-1947'.[76] Like Gageby, Barcroft was granted early access to the former Secretary-General's papers and thus the thesis gave a thorough account of much of Lester's time working for the Secretariat. Barcroft was also able to supplement the diaries with interviews of several of Lester's Secretariat colleagues, including Martin Hill and Valentin Stencek, the latter of whom was another critical individual in the League's liquidation. Barcroft's real focus, however, was Lester's time working for the League in Danzig, and as such only briefly examined liquidation, with only five pages devoted to his final eighteen months in charge. My research contradicts the idea that Lester's experience in these months was therefore uninteresting and unworthy of further study, and instead shows that this time was one of the most challenging of his League career.

More than a mere caretaker, Lester was responsible for the liquidation of an intergovernmental organisation and thus occupies a unique position in our understanding of these institutions.[77] His leadership and management of the process and people involved has not been considered by any of the writers mentioned, who have instead focussed on the high-level chronological events. This thesis addresses this discrepancy, going further to also look at why Lester took the actions he did, and how his colleagues, both internal and external to the organisation, viewed those choices. My research emphasises that the League of Nations was unlike any other intergovernmental organisation that came before it, and with no precedent to draw upon or guide him through liquidation, Lester's work and decisions are vitally important in understanding why the closure unfolded as it

---

[75] Gageby, *The Last Secretary-General*, pp. 250-258. The only other published work on Lester, written by Marit Fosse and John Fox in 2016, is similarly based on Lester's papers although, in using only these papers – and no other primary sources – Fosse and Fox's work is significantly more simplistic than Gageby's. Fosse, Marit, and John Fox, *Sean Lester: The Guardian of a Small Flickering Light* (Lanham, 2016).
[76] Barcroft, Stephen, 'The International Civil Servant: the League of Nations Career of Sean Lester, 1929-1947' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1973).
[77] Fosdick, *The League and the United Nations After Fifty Years*, p. 72.

did. The culture of an organisation is heavily influenced by its leadership, and my research demonstrates that the case of the League of Nations was no different.[78]

Yet leadership does not need to be solely embodied by the person in charge, or by one person alone. The League Secretariat was more than one individual, but much of the existing literature has tended to diminish the contributions and perspectives of others, especially in relation to those who stayed with the organisation until the bitter end. This thesis takes great pains to highlight the individuals, especially those in the Secretariat, whose commitment to the League was often more pronounced than those senior to them, and who were left behind when the organisation's leaders believed closure work was complete in 1947. Take for example Valentin Stencek, Director of Personnel and Internal Administration – and effectively Lester's second-in-command – who bore increasing levels of responsibility whilst Lester was away from Geneva during 1946, but has barely warranted a mention in almost all works on the subject.[79] He effectively managed the day-to-day running of the Secretariat for months during 1946-47 and my research illustrates both his personal contribution to the process as well as the value of scrutinising these events from as many different perspectives as possible. A similarly unacknowledged figure is Percy Watterson, a long-serving accountant with the League Treasury. Like Stencek he has not featured in scholarly works on this period, despite continuing to work for the organisation in his spare evenings and weekends following his departure – he officially moved to the Food and Agriculture Organisation in October 1946 – and crucially acting as the League's Trustee and Liquidating Agent into 1948.

Where there are several publications focussing on some of the events in question from an individual perspective, these are almost exclusively from those working on the creation of the U.N. or the evolution of the I.L.O. While studies of figures such as Gladwyn Jebb, Charles Webster, and Edward Phelan provide a useful, external insight into the transfer process and decision-making, there are no comparative works from the League's standpoint other than the limited outlook provided by

[78] Parry, Ken W., and Alan Bryman, 'Leadership in Organizations' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, Second Edition (London, 2006), pp. 447-457.
[79] Even Emma Edwards' study of the League during the Second World War only mentions Stencek in passing: Edwards, 'The Wartime Experience of the League of Nations', p. 299; p. 307.

Lester's diaries.[80] This thesis therefore addresses this one-sided view of the League's closure and uses all possible perspectives to scrutinise what it was really like to work for, and with, an organisation in liquidation. These figures were not passive bystanders, and this thesis shows that they were far from nonchalant about the chaotic, uncertain, and often unappreciated circumstances in which they found themselves.

Interrogating the experiences of those employees who stayed with the League until the very end not only reveals a different perspective on events, but also allows further analysis of what bound this final cohort of officials together and whether they shared a common set of characteristics. This approach follows in the footsteps of a small number of writers who have taken a similar tactic. Ranshofen-Wertheimer's *The International Secretariat*, although primarily concerned with the logistics and procedures of that body, examined some biographical features of Secretariat officials. These included age, nationality distribution, and gender, but the lack of data available during the volume's compilation meant Wertheimer was unable to produce as full and as rigorous an account as he would have liked.[81] Klaas Dykmann is another historian to embark on a similar study in a more recent wave of interest in officials, publishing 'How International was the League of Nations Secretariat' in 2014 and, as the title suggests, Dykmann focussed almost exclusively on the topic of nationality.[82] Even more recently, Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Torsten Kahlert published their prosopographical study of the 31 Directors working in the Secretariat during the League's lifetime – looking at both nationality and professional background – whilst Myriam Piguet, in the same edited volume, looked at the organisation's female officials and demonstrated how a roughly equal gender distribution did not necessarily mean equal opportunities.[83]

---

[80] Some examples include: Gladwyn, Lord, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London, 1972); Eichelberger, *Organizing for Peace*; Campbell, Thomas, and George Herring, *The Diaries of Edward Stettinius Jr., 1943-46* (New York, 1974); Reynolds, P. A., and E. J. Hughes, *The Historian as Diplomat: Charles Kingsley Webster and the United Nations, 1939-1946* (London, 1976); International Labour Organisation (ed.), *Edward Phelan and the ILO: The life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009).

[81] Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, pp. 351-369.

[82] Dykmann, Klaas, 'How International was the League of Nations Secretariat' in *The International History Review* 37, No. 4 (2015), pp. 721-744.

[83] See both Gram-Skjoldager, Karen, and Torsten Kahlert, 'The Men Behind the Man: Canvassing the Directorship of the League of Nations Secretariat' in Ikonomou, Haakon A., and Karen Gram-Skjoldager (eds.), *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus, 2019), pp. 19-29; Piguet, Myriam, 'Gender Distribution in the League of Nations: The Start of a Revolution?' in Ikonomou and Gram-Skjoldager (eds.), *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, pp. 62-73.

Alongside the increased historiographical interest in the League of Nations over the past fifteen years, so too has attention grown regarding internationalism – especially in relation to organisations – and how it has manifested itself over the 20th century. Back in 1997, Akira Iriye's *Cultural Internationalism* suggested it was time for the historical academy to start looking at international relations and internationalism as something more than connections and interplay between states alone.[84] In the period since, the field has expanded to include explorations of new and alternative narratives that unite people across state boundaries, and the topic remains very much en vogue in the historical community, with several books published in the past decade. The most recent of these include Patricia Clavin and Glenda Sluga's edited volume *Internationalisms*, Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley's *The Institution of International Order*, David Brydan and Jessica Reinisch's *Internationalists in European History*, and *International Organizations and Global Civil Society*, edited by Daniel Laqua, Wouter Van Acker, and Christophe Verbruggen. Between them these works have covered topics as diverse as indigenous internationalism, Pan-American exceptionalism, and international languages.[85] The League itself is frequently invoked in many of these new studies, although this is mostly in relation to movements that, while the Secretariat was involved in, are typically broader than the organisation alone. Both Sluga's look at feminist internationalisms in the 20th century, or Sunil Amrith's review of the internationalisation of public health across the same time period fall into this category.[86]

These are, however, still early days for the subject, and academics are rightly becoming increasingly aware of some of the contradictions of internationalism as a universal term. Daniel Laqua's 2021 article serves as a reminder that internationalism can mean different things and manifest itself in a variety of ways: as an idea, practically in the form of conferences and congresses, and as means of

---

[84] Iriye, Akira, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, 1997), pp. 1-12.
[85] Sluga, Glenda, and Patricia Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017); Jackson, Simon, and Alanna O'Malley (eds.), *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations* (Abingdon, 2018); Brydan, David, and Jessica Reinisch (eds.), *Internationalists in European History: Rethinking the Twentieth Century (*London, 2021); Laqua, Daniel, Wouter Van Acker, and Christophe Verbruggen (eds.), *International Organizations and Global Civil Society: Histories of the Union of International Associations* (London, 2019).
[86] Sluga, Glenda, 'Women, Feminisms and Twentieth-Century Internationalisms' in Sluga and Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms*, pp. 61-84; Amrith, Sunil S., 'Internationalising Health in the Twentieth Century' in Sluga and Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms*, pp. 245-264.

organising or structuring the world.[87] Patricia Clavin also rightly pointed out in her introduction to the Laqua edited volume *Internationalism Reconfigured*, that even the concept of liberal internationalism – a term often associated with the League of Nations – can be misunderstood due to the inherent contradictions within its name.[88] The decision to create a new intergovernmental organisation in the United Nations, and the supposed failure of the League of Nations, is often held up by realist thinkers as a collapse of liberal internationalism and the triumph of a more practical, less utopian attitude towards international cooperation. Although this thesis is not a comparison of the U.N.'s and the League's styles of internationalism, it does conclude that the links between the two organisations are much greater than currently appreciated. Those responsible for creating the new secretariats, making no secret of their desire to learn from the League and take advantage of the experience held by its officials, were not as disdainful of their predecessor's marque of internationalism as perhaps previously thought.

In the preface to her history of the League's E.F.O., Clavin noted that Margaret Macmillan, back in 2001, suggested only "a handful of eccentrics" studied the League of Nations.[89] This ubiquitous idea of the organisation as unworthy of study had continued for almost sixty years by that point, but as Clavin and others have since established, studying the League is far from a pointless endeavour. It has been almost fifteen years since Susan Pedersen called for a reassessment of the League in her 2007 article 'Back to the League of Nations', and while significant progress has been made, we are not even close to fully understanding this unique organisation and its story.[90] There have been studies focussed on specific Secretariat functions, the revival of interest in internationalism, and the organisation's relationship with specific member governments, and while these have demonstrated the many different entry points into studying the League, they are all small parts of a much larger whole.[91] The closure process has been missing from

---

[87] Laqua, Daniel, 'Internationalism', *European History Online (EGO)*, published 4 May 2021, pp. 1-28. http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/internationalism/daniel-laqua-internationalism.

[88] Clavin, Patricia, 'Introduction: Conceptualising Internationalism Between the World Wars', pp. 1-14, in Laqua, Daniel (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London, 2011).

[89] The Margaret Macmillan quote is reproduced in the preface to Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, p. v.

[90] Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations: Review Essay'.

[91] Susan Pedersen's *The Guardians*, published in 2015, is an in-depth study of the League mandate system; William McAllister's 2000 study of international drug policy also conducts a considerable

the League's story for too long; understanding this period in the organisation's narrative not only challenges many of the mistaken assumptions about the institution's life, but also encourages us to think differently about its legacy.

Thesis Outline and Sources

This thesis is presented over four main chapters in a predominantly chronological order. The first section looks at the months beginning with the organisation's final Assembly – and public death – in April 1946, through to the transfer of the League's Geneva estates to the United Nations at the end of July. This was only a four-month period but was also one of the busiest, dominated as it was by the handover of fixed assets, ill-prepared attempts at technical function transfer, as well as the exodus of the majority of Secretariat officials. The second chapter covers the official handover in August 1946 of the League headquarters to the United Nations, the impact of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, and the experience of those staff remaining in Geneva up to the end of that year. The third part contains the remaining actions of Seán Lester and his senior colleagues, up to the dissolution of the Board of Liquidation at its last – and 42nd – meeting at the end of July 1947. This includes the group's efforts to manipulate the outside world's perception of the closure process, as well as the long-running and contentious negotiations with the I.L.O. over staff pensions. The final chapter of this thesis looks at both the events following the Board's dissolution, including the U.S. taxation issues that dragged on into 1948, alongside the longer-term legacy of the League's closure, highlighting the fate of the final officials and how the institution bled into the international organisations that followed.

The well-preserved Archives of the League of Nations at the United Nations Office in Geneva – hereafter UNOG – are the primary source of information about the detailed elements of the organisation's closure, including Board of Liquidation reports, internal Secretariat correspondence, and other official documentation. However, wary of investigating events from a League-only perspective, this research

review of the various drug control bodies administered by the League: McAllister, William B., *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2000); Elisabetta Tollardo reviews the relationship between Fascist Italy and the League during the former's membership of the organisation: Tollardo, Elisabetta, *Fascist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922-1935* (London, 2016).

uses an expanded range of sources beyond the bounds of the Palais des Nations. Digitised elements of the extensive U.N. Archives in New York and the physical UNOG Archives in Geneva provide a useful counterpoint view of the transfer and liquidation process, as well as offering an external standpoint on the League's actions and its decision-makers during this period; the correspondence of Adriaan Pelt and Włodzimierz Moderow are of particular interest, due to their close proximity to events in Geneva.[92] I also make use of the U.K. National Archives to further illuminate our knowledge of the events, as well as employing the British Library's collection of both British and international news media – particularly *Tribune de Genève* – to explore the League's closure from the viewpoint of those beyond the immediate inner circle of international governance.

A key element of this thesis is the actor-focussed perspective it applies to these events, and consequently my research employs a number of personal papers from both those working within the Secretariat, to those looking at proceedings from the outside. These include: Seán Lester (Secretary-General of the League Secretariat), Włodzimierz Moderow (Director of the U.N. in Geneva), and Trygve Lie (Secretary-General of the U.N. Secretariat). Although no personal papers exist for Connie Harris (Interim Head of Personnel from late 1946 onwards), I have conducted an interview, and liaised, with her family in order to gain their personal perspective on her experience of living and working in Geneva. Finally, this thesis makes use of existing oral history gathered by Stephen Barcroft in the early 1970s for his unpublished thesis. Although records of these interviews are no longer available, I have held my own interview with Barcroft, and this thesis makes use of his recollections.

Finally, it is not possible to write about the production of this thesis without acknowledging that much of the research contributing to it was conducted in 2020-21 and, as might be expected, has been affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of international travel restrictions and archive reading room closures, certain planned elements of my research have changed or been abandoned altogether.

[92] Moderow was Director of the UN Office at Geneva from 1946 and consequently worked closely to those League staff remaining at the Palais des Nation. Pelt, a former League official, was Under Secretary-General for Conferences and General Services under Trygve Lie, and spent considerable amounts of time liaising with the League Secretariat in 1945-47.

An original intention of this thesis included using the extensive United Nations Archives material held in both New York and Geneva to provide a counter perspective to the League's experience of closure, specifically the work of individuals like Adriaan Pelt, David Owen, Alexander Elkin, and Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer, all of whom liaised closely with the League Secretariat during the transfer process. These sources would also shed light on the work of Seán Lester during his months in New York in the autumn of 1946. According to League sources and Lester's diary, he worked with the U.N. Secretariat during these months, and United Nations material would likely illuminate further the extent of his U.S.-based activity. The same is also true of material held by the Archives of the I.L.O. and the World Health Organisation; as successor organisations of the League, these sources would provide an additional external perspective on events.

I also originally intended to use the personal papers of Arthur Sweetser (held at the National Library of Congress in Washington D.C.) to bolster my research. The former League official was an ardent supporter of both his ex-colleagues and the organisation, exchanging lengthy correspondence with figures such as Lester and Carl Hambro, and I planned to include his writing as a useful addition to the more actor-focussed elements of this thesis. The most important figure, however, for whom I have identified personal papers, but have been unable to consult, is Percy Watterson. The F.A.O. Archives in Rome hold papers for Watterson, but the material remains inaccessible while the reading room is closed.

Fortunately for the completion of my research, I gathered a significant amount of archival material prior to the start of the pandemic. I have also made increased use of digitised sources, much of which has been made available online or via the kind assistance of archivists in the wake of closures and travel restrictions. Whilst this thesis would no doubt have benefitted from access to material I originally hoped to include, it does not negate the outcomes and impact of my research.

Final Thoughts

While the past ten to fifteen years have produced a wealth of new and valuable studies of the League, it remains an understudied and misunderstood entity. There is so much more to the organisation than a set of successes and failures to be weighed against one another. This binary approach belies the League's importance in the history of international relations in the 20th century: it was the first international institution of its kind, the only one to undergo a complete and thorough liquidation process and, as this thesis shows, had an interwoven relationship with the intergovernmental organisation that followed and remains in place today. The League of Nations' small stature in its final years did not mean it was without impact on the people working there or on the wider developments in international politics, and analysing its closure allows academics – for the first time – to understand not only the organisation's complete story, but to also grasp the full life cycle of intergovernmental institutions from birth to death. Closing an international organisation like the League was not as simple as turning off the lights; it was a complex process that threw up heretofore-unknown problems, complicated by distinctly human issues, all taking place in a unique set of circumstances.

For too long the final months and years of the League of Nations have been either dismissed or forgotten, and the unfortunate consequence has been the belief that these events have no historical merit and are unworthy of academic scrutiny. This thesis takes this misconception and reveals it as the fallacy it is. The League's death may have taken place quietly and behind closed doors, but it was also chaotic, unplanned, and at odds with the neat conclusion the organisation itself liked to project. Many of the accepted assumptions about the League of Nations – the bureaucratic efficiency, its delineation from the United Nations, and even the date of its closure – are contradicted by my work. Close examination of the dissolution changes the way we think about this great experiment in international cooperation, the people who worked there, and its continuing legacy and impact on the United Nations Organisation. The League was one of the first great trials of international administration and this thesis finally reveals how the experiment drew to a close.

Chapter Two

Transfer and Tribulations, April to July 1946

"The League is dead: long live the United Nations!"
Viscount Cecil of Cherwood, 9 April 1946, speaking at the 21st Assembly of the League of Nations.[93]

"*You do realise, I know, that our actual work and responsibilities have not been in the slightest degree lessened by the Assembly decision…".*
Seán Lester in a letter to Cecil Kisch, 31 May 1946.[94]

This chapter outlines the work and challenges faced by the League of Nations in the period that began with the organisation's official closure at its final Assembly in April 1946 and ended with the transfer of its Geneva properties at the end of July 1946. Barring the events of this Assembly, and like much of the League's history following the Second World War, historians and other scholars alike have neglected these months. Indeed, Cecil's much-quoted declaration above has been used on numerous occasions as a neat sound bite with which to conclude studies focussed on the League.[95] This chapter challenges this assumption – alongside several others about the League and the United Nations – and instead argues that these few months in the second quarter of 1946 were not only some of the most active the organisation had experienced in years, but were dominated by a reactive chaos pressed upon its leadership and officials by events beyond their control.

The months between April and July 1946 were the busiest of the League's closure, dominated by activity centred on transfer to the United Nations. My research refutes

[93] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, p. 30.
[94] LNA, 31 May 1946, letter from Lester to Cecil Kisch, R5816.3 50/43877/43844; the underlined emphasis on "in the slightest degree" was Lester's own.
[95] Both Mark Mazower and Patricia Clavin used Cecil in this fashion, as did George Scott in 1973: Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, p. 359; Mazower, *Governing the World,* p. 211; Scott, *Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, pp. 404-405.

the myth that there was little or no connection between these two organisations, and that the U.N. was a wholly fresh start for international cooperation. Even those more recent works focussed on the League's socioeconomic activities, while acknowledging the ties between the two organisations, have yet to probe the depth of these links or the way in which they came about. Instead the literature has advanced a more simplistic perspective in which the League ended neatly before the U.N. took its place, and while academics such as Patricia Clavin have delved into the similarities between the institutions, they have neglected to explore the period of transition.[96] This thesis instead shows that the assumption of League activity was much more of a direct transfer than has previously been suggested, and that the two organisations were interwoven until the League's eventual end, especially during 1946. Importantly, this chapter also introduces the role of precedent in the administration of international organisations, and how the lack of exemplars from which to draw upon for the liquidation of the League ensured that the transfer process was neither smooth nor straightforward.

This chapter looks at the key elements of this first four-month period, starting with the events of the 21st Assembly – the last time members of the organisation had any real input into the League – and its outcomes. One of those outcomes, and the second area of focus, was the creation of a Board of Liquidation. This was the only official structure established to oversee the closure, and my research shows how its focus on purely strategic issues and inability to respond quickly to problems severely limited its effectiveness. This chapter also looks more closely at the three main elements of transfer to the United Nations – in the form of physical assets, functions or activities, and people – all of which caused more disruption and disorder than has previously been recognised. Finally, I illustrate the problems with a case-study that demonstrates the transfer experience of the small group of officials still working in Princeton, U.S.A, following their decampment there during the Second World War. This served as a microcosm of the changes taking place on a wider scale in Geneva.

Both the United Nations and the League of Nations were complex, bureaucratic institutions in the 1940s, yet neither organisation's leadership appreciated the level

[96] Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, pp. 342-357.

of planning and precision needed to effect a smooth transition between them. Liquidating an organisation on this scale had never taken place before, and this chapter demonstrates what happened when the League attempted to do so without any experience to draw from. It also explores the negative effect that presentism, and the lack of time for long-term thinking that often accompanies it, had on the League's ability to deliver liquidation in an orderly and efficient manner.

The chapter also reveals the role of people in the process; the decisions made, the relationships cultivated, and impact of change were all felt, or manifested, by individuals in the League and beyond. While it is no longer possible to interview any of the officials who worked for the Secretariat, and not everyone kept personal papers or diaries we can use for reference, my research uses what is available in archives to draw out valuable information. A significant conclusion of this chapter focuses on the importance of personal rapport between colleagues and the negative impact a poor relationship can have on a much wider scale when it exists between senior figures, limiting what can be achieved during a turbulent time. The flawed personal connection in this instance was that between Seán Lester – last Secretary-General of the League – and Włodzimierz Moderow – senior U.N. representative in Geneva from May 1946. This research draws conclusions about their relationship not only from explicit dislike expressed in personal papers, but also their formal day-to-day correspondence, the reliance on written communication instead of meeting in person – despite working in close physical proximity – and their use of intermediaries to conduct discussions, all of which can be gleaned from the official archive material.

This chapter therefore challenges a number of assumptions about the League and its closure that have persisted for over seventy years. The 21st Assembly was not the end for the organisation, but it was the end of involvement for its members. The period following the public funeral was not quiet or without incident; it was chaotic, haphazard, and merely scratched the surface of actual liquidation. The United Nations was not a completely new organisation but had significant ties to its predecessor: it received assets, activities, people, and experience worth millions of dollars. The League was more than just a framework for intergovernmental cooperation; it was made up of, and managed by, individuals who faced uncertainty

both personal and professional. The last chapter of the League of Nations did not end in April 1946; instead that is where it began.

The Build-Up to April 1946

The year between the start of the San Francisco Conference in spring 1945 and the League's final Assembly in April 1946 did not yield answers to the many questions the League's leadership and Secretariat had about the organisation's closure. Hopes that the U.N. conference would aid planning in Geneva were quickly dashed by a focus on more political questions, and the personal affront experienced by the League's delegation – made up of Seán Lester, Seymour Jacklin, and Alexander Loveday – did not fill the group with enthusiasm.[97] Forward planning was instead delegated to the United Nations Preparatory Commission and its Executive Committee, created to establish the main tenets of the new organisation.[98] Any liaison with the League was carried out by the Committee's Secretariat – most notably the Executive Secretary Gladwyn Jebb, and his deputy David Owen – and was decidedly one-way i.e. the League provided information while the Executive Committee declined to share its progress, much to Lester's recurring frustration.[99]

The first concrete outcome relevant to the League was the United Nations decision to consider transfer of the League's assets separately from that of its activities, services, and functions. To this end, the U.N. planners created another body, the United Nations Committee on League of Nations Assets, to engage and negotiate with the League's leadership to agree an approach for asset transfer.[100] The

---

[97] The invitation to the conference only arrived in Geneva on 12 April, less than two weeks before proceedings started: Lester's Diary, 12 April 1945, letter from Winant (US Ambassador in London) to Lester. Lester's personal papers also contain entries relating to the group's treatment in San Francisco: Lester's Diary, 30 April 1945, personal diary entry; Lester's Diary, 3 May 1945, letter from Lester to Owen; Lester's Diary, 15 May 1945, personal diary entry.

[98] LNA, 24 June 1945, official press communication from the US Office of War Information detailing the establishment of the United Nations Preparatory Commission, S565.

[99] Id. States represented on the Executive Committee were Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Czechoslovakia, France, Iran, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Yugoslavia. For a list of delegate names, see Gladwyn, *Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*, p. 173. For details of the relationship between the League and the Committee's Secretariat, see: LNA, 11 September 1945, Lester notes on a meeting between Gladwyn Jebb, Owen, and Lester, S565; LNA, 1 September 1945, letter from Jebb to Lester requesting assistance, S565; LNA, 24 September 1945, letter from Jebb to Lester, S565. LNA, 1 December 1945, letter from Lester to Hambro relaying his dissatisfaction as well as that of Myrddin-Evans of the ILO, S565.

[100] TNA, 28 November 1945, Committee 7: League of Nations, Second Meeting, FO 371/57248.

Committee was made up of representatives from eight states, and led by the Polish delegate Włodzimierz Moderow, who would become a vitally important figure in League-U.N. relations over the course of the former's dissolution.[101] This Committee and the Supervisory Commission of the League met four times during January 1946, ultimately coming to an agreement known as the Common Plan for the Transfer of League of Nations Assets.[102] It was a short document – fewer than two pages in length – and the result of compromise on the side of both parties.[103] It outlined the key principles under which assets of the League would be moved to U.N. management, and scheduled this transfer to take place "on or about" 1 August 1946. Assets would be valued at cost, and a share of the proceeds would be allocated to each remaining member-government of the League. The League would also be responsible for settling accounts in arrears, devising a means of dividing the transfer proceeds between members, and dissolving the organisation as quickly as possible.[104] There were no definite plans as to how this transfer would take place or who was responsible for managing it at either organisation, but it was some much-needed progress. Most importantly, the agreement laid out the high-level principles months before any transfer was meant to take place, ensuring any further refinement and detail could be settled in plenty of time.

United Nations planners were, however, less forthcoming about the future of the League's non-political functions and activities. The former were areas of work delegated to the League by international agreement, such as the provision of Secretariats for the Permanent Central Opium Board (P.C.O.B.) and the Drug Supervisory Body (D.S.B.), or acting as a custodian for original signed documents

---

[101] The eight members represented on the Committee were Chile, China, France, Poland, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the U.K., and the U.S.A. TNA, 14 March 1946, from 'Report of the Committee set up by the United Nations Preparatory Commission', sent to League members by Lester, originally published 28 January 1946, FO 371/57321.

[102] The final dates for the January negotiations were agreed only days beforehand, a copy of the Preparatory Commission's report was not made available to the Supervisory Commission in advance, and in spite of this the group was asked to lead the negotiations with just three days' notice: LNA, 5 January 1946, telephone message from Seymour Jacklin regarding a conversation with Protitch (Committee Secretary), S565; LNA, 7 January 1946, letter from Jebb to Lester, S565; Lester's Diary, 10 January 1946, letter from Lester to Seymour Jacklin.

[103] The Supervisory Commission downgraded its opinion of the Plan from being "convinced" of its "fair and reasonable nature" to only "considering" it as such. LNA, 20 February 1946, draft report on Discussions with U.N. Representatives on Asset Transfer, S565. The U.N. Committee meanwhile reported "difficulties and divergences of opinion" during the negotiations. TNA, 1 February 1946, proceedings of the UN General Assembly League of Nations Committee – second meeting, Moderow presenting, FO 371/57248.

[104] LNA, 14 March 1946, Report on Discussions with the Representatives of the United Nations on Questions of the Transfer of League of Nations Assets, S567.

and international treaties, usually referred to as the Treaty Series. As these functions were administered by the League, but not directed by it, they were often supported by many states beyond its membership – the United States, in particular, was a strong advocate of drug control work.[105] The Preparatory Commission's recommendation, which was approved by the General Assembly two months later, was to transfer these functions i.e. the P.C.O.B., the D.S.B., and the Treaty Series, to the U.N., albeit with the right to review this decision at a later date should it choose, and without a schedule or scheme as to how the handover would be managed.[106]

The potential transfer of activities, however, was a more contentious subject. Sometimes described as technical activity, the League's work in this arena typically took the form of facilitating international collaboration in socioeconomic fields such as public health, social welfare, and intellectual cooperation. The areas of focus were decided upon by the League's many technical committees – made up of delegates from countries both part of, and outside, the organisation – and carried out by officials of the Secretariat. The recommendations of the Bruce Report, published in August 1939 and commissioned by former Secretary-General Joseph Avenol, strongly suggested there was backing for this kind of activity beyond the League's membership, but support for a direct transfer to the U.N. was not universal. Both the Soviet Union and the United States were hesitant to link the new organisation with the supposed failure of its predecessor. An unnamed source in the U.S. delegation to the Commission told Lester that there was a strong disinclination to take on much of the technical work to avoid the idea that the U.N. was merely a remodelled League.[107] Despite the apprehension, however, there were some areas singled out early by U.N. planners as being worthy of transfer – including the statistics and research work of the Economic and Finance Organisation – more details of which can be found later in this chapter.[108]

---

[105] Bertil Renborg, Head of the League's Drug Control Service through the war, compiled a comprehensive overview of its work – funded by the Carnegie Foundation – following his departure from the organization: Renborg, *International Drug Control,* pp. 38-43.
[106] United Nations, *Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations* (London, 1946), pp. 116-118.
[107] Lester's Diary, 13 August 1945, personal diary entry on confidential information from a member of the U.S. delegation to the Preparatory Commission.
[108] These sections are singled out in several different reports. For an example, see: TNA, 12 November 1945, Report by the Executive Committee, FO 372/4382.

As to how any activities might be transferred, the U.N. was forced to take a compromise approach. Whilst the majority of the new organisation's members favoured a mass transfer – as did the League – the Soviet government was wary of inadvertently agreeing to internationalist encroachment within its borders, preferring to review each function or activity on a case-by-case basis. At a discussion in late November 1945, the U.S.S.R. representative Boris Shtein argued that "no distinction could be drawn between political and non-political functions".[109] Like its predecessor, the United Nations was not a monolith; ideological cracks were already beginning to form amongst the wartime Allies, and both the Preparatory Commission and the first officials of the U.N. Secretariat had to tread lightly if their new experiment was to avoid falling at the first hurdle. With that in mind, the Preparatory Commission agreed that the new U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) would provisionally assume several activities, pending a later review during which the U.N. could choose to discontinue the former League work if so desired.[110] Nevertheless, like the agreement to transfer some of the League's functions, the process of how and when this would happen was yet to be determined.

And thus the purgatory period that began one year earlier dragged on into the spring of 1946. Almost a year after the San Francisco Conference opened, the League and its officials had little sense of what the coming months would hold. They had expected, or hoped, to better understand the aims of the transfer process, as well as how and when it would take place. As one General Assembly delegate noted in a report to his colleagues in January 1946, there was "an intimate connection" between the transfer to the U.N. of certain assets and functions, and the League's dissolution: the latter could not take place until the United Nations effected the former.[111] Instead the League had only a vague commitment to purchase its estates, a collection of loose promises to take on some of its work, and absolutely no idea how any of this would be managed. Staff did not know if they had jobs in the long-term, the organisation could not undertake any liquidation activity, and senior U.N.

---

[109] LNA, 3 December 1945, letter from Lester to Hambro reporting the results of a telephone conversation with Jebb, S565. See also: Porter, Louis H., 'Cold War Internationalisms: The USSR in UNESCO, 1945-1967' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018).
[110] TNA, 12 October 1945, records from Executive Committee meeting review of Committee 9 report, T236/431; Lester's Diary, 11 October 1945, letter from Loveday to Lester; TNA, 20 March 1946, UN General Assembly Resolutions affecting the League of Nations, FO 371/57321.
[111] United Nations Archives Geneva, 22 January 1946, report by Hugh McKinnon-Wood titled The extent to which the liquidation of the League depends on the assumption by the United Nations of activities hitherto exercised by the League, A/LA/W/13., G.I. 4/1.

figures provided little reassurance. Recounting a recent discussion with the United Nations Executive Committee's David Owen, Lester wrote to Carl Hambro in February 1946: "In our conversation however, pointing out the difficulties created by the absence of decisions by the United Nations I asked if he could yet indicate any date on which the assumption of League activities could take place…For the present he said both organizations had to face all the troubles of this indefiniteness."[112] All of this left the League and its Secretariat in an ambiguous position with the organisation's first Assembly in over six years rapidly approaching. This gathering was supposed to be the institution's funeral, but the League's administration could neither close the organisation nor carry on as before. The end of the League was supposedly nigh, but in reality the upcoming 21st Assembly would merely mark the start of another chapter in the organisation's history.

The 21st Assembly

The League's Assembly had not met since the abortive session of December 1939, during which the war in Eastern Europe was all but ignored and the Soviet Union was expelled from the organisation's ranks.[113] The League leadership, including Lester and the Supervisory Commission, initially thought, in line with organisational precedent, that two Assemblies were needed to close the League: one to approve the work of the Secretariat during the war and empower the Commission to negotiate with the United Nations on behalf of members, and a second to formally close the organisation.[114] However, the cautious pace at which U.N. planning was unfolding meant it was increasingly unrealistic to hold an Assembly before the end of 1945, and the narrow comprehension of the complexities of liquidation meant the League leadership still believed the process could be managed with relative ease. Instead Lester and Hambro suggested to member states that the Supervisory Commission should be empowered to begin negotiations without the Assembly's explicit approval, and by October 1945 this approach was formally adopted.[115]

---

[112] LNA, 20 February 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro recounting a recent meeting with Owen, S565.
[113] Walters, *History of the League*, pp. 806-807.
[114] See both LNA, 3 August 1945, [unknown author], memorandum on desirability of two Assembly meetings, S565; LNA, 4 August 1945, [unknown author], proposed timetable of U.N./League meetings and negotiations 1945-46, S565.
[115] The original message to members suggesting the single Assembly approach was sent in August 1945: LNA, 23 August 1945, draft telegram to League members, S565. The final confirmatory communiqué was sent in October: LNA, 17 October 1945, communiqué to League members, S565.

Despite the lack of progress in discussions with the U.N., the convocation for the League's 21st, and final, Assembly was despatched to members in late January 1946.[116] This would be the organisation's last hurrah, and those both in and outside the Secretariat wanted to go out with their heads held high. Arthur Sweetser, a former Secretariat official and vocal advocate for the organisation in his native United States, wrote to Carl Hambro, the Chair of the Supervisory Commission, suggesting they host an elaborate event to fly in the faces of those who sought to "scapegoat" the League for their own shortcomings.[117] Lester was all in favour of the proposal; he wanted the League to close with dignity and with pride in what it had achieved, even if the rest of the world had moved on.

The central Assembly agenda item was the closure of the organisation, and this measure was the only instance in which the agreement to close the League's doors was formalised. The decision to create a new global organisation obviously made the League redundant, but at no point prior to the final Assembly was the organisation's demise ratified by either the U.N. or the League's leadership. So why was the League able to solemnise its closure, when other institutions might have quietly fizzled away? The answer lies in the organisation's valuable assets, worth millions of dollars, and over thirty governments all hoping for a share. An Assembly resolution, approved by all members, would therefore be needed to legally close the organisation and agree a fair-minded process for liquidation of said assets. Members were not expected to oppose dissolving the League, but it was deemed appropriate – and in line with the League's championing of due process – to create a resolution that would capture any outstanding issues whilst also bringing the organisation to a close. There was, however, no legal precedent from which to draw. While this allowed for a degree of freedom in its design, it also meant starting from scratch. Consequently, despite significant assistance from the British Government, there was a large amount of work to complete within such a short space of time, and it was a rush to finalise the text; as late as 6 April, only two days before proceedings

---

For a breakdown of Hambro and Lester's reasoning for this approach: LNA, 7 September 1946, letter from Lester to Francisco Castillo Najera, Mexican Supervisory Commission member, S565.

[116] LNA, 24 January 1946, letter from Lester informing Jebb that he has been directed to convoke an Assembly for 8 April, S565.

[117] Lester's Diary, [exact date unknown – listed as February 1946], letter from Sweetser to Hambro regarding plans for the 21st Assembly.

began, Lester and Jacklin were still reviewing the latest draft.[118] The fixed deadline meant those working on the resolution were obliged to view its contents through a short-term lens i.e. focussing only on what was needed to ensure its passage through the Assembly, leaving little space or time to consider what the text should helpfully reflect, such as the aims of the dissolution process, or the practical means by which it should take place. The tight timeline in place for both the Assembly and the months that followed were a blow to long-term planning for liquidation and, as this thesis shows, wrought lasting damage to the process.

The last-minute rush to draw up the resolution was not the only work carried out by the Secretariat in preparation for the grand affair. The formulation of a report reviewing the work carried out by officials during the war took substantial resources, as did the agreement of the agenda and preparing Hambro's speech for the opening session, alongside other menial but protracted tasks such as arranging hotel accommodations and upgrading the interpreter earphone system.[119] The number of officials in the Secretariat dropped to 81 in 1943, but by the start of 1946 those numbers had increased to 132, and still more would be needed to support an Assembly and the activity surrounding it.[120] In contrast to what might be expected, closing the organisation increased the workload rather than diminishing it. The result was a scramble to re-engage former officials, new staff, and even new U.N. Secretariat members to meet the need.[121] By 1 April, one week before the Assembly began, 232 new staff had been brought on board, bringing the total number of League employees to 397, the majority of whom worked in support roles such as clerks, ushers, cleaners, and shorthand-typists.[122]

---

[118] The Supervisory Commission agreed that a member of the League should propose the resolution at the Assembly, and Britain – the most prominent remaining member of the League – was heavily involved in the organisation's affairs until its closure. See LNA, 21 February 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S565; Lester's Diary, 25 April 1946, Lester personal diary note on the proceedings of the Assembly and the British Government help in its planning; LNA, 6 April 1946, letter from Lester to Jacklin querying some of the wording in the latest British draft of the dissolution resolution, S565.
[119] LN, *Report on the work of the League during the war*. Also see: LNA, 18 February 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek explaining that Hambro has some queries regarding the earphone interpreter system, S565; LNA, 2 March 1946, [unknown author], Annotated Provisional Agenda of the Assembly, R5704 15/40199/40199; LNA, 29 March 1946, memo from Lester to Hambro, forwarding the latter a script for his opening speech to the Assembly, S565.
[120] LNA, January 1943, [unknown author], Listes des membres du secrétariat de la société des nations, R5357 18A/604/534. LNA; 1 January 1946, [unknown author], Listes des members du secretariat de la société des nations, S698.
[121] See LNA, 12 February 1946, letter from Owen to Lester agreeing to pass on the former's request for additional support from United Nations' officials during the upcoming Assembly, S565.
[122] Numbers taken from: LNA, 1 April 1946, [unknown author], list of Secretariat staff, including temporary and U.N. officials, present for the 21st Assembly, broken down by department and availability, S913.

The Assembly did not fail to attract attendees. 35 member-states were in attendance, plus one observer state, and representatives from the U.N., the I.L.O., and the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation – among others – with 173 delegates in total.[123] While the numbers were smaller than previous Assemblies, it was notable that every member had at least one delegate present; even the organisation's first Assembly, held in 1920, failed to attract full attendance.[124] Delegates, members of the press, and the bolstered Secretariat saw the great halls of the Palais des Nations busy again after years of quiet seclusion. The home of the League was built to impress, and the sense of grandeur it was designed to instil – as a representation of international cooperation – was at its most radiant when the Assembly was in session. April 1946 was no different, even if the main Assembly Hall was a little emptier than it had been in the past.[125]

Proceedings began on 8 April and lasted for twelve days, made up of committee meetings considering specific issues, as well as a number of plenary sessions of the Assembly as a whole.[126] These latter sessions were not designed as forums for productive debate – there were too many delegates to foster decision-making – and instead took the form of lengthy speeches given by representatives. This being the final Assembly, these speeches were mostly dedicated to the end of the organisation, its history, and the hopes for its legacy in the future. The outpouring of lament for this fallen endeavour was a comfort to those still working for the League, but the credibility of the eulogisers was also undercut by their abandonment of that same organisation for the newer, shinier model that was the United Nations, something Sweetser recognised in a speech just days before the Assembly when he

[123] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, pp. 11-17.
[124] The first Assembly attracted representation from 40 of 42 total members, and even the tenth Assembly in 1929 – arguably taking place at the height of the League's power – could not manage a full-house of attendance. League of Nations, *Official Journal Special Supplement: Records of the First Session of the Assembly* (Geneva, 1920), pp. 10-19; League of Nations, *Official Journal Special Supplement: Records of the Tenth Session of the Assembly* (Geneva, 1929), pp. 11-22.
[125] The Assembly Room at the Palais des Nations had a capacity of just over 1500 when first-built: TNA, 28 January 1946, Appendix to the Common Plan for the Transfer of League of Nations Assets established by the U.N. Committee and the Supervisory Commission of the League of Nations, pp. 3-7, FO 371/57248.
[126] The two major committees were the First and Second Committees. The First Committee was also known as the General Committee as it dealt with general questions, whilst the Second Committee, aka the Finance Committee, considered financial and administrative issues. LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly,* p. 26.

said “I feel a bit like a man on his second honeymoon who is asked to speak about his first wife.”[127]

The eventual outcomes of the Assembly were mostly as expected. The Permanent Court of International Justice was officially closed which, in all respects other than the formal resolution of the Assembly, had already taken place.[128] Seán Lester was retroactively promoted to full Secretary-General of the organisation, a position in which he had been ‘Acting’ since the resignation of Joseph Avenol in the summer of 1940.[129] Accounts were approved up to the end of 1945, decisions taken by the Supervisory Commission during the war were validated, and tribute was paid to the U.S. institutions responsible for housing League missions during the war, as well as to the Soviet Union for its role in “the overthrow of the Fascist enemies of civilisation”.[130] Delegates also rubber-stamped the U.N. decisions agreed at its General Assembly two months earlier, essentially allowing the new organisation to adopt whichever functions and activities it wished – explicitly naming only the Treaty Series – but providing no specific means of oversight for these transfers. Instead the Assembly instructed Lester to “afford every facility” to the U.N. in any transfer work. This specific instruction, interpreted to mean Lester should take special pains to assist the U.N., soon caused problems as it clashed with his responsibility to the League and its closure.[131]

The resolution to dissolve the organisation was approved unanimously on 18 April at the close of proceedings. Framed by the argument that the Charter of the U.N. had created a new international organisation serving the same purpose as the League, and as most League members had already joined, the League of Nations would cease to exist – barring liquidation activities – from the day following the Assembly’s

---

[127] The discussions take up a significant portion of the official records of the Assembly – 22 different member representatives spoke – and many examples of the delegates’ lamentations can be found therein. Ibid, pp. 27-54. Sweetser’s speech was published a few months later: Sweetser, Arthur, ‘From the League to the United Nations’ in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 246 (Jul., 1946), p. 1.
[128] LNA, 17 April 1946, Report and Resolution of the First Committee on the Dissolution of the Permanent Court of International Justice, from the Twenty-first Ordinary Session of the League of Nations Assembly, R3820 3C/43816/42549.
[129] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Session of the Assembly,* pp. 277-278.
[130] Ibid, p. 280. The thanks to the Soviet Union were added to avoid the government demanding a portion of the League’s assets – as an expelled member it was not, in theory, subject to the same exclusion rules that a resigned member was. The League’s leadership however did not want to include the Soviet Union in any distribution of assets, and thus the Assembly resolution was positioned as an effort to placate any demands.
[131] Ibid, p. 278.

end. It was a ten-point statement, thin on detail, covering the ratification of the Common Plan – a moot point considering the U.N. General Assembly had already started to act on the agreement – as well as transferring several specific funds to the I.L.O., outlining the responsibilities of the Secretary-General, confirming the distribution of assets to members, and the formation of a Board of Liquidation to oversee what remained.[132]

The resolution did little more than provide some high-level principles for what would follow. There was no timetable for fixed assets set beyond the suggested date of transfer, no guidance on which areas took precedence over others, and no discussion of how any of the liquidation or transfer would manifest on a practical, day-to-day basis. If anything, the resolution was contradictory in parts, leaving it difficult to conclude what a successful liquidation looked like. The importance of continuity in activities was stressed both within the resolution itself, as well as in Committee meetings.[133] Any interruption to services was cautioned against in the strongest terms, and the resolution empowered the Secretary-General to ensure this work continued "to whatever extent is necessary" to guarantee a smooth transition to the United Nations, including the extension of staff contracts and prolongation of negotiations. Yet the same resolution also called for liquidation to be enacted quickly, as well as allowing the U.N. to employ any current League officials as, and when, it wanted. So what could Lester and his colleagues take from this? The resolution conveyed a mixed message: dissolve the organisation as quickly as possible, give the United Nations whatever it needed, but also ensure the League's legacy by managing a smooth handover, with minimal interruption, at all costs.[134]

The Assembly was outwardly a success, and some vindication for those in and outside the League's Administration in regard to the organisation's legacy. The proceedings were lauded in the British press, described as "a dignified end for a great international institution" by the *Belfast Telegraph*, while both the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times of London* issued daily reports on events.[135] The

---

[132] 'Resolution for the Dissolution of the League of Nations' in Ibid, pp. 281-284.
[133] Taken from the Report of the First Committee to the Assembly, led by rapporteur Professor K. H. Bailey, delegate of Australia: Ibid, p. 250.
[134] Ibid, pp. 281-284.
[135] The Belfast Telegraph's report was heavily influenced by Reuters correspondent Boris Kidel: *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 April 1946, [unknown author], 'Packed Public Galleries Watch League End', p. 5. For examples of the coverage from the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times of London*, see the former's article on the end of the mandates system, and the latter's editorial on the failure of states to live up to

organisation's virtues were extolled, praise was lauded upon its lofty ambitions, but it was foolish to pretend this was the end. It was an exercise in box-ticking, and perhaps a well-deserved morale boost for those who had spent years in isolation working for a maligned institution, but there was much more to be done, and no concrete plans for how it would be managed.

The Board of Liquidation

A central part of understanding how the League liquidated lies in the structure established to manage the process. The idea of a Board of Liquidation was first proposed in the draft dissolution resolution prepared by the British Government, which argued that a board or committee would be best placed to oversee wind-up activities and control the actual end date of the League in lieu of the Supervisory Commission. Providing oversight and decision-making machinery for the Secretariat in the Assembly's absence, its suggested responsibilities included the dispersal of staff, liquidating affairs as quickly as possible, and issuing progress reports to members.[136] The Board of Liquidation was separate from the League's Secretariat and, as this thesis shows, often away from Geneva, but its decisions and priorities are critical in grasping why the dissolution progressed as it did.

The Assembly's First Committee quickly agreed to the proposal, and four criteria were used as a means of choosing the Board's members: continuity in the management of the League from the Supervisory Commission, personal qualifications and experience, the financial relationship between the candidate's home state and the League, and a geographical representation of membership. As a result there was significant continuity between the Board's membership and that of the Supervisory Commission, as Cecil Kisch (United Kingdom), Carl Hambro (Norway), Emile Charvériat (France), and Adolfo Costa du Rels (Bolivia), were all elected to the new body. Also nominated to the Board were Atul Chatterjee – Chairman of the P.C.O.B. and delegate from India – F. T. Cheng (China), Jaromír

---

the League's promise: *Manchester Guardian*, 10 April 1946, [unknown author], 'Carrying on the League's Work on Mandates', p. 5; *The Times of London*, 12 April 1946, [unknown author], 'The End of the League', p. 5.

[136] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, p. 82.

Kopecky (Czechoslovakia), Daniel Secrétan (Switzerland), and Seymour Jacklin (South Africa).[137]

The Board was officially created by the Assembly's dissolution resolution, which also set out some protocols by which it would be managed. Terms were agreed regarding its full power in decision-making, setting a quorum of five members, granting Board members the international status of League officials and, notably, instituting a generous remuneration package. The group's chair was entitled to a monthly subsistence allowance of 3,000 CHF per month, and 2,000 CHF for other members, as well as recompense for travel and accommodation. Stephen Barcroft, during his interviews with former Secretariat officials in the early 1970s, found that not everyone was happy about the arrangement, especially as officials were, until the summer of 1946, still expected to pay a subset of their own salaries towards the League budget as voluntary contributions.[138] In addition to these agreed protocols, the Board would later set its own terms of reference covering the preparation of agendas, the regular location of meetings, and in the first meeting of the Board on 23 April, nominating Hambro to the role of Chair, with Kisch as his deputy.[139]

In practice, the Board's effectiveness in dealing with problems as they arose was severely compromised by the irregularity of its meetings. The group was not a sitting Board – they met when the members' schedules allowed it – and this meant its guidance was often unavailable when it was most needed. There were three meetings at the end of April following the Assembly, and then no more until mid/late-July, when seven meetings were held over a number of days – although four additional secret meetings were also held across the April and July sessions, usually

[137] A sub-committee of representatives from the Assembly's First and Second Committees proposed the candidates. This included delegates from China, France, Canada, Poland, Turkey, Uruguay, and the United Kingdom – as well as the Chairmen of the First and Second Committees, Maurice Bourquin and Atul Chatterjee respectively. Ibid, pp. 139-140.
[138] Ibid, p. 281. The dissent focussed on the Board's remuneration package was given voice by Louis Atzenwiler – a member of the P.C.O.B. Secretariat from 1931 through 1946 – in his interview on 5 July 1970 with Barcroft: Barcroft, 'The International Civil Servant', p. 298. The voluntary contribution scheme began in 1939, when staff was asked to donate a portion of their salaries to the League's Administration on the proviso that these funds would be used for staff welfare purposes. The contribution scheme continued into 1946, before it was eventually ended from 1 August of that year. It was not popular with officials, especially as it became clear the funds were sometimes used for day-to-day running of the organisation. LNA, 12 June 1947, letter co-signed by 83 officials and former officials of the League Secretariat, addressed to Carl Hambro, S922.
[139] LNA, 1 May 1946, [unknown author], Board of Liquidation document titled Rules of Procedure for the Board of Liquidation, B.L.3(1), S570; LNA, 23 April 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of First Meeting, B.L./First Session/P.V.1., S569.

to discuss a matter which the members did not want appearing in regular meeting minutes.[140] Chester Purves, a respected former Secretariat official with the Personnel department, forced to leave like many others in May 1940, was re-engaged to lead a small Secretariat supporting the Board. Together they were responsible for preparing agendas, ensuring Board members were paid, writing minutes, and preparing fortnightly progress reports. These reports were not initially part of the Board's terms of reference, but as the group met so sporadically, it was suggested a report – issued via postal services – covering recent developments and updates on closure would be of use to members.[141] They were not, however, of great help to the Secretariat on a day-to-day basis, resulting in an increased workload to issue them every two weeks, and there was no mechanism by which Board members could take action on the reports beyond writing to Lester or Purves. The Board's inability to function when it was not in session was a fundamental problem, and it was one that would especially rear its head in the later months of 1946.

Lester now reported directly to the Board, and issues for discussion were typically tabled as official Board of Liquidation Documents. There were eventually 147 in total, and usually prepared by the Secretary-General or another relevant member of the Secretariat. For example, the first B.L. document – using the League's own referencing acronym – was a letter from the Italian Government asking to be included in the distribution of proceeds from asset liquidation, not scheduled to take place until 1947.[142] Secretariat officials were often reminded that the Board was only interested in high-level issues pertaining to liquidation – no routine issues were to be included in the fortnightly reports. It was a strategic body rather than a working group; it was less concerned with practical matters and more with issues of policy and approach. Any problems or issues falling outside this high-level remit –

---

[140] The first official set of meeting dates for the Board were 23 and 30 April, and 1 May 1946. The second group took place on 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, and 27 July 1946. The secret meetings met on 1 May, 16 July, 23 July, and 29 July 1946. Minutes for the official meetings can all be found in LNA, Various dates, B.L./P.V.1-10, S569. The first set of secret meeting minutes are held in LNA, 1 May 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of secret meeting, R5816.2 50/43856/43844. Records of the three other secret meetings are held in LNA, Various dates, Board of Liquidation: minutes of secret sessions, R5816.2 50/43856/43844.

[141] LNA, 2 May 1946, note from Lester to Chester Purves requesting the latter take on responsibility for the fortnightly update reports to the Board of Liquidation, R5816.3 50/43877/43844. The first report produced can be found at LNA, 15 May 1946, First Fortnightly Progress Report to the Board of Liquidation, B.L./F.P.R.1, S923.

[142] LNA, 26 April 1946, Board of Liquidation Document titled Claim of the Italian Government to share in League assets, B.L.1., R5812 50/43851/43262.

including liaison with the United Nations – were considered the Secretary-General's responsibility, leaving Lester with no recourse to, or back-up from, a higher authority when needed.[143]

Yet despite its removal from routine issues, the Board – made up of individuals long associated with the League – also had a quasi-emotional connection with the organisation. Like other organisational bodies, it is easy to think of the Board as a purely bureaucratic institution, but like all these other groups, it was made up of people with their own motivations and attachments. For example, ensuring the on-going use of the Palais des Nations, specifically built for the organisation in the 1930s, was a priority for the group – they were concerned the U.N. would vandalise the building – as were certain issues they believed they had a "moral duty" to oversee, such as aiding League-associated bodies, even when they had no official mandate to do so.[144]

Nonetheless, with hindsight, it is difficult to rectify these personal motivations and the group's focus on strategic matters with the organisation's day-to-day decision-making needs. Whilst the Board was undeniably made up of experienced individuals, with a great familiarity with the high-level management of the League, it was also disconnected from the practical work of its officials. There were some established working relationships between the Board and certain members of the Secretariat – particularly Lester – that were undoubtedly of use and support, but there was little in the way of contact with those not in the highest echelons of the organisation.[145] There were those in the Secretariat who believed the group was overpaid – exacerbated by the infrequency with which it met – and the seeming lack of concern about their absence from Geneva. In their final meeting during this period, on 24 July 1946, the Board noted that a meeting in September was unlikely due to their expected presence at the second half of the U.N.'s first General Assembly. While it was suggested they might meet in New York for a session should they be able to gather a quorum, there was a distinct lack of unease about being

[143] LNA, 2 May 1946, note from Lester to Purves in which Lester stresses that only liquidation issues should be addressed to the Board, R5816.3 50/43877/43844.
[144] LNA, 1 May 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of Third Meeting, B.L./P.V.3., S569.
[145] For example, see: LNA, 31 May 1946, letter from Lester to Kisch in which he provides an update on officials' furniture, staff numbers, and secondments to the U.N., R5816.3 50/43877/43844; LNA, 11 June 1946, letter from Hambro to Purves regarding member contributions in arrears, R5816.3 50/43877/43844.

unable to provide oversight to the League for several months.[146] They did not appreciate it at the time, but they should have been worried: the Board would not meet again until 1947.

Transfer of Fixed Assets

The League of Nations fulfilled many roles in international cooperation in the interwar period – as a forum for debating territorial disputes, acting as the guardian of treaties, and providing secretarial support for committees – but the organisation was also the owner of significant and valuable possessions that needed to be disposed of. The League's fixed assets were defined as those held by the organisation that could not be quickly turned into cash, including fixtures, fittings, and buildings, and agreement of the Common Plan confirmed that these assets would be transferred to the U.N. To give a small insight into what this meant, the League had eight different estates in Geneva, totalling an area of over 200,000m^2. The Ariana Park estate, within which stood the Palais des Nations, had buildings with a cubic content of approximately 440,000m^3, containing nearly 600 offices, an assembly room with space for over 1500 people, two bars, and a cinema. Filling these rooms were all the organisation's furniture and fittings, with more than 4000 chairs, 113 sofas, 103 ladders and 23 vacuum cleaners.[147] All of these were accounted for in the Common Plan, approved by both the U.N. General Assembly in February 1946 and the League's Assembly two months later. It was high-level and lacking in detail, but it contained three crucial elements that helped the transfer of assets to the U.N. progress much more smoothly than other areas of work.

Firstly, it provided a deadline to work towards. The Common Plan committed both organisations to a transfer date of "on or about" 1 August 1946, and something as simple as setting a deadline, gave an impetus to the work that was needed to put this Plan into effect. Having both Assemblies agree to this date meant both

[146] LNA, 24 July 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of Tenth Meeting, B.L./P.V.10., S569.
[147] Detail about the League estates comes from LNA, 31 October 1945, document prepared by Stencek for the Supervisory Commission titled 'League Estates', C.C.1453, S565. Information concerning Ariana Park: LNA, 31 October 1945, document prepared by Stencek for the Supervisory Commission titled 'The League Buildings: Ariana Park', C.C.1450, S565. Details of the fixtures and fittings: TNA, 28 January 1946, Appendix to the Common Plan for the Transfer of League of Nations Assets established by the U.N. Committee and the Supervisory Commission of the League of Nations, pp. 3-7, FO 371/57248.

organisations' secretariats were accountable for making it happen – it provided a critical level of momentum that would prove lacking in other parts of transfer.[148]

Secondly it provided a basis from which work could start. Unlike the transfer of functions or the liquidation of other elements of the League, the Common Plan's existence meant that the two secretariats were not starting with a blank sheet of paper. There was little in the way of practicalities in the agreement, and neither side thought it perfect, but it was the result of appropriately senior individuals from both parties thrashing out the high-level decisions between them during the face-to-face negotiations in January. This meant there was agreement on the strategic direction of the transfer, something the Secretariats would not necessarily have had the authority to settle on their own.

Finally, it established a negotiating relationship between the relevant elements of the U.N. and the League. The U.N. Committee on League of Nations Assets disbanded following the agreement of the Common Plan, but in its place the General Assembly created another group, the U.N. Negotiating Committee, to liaise with both the Swiss Government and the League as agreed in the Plan.[149] In doing so, the lines of communication between the organisations were clear; League officials knew who was responsible for what, and who they needed to liaise with on a daily basis.[150] Importantly, both this Committee and its predecessor were led by Włodzimierz Moderow, the Polish delegate to the U.N. Preparatory Commission, which provided valuable continuity between not just the two U.N. Committees, but also between the U.N. and the League.

Moderow was a lawyer and former member of the General Prosecutor's Office in Poland before working for the Polish Government in Exile in London during the war. He had also been a member of the League's Communications and Transit Committee in the past, so he was not a stranger to the organisation. The working relationship between Lester and Moderow was the practical expression of the

[148] LNA, 14 March 1946, Report on Discussions with the Representatives of the United Nations on Questions of the Transfer of League of Nations Assets, A.8.1946.X., pp. 1-10, S567.
[149] LNA, 16 February 1946, Lester personal memo regarding the creation of a U.N. Negotiating Committee, S565.
[150] LNA, 14 March 1946, letter from Lie to Lester explaining that the Negotiating Committee will arrive in Geneva on 6 April, S565 50/43684/43262; LNA, 6 April 1946, [unknown author], memo detailing the hotel arrangements for each member of the Negotiating Committee party, S565.

theoretical liaison between the two secretariats, and official documentation suggests a formal but cordial affinity between the two men.[151] However, when Moderow was appointed Trygve Lie's representative in Geneva from mid-May, while his professional relationship with Lester continued in much the same vein, privately it became more strained. A last-minute request from the Negotiating Committee for a tour of La Pelouse, the Secretary-General's official residence, earned a passive-aggressive written rebuke from Lester in response.[152] The Secretary-General also expressed his frustration with Moderow's perceived lack of respect for the League during the handover events in early August – referring to him as "a bloody fool" in his diaries – which was in great contrast with Lie, whom Lester thought well of.[153] The Secretary-General's private feelings did not spill over into the public sphere – and there is no indication in Moderow's papers that Lester's vexations were reciprocated – but the limits they placed on the relationship were significant. The League's Archives show that the pair rarely met in person to discuss issues during these months, choosing instead to conduct their business through memos or letters, or via a third-party, usually Director of Internal Administration Valentin Stencek.[154] While this was more than acceptable when either man was away from Geneva, for the two months in this period when both were working in the same building, it was a hindrance on productivity, especially in regard to the more controversial elements of transfer.

With so many of the strategic principles agreed in advance, discussions on asset transfer were fortunately not curtailed by Lester and Moderow's differences. The momentum generated by the agreement of the Common Plan meant work could begin on the finer details of asset transfer immediately. The Negotiating Committee

---

[151] LNA, 3 April 1946, letter from Lester to Włodzimierz Moderow, welcoming the latter to Switzerland and expressing his hopes for useful negotiations, R5812 50/43684/43262; LNA, 5 April 1946, letter from Moderow to Lester, thanking the latter in advance for his assistance with the Negotiating Committee, S565.

[152] LNA, 10 April 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow, explaining that he would be happy for the Negotiating Committee to visit the grounds of La Pelouse, but in regard to the house he said, "I was sure they would not wish to walk in on such short notice…" and politely asked for more notice in future, S565. Also: Lester's Diary, 11 April 1946, letter from Moderow to Lester in which the former apologised for the inconvenience; Lester's Diary, 26 April 1946, Lester personal diary entry recalling the events of a post-Assembly dinner hosted by Moderow, and his impressions of the host.

[153] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1946, Lester personal note covering the handover celebrations taking place in Geneva, in which he described Lie as "a man of personality and character" and Moderow as "a bloody fool". Also see LNA, 8 August 1946, letter from Lester to Lie thanking him for his work in establishing good relations between the two organisations, R5813 50/43874/43262.

[154] For example: LNA, 24 June 1946, memo from Stencek to Moderow relaying Lester's proposed minor amendments to the asset transfer agreement, R5813 50/43874/43262.

remained in Geneva until 2 May – reviewing the inventories in the Common Plan and, for the most part, negotiating terms with the authorities in both Bern and Geneva. The League's chief legal adviser, Émile Giraud, was also working on the subject before the Assembly even ended. He advised his colleagues that three essential things were needed to realise the transfer envisaged in the Common Plan. Firstly, the U.N. General Assembly and the League Assembly would need to pass resolutions agreeing the transfer, both of which were done by 18 April. Secondly, a change would need to be made with the Swiss Land Registry – management of which was already underway in the joint negotiations with the Swiss. Finally, they needed a documented agreement between the U.N. and the League that would formally handover possession of the assets and lay out the terms under which this transfer would take place.[155]

This closely defined process ran relatively smoothly as a consequence. There was no controversy around the transfer of these fixed assets; the U.N. was happy to take on the palatial facilities and were particularly complimentary of the state of the buildings, noting that they were "in perfect condition".[156] The energy driving this work meant a draft agreement was already in place by 1 May, and while it went through a number of iterations as it was passed between representatives of the two organisations, the main substance of the document did not alter.[157] The only changes of note were the addition of a point agreeing Lester's continued use of La Pelouse, and the actual nature of the document itself, as Moderow suggested and Giraud agreed, that it might be considered an executive agreement rather than a standalone legal contract. The lawful basis of the transfer was therefore bound in the combination of this document and the approval of both Assemblies.[158]

[155] LNA, 17 April 1946, memo from Émile Giraud to Lester regarding his legal opinion on what will be required for a transfer of assets to take place, R5813 50/43874/43262.
[156] LNA, 30 April 1946, letter from Adriaan Pelt to Lie, listing the main problems involved in transfer of League assets and activities, R5812 50/43298/43262.
[157] A draft version of the agreement can be found at: LNA, 1 May 1946, [unknown author], Draft agreement concerning the transfer of certain League assets to the UN, R5813 50/43874/43262. Also see: LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Stencek to Moderow outlining some final minor changes, R5813 50/43874/43262.
[158] LNA, 7 May 1946, letter from Stencek to Pelt suggesting Lester have the continued use of La Pelouse, R5813 50/43874/43262; LNA, 26 June 1946, memo from Moderow to Lester suggesting a simplified version of the agreement could be used, R5813 50/43874/43262; LNA, 28 June 1946, memo from Stencek to Moderow, agreeing to the latter's final changes, R5813 50/43874/43262.

By the end of May the U.N. concluded its negotiations with the Swiss and an agreement was approved. Contract details relating to Palais utilities were passed to U.N. representatives in June, covering insurance, heating, water, and more, and by the end of June the final Agreement between the two organisations was settled.[159] The document contained ten articles over just six pages, and covered the transfer of the land, buildings, fixtures, and fittings, as well as the free-of-charge transfer of gifts bequeathed to the League. It agreed terms by which the I.L.O. would be able to use the Palais Assembly Room, as well as granting I.L.O. staff access to the Library. It also committed the U.N. to adhere to certain obligations on the land – specifically no additional building beyond agreed terms with the local government – granted the League continued use of the Palais whilst the organisation closed down, and agreed a process by which any further issues would be managed. Finally, the agreement was noted as taking effect from the day of signature: 1 August 1946, the original date identified by the Common Plan six months earlier.[160]

On 1 August, as planned, Moderow, Lester, and J. Lachavanne – representing the Geneva Canton – signed the Agreement Concerning the Execution of the Transfer to the United Nations of Certain Assets of the League of Nations.[161] The relative ease of these proceedings was a tribute to the value of careful planning: setting out the actions to be taken, agreeing who was responsible for what, and allocating sufficient time and resources to see it through. However the transfer of these assets was not an exercise that could be conducted in isolation; simply moving the League's estates to the United Nations meant the Palais would be owned by one organisation but administered by another. Of course this was highly impractical: asset transfer would have to be accompanied by a similar transfer of Palais services, and this meant people and activities.

Transfer of Activities, Functions, and Services

[159] The agreements with the Geneva Canton can be found in: LNA, 22 July 1946, 'Projet d'acte de transfert S.D.N. – O.N.U. – Ariana – Palais', R5813 50/43874/43262; LNA, 22 July 1946, 'Projet d'acte de transfert S.D.N. – O.N.U. – Terraine et villas privés, R5813 50/43874/43262. See also: LNA, 28 June 1946, memo from Stencek to Moderow confirming that the agreement can be finalised and signed on 1 August as planned, R5813 50/43874/43262.
[160] LNA, 22 July 1946, 'Agreement Concerning the Execution of the Transfer to the United Nations of Certain Assets of the League of Nations', R5813 50/43874/43262.
[161] LNA, 30 July 1946, letter from Stencek to J. Lachavanne – of the Genevan government – inviting the latter to the Palais to sign the legal agreement transferring the League assets to the United Nations, R5813 50/43874/43262.

As successful as the League's technical activities were, even with those countries not members of the organisation, the continuation of this work in the U.N. was significantly more contentious and chaotic for two reasons. The first was the opposition of the U.S.S.R. to the direct transfer of all supposedly non-political work without further scrutiny. The Soviet government believed that a major cause of the League's diminishing impact on issues of security in the 1930s was a result of the organisation's expansion into socioeconomic work, and was also reluctant to accept any interference in its own affairs in the name of "rootless cosmopolitanism".[162] The second problem stemmed from the overwhelming desire of those responsible for founding the United Nations, especially in the United States, to brand the new organisation as a departure from what had come before. The theory made sense: after the devastation of the recent past, the organisers of the U.N. realised any new body would need the complete faith and trust – or at least a willingness to try – of its membership. Thus the unofficially agreed approach was to distance the U.N. from its predecessor: the League was branded a failure but the United Nations would be different. As a demonstration of how far the U.N. planners went in their efforts to publicly distance themselves from their predecessor, the League of Nations Sub-Committee of the Preparatory Commission spent a significant portion of its seven meetings discussing the correct terminology to use when mentioning the League. The word transfer in regard to activities was ultimately considered inappropriate – it implied a direct connection to the League – and was instead replaced with "assumption of".[163]

The various Committees of the U.N. and the General Assembly had already agreed to transfer the Treaty Series function of the League – with a legal agreement already in place – as well as the Secretariat functions to the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Drug Supervisory Body, both of which were created by international conventions and therefore less tainted by the League's reputation. Nevertheless the U.N. planners did not suggest a process for transfer of these functions, no deadlines were earmarked, and no roles or responsibilities were assigned to either the United

[162] Campbell and Herring, *Diaries of Edward Stettinius Jr.*, p. 132; Porter, 'Cold War Internationalisms', p. 6.
[163] See both: TNA, 28 November 1945, Committee 7: League of Nations, Second Meeting, FO 371/57248; TNA, 5 December 1945, Committee 7: League of Nations, Fifth Meeting, FO 371/57248.

Nations or the League.[164] Likewise, the General Assembly agreed to provisionally take on League activity in the fields of economics, employment, drug control, statistics, social welfare, and transport and communications but, as with the other functions, no concrete plans were put in place to realise this transfer beyond a request that the ECOSOC review the activities before the next meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in October.[165] Meanwhile, the health-related activities of the League were destined for a different institution: the new World Health Organisation. Iris Borowy has written at much greater length about the League's health activity than can be covered here, but there was a post-war consensus amongst the Allies that they should create a separate and dedicated global health body into which the League's work, alongside the successes of U.N.R.R.A., could be funnelled.[166] Secretariat officials like Yves Biraud and Raymond Gautier were involved in planning for a global conference on the subject from March 1946, but what this new institution would look like and any transfer of activity to it remained a lower-level priority until that conference was held over the summer.[167]

The uninterrupted continuation of the League's activities and functions was sacrosanct to the organisation's leadership and members; Lester alone expressed this sentiment on a number of occasions.[168] This is not to suggest that those in the United Nations did not feel the same way – behind the scenes the new U.N. Secretariat was eager to learn as much as they could from the League's example, including the commission of a 250-page review by former official Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer – but the new organisation needed to pursue transfer on its own

---

[164] UNOG Archives, 29 April 1946, report prepared by Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer for the U.N. entitled 'Notes on some Problems Raised by the Continuation of certain League Activities', G.I. 4/11 1260. Also see: UN, *Report of the Preparatory Commission*, pp. 116-117. The P.C.O.B. was created by the International Convention relating to Dangerous Drugs 1925, and the D.S.B. by the Convention for limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs 1931. For more on the role of the League in drug control, see Renborg, *International Drug Control.*

[165] TNA, 20 March 1946, UN General Assembly Resolutions affecting the League of Nations, FO 371/57321.

[166] Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health*, pp. 421-444.

[167] LNA, 26 February 1946, letter from Jebb to Lester requesting the presence of a League representative at the Technical Preparatory Committee of the ECOSOC, in order to consult on plans for an international health conference in June 1946, S565; LNA, 4 April 1946, first meeting minutes of the Sub-Committee to Study Relations between the Future Organizations and Other Bodies, part of the Technical Preparatory Committee for the International Health Conference, held 29 March 1946, R6150 8A/43889/41755.

[168] See: Lester's Diary, 28 February 1945, letter from Lester to Walshe. Other areas of the League's Administration also stressed continuity in function: LNA, 7 May 1946, 'Memorandum on the relations of the Supervisory Body to the United Nations', produced by the Drug Supervisory Body, R5146 12B/43890/8707.

terms.[169] In addition, going back to the transfer of the fixed assets, the immovable deadline of 1 August meant the League Secretariat's activities and functions – the organisation's pride and joy – would have to wait whilst the less glamorous central services took precedence. These were the internal functions that facilitated the running of the building and the activities contained therein; they were, and are, the backbone of any organisation. In the Secretariat's structure, this included the Supplies Branch, the Internal Service – which included technical, mailing, automobile, and telephone services – the Stenographic Service, the Roneo and Multigraph Service, the Registry / Archives, and the Distribution Service, as well as the Library.[170]

The last of this group, the Library, was considered both an asset of the League as well as a central service and activity. It was home to a considerable collection of documentation and was built at the Palais with a gift from John D. Rockefeller Jr. In the report commissioned by the U.N. Secretariat on the possible continuation of League activities, Ranshofen-Wertheimer advised maintaining the Library in Geneva for the foreseeable future for several reasons.[171] Until the U.N. built its new permanent headquarters, there was little chance the Library could be accommodated in its temporary facilities in New York. Even if there were room, a move would undoubtedly cause disruption to services, and this would be felt most strongly in Europe which, having seen most of its major collections and libraries damaged during the war, would need the Library's resources.[172] Ranshofen-Wertheimer's experience with the subject matter – the reason he was asked to perform the review in the first place – was rightly taken on-board by the U.N.; there was no disagreement with his proposal, and it was agreed that the Library should be maintained in Geneva until further notice.

The League's Archives meanwhile were also both a central service as well as an organisational asset, but their transfer to the U.N. had not yet been considered and

---

[169] UNOG Archives, 29 April 1946, report by Ranshofen-Wertheimer titled 'Notes on some Problems Raised by the Continuation of certain League Activities', G.I. 4/11 1260; UNOG Archives, 19 May 1946, report by Ranshofen-Wertheimer titled 'Transferrable Activities and Functions', G.I. 4/11 1260.
[170] LNA, 31 July 1946, League Internal Circular 21, Note by the Secretary-General regarding the transfer of certain services to the UN, R5812 50/43625/43262.
[171] *The International Secretariat*, remains the most comprehensive review of the League's Secretariat, covering all imaginable areas including its structure, functions, external relations, personnel ranks, benefits, and pay scales: Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat.*
[172] UNOG Archives, 29 April 1946, report prepared by Ranshofen-Wertheimer titled 'Notes on some Problems Raised by the Continuation of certain League Activities', G.I. 4/11 1260.

Ranshofen-Wertheimer expressed concerns about the possibility of transferring all files to New York. Without knowing which activities and functions would be shifting to U.N. control, any move would be potentially redundant, and while some political archive material might be useful to the new organisation, its leadership decided to wait and make a decision later.[173] And the Archives were not the only central service to remain under League purview when the Palais was handed over on 1 August. The Registry, Distribution Service, and Printing and Publications Department all remained under League management, for the very simple reason that the U.N. was not ready to take them on.[174]

All other general services, however, were transferred alongside the building as planned, following the preparation of agreements that set terms for the relationship between the two organisations from August onwards. This culminated in a final Internal Circular to Palais staff of both secretariats on 31 July 1946, confirming that the League would continue to have access to the transferred general services, whilst the U.N. could continue to use those that had not i.e., Distribution and Registry. The attached annex to that circular laid out, in detail, who was now responsible for what services, how they should be accessed by different staff, and how the cost of these would be met. Clear and concise, it was a demonstration of how services could be transferred efficiently, when provided with sufficient time and planning.[175]

While it was agreed that most League activities and functions would transfer to the ECOSOC, subject to subsequent review, this did not mean the new organisation moved them either immediately or in toto. Despite majority support for a mass transfer, the Soviet opposition to this approach resulted in the ECOSOC compromise and a piecemeal transfer whereby activities would move when the new Secretariat was ready, which had the added benefit of preventing any rushed decisions or unnecessary delays.[176] It was a sensible tactic, and guaranteed that the new U.N. agencies responsible for these activities would be fully prepared for their

---

[173] Id. For more on the transfer of the League's Archives, see chapter four of this thesis.
[174] LNA, 29 July 1946, letter from Moderow to Lester requesting continued use of the League's Distribution and Publications Service for the foreseeable future, R5813 50/44053/43262.
[175] LNA, 31 July 1946, Internal Circular 21, written by Lester, confirming how usage of central Palais functions will work from 1 August 1946, R5812 50/43625/43262.
[176] TNA, 12 October 1945, records from Executive Committee meeting review of Committee 9 report, T 236/432; UNOG Archives, 29 April 1946, report by Ranshofen-Wertheimer titled 'Notes on some Problems Raised by the Continuation of certain League activities, G.I. 4/11 1260.

transfer – helping to safeguard continuity – whilst also ensuring that no particular service would have to remain at the League if it was ready to move. In some ways this approach was good news for the League's management; the 21st Assembly advocated the continuation of this work and explicitly granted Lester the authority to make sure transfer took place with as little interruption as possible. However it also wanted the organisation to liquidate rapidly, and the U.N. piecemeal method meant waiting for an as-yet-undefined period of time whilst the new institution organised itself. Lester wrote to Lie on several occasions in May 1946 to glean some kind of commitment or timetable from the new organisation in relation to the activity transfer, but the new Secretary-General was too busy with his own problems to provide anything more than a vague response. Ultimately there was no opportunity for the League's Administration to close the organisation before the United Nations was ready and the directive to liquidate as quickly as possible was effectively ignored until transfer was complete.[177]

If the U.N. assumption of the Palais's general services had already forced Lester and his colleagues to bend the parameters of their objectives, attempts to transfer technical activities were even messier. The transfer of the Economic and Financial Organisation (E.F.O.) activity based at Princeton was agreed relatively early during this period, although this would cause its own set of problems in the months to come and is the subject of an in-depth case study later in this chapter.[178] The Communications and Transit Section, part of Department II alongside the E.F.O., was also earmarked early for transfer, no doubt thanks to Branko Lukac, the head of the service who was seconded to the U.N. Secretariat at the beginning of April.[179] This meant all of Department II, bar the Geneva-based component of the E.F.O., was scheduled to move to U.N. control on 1 August, although Lester was an early advocate for transferring this last part of the department at the same time. He argued that splitting a department in half would undoubtedly lead to a disruption in

[177] See both LNA, 14 May 1946, letter from Lester to Lie regarding the transfer of the Publications Department, R5610 19/43868/43868; LNA, 16 May 1946, letter from Lester to Lie regarding the transfer of the drug control bodies, R5505 12A/43883/2131.
[178] LNA, 7 June 1946, letter from Alexander Elkin to Lester advising the latter that the U.N. intend to transfer Princeton functions and staff from 1 August 1946, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[179] LNA, 9 April 1946, letter from Lie to Lester, thanking the latter for releasing Branko Lukac from his contract, S568.

services, however he also accepted that this was not his decision to make and deferred to the United Nations' verdict.[180]

This chapter returns to the staffing situation of the League Secretariat in the next section, but here it is worth mentioning that all officials were given notice at the end of March that their contracts would be terminated on 31 July. For elements of the Secretariat expected to remain under League control after this date, short-term contracts would be offered to staff, as was the case with the Geneva section of the E.F.O.[181] On Monday 29 July, only three days before the League handed the Palais over to the U.N., Lester received a message from Moderow, by then the chief U.N. Secretariat official in Geneva, explaining that the U.N. had changed its mind and decided to transfer the remaining E.F.O. personnel and activity in Geneva from 1 August. The new organisation would keep the service at the Palais for at least three months, and would offer contracts to the individuals in the course of "the next few days".[182] Although the service was effectively ready to move to new management, the decision came out of the blue – David Owen only made the proposal internally at the U.N. on 24 July – and was just the first of many instances where the new organisation's lack of foresight left the League picking up the pieces.[183] Lester in particular was left reeling by the request, especially as several officials had already signed temporary League contracts, and because there was no reassurance that their new U.N. contracts would be ready in time for 1 August.[184]

Lester's desire to see all of Department II transferred to the U.N. at the same time likely played a role in his decision to accept the new organisation's last-minute proposal. However events playing out at the same time, in regard to Department III, saw Lester attempt to exert some control over the situation for the first time in

---

[180] See LNA, 21 May 1946, memo from Gregoire Frumkin to Lester, expressing his frustration about the continued division of the E.F.O., S568; LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt, noting his concern that the U.N. is only proposing one-year contracts for the Princeton E.F.O. officials, S568; LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt, expressing his disappointment that the U.N. will not be transferring the Geneva elements of the E.F.O. alongside those at Princeton, S927 50/43945/43262.
[181] LNA, 25 July 1946, handwritten note from Stencek to Lester, noting that two of the Geneva-based E.F.O. officials have already accepted their temporary contracts, S922.
[182] LNA, 29 July 1946, letter from Moderow to Lester explaining that the U.N. will now be transferring all Geneva elements of the E.F.O. alongside those from Princeton, from 1 August 1946, R5813 50/44053/43262; LNA, 29 July 1946, memo from Lester to Stencek, expressing his hopes that the new U.N. contracts for Geneva E.F.O. staff will arrive before 1 August, R5813 50/44053/43262.
[183] UNOG Archives, 24 July 1946, letter from Owen to Moderow, G.I. 4/9 251.
[184] LNA, 31 July 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow, in which the former expresses his hope that the Geneva E.F.O. officials now have their U.N. contract offers, R5813 50/44053/43262.

months. Department III was made up of three separate activities: the Health Organisation, the Social Questions Section, and the Drug Control Service, the last of which was separate from the Secretariat functions provided to the P.C.O.B. and D.S.B.[185] League representatives were involved in planning for a new global health institution, which would become the World Health Organisation but, following the world health conference in June 1946, no further progress in terms of transfer logistics had been made by July.[186] Likewise there was no indication of when or how the ECOSOC Committee on Narcotic Drugs would be established and when the League's work in this area would transfer, and the same was true of the League's social welfare activity, which was heavily impacted by the war. Moderow and Lester exchanged communications in mid-July about the latter section, agreeing to discuss the matter further at some undefined point in the future, but nothing happened until 26 July.[187]

Adriaan Pelt, another former League official now working for the U.N. as the Under Secretary-General for Conferences and General Services, cabled Moderow on Friday 26 July, informing him that the U.N. intended to transfer all of Department III from 1 August, to coincide with the other transfers.[188] By the following Monday, as Lester was also dealing with the decision to move the E.F.O. activity in Geneva, he became aware of this new pronouncement and, in a rare move, decided to push back. He did not refuse outright – he did, however, call the transfer "impossible" in a cable to Pelt – but he informed both Moderow and Pelt that he could not be held responsible for the disruption that would likely ensue from a rushed transfer.[189] Moderow agreed with him, also messaging Pelt and echoing Lester's suggestion that, if the U.N. had now decided it was ready to take on these activities, a transfer date of 1 September would be much more appropriate.[190] Fortunately for Lester's

[185] LNA, 1 April 1946, [unknown author], report entitled 'The Present Organisation of the Secretariat of the League of Nations' detailing the different sections of the Secretariat, the different functions performed by these, and the officials working therein, S922.
[186] LNA, 29 April 1946, telegram from Lester to Lie explaining that the former is happy to second Yves Biraud to the United Nations in preparation for the World Health Conference, R5813 50/43905/43262.
[187] LNA, 10 July 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow in which the former forwards a note by Henri Vigier on the work of the Social Questions Section, R4659 11A/43999/41292.
[188] LNA, 26 July 1946, cable from Pelt to Moderow, informing the latter that the U.N. intends to transfer the remaining Department III activities from 1 August 1946, S568.
[189] LNA, 29 July 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow, noting that he will not bear responsibility for any repercussions from the last-minute request to transfer Department III, R5813 50/44054/43262.
[190] LNA, 29 July 1946, cable from Moderow to Pelt, urgently requesting a one-month delay in the transfer of Department III activities, R5813 50/44054/43262.

sanity, Pelt agreed to the one-month postponement, but it demonstrated problems with two important elements of the U.N.-League relationship.

There was a clear lack of meaningful communication between the U.N. Secretariat in New York, and the League in Geneva. That major decisions could be taken and communicated to Lester with less than a week's notice suggested either a clear lack of regard for the League's position and activity, or a lack of understanding regarding the impact of those decisions. The request to move Department III with only three days' notice left no time to inform member-states of the changes, prepare handover documentation or, perhaps most importantly, provide affected staff with sufficient notice of their termination or draw up new U.N. work contracts. With former League officials like Pelt involved in the U.N. it was unlikely that the new organisation's Secretariat lacked respect for its predecessor, especially considering the warm correspondence between Pelt, Lie, and Lester, and it was therefore more likely that both ignorance and presentism were the root causes. One only has to look at the letter sent by Lie to Lester on 6 August, which covered a wide range of issues, but not once did the U.N. Secretary-General mention or even make inference to the panic of one week earlier.[191] The United Nations was, and is, a more complex organisation than the League, and the haphazard efforts at smooth transition demonstrated how difficult and time-consuming it was to establish its Secretariat. This is further evidenced by the second problem demonstrated by the end of July turmoil: the disconnect between the U.N. in New York, and its representatives in Geneva. Moderow was almost as taken aback by the last-minute decisions as Lester, and it revealed a level of disparity within the United Nations. Just as the League was not a homogenised collection of people who all felt and acted the same way, nor was its successor, especially as it was finding its feet. This confusion, with some elements of the U.N. not knowing what other parts were doing, would also rear its head when considering the League's personnel.

[191] LNA, 6 August 1946, letter from Lie to Lester regarding the possible transfer of the P.C.O.B. secretariat in September, R5813 50/44054/43262.

People Problems

At the start of April 1946, the Palais des Nations was busier than it had been in years, with regular Secretariat officials boosted by a growing number of U.N. personnel, as well as over 200 individuals employed for the Assembly. The striking nature of the buildings in Ariana Park were impressive and inspiring, yet the setting – nestled in an estate away from the hustle and bustle of the city – could also intimidate. The sense of loneliness and isolation felt by those working there, especially during the war and in the run-up to the Assembly, was only exacerbated by the sweeping staircases, long corridors, and high ceilings, so to many of those long-running members of staff it was a sweet relief to see the halls filled once again. To the casual observer it seemed as if business was booming, and while the grand farewell of the 21st Assembly was a long-awaited moment of catharsis for those who had been quite literally stuck in Geneva throughout the war, it was also a bittersweet experience.[192]

In the months leading up to the Assembly, Lester was under increasing pressure from Hambro to give notice to all remaining officials. The Secretary-General, concerned that dismissing staff with an arbitrary end date might leave the League shorthanded, was reluctant despite knowing it would have to be done at some point during the year. Hambro argued that the League must be seen to be dismantling, regardless of U.N. delays, suggesting key officials could be re-engaged on short-term contracts if needed.[193] Despite his protestations, both formal and informal, this was a battle Lester could not win and in late March all officials, regardless of contract type or rank, were given notice with a termination date of 31 July, chosen as the last day the Palais would be in League hands.[194] So as the League headed into its final Assembly, not only did Lester not know if he would have sufficient resources to actually liquidate the organisation, its staff also had no idea if they would be employed beyond the summer. Loyalty to the League and to their colleagues, alongside the guarantee of work until at least the end of July, kept most

[192] Lester's Diary, 25 August 1940, letter from Loveday to Lester regarding his journey from Geneva to the United States.
[193] LNA, 25 February 1946, Lester's personal notes on a Supervisory Commission meeting from the previous day, S565.
[194] LNA, 21 March 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro confirming that he will be giving notice to a large number of officials that day, S565. Also see: Lester's Diary, 3 April 1946, personal memo on decision to issue notice to all staff with a termination date of 31 July 1946.

officials with the Secretariat for the time being, but their long-term prospects remained uncertain.

As the highs of the Assembly drifted away and the U.N. plans remained in development, the League Secretariat leaders tried to occupy themselves with what they could control in relation to officials. This included calculating indemnities for staff, deciding the terms on which new temporary contracts would be offered from 1 August, who these contracts would be offered to, and managing the expectations of its employees about their prospects. The Preparatory Commission and General Assembly had not guaranteed future roles for League employees and announced that no direct transfer of staff would take place. Offers might be made to League officials, and they were encouraged to apply for U.N. positions, but these would be based on new contracts with the U.N. Secretariat, and this was all the remit of the organisation's Secretary-General, Trygve Lie.[195] Either way, it was unclear – to the League at least – if the U.N. would re-employ the associated staff when assets and activities moved.[196] The U.N. held two interview boards in Geneva in the week following the end of the Assembly, where League officials interested in roles with the new Secretariat met with their prospective new employers to discuss their experience and skills, but more than anything they were an opportunity for the U.N. to identify any officials it wanted to poach from the League's ranks.[197]

In the meantime, League officials were faced with uncertain circumstances. 148 individuals met with the U.N. panels, however the new Secretariat made it clear that these interviews were no guarantee of job offers, and individuals faced a tough decision regarding their League positions. They could stay, understanding that there was no promise they would be either offered temporary contracts to remain with the League for a few more months, or moved to the U.N. in activity transfer. Even if they secured a temporary continuation of their role at the League, they risked missing out on opportunities with other organisations, and potentially finding themselves looking for work in six months when all the new positions created by the U.N. and its

[195] Lester's Diary, 18 December 1945, letter from Lester to Loveday regarding the expected outcomes from the Preparatory Commission report and the impact on staff.
[196] LNA, 23 July 1946, letter from Pelt to Lester apologising for delays in appointing League officials to the United Nations, S927.
[197] See both: LNA, 29 April 1946, list of League officials interviewed by the two U.N. interview boards between 24 and 29 April 1946, S927; LNA, 2 May 1946, letter from Pelt to Lester thanking the latter and his colleagues for their help with the interview board process, S927.

agencies were filled.[198] The alternative was to actively look for opportunities at the U.N. or other employers, leaving before 31 July, and invalidating their chance at an indemnity payment.

Even when early offers of employment were made by the new organisation, League officials were sometimes forced to make decisions with little time to consider their options. Phyllis van Ittersum, a 26-year veteran of the Economic and Financial Section, wrote to a Princeton-based colleague in June 1946 explaining that she had transferred to the U.N. Secretariat as of that morning, in a new position as secretary to Alexander Elkin, the Assistant Director for Administration at the Palais. Disconcertingly she explained that "the arrangement is quite temporary and very vague", and she was given only twenty minutes to make up her mind about the role.[199] Many of these officials had lived in Geneva for years, and some – like van Ittersum – had been with the League since its earliest days, and the change was a large upheaval whatever choice they made.[200]

As officials made their choices, Lester's earlier concerns about resources started to come true. The U.N., actively establishing its own Secretariat during this period, was starting to identify League officials – and their decades of experience – it wanted to join its ranks. Some individuals, such as Martin Hill – who would go on to have an illustrious career in the U.N. – and Léon Steinig left the League before the end of July, with the consent of Lester and the Administration.[201] Others, upon request from the United Nations and other agencies, were seconded to new positions for periods of time up to the termination of their League contracts at the end of July. These included two senior officials: Branko Lukac, Head of the Communications and Transit Department, and Yves Biraud of the Health Organisation.[202]

---

[198] This was a concern Lester himself expressed to Pelt: LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt concerning League staff staying with the organisation after the end of July, S922.
[199] LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Phyllis van Ittersum to Ansgar Rosenborg, C1626.
[200] Two figures with long-service who would later take on important roles in the liquidation of the League were Constance (Connie) Harris and Percy Watterson. Harris joined the organisation on 12 August 1919, while Watterson joined one month earlier on 14 July 1919. LNA, Personnel File: Harris, Constance Myra; LNA, Personnel File: Watterson, Percy Gill.
[201] LNA, 14 June 1946, letter from Stencek to Lester with an update on staffing, including Martin Hill's departure, S922; LNA, 15 May, telegram from Lester to Lie agreeing to second Léon Steinig to the U.N. from 1 June 1946, R5813 50/43905/43262.
[202] LNA, 1 June 1946, [unknown author], table showing allowances and pensions contributions for seconded staff, including Branko Lukac and Yves Biraud, R5813 50/43905/43262.

These departures caused two different problems. The first centred on the management of these secondment requests, and this related back to the previously mentioned communication problems within the U.N. Secretariat. Despite Trygve Lie's early optimism that Lester and Pelt would easily come to a "suitable and convenient" arrangement on staffing, there was no standardised process by which United Nations officials were obliged to adhere until mid-June; requests did not find their way to the League via an agreed route or common contact.[203] Instead the League had to manage queries from a range of departments and, on more than one occasion, found itself fielding multiple requests for the same League official from different parts of the U.N. Secretariat. It was a burden on the League's Administration, and it was only when Pelt agreed to act as the channel for all future requests that the chaos started to ease.[204]

The second problem related to Lester's specific concern about a loss of resources. Some of the League's most experienced officials were desirable employees in the eyes of the United Nations, and Lester had to once again balance the Assembly's competing directives of being as helpful to the new organisation as possible, whilst also liquidating the League as efficiently as he could. The fewer officials he had at his disposal, the longer the liquidation would take and, with a lesser degree of experience available, the risk of mismanaging the process increased.[205] Despite existing literature's assumption that this was a quiet period, it was quite the opposite, and the League needed its Secretariat's experience more than ever. This was especially true in the case of Seymour Jacklin, the League's Treasurer, and consequently a member of staff expected to stay with the organisation until the end of the liquidation process. To Lester's surprise and consternation, Jacklin decided he would leave the organisation on 31 July, and instead put himself forward as a member of the Board of Liquidation, a position he was awarded during the 21st Assembly. Lester had his own difficulties with what he described as Jacklin's "deep-seated inferiority complex" over the years – he privately suggested the Treasurer had a "long continued attack of persecution mania" and called him "a stupid man" –

[203] UNOG Archives, 9 April 1946, letter from Lie to Lester, P188 Papers of Włodzimierz Moderow 1921-1960.
[204] LNA, 8 June 1946, letter from Stencek to Lester suggesting Pelt take over as the point of contact on secondment requests, S568.
[205] LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt expressing concerns about the high volume of secondment requests and the possible disadvantages seconded officials may face when pursuing permanent positions at the U.N., S568.

but their professional relationship functioned adequately during the war and Jacklin's announcement was a surprise to many. The League would have to liquidate after the end of July without its chief financial officer.[206]

All of this was further exacerbated by increased workloads for some members of the Secretariat. The dramatic decline in activity, brought about by the conflict in Europe and beyond, was reversing itself and requests for League assistance were on the rise. The levels of staffing, reduced to fit wartime demand, were now insufficient to handle even the routine work of the Secretariat. On numerous occasions, both the Publications Department and the Library requested increases in resources that fell on deaf ears.[207] Henri Vilatte, managing the Personnel Department, noted that they would have to manage with just three members of staff after 31 July.[208]

Lester was also motivated by a desire to look after his staff and wished to see his colleagues move onto new opportunities wherever possible. News of positions in the U.N. and other agencies were freely circulated among staff, and Lester raised concerns with his U.N. counterparts regarding the decision to only offer short-term contracts to staff transferred alongside services, activities, and assets.[209] To what extent this was personal concern, or concern for his ability to continue running the League, is debatable, but it was most likely a little of both. Lester was closer to his officials than his predecessors, by virtue of the smaller number of staff under his control and the physical proximity of those who remained in Geneva during the war. For many of those who continued to work for the organisation between 1940 and 1945, colleagues constituted their entire social circle. This was as true for Lester, a committed family man who suffered greatly while separated from his wife and daughters for several years, as it was for any other League official.[210]

---

[206] Lester's Diary, 3 April 1946, Lester personal note on a Supervisory Commission meeting during which Jacklin confirmed his wish to leave the Secretariat in July 1946. Privately Lester found Jacklin paranoid and in possession of a "deep-seated inferiority complex": Lester's Diary, 1 March 1946, personal diary entry.
[207] LNA, 31 May 1946, letter from Lester to Kisch explaining that staff numbers would likely go up in coming weeks due to an increase in workload, R5816.3 50/43877/43844; LNA, 13 June 1946, memo from E. A. Lloyd – Head of the Publications Department – to Stencek urgently requesting additional staff for the department, S937 19/43868/43868.
[208] LNA, 24 July 1946, memo from Henri Vilatte to Elkin explaining how he plans to manage the League's Personnel Office from 1 August onwards, S922.
[209] LNA, 24 April 1946, letter from Stencek to Julian Huxley – at U.N.E.S.C.O. – requesting details of all available U.N.E.S.C.O. posts so they can be forwarded to League officials, S942.
[210] Bendiner, Elmer, *A Time for Angels: The Tragicomic History of the League of Nations* (New York, 1975), p. 402.

However Lester's personal concern for his staff was not infinite, and was significantly diminished on issues involving money. His relationship with the Administrative Tribunal, established in 1928 to address complaints from League and I.L.O. officials, was difficult on occasion, especially following the latter body's ruling against the League in regards to staff dismissals in 1939 and 1940.[211] In short, the League dismissed a large number of officials following the invasion of Poland in 1939 and then north-western Europe in 1940, often with a shorter notice period than the organisation was contractually obliged to provide. The Administrative Tribunal ruled at the end of February 1946 that the League had acted unlawfully in this instance and should make financial restitution to the former officials in question. The League's leaders, however, proposed that they were not bound by the Tribunal's decision, eventually taking the issue to the 21st Assembly to justify their position. The real cause for concern for the League's Administration was the financial implications of the Tribunal's decision, especially as the ruling in February resulted in over 100 former officials bringing cases against the organisation – with more expected – by the time the Assembly began. This worry was shared by member-governments wary of seeing their share of assets reduced, and led to the Assembly backing the leadership's stance, effectively allowing the organisation to ignore its own judicial body.[212]

The League's staff was not a unionised work force, but staff were represented by a Staff Committee – a useful source of information about officials' concerns – and the relationship between the body and the leaders of the Secretariat could be combative during what was a difficult time for both officials and management. The Committee raised a number of issues that troubled employees, including the 31 July deadline set for officials based outside Geneva to remove their furniture from the Palais – which would prove to be a thorn in the side of the League leadership throughout dissolution and is covered in greater depth later in this thesis – as well as the repatriation of officials recruited locally but not Swiss citizens.[213] They were also

---

[211] Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, pp. 259-262.
[212] Extract from the sixth meeting of the Second (Finance) Committee of the 21st Assembly: LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, pp. 130-133. LNA, 9 April 1946, report by Lester on the Administrative Tribunal ruling of 26 February 1946, S942.
[213] LNA, 3 July 1946, letter from Gordon Graham – representing the Staff Committee – to Lester, relaying the committee's views and suggestions regarding the termination of contracts taking effect from 31 July, S918. For an outline of the officials' furniture problem, see LNA, 3 June 1946, memo from Stencek to Moderow, R5385 18A/39144/3471.

particularly vocal in regards to the calculation of indemnity payments for staff leaving the organisation on 31 July.

The Secretariat was in possession of a complex employee contract landscape by 1946. When the organisation's future was particularly uncertain in 1939 and 1940, the Supervisory Commission instructed Lester's predecessor, Joseph Avenol, to keep staff contracts, where he could, in a state that allowed officials to be dismissed with minimal notice and obligations. This was designed to protect the League from excessive financial outlay while the organisation was under great threat and, in theory, to allow officials to leave Switzerland quickly if needed. The practical result was a Secretariat made up of officials on a variety of different contract terms, some of which did not, from a legal perspective, reflect their length of service.[214] Although the organisation's leadership did make some allowances to ameliorate the unusual situation, they made little room for leeway when it came to financial recompense for employees. Not that this stopped the Staff Committee from continuing to press the issue however, continually pushing for the best possible deal for its members. This included lobbying for indemnity payments to be based on real salary values i.e., including cost-of-living and other allowances, negotiating diplomatic status in regard to Swiss taxation for those leaving the international civil service – for at least a short period – and ensuring any holiday leave not taken by 31 July would be remunerated upon termination of contract.[215]

The Staff Committee was not always successful in its efforts – usually on issues that involved asking the League for more money – and in this instance they had to wait until 30 July for their official response, just one day before most officials left the organisation.[216] Nonetheless the Secretariat leadership, like Lester personally, was not averse to staff concerns and could work with representative groups in a positive way at times. An example of this relates to the Staff Sickness Insurance Association, created in 1921 with a view to supporting officials in the case of illness or accident. With the U.N. unable to take over the Fund, a solution needed to be identified that would remain true to the ideals of the Association, and specifically that it should only

[214] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, p. 118.
[215] LNA, 3 July 1946, letter from Graham – representing the Staff Committee – to Lester, relaying the committee's views and suggestions regarding the termination of contracts taking effect from 31 July, S918.
[216] LNA, 30 July 1946, letter from Stencek to Graham regarding the Staff Committee queries of 3 July, S918.

be used to provide remuneration to those who suffered accident or illness. Together, the Executive Board and the Secretariat leadership identified a solution whereby the Association could continue to function for former members now part of the U.N. Secretariat, whilst also remaining true to the principles on which the fund was founded. It was not a perfect solution, but was testament to the power of face-to-face negotiations, and demonstrated that while officials and the League's management did not always agree, they were able to work together in a productive fashion when needed.[217]

The League started these months with 397 employees on the books, but within four months, as officials left for new opportunities or returned to their home countries, this figure shrank to just 73, and of that number, only 31 were expected to stay with the organisation beyond the outstanding transfer of activities to the U.N.[218] The Palais des Nations remained as busy as it was at the beginning of April, but the vast majority of those filling the halls were now U.N. officials. Some staffing issues were still to be resolved – the Staff Committee represented fewer individuals after July but they remained a vocal force – but by the beginning of August, at least some of the turmoil appeared to be over.

The E.F.O. at Princeton

The experience of the E.F.O. office at Princeton between April and July 1946 was a microcosm of the wider League experience during the same period. The group working there, nearly 4,000 miles from Geneva, had to contend with all the same aspects of transfer to the U.N., including assets, activities, and people, and their experiences demonstrated the full range of tribulations the organisation had to contend with.

As already mentioned, the League's technical activity was significantly more effective than its political endeavours in the 1930s, and this was especially true of

[217] LNA, 28 July 1946, document prepared by Stencek – for Lester – looking at the Staff Sickness Insurance Association and the proposed options for its future, S913.
[218] LNA, 31 July 1946, [unknown author], report on the anticipated contractual positions of staff on 31 July 1946, S922; LNA, 31 July 1946, report by Stencek providing a breakdown of all staff in League employ from 1 August 1946, and any anticipated transfers that remain outstanding, S927.

the work around economics and global financial study.[219] When it became unclear if the Secretariat could continue working at full capacity in Switzerland in 1940, Arthur Sweetser worked with the Rockefeller Foundation and Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study to invite several of the League's technical sections to continue their work in the safety of the United States. After some dithering by Lester's predecessor, a contingent of eight officials from Department II, led by its Director Alexander Loveday, relocated to Princeton on a mission to the United States. Away from a physically isolated and communications restricted Switzerland, the E.F.O. flourished during the war, producing a range of publications on topics including the transition from war to peace-time economies, and commercial policy in the interwar period.[220]

By the beginning of April 1946, the number of people left in the Princeton office was 28 – made up of eight Secretariat officials and 20 locally-recruited staff – and they, following Loveday's departure in February 1946, were led by Ansgar Rosenborg, a Swedish member of Section who had been with the organisation since 1921.[221] He was supported on a practical level by Percy Watterson, an accountant with the League's Treasury who would become a critically-important figure in the liquidation of the organisation in 1947. While the group's prospects were in a healthier condition than some of their colleagues in Geneva – the ECOSOC had already agreed to the creation of an Economic and Employment Commission as well as a Statistical Commission – they were no less immune to the uncertainty enveloping the League. There was no timetable for transfer, no guarantee of roles in the new Commissions, and at the end of March, like the rest of the Secretariat, officials were given notice of termination of their contracts effective 31 July.[222]

If the calculation of indemnities and benefits was complicated for those officials based in Geneva, there were added layers of complexity for those in the United States. On 8 April, the day the final Assembly began in Geneva, Lester sent a five-

---

[219] The best source of information on the rise and dominance of the E.F.O. is Patricia Clavin's 2013 work *Securing the World Economy* which covers the League's work in economics and financial management from its beginnings.
[220] Clavin goes into significantly more detail on the work of the Princeton group during the war in Chapter 8 of *Securing the World Economy*, titled 'Made in the USA, 1940-1943': Ibid, pp. 267-304.
[221] LNA, 1 April 1946, [unknown author], report entitled 'The Present Organisation of the Secretariat of the League of Nations' detailing the different sections of the Secretariat, the different functions performed by these, and the officials working therein, S922.
[222] TNA, 20 March 1946, UN General Assembly Resolutions affecting the League of Nations, FO 371/57321.

page document to Rosenborg outlining the numerous rules and procedures to be followed regarding his charges in New Jersey, most of which were unsurprising. For example, the League would not pay indemnity to officials salaried by the Rockefeller Foundation grant issued in 1940; instead this should be covered by the funds remaining. Rosenborg was also asked to inform local staff that, as soon as a transfer date was agreed, he would issue them with one month's notice of the termination of their contracts. This did not affect the possibility of them moving to the United Nations and brought them in line with the circumstances of their colleagues.[223]

The controversial elements of Lester's new rules, however, related to the Secretariat officials' entitlement to repatriation expenses and what were called leave journeys i.e., remuneration for travel to home countries as part of their holiday allowance. The League agreed to pay the costs of repatriation of any Princeton-based Secretariat official to either their country of recruitment or any other location they so wished, provided it was not more expensive than repatriation to the former. For example, an official recruited in France could not request repatriation to New Zealand. Crucially however these repatriation expenses came with an expiration date: all requests and journeys had to be taken within three months of leaving League service, and these time limits were a worry for officials. Only two months earlier, Lester had indicated that staff and their families would be entitled to the provisions outlined in the Staff Regulations, whereby the League would pay officials for the cost of travel to their home countries for holidays, as well as funding the cost of repatriation journeys upon termination of contracts. However, the decision to terminate contracts as of 31 July made the leadership change its mind: leave journeys would not be funded close to repatriation dates, nor would they be allowed at all if the Princeton office was too busy.[224]

Officials working in Princeton were not happy, and four of them wrote detailed breakdowns of Lester's updated guidelines in individual letters to Rosenborg, outlining their "fresh anxiety" with the rules and the time restrictions now in place.[225]

---

[223] LNA, 8 April 1946, letter from Lester to Rosenborg regarding issues arising as a result of terminating the contracts of those officials still working at Princeton, S922.
[224] Id.
[225] LNA, 24 April 1946, letter from Folke Hilgerdt to Rosenborg expressing concerns regarding the guidelines from the League's leadership relating to leave journeys, C1784-4.

They felt punished for being based in the United States, and were aggrieved that the League seemed to be putting economising above their contracted rights. There was a disparity in the expectations between the two groups: the officials in New Jersey, and the Administration in Geneva. The former felt let down by an organisation they had dedicated themselves to, whilst the latter did not understand why those in Princeton were unwilling to accept the practical realities of liquidation procedures.[226] The lack of face-to-face interaction and reliance on slow postal communications meant the personal reassurance often needed in management of people, especially during times of great change, was missing. All of this was aggravated by the continued lack of news as to when this group might transfer to U.N. management. Worried for himself and his colleagues, Rosenborg tried to pursue the issue directly in early May, but was instructed by Martin Hill, then a Special Adviser to Trygve Lie, to stay out of the discussions.[227] At the end of May, with no news forthcoming, Valentin Stencek – effectively Lester's second in command – suggested offering temporary contract extensions, to at least provide some reassurance to those based in Princeton that they would not be unemployed come 1 August.[228]

Despite the anxiety and concern about the future, the relationship between the Princeton mission and the leadership in Geneva was not irreparably damaged by the repatriation debate. When Pelt privately informed the League's Secretary-General that the U.N. planned to transfer the E.F.O. activity, assets, and people at the end of July, Lester pressed two issues on his counterparts in the United Nations. Firstly, that any new contracts offered to officials should not directly reflect those under which they were then subject. The war placed considerable financial constraints on the League and, as a result, officials' contracts were less favourable than they would otherwise expect or warrant; the Administration wanted to ensure these individuals were appropriately compensated for their work in future.[229] Lester was also concerned that the U.N. was only offering temporary positions thus far, again relaying these worries to Pelt. He may have had little time for staff dissension

[226] See LNA, 20 June 1946, memo from Stencek to Lester explaining that Rosenborg had granted a leave journey for Paul Deperon's wife and daughter, S942; LNA, 25 June 1946, letter from Stencek to Rosenborg regarding Deperon's request for an additional leave journey for himself, S942.
[227] LNA, 4 May 1946, letter from Martin Hill to Rosenborg, suggesting the latter refrain from proposing procedure for transfer of functions, S568.
[228] LNA, 29 May 1946, report by Stencek covering all current officials and possible offer of temporary contracts from 1 August, S922.
[229] LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt regarding the U.N. decision to assume the E.F.O. functions based in Princeton from 31 July, R5813 50/43945/43262.

on occasion, especially when it affected his budget, but Lester was not without concern for his Secretariat officials and their prospects.

The good news for the Princeton officials was that they now knew when they would be transferring – 31 July – with confirmation received at the end of June.[230] However the first contract offers did not arrive until 16 July, and an increasingly exasperated Rosenborg was reduced to a direct appeal to David Owen, then in charge of the new U.N. Department of Economic Affairs, in order to chase the formal contract letters for his officials.[231] He was finally successful, but if the permanent Secretariat officials thought their situation was fraught with anxiety, this was nothing compared to their locally-recruited colleagues.[232]

Rosenborg, understandably, had a greater connection with his local staff than the Secretariat leadership in Geneva did, and was largely responsible for securing their future employment. In mid-July, Pelt cabled Lester to let him know that the U.N. hoped to "clear [the local employees'] status one way or other within the next two weeks" – not particularly reassuring for individuals whose contracts were due to terminate in a fortnight – and while the League's leaders were supportive of Rosenborg's efforts to secure positions for his staff, it refused to temporarily prolong their employment whilst the U.N. made its arrangements.[233] Meanwhile, with only four days' notice, the U.N. invited the locally-recruited staff to New York for interviews on 22 July, but informed them that as the new Department of Economic Affairs was undergoing "a difficult organizational period" and Owen was away in Europe until mid-August, no offers of employment could be made for at least a month.[234]

---

[230] LNA, 29 June 1946, cable from Lester to Pelt regarding offers of employment for League officials currently based at Princeton, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[231] LNA, 18 July 1946, letter from Rosenborg to Lester in which the former explains that he has been holding the E.F.O. together as best he can in the face of uncertainty, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[232] LNA, 17 July 1946, memo from Vilatte to Lester noting that U.N. contract offers have now come through for four of the Princeton-based officials, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[233] LNA, 16 July 1946, cable from Pelt to Lester confirming that U.N. contracts for League officials at Princeton are being finalised, and that he hopes to resolve the local staff "issue" within the next two weeks, R5813 50/43945/43262; LNA, 20 July 1946, cable from Lester to Rosenborg apologising that the League cannot extend the contracts of locally recruited staff, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[234] LNA, 18 July 1946, letter from L. Malania – Executive Officer at the U.N. Department of Economic Affairs – to Una M. Russell – a local staff member of the E.F.O. at Princeton – inviting her to attend an interview in New York on 22 July 1946, R5813 50/43945/43262.

The disarray in Princeton was further aggravated by the distance between Rosenborg and Geneva, in terms of both geography and the levels of priority attached to the problem. Like the frantic issues surrounding the transfer of the rest of the E.F.O. activity in Geneva, and the last-minute request to transfer all of Department III, much of the back-and-forth between the U.N., Rosenborg, and the League leadership took place over a matter of days. Queries and plans that might have been discussed weeks or even months earlier, were hastily cobbled together in a disorganised fashion by both secretariats. David Owen, from Europe, managed to exert some influence to have two-month contracts offered to local staff at the last minute, but the fortunate end to the issue did not negate the bedlam of the previous weeks.[235]

Of course the Princeton transfer was not just about people, it also included activities and assets, and the same last-minute approach extended to these as well. As already mentioned, the U.N. proposed a takeover of the E.F.O. at Princeton in early June, but the official confirmation was not forwarded to Rosenborg for several weeks.[236] In many ways the proposed method of transfer was relatively straightforward: all regular activity would continue as before, and officials would remain in the same office at Princeton until they could be relocated to New York. Very little would change on a day-to-day basis, except that Rosenborg and his staff would now report to U.N. Headquarters instead of Geneva. This was fortunate, as some of the more practical transfer issues were once again subject to a lack of forethought.

The major question surrounded E.F.O. publications. At the proposed time of transfer, several publications were in different stages of preparation, and the issue centred on those reports completed by the E.F.O. but at either the printers or with linguists for translation into French. The United Nations did not want to publish reports under a League masthead, but would it be right to publish them later under their own banner if they had been written by League officials? It may not have seemed like a vitally-important issue during the relative turmoil of May and June – hence the lack of urgency in addressing the questions – but the absence of prior

[235] LNA, 26 July 1946, cable from Lester to Rosenborg in which former notes that he now understands David Owen has stepped in to resolve the issue, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[236] LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek asking the latter to forward Pelt's telegram of 8 June – regarding the U.N. takeover of the Princeton E.F.O. functions – to Rosenborg, S922.

consideration only made the matter more complicated. Significant time was spent corresponding on the matter in July, and the dearth of preparation meant the problem was not resolved before the transfer date, leaving it to be dealt with in August and beyond, even though the E.F.O. had supposedly been fully subsumed by the U.N. by that point.[237]

With the transfer of people and activity (mostly) dealt with, there was one remaining issue: the liquidation of the Princeton Office. Watterson, the one Princeton-based official not leaving the Secretariat with everyone else as he was a Treasury official rather than attached to the E.F.O., was tasked with liquidating what was left of the office. Arrangements for the remaining fixed assets needed to be made and, as the future of the activity and staff remained uncertain until mid-July, neither Watterson nor the League Administration had much time to consider the issue in advance. Additionally, while Watterson knew he would have one or two months after the E.F.O. transfer to address any problems, he was still not entirely sure of his responsibilities. On 20 July he outlined what he thought were the outstanding questions in a letter to Lester, suggesting: the disposal of publications left in the office; finding a home for the library the mission had accumulated; removal of furniture and Treasury records to Geneva; the return of League items loaned to the New York World Fair in 1940, alongside the repatriation of the Peace Plow to Switzerland, created for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1872, and gifted to the people of Geneva in 1878. Watterson had his list, but as an accountant his primary focus was the financial liquidation of the office; he had no instruction of what he was to do about any of these office assets.[238] It was not until 3 August, three days after the official transfer to the U.N., that Lester informed Watterson that all these assets now belonged to the new organisation. Although, as no costs had been agreed and negotiations with the U.N. had not yet happened, their transfer – like the publications issue – was distinctly more theoretical than practical.[239] Official records tell us that the E.F.O. was fully-transferred to the United Nations from 1

[237] See: LNA, 18 June 1946, memo from Stencek to Lester on the Princeton transfer and the expected effect on publications, R5813 50/43945/43262; LNA, 26 July 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow explaining that the Princeton situation has been settled but that he would prefer more notice in future, R5813 50/43945/43262; LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt regarding the new U.N. contracts for Princeton-based staff, S927 50/43945/43262.
[238] LNA, 20 July 1946, letter from Watterson to Lester, outlining a list of what he believed were the principal issues in relation to the liquidation of the Princeton office, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[239] LNA, 3 August 1946, letter from Lester to Watterson, issuing instructions on the liquidation of the Princeton Office, and the agreements already in place with the U.N., R5813 50/43945/43262.

August; archive sources reveal that this is as much a pleasant fiction as the assumption that these months were without incident.[240]

Those officials working in Princeton saw the full consequences of a lack of transfer planning up close. The office's assets were a mystery to its liquidator, Rosenborg admitted he had no sense of the plans for their work, and the personnel suffered some shabby treatment alleviated only by the persistence of their leader.[241] Despite the pandemonium of the previous weeks, Rosenborg was remarkably sanguine about the situation and his feelings towards his time at the League in a letter to Lester. The group was expected to stay in Princeton through August, and other than Watterson moving to a different office, life was expected to stay much the same.[242] Fortunately for all of those involved, things managed to resolve themselves but that it did not fall apart is a greater testament to the perseverance of the individuals involved than any strategic foresight on the part of either the United Nations or the League.

Conclusions

Purgatory can be described as a period of interminable anticipation, waiting to learn of one's fate from a higher power; for the League that higher power was the United Nations, and by the end of July 1946 the wait was at least partly over. The process had been more reactive and tumultuous in nature than many in the organisation had hoped, but a significant portion of the transfer work was complete. The number of Secretariat personnel was greatly reduced, and in little more than three months the League moved from the highs of the 21st Assembly to the lows of becoming lodgers in a palace they used to own.

During the months up to the end of July 1946 the League was forced to relinquish control over many of its affairs whilst also trying to maintain some dignity in the

[240] LNA, 1 September 1946, League of Nations Board of Liquidation: First Interim Report presented in accordance with Paragraph 9 of the Assembly Resolution of April 18th, 1946, C.83.M.83.1946., S570.
[241] LNA, 18 July 1946, letter from Rosenborg to Lester, updating the latter on the current situation regarding the Princeton group, R5813 50/43945/43262.
[242] LNA, 31 July 1946, letter from Rosenborg to Lester, in which the former explains that the work and experience of the E.F.O. group at Princeton is expected to stay much the same for at least the next three to four weeks, R5813 50/43945/43262.

process. Lester had to swallow his pride on numerous occasions during those months, especially when faced with directives he genuinely believed would have a negative effect on services offered to not just League members, but also members of the United Nations. The U.N. machine, by then in full flow if not fully formed, was able to dictate the terms on almost all matters by virtue of the power invested in it by governments. The League wielded little influence, and the areas where it was able to demonstrate some control were those where the U.N. allowed it. Constrained by the Assembly instruction to offer any and all help to the U.N. Secretariat in transfer, it effectively meant deferring to the new organisation at all times. Lester had no recourse to a higher authority; the Board of Liquidation, as an entity, was ineffective in many of these instances. It did not intercede on issues relating to the United Nations and, as events often unfolded over mere days, its infrequent presence in Geneva meant it was absent when most needed. Lester often went to Hambro and Kisch for advice but, conducted via post or sometimes cable, reaction times for urgent issues were just not fast enough to be of use.

The relationship forged between Lester and Hambro was, however, a welcome reprieve for the Secretary-General, as the Board Chairman was able to provide counsel on issues that a subordinate member of the Secretariat could not. Lester's written updates to Hambro were an opportunity to not only inform the latter of progress, but also a chance for the Secretary-General to express his more private concerns. Their connection was forged during the war, which provided a strong foundation for their continued working relationship. When the League's existence was threatened in the summer of 1940, it was Lester and Hambro who arranged a Supervisory Commission meeting in Lisbon to pass a budget for 1941. The Commission was forced to meet outside Geneva for several years, but their strategic oversight from afar ensured the organisation's survival.[243]

The link between Lester and Hambro demonstrated the importance of cooperative relationships over both these early months and throughout the closure of the League, and the consequences when they are lacking. Existing associations were the most helpful to Lester, for example with individuals like David Owen and Adriaan

[243] Lester's predecessor, Joseph Avenol, had previously refused to set a budget for 1941, without which the Secretariat would have been unable to function. James Barros's account of Avenol's tumultuous tenure remains the most comprehensive, over forty years since it was first published: Barros, *Betrayal From Within.*

Pelt. The former served in the British Civil Service until he became Jebb's deputy at the Executive Committee of the U.N. Preparatory Commission, and while the length of his relationship with Lester and the Secretariat was not long, he and Jebb were the central points of contact for the League during the initial planning stages for the new organisation. He also had a particularly friendly relationship with Lester, the two often meeting for dinner when the latter was in London.[244] Their connection was important on a number of occasions, and never more so than when Owen intervened at the last minute to resolve the employment situation of the locally recruited staff at Princeton. Pelt meanwhile was previously a member of the Secretariat – for a significant number of years at the senior rank of Director – and his understanding of the League as well as his willingness to engage with Lester and Stencek helped to ease the discomfort that accompanied their lack of control in regard to transfer. It is certainly notable that the only occasion when Lester felt able to resist the inconsistent U.N. demands was against Pelt's request to transfer Department III with only four days' notice.

Nevertheless the most important relationship during this period was that between Lester and Moderow. The latter was the most senior U.N. official in Geneva and while he and Lester had a fractious personal connection, their professional relationship was ostensibly satisfactory. It was, however, more distant than that between Lester and other members of the U.N. hierarchy, and there is no indication that the two spent significant time together, either personally or professionally. The revelation that the two interacted for the most part by letter, and often via intermediary, should have been of great concern to their superiors; the lack of personal contact guaranteed the relationship would never progress beyond the cordial. Whilst a lukewarm connection between colleagues might not be out of the ordinary, and perhaps acceptable in many workplaces, as the two most senior representatives of their organisations in Geneva, Lester and Moderow needed to be able to collaborate to address the complexity inherent in transfer. Even the frantic efforts of both men to protest the last-minute transfer of Department III activities in late July could not bring them together: they still primarily liaised in writing.[245] The disjointed interactions between the two, and between the League and U.N.

[244] LNA, 17 August 1945, letter from Owen to Lester, asking the latter if they can have dinner together when he is next in London, S565.
[245] LNA, 29 July 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow, noting that he could not bear any responsibility for the last-minute transfer should it go ahead, R5813 50/44054/43262.

Secretariats, only demonstrated how important robust rapport and the nurturing of collaborative relationships – or, at the very least, the willingness to exchange ideas face-to-face – were for the efficient transfer between organisations. Although the two men were not shouting at each other in the Palais corridors, one can only imagine what might have been achieved, and sooner, had they worked more closely.

Moderow was Lie's representative and should have been a useful resource for Lester when trying to fathom the new organisation's motives and plans. The United Nations was, however, a very new institution, and the relationships within its own Secretariat were still forming. As demonstrated by Moderow's own difficulties in receiving information from New York, the U.N. was discovering the innate problems, or potential for problems, that came with a Secretariat divided by an ocean. Moderow was only as good a liaison for the two organisations as the directives he received from New York, and without frequent updates from his superiors, he was sometimes as ill-informed as Lester. The confusion surrounding the transfer of the Geneva-based activity of the E.F.O. and Department III at the end of July was not the result of Moderow refusing to share information with Lester, but rather poor communication from New York.

If the events of these months revealed anything, it was that careful and considered planning was vital to the smooth transfer between these two organisations, even if one of those organisations had all the power in the situation. The transfer of assets was a success because planning began over six months earlier and was given the time, space, and resources required to make it happen. The Common Plan may not have had a lot of detail in the first instance, but it outlined the core elements of what would be included in asset transfer, as well as areas of responsibility for the interested parties. From this a more comprehensive and considered approach was defined and ensured that sufficient time was allocated.

With no clear timetable, and no indication from the U.N. when it would be ready to take on management of Secretariat functions and activities, it was almost impossible for the League to be proactive about other elements of transfer. Consideration of the issues was left on the backburner until the last possible moment, leaving no opportunity for any of the strategic planning which helped the asset transition progress so meticulously. Sometimes the United Nations Secretariat seemed both

blissfully unaware of, and wilfully disinterested in, the chaos its actions inflicted on the League, and it is likely its apparent indifference was the consequence of its own impending deadline; the second half of the first General Assembly, and the first to be held in New York, was scheduled for October 1946 and there was a frantic rush to ensure everything was ready for this heavily scrutinised event. To a large extent the League's attempt to control transfer during these months was a victim of the U.N.'s success; unable to properly consider the unknowable task ahead of it, the Secretariat was compelled to abandon its characteristically bureaucratic tactics. Nothing was dealt with until it was urgent, and this approach not only resulted in confusion, but also risked the efficacy with which the transfer took place. Furthermore, it disregarded the human cost of unplanned and disorganised change. The number of League employees affected was not huge, but this did not lessen the impact for those waiting to hear if they might need to move to another continent at short notice, or search for a new job with almost no warning.

Almost miraculously, despite the turmoil, most of the transfer was realised on 1 August; activities, functions, and especially assets, were assumed by the U.N. and by the beginning of August only a small collection of services remained under League control. As the second half of 1946 saw those remaining activities also become part of the new organisation, the League was slowly becoming a shell of its former self, and yet the upcoming months would also allow its leadership to regain some of the control it had lost since the foundation of the United Nations. Instead attention could now turn to the major task ahead: the liquidation of the League of Nations.

Chapter Three

A Tale of Two Cities, August to December 1946

"*Judging by the papers here it [New York] seems to have become one of the centres of world politics, all the most prominent people staying there and even the Conference of Foreign Ministers being held there…Things are pretty quiet here, although I have plenty to do.*"[246]

Letter from Valentin Stencek, in Geneva, to Seán Lester upon the latter's arrival in New York for the U.N. General Assembly, 29 October 1946.

When the League's estates were handed over to United Nations control on 1 August 1946, while some transfer and liquidation questions remained, a sense of tentative optimism emerged at the Palais des Nations. Much of the outstanding work could be completed before the year ended, and it seemed that the stressful and reactive approach to liquidation could be replaced by something calmer and more structured. Seán Lester, the League's long-suffering Secretary-General, was particularly exasperated by the chaotic events of July, but even he felt relaxed enough about the coming months to take a ten-day holiday at the start of August. Yet by the end of 1946, the cautious positivity was gone, and the organisation's Secretariat faced a lengthy list of unresolved issues with a severely depleted workforce.[247] This chapter reveals the continued impact of presentism on events, what caused the dissolution to fall behind schedule and shows that the decisions taken, and crucially those not taken, in the latter half of 1946 were instrumental in pushing the League's closure into 1947 and beyond.

The final five months of 1946 rarely feature in the scholarship addressing the League's dissolution, which has typically skipped from the 21st Assembly to the

[246] LNA, 29 October 1946, letter from Stencek to Lester, S567.
[247] The Secretariat was made up of 56 officials on 1 August, but by 1 January 1947 this number had dropped to just 20. See: LNA, 1er Août 1946, Listes des Membres du Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, S698; LNA, 1er Janvier 1947, Listes des Membres du Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, S698.

division of assets amongst member-states and the issuance of the Board of Liquidation's Final Report in September 1947. At a glance these months may seem of little consequence to the League's story, and this has unquestionably played a part in the short shrift given to the period in historiography. No major decisions were made over these months – the Board of Liquidation was not in session – the first U.N. General Assembly in New York commanded the attention of governments, and work taking place in Geneva was superficially of a low-key nature. For example, this included organising repatriation expenses for staff and purchasing glass cabinets for a new permanent exhibit at the Palais des Nations. What this chapter shows, however, is that looking at events from a surface-level perspective means important observations have been missed, as these seemingly minor undertakings and the lack of activity instead demonstrate how and why the League's closure took as long as it did.

This was a time of shifting sands for the League, as the priorities of governments and other international organisations changed, and the previously unchecked momentum driving the closure process ground to a halt. Heretofore unknown or underestimated technical problems became apparent – including the taxation of League officials based in the United States, the transfer of Pensions Funds to the I.L.O., and disagreements over the valuation of certain League assets – and the reticence to address either these or any other issues deemed low priority served to lengthen the dissolution process. In addition, this chapter further demonstrates the institutional shortcomings of the closure mechanisms put in place by the 21st Assembly, specifically the Board of Liquidation's unwieldy size and the lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, both of which combined to create barriers to timely decision-making. Furthermore, the events of the autumn of 1946 reinforce a recurrent element of this thesis, specifically how the lack of precedent for the closure of intergovernmental organisations led to the persistent mischaracterisation of the process as one that could be managed quickly and efficiently. This was made evident in the lack of strategic planning, and the willingness to accept – without question – a separation of the League's leaders from its Secretariat between New York and Geneva. The absence of leadership in the latter half of 1946 was a significant brake on progress, showing that without the physical presence and focus of decision-makers, the Secretariat officials left in Geneva could do little but wait for them to return in their ever-diminishing corner of the Palais des Nations.

The chapter begins by looking at the roughly six weeks following the Palais handover, and the continuation of the brisk pace of change that had defined the summer so far. As with those earlier months, the pressure on the United Nations to build its own institutions and Secretariat as quickly as possible meant the new organisation continued to dominate and define the transfer schedule. Furthermore this pressure, coming from outside the League, ensured momentum remained with the dissolution process in Geneva until the latter half of September. The second section charts the physical separation of the League's leadership from its Secretariat, as the U.N. General Assembly resulted in half of the Board of Liquidation and Seán Lester relocating to New York for two to three months. The geographical distance between New York and Geneva caused several problems for the organisation's closure, from the more obvious delays in communications to the less considered impact on morale.

The third part of this chapter looks at the changing priorities of the international community – including governments, the U.N., the Board of Liquidation, and even Lester – and how the consequent reduction in external pressures on the Secretariat exposed major problems inherent in the League's work to close the organisation, previously disguised by the summer's rapid changes. The momentum that drove the transfer of the League's activities and Palais services disappeared quickly once they were complete. The United Nations Secretariat was increasingly occupied with urgent work unrelated to the League, and the institution needed to develop quickly to meet its timeline for the General Assembly. The impetus did not therefore vanish into the ether but instead shifted to New York, along with the focus of the rest of the world and, with Board members unable to meet or unwilling to make decisions, there was a dearth of the leadership needed to push dissolution forward. This leads into the fourth and final section of this chapter, which looks at the changing experience of those Secretariat officials left behind in Geneva. Disregarded by their leaders and no longer holding the attention of external bodies such as the U.N. and the independent International Labour Organisation, the individuals left in Switzerland had a harsh introduction to their new reality. It became increasingly difficult to obtain the guidance they needed from senior figures, personal commitments to the League were set aside, and their own numbers diminished despite their high workload. The

positive, if bittersweet, mood that reigned supreme amongst officials during the summer, made way for a downbeat and resigned group by the time 1947 began.

The final five months of 1946 were a vital stepping-stone between the high levels of activity following the 21st Assembly, and the long-haul attempts to close the organisation in 1947, and this chapter shows how a potent combination of factors were the cause. The physical split of the Board of Liquidation – and the Secretariat – between two continents was a significant challenge to overcome, both in terms of time delays but also for the morale and motivation of those left behind. Without precedent to guide them, League members' representatives at the 21st Assembly created a framework for dissolution that was ill-equipped for the challenge. The lack of clarity around who was responsible for what also made it difficult to either adapt the framework to meet the change in circumstances or make any significant progress on liquidation. These issues were made worse by the lack of both operational and strategic planning for liquidation beyond a list of outstanding issues managed by the Board's Secretary.[248] The presentism that prevented in-depth consideration of closure over the summer was still a serious problem, however, by the autumn, it was no longer transfer issues that took precedence but instead New York and the General Assembly. There was no liquidation timetable, no prioritisation of problems, and no attempt to manage either the physical separation of Lester from the rest of the Secretariat or the nullification of the Board's decision-making powers stemming from the same geographical split. This chapter shows that when the world's focus moved away from Geneva and towards New York, all momentum driving the League's closure was lost, leaving the Secretariat to face a difficult, unknown number of months of liquidation ahead.

Summer Momentum

The weeks of August and early September saw much of the same rapid, pressurised change that characterised the earlier part of the summer, though with a

[248] Chester Purves, Secretary to the Board of Liquidation, kept a list of outstanding issues requiring Board intervention at any point in time. For example, see LNA, 26 September 1946, report by Purves entitled 'Board of Liquidation: items carried over from the July meetings', R5816.4 50/44081/43844; LNA, 11 October 1946, report by Purves entitled 'Board of Liquidation: summary list of outstanding items (revised)', R5816.4 50/44081/43844.

little less of the poor inter-organisation communication that also marred those same months. The end of July was a watershed moment for transfer between the League and the U.N.; the Palais des Nations and the rest of the Ariana Estate became part of the United Nations, alongside functions and activities including the Economic Intelligence Service, Communications and Transit, and the Library.[249] The United Nations was the key factor in driving this rapid change, which was negative for Lester and his colleagues in terms of the aforementioned stress, but also positive in providing the momentum necessary for much of the League's dissolution. The second half of the first U.N. General Assembly was scheduled to begin in October, and this deadline pushed the new organisation to establish its own secretariat as quickly as possible, and thus the outside pressures that drove the changes before 1 August carried on into the rest of the month, ensuring almost all remaining areas of League Secretariat activity were moved to U.N. control by the end of the summer.

The changes of the late summer were also facilitated by the new relationship between the Secretaries-General of both organisations: Lester and Trygve Lie. Whilst the two had communicated via correspondence previously, Lie's visit to Switzerland at the beginning of August brought the two men face-to-face, and they were almost immediately on good terms.[250] This was of course in stark contrast to Lester's sometimes difficult relationship with Włodzimierz Moderow (Director of the U.N. Office in Geneva), which reached its nadir in early August and was made all the more wearisome for the former as the U.N. officially took control of the Palais. At an official luncheon celebrating the handover and Lie's trip to Geneva at the start of the month, Lester took affront at a number of Moderow's jibes about the "outsider position" he now occupied in Geneva and even belied his typically unassuming nature when later publicly mocked by Moderow for his "emotional" viewpoint on neutrality. Lester's good relationship with Lie was all the more productive by comparison and was most likely helped, as noted in the same diary entry in which Lester recalled the disagreement with Moderow, by the U.N. Secretary-General's shared dislike of his Geneva representative. Lester wrote: "One thing to be said for

[249] The first point of the Common Plan stated "The League of Nations agrees to transfer to the United Nations, and the United Nations agrees to receive on or about August 1st, 1946…": LNA, 14 March 1946, Report by the League Supervisory Commission: Report on Discussions with the Representatives of the United Nations on Questions of the Transfer of League of Nations Assets, A.8.1946.X., S567.
[250] For examples of their correspondence in early August, see: LNA, 7 August 1946, letter from Lie to Lester, R5813 50/43874/43262; LNA, 8 August 1946, letter from Lester to Lie, R5813 50/43874/43262.

Lie; I think he will not be easily deceived by time-servers and sycophants. His Geneva representatives have been feeling this."[251]

The preceding 18 months had been humbling for Lester as he experienced a number of professional slights, from the debacle at the San Francisco Conference to the difficult months working alongside Moderow, so his new friendship with Lie was a welcome reprieve and restored some of the prestige he felt his position was owed. In letters exchanged following the handover of the Palais, Lie thanked Lester for his "kind hospitality", "constant helpfulness", and "generosity and good feeling", to which the latter responded that Lie's "spirit and personality inspire and encourage all who believe in the great work".[252] The nature of their relationship would later play into Lester's decision to attend the U.N. General Assembly as an honoured guest and, personal feelings aside, the new line of communication between the two men was a great improvement on the problems that dogged transfer practicalities during June and July.[253]

The major thrust of the late summer momentum was saved for those areas of Secretariat activity the U.N. had originally wanted to move to its control at the end of July: drug-control, health, and social questions. While that last-minute request provoked considerable consternation and stress in Geneva – including Moderow – it meant the revised transfer date of 1 September was agreed early on, allowing for at least some planning, even if it was only a matter of weeks instead of days.[254] The new organisation was not entirely prepared for the move – requesting somewhat basic information on the management of the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Drug Supervisory Body in late August – but the advanced agreement of a transfer date ensured the League's leadership could fulfil its obligations, providing a one-month notice period for officials, as well as informing governments of the

[251] Lester recounted the events of the luncheon in his diary, noting that, when Moderow suggested he had an emotional perspective on the issue of neutrality: "I was flabbergasted and said: "rubbish, what do you mean by saying something like that?" Lester's Diary, 5 August 1946, personal diary entry.
[252] LNA, 7 August 1946, letter from Lie to Lester, R5813 50/43874/43262; LNA, 8 August 1946, letter from Lester to Lie, R5813 50/43874/43262.
[253] In a personal memo, Lester noted that at a U.N. General Committee meeting of the night before, it was agreed by all participants to treat Lester (and others invited to the General Assembly) as "distinguished visitors": Lester's Diary, 29 October 1946, personal diary entry.
[254] Lester confirmed the 1 September 'moving' day in a letter to Hambro: Lester's Diary, 6 August 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro.

changes in advance.[255] The move of the Social Questions Section was the easiest of the three areas to manage – having no officials permanently attached to it since 1941 – but neither the Health Organisation nor the drug control mechanisms caused any unexpected problems from the League's perspective.[256]

These transfers meant a major portion of the Secretariat's Geneva activities were under U.N. control by the beginning of the autumn and, despite Percy Watterson's early confusion regarding the liquidation of the Princeton Office, the onward momentum meant he also effected the majority of his U.S.-based transfers to the U.N. in a matter of weeks.[257] The remaining physical assets of the Economic and Financial Organisation office in New Jersey, including furniture, equipment, and copies of League publications, all moved to the U.N. in New York on 29 August, alongside the former officials working under Ansgar Rosenborg, who had been under U.N. management since the beginning of the month.[258] Meanwhile Watterson officially remained a member of the League Secretariat until the end of October to manage the financial liquidation of the organisation's presence in the United States, moving to an office at Hunter College elsewhere in Princeton, where he continued to be assisted by Frank Aydelotte and the administration of the Institute for Advanced Study.[259] His work for the League was not over at the end of October, but his liaison with the U.N. was all but complete by the start of September.[260]

The remaining central services of the League's Secretariat also transferred to U.N. control quickly and, for the most part, quietly across August and September. The Registry and Distribution Service was the first to move on 1 September, followed by

---

[255] For example, the official communique to governments regarding the transfer of the P.C.O.B. and the Supervisory Body was issued on 26 August 1946: LNA, 26 August 1946, Transfer to the United Nations of the Activities of the League of Nations relating to the Control of Narcotic Drugs, C.L.15.1946.XI., R5813 50/44054/43262.

[256] LNA, 1 December 1946, League of Nations, Board of Liquidation Second Interim Report, C.89.M.89.1946, S923.

[257] See chapter two of this thesis for more on the E.F.O. transfer and liquidation.

[258] Details of the different elements of the Princeton Office's liquidation can be found in Watterson's first liquidation report: LNA, 3 September 1946, Board of Liquidation: League's Missions in the U.S.A, Report No. 1, R5813 50/43945/43262.

[259] Frank Aydelotte and the Princeton I.A.S. continued to show much of the same generosity and warmth towards the League at this time as they had during the war. Watterson continued to use, with their permission, the Institute's Courier Service, throughout his efforts to close the League's office there: Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, 23 August 1946, letter from Jane Richardson – Secretary to Aydelotte – to Percy Watterson confirming the latter can continue to use the courier service as needed, Director's Office: General Files: Box 38: League of Nations Correspondence Since August 1940, 70675 Princeton I.A.S. files: Aydelotte and the League.

[260] See both later in this chapter and the rest of this thesis for more on Watterson's continuing work with the League.

the Documentation and Printing Service a month later alongside the Publications Service.[261] Transferring the last of these, however, was not as easy a prospect as other areas of the Secretariat because, while it provided a central service role for the rest of the organisation, it also held a considerable number of assets in the form of copies of League publications and their associated copyrights. Whilst the transfer of these assets was agreed months earlier, the value of the publications and their inalienable rights, and thus the price to be remunerated to the League by the U.N., was a point of contention. An early figure provided by the League's Secretariat – 50,000 CHF, or approximately U.S. $165,000 in 2021 – was purposefully much lower than the publications were worth and was suggested only as a way of guaranteeing the U.N.'s agreement to the transfer, with the belief that it could be re-negotiated in the future. The U.N. however understandably bristled when the League later suggested a new value of nearly 2,000,000 CHF instead, the equivalent of circa $6.6m in 2021. Alexander Elkin, one of Moderow's Assistant Directors, expressed his frustration with the League's unwillingness to negotiate in good faith, noting in a memo that while the U.N. had shifted to talking of hundreds of thousands, "the League talked – and still seem to be thinking – of millions."[262] Nevertheless, by late September, the new organisation's attention had moved onto the impending General Assembly, and haggling over the value of the League's publications was no longer considered urgent. The momentum that so successfully guided the other transfers of August and September changed direction and the question of publications value was deemed minor enough to be set aside for the foreseeable future, ultimately waiting until 1947 when it was negotiated alongside the rest of the League's fixed assets. The outstanding issue did not affect the Service's move to U.N. management on 1 October, but while this was reported as the official transfer date in reports to members, it was not the end of the affair. It was

[261] Stencek and Elkin agreed the protocols for how these services would be transferred and used along the same lines as those drawn up for the Palais handover: LNA, 26 August 1946, memo from Elkin to Stencek, R5813 50/43874/43262. The transfer dates for the Documentation, Printing, and Publications Services Details can be found in: LNA, 1 December 1946, League of Nations, Board of Liquidation Second Interim Report, C.89.M.89.1946, S923.

[262] UNOG Archives, [exact date unknown], memo from Elkin to Moderow, G.I. 4/4 (26). The calculation of the 2021 USD equivalents for Swiss Francs in 1946/47, is done on the basis of two exchange rates. The first utilises a 1947 exchange rate for CHF into USD of 1 CHF = 0.234 USD, used by the League when calculating how the organisation's liquid assets should be allocated to members as U.N. credits: LNA, 4 August 1946, letter from Lester to Lie with details of U.N. members entitled to participate in the distribution of the League's assets, R5812 50/43672/43262. The second calculation uses: Williamson, Samuel H., 'Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past' at www.measuringworth.com (retrieved 4 December 2021).

also not the last time the Board's formal reporting to members would obscure and obfuscate the complications of closure.[263]

Asset valuations aside, by the start of October, all the Secretariat's technical activities had moved to U.N. management. The vast majority of the League's assets – or, at least, those the United Nations was immediately concerned with – had also been transferred to U.N. control, but once these had been effected the pressure to deliver the outstanding areas began to wane, and the first signs of a slow-down were visible. Despite the U.N. taking over the Palais on 1 August, they still had not taken ownership of all the associated utilities by mid-October, and did not seem to be in a rush to do so.[264] Other League assets, specifically a number of funds the U.N. had tentatively agreed to manage in future, were shelved for later consideration, presaging a wider trend that would characterise the following months and ultimately thwart efforts to close the organisation as quickly as possible.[265] Without the external pressures driving progress, the once out-of-control momentum that had enthusiastically realised the decisions of both the U.N. General Assembly and the League Assembly during the summer had finally slowed to a crawl.

An Ocean Away

At its tenth meeting in late July, the Board of Liquidation noted that it would not be in session again for some time due to the scheduled U.N. General Assembly in the coming autumn.[266] Whilst it was not the first time representatives to the new organisation would gather in person, it was the second half of the first Assembly, the first meeting to take place in New York, and the first since the U.N. Secretariat had

[263] For the reasoning behind the original low value of 50,000 CHF and the debates between Moderow and Lester, see: LNA, 2 September 1946, personal memo written by Lester regarding his conversations with Moderow, S567; LNA, 6 September 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro regarding the original 50,000 CHF value assigned to publications, S567.
[264] Delays to these transfers were significant enough to cause Elkin to apologise to Stencek in October: LNA, 12 October 1946, memo from Elkin to Stencek, R5502 18B/43967/38729.
[265] Just some of the Funds earmarked for transfer to the U.N. but not moved until 1947 were the Léon Bernard Fund, the Darling Foundation, and the proceeds of the Wateler Peace Prize: LNA, 18 December 1946, cable from Lester to Pelt regarding the long-awaited U.N. decision on the Darling Foundation and the Léon Bernard Fund, R6115 8A/13512/13060.
[266] Board members expressed some concerns about the inability to reach quorum during the U.N. General Assembly, suggesting the possibility of either liaising by correspondence or flying a Europe-based Board member to New York, but no decisions were made: LNA, 24 July 1946, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Tenth Meeting, B.L./P.V.10, S569.

been established. With this in mind, almost half of the Board of Liquidation's members – now counting Seymour Jacklin who, having left the League Secretariat on 31 July, officially became a member of the group from 1 August – left Europe to attend the Assembly, including both Carl Hambro and Cecil Kisch, the Chair and Vice-Chair respectively.[267] The opportunity to travel to New York also proved an irresistible lure for Lester, who was invited by Trygve Lie when they met at the beginning of August, leaving behind Valentin Stencek and the rest of what remained of the Secretariat at an increasingly lonely Palais.[268]

New York is almost 4,000 miles from Geneva, and the geographical separation between the League's Secretariat and its most senior leaders created a number of obstacles to the organisation's dissolution. First was the time and energy spent organising the logistics for Lester's trip, and while the U.N. assisted in regard to the Secretary-General's accommodation, Percy Watterson – still working from Hunter College in Princeton – spent a not-insignificant portion of his time in September and October making preparations for Lester's trip.[269] He opened several bank accounts in New York, arranged for League publications to be available should Lester need them, and generally acted as a central liaison point for Lester and Cosette Nonin – Lester's Secretary – during their stay in the United States. Even after Watterson left the Secretariat at the end of October, having taken up a new role in the Food and Agriculture Organisation in Washington D.C., he continued in this liaison role until the Secretary-General returned to Geneva in December.[270] Nonetheless, even though Lester and Nonin's trip diverted precious resources away from closure work, the Secretariat in Geneva was at least able to keep in contact with the two once they arrived in the United States. The members of the Board of Liquidation, although

---

[267] Carl Hambro, Cecil Kisch, Seymour Jacklin, and Adolfo Costa du Rels, were all in New York for the U.N. General Assembly, although Kisch did leave proceedings earlier than the others at the start of November. This left Atul Chatterjee, Daniel Secrétan, Emile Charvériat, F.T. Cheng, and Jaromír Kopecky in Europe; an almost even split of members between the North American and European continents. For details of Kisch's earlier departure, see: LNA, [No date], letter from Kisch to Hambro confirming the latter's imminent departure, S567.

[268] Lester recounted Lie's invitation to New York in a letter to Hambro: Lester's Diary, 6 August, letter from Lester to Hambro. He later confirmed his decision to attend in another letter to Hambro two weeks later: LNA, 22 August 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S567.

[269] LNA, 30 August 1946, letter from Hill to Lester requesting details of the latter's stay in New York in order to book accommodation for him, S567.

[270] There are numerous examples of Watterson's logistics work preparing for Lester's trip: LNA, 9 September 1946, letter from Cosette Nonin to Watterson requesting the latter's assistance with documents, S567; LNA, 3 October 1946, letter from G.S. Stephenson, Assistant Treasurer at the Bankers Trust Company in New York, to Watterson, confirming establishment of a new account in Lester's name, S567; LNA, 23 December 1946, letter from Watterson to Nonin regarding outstanding issues on Lester's U.S. bank account, S567.

granted international civil servant status via their positions, were not full-time Secretariat officials and were under no obligation to keep the League informed of their whereabouts. Carl Hambro, the Board Chairman, spent nearly four months away from Europe during this period, leaving Norway in mid-September and not returning until the final days of 1946.[271] He also neglected to leave his New York address with officials before his departure, leaving Chester Purves – the Board of Liquidation Secretary – with no means of contacting the Chair until he was able to glean the information from Lester when the latter arrived in the U.S. almost a month later.[272] Representatives at the 21st Assembly in April 1946 could not have anticipated the impact of a U.N. General Assembly held in North America on its part-time Geneva-based Board, but the same was not true for the League leadership. Both the Secretariat and Board members were aware at least two months in advance that some of the latter would be away from Europe during the autumn, but the potentially negative impact of this absence was not given any further consideration beyond a vague commitment to liaise via correspondence if needed.[273] International governance, even during the days of the U.N. Preparatory Commission, had been traditionally administered from Europe, and the League had simply not encountered a transatlantic split in its leadership before. There was a genuine underestimation of the effect this would have, which, combined with the lack of liquidation precedent, left the League unprepared for the challenges ahead.

The major problems brought about by the physical distance between New York and Geneva were the travel and communications delays. Travel across the Atlantic took an average of seven days, although this could of course be lengthened by weather problems, and the time to and from European ports also needed to be factored in.[274] Lester left Geneva on 14 October, spending just under ten days travelling westwards across Europe and then the Atlantic, before embarking upon his return

---

[271] We do not have an exact date for Hambro's departure from Oslo, although a telegram to Chester Purves, dated 14 September 1946, confirmed he had just left Europe: LNA, 14 September 1946, [unknown author], cable to Purves, R5816.3 50/43953/43844. Hambro departed New York on 21 December 1946: LNA, 20 December 1946, telegram from Hambro to Lester, R5816.4 50/44101/43844.
[272] LNA, 24 October 1946, telegram from Purves to Lester, requesting Hambro's New York address, R5816.3 50/43953/43844.
[273] LNA, 24 July 1946, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Tenth Meeting B.L./P.V.10, S569.
[274] Atlantic crossing time data comes from: Hugill, Peter J., *World Trade Since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism* (Baltimore, 1995), p. 128; Stopford, Martin, *Maritime Economics*, Third Edition (London, 2008).

on 29 November, this time passing nearly two weeks on his journey.[275] Approximately twenty days of travelling might not have seemed a great deal of time, but in addition to the ten days of holiday already taken by Lester in August, this meant he was physically away from his office and uncontactable for a full month during the latter half of 1946.[276]

Lester and Stencek did take great pains to keep each other updated as much as possible whilst the former was in New York, usually in the form of ad hoc lengthy letters every week or ten days, but conducting business via correspondence naturally added delays to proceedings.[277] Although cables could be used to send urgent information, they were intrinsically limited in terms of the level of detail that could be included, and longer documents and letters had to be sent via more conventional means. For instance, the minutes of an informal meeting between Hambro, Seymour Jacklin, Adolfo Costa du Rels, and Lester, held in New York on 29 October, were not issued to the rest of the Board for another five weeks due to drafts and approvals having to make their way back and forth across an ocean before the document could be distributed.[278] Furthermore, communicating via letter or cable was simply not as productive as meeting face-to-face, which allowed for the exchange of information on a much more rapid basis, as well as the generation of ideas that comes from being in a room with people working on the same problem. The League was also not alone in underestimating the perils of this ocean-sized complication: the U.N. was having its own issues with communications between New York and Geneva. In September 1946, Moderow took the unusual step of bringing his concerns to both Adriaan Pelt and Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer at headquarters, noting that the system "would not, at the moment, appear to be working as smoothly as might be hoped." Documents were somehow going missing

[275] Lester left on 14 October before sending confirmation of his arrival to Stencek on 24 October. His return passage left on 29 November, and he was back in Geneva by 10 December: LNA, 11 October 1946, letter from Lester to Lloyds and National Provincial Bank London, confirming the former's absence from 14 October, R5299 17/3934/3933; LNA, 24 October 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek confirming the former's arrival in the U.S., S567; LNA, 21 November 1946, letter from F.J. Saunders of the U.N. Transportation Services to Lester, confirming details of the latter's tickets for the Queen Elizabeth departing on 29 November, S567; LNA, 10 December 1946, letter from Lester (in Geneva) to Terence Maxwell regarding the Staff Pensions Fund, S568.
[276] LNA, 22 August 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro confirming the former's "ten days leave", S567.
[277] One example of a lengthy update to Stencek is a letter he sent on 1 November, covering a number of different topics across three pages: LNA, 1 November 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek, S567.
[278] The meeting minutes were eventually issued as a Board of Liquidation document on 6 December: LNA, 6 December 1946, Board of Liquidation document titled Notes on an Informal Meeting held in New York on October 29th, 1946, B.L.68, S568.

in transit, and even cables – which should have been more reliable – seemed to be subject to delay, with a lag of up to a week in some cases.[279]

The Secretariat's lack of face-to-face interaction also affected the Board of Liquidation, as the physical division of the group meant they were unable to hold an official meeting for the rest of 1946. Across the first set of Board meetings in April and May, the group agreed terms of reference which defined the quorum for decision-making as five members.[280] With four of the Board – including both the Chair and Vice-Chair – in North America, and the other five scattered across Europe, holding a full meeting was almost impossible. There was some early hope that the Secretariat might be able to bring one of the European members over to the United States to reach quorum but the diversion of resources required to put the logistics in place, as well as an estimated cost of almost 67,000 CHF, meant the possibility was dismissed early on.[281] The closest the group came to a meeting during these months was an informal gathering, held at the end of October with Hambro, Jacklin, and Costa du Rels, but without quorum, authoritative decision-making was impossible, and it was the only time they met as a group during their respective months in the U.S.[282] Members based in Europe were slightly more concerned by the lack of Board meetings – Jaromír Kopecky wrote to both Lester and Stencek on several occasions to query the date of the next session, not realising that many of his colleagues were still in North America – but their discomfiture was never serious enough to warrant more than gentle reassurance from Stencek or Purves that the group would meet again as soon as possible.[283] Ultimately, no Board meetings for over six months meant no decision-making or high-level direction at a time when, dealing with unanticipated issues, the Secretariat needed its input.

---

[279] United Nations Archive, 21 September 1946, memo from Moderow to Pelt and Ranshofen-Wertheimer, G.V 4/1/114.
[280] LNA, 1 May 1946, Board of Liquidation Rules of Procedure, B.L.3.(1), S570.
[281] In a document prepared by Ernest Haury, the costs of holding a 6-day Board meeting in New York – including travel expenses and subsistence allowance for both Board members and Secretariat officials – came to a total of 66,624 CHF: LNA, 19 September 1946, report prepared by E.H. Haury entitled 'Board of Liquidation: Meeting in New York (November 1946: 6 days), Estimated Cost', R5816.4 50/44081/43844. Lester later confirmed the impossibility of a meeting in letters to both Kopecky and Kisch: LNA, 1 November 1946, letter from Lester to Jaromír Kopecky, S567; LNA, 5 November 1946, letter from Lester to Kisch, S567.
[282] LNA, 1 November 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek updating the latter on the unofficial Board meeting, S567.
[283] For example: LNA, 18 November 1946, letter from Kopecky to Purves regarding the next Board of Liquidation meeting, R5816.4 50/44101/43844.

The physical distance between the League's decision-makers and the organisation's Secretariat was a serious obstacle to the closure process, diverting resources to activities unrelated to the dissolution, and causing delays in both everyday business and major decision-making. One major illustration of this centred on the production of the Board's Second Interim Report for members, which was supposed to be issued to governments on 1 December 1946 as per 21st Assembly guidelines.[284] Although the final document was released with this official publication date, the League's Archives reveal it was heavily delayed due to both a lack of progress in liquidation and its forced completion via correspondence across the Atlantic, ensuring it was still in draft stages throughout December and not actually distributed to members until late January 1947.[285] The 1 December publication date stayed on the document only because the Board of Liquidation – and historically the League as an institution – was intrinsically concerned with its performance and reputation with governments, and it was easier to change the date on a report than openly admit the dispersion of leadership had caused delays.[286] Yet the 4,000 miles of ocean represented more than just a physical separation to be overcome, it also signified an overall shift in the international community's gaze, which was no longer fixed on Europe.

Priorities

Most of the League's work between the end of the 21st Assembly and the handover of the Palais to the United Nations was driven by the latter organisation, resulting in a chaotic effort to transfer numerous Secretariat activities in a brief period of time. The 1 August handover and transfers of August and September did not bring an end to the influence of the U.N. though. The new organisation's agenda remained as relevant as ever, although this time the impact was less direct, as the U.N. Secretariat's focus moved away from the League, taking with it the attention of those who might otherwise have been engaged with the liquidation in Geneva. The

[284] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, p. 282.
[285] LNA, 1 December 1946, League of Nations, Board of Liquidation Second Interim Report, C.89.M.89.1946 S923; LNA, 14 November 1946, letter from Purves to Daniel Secrétan in which the former explains the second report "will contain only a bare recital of events that have taken place since the last Report", R5816.3 50/44023/43844.
[286] Chapter four of this thesis examines this in greater detail.

physical distance between the Secretariat and its leadership already detailed above caused obvious problems for the closure process, but the psychological distance between the same groups had just as much, if not more, of a negative impact.

Lester made the decision to travel to New York upon his return from leave in mid-August 1946, but we can only speculate about why he chose to accept the invitation. He had a good relationship with Lie and noted to Hambro that the offer was also "of a certain semi-political interest in the history of the two organizations", yet he also claimed to be disinclined towards public ceremony and ultimately spent very little time at General Assembly proceedings whilst in the U.S.[287] One might surmise that he wished to remain physically close to the Board Chairman to ensure efficient management of the closure process, but there is little evidence for this other than a passing mention in an August letter to Hambro when he wrote: "I do not know how long I really can stay but it may be possible for us to do something there in relation to the Liquidation Board."[288] There was also an appeal to spending some time away from the claustrophobia of Geneva for Lester; it was an opportunity to work with the U.N. on something new, as well as a chance to see friends and colleagues after a long separation. His personal and professional struggles during the war are well-documented, and the immediate post-war period was hectic as governments' attention returned to the League and planning for the new organisation reached fever pitch, so his decision to accept Lie's proposal immediately after returning from his August holiday suggested a desire to get away from it all for a few more months. Lester certainly remarked in a letter to Stencek in November that he was preferring to spend his time working on matters with their mutual friend and former Secretariat colleague, Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer, and he enjoyed the opportunity to socialise with old friends such as Manley Hudson and Arthur Sweetser.[289]

Despite some early concerns that Lester might be treated to the same disdain he received in San Francisco in the spring of 1945, the League's Secretary-General was invited to New York as a respected dignitary, which came with a standing and

---

[287] In a personal letter to Arthur Sweetser, Lester admitted to avoiding going to Lake Success wherever possible, noting "I do not like hanging round there…". LNA, 18 November 1946, letter from Lester to Sweetser, S567. Also see: Lester's Diary, 6 August 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro.
[288] LNA, 22 August 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S567.
[289] LNA, 5 November 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek, S567. LNA, 18 November 1946, letter from Lester to Sweetser in which he recalls a trip to see Hudson, S567; LNA, 22 November 1946, telegram from Lester to Sweetser confirming dinner plans, S567.

profile he had not experienced on a wider scale for some time.[290] Whilst he had occupied the most senior position in the Secretariat for over six years, his experience of the post had been as either the beleaguered leader of a small wartime workforce or as the junior partner in negotiations with the U.N. Whilst his absence was a hindrance to his Palais colleagues, travelling to New York was an opportunity for the former journalist, politician, and diplomat to be at the centre of building something positive, away from the thankless job of dissolution.

Nevertheless, Lester was not the only senior League figure to have his attention drawn away from the organisation after the summer. As previously mentioned, the 21st Assembly decided that – like members of the Supervisory Commission before it – acting as a Board of Liquidation member was not a full-time position, and most members managed their Board responsibilities in addition to their everyday roles. For example, the four members attendant in New York for the U.N. General Assembly – Carl Hambro, Cecil Kisch, Seymour Jacklin, and Adolfo Costa du Rels – were all present as representatives, either in an official or unofficial capacity, of their respective governments. They were not there to formally represent the League or its interests, and were almost exclusively occupied with their governmental engagements whilst the General Assembly was in session.[291] Geneva was 'out of sight, out of mind', and while the League's closure remained of concern to the group, it was simply not as important at that time as the successful launch of the United Nations. Resultantly, even though it is difficult to be definitive about the Secretary-General's motives for travelling, Lester's attendance in New York was partly beneficial in ensuring the League remained present in the minds of those Board members for at least some of the time.

The Secretary-General was particularly concerned about the focus of Seymour Jacklin, with whom he had had a particularly fractious relationship over the past twelve months.[292] The former League Treasurer and Deputy Secretary-General had only recently become a Board member, but Lester found it almost impossible to get

---

[290] Martin Hill wrote to Lester in early October as he was concerned Lie had not gained U.S.S.R. approval for Lester's visit to the General Assembly and, while he was not convinced of it, he was worried there might be a repeat of the events of San Francisco: Lester's Diary, 7 October 1946, letter from Hill to Lester.
[291] LNA, 1 November 1946, letter from Lester to Kopecky confirming the General Assembly delegate status of Hambro, Kisch, and Jacklin, S567.
[292] See chapter two for more details of the Jacklin-Lester relationship.

Jacklin to respond to letters, let alone speak to in person. In a letter to Cecil Kisch in early November, Lester wrote of his impression of Jacklin during a recent meeting: "His attitude struck me as uninterested, critical and still resentful…".[293] The Secretary-General had not supported the plan to add Jacklin to the Board in the first place – the move left the Treasury without leadership during liquidation – and the South African's busy schedule only made achieving quorum all the more difficult for a group Lester already felt was too large to work effectively.[294]

It was to be expected then that Lester noted, in a letter to Sweetser, that he was having trouble getting the Board to focus on League issues.[295] Unfortunately for the Secretary-General and those trying to resolve some of the problems arising from closure, even when they were able to interest Board members, the latter wanted to focus on lower-priority issues. An on-going U.S. income tax case involving former Permanent Court of International Justice Judge Manley Hudson continued to take up valuable time, despite the matter having been discussed, and supposedly resolved, at previous Board meetings, as did a disagreement with Alexander Loveday, the former Director of the E.F.O. and ranking member of the Secretariat in the United States during the war.[296] The latter centred on Loveday's furniture – still stored at the Palais des Nations – and while similar arrangements for other former officials were rightly managed by more junior Secretariat colleagues, Board members involved themselves in Loveday's case. The more important the figure, such as a former P.C.I.J. Judge or a former Secretariat Director, and the closer the personal friendships between them and Board members, the more likely it was the latter would spend precious time on the case.[297] Perhaps it is not surprising that more powerful individuals would receive preferential treatment by the Board, but with half of its members so busy in New York, the more time spent on relatively inconsequential questions was less time spent on serious issues delaying liquidation.

---

[293] Lester complained most often – in regard to Jacklin – to Cecil Kisch: LNA, 5 November 1946, letter from Lester to Kisch, S567.
[294] Lester expressed his concerns about the unwieldy size of the Board in a letter to Hambro: LNA, 10 September 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S567.
[295] LNA, 18 November 1946, letter from Lester to Sweetser, S567.
[296] See: LNA, 17 July 1946, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Sixth Meeting B.L./P.V.6, S569; LNA, 26 July 1946, Board of Liquidation document titled Claim of Manley Hudson to relief from U.S. income tax on arrears of salary B.L.45(c), S569; LNA, 3 December 1946, letter from Hambro to Lester regarding Hudson's income tax claims, S567.
[297] LNA, 27 December 1946, letter from Stencek to Loveday, R5276 17/40603/1371.

All this exposed a fundamental problem at the heart of the Board: a misconception of what liquidation involved, and the complexities inherent within. The group was aware of the dominant problems in the autumn of 1946, but no action was taken to address them. The Secretariat in Geneva continued to produce Board of Liquidation documents and fortnightly progress reports whilst members were away from Switzerland, yet there is little evidence these were acted upon or followed up.[298] With no history or examples to draw upon, there was a fundamental misunderstanding of how long some issues would take to resolve, leading to recurrent dismissals of their urgency. The predominant approach was to propose delaying discussion until the next Board meeting – unlikely to take place until February 1947 – reflecting the genuine belief that matters could be dealt with in a handful of meetings, despite all the evidence from the liquidation experience thus far suggesting that the resolutions they hoped for could not be achieved quickly or without controversy in some arena or another.

Several major problems surfaced during the autumn, none of which were addressed by the Board of Liquidation. The transfer of the Palais des Nations and its associated assets was settled in an agreement dated 31 July, but a key component of the move to U.N. ownership remained outstanding: the price the new organisation would pay the League for the privilege. An outline schedule was included in the Common Plan agreed at the start of the year, but there was disagreement between the two secretariats as to whether this total was final and, if not, what the value should reflect.[299] Lester argued the final figure should represent the full cost price of the buildings, taking improvement works and the result of as-yet unresolved arbitration cases into account. The U.N. meanwhile wanted to use the value outlined in the Common Plan, although this figure, as was discovered by Stencek some months after it was first documented, was not accurate when produced in early 1946. Erroneously, the original value used in the Common Plan was one produced for the end of 1944 as opposed to 1945 and, crucially for the negotiations with the U.N., a footnote to the agreement – which would have noted that the figures were

[298] Over twenty Board of Liquidation documents were produced across this period, plus a further seven Secretariat progress reports. For two examples, see: LNA, 15 October 1946, Board of Liquidation: Eighth Fortnightly Progress Report, B.L./F.P.R.8, S923; LNA, 21 November 1946, Board of Liquidation document titled Disposal of the Surplus in respect of the Financial Year 1945, B.L.66, S569.
[299] LNA, 14 March 1946, Supervisory Commissions document titled Report on Discussions with the Representatives of the United Nations on Questions of the Transfer of League of Nations Assets A.8.1946.X, S567.

subject to further discussion – was accidentally omitted, leaving the League at a disadvantage.[300] Meanwhile Board members, occupying more senior diplomatic roles that would have allowed them to intervene in the dispute, continued with their unexplained decision to remain outside negotiations with the U.N. The same was true for the transfer of the Staff Pensions Fund from the League to the International Labour Organisation, which was initially considered a *fait accompli* at the proceedings of the 21st Assembly. Unfortunately the I.L.O. had not yet given its approval to the transfer and, along with problems relating to the Fund's holdings, it became increasingly clear the organisation was in no hurry to take on the responsibility.[301] The I.L.O. was no longer, in practice at least, subject to League control, and it had no reason to submit to conditions it found unfavourable.[302] Early pressure to initiate negotiations from the League's Board would have been useful during the autumn months, but its absence relegated what would become contentious discussions to 1947.

The final major issue overlooked by the Board over these months, and the one which would ultimately push the completion of League business into 1948, was the on-going debate with the U.S. Treasury Department over the taxation of League officials based in the United States during the war. A legal test case, separate from that of Manley Hudson and instead involving former E.F.O. official John Henry Chapman, was in the process of being initiated on the League's behalf in the States, but there was wariness on the part of Geneva officials when they learnt more about the proceedings. Émile Giraud, the League's legal advisor and a member of the Secretariat for nearly twenty years, explicitly stated that the case was a lost cause and should not be pursued, and yet his advice was completely ignored.[303] Seymour Jacklin felt the same way but Lester, upon learning of the former Treasurer's opinion, did nothing to alter the Secretariat's approach to the issue or inform other

[300] Stencek provided a detailed breakdown of the negotiations in a letter to Lester in early November: LNA, 7 November 1946, letter from Stencek to Lester, R5813 50/43874/43262.
[301] The transfer of the Staff Pensions Fund is covered in chapter four.
[302] LNA, 14 December 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro regarding the I.L.O. / Pensions Fund situation, S567.
[303] Giraud prefaced a larger memo on the matter with a note to Lester, in which he wrote "The claim, to my mind, has no legal ground and the suit will be lost." LNA, 22 October 1946, note from Giraud to Lester, S567; LNA, 22 October 1946, memo by Giraud titled 'Is there a legal basis for the claim that the salaries of the League of Nations officials who have exercised their functions in the U.S.A. should be exempted from taxation?', S567.

Board members, ensuring any opposition to pursuance of the case was quietly kerbed.[304]

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the European-based members of the Board were slightly more proactive in pushing for a meeting in the latter half of 1946, but they brought their concerns to Lester or Purves rather than Hambro, and this raised important questions about the relationship between, and respective responsibilities of, the Secretary-General and the Board.[305] The relationship between the Board and the Secretariat was ambiguous; there was a distinct lack of definition as to who was ultimately responsible for delivering liquidation, and what power Lester had, if any, to force the Board into action. The group was initially designed to function much as the Supervisory Commission had done during the late 1930s and during the war i.e. as a proxy for the League Assembly, but how the Secretariat – and specifically the Secretary-General – was supposed to liaise with the group was unclear.[306] Ultimately Lester chose to take a more subservient position, meaning he felt unable to make strategic decisions independently, nor press the Board to make those decisions in his stead. Yet, despite knowing this set-up would suffer while the General Assembly was in session, neither the Board nor the Secretariat believed the situation called for a remedy, either in advance or during the New York-based proceedings. This created a void of decision-making for several months during the closure, made all the more prominent by the opportunity for progress that came with the relative calm following the transfer of activities and functions to the U.N.

This was the first time an organisation like the League had closed, and while the spring and summer months of 1946 were dominated by an almost manic drive to enact dissolution as quickly as possible, the autumn months exposed a significant problem at the heart of the whole endeavour: there was no plan. The United Nations, as an organisation, was unprepared for the rapid establishment of its

---

[304] The background, progression, and outcomes of this lawsuit are covered in more detail in both chapters four and five of this thesis. See also: LNA, 19 November 1946, Lester personal note on conversation between himself and Jacklin, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[305] LNA, 18 November 1946, letter from Kopecky to Purves regarding the next Board of Liquidation meeting, R5816.4 50/44101/43844; LNA, 10 December 1946, handwritten letter from Atul Chatterjee to Lester regarding the next Board of Liquidation meeting, S567.
[306] The outcomes of the 21st Assembly were not clear on the relationship between the Board and the Secretariat. The dissolution resolution was explicit as to the power of the Board to replace the Secretary-General should the latter be unable or unwilling to carry out his duties, but not vice versa: LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly,* pp. 269-272.

Secretariat, but it knew what it wanted to achieve and when.[307] So while the external impetus of the U.N. helped drive the work of those early months, when the transfers were complete – when the new organisation had secured what it needed from its predecessor – it became all too obvious that the overwhelming pressure on the League's Secretariat during the spring and summer meant it had been unable to think strategically about its own objectives or schedule. Unfortunately, however, even once the U.N. demands on League Secretariat time dissipated in September and October 1946, the urgency of the General Assembly and its demands on many of the League's leaders – Hambro, Kisch, Lester, Jacklin – meant the organisation's closure continued to be a victim of presentism.

Without the driving force of the Board of Liquidation's strategic guidance, there was a complete lack of internal momentum in the Secretariat. Only the most pressing and urgent of issues were advanced during these months, and these were only considered as such because they were matters concerning external stakeholders. The Board's Second Interim Report was cobbled together in a rapid and perfunctory fashion through correspondence between Chester Purves and other Board members. The group acknowledged there was little to report in the way of progress and, as already mentioned, the geographical distance and lack of initial Board input meant the document was still issued over a month late.[308] The only other matter settled by the Board over these months was another driven by a deadline set by members: the production of a budget for 1947. However, like the interim report, it was drawn up at the last-minute, was only one page in length, and covered just three months in order to appease both governments and the members of the Board who continued to believe that a budget would not be required beyond the first quarter of the next year.[309]

By the end of 1946, the League's Secretariat still had no plan for delivering dissolution beyond Purves's list of outstanding Board agenda items, no deadlines other than an arbitrary completion date of the end of March 1947, and no means of

[307] See chapter two for more details on the rush to build the U.N. Secretariat.
[308] For an example of the back-and-forth regarding the report into January, see Purves's cable to Hambro in January: LNA, 3 January 1947, cable from Purves to Hambro regarding edits to the Second Interim Report, R5816.3 50/44023/43844. See also LNA, 1 December 1946, League of Nations, Board of Liquidation Second Interim Report, C.89.M.89.1946, S923.
[309] Lester outlined some of his concerns with the 1947 budget in a letter to Kisch in November: LNA, 19 November 1946, letter from Lester to Kisch, R5353 17/44093/44093.

making any decisions or managing progress without the Board of Liquidation.[310] Over the summer the Secretariat had been drowning in poorly-planned requests for assistance from the U.N., but by the time the leaves were falling in Geneva, the League's own ill-preparedness was at the forefront. With its leadership absent, those remaining in the Swiss city found themselves in an unenviable position.

Empty Spaces

While Lester was away from Geneva, Valentin Stencek, Director of Personnel and Internal Administration, was effectively left in charge of the Secretariat on a day-to-day basis, as well as continuing to carry out his responsibilities as the unofficial operations chief for the organisation.[311] He was overwhelmingly busy throughout this period, not because the League was making great progress with dissolution, but because there were fewer and fewer resources available to him, and there was a copious amount of work to be done at both a strategic and operational level. As an example, a large portion of Stencek's time over these months was consumed by efforts to remove furniture from the Palais des Nations belonging to Secretariat officials, both former and current. Staff had been allowed to store personal belongings at the Palais in the early 1940s as a result of the logistical problems caused by wartime. Upon termination of officials' contracts, Secretariat regulations granted them reimbursement for removing their items back to their home countries but, while the League was more than happy to pay these costs, the physical removals arrangements had to be made by the staff in question. By October 1946 there were 122 removals cases outstanding, over sixty of which still had furniture lots stored at the Palais. Deadlines for their removal were regularly pushed back, despite the buildings no longer even being in the control of the League, and Stencek bore the brunt of organising new procedures, contacting officials, and breaking the news of further delays to the U.N. Secretariat.[312] Indeed there were very few matters he was not involved with to some degree or another, from liaising with Moderow on outstanding issues relating to transfer of the Palais, organising repatriation benefits

[310] LNA, 11 October 1946, Summary List of Outstanding Items for the Board of Liquidation, produced by Chester Purves, R5816.4 50/44081/43844.
[311] LNA, 11 October 1946, letter from Lester to the manager of the Lloyds and National Provincial Bank in London, R5299 17/3934/3933.
[312] For details of Stencek's work in this area, see his update for Lester in mid-October: LNA, 11 October 1946, letter from Stencek to Lester on the staff furniture situation, S567.

for former officials, and even approving the purchase of a garden hose for the New Delhi Office.[313]

The former Austro-Hungarian civil servant was not known for personal candour or small talk in his correspondence – if anything, he was quite formal – but he obviously cared about those in his charge. When planning the transfer of the drug control functions in August, Stencek went out of his way to ensure a new position in the League Treasury for Evelyn Curry, then an official with the Opium Section. Curry had previously been part of the Secretariat contingent based in Washington D.C., but personal clashes with Léon Steinig, the Secretary to the Permanent Central Opium Board, forced her to move back to Geneva and she refused to work with the Austrian in future. Not wanting to lose an individual as talented and experienced as Curry, Stencek suggested the lateral move to the Treasury to help the League's resource issues, as well as keeping Curry employed until she received an offer of a new position from the United Nations, away from Steinig. Stencek was under no obligation to make any such arrangements but did so out of the duty of care he felt for his colleagues, especially one who had already suffered in a Secretariat role.[314]

Stencek was devoutly committed to his work, but he was not immune to the frustration growing in the League offices. He took the rare step of complaining to Lester in a letter in November regarding the lack of communication on the U.S. income tax issues, describing the situation as "rather embarrassing" and that he felt "quite incompetent to give any advice as to what should be done."[315] Chester Purves, managing his increasingly-long list of issues for the Board to address upon its reconvening, also expressed his disappointment at the lack of headway in letters to both Lester and Kisch, telling the latter that there was "very little progress to report", and that the Board's second report to members would be "even more jejune"

---

[313] LNA, 4 October 1946, letter from Stencek to Kamal Kumar, head of the New Delhi Office, regarding the reimbursement of the purchase of a length of garden hose, R5353 17/43613/43553.
[314] It is unclear exactly what caused the professional relationship between Curry and Steinig to break down from 1943 onwards, but from letters exchanged in early 1945 it was clear that Curry's position in the U.S. had become untenable, and that this was due to Steinig's attitude rather than Curry herself. The situation was so bad in fact that Curry requested either a transfer back to Europe or for the acceptance of her resignation, the former of which was granted. See: LNA, 26 February 1945, letter from Evelyn Curry to Loveday, S750; LNA, 22 March 1945, letter from Bertil Renborg to Lester, S750. Stencek later wrote to Renborg, head of the Drug Control Service, in early August 1946, suggesting Curry's move to the Treasury to 'prop up' that department, as well as preventing her from having to work alongside Steinig again: LNA, 9 August 1946, letter from Stencek to Renborg, S750.
[315] LNA, 11 November 1946, letter from Stencek to Lester, S567.

than the previous one as a result, adding that the whole endeavour was "rather disconcerting".[316] Both men and their colleagues had, in effect, been temporarily forsaken by their senior leadership, and not even the famous Geneva espirit de corps was immune to disillusionment.

Those left in Geneva were not a homogenous group, and like any workforce they were a collection of individuals with individual concerns. There was an obvious bond and camaraderie between them, most evident in their commitment to the shrinking organisation, but they were not without their disagreements or conflicts. Many of the Secretariat's female officials – who constituted a third of its numbers at the start of August 1946 but over half by the following January – had, as their more senior male colleagues left the organisation, taken on more responsibilities and work beyond their often junior ranks.[317] Take the example of Constance Harris, one of the longest-serving Secretariat officials, who joined the League in 1919 as a stenographer, acted as the Secretary of the Central Section from 1933, was then entrusted with the work of the Social Questions Section from 1941, before becoming the Acting Head of the Personnel Office following Henri Vilatte's departure in 1946.[318] When she finally left the Secretariat in August 1947, the high regard in which she was held and her varied career were reflected in a letter from Lester: "That you are entitled to feel satisfaction at the way in which you have always performed your duties is amply attested by your record, from which it is evident that the excellence of the work you have done is matched only by the variety of its character."[319]

The increased workload and responsibilities of officials were often acknowledged by the League's leadership, and much appreciated as resources became thin on the ground, but requests for promotions and salary increases were refused time and time again. Evelyn Curry, so well-respected by Stencek that he acquired a new role for her in August 1946, was recommended for promotion to the Intermediate Class

---

[316] See: LNA, 11 November 1946, letter from Purves to Lester, R5816.3 50/44023/43844; LNA, 11 November 1946, letter from Purves to Kisch, R5816.3 50/44023/43844.
[317] On 1 August 1946 there were 56 Secretariat officials in post, 19 of whom were women. By 1 January 1947 the total number of officials was down to 20, 12 of whom were women. See: LNA, 1er Août 1946, Listes des Membres du Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, S698 ; LNA, 1er Janvier 1947, Listes des Membres du Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, S698.
[318] See Harris's personnel file for the full details of her various roles: LNA, [unknown date and author], C.M. Harris curriculum vitae, S789.
[319] LNA, 27 August 1947, letter from Lester to Constance Harris, S789.

on a number of occasions by her former manager Bertil Renborg, but was denied each time in spite of her recognised "excellent service".[320] Cecily Babington, part of the Board's secretariat, wrote to Stencek at the end of July 1946 to request an increase in salary and threatened to resign if her appeal was not met: "I find that I am considerably out of pocket, therefore to my great regret I feel my best course would be to return to England and look for other employment."[321] Stencek turned down her request and Babington, "reluctant to leave the Secretariat before the completion of the work of the Board of Liquidation", ultimately stayed with the organisation until the end of August 1947.[322] In addition to the promotion and salary denial, all officials were also on temporary contracts, as per the mass notice issued to staff in March 1946, and these were only renewed for two months at a time, leaving people unsure when they would be dismissed.[323] This, of course, was only exacerbated by the lack of deadlines or plan that might have, at least, given them some indication of when their service would be terminated.

Staff also had to suffer the indignity of no longer controlling their own buildings, and this loss of control led, on occasion, to pettifoggery. Just days after the Palais was handed over to U.N. control, U.N.R.R.A. held its fifth Council in the former League facilities, making use of the services and facilities on hand. As the session took place less than a week after the Ariana Estate transfer, League officials were still heavily involved in the advanced planning, provided support throughout the Council sessions themselves, and worked closely with the U.N. Secretariat to assess the expenses owed, seemingly charging U.N.R.R.A. for every possible item. A schedule of monies, agreed between the three organisations after the Conference, listed the expected charges for telephony, heating, and services of particular individuals, alongside reimbursement for 86 pieces of broken china and glassware, 82 articles of missing office supplies, and two missing cleaners' smocks – amongst others – coming to a total of more than 30,000 CHF.[324] The Palais des Nations was an

---

[320] LNA, 18 September 1946, letter from Stencek to Curry, S750.
[321] LNA, 29 July 1946, letter from Cecily Babington to Stencek, S707.
[322] LNA, 2 August 1946, letter from Babington to Stencek, S707.
[323] For examples, see contract renewals for Marie Boiteux in July and December 1946: LNA, 11 July 1946, letter from Stencek to Marie Boiteux, S723; LNA, 13 December 1946, memo from Stencek to Boiteux, S723.
[324] For details on the agreement to hold the Council meeting at the League see: LNA, 12 July 1946, letter from Ranshofen-Wertheimer to Moderow regarding the use of the Palais des Nations for the U.N.R.R.A. Council Session, R5810 50/43985/42168. Also see: LNA, 11 September 1946, [unknown author], Protocol Signed by Representatives of the United Nations, the League of Nations, and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, in Geneva, R5810 50/43985/42168.

extraordinarily grand collection of buildings and grounds, and it lent the League of Nations – and its staff – a sense of authority, even when the organisation was becoming increasingly insignificant on the world stage. It was certainly easier for Secretariat officials to feel slightly better about their position and standing when they occupied such a palatial home, but the transfer to the U.N. took this from them. This was made all the more galling by the diminishing number of League officials, as although Secretariat numbers had already reduced dramatically since the start of 1946, people continued to leave between August and December. Slowly but surely most officials either transferred to the United Nations or moved on to new roles entirely, including senior officials who had been with the League for decades, such as Émile Giraud, Percy Watterson, and Henri Vilatte.[325]

By the time 1947 began only 20 League officials remained in post.[326] The autumn months had not been kind to those that remained: their most senior colleagues had taken the opportunity to travel across the Atlantic for the glamour of New York, refused their applications for recognition of going above and beyond the call of duty, ignored their requests for assistance with the most difficult of liquidation issues, and declined to give them any kind of indication of their job security. They had lost control of the little they had left and come to the unfortunate realisation that without their assets and their services, the wider world did not really seem to care about the League anymore.

Conclusions

The months of August to December 1946 represented a period of great change for the League and its Secretariat, in terms of its functions, its resources, and its position on the global stage. It was by no means the first time the organisation had found itself relegated to the lower echelons of public consciousness, but its brief renaissance following the war was at an end, and the U.N.'s direct involvement with the League was greatly diminished once the majority of transfer questions had been answered. This might have represented, in other circumstances, a chance for the

[325] Giraud officially left on 31 December 1946, Vilatte on 5 November 1946, and Watterson departed on 31 October 1946. See LNA, Personnel file: Émile Giraud; LNA, Personnel file: Henri Vilatte; LNA, Personnel file: Percy Gill Watterson.
[326] LNA, 1er Janvier 1947, Listes des Membres du Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, S698.

League to finally take control of its fate and enact the closure it wanted. The pace of change following the 21st Assembly was rapid and entirely controlled by the United Nations timetable but, while this pressure lessened once the majority of transfer was effected, presentism and the unfamiliarity with liquidation's challenges continued to scupper proceedings. Progress on issues surrounding closure, both great and small, was minimal at best, and at worst a great source of frustration for those Secretariat officials in the thick of things. Unlike those earlier months in the year, much of the direct external pressure on the organisation had dissipated but the League was not ready for either the change in international focus or the freedom it had been granted to take charge of its own death.

There is no doubting the negative impact caused by the physical separation of the Secretariat from many of its senior leadership – on morale, on efficiency, and on decision-making. Communication delays were an obvious inconvenience but the lack of face-to-face interaction and support from leadership were even more challenging to overcome, and the experience of those based in Geneva suffered significantly as a result. The latter half of 1946 was a time of great change for the Secretariat as an institution – in terms of numbers, responsibilities, and prestige – and being left behind by its most senior figures was yet another test of officials' commitment both to each other and to the League's brand of internationalism. The glamour and glitz of New York, where every hotel was booked out for weeks and the world's diplomats were gathered, was – figuratively-speaking – a million miles away from the war damaged corridors of Europe, and the experiences of those working in these two places could not have been more different.

The United Nations, its General Assembly, and New York were, to everyone other than the handful of League officials in the Palais, more important than anything else in the realms of international governance in the second half of 1946. The urgency inherent in the U.N.'s work in 1946 was an enormous challenge for the League Secretariat to overcome, and realistically officials could do little to change a global shift in attitudes – it was no longer the home or centre of intergovernmental relations – but it was also ill-prepared for its impact. To be sure, if these months reveal anything, it was that the League was not truly ready for any of the trials it could expect to face during liquidation. This lack of preparation extended from the specific, such as the insufficient mitigation for the Board's impotence during the General

Assembly, to the wide-ranging i.e., the complete absence of a liquidation timetable. The lack of precedent from which to look for guidance meant problems were not anticipated in advance, and there was a constant sense of 'fire-fighting' across the Secretariat. The League was almost notorious for bureaucracy throughout its lifetime but, in closure, rigour and design were replaced by confusion and disorder.

During the high summer of 1946, as transfers to the U.N. progressed rapidly, if haphazardly, it might have been hard to believe that the League of Nations Secretariat would still be working to close the organisation's doors nearly eighteen months later. The key to understanding why this was the case can be found in the autumn of 1946, as the world's attention turned away from Europe, leaving the Secretariat without decision-makers and exposing serious deficiencies in the organisation's machinery and planning for closure. The external pressures that were once a source of stress and anxiety for the officials in Geneva had gone, but with them went the motivation and impetus so desperately needed to enact dissolution. Distance, both physical and psychological, was not conducive to momentum, and only served to highlight the fundamental difficulties with the organisation's liquidation: no one understood the scale of the task, and it was hard to get anyone to focus on the closure of a defunct institution when more urgent matters called for attention. When the League's leadership slowly returned to Europe as the year came to an end, the organisation was no closer to liquidation than it was months earlier, and many were aware that 1947 would likely prove as challenging a year as any other in its history.

Chapter Four

Pride and Prestige, January to July 1947

"*…despite the fact that my heavy duties here have meant confining my work for the League to week ends, I have felt that I owed it to the League...*"[327]
Percy Watterson, writing to Valentin Stencek in a letter dated 4 June 1947, regarding his willingness to help liquidate the League's affairs in the United States.

"*The CHAIRMAN felt that the Final Report should be a dignified document. It would, after all, be the last word heard from the League – a kind of epilogue.*"[328]
From the minutes of the 28th meeting of the Board of Liquidation, held at Geneva on Thursday 12 June 1947.

The first half of 1947 marked the final push of both the Secretariat and the Board of Liquidation to close the League in as dignified and orderly a fashion as possible. After the manic months of preparing transfers to the United Nations in the summer of 1946, and the agonising wait for the League's leadership to return its attention to Geneva during the autumn, the path to dissolution seemed clear to the Secretariat. The first United Nations General Assembly had dominated the focus of individuals crucial to the League's closure, including the Board's Chair and Vice Chair – Carl Hambro and Cecil Kisch respectively – as well as the Secretary-General Seán Lester. By January 1947, however, they were back in Europe and ready to concentrate on the liquidation process. The mood amongst these leadership figures was optimistic following their return from New York, and they foresaw the resolution of the outstanding dissolution questions by the end of March or April at the latest. Their confidence was however misplaced: the first Board of Liquidation session was not scheduled to begin until February, the agenda for those meetings contained over

[327] LNA, 4 June 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek, C1784-4.
[328] LNA, 12 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Eighth Meeting B.L./P.V.28, S569.

thirty separate items, and it would take over eight months to issue the Final Report on liquidation to members.

The Board of Liquidation was the League Assembly's proxy in closure questions – it represented both the concerns and decision-making power of members, who had otherwise dispensed of their obligations to the organisation – and was the strategic driving force behind closure; they effectively decided what would happen and when. The group, made up of nine representatives from different countries, met ten times in 1946, but needed 32 separate meetings in 1947, across sessions in February, April, June, and July, to conduct the League's outstanding business. A large part of the delay was brought about by the Board's intense focus on its financial commitments to members, which manifested itself in the pursuit of outstanding contributions, severely protracted negotiations with the International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.), and the continued 'entertainment' of a much-disliked tax lawsuit in the United States, but the preoccupation with money was merely a symptom of a different affliction. The senior leadership of the League, especially the Board of Liquidation, was gripped by the need to protect the organisation's reputation in both the short and long-term, and this chapter shows how this fixation on legacy motivated so many of its choices through 1947.

The chapter examines three crucial elements of this time period and reveals how closer analysis of these uncovers how pride, legacy, and fear compelled both decision-makers and officials during a time of both high activity and frustration. Firstly, this chapter will look at the Board of Liquidation's pride in the League of Nations, how this was realised in the group's efforts to protect its legacy, and how this has had an impact on our contemporary study of the organisation. More specifically, this section outlines how the Board's concerns about its reputation and performance during liquidation materialised in a number of ways, but primarily in its increasingly grand plans for the permanent League exhibit in the Palais Library building, even at the expense of its other central tenet: providing a good return on investment for members.

The second component reviews the League's relationship with its partner organisation, the I.L.O., as an exemplar of the Board of Liquidation's wider preoccupation with its reputation and how this manifested itself in the group's efforts

to bolster the institution's funds before closure. As the I.L.O. was financially tied to the League from its inception, the relationship between the organisations has always been a critical element of their respective histories, and this remained true during the League's dissolution and especially during the first half of 1947. This chapter reveals how a breakdown in the working relationship between the two organisations' leadership in 1947 – ostensibly over money – and a change in power dynamic, were the major causes of the delay to the League's liquidation, and how pride and obstinance on both sides contributed to the setbacks.

The third and final section looks at the Secretariat officials still working for the League during 1947, their own pride in the organisation, and the relationship they shared with the Board of Liquidation. Those who remained in 1947 were often unusually committed to the League, towards both their colleagues and the organisation's ethos, but that dedication was not always rewarded or recognised by the institution's leadership, and even in cases where it was, the officials in question sometimes found their loyalty taken advantage of. They were also rarely allowed to take part in the Board's attempts to safeguard a long-lasting legacy for the organisation, excluded from the deliberations over what should be celebrated, and discovered that the Secretariat, arguably the first international civil service, was not considered worthy of inclusion.

This chapter ultimately shows how pride in one's work, efforts to preserve an organisation's dignity, and an inherent emphasis on public relations came to affect the League's final months, in both positive and negative ways. Many of the Board of Liquidation's decisions during 1947 were guided by the overarching refrain: what will people think? The preoccupation with maintaining standards of practice, constructing an official view of the dissolution process, and appointing itself guardian of the League's memory, were all the results of the leadership's attempts to safeguard the legacy of both their own performance since April 1946 and the organisation as a whole. The League was not what it once had been, and the Board struggled to come to grips with that reality. Nevertheless, the decisions made by this small group of men in 1947 affected not only the way in which the League closed, but continue to have long-term repercussions for our own examination of the organisation.

Controlling the Narrative

The League's reputation was at the forefront of the organisation's consciousness from its inception; the institution's founders knew public support was vital for its survival. This early form of public relations was managed by the Information Section of the Secretariat, which was created to ensure consideration was always given to both publicity and opinion in the organisation's work.[329] By the time the Board of Liquidation came into existence in 1946, public relations had been a fundamental tenet of the League for over 25 years, and the organisation's leadership was accustomed to considering wider opinion and the institution's reputation when making decisions. And, as a consequence of the international community's desire to distance the United Nations from its predecessor, senior figures within the League had been focussed on the need to rehabilitate the organisation's legacy for some time. Despite pressure to withdraw from the public sphere quietly, the League's leadership held a full ceremonial Assembly in April 1946 to officially begin the liquidation process, not just because it believed the correct procedures should be followed, but because it was an opportunity to correct the negative trend in public opinion. Former Information Section official Arthur Sweetser, writing to Hambro following a meeting in February 1946, wrote that he believed the League was being blamed for the shortcomings of governments: "It is alarming what a perversion of history is being perpetrated today, partly consciously by those who want to find a scapegoat for their own failures and partly unconsciously by those who did not live the past and do not know any better. In any event, the League is all too often being held responsible for the shortcomings of governments and the really guilty parties are being allowed to go scot-free."[330] This concern and preoccupation with what people would think of both the Board of Liquidation and the League as a whole, dictated much of the former's decision-making during the dissolution period. In some cases this influence was indirect – to be explored in the later sections of this chapter – but at other times it was much more unequivocal. This section looks at how the Board tried not only to control the story of liquidation, but how it also claimed ownership of the League's long-term legacy in the process.

---

[329] Ranshofen-Wertheimer described the League's focus on public relations as ground-breaking: "In no other respect did the creation of the League mark a more complete break with habits of the past than in the new kind of relationship between a diplomatic body and public opinion…". Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, p. 201.

[330] Lester's Diary, February 1946 [exact date unknown], letter from Sweetser to Hambro.

Throughout the closure process the Board tried to control the narrative around the League's dissolution through the contents and backdated publication dates of its four Interim Reports to members, but its Final Report to members was the pinnacle of the group's efforts.[331] Although these documents were all relatively similar in structure – covering the progress of transfers, financial questions, and liquidation of non-transferable services – the Board was determined that this, the League's last word, would take on a mantle greater than the sum of its parts. Hambro made the importance of this document clear to his colleagues in the group's 28th meeting: "The CHAIRMAN felt that the Final Report should be a dignified document. It would, after all, be the last word heard from the League – a kind of epilogue."[332] Whilst the Interim Reports were pulled together by the Secretariat and a small drafting committee led by Cecil Kisch, the Final Report had significantly more input from the rest of the Board, and the group spent considerable portions of its time during 1947 on the text. As early as February, the Board's deliberations on outstanding member contributions were predicated on how the group would be able to present their decision-making to members, and how the use of certain wording would justify the choice to vigorously pursue debts in some cases, and forgive them in others.[333] These discussions became increasingly prevalent in meetings as 1947 progressed, and by the final sessions in June and July, the composition and editing of the report became the primary subject of the Board's meetings.[334]

In private the Board had committed itself to a 31 July publication date for the Final Report, and it hinted as much to members in the opening remarks of the fourth Interim Report published at the start of May.[335] In order to meet the self-imposed schedule, Board members were expected to continue working on the subject between the June and July sessions, reviewing drafts and sending comments to the

---

[331] See chapter three for more on the backdating of the Board's Interim Reports.
[332] LNA, 12 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of Twenty-Eighth Meeting B.L./P.V.28, S569.
[333] In its 16th meeting, the Board spent time considering how its decisions regarding contributions might be interpreted by members, and how the presentation of these decisions could be manipulated to avoid criticism. LNA, 14 February 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Sixteenth (Private) Meeting B.L./P.V.16, S569.
[334] The Final Report was discussed at nine out of the ten last Board meetings. For examples see: LNA, 9 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirty-Fourth Meeting B.L./P.V.34, S569; LNA, 23 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Forty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.42, R5816.2 50/43856/43844.
[335] LNA, 26 April 1947, letter from Purves to F.T. Cheng regarding the Final Report publication date, R5816.3 50/44023/43844; LNA, 1 May 1947, Board of Liquidation: Fourth Interim Report, covering the period March 1st – April 30th, 1947, C.4.M.4.1947, S923.

Secretariat.[336] Introducing this deadline meant the group was trying to write a full and coherent report of the dissolution whilst simultaneously still trying to make that dissolution a reality, so it was not surprising that the Report's finer detail was still the primary topic of conversation at the Board's last – its 42nd – meeting in late July.[337]

The Board was deliberately meticulous over the report and its contents because it had a clear idea of what it wanted to achieve with its publication. This was the last testament for the organisation, but the Board also saw it as the mark sheet for its own performance as the arbiters of the League's dissolution. As a consequence the report was not a complete or wholly accurate depiction of the previous fifteen months, but instead a carefully selected highlight reel of the Board's accomplishments which downplayed problems and obfuscated several dates of transfer. The group wanted to ensure it could not be blamed for problems beyond its remit – for example noting that it held no responsibility for the problems arising from the dissolution of the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation – and the supposed dates of transfer for the Staff and Judges' Pensions Funds were listed in the report as having taken place earlier than they actually had.[338] The document outlined the measures taken to manage the long-running income tax dispute in the United States and the decision to continue pursuing a lawsuit, but neglected to mention that said decision had been made in spite of the low chances of success and the negative attitude of many Board members towards it.[339] No excuse was offered for the delay in dissolving the organisation, and the ill-tempered nature of the negotiations between the Board and the I.L.O. was left out of both the Final Report and the discussions at the I.L.O. Governing Body session in June and July, perhaps an indication of both sides' discomfiture at the whole endeavour and an effort to keep up appearances.[340] The Board wanted the narrative put forward in its Final Report to be accepted as both the official and only version of the organisation's

---

[336] LNA, 27 June 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Purves, titled Preliminary Draft of Final Report to States Members B.L.164, R5816.4 50/44023/43844.
[337] LNA, 23 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Forty-Second Meeting B.L/P.V.42, R5816.2 50/43856/43844.
[338] See LNA, 22 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Forty-First Meeting B.L./P.V.41, R5816.2 50/43856/43844; LNA, 23 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of Forty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.42, R5816.2 50/43856/43844.
[339] LN, *Board of Liquidation: Final Report to Members*, p. 51.
[340] The I.L.O. Governing Body was in session from 13 June to 10 July 1947, but the negotiations regarding the transfer of the Pensions' Funds did not feature in that time, nor did the Governing Body officially approve the decision of its sub-committee led by Myrddin-Evans: International Labour Office, *Minutes of the 102nd Session of the Governing Body. Geneva – 13 June -10 July 1947* (Geneva, 1947).

closure, and in this regard its efforts were a success. The later response from members was almost non-existent, suggesting acquiescence, and the long-term impact has been a similar willingness from scholars to accept this quiet and unremarkable version of events.[341] This thesis not only contradicts the Board's sanitised narrative, but also acts as a reminder of the danger of taking things at face value.

The Board was highly conscious of the contemporaneous opinions of members and the wider international community, but the group was serious about its self-appointed role as protector of the organisation's memory, and was therefore also concerned with the League's longer-term reputation and how it might be viewed in the future, using the time left before liquidation to plan accordingly. This cognizance was evident in the Board's planning for the organisation's Archives which, it believed, occupied an important place in not only shedding light on the League experience from within the institution, but also in rehabilitating its image and legacy in the decades to come.

The Archives were officially moved to U.N. control in 1946, but plans for the future practical management and use of the League's files were left for later discussion. Although the U.N. now effectively owned the Archives and employed the League's former Registry officials, the files remained on-site in Geneva, documents created by the Secretariat continued to be deposited as before, and the outstanding issues were put aside due to the perceived lack of urgency in their address.[342] What needed to be agreed between the two organisations before the League liquidated included questions such as how the U.N. would manage these files in the future, where they would be kept, and what kind of rules would the new organisation's officials be bound by when using them.

Lester and the Board had two central goals regarding the Archives' future usage. Firstly, they wanted the files to be physically safe, a concern that tied in with their

---

[341] Very few governments acknowledged the issuance of the Final Report; two examples are: LNA, 12 September 1947, letter from La Secretaría de Estado de Relaciones Exteriores de la Républica Dominicana to the Secretary-General League of Nations, R5816.4 50/44023/43844; LNA, 14 October 1947, letter from La Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, R5816.4 50/44023/43844.
[342] The official transfer of the Archives to U.N. ownership in August 1946 was laid out in a letter to Hambro: LNA, 6 September 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S567.

wider anxieties around the U.N. and its respect for the League's property. This had materialised elsewhere as fears that the new organisation would neglect or abandon the Palais des Nations, and although that fear was later allayed, the Board was now worried that the archive collections would be broken up or moved to New York.[343] They were also anxious about the security of the Archives, and specifically the confidentiality of some Board documents, which were not easy to delineate from less sensitive papers.[344] The Board's documentation was, for the most part, deposited in existing Registry files alongside other non-Board related items; not many Board-exclusive files or jackets were created for its documents. For example, proceedings of the Board's sub-committee on missing member contributions – which included details of sensitive negotiations with governments – could be found in a box with a range of other Financial Administration files and documents from the previous 10-15 years, and this filing system remains in place today.[345] Whilst the League's recent past and actions remained fresh in the mind of governments, the Board did not want its confidential discussions and decision-making to cause controversy or reflect poorly on the group's performance.[346]

Ultimately its fears in both these instances – in terms of the future safekeeping of the files, and the careful management of any confidentiality issues – were unfounded, and the U.N. proved more than amenable to League requests. This was partly a result of the U.N.'s willingness to accommodate the League leadership on said requests, its agreement that the Archives represented a valuable resource, and also the work of the U.N. Chief of the Communications and Records Service, Bertil Renborg, a former Head of the League's Drug Control Service who left the Secretariat less than a year earlier, as well as Włodzimierz Moderow.[347] In early November 1946, the latter wrote to Adriaan Pelt in New York to raise concerns

---

[343] At an early May 1946 Board meeting, Kisch suggested "vandalism" might follow the U.N. takeover of the Palais: LNA, 1 May 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of Third Meeting B.L./P.V.3, S569. And in a message to Moderow at the end of July 1946, Pelt suggested the Archives would be transferred to New York: LNA, 26 July 1946, cable from Pelt to Moderow, R5813 50/44054/43262.
[344] LNA, 3 June 1947, memo from Stencek to Lester regarding the Board's archives, R5816.4 50/44126/43844.
[345] Registry file box R5294 of the League's Archives contains files on gifts and legacies to the League, dated 1933-1947, alongside the Board's work on contributions.
[346] LNA, 12 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Eighth Meeting B.L./P.V.28, S569; LNA, 5 June 1947, Board of Liquidation memorandum, prepared by Lester, titled Disposal of the Board's Archives, R5816.4 50/44126/43844.
[347] Moderow, confirming the establishment of the new procedures, wrote to Lester in mid-April and, at the wish of Pelt, conveyed the U.N.'s commitment to the League's Archives: LNA, 15 April 1947, letter from Moderow to Lester, R5813 50/44104/43844.

about the files, noting that they were "of considerable historical interest and we should take every precaution to preserve them as a whole."[348] During in-person negotiations in February, the U.N. agreed to keep the Archives at the Palais, and created strict guidelines for the request and usage of League files from officials in both Geneva and New York. The outcome was as positive as could have been hoped for from the Board's perspective.[349]

At the end of the day, the Board's concerns about safety and security centred on its desire to preserve the League's Archives for the future. Lester and the group repeatedly stressed their wish – in both Board meetings and correspondence with the U.N. during 1946 and 1947 – that the organisation be studied for decades to come as a means of restoring its reputation, as exemplified in a letter from Sweetser to Hambro: "What seems to me more important by far is that, if history is allowed to be misread in this way, we will have lost the principal lesson of the past quarter century and run the risk of making the same mistake all over again."[350] In a February letter to Moderow thanking him for his work guaranteeing the future of the Archives, Lester wrote that he hoped the organisation's files be made available so "serious students of international affairs during the period would be enabled…to make use of them."[351] In a memorandum covering disposal of the Board's papers, drafted by Purves and Lester in June, the men maintained that while there was sensitive information contained within these files, removing any documents or sections of minutes "which may be considered unsuitable for preservation" would be time-consuming and difficult, and that doing so "would certainly destroy their value as historical records."[352] The Board agreed with them, prioritising long-term legacy over the short-term risk of controversy, and ensuring that both the League and its dissolution could be studied many decades later.[353] The group's choice to preserve the Archives in as open and accessible fashion as possible was a prescient one; in

[348] UNA, 12 November 1946, letter from Moderow to Pelt, G.V. 2/2/5 (346).
[349] The future management of the League's Archives was outlined in: LNA, 24 February 1947, memo by Renborg entitled Note Concerning Transfer to United Nations, Lake Success, of League of Nations Registry Files, R5813 50/44104/43262.
[350] Lester's Diary, February 1946 [exact date unknown], letter from Sweetser to Hambro.
[351] LNA, 27 February 1947, letter from Lester to Moderow, R5813 50/44104/43262.
[352] LNA, 5 June 1947, Board of Liquidation memorandum, prepared by Lester, titled Disposal of the Board's Archives, R5816.4 50/44126/43844.
[353] LNA, 12 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Meeting B.L./P.V.28, S569.

2009 the collection was added to U.N.E.S.C.O.'s Memory of the World Register in light of its value to global heritage.[354]

The Board did not pass up even the smallest opportunity to stamp its presence on the League's legacy. At the end of 1946 Frank Walters, the former Assistant Secretary-General and 20-year Secretariat veteran, was granted access to the League Archives long before they were made public to facilitate his research for a comprehensive history of the organisation.[355] Although Walters left the Secretariat in 1940 and his book was neither funded nor officially endorsed by the League, he was considered enough of an ally to the organisation that his research would not pose a threat to its legacy. If anything, senior figures both within the League and supporters outside it were happy that an old friend was working on the matter before anyone else, knowing that he would likely provide a comprehensive but kind evaluation. Arthur Sweetser, unswervingly faithful to the League cause, wrote to Lester in early August 1947, expressing his happiness with Walters' new role and noted that he would have a "big contribution" to make in his book, which he believed would "set the record right" on the organisation.[356]

With Walters' independent, but welcome, book on the way, Cecil Kisch suggested to Lester at the end of April that perhaps the League might use some of its remaining money to finance an official history of the Nansen office. Despite similar background musings from Hambro in the past, the timing of the suggestion was surprising for its tardiness and was undoubtedly predicated on the idea that it would be another opportunity for the League to present its version of events. Both Fridtjof Nansen and the Nansen International Office for Refugees were extraordinarily popular in the 1930s – the latter winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1938 – and choosing to fund an official history of its work was likely seen as a safe way of capitalising on its popularity. Lester, however, was less than enthused in his responses to both Kisch and the Board Chairman. Explaining that there was no room in the budget for such

---

[354] Habermann-Box, Sigrun, 'From the League of Nations to the United Nations: The Continuing Preservation and Development of the Geneva Archives' in Herren, Madeleine (ed.), *Networking the International System: Global Histories of International Organizations* (Heidelberg, 2014), p. 28. For more on the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, see: https://en.unesco.org/partnerships/partnering/memory-world (retrieved 3 December 2021).
[355] Lester wrote to Frederic Hapgood – formerly of the League Registry service and transferred to the U.N. at the end of August 1946 – confirming that he and Moderow had agreed to grant Walters access to the Archives, and that Hapgood should provide all necessary services to him. LNA, 11 December 1946, memo from Lester to Hapgood, S568.
[356] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1947, letter from Sweetser to Lester.

an endeavour, that it would be hard to justify – its public popularity aside – why they had chosen the Nansen work above other areas, and, with only a few months of liquidation work left, no one would be around to supervise the work anyway. In short, the idea was a last-minute pipe dream from Board members that was otherwise an entirely impractical notion and, thankfully for Lester, the discussions went no further.[357]

Less impractical, but just as rushed at the end, were the League's preparations for its permanent exhibit at the Palais des Nations. An exhibition space was part of the original plans for the Palais in the early 1930s, and designed to house pieces from the League collections, but the organisation's leadership never seemed entirely sure what they were trying to create, with different names used in both correspondence and official documents to describe it: museum, permanent historical collection, exhibit, portrait gallery. Conceived as a space within the wider Library building, early sketches in the League Archives show a long, gallery-like room with copious amounts of southern natural light. Of course all plans were set aside up to, and during, the Second World War, as uncertainty about the future and a limited workforce made it both pointless and almost impossible to do anything tangible. As soon as the war was over however, and the League's impending fate was decided, the idea came to prominence once again.[358]

In the early stages of its existence, the Board of Liquidation seemed to have as few concrete ideas about the exhibit as its pre-war forebears. Discussed at the first set of meetings in late April and early May, the collection was referred to only as "artistic and photographic material illustrating the history of the League", but the group agreed that it should take the time to design a permanent display of these items and put them in place before the organisation went out of existence.[359] The planning started out in a logical fashion, creating a sub-committee made up of senior Secretariat figures Willem van Asch van Wijck, Tevfik Erim, and Arthur Breycha-Vauthier – Assistant Librarian – who would deliberate and then report back to the

---

[357] LNA, 1 May 1947, letter from Lester to Kisch, S567; LNA, 14 May 1947, letter from Lester to Hambro, S567.
[358] Two separate plans for the museum, from 1933 and 1937, were enclosed in a letter from the Secretary of the Building Committee to Stencek: LNA, 15 May 1937, letter from F.I. Lloyd to Stencek, R5265 16/33081/33080.
[359] LNA, 30 April 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of the Second Meeting B.L./P.V.2, R5816.2 50/43856/43844; LNA, 16 May 1946, memo from Lester to an unknown recipient regarding the decision to continue with the planned "portrait gallery", R5265 16/33082/33080.

Board with a list of figures they might want to feature in the exhibit, how prominent they should be, and any other proposals for the space.[360] The three men produced a lengthy list of diplomats and statesmen they believed should be highlighted – although only Stencek took the time to note that no women featured in the sub-committee's suggestions – and the Board quickly seized the opportunity to get involved, using its contacts to request items from foreign dignitaries and governments, weighing-in on the respective portraiture sizes for different statesmen, and even approving cabinet purchases.[361]

As senior figures in international diplomacy, members of the Board were better placed than most other League officials to receive successful responses to requests for photos and paintings, and were able to exert pressure on foreign governments in a way the Secretariat was not. Daniel Secrétan, Board member and Minister Plenipotentiary on the Swiss Federal Council, pressed his Government for a bronze bust of Giuseppe Motta, and Arthur Sweetser – again supporting the League in his free time – was able to procure a photograph of John D. Rockefeller Jr. directly from the latter's son.[362] The Board's work in dissolving the League was almost exclusively about closing things down, but the exhibit was about building something new, and the group was especially encouraged about a project designed to cement the organisation's legacy for many years to come.

As 1947 began the Board continued to use its influence to obtain portraits of figures from the sub-committee's list, but as more time passed the scope for the exhibit started to creep beyond the original vision of a portrait gallery. Firstly, despite the early progress in agreeing a list of names and their respective prominence, there was not a great deal of coordination of either the Board or Secretariat activity. Theoretically Secrétan was overseeing the project from the Board's perspective, but with members scattered across North America and Europe in the latter half of 1946,

---

[360] LNA, 10 July 1946, memo from Tevfik Erim and Willem van Asch van Wijck to Lester, R5265 16/33082/33080.
[361] Stencek made his note on the lack of women, alongside some suggestions, in a personal memo: LNA, 11 July 1946, Stencek personal memo, R5265 16/33082/33080. The Board of Liquidation asked for example photo sizes so it could decide the best dimensions for portraits at a secret meeting in July 1946: LNA, 23 July 1946, Board of Liquidation: Minutes of the Secret Meeting, R5816.2 50/43856/43844. LNA, 10 July 1946, report by Erim and van Asch van Wijck on figures to be included in the exhibit, R5265 16/33082/33080; LNA, 26 November 1946, letter from Hambro to Lester agreeing the purchase of glass cabinets, S567.
[362] LNA, 9 August 1946, letter from Secrétan to Lester, R5265 16/33080/33080; LNA, 16 January 1947, letter from John D. Rockefeller Jr. to Sweetser, R5265 16/33080/33080.

there was little chance to review progress of the increasingly disparate activity. From a Secretariat point of view, van Asch van Wijck, Valentin Stencek, and Lester were all involved, but no single individual had control of affairs or was responsible for coordinating the work.

The most involved figure was an international official, but by 1947 he did not work for the League anymore. Arthur Breycha-Vauthier joined the organisation's Secretariat in 1928 as an Assistant Librarian and had therefore been closely involved with the earliest plans for the exhibit. He sat on the Secretariat sub-committee in the late spring of 1946 and suggested a much wider remit for what he called "the Museum", noting that it ought not to just show records of the League's activities, but also demonstrate how the organisation was a unique venture in international relations. In a letter to Stencek in May 1946 he proposed a number of exhibits, including overviews of the practical working of an international conference, the League's work on drug control – including some drug paraphernalia – and caricatures on the organisation.[363] His general vigour and enthusiasm for his work had been praised by Lester in the past, but his primary involvement in planning for the exhibit diminished when he was transferred to the U.N. alongside the rest of the Library staff in the early autumn of 1946.[364] Although he was forced to take a back seat whilst he settled into his new position, he remained involved in the project – albeit now from the perspective of a U.N. official – coordinating the receipt and removals of collection items, and even chasing portraits for inclusion.[365] The League and the Secretariat took advantage of the librarian's enthusiasm for an endeavour that he had helped design, but Breycha-Vauthier did not seem to mind too much. If anything, he used the situation to his benefit, continuing to make suggestions for the exhibit during 1947, and volunteering himself as a resource for his former employers. He suggested the addition of some bronze signage welcoming visitors to the exhibit, and a guidebook-type pamphlet providing further details on the displays; both ideas were taken on by the Board at the League's expense.[366] Breycha-Vauthier was free labour for the League's project, but he used the Board's

[363] LNA, 23 May 1946, memo from Arthur Breycha-Vauthier to Stencek, R5265 16/33082/33080.
[364] In a letter to Alexander Loveday at the start of 1945, Lester described Breycha-Vauthier as "extremely energetic and resourceful". Lester's Diary, 3 January 1945, letter from Lester to Loveday.
[365] For example, see: LNA, 11 July 1947, letter from G. Kaeckenbeeck – of the Belgian Foreign Affairs and Commerce Ministry – to Breycha-Vauthier regarding a portrait of Hymans, R5265 16/33080/33080.
[366] LNA, 15 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.22, S569; LNA, 16 July 1947, memo from van Asch van Wijck to Stencek regarding new suggestions for the museum from Breycha-Vauthier, R5265 16/33082/33080.

preoccupation with the organisation's legacy to support an endeavour he was not only personally invested in, but one he would also soon take over management of in his role at the United Nations.

Figure 1: 2021 photograph of a celebratory tapestry created for the League's Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939-40.[367]

Of course Breycha-Vauthier and the Board were both able to keep adding to the design of the permanent exhibit as a result of the delays to liquidation. More time meant the collection was able to expand beyond what it might have been limited to, had the League dissolved as intended in March 1947. "Six rather nice modern tapestries made by some French women" for the League's Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939-40 – on the themes of Clan, Medieval State, Village, Family, Nation, and Federation – which were moved to Haverford College during the war for safekeeping, were returned to Geneva by Percy Watterson so they too could be included (Figure 1 on the previous page shows a 2021 photo of the Federation

[367] UN Library & Archives Geneva [@UNOGLibrary], 22 January 2021, "If you thought that our collection was made of paper records only, have a look at this carpet that was part of the #LeagueofNations pavilion in the 1939-40 New York World's Fair!", Twitter. https://twitter.com/UNOGLibrary/status/1352556612494487553 (retrieved 1 December 2021).

tapestry).[368] The extra time also allowed the Secretariat to find alternatives for figures for whom official portraits were proving difficult to source. A portrait of Aristide Briand was finally acquired after months of chasing the French Government – even if it was one of the statesman on his death-bed – and more ideas for new exhibits kept coming.[369] Another item added to the displays was a Woodrow Wilson Foundation medal awarded in 1930, although it is worth noting that the medal that eventually went on display was a replica, the original having been lost somewhere in the Palais in the intervening years, and the Secretariat having had a copy made rather than admit it's error by asking for a replacement.[370] The collection also expanded to incorporate exhibits about the "lesser lights" of the League – an idea originally proposed by the sub-committee in 1946 – meaning there was an increased focus on the work of committees and the organisation's technical achievements. Just a few of the suggestions made by the Board included features on the Disarmament Conference, the Leticia and Chaco Commissions, and extraordinary figures like Countess Apponyi, the only female delegate to preside over an Assembly Committee in the League's history.[371]

The overall effect of this extra time and input from figures such as Breycha-Vauthier, was a historical collection that became increasingly ostentatious and eye-catching throughout the year. It was no longer just a means of displaying a few portraits and memorabilia from the League's lifetime, but instead – at least for the organisation's leadership – came to represent something greater. At a Board meeting in early July 1947, Cecil Kisch expressed his anxiety that the collection might become "a mausoleum", and instead encouraged his colleagues to think of the exhibition as a living, breathing space within the (now U.N.) Library.[372] And so the plans for the collection quickly spread to include films on the activities of the League and the use of audio recordings of famous speeches produced by the Information Section in the

[368] LNA, 12 September 1946, letter from Stencek to Hambro suggesting the inclusion of the tapestries, S567; LNA, 5 November 1946, letter from Stencek to Watterson, S567; LNA, 4 June 1947, list of the tapestries and their themes prepared by Breycha-Vauthier, R5265 16/33080/33080.
[369] LNA, 12 March 1947, letter from van Asch van Wijck to A. Ganem – of the French Foreign Ministry – regarding a portrait of Briand, R5265 16/33080/33080.
[370] LNA, 14 June 1946, letter from Stencek to Watterson, asking the latter if he can procure a duplicate medal to replace the one that had been lost, R5265 16/33080/33080.
[371] LNA, 15 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.22, S569.
[372] LNA, 8 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirty-Third Meeting B.L./P.V.33, S569.

1930s, as well as Breycha-Vauthier's bronze signage and guidebook.[373] In line with the Board's thinking about the future study of the League's Archives, Kisch also suggested the inclusion of a reading room space within the exhibit, hoping to encourage visitors to sit and engage with organisational material.[374]

This was the Board's chance to tell the League's story from its own perspective, uncorrupted by the subjective voices of outsiders. The irony was sadly lost on the group that while this was indeed an opportunity for the Board to put forward its account of the institution's history, it too had a vested interest in portraying the League as positively as possible, and it also represented just one pillar of the organisation. An early suggestion from Stencek in May 1946 to consult Secretariat members on the exhibit and what could be included, was never followed up on.[375] The Secretariat, as a core element of the League and the facilitator of the strategic achievements heralded by the Board in its vision for the collection, was conspicuous by its absence from the collection. Beyond the Secretaries-General, officials had no presence in the exhibits, nor did they have a voice in identifying what should become part of the League's legacy. As it was designated by the Assembly as its representative in closure, the Liquidation Board had the monopoly on both the dissolution process and on the League's memory.

---

[373] Adolfo Costa du Rels made the initial suggestion of film footage at the Board's 22nd meeting: LNA, 15 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.22, S569. Meanwhile, Jaromír Kopecky mentioned gramophone recordings of speeches from the League's Final Assembly to Lester in July: LNA, 16 July 1947, memo from Lester to van Asch van Wijck, S567. Ranshofen-Wertheimer explained the expansion of the Information's Section in the 1930s to include the production of films and audio recordings demonstrating the League's work: Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, pp. 206-207.

[374] LNA, 8 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirty-Third Meeting B.L./P.V.33, S569.

[375] Stencek's suggested that Secretariat Directors and Heads of Departments and Sections should be allowed to review, and provide commentary on, the proposals of the Erim, van Asch van Wijck, and Breycha-Vauthier sub-committee: LNA, 11 July 1946, personal memo by Stencek, R5265 16/33082/33080.

Figure 2: Visitors review the exhibits at the inauguration of the League of Nations permanent exhibit, 17 July 1947.[376]

The culmination of these plans was a ceremony on 17 July 1947 to mark the handover of the collection from the League to the United Nations. Prominent League figures including Lester were present, as well as representatives from the Norwegian and Swedish Governments who were there to officially present portraits of Fridtjof Nansen, Carl Hambro, and Hjalmar Branting.[377] The idea was first suggested in May 1947 and, whilst it was a low-key affair with a handful of brief speeches from guests, local press were invited for what would actually be a more

[376] League of Nations Photograph Collection, Max Kettle, Agence de Reportage et Photographie Publicitaire, [no exact date – listed only as 1947], text on back reads "V 754, Musée, LN9 1947, N. A/954/2. https://archives.ungeneva.org/musee-de-la-sdn-inauguration-754-756 (retrieved 6 December 2021).
[377] LNA, 16 July 1947, [unknown author], internal circular titled Board of Liquidation, Historical Gallery, providing details of attendees and timings, R5265 16/33082/33080.

public display of the passing of the torch than anything that had come before it (see Figure 2 on the previous page).[378] In his speech accepting the "precious gift" of the permanent exhibit on behalf of the U.N., Moderow assured the attendees that the new world organisation would strive to maintain the collection as the League would have done, and paid tribute to his institution's predecessor: "By their work and their deeds these men had left deep marks in the history of peace and reconciliation, and would be considered by future generations as craftsmen in international cooperation."[379] Following the pomp and circumstance of the 21st Assembly for the League, and the first General Assembly of the U.N. later in the same year, the backstage wrangling and transfer between the two organisations was kept firmly behind closed doors, even including the handover of the Palais in the summer of 1946. The ceremony on 17 July, simple but proud, was as much an indicator of the League's 'quiet death' as anything else that took place during the dissolution period.

The I.L.O. and Keeping Up Appearances

While the Board of Liquidation's pride in the League's history helped build a long-term legacy for the organisation, that same pride led to some intransigent and uneasy decision-making in the first half of 1947, especially in regard to the International Labour Organisation. The I.L.O. was created in 1919 alongside the League, and designed to contribute to a peaceful world through a tripartite system – made up of labour representatives alongside those from employers and governments – and focussed on social justice.[380] It was not, however, a fully independent organisation, having to rely on the League Assembly to approve its budget on an annual basis, and on the League Secretariat to gather the contributions from members that made up that same budget, creating what David Morse, Director-General of the I.L.O. from 1948-1970, later called a natural conflict between the two organisations.[381] Emmet O'Connor, in his preface to Edward Phelan's memoirs, even went as far as to suggest that the I.L.O. had enemies within

[378] LNA, 9 May 1947, Lester to van Asch van Wijck regarding the possibility of an opening ceremony in July, S567.
[379] UNOG Archives, 18 July 1947, memo from Moderow to Pelt providing an overview of the handover ceremony and Moderow's speech, G.I. 4/15 (1978).
[380] The organisation's aim was "Lasting Peace Through Social Justice". Morse, David A., *The Origin and Evolution of the I.L.O. and Its Role in the World Community* (Ithaca, 1969), p. 9.
[381] Ibid, p. 15.

the League's membership who resented the former's creation as a special concession to labour concerns.[382] This tie to the League of Nations meant the I.L.O., despite having the freedom to pursue policy set by its own membership – which included states not members of the League – was never truly in control of its own fate whilst that link remained in place. The two organisations were entwined from birth – a big brother and a little brother – and this 25-year dynamic was a crucial element in the closure of the League, and especially the delays in its realisation. This section will examine the intricate nature of the relationship and disagreements between the League and the I.L.O. in 1947, and how the Board of Liquidation's seemingly dogged focus on propriety and financial questions was, in reality, a side-effect of decision-making based on apprehension and fear of condemnation.

The I.L.O. moved almost all its operations from Geneva to Montréal during the Second World War and, unlike the League, was able to hold some organisation-wide meetings during this period. The most important of these was the International Labour Conference at Philadelphia in 1944, the hosting of which was not only an achievement in itself, but the ensuing Philadelphia Declaration was a crucial development in gathering international support for the organisation's future.[383] Said Declaration restated the I.L.O.'s mission for a post-war world, and grounded the organisation in an affirmed commitment to the equality of human beings and their right to pursue their well-being and all economic opportunities.

The I.L.O. was desperate to avoid the League's fate, but its survival was by no means a foregone conclusion, even in the face of its success in Philadelphia. Despite assurances that it would continue post-war, the I.L.O. was not invited to take part in the negotiations at Dumbarton Oaks, and suffered the same fate as the League's representatives at the San Francisco Conference in 1945, with accommodation issues, no official accreditation for the delegation, and Edward Phelan, the Irish Director-General, forced to leave by the Soviet delegates due to his

[382] The book in which O'Connor's essay appears was a compilation of Phelan's unfinished memoirs and was published as part of the I.L.O. Century Project in 2009: O'Connor, Emmet, 'Edward Phelan: A biographical essay' in International Labour Organization (ed.), *Edward Phelan and the I.L.O.: The life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009), p. 33.
[383] The Philadelphia Declaration is widely considered a key moment in the I.L.O.'s history. Daniel Maul called it "a turning point", David Morse described it as "the rebirth of steadfast confidence in the mission of the ILO", while Antony Alcock suggested it set a precedent for the U.N. Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Maul, Daniel, *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 111; Morse, *Origin and Evolution of the I.L.O.*, p. 30; Alcock, Antony, *History of the International Labour Organisation* (London, 1971), pp. 182-183.

citizenship of a neutral state – something Lester also struggled with but ultimately managed to avoid.[384] Nevertheless Phelan was determined to guarantee the organisation's survival, publicly trying to distance it from the League and, although full independence was not possible, the I.L.O. succeeded where its big brother failed, and endured into the post-war world as a U.N. agency.[385]

By the start of 1947, the two organisations were in very different positions than just one year earlier. The I.L.O. had made official its relationship to the U.N. and was ready to begin a new chapter in its history, while the League strained to complete dissolution. To the Board of Liquidation, the organisation's position had not changed to that degree; it was no longer the leader in international governance that it once was – that honour now fell to the U.N. – but the League name still, in its eyes at least, commanded respect and the group felt a need, as it did with the organisation's Archives and the Museum, to protect its reputation as a bastion of procedure and propriety. The I.L.O. meanwhile, assured of its place in the new international system, discovered a self-assurance that inevitably collided with the League leadership's long-standing pride to cause all manner of problems for the liquidation.

Although the relationship between the I.L.O. and League leaderships turned fraught in 1947, the two organisations were not always at loggerheads. The two Secretariats worked alongside each other in Geneva for two decades at a time when their very existence was an experiment for international organisations, and the relationship between Phelan and Lester was an example of the friendships that could grow between international civil servants. Their connection began when Lester became Ireland's representative to the League in 1929, and the two men and their wives played bridge on a weekly basis when they were in Geneva together.[386] The greatest obstacles to the smooth-running of the I.L.O.-League relationship in 1946 and 1947 were related to questions of money, but when financials were not involved, the long-standing relationship between the two Secretariats could usually bring about a reasoned conclusion to any problems.

---

[384] Maul, *The International Labour Organization,* pp. 137-138.
[385] From O'Connor, 'Edward Phelan', p. 32.
[386] Ibid, pp. 24-27.

For example, the persistent problem relating to the removal of officials' furniture and belongings from the Palais was eventually resolved with a little help from the I.L.O. The League Secretariat had previously found it difficult to compel officials, both former and current, to remove their belongings, and the deadline for doing so was put further and further back, effectively extending dissolution. With no resolution in sight by the start of 1947 this was becoming an increasing problem, so the Board approved a plan whereby all officials with outstanding belongings at the Palais were given an option: remove items and submit claims by 31 October 1947, or provide a verified estimate by June, and have 75% of the total granted immediately. The latter option was overwhelmingly popular, especially with those officials still working for the Secretariat, as it guaranteed reimbursement for the majority of any removal costs without a worrisome deadline to contend with. Lester knew however, especially in those cases where officials chose the former route – albeit at a risk if they did not do so before the deadline – that this committed the organisation to administrative work up to the end of October, months after he expected the Secretariat to leave the Palais. Instead he turned to the I.L.O. at the start of the year, asking Phelan if his Secretariat would be amenable to taking on this work after dissolution, dependent on the League providing funds to cover the expected costs of the removals and throwing in a small clerical fee.[387] The I.L.O. accepted, and a niggling problem that had bothered the League's administration for almost a year was resolved with relative ease by demonstrating a willingness to work together.

Not all financial questions were necessarily problematic either, as there were minimal issues regarding the transfer of what remained of the League's Working Capital Fund. Part of the Final Assembly's resolution to dissolve the League included stipulations for the Fund to be transferred to the I.L.O. as soon as possible, meaning the transfer of over 2.5m CHF was quickly agreed and carried out in under two weeks in April 1947.[388] The specific nature of the instruction from a higher authority, in this case the League Assembly, was undoubtedly helpful as it reduced the likelihood of the leaderships becoming bogged down in drawn out negotiations,

[387] As outlined in: LNA, 12 April 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled Removal and repatriation expenses of former and present League officials B.L.118, S569; LNA, 14 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-First Meeting B.L./P.V.21, S569.
[388] The transfer was outlined in a letter to Phelan on 2 April 1947, and by 15th of that same month, it had been carried out: LNA, 2 April 1947, letter from Lester to Edward Phelan regarding the transfer of the Working Capital Fund, R5306 17/43861/8461; LNA, 15 April 1947, letter from Phelan to Lester thanking the latter for the transfer, R5306 17/43861/8461.

but where guidance was less forthcoming, arguments about money caused the relationship between the two organisations to be tested. Major disagreements arose from four issues in the first half of 1947 and the detailed nature of these disputes not only reveal why the League's liquidation took longer than expected, but also how the most ardent champions of objective decision-making and procedure could become blinded by pride and worries about their reputation.

The first of the disagreements between the two organisations related to the Staff Pensions Fund for officials of both the League and the I.L.O., which was established by the Eleventh Assembly in 1930, and was overseen by an Administrative Board made up of representatives appointed by both organisations' leadership, as well as those nominated by members of the Fund.[389] The Resolution to Dissolve the League of Nations, agreed at the 21st Assembly in April 1946, called for the administration of the Fund to be transferred to the I.L.O., which was later agreed by that organisation – on the condition that another actuarial review confirm the Fund's fiscal health – at the International Labour Conference in Montréal in September and October of the same year. All seemed well as far as the League's leadership was aware; the Administrative Board raised no concerns when it met in December 1946, a paper to the Board of Liquidation at the end of January 1947 outlined the previous steps taken by the League to bolster the Fund, and the Actuary's report showed the Fund held a surplus of over 5m CHF at the end of 1946.[390] Satisfied that all the necessary conditions had been met, Lester telegrammed Phelan to begin the transfer on 28 January, but the transfer had already started to falter without the League Secretary-General's knowledge.[391]

The League leadership made a mistake in assuming the I.L.O. did not have its own interests to consider. Phelan replied, over a week after Lester's message, with a telegram of his own which stunned both the Board of Liquidation and the Secretariat. The I.L.O. disagreed with the League's use of an actuarial yield rate of 4.5%; instead it preferred a more realistic 2.5% rate in line with that used by the

[389] Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat,* pp. 312-313.
[390] LNA, 28 January 1947, Board of Liquidation document, written by Lester, titled Staff Pensions Fund B.L.83, S569.
[391] Lester's 28 January 1947 telegram to Phelan was distributed to Board members as part of a Board of Liquidation document: LNA, 8 February 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled Staff Pensions Fund B.L.94, S569.

United Nations.[392] At this lower rate, the Pensions Fund's surplus would be wiped out and the I.L.O. wanted the League to cover the deficit before transfer, which translated into an additional 2.5m CHF from the organisation's coffers.[393] If this proposal was rejected, the I.L.O. leadership argued that its Governing Body would never agree to transfer the Fund. All the arguments that followed stemmed from a dilemma arising from the Final Assembly's decree that the League was responsible for handing the Fund over to the I.L.O. in good financial order: it was never made clear which party was responsible for deciding what "good financial order" actually meant.[394]

Lester and other Board members were initially both surprised and disappointed by the I.L.O.'s entrenched position; at the start of February, the leadership was still working towards the end of April as a final closing date for the League and the new state of affairs posed a risk to the schedule.[395] Nevertheless, the group trusted that the upcoming Board session – the first time the group had met in-person since July 1946 – would give it the opportunity to produce a counter offer, negotiate a final settlement with Phelan and his colleagues, and still meet the expected deadline. Their first counter proposal suggested taking the necessary 2.5m CHF from government contributions collected during 1947 – whether they were for that year or for years previous – thereby bolstering the Fund and providing "a windfall" for the I.L.O. This was despite the Board's own concerns that doing so i.e. propping up the Fund with monies from only League members, would unfairly benefit the members of the I.L.O. who did not fall into that category, and the group was intrinsically wary of doing anything that might be contrary to its commitment to regulations or unpalatable to its membership.[396] Yet in spite of the Board's belief that its counter offer would be both agreeable and readily accepted by the I.L.O., it falsely-assumed

[392] LNA, 5 February 1947, telegram, dictated over the telephone, from Phelan to Lester, S568.
[393] The 2.5m CHF figure was confirmed following a face-to-face conversation between Lester and Myrddin-Evans at the end of February: LNA, 27 February 1947, letter from Lester to Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, S568.
[394] Myrddin-Evans explained in a letter to Lester: "…it is most unlikely that the Governing body would agree to accept a calculation based on any higher figure": LNA, 19 March 1947, letter from Myrddin-Evans to Lester, S568.
[395] Lester wrote of "shock" and "great disappointment" following the Governing Body session: LNA, 14 March 1947, letter from Lester to Cecil Kisch, S568.
[396] LNA, 18 February 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Seventeenth (Private) Meeting B.L./P.V.17, S569. Lester made his proposal to Myrddin-Evans in later February: LNA, 27 February 1947, letter from Lester to Myrddin-Evans, S568.

that the latter organisation held the weaker negotiating position, and that it was not busy with its own work and efforts to settle its relationship with the U.N.

The relationship between the League and the I.L.O. was not, historically at least, one of equals, and the former's leadership struggled to realise or accept that this was no longer the case, finding it difficult to comprehend that the latter was no longer bound to acquiesce to either the Board of Liquidation's assumptions or timetable. The I.L.O. executive group responsible for high-level decision-making and offering recommendations to the International Labour Conference was the Governing Body. Made up of a rotating group of representatives from members, it met three times a year, and was scheduled to hold the first of its 1947 sessions in March, at which point the Board of Liquidation expected its counter offer to be put to the group for discussion and approval.[397] Lester and his officials waited for a response each day the Body was in session but, not hearing anything to the contrary, assumed – once again – that all was proceeding well. It was only after the session closed that Lester discovered Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, the Chair of the Governing Body, opposed the Board's counter-offer from the start and had not put the issue on the meeting agenda. The Secretary-General was shocked and frustrated, Myrddin-Evans' decision effectively extending the League's liquidation to at least June i.e. the month of the next Governing Body meeting.[398] However progress in the intervening months was also slow whilst negotiations were forced to take place via correspondence, neither body being present in Geneva at the same time as the other.[399] The Liquidation Board expressed a willingness in its April meetings to come to some kind of compromise with the I.L.O., but the need to hold these negotiations at an executive level i.e. beyond the remit of Lester and Phelan, both of whom were consistently present in Geneva, meant in-person discussions

[397] In 1947 the Governing Body was made up of sixteen government representatives, eight from the employment group, and eight from the worker's groups, reflecting the wider organisation's tripartite structure. For details of the 1947 members see: I.L.O., *Minutes of the 102nd Session of the Governing Body.*

[398] LNA, 14 March 1947, letter from Lester to Kisch outlining the results of the I.L.O. Governing Body session, S568. Lester would also write to Hambro five days later, noting he was "still suffering from the shock and disappointment": LNA, 19 March 1947, letter from Lester to Carl Hambro, S568.

[399] A letter, dated 19 March 1947, from Myrddin-Evans to Lester was read out during the Board's 23rd meeting on 16 April 1947: LNA, 16 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Third Meeting B.L./P.V.23, S569.

with I.L.O. representatives could not start until both bodies were in the same place at the same time: June 1947.[400]

So a date for the negotiations was set, but administration of the Staff Pensions Fund was not the only outstanding problem that reveals much about the Board's decision-making in 1947; there were three other issues creating friction between the League and the Governing Body. The first concerned another Pension Fund, this one established for the Judges of the Permanent Court of International Justice. The Court was superseded by the new International Court of Justice in 1946, but the administration of the Pension Fund was not transferred alongside the other assets, and instead the I.L.O. had provisionally agreed to take on its management. While the Fund itself was nowhere near the size of the Staff Fund, the yield rate percentage was once again a point of contention, and there were outstanding questions for the Board regarding the number of judges eligible to receive a pension and how much additional funding was required to make it fiscally unassailable.[401] The Board, as with the Staff Pensions issues, was reluctant to swallow its pride and decided to take a course of action that would protect the organisation – and its members – financially whilst also, hopefully, reduce the likelihood of I.L.O. objections. Sensing the matter might be best resolved by consulting an outside authority, the League sought the opinion of a Dutch Insurance Company, which provided a quote based on a rate of 2.5%.[402] Feeling safe that the transfer of this Fund was the most straightforward of the outstanding issues, Lester put the Company's proposal to Phelan and Myrddin-Evans in early May, but was disheartened to find that the I.L.O., whilst not necessarily opposed to the idea, were not willing to agree just yet either.[403]

The second outstanding issue with the I.L.O. regarded the distribution of certain members' shares of the Working Capital Fund, which had been removed from the Fund in 1946 and placed into a suspense account, to safeguard against non-

[400] LNA, 27 May 1947, cable from Lester to Kisch detailing planned dates for negotiation with the Governing Body delegation, R5816.4 50/44117/43844.
[401] LNA, 28 January 1947, Board of Liquidation document, written by Lester, titled Judges' Pensions Fund B.L.84, S569.
[402] Details of the technical opinion obtained from Nationale Levensverzekering-Bank N.V. were sent to Board members in April 1947: LNA, 10 April 1947, Board of Liquidation document, written by Lester, titled Judges' Pensions Fund B.L.115, S569.
[403] LNA, 7 May 1947, letter from Lester to Hambro regarding the conversations he had over a dinner in Geneva with Phelan, Myrddin-Evans. G.A. Johnston, and Wilfred Jenks, S568.

payment of contributions before liquidation. These were known as contributions in suspense and totalled 1.4m gold francs, but the Board had not yet decided how, or if, this money would be distributed. The I.L.O., first raising the question in April, argued that the funds should be split between the two organisations as they had been during a similar situation when Chile withdrew from the League in 1940.[404] Lester however, still bruised by Myrddin-Evans's unwillingness to compromise in other areas, admitted to Hambro that, while the Board was likely to agree to Phelan's request, he was disinclined to concede any ground to the I.L.O. whilst the rest of the negotiations remained so turbulent.[405]

The third outstanding issue centred on the Board of Liquidation's decision to not distribute to the I.L.O. any contributions arrears older than two years, and instead retain these funds for the League alone which was, according to Lester, "the really sore point" for Myrddin-Evans and the I.L.O., and they harboured "a violent resentment" as a result.[406] The League's Supervisory Commission had waived Article 33(b) of the Financial Regulations between the two organisations during the war and distributed contributions in arrears to the I.L.O., but the Board reasserted its former authority by reinstating the Article in 1947 without consulting the I.L.O., letting Phelan and his colleagues believe they would receive the funds as before. In a letter to Lester at the start of June, the I.L.O.'s Director-General attempted to articulate his anger in as polite a fashion as possible, noting that "it would appear appropriate that the Board should follow the procedure under which those Regulations were always applied in the past", but behind the scenes the I.L.O. was furious that the Board of Liquidation had unilaterally made the decision without consulting them.[407] Receiving no concessions on the matter from the League, the I.L.O. leadership used its new position of authority and refused to resolve any of the four aforementioned disputes in isolation – even where a resolution seemed relatively straightforward as with the

[404] Phelan outlined the I.L.O. position in a letter to Lester in mid-April: LNA, 14 April 1947, letter from Phelan to Lester, R5306 17/43861/8461.
[405] LNA, 7 May 1947, letter from Lester to Hambro regarding the conversations he had over a dinner in Geneva with Phelan, Myrddin-Evans. G.A. Johnston, and Wilfred Jenks, S568.
[406] Id.
[407] Phelan wrote: "I therefore venture to suggest that the decision concerning the allocation of certain arrears to the Reserve Fund should not be considered as final until the consultation…has taken place." Phelan's 2 June 1947 letter was distributed to Board members via a Board of Liquidation document: LNA, 5 June 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled Application of Article 33(b) of the Financial Regulations: Further correspondence with the Director-General of the International Labour Office B.L.137(a), S569.

Judges' Pensions Fund – instead insisting on negotiating all four issues in one package deal.[408]

All the animosity, ill-feeling, and wounded pride culminated in face-to-face negotiations when Myrddin-Evans, Hans Oersted, and Joseph Hallsworth – representing the Governing Body – visited the Board of Liquidation during its 30th meeting on 13 June 1947. The goodwill that Phelan believed was necessary for the financial relationship between the two organisations to work was nowhere to be found, and the meeting was unusually bad-tempered.[409] The session was dominated by lengthy diatribes from Hambro on the League side, and Myrddin-Evans for the I.L.O., with both men increasingly frustrated with the other's perceived intransigence. Myrddin-Evans had to apologise at one point in the meeting for his "facetious remarks", whilst Hambro, a consummate diplomat with years of experience, became so tired of proceedings that he suggested they abandon negotiations for the day.[410] Yet as ill-tempered and prideful as it was, the meeting was not a waste of time. With the benefit of meeting face-to-face and thus recognising the I.L.O.'s unwillingness to compromise its stance, and aware of the need to expedite the League's dissolution, the Board of Liquidation finally accepted – in its meeting the following day – that it had little choice but to accede to the I.L.O. demands. The final deal ultimately accepted the Governing Body's position on all the issues bar the original demand for a bolstered Staff Pensions Fund to the tune of 2.5% yield rate – the Board having managed to negotiate a 2.75% rate instead and a consequent injection of just over 2m CHF before the Fund was transferred.[411]

Over three months of pontificating and arguing on the side of the League, and the result was almost exactly the same as it would have been had the Board accepted the I.L.O. position at the start of February. Superficially these clashes looked like a spat over money, each side wanting a greater slice of the proverbial pie, and the League's actions in other areas seemingly provide further evidence for this

---

[408] LNA, 7 May 1947, letter from Lester to Hambro regarding the conversations he had over a dinner in Geneva with Phelan, Myrddin-Evans. G.A. Johnston, and Wilfred Jenks, S568.
[409] In his memoirs, collected in a volume by the I.L.O., Phelan wrote that the financial system between the two organisations was "far too complicated" and that "its successful operation depended entirely on the existence of a large measure of goodwill and understanding between them." I.L.O. (ed.), *Edward Phelan and the ILO*, p. 242.
[410] See LNA, 13 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirtieth Meeting B.L./P.V.30, S569.
[411] LNA, 14 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirty-First Meeting B.L./P.V.31, S569.

argument. By way of illustration, the pursuit of outstanding contributions from members was a major part of the Board's focus throughout the liquidation period, and rarely did a Board meeting pass without contributions featuring on the agenda. Hambro even explained to the group in February 1947 that he did not want governments to know that the League had been so successful in retrieving contributions long-since-forgotten by members both past and present; he did not want states with outstanding debts to have an excuse not to pay.[412] Taking this approach, threatening members with both non-participation in the distribution of the League's assets and receiving a black mark in the new U.N. copybook, meant the Board was able to re-coup over 28m CHF through 1946 and 1947, from an original outstanding total of almost 44m.[413] This left only six countries – Albania, Bulgaria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Paraguay, and Spain – with their combined 6.2m CHF debt to both the League and the I.L.O., unpaid at the end of the dissolution period.[414]

The Board was equally ardent with its recoup of other debts, including those owed by former sales agents for League publications. The outstanding figure in April 1946 stood at almost 100,000 CHF, but the Secretariat's relentless pursuit saw this reduced to 38,000 by the end of June 1947 – a reduction of over 60%.[415] No debt was too insignificant to chase, including a small debt owed by a Tokyo sales agent named San-Yo-Sha. The decision to do so involved Percy Watterson – working full-time for the F.A.O. since November 1946 and supposedly only working for the League on closing the organisation's U.S. accounts – pursuing the case with the U.S. Custodian of Alien Property in his spare evenings and weekends, all for an amount of only 3,000 CHF.[416]

---

[412] LNA, 11 February 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twelfth Meeting B.L./P.V.12, S569.
[413] LNA, 10 April 1946, statement of the proportion of the total contributions of each state member paid to the League up to March 31st 1946, R5294 17/43857/3223.
[414] The precise outstanding debt was 6,267,468.09 CHF. This figure did not include those member debts which were forgiven i.e., wiped clean, during the liquidation process. A detailed breakdown of the contributions calculations is in the Final Report issued by the Board of Liquidation. It should be noted that whilst this publication has a listed publication date of 31 July 1947, it was not completed and distributed until the start of September 1947: LN, *Board of Liquidation: Final Report to Members*, pp. 28-45.
[415] Documents prepared for the Board outlined the position of publication sales debts in January and July of 1947: LNA, 29 January 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled League Publications Accounts B.L.85, S569; LNA, 23 July 1947, [unknown author], Board of Liquidation document titled Publications Service: Outstanding Accounts B.L.176, S569.
[416] LNA, 14 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirty-First Meeting B.L./P.V.31, S569; LNA, 27 May 1947, letter from Stencek to Watterson asking the latter to pursue the debt with the Alien Property Custodian in Washington D.C., C1784-4 18A/11022/1919.

This dogged pursuit of even the smallest amounts of money, especially when compared with the millions of contributions owed by governments, shows that it was not always the money that made a difference to the Board of Liquidation: it was a matter of principle. The recoup of funds was naturally of concern, representing as it did the interests of members, but the concept of legality and procedure was important to a group that had little else to motivate it in its final months other than a job well done. Neither the Board nor Secretariat officials were under the impression that their work over the institution's final months would be met with immediate renown or fanfare; the best reward they could hope to receive was acknowledgement from members that it had liquidated the organisation as well as possible and, for the Board, that meant executing its responsibilities in a meticulous manner and upholding the standards to which the League had held itself for the past 25 years.

This self-regard and commitment to a set of standards established at the end of the previous World War, was the Board's central cause of anguish when dealing with the I.L.O. approach to liquidation negotiations. The Board believed the I.L.O. was trying to cheat its way to a better deal, and this offended its sense of fair play. Much of its grievance stemmed from a separate I.L.O. decision to withhold budget surpluses from 1945 and 1946 from the League, a stance the Board believed was against the rules and, coupled with the I.L.O. outrage regarding 1947 contributions in suspense, highly-hypocritical.[417] All of this was further exacerbated by the liquidation deadline the Board had set itself of March or April; it knew the I.L.O. leadership was aware of the timings and genuinely believed they were wilfully delaying proceedings in order to obtain a better deal. The Board assumed, and events would prove, that the longer the negotiations continued, the more likely they would be forced to accept the I.L.O. position; the group felt it was being taken advantage of, and perhaps this rankled the group more than anything else, leaving it blind to the negative effects of its unwillingness to cede ground from the start.

The long-held power dynamics of big brother and little brother had shifted. The League was a defunct international organisation, largely forgotten even by its membership, while the I.L.O. was now an official U.N. agency and had been given a

[417] LNA, 14 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-First Meeting B.L.P/.V.21, S569.

new lease of life and energy as a result. After decades of subservience to the League's agenda, it now had the ability to control its own fate – relatively-speaking – and provide its membership with the best possible return on investment. This meant pushing the League to bolster the Staff Pensions Fund as much as possible before taking on its administration, negotiating all the contentious issues concurrently, and even trying – albeit unsuccessfully – to push for a larger slice of the League's Renovation Fund to pay for upkeep of the I.L.O. property lake frontage.[418]

The Board did not like it, but with time it became clear they had little option but to acquiesce to the I.L.O. position. Kisch warned Lester in the spring that the dynamics between the League and the I.L.O. had changed and they ought to avoid a row with the latter, especially in light of the long-standing relationship between the two organisations.[419] The Board's commitment to rules and regulations meant it was never happy with the final arrangement – although that blow was softened by the better-than-expected results in chasing members' outstanding debts – and feared that its concessions to the I.L.O. would be discovered by members.[420] In an effort to avoid events reflecting poorly upon the group, no mention of the controversy and bitter recriminations made it into the Board's Final Report to members, references to the release of contributions in arrears were removed, and for the benefit of members, the transfer of the Judges' Pensions Fund and the Staff Pensions Fund were presented as having taken place on 1 April and 31 May respectively, several weeks earlier than in reality.[421]

The Board of Liquidation believed that acquiring a large financial windfall for members was one of the markers of a successful liquidation, and the group's desire to protect the legacy of both the League and of its own performance, led it to make

---

[418] LNA, 2 April 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled Renovation Fund and containing correspondence between Lester and Phelan in regard to the League Renovation Fund B.L.113, S570.
[419] Kisch wrote: "I think you were right not to be too violent with him [Myrddin-Evans]. We don't want to end up with a row with the I.L.O. which we have done so much to help." LNA, 5 May 1947, letter from Kisch to Lester, S568.
[420] LNA, 21 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twenty-Sixth Meeting B.L./P.V.26, S569.
[421] LNA, 17 June 1947, letter from Hambro to Myrddin-Evans officially accepting the terms of the agreement, R5306 17/43861/8461; LNA, 27 June 1947, letter from Lester to Terence Maxwell explaining the agreement reached between the League and the I.L.O. and the dates of transfer, S568 18A/27605/3411; LNA, 28 June 1947, letter from Lester and Stencek to the Manager of the Lloyds & National Provincial Foreign Bank Ltd. confirming the bolstering of the Staff Pensions Fund by 2.2m CHF, R5299 17/3934/3933.

decisions that ultimately proved counter-intuitive to the speedy deliverance of closure. In its meetings and in relation to the arguments with the I.L.O., the Board referred to its negotiating position as being "morally-right", but as the outcome of the wrangling with the Governing Body showed, taking the moral high-ground did not achieve very much. It did not matter if one of the organisations was more 'right' than the other. The idea that the disputes would be resolved in the manner they had always been, following the same rules and procedures, with the same power dynamics as had existed before the war, was wishful thinking on the League's part. The Board of Liquidation did not appreciate that negotiating with the I.L.O. in 1946-47 was not the same as doing so ten years earlier. The relationship between the two organisations had changed, and the I.L.O.'s priorities were no longer the same as the League's. The presentism that compelled the Secretariat to adhere to the U.N. timetable in 1946 was just as much a factor in the negotiations with the Governing Body in 1947 and, once more, there was little the League could do but acquiesce to the uncertainty. The organisation's leadership took great pride in its 25-year history, but that same pride made it blind to the realities of the impotent position in which it found itself. Both the League and the I.L.O. acted with stubbornness and bad faith during their prolonged negotiations, but by 1947 only one of these organisations had the agency and influence with which to support its posturing.

The Rear Guard

During closure, the Board of Liquidation was effectively free to do what it wanted, for better or worse, with little to no oversight. As this chapter has shown thus far, many of the decisions it made in 1947 were affected by a desire to pursue what it believed member governments wanted i.e., money, alongside the hope of building a positive legacy for the organisation, sometimes at the expense of speed and, as this section reveals, the League's staff. When the Secretariat returned to work in 1947, it was made up of just 20 officials – twelve women and eight men. Fifteen of them were still in post by July, but two months later only three remained.[422] This section looks more closely at this 1947 cohort and the League leadership's relationship with them,

[422] LNA, 1er Janvier 1947, Listes des Membres du Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, S698; LNA, 23 August 1947, letter from Lester to Stencek confirming the staffing arrangements for September 1947 onwards, S723.

revealing the different attitudes towards them from the Board and the Secretariat's senior figures, and why these officials were not allowed to claim ownership of even a small part of the legacy the Board was trying to build, despite their own long-running commitment to, and pride in, the League of Nations.

As a group the 1947 officials were at the older end of their working lives – their average age was almost 50 – and the vast majority had worked for, and been loyal to, the Secretariat for many years. Eight of the officials left in 1947 had over twenty years each under their belts, the longest-serving of whom was Constance Harris. She joined the Secretariat in 1919 at the age of 22 and stayed with the League for over 28 years before leaving in mid-August 1947 at the age of 50. She held the longest tenure of not just those remaining in 1947, but of any other League Secretariat official in its history.[423] A number of the group also had more than one appointment with the League, and several of them had four or more separate appointments across the Secretariat's lifetime, suggesting a level of commitment both from these individuals to the League, and from the League to them.[424] Some of their appointments only lasted for short periods, but overall they added up to considerable service. Kathleen Harrison, a shorthand-typist, held four separate appointments spanning from 1924 through to 1947 for a total of 12.75 years – the shortest of the group – while Winifred Oberdorff also had four appointments working as a copyist and stenographer, but this time adding up to almost twenty years of service.

There are numerous examples amongst these officials of individuals wanting to return to the Secretariat again and again, and senior figures endeavouring to accommodate them. Oberdorff joined the Secretariat as a copyist in 1919, serving for 13 years before leaving to get married. Unfortunately, after fewer than two years of marriage and aged only 31 years old, she was widowed in 1934. With no means to support herself she wrote to the Secretariat asking to return and, as she was well-regarded during her previous tenure, it was agreed to re-engage her. Oberdorff left again in 1940 when war forced a mass exit of officials, but came back to the League

[423] LNA, [no date], Curriculum Vitae of C.M. Harris prepared by League of Nations Secretariat, S789.
[424] The other four officials who all had more than one appointment all had two in total. Cecily Babington and Alma Schibli both worked for the Secretariat in the 1920s before returning after the Second World War, while Chester Purves and Roger Fuss both left the service in mid-1940 before being recruited again in 1946 and 1942 respectively.

in 1946 when Valentin Stencek facilitated her return once again, who later went as far as to convince Oberdorff to stay with the Secretariat in April 1947 when she tried to leave the organisation for a better paid role with the new U.N. Refugee Organisation.[425] A very similar case was that of Alma Raisin (later Schibli), who joined the Secretariat in 1920 and left to marry in 1926. Also widowed at a young age, she wrote to the Palais during the Second World War as she was finding it difficult to financially support herself and her son following her husband's death, and she was offered a position as a shorthand-typist as a result. These women obviously felt some degree of confidence that the leaders of the Secretariat would be amenable to their requests and, judging by the positive responses they received, their faith was justified.[426]

There are other instances amongst the group of officials remaining in 1947 of the Secretariat's leadership choosing to not only respond positively to pleas for employment like those from Oberdorff and Schibli, but to also actively seek out and recruit former staff for new positions. Cecily Babington, hired to support the Board of Liquidation in early 1946, had previously worked for the Secretariat as a shorthand-typist between 1922 and 1935. Chester Purves was also directly re-engaged to take on the role of Secretary to the same Board, having previously worked as a member of section in the Internal Service for 18 years, several of which were spent as a direct assistant to Stencek.[427] His return was lobbied for by the latter, and he was so pursued by the leadership that he was allowed to bring his niece Ann with him – and find work for her with the Secretariat – when he returned to Geneva in 1946.[428]

One of the most notable examples of officials' dedication to the League came in the case of Percy Watterson, already mentioned several times in this thesis. Born in Leeds in 1887, he joined the Secretariat at its inception in July 1919 as an accountant. He stayed in the Treasury throughout its lifetime and relocated to Princeton alongside the Economic and Financial Organisation (E.F.O.) in 1940 to

---

[425] LNA, 10 August 1934, letter from unknown author to N. Williams regarding Winifred Oberdorff's request to return to the Secretariat, S844; LNA, 2 April 1947, memo written by Stencek explaining that he had convinced Oberdorff to stay with the League following her resignation earlier that day, S844.
[426] LNA, 19 January 1945, letter from Alma Raisin to Stencek asking the latter to keep her in mind for any English secretarial roles, S876.
[427] Purves left the Secretariat, for the first time, in 1940 following Avenol's call for resignations: LNA, 19 July 1940, letter from Stencek to Purves acknowledging the latter's resignation, S860.
[428] Purves did not want to leave his niece in London when he returned to Geneva, and thus directly asked if he could bring her with him and have her work for the League. LNA, 30 January 1946, letter from Jacklin to Lester outlining the reappointment (and appointment) of Purves and his niece, S860.

support its work. When the final E.F.O. staff in the U.S. transferred to the United Nations at the end of July 1946, Watterson – despite having already found a new position with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O.) – stayed in New Jersey on a part-time basis in order to close the Princeton office and wrap up the League's financial matters in the United States, whilst simultaneously working in his new role.[429] It was originally anticipated that this split of roles between the League and the F.A.O. would only last for two months while Watterson wrapped up loose ends, but by the start of October it became clear that finalising the League's U.S.-based business would take longer than planned. Nevertheless Watterson was utterly committed to both the League and its Secretariat, and felt he owed it to the organisation he had worked for the majority of his career to complete the work he had started. In a personal letter to Stencek in August 1946, he wrote "It is moreover a sincere regret that I have not been able to complete my services with the League in Geneva itself which holds so many intimate associations, and where I should have had the privilege of expressing my adieus personally to so many old colleagues and friends."[430] He officially left the League's employ, and joined the F.A.O. as expected, full-time, at the start of November 1946, but that was not where his relationship with the Secretariat ended.

Instead, Watterson agreed to use his weekends and evenings on the League's behalf, whilst working a full-time job for the newly-established F.A.O. – his new employers having agreed to the arrangement.[431] The topic of financial restitution was discussed between Watterson, Lester, and Stencek, but no decision was ever reached and ultimately the Englishman, assuming the work would take a matter of a few weeks to conclude, agreed to volunteer his time without salary. However the work was still not complete by the end of 1946 and, despite outsourcing the publication of the E.F.O.'s final work – titled *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years* and written by Princeton academic Dudley Kirk – to his former colleague Ansgar Rosenborg at the U.N., Watterson found himself toiling on League-related problems throughout 1947.[432] Originally his remit centred on the closure of the

[429] LNA, 12 September 1946, letter from Stencek to Watterson suggesting he remain on the League payroll on a part-time basis, S904.
[430] LNA, 23 August 1946, letter from Watterson to Stencek, S904.
[431] LNA, 17 July 1946, cable from Lester to Ansgar Rosenborg regarding the agreement with the F.A.O. in regard to Watterson, S904.
[432] Rosenborg, now working at the U.N., took on the responsibility for the publication of the final E.FO. publication, titled *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years*, in late November 1946. As Watterson had not been part of the E.F.O. and Geneva was keen to close the Princeton accounts as soon as possible,

League's accounts in the United States, but as liquidation proceedings dragged on he became the default liaison for any outstanding problems the League had in North America, and his workload was much greater than he could have originally anticipated. As already mentioned above, he chased debts for the League and acted as a point of contact for Lester while he was in New York in the autumn of 1946, but he also dealt with forgotten insurance accounts and even spent time arranging the shipment of the celebratory tapestries belonging to the League which had been on display at Haverford College during the war.[433] Despite these numerous additional tasks, Watterson managed to close the League's U.S.-based accounts in May – the delays to Ansgar Rosenborg's E.F.O. publication notwithstanding – and his commitment to the organisation remained steadfast despite the lack of restitution, but even he was frustrated at times.[434] He was most exasperated by the lack of communication about his activities, occasionally expressing annoyance that one half of the Secretariat did not seem to know what the other half was doing, and having to remind his Genevan colleagues of updates he had already provided.[435] However there was one additional matter that devoured Watterson's time more than any other in 1947, and it tested his dedication to the League to its limit: the organisation's legal case against the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

Secretariat officials based in the U.S. during the Second World War were obliged to pay income tax as non-resident aliens during their time there. Ordinarily officials were exempt from paying such taxes in Switzerland so the League decided to pay lump sums to these individuals to cover the income lost until an appeal against the taxation could be launched. The League believed it had solid legal grounds to

---

it was felt that Rosenborg would be a better figure to oversee the process: LNA, 26 November 1946, letter from Stencek to Ansgar Rosenborg asking if the latter would accept responsibility for the publication, C1741 19/43868/43868.

[433] Watterson discovered in February 1947 that fire insurance covering League publications held in Trenton, New Jersey, was still active, over six months after it should have been cancelled: LNA, 14 February 1947, letter from A.W. Volz of Walter F. Smith and Company to Watterson, C1784-4. For examples of Watterson pursuing debts see: LNA, 7 May 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek regarding League monies held with the Banque de l'Indochine in Hanoi, C1784-4, or LNA, 5 June 1947, letter from Watterson to David L. Bazelon regarding outstanding publications debts, C1784-4. LNA, 3 February 1947, letter from Benjamin Gerig to Dean Lockwood of Haverford College, Pennsylvania, regarding the removal of League tapestries from the College to Geneva, C1784-4.

[434] Watterson explained the situation regarding the publication of *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years* in a letter to Stencek: LNA, 20 May 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek, C1784-4.

[435] In a letter to Rosenborg in early January 1947, Watterson wrote: "Despite the few people that still remain in League service in Geneva, it seems that they have little to do with one another." LNA, 9 January 1947, letter from Watterson to Rosenborg, C1741. He wrote to Chester Purves about the above incident, reminding him that he left Princeton some months earlier: LNA, 9 January 1947, letter from Watterson to Purves, C1784-4 10A/43320/41207.

reclaim the money, hoping to provide a better financial deal for its members in the process, and thus launched a test case using John Henry Chapman, a New Zealander who worked for the E.F.O. in Princeton during the war, and had been with the League as a Member of Section since 1921. Should the case be successful, the outcome would set precedent for other officials, and the Internal Revenue would be forced to reimburse these individuals who would, in turn, repay the League.[436] A law firm in New York, Edwards & Smith, was pursuing the case on the League's behalf but the physical and mental distance between New York and Geneva meant that the League's leadership was not always particularly well-informed or knowledgeable about the process. This was especially true after the departure of Secretariat legal advisor Émile Giraud in late 1946, which led to misconceptions as to what the case would involve from the League's perspective and how long it would take to resolve. The League's leadership laboured under the assumption that the case would be settled before the organisation dissolved itself, despite repeated warnings from Harold Edwards, of Edwards & Smith, that any decision would be unlikely before the autumn of 1947 at the earliest.[437]

In the autumn of 1946, Giraud and several members of the Board of Liquidation expressed serious concerns about the case's likelihood of success, the increasing legal costs, and the lack of definite timeline. The Board made the decision to push on regardless, but as time passed the case started to represent more of a burden than an opportunity.[438] Carl Hambro called the law suit "disgusting" in a letter to Lester in March 1947, and once again suggested they "cut our losses" and abandon the case.[439] At its twentieth meeting on 12 April, several members of the Board echoed Hambro's concerns, but Kisch convinced the group that $5,000 – the outstanding fees quoted by Edwards and Smith – was a worthy price to pay for a possible pay-out of almost $80,000.[440] So, despite his misgivings, Hambro wrote to Edwards again to confirm that the League would be going ahead with the case,

---

[436] LNA, 4 July 1946, [unknown author], Board of Liquidation document titled Income Tax on Salaries of League Officials in U.S.A. B.L.17, S570.
[437] See Edwards' letter to Hambro: LNA, 12 March 1947, letter from Harold Edwards – of Edwards & Smith in New York – to Carl Hambro, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[438] In a letter to Lester, Hambro wrote: "Under the circumstances, I can do nothing but ask them [Edwards & Smith] to keep on": LNA, 3 December 1946, letter from Hambro to Lester, S567.
[439] Hambro wrote "I do not like the whole situation and we shall have to discuss whether it would not be the best course to cut our losses and get out of this whole disgusting law suit." LNA, 18 March 1947, letter from Hambro to Lester, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[440] LNA, 12 April 1947, League of Nations: Board of Liquidation, Provisional Minutes of Twentieth Meeting B.L./P.V.20, S569.

explaining that members would be more likely to forgive an unsuccessful verdict than having spent $25,000 on a case they then decided to drop.[441]

The decision to pursue the costly lawsuit despite everyone's misgivings may have seemed foolhardy, but the Board's discussion in its twentieth meeting and Hambro's consequent letter to Edwards, reveal why the group would take such a risk. Once again the decision to continue seemed to be about money – the League did not want to be seen wasting any – but the Board's preoccupation with propriety was also responsible. Pursuit of the lawsuit, like the pursuit of outstanding debts, was the 'right' course of action. League officials had never paid income taxes whilst they were part of the Secretariat and, from the Board's perspective, although the League decided to reimburse those U.S.-based officials as a matter of staff welfare in the interim, they should never have been taxed in the first place. Even though the United States was not a member of the League and had never agreed to an arrangement whereby officials would be exempt, the organisation's leadership believed it had the right to demand its $80,000. As far as the Board of Liquidation was concerned, it was a matter of principle and, as echoed in meeting records, it did not want to explain to members why the League had spent $25,000 to initiate the case, only for it to be abandoned before its conclusion.[442]

Nonetheless the decision to continue, borne out of the Board's apprehension about its reputation, resulted in difficulties that were centred not just on the schedule and the costs, but also what was involved in pursuing it and who was responsible. With Edwards & Smith based in New York, and many of the former officials to which the lawsuit applied still living in the United States, Percy Watterson was, as far as the League's leadership was concerned, conveniently placed to coordinate the work involved. This included obtaining financial details and power of attorney forms from his former colleagues, as well as liaising with Edwards & Smith lawyers, despite not being made fully-aware of the details of the case by Geneva – another cause of frustration on his part.[443] When Watterson left the League in October 1946, he could

[441] LNA, 24 April 1947, letter from Hambro to Edwards, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[442] Cecil Kisch told his fellow Board members: "A Government faced with a similar situation would certainly decide in favour of a continuance." LNA, 12 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Twentieth Meeting B.L./P.V.20, S569.
[443] Watterson wrote to Stencek in May 1947 to check if the case was still happening as he had not received any information on the subject: LNA, 2 May 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek, R3748 3A/41136/705.

not have imagined that he would still be using his weekends and evenings to settle the organisation's business many months later, and still without salary. Yet he never complained – at least not in official correspondence – and never refused a request for help, which would once again prove fortuitous for the League's leadership when it became apparent the case could not be resolved before the organisation dissolved.

The Board's choice to pursue the case despite the League's impending closure raised an important question: how could an organisation pursue a lawsuit if said organisation no longer existed? The answer proposed by Edwards & Smith was to appoint a trustee to act as a final executor of the League's estate; someone who could tie up the last financial loose ends once the organisation was otherwise dissolved. Initial discussions suggested either Hambro or Lester as suitable candidates, but attention soon turned to Watterson, once again conveniently located in Washington D.C. Stencek had the unenviable job of conveying yet another appeal for assistance to his former colleague, taking great care to note that costs would be covered, the work would likely be complete by "October at the latest", and that Watterson must clear the proposal with the F.A.O. first.[444] Including the time it took for Stencek's letter to cross the Atlantic, only six days passed before Watterson confirmed via telegram that he was happy to take on the trustee role – providing it did not take up too much of his time – and that the F.A.O. had agreed.[445] Unfortunately for Watterson the work would once again take up a significantly greater portion of his time than expected, but the Board concluded, consciously or not, that it could take advantage of, and benefit from, his continued willingness to go above and beyond for the organisation.

The Board of Liquidation had both a physically and emotionally distant relationship with the officials of the Secretariat. Most of the Board members had very little contact with staff beyond Lester, Stencek, and Purves, as well as possibly Cecily Babington and Dagny Gran – both of whom worked alongside Purves supporting the administration of meetings. As a consequence this meant the group did not have the same loyalty to officials, past and present, that Lester did as Secretary-General; it

[444] LNA, 20 June 1947, letter from Stencek to Watterson outlining the position of trustee, C1784-4 3A/41136/705(2).
[445] LNA, 25 June 1947, telegram from Watterson to Stencek, R3748 3A/41136/705.

tended to view the Secretariat as separate from the rest of the League it was trying to build a legacy for. The Board felt a responsibility to protect its version of the organisation's history and essentially claimed a monopoly on what was, and what was not, to be preserved; the Secretariat was not part of the process.

The commitment to acting as legal adjudicator for the League's closure and its allegiance to rules and procedure, meant the Board could be less than benevolent when it came to decisions involving officials, and especially requests from staff for leeway or flexibility surrounding said rules. One of the Board's most unsympathetic rulings came in relation to the (supposedly) voluntary contributions paid by officials during the war. These contributions were purportedly for staff welfare purposes and pooled into a central fund, but in reality it became another strand of general funding for the organisation, with Stencek calculating that of the 1,025,982 CHF – the equivalent of almost $3m in 2021 – collected from officials between 1940 and 1946, only 41,220 CHF had been used for officials' benefit.[446] In June 1947, Yves Biraud – former President of the League Staff Committee and by then a W.H.O. official – wrote to Hambro on behalf of another 91 co-signees asking him to return the contributions to staff.[447] Biraud argued that they had not been used as originally intended, the scheme had not been truly voluntary – noting that the funds had been listed in official budgets as income before officials even agreed to the arrangement – and that the League was now in sufficiently good financial health to warrant the reimbursement, which was calculated in a Board of Liquidation document at just under one million Swiss Francs.[448] No current officials signed the letter, but Stencek noted that a number of them – although not specifically named – were sympathetic to their former colleagues' proposal.[449] This was a request of an ethical nature,

[446] This meant 984,761 CHF of the voluntary contributions had been "used for ordinary Secretariat expenditure": LNA, 14 June 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester, S922. The calculation of the 2021 USD equivalents for Swiss Francs in 1946/47, is done on the same basis as that used in chapter 3, first utilising a 1947 exchange rate for CHF into USD of 1 CHF = 0.234 USD: LNA, 4 August 1946, letter from Lester to Lie, R5812 50/43672/43262. The second calculation converts 1947 USD into 2021 USD: Williamson, 'Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past' at www.measuringworth.com (retrieved 4 December 2021).
[447] LNA, 12 June 1947, letter from Yves Biraud to Hambro, S922. A full list of signées can be found at: LNA, 26 juin 1947, Liste des signataires de la pétition concernant le remboursement de la contribution volontaire et auxquels ont a envoyé copie de la lettre adressée en réponse, au Dr. Biraud, S922.
[448] LNA, 16 June 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled Voluntary Contributions B.L.160, S922.
[449] LNA, 12 June1947, letter from Biraud addressed to "Monsieur le Président du Comité de Liquidation de la Société des Nations', S922. When forwarding Biraud's letter to Lester, Stencek noted that several current officials had also been approached to co-sign but, whilst feeling sympathy for the request, had thought it best to abstain. LNA, 14 June 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester, S922.

signed by officials who had worked hard for the League – on reduced pay – during the most dangerous time in the organisation's history, and now submitted to a group of men who enjoyed privileged positions in the diplomatic world. The Board often spoke of its moral duty and commitment to doing what was right in its meetings, especially in regard to the I.L.O. Staff Pensions debacle, but in this instance the request was only discussed in brief at the group's thirty-second meeting before being dismissed without argument. Carl Hambro even went as far as to suggest the only reason the claim had been made was because the former officials in question had heard "the rumours concerning the large sums at the Board's disposal."[450]

The Board was not entirely without sympathy for former officials. Percy Watterson travelled to Vichy in June 1940 on League business, but following the invasion of north-western Europe, he was forced to abandon his car and flee to England via boat. After almost six years – during which he was in the United States – he submitted a claim for 2,500 CHF to cover the loss, and while the Board was not happy about the delay in his request, decided to grant him a partial indemnity of 1,000 CHF.[451] Another example where the Board granted some leeway was that of Doctors Park and Dakshinamurthi, both of whom worked for the League at the Epidemiological Bureau in Singapore and had lost personal effects during the Japanese bombardment and invasion of the city in 1942.[452] The Board did not believe it had a legal case to answer, but Kisch pointedly noted that, as the two men had shown loyalty to the League, the organisation may have a "moral liability" to uphold. Confident that making payments of £1,250 to Park and 1,000 rupees to Dakshinamurthi would not set a precedent for similar war-damage claims, the Board agreed to grant these indemnities on the proviso that no legal liability should be accepted.[453]

---

[450] Lester wrote "I am asked to inform you that the Board does not see its way to grant the request." LNA, 23 June 1947, letter from Lester to Biraud, S922; LNA, 16 June 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.32, S569.
[451] The original request from Watterson is detailed in a Board of Liquidation document: LNA, 14 January 1947, [unknown author], Board of Liquidation document, written by Lester, titled Claim of Mr. P.G. Watterson for Loss sustained on his Motor Car B.L.77, R5501 18B/40436/37845. Watterson acknowledged his 1,000 CHF indemnity roughly six weeks later in a letter to Lester: LNA, 25 February 1947, letter from Watterson to Lester, C1784-4.
[452] The claims are laid out in a Board of Liquidation document: LNA, 30 January 1947, [unknown author], Board of Liquidation document titled Claims for Indemnity made by Dr. C.L. Park and Dr. S. Dakshinamurthi, ex-officials of the League's former Epidemiological Bureau at Singapore B.L.86, S569.
[453] Lester noted in the Board's thirteenth meeting, where the claims were discussed, that the League had been particularly strict about claims for war damage for fear of setting precedent, but "that danger was now over and these two cases only remained." LNA, 12 February 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Thirteenth Meeting B.L./P.V.13, S569.

One particular request for assistance came to the Board on several occasions in 1947 regarding Lucie Courtault, a Frenchwoman who served as a Clerk in the League's Paris office between 1920 and 1940. Now over 60 years old and partially-infirm, the devaluation of the French Franc meant that her League pension was no longer sufficient to live on, and while Courtault received some financial respite as a result of an earlier claim in the spring of 1946, she requested assistance again. The Board discussed the matter in its twenty-second and twenty-fourth meetings in April and, while the group was deeply sympathetic to Courtault's plight, it was concerned that granting funds directly from the Board could create a dangerous precedent. Committed as it was to doing things in line with regulations, the Board did not want an influx of requests from former officials to deal with, so it came up with an indirect means of assistance. The Board granted 15,000 CHF from League funds to the Administrative Board of the Staff Pensions Fund, to be distributed by the latter at its discretion, but on the proviso it be used only to relieve the case of Courtault and others like her suffering financial hardship. This allowed the Liquidation Board, and the League, to help those in the direst need of assistance, while shifting responsibility for it to an arguably more appropriate source and keeping its staunch principles intact.[454]

Nevertheless Courtault's request for assistance was just one of many dealt with by the Board and unfortunately for the Frenchwoman's former colleagues, the group was often much less sympathetic to their claims. Emile Henneberger appealed for compensation following his contraction of emphysema, a condition he claimed was brought about by working in unheated parts of the Palais during the war.[455] Similarly, Tatiana de Peganow appealed for disability compensation following her dismissal from the Secretariat in 1929 due to ill-health.[456] Léon Steinig, a former U.S.-based official, requested a rebate on further taxes he had been forced to pay as a result of the League's decision to refund his income tax in the United States as a lump sum.[457] All of these requests were denied by the Board of Liquidation.

---

[454] LNA, 12 June 1947, [unknown author], Board of Liquidation document titled Staff Pensions Fund, Contribution of 15,000 francs to relieve cases of hardship B.L.155, S569.
[455] LNA, 21 April 1947, Board of Liquidation: Annex to Twenty-Seventh meeting, prepared by Lester and titled Claim of E. Henneberger, S569.
[456] LNA, 16 April 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Lester, titled Demande d'indemnité de Mlle de Peganow B.L.125, S569.
[457] LNA, 5 March 1947, letter from Léon Steinig to Stencek asking the League to refund the additional $957 he has been charged by the U.S. Government, C1784-4.

Lester was party to Board decisions – he sat in on all its meetings even if he was not a member – but outside of sessions his instinct tended towards protecting his officials, especially those still working at the Palais. After years of reduced salaries and stagnant benefits caused by the League's diminished war-time budget, many officials – especially those in more junior roles – were finally granted long-overdue increases in both salary and benefits at the start of 1947.[458] He also pushed for other international organisations in Geneva to recognise its newly-employed former League officials as international civil servants. As these individuals were already in Switzerland when they were recruited, they were often categorised as locally recruited employees – which did not provide the same protections and benefits as an international official – despite most of them having originally moved there to work for the League from their home countries.[459] He also tried to secure future employment for those left working at the Palais. He provided references for individuals, and in June 1947 he sent letters advocating for his officials to the U.N. – both in New York and Geneva – the I.L.O., the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organisation, and U.N.E.S.C.O., alongside mini-biographies of each member of staff.[460] Unfortunately he was not particularly successful in this endeavour – most of the new institutions had already filled their ranks by the summer of 1947 – but this lack of success did not diminish his efforts on their behalf.

Lester's working relationships were strictly serious and professional, but on occasion he let down his guard with those with whom he worked closely. His secretary since he became Deputy Secretary-General in 1937, Cosette Nonin, left for a new position with the U.N. Geneva Office at the end of January 1947, and Lester wrote a kind and thankful letter to her upon her departure: "I have had no work in which you did not participate and I have never felt either the need or inclination to conceal from you any element, political or personal, touching upon our Secretariat life…It is no wonder that this has developed a relationship which I will always look back upon

[458] For just two examples see the salary increases granted to Constance Harris and Cecily Babington, which were backdated to January and March respectively: LNA, 27 May 1947, letter from Lester to Harris, S789; LNA, 21 March 1947, letter from Stencek to Babington, S707.
[459] LNA, 7 January 1947, letter from Lester to Moderow, R5385 18A/44108/3471.
[460] LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to Phelan, S916; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Refugee Organisation, S927; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to Moderow, S927; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to Trygve Lie, S927; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to the Director-General of U.N.E.S.C.O., S942.

with pleasure and satisfaction".[461] He was also particularly grateful to Stencek, writing "I never shall be able to say enough" in a note celebrating the latter's 25 years' of service in 1946, and showered his right-hand man with uncharacteristically effusive praise in a farewell letter in August 1947: "During a career of more than 26 years' duration in which you have been called upon to fulfil duties of a most varied nature, you have shown yourself to be an excellent international official. Your deep sense of responsibility, tireless industry, thoroughness and impartiality have been remarkable. Your imperturbable efficiency, calmness in every emergency, your good judgment, common sense and sense of proportion, always most estimable qualities, have proved invaluable in the difficult days of war and liquidation."[462]

The Final Report to members, issued by the Board of Liquidation, revealed that approximately 200 former League officials moved to the United Nations, or its agencies, following the former's dissolution. This seemingly rosy figure did not, however, always reflect the experience of those Secretariat staff that stayed with the League through 1947. Although some of the officials mentioned above were able to find other roles as international civil servants following their departure, it was not as easy as it was for their colleagues who transferred directly into positions at the U.N. or elsewhere. Constance Harris left the League without another position lined up, as did Evelyn Curry and Marie Boiteux, despite the latter's expressed wish to move to another international organisation.[463] Between them, these three women had over seventy-five years of experience as international officials, but aside from Lester's efforts, they were let down by a lack of interest from both the new organisations, and their most senior leaders.

The Board of Liquidation was not impervious to officials' concerns, but the Secretariat simply did not feature in its legacy-focussed priorities. When discussing requests from current and former officials, Board members would often note that they felt empathy for the people concerned and that the appeals were sometimes justified but, in contrast to the group's maintained belief that the moral high-ground was important in the negotiations with the I.L.O., in these instances rules and

[461] LNA, 4 February 1947, letter from Lester to Nonin, S568.
[462] Lester continued: "Your invariable kindness to the staff and readiness to consider their point of view won you their highest regard and esteem. I would ask you to accept my renewed thanks for your cooperation and my best wishes for the future." LNA, 7 August 1947, letter from Lester to Stencek, S887.
[463] LNA, 19 July 1947, letter from Boiteux to Stencek, S723.

procedures were more important.[464] The leadership's commitment was to the League as an institution rather than the League as a workforce of Secretariat officials, and this approach influenced the Board's policy in all areas of decision-making. It meant the group could take advantage of Watterson's commitment and refuse legitimate requests for financial compensation, whilst prioritising issues that would reflect well upon the organisation as a whole.

Conclusions

Reading the Board of Liquidation's Final Report to members, one might be forgiven for assuming the months leading up to its publication were relatively quiet and without controversy. It contained no mention of delays to closure, or long-running disagreements with the I.L.O.; it was a carefully crafted message designed to reassure governments that the process was over and that the Board had safely delivered on its responsibilities as an impartial arbiter. Behind its meticulous message, however, was a Board of Liquidation motivated by both pridefulness and apprehension, an official legacy designed by only a handful of men, and a Secretariat barred from sharing in the ownership of the League's memory.

The League's founders rightly understood that public and member support were vital for its survival – hence the ground-breaking early emphasis on public relations – but the endemic desire to prove itself worthy remained a part of the organisation's psyche long after its fate was sealed. Pride in the League experiment and the longing to be seen as a credible part of the international community, by those both in 1947 and in the future, guided almost every course of action taken by the Board in its final months. They aimed to preserve the organisation's legacy via a double-pronged approach: keeping governments happy by providing a good return on investment and using all possible means to ensure the League story was not further maligned or erased after it was gone.

---

[464] A case that came to the Board on a couple of occasions during the liquidation period involved two former officials of the PCIJ. Both men were obliged to resign in 1940 but continued to work through 1945, without pay, to ensure the Court remained functional. The claim was first put to the Board for financial compensation in June 1946, and discussed at the fourth meeting in July of the same year, but the group refused to consider the issue as it had already been heard at the Supervisory Commission: LNA, 27 June 1946, Board of Liquidation document, written by W.J.M. van Eysinga, titled Situation of two former officials of the Permanent Court B.L.12, S569; LNA, 15 July 1946, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Fourth Meeting B.L./P.V.4, S569.

There were both positive and negative repercussions, depending on one's interests, to the Board's approach to liquidation in 1947. The group was undoubtedly successful at recouping debts owed to the organisation, and its pursuit of such monies was of benefit not only to members but also occasionally to officials – current and former – who received long-overdue increases in salary and, where they were successful, compensation claims. The League's well-endowed coffers also allowed the Board to pursue its increasingly grand plans for the permanent exhibit. Without the additional available funds, it is unlikely the Board and Breycha-Vauthier would have had the means with which to make the League Museum a reality, at least on the scale to which they imagined. The Board was in no way obliged to continue with the 1930s plans for a permanent exhibit – it was not part of the Assembly's resolution to liquidate the organisation – but the tenacity of its members, and of Secretariat officials, saw the establishment of a museum which remains in the Palais des Nations today as a continuing testament to an organisation that many in the international arena in 1947 would have happily seen removed from collective memory.

In many respects the Board of Liquidation had reconciled itself to the nature of the organisation's reputation in the post-war world. It knew that the efforts to please governments and other international organisations with a proper liquidation would not change the way many felt about the League's past, and the endeavour to provide members with a good return on their financial investment would not save the institution's reputation in the short-term. The League's ingrained focus on public relations and prestige, however, meant that the Board was unusually aware of the power of narrative and how control of it could be used to influence people long after the organisation was buried. The actions taken to keep the League's Archives together and accessible to researchers, have had many of the long-term implications the Board wished for, even if academia's reassessment of the organisation took a little longer than it would have liked, and said reassessment has not resulted in a complete turnaround on how we think about the League's relative merits. Nevertheless, without the leadership's pioneering recognition of the importance of archives, it is unlikely we would understand, and be able to study, the League with the ease to which we have become accustomed.

Yet the Board's pride and fear of reproach also proved self-defeating. The efforts to pursue debts, whilst advantageous for the organisation's finances and the perception that the leadership was taking its role seriously, caused significant delays to the liquidation process. Whilst the choice was never made explicit in correspondence or official minutes of Board meetings, the group decided appearance were more important than expediency. This manifested itself in the on-going pursuance of contributions, the decision to continue with the income tax lawsuit, and the tumultuous negotiations with the I.L.O., which might have been settled months earlier had the Board addressed the situation sooner. The same events were further negatively affected by the perceived injury to the leadership's ego, brought about by the I.L.O.'s entrenched negotiating position. Phelan and Myrddin-Evans were no longer obliged to kowtow to the League's suggestions, but the Board was not ready to accept the new power dynamics of 1947.

The Board of Liquidation had a tendency to act like it owned the League which, in some respects and as already mentioned, meant it acted fervently to protect the organisation's memory. However, this sense of entitlement did not include, and also resulted in sometimes shabby treatment for, the League's most dedicated officials. Sadly for these individuals, the Board's efforts to please – the targets of which included governments, the general public, and even unknown future researchers – did not include those who had worked for the organisation for decades. Board members were not wilfully malicious, but the group took the view that it was not responsible for the Secretariat, and instead acted first and foremost with the interests of members in mind. The positive rulings made in favour of officials only tended to occur if said decisions did not impact negatively on the organisation's financial situation, and if actions could be taken quietly without setting a precedent for others. Officials were dedicated both to each other and to the idea of the League, but 'the League' was not always loyal to them in return. Despite the efforts of Lester and Stencek, a number of individuals who wished to remain in international civil service were unable to find new positions upon leaving the League, and the willingness of those like Watterson and Breycha-Vauthier to go above and beyond the call of duty was taken advantage of. The Board was fixated on preserving the League's memory, but the legacy it was trying to build did not necessarily reflect the whole organisation. The Secretariat, arguably the backbone of the institution and the

one constant throughout its lifetime, was not part of the image the Board was trying to preserve and was cast aside as a result.

July 1947 marked the end of the Board of Liquidation's work. The organisation itself was still lingering on its deathbed, but the leadership decided strategic oversight was no longer needed and Hambro's group parted ways for the last time on 23rd of that month. There were no official celebrations of its work at that meeting, or even a few words of commemoration or thanks. After six months of inactivity in the latter half of 1946 the group spent 32 meetings, across four separate sessions, doing its utmost to protect the League's reputation both then and in the future. In many ways it succeeded in what it set out to achieve: financial recompense for members was better than expected, it enabled the future study of the organisation, and built a physical memorial that continues to stand at the heart of the Palais des Nations. Nonetheless that same commitment also resulted in a liquidation that was months overdue, an abandoned and unappreciated workforce, and an inability to recognise that prideful posturing was not an advantageous approach to negotiations. The Board spent so much of its time either looking back at the organisation's glory days, or forwards to the desired reassessment of its legacy in the years to come, that it often forgot to manage the practicalities of 1947.

Chapter Five

The Many Endings of the League of Nations, August 1947 and Beyond

"Today's New York Times brought the grand news that you are at the end of your long vigil in Geneva and I want to send you this line of warmest congratulations on a grand job grandly done!!!"

Letter from Arthur Sweetser to Seán Lester, 5 August 1947.[465]

"I tried to obtain, tried to identify people who had had previous experience in the League of Nations so that we would be able to benefit from their experience in the League, and maybe we would learn more about what not to do and would help us identify what we should do…"

From an interview with Milton P. Siegel, former Assistant Director-General of the World Health Organisation, 15 November 1982.[466]

At what point did the League of Nations cease to exist? On the surface this might seem like a straightforward question with a clearly identifiable answer, but the institution's closure was elaborate and is not easily simplified. The organisation was made up of various facets, some more palpable or physical than others, and all were legitimate aspects of what Arthur Sweetser described as "this first Great Experiment", but few of the League's elements drew to a close at the same time.[467] This chapter examines the weeks and months following the Board of Liquidation's dissolution, the challenges faced by those officials still working in the League's name, and the elements of the organisation that outlived it. And, most importantly,

---

[465] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1947, letter from Sweetser to Lester.
[466] World Health Organization Archives Unit, 15 November 1982, Transcript of oral interview with Professor Milton P. Siegel, moderated by Gino Levy, Chief of News Media Relations at the W.H.O., and with the participation of Mr Norman Howard-Jones, p. 26: https://www.who.int/archives/fonds_collections/special/milton_siegel_tapes.pdf (retrieved 21 February 2021).
[467] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1947, letter from Sweetser to Lester.

this chapter asks if it is possible to, and if we should, pronounce one of the League's many endings more valid than the others.

The mood amongst the League's leadership was once again relatively high at the end of July 1947. The Board of Liquidation departed Geneva for the last time following its final meeting on 23rd of that month and, having taken action to establish the permanent exhibit and the long-term protection of the organisation's Archives, the group felt satisfied with its achievements. Board members identified only the Final Report as outstanding business and "agreed that unless anything unexpected should occur requiring a meeting in the meantime, the Board would not need to hold another formal meeting and would be regarded as dissolved on 31st July, 1947."[468] As far as the group was concerned, their work – as well as that of the League of Nations – was over, and this chapter scrutinises what followed, highlighting a number of problems that prevented the organisation concluding its business, and challenging our preconceived ideas about the League's death.

Compared to the high levels of activity in 1946 and the first half of 1947, the League's last months were not particularly hectic or tumultuous. Instead this chapter covers a time when the organisation was experiencing a long, drawn-out demise, a spectre of its former self but still labouring to metaphorically turn off the lights. Studying these months transform our understanding of when and how the League actually closed, demolishing the long-held belief that the organisation disappeared from the world in the spring of 1946, or even the summer of 1947, and instead suggests that elements of both the organisation and its institutional memory continued into 1948 and beyond. This chapter also forces us to consider what we mean when we talk about the end of an organisation; what markers need to be in place to make the end a reality, and does it matter if we are unable to identify this moment in time for the League?

This chapter is structured around the League's many endings, with five sections focussed on key points at which different aspects of the League concluded. The first examines August 1947, the month following the Board of Liquidation's dissolution and leading up to the dispatch of its Final Report to members at the start of

[468] LNA, 23 July 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Forty-Second Meeting B.L./P.V.42, R5816.2 50/43856/43844.

September. The second covers a further eight weeks up to 25 October 1947, when the League officially disbanded the Secretariat and closed its financial accounts. The third section then features the months up to the end of January 1948, wherein the last official communication from the League was sent to members, and the fourth covers February 1948 and beyond, during which a handful of former Secretariat officials continued to manage organisational business and field requests from outside parties. The final section of this chapter focuses on the fortunes of those Secretariat officials who remained with the organisation through 1947, and how these individuals were specifically recruited by the new post-war global institutions to take advantage of their collective knowledge and keep the League's memory and experience of international civil service alive.

An international organisation's last tasks are a long way from the glamour and excitement of assembly meetings and conferences; instead they are often tedious, repetitive, and thankless in nature. The League of Nations was predisposed to publicly touting its work – the organisation had depended on support from governments for its survival – but its wearisome final duties were completed behind closed doors. Endings are inherently messy; the League's last officials discovered that even the most well-organised liquidation could not envisage or plan for every scenario. No matter how hard they tried, there was always something else to be done, and they knew there would be no notoriety or thanks for their efforts at the end. At least six months passed between the Board's dissolution and what might be considered the termination of League business; this chapter will reveal why this was a laborious process for those overseeing it and suggest that trying to attribute a single definitive ending to the League is just as thorny an endeavour. The Board of Liquidation, Secretariat officials, and state-members of the organisation all had different perspectives on the League, and these viewpoints were accompanied by opinions on when the institution came to an end, potentially varying by months or even years. The date of an organisation's death, without a pre-agreed definition of what that means, is inherently subjective; this chapter not only suggests that this quandary cannot be remedied for the League, but also proposes accepting the uncertainty that comes with it.

The Public End: August 1947

By the end of July, much of the League's liquidation was complete and the end was finally in sight for both the Secretariat and those outside the organisation. The Board had dissolved itself, having drawn the conclusion – after 42 meetings – that oversight was no longer required, meaning the last steps to symbolically shutter the League could now be made. The weeks up to the end of August became the public end of the organisation, the point at which the leadership exhorted to the rest of the world that the work was over and they could all be congratulated on a job well done.

The one remaining major task, from the perspective of the Board of Liquidation at least, was the completion and publication of the Final Report to members. At the 21st Assembly back in April 1946, the agreed resolution to dissolve the League explicitly stated that the Board "shall make and publish a report" to members, and "declare itself to be dissolved", after which "the liquidation shall be deemed to be complete", hence the Board's focus on its publication as the conclusive marker of closure.[469] This was its indicator of success; once completed, its members could be satisfied their work was done. Despite the rush of activity in June and July however, the Report was not finished by the time the Board dissolved itself at the end of the latter month. The greater part of the document was ready, but the French version of the text was not yet finalised – for which the French-speaking members of the Board, specifically Émile Charvériat, Daniel Secrétan, and Jaromír Kopecky, were relied upon – and Carl Hambro was slow to give his final sign-off on a document he knew needed to be beyond reproach.[470] He continued to send small changes to Chester Purves, Secretary of the Board of Liquidation and the person responsible for finishing and arranging the publication of the Report, some of which identified inconsistencies in the text whilst others highlighted minor formatting issues.[471] Nonetheless, even when these changes were made, Purves was still unable to finalise the Report, noting in a letter to Cecil Kisch in mid-August that while the second proof had since been sent to the printers, Hambro wanted yet another

---

[469] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, p. 284.
[470] LNA, 14 August 1947, letter from Purves to Secrétan asking for comments on the French version of the Final Report to Members, R5816.4 50/44023/43844; LNA, 19 August 1947, letter from Émile Charvériat to Purves passing on his modifications to the French text of the Final Report, R5816.4 50/44023/43844;
[471] LNA, 12 August 1947, Hambro to Purves, R5816.4 50/44023/43844.

chance to review the document and its appendices before sign-off, a task prolonged by the former Board Chairman's return to Norway.[472]

Furthermore Hambro also spent a week in Sweden on a diplomatic mission – a trip of which Purves was unaware – meaning the latter became increasingly-frustrated by the delays, writing what he described as "a rather desperate telegram" to the Chairman in an effort to hurry him along and complaining to Lester that he was "at a loss to explain the delay" just days before he was scheduled to permanently leave Geneva.[473] The Board Secretary's contract was due to expire at the end of August and, with personal business to attend to in London, Purves was committed to meeting his deadline, even writing to Hambro on his final day as an official to inform the Board Chairman that his latest set of corrections and changes was sent too late to be incorporated into the Report.[474] However the end of Purves's Secretariat tenure was not the only reason to hurry along the completion of the document. The United Nations placed an order for 1500 copies of the Report back in early August, hoping the document could be used as a basis for discussion at the upcoming Second General Assembly starting in September. Meanwhile the Board had already agreed to release the Report with an official back-dated publication date of 31 July, and the longer the period between this and the actual publication, the more likely the time discrepancy would be noticed. Despite work on both the Report and liquidation continuing throughout August, this earlier date was the end point the League's leadership wanted the rest of the world to focus on.[475]

The official communication sent to members alongside the Report in the first week of September explicitly stated that the Board's work was completed at the end of July, and a press communique issued at the same time backed up this version of events, specifically noting that all claims had been settled and affairs terminated in

---

[472] LNA, 16 August 1947, Purves to Kisch, R5816.4 50/44117/43844.
[473] Purves could not understand the reason for Hambro's tardy response and the Chairman's insistence on continuing to make changes: LNA, 27 August 1947, letter from Purves to Lester R5816.4 50/44023/43844.
[474] Purves explained in a letter to Kisch that his "private affairs have been much neglected during the last year, and I must now go home and try to tidy them up." LNA, 16 August 1947, Purves to Kisch, R5816.4 50/44117/43844. See also: LNA, 29 August 1947, letter from Purves to Hambro, R5816.4 50/44023/43844.
[475] LNA, 6 August 1947, telegram from Ranshofen-Wertheimer to Purves requesting 1500 copies of the Board's Final Report to Members, R5816.4 50/44023/43844.

good order.[476] Representatives of the press were also invited into Seán Lester's office in the first week of August to hear a summary of the Final Report – mostly a recap of the Board's work transferring activities and assets to both the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation – to reinforce the idea to outside observers that the League's work was complete. An unnamed reporter from the *Tribune de Genève* reported as such in their article summing up the meeting, noting that while a few officials would remain with the organisation for a month to deal with minor matters, the League itself ceased to exist on 31 July.[477] Similar, albeit shorter, articles appeared in both *The Times of London* and *The New York Times* within 24 hours of each other, reporting the same official story with the London paper noting that "The League's existence was formally terminated on July 31." Meanwhile *The New York Times* write-up was only six sentences long and buried on page 12 of the August 5 edition between an article on coal output in the Ruhr valley and a large advertisement for a sale at Famous Wines and Liquors Inc.[478] Neither the press at the time, nor its readers, were particularly interested in the end of the League. No letters to the editor made it into editions following these latest reports, not even from Arthur Sweetser, who had previously written to *The New York Times* on several occasions in support of the League.[479] By the summer of 1947 wider audiences had simply stopped caring about an institution long-gone from public consciousness, and newspaper editors were more than happy to accept the sanctioned story put forth by the organisation's leadership. Even governments, the major stakeholders in the dissolution and the primary beneficiaries of the Board's focus on bolstering the organisation's finances, barely responded to the League's conclusion.[480]

---

[476] LNA, 30 August 1947, communique issued to members of the League 'Final Report to States Members of the League' C.L.2.1947, R5816.4 50/44023/43844. Meanwhile, the press communique, in its final paragraph, stated that "all valid claims had been met and the affairs of the League of Nations had terminated in good order." LNA, 30 August 1947, Press Communique titled 'Work by the Board of Liquidation', R5816.4 50/44023/43844.

[477] The unnamed author of the article went on to suggest that the League would soon be no more than a historic memory: "…la Société des Nations ne sera plus qu'un souvenir historique." LNA, 5 August 1947, [unknown author], 'La liquidation de la S.D.N.', *Tribune de Genève*, R5813 50/43874/43262.

[478] *The Times of London*, 4 August 1947, [unknown author], 'Winding Up League of Nations: Disposal of Assets'. Meanwhile *The New York Times* article began "Liquidation of the League of Nations has been completed, Sean Lester, secretary of the liquidation commission, announced today." *The New York Times*, 5 August 1947, [unknown author], 'League of Nations Assets Are Finally Liquidated', p.12.

[479] One example of Sweetser's many letters to *The New York Times* came in November 1941: *The New York Times*, 23 November 1941, letter to the editor from Arthur Sweetser titled 'Correcting a False Impression About the League', Section 4, p. 7.

[480] The Secretariat received few official acknowledgements of the League's closure from governments. For two examples, see: LNA, 12 September 1947, letter from La Secretaría de Estado de Relaciones Exteriores de la Républica Dominicana to the Secretary-General League of Nations, R5816.4 50/44023/43844; LNA, 14 October 1947, letter from La Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, R5816.4 50/44023/43844.

The official narrative was more than just a convenient story concocted for the outside world; the organisation's leadership treated August as the month in which the League ended. The value of the organisation's material assets to be transferred to the U.N. was finally settled at 46,194,569.29 CHF – converted to U.S. $10,809,529.21, and equivalent to roughly $135m in 2021 – and congratulatory letters passed between figures such as Lester, Trygve Lie, and long-time League stalwart Sweetser.[481] Lie wrote to Lester towards the end of the month, his thank you reflecting a relationship predicated on their shared understanding of what it took to be the Secretary-General of an intergovernmental organisation. Lie also took pains to note how grateful he was for Lester's work in not only facilitating the transfer process, but also ensuring the United Nations did not need to start from scratch due to his safeguarding of the League's activities during the war; he acknowledged that it cannot have been an easy task: "…it has been of the greatest importance to me personally to have, as it were, as my predecessor someone like yourself who has so willingly given his very best efforts at all times in what must have been a very disheartening and depressing task."[482] Sweetser's celebratory letter was written earlier in the month, following the publication of the *New York Times* article which, as Sweetser noted in his correspondence "…brought the grand news that you are at the end of your long vigil". The letter was a typically lengthy three-page missive on the struggles of managing international organisations, written specifically in response to the publicly declared end of the League; Sweetser, like Lester, Lie, and Hambro, acted as if the work was done: "It is gratifying indeed to think that the organization which meant so much to so many kept its flag flying to very end and passed out of the picture with all its details cared for and cleared up."[483]

August was likewise marked by the departure of the majority of the League's officials, including Lester himself. The Secretary-General officially remained in his post until the end of the month, but he permanently returned to Ireland on the morning of 8 August. Lester had no intention of remaining on the organisation's

---

[481] Lester informed Trygve Lie of the credit shares in a letter sent at the beginning of August. The USD equivalent of the 46m CHF total was reached using a conversion rate of $23.40 USD to 100 CHF – this was the rate effective at the date of transfer and that used in Lester's calculations: LNA, 4 August 1947, letter from Lester to Lie, R5812 50/43672/43262.
[482] Lester's Diary, 27 August 1947, letter from Lie to Lester.
[483] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1947, letter from Sweetser to Lester.

payroll beyond that point, but Valentin Stencek successfully persuaded Hambro – in light of the Secretary-General's continued counsel via airmail until the end of August – to extend his contract until the last day of the month.[484] If managing the League during the Second World War proved stressful for Lester, overseeing the organisation's liquidation was just as, if not even more, taxing. By the time he left Geneva he had spent seven years in a role he originally held no ambition for, presiding over an increasingly maligned and abandoned organisation. His was a difficult and unappreciated task, and he had little interest in staying in Geneva until the bitter end; after many years separated from his family, and satisfied that he was finally free to leave his post, he slipped away to County Wicklow with neither fanfare nor recognition.[485]

Lester was far from the only member of the Secretariat to depart following the Board of Liquidation's dissolution. Between the Board's last meeting on 23 July, and 31 August, twelve of the fifteen officials still employed by the League left the organisation, including stalwarts such as Otto Jenny, Evelyn Curry, Willem van Asch van Wijck, and Connie Harris.[486] All of the League's officials had been employed on temporary contracts since August of the previous year, renewed on a short-term basis every two to three months as needed.[487] The leadership's decision in July and August 1947 that the work of the League was over, alongside the public assertions supporting that position, meant officials' contracts were allowed to expire and the vast majority of what remained of the Secretariat fizzled away over a few weeks. As with Lester's departure, there were no official festivities, no celebration to mark the passing of the milestone; instead members of the Secretariat quietly drifted away across the month. The only recorded acknowledgement of their partings came in official letters sent to the individuals in question by either Lester and Stencek,

[484] LNA, 29 August 1947, letter from Stencek to Hambro, S816.
[485] LNA, 5 September 1947, letter from Stencek to Welps confirming the prolongation of Lester's contract, S816.
[486] Jenny (Treasury), Curry (Drug Control Service and Internal Administration), van Asch van Wijck (Department I), and Harris (Department I and Personnel Office) served as officials for almost 100 years between them – just over 95 years in total. Other officials leaving in July and August, beyond those already mentioned, were Cecily Babington (Board of Liquidation Secretariat), Aline Buffle (Stenographic Service, Internal Administration, and Secretary-General's Office), Dagny Gran (Board of Liquidation Secretariat), Kathleen Harrison (Treasury), Winifred Oberdorff (Treasury), Chester Purves (Board of Liquidation Secretariat), and Alma Schibli (Treasury).
[487] See chapter two for more detail on staff contracts from 1946 onwards.

thanking them for their service, and whilst the letters were wholly affable, they seemed scant recognition for often decades of commitment.[488]

Many of those leaving in the summer of 1947 had been part of the Secretariat for decades, but many of them had only worked together closely in recent times. This meant these farewell letters were often impersonal by virtue of the fact that those officials who would have been best placed to write them had already left. For instance, Evelyn Curry served in the Secretariat as a shorthand-typist for over 22 years, and whilst Stencek took the time to add a sentence giving his personal thanks for her work as his secretary over the past year – "I have had occasion personally to appreciate the excellent quality of your work, your intelligence and reliability" – his letter to her was otherwise a dispassionate summary of her career history. Perhaps a clinical thank you was better than nothing, but even the most devoted of officials like Curry might have found statements like "Your excellent health has made your services uninterruptedly valuable" less than inspiring after two decades of commitment.[489] These were long careers coming to an end, but as the last officials standing, there was no one left to commemorate with.

There is good reason to think that the end of August 1947 effectively marked the end of the League. The little white lies of the Final Report were finally agreed, the press reported on the end of the organisation at the start of the month, and all but three Secretariat officials had flown the nest. Stencek, the most senior figure remaining, wrote to Uno Brunskog, the League's Auditor, on 20 August explaining that he hoped to officially close the League's financial accounts on 1 September and consequently complete the League's business just a few days later. Looking beyond the public announcements, however, to the work taking place in August reveals this was an overly-optimistic goal.[490] Although much of the League's more substantive activity was over by the end of July, and despite the public assertions to the contrary, the Secretariat was not occupied with only liquidation activity during August 1947.

[488] For examples see: LNA, 29 August 1947, letter from Stencek to Babington, S707; LNA, 17 August 1947, letter from Lester to Harris, S789.
[489] LNA, 18 August 1947, letter from Stencek to Curry, S750.
[490] LNA, 20 August 1947, letter from Stencek to Uno Brunskog, R5353 17/44134/44093.

The Museum, handed over to the management of the U.N. at the end of July, still continued to occupy officials' time. Van Asch van Wijck provided framing and colour guidelines to the South African Government, Stencek took over writing thank you letters for donations, and even Hambro continued to act as a liaison during the month.[491] There were small administrative issues relating to a money transfer to the former Indian Office of the League – by-then part of the United Nations – that needed to be resolved with a London bank, and bills to settle with the U.N. apropos League officials seconded to the new organisation in 1946.[492] Stencek was also forced to write to Hambro in the latter half of August, asking for the Chairman's counsel; in the efforts to resolve the problems plaguing the reimbursement of furniture removals and repatriation costs for officials, the Board of Liquidation had overlooked what would happen to the funds transferred to the I.L.O. for the administration of these refunds, should the remaining individuals neglect to submit their claim by the October deadline. This was in addition to the work involved in transferring the funds across to the I.L.O. because, despite the agreement between the organisations having been made over two months earlier, the financial transfer was effectively forgotten until the very end of August, forcing Stencek to fast-track both the transfer of the 31,000 CHF in question and the instructions for how it should be managed.[493]

Despite all the public pronouncements to the contrary, towards the end of August both Lester and Stencek realised that there were still elements of work to be completed before the Secretariat could truly close its doors. Some bank accounts had been closed up to this point, but there were still a number of financial issues to resolve, including the settling of more bills with the U.N., transferring various funds to other organisations, and of course the finalisation and audit of the accounts.[494]

---

[491] LNA, 30 July 1947, van Asch van Wijck to The Secretary of the High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa in London, R5265 16/33080/33080; LNA, 28 August 1947, letter from Stencek to G. Kaeckenbeeck, Belgian Foreign Ministry, R5265 16/33080/33080. In addition, Hambro explained in a letter to Stencek, that he had been told that "the [portrait] frame should be in light gold to create a Halo round the representative of the North." LNA, 7 August 1947, letter from Hambro to Stencek, R5265 16/33082/33080.

[492] LNA, 4 August 1947, letter from Stencek to 'The Manager, Lloyds Bank Ltd, London' checking confirmation of a transfer to the League from the Indian Office, R5353 17/43613/43553; LNA, 29 July 1947, letter from Stencek to Byron Price, Assistant Secretary-General for Administrative & Financial Services, United Nations, New York, regarding League officials seconded to the U.N. in New York, R5813 50/43905/43262.

[493] LNA, 20 August 1947, letter from Stencek to Hambro, R5385 18A/44108/347; LNA, 30 August 1947, letter from Stencek to Phelan, R5385 18A/35884/3471.

[494] Just one example of bank accounts closed at this time was the League's 'General Account' at the Lloyds & National Provincial Foreign Bank in London: LNA, 13 August 1947, letter from Stencek to 'The

These were alongside a number of trivial but necessary tasks still outstanding – Lester euphemistically called them "several other points requiring treatment" – forcing the Secretary-General to write to Stencek on 23 August, and instruct him to extend his own contract through to the end of September, alongside that of Peter Welps – a twenty-year veteran of the Internal Control service – and "any secretarial assistance you may need".[495] Lester's instruction proved especially providential just a few days later when, responding to Stencek's query regarding the audit of the final accounts, Brunskog – based in Stockholm – explained that the financial review would have to wait until he was next able to come to Geneva in October.[496]

The staff and leadership were all-but gone, the Final Report was with governments, and the world's press had announced the liquidation work complete. This was the public end of the organisation; the point at which the League told both members and the wider world that liquidation was over. It was certainly an ending – with the Board's last tasks complete and Lester back home in Ireland, strategic oversight was effectively over – but it was not the end. Sat quietly in a corner of the Palais des Nations, Stencek, Welps, and Marie Boiteux – the "secretarial assistance" and shorthand-typist with over twenty-six years of League experience – continued to labour in an effort to truly dissolve the organisation and bring the Secretariat's work to a close.

The End of the Secretariat: 25 October 1947

The League's next ending took place on 25 October 1947, the day on which the organisation's Secretariat ceased operations. As an institution, the Secretariat was the scaffolding that supported all League activity, and it is unsurprising therefore that this framework outlived almost every other element of the organisation. The group was reduced to only three people at the start of September 1947 but there was still work to be done, and while the termination of any organisation is naturally

---

Manager, Lloyds & National Provincial Foreign Bank Limited, London', R5299 17/3934/3933. See also: LNA, 23 September 1947, letter from Stencek to Breycha-Vauthier regarding the transfer of the Library Building Fund to the United Nations, R5265 16/33082/33080.

[495] LNA, 23 August 1947, letter from Lester (writing from Avoca in Ireland) to Stencek, S723.

[496] In a letter to Stencek, Brunskog explained that he would be coming to Geneva in October regardless as he would be examining the I.L.O. accounts at that time and did not think he could justify the expense of two separate trips to Switzerland: LNA, 29 August 1947, letter from Brunskog to Stencek, R5353 17/44134/44093.

dominated by financial activities – settling outstanding obligations, organising audits – the dissolution of the League in September and October 1947 reveals that the organisation's liquidation was more complex than simply signing-off a set of accounts. Stencek, Welps, and Boiteux soon came to understand that there was a reason the organisation's most senior leaders were unconcerned with seeing the work through until the bitter end: tying up the loose ends of any endeavour, especially one as ambitious as the League, was often uninspiring and tedious.

With all but two of his colleagues gone, Stencek frequently found himself working on tasks that would otherwise have been dealt with by more junior officials. The jobs he was called upon to do during these weeks ranged from the small – such as paying for the League's subscription to *The Times of London* – to the more involved, for example the continued oversight of the removal of items belonging to former officials of the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague.[497] The period might have laid the groundwork for the financial closure of the League, but the eight weeks in September and October also acted as a clearing house for all those tasks left until the last-minute, either mistakenly overlooked in the past or neglected due to their wearisome nature.

In 1933, the French Government had loaned three Sèvres porcelain vases to the League and, having seemingly been overlooked in the earlier activity of 1947, they needed to be repatriated to Paris before liquidation was complete. It was not a quick task either; the French Government had effectively forgotten about the vases during the war and not responded to previous enquiries made on the League's behalf, and thus Stencek had to first convince the French Foreign Ministry to grant their approval to make any arrangements.[498] Once their repatriation was approved, attention turned to finding a reliable removals firm, acquiring sufficient insurance – the vases were valued at 25,000 CHF – and supervising the physical removals process, from packing to transportation. The administration of the procedure took weeks – confirmation that the vases had been received by the French Government

[497] LNA, 5 September 1947, letter from Stencek to The Manager of Hugh Rees, Ltd. regarding the payment of a subscription to *The Times*, R5299 17/3934/3933; LNA, 10 October 1947, letter from Stencek to D. J. Bruinsma, now of the International Court of Justice, regarding the removal of Lars Jorstad's furniture from The Hague, R5291 17/42922/2989.
[498] The French Foreign Ministry did not grant their approval to start making arrangements until mid-September: LNA, 15 September 1947, letter from French Foreign Ministry to Stencek, R5502 18B/40793/40793.

was only sent on 24 October – and at a cost of over 2,000 CHF, a total higher than originally anticipated due to both the insurance costs and, because of air traffic delays forcing the vases to travel by land rather than via aeroplane, increased transportation fees.[499]

Some of Stencek's tasks were not that different from those he might have had to complete normally, such as writing letters of recommendation for former colleagues, whilst others were unique to the situation. Lester's swift departure at the beginning of August meant the Secretary-General was unable to complete some of the personal administrative work that accompanies an international relocation, leaving Stencek to take on these tasks on his behalf. The assignment perhaps most tangential to his Secretariat role included trying to sell Lester's car via a dealer in Geneva, which was made more onerous due to the type of car. Archival correspondence between the two men does not mention the model, but Stencek was forced to explain to Lester that the vehicle's powerful engine meant there had thus far been little interest from buyers: "I was told that had it been a 7-seater they would have already found a purchaser, but for a 5-seater everybody finds that being rather powerful, the running expenses are too high."[500] A buyer was eventually found in late October, albeit at a lower-than-hoped price, but Stencek was still required to complete the necessary paperwork around the sale, including returning the number plates to the appropriate Swiss agency, and claiming a reimbursement on the insurance.[501]

The sale of Lester's car was not a pressing matter in relation to the closure of the League, although it was emblematic of some of the issues that arise when an international civil service disintegrates and many of its constituent parts return home. Much of Stencek, Welps, and Boiteux's work over September and October could be categorised as tedious or unspectacular, but it was almost always necessary, and one such example related to a missing Judges' Pensions payment

[499] The vases were valued, for the purposes of insurance, at 25,000 CHF, increasing costs: LNA, 29 September 1947, letter from Stencek to Mademoiselle Arthurion, R5502 18B/40793/40793. The air traffic delays meant the vases were eventually transported by land over a weekend, leading to an increase in the original invoice, for a total of 21,000 French Francs – the equivalent of 2,377 CHF (exchange rate of 1 CHF = 9.76 French Francs, as used by Véron, Grauer & Cie, the Geneva removals firm). See LNA, 13 October 1947, letter from J. Véron, Grauer & Cie to Mademoiselle Arthurion, R5502 18/40793/40793.
[500] LNA, 2 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester, R5813 50/44139/43262.
[501] LNA, 23 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester, R5813 50/44139/43262.

of 14,000 CHF. The money was meant to be paid to Judge Willem van Eysinga in January 1945 and said amount was transferred to the Société de Banque Suisse, with an order to pay van Eysinga the equivalent amount in Dutch florins. Unfortunately the funds never arrived in the Netherlands, instead becoming held up at Dresdnerbank in Berlin, whose assets were frozen at the end of the war. Previous attempts to gain restitution from the Société de Banque Suisse proved unsuccessful, and so in July 1947, the League retained a Geneva lawyer to pursue the matter. Needless to say, the last-minute efforts proved ineffective over such a short time period, and the issue was one of very few that the Secretariat was unable to resolve before the end of October. Unwilling to write off the 14,000 CHF, and as the I.L.O. had agreed to administer the Judges' Pensions Fund in the future, the debt was transferred to the Staff Pensions Administrative Council at that organisation for resolution. Available archival material does not make it clear why the affair was left so late in the liquidation process, especially as the money had effectively been in limbo for over two and a half years, but the delays stopped Stencek and his colleagues from closing this part of the League's business. Chasing down the money was a tiresome task, especially considering it might have been settled months earlier, but it was a necessary one; despite the prevarication the issue would not, and did not, resolve itself.[502]

Like the missing pension payment, many of Welps' and Stencek's final tasks in September and October focussed on money, as one might expect when closing an organisation. This included settling more debts with the United Nations – coming from intermittent profits from the sale of publications, administrative costs such as officials' telephone calls and stamps – and continuing to close the organisation's many bank accounts both in Switzerland and overseas.[503] Many of these account closures were accompanied by transfer requests, moving the remaining financial assets in these accounts to successor organisations. The 31,000 CHF earmarked for the outstanding staff removals' claims was finally transferred to the I.L.O. in early

[502] Stencek provided a full explanation of the situation in a letter transferring the debt to the Pensions Administrative Council: LNA, 9 October 1947, letter from Stencek to the President of the Staff Pensions Administrative Council at the I.L.O., R5353 17/44138/44138.
[503] There are several examples of the League paying sums to the U.N. in September and October, including 1,725 CHF for the period of July and August: LNA, 2 September 1947, letter from 'The Treasury' to Lloyds & National Provincial Foreign Bank Ltd, R5299 17/3934/3933.2; and a further 232 CHF for the costs accrued in September for postage of items to the Board of Liquidation: LNA, 2 October 1947, letter from Stencek to H.W. Salisbury, Finance Officer of the United Nations European Office, R5299 17/3934/3933.

September, whilst the remnants of the Library Building Fund – a little under 2,000 CHF – was moved to the U.N. in Geneva with the explicit disclaimer that the money would be used to continue development of the permanent exhibit in the Library building, and that the League's auditor would verify the veracity of the expenditure.[504] The remnants of the Rockefeller Grant were also transferred to the U.N., although this time to the New York headquarters, to be used towards the publication of the last remaining report financed by the E.F.O. during its time in Princeton.[505] The League's liquid assets could also be definitively calculated, with a total of just over 15m CHF – roughly $43m in 2021 – returned to members; either as credits in members' accounts with the U.N., or directly to governments not yet part of the new organisation.[506] Brunskog was also a man of his word, returning to Geneva in mid-October as promised. He verified the organisation's accounts and issued a report to members explaining his conclusions on 25 October 1947.[507]

This date, 25 October, became the new end point publicised to both members and other outside parties, and even before Brunskog's audit, it was the endpoint Stencek started to work towards. In the middle of October, Stencek began writing letters to a range of different institutions – some local, others international – to both inform them that the League would cease to exist from 25 October 1947, and to thank them for any cooperation their institution shared with the League throughout its history. A small number of them were sent in Lester's name – although he did not write them or sign-off on their contents – but the majority were sent by Stencek, and the recipients varied from the Swiss Federal Council and the President of the Geneva State Council, to the Chief of the Geneva Police and the Geneva Postal Service. Most of the letters followed a similar template – some even used the exact same

---

[504] LNA, 4 September 1947, letter from H. Gallois, Assistant special du Directeur général at the I.L.O., to Stencek, confirming receipt of the 31,024.70 CHF, R5385 18A/44108/3471. Meanwhile the Library Building Fund was transferred to Arthur Breycha-Vauthier in his position as the Chief of the Library of the United Nations European Office which he noted, in his official acknowledgement of the 1,924.15 CHF transfer, would be especially used in the "preparation and printing of a pamphlet explaining the various exhibits" [of the Historical Collection]: LNA, 2 October 1947, letter from Breycha-Vauthier to Stencek, R5265 16/33082/33080.

[505] Percy Watterson, still guarding the League's remaining financial assets in the U.S., confirmed the outstanding Rockefeller Grant balance – of $5,184.77 – was transferred to the U.N. account at the Chemical Bank and Trust Corporation in New York: LNA, 8 October 1947, letter from Watterson to Pelt, C1741.

[506] The full breakdown of the League's assets – both fixed and liquid – and how they were distributed to members and the U.N. organisations was published in a communique in early September. The liquid assets amounted to 15,238,794.32 CHF: LNA, 9 September 1947, communique distributed to members of the League titled 'Distribution of League Assets' C.6.M.6.1947, S923.

[507] LNA, 25 October 1947, League of Nations, Supplementary Accounts for the Winding-Up Period after the Close of the League Accounts on July 31st, 1947 C.7.M.7.1947, R5353 17/44134/44093.

wording – but the occasional letter took on a more personal tone, especially as some of the recipients worked closely with Stencek in his long-term role as Director of Internal Administration and Personnel.[508]

Stencek had not just worked alongside his League colleagues for over twenty years, but also those figures in Geneva he liaised with on a regular basis, and while he had already taken the opportunity to say goodbye to his colleagues, as Stencek's final weeks passed by he used the official thank you letters as a chance to bid adieu to these other friendly faces. His letter to Louis Casaï for example, the Director of Geneva Public Works, went beyond the formulaic and veered into the personal, thanking the latter for his amiable and welcoming attitude. It was a sentiment reciprocated by Casaï in his response, who wrote "vous avez eu l'art d'accomplir, avec un sang-froid et un égalité d'âme tout-à-fait remarquables" – a great compliment for a man who prided himself on his self-discipline. Stencek's letter to Gallois at the I.L.O. similarly felt less like a formality and more like a personal choice – an official letter had already been sent to Phelan – as he rued the loss of their working relationship and expressed hopes that they would stay in contact: "C'est avec un bien grand regret que je vois cette collaboration se terminer prochainement, mais j'espère rester en contact avec vous car je ne quitterai pas Genève."[509] Yet even when the letters were more formal, it is not to suggest that this formality always came at the expense of genuine thanks. For example Stencek's letter to John Lachavanne, Directeur-conservateur du Registre foncier in Geneva, was shorter than some of his other notes, but he still took the time to thank the latter for his good natured responses to requests from the Palais: "…vous avez toujours répondu aux demandes de l'administration avec le plus grand bon vouloir."[510] Stencek was skilled at adapting his style, writing in more personal terms when he held a closer working relationship with the individual in question, and taking a more conventional, if

---

[508] The letters to the Geneva Telephone Service, the Geneva Postal Service, the Geneva Telegraphy Service, and the Geneva Customs Service, were all – bar the recipients' names – identical: LNA, 17 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Fritz Jöhr, Directeur des téléphones, R5813 50/44139/43262; LNA, 17 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Edouard Sägesser, Directeur des postes, R5813 50/44139/43262; LNA, 17 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Hermann Gimmi, Chef du télégraphe, R5813 50/44139/43262; LNA, 17 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Adolphe Zoller, Directeur des douanes, R5813 50/44139/43262.

[509] LNA, 17 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Louis Casaï, R5813 50/44139/43262; LNA, 21 October 1947, letter from Casaï to Stencek, R5813 50/44139/43262; LNA, 21 October 1947, Stencek to Gallois, R5813 50/44139/43262.

[510] For example, see LNA, 16 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Secrétan, R5813 50/44139/43262; LNA, 15 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Lachavanne, Directeur-conservateur du Registre foncier, R5813 50/44139/43262.

nonetheless earnest, approach when contacting those with whom he had only a passing acquaintance.

Stencek was somewhat forsaken by Lester in September and October. When Lester left for Ireland in early August, it was done with the belief that the "few matters of secondary importance" would only take a further two to three weeks to complete.[511] While Brunskog's absence from Geneva meant a delay to the final audit, it was still expected that the eight weeks of September and October would be straightforward, or at least relatively quiet. Stencek even hoped to spend the first 12 days of October on some much-earnt leave, but the aforementioned collection of both mind-numbing and financial tasks prevented the realisation of that wish, and Lester's absence did not help.[512] While Lester officially left the League's employ at the end of August, there was an expectation – at least on Stencek's part – that he would make himself available via correspondence to help complete the final few tasks of liquidation. However Stencek found Lester hard to pin down in September and early October, sending written updates on progress that often featured reminders noting that he had not yet heard from the Secretary-General on a number of issues. In an update letter to Lester at the end of September he wrote "I have been waiting for some news from you…", followed by another request for guidance just a few days later: "I hope the letter has reached you as I am beginning to wonder why I have received no news from you since the beginning of September, although I have written to you on several occasions in the meantime."[513] After years of keeping the League's sinking ship afloat, Lester had, in effect, mentally checked out of the institution, choosing to mark his return to Ireland as a clean break from a challenging time in his life. There is no record in the League's Archives that he was involved in any liquidation matters after his departure – bar the instruction to extend Stencek and Welps' contracts – effectively leaving those in Geneva to manage the outstanding questions alone. Fortunately Stencek did not seem to mind too greatly, or at least

---

[511] The supplementary accounts for the winding up period following 31 July, sent to members at the end of October, noted: "…there remained outstanding on the date of the Board's dissolution on July 31st, 1947, a few matters of secondary importance, for the settlement of which a small staff was retained": LNA, 25 October 1947, League of Nations, Supplementary Accounts for the Winding-up Period after the Close of the League Accounts on July 31st, 1947, C.7.M.7.1947, R5353 17/44134/44093.

[512] Stencek noted in a letter to Brunskog that he would be absent on leave between 1 and 12 October, but this holiday never materialised: LNA, 24 September 1947, letter from Stencek to Brunskog, R5265 16/33082/33080.

[513] LNA, 29 September 1947, Stencek to Lester, R5353 17/44093/44093; LNA, 2 October 1947, Stencek to Lester R5813 50/44139/43262.

not so much as to officially record any grievances. When he wrote to Lester on his last full day at the Palais in October, he did so with warmth and affection, thanking the Secretary-General for treating him as a "trusted collaborator and friend" rather than a subordinate, and expressed a desire to keep in touch in the future. If he felt at all aggrieved by the lack of communication from Lester in the previous weeks, he hid it well.[514]

Instead it was Stencek, with support from both Welps and Boiteux, who was obliged to manage the remaining tasks. Their work in September and October was unexciting but also inescapable and serves as a reminder of the realities of closing a complex organisation like the League. It was not declarations at the 21st Assembly or Board pronouncements that dissolved the League, but the quiet labouring of officials. The Secretariat, once made up of a peak of 707 individuals in 1931, was down to just three souls by September 1947, and when Boiteux left at the end of that month, only Welps and Stencek remained.[515] Like the colleagues who departed during August, the two men's oft-extended contracts were finally allowed to expire and, with their departure on 25 October, the Secretariat was no more. With no employees, no bank accounts, and its assets either liquidated or transferred to other bodies, the institution known as the League of Nations quietly ceased to exist.

The Final 'Final Report': 31 January 1948

To outside eyes the League looked closed, and the Secretariat was no more, but the organisation's business was not over. Stencek might have sent out the official thank you letters and closed the accounts, but work did not stop on 25 October 1947. Even if all the archival evidence to the contrary is ignored, the League itself contradicted its closure narrative when it issued a final official communication to members at the end of January 1948. The League's declarations of closure, dated either in August or October 1947, have proved resilient over time; the official narrative put forth by the organisation has been accepted at face value in the years since but, it must now be recognised that this officially sanctioned version of events

[514] Stencek also described Lester as someone "to whom I could turn in all my troubles for advice and help, being sure that these will be readily and most generously extended to me." Lester's Diary, 24 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester.
[515] Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, p. 242.

was provided by an unreliable narrator. In light of the organisation's leadership tendency to alter the truth of liquidation in its formal reporting, it is perhaps not surprising that the authoritative end of the League was not quite the definitive full stop it appeared to be.

When Stencek sent his final liquidation update to Lester on 23 October, he noted that he would probably still come into the Palais to check on affairs, and his prediction was correct.[516] Every day the 63 year-old – the oldest member of the 1947 Secretariat cohort – travelled up the hill to the Palais des Nations and, even though Geneva was enjoying "a beautiful autumn" – Stencek's own words – it cannot have been an easy task to continue labouring on an experiment long since abandoned by almost everyone else. Nevertheless his commitment persisted, and in a November letter to Percy Watterson, Stencek noted that there was always something for him to manage: "Although the Secretariat has been closed down since 25th October, I still come every day to the Palais des Nations as there is always some business to be attended to."[517] Whether this was liaising with Watterson or dealing with the correspondence received from governments in response to the official closure, Stencek's work, despite him no longer being employed by the League, continued intermittently into 1948.

Just as the eyes of governments and diplomats turned towards New York and the United Nations in the autumn of 1946, one year later the majority of the League's on-going business was also taking place on the western side of the Atlantic. Watterson, by-then officially the League's Trustee and Liquidating Agent, had been granted a small fund for his work expenses, and was continuing the informal role he had played for the past year: the League of Nations' American liaison. Just as the League's financial affairs were being closed in Geneva, this small financial package – $7,359.81, including $5,000 of legal fees for Edwards & Smith, the firm handling the Income Tax lawsuit – meant a new bank account cropped up in the organisation's name, albeit as part of the longer "P. G. Watterson, Trustee and Liquidating Agent, League of Nations", at the Princeton Bank and Trust Company.[518]

---

[516] LNA, 23 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester, R5813 50/44139/43262.
[517] LNA, 12 November 1947, letter from Stencek to Watterson, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[518] The full name on the account was confirmed in a letter from the Princeton Bank and Trust Company: LNA, 28 October 1947, letter from Lilian V. S. Stout, Assistant Treasurer, to Watterson, C1784-4. In addition, it is not clear why Watterson – living in Washington D.C. – decided to use the Princeton Bank and Trust Company for this last League account. He noted, in a letter to the bank in

Despite the official story, the League of Nations still had financial assets in its name, and its business in North America continued with Watterson at the helm. The F.A.O. official found himself dealing with a collection of small tasks in his new side role as the League's executor: using his newly-minted funds to send Economic and Financial Organisation (E.F.O.) material from a former League official to the U.N. in Geneva, responding to more queries about the previously-mentioned World's Fair tapestries, and trying to locate the missing publications debts held by San Yo-Sha in Japan.[519] None of these tasks were particularly onerous or time-consuming, but like those that occupied Stencek and Welps in Geneva, they were inescapable.

One such example of these seemingly trivial but necessary tasks centred on an Internal Revenue refund of fewer than five U.S. dollars. Bertil Renborg, the former Head of the Drug Control Service who transferred to the U.N. in the autumn of 1946, received a letter in early October 1947 informing him that he had been over assessed for the taxation year of 1942, issuing him a cheque for the grand total of $4.53. As the League had reimbursed its U.S.-based officials for taxes paid during their time in Princeton or Washington D.C., this money technically belonged to the League, and thus Watterson had to advise Renborg to cash the cheque, forward the amount onto him, before remitting the less-than-opulent windfall back to Geneva.[520] It was hardly a serious issue, but this was the kind of problem that had to be resolved in order to close an organisation like the League in a compliant fashion. It did not matter if a question arose as a result of external forces or League disorganisation, it could not be ignored.

Watterson was not the only former League official trying to wrap up the organisation's business in the United States. Ansgar Rosenborg, although employed

---

early October 1947, that he had previously been a personal banking customer of theirs – presumably when based in Princeton between 1940 and 1946, but why he chose to open an account with them again in 1947 is unclear: LNA, 7 October 1947, letter from Watterson to Princeton Bank and Trust Company, C1784-4.

[519] See chapter four of this thesis for more on the San Yo-Sha debt, and in addition: LNA, 29 September 1947, letter from Ragnar Nurkse to Watterson, asking the latter to forward on 15 diagram drawings for the French publication of "Inflation Volume" being issued from Geneva, C1784-4; LNA, 25 November 1947, letter from Aldo Caselli, Comptroller at Haverford College, to Watterson, querying whether the display material for the tapestries might also be recalled to Geneva, C1784-4; LNA, 15 January 1948, letter from David L. Bazelon, Assistant Attorney-General and Director of the Office of Alien Property, to Watterson, regarding the San Yo-Sha publications debt, C1784-4.

[520] See both: LNA, [unknown date], letter from Office of Commissioner of Internal Revenue, U.S. Treasury Department, to Renborg, C1784-4; LNA, 14 October 1947, letter from Watterson to Renborg, C1784-4.

by the U.N. since the summer of 1946, was still trying to oversee the release of the E.F.O.'s final publication: *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years* by Dudley Kirk. Rosenborg had agreed to oversee the publication in 1946 because, as a former E.F.O. official – which Watterson was not – he had a greater understanding of the text and the review process. Unfortunately it had taken significantly longer than expected to finalise the contents due to various delays and absences, but it was finally published by Princeton University Press, the E.F.O.'s publication partner during its time at the Institute for Advanced Studies, on 22 September 1947.[521] Five thousand copies of the publication shipped from New Jersey as planned and only one, outwardly straightforward, task remained: paying the Princeton University Press bill, using what was left of the Rockefeller Grant.[522]

Unfortunately for Rosenborg it was not as simple as it seemed. When the bill arrived, it was much higher than expected – only $5,184 remained of the Rockefeller Grant but the invoice was for over $10,000 – and Rosenborg was pressed into a war of words with his long-time contact at Princeton University Press, Norvell B. Samuels.[523] Over several weeks in October 1947 the debate went back and forth, Rosenborg worried because he now had to find an additional $5,000 from somewhere – hopefully the U.N. – while Samuels was obliged to justify the invoice by explaining that the Press had already lowered the bill as a favour, and had foregone any profit in order to reduce the total.[524] Rosenborg endeavoured to convince his U.N. superiors to pay the additional sum needed to settle the bill – the invoice coming too late to be paid by the League before Stencek's departure – but by the end of January 1948 the amount was still unpaid. Samuels continued to send reminders – "As I have told you, Princeton University Press did not make any profit at all on this book…we feel that it is somewhat unfair to expect us to continue to carry this account" – but Rosenborg, both frustrated that the U.N. had not yet agreed

---

[521] LNA, 12 September 1947, cable from Ranshofen-Wertheimer to J.G. Schumacher confirming Rosenborg's return to New York, C1741; LNA, 29 September 1947, letter from Rosenborg to Owen, C1741.
[522] LNA, 29 September 1947, memo from Ranshofen-Wertheimer to Rosenborg confirming that Watterson has been instructed to transfer the money to the U.N., C1741; LNA, 24 September 1947, letter from Norvell B. Samuels to Rosenborg, C1741.
[523] LNA, [unknown date], invoice from Princeton University Press for publication and distribution of *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years*, C1741; LNA, 1 October 1947, letter from Rosenborg to Samuels expressing concern over invoice total, C1741.
[524] Samuels explained that had the Princeton University Press accounted for its usual profit on the publication, the bill "should have been in the neighbourhood of $12,000": LNA, 21 October 1947, letter from Samuels to Rosenborg, C1741.

to the expenditure and that he was still trying to deal with League problems over eighteen months after he left the Secretariat, had to wait whilst the U.N. prevaricated.[525]

Nevertheless the major issue holding up the League's business was the much-derided income tax lawsuit brought against the U.S Internal Revenue. Before the case was heard by the Tax Court, Watterson had to spend the late part of August 1947 writing to League officials based in the United States during the Second World War, asking them to sign an agreement confirming that, should the lawsuit be successful, they would hand over the proceeds of any windfall to the League.[526] This meant that these monies could be gathered by Watterson, and then distributed amongst the organisation's former members in accordance with the same distribution scheme established for the liquidation of the League's assets.[527] Nevertheless, despite all the work put in place to situate Watterson as Trustee and Liquidating Agent, the case was dismissed by the Tax Court on 9 October 1947, as predicted by League legal advisor Émile Giraud one year earlier.[528] John F. Dailey Jr., working for Edwards & Smith on behalf of former official John Chapman, made a number of different arguments to the Court but the judges presiding explained that it was not their place to evaluate the wisdom of taxing people, but instead to interpret the laws of Congress, and that the petitioner's "elaborate arguments" were "ineffective".[529]

The negative, if unsurprising, result did not however mean that the League's responsibilities in this regard were complete; instead of distributing a windfall to members, Watterson's first task was to update the interested parties including

---

[525] LNA, 11 December 1947, letter from Samuels to Rosenborg, C1741; LNA, 19 December 1947, letter from Rosenborg to F. P. E. Green of the UN Economic Affairs Department, C1741.
[526] The agreement signed by former officials stated: "In consideration of the matters above set forth I hereby confirm the understanding and agreements therein states and hereby agree, on behalf of myself, my heirs, executors, personal representatives, administrators or assigns, to conform thereto and to perform and make, execute and deliver the acts, assignments, agreements and payments therein set forth, in the contingencies and according to the conditions therein provided, as and when called upon by the Trustee and Liquidating Agent or substitute or successor Trustee or Liquidating Agent." LNA, 26 August 1947, letter from Watterson to Loveday, C1784-4.
[527] LNA, 10 September 1947, letter from Stencek to Watterson sending instructions on next steps, C1784-4 3A/41136/705.
[528] Giraud wrote: "The claim, to my mind, has no legal ground and the suit will be lost." LNA, 22 October 1946, memo from Giraud to Lester, S567.
[529] LNA, 9 October 1947, The tax court ruling: 9 T. C. No. 87, The Tax Court of the United States, John Henry Chapman v Commissioner of Internal Revenue, Docket number 10121, promulgated October 9 1947, C1784-4.

Chapman and other former U.S. officials.[530] Watterson also wrote to Stencek at his home address in Geneva in early November, explaining that he would be organising the final payment to Edwards & Smith, and detailing his actions up to that point to halt the New York lawyers' desire to appeal the decision.[531] Despite receiving explicit instruction from Lester before his departure that no further action should be taken in the case of a negative outcome, Edwards & Smith wrote to Watterson explaining that, as Trustee and Liquidating Agent, he could authorise the pursuit of a special Act of Congress designed to cover the payment of such taxes.[532] Watterson was forced to write to them on two separate occasions in early November, confirming that absolutely no action should be taken in further pursuance of the case and that their business was over.[533]

Stencek was not surprised by the result – "I felt all along that it was rather a weak [case]" – and in his now informal and unpaid role as the League's Genevan representative, he instructed Watterson to compile a report for members, and send his expenses to Brunskog so the final accounts might be audited.[534] These were Watterson's last official tasks as Trustee and Liquidating Agent – his custodianship was over – and while he acknowledged in November 1947 that compiling the documents might take a little time to finish, by the end of January 1948 he was ready.[535] Copies of the Court Judgement were sent to all 34 League member-states – and the nine Board of Liquidation members – alongside a covering letter from Watterson explaining the case outcome, and his decision to close the final administrative account as a result.[536]

The League's institutions had been gone for several months but the continuation of business into 1948 challenges the notion that the end of the organisation's physical

---

[530] LNA, 22 October 1947, unsigned letter from Edwards & Smith to John Henry Chapman confirming the outcome of the lawsuit, R3748 3A/41136/705; LNA, [unknown date], sample letter sent from Watterson to former League officials based in the United States during the Second World War, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[531] LNA, 3 November 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[532] LNA, 25 October 1947, letter from Edwards & Smith to Watterson, C1784-4.
[533] See both: LNA, 4 November 1947, letter from Watterson to Edwards & Smith, C1784-4; LNA, 18 November 1947, letter from Watterson to Edwards & Smith, C1784-4.
[534] LNA, 12 November 1947, letter from Stencek to Watterson, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[535] Watterson explained to Stencek that preparing copies of the Court Judgement for members "will take some little time": LNA, 25 November 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[536] LNA, 31 January 1948, letter from Watterson to 36 Member States and nine Board of Liquidation Members, C1784-4.

framework was also the conclusion of its story. Watterson's letter to members were the League's last words; after January 1948 the organisation was never heard from again in an official capacity. Watterson had fulfilled his obligations and could finally look forward to focussing his energies elsewhere. However, forces beyond the control of the League's last stalwarts meant they were not allowed to rest easy just yet.

The Un-Ending: Spring 1948 and Beyond

Trying to wrap up the League of Nations was a difficult task; liquidation on this scale had not been attempted before and both the organisation's leaders and its Secretariat consistently bumped up against unknowable problems as a result. Nonetheless, precedent or previous experience would not necessarily have prepared the League's last officials for obstacles conjured up by the actions and interests of external parties. The Board of Liquidation had dissolved itself, the Secretary-General had retired to Ireland, the Secretariat closed down, and the last communication to members had been sent; those final devotees acting on the organisation's behalf, specifically Rosenborg, Stencek, and Watterson, had completed all the tasks asked of them, and yet outside forces had other plans.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering it was the last piece of League business to be concluded before the end of January, the dismissal of the income tax lawsuit brought further fallout not long after Watterson dispatched his final report to members. Back in the spring of 1947, the League's leadership assumed that any negative consequences to come from pursuing the case would be confined to a cost in terms of both Watterson's time and the legal fees, and the Board believed this risk was worth the possible reward.[537] What neither the Board, nor the League's lawyers in the United States, failed to anticipate however, was an entirely different downside to the case's dismissal. Watterson wrote to Stencek at the very end of January to explain that "a grave problem has arisen" as a result of the U.S. Court's ruling against the League in the Chapman case. The outcome of the lawsuit had since led the Tax Commissioner in the United States to reclassify the League officials based

[537] LNA, 12 April 1947, League of Nations: Board of Liquidation, Provisional Minutes of Twentieth Meeting B.L./P.V.20, S569.

in the country during the war, for the purposes of income tax, as 'resident aliens' for the years 1944, 1945, and 1946; they had previously been assessed as 'non-resident aliens' for the entire time. He only discovered this change in their – and his own – status after a chance meeting with Rosenborg in New York which, as the latter explained, meant these officials could expect to be called before the Commissioner and asked to pay additional amounts, depending on salary, to cover the changes. Rosenborg, Folke Hilgerdt, and John Chapman had all already received calls to do so, and the rest of the group – eighteen individuals in total – could expect the same in the near future.[538] As Watterson explained to Stencek: "It does seem rather hard on the Princeton and Washington ex-officials still in this country that through no fault of their own may possibly be held liable for taxes to the extent of hundreds of dollars with, in my case at least, no recourse to another organisation."[539]

League officials did not pay income taxes in Switzerland, and the organisation had refunded those individuals expected to pay similar levies during their time in the United States. With the League's liquid assets transferred to members in October 1947, there was no money to compensate these officials for the additional taxes they now had to pay, leaving former League employees out of pocket. Both Watterson and Stencek were at a loss as to what could be done for these officials; there were no funds available to reimburse them and in all likelihood there was no way to help. Watterson tried to procure advice from Seymour Jacklin, then the South African Government's representative at the United Nations, whilst he was visiting New York, but the former League Treasurer and Board of Liquidation member was unable to help, leaving Stencek to contact both Lester and Hambro for guidance.[540] He referred to the situation as "hopeless" in his letter to Lester, and Stencek hoped the two men would agree with his assessment that unfortunately for those ex-officials affected, there was nothing to be done, but neither man was forthcoming

[538] LNA, 26 August 1947, list of U.S.-based League officials, prepared by Watterson, affected by the income tax lawsuit and the consequent fallout, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[539] LNA, 26 January 1948, letter from Watterson to Stencek outlining the "grave problem", R3748 3A/41136/705.
[540] Upon Watterson's request for assistance, Seymour Jacklin suggested that the U.N. could reimburse these officials as the new organisation had received "the balance of the funds from the League." This was not true – as later confirmed in a letter from Stencek – League Members had received the balance of funds from the League as U.N. credits, but the U.N. itself did not have any former liquid assets with which to refund officials. See: LNA, 26 January 1948, letter from Watterson to Stencek, R3748 3A/41136/705; LNA, 4 February 1948, letter from Stencek to Watterson in which the former explains Jacklin's error, R3748 3A/41136/705.

with a response.[541] When Hambro finally answered the query it was two months later, and the Board of Liquidation Chairman suggested nothing in the way of advice or solution, or even approval of the decision to leave officials to pay the income tax bills alone. Instead he offered only two sentences: "Many thanks for your letter of February 14th 1948 which brought us the final document concerning the tax difficulties. I am glad that you sent the document to me and I have communicated it to Sir Cecil Kisch."[542] The Board of Liquidation, so full of pride in the organisation and its ethos just six months earlier, had always been distant from the Secretariat's officials but these events reiterated that it, and Lester, had moved on, both literally and figuratively, from the League's woes.

The League's Archives do not reveal what happened to those former officials asked to pay increased income taxes in the United States; with no indication that the organisation refunded them we can assume they were left to settle the bills by themselves. The same sources and Lester's personal papers also show the Secretary-General never responded to Stencek's query regarding Watterson's "grave problem", and indeed there is no evidence he ever wrote to him after his departure in August 1947. Stencek was not a man to complain, but there are small hints that he felt frustrated by his former colleague's lack of contact, at least on a personal level. There were the updates sent in September and October 1947, and in his letter explaining the fallout of the lawsuit, he noted his disappointment at the lack of the "long letter you promised to send me".[543] It is not entirely clear at what point Stencek stopped coming to the Palais every day to check on the League's affairs; Watterson always wrote to Stencek at his home address after October 1947 but the latter was still using official League stationery to respond to correspondence as late as February 1948.[544] However as the files in the League Archives become thinner from the end of 1947 onwards, so too did Stencek fade from events, and there is a sense that he felt adrift after a long career as a civil servant both in the Secretariat and as part of the Austro-Hungarian Government. In his letter to Lester in February he noted that he was enjoying his "freedom" but that while he was trying to fill his time as best he could, "so far nothing has turned up that would be of any interest to

[541] LNA, 4 February 1948, letter from Stencek to Lester, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[542] LNA, 8 April 1948, letter from Hambro to Watterson, C1784-4.
[543] LNA, 4 February 1948, letter from Stencek to Lester, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[544] One such example is Stencek's letter to Watterson dated 4 February 1948: LNA, 4 February 1948, letter from Stencek to Watterson, C1784-4.

me."[545] Stencek's time with the League was coming to an end – the number of weeks between each unexpected request for assistance became greater and greater – and while he was not yet ready for retirement, he was struggling to find his place in the post-war system.

Watterson meanwhile found that the end of his responsibilities as the organisation's Trustee and Liquidating Agent was not going to be the end of his work for the League. Separate from the lawsuit, the U.S. Internal Revenue service sent a query in mid-February 1948 to John Chapman – coincidentally the former E.F.O. official in whose name the tax case had been filed – regarding shortfalls in his income tax for 1942, 1943, and 1944.[546] These shortfalls were paid by the League in 1946, but the Revenue service had misplaced the corresponding cheque information, and Watterson, once again fulfilling his role as the clearing house for all the League's business in the United States, had to spend the next two months following-up with both Chapman and the Princeton Bank and Trust to track down the missing information.[547] On a number of occasions, Watterson offered to reimburse Lilian Stout, of the Princeton Bank and Trust, for the time she spent pursuing the query, suggesting she take money directly from his League account: "As stated in my letter of February 28, any expenses incurred in this connection may be charged to my account as Trustee and Liquidating Agent of the League of Nations". What makes Watterson's proposal particularly surprising in relation to the League's many endings is that he made these offers – the last of which was dated 13 April 1948 – after he had supposedly concluded the organisation's financial affairs at the end of January. There is no other evidence in the League's Archives to either support or contradict this irregularity, making it difficult to state with any certainty, but Watterson's repeated offer strongly suggests that the League continued to hold financial assets into the spring of 1948.[548]

Despite their efforts to close the League as quickly and orderly as possible, the rear guard of officials found themselves struggling over a long period of time to terminate

[545] LNA, 4 February 1948, letter from Stencek to Lester, R3748 3A/41136/705.
[546] See both: LNA, 20 February 1948, letter from Chapman to Watterson, C1784-4; LNA, 24 February 1948, letter from John F. Dailey Jr, of Edwards & Smith, to Watterson, C1784-4.
[547] Watterson first raised the question with Lilian Stout at the Princeton Bank and Trust in late February, and the matter was only confirmed as settled in April: LNA, 28 February 1948, letter from Watterson to Lilian Stout, C1784-4; LNA, 13 April 1948, letter from Watterson to Dailey Jr., C1784-4.
[548] LNA, 13 April 1948, letter from Watterson to Stout, C1784-4.

the last niggling bits of organisational business. In New York, Rosenborg was starting to despair of his continuing League errands. He finally convinced the U.N. Publication Board to pay the outstanding Princeton University Press bill in mid-February, but he was not safe from the unexpected ignorance of others.[549] When Columbia University Press wrote to the "League of Nations" at Princeton in March and April 1948, asking the organisation to settle an outstanding $1 bill, the details were initially passed on to Rosenborg in New York.[550] Adamant that his responsibilities had been solely confined to the publication of *Europe's Population*, Rosenborg referred the matter to Watterson and, in his letter to the latter, he seemed both resentful at the nature of the query, and almost elated to be absolved of any responsibility towards it. He mockingly noted that the demand was for "the formidable amount of $1.00", and told Watterson, whilst noting there was nothing to be done about the situation: "But that is your headache, not mine."[551] Even the ever-composed Watterson struggled to contain his disbelief in his response to the Columbia University Press, replying "I am somewhat surprised to learn that the Press is not aware that the League ceased operations in Princeton some eighteen months ago."[552] The Board of Liquidation publicly declared the end of closure work at the end of July 1947, and yet Watterson and Rosenborg, over nine months later, were learning that even the most carefully controlled dissolutions were not immune to the obliviousness of other parties.

Not that the persistent issues affected only those based in the United States. Otto Jenny and Peter Welps, both working at the I.L.O. following their departures from the League, were roped in to help with an outstanding staff removals query received months after they departed. Agnes Driscoll, a former official of the Permanent Court of International Justice, wrote to Welps in February 1948, requesting his help in chasing down D.J. Bruinsma – Head of Internal Services at the International Court

---

[549] Samuels wrote in his reminder, dated 10 February, that "We think we have been extremely patient as regards payment of this bill but we feel that the United Nations is imposing on us". LNA, 10 February 1948, letter from Samuels to Rosenborg, C1741.
[550] The first reminder can be found at: LNA, 25 March 1948, invoice for $1 from Columbia University Press to "League of Nations, Princeton, New Jersey", C1784-4. The second, somewhat passive-aggressive reminder – "We know you will realize how each outstanding account handicaps us and why we ask that you send us your check promptly" – was sent several weeks later: LNA, 16 April 1948, letter from Mrs L. E. Scanlan, Assistant Treasurer, to League of Nations, Princeton, C1784-4.
[551] LNA, 28 April 1948, letter from Rosenborg to Watterson, C1784-4.
[552] Watterson suggested to Scanlan that, as the League's accounts were well and truly closed, she refer the matter to Charles Proffitt, the Press's Director, and consider writing-off the $1 bill: LNA, 3 May 1948, letter from Watterson to Scanlan, C1784-4.

of Justice – in regard to an on-going query from July of the previous year. Driscoll wanted to know why an amount of money had been deducted from her removals compensation, but Bruinsma had not responded to her questions. Her letter was passed onto Jenny who, perhaps misunderstanding the nature of Driscoll's query, instead instructed her to contact Bruinsma directly. Whether Driscoll was ever able to resolve the issue is unknown, but there was clearly frustration on Jenny's part at the prospect of resolving problems that should have been laid to rest the previous summer, suggesting to Driscoll that she was at fault for raising the query even though the former P.C.I.J. official specifically apologised for having to chase the matter in the first place.[553]

These persistent leftover issues were littered throughout the late winter and spring of 1948, but the summer of that year seemed to bring an end to the outstanding questions. However, in the true spirit of the organisation's already longwinded dissolution, a query arrived at the U.N. in September 1949 from an unlikely source. Perhaps the Columbia University Press demand for $1 less than a year after the League's demise was plausible, but that understanding could not be extended to the Chief Accountant of U.N.E.S.C.O. Writing to the "The Secretary" of the Board of Liquidation, an R. Adams explained that a recent audit had highlighted an unpaid bill for Cecil Kisch's 1947 Board of Liquidation travelling expenses. Although an unpaid invoice is an obvious inconvenience for an organisation's accounting, it is hard to accept that U.N.E.S.C.O. was unaware the League closed two years earlier or that it thought it likely the bill would be settled.[554] The U.N. at Geneva, in receipt of the letter at the Palais des Nations, decided to consult Jenny once again in his capacity as a former League Treasury official. Writing back to Adams, a U.N. Finance Officer explained that even if the claim was in order, there was no way the bill could be settled and reminded them: "the United Nations has no responsibility for League affairs."[555]

---

[553] Driscoll's original letter stated "I hardly know how to approach the matter without asking for your help. With apologies for troubling you again." LNA, 6 February 1948, letter from A. M. Driscoll to Peter Welps, R5291 17/42922/2989. Jenny's response meanwhile was dismissive, mistakenly assuming Driscoll was asking for her removals compensation – which she was not – and instructed her to "address your request direct to Mr. Bruinsma", something Driscoll had already been trying for over six months." LNA, 11 February 1948, letter from Jenny to Driscoll, R5291 17/42922/2989.
[554] LNA, 22 September 1949, letter from R. Adams, Chief Accountant UNESCO, to "The Secretary, Board of Liquidation, League of Nations, Geneva", R5816.4 50/44117/43844.
[555] LNA, 4 October 1949, letter from J. R. Conway, U.N. Finance Officer, to Adams, R5816.4 50/44117/43844.

These men were dedicated to the League – how else to explain their continued willingness to get involved – but it was difficult to move forward when they kept being pulled back into something they should have left behind months or even years earlier. The problems were not always difficult to resolve – some of them were very small – but those planning the organisation's ending did not appreciate the possibility of complications arising after the leadership disbanded. Therefore, when these unanticipated queries cropped up again and again, the resolution of the problems fell to the Secretariat's last officials by default. Nevertheless it is also true that even if every eventuality had been prepared for, every risk mitigated against in some fashion, it was unlikely that the organisation's dissolution could be fully controlled. As the events of 1948 showed, officials like Rosenborg and Watterson, Stencek and Jenny, were only able to manage proceedings as much as their positions and power allowed; there was no way of predicting the interests and expectations of outside parties.

Living On in Memory

This thesis has dealt before with the nebulous nature of the League, and the lack of agreed definition of exactly what is meant when we talk about the League of Nations. The organisation was a forum for state governments, a collection of physical and monetary assets, the technical functions and activities it provided; the League was all of these things and more. This final section looks at one of these components – the organisation as an international civil service – and demonstrates how the accumulated experience of the League's officials was, and still is, used by the Secretariats that followed. The U.N. Library at Geneva today has an Institutional Memory Section, committed to coordinating and preserving what it calls the "heritage of invaluable historical collections", a key part of which are the League of Nations Archives.[556] The knowledge contained within these Archives, and that held by the League's Secretariat officials became an equally central part of the United Nations and its agencies in the mid to late 1940s, and consequently this section

[556] Taken from the U.N. Library at Geneva list of goals, under the section heading "Preserving the Institutional Memory of UN Geneva", United Nations Office Geneva Archives webpage: https://www.ungeneva.org/en/knowledge/archives (retrieved 15 March 2021).

investigates whether this element of the League – arguably the most enduring – truly came to a close in 1947-48.

Even before the foundation of the United Nations, during the Second World War, a number of Secretariat officials – some of whom were still employed by the League at the time – were invited to share their knowledge and unique experience by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. George A. Finch, Director of the Endowment's Division of International Law, liked to bring attention to a Winston Churchill speech from February 1945 to echo why he and the Endowment were drawing upon a defunct organisation: "All the work that was done in the past, all the experience that has been gathered by the working of the League of Nations, will not be cast away."[557] Under Finch's leadership, the Division of International Law went on to publish seven works under the banner Studies in the Administration of International Law and Organization, covering topics such as international tribunals, drug control, and a survey of the economic and financial organisation of the League. The most significant work in this collection, however, was Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer's review of the League Secretariat's structure and procedures, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration*, which Wertheimer specifically hoped would be of value to those building future administrations. In his preface and introduction, he wrote "The value of this study is unique", that it "should be a valuable handbook for experts and officials", and that "much of the contents of the volume has already been made privately available to officials and official agencies working upon problems of post-war reconstruction."[558] Although many tried to publicly distance themselves from the League name at the time, in private it became apparent early on that the Carnegie Endowment was not alone in wanting to take advantage of the knowledge and proficiency of Secretariat officials.

Chapter two of this thesis includes much more detail on the recruitment of League officials by the United Nations and its agencies in 1946 – and some of the problems

---

[557] Finch quoted from Winston Churchill's speech to the U.K. House of Commons on 27 February 1945, in his preface to Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer's review of the League Secretariat: Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat*, p. vii.

[558] Ibid, pp. xiii, viii. There were six other works, alongside Ranshofen-Wertheimer's, published by the Carnegie Endowment under this banner: Butler, *International Law of the Future;* Hudson, *International Tribunals*; Pastuhov, *Guide to the Practice of International Conferences*; de Azcárate, *League of Nations and National Minorities*; Hill, *Economic and Financial Organization of the League*; Renborg, *International Drug Control*.

associated with it – but it bears repeating that the League's leadership was largely pleased with, and even encouraged, the transfer of the unique knowledge belonging to its officials. Ranshofen-Wertheimer was an early hire for the new U.N. Secretariat – he had previously left the League in the spring of 1940 – and his experience of the peculiarities of international civil service were quickly put to use preparing memorandums for his new employer on subjects such as the hiring of individuals who were not citizens of U.N. member states, and the practicality of transferring certain League functions and activities to the new organisation.[559] Branko Lukac and Martin Hill, of the Communications and Transit Section and the E.F.O. respectively, were both released early from their Secretariat contracts at the request of the U.N.[560] By the summer of 1946 the U.N. clamour for League officials was so high that Lester sent a request for respite to Adriaan Pelt – himself a former member of the Secretariat since recruited by the U.N. – noting that the demand had reached the point where "in one case there were actually two requests for the same official."[561]

Whilst a significant number of individuals left to apply their experience at the U.N., I.L.O., and other agencies, the opportunities for League officials still with the organisation started to diminish during 1947. The new secretariats were mostly working at capacity by that point with many of their structures in place, and the collective knowledge of the League's procedures was no longer as in demand as before. However, this is not to suggest that every member of the Secretariat's rear guard was left behind; many of these men and women still went on to use their years of experience in new roles, ensuring the continuation of the League's memory. Figures such as Émile Giraud, the League's legal advisor, and Tevfik Erim, a Member of the Political Section, were directly head-hunted by the U.N. in the autumn of 1946 and both moved to New York for their new roles.[562] The Treasury's

---

[559] LNA, 25 March 1946, memo by Ranshofen-Wertheimer titled Employment of Nationals of Non-Member States with the Secretariat, S568; LNA, 29 April 1946, report by Ranshofen-Wertheimer titled Transfer of Functions: Notes on some Problems Raised by the Continuation of certain League Activities, S568.

[560] Trygve Lie, thanking Lester for releasing Lukac from his League contract, wrote: "he will be most valuable to the United Nations…": LNA, 9 April 1946, letter from Lie to Lester thanking the latter for releasing Lukac from his position, S568. Hill meanwhile, described by Lester as an "exceptional" case, was released immediately following the 21st Assembly, again at the request of Lie: LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Stencek, S568.

[561] LNA, 17 June 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt, S922.

[562] Lester wanted to hang onto Giraud for longer – he wrote to Pelt in early November 1946 describing him as "my last Legal Adviser" – but agreed to release him before the end of that year. LNA, 6 November 1946, letter from Lester to Pelt, S567. Meanwhile Erim was offered a role in October 1946

Otto Jenny was first offered a new position with the I.L.O. in July 1946, the latter organisation hoping he could start work in January of the next year noting: "We are most anxious to secure the services of [Jenny] of whose work we have heard most highly from Jacklin and others".[563] Lester however was aghast at the thought of losing his most senior Treasury official during liquidation – having already lost Jacklin – and begged Edward Phelan to second Jenny back to the League until the work was complete.[564] Fortunately for Lester, the Director-General agreed, and while Jenny officially joined the I.L.O. in January 1947, he remained with the League on secondment for another eight months.

As previously noted, Ansgar Rosenborg was transferred to the U.N. in the summer of 1946 as part of the E.F.O., where he became a significant figure in that organisation's Secretariat. He headed U.N. missions to Haiti and Indonesia in the 1940s and 1950s, became the Secretary-General's representative to Guinea in the latter of those two decades, before retiring in 1959 at the age of 65.[565] This thesis has also already explained that Rosenborg's fellow Princeton colleague, Percy Watterson, was recruited by the Food and Agriculture Organisation in 1946, but the accountant's skills were noticed by another of the new U.N agencies in the same year. The Interim Commission of the World Health Organisation recruited Watterson to establish the new organisation's budgetary and accounting procedures – a service he was happy to provide – meaning that, in the late summer and early autumn of 1946, Watterson's experience was so in demand he was working for three international organisations at once: the League, the F.A.O, and the W.H.O.[566]

Some of the leaders of the new secretariats were more explicit than others in their desire to take advantage of the existing international civil servants available to them. In 1982, as part of its oral history programme, the W.H.O. recorded two interviews

---

but having asked Lester to intervene in order to secure a higher salary, he did not depart until the spring of 1947. He wrote to the Secretary-General: "that as a result I may be enabled to put my capacities and experience at the disposal of the United Nations for work which I have very much at heart." LNA, 11 October 1946, letter from Erim to Lester, S567.

563 LNA, 17 July 1946, letter from G.A. Johnston at the I.L.O., to Lester, S568.

564 In a letter to Phelan, Lester referred to Jenny as "really indispensable". LNA, 29 October 1946, letter from Lester to Phelan, S567.

565 *The Washington Post*, 18 February 1979, [unknown author], 'Ansgar Rosenborg, Was U.N. Official', (retrieved online 10 March 2021: https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1979/02/18/ansgar-rosenborg-was-un-official/b2b58e13-1a1a-44b4-9113-43d639580a1f/).

566 United Nations World Health Organization Interim Commission, *Official Records of the World Health Organization No. 4: Minutes of the Second Session of the Interim Commission, held in Geneva from 4 to 13 November 1946* (Geneva, 1947), pp. 39, 74-75.

with Milton P. Siegel, Director and later Assistant Director-General of the organisation's Division of Administration and Finance, and previously part of the Interim Commission to establish the new body.[567] Siegel had also been involved in establishing the U.N. Secretariat in New York, and came to Geneva in 1947 to complete a similar task for the W.H.O. In his interview, he explained that he was a great believer in learning from that which had gone before: "I had the attitude that instead of trying to reinvent the wheel, as they often say, maybe we can learn something from the predecessor organization which was called the League of Nations." He also took the position that the best way to gather that knowledge would be to obtain it from those who had lived the experience, which led him to both Valentin Stencek and Chester Purves. The former was tasked with "writing the staff regulations, the staff rules…", whilst the former Board Secretary became the Acting Chief of the Conference and General Services Division, managing the Second World Health Assembly in Rome in the summer of 1949.[568]

Siegel freely-acknowledged the benefits of recruiting those with experience of international administration – "Had I not had the assistance of people such as those two [Stencek and Purves], I am confident I would have made the same errors as have been made by many other people, such as myself, in other organizations" – and that this was frequently down to recognising what not to do, as much as it was about what they should.[569] Working as part of the W.H.O. Secretariat proved to be the challenge Stencek was looking for, adrift after his time at the League was over. Footnotes to the Siegel interview transcript state that Stencek was Chief of Personnel from September 1948 to April 1949 but he also served, intermittently, as an Administrative Consultant in the Division of Administrative Management and Personnel, part of Siegel's Department of Administration and Finance, between 1954 and 1966. Some of these contracts lasted for as little as a few weeks whilst his final tenure continued for eight years, taking him up to 1966 and his retirement at the age of 82.[570] The arrangement was a win-win situation for both Siegel and Stencek; the former gained invaluable insight into the successful administration of an

[567] The details of Siegel's positions at the W.H.O. are taken from his 1982 interview: W.H.O. Archives Unit, 15 November 1982, oral interview with Milton P. Siegel, p. 3.
[568] Ibid, pp. 10, 26.
[569] Id.
[570] Information regarding Stencek's numerous positions and the dates of his employment were provided by the W.H.O. Archives Service, 21 November 2019.

international civil service, whilst Stencek successfully-delayed his retirement by another twenty years.

Seán Lester however was much more interested in the quiet life than his former colleague. In May 1946, in a letter to his brother-in-law, Lester made it clear his only plans for the future centred on retirement to the new family home in County Wicklow in Ireland, "about forty miles from Dublin…a moderate sized house with about fifty acres of land, though I have not the faintest idea what do with land…", and he continued to stress his lack of ambition both in the past, and in the future.[571] He turned down offers of ambassadorial roles for the Irish Government in New York, Brussels, Stockholm, and Pretoria, not wanting to serve in big cities and expressing a preference to stay in Ireland if at all possible.[572] In a conversation with Freddy Boland, Secretary of the Irish Department of External Affairs, in July 1947, both men admitted that Lester's history as Secretary-General of an intergovernmental organisation made it difficult to find an appropriate role for him in the Irish Foreign Service. In a memo recalling the conversation, Lester said: "I am something of an anomaly" – an assessment Boland agreed with. Short of taking a position as an advisor to Trygve Lie or becoming a very senior member of one of the new international civil service branches, there was no obvious place for a former Secretary-General.[573] The only possible future Lester saw for himself beyond permanent retirement at the age of 58, was in either special mission or committee work, but less than a year later he reaffirmed his commitment to his settled existence when he declined an offer from Lie to lead the U.N. Security Council Commission established to "deal with the India-Pakistan question". The post was well-paid and prestigious but, as Lester explained in his response, while he was greatly flattered by Lie's confidence in him, "difficult and urgent personal affairs" made it impossible for him to accept the role. He did not expand on the "personal affairs" at the time, although one of his daughters – it is unknown which – decided to elaborate further some unknown years later, annotating Lester's papers by

---

[571] Lester's Diary, 22 May 1946, letter from Lester to James Tyrrell, Lester's brother-in-law. In addition, in a report to Eamon de Valera, dated 11 June 1947, Lester closed his letter with the statement "I have never been ambitious, I sought none of these positions". Lester's Diary, 11 June 1947, Lester to Eamon de Valera, Minister of External Affairs, Dublin.

[572] The letter from J.T. Walshe, of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, offering these postings to Lester has been lost from his files. In a handwritten entry in Lester's Diaries, his daughter, Ann Gorski, wrote: "I have mislaid this letter in which SL was offered posts in either New York, Brussels, Stockholm, or Pretoria. And SL had noted in the margin that he was not interested in any of these offers. As I remember this." Lester's Diary, 4 April 2005, handwritten note by A. Gorski.

[573] Lester's Diary, 9 July 1947, personal memo by Lester.

underlining the phrase in pencil and writing “His fishing!” next to them.[574] Lester’s experience made him an invaluable source of wisdom and knowledge about the management of an international civil service, but as he and Freddy Boland correctly identified in the summer of 1947, his seniority made it almost impossible to find an appropriate position for him after he left the League. His contribution to the organisation’s institutional memory ended in 1947, but the international civil service to which he had belonged continued – by then split into different branches across different institutions – at least partly, thanks to his former colleagues.

Not every member of the Secretariat found themselves in high demand either before or after their departure from the Palais, but the esteem in which many individuals were held by the U.N., the I.L.O., the W.H.O., and others, shows the value attributed to their knowledge, experience, and to the international civil service framework they helped to cement. There is a lot more to be written about the transplantation of the League blueprint onto the organisations that succeeded it – beyond the scope of this thesis – but in an intangible way, the League Secretariat continues to this day in the international civil service that continues to support intergovernmental organisations. The knowledge and memory belonging to the League lived on long after the more palpable elements of the organisation drifted away in 1947 and 1948, and will likely continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

Conclusions

The League was more than just an institutional framework in which representatives from governments could gather to discuss and debate the issues of the day, and this was especially true after April 1946, the last time these governments came together. The League was, instead, the sum of a number of different parts; some of these elements were tangible – the Palais des Nations, the many Assembly meetings – whilst others were more incorporeal – the collective knowledge held by officials, or the idea that intergovernmental cooperation was possible on a truly global scale. To try and pinpoint an absolute ending for the League is, therefore, an almost Sisyphean task; it is all too easy to become trapped in a loop, trying to decide which

[574] See: Lester’s Diary, 8 June 1948, letter from Lie to Lester; Lester’s Diary, 9 June 1948, telegram from Lester to Lie.

of the endings mentioned in this chapter is the correct one, never reaching a satisfying conclusion.

In reality, all of the endpoints discussed in this chapter are legitimate in one way or another. The end of August 1947 was the culmination of the Board of Liquidation's commitment to the organisation and thus the end of the League's strategic decision-making. The organisation's leadership was steadfast in its belief that the end of its work was the end of the League as a whole and, as the body invested with the power of the Assembly, its authority on the subject cannot easily be dismissed. The League was legitimised by its members and if the Board of Liquidation, acting on their behalf, announced the liquidation was over, this declaration must carry some weight. Nevertheless, examination of the evidence shows that the Board was wrong to assume that its existence was the lynchpin by which the League's survival should be judged; its high-level guidance and decision-making was only one part of what remained of the organisation. And, of course, this thesis has already established that the Board of Liquidation had a vested interest in portraying the League's work as being complete before it was. Chapter four demonstrated the body's focus on its own reputation, how its efforts would be perceived by members, and the willingness of the group to obfuscate the reality of liquidation in an attempt to build a positive, long-lasting legacy for itself and the organisation. August 1947 saw the end of the Board of Liquidation, and consequently the end of the formalised League leadership, but many other elements of the organisation continued.

There is a more compelling argument to be made for 25 October 1947 as the most meaningful ending of the League. This date saw the last remaining structure of the organisation – the Secretariat – come to a close, as well as the completion of the majority of the League's outstanding work. After this point, the League of Nations had no physical home, no employees, and no assets beyond a pot of just over $7,000 sitting in a bank account in New Jersey. It was also the point at which Valentin Stencek, a more reliable narrator perhaps than figures within the League's leadership, announced the end of the organisation that had been his home for over 25 years. Looking at the League of Nations as a purely bureaucratic administration as perhaps envisaged by Max Weber, the end of October 1947, with the closure of the last vestiges of the institutional structures and systems, was as close to a

definitive end as might be possible.[575] Nevertheless it was not the end of all things; significant work was still to be completed, money remained in a bank account with the League's name attached to it, and the organisation's Liquidating Agent was only just starting to fulfil his obligations. If Watterson was still in the midst of managing the League's last financial matters, the institution's narrative had not yet come to a complete close.

Moving into 1948 the League's responsibilities and work persisted even as its institutional structures evaporated. The end of January of that year marked the organisation's last official contact with its membership, and the lawsuit against the U.S. Internal Revenue service – the only reason Watterson was appointed Liquidating Agent – was seemingly settled, but as this chapter has shown, closure was not a process that could be fully-controlled. Stencek continued to intermittently manage outstanding questions, Rosenborg was trying to remove himself from the last vestiges of a publication originally scheduled for release at least a year earlier, and the end of Watterson's official responsibilities did not mean he could ignore his unending collection of informal tasks. Despite these men's best efforts to draw a metaphorical line in the sand, there was no fool-proof way to close the book on the League of Nations; whilst they might have been finished with the organisation, that did not mean external forces felt the same way.

The closing months of the tangible League were haunted by a sense of death by a thousand cuts, slowly disappearing into the ether until only the incorporeal memory of the organisation remained. The last tasks of liquidation took longer than anyone anticipated – brought on by both a lack of understanding of the process and the unforeseeable actions of others – and when the leadership moved on, both physically and mentally, the tedious but necessary winding-up fell on the shoulders of those left behind. The story of their commitment to the League is bittersweet in many ways; as the last remnants of a 27-year experiment, they watched the organisation crumble into dust alone, with no one to commiserate with or to appreciate their work. It is unclear if these individuals believed their efforts were worth it, or if they even cared to that extent – this is a potential area of research for

[575] For more on Weber's definition and praise for bureaucratic administrations see: Weber, Max, *Economy and Society, A New Translation.* Edited and translated by Keith Tribe (London, 2019), pp. 347-354.

the future – but their experiences reveal a collection of endings that were, more often than not, both lonely and unspectacular. However, as we have established, the death of the League's more tangible components was not a mortal blow to all aspects of the organisation; its knowledge and memory endured in its officials as they moved on to newer and greener pastures in the global institutions still at the centre of our world today.

Trying to reconcile the organisation's diverse and many endings into one faultless and unassailable closure story, alongside the very real argument that one portion of the League of Nations never ended at all, is not really possible. What this thesis suggests instead is that the inability to do so is not to the detriment, but to the benefit of our understanding of the organisation and its end. It might be possible to force a conclusive finale on the League of Nations but doing so would be a simplification of what we have learnt about the organisation at the end of 1947 and into 1948. The process of coercing the narrative into a neat close would compel us to apply our own definition of ending on an organisation that struggled to do so itself; any conclusions drawn in the process could never be truly objective and would only exist to make us, as scholars, feel more satisfied with the endeavour. Perhaps the real error is to think of the League of Nations as a story, implying that the organisation had a fiction-like beginning, middle, and end – and satiate our human instinct to impose order on chaos – when the reality was much more complex.

The League's closure came about as a collection of endings: some small and some more significant. Accepting this, and resisting the urge to simplify the process, forces us to re-think our assumptions about the closure of international organisations. Combined with what this thesis has already revealed about the League's relationship to the U.N. and its agencies, this only reinforces the idea that the League of Nations, and likely other intergovernmental organisations, do not snap out of existence but instead blur and merge into what follows.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

"If there is any satisfaction in this world of ours, it comes, I think, from doing well and thoroughly the thing you have to do, and you certainly have done that up to the last second of the last hour. You can look the world in the face with the clearest of consciences, knowing that you have fulfilled the mandate entrusted to you…and that, God knows, with too little appreciation or recognition."
Letter from Arthur Sweetser to Seán Lester, 5 August 1947.[576]

Since its closure in 1947-48, the final months and years of the League of Nations have often been relegated to the back page of the organisation's history or ignored entirely. The result of this neglect is both a conscious and unconscious consensus that this time, a transformative period in the League's story, was without either note or scholarly merit. This thesis has, step by step, dismantled this misconception, revealing a two-year period dominated by activity driven by outside forces, changing power dynamics, and a failure to appreciate the enormity of the task, alongside stories of extraordinary personal commitment, the previously unexplored obfuscation of the links between the League and the United Nations, and a behind-the-scenes willingness to recognise the organisation's value as a trial run for the international system still in place today.

Many of the beliefs held about the League, and especially its closure, are either misguided or outright false. Publicly the organisation was a maligned endeavour but privately there were many in the post-war world who not only appreciated what had come before, but actively drew upon both its ideas and its assets. The League's Secretariat is often held up as pinnacle of bureaucratic efficiency but the commitment to structures and established procedures, ingrained in the organisation from its inception, failed both staff and leadership in 1946 and 1947 as it became

[576] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1947, letter from Sweetser to Lester.

apparent the framework for closure was not fit for purpose. Instead the closure period was full of contradictions and self-defeating undertakings. Time-wasting negotiations with the International Labour Organisation, and the ill-conceived and costly entertainment of a tax lawsuit in the United States were both justified by the pursuit of the moral high ground, but at the cost of efficiency. Decisions were made on the basis of long-running, but by-then irrelevant, procedures and ways of thinking, without considering the benefit of adapting to the circumstances.

This research has thrown light on a leadership structure that was both poorly defined and ill-equipped to manage a complex liquidation, leaving the League's Secretariat frustrated by a lack of progress and without much-needed direction. The increasingly small number of officials left at the Palais also struggled with a lack of resources, a Board of Liquidation overly apprehensive about its reputation, as well as becoming tenants in the palatial complex built in their name. This thesis has also highlighted the League's previously understudied efforts to control and manipulate the ways in which the organisation would be appraised and thought about in the future and, interestingly, how its endeavours to protect the institution's Archives have helped facilitate this and other research into the League.

These final thoughts are designed to take the findings of this thesis and further break down what they mean for our understanding of this one-of-a-kind experiment. Firstly, looking at the framework put in place to close the organisation, these conclusions reveal how a timetable directed by U.N. and I.L.O. deadlines forced the League into a reactive approach to its dissolution, and how this combined with the unknowable task of liquidation to extend the process far beyond the anticipated endpoint. Secondly it looks at the experience of closure from the perspective of those carrying it out, and how these relatable individuals demonstrated an entirely unconventional commitment to the organisation and to each other. Finally, I turn to the United Nations and the other intergovernmental organisations that followed in the League's wake, reinserting the post-First World War institution back into the story of International Organisation in the twentieth century, and revealing that the lines separating the League of Nations from its successor organisations are not as distinct as previously thought.

Planning, Presentism, and Precedent

The closure of the League of Nations was a by-product of the Allies' decision, made in the course of the Second World War, to create a new institution for the post-war world. The League's fate was not a foregone conclusion before this – the organisation and its functions could easily have been reinvigorated had governments chosen to do so – but the desire for a fresh start, free from any association with the circumstances that led to another global war just twenty years after the last, was a powerful incentive. The League's closure, however, took much longer than anyone originally anticipated – full dissolution was expected before the end of 1946 – and this thesis has not only detailed what happened in the two years following the Final Assembly, but also how and why an organisation known for its bureaucracy could stumble when managing its own demise. Neither the League's leadership nor its Secretariat were well-prepared for closure, either before the process began or during. Key elements that might have made proceedings more manageable were not in place, or even discussed to any degree. There was no agreement of overall objectives or what liquidation 'looked like', the absence of which made it almost impossible to break the process down into manageable pieces and left the enormity of the undertaking to loom over the process. It was also unclear what level of autonomy the Secretariat had to make decisions independently of the Board of Liquidation, leaving officials frequently frustrated by a lack of momentum whilst they had to wait for correspondence from figures like Carl Hambro, or for the group to meet in person, the latter of which sometimes took months.

However a lack of preparation and inadequate planning does not mean that the League's officials were incompetent or idle; these individuals had proved themselves more than capable and their diligence was not in doubt. The vast majority of those still working for the Secretariat and as part of the Board of Liquidation had been part of the League machinery during the Second World War, risking their safety and ensuring the organisation's survival through its darkest days. What derailed the organisation's liquidation was not ineptitude or an absence of motivation, instead it came about as a result of a lack of focus and direction caused by three things: the reactive approach the League took in order to meet the

demands stemming from the rapid construction of the United Nations, the priorities of these new institutions, and the problems that came with a truly unique challenge.

The months preceding the 21st Assembly in April 1946 were plagued by confusion whilst the League's leadership remained in the dark about the establishment of the United Nations and the new organisation's plans for the League's assets, activities, and people. This information was essential to understanding what work lay ahead of the Secretariat, and while handover to the new bodies was not the only task that needed to be accomplished during closure, the organisation's leadership rightly predicted that it would be the most pressing. Whilst the new U.N. was busy establishing itself, as frustrating as it was, there was not much the League could practically do to remedy the situation. The organisation simply did not have sufficient knowledge to plan for closure in a proactive way, and instead found itself stuck in a reactive cycle, waiting for information followed by a rush to keep up with events beyond its control.

The League leadership originally considered holding two Assemblies before dissolving – one in the autumn of 1945 to agree a budget for 1946 and review wartime work, and another in the spring of 1946 after the U.N. General Assembly, to eulogise the organisation and formally close its doors.[577] In an ideal world, this latter Assembly would have had a greater focus on closure and planning, but holding two Assemblies within a six-month period, straddling an even larger U.N. General Assembly, was simply not feasible. Consequently, with only one Assembly to cover a wide range of business, it is unsurprising that there was little time available to seriously consider a framework for closure or what might be involved in achieving it. The so-called Dissolution Resolution was drawn-up by senior figures in the League, alongside input from the British Government, and whilst the text was obviously focussed on closure, it was never designed to be a detailed guide to this unknown process. It provided some high-level principles, including the creation of a Board of Liquidation and quarterly reports to members, but its main purpose was to provide the Assembly with an official and legally-binding means of announcing the organisation's demise.[578] The speed at which the Resolution was composed – the

[577] LNA, 4 August 1945, proposed timetable of U.N./League of Nations meetings and negotiations 1945-46, S565.
[578] LNA, 21 February 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S565.

final draft for discussion at the Assembly was still under review just two days before proceedings began – meant there was neither the time nor the inclination to expand the text.[579] If anything, Seán Lester was wary of placing constraints on what he rightly anticipated would be an administration-heavy process. Liaising with Hugh McKinnon-Wood in February 1946 he wrote: "I am not sure if it necessary or desirable to have detailed directions given to the Administration on this and other administrative questions; there are enough complications and restrictions and pressure without adding to the stranglehold on the representative officers who must be counted upon to take all the necessary steps to carry out any decisions in the quickest and best way."[580] He was, however, as this thesis has shown, needlessly concerned that tying the Secretariat into a formalised structure for liquidation would only elongate the process. The note that "liquidation should be effected as rapidly as possible" was the only specific guidance written into the Resolution and, as this thesis has also shown, it was insufficient.[581]

The presentism that left the League's leadership with minimal time in the early part of 1946 to focus on either what they wanted to achieve from liquidation, or establishing how they would achieve it, became a recurring problem throughout the closure period. The opportunity to think either strategically or long-term about the dissolution process was a luxury the League could not afford in 1946-47. The immediate post-Assembly months were deeply chaotic as the U.N. hurriedly established its own Secretariat and the League rushed to meet its needs, and closure issues remained on-hold during the autumn whilst the more pressing General Assembly in New York took precedence. This thesis has reiterated on a number of occasions that the League plummeted down the list of priorities for the international community, and the United Nations now came first for both resources and attention. If the U.N. needed something, the League had no choice but to comply – its membership made that clear at its Final Assembly – and this happened again and again whilst the new secretariats fell into place during 1946. International power dynamics irrevocably changed with the creation of the United Nations. As a result it was not until 1947 that the League's leadership really had the opportunity to get to grips with the full scope of closure and its many complexities, resulting in 32

[579] LNA, 6 April 1946, letter from Lester to Jacklin querying some wording in the latest British draft of the Dissolution Resolution, S565.
[580] LNA, 12 February 1946, letter from Lester to Hugh McKinnon-Wood, S565.
[581] LN, *Records of the Twenty-First Assembly*, p. 281.

Board meetings in fewer than six months as it became clear that some issues, like the Pensions Funds or the removal of staff furniture, could not be resolved as quickly as imagined.

While the inability to be proactive about liquidation had a significant impact on the League's ability to deliver it, there was another element to blame for the problems with planning: no one had ever done this before. While the League had some experience of attempting the unknown, dismantling the various structures of the organisation – including its international civil service – was a challenge unlike any other. There was no guidebook or precedent to draw from, meaning the League's leadership had little more than a blank page from which to start. The organisation had, in its most recent past, proved both resilient and able to adjust to changing circumstances, surviving the war with most of its technical functions intact and ready for handover to the new organisations, however the ability to adapt was not enough to anticipate the inherent issues with, or to prepare for, liquidation. There was a consistent underestimation of the complexity of closure throughout the process, whether it manifested itself in believing the absence of the Board of Liquidation in the latter half of 1946 would not be a problem, or failing to appreciate the League's diminished position in negotiations with the I.L.O. This thesis has stressed on numerous occasions that the decision-making framework put in place by the 21st Assembly was frequently insufficient to manage the challenges of liquidation, but it is important to remember that this approach – one overarching strategic group sitting in lieu of the Assembly – had worked relatively well during the war; the League's leadership simply did not appreciate that closure was an entirely different test that would require a new approach.

These two problems – the lack of precedent and being forced to act reactively rather than proactively – fed each other throughout dissolution, resulting in the disorganised and inversely chaotic yet slow liquidation process. In many ways, facing these two problems combined meant the League was doomed in its efforts before it began. A limited understanding of the challenge that lay ahead meant officials and decision-makers were less concerned about their inability to be proactive, yet the lack of time to sit back and think strategically about the closure process meant they never truly understood the scope of the challenge until much later. Understanding that there was a quandary at the heart of the organisation's

closure reveals why the dissolution unfolded in the way that it did, and emphasises the League's position as a great experiment in not just intergovernmental cooperation, but also in liquidation.

People and Experience

As important as structural elements are in the closure of the League, a key part of this research has looked beyond the institutional aspects of the organisation to also think about the individuals who worked there during the dissolution and their involvement in the process. This increasingly small group of officials were pioneers in unknown territory, and their experiences bring a personal and distinctive viewpoint on what might otherwise seem a dispassionate or clinical set of events, especially considering the Secretariat and the Board of Liquidation were the only elements of the organisation left by 1946.

As a result of this more actor-focussed approach, this research has revealed circumstances and individuals both ordinary and extraordinary in nature. In many ways their stories would seem deeply familiar to anyone who has shared a workplace with colleagues over a number of years. They shared rivalries and frustrations with one another – Włodzimierz Moderow and Lester for example – but at other times their affection and concern for their fellow officials shone through. They frequently inquired after each other's health and families, Lester wrote to the new international organisations trying to find roles for staff, whilst Valentin Stencek referred to Lester as a man "to whom I could turn in all my troubles for advice and help."[582] They worked in offices, took sick days when needed, and complained about the Geneva weather in correspondence, yet their familiarity to us is countered by their extraordinary choices and accomplishments.[583] They chose to work for an organisation unlike any other before it – usually leaving their home countries to do so – and the majority of those left in Geneva in 1946 and 1947 had made it their life's work. They chose to stay in Switzerland during a world war, and again chose to

[582] For examples, see: LNA, 20 May 1947, letter from Hambro to Lester congratulating the latter on the birth of his grandson, S567; Lester's Diary, 24 October 1947, letter from Stencek to Lester; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to the Director-General of U.N.E.S.C.O. regarding job opportunities for League Secretariat officials, S942.
[583] "There has scarcely been one good days [sic] weather for weeks here and all Switzerland seems to be more or less under floods." LNA, 6 September 1946, letter from Lester to Hambro, S567.

stay when the League was publicly criticised and effectively sentenced to death by the Allies' choice to create a new institution. Their long-term loyalty to the League and their first-hand experience of the closure process have been recurring themes in this research, and as a consequence their perspectives do not just shed light on the end of a political experiment, but also the social history of the institution.

One of the most glaring omissions from histories of both the League and of its closure has been the relegation of Seán Lester to a concluding paragraph or footnote. The Secretary-General's exclusion from the organisation's story has preserved the scholarly inference that both he, and the League's final years, are not worthy of interest or of value to history, despite the fact he oversaw one of the League's most tumultuous periods and held the position for seven years, as long as his predecessor Joseph Avenol. He inarguably faced a challenging task in dissolving the League, especially with a lack of both real-world experience to draw upon and agreement as to what he was responsible for. The Secretary-General was critical in keeping the League together during the war, and the close working relationships he forged in those years were just as important during liquidation. His links with Hambro and Cecil Kisch meant lines of communication with the Board were always kept open, even if they were never clearly defined, and his established connection with Adriaan Pelt and burgeoning friendship with Trygve Lie meant U.N.-League relations remained gracious during the transfer chaos of 1946. Even his difficult relationship with Moderow, which resulted in unnecessary hurdles in the early days of League and U.N. co-existence at the Palais, thawed with time.[584] Lester also nurtured close and productive working relationships with Secretariat officials like Valentin Stencek and Chester Purves, both of whom had major roles to play in liquidation, and he advocated on behalf of the whole Secretariat when he appealed to the U.N. and its agencies regarding future job opportunities.[585] Lester wrote of his moral duty to lead the League in the wake of the Avenol crisis in the summer of 1940, and he felt the same responsibility to see liquidation carried out to the best of

[584] LNA, 11 September 1946, letter from Lester to Moderow thanking the latter for his "excellent collaboration" in the transfer work, R5813 50/43874/43262. UNOG Archives, 28 January 1947, letter from Lester to Moderow commiserating over their shared lack of information from U.N. headquarters relating to outstanding transfer questions, G.I. 4/4 (26).
[585] For examples, see: LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to Phelan, S916; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Refugee Organisation, S927; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to Moderow, S927; LNA, 13 June 1947, letter from Lester to Lie, S927.

his ability for the sake of members, staff, and the future success of the United Nations.[586]

Lester was a relative newcomer to the organisation in comparison to some of his colleagues, and his career was varied before becoming League High Commissioner to Danzig. He had a fruitful family life away from work, and throughout the liquidation there was a clear sense that he had a very real desire to move on from the League.[587] Lester made it continually clear that he had never aspired to the position of Secretary-General, and his seven-year tenure in the role was perpetually fraught with problems. If anything, the trials of liquidating an intergovernmental organisation weighed heavily on Lester – especially the unpredictable nature of an unstructured liquidation – and his enthusiasm for the organisation waned towards the end. His eagerness to leave Geneva behind meant he readily jumped at the chance to travel to New York in the autumn of 1946, and while he continued to work on liquidation from the other side of the Atlantic, he also relished the opportunity to liaise with the U.N. Secretariat on its establishment. This was his chance to work on something both new and exciting that was a million miles away from the dreary day-to-day attempts to close a defamed intergovernmental organisation. His absence – alongside that of half of the Board of Liquidation – proved an obstacle to progress in later 1946, and while his decision to travel to the U.S. was made with the intention of maintaining close contact with Hambro, Kisch, and others, he expressed no regret, either publicly or in his personal papers, for leaving Geneva behind and inadvertently delaying liquidation. He also physically moved on in August 1947, leaving what was left of the Secretariat to fend for itself before liquidation had been fully effected and, once gone, he did not look back. The leadership and recourse to a higher authority that a Secretary-General might well have been expected to provide was missing from the Secretariat after the summer of 1947, leaving the League's final acts, entirely unofficially, in the hands of a few officials.

---

[586] In a private journal entry dated 2 August 1940, recalling a conversation with Adolfo Costa du Rels about his taking up the post of Secretary-General, Lester wrote: "I explained my personal views, pointing out that the job was not an enviable one…I said I would think it over and I had never yet refused moral responsibilities…". Lester's Diary, 2 August 1940, personal diary entry.
[587] In a report to Eamon de Valera, dated 11 June 1947, Lester closed his letter with the statement "I have never been ambitious, I sought none of these positions". Lester's Diary, 11 June 1947, Lester to de Valera, Minister of External Affairs, Dublin.

Valentin Stencek, one of these last stalwarts, had a very different experience of liquidation from his immediate superior. He was a bureaucrat rather than a diplomat, having worked as part of the Austro-Hungarian – and then Czechoslovakian – Civil Service, before joining the League in 1921, and took great pride in his formal and principled approach to work. He was a backstage player – like many others left in the Secretariat in 1946-47 he was accustomed to working behind-the-scenes – but this aspect of his nature did not mean he was anything less than dedicated to the organisation. He had worked quietly but diligently throughout his League career and the closure period only highlighted the value of his steadfast reliability. When other members of the League's leadership were absent, both during the latter half of 1946 and from the summer of 1947, he could be trusted to take the reins and ensure the organisation's interests were looked after, even after he left the Secretariat's employ. In truth, unlike Lester, his personal circumstances left him little to focus on besides the League and his commitment to international civil service by the mid-1940s. He was almost five years older than the Secretary-General, his children were by-then in their twenties and established in their adulthood, his much-loved wife Emily passed away in 1944, and he had no intention of returning to a Silesia that bore little resemblance to the place he left before the First World War.[588] He also had no interest in retiring, despite turning 63 in 1947, continuing to look for work following his departure from the League, and eventually finding it at the World Health Organisation where he worked intermittently in a consultancy role until he finally retired at the age of 82.

Percy Watterson, despite officially leaving the League's employ in the autumn of 1946, held a similarly trusted place in the Secretariat. Like Stencek he did not have a showy role – he was Chief Accountant within the Treasury – but he was one of the longest-serving officials, having joined in July 1919 at the age of 31, and demonstrated a similar dedication to the League as his colleague. He crossed Vichy France in the summer of 1940 to travel to Princeton and become the Secretariat's Treasury agent in the United States and, following the transfer of the Economic and Financial Organisation to the United Nations in July 1946, Watterson became, by default, the League's primary – and sole – representative in North America. It was not a position he sought out – it was not even an official position until the middle of

[588] Stencek's personal details come from his personnel file: LNA, [no date and unknown author], Stencek's Carrière au Secrétariat held by the personnel office, S887.

1947 when he became the organisation's Trustee and Liquidating Agent – and Watterson was not well-compensated for his time, but he felt a responsibility to take on the role regardless and, with the assistance of Stencek, oversaw the last nine months of League activity.[589] When former officials faced an unexpected tax bill in the United States in the spring of 1948, the League's leaders were nowhere to be found; instead it was figures like Stencek and Watterson who tried to find an acceptable solution. However, unlike both Stencek and Lester, who both struggled to immediately find appropriate post-League roles, Watterson found himself in demand by the new international organisations both before and after his departure from the Secretariat. He was recruited to draw up the Draft Financial Regulations for the W.H.O. in the summer of 1946, joined the Food and Agriculture Organisation a few weeks' later, all whilst continuing to work for the League in a part-time, and then a side-role, capacity. As this thesis has shown, Watterson's enthusiasm for international civil service was eagerly taken advantage of by those creating new administrations in the post-war world.

He was not the only one looking to continue their work supporting the League's brand of internationalism. Most of the organisation's last officials – Lester being one of the exceptions – chose to stay in the international civil services, either moving to the United Nations (Ansgar Rosenborg, Cosette Nonin, and Émile Giraud), the I.L.O. (Otto Jenny and Peter Welps), the F.A.O. (Henri Vilatte and Watterson), or the W.H.O. (Raymond Gautier and Chester Purves). Even those who were not initially able to find work in the new organisations, like Stencek, chose to stay in Geneva because the city, and its international community, had become their home. Connie Harris, having lived in the city for over 25 years by the mid-1940s, also stayed in Switzerland despite not being able to find a position in one of the new secretariats that was commensurate with her rise through the ranks at the League, not returning to England until the 1970s when she retired.[590] This thesis has shown that those individuals who stayed with the organisation until the bitter end were exceptionally dedicated to the League and the internationalism on which it was founded. They were not always rewarded for this loyalty – either in terms of financial recompense

[589] In a letter to Stencek in June 1947, Watterson said "I have felt that I owed it to the League and the Board of Liquidation to satisfactorily wind up matters as a fitting termination to the many years of service I enjoyed with the Organization." LNA, 4 June 1947, letter from Watterson to Stencek, C1784-4.
[590] Information kindly provided by Harris's family suggests she may have worked for the International Red Cross in Geneva following her League departure, but so far I have not been able to confirm this with Red Cross sources.

or in being unable to find adequate positions following their departure – but their commitment to the League and to one another explains how the liquidation of the organisation, despite taking longer than expected, was completed as fully as it was. While the Board of Liquidation and Lester took their leave of the process in the summer of 1947, this thesis has revealed that it was figures like Stencek, Watterson, Peter Welps, and Otto Jenny – the last of the Secretariat's rear guard – who ensured the organisation's final tasks were completed.

What Came Next

One of the key conclusions to be drawn from this thesis is that, while the League quietly died in 1946-48, much of what it created lived on – and continues to do so – in the international system that followed. This research rightly reinserts the end of the League of Nations back into the narratives of twentieth-century history, international relations, and of those intergovernmental organisations we take for granted today. This reinsertion is not about picking a side in the interminable success or failure debate that often envelopes studies of the League, but rather pointing out that it did not disappear without a trace into the ether, and instead demonstrating that many remnants of the organisation – and lessons learnt from its experience – found their way into the United Nations and its agencies. The League of Nations was a great experiment in the field of international organisation, and this thesis has shown that whether or not one believes that experiment was a success, the results of that trial run were taken onboard by what followed in its wake.[591]

The decision to build a new intergovernmental organisation in the aftermath of the Second World War was predicated on the idea that it would be nothing like the 'failed' League of Nations. The founders of the United Nations wanted to distance the new organisation from what had come before; an understandable endeavour arguably necessitated by a fragile new world order. If the U.N. was to succeed, it

[591] The League was often referred to as "a great experiment" during this period. Just two examples are in the title of Ranshofen-Wertheimer's review of the Secretariat: Ranshofen, *The International Secretariat*; and in a letter from Arthur Sweetser to Frank Aydelotte – head of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies – where the former describes Frank Walters' history of the League as a vivid account of "the first great experiment": White and Levy Archives, 15 November 1948, letter from Sweetser to Frank Aydelotte, Director's Office: General Files: Box 39: League of Nations Invitation to the Economics Group, 70159 Princeton I.A.S. files.

needed the faith and trust of its members; the League's efforts to manage the antagonistic political environment of the 1930s were proof of how crucial member support was for I.G.O. survival. Any authority they had was imbued in them by their membership; without the backing of governments, both financially and politically, these organisations offered only empty platitudes. The efforts in the mid-1940s to distance the U.N. from the League were perhaps therefore warranted, but scholars writing today have continued to perpetuate this myth, in part because the extent of the entwining of the League and the United Nations in 1946-47 has, until now, been unappreciated.

This thesis has also demonstrated that the public attempts to distance the new international system from the League were often quite different behind the scenes, as a number of those in charge of establishing the new secretariats were much more willing to draw upon the lessons learnt during the organisation's quarter of a century of experience. While the United Nations and its associated institutions needed to be seen to create something new to take advantage of post-war reconstruction enthusiasm and to inspire confidence, away from the spotlight they were free, and eager, to take advantage of the League of Nations' many assets. As Milton Siegel explained when describing his work establishing the W.H.O. Secretariat, the League experiment provided invaluable guidance as to both the right and wrong way to build an international civil service.[592]

Not every element of the U.N. and its associated agencies began life in the League – the United Nations is significantly broader in remit, membership, and budget – but examining how much of the League was handed over to the United Nations yields surprising results. This thesis has revealed that almost every remaining element of the League in the mid-1940s ultimately became part of the U.N. The organisation's physical assets, from major structures such as the Palais des Nations, the rest of the Ariana Estate and the League Archives, to paintings, office equipment, and vacuum cleaners, were all transferred wholesale to the new organisation. As highlighted in the last chapter, many of the League officials still with the organisation in 1946-47 were headhunted by the U.N., W.H.O., I.L.O. and others for their unique skills and experience in an effort to establish and strengthen the new secretariats.

[592] W.H.O. Archives Unit, 15 November 1982, oral interview with Milton P. Siegel, p. 26.

Technical activities and services provided to governments around the world, including the various drug control bodies, the Economic and Financial Organisation, and the Weekly Epidemiological Record – as well as the people supporting them – were transferred over to new management but otherwise remained intact. Numerous financial assets covering pensions, renovations, and publications, all became part of the U.N. bubble, including the troublesome Staff Pensions Funds. Even the League's final liquid assets – money sat in bank accounts in various countries and officially owned by the League's members – were indirectly transferred to the new organisation in the form of credits for those also part of the U.N. The only financial assets remitted directly, in cash, to League members were those belonging to Finland, Ireland, Switzerland, and Portugal, who were not yet part of the new organisation. Only a handful of funds and some destitute functions, such as the Forstall Fund and the Nansen Office, were genuinely liquidated or transferred to non-U.N. institutions.[593] There was a significant continuum between the League and what came after; the interwar and post-war international organisations were not entirely independent of one another.

Not only are the lines separating the League and the U.N. blurred by the transfer of a significant portion of the former into the latter, but the two organisations lived, quite literally, side-by-side for over a year. Traditionally the institutions are portrayed as siloed bodies, with the United Nations rising out of the League's ashes, suggesting the post-World War One organisation was long dead by the time the new I.G.O. arrived. Yet this thesis reveals this is another fallacy, especially in the halls of the Palais des Nations in 1946 and 1947, where both organisations shared expertise and resources. This does not just change the way scholars might think about both the liquidation of the League and the creation of the United Nations, but also more widely about the lifecycles of intergovernmental organisations and how they are written about in the academic field of international organisation. The League's example not only counters the misconception that international organisations do not die, contrary to the position of some international relations scholars, but it also checks the impulse to portray these institutions as neatly delineated from one

[593] LNA, 14 February 1947, Board of Liquidation: Provisional Minutes of Sixteenth Meeting (Private), B.L./P.V.16, S569; LNA, 15 April 1947, Board of Liquidation document, prepared by Verchère de Reffye, titled Rapport sur la liquidation de l'office international Nansen, B.L.124, S569.

another.[594] This thesis has repeatedly shown the effect that both the League and the U.N. had on the other's dissolution and foundation respectively, whether through the delays to League planning and the handover of physical and liquid assets to the new organisations, or via the U.N. headhunting of Secretariat officials. The League bled into the U.N. and its agencies and vice versa, demonstrating that organisations like this are not always the fully independent bodies they are consistently portrayed as. This blurring of one institution's end and another's beginning challenges the assumptions we hold about these transformative periods in the histories of the League and the U.N. and forces us to reconsider the nature of the relationships between intergovernmental organisations.

The institutions created in the wake of the Second World War were not the only ones thinking long-term in 1946 and 1947; the Board of Liquidation, charged with dissolving the organisation as quickly as possible, spent a significant portion of its time creating a foundation on which a positive and long-lasting legacy for the League might be built. The organisation's emphasis on public relations and the power of narrative was ingrained in the League Secretariat and leadership from its earliest days, and this thesis shows how this way of thinking remained a part of the institution even after its fate was sealed. The League of Nations Museum, still managed by the U.N. as part of the Palais des Nations, began its life as a means of presenting a curated image of the organisation, and was designed as a rebuttal to a world that had refocussed on post-war opportunities. The preservation of the League's Archives and the guarantee of access to them were prioritised by the Board of Liquidation in the hope that, in the future, research like this would lead to a reassessment of the organisation's achievements and the restoration of its reputation. Some of the Board's endeavours were more cynical than others – the crafting of its Final Report to members was an exercise in presenting a very particular version of events – but this thesis has revealed the extent to which much of the League's memory did not materialise naturally but was instead meticulously planned.

As a final note, it should be pointed out that one major lesson of the League's experience has been ignored by both the organisations that sprang up in the wake

[594] Reinalda, *History of International Organizations*, pp. 756-758; Strange, 'Why do international organizations never die?', pp. 213-220.

of the Second World War and those that have followed since: the problems of closing an intergovernmental organisation. This has stemmed, in part, from the lack of awareness surrounding the League's closure – something this thesis hopes to rectify. It is also the result of these new institutions being compelled to work reactively, the same issue that plagued the Secretariat in 1946. This need or choice to focus only on the most pressing issues remains as much of a problem today as it was when the League was undergoing liquidation, and the perils of closing an I.G.O. without adequate thought or preparation have not been given their due. Major intergovernmental organisations including the U.N. and agencies such as the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation, as well as newer bodies like the European Union and N.A.T.O., have all chosen to omit closure provisions from their institutional charters or treaties. Perhaps the founders and current leaders of these organisations believe they have found the magic formula for an immortal intergovernmental organisation that, unlike the League, will never have to think about its own demise, but it is more likely that the modus operandi of reactive thinking has left closure as a question for another day. Long-term thinking is often the first casualty of pressurised schedules, and it is understandable that intergovernmental organisations – or any organisation – are typically focussed on the most vital questions. Designing a liquidation process does not qualify as a critical issue; there is little obvious incentive to take time away from urgent problems in order to plan for a theoretical closure that may never take place. Nevertheless the League's dissolution ought to be a warning to any international organisation convinced of its own immortality: not only is it possible for these institutions to die, but preparing for an unlikely demise may save much time and effort should it come to pass. The League of Nations was not fortunate enough to have a forerunner's experience to look to for guidance during its liquidation, but its own struggles with the process have left a precedent from which others might draw in future.

Final Conclusions

The League of Nations was an organisation of firsts, and its end was no different. It was the first multi-member, multi-remit international organisation to live, and it was the first to die. Considering the scope of the institution, its assets, its membership, and its connections, it is not at all surprising that the prospect of tearing it down was

a daunting one, and the reality of the situation in 1945-48 only made the job even harder. The end of the League was in many ways a victim of both presentism and precedent. Its leaders did not know what the closure of the organisation meant in practical terms; they had a broad outline in their minds but no time to expand on it or determine how to make it happen. As a consequence, the Secretariat's usual flair for all things efficient and bureaucratic had to be put aside for an approach that was more instinctual and freewheeling, that ultimately dragged on for much longer than imagined.

The foundation of a new international system, agreed in 1945, did not only cement the end of the League but also dictated what could happen and when, as fresh deadlines took precedence over the old organisation's liquidation. For 25 years the League of Nations had effectively been at the top of the list when it came to the priorities and power in international cooperation; the creation of the U.N. quickly reversed that, catapulting the League to the bottommost position. Languishing in its new situation, the organisation – having publicly pronounced its death at the Final Assembly in April 1946 – found it difficult to raise much in the way of interest or concern from anyone outside its immediate sphere of influence. Reports of the League's demise in the press passed without significant comment from the public, and not even members had much to say beyond perfunctory acknowledgements upon receipt of the Final Report. The new U.N. bodies cared about the transfer of assets, activities, and knowledge, but their interest did not extend to the closure as a process or to elements of the organisation beyond their remit. These new institutions neither had, nor have, the metaphorical time or space to think about less-than-urgent concerns, and as the new top priority in international affairs, they had the power to control what happened and when. The change in power dynamics was not always accepted or handled with ease by the Board of Liquidation, whose insecurity about its performance manifested itself in pointless quarrelling with the I.L.O. and financing increasingly extravagant additions to the League Museum. The group understood the world had changed but found it difficult to relinquish either its relative prestige or their pride in the organisation.

Meanwhile the U.N. was a spectre haunting the League as it closed, looming over events both physically and psychologically. Even once most of the transfer was completed in 1946, the League Secretariat still had to go to work every day in the

same building as their replacements, ask them nicely for the use of resources they created, and watch quietly whilst the League was publicly forsaken for the greater good. These officials were just as proud of the League as the Board of Liquidation, but much less able to do anything about it. Surrounded by their successors they nevertheless carried on with the same determination as in the past, and this thesis has shown how this was especially prevalent in those who stayed with the League until the bitter end. They were not particularly prominent or public figures; they were a small collection of European bureaucrats and administrators, doing the best they could to efficiently close the organisation to which they had pledged their professional lives.

Fortunately for many of these individuals, while the League of Nations was buried, the basis on which it was founded – providing a centre for multilateral cooperation and discussion – lived on. The unique knowledge and experience of the Secretariat meant many former League officials were able to find new homes in the United Nations Organisation, and the direct transfer of assets, functions, and funds demonstrates a previously unappreciated strength to the links between the old and the new. The two organisations were bedfellows for over eighteen months in 1946 and 1947, sharing both offices and people; this thesis proves that the supposed temporal and institutional distance between the League and the United Nations was not as great as thought, both at the time and in the present day. The creation of the U.N. is a crucial element in the end of the League, but the same is also true vice versa; telling one story without the other is injudicious.

The League of Nations suffered a quiet death, overseen by a small group of international civil servants in a discreet corner of the Palais des Nations. Following the 21st Assembly in April 1946, there were no grand celebrations or parties, nor were there any public disputes or death throes. Quiet does not, however, mean boring or without value to scholars; the 18 months or more constituting the League's liquidation period were disordered and surprising. This time challenges our assumptions about the organisation's story, its relationship with the post-war institutions that replaced it, and the dangers of embarking on closure without a strategy. There were spectacular highs (the Final Assembly), a plethora of bittersweet moments (the handover of the Palais to the U.N.), and more than a few low points (sending a bill for broken crockery to U.N.R.R.A. following its conference

in the summer of 1946). The League's last chapter was full of unexpected developments but it was finally over, leaving those embroiled in its demise to turn, like the rest of the world had several years earlier, to the future and the United Nations Organisation. Writing to Seán Lester on hearing of the Board of Liquidation's dissolution, Arthur Sweetser summed up the feelings of many of those involved in the League's final years: "It has been a hard, ungracious, and thankless job that you have held since those memorable days in the 40's [sic] when you and I were exchanging telephone calls in New York and the League Secretariat in Geneva, and I was plodding my way over to the Waldorf to see Hambro. Little did any of us dream then of how many years would go over the top before we saw the end of the chapter…and least of all did any of us dream that the new League would be preparing its foundations over here in the New World, just a few blocks away from our hotels!!! Human affairs are inscrutable and unpredictable indeed."[595]

[595] Lester's Diary, 5 August 1947, letter from Sweetser to Lester.

Bibliography

Archives

League of Nations Archives, Geneva (LNA)
League of Nations Secretariat, 1919-1946
League of Nations Photograph Collection

Seán Lester's Diary, Geneva

Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Princeton

The National Archives, Kew (TNA)

United Nations Archives Geneva, Geneva (UNOG)

United Nations Archives, New York (UNA)

World Health Organisation Archives Unit, Geneva.

Press

Belfast Telegraph

Manchester Guardian

The New York Times

The Washington Post

Times of London

Tribune de Genève.

Published Primary and Secondary Sources

Alcock, A., *History of the International Labour Organisation* (London, 1971).

Amrith, Sunil S., 'Internationalising Health in the Twentieth Century' in Sluga, Glenda, and Patricia Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017).

Amrith, Sunil, and Glenda Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations" in *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (Sep., 2008), pp. 251-274.

Archer, Clive, *International Organizations,* Third Edition (Abingdon, 2001).

Armstrong, David, Lorna Lloyd, and John Redmond, *From Versailles to Maastricht: International Organisation in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Basingstoke, 1996).

Armstrong, David, Lorna Lloyd, and John Redmond, *International Organisation in World Politics*, Third Edition (Basingstoke, 2004).

Barros, James, *Betrayal From Within: Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 1933-1940* (New Haven, 1969).

Bendiner, Elmer, *A Time for Angels: The Tragicomic History of the League of Nations* (New York, 1975).

Bennett, LeRoy, and James Oliver, *International Organizations: Principles and Issues* (Upper Saddle River, 2002).

Betts, Paul, 'Humanity's New Heritage: UNESCO and the Rewriting of World History' in *Past & Present* 228, no. 1, (Aug., 2015), pp. 249-285.

Boje, David, 'Globalization Antenarratives' in Mills, Albert J., Jean C. Helms Mills, Carolyn Forshaw, and John Bratton (eds.), *Organizational Behaviour in a Global Context* (Peterborough, 2007).

Borowy, Iris, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation 1921-1946* (Frankfurt, 2009).

Brydan, David, and Jessica Reinisch (eds.), *Internationalists in European History: Rethinking the Twentieth Century* (London, 2021).

Butler, Nicholas Murray, *The International Law of the Future: Postulates, Principles, Proposals* (Washington D.C., 1944).

Caine, Barbara, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke, 2010).

Campbell, Thomas, and George Herring, *The Diaries of Edward Stettinius Jr., 1943-46* (New York, 1974).

Carr, E. H., *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London, 2016).

Cecil, Robert, *A Great Experiment: An Autobiography* (London, 1941).

Clark, Christopher, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Princeton, 2019).

Claude, Inis L. Jr., *National Minorities: An International Problem* (Cambridge, 1955).

Claude, Inis L. Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York, 1962).

Claude, Inis L. Jr., *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organizations*, Fourth Edition (New York, 1984).

Clavin, Patricia, 'Europe and the League of Nations' in Gerwarth, Robert (ed.), *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914-1945* (London, 2007).

Clavin, Patricia, 'Introduction: Conceptualising Internationalism Between the World Wars' in Laqua, Daniel (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London, 2011).

Clavin, Patricia, and Jens-Wilhelm Wessel, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of Its Economic and Financial Organisation' in *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (Nov., 2005), pp. 465-492.

Clavin, Patricia, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (London, 2013).

Coicaud, Jean-Marc, and Veijo Heiskanen (eds.), *The Legitimacy of International Organizations* (Tokyo, 2001).

Cox, Robert W., and Harold K. Jacobson (eds.), *The Anatomy of Influence: Decision-making in International Organization* (New Haven, 1973).

Craig, Gordon A. and Francis L. Loewenheim, 'Introduction' in Craig, Gordon A., and Francis L. Loewenheim (eds.), *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton, 1994).

Craig, Gordon A., 'Diplomats and Diplomacy During the Second World War' in Craig, Gordon A., and Francis L. Loewenheim (eds.), *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton, 1994).

de Azcárate, P., *League of Nations and National Minorities: An Experiment* (Washington D.C., 1945).

Divine, Robert A., *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York, 1967).

Dubin, Martin D., 'Transgovernmental Processes in the League of Nations' in *International Organization* 37, no. 3 (Summer, 1982), pp. 469-493.

Dubin, Martin D., ‘Towards the Bruce Report: the economic and social programs of the League of Nations in the Avenol era’ in United Nations Library (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: Proceedings of the Symposium. Organized by The United Nations Library and The Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 6-9 November 1980* (Berlin, 1983).

Dunbabin, J. P., ‘The League of Nations' Place in the International System' in *History* 78, no. 254 (Oct., 1993), pp. 421-442.

Dykmann, Klaas, ‘How International was the League of Nations Secretariat’ in *The International History Review* 37, no. 4 (2015), pp. 721-744.

Eichelberger, Clark, *Organizing for Peace: A Personal History of the Founding of the United Nations* (London, 1977).

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette, ‘Death of International Organizations. The organizational ecology of intergovernmental organizations, 1815-2015’ in *The Review of International Organizations* 15 (2020), pp. 339-370.

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette, ‘What kills international organisations? When and why international organisations terminate’ in *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 1 (2021), pp. 281-310.

Endres, Anthony M., and Grant A. Fleming, *International Organizations and the Analysis of Economic Policy, 1919-1950* (Cambridge, 2002).

Fleming, Robin, 'Writing Biography at the Edge of History' in *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (Jun., 2009), pp. 606-614.

Fosdick, Raymond, *Chronicle of a Generation: An Autobiography* (New York, 1958).

Fosdick, Raymond, *Letters on the League of Nations* (Princeton, 1966).

Fosdick, Raymond, *The League and the United Nations after Fifty Years: The Six Secretaries-General* (Newtown, 1972).

Fosse, Marit, and John Fox, *Sean Lester: The Guardian of a Small Flickering Light* (Lanham, 2016).

Fried, John H. E., ‘Relations between the UN and the ILO’ in *American Political Science Review* 41, no. 5 (Oct., 1947), pp. 963-977.

Gageby, Douglas, *The Last Secretary-General: Sean Lester and the League of Nations* (Dublin, 1999).

Geyer, Martin, and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to The First World War* (Oxford, 2001).
Ghebali, Victor-Yves, 'La transition de la Société des Nations à l'Organisation des Nations Unies' in United Nations Library (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: Proceedings of the Symposium. Organized by The United Nations Library and The Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 6-9 November 1980* (Berlin, 1983).

Ghebali, Victor-Yves, *Organisation Internationale et Guerre Mondiale. Le Cas de la Société des Nations et de l'Organisation Internationale du Travail Pendant la Second Guerre Mondiale.* Édité par Robert Kolb (Bruxelles, 2013).

Gladwyn, Lord, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London, 1972).

Goodrich, L., 'From League of Nations to United Nations' in *International Organization* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1947), pp. 3-17.

Gram-Skjoldager, Karen, and Haakon A. Ikonomou, 'Making Sense of the League of Nations Secretariat – Historiographical and Conceptual Reflections on Early International Public Administration' in *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Jul., 2019), pp. 420-444.

Gram-Skjoldager, Karen, and Torsten Kahlert, 'The Men Behind the Man: Canvassing the Directorship of the League of Nations Secretariat' in Ikonomou, Haakon A., and Karen Gram-Skjoldager (eds.), *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus, 2019).

Gram-Skjoldager, Karen, Haakon A. Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert (eds.), *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920-1960s* (London, 2020).

Greenwood, Royston, and C.R. (Bob) Hinings, 'Radical Organizational Change' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, Second Edition (London, 2006).

Grigorescu, A., 'Mapping the UN-League of Nations Analogy: Are There Still Lessons to Be Learned from the League?' in *Global Governance* 11 (2005), pp. 25-42.

Groom, A. J. R., and Paul Taylor (eds.), *Frameworks for International Cooperation* (London, 1990).

Habermann-Box, Sigrun, 'From the League of Nations to the United Nations: The Continuing Preservation and Development of the Geneva Archives' in Herren, Madeleine (ed.), *Networking the International System: Global Histories of International Organizations* (Heidelberg, 2014).

Hambro, C. J., *How To Win The Peace* (London, 1943).

Henig, Ruth, *The League of Nations* (London, 2010).
Herren, Madeleine, 'Governmental Internationalism and the Beginning of a New World Order in the Late Nineteenth Century' in Geyer, Martin, and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to The First World War* (Oxford, 2001).

Hilderbrand, Robert C., *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Post-war Security* (Chapel Hill, 1990).

Hill, M., *The Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations: A Survey of Twenty-Five Years Experience* (Washington, D.C., 1946).

Hinsley, F. H., *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (London, 1963).

Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London, 1994).

Holsti, Kalevi, 'Change in International Politics: The View from High Altitude' in *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 2018), pp. 186-194.

Hopkins, Keith, 'What is Social History?' in *History Today* 35, no. 3 (Mar., 1985), pp. 38-39.

Housden, Martyn, *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace* (Harlow, 2012).

Hudson, Manley O., *International Tribunals: Past and Future* (Washington, D.C., 1944).

Hughes, E. J., 'Winston Churchill and the Formation of the United Nations Organization' in *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 177-194.

Hugill, Peter J., *World Trade Since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism* (Baltimore, 1995).

International Labour Organisation (ed.), *Edward Phelan and the ILO: The life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009).

International Labour Organisation, *Minutes of the 102nd Session of the Governing Body, Geneva. 13 June -10 July 1947* (Geneva, 1947).

Iriye, Akira, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, 1997).

Iriye, Akira, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2004).

Jackson, Simon, and Alanna O'Malley (eds.), *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations* (Abingdon, 2018).

Jordanova, Ludmilla, *History in Practice* (London, 2000).

Kahlert, Torsten, ' 'The League is Dead, long live the United Nations': The Liquidation of the League and the Transfer of Assets to the UN' in Ikonomou, Haakon A., and Karen Gram-Skjoldager (eds.), *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus, 2019).

Karns, Margaret P., Karen A. Mingst, and Kendall W. Stiles, *International Organizations: The Politics and Processes of Global Governance,* Third Edition (London, 2015).

Kennedy, Paul, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York, 2006).

Keohane, Robert O*., International Institutions and State Power* (Boulder, 1989).

Kessler-Harris, Alice, 'Why Biography?' in *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (Jun., 2009), pp. 625-630.

Kosseleck, Reinhart, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time.* English translation by Keith Tribe (New York, 2004).

Kott, Sandrine, 'Fighting the War or Preparing for Peace. The ILO during the Second World War' in *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 3, International Organisations during the Second World War (2014), pp. 359-376.

Langrod, Georges, *The International Civil Service: Its Origins, its Nature, its Evolution* (Leyden, 1963).

Laqua, Daniel (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London, 2011).

Laqua, Daniel, 'Internationalism', *European History Online (EGO)*, published 4 May 2021, pp. 1-28. http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/internationalism/daniel-laqua-internationalism (retrieved 10 November 2021).

Laqua, Daniel, ‘Student activists and international cooperation in a changing world, 1919-60’ in Brydan, David, and Jessica Reinisch (eds.), *Internationalists in European History: Rethinking the Twentieth Century* (London, 2021).

Laqua, Daniel, ‘Transnational intellectual cooperation, the League of Nations, and the problem of order’ in *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011), pp. 223-247.

Laqua, Daniel, Wouter Van Acker, and Christophe Verbruggen (eds.), *International Organizations and Global Civil Society: Histories of the Union of International Associations* (London, 2019).

Lauren, Paul Gordon, 'The Diplomats and Diplomacy of the United Nations' in Craig, Gordon A., and Francis L. Loewenheim (eds.), *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton, 1994).

Lavelle, Kathryn, ‘Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in International Organizations: U.S. Involvement in the League of Nations’ in *Review of International Organizations* 2 (2007), pp. 371-393.

League of Nations, *Board of Liquidation Final Report, presented to States Members of the League of Nations in accordance with the requirement of the Final Article of the Resolution for the Dissolution of the League of Nations adopted by the Assembly on April 18th, 1946, at its Twenty-first Ordinary Session* (Geneva, 1947).

League of Nations, *Official Journal Special Supplement No. 194: Records of the Twentieth (Conclusion) and Twenty-First Ordinary Sessions of the Assembly* (Geneva, 1946).

League of Nations, *Official Journal Special Supplement: Records of the First Session of the Assembly* (Geneva, 1920).

League of Nations, *Official Journal Special Supplement: Records of the Tenth Session of the Assembly* (Geneva, 1929).

League of Nations, *Report on The Work of The League 1941-1942, Submitted by the Acting Secretary-General* (Geneva, 1942).

League of Nations, *Report on The Work of The League 1942-1943, Submitted by the Acting Secretary-General* (Geneva, 1943).

League of Nations, *Report on the Work of The League 1943-1944, submitted by the Acting Secretary-General* (Geneva, 1945).

League of Nations, *Report on the work of the League during the war: submitted to the Assembly by the Acting Secretary-General* (Geneva, 1945).

Long, David, and Schmidt, Brian (eds.), *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations* (Albany, 2005).

Loveday, Alexander, *Reflections on International Administration* (Westport, 1974).

Luard, Evan, 'The Process of Change in International Organizations' in Luard, Evan (ed.), *The Evolution of International Organizations* (London, 1966).

Luard, Evan, *A History of the United Nations: The Years of Western Domination, 1945-55 Vol. 1* (New York, 1982).

Luard, Evan, *The United Nations: How it Works,* Second Edition (Basingstoke, 1994).

Lyons, F. S. L., *Internationalism in Europe, 1815-1914* (Leyden, 1963).
Martin, Lisa, and Beth Simmons (eds.), *International Institutions: An International Organization Reader* (Cambridge, 2001).

Maul, Daniel, *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy* (Berlin, 2019).

Mazower, Mark, 'An International Civilization? Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century' in *International Affairs* 82, no. 3 (May, 2006), pp. 553-566.

Mazower, Mark, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London, 2012).

Mazower, Mark, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Woodstock, 2009).

McAllister, William B., *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2000).

Meisler, Stanley, *The United Nations: The First Fifty Years* (New York, 1995).

Menzies, A. A., 'Technical Assistance and the League of Nations' in United Nations Library (ed.), *The League of Nations in retrospect: Proceedings of the Symposium. Organized by The United Nations Library and The Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 6-9 November 1980* (Berlin, 1983).

Meron, Theodor, *The United Nations Secretariat* (Lexington, 1977).

Mills, Albert J., 'Introducing Organizational Behaviour' in Mills, Albert J., Jean C. Helms Mills, Carolyn Forshaw, and John Bratton (eds.), *Organizational Behaviour in a Global Context* (Peterborough, 2007).

Morse, David A., *The Origin and Evolution of the I.L.O. and Its Role in the World Community* (Ithaca, 1969).

Murray, Gilbert, *From the League of Nations to the U.N.* (London, 1948).

Myers, Denys P., 'Liquidation of League of Nations Functions' in *The American Journal of International Law* 42, no. 2 (Apr., 1948), pp. 320-354.

Namier, Lewis, *The Structure of Politics At the Accession of George iii,* Second Edition (Wellingborough, 1957).

Nasaw, David, 'Introduction' in *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (Jun., 2009), pp. 573-578.

Noel-Baker, Philip, *The League of Nations at Work* (London, 1926).
Nord, Walter R., Thomas B. Lawrence, Cynthia Hardy and Stewart R. Clegg, 'Introduction' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, Second Edition (London, 2006).

Northedge, F. S., and M. D. Donelan, *International Disputes: The Political Aspects* (London, 1971).

Northedge, F. S., and M. J. Grieve, *A Hundred Years of International Relations* (London, 1971).

Northedge, F. S., *The League of Nations: its life and times 1920-1946* (Leicester, 1986).

O'Connor, Emmet, 'Edward Phelan: A biographical essay' in International Labour Organization (ed.), *Edward Phelan and the I.L.O.: The life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009).

Parker, Barbara, and Stewart Clegg, 'Globalization' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, Second Edition (London, 2006).

Parry, Ken W., and Alan Bryman, 'Leadership in Organizations' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, Second Edition (London, 2006).

Pastuhov, Vladimir D., *A Guide to the Practice of International Conferences* (Washington D.C., 1945).

Paul, T.V., 'Assessing Change in World Politics' in *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 2018), pp. 177-185.

Pedersen, Susan, “Back to the League of Nations” in *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (Oct., 2007), pp. 1091-1117.

Pedersen, Susan, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015).

Piguet, Myriam, ‘Gender Distribution in the League of Nations: The Start of a Revolution?’ in Ikonomou, Haakon A., and Karen Gram-Skjoldager (eds.), *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus, 2019).

Plesch, Dan, *America, Hitler, and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (London, 2011).

Purves, Chester, *International Establishments: Some notes on the Experience of the Internal Administration of the League of Nations Secretariat* (London, 1945).
Ranshofen-Wertheimer, Egon F., ‘International Administration: Lessons from the Experience of the League of Nations’ in *The American Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (Oct., 1943), pp. 872-887.

Ranshofen-Wertheimer, Egon F., *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington D.C., 1945).

Reinalda, Bob, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (Abingdon, 2009).

Reinisch, Jessica, ‘Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA’ in *Past & Present* 210, Issue Supplement 6 (2011), pp. 258-289.

Reinisch, Jessica, ‘Introduction: Relief in the Aftermath of War’ in *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (Jul., 2008), pp. 371-404.

Renborg, Bertil A., *International Drug Control: A Study of International Administration By and Through the League of Nations* (Washington D.C., 1947).

Reynolds, P. A. and E. J. Hughes, *The Historian as Diplomat: Charles Kingsley Webster and the United Nations, 1939-1946* (London, 1976).

Rochester, Martin J., ‘The Rise and Fall of International Organization as a Field of Study’ in *International Organization* 40, no. 4 (Sep., 1986), pp. 777-813.

Rovine, Arthur, *The first fifty years: The Secretary-General in World Politics 1920-1970* (Leyden, 1970).

Salter, Arthur, *Memoirs of a Public Servant* (London, 1961).

Samuel, Raphael, 'What is Social History?' in *History Today* 35, no. 3 (Mar., 1985), pp. 34-38.

Schlesinger, Stephen C., *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations. A Story of Superpowers, Secret Agents, Wartime Allies and Enemies and Their Quest for a Peaceful World* (Boulder, 2003).

Scott, George, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (London, 1973).

Sinding, Knud, and Christian Waldstrom, *Organisational Behaviour*, Fifth Edition (Maidenhead, 2014).

Sinha, Aseema, 'Building a Theory of Change in International Relations: Pathways of Disruptive and Incremental Change in World Politics' in *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Jun., 2018), pp. 195-203.
Sluga, Glenda, 'Women, Feminisms and Twentieth-Century Internationalisms' in Sluga, Glenda, and Patricia Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017).

Sluga, Glenda, and Patricia Clavin, 'Rethinking the History of Internationalism' in Sluga, Glenda and Patricia Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017).

Steiner, Zara S., *The Lights That Failed: European international history, 1919-1933* (Oxford, 2005).

Stone, Lawrence, 'Prosopography' in *Daedalus* 100, no. 1, Historical Studies Today (Winter, 1971), pp. 46-79.

Stopford, Martin, *Maritime Economics*, Third Edition (London, 2008).

Strange, Susan, 'Why do international organizations never die?' in Reinalda, Bob, and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations* (London, 1998).

Sweetser, Arthur, 'From the League to the United Nations' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 246 (Jul., 1946), pp. 1-8.

Sweetser, Arthur, *The League of Nations at Work* (New York, 1920).

Tollardo, Elisabetta, *Fascist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922-1935* (London, 2016).

Tournes, Ludovic, 'The Rockefeller Foundation and the Transition from the League of Nations to the UN (1939-1946)' in *Journal of Modern European* History 12, no. 3 (2014), pp. 323-341.

United Nations World Health Organization Interim Commission, *Official Records of the World Health Organization No. 4: Minutes of the Second Session of the Interim Commission, held in Geneva from 4 to 13 November 1946* (Geneva, 1947).

United Nations, *Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations* (London, 1946).

Walters, F. P., 'The League of Nations' in Luard, Evan (ed.), *The Evolution of International Organizations* (London, 1966).

Walters, F. P., *A History of the League of Nations* (London, 1952).

Weber, Max, *Economy and Society, A New Translation.* Edited and translated by Keith Tribe (London, 2019).
Weiss, Thomas G., 'The United Nations: before, during and after 1945' in *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (2015), pp. 1221-1235.

Wilkinson, Paul, *International Relations: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2007).

Williams, Andrew J., Amelia Hadfield, and J. Simon Rofe, *International History and International Relations (Abingdon, 2012).*

Winchmore, Charles, 'The Secretariat: Retrospect and Prospect' in *International Organization* 19, no. 3, The United Nations: Accomplishments and Prospects (Summer, 1965), pp. 622-639.

Unpublished Secondary Sources

Barcroft, Stephen, 'The International Civil Servant: the League of Nations Career of Sean Lester, 1929-1947' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1973).

Edwards, Emma Mary, 'The Wartime Experience of the League of Nations, 1939-1947' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ireland Maynooth, 2013).

Porter, Louis H., 'Cold War Internationalisms: The USSR in UNESCO, 1945-1967' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018).

Interviews

Arbuthnot, Mollie, Hilary Bugler, and Julian Bugler. Interview by Victoria Jane Mumby via Skype, 18 December 2020.

Barcroft, Stephen. Interview by Victoria Jane Mumby in Dublin, 8 July 2019.

Online Sources

United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, 'How many people work for the United Nations Secretariat?'. http://ask.un.org/faq/14626 (retrieved 4 December 2021).

United Nations Geneva Archives, 'Preserving the Institutional Memory of UN Geneva'. https://www.ungeneva.org/en/knowledge/archives (retrieved 4 December 2021).

UN Library & Archives Geneva [@UNOGLibrary] Twitter, "If you thought that our collection was made of paper records only, have a look at this carpet that was part of the #LeagueofNations pavilion in the 1939-40 New York World's Fair!". https://twitter.com/UNOGLibrary/status/1352556612494487553 (posted 22 January 2021, retrieved 1 December 2021).

Williamson, Samuel H., 'Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past'. www.measuringworth.com (retrieved 4 December 2021).