

Beyond Geopolitics

NEW HISTORIES OF LATIN AMERICA
at the
LEAGUE OF NATIONS



Edited by

ALAN MCPHERSON AND YANNICK WEHRLI

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University of New Mexico Press | Albuquerque

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Printed in the United States of America
20 19 18 17 16 15 1 2 3 4 5 6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Beyond geopolitics : new histories of Latin America at the League of Nations /
edited by Alan McPherson and Yannick Wehrli.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8263-5165-4 (cloth : alkaline paper) — ISBN 978-0-8263-5171-5 (electronic)

1. Latin America—Foreign relations—20th century. 2. League of Nations—History. 3. Political leadership—Latin America—History—20th century.
4. World politics—1900–1945. 5. International relations—History—20th century.
6. International cooperation—History—20th century. I. McPherson,

Alan L. II. Wehrli, Yannick, 1977–

F1415.B48 2015

980.03—dc23

2015004599

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Plenary session of the Eighteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, 13 September–6 October 1937.
Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

BOOK DESIGN: Catherine Leonardo

Composed in Minion Pro 10.25/13.5

Display type is Adobe Garamond Pro

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Acknowledgments

Most of the chapters in this volume began as papers presented at an international conference titled “Latin America and ‘International Geneva’ during the Interwar Period: The Origins of Regional and International Integration,” which took place in October 2011 in Geneva. This conference would not have been possible without the impulse of Aline Helg, professor at the University of Geneva, and of Claude Auroi, professor at the Graduate Institute, Geneva and president of the Swiss Society of Americanists. We first would like to thank them for their initiative. The conference was sponsored by the University of Geneva, the Swiss Society of Americanists, the Swiss National Science Foundation, the International Labour Organization Century Project, and the Academic Society of Geneva. All these institutions deserve our heartfelt gratitude.

We also would like to thank Jacques Oberson and Colin Wells from the League of Nations Archives, and Jacques Rodriguez from the Archives of the International Labour Office for their help in obtaining the photographs that richly illustrate this book. Help also came from the Archivo General de la Nación in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Financial support was provided from the Office of the Vice President for Research, University of Oklahoma. At the University of New Mexico Press, Clark Whitehorn believed in the project from its inception, and the production staff did an excellent job, from editing to layout.

Finally, an abrazo to all the contributors. They not only waited patiently after the 2011 conference for a book project to materialize, but also then provided us with high-quality studies, did their own translations to English, and

proved forbearing with our editing. Each in his or her area of expertise has shed light on Latin American participation at the League of Nations.

ALAN MCPHERSON, Norman, Oklahoma

YANNICK WEHRLI, Geneva, Switzerland

July 2015

INTRODUCTION

New Histories of Latin America at the League of Nations



YANNICK WEHRLI, Université de Genève

In 1930, Ecuador's minister of foreign affairs wrote in his annual report to his nation's National Congress that there were “two poles that offset and balanced our destiny as tributary of the Old and New World”: Washington and Geneva.¹ Was the League of Nations (LN, or League) as important as the United States for Latin American international relations? The authors of this book argue that participation in the LN had a real impact on Latin American politics and societies.

Founded at the initiative of US President Woodrow Wilson in 1919 during the Paris Peace Conference, the League had as its main objectives maintaining world peace and strengthening international cooperation. Its governing bodies were its council and assembly. Both were assisted by the permanent secretariat in charge of all administrative matters. Around them gravitated a series of committees, institutes, and organizations in charge of a wide variety of economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural issues. To name but a few, these included the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Health Organization, the Economic and Financial Organization, the Organization for Communications and Transit, the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young Persons, and the Paris International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation.² All of these organizations formed what might be called the “system of the League of Nations,” by analogy with that of the United Nations (UN).

This system initiated projects of lasting importance. It is well known that many of the specialized agencies of the UN, such as the World Health

Organization, UNESCO (the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), and UNICEF (originally the UN International Children's Emergency Fund, now the United Nations Children's Fund) originated in the League's commissions or organizations. As Swiss historian Antoine Fleury says, "The League of Nations can be said to have been the harbinger of a new world order based on international cooperation. It embodied the new ideas that characterized the twentieth century." For instance, Fleury adds, "the League of Nations can be compared to an apprenticeship in international economic cooperation."³ The League of Nations was much more than a political failure. It helped establish a culture of multilateral debate and exchange through the new practice of regular international conferences.

Very soon after its founding, the Latin American states expressed their interest in the organization. It allowed them to strengthen their position on the international stage, particularly in relation to the United States. At the end of 1920, seventeen of the twenty Latin American republics were members of the organization, and all joined at some point in the League's life (1920–1946). Latin America accounted for a quantitatively significant part of the League—in its early years, more than one-third of its member states. Although this proportion decreased as other European and Asian countries became members and some Latin Americans withdrew, it never fell below 20 percent. Of course, this presence did not reflect Latin America's real political power, but neither was it neglected during votes and elections in an organization in which each member state had one vote. France, for instance, quickly realized all the advantages it could obtain by ensuring Latin American votes.⁴

Relationships between Latin America and the League were characterized by a series of ups and downs. The adoption of the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1919 raised huge expectations, quickly cooled by the US Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. Some Central American states, such as Honduras and Nicaragua, lost interest and attended the sessions of the assembly on a very irregular basis. After the 1921 assembly decision not to get involved in the Tacna and Arica dispute, Bolivia and Peru stopped coming to Geneva until 1929. Other major setbacks came in 1925 and 1926 when Costa Rica and then Brazil decided to withdraw. The former deemed participation in the League too expensive and useless; the latter was frustrated by its failed attempt to get a permanent seat on the council.⁵ The end of the 1920s opened a new era in Latin American involvement in the League. In 1929, Peru, Bolivia, and Honduras came back to Geneva. Mexico became a member in 1931, followed in 1934 by Ecuador. In 1933, Argentina renewed its

relationship with the League following a break of thirteen years after its propositions to democratize the League were rejected.⁶ Most of all, the League was involved in the peaceful resolution of the Chaco War from 1932 to 1935 and succeeded in 1933 in putting an end to the conflict between Peru and Colombia over the Leticia territory. After this apotheosis, the relationship again deteriorated when the political situation in Europe worsened as the Good Neighbor Policy of the United States improved relations with Latin America. In 1936, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras withdrew, followed by El Salvador the next year. The hemorrhage continued in 1938 with Chile and Venezuela and in 1939 with Peru. In 1946, at the last session of the assembly, only nine Latin American states were still members of the League.⁷ Several countries, however, kept participating in technical activities of the League after withdrawing.⁸

Despite the significant Latin American presence, the League focused all its attention on European affairs, especially because the Treaty of Versailles had given it several missions related to the restoration of peace in Europe. Management of the mandate system, administration of the Free City of Danzig and of the Saar Basin, protection of minorities after the redrawing of the Central and Eastern Europe borders, disarmament—all were themes that were widely dealt with in Geneva but drew little interest from Latin American governments and publics. That European countries occupied most of the seats on the council and various committees and provided most of the members of the secretariat further strengthened the impression that the League was actually more a European than a global organization.⁹ This fueled a debate, not only in the Latin American press but also within cabinets and ministries, about the relevance of involvement in the League. The feeling spread that contributions to its financing, often wrongly perceived as weighing heavily on state budgets, were not cost effective. Manuel Arocha, Venezuelan member of the League's secretariat, wrote the following in a 1922 report:

For the average man of Latin America, the League of Nations, the real League of Nations, the one that, during the armistice, day full of promise and hope, was announced to the world, does not exist. From his point of view, there is in Geneva only a kind of caricature of the first ideal project: a society of "European nations," instrument that the Great Powers handle at their will to satisfy their egos and fulfill their vengeance, which costs a lot of money and does not bring any benefit to the neglected Latin America. On the other

hand, for the average man of the League of Nations (note that I do not only mean the Secretariat), Latin America is little but a small group of remote countries, that do not want to pay and that argue with each other all the time.¹⁰

The relationship between the first global international organization and Latin America was indeed not self-evident.

The proponents of the LN replied by stressing the benefits of the organization: it made available its expertise in economic and social matters, provided a forum for voices from Latin America, and allowed the region to strengthen ties with Europe, a necessary counterweight to the influence of the United States. In spite of these arguments, and successful efforts by Latin American governments and delegates in Geneva for a greater presence on the council and the secretariat, the marginal position of Latin America in the LN could not be denied.¹¹

LATIN AMERICA AT THE MARGIN OF LEAGUE OF NATIONS HISTORIOGRAPHY

The peripheral position of Latin America in the life of the League explains why its role is also limited in the historiography of the organization. As a whole, the history of the LN has long been neglected. Why look at an organization that failed miserably? Since the late 1960s, those who studied its history focused on its political activities and the (dys)functioning of collective security.¹² The papers presented at the international symposium for the sixtieth anniversary of the creation of the LN reflected this strong interest in the functioning of the institution and its political as well as economic activities.¹³

The 1990s witnessed renewed interest in the League. In 1993 the journal *Relations internationales* devoted a special issue to it, and in 1996 an international conference was organized by the United Nations in Geneva on the fiftieth anniversary of the liquidation of its activities and transfer to the UN.¹⁴ Researchers no longer emphasized the failure of collective security but rather the innovations of the LN, such as the protection of minorities, and the legacy it passed on to the UN.¹⁵ Two years later, Antoine Fleury highlighted the new themes of the historical research: “Many current investigators are introducing a long-term perspective into the study of the

emergence and deepening of the transnational dimension in the field of international relations. Such a perspective restores a sense of pride to the League and its activities.” The League thus emerged not as a failure but rather as an experimental laboratory in international matters. Fleury finally formulated the hope that these lines of research be pursued: “Let unbiased historians rediscover the models, means, and objectives suggested, elaborated, and more or less happily put into practice by the League of Nations.”¹⁶

As shown in Susan Pedersen’s review essay almost ten years later, Fleury’s wish was fulfilled. The transnational interest in cultural and normative transfers, in circulation of knowledge, and in networks of nonstate actors (experts, unions, associations, and the like) highlights the pioneering role of the League and its impact not only internationally but also nationally and locally.¹⁷ The second mission of the LN—to contribute to the strengthening of international cooperation—now gets top billing. Historians have multiplied their approaches: the fight against infectious diseases, the protection of children, the struggle against drug and human trafficking, the plight of refugees, intellectual and scientific cooperation, food safety, the eradication of slavery, and many more.

In this new history of the LN, as in the old, however, Latin America remains neglected.¹⁸ Of the forty papers presented at the conference “Towards a New History of the League of Nations” and of the thirty papers of a symposium for the ninetieth anniversary of the ILO, only four at each event were devoted to Latin America.¹⁹ Furthermore, like Manuel Arocha, one could almost say that, for the average historian of the LN, Latin America was just a group of remote small states arguing and fighting with each other all the time. Indeed, major general works on the LN examine Latin America, if they mention it at all, by addressing the resolution of the Chaco War and the conflicts over the territories of Tacna-Arica and Leticia.²⁰ Specific works on Latin America at the League of Nations are still rare.

The first books published on the topic came in the 1980s and were traditional diplomatic histories that focused on the participation of a country or group of countries, first Venezuela and then Central America.²¹ By the 1990s, the participation of Brazil and its withdrawal in 1926 attracted the attention of Brazilian researchers.²² Their Argentine colleagues focused their attention on the attitude of President Hipólito Yrigoyen and the withdrawal of the Argentine delegation from the first session of the assembly.²³ For ten years, Fabián Herrera León studied the policies of the Mexican governments

toward the various bodies of the LN.²⁴ Latin American national diplomatic archives and those of the LN also shed new light on the Chaco and Leticia conflicts.²⁵ Finally, it is to Thomas Fischer we must give credit for the most recent study of Latin American political participation in the LN and how these states used it to strengthen their sovereignty.²⁶

If at first political history prevailed, themes and approaches have diversified in the early 2000s: the protection of children, including the issue of infant mortality; prostitution and other forms of human trafficking (so-called white slavery); the fight against infectious diseases; and nutrition and food policies. These works are less focused on the attitude of governments and more on Latin American networks of experts and social reformers and their relations with secretariat staff and members of the specialized committees of the LN.²⁷ Several studies, especially those of Juliette Dumont and Corinne A. Pernet, deal with the relations between Latin American intellectuals and the LN's bodies in charge of intellectual cooperation in Paris and Geneva.²⁸ Finally, several publications focus on links between Latin American governments, trade unions, and social reformers and the ILO.²⁹ One recent collective work illuminates the role of correspondents of the ILO in establishing links with Latin America, highlights the fundamental influence of the first American Labor Conference organized under the auspices of the ILO in Chile in 1936, and shows the influence of the organization in the implementation of social policy in Latin America in the 1930s and the 1940s.³⁰ Publications on Latin America and the LN have thus increased dramatically in the last five years, a very encouraging new dynamic.

WHY A BOOK ON LATIN AMERICA AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS?

Is the participation of the peripheral states of Latin America in the League really worthy of attention? Why does the region deserve special treatment? Various reasons exist. If the LN was more akin to a European organization because of its funding sources, its priorities, and the preponderance of Europeans in its various bodies, it nevertheless claimed universality. Only Latin American participation allowed it to truly claim its status as a world organization, however. For this reason, the LN secretariat and the International Labor Office, which is the ILO's secretariat, both took special

measures to address the interests of Latin Americans. They put in place on the continent a network of correspondents whose main mission was to improve the exchange of information. Moreover, the League's secretary general, Eric Drummond, created in 1923 within the secretariat a special office for Latin America.³¹

Latin American delegates also saw themselves as having different interests and moral and juridical principles from their European counterparts, however culturally close to them they felt. Although some states declared war on Germany or broke off relations with it, that Latin America nevertheless remained outside the war gave its representatives a veneer of impartiality and neutrality in discussions related to European politics. Latin Americans were also convinced that Europe had much to learn from what they called the American pacific legal tradition, whose central idea was the rule of law over force.³² Either for international officials or for Latin American representatives of the time, Latin America was a special case.

For researchers, Latin American participation serves primarily to address key issues in the study of international organizations, such as the tension between universalism and regionalism. Its study also makes possible a better understanding of the history of the continent and a reconsideration of the chronology of the LN. Usually, the 1920s are presented as a period of development and affirmation of the organization, with 1929–1930 considered its zenith. The 1930s follow as a period of successive failures—the London Economic Conference, the Conference on Disarmament, the crisis in Manchuria, the Italo-Ethiopian War—a slow descent into hell ending with the outbreak of World War II. However, it is precisely during the 1930s, mainly because of the economic crisis, that the relationships between Geneva and Latin America improved. The socioeconomic situation motivated requests for technical assistance and cooperation in the fields of labor law and nutrition, for example. Such activities and exchanges persisted despite the war, and serve today to emphasize the continuities between the LN and the UN.

The following chapters emphasize five themes. The first concerns the political involvement of Latin American nations in the League and their relationships with world powers. The LN was Latin America's first encounter with multilateralism. The brief experience of the Second Hague Conference in 1907 aside, the meetings of the LN were an opportunity for Latin Americans to experiment with multilateral diplomacy on a global scale and mingle regularly with European counterparts. This experience was often

painful because the governments usually sent delegations insufficiently numerous, competent, or prepared to deal with the various topics discussed in Geneva, which sometimes led to the reorganization of diplomatic services and to reflections on the balance between means and ends.³³

The proximity with world powers was a double-edged sword because it also led to unwanted involvement in major international conflicts such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia or the Spanish Civil War. Latin American governments worked hard to limit their participation in these conflicts.

The second theme deals with international cooperation on social, economic, intellectual, or scientific issues. Thanks to their participation in the various bodies of the LN, Latin American governments benefited from a body of global expertise that they could easily mobilize in their quest for progress and modernity. It was thus possible to internationalize their national or regional problems. The international context and the influence of the LN are essential to studying the consolidation of Latin American unions or the development of social insurance schemes such as unemployment insurance or retirement pensions, for example.

Cultural distinctiveness is the third theme of this volume. Participation in the LN, allowing a confrontation between various political, socioeconomic, and cultural realities, raised in Latin American policy circles in Geneva a reflection on the role of Latin America in the international community. Was it on the side of civilization or barbarism? Could it mix with the industrialized powers or was it underdeveloped? Rather close to Europe or fully American (in its continental sense)? Studying Latin American participation in the LN provides insights not only into Latin American self-representation but also into how Europe perceived the area, however distorted that perception may have been by ignorance and prejudice.

As mentioned, the study of Latin American participation addresses the tensions between universalism and regionalism, which is the fourth theme. The LN had a universal vocation, but when delegates discussed world peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, they mainly had in mind the European political situation. Similarly, experts, international delegates, and officials, mostly European, who participated in the development of standards, for example in terms of labor or child protection, based their work primarily on their own European practices, experiences, and cultures. Models that the LN and the ILO helped spread, though supposedly universal, were in fact European. Given that “universal” meant European, and since there were so few Asian and even fewer African member states because of

colonization, the study of Latin American participation is essential to addressing the interaction between regionalism and universalism. Consideration of Latin American reactions to the failure of collective security allows, for example, to better understand the recognition, after World War II, of the relevance of regional organizations for peacekeeping.

Tensions between universalism and regionalism are also observed in the social and economic activities of the League. Conventions and recommendations developed under the auspices of the LN and the ILO were not always accepted without opposition: Latin Americans, for example, insisted on their socioeconomic peculiarities. The low industrial development, dependence on international commodity markets, the still largely rural population, and even food and the singularity of Latin American bacterial strains necessitated modifications to the solutions and standards emerging from Geneva. Latin American regionalism thus conflicted with the League's universalism, and opposition to cultural and normative transfers forced international organizations to adapt to Latin American requests lest they lose all credibility. In what ways did the LN and the ILO act to balance regional needs and universal principles? The following chapters provide answers.

Finally, taking the LN into account also enhances an understanding of Latin American relations with the United States. On the one hand, the League offered a space for denouncing Washington's interventions. On the other, Article 21 of the covenant recognized the validity of the Monroe Doctrine, defined as a regional agreement. This severely limited the capacity for League action in Latin America. Nevertheless, Geneva provided Latin Americans with a protected forum, away from the influence of the United States. US hegemony also raised the question of rivalries between the LN and Pan-American organizations. Cooperation between the League and the Pan American Union never really materialized beyond exchanges of publications, despite several proposals from Latin American delegates in Geneva.³⁴ As the Pan American Union expanded its field of activity and started dealing with health and labor issues or intellectual cooperation, League officials feared the competition and a possible loss of interest from Latin America.³⁵ The United States remained the elephant in the room, owing to its special relationship with Latin America and its absence from the League.

The richness of these five themes fully justified the organization in October 2011 of an international symposium on Latin America in Geneva's

international organizations of the interwar period. The papers presented on that occasion make up most of the chapters of this book.³⁶

ORGANIZATION, APPROACHES, AND THEMES

Susan Pederson counts “three different but not mutually exclusive narratives of the League.” The first deals with the maintenance of security and conflict resolution; the second with “the business of adjudicating, managing, and delimiting relations of sovereignty”; and the third with international cooperation in intellectual, technical, economic, social, and humanitarian issues.³⁷ To focus only on the third narrative and the transnational history of Latin American participation would be too restrictive, because much remains to be written about political and diplomatic issues and interstates relations. That is why this volume fully assumes the heterogeneity of approaches, methods, and topics addressed.

The first chapters tackle issues of sovereignty and peaceful conflict resolution. Alan McPherson examines the possibilities of use of the League as a space of contesting US occupations in Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. In the next, my own chapter, I show how most Latin American governments chose to limit as much as possible the application of economic sanctions voted by the LN against Italy following the invasion of Ethiopia. I also demonstrate how they then claimed a regionalization of collective security in order not to be dragged against their will into a European conflict. Fabián Herrera León in chapter 3 and Abdiel Oñate in chapter 4 discuss how the government of Lázaro Cárdenas chose to transform Mexico into an ardent supporter of the principles of the LN covenant during the Spanish Civil War and the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. With Mexican-US tensions over oil as a backdrop, the goal in both situations was to preserve a legal instrument the main objective of which was to ensure respect for national sovereignty.

The ILO is the focus of three chapters that each raise the importance of the first American Labor Conference, organized in 1936 by the ILO in Santiago, Chile. In chapter 5, Norberto Osvaldo Ferreras analyzes the requests to the ILO by Latin Americans before and during the conference and the impact of the conference itself. Véronique Plata-Stenger adopts the ILO officials’ point of view and shows in chapter 6 how they changed their practice to meet Latin American expectations without compromising the

universality of international labor conventions adopted in Geneva. Finally, Patricio Herrera González shows in chapter 7 how this conference led to the creation of the Confederation of Latin American Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, or CTAL) in 1938. The close relationship between ILO officials and Vicente Lombardo Toledano brought an aura of legitimacy to the new union entity.

The next four chapters have a common theme—intellectual and scientific cooperation. In chapter 8, Corinne A. Pernet focuses on the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation’s debates about the writing of history outside the framework of the nation-state and in particular Argentine Roberto Levillier’s project to publish a collection of historical and anthropological works on the American continent. In chapter 9, Juliette Dumont tackles the rivalry that could oppose the organs of the LN to their Pan-American counterparts. She analyzes the reactions to the project of founding the Pan-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, which aroused widespread concern in Geneva and Paris, but ambivalent attitudes among Latin American intellectuals. In chapter 10, Letícia Pumar analyzes Brazilian Miguel Ozório de Almeida’s positions within the organs of intellectual cooperation in Geneva, Paris, and Rio de Janeiro. She shows how much he was in favor of scientific internationalism while wishing to contribute to the development of his country. With the legitimacy conferred on him by his action in the LN, he did not hesitate to be critical of the regime of Getúlio Vargas. Finally, in chapter 11, Juliana Manzoni Cavalcanti traces the career of the Austrian biologist Rudolf Kraus, who led several bacteriological institutions in the Southern Cone and participated in the work of the LN’s Health Organization. She shows the difficulties Latin Americans faced in adopting the standardization of sera and vaccines promoted in Geneva.

The last section of this volume deals with the economic and social activities of the League. José Antonio Sánchez Román focuses in chapter 12 on the reflections of the Argentine economist Salvador Oria about the economic situation in his country and in particular its situation of dependence. Addressing the participation of Oria in the LN’s Committee on Double Taxation, Sánchez Román argues that Oria anticipated the developmentalist theories of the mid-twentieth century. In chapter 13, María Leticia Galluzzi Bizzo studies the role of LN in the dissemination of knowledge and public policies on nutrition in Latin America, especially after the Third International Conference on Nutrition, held in Buenos Aires in 1939. Finally, in chapter 14, Amelia M. Kiddie presents the mission conducted in 1938 across Latin

America by several officials of the secretariat to promote the nonpolitical activities of the League. Separating the technical from the political, this mission succeeded in keeping Latin Americans interested in the League. Several states announced their desire to maintain contact with the technical bodies of the organization even after deciding to withdraw. The mission thus helped make Latin America a more active partner in the international system after World War II ended.

Several chapters focus on Mexico. According to a former high official of the organization and its first historian, Francis Paul Walters, “no Latin American State Member was so active and courageous in its support of the Covenant as Mexico.”³⁸ The 1917 Mexican Constitution also raised interest among ILO staff members and workers’ delegates, who welcomed Mexican membership with open arms.³⁹ The activism of Mexican union leaders or President Lázaro Cárdenas’s defense of the principles of the covenant cannot be denied. But Mexican active participation was actually quite brief (1933–1939) and Mexico is somewhat overrepresented in this volume by authors specialized in Mexican history. Even if they were not necessarily such “courageous” defenders of the covenant as Mexico was, other states were active in the LN not only in political but also in social activities. For example, the participation of Cuba, Uruguay, or Colombia from 1920 to 1946 also deserve recognition and investigation. Many fields remain to be explored, and many histories on Latin American participation in the League of Nations are still to be written.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Manuel Pérez-Guerrero, *Les relations des états de l’Amérique latine avec la Société des Nations* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1936), 213.
2. For an organizational chart of the League, see Pierre Gerbet, Victor-Yves Ghébali, and Marie-Renée Mouton, *Le rêve d’un ordre mondial: De la SDN à l’ONU* (Paris: Impr. Nationale Ed., 1996), 424. On the history and activities of some of these bodies, see Jean-Jacques Renollet, *L’UNESCO oubliée: La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle (1919–1946)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999); Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organization, 1921–1946* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009); and Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, “Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of Its Economic and Financial Organisation,” *Contemporary European History* 14 (2005): 465–92.
3. Antoine Fleury, “The League of Nations: Towards a New Appreciation,” in *The*

- Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years*, ed. Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute / Cambridge University Press, 1998), 516.
4. Yannick Wehrli, “Les délégations latino-américaines et les intérêts de la France à la Société des Nations,” *Relations internationales* 137 (2009): 45–59.
 5. Jorge Rhenan Segura, *Sociedad de las Naciones y política Centroamericana (1919–1939)* (San José, Costa Rica: Euroamericana de ediciones, 1993); Eugênio Vargas Garcia, *O Brasil e a Liga das Nações (1919–1926): Vencer ou não perder* (Porto Alegre: Ed. da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul / Brasília: FUNAG, 2000).
 6. Thomas Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen: Lateinamerika und der Völkerbund, 1920–1936* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 107–27; Yannick Wehrli, “Créer et maintenir l’intérêt: La liaison entre le Secrétariat de la Société des Nations et l’Amérique latine (1919–1929)” (master’s thesis, Université de Genève, 2003), 32–62. On Mexico’s case, see Fabián Herrera León, *México en la Sociedad de Naciones, 1931–1940* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2014), 91–124.
 7. Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina and Uruguay.
 8. These countries include Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela.
 9. Patricia Clavin, “Europe and the League of Nations,” in *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914–1945*, ed. Robert Gerwarth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 325–54.
 10. Report of Manuel Arocha, 22 November 1922, R 1589, 40/25104/14672, “Organisation du Bureau de l’Amérique Latine,” League of Nations Archives.
 11. Adolfo Costa du Rels to José-María Gutiérrez, 1 November 1935, vol. “Delegación permanente ante la Liga de las Naciones, 1935–1937,” DBNU-10-R-2, 124, *Archivo de la Cancillería de Bolivia*, La Paz; report by the Guatemalan Legation in Europe, 31 December 1927, *Memoria de los trabajos efectuados por la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores en el año de 1927, presentada a la Asamblea legislativa en sus sesiones ordinarias de 1928* (Guatemala, 1929), 84–85; report by the Panamanian delegation on the 17th session of the Assembly, *Memoria que el Secretario de Estados en el despacho de Relaciones Exteriores y Comunicaciones presenta a la Asamblea Nacional en sus sesiones ordinarias de 1938* (Panama City: Imp. Nacional, 1939), 347; Perez-Guerrero, *Les relations des états de l’Amérique latine*; and Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen*, 187–261.
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13. *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: W. de Gruyter, 1983).
 14. Special issue “Les Organisations internationales au XXe siècle,” *Relations internationales* 75 (1993); United Nations Library at Geneva, *The League of Nations, 1920–1946: Organization and Accomplishments; A Retrospective of the First Organization for the Establishment of World Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1996).
 15. Good examples of this are the papers of Joost Herman, “The League of Nations and its Minority Protection Programme in Eastern Europe: Revolutionary, Unequalled and Underestimated”; and of Alan James, “The United Nations’ Debt to the League of Nations,” United Nations Library at Geneva, *The League of Nations*, 49–54 and 86–93.
 16. Fleury, “The League of Nations,” 518, 522.
 17. Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *American Historical Review* 112 (2007): 1091–117. For a methodological discussion on the transnational history of the LN, see Sandrine Kott, “Les organisations internationales, terrains d’étude de la globalisation. Jalons pour une approche socio-historique,” *Critique internationale* 52 (2011): 9–16; and Patricia Clavin, “Defining Transnationalism,” *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 421–39.
 18. The last international conference on the LN history was called “Towards a New History of the League of Nations,” Geneva, 25–26 August 2011.
 19. The conference “Towards a New History of the League of Nations” may be consulted at http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/study/academicdepartments/international-history/conferences/conferences/New_History_LoN.html (accessed April 30, 2015). See also the conference “Social Transnational Policies: Reformist Networks and the International Labour Organization,” Geneva, 7–9 May 2009. Papers presented there have been published in two separate volumes: *L’Organisation internationale du travail: Origine, développement, avenir*, ed. Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Vincent Viet (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011); and *Universalizing Social Rights: The International Labor Organization and Beyond*, ed. Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, ILO, 2012).
 20. Bendiner, *A Time for Angels*, 248, 317–20; Scott, *The Rise and Fall*, 175–77, 242–52;

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 38. Walters, *History of the League of Nations*, 462.
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PART ONE

SOVEREIGNTY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION



CHAPTER ONE

Anti-Imperialism and the Failure of the League of Nations



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One might assume the League of Nations (LN, or League) to be the ideal forum for resisting US empire in Latin America in the interwar period. After a devastating world conflagration in which the concept of empire suffered a near deathblow, the founding of the first international organization in which Latin Americans could join together and with Europeans to pare back the power of the United States would have presented an unprecedented opportunity. Perhaps the greatest instance of that power was the US military occupations of Latin America, several of which overlapped with World War I.

Yet, during three lengthy US occupations of the Circum-Caribbean—Nicaragua (1912–1933), Haiti (1915–1934), and the Dominican Republic (1916–1924)—the LN played virtually no role in assisting Latin American diplomats in ending US occupations. The case of Nicaragua was most understandable since that Central American nation’s political leaders had requested military intervention against internal rebellion and continued to support it from 1912 to 1933, and so it was unlikely that their representatives in Geneva would contest it. But Dominican and Haitian leaders largely rejected US military interventions, and at times their diplomatic representatives abroad did fight the subjugation of their capitals. Yet both at the founding of the LN and during its first decade of activity, next to no attempt was made to protest concrete cases of imperialism.

VERSAILLES I: DIVERGENT EXPECTATIONS

The postwar situation did not augur well for Latin Americans. In 1919 following the war, Western Hemisphere delegates to the Paris Peace Conference traveled to France expecting to encounter an international forum for their nation, but those expectations indicated divisions not only between Latin America and the United States but also among Latin Americans and between them and Europe.

Invitations to the conference conferred to the hemisphere were an early indication of the political tensions inherent in the founding of the LN. Among South American nations, Brazil was the only one initially invited to send a delegation, because it had joined the war materially. Only later were Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Uruguay invited.¹ In Central America and the Caribbean, six nations—Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama—were invited and sent delegates. As expected, the men sent were prominent in politics or letters in their respective countries and many had substantial diplomatic experience.²

Yet it was clear from the outset that the delegates were appendages of US diplomacy, sent to support the administration of Woodrow Wilson rather than to defy it or even to advance their own agenda. Wilson himself had ordered the occupations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as well as the taking of the Mexican port of Veracruz and expected wartime loyalty from the area just as he had from US citizens. Given that context, conference invitations were a reward of sorts for having declared war against the Central Powers, even though no Circum-Caribbean nation had participated militarily. Colonel Edward House, Wilson's foreign policy consigliore, even suggested that the six delegations from the Circum-Caribbean merely be represented by the United States, but the State Department refused, believing their independent presence would in fact benefit the United States. Costa Rica was denied an invitation because the United States did not recognize the Federico Tinoco government. The Dominican Republic, then under US military governance, was not invited either because, ironically, it had not bothered to declare war. Some delegates who did show up were unabashedly pro-United States, such as Salvador Chamorro Oreamuno, whose son just happened to be president of Nicaragua and who very much appreciated the existing US occupation of his country for helping him keep down his family's political enemies. Reflecting flimsy diplomatic budgets, each Circum-Caribbean delegate came as the lone accredited representative of his country.³

Once the delegates gathered near Paris, the conference was fraught with tension. The presence of Latin Americans ended up being of little consequence to Washington because the British and French negotiated with the United States a two-tiered structure in which the Great Powers would discuss substantive issues during one closed-door “conversation” while another, which hosted all delegates, made no decisions of substance.⁴

Yet the diplomacy of Latin Americans at Versailles did carry some symbolic weight. As a whole, they were uninterested in the German question or the issue of future wars. “Their priority,” writes Michael Streeter, “was to have a safeguard against American intervention.” On 28 April 1919, Panama’s delegate, Antonio Burgos, emphasized the right of small nations versus “a greater Power,” a clear reference to the United States.⁵ Policarpo Bonilla, the Honduran representative at the peace talks, asked for clarification of Article 21 of the LN Charter, which indicated that there would be no conflict between the charter and the Monroe Doctrine. Because the governing interpretation of the doctrine at the time championed US “international police power” over Latin America, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, Article 21 implied that the charter pledged to do nothing to challenge US occupations in the Americas. Bonilla and others wished to weaken Article 21 in order to establish a legal basis for denying Washington a justification for future interventions in Latin America.⁶ The delegate from Honduras proposed an amendment stating “that no nation can there acquire [sic] by conquest any portion of their territory nor intervene in their internal government or administration, nor perform there any act which can diminish their autonomy or wound their national dignity.” Streeter finds “not the slightest indication that the amendment was ever seriously considered by the Great Powers.” The speaker following Bonilla was the French minister, who moved on to other matters.⁷

At Versailles, Haitians, at the time under US occupation, were bolder. Haiti’s representative in Paris, Tertulien Guilbaud, was well prepared to confront US diplomats. A poet of patriotism, he was a favorite son of the mixed-race elite and had taught literature and mathematics before studying law at the University of Paris and founding a law school upon his return to Haiti. Immediately before the US occupation, he was education minister and justice minister. He was offered the presidency when the United States invaded Haiti in 1915, but refused out of patriotism. He later accepted the position of minister to France.⁸

Guilbaud had instructions not to attempt to send the US marines home but to abolish US-imposed martial law and provost courts in Haiti and to

end US financial control over its treasury, still significant objectives at a time when Washington had a signed treaty with Haiti ensuring these privileges. The strategy was entirely a moral one, using the leverage of public denunciation. Foreign Minister Constantin Benoît pointed out to Guilbaud the contradiction between Wilson's "principle of respects for the rights of smaller nations" and Haiti's failure at "obtaining justice." He suggested the possibility of publicly embarrassing Secretary of State Robert Lansing and his president. Lansing signaled his openness to downgrading the marine brigade in Port-au-Prince to a "legation guard," but US officials in Haiti and Washington killed the idea. Streeter concluded that Haiti's "most concrete achievement" at Versailles was merely to have become a member of the League, which automatically followed from ratifying the Treaty of Versailles.⁹

Dominicans were bolder still than Haitians at Versailles, but also more desperate and equally ineffective. In 1916, the US occupation had pushed their president, Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, into exile. It simultaneously installed a military government that operated like a dictatorship, thus making it nearly impossible for Dominicans to represent their nation abroad, unlike Haitians. Henríquez y Carvajal—known as Don Pancho—lay low in 1917 and 1918, but when the war drew to a close he gleaned an opportunity in Wilson's hypocrisy. "Like all patriots," the French chargé in Santo Domingo explained, "[Henríquez y Carvajal] sees that the US occupation of his country is incompatible with the principle of the rights of small nations proclaimed by President Wilson."¹⁰

Don Pancho gambled that he could show up at Versailles and appeal directly to Wilson to reconcile his words and actions and end the occupation. Although the Dominican Republic did not figure on the list of official delegations, the military government allegedly appointed a Dominican representative to the Versailles conference, a Dr. Galván, who had been a representative in Washington. But Don Pancho refused to be "soothed" by such an envoy, the British vice consul wrote.¹¹ In a Herculean feat of fund-raising, the exiled president and his circle tapped family, friends, and compatriots for thousands of dollars merely to ship Henríquez y Carvajal to Paris in February 1919. Days before he departed, a sympathetic Cuban newspaper declared, "the time has come not only for the small nations of Europe but for those of America; not only for Belgium and Poland but for Santo Domingo!"¹²

Events soon deflated such enthusiasm.¹³ Don Pancho made it to Paris but never got to meet Wilson and was physically shut out of peace talks. "I am almost completely isolated," he wrote in despair to his son-in-law in April.



Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, exiled president of the Dominican Republic who lobbied at Versailles against the US occupation of his country. Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

"The Conference delegates are unavailable." He did have a meeting with State Department officials, who, to his dismay, informed him that Paris was not the place to discuss Santo Domingo or any other non-European issue.¹⁴

VERSAILLES II: OMINOUS RESULTS

After the conference, Latin Americans joined the LN enthusiastically, many in the hopes that it would limit the US tendency toward intervention. In 1919,

nine states, including all those that attended the conference, became charter members, and several more did so in 1920. Argentina and Chile, among others, did not attend the conference but acceded to the League.¹⁵ By the first League of Nations General Assembly in 1920, a quarter of the LN's members were from Latin America. All Central American nations joined.¹⁶

But hopes again dimmed immediately. Brazil was the only Latin American nation on the League Council, and it did not enjoy permanent status.¹⁷ Ecuador did not even join the LN until 1934, mainly because of domestic instability.¹⁸ Nicaragua and Haiti were full members, but while having soldiers from a nonmember country, the United States, on their soil. Most despairing to anti-interventionists was that the United States itself failed to ratify the treaty. Without US membership, there was no way Latin Americans could coerce Washington to do anything through the LN's institutions. The League would be a purely rhetorical tool, if that. The tacit support that the United States did give the LN in subsequent years actually worked against Latin America because it pressured its European leaders to avoid antagonizing Washington about hemispheric matters they considered peripheral to the LN's greater mission. Latin Americans thus suffered the worst of both worlds: US pressure on the League but no ability to get the United States to adhere to League resolutions.¹⁹

THE 1920S: SELF-DETERMINATION

The concept of self-determination, which seemed to many to be contradicted by US actions, kept Latin American hopes for an effective anti-occupation LN alive during the 1920s. Even those who suffered intervention or occupation were embittered by the gap between US words and actions. They contested any US-fed notion of Pan-Americanism during the war years. Certainly no Pan-American Conference was convened during the war; in fact, the war delayed a planned 1914 meeting until 1923. The war also created a powerful anti-imperialist minority in the United States.²⁰ Of largest consequence was that the end of the war did not end any occupation immediately, a disconnect that laid bare other, nonstrategic reasons for the US presence, such as commercial profit and social engineering. The message of self-government affected most deeply those whom the empire did not allow to self-govern. Latin Americans saw the end of the war as an opportunity to exploit the paradoxes imbedded in Wilson's global foreign policy ideology:

the US president fought a “war to end all wars” and helped imperial allies with a promise to spread “self-determination.” As Erez Manela points out, it soon became clear to nationalists and anticolonialists outside Europe that Wilson’s calls for self-determination were not aimed at them.²¹

Latin Americans, like others around the world, did not accede easily to the US implication that freedom was not for them. For Latin Americans, the rallying cry of self-determination inspired even more in peacetime. In 1921, Diógenes Escalante, who was part of Venezuela’s delegation to the LN from 1920 to 1936, wrote to Venezuelan leader Juan Vicente Gómez that the League “will serve us in the future to counterbalance the all-absorbing influence of the United States and to work with the Europeans to frame policies more in our interests. One of the reasons that the United States disliked the League is because it removes the South American republics from Washington’s tutelage, according us the international importance and the maturity that the United States prefers us not to have.”²²

In this context, Haiti did attempt action through the League. Although occupied by the United States throughout the 1920s, Haiti was nominally independent and so it sent diplomats and delegates abroad. Usually these were puppets of the pro-occupation presidents. But there was one exception. Dantès Bellegarde, an experienced statesman and educator, was sent to various European capitals by Port-au-Prince. Often against the wishes of his own government, he argued for the rights of other small nations or those of Haitians exploited for their labor in Cuba.²³ On 1 July 1924, Bellegarde made his most impassioned speech to a pacifist organization in Lyon, embracing the language of “international law” to denounce US occupation. At the LN, US diplomats, as observers, barely got Bellegarde’s resolution in favor of US withdrawal from Haiti watered down enough to be innocuous.²⁴ In 1930, Bellegarde returned to France, this time to speak to the League of Nations Assembly.²⁵ In his speeches, Bellegarde reached out to several audiences at once, particularly by flattering the French.²⁶ He also appealed to the League’s self-interest, saying it would bolster its standing if it induced the United States to join and then pressured it to end occupations.²⁷

Ultimately, however, the League was only effective indirectly. Dominicans were especially skilled at exploiting the hypocrisy of Wilson’s self-determination rhetoric. Dominican poet Fabio Fiallo continued to denounce Wilson, “whose cynicism ran parallel with his iniquity when in Versailles he was proclaimed the Defender of the Rights of Weak Nations, while here in the Caribbean the waters were covered with cruisers crowded with marines



Dantès Bellegarde, a Haitian statesman and delegate at the LN's Assembly in 1921, 1922, and 1930, who made speeches in France during the 1920s against the occupation of Haiti by US forces. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

and soldiers.”²⁸ Echoing Zola, Dominican historian and novelist Gustavo Adolfo Mejía in 1920 published a tract titled *I Accuse Rome*, in which there was no mystery as to who the duplicitous “Rome” truly was: “I accuse Rome of treason to civilization. . . . I accuse Rome of having dishonored the international treaties and doctrines of its most brilliant sons.”²⁹ Speaking of the Dominican occupation, Cuban historian Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring told a crowd that it was Wilson’s “ideas . . . that have moved and convinced me to raise my voice in defense precisely of trampled rights and in a demand for justice for a people of America, brother and neighbor to ours.” “How will President Wilson, after having proclaimed . . . the rights of small nationalities,” he added to loud applause, “allow that not in Europe but in his own continent there exist a small nation to which his own government has denied the liberty and sovereignty that he . . . brought to small European nations?” Roig specified that Caribbean nations should be self-interested in their

defense of the Dominican Republic since the rights of all small nations close to the United States were similar and interdependent.³⁰

Henríquez y Carvajal used the remainder of his time in Paris to lobby fellow Latin Americans and there got the idea of a commission to rally support in South America, an idea that came to fruition in 1920.³¹ He also returned to form the Dominican National Commission in New York City, which for the rest of the occupation was instrumental in raising funds in addition to a little hell.³² In the years that followed the war, Dominican and Haitian activists compared themselves with Poland and other trodden nations and repeatedly pointed out Wilson's hypocrisy.³³

The issue of self-determination eventually made its way into negotiations between Dominicans and US diplomats in the 1920s. At one meeting with Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, the American Federation of Labor's president, Samuel Gompers, argued in favor of Dominicans, telling Daniels that the issue of Dominican improvement through US tutelage was irrelevant. "They have the right to self-determination," Gompers insisted.³⁴

Early on it dawned on US occupiers that contradictions abounded in their Circum-Caribbean policy. In March 1919, after meeting with the Haitian minister in Paris, the American mission there advised Washington not "to continue the occupation in the present form, without subjecting the United States to much criticism, particularly, as the rights of smaller nations are being kept to the fore and in the light of the President's utterances."³⁵ Yet it took a new generation of policymakers in Washington to finally respond to entreaties in favor of Latin American self-determination. At the conclusion of the war in Europe, several longtime State Department leaders resigned and a new leadership emerged. In Latin American affairs, Leo S. Rowe and Sumner Welles began to initiate military withdrawals.³⁶ In 1922, Welles negotiated the end of the Dominican intervention. Simultaneously, the United States reorganized the Haitian occupation and oversaw elections in Nicaragua in order to get its troops out.

THE 1930S: DECLINE

In the late 1920s and 1930s, the League was where anti-imperialism went to die. In 1929, some may have been heartened to see Froylán Turcios, the Honduran champion of Nicaraguan anti-intervention insurrectionist Augusto Sandino, become his nation's delegate at the League. But Turcios

sailed for Europe very likely on a promise to stay out of Nicaragua's affairs, and he left no record of his actions in Geneva. Honduras itself left the League in 1936, as did Nicaragua.³⁷ To be sure, the League continued to defend the rights of small nations, and to champion sovereignty and nonintervention. But activity against the US empire in the hemisphere mostly occurred in the Americas. Latin Americans' own diplomatic conferences, at Havana in 1928 and Montevideo in 1933, were far more effective at fighting off US military occupation precisely because US officials attended. These very public protests against US military intervention helped create enough transnational pressure to convince US members of Congress and the State Department to end occupations. But the League of Nations was only marginally part of this process of anti-imperialist liberation. The LN's failure to address Latin American concerns about occupation spoke to its largely Eurocentric orientation, which doomed it as a truly global organization.

NOTES

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CHAPTER TWO

A Dangerous League of Nations

The Abyssinian War and Latin American Proposals
for the Regionalization of Collective Security



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“**L**et us fear . . . large or small, strong or weak, near or far, white or colored people, let us fear one day to be the Ethiopia of someone.”¹ With these words, General Alfred Nemours, the Haitian delegate to the 16th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations (LN, or League), ended his speech on 10 October 1935 and urged member states to assume their responsibilities and to vote for sanctions against Italy following its aggression a few days earlier against Ethiopia. Representative of a small state, the Haitian recalled the fundamental mission of the League as laid down in Article 10 of the covenant that guaranteed the territorial integrity and independence of member states. Article 16 also considered the possibility of economic sanctions or even military actions against states that did not respect this principle.

For Latin American countries, these security guarantees were one of the main reasons for joining the new international organization in 1919 and 1920.² Even if the absence of the United States from the League deprived Latin Americans of the protection of the covenant in their tumultuous relationship with that great northern interventionist power, the collective security system and its legal and underlying moral principles reinforced the role of these states within the international community. Following the Italian aggression, therefore, the defense of small countries such as Ethiopia should have interested Latin American governments. However, with few exceptions, it did not.

If the system of collective security guaranteed rights for its members, it also meant obligations, as in any contractual relationship. Sooner or later, Latin American states could be called upon to intervene in a foreign conflict and even to impose economic or military sanctions against an aggressor state. The Abyssinian war enabled them to realize the cost of these obligations. Many Latin American governments only partially applied the sanctions against Italy that had been voted on in October 1935, if at all. Others, such as Mexico, followed through on their commitments.³ But almost all drew the same conclusion from the episode: such a scenario should never happen again. Some adopted drastic measures, such as withdrawing from the League. Other states advocated reform of the covenant or the establishment of a new continental organization, a sort of league of American nations, to regionalize collective security and to prevent the turmoil of European politics from leading them into new conflicts.

The explanation for the withdrawals of Latin American states from the League between 1936 and 1939 lies not so much in the strengthening of Pan-Americanism caused by the Good Neighbor Policy that would make participation in the League of Nations useless, but in the fear Latin American governments harbored that they would be swept away in a conflict that did not concern them. Meanwhile, the European situation worsened monthly. The LN diplomacy of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Peru was particularly representative of this fear.

MALAISE AND CAUTION

The identity of the aggressor and the complex nature of the relationships that bound Latin American countries to Italy made their position particularly difficult. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Italy had been the starting point of large migration flows to Latin America. In Argentina and Uruguay, governments feared demonstrations by or hostile attitudes from the large Italian community. These turned out not to be an issue.⁴ In other countries, Italians were less numerous but still influential. The Italian community in Peru controlled major industries such as Empresas Eléctricas Asociadas, which enjoyed a monopoly over the power grid of Lima, and Banco Italiano, owned by Italian migrants, was the country's largest bank. Italians belonged to the political and financial elite and could easily influence it by generous grants to major newspapers such as *El Comercio*.⁵

A second reason for Latin American caution in the Abyssinian matter was the fear that too hostile an attitude toward Italy would harm relations with it, which were generally excellent. The Peruvian government felt indebted to the “exceptionally friendly attitude” that Italian diplomats in Geneva had shown in 1933 during negotiations aimed at resolving the conflict between the Andean country and Colombia concerning the territory of Leticia.⁶ Peruvian diplomats defended the revision of the Salomón-Lozano Treaty and therefore the return of the territory of Leticia to Peruvian jurisdiction. Although it was contrary to the inviolability of treaties, the argument met with strong support from the Italian fascist regime, which wanted to revise the Treaty of Versailles.

Cultural proximity motivated some Latin American groups, especially conservatives, to not undermine relations with their Catholic and Latin cousins for the defense of Ethiopians, whom they considered a barbarous, culturally backward people. Finally, a certain attraction to authoritarianism and fascist corporatism reinforced positive feelings for Italy. The anticommunism of Italian leader Benito Mussolini secured the adhesion of Venezuelan President Eleazar López Contreras, who strongly opposed the sanctions against Italy.⁷ But the main obstacle to a firm and decisive application of the sanctions resided in the fear of undermining trade relations with Italy, so important in times of economic depression for mainly exporting countries. Argentine Foreign Minister Carlos Saavedra Lamas synthesized well the mindset of Latin American governments when he called sanctions a “painful sacrifice because of the profound ties between the two countries for almost a century demographically, culturally and economically.”⁸

Most Latin American governments were thus in a dilemma. As Peru’s minister of foreign affairs noted in 1936, on one side were the obligations in the Covenant of the League of Nations. “The honor of the state” and the “prestige of Peruvian diplomacy” depended on Peru following through on sanctions against aggressors. On the other side were “the close historical link” that united Peru to “people of Italy” and “the valuable contribution paid to the country by the Italian colony.” The Chilean government on 9 October 1935 also expressed the pain of fulfilling obligations as a member state against a “nation to which the national economy owed so much” and that had played an important role in the “development of universal and modern culture.”⁹ How then to comply with international commitments and acknowledge the assault made by a large power on a small state yet safeguard good political and trade relations with Italy?

The first strategy was to avoid exposure. Governments were reluctant to take a public stand in what looked like a colonial conflict very distant from the American continent. Peace negotiations initially facilitated this low-profile policy. Following the December 1934 military skirmish between Italian and Ethiopian troops at Wal-Wal, a poorly defined boundary zone, negotiations between Italy and Ethiopia were held outside the framework of the LN. After first refusing, Mussolini finally agreed that the 1928 arbitration treaty between the two countries be applied, with the approval of France and Great Britain, two colonial powers in East Africa anxious to maintain Italy on their side against Nazi Germany. It was not until May 1935 that the council of the League took over the matter but decided to keep conciliation under the 1928 treaty. In July, the council planned to meet on 4 September to address the issue unless the negotiations were successfully concluded in the meantime. Meanwhile, the French and British were offering various plans, all in favor of Italy, which rejected them while making military preparations.¹⁰

The decision of the council in May to intervene had repercussions for Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, the three Latin American nonpermanent members, which might have to take sides. The three governments instructed their representatives to approach the matter with extreme caution. Even the Mexican authorities, so energetic in their defense of the covenant and the application of sanctions, counseled caution.¹¹ On the Argentine side, in July, Saavedra Lamas gave instruction to Enrique Ruiz Guiñazú, minister in Switzerland and representative at the council, to act so as not to “offend Italy,” while defending the principles of sovereignty and nonrecognition of territorial acquisitions achieved by force.¹²

In September, Mexico ended its term on the council, but the situation grew more complicated for Argentines and Chileans. On 4 September, the council appointed a committee of five and instructed them to present a solution to the conflict. Following the Italian rejection of the committee’s peace proposals, the council could only see the failure of the conciliation and at the end of the month recommended an immediate end to any violation of the covenant. In open defiance of the council recommendation, Italy launched a military offensive on 3 October. On 6 October, the council appointed a committee composed of six states, including a reluctant Chile, to analyze this new situation. The next day, the Committee of 6 had no choice but to conclude that Italy had violated the covenant. The council then appealed to the assembly to decide.



Enrique Ruiz Guiñazú, Argentine representative in Switzerland and at the LN's Council in 1935 and 1936. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

The unease felt in Santiago and Buenos Aires was palpable. The Chilean and Argentine representatives, Manuel Rivas Vicuña and José María Cantilo respectively, were both ambassadors in Rome. However, once the council abandoned conciliation and moved toward recommendations and sanctions, they asked to be replaced in order to not jeopardize their relationship with the Italian government.¹³ The new Chilean representative and minister in Switzerland, Luis V. Porto Seguro, refused to participate in the Committee of 6 on the grounds that he had not yet received instructions from his government.¹⁴ For the Argentines, the position was even more difficult because they held the rotating presidency of the council. Saavedra Lamas seemed to regret the seat: "It only serves to complicate our place in the current affairs of Europe, which is more complex every day!"¹⁵

If, until now, only three Latin American states had the opportunity to take part, willingly or unwillingly, in discussions on the conflict, the opening of the session of the assembly in early September, along with the council, had the potential to force those who so far remained silent to take a stand. This



Manuel Rivas Vicuña, Chilean representative at the LN's Council and Ambassador to Rome in 1935 and 1936. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

was especially so since the British government, urged by public opinion, seemed increasingly inclined to favor sanctions against Italy.¹⁶ Only delegates from Honduras, Panama, and Haiti intervened to assert the need for the League to defend small nations against large ones and ask in the name of morality and solidarity that the rules of international law and justice be implemented worldwide. The Haitian delegate added the issue of racial equality to justify intervention on the side of an African state.¹⁷ Other Latin American delegations preferred to abstain, divided between their desires to not harm Italy and to preserve their credibility on the international scene. The Peruvian delegation had received instructions not to do or vote for anything without first consulting the Italian delegate and to serve the interests of Italy without compromising the fundamental principles of Peru's foreign policy.¹⁸ The Chilean delegation was instructed to act in agreement with other Latin American delegations but only if the issue of nonrecognition of conquests obtained by force arose. The Chilean delegate considered a posteriori that it was best not to mention the Abyssinian conflict in his speech to



Jesús María Cantilo, Argentine representative at the LN's Council and Ambassador to Rome in 1935–1936. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

the assembly because “it was impossible to do it without hurting Italy, which would be an anti-political attitude on the part of a country so far from the center of the conflict and which has for it only an interest of principle.”¹⁹ As for the Argentine delegates, they were to refrain from holding any post in the commission and any action related to the conflict.²⁰

Because it was the responsibility of the assembly to decide on sanctions, Latin American delegations had no choice but to take sides. All voted for sanctions because it was difficult to oppose them without both incurring the wrath of Britain and discrediting oneself by contradicting the principles of the covenant. Delegates from Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru explained their vote in plenary. If everyone recognized the merits of the defense of the principles of the covenant to maintain peace, they regretted that it was necessary to adopt coercive measures and hoped that sanctions would be lifted soon. Chile’s Porto Seguro and Peru’s Francisco Tudela also recalled the close ties that existed between their country and Italy. But Porto Seguro, Venezuelan Cesar Zumeta, and Uruguayan Alberto Guani made reference to the likely

difficulties in the application of sanctions. Only Haitian, Mexican, and Bolivian delegates clearly declared themselves in favor of sanctions.²¹

EVADING SANCTIONS

Because member states remained sovereign nations, legally, the League of Nations had no power to compel them to apply the sanctions. The assembly therefore limited itself to expressing the hope that all member states would adhere to the measures. It also voted to set up a coordinating committee responsible for establishing sanctions and verifying their application. The committee quickly adopted four separate measures. The first was an embargo on arms and ammunition to Italy. Latin Americans overwhelmingly approved this measure for the simple reason that it did not concern them directly, none of them having the ability to export weapons. The second measure prohibited loans and credits not only to the Italian government but also to Italians worldwide. This measure was also fairly well accepted because, in general, Latin America was not able to lend to Italy. The third sanction banned all imports from Italy, which would not fail to provoke retaliation from the Italian side. Finally, the last measure prohibited the export to Italy of many raw materials useful to the war effort, such as tin, rubber, manganese, various rare metals, and beasts of burden; a second step proposed including other products as well, such as oil.

Because the last measure would seriously hamper exports to Italy, it provoked strong reactions in Latin America. Discussions were held in the highest spheres: presidential palaces, foreign ministries, and central banks. The Peruvian government thought it had to act with moderation and caution so as to not disrupt trade with Italy.²² In Montevideo, the foreign minister believed that any extreme measure should be rejected.²³ His Chilean counterpart was firmly convinced that the sanctions were a mistake.²⁴ Finally, in Argentina in late September, the situation was clear to Saavedra Lamas: “The government has decided to evade the application of sanctions.”²⁵ As a result, many other governments did everything they could to delay and minimize the application of sanctions.

Quickly the resistance was organized. Governments did not hesitate to inquire about the attitude of neighboring countries and to adopt the same approaches. The first, used by Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, was to rely on assembly decisions made in 1921 regarding economic blockades. In the first

year of the League, a commission studied the application of sanctions laid down in Article 16. From its work had emerged a series of amendments. Member states never adopted them, but the proposals, which the assembly passed unanimously, had a certain legitimacy. Among these proposals was the idea of differing degrees of involvement in economic sanctions based on member states' geography and economic situation. Another question addressed making optional the sanctions for states that would suffer consequences too heavily. Claiming geographical distance and the importance of trade links with Italy, Latin Americans could justify the gentle application of sanctions.²⁶

The second approach aimed at excluding the main export products listed in the fourth sanction. Thus, Argentina and Uruguay immediately declared that under no circumstances would they prohibit the export of grains or meat.²⁷ Chilean delegates insisted that nitrates and copper not be on the list.²⁸ Peruvians defended the export of cotton at the request of Italy, and with the Venezuelans they opposed the oil embargo.²⁹

Legalistic arguments were also made. The Argentine government invoked the respect of its constitution, which guaranteed freedom of trade in the Argentine territory. The constitution also allowed Argentina never to enforce the prohibition of Italian imports; in fact, it forbade the executive from taking such action. Only Congress could do so, but the next session of Congress was scheduled for May 1936 and no one suggested convening a special session.³⁰ Peru and Uruguay resorted to legislation, delaying the adoption of sanctions for several months.³¹

Two additional methods were used to limit the prohibition of Italian imports. The first was to outline a number of exceptions. One Peruvian decree authorized the Ministry of Finance to issue special import licenses to satisfy the needs of the national economy.³² Chile had concluded a clearing agreement with Italy, so the Ministry of Foreign Affairs exempted from the ban any imports meant to service the agreement. Although it was expected that the importation of Italian merchandise would be warranted to the board of control of international exchange, according to the minister of Uruguay in Chile, there was a great distance between theory and practice, which helped Chile good business relations with Italy. The Coordinating Committee asked the member states to suspend existing clearing agreements with Italy, but Chile refused to comply.³³

The second method was to delay the date of entry into application of the sanctions. In Peru, 31 December 1935 was first chosen, then postponed until

31 January 1936, then 20 February. In Chile, the government asked for a sixty-day delay from 18 November. In Ecuador, the government decreed implementing sanctions on 2 February 1936 but suspended it a month later, saying that the situation no longer required such measures.³⁴

It is clear that most Latin American countries—even Bolivia, which was initially somewhat favorable—applied the sanctions against Italy very lightly.³⁵ It was therefore with relief that they received the news of the assembly's decision to lift sanctions in July 1936 after the Italian Army's victory.

TOWARD A REGIONALIZATION OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

Both the requirement for the application of sanctions and their failure provoked negative reactions from Latin American publics and governments. The criticism was not geared toward the inability of the LN to protect a small nation so much as the disadvantages of sanctions and their costs to the national economy. At the assembly in July 1936, several delegates expounded on the will of their government to avoid being again dragged into a distant conflict. Panamanian Galileo Solís criticized the tendency to universalize conflict resolution: “Any attempt to transform a regional conflict into a universal problem can only bring chaos in the relations between states.”³⁶ The Ecuadorian Gonzalo Zaldumbide and the Peruvian Tudela expressed their support for regional agreements that allowed limited responsibilities under the covenant while being more efficient. Thus, distant countries would not have to bear the negative consequences of a conflict over which they had no control.³⁷ In short, regionalization of collective security seemed the ideal solution. Whether in Geneva or in the Americas, the idea won support from most Latin American countries. Only Argentina and Mexico strongly opposed the proposition, believing that strengthening regionalism might give too much influence to the United States.

In January 1936, the president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, proposed an inter-American conference. He wanted to discuss ways to ensure peace in the continent and to strengthen solidarity in the face of extracontinental threats. It was also a way of promoting his Good Neighbor Policy.³⁸ This conference, held in Buenos Aires in December 1936, was the occasion for many Latin American governments to defend the idea of a continental system of collective security. Haiti, Ecuador, El Salvador, Cuba, and Bolivia suggested during the preparatory discussions the establishment of a

permanent continental organization.³⁹ Colombia and the Dominican Republic each presented a detailed project of association or league of American nations modeled on the League of Nations and including various process of conflict resolution such as conciliation, arbitration, and international courts of justice. Unlike the Dominican project, the Colombian considered the use of sanctions against the designated aggressor state. The Colombians also proposed extensive collaboration with the League of Nations, thus demonstrating that the organizations were not incompatible. Finally, both projects met opposition from the great continental powers, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, which rejected any idea of permanent political continental organization.⁴⁰

Guatemala and Chile each proposed a treaty that aimed at strengthening continental solidarity and security. Neither was discussed in Buenos Aires, but the proposals illustrated the various ways to create distance from European affairs. Again, both projects were distinguished by the nature of the relationship they planned with the League of Nations. In its proposed Treaty of Solidarity and Mutual Cooperation, the Guatemalan government, supported by the other Central American states, established a continental system of peacekeeping bearing in mind extracontinental attacks. According to the minister of foreign affairs of Guatemala, the conclusion of this treaty meant the withdrawal from the League of Nations. Guatemala did decide to withdraw from the League in May 1936, followed two months later by Honduras and Nicaragua. These small states of Central America, led by dictatorships very close to the United States, favored the continental route. For the rest of Latin America, however, withdrawal was not yet on the agenda.

The Chilean proposal, handed out to all the Latin American governments and the United States in May 1936, envisioned a treaty to coordinate and complement existing peace treaties. It provided the usual means of maintaining peace, such as conciliation and arbitration, but, given the Ethiopian experience, rejected any notion of sanctions except the suspension of diplomatic relations. Most interesting, it proposed to organize international security around a system of regional agreements. The memorandum presenting the proposal recalled that “the American republics who were members of the League of Nations were obligated to impose on friendly countries, for circumstantial reasons, sanctions contrary to their legal tradition and their permanent interests. Chile did not wish to continue to be exposed to such contingencies, which disturbed fundamentally its political and economic life.” Although the memo confirmed Chile’s intention to remain in the

League of Nations, it also rejected a new continental organization. However, by the conclusion of the proposed treaty, the United States and Latin American states could be part of a regional agreement in accord with Article 21 of the covenant, which accepted the existence of such agreements if they were aimed at peace.⁴¹ The participation of American states in the collective security system established by the League of Nations would thus be limited to the continental area, without possible sanctions, while maintaining membership in the organization. Obviously, the Chilean proposal required an amendment to the covenant.

In July 1936, the assembly decided to launch reflections on the reform of the covenant and asked governments for suggestions. Peru, Panama, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, and Ecuador proposed various reforms to regionalize collective security. For the Peruvian government, the objective was that “in any case American countries currently undergoing political and social evolution, be involved, with an obvious danger to their progress, in adverse situations derived from political causes and factors that are totally foreign.”⁴² The first set of measures aimed at ending the obligation to apply sanctions by a reform of Article 16. Sanctions should be limited to states close to the conflict, gradual, limited to the rupture of diplomatic relations, and not be in any way commercial or military. In order to not universalize conflict resolution, another series of proposals addressed reforming Article 21 and allowing decentralization of the operations of the League through associations or regional agreements that would address issues directly under their jurisdiction.⁴³ With these two sets of measures, Latin Americans would not suffer the deteriorating political situation in Europe.

CONCLUSION

Although previously the concept of collective security remained abstract, with the Abyssinian war and the decision to apply sanctions against Italy, responsibilities for members of the League of Nations suddenly became very real. For Latin American countries, such responsibilities meant jeopardizing their trade relations in times of economic crisis and their traditional friendship with the Alpine country. To limit such negative effects, several Latin American governments expressed reservations and adopted various delaying tactics. In July 1936, the minister of foreign affairs of Chile recognized confidentially that with this strategy the country had been able to maintain

perfectly normal trade relations with Italy.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, this episode had a strong impact on both public opinion and governments, which learned that collective security involved risks and being a member of the League of Nations was not without consequences. Meanwhile, President Roosevelt proposed to strengthen the security of the continent for both internal conflicts and extracontinental threats. Therefore, the question could be asked whether it was still worth maintaining links with Geneva.

Three Central American states answered this question in May and July 1936 by breaking their ties with the League. For the others, diplomatic action was taken in parallel at the League in Geneva and in the Pan-American area in Buenos Aires during the inter-American conference. For some, the solution lay in a new continental organization. For others, a treaty would be enough. The other approach was to reform the covenant to organize collective security based on regional agreements and to weaken sanctions. Withdrawals from the League by Chile, Venezuela, and Peru in 1938 and 1939 were due to the failure of the reform proposals, which denied them guarantees to not be drawn into a European conflict. The improvement of continental relations and the strengthening of the Pan-American movement following conferences in Buenos Aires in 1936 and Lima in 1938 played only a secondary role. The influence of the Ethiopian war also allows us to better understand why, at the San Francisco conference in 1945, Latin American delegations insisted on including in the United Nations Charter the possibility of a regional peacekeeping system.

NOTES

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CHAPTER THREE

Mexico and Its “Defense” of Ethiopia at the League of Nations



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The main objective of this chapter is to present some reflections on the performance of Mexican diplomacy at the League of Nations (LN, or League) during the phase of colonial expansion in Africa that Italian fascism undertook in late 1935. In that case, Mexico found itself forced not only to accept or reject the gradual imposition of sanctions adopted in Geneva against that potential aggressor, but also to protect the respectability it had earned on the international stage as a member of the council of the League from 1932 to 1935. Thanks especially to its role in the Chaco and Leticia conflicts, Mexico had emerged as a member worthy of receiving tasks of the utmost importance.¹ Among these was its leadership of the Study Committee, which analyzed the feasibility of applying a petroleum embargo against Italy, the impact of which would raise a discussion in Mexican public opinion concerning the advisability of the nation’s continued membership in that international organ.

The scant historiography—mostly of a triumphalist tenor—that exists on this topic presents but a partial version of this complex diplomatic episode and, more significantly, engages in oft-repeated factual errors.² In reality, Mexican foreign policy and its associated diplomacy remained on the margins of the collective actions ratified in Geneva during the months of fighting in Africa, and only rose to the “defense” of Ethiopia after it had been conquered and annexed to the new Italian empire.

AN UNEXPECTED CHALLENGE FOR THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS: FASCIST ITALY AGAINST ETHIOPIA

It is well known that Italy joined Europe's quest to colonize Africa quite late and in clearly disadvantageous conditions near the end of the nineteenth century, and that it was responsible for reprehensible attempts to invade Ethiopia.³ Warriors commanded by Menelik II triumphed over Italy's expeditionary forces at Adua in 1896, a battle justly celebrated as the worst defeat of any European power in the history of colonial Africa.⁴ After that, Italy had to settle for its possessions in Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia, the latter two neighbors of the independent empire that passed into the hands of King (Negus) Haile Selassie in 1931.⁵

It is worthwhile to go back in time and examine the dissatisfaction among Italians with respect to the benefits they obtained as an ally in the victory in the 1914 war, however.⁶ Italy expected to receive "equitable compensation" in Africa as payment for its contribution to the war effort, based on the terms of the Treaty of London of 1915. This "mutilated peace" became the first revisionist claim to emerge from this victorious power, even before the ascent of fascism in 1922. Episodes like the 1923 Italian bombardment of Corfu would soon reveal the scant appreciation that Italians felt for the pacifism embodied in the founding of the League of Nations.⁷ Fascism continued its slow evolution until it took the form of the totalitarian dictatorship imposed in the 1930s, determined to return lost prestige to the Italian people. In 1932, Emilio De Bono, the minister for the colonies, broached a plan to wreak vengeance for the rout at Adua. In 1934, De Bono personally entrusted preparations for the attack to Mussolini. Their plan proposed destroying Abyssinia's armed forces and conquering all of Ethiopia.⁸

The first chapter in the Abyssinian crisis occurred on 5 December 1934, when Ethiopian troops skirmished with Il Duce's colonial army around Wal-Wal. That incident would be Mussolini's pretext to launch the conquest of Selassie's empire, an enterprise that glorified his personage and gave Italy's colonial possessions the geographical coherence required to transform the nation into a powerhouse in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Just as Mussolini had anticipated, the events at Wal-Wal were initially deemed by European powers to be a "colonial problem" that could be resolved on the basis of the arbitrary procedures laid out in the Italo-Ethiopian Friendship Treaty of 1928. However, Italian diplomacy insistently rejected that possibility. Despite British efforts to dissuade them, Ethiopia's leaders appealed to

the Council of the League of Nations, based on Article 15 of the pact, in an attempt to force Italy to accept this means of resolving the confrontation. Italian diplomacy acceded to the installation of a mixed arbitration commission, though its real intention was to neutralize the League and leave the way open for Mussolini to carry on preparations for war unencumbered.

In Geneva, France and Great Britain, with the acquiescence of the other council members, forged a dual policy for handling the conflict, one that favored recourse to conciliation (both within the League and outside it) while upholding the Friendship Treaty to pressure both sides. Clearly, the intention of the British and French was to inflict as little damage as possible on their European ally in the context of efforts to contain Nazi Germany. Thus they maneuvered behind the backs of the League and Ethiopia to draft proposals that stipulated territorial concessions to Italy.⁹ Meanwhile, Il Duce’s plans to conquer Ethiopia proceeded apace and were set in motion on 3 October 1935, when Italy invaded.

ETHIOPIA AS A COLONIAL INCIDENT

Because Ethiopia’s pleas for intervention by the League had fallen on deaf ears, in April 1935 Mexico’s representative to the Council of the League of Nations, Marte R. Gómez, asked his foreign minister, Emilio Portes Gil, for general instructions to be followed in the unlikely event that the issue were brought before the organ for discussion at its next extraordinary session, one that France convoked when Germany reinstated compulsory military service.¹⁰ If that eventuality were to occur, came the response, Gómez was authorized to offer aid to Ethiopia in solidarity with a weak country but was firmly ordered not to take any initiative.¹¹ Without mentioning the African conflict explicitly, Mexico’s representative used his time at the League’s podium—planned for an ambiguous condemnation of German violations of postwar agreements—to say that all of the League’s preventive actions must be adopted “without distinction of race or continent,” thus adding one more ambiguity.¹²

At the time, Gómez judged that the “Abyssinian question” could be resolved through the resolutions adopted in late May at a meeting of the council devoted almost entirely to this issue. In this way, at least formally, Ethiopia would no longer be treated as a colonial incident. Italy’s diplomatic intransigence and the substantial buildup of troops and arms in Africa

finally pushed the British government to attempt to resolve the conflict through the League of Nations, thus obliging France to work behind the scenes to convince Italy to reach an accord with Ethiopia that respected the settlement times and conditions established by the council.¹³

Although Gómez had reported, with satisfaction, the council's positive response to Ethiopian demands, he thought that "things seemed too good to be true," especially when rumors began to circulate of a plan to constitute a protectorate in the area around Ethiopia that Italy coveted.¹⁴ He was instructed to abstain from expressing any opinion on European affairs unless freedoms in Ethiopia came under grave threat.¹⁵ In meetings held in late July and early August 1935, the council members from France and England worked on a resolution that might be deemed acceptable, especially by Italy. The other councillors, including Gómez, simply stood by as "representatives in recess," awaiting the Franco-British draft, which they would simply rubber-stamp. The most important resolution in the document was the desire for the parties to continue conciliation and negotiations in the terms set down in the 1928 treaty. However, at the express behest of Mussolini, the document eliminated the commitment not to resort to force of arms while an accord was being hammered out. Thus Italy was free to continue its invasion while the diplomats debated.

Meanwhile, Mexico was preparing its exit from the council, the abstention policy subordinated to the interests of the League's powerhouses that the council had sustained at its most recent sessions notwithstanding. To this end, Marte Gómez was instructed to deliver a farewell discourse that would stress the proactive attitude with which, up to that time, the League had responded to cases of violations of its founding agreement, this in reference to acts committed by "Japan, Germany and Paraguay."¹⁶ Gómez's speech would call attention to the Abyssinian question and the nonrecognition of territorial changes by force, hoping—as always—that Italy would not misinterpret his carefully framed message. Finally, in couched terms, he reminded those present that other countries in the organization were capable of resolving international conflicts.¹⁷ Despite its moderate tone, Gómez's intervention left a sour taste in the mouths of the Italian delegates. Rome proceeded not only to prohibit the diffusion of Gómez's speech, but also to announce that it considered it an act of ingratitude on the part of Mexico. Italy's subsecretary for foreign commerce, Fulvio Suvich, made this judgment known in no uncertain terms to Mexico's ambassador in Rome.¹⁸

ON THE WILLINGNESS TO IMPOSE SANCTIONS

On 3 October 1935, Italy undertook its conquest of Ethiopia by launching attacks from its military bases in Eritrea and Somalia. While the council debated how to proceed, Italian troops avenged their defeat at Adua by bombarding the city nonstop for two days.¹⁹ It was not until 7 October that the League declared that Italy’s acts did indeed violate Article 12 of the pact, but left it to individual members to decide whether to apply the sanctions stipulated in its rigorous Article 16.

Each member of the League was thus obliged to pronounce in favor, or against, implementing sanctions, and to establish a procedure for applying them if their application were eventually ratified. Mexico’s Department of Foreign Affairs (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores) consulted with President Lázaro Cárdenas on the issue before instructing Gómez to consent to applying the first level of sanctions, those of an economic and financial nature, “in the expectation that those extreme measures will allow peace to be achieved and a solution to the conflict reached.”²⁰ The Cárdenas regime would succeed in making the League of Nations into its principal tribunal for presenting and defending the guiding principles—self-determination and nonintervention—of the international conduct of its government before that community. Those tenets would constitute the pillars of Mexico’s position on these and subsequent questions and, at the same time, of the country’s policy in its relations with the rest of the world. Although one might well suspect that certain outside pressures were exerted on this government, especially by US diplomacy, it would be more salient to speak—at least for the initial period of the Good Neighbor Policy—of important coincidences both economic and political related to the decisions concerning the international embargo taken in Geneva as a consequence of the African conflict.²¹ However, this self-defense policy must be placed squarely in context, which obliges one to include in the analysis the limits that a deficient economic performance coupled with growing budget insufficiency may well have imposed on the *cardenista* government. This is to say that conditions of vulnerability allow us to estimate the constraints the country felt with respect to the League’s policy of collective security—with special emphasis on the question of economic sanctions—and evaluate the sacrifice that severing relations with an international market of modest importance, but one clearly in a process of development, would be for Mexico’s economy in particular and other Latin American economies in general. The government of Lázaro Cárdenas

clearly placed a high value on Mexico's membership in the League of Nations, but economic imperatives and the country's urgent need to reorient and redimensionalize its international commercial operations conditioned, to some degree, the direction of its politics and economy. Therefore, with regard to sanctions, this was clearly not the time to play the hero, but neither could the country ignore its commitments to the League's constitution.²²

So, with the exception of those of Italy and three other nations—Albania, Hungary, and Austria—that remained staunchly behind her, all the delegations declared themselves in favor, in general terms, of the council's judgment and the need to sanction Italy. As George Baer observes, "These were great days at Geneva." This, though, he continues, was just the beginning of a process that most of the delegates supported simply because it seemed the general inclination, not because of any deep-seated conviction that it was correct to punish—even collectively—a key European power for its actions toward a country for which few held any sympathy.²³ During the months that followed, many foreign ministries imposed this reading of the situation through purely national interests.

Before a scheduled recess, the president of the 16th Assembly submitted a text for ratification, "expressing his hope" that the members of the League would set up a broad-based committee "to study and facilitate coordination of the measures that the States are attempting to enforce in compliance with Article 16 of the Pact." That group, the Coordinating Committee, met for the first time on 11 October to elect Portugal's representative, Augusto de Vasconcelos, as president and to create a smaller support subcommittee with sixteen members (Argentina was the only representative of the Americas). Counting its Portuguese president, the Coordinating Committee originally had seventeen commissioners, but one more was added when Mexico was issued a special invitation, thanks to its status as a petroleum-producing country. The ulterior motive was to include a "tendency" that counterbalanced Argentina's posture against sanctions.²⁴

MEXICO'S PERFORMANCE IN THE COMMITTEE OF 18

Mexico did indeed represent a Latin American tendency that would back the strict application of the pact, at least judging by its legalistic profile in the organization. It ratified without reserve the decision to apply sanctions

at the time and in the manner that the Coordinating Committee deemed convenient.²⁵

Following a proposal by Great Britain, during the first phase of deliberations the Committee of 18 would evaluate suspending all types of purchases from Italy to significantly reduce its revenues. That suggestion was passed on to the Economic Subcommittee and would later be accepted by the plenum of the Coordinating Committee.²⁶ To bring this first stage of work to an end, on 19 October 1935, the president of the Coordinating Committee was authorized to invite nonmember states to support collective sanctions.

Meanwhile, on 30 October, Congress invested Cárdenas with the power to issue progressive decrees of sanctions against Italy, and he proceeded to sign them that same day.²⁷

Before the second period of sessions was declared closed, Canada asked the Coordinating Committee to consider an embargo on such products as oil, steel, coal, and coke, seconding the positive attitude that the United States had shown to the actions ratified in Geneva.²⁸ This issue was submitted to the Committee of 18, which decided that those products and their derivatives could be added to the list of embargoed goods once the feasibility and efficacy of the measures were demonstrated.²⁹

The Coordinating Committee was expected to take up this matter once the short period spent evaluating the embargo concluded, but, during that lapse, French-British diplomats intensified their direct conversations with Italy. The Hoare-Laval secret plan, made by Britain and France to give two-thirds of Abyssinia to Italy, was formulated at that time and represented, to quote Francisco Quintana, “the final French-British attempt (frustrated by the pressure of public opinion) to distance itself from the conflict . . . against the principle [parties] to the Pact.”³⁰

The Hoare-Laval Plan weakened the system of collective security and questioned—though perhaps only timidly—the need to sanction Italy when not even the main powers in the League were genuinely disposed to do so. In many countries, including Mexico, the whole matter was brought up for debate once again in terms that could be expressed quite simply: Why confront a friendly country because of problems with a nation we don’t even know?

In an attempt to bring the crisis to an end, the council on 19 December resolved to ignore the Franco-British formula, stipulating instead the creation of a conciliating committee, to be called the Committee of 13.³¹ After that, the Committee of 18 met to inform all concerned that the measures

would continue to be enforced, thus opening a new phase of sanctions that included assessing a possible embargo on petroleum sales as it was planned.

MEXICO AS PRESIDENT OF THE PETROLEUM COMMITTEE

On 22 January 1936, the Committee of 18 ratified the formation of a technical committee that would report on the conditions that governed the production, commerce, and transport of petroleum and its derivatives, with a view to resolving the issue of the pending embargo.³² That same day, Gómez was confidentially informed of his participation on the committee even before his government received the formal invitation (on 24 January) to attend the first meeting, scheduled for 3 February.³³

The clear willingness of the Cárdenas government to enforce the pact was a determining factor in Gómez's being named president of the organ that came to be called the Petroleum Committee.³⁴ Under his direction, members decided to create two support subcommittees for provisioning and consumption and for transport. By the time of its third session, the Petroleum Committee presented some important conclusions: first, production in Italy and Albania—the latter under Italian control—was negligible; and, second, stocks in Italy would be used up in a year. On the basis of these findings, Gómez affirmed that the petroleum embargo would suffice to put a stop to Italy's designs.³⁵

Finally, on 12 February 1936, after nine more days of work, the Petroleum Committee stated in its final report—presented as a series of findings—that the oil embargo would indeed be an efficacious measure and that its implementation was viable.³⁶ As France and Great Britain had already voted to approve the report, the next step was for its conclusions to be accepted by the Committee of 18, which was convoked to decide the issue on 2 March. That meeting never took place because the French and British decided not to institute any stronger measures against Italy in light of the German question, which was about to rear its ugly head once again in the remilitarization of the Rhineland.

For the most powerful members of the League, the Petroleum Committee's conclusions were of a clearly deterrent character, designed to force Italy to accede to conciliation. Nonetheless, it is necessary to mention the ongoing changes in Mexico's diplomatic mission in Geneva from its "expectant



Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie at the Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly (Part Two), 30 June–4 July 1936. The Mexican delegation is three rows behind.
Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

silence” to its “defense” of Ethiopian sovereignty after the constitution of the new Italian empire.

While awaiting the meeting of the Committee of 18, Gómez advised the Mexican Foreign Ministry to wait patiently for events to develop and, meanwhile, to act with great prudence. Despite its antifascist rhetoric, the Mexican government had no intention of doing anything else, much less something heroic.³⁷

However, in April 1936, the waiting had become unbearable, and Mexico’s leaders were moved to protest the virtual suspension of the Committee of 18’s activities on the grounds that suspension could only work to Italy’s advantage on the field of battle.³⁸

By protesting, Mexico assumed a position that Italy would interpret as ultrasanctionist, though the possibility that sanctions would be adopted

again was remote. Il Duce's army defeated what was left of Ethiopia's armed forces, demoralized by Selassie's escape to Europe, and entered Addis Ababa triumphantly on 5 May 1936.³⁹ The Ethiopian campaign marked a double victory for Italy—over the Ethiopian army and over the nations that favored imposing sanctions. Given what appeared to be a fait accompli, the countries meeting in Geneva opted to tear down the edifice of sanctions they had built.

In the days that followed, Cárdenas instructed his new representative in Geneva, Narciso Bassols, to vote in favor of continuing the embargo and against recognizing Italy's annexation of Ethiopia. Speaking before the assembly on 3 July, Bassols outlined the posture of the Mexican government, though only until the general vote, when the Mexican delegation walked out of the hall in an apparent protest before the sanctions were lifted, though its real intention was to not impede the wishes of the majority.⁴⁰

It would be easy to conclude that Mexican diplomacy abandoned Ethiopia to its fate at the very last moment. More relevant is to ask whether until that time the government of Mexico had ever really supported Ethiopia, as is so often adduced. Resolving this question requires making a distinction between, on the one hand, Mexico's defense of the League of Nations and its accords, and, on the other, its defense of Ethiopia. This would lead one to conclude that until that moment, but only indirectly, Mexico's foreign policy had defended the African country. However, the clearest Mexican actions in defense of Ethiopia's sovereignty only took place once that nation's territory had been annexed. For instance, at the extraordinary assembly in May 1937 and then in 1939 Mexico evaded two attempts to erase Ethiopia from the list of the member states of the League of Nations.⁴¹

For a more detailed examination of Mexico's "defense" of Ethiopia, see Fabián Herrera León, *México en la Sociedad de Naciones, 1931–1940* (Mexico City: SRE, 2014), 235–79.

NOTES

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2. For examples, see Fernando Serrano Migallón, *Isidro Fabela y la diplomacia mexicana* (Mexico City: FCE-SRE, 1981); and Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, comp., *Narciso Bassols: Pensamiento y acción* (Mexico City: FCE, 1995).

3. Serge Bernstein and Pierre Milza, *Histoire du XXe siècle: La fin du monde européen, 1900–1945* (Paris: Hatier, 1996), 356.
4. Geoffrey Bruun, *La Europa del siglo XIX (1815–1914)* (Mexico City: FCE, 2005), 173.
5. It is paradoxical that in 1923 Italy would sponsor Ethiopia’s admission to the League of Nations, on the condition that the African country promise to abolish slavery in all its forms, and human trafficking by sea and land. On this topic, see R 1454, dossier “Admission of Ethiopia,” League of Nations Archives (hereafter LNA); Antoinette Iaradola, “Ethiopia’s Admission into the League of Nations: An Assessment of Motives,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 4 (1975): 601–22; and Jean Allain, “Slavery and the League of Nations: Ethiopia as a Civilised Nation,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 8 (2006): 213–44.
6. J. L. Brierly (member of Great Britain’s Foreign Research and Press Service), “Memorandum on the Causes of the Failure of the League,” Foreign Research and Press Service, Oxford, 11 January 1943, Foreign Office Archives (hereafter FO) 371/34513, National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK).
7. See Michel Marbeau, *La Société des Nations* (Paris: Puf, 2001), 65–67.
8. On the planning and execution of the conquest, see Emilio de Bono, *Anno XIII: The Conquest of an Empire* (London: Cresset Press, 1937); George W. Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia and the League of Nations* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), 12–19; and George W. Baer, “Leticia and Ethiopia Before the League,” in *The League of Nations in Retrospect* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), 285–87.
9. José Luis Neila Hernández, *La Sociedad de Naciones* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1997), 69; and Baer, “Leticia and Ethiopia,” 286.
10. Emilio Portes Gil to Marte Gómez, Mexico, 1 January 1935, 29-1-15, Archivo Histórico “Genaro Estrada” de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México (hereafter AHGE-SRE); Gómez to Portes Gil, Paris, 28 February 1935, Reserved no. 17 “Presentación de credenciales,” 29-1-15, AHGE-SRE; and Gómez to Foreign Affairs, Paris, 8 April 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
11. Foreign Affairs to Delegamex Paris, Mexico, 9 April 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
12. “Eighty-Fifth (Extraordinary) Session of the Council,” *Official Journal* 16, no. 5, Geneva, May 1935, 560.
13. Gómez to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 30 May 1935, Reserved no. 40 “86 Reunión del Consejo de la SDN,” III-495-1 (I), AHGE-SRE.
14. Gómez to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 30 May 1935, Reserved no. 40 “86 Reunión del Consejo de la SDN,” III-495-1 (I), AHGE-SRE.
15. Gómez to Foreign Affairs, Paris, 19 July 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE; Foreign Affairs to Delegamex Paris, Mexico, 22 July 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
16. Foreign Affairs to Delegamex Paris, Mexico, 28 August 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.

17. Speech by Marte Gómez at the 88th Council of the League of Nations (September 1935), in “Libro Blanco,” III-2470-4, AHGE-SRE. The transcript of the speech can be found at Herrera León, *México en la Sociedad de Naciones*, 407–8.
18. Vasconcelos to Foreign Affairs, Rome, 12 September 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
19. On the excesses and violations of international conventions on war during the Italy-Ethiopia conflict, see Richard Pankhurst, “Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: A History of Their Discussion, from the League of Nations to the United Nations (1936–1949),” *Northeast African Studies* 6, no. 1–2 (1999): 83–140.
20. Foreign Affairs to Gómez, Mexico, 9 October 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
21. Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 15, 43–44.
22. On Mexican economic difficulties of these years, see Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt*, 15, 24–26.
23. Baer, *Test Case*, 6.
24. It was the Uruguayan functionary, Julián Nogueira, who promoted, and insisted on including Mexico in the smaller committee, in talks with the general secretary, Joseph Avenol, and the director of the political section, Francis P. Walters, due to the “unique tendency” Argentina represented. Julián Nogueira to Walters, Geneva, 12 October 1935, R 3666, dossier 20249, LNA.
25. Foreign Affairs to Delegamex Geneva, Mexico, 21 October 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
26. This subcommittee was made up of Great Britain, France, the USSR, Poland, Spain, Canada, Holland, Sweden, Switzerland, Argentina, Belgium, Turkey, and Rumania. See Société des Nations: Comité des dix-huit, “Procès-verbal provisoire de la quatrième séance,” Geneva, 14 October 1935, R 3565, dossier 20307, LNA.
27. Foreign Affairs to Delegamex, Mexico, 31 October 1935, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE. The decrees on prohibiting exports of the items specified by the Coordinating Committee, the ban on authorizing direct and indirect credits or loans to the Italian government, and the prohibition on exporting arms, munitions, and war materiel to Italy appeared in the *Diario Oficial* on 7 November 1935, pages 101–5.
28. The secretary of state, Cordell Hull, stated that his government had adopted a unilateral policy of neutrality—a neutrality law ratified by Congress prohibited all shipments of arms, munitions, and war materiel to the warring parties—but also declared that the United States was monitoring the measures adopted by the League to stop the war with interest and concern.
29. Vicente Estrada Cajigal, member of the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations, to Gómez, Geneva, 6 November 1935, “Conflicto Italia-Etiopía: aplicación sanciones,” 35-1-1 (II), AHGE-SRE.

30. Francisco Quintana Navarro, *España en Europa, 1931–1936: Del compromiso por la paz a la huida de la guerra* (Madrid: Nerea, 1993), 295.
31. The Committee of 13, which included all the members of the council except Italy, mainly examined the feasibility of continuing to act exclusively through conciliation. In their conclusions, they not only observed that it was impossible to present a conciliation project in the current state of the conflict, but also considered it inappropriate, first, to send a study commission to document the evolution of hostilities and, second, to offer financial aid to Ethiopia based on a convention not yet formally implemented.
32. To determine whether the petroleum embargo would be efficacious, the “Committee of Experts on Petroleum Commerce and Transport” had to ascertain, as far as possible, the following: (1) Italy’s consumption (including colonies) of all types of petroleum products, separating normal uses from those involving military operations; (2) the sources of Italian supplies; (3) an estimate of Italian reserves; (4) the means of transportation that Italy could use to supply petroleum; and (5) Italy’s possibilities to replace petroleum with another fuel. The members of this committee were France, Great Britain, Iraq, Iran, Mexico, Norway, the Low Countries, Peru, Rumania, and the USSR. Venezuela was an observer because, like Argentina, which refused to join the committee, it argued that it had no petroleum experts in Europe. Gómez to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 14 February 1936, Reserved no. 6 “Comité del Petróleo” en el Conflicto ítalo-etíope,” 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
33. Gómez to Foreign Affairs, Geneva, 22 January 1936, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE; Gómez to Foreign Affairs, Paris, 24 January 1936, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
34. The separate minutes of the work of this “Comité créé en vue de procéder à un examen technique des conditions régissant le commerce et le transport du pétrole et de ses dérivés, sous-produits et résidus” from its first session, in R 3681, dossier 22392, LNA. For a recent biographical study on Gómez, see Michael A. Ervin, “Marte R. Gómez of Tamaulipas: Governing Agrarian Revolution,” in *State Governors in the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1952: Portraits on Conflict, Courage, and Corruption*, ed. Jürgen Buchenau and William H. Beezley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 123–38.
35. Gómez to Foreign Affairs, Geneva, 7 February 1936, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
36. On the *rapport* of the Petroleum Committee, see League of Nations: Coordinating Committee, “Rapport du Comité des experts pour l’examen technique des conditions régissant le commerce et le transport du pétrole et ses dérivés, sous-produits et résidus,” Geneva, February 12, 1936, Unofficial: Coordinating Committee 113, in R 3681, dossier 22392, LNA.
37. Foreign Affairs to Delegamex Paris, Mexico, 9 March 1936, 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
38. After the Petroleum Committee delivered its report, the conciliatory approach of the Committee of 13 had allowed the Italian Army to make several important

- conquests and defeat most of Ethiopia's forces, including the imperial army that guarded the road to Addis Ababa. On the evolution of the Italian campaign, see Leopoldo Ortiz to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Rome, 11 May 1936, "Se remite informe político," 35-1-1 (III), AHGE-SRE.
39. Narciso Bassols to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, London, 23 April 1936, "Informe sobre las actividades recientes de la Sociedad de Naciones respecto del conflicto italo-etíope," 35-1-1 (IV), AHGE-SRE.
 40. "Discurso pronunciado el 3 de julio de 1936 por el C. Licenciado Narciso Bassols ante la Sociedad de Naciones," Geneva, 3 July 1936, 35-1-1 (IV), AHGE-SRE; Seizième session ordinaire de l'Assemblée de la Société des Nations: Communication de la délégation des Etats-Unis du Mexique," Geneva, 3 July 1936, A.86.1935/36, 35-1-1 (X), AHGE-SRE.
 41. On this topic, see Isidro Fabela, *Cartas al presidente Cárdenas* and *La política internacional del presidente Cárdenas* (Mexico City: Instituto de Cultura Mexiquense-El Colegio de México, 1994), 232–34; and Manuel Tello to the secretary of foreign affairs, "Eliminación de Etiopía de la lista de contribuyentes de la Sociedad de Naciones," Geneva, 3 October 1939, III-493-1, AHGE-SRE.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nonintervention through Intervention

Mexican Diplomacy in the League of Nations
during the Spanish Civil War



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That September morning of 1937 was not the first time Isidro Fabela had walked the short distance from his home, in Geneva's district of Les Pâquis near the Cornavin train station, to the seigniorial Avenue de France on the shores of Lac Leman. There stood the imposing building of the League of Nations (LN, or League). Entrusted with the delicate mission of coordinating Mexico's return to the European diplomatic arena in Geneva and advancing Mexico's new revolutionary foreign policy, Fabela, Mexico's ambassador to the League, would play a significant role in the drama unfolding in Geneva as the international order of the period between the wars unraveled in the late 1930s.

In the months that followed Spanish General Francisco Franco's insurrection in Morocco on 18 July 1936, Mexican diplomats conceived and advanced a campaign in Geneva and other European capitals in almost complete isolation from the League's other member countries, to defend the beleaguered government of the Second Spanish Republic, which was then under attack by domestic and foreign armies. In the context of 1936 Europe, as the Western democracies, led by Britain and France, struggled to find an answer to the challenges posed by Italian and German fascism, Spain emerged as a fundamental piece on the interwar European chessboard.

Mexico's diplomatic defense of Republican Spain in Geneva and the welcoming of thousands of Spanish immigrants fleeing Spain after 1938 were

two of the most significant actions the Mexican government took in international relations during the 1930s, but they comprised only one aspect of President Lázaro Cárdenas's foreign policy.¹ Other facets included Mexico's negotiations with foreign oil companies on property rights, with international bankers about Mexico's foreign debt, and with the United States on a number of bilateral issues.² These facets of Cárdenas's foreign policy had the ultimate objective of reinserting Mexico into the political and economic international order of the 1930s and its prominent organizations, such as the League of Nations, thus putting an end to Mexico's post-1914 absence from major international venues. This absence had been caused by the socialist-influenced ideology of Mexico's post-Revolutionary governments.³

From the point of view of politicians in Madrid, Mexican diplomacy in Geneva was especially important: Mexico's arguments on the proper treatment of the Spanish war in the League were legally solid and could potentially alter the Great Powers' position on neutrality in the Spanish conflict. Cárdenas's strategy centered on convincing British and French officials, who were at the helm of the League's powerful council, to alter their interpretation of two fundamental principles of international law: neutrality and non-intervention. For Britain and France, the war in Spain was an internal conflict, a civil war, for which the League's pact prescribed strict neutrality. In contrast, Mexico's position held that, when a legitimately constituted member government was under attack by armies supported by foreign countries, the League's covenant required intervention.⁴

To advance these foreign policy objectives in the LN, Cárdenas sent to Europe two of his closest advisors—Narciso Bassols in 1936 and Fabela in 1937. Together they articulated a strategy to defend Republican Spain based on what became the core principles of Mexico's post-Revolutionary foreign policy: self-determination, respect for a state's territorial integrity, the rule of law, and nonintervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign country.⁵ Following specific instructions from Cárdenas, Bassols and Fabela prepared a series of documents and speeches that carefully outlined Mexico's legal arguments concerning the LN's response to the Spanish conflict.

Mexico's diplomacy in the LN regarding the Spanish Civil War was exceptional because Mexico alone among Latin American countries argued that the Great Powers were obligated by the League's covenant to intervene in the Spanish conflict. Standing up to the Great Powers was a difficult and bold position for Mexico, a relatively weak country and an outsider in

European diplomatic circles, to take. To complicate matters further, Mexico's interpretation of neutrality and nonintervention evolved into a set of policy proposals for the LN that appeared to contradict Mexico's long-standing defense of nonintervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. British and French diplomats seized on this apparent inconsistency to reaffirm their neutrality policy. However, a careful examination of the sources reveals that there was no contradiction in Mexico's analysis of the war in Spain. Also, as Mexican diplomats anticipated, neutrality and nonintervention became the crux of the debate in Geneva not only over the Spanish Civil War, but also over the coming of World War II in 1939.

EARLY STAGES OF MEXICO'S NONINTERVENTION POLICY, 1935–1936

With the exception of the Soviet Union, European countries locked step behind Britain and France in support of strict neutrality in the Spanish conflict, and the Latin American countries followed suit. This trend in Latin America reflected a growing sympathy for Franco's Nationalist camp given the Spanish Republican government's association with the Soviet Union, which made the rulers of these oligarchic Latin American republics uneasy. According to historian Lois Elwyn Smith, "The Latin American states, other than Mexico, generally favored Franco. The readiness of most Latin American states to abandon the Spanish Republic was demonstrated in the alacrity with which they recognized the government of General Franco. At least three (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua) did so in 1936; seven others (Peru, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay), before Franco's proclamation of victory on March 29, 1939; and Colombia and Panama on April 1, 1939."⁶

Most Latin American republics were also ideologically closer to Franco's discourse of *hispanidad*—a community of Spanish-speaking nations led by a Spanish Catholic monarchy—than to the social democratic ideas of Republican Spain. In August 1937, the Uruguayan delegation proposed to bring to the League's assembly an initiative to mediate in the Spanish conflict by granting recognition to both sides. Mexican and Spanish officials promptly turned down his proposal because it would grant military and political rights to Franco's rebels equal to those of the legitimate Spanish government.⁷

Early in his presidency (1934–1940), Lázaro Cárdenas began articulating a foreign policy for Mexico rooted in the nationalist ideology of the 1917 Mexican Revolution: a blend of classical liberalism, socialism, and native communalism. This foreign policy was part of a larger effort at nation-building by Mexico's post-Revolutionary political class, an endeavor that required redefining Mexico's insertion into the world order of the 1930s. Cárdenas aimed at eliminating foreign control of the country's natural resources, which had produced not only foreign debt but also economic dependency.⁸ In this context, Cárdenas and Fabela coincided in assigning great importance to both the LN and events in faraway Spain. They feared a *franquista* victory could derail the *cardenista* project in Mexico, because a conservative victory in Spain risked encouraging Mexican conservatives to undertake hostile actions against the Cárdenas administration.⁹

One of the first salvos of Mexico's diplomatic offensive in the League of Nations came early in 1935. On 8 September, Cárdenas, speaking at the seventh annual meeting of the Scientific American Association in Mexico City, reaffirmed Mexico's loyalty to the principles of the Geneva Pact and to international collaboration and peace. Cárdenas asserted that force, far from being a legitimate way to resolve international differences, must be considered a shameful remnant of a primitive social state.¹⁰

In spring 1937, Italian and German military interventions in the Spanish conflict increased substantially in contrast to the limited support the Soviet Union and Mexico provided to the Republic.¹¹ Evidence mounted that Italian troops and German warplanes were fighting alongside the Falange Espanola, the fascist paramilitary organization.¹² The Falange, under Franco, served as *franquista* storm troops, which fought arm in arm with Italian *legionarios* despite Italian leader Benito Mussolini's repeated denials to the League's council. That the British believed Mussolini's claims is dubious, given that throughout 1937 Julio Alvarez del Vayo, the Spanish foreign affairs minister, made no fewer than twenty reports to the council documenting Italian and German incursions into Spain.¹³

From the beginning, Spain's Republican government found itself almost completely isolated. British and French officials had strong concerns that Spain and the Spanish Left would advance the Soviet Union's goal of a proletarian revolution in Europe. Although the Soviet Union did provide the lion's share of military and economic assistance to the Spanish Republic, it was Mexico who rallied to Spain's side diplomatically, providing the legal argument to end the blockade of Spain's Republican government.¹⁴ In the

United States, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, despite initial hesitation, also embraced nonintervention. In March 1937, the US Congress passed the Spanish Civil War Neutrality Act, which prohibited American military exports to Spain as well as the transfer of weapons and military supplies by third parties to either side in the Spanish conflict.¹⁵

British and French officials were unsure of the extent to which their country's substantial economic interests in Spain would be affected by the policies of the Popular Front's government in Spain, whose economic program included agrarian reform and nationalization of strategic industries. They responded by creating, on 9 September 1936, the Non-Intervention Committee, also called the Committee of London. Not part of the League of Nations, this committee would nevertheless coordinate an international effort to quarantine the Spanish conflict and enforce nonintervention. Operating independently, it could elude obligations imposed by the LN pact. The committee had two objectives: to stop all commerce in arms with Spain and to supervise the withdrawal of all foreign combatants, on both sides of the conflict, from Spanish territory. France then closed her Pyrenees border, and French and British ships of the line began patrolling the Spanish coastline.¹⁶

The summer of 1936 found Bassols crafting a speech he would deliver to the League's assembly on 2 October, a month after the founding of the Committee of London. The written version of the speech became a blueprint for Mexican diplomacy in Geneva regarding Spain in the years that followed. This document for the first time captured for a European audience the essence of Mexico's view of the Spanish conflict.¹⁷ Bassols was an intellectual, a lawyer, a prominent member of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM), and a politician whose contribution to nation-building in Mexico was highly significant though not well known.¹⁸

Bassols and Genaro Estrada, who was foreign secretary in the 1920s, were colleagues of Fabela's in the Mexican Foreign Service in the 1930s. Together, the three men had established the nonintervention principle in several Pan-American conferences as one of the central tenets of Mexico's gradual return to the international arena after the Mexican Revolution. With the exception of hemispheric gatherings, the country had not participated in international organizations for nearly twenty years—until 1931, when Mexico was admitted to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the LN.¹⁹

On 1 September 1936, just over six weeks after the franquista rebellion, and on the occasion of his annual address to the Mexican Congress, Cárdenas

outlined his position regarding Spain. The conservative Mexico City newspaper *Excélsior* reported on 8 September that the president acknowledged having sold arms to the Spanish Republican government and had expressed solidarity with the struggle against international fascism. Cárdenas justified Mexico's policies with the argument that Spain was a League member suffering foreign intervention, and thus was entitled to the League's support.²⁰

Bassols's speech of 2 October 1936 to the 17th Assembly of the LN expressed Mexico's concern that the clash of national interests among member countries (in cases such as the Chaco War, Mussolini's intervention in Ethiopia, or the war in Spain) had paralyzed the LN, and warned of a loss of faith in the organization's ability to achieve collective security. Bassols proposed to reactivate the League to take action in support of those who had a right to the League's assistance and to sanction the aggressors. In his speech, Bassols asserted that the Republican government was the only legitimate representative of the people of Spain, elected in a free election; that Mexico considered the Committee of London and the policies of neutrality misguided and out of compliance with the LN pact; and that Mexico requested that the Spanish conflict be brought within the framework of the League of Nations.²¹

FABELA ON NEUTRALITY AND NONINTERVENTION

When Fabela arrived in Paris in early March 1937, Bassols awaited him with a letter for Fabela from Cárdenas. That letter, dated 17 February, contained Cárdenas's detailed thoughts on neutrality and nonintervention. Bassols and Fabela pored over the letter, in which Cárdenas expressed the following:

It is in our interest to show without ambiguity that the Mexican attitude in relation to Spain is not in contradiction to the "non-intervention" principle. . . . Certain nations of Europe hide behind the nonintervention policy to refuse aid to the Spanish government legitimately constituted. Mexico cannot embrace this view, because noncollaboration with the constitutional authorities of a friendly nation is, in practice, indirect support—though no less effective for that reason—for the rebels who are threatening the legitimate regime which those authorities represent. That constitutes, in fact, one of the subtler forms of intervention.²²

Bassols and Fabela, acting on the president's instructions, concluded that the British position on nonintervention could not be legally sustained, and so offered an alternative line of argument: nonintervention was one aspect, among others, of a broader neutrality policy in accordance with the League's pact. This neutrality policy would take effect only in cases of internal or civil wars. On this point, Cárdenas was firm:

When Mexico adhered to the League of Nations' Covenant, we took its generous provisions very seriously, because one of the most important conquests in international law is the establishment of a clear separation between States which have been victims of an aggression, to which all necessary moral and material support ought to be afforded, versus aggressor States, for which a regime of economic, financial, and other sanctions is imposed. The justification for this difference is even more evident in the struggle between the constitutional power of a State and rebels from a faction supported—as is the case in Spain—by elements foreign to the life and political traditions of the country.²³

In 1937, both Bassols and Fabela faced British accusations of hypocrisy: if these Mexican delegates posed nonintervention as the central element in relations between countries, how was it that Mexico now opposed the League's nonintervention policy in Spain and wanted to abolish the Committee of London? And how was it that Mexico was sending money, arms, and materiel to the Spanish Republican government against its own doctrine of nonintervention?²⁴

According to Fabela's papers, on 22 May 1937, Fabela met in his Geneva home with Luis Jiménez de Asúa, Spain's representative in Prague, to co-ordinate Mexico's actions in Geneva with those of the Spanish Republican government. Fabela was anxious to hear why Spanish officials in the League had accepted the *política absurda* of nonintervention of Britain and France. This was "a grave error," Fabela told Jiménez de Asúa. "I reminded him that when Spanish President Manuel Azaña had, in his speech in Valencia on January 21, 1937, officially subscribed to such an agreement, Spain voluntarily renounced the rights the Geneva Pact provides its members through articles 10 and 11." Jiménez de Asúa responded that his government had been pressured to do so because, as they were told by the Great Powers, "it is convenient for international peace."²⁵

To Fabela's surprise, the Spanish diplomat related his conversation with France's prime minister, Léon Blum, an account that showed that, had there been no British threat, France would have supported the Spanish Republic. Blum at first appeared to sympathize with the Spanish Republican cause. His government, like that of Spain, had won elections supported by Popular Front coalitions, and at the start of the Spanish war, Blum had had no qualms about assisting the Republican government.²⁶

Fabela's notes reveal Blum's personal views as well as the enormous pressures exerted on Blum to keep France neutral. In August 1936, right after the franquista uprising, Madrid, through Jiménez de Asúa, asked French officials for immediate delivery of a large purchase of weapons previously agreed upon in a 1935 commercial treaty between the two governments. The French government was bound by treaty to supply the armaments. Blum's government, however, supported by a fragile coalition of left-of-center forces and, under pressure from the French press and from Britain to maintain neutrality, hesitated and suspended the delivery.²⁷

The main dissenting voice in Blum's cabinet was that of Édouard Daladier, minister of war.²⁸ Because of Daladier's influence, the weapons remained stored in Marseille. Finally, after weeks of telegrams, letters, and high-level conversations among French, Spanish, and LN officials, Blum urgently summoned Jiménez de Asúa, who had been acting as liaison in Paris between the two governments, to his private domicile. Jiménez de Asúa told Fabela that, at a very early hour, he was received directly in Blum's bedroom, and thought, "most peculiar," when he saw Blum in his pajamas and robe. Blum's face was contorted with an anguished look. As soon as the Spanish diplomat walked in, Blum, crying like a child, said, "We are dishonored, my situation is terrible. I have called you here to tell you that France cannot hand over arms to Spain; . . . yesterday the British ambassador in Paris came to tell me categorically that, if the French government delivered weapons to the Spanish government, England would maintain an absolute neutrality in any conflict that might arise." According to Fabela, Jiménez de Asúa froze and Blum, who had not slept all night, moaned, "They will say that I am a dishonorable Jew and they will be right, but I cannot launch my nation into an adventure that could give rise to another terrible tragedy. France cannot operate alone in Europe's international politics; it must agree with Great Britain."²⁹ In the end, the French leader acquiesced to the call for nonintervention, even though, as he acknowledged to the Geneva newspaper *Journal des Nations*,

France knew that nationalist rebels were using Lisbon as a port of entry for their weapons, despite the Non-Intervention Committee resolutions.³⁰

With the establishment of the Non-Intervention Committee, the Great Powers found a legal formula to keep the Spanish war out of the LN and avoid the obligations that the League's covenant imposed. In his 20 September 1937 speech to the LN, Fabela declared, "My government, in view of this year's events, considers the policy of subtracting fundamental peace issues from the League's jurisdiction a very dangerous one, a policy which hides reality with a fiction instead of valiantly addressing the problems. We want to believe that the spirit that led to the creation of a committee outside the LN was inspired by the desire to avoid a world confrontation that could have been unleashed . . . if the Pact's provisions had been strictly applied."³¹ Fabela quoted Manuel Azaña, president of the Second Spanish Republic, as saying, "the only effective nonintervention in this case has been the nonintervention of the League of Nations. The Committee is founded on a false premise and functions on an error, because it cannot substitute for the League; the Committee does not replace the League but puts it to sleep with a narcotic."³² "Who can, or even better, who should intervene in this crisis of morality and international law to return to a situation of justice and respect for the Pact?" asked Fabela rhetorically. "Only one institution: the League of Nations, which because of its specific objectives has the authority and the duty, according to its statutes, to exercise its influence and its actions there where peace is altered."³³

Fabela emphasized that from Mexico's perspective, and in line with the League's pact, Mexico's aid to the Spanish Republic constituted not an intervention, but an obligation. The Committee of London, on the other hand, Fabela argued, was intervening *de facto* against Spain's constitutional government by preventing it from acquiring the materials needed for its defense. Shortly after his arrival in Geneva, Fabela sent a note to the LN secretary general outlining the legal basis for Mexico's defense of the Spanish Republic: Articles X and XI of the League's pact and the 1928 Convention on the Rights of States in Event of Civil Strife (Inter-American).³⁴

Mexican diplomats had developed a definition of nonintervention distinct from the Anglo-French interpretation and stemming from a century of Great Powers meddling in Mexico's internal affairs. In contrast to the Anglo-French powers, Mexico had been on the receiving end of colonialism, which produced a more nuanced perspective on nonintervention: each conflict was



Plenary session of the Eighteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, 13 September–6 October 1937. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

to be dealt with on its own terms, rather than with a broad application of the law.

In Fabela's view, British support for nonintervention in Spain owed more to concerns about Britain's foreign trade and investments—which British diplomats calculated would fare better under a Franco government—than to enforcing the Geneva Pact and protecting the Spanish Republic. Along those lines, in the summer of 1937, Fabela reported to Cárdenas:

The failure of the Non-Intervention Committee [to stop the flow of weapons to the franquista side] made Britain and France draw up a new plan formulated by Britain's Foreign Secretary, Mr. Anthony Eden, a plan which, in my judgment, is transcendental because it demonstrates the British government's intentions to help General F. Franco, thus provoking the defeat of the legitimate Spanish government. . . . The proposal of recognizing the rebels, alone, and with

that granting them rights, is an indication of these intentions which, coming from the United Kingdom, are understandable, as the taking of Bilbao by the rebels is of much interest to the English, who have to maintain good relations with whatever government *de facto* possesses the mining territory of Vasconia, from where many British industries are supplied, especially with iron.³⁵

Shortly before his speech to the League's assembly in September 1937, Fabela became convinced of the need to challenge the Non-Intervention Committee directly. A recognition of belligerency status of a group by an outside power grants certain rights, such as the right to purchase weapons in foreign markets, or to have recognized envoys in other countries.³⁶

The problem for Mexican diplomats became how to justify, before the LN, Mexico's going even further than Spain in opposing the nonintervention policy and the Committee of London. For the Spanish authorities, it was of dire importance to maintain good diplomatic relations with France and Great Britain, upon whose aid Spain depended for survival. Fabela learned firsthand from Manuel Azaña, the Spanish Republic's president from 1936 to 1939, that Spain had no alternative but to work with the Committee of London: "To limit the war, the Republic's government has accepted sacrifices regarding its rights."³⁷

In 1937, Fabela realized how isolated Mexico was in the LN as a result of its posture on the Spanish war, and the repercussions this isolation could have upon the cardenista project back in Mexico. Cárdenas's project of economic development required markets for Mexican exports and foreign investments to finance industrial development. Access to those resources would be difficult if Mexican diplomacy in the LN faltered. In addition, since his election in 1934, relations between Cárdenas and the foreign oil companies operating in Mexico had deteriorated to the point that, in 1938, the president was forced to issue a nationalization decree of all foreign-owned oil companies in Mexico. In this context, Mexico's diplomatic isolation in the LN would have substantially weakened Cárdenas's hand in his negotiations with foreign bankers and international oil companies.

"In such circumstances," Fabela wrote Cárdenas, "Mexico's posture, as laid down by you, is all the more noble. Mexico, against the entire world, even against Spain herself, defends the integrity and the enforcement of the Pact and upholds its principles in not accepting, *urbis et orbi*, the Non-Intervention Committee."³⁸

EPILOGUE

The sequence of events in Mexico and Spain makes one appreciate the context in which Fabela distilled his ideas. The cardenista period began in Mexico shortly after the Asturias insurrection of October 1934 in Spain. In both cases, the events signaled a popular reaction against governments that had fallen under the control of the wealthy. Later, in February 1936, Mexico's Marxist trade union leader, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, established what would become the most powerful federation of trade unions in the country and, with other Leftist organizations, came close to forming a Mexican equivalent of the Spanish Popular Front.³⁹ These key events took place almost simultaneously with the electoral victory of the Popular Front in Spain. Also in 1936, Cárdenas's decision to exile former Mexican President Plutarco Elías Calles, who for ten years had been Mexico's conservative strong man, came only a few days after Franco's revolt put the Spanish Republic on the defensive.

Also running parallel were Cárdenas's 1938 nationalization of foreign oil companies operating in Mexico and the Spanish Republicans' Ebro offensive, one of its last stands against advancing franquista forces. And, finally, Cárdenas's shift to the right, evident partly in his selection of the relatively conservative candidate Manuel Ávila Camacho as his successor in the presidency, signaled the end of radical reforms and occurred just days after the Spanish Republic's overthrow.⁴⁰

The British perspective prevailed in the LN, and the Second Spanish Republic fell in 1939. According to British officials, the Geneva Pact called for strict neutrality in the Spanish conflict. Reinforcing this posture was the desire to protect British trade and investments, and the Franco regime seemed a more profitable option. Economic interests and relations with Italy and Germany took precedence. Rather than resist Italian expansionism in Abyssinia and intrusion into Spain, Britain and France chose accommodation. These hopes turned out to be delusions. As Mexican documents reveal, Britain likely forced France to follow suit on neutrality and then ignored the fascist powers' flagrant violations of the nonintervention agreement.

By contrast, Fabela articulated a Mexican vision of the international order in terms of an altruistic defense of democracy, the rule of law, and the Covenant of the League of Nations. This led to a nuanced application of non-intervention policies and, in the Spanish case, the conclusion that intervention was required. Mexican policy in Europe came directly from Cárdenas,

refined in discussions with and in the writings to intellectuals close to the president such as Bassols and Fabela. They engineered Mexico's return to the European arena and established the tenets of Mexico's modern foreign policy. They charted a course oriented by nonintervention and self-determination, principles that guide Mexican diplomacy to this day. These statesmen also designed the Mexican defense of Spain to protect Mexico from foreign intervention, and thus safeguard the Mexican Revolutionary project. Isidro Fabela remained in Europe until 1941, assisting in the effort to document and transport to safe haven in Mexico an estimated fifteen thousand Spanish refugees. In November 1941, Fabela retired from his post in Geneva.⁴¹

The passage of time since the 1939 debacle in Spain has not diminished the high moral standards reached by Mexican diplomacy in Europe during those years. Although it was only after Franco's death that Mexico formally reestablished diplomatic relations with Spain, on 28 March 1977, the bonds uniting Mexico and democratic Spain were never broken.

NOTES

1. The impact that Spanish immigration to Mexico between 1938 and 1945 had on Mexican society was far reaching and is one of the best studied aspects of the relationship between Mexico and the Second Spanish Republic. See, for example, José Antonio Matesanz, *Las raíces del exilio: México ante la guerra civil española* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México/UNAM, 2000).
2. Linda Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics: The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 1–4; Emilio Zebadúa, *Banqueros y revolucionarios: La soberanía financiera de México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), 17–19, 311–12; Lorenzo Meyer, *México y los Estados Unidos en el conflicto petrolero (1917–1942)* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1968), 198; and Jan Bazant, *Historia de la deuda exterior de México, 1823–1946* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1968), 285.
3. Agustín Sánchez Andrés and Fabián Herrera León, *Contra todo y contra todos: La diplomacia mexicana y la cuestión española en la Sociedad de Naciones, 1936–1939* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Ediciones Idea, 2011), 303.
4. Isidro Fabela, *Intervención* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1959); *Historia diplomática de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958); *Cartas al Presidente Cárdenas* (Mexico City: Offset Altamira, 1947); and *Neutralidad: La Sociedad de Naciones y el Continente Americano ante la guerra de 1939–1940* (Mexico City: Biblioteca de Estudios Internacionales, 1940).

5. These principles are associated with what scholars call the Doctrina Estrada, a set of precepts enunciated by Mexico's Foreign Secretary Genaro Estrada in 1930. Genaro Estrada, *Obras Completas* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1988), vol. 2, 144–45; see also Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbor: A Portrait of the Mexicans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 318–19, 340.
6. "In connection with the pro-Franco attitude of the majority of Latin American governments, it has been pointed out that many of them were themselves military dictatorships," Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 168–69; *New York Times*, 18 February 1938; and *Excelsior*, Mexico City, 15 May 1943.
7. Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 300.
8. Abdiel Oñate, *Razones de Estado: Estudios sobre la formación del Estado mexicano moderno* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés Editores, 2005), 47–54; Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 137–41; and Keith A. Haynes, "Dependency, Postimperialism, and the Mexican Revolution: An Historiographic Review," *Mexican Studies* 7, no. 2 (1991): 225–51.
9. On Cardenista ideology, see Amelia M. Kiddie, "La Política del Buen Amigo: Mexican–Latin American Relations during the Presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2010); Fernando Alanís Encino, *El gobierno del general Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940* (Mexico City: El Colegio de San Luis, 2000); Stephen R. Niblo, *Lázaro Cárdenas: Dos pasos adelante, un paso atrás* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 2000); Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994): 73–107; Fernando Benítez, *Lázaro Cárdenas y la Revolución Mexicana: El Cardenismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1978); Isidro Fabela, *La política internacional del Presidente Cárdenas* (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1975); Arnaldo Córdova, *La ideología de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Editorial Era, 1973); and Tzvi Medin, *Ideología y praxis política de Lázaro Cárdenas* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI editores, 1973).
10. Bernard Hardion, French Chargé d'Affaires in Mexico City, to Pierre-Etienne Flandin, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères in Paris, Series LN, 2149, 152, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.
11. Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 153.
12. Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 7.
13. See Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 237–38.
14. For an analysis of the Soviet Union's Spanish policy see Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 153; José Luis Alcofar Nassaes, *Los asesores soviéticos en la Guerra civil española* (Barcelona: DOPESA, 1971); see also Fabela, "Speech to

- the XVIII Plenary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations,” Geneva, 20 September 1937, file 30754/17950, Archivo de la Sociedad de Naciones, Geneva (hereafter ALN), reproduced in Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 222–24, 367; on financial aid, see Indalecio Prieto, “Report on the use of Spanish funds in Mexico,” Mexico City, 20 June 1940, file 257, Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, Junta de Ayuda a los Refugiados Españoles; and box RE 134, Archivo Barcelona (hereafter AMAEE/AB).
15. Dominic Tierney, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Spanish Civil War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 9; see also Christopher D. O’Sullivan, “Roosevelt’s Policy: Was the United States Truly Neutral in the Spanish Civil War?” *History in Dispute: The Spanish Civil War* (St. James, MO: St. James Press, 2006), 209.
 16. Files 5 and 22, box RE 104, AMAEE/AB; League of Nations, *Official Journal*, Geneva, January 1937; and Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 184, 256.
 17. Narciso Bassols, “Discurso pronunciado ante la XVII Asamblea de la Sociedad de Naciones,” Geneva, 2 October 1936, *Official Journal*, Spec. Supp., no. 155 (1936): 100–1; *El Nacional*, Mexico, 13 October 1936, reproduced in Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 345–50.
 18. According to Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1994), in a drastic move Bassols distanced himself from Cárdenas as a result of the president granting asylum in Mexico to Leon Trotsky. Maxim Litvinov, Soviet foreign minister, abruptly called off talks with Bassols when news of Trotsky’s asylum reached Geneva. Mario Ojeda Revah suggests that the asylum also canceled the formation of a Mexican Popular Front in 1937. *México y la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid: Turner Publicaciones, 2004), 132. On Bassols’s work, see Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Narciso Bassols and Fernando Paz Sánchez, *Vida y Pensamiento de Narciso Bassols* (Mexico City: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1986); Armando Labra, *Narciso Bassols* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Recursos para la Atención de la Juventud, 1985); and Partido Revolucionario Institucional, *Narciso Bassols* (Mexico City: Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, PRI, 1982).
 19. On September 12, 1931, the Mexican Senate ratified the League of Nations Pact, with the caveats that this move did not affect Mexico’s nonrecognition of the Monroe Doctrine, which had been included as part of the League’s covenant, files 8 and 18, box 503, Archive of the League of Nations, Latin America Bureau (hereafter ASDN/LAB); *Journal de Genève*, 15 September 1931, Box 533.3, ASDN/LAB; *El Nacional*, Mexico City, 25 May 1931; *El Universal*, Mexico City, 6 and 15 November 1931, and 9 October 1931; *Excélsior*, Mexico City, 20 September 1931; *Times*, London, 14 September 1931; Hemeroteca Nacional, Universidad Autónoma de México, Mexico City. See also Fabián Herrera León, “México y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Los orígenes de una relación, 1919–1931,” *Foro*

- Internacional* 51, no. 2 (2011): 336–55; Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 11–12, 48; and Yannick Wehrli, “Créer et maintenir l’intérêt: la liaison entre le Secrétariat de la Société des Nations et l’Amérique latine (1919–1929)” (master’s thesis, University of Geneva, 2003).
20. *Excélsior*, Mexico City, 8 September 1936; for Álvarez del Vayo’s arguments, see Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 240–43.
 21. Bassols, “Discurso de 2 de octubre”; see also Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish*, 178–79.
 22. Cárdenas to Fabela, Mexico City, 17 February 1937, in Fabela, *Cartas*, 6–8. All translations from the Spanish language original are by the author.
 23. *Ibid.*, 8.
 24. Note from the British representative in the Non-Intervention Committee to Avenol, General Secretary, London, 31 March 1937, 28502/17950, ASDN; Fabela to Avenol, Geneva, 9 October 1936, 28502/17950, ALN.
 25. Fabela, “Notas sobre,” II, 4, 92, 97–98.
 26. Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León, *Contra todo*, 182–83. On Léon Blum and the Spanish Civil war, see Serge Bernstein, *Léon Blum* (Paris: Fayard, 2006); Claude Thiebaut, “Léon Blum, Alexis Leger et la décision de non-intervention en Espagne,” in *Les Français et la Guerre d’Espagne*, ed. Jean Sagnes and Sylvie Caucanas (Perpignan: Université de Perpignan, 1990), 23–43; and Jean Lacouture, *Léon Blum* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 231–35.
 27. Fabela, “Notas sobre,” 102; Sánchez Andrés and Herrera León refer also to a line of credit for 20 million francs opened by the French government for purchases of military equipment by Spain that was not executed. *Contra todo*, 182.
 28. Jackson’s text corroborates Fabela’s view. Daladier, who in 1938 succeeded Blum as prime minister of France, appears as “pro-Republican, but even more timid than the latter in the face of fascist threats and British pressure.” Jackson, *Spanish Republic*, 453.
 29. Fabela, “Notas sobre,” 107–10.
 30. Letter from Fabela to Cárdenas, Geneva, 18 July 1937, in Fabela, *Cartas*, 28–33; *Journal des Nations*, Geneva, 15 October 1936, 26895/17950, ASDN.
 31. Isidro Fabela, “Discurso de 20 de septiembre de 1937 pronunciado en la XVIII Asamblea Ordinaria de la Sociedad de Naciones en Ginebra, Suiza,” *El Nacional*, Mexico City, 13 October 1937.
 32. *Ibid.*
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Diplomatic note from Fabela to the SDN Secretary General Avenol, Geneva, 29 March 1937, 30754/17950, ASDN; see also Carlos Marichal (coordinador), *Méjico y las Conferencias Panamericanas, 1889–1938* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2002), 126–28.
 35. Fabela to Cárdenas, Geneva, 17 May 1937, in Fabela, *Cartas*, 34.
 36. *Ibid.*, 14.

37. Ibid., 17.
38. Ibid.
39. Cárdenas's granting political asylum to Leon Trotsky in 1937 canceled the formation of a Mexican Popular Front in Mexico. Both the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) and the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) strongly objected to the asylum decision. Ojeda Revah, *Mexico y la Guerra*, 87, 132.
40. Jackson, *Spanish Republic*, v; Ojeda Revah, *Mexico y la Guerra*, 54, 83.
41. Fernando Serrano Migallón, *Isidro Fabela y la diplomacia mexicana* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1997), 3.

PART TWO

LABOR



CHAPTER FIVE

Europe-Geneva-America

The First International Conference of American States
Members of the International Labour Organization



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The 1929 economic crisis and the political crisis in the 1930s affected relations between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Latin America in several ways. The most evident consequence was the outreach efforts the two parties made. This approach was not without conflict and distrust, yet it proceeded from the need to establish common goals. The existence of dialogue and the search for agreements in a world where ideological and political conflicts were becoming more accentuated seemed to be a contradiction. Realpolitik was important in the relationship between the ILO and Latin American countries, one that might have been more advantageous for the ILO. At the same time, both the ILO and Latin American countries understood one another. Some ILO requests were accepted by Latin Americans, and vice versa. The bond would ultimately be beneficial for everyone and strengthened throughout the next decades.

Relations between Latin Americans, the ILO, the League of Nations (LN, or League), and the United States and Europe were characterized by profound and constant instability, but general lines and policies stood out that would eventually outlive them. Being for or against fascism or communism might have shaped the alternatives and possibilities of this period, but the 1930s cannot be reduced to this conflict. The decade opened other possibilities, even if these did not necessarily pan out. Latin America was also not homogeneous. National and regional contexts conditioned the collaboration or competition among the ILO, the LN, and individual countries.

The First International Conference of American States Members of the ILO, which took place in 1936, encapsulated many of these patterns. American issues, mostly those related to the Southern Cone, allowed identification of positions and behaviors as part of national interests and not as reflections of external needs. The 1930s were particularly interesting because projects and possibilities faced the disaggregation of liberal democracies in Latin America. The crisis of Western countries made it possible for American countries not only to substitute European imports with their own goods but also to experiment with alternative political projects ranging from conservative restorations in Argentina to the expansion of the welfare state in Uruguay.

**PREPARATION FOR THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN STATES
MEMBERS OF THE ILO**

When a conference for ILO American member states was first considered, no precedent existed. No other conference of a global organization had ever considered only regional issues, with one exception, a project to organize an Asian countries' conference in 1929.¹ At the ILO's own yearly conference, thematic meetings had taken place, mainly related to maritime labor.²

The American conference was not a spontaneous proposal, nor was its agenda shaped only by the ILO. On the contrary, American countries called for this meeting while they presented their claims. The relation between the parties, until that moment, was relatively distant. Some of the Latin American countries had closer bonds and some only distrust or lack of interest.

Although the American conference held in Havana in 1928 raised the possibility of taking measure to protect workers, the starting point for the first American conference of ILO member states took place at the 1933 Seventh Pan-American Conference in Montevideo. To that moment, concerns about labor in Latin America had been tangential and had no influence in Pan-American meetings. However, the 1929 crisis and Mexico's active participation changed the topics discussed in conferences. Among the new issues was the possibility of creating an Inter-American Labor Institute, coordinated and controlled by the Pan American Union and based in Buenos Aires. The objectives and attributions of the institute would overlap with

those of the ILO. This concerned leaders and mobilized officials in Latin America and in the United States.³

The debates at Montevideo shaped concerns and issues that called for specific answers. The conference became part of the reconfiguration of relations between Geneva and the Americas. The ILO was already attempting a rapprochement with Latin America by appointing correspondents in Brazil (1929) and Argentina (1931), and by sending missions to the Southern Cone. However, the ILO seemed not to understand the region's specificities.

The conference in Montevideo was thus a wake-up call for the ILO's Latin American policy. ILO officials had to acknowledge that America was indeed a region with its own needs and issues. But it was not easy to achieve this acknowledgment, mainly because Latin America narrowed the relations with Geneva's institutional system throughout the 1920s and the region considered itself universal, meaning European.⁴

Geneva's first reaction to a proposal for an American conference on labor was to monitor its probable impact on the Americas. Harold Butler, general director of the ILO, appointed Stephen Lawford Childs, the head of ILO's cabinet and a man he could trust, to pursue this mission. Childs had already been to Latin America as a representative of the LN Commission for Refugees. He confidentially visited Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Panama, in that order.⁵ At this time, Eduardo Migone, correspondent in Argentina, informed him about the discussion on labor issues at the Montevideo conference, such as the creation of a Pan-American Labor Office not affiliated with the ILO.⁶

Childs's trip shed some light on the situation. He stated during his trip that the responsibility for the call for the American conference rested with the Mexican delegation, some misunderstandings among the Southern Cone members, and the surprising (for the ILO) position of Latin American workers, who had found in this conference a forum in which they could take part. Because workers were hardly ever sent to Geneva to attend international labor conferences, they had no firsthand experience. For some workers, this was the first time in an ILO meeting. In all previous international meetings, however, countries should have sent workers to the annual conferences but had not. State representatives as well as workers and patronage representatives should have been part of all the delegations to ILO annual conferences.⁷

The ILO proposed to organize a meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1935 but the Brazilians rejected it. Uruguayans also declined the offer. The

Argentines accepted, but questioned how to conduct the meeting. Childs and Butler stated that the Buenos Aires conference had to be technical, to include participation from European countries, and to deal with the codification of Geneva's legislation, which had to be accepted by American countries. Childs had prepared the invitation so that the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs would release the information, something that was incompatible with the wishes of Argentine Foreign Minister Carlos Saavedra Lamas, who saw this as interference. Saavedra Lamas refused to organize the meeting. Finally, Chile agreed to host, and the proposal met American expectations.⁸

Institutionally and officially, the reformulation process of an American labor conference in the region started in 1935 at the Nineteenth International Labour Conference in Geneva, when the Chilean government delegate, Fernando García Oldini, proposed to hold this special conference in his country. He hoped that the conference would inform ILO members about enforced social legislation in the Americas. García Oldini highlighted the data and proposals by Butler in his report.⁹ Almost three-quarters of the conventions (the second kind of measure, after resolutions, passed at ILO conferences) ratified in the last year related to Latin America, so Butler affirmed that labor-related legislation in the region had been underestimated.¹⁰ The only way to end this situation was a stronger bond between the ILO and the Americas.

In tune with this new Latin American approach, the director of the ILO's annual report showed that Europeanism was undergoing a crisis and that broadening relations with other spheres was critical to increasing ILO legitimacy. Because of that, Butler accepted, first, holding meetings in countries outside Europe to deal with regional matters, and, second, hiring or inviting experts from overseas to analyze matters that would affect both sides.¹¹

Butler paved the way for the first regional meeting. García Oldini asserted that he had the support of Latin American countries and committed Chile to collaborate financially, if necessary, in the realization of the conference—quite a statement in a lean season. The following issues were proposed for the meeting: agricultural labor, social welfare, and unemployment caused by the lack of demand for raw materials in Europe. For the Chilean delegate, spreading knowledge about American matters did not imply that the ILO had to abandon its concern with European issues.¹²

The most emphatic support for regional meetings came from the Brazilian workers' delegate, Chrysostomo Antonio De Oliveira, who established an

agenda for American countries. He suggested that the Inter-American Conference should discuss a minimum wage, job placement by state agencies, and agricultural labor and the suppression of the truck system (the payment of work in kind or with merchandise). Also, and as a precondition, he insisted on discussing the regulation of working conditions of agricultural wage earners. European colonial powers allowed salaries so low that natives worked in conditions that resembled those of slavery, which constituted unfair competition for American workers. At the 1935 International Labour Conference in Geneva, De Oliveira advanced that the improvement for workers in America should lead to improvements for workers outside the continent as well.¹³ For the Colombian government delegate, Rafael Guizado, this was a good opportunity to go over the agreements from a regional point of view, addressing country-specific interests.¹⁴

If Latin America acknowledged the universality of debates, then the ILO's general director criticized the Eurocentrism that had prevailed in his institution. Such Eurocentrism had already been mitigated by the incorporation of the Soviet Union and the United States and the interest shown by Asian and Latin American countries to improve the quality of their representation.¹⁵ Such changes renewed the identity of the ILO. Still, Europe and Asia's presence and action were inescapable. Butler thus accepted holding a conference in Latin America.¹⁶

The 1929 crisis altered other tenets of international politics. Free trade made room for protectionist economic policies, national cultural values confronted universal ones, markets closed, migrations stopped, and countries started to defend their narrow immediate interests. Americans thus felt the need to be different from the rest, and old matters moved back to the forefront to justify defensive policies.¹⁷ For the Versailles system, the most appropriate way to keep moving seemed to be acknowledging non-European specificities rather than imposing rules or sanctions.

Butler convened the conference in Santiago so that it would follow the representation procedures of the International Labour Conference: four delegates per state, two representing the government, one the employers, and one the workers, including the participation of the ILO Administrative Council, which was to steer the course of the meeting. The conference gave itself three tasks, within which figured a wide range of issues. The first was to analyze the application of already existing conventions, specifically those related to social welfare and female and child labor conditions. Second was to examine matters that could afterward be dealt with at the next

conference.¹⁸ The last task was to encourage countries from the region to send their suggestions.

In the Administrative Council's meeting, which took place in November 1935, before the American conference, American governments introduced their priorities: (1) establishing a minimum age for workers, which in several conventions had been set at sixteen; (2) rationalizing and reducing working hours in the textile industry; (3) improving the diet of workers; (4) establishing technical labor agencies; (5) setting a a minimum wage; and (6) improv-ing the life and labor conditions of agricultural workers. The United States and Chile proposed the first two issues.¹⁹ New topics were added at the Santiago conference itself in January 1936. Its twenty-two proposals ranged from industrial labor to indigenous labor.²⁰

**THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
AMERICAN STATES MEMBERS OF THE ILO:
AGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTS**

The discussions that took place throughout the conference showed the possibilities and pitfalls of ILO-Latin American collaboration, allowed a European reading of the labor question as it related to the region, and revealed that American countries were not a homogeneous block. On one side were the interests of the United States, whose idea of labor rights did not necessarily coincide with that of other countries, especially Mexico and Argentina.²¹

Social conflicts in the Americas were also highlighted. Some govern-ment delegates rejected ILO positions. Workers, meanwhile, showed a block adherence to Geneva because they could continue to be represented at international meetings. Working with the ILO was also a way to assert in the international arena workers' rights that were denied in their respective countries.

In addition to resolutions, the conference in Santiago drafted an impor-tant set of documents, which consisted of technical reports and debates on female labor, child labor, and the employment of minors, approved conven-tions and their application, and social welfare. ILO members and American representatives discussed and monitored child and female labor as well as the costs of labor especially closely because these factors could lower the price of Latin American exports.²²



Chilean President Arturo Alessandri Palma and International Labour Office Director Harold Butler after the inaugural session of the ILO First Regional Conference, Santiago, 2 January 1936. Courtesy of the ILO Archives at Geneva.

Some issues were more universal because they concerned the Americas and beyond. Such was the case of social welfare. Other themes were introduced as being more specific to the region, for instance the truck system, indigenous labor, and agricultural labor

The tension between the Americas and Geneva, which was evident at Montevideo's Pan-American Conference in 1933, had taken a different course in the three years since. The debate was resolved during the third session of the conference with an agreement between the ILO and the American countries as recorded in the Sixth Resolution. National governments requested more information and promotion of themselves in Geneva. The same applied to conventions, recommendations, and other ILO activities in the Americas. Latin Americans wanted more professionals from that region to be hired in the ILO's technical staff, more conferences to be held, and more publications in Spanish and Portuguese, all this as a way of acknowledging the region's

importance. The Sixth Resolution was broad enough to leave everyone satisfied. It opened the possibility of convening new regional conferences; stipulated that most American officials and experts were appointed, that more offices corresponded to the region, and that more publications and more widespread actions would be taken in America with regard to the work being requested.²³ Such demands reappeared throughout the conference.

The first to raise the issue of the Inter-American Labor Institute was the government delegate from Uruguay, José Antuña, who brought up the debate from the Seventh Pan-American Conference, stating that the Argentine-Chilean-Mexican proposal received almost unanimous approval from other countries from the region and that it had to be ratified in the Eighth Conference, which was to take place in Lima in 1938.²⁴ He added that an inter-American institute should not be seen as contrary to the spirit of Geneva.²⁵ For Uruguay's technical adviser, Miguel Salom, the ILO was too immersed in Europe's concerns and needed instead to take care of America. Salom considered it necessary to see the particular conditions that the region presented, claiming that these could be better understood if treated on-site. The creation of a regional labor office did not imply a break with Geneva. Instead, a constructive unionism would be shaped.²⁶

Workers, meanwhile, opposed the Inter-American Labor Institute. For Luis Solís Solís, representative of Chilean workers and main speaker of this group, American countries were too different from one another and their internal disparities were as big as they were in Europe. For him, the ILO was an imposition by the workers of the world and its disaggregation equaled disaggregating the labor movement at the exact moment when the Soviet Union and the United States were joining the ILO. The ILO was a space in which workers were equal. In contrast, the Pan American Union looked like an instrument of American imperialism in which equal treatment was not guaranteed.²⁷ In the seventh session of the meeting, Paraguay's government delegate, Horacio Fernández, ratified his support for Geneva, keeping the commitment undertaken in Montevideo.²⁸

When the Sixth Resolution was discussed, the delegates also brought up Montevideo's congress. Uruguay's Antuña defended again the creation of the Inter-American Labor Institute and his position had been unanimously approved in the Seventh Pan-American Conference. Although it had been Mexico's proposal, Chile had presented a similar proposal that it withdrew to achieve consensus on the eventually victorious one. Despite the fact that Antuña reaffirmed once again the commitment to Geneva, he understood

that the regional institute would make room for more efficient labor policies and this proposal was coherent with Uruguayan policies regarding regional institutions.²⁹

Therefore, supporting the creation of the Inter-American Labor Institute was not only Uruguay's decision but also the Pan American Union's. The resolution was proposed by Uruguay's delegation, Cuba's José Enrique de Sandoval y Saavedra, Argentina's Alejandro Unsain, and the workers' representatives as a whole. Several representatives were pleased once the resolution was approved. The Mexican delegate recalled that his country had presented the proposal in Montevideo.³⁰ The resolution added proposals so as to leave everyone satisfied.

Brazil's government delegate, Affonso Bandeira de Mello, defended the ILO's position and withdrew his country's support for the Inter-American Labor Institute because of budgetary concerns and his view that American specifics did not justify the creation of a regional agency. Moreover, he understood that, as Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay were destinations for European immigration, issues discussed in Geneva should also take the countries of emigration into consideration.³¹

Unsaín of Argentina quoted an interview that the Chilean minister of foreign affairs, Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal, granted to *El Mercurio*, in which Cruchaga said that the proposal to not back Uruguay's request was made because the matter needed to be discussed in Lima and that he was not necessarily against the idea. The interview ended by asserting that the Chilean government was in favor of Antuña's position.³²

At the end of the conference, Butler stated that it was possible to maintain good relations between Geneva and the Americas. As concessions to the Americas, he accepted the main regional claims: holding new American conferences, increasing the number of officials of this origin, and issuing more publications in Portuguese and Spanish. Matters specific to the Americas, such as the indigenous issue, agricultural labor, and the truck system, deserved priority treatment.³³

Whether it was because of this statement or for other reasons, the issue regarding the Inter-American Labor Institute, as discussed at the Montevideo Pan-American Conference, was not taken up again until 1938, at the Eighth Pan-American Conference, in Lima.³⁴

The First International Conference of American States Members of the ILO focused on issues of representation in disputes and unity in labor matters, but these were just some of the items on its agenda. The forces with an

impact on an organization such as the ILO are numerous: regional bonds, country-specific concerns, and the interests of different type of workers to name but a few. ILO officials' public and confidential statements demonstrated how the organization moved to cater to the needs of states, workers, and employers at the same time as it promoted the continuity of the institution to struggle for equality in labor legislation.

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NOTES

1. The affirmation belongs to Walter Ridell, president of the ILO's Administrative Council and Canadian delegate. See International Labour Organization, *Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization: Sessions' Minutes* (Geneva: ILO, 1936), 6.
2. As an example, we have the Second International Labour Conference, which not only had the port city of Geneva as its headquarters but also dealt specifically with the issue of maritime workers. League of Nations, *International Labour Conference, Second Session* (Geneva: ILO, 1920).
3. At the 1928 conference, the resolution regarding a material improvement of workers was approved. See Unión Panamericana, *Diario de la sexta Conferencia Internacional Americana, Habana, 1928* (La Habana: Impr. de Rambla, Bouza, 1928), 346. This proposal frightened the ILO, and Albert Thomas sent the Chilean lawyer and social reformer Moises Poblete Troncoso on a mission to show the ILO's commitment to American states, but he had little success. See Fabián Herrera León and Yannick Wehrli, "Le Bureau international du travail et l'Amérique latine durant l'entre-deux-guerres: Problèmes et enjeux," in *L'Organisation internationale du travail: Origine—développement—avenir*, ed. Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Vincent Viet (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 163. The considerations of the Pan-American conference regarding the Pan-American Institute are broad and unspecific. They deal with various issues that range from the need for work contracts to workers' freedom of association. In any case, in the initial consideration, the issue concerning the inequality of indigenous people, natives (*criollos*), and mestizos with other workers did come up. This would be a recurring issue in coming debates. See Unión Panamericana, *Séptima Conferencia Internacional Americana: Acta Final. Montevideo, December, 1933* (Montevideo: Florensa Impresor, 1934), 46–52.
4. The Brazilian delegate to the eighth annual conference, Fonseca de Montarroyos, argued against an indigenous legislation that would also regulate Latin America. He stated that in Latin America, all were citizens. See League of Nations,

- International Labour Conference: Eighth Annual Meeting*, vol. 1 (Geneva: ILO, 1926), 263–64.
5. “Mr. Childs’ Mission to South America. Revised itinerary,” in *Mr. Childs’ Mission to Latin America (January 1934)*, file XT 86/5/1 I, International Labour Organization Archives, Geneva (hereafter *Mr. Childs’ Mission*).
6. So as to have an idea of the concern caused, let us remember that Montevideo’s meeting ended on 26 December 1933, and that Childs left Geneva on 26 January 1934. The thank-you message for the information to Migone is “Letter from Harold Butler to Raul Migone 13/01/1934,” in *Mr. Childs’ Mission*. A report by Migone on this issue is “Rapport général sur la République Argentine (Fin Novembre 1933—Fin Janvier 1934)” in ILO, *Argentine, Correspondent Office (1931–1938)*, box C, Argentine 2–2–1 (J4) 2–2–1 (J7) (1933–1937), International Labour Organization Archives, Geneva (hereafter ILOA).
7. “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Buenos Aires, March 1, 1934,” in *Mr. Childs’ Mission*.
8. “Confidential Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Rio de Janeiro February 16, 1934,” “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Buenos Aires, March 1, 1934,” “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Ancona, March 17, 1934,” “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Alejandro Unsain, Geneva, April 19, 1934,” and “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Raúl Migone, Geneva, April 18, 1934,” in *Mr. Childs’ Mission*.
9. For Butler’s report, see ILO, *International Labour Conference, Nineteenth Session: Report of the Director* (Geneva: ILO/OIT, 1935), 67.
10. Information on the approval of conventions in ILO, *International Labour Conference: Provisional Stenographic Extract, Nineteenth Session* (Geneva: ILO, 1935), 117. For Butler’s appreciation, see ILO, *Nineteenth Session*, 67.
11. ILO, *Nineteenth Session: Report of the Director*, 67.
12. Ibid., 118–20. Support and comment on 124, 167, 201, 216, 224, 237, 240, 248, 264, 326, 550, and 551.
13. ILO, *Provincial Stenographic Extract*, 264.
14. Ibid., 240.
15. Ibid., 286–87.
16. Ibid., 291, 581.
17. For example, the indigenous issue. See Norberto Ferreras, “La modernité intégrée par les peuples indigènes: L’Organisation internationale du travail et l’Amérique latine, la question des peuples indigènes et tribaux,” in *Modernités Nationales, Modernités Importées entre Ancien et Nouveau Monde XIXe-XXIe siècle*, ed. Daniel Aarão Reis and Denis Rolland (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2012).
18. ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, xvi.
19. Ibid., xviii.
20. Ibid., 330–32.
21. The countries that participated with full delegations were Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, the United States, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The

- countries that sent only government representatives were Argentina, Canada, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. Argentina did not send a full delegation because it was in the middle of a general strike, which caused confrontations between workers and police in the streets of Buenos Aires. Canada participated for the first time in a Pan-American meeting because its representative was a member of the Administrative Council. Chilean citizens who acted as its government delegates represented Haiti. Overall, eighteen countries had representation and Costa Rica sent an observer. See *Conference of American States Members*, 330–32.
22. The reports included the following: ILO, *Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization: Report on Female Labor* (Geneva: ILO, 1935); ILO, *Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization: Report on Social Insurance* (Geneva: ILO, 1935); ILO, *Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization, Santiago de Chile, January, 1936: Examination of International Labour Conventions with a View to Their Ratifications: 1) Hours of work, 2) Unemployment and placing* (mimeo); ILO, *Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization, Santiago de Chile, January, 1936: Examination of International Labour Conventions with a View to their Ratifications Ratified by the American States* (mimeo); and ILO, *Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization, Santiago de Chile, January, 1936: Report on the Employment of Children and Young People* (mimeo).
23. The resolution is in ILO *Conferencia del trabajo de los estados de América miembros de la organización internacional del trabajo* (Geneva: Oficina Internacional del Trabajo, 1936), 383–84.
24. It is worth mentioning that it was not ratified and that the issue was not even analyzed. See Pan American Union, *Eighth International American Conference: Final Act, December, 1938* (Lima: Imprenta Torres Aguirre, 1939).
25. José Antuña, in ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, 41–45.
26. Miguel Salom, in *ibid.*, 55–58. Salom exposed an argument when he talked to Childs in Montevideo soon after the Pan-American Conference: “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Buenos Aires, March 1, 1934,” in *Mr. Childs’ Mission*. In this conversation, Childs introduced him as a workers’ representative and a friend from the ILO.
27. Luis Solís, in ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, 67–68.
28. Horacio Fernández, in *ibid.*, 127.
29. In the Pan-American Conference, the creation of the Inter-American Labor Institute had been approved by all the representatives with the United States’s abstention. Antuña’s intervention in ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, 224–26. Uruguay and Argentina’s positions drew attention because they had committed to the ILO in confidential conversations with Childs and Tixier, who had traveled to the Southern Cone in February and November 1934.

- See “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Buenos Aires 1/03/1934,” and “Letter from Stephen Lawford Childs to Harold Butler, Ancona, March 17, 1934,” in *Mr. Childs’ Mission*; and “Confidentiel. Mission de M. Tixier en Argentine (November 3–17, 1934),” and “Confidentiel. Mission de M. Tixier au Uruguay (November 18–24, 1934),” in *Mr. Tixier’s Missions to South America (1934)*, ILOA.
30. Solís and Peón del Valle and Arroyo, delegates from Mexico and Ecuador, respectively, were in favor of Uruguay. See ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, 227–29.
 31. Affonso Bandeira de Mello, Brazilian government delegate, in ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, 233–34.
 32. Alejandro Unsain, Argentine government delegate, and the interview to Cruchaga Tocornal in ILO, *Conference of American States Members*, 236, 260, 261.
 33. Butler, in ILO, *America States Labor Conference*, 305–6.
 34. Pan American Union, *Eighth International American Conference*.

CHAPTER SIX

“To Raise Awareness of Difficulties and to Assert Their Opinion”

The International Labour Office and the
Regionalization of International Cooperation in the 1930s



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In his 1941 annual report, Edward Phelan, acting director of the International Labour Office, considered regional cooperation to be a primary international postwar activity. “The responsibilities of the International Labour Organization (ILO) are worldwide,” he wrote, “and the experience of twenty years has shown that in order to enable it to discharge those responsibilities in a manner which takes due account of the interests and problems of all its Members it must have direct and intimate contact with all parts of the world and specialized machinery for handling, within a general international framework, the special problems of particular regions.”¹ Before moving to Montreal in 1940, the ILO organized its first two regional conferences in Latin America.² These marked the beginning of a new international practice, according to which the ILO sought to build new spaces for dialogue closer to the social and economic realities of the member states. Regional conferences were part of a broader reflection in the 1930s on the excessively European-centered international cooperation on social and labor issues and on the means to increase the participation of less developed countries in eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia.³ They were an important tool in encouraging the ratification of international labor conventions in these regions.

Latin American countries thus gave a new impetus to the ILO just as its activities slowed down in Europe. Latin American participation in the

technical work of the ILO played a central role in the promotion, within the organization, of a Latin American perspective.⁴ The Great Depression also played an important role in the shift of ILO activities outside Europe. In its wake, criticism from extra-European representatives about the domination of European interests at the ILO became more and more frequent. For non-Europeans, international labor conventions, which were the main activity of the organization and were based on the experience of the most industrialized European countries, held little interest, as did most of the reports produced within the International Labour Office. At the same time, the crisis sparked greater interest from some governments, in particular Latin American ones, in gathering information, advice, and expertise for their social reforms.

Studies on regional cooperation by international organizations remain a field of research almost exclusively explored by political science.⁵ Marked by the influence of the neorealist and neofunctionalist theories developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, these studies usually used the concept of regional cooperation to raise the question of defining the role of the state in institutional architectures.⁶ This seems to remain the case today, despite theoretical developments in the 1990s around new regionalism.⁷

The objective of this chapter, by contrast, is to analyze the influence of international organizations in promoting forms of regional cooperation and their impact on institutional organization and activities. This analysis will show that the ILO's regional action contributed to a strengthened position in Latin America, but did not completely defuse claims regarding a purely regional approach to labor issues. Considered a way to counter protectionism, ILO-led regionalization was a new form of international cooperation in which technical issues were placed at the center of the collaboration with less developed countries. In this sense, regional conferences were part of a larger process emerging at the ILO, whose activities in the 1930s moved toward practices of development, technical cooperation, and technical assistance.⁸ Regional conferences led to a new administrative structure based on dual-speed international cooperation, one of the characteristics of development work by international organizations after 1945. These conferences were not able to adopt conventions like the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, but were designed for participating countries to assert their opinion and their specific needs through resolutions and recommendations.⁹ Moreover, projects for a regional labor office in Latin America and the reaction to them led to an extensive social expertise in the ILO no longer confined to the economic and social conditions of industrial powers.

REGIONALISM V. UNIVERSALISM: CHALLENGES TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE 1930S

Despite claims to universalism, the international organizations set up in Geneva after 1918 had an overall European character.¹⁰ The International Labour Office was dominated at least until 1934 by European powers, as demonstrated by their importance at the Governing Body (GB) and the fact that Britain and France were its main financial backers. Until 1938, the ILO was successively directed by the socialist Albert Thomas of France and Harold Butler of Britain and its activities rested mostly on European networks. French and British nationals also dominated the staff, which was responsible for elaborating and disseminating the technical information that also served the international labor conferences.

However, the Great Depression prompted a crisis of legitimacy at the ILO that the organization's universalistic discourse could no longer contain. In his annual report of 1932, the last before his death, Thomas highlighted the difficulties the ILO faced in developing its activities and underlined the necessity to diffuse its influence beyond Europe.¹¹ International conferences grew detached vis-à-vis Europe and became spaces for constructing an opposition between the universalistic ideal and national and regional peculiarities.¹² Regional integration projects were of particular interest, and their development could partly be explained by the political failures of the League of Nations (LN, or League) in economic cooperation and military security.¹³ In the field of social policy, new regional discourses and propositions coming from less socially developed countries were also challenging the ILO. For example, at the 1933 ILC, the Congress of Japanese Trade Unions and the Indian National Trade Union Federation announced a resolution for a social Asiatic congress.¹⁴ At the 1934 ILC, workers' adviser Jivko Topalovitch, delegate of Yugoslavia, called for a strengthening between regional groups and referred to proposals to tighten collaboration between the labor organizations of the countries belonging to the Little Entente.¹⁵ Japanese workers' delegate Tadao Kikukawa highlighted the profound gap between the problems discussed in Geneva and the socioeconomic realities of Asia: "Social legislation is still undeveloped and the labour movement is still under oppression. . . . While the 40 hour week is being discussed here, even an eight-hour day is not being considered yet in Asia."¹⁶ Gregorio Beschinsky, an Argentine government delegate, insisted on that the ILO had done too little to study Latin

American regional issues.¹⁷ Promoters of regionalism proposed creating regional labor offices as a way to adjust the Western paradigms of social protection to non-Western contexts.

Such was the case of the Pan-American Labor Office projects, proposed since the 1920s at Pan-American conferences, at which social issues were becoming more and more important, a tendency that would strengthen with the Great Depression.¹⁸ The Seventh Pan-American Conference of 1933 in Montevideo adopted recommendations that included introducing unemployment insurance and establishing a public works program, two measures directly linked to the Great Depression. Other adopted resolutions recommended that the governments should examine measures of protection against sickness, accident, disability, and old age. Delegates also planned to create an Inter-American Institute for the Development of the Cooperative Movement, which would have been linked institutionally to the Pan-American Union. The Montevideo conference thus produced a comprehensive program of social policies, under the authority of the Pan-American Union but without ILO participation.¹⁹

The International Labour Office's concerns, meanwhile, focused mainly on a Mexican draft convention for the creation of a regional labor office, submitted by the delegation of Mexico, an ILO member only since 1931 despite attempts at rapprochement that Thomas initiated in the 1920s.²⁰ This office would have the dual function of collecting and exchanging social data. Even if it were meant to cooperate with the ILO, the office would centralize the data on a regional scale and therefore situate itself as a competitor of the International Labour Office.²¹

The project was ultimately postponed until the next Pan-American conference, some Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Venezuela, having reaffirmed their support for the ILO rather than for the regional office.²² Neither did the project receive the support of the United States because in 1933 some Roosevelt cabinet members, mostly from the reformist circles, were in contact with the International Labour Office to discuss a possible entry of the United States to the ILO, which in 1934 became effective. The second director of the International Labour Office, Harold Butler, played an important role in the rapprochement of the United States to the ILO, being in close contact with important personalities of the Labor Department, such as Frances Perkins, secretary of labor since 1933. Butler also had close relationship with Prentiss Gilbert, the American consul in Geneva, who proved a valuable support for the ILO between 1933 and 1934, when the application for

membership came before Congress.²³ The US government attitude at Montevideo suggested that it considered the ILO, where European powers could counterbalance Latin American influence, a better instrument to serve Roosevelt’s policy of ensuring US security and economic domination in the hemisphere. The development of social policies in Latin American republics echoed the desire of the US government to improve economic relations there, and in this context the ILO could serve as an instrument in developing inter-American cooperation.²⁴

Faced with challenges such as the proposed Pan-American office, officials of the International Labour Office explicitly began to ask about the possibility of integrating regional cooperation within the broader framework of international cooperation.²⁵ Until the end of the 1930s, regional cooperation remained controversial even if the League covenant explicitly referred to regional agreements. Some projects of regional integration, especially the clearly hegemonic ones of Japan and Nazi Germany, were seen as weakening international cooperation. The International Labour Office chose a position in between, evidenced by the 1934 report of Wilfred Jenks, a British official and legal expert: “It might be well for the Office to be more ambitious to control [regional agreements] in their early stages than it has been in the past. For this purpose it might be well to prepare a model of constitution for regional labour organisations, which could be circulated among interested persons as soon as regional organisation has become a serious possibility in any area.”²⁶ For Jenks, regional cooperation had to be promoted only insofar as it strengthened the network of the ILO. Regional cooperation was also to be coordinated at all levels, including research programs and the programs of regional conferences. Besides, according to Jenks, the arrangements proposed by the ILO should not be the object of an amendment to its constitution, but inserted in the constitutions of the regional offices. Only in 1946, with the constitutional revision of the ILO, would the practice of regional conferences be normalized in Article 38.

If regional projects were seen as a good thing attesting to the liberal spirit in “peripheral” countries regarding social issues, officials of the International Labour Office were also well aware of less pleasant potential consequences, the more important being doubts about the universality of the organization. Some of them feared that proponents of regional institutions would use the argument of different socioeconomic conditions to justify not following international labor conventions, still the main concern of the ILO. For Adrien Tixier, head of the Section on Social Insurance,

recognition of regional units could enhance coalitions against certain conventions. Referring to the experience of the ILO with Scandinavian countries, he noted, “Thus, to please Denmark, a country of voluntary insurance, Sweden and Norway, which have compulsory insurance systems, frequently abstain from voting our conventions.”²⁷ The creation of regional institutions would also call into question the competence of the ILO on specific issues, including equality of treatment between nationals and aliens, in particular regarding insurance-related services. International Labour Office officials were at last deeply concerned about the participation of workers’ organizations in these regional labor offices. This issue was particularly important because the ILO relied on tripartite negotiation, the constant dialogue and cooperation between governments, employers, and workers.²⁸ Given labor organizations’ lack of experience and coordination, some officials feared that the Pan-American Labor Office would mainly represent governmental interests.

BUILDING NEW TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

Discussions about regional cooperation underlined the new weight extra-European countries enjoyed within the ILO. They first received recognition in 1934 after GB membership was extended and a new section dedicated to collecting information outside Europe was created.²⁹ This new policy relied partly on officials of the International Labour Office who, through contacts and missions in less developed countries, informed the office of the difficulties in getting non-Europeans to work with the ILO and of ways to “get closer” to them. In the 1930s, these missions helped the International Labour Office reflect on its limits. For example, the reports of the Section on Social Insurance, from the birth of the ILO one of the cornerstones of its standard setting, stressed the limits of a theoretical approach that ignored national realities. As Tixier put it in 1935 after a study mission in Latin America, “to get people interested we must show them that we know the problems that interest them and that we can render them a service.”³⁰ He concluded that ILO activities and norms had little relevance in countries without social insurance, specialists, or other tools of social protection. From 1934 onward, Tixier contributed to the technical orientation of the section, insisting, for example, on the need for more actuaries to develop the expertise of the section on financial aspects of social insurance.

It was not until the first regional conference in 1936 in Santiago that ILO regional action would be institutionalized. Regional conferences would become privileged places to discuss the problems of less developed regions. Focusing on technical aspects of social policies, ILO regional conferences were specific forms of international technical cooperation. They did not, however, produce a regionalization of international labor standards but instead adopted a pragmatic approach to the difficulties of Latin American countries to adopt and ratify international conventions.

Regional conferences were thus a new form of international cooperation. The idea of a regional conference was discussed at the 1931 ILC, which passed a resolution for an Asiatic conference, strongly supported by Albert Thomas since 1929.³¹ However, according to Victor-Yves Ghebali, French and British colonial powers opposed its realization.³² At the 1931 GB session, the delegates of France and Great Britain and most Asian representatives opposed the resolution given the lack of studies on conditions of work in Asia and difficult political relations between India, China, Japan, and Europe at the time.³³ Debates also focused on which countries should be represented at this conference, in particular European colonial powers. The Indian delegate insisted on extending representation to the Netherlands Indies, Indochina, Malaysia, and Ceylon.

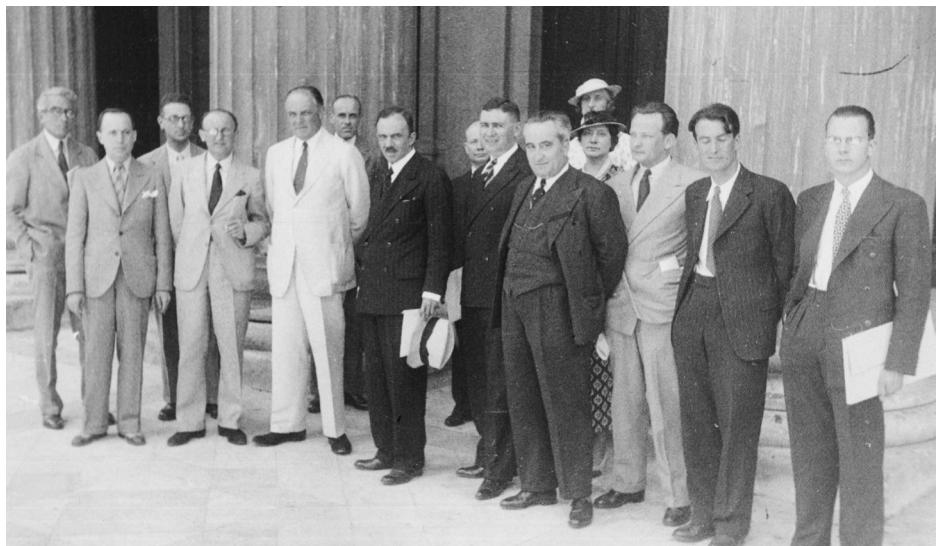
In contrast, the June 1935 GB session supported the idea of an American conference, which underscored the growing importance of American states in the ILO, especially since the entry of the United States. The proposal, presented by the Chilean delegate Fernando García Oldini, came directly from Chilean President Arturo Alessandri. His stature among labor organizations and Left parties having weakened considerably, especially after a strike by farm laborers in 1934, partly explained this invitation.³⁴ The resolution was adopted at the 1935 ILC.³⁵ The Santiago conference was scheduled for 2 January 1936.

The shift in the balance of power toward regionalism prompted officials of the International Labour Office to invest considerable efforts to make the Santiago conference a success. They managed to get almost all the Latin American countries represented, in addition to Canada and the United States. Before the conference, the International Labour Office sent its officials to various Latin American countries to encourage them to send complete tripartite delegations.³⁶ In September 1935, Butler also sent Moisés Poblete Troncoso of Chile to Santiago to settle the practical and political issues raised by the planned conference. Poblete played a central role in making the meeting a success.³⁷ The

Santiago conference brought together labor specialists with political positions who could discuss issues in their country. Cuba was represented by José Enrique de Sandoval y Saavedra, lawyer and adviser to the Ministry of Labor. Peru was represented by Edgardo Rebagliati, a major player in the development of social security in this country. Officials of the International Labour Office ensured the presence of Latin Americans, who significantly contributed to making the organization known in their country. Some were also deeply involved in international networks, such as the Brazilian general director at the Ministry of Labor, Affonso Bandeira de Mello. General secretary of the National Labor Council, Bandeira de Mello was also an expert for the ILO Standing Committee on emigration and the regular government delegate at the ILC.

The 1936 conference made evident the ambivalence that arose from a regional commitment from the ILO and the Latin American delegates. Butler recognized that the development and application of social legislation in Latin America raised particular problems related to the existence of a dispersed and heterogeneous population in undeveloped countries.³⁸ The meeting in Santiago reaffirmed the tension between a universalistic and a Latin American model of labor, emphasized by the intervention of the Venezuelan government delegate Luis Yépes: “The mere copying of European and North American methods has not proved favourable, but through the work of this Conference we shall become better acquainted with American labour ideals; we shall get a better knowledge of our own mentality and ability to secure that measure of justice to which we are entitled.”³⁹ José Guillermo Antuña, the Uruguayan government delegate, proposed a resolution for the creation of an inter-American institute of labor. The Mexican delegate, following an initiative of the Mexican Labor Department, also intended such a proposition, despite a diplomatic mission of Butler to Mexico in 1934 and the work of the correspondent of the International Labour Office in Mexico, Federico Bach, to discourage any regional labor office.⁴⁰ Antuña insisted that solutions to social and economic problems in Latin America could only be taken into account within regional structures, which were more likely to capture the continental “social atmosphere” and to defend the national sovereignty of Latin American countries.⁴¹ His remarks echoed the concerns of many Latin American political elites in the context of a possible war in Europe.

Meanwhile, workers’ delegates, often members of nascent national federations of workers, strongly defended international cooperation. Through the Chilean workers’ delegate and general secretary of the National Confederation of Trade Unions, Luis Solís, workers insisted on the necessity to increase



Officials of the International Labour Office at the ILO First Regional Conference, Santiago, 2–14 January 1936. From left to right: Maurice Thudichum, Moisés Poblete, David Blelloch, Stephen L. Childs, Harold Butler, Kenneth McKinlay, George Johnston, Lewis Lorwin, Oswald Stein, Robert Lafrance, C. Wilfred Jenks, Enrique Siewers, Winifred Duncan, and Geneviève Laverrière. Courtesy of the ILO Archives, Geneva.

international cooperation.⁴² For them, the 1936 ILO regional conference gave an international dimension to their preoccupations.⁴³ The ILO wanted to encourage this. As Tixier wrote, technical collaboration with Latin America could “provide a basis for the intervention of the different trade unions, seeking reforms and ratifications of international conventions.”⁴⁴ The ILO could also play a role in trade unionism in Latin America and counterbalance labor organization under governmental control, a phenomenon that was particularly prevalent in Brazil and Uruguay.⁴⁵ The different positions that politicians and workers adopted made it clear that regionalist discourse could not be reduced to a blanket opposition to international cooperation.

THE DIFFUSION OF ILO MODELS IN LATIN AMERICA

For the International Labour Office, regional conferences were a way to reinforce its diffusion of international conventions, know-how, and expertise, and

were thus also a conveyor belt for the social models it promoted. It promoted them in part by limiting discussion at the Santiago conference. At the June 1935 conference, Latin American delegates presented issues they wanted to discuss, including the living conditions of farm workers, wages, and unemployment resulting from the restriction of international trade between countries producing raw materials and European countries, and the problem of emigration.⁴⁶ Despite this diversity, under pressure from Tixier, for whom the conference had to mainly encourage Latin American governments to favor compulsory insurance, the Santiago conference focused on social insurance and the working conditions of women and children.⁴⁷ To ensure the success of this strategy, the International Labour Office sent its best experts to Santiago. Oswald Stein, a Czech member of the Section on Social Insurance since 1922 and a specialist in actuarial questions who would become important in the diffusion of the compulsory social insurance model in Latin America in the 1940s, represented the International Labour Office in the Committee on Social Insurance.⁴⁸ Stein took the office's report on social insurance, which described results since 1919, as a basis for discussions. Not surprisingly, then, the adopted resolutions endorsed the principle of compulsory and contributive insurance that ILO conventions promoted and reaffirmed it at the second ILO regional conference in Havana in 1939, organized two months after the outbreak of war in Europe.⁴⁹ This second conference also adopted the ILO principle of collaboration among government, employers, and workers in administering social insurance.

Other resolutions revealed how Latin American poverty raised problems in the field of social protection and concessions made to ILO principles. Regarding death pensions, an ILO-promoted resolution stated in 1936 that, when economic conditions did not allow payment under the insurance system, the pension system would be replaced by a lump sum to the widow, widower, or disabled children. In 1939, the Committee on Social Insurance accepted the principle of self-insurance in case of accident. Latin American delegates also underlined the necessity for the ILO to study the investment of the funds of social insurance, giving impetus to the technical work of the International Labour Office. This grew out of the awareness that, in less developed countries, the ILO was to play an important role in social scientific management under state control.⁵⁰ After the conference, the Section on Social Insurance developed its publications on statistics, financial projections, and financial plans, all roadmaps for nation-based institutional modernization. Technical conferences were also organized in Geneva in 1936, 1937, and 1938, allowing the International Labour Office to provide technical

information while strengthening its expertise of American economic and social conditions, thanks to an enhanced exchange of information. This contributed to the “scientification” of social policies in Latin America. The lack of experts at the national level led some Latin American governments to seek the International Labour Office technical assistance in administering and organizing their social insurance systems.⁵¹

Finally, at the regional conferences, and given the diversity of ideas on social insurance, experts of the International Labour Office adopted a compromise position. While defending the principles laid down by the ILO, they also considered ideas from American administrators, politicians, workers, and experts on social protection, especially the need to link social insurance to other policies such as medical services. This aspect of social protection was growing, particularly in Chile and the United States. At the Santiago conference, the Committee on Social Insurance also stressed the need to link health insurance to prevention, worker education on hygiene, and nutrition.

These features of health insurance were not all new to the International Labour Office but did reflect the growing prominence in the 1930s of American countries, especially the United States, in the orientation of ILO social policy.⁵² At the Havana conference, the American John Winant, chairman of the US Social Security Board from 1935 to 1937 and appointed director of the International Labour Office in 1939, underlined how “the need for social insurance as part of a wider program of social security is today universally recognised.”⁵³ The call for extending social insurance initiated a paradigm shift toward “social security” inspired by American and British experiences.⁵⁴ The International Labour Office had adopted an attitude at regional conferences, where, rather than simply defend its social insurance model, it positioned itself as a privileged interlocutor of American countries. During World War II, when the ILO engaged with the Allies against the Nazi expansion, experts of the International Labour Office gave a practical dimension to the new ideas on social insurance, especially through the dispatch of missions of technical assistance in Latin America.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

Responding to tensions between Europe and the rest of the world in the 1930s, the regional ILO conferences in Latin America highlighted the ILO’s capacity to adapt to changing international and regional contexts. While validating

regional cooperation, these conferences repositioned the ILO in an international context. They built bridges over international divisions, allowing the ILO to strengthen its influence in all regions of the world.⁵⁶ Spaces for international dialogue on social issues, the two first ILO regional conferences in Latin America not only created new transnational networks of technical information and expertise but also constituted a conveyor belt for the diffusion of ILO models based on industrialized European countries. Following the argument of Kiran Klaus Patel and Patricia Clavin, ILO regional conferences can thus also be considered institutions encouraging a “Europeanization” process.⁵⁷ However, this process was not a linear but a dynamic one because it also allowed Latin American elites to internationalize their social and economic agendas.⁵⁸ The ILO created an environment conducive to the integration of peripheral demands into the international agenda.

This back and forth, in turn, reoriented ILO activities toward new fields of research, even if in a limited way. Regionalization helped change the institutional logic of the ILO and its activities, which focused not only on producing international norms but also and increasingly on helping countries develop and manage their social policies, a new phase in the evolution of the ILO toward technical cooperation. The aims of regional conferences were and still are to allow an international coordination in the development of social policies and to clarify the goals and means of regional social policies according to ILO principles. This kind of technical cooperation in the 1930s set the background for the establishment after the World War II of ILO development programs, organized according to the principles of international and regional cooperation.⁵⁹

NOTES

1. Annual report of the Acting Director of the International Labour Office (hereafter Annual report of the Director), 108, 1941, International Labour Organization Archives (hereafter ILOA), Geneva. The International Labour Organization (hereafter ILO) is a League of Nations creation that lives on today. It is composed of the Governing Body, the International Labour Conference, and the International Labour Office. The International Labour Office is the secretariat of the ILO.
2. In 1944, the conference in Philadelphia also adopted a resolution on the organization of a regional conference in the Middle East. The first Asian regional

conference was held in India in 1947. In Africa, the first conference was in Lagos, in the Federation of Nigeria in 1960. The first ILO European regional conference was organized in 1955.

3. For some case studies of ILO activities in these regions, see Fabián Herrera León and Patricio Herrera González, *América Latina y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Redes, coopéración técnica e institucionalidad social, 1919–1950* (Mexico City: UMSNH, UM, UFF, 2013); Fabián Herrera León and Yannick Wehrli, “Le Bureau international du travail et l’Amérique latine durant l’entre-deux-guerres; Problèmes et enjeux,” in *L’Organisation internationale du travail: Origine, développement, avenir*, ed. Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Vincent Viet (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 157–66; Jeremy Seekings, “The ILO and Welfare Reform in South Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, 1919–1950,” and Sandrine Kott “Constructing a European Social Model: The Fight for Social Insurance in the Interwar Period” in *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, and Geert Van Goethem (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 145–72 and 173–95; and Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Slepston, and Jasmien van Daele, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009* (Geneva: ILO, 2009).
4. Corinne A. Pernet, “Developing Nutritional Standards and Food Policy: Latin American Reformers Between the ILO, the League of Nations Health Organization, and the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau,” in *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, ed. Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 249–61; “L’OIT et la question de l’alimentation en Amérique latine (1930–1950): Les problèmes posés par la définition internationale des normes de niveau de vie,” in *L’Organisation internationale du travail*, 167–78.
5. For an institutional point of view, see André Sapir, “Le régionalisme et la nouvelle théorie du commerce international sonnent-ils le glas du GATT?” *Politique étrangère* 2 (1993): 277–93.
6. Tanja A. Börzel, Lukas Goltermann, Mathis Lohaus, and Kai Striebinger, *Roads to Regionalism: Genesis, Design, and Effects of Regional Organizations* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012). For a theoretical point of view, see Ernst B. Haas, “The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheorizing,” *International Organization* 24 (1970): 607–46.
7. Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, *Theories of New Regionalism* (London: Palgrave, 2003); Bjorn Hettne, Andres Inotai, and Oswaldo Sunkel, *Studies in the New Regionalism*, vols. 1–4 (London: Macmillan, 1999–2001); Edward D. Mansfield and Helen V. Milner, “The New Wave of Regionalism,” *International Organization* 53 (1999): 589–627; James H. Mittleman, “Rethinking the ‘New Regionalism’ in the Context of Globalization” *Global Governance* 2 (1996): 189–215; Andrew Gamble

- and Anthony Payne, *Regionalism and World Order* (London: Macmillan, 1996); and Andrew Hurrell, “Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective,” in *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, ed. Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 38–73.
8. Véronique Plata, “Le Bureau international du travail et la coopération technique dans l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Relations Internationales* 157 (2014): 55–69; Daniel Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Anthony Alcock, *History of the International Labour Organisation* (London: Macmillan, 1970); Alexander Johnston, *The International Labour Organisation: Its Work for Social and Economic Progress* (London: Europa Publications, 1970).
 9. Annual report of the Director, 7, 1930, ILOA.
 10. Patricia Clavin, “Europe and the League of Nations,” in *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914–1945*, ed. Robert Gerwarth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 325–54.
 11. Annual report of the Director, 1932, ILOA. On Albert Thomas and his influence on the work of the ILO, see Denis Guérin, *Albert Thomas au BIT, 1920–1932: De l’internationalisme à l’Europe* (Geneva: Institut européen de l’Université de Genève, 1996).
 12. On the regional discourse and its impact on the League of Nations, see Anne-Isabel Richard, “Competition and Complementarity: Civil Society Networks and the Question of Decentralizing the League of Nations,” *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012): 233–56.
 13. Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jean-Michel Guieu, “L’‘insécurité collective’: L’Europe et la Société des Nations dans l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin* 2 (2009): 21–43; and Eric Bussière, “L’organisation économique de la SDN et la naissance du régionalisme économique en Europe,” *Relations Internationales* 75 (1993): 301–13.
 14. Carolien Stolte, “Bringing Asia to the World: Indian Trade Unionism and the Long Road towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–37,” *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012): 257–78.
 15. Record of proceedings of the International Labour Conference (hereafter ILC record of proceedings), 1934, 213, ILOA.
 16. Ibid., 264.
 17. Ibid., 247.
 18. Pan-American conferences were organized in Latin America since 1889. See the Pan American Union annual publications. Some are available online at <http://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Pan+American+Union%22> (accessed 28 March 2015).
 19. Harold Butler to Migone, 28 December 1933, XR 62/1/1, “Pan-American Conference (Montevideo, Dec. 1933),” Butler cabinet files, ILOA. Migone was the correspondent in Buenos Aires and was in Montevideo in 1933, sent unofficially

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20. Fabián Herrera León, “México y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Los orígenes de una relación, 1919–1931,” *Foro Internacional* 51 (2011): 336–55.
 21. Butler to Leifur Magnusson, 27 December 1933, XC 61/1/2, “United States. Correspondent’s Office Washington. L. Magnusson. Jacket 1 to 4,” Butler cabinet files, ILOA.
 22. XR 62/1/1, “Pan-American Conference,” Butler cabinet files, ILOA.
 23. Olga Hidalgo-Weber, “Les réseaux américains et britanniques à l’OIT dans l’entre-deux-guerres: L’élaboration d’une spécial relationship sociale et économique,” paper presented at a PhD conference, Conférence Universitaire de Suisse Occidentale, Lausanne, 8–10 June 2011; Stephen Hughes and Nigel Haworth, “A Shift in the Centre of Gravity: The ILO Under Harold Butler and John G. Winant,” *ILO Histories*, 293–312.
 24. “Pan-American Conference, 7th International Conference, Montevideo, December 1933,” D 600/923/2/8, Diplomatic Division, ILOA. For an American point of view, see *What the International Labor Organization Means to America*, ed. Spencer Miller Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).
 25. On international organizations as reflections of the tensions between centralism and local governance, see Christoph Schreuer, “Regionalism v. Universalism,” *European Journal of International Law* 6 (1995): 477–99.
 26. Wilfred Jenks, memorandum, 1934, RL 01/4, “Coordination between regional labour organization and the ILO,” Relations Series, ILOA.
 27. Adrien Tixier to Wilfred Jenks, 25 August 1934, RL 01/4, “Coordination between regional labour organization and the ILO,” Relations Series, ILOA. See also Pauli Kettunen, “The ILO as a Forum for Developing and Demonstrating a Nordic Model,” in *Globalizing Social Rights*, 210–30.
 28. Bernard Béguin, *Le tripartisme dans l’Organisation internationale du travail* (Geneva: Droz, 1959).
 29. ILC Record of Proceedings, 1934, ILOA. In the 1920s, only Japan and India were permanent members of the Governing Body. With the 1934 reform, seven extra-European governments of the sixteen represented were elected.
 30. Adrien Tixier, mission report, 22 January 1935, RL 86/0 “Relation of the ILO with central and South America. General,” Relations Series, ILOA. Original quote in French: “Pour intéresser les gens il faut leur montrer qu’on connaît les problèmes qui les intéressent et qu’on peut leur rendre service.”
 31. “Asiatic Conference,” XD 6/1/1, Butler cabinet files, ILOA.
 32. Victor-Yves Ghebali, *L’Organisation internationale du Travail* (Geneva: Georg, 1987).
 33. Record of proceedings of the Governing Body (hereafter GB record of proceedings), 55th session, October 1931, 604–13, ILOA.
 34. Moisés Poblete Troncoso, note, 23 May 1935, “Regional Conference of American States members of the ILO. Santiago de Chile (December 1935–January 1936),” XD

- 12/1/1, Butler cabinet files, ILOA. For a summary of the Santiago conference, see *International Labour Review* 33 (1936): 479–98, 688–727.
35. The Governing Body unanimously accepted the invitation of Chile, which had ratified thirty-three conventions and the conventions covering sickness, invalidity, and old-age insurance.
 36. Butler sent Stephen Lawford Childs, member of the organizing committee of the conference, to Latin America in November 1935 to prepare his visit in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina before the conference and to press the authorities to send tripartite delegations. “Regional Conference of American States members of the ILO. Santiago de Chile (December 1935–January 1936), Jacket II,” XD 12/1/1, ILOA. See also the contribution of Lisa Singleton, “The ILO and Social Security in Latin America, 1930–1950,” in Herrera León and Herrera González, *América Latina y la Organización*, 243–74.
 37. “1st regional conference of American States Members of the ILO (Santiago de Chile, Dec. 1935)—Preparatory mission of Mr. Poblete Troncoso,” D 1086/1/6, Diplomatic Series, ILOA.
 38. Record of proceedings of the Santiago Conference, 1936, 304, ILOA.
 39. Ibid., 97.
 40. Professor Federico Bach and Harold Butler, correspondence, 13 November 1935, “Proposed creation of an international labour office, Mexico,” RL 01/4/o, Relations Series, ILOA.
 41. Record of proceedings of the Santiago Conference, 1936, 43, ILOA.
 42. “1st regional conference of American States members of the ILO (Santiago de Chile, Dec. 1935),” notes, pamphlets, and speech on the conference, D 1086/12, Diplomatic Series, ILOA.
 43. On the impact of the Santiago Conference on the Latin American labor movement see Patricio Herrera González, “La primera conferencia regional del trabajo en América: Su influencia en el movimiento obrero, 1936,” in *América Latina y la Organización*, 199–242.
 44. “Social Insurance section (1932–1938),” draft program for the 1934–1935 activities, XO 1/7/1, Butler cabinet files, ILOA.
 45. Adrien Tixier, “Relation of the ILO with central and south America. General,” 22 January 1935, RL 86/o, Relations Series, ILOA. See also Alain Touraine, “L’évolution du syndicalisme en Amérique latine,” *Revue française de sociologie* 29 (1988): 117–42.
 46. “Regional Conference of American States members of the ILO. Santiago de Chile (December 1935–January 1936),” XD 12/1/1, ILOA.
 47. Ibid.
 48. On the role of the ILO in the development of social standards in Latin America during the war, see Jill Jensen, “From Geneva to the Americas: The International Labor Organization and Inter-American Social Security Standards, 1936–1948,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 80 (2011): 215–40.

49. *International Labour Review* 41 (1940): 239–40, ILOA.
50. For a similar argument, see Martha Finnemore, “International Organizations as Teachers of Norms: The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and Science Policy,” *International Organization* 47 (1993): 565–97.
51. Véronique Plata, “La difusión de las normas internacionales del trabajo en Venezuela, 1936–1939: Una práctica de cooperación técnica internacional en la OIT,” in *América Latina y la Organización*, 127–60.
52. Sandrine Kott, “De l’assurance à la sécurité sociale (1919–1949): L’OIT comme acteur international” (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2008), 1–29.
53. Report of the Director at the Havana Conference, 1939, 58, ILOA.
54. Kott, “De l’assurance à la sécurité sociale,” 23.
55. Sandrine Kott, “Fighting the War or Preparing for Peace: The ILO During the Second World War,” *Journal of Modern European History* 12 (2014): 359–76.
56. In Latin America, the ILO opened new branch offices in Cuba in 1936, in Chile, Venezuela, and Peru in 1937, and in Ecuador, Colombia, and Uruguay in 1938.
57. Patricia Clavin and Kiran Klaus Patel, “The Role of International Organizations in Europeanization: The Case of the League of Nations and the European Economic Community,” in *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century: Historical Approaches*, ed. Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 110–31.
58. For a similar argument, see Dominic Sachsenmaier, Jens Riedel, and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2002), in particular the contribution of Jürgen Kocka, 119–28.
59. The first program of technical cooperation launched by the ILO in 1948 was the *Manpower Program* and was meant for the reconstruction of Europe before being deployed in Latin America and Asia. For a European perspective, see Lorenzo Mechì, *L’Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro e la ricostruzione europea* (Rome: Ediesse, 2013).

Beyond Social Legislation

Worker Unity in Latin America and Its Links to the
International Labour Organization, 1936–1938



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This study examines a series of little-known events in the history of organized labor in Latin America. At two meetings held in January 1936 in Santiago, labor leaders from several nations in the Americas, primarily South America, discussed the principal socioeconomic, political, and work-related problems affecting the working class on the continent. Their diagnosis was unanimous. First, a lack of unity prevented organized labor from slowing employer abuses. Second, demanding improved social and labor guarantees from states in the absence of a continent-wide union structure was impossible. The worker delegates who gathered in Santiago signed a pact—still unpublished—to raise awareness among the continent's workers about the urgent need to form a common front. In Mexico, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a widely recognized labor leader, called for worker unity throughout the hemisphere and actively collaborated in promoting a Latin American Labor Congress as a way to fulfill the pact. In September 1938 in Mexico City, collaboration between labor leaders, some of them signatories of the pact, resulted in the founding of the Confederation of Latin American Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, or CTAL).

The continental and international relations behind this pact are important to understanding the actions and perspectives of workers' movements in a period defined by an international crisis, liberalism under threat, and totalitarianism. Activists established South-North connections among

leaders and union organizations at a time when territorial and ideological borders were no longer impediments. International organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Communist International (Comintern) sought to exert influence during preparations for the Latin American Labor Congress through both correspondence and direct visits—some clandestine—by their officials and emissaries.

Identifying the international linkages of the Latin American labor movement helps us understand the influence international organizations enjoyed in their political positions and in forming such a regional identity. This study takes newly available sources into account to expand beyond exclusively national explanations for continuities and discontinuities in labor histories.¹

THE AMERICAN LABOR CONFERENCE IN CHILE

In the nineteenth session of the International Labour Conference, held in Geneva in June 1935, Fernando García Oldini, the Chilean government's representative before the ILO, issued an invitation to the delegates there to organize an American labor conference in Santiago.² The purpose was "to examine the possibility of having the International Labour Conference meet in Chile to discuss not only questions of universal importance, but also regional issues such as the conditions of agricultural workers, the debate surrounding workers and leisure time, and the application of social security."³ The representatives from the Americas approved the proposal unanimously on 21 June at the seventy-second session of the board of directors of the ILO.⁴

The First Labour Conference of American States Members of the International Labour Organization was held in Santiago from 2 to 14 January 1936. It set as goals a rapprochement between employers and workers and a strengthened state role as mediator. For the ILO, the meeting marked opportunities to organize the first regional labor conference beyond Europe and to observe firsthand problems related to work, economic issues, and cultural concerns on scales that differed significantly from the situations with which its directors, officials, and technicians were familiar. The representatives of the ILO understood the importance of the meeting in Chile and were eager to promote other assemblies in the Americas, in part because the region mirrored how near—or far—the League of Nations and the ILO were from

achieving their primary objectives: namely, the administration of social justice and universal peace to ensure understanding among peoples.

Labor leaders on the continent were aware that the postwar period and the severe economic crisis of 1929 had transformed their struggle and the pressure mechanisms they could exert on employers and the state. They also knew that achieving their demands, even gradually, would require different commitments on the part of the rank and file, because securing new labor rights and consolidating those already guaranteed in legislation meant complying with new norms and obligations that employers had agreed to and officials and technicians in departments or ministries of labor had arbitrated.⁵ Now more than ever, workers were obliged to study and participate actively in discussions at assemblies: acceptance of their social and labor demands could no longer be assured exclusively through traditional tactics of mass demonstrations, confrontation, and agitation. The testimony of Guillermo Polo Medrano, a Peruvian worker, clearly elucidates these new qualities of the working-class struggle:

There are some who mistake the position of the worker in this job market. They believe that simply because they are workers they must aggressively brandish their weapons of war. But those who think this way are in an equivocal condition; the evolution of time teaches the worker to become cultured, to study widely [and] to defend his rights with broad awareness of cause. As long as this does not occur, we shall indeed fail; moreover, my opinion is that only in this way can he obtain the triumphs that signal the advance of civilization.⁶

Although favorable to broadening workers' rights while demanding greater compliance, the new relations between workers and employers were by no means free from abuses and excesses. Indeed, many governments were quite willing to corrupt their own labor legislation. Meanwhile, employers, in collusion with labor officials, contrived to ignore collective labor contracts and repeatedly prolonged the working day or arbitrarily reduced their workers' wages.⁷

However, the practices of consensus, negotiation, and collaboration were steadily gaining more adherents in international law generally. The Comintern resolved in 1935 to adopt all necessary and practical means to solidify multiclass solidarity among unions in order to slow the advance of Nazism and fascism on both continents. At the same time, the reformist

route of Latin American unionism became juxtaposed to the path of revolution and class warfare. The organized working class was available to establish a partnership with the national bourgeoisie and to build broad popular fronts and multiclass alliances, underscoring the fact that continental labor unity could not be postponed. Given these new conditions, the formation of a powerful Latin American union seemed a real possibility, especially because, since the late 1920s, worker assemblies and congresses had issued calls to unite all proletarian forces in the continent without tutelage from the United States or Europe.⁸

VICENTE LOMBARDO TOLEDANO AND HIS “MESSAGE TO THE PROLETARIAT” OF LATIN AMERICA

Although the ILO expressly stated that delegations to the conference should be tripartite (government, employers, and workers), Mexico decided against sending worker delegates to the American labor conference in Chile because Emilio Portes Gil, then president of the National Revolutionary Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionario, or PNR), advised President Lázaro Cárdenas that it would be “inconvenient” given the harsh criticisms that were being directed at his government over its social policies, which opposition forces deemed too “leftist.”⁹ Mexican businessmen and employers also did not send representatives to the conference. In their place, Carlos Peón del Valle, secretary of the Mexican Embassy, and Ignacio Cienfuegos y Camus, Mexico’s ambassador to Chile, were named as delegates of the government. They would play prominent roles in various sessions during the event, especially in debates on the topics of land tenure and female and child labor.

Lombardo Toledano, secretary general of the Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (CGOCM), had the tasks of preparing the congress workers’ proletarian unification of their country and controlling the most fractious factions. Although we have no direct sources, we believe that his refusal to participate in the American labor conference was partly to prevent the radicalization of the opposed to General Cárdenas, headed by Plutarco Elías Calles. However, Lombardo Toledano certainly recognized the importance of the conference in Chile, pointing out that it was the first time since the ILO was established in Washington in 1919 that a significant number of delegates had come together to “study the problems of the working class.”¹⁰ Despite the earlier Pan-American conferences in Santiago (1923),

Havana (1928), and Montevideo (1933) that encouraged analyses of workers' conditions and stressed the need to create specific entities to carry out those proposals, no practical results had been achieved.

Mexican workers were not represented directly at the American labor conference, therefore, but Lombardo Toledano sent a lengthy missive addressed to the proletariat on the continent. In it, he praised the ILO's initiative and its commitment to improving social legislation governing wage workers and negotiating international accords. However, the Mexican emphasized that the "struggle supported in law is easier and more efficacious than battling on the margins of the law. The standardization of labor legislation will also serve to unify union activity and political action."¹¹ This pragmatic approach is reflected clearly in Lombardo Toledano's priorities: "The most important problem for the working class is not that of social legislation, but its efficacious and urgent standardization. . . . It is not necessary that all workers think the same way, hold the same political doctrine, or opine similarly on the characteristics of future society; nor is a common ideological denominator required [as they] strive to establish a collective defense of their interests."¹² Lombardo Toledano felt that this program would enable workers to procure and guarantee the fundamental freedoms of individuals and their union and political organizations.

Other labor leaders from the region joined Lombardo Toledano to agree with his proposals at the American Labor Conference. Rosendo Naula, José Cosío, Luis Yépes, and Luis Solís all used language similar in form and content. Among the workers' representatives at the meeting, therefore, expectations for unifying the proletariat in the hemisphere reached unanimity, in both principles and urgency.¹³

THE PACT AMONG LABOR LEADERS IN CHILE

Taking advantage of the workers' delegates who would attend the American Labor Conference in Chile, the Latin American Confederation of Unions (Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana, or CSLA), a worker organization associated with the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU, commonly known as the Profintern), called on labor leaders, particularly in the Southern Cone, to discuss the labor and socioeconomic situation of workers of the continent and lay the foundations for a conference of Latin American workers in order to establish common criteria for regional trade union action and

realize the unity of farm workers in a continental confederation.¹⁴ Like other labor leaders, Lombardo Toledano received a telegram from the CSLA inviting them to participate in this meeting regardless of the American Labor Conference.¹⁵ The CSLA also issued a report on the ILO conference that identified issues related to work, unions, and social problems that resulted from governments' lax application of the ILO's conventions.¹⁶

The CSLA decided to send three observers—an Argentine (Miguel Contreras), a Uruguayan surnamed Martínez (in reality, a Venezuelan named Ricardo Martínez), and a Chilean (Elías Lafertte)—to the American Labor Conference of January 1936.¹⁷ In his autobiography, Lafertte, a member of Chile's Communist Party, affirmed that it was the attendance of so many important labor leaders at the conference that motivated the three observers to attend the conference because the CSLA was anxious to denounce the "real situation that exists in America" and to contribute to improving the "lot of workers throughout Latin America."¹⁸ An additional aim was to reconcile the distinct postures of organized labor on the continent and settle on procedures to achieve a single great union organization.

Lombardo Toledano, meanwhile, chose to remain in Mexico for two reasons. First, plans were under way for a National Congress for the Unification of the Proletariat (Congreso Nacional de Unificación Proletaria, or CNUP), whose objective was to form a popular front and foster unity among Mexican unions. Second, his leadership was being openly challenged by a group led by Fernando Amilpa, representative of the leftist opposition to syndicalism.¹⁹

It turned out that Lombardo Toledano enjoyed success in Santiago without even being there. Outside the official sessions, a group of workers, mainly from South America and surely convoked by the CSLA, made a commitment to follow the guidelines set out in Lombardo Toledano's open letter.²⁰ According to their pact, in most countries—although labor legislation in several nations could be considered progressive on paper—labor contracts were arbitrary. The lack of regulation and control by public authorities also made legislation inoperative in factories and workshops. They also warned representatives of the ILO of the absence of inspectors to monitor compliance with labor laws and conventions the ILO promoted. Faced with such criticism in 1939, during the celebration of the second American labor conference in Havana, John Winant, director of the ILO, recognized that Latin America enjoyed significant social progress. He said the countries of the "New World" shared the basic problems that "also belong to the world," requesting reciprocity from countries on the continent with the ILO. Winant

assumed that the regional position was manifest in the context of cooperation with the “universal mission” of the ILO.²¹

Signatures to the pact accentuated the urgent need to establish a continent-wide union capable of countering the business class while awakening government officials to the need for public policies to address the precarious conditions of workers across the continent. The pact also criticized workers who unwittingly became victims of subjection, exploitation, and persecution.

The meetings concluded on 14 January 1936. Labor leaders who had signed the pact returned home entrusted with a mission to promote, through their labor organizations, a congress of Latin American labor to achieve worker unity across the continent. After signing the pact and attending the closing ceremony, Naula of Ecuador visited Buenos Aires and Montevideo, but was detained by the police in an event that set off a flurry of activity among the diplomatic corps and union leaders. Naula was released a few days later. Although the reason for his arrest was never clarified, it is hard to imagine that it was not related to his vociferous criticism of the region’s governments for failing to ensure and expand the rights of workers. Solís and Lafertte were victims of similar episodes and were detained in Santiago in early February after a prolonged strike by railroad workers that Arturo Alessandri’s government aggressively repressed. In Solís’s case, worker organizations in several countries protested his arrest, interpreting it as a reprisal against his public denunciation of the Alessandri regime for neglecting working-class concerns.²²

Lafertte’s situation, however, was more complicated because he had entered Chile illegally. After being moved from one prison to another in Santiago and subjected to extensive interrogations and torture, he was finally taken to the port of Antofagasta together with a worker named Víctor González. There, the government informed them that they were to be extradited to Mexico.

LOMBARDO TOLEDANO’S EFFORTS TO INSTALL A LATIN AMERICAN WORKERS’ CONGRESS

After the meetings in Chile, Lombardo Toledano coordinated communications among union leaders in Latin America and made contact with labor officials in the United States and Canada to convoke as many delegations as possible to the continental workers’ congress, in order to achieve a single trade union confederation. Panama and Mexico were advanced as possible

hosts. Each letter, telegram, and message that Lombardo Toledano sent alluded to the pact signed in Chile, as did the missives the CSLA distributed during the same period, as part of its strategy of interclass cooperation dictated by Moscow in August 1935.²³ As the weeks passed, labor leaders signed on to another pact calling for unity among all workers in Latin America.²⁴ They aroused the interest not only of many unions in the region but also of the ILO and the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU).

The founding of the Workers University of Mexico (*Universidad Obrera de México*) in early February 1936 was a first step toward consolidating the unity and defense of the proletariat. In its classrooms, faculty and staff projected the formation of a vanguard of workers, standard-bearers of the “ideas that will preside over the future world.”²⁵

During the week beginning 19 February, the assembly of the National Congress for the Unification of the Proletariat in Mexico emphasized that “now that one central union has been created in Mexico, this powerful group of workers must undertake the work required to procure the unification of the unionized workers of Latin America.”²⁶

When the Mexican Confederation of Workers (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, or CTM) was founded on 24 February 1936, its constituent assembly agreed to convoke a congress for all workers in Latin America. It announced that the Mexican labor movement “would do everything in its power to achieve the international unity of the organized proletarian movement [and] will fight in an organized and systematic way until it overcomes all the obstacles that block the fulfillment of its goals.”²⁷ The formation of the CTM stimulated other workers’ organizations in the region. Soon, labor organizations from Argentina, Chile, and Colombia joined Mexico in calling for workers’ representatives to participate in the Latin American Workers’ Congress.

THE ILO, THE PROFINTERN, AND THE LATIN AMERICAN WORKERS’ CONGRESS

Lombardo Toledano, a vital link between the labor organizations of the continent and the organization of the Latin American Workers’ Congress, was a skilled political negotiator who maintained relationships with important organizations such as the ILO and the Profintern. Since 1926, Lombardo Toledano’s correspondence with high officials of the ILO had allowed him to

strengthen his contacts, access privileged information on international conferences, keep himself up to date on news concerning labor and industrial law, exchange bibliographies on union-related matters, and compare statistics on the workplace and social conditions of the working class. Well before Mexico officially joined the ILO in September 1931, Lombardo Toledano was already held in high esteem by the ILO's directors.²⁸ They had entrusted him with publicizing the situation of unions in Mexico and accepted his "diplomacy," which led to Mexico's admittance to the ILO.²⁹

Lombardo Toledano soon became a mediator between the ILO and the Latin American labor movement.³⁰ The Mexican had made contact with Adolf Staal, head of Worker Relations Services at the ILO, which had provided education on epistolary subjects for workers since 1933. Staal, present at the 1936 Chile conference, declared his interest in establishing a joint effort with the workers of Latin America. In his annual report, Staal stated that the meeting in Santiago had provided an opportunity to establish "contacts with labor organizations [that are] valuable for both parties."³¹ In the ensuing months, Staal asked Lombardo Toledano and Rodolfo Piña Soria (a member of the CTM) for updates on preparations for "a Continental Labor Congress undertaken by the National Executive Committee of the CTM some months ago." This reflected "the great interest" that Staal had "in keeping himself well and opportunely informed as to the details of such an important project."³² News of the continental workers' meeting generated such high expectations at the ILO that Lombardo Toledano himself wrote to Harold Butler, director of the ILO, to confirm that the CTM was striving "with all means at its disposal, to assure that Latin American countries remain linked to Geneva, as this means international understanding among all peoples."³³ The interest of the ILO in organizing the Latin American Workers' Congress became clear when the principal organ for publicizing the activities of the International Bureau of Labor announced that in "December 1937 or January 1938 a Congress with all worker organizations in Latin America will be held in Mexico. On September 20 [1937], the National Committee of the CTM sent out invitations to the most important labor organizations."³⁴

The ILO was not the only party interested in preparations for this workers' congress. The Profintern was keeping close tabs on Lombardo Toledano's movements and negotiations through its contacts in the Mexican Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Mexicano*, or PCM). The PCM was convinced that the founding of the CTM represented nothing less than a historical opportunity to establish a broad popular movement



Panoramic view of a plenary session at the Latin American Labor Congress, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, 8 September 1938. Courtesy of the Photographic Archive, "Vicente Lombardo Toledano" Workers' University of Mexico.

in Mexico and the region, especially in light of the interest that President Cárdenas's "nationalist revolutionary" project stirred throughout Latin America.³⁵

In late April 1936, Witold Antonovich Lovsky, a representative of the CSLA, held a long conversation with Lombardo Toledano to iron out the steps in convoking different worker organizations on the continent to the second congress. In letters to comrades in the Southern Cone, Lovsky emphasized the importance of the pact signed in Chile. "It is something that can be taken advantage of," he argued, adding that "the Pact is not a simple matter of etiquette."³⁶

Lombardo Toledano also attempted to gain the support of the worker movement in Mexico's northern neighbor. In another open letter, he sought to touch the hearts of the proletariat in the United States with his proposal to unite the proletariat from one end of the continent to the other. "You can

contribute to the cause of the emancipation of the proletariat with incomparable services. . . . You can also help the semi-colonial nations of Latin America, whose geographical and moral vanguard is found in my country.”³⁷

International cooperation among Latin American unions received further strong support when the CTM was incorporated into the IFTU, an organization of workers particularly from European countries, which followed the Social Democratic trend and collaborated with the ILO. The CTM-IFTU union was another step in the realization of a project of worker unity. “Admittance to the IFTU will be, without doubt, an important contribution,” CTM officials argued, “especially for Latin American Labor . . . who always identify with the cause of national freedom, due to their situation as semi-colonial peoples with poor economic development.”³⁸

Given that the CTM, with its more than six hundred thousand members, was considered the principal union in the Americas, in September 1936 Lombardo Toledano sent a long letter reiterating the invitation to worker groups throughout the region to gather as soon as possible in a labor congress. “Meanwhile,” he wrote, “there is a task we must carry out with enthusiasm and no loss of time; the unification of the proletariat. . . . Every fundamental vindication of the wage-earning class depends on each one of the Latin American nations achieving internal unification of the proletariat and international solidarity in the face of the force that oppresses us all.”³⁹

In March 1937, the General Confederation of Labor (Confederación General del Trabajo, or CGT) of Argentina announced its support for the CTM’s push for a Latin American Labor Congress. The congress, which would bring together the largest contingent of worker representatives ever in the region, was characterized by the leaders of the CTM as “the most effective bulwark that Latin America has against its domestic enemies and imperialism.”⁴⁰

THE CONSUMMATION OF WORKER UNITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND LINKS WITH THE ILO

In August 1938, the CTM published the final convocation for the Latin American Labor Congress to be held in Mexico City from 5 to 8 September of that year. At the inauguration on 5 September, Lombardo Toledano

stressed the historical significance of bringing together for the first time proletariats from Latin America and around the world to breathe life into a worker organization spanning most of the continent.⁴¹ He insisted that the unity of Latin American labor was inevitable.⁴² His speech also referred to the participation of communists, Mexicans, and foreigners, dismissing all suspicion of subordination to political parties, ideologies, or leaderships, be they national or international. Lombardo Toledano had to convince very different allies such as the ILO or IFTU that the independence of workers would be a constant.

In their address at the inaugural session, Ramón González Peña of Spain, León Jouhaux of France, and Eduardo Fimmen, president of the International Federation of Transport Workers, applauded the initiative of the continent, paid homage to Lombardo Toledano's leadership, and praised the CTM for securing delegates from throughout the region. Delegates also listened attentively to the speech by the leader of India's railroad workers, Shri Guruswami, who briefly described the "brutal exploitation" to which workers in his country and the British colonies were subject, exemplified by the experience of "comrades" who were "exported" to "Trinidad and Jamaica." Guruswami stated that he had come to the congress to learn from Latin American labor how to more "effectively" confront enemies inside and outside India.⁴³

At a later meeting, held in the Green Room at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes on 8 September 1938, delegates resolved to establish the Confederation of Latin American Workers. Vicente Lombardo Toledano was elected president in recognition of his efforts to procure worker unity in the hemisphere. The act was simple, brief, and definitive. Earlier discussions had paved the way for this development and established that it was but the first step in the struggle for a "grand Fatherland" for all workers.

By the end of 1938, Lombardo Toledano became an undisputed protagonist in the Mexican and continental political scene, strengthening its international union leadership. His consistent anti-imperialism in his capacity as leader of the CTM and CTAL and his continued solidarity with the Spanish Republic, defending it in his speeches and writings on the Soviet Union, became hallmarks of his personality. The region's progressive political leaders referred to the president of the CTAL as the champion of continental trade unionism.



CTAL President Vicente Lombardo Toledano, center, surrounded by two ILO officials in charge of relations with Latin American Workers, Adolf Staal (far left) and David Efrón (far right), at the Second General Congress of the CTAL, in Cali, Colombia, December 1944. Courtesy of the Photographic Archive, "Vicente Lombardo Toledano" Workers' University of Mexico.

NOTES

1. The historiography of the Latin American labor movement is largely an extension of national histories, for example Pablo González Casanova, ed., *Historia del movimiento obrero en América Latina*, 4 vols. (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales de la UNAM and Siglo XXI Editores, 1984); and Leslie Bethell, ed., *Historia de América Latina*, vol. 12, 13 (Barcelona: Cambridge University Press and Crítica, 1997).
2. For a more detailed understanding of the relations between workers and the first American labor conference, see Patricio Herrera González, “La primera conferencia regional del trabajo en América: Su influencia en el movimiento obrero, 1936,” in *América Latina y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Redes, cooperación técnica e institucionalidad social, 1919–1950*, ed. Fabián Herrera León and Patricio Herrera González (Morelia: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2013).
3. Fernando García Oldini, “Discussion du rapport du Directeur,” *Informations Sociales* (Geneva) 13 (24 June 1935): 426.
4. Harold Butler, director of the International Bureau of Labor, to the government of Chile, Geneva, 12 July 1935, in “Conferencia del Trabajo de los Estados de América miembros de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo,” *Actas de las sesiones* (Geneva: Oficina Internacional de Trabajo, 1936), xv–xvii.
5. Few studies focus on the departments or offices of labor in Latin America and their technical, economic, social and political functions, but these contributions were fundamental in relating the particularities of labor realities to executive and legislative powers, and the employer and academic sectors. For the cases of Argentina and Chile, see Mirta Lobato, “Historia de las instituciones laborales en Argentina: Una asignatura pendiente,” *Revista del Trabajo* 4 (January–November 2007): 145–54; and Juan Carlos Yáñez, *La intervención social en Chile 1907–1932* (Santiago: RiL Editores and PEDCH, 2008).
6. Guillermo Polo Medrano (Peruvian worker, Asamblea de Sociedades Unidas), worker delegate speech, 8 January 1936, Santiago de Chile, in *Actas*, 137.
7. For the cases of Argentina and Chile, see Lobato, “Historia de las instituciones laborales en Argentina”; and Yáñez, *La intervención social en Chile*.
8. See Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *La Doctrina Monroe y el Movimiento Obrero* (Mexico City: Talleres Linotipográficos La Lucha, 1927); Ricardo Melgar Bao, “Un Neobolivarianismo antiimperialista: La Unión Centro Sud Americana y de las Antillas (USCAYA),” *Políticas de la Memoria* 6–7 (summer 2006–2007), CEDINCI: 149–64; Daniel Kersfeld, “La Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas: Una construcción política entre el marxismo y el latinoamericanismo,” *Políticas de la Memoria* 6–7, 143–48; Alexandra Pita, *La Unión Latino Americana y el Boletín Renovación: Redes intelectuales y revistas culturales en la década de 1920* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Universidad de Colima, 2009); and

- Alexandra Pita and Carlos Marichal, coord., *Pensar el Antiimperialismo* (Mexico City: Universidad de Colima, El Colegio de México, 2012).
9. Lovsky, alias Godoy, to the *Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana*, Mexico, 10 February 1936, leg. 495, series 10, exp. 327, Russian State Archive of Social and Political Historia, Rossiiskiy Gosudarstvennyi Arxiv Sotsial'noi y Politicheskoi Istorii (hereinafter RGASPI).
 10. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “La Conferencia Internacional del Trabajo de Santiago de Chile,” Mexico, 25 December 1935, id. 16231, leg. 270, Fondo Histórico Lombardo Toledano (hereafter FHLT).
 11. Ibid.
 12. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “Mensaje al proletariado de la América Latina,” *El Universal* (Mexico City), 1 January 1936.
 13. Rosendo Naula, Ecuadoran worker delegate speech, 7 January 1936; José Cosío, Cuban worker delegate speech, 7 January 1936; Luis Yépes, Venezuelan worker delegate speech, 8 January 1936; and Luis Solís, Chilean worker delegate speech, 4 January 1936, Santiago de Chile, in *Actas*, 67, 112–13, 121, 142.
 14. Lovsky, 10 February 1936, RGASPI.
 15. This telegram, signed by Miguel Contreras, stressed that the American labor conference could “be exploited widely in the struggle over labor legislation and [for] decisive united steps,” Montevideo, November 1935, id. 15913, leg. 269, FHLT.
 16. Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana, *El cumplimiento de la legislación en la República Argentina: En relación con la aplicación de los convenios y recomendaciones aprobadas por la Oficina Internacional del Trabajo* (Santiago: CSLA-Imp. Gutenberg, 1936), 58.
 17. The observers were Miguel Contreras, general secretary CSLA; Elías Lafertte, secretary of the FOCH; A. Montes, member, *Secretariado del Caribe* (actually Ricardo Martínez, alias Arturo, Montes, Juárez, Amadeo, Rolito, Enrique, Soto, Suárez, Ricky, member of the Venezuelan Communist Party). See Lazar Jeifets, Víctor Jeifets, and Peter Huber, *La Internacional Comunista y América Latina, 1919–1943: Diccionario biográfico* (Geneva: Instituto de Latinoamérica de la Academia de las Ciencias [Moscow] and Institut pour l’histoire du communisme [Geneva], 2004), 198–99; Jorge Arrate and Eduardo Rojas, *Memoria de la izquierda chilena*, vol. 1, ch. 3 (Santiago: Ediciones B, 2003); Olga Ulianova, “Develando un mito: Emisarios de la Internacional Comunista en Chile,” *Historia* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) 41, no. 1 (2008): 143; and Dr. Faustino E. Jorge, technical adviser of the CSLA, in Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana, *El cumplimiento*.
 18. Elías Lafertte, *Vida de un comunista* (Santiago: Editorial Austral, 1957), 273–74; Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana, *El cumplimiento*, 4.
 19. Lovsky, 10 February 1936, RGASPI.
 20. The following labor leaders signed on to a pact calling for unity among all workers in Latin America: Francisco Pérez Leirós, Pedro Chiarante, and Antonio

- Sánchez (Argentina); Elías Lafertte, Luis Solís Solís, Juan Díaz Martínez and Isidoro Godoy (Chile); Felipe Ortiz (Bolivia); Rafael Burgos (Colombia); Mario Masi (Paraguay); Arturo Freire and José Lazarraga (Uruguay); and Rosendo Naula (Ecuador).
21. Segunda Conferencia del Trabajo de los Estados de América Miembros de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo, “Memoria del Director de la Oficina Internacional del Trabajo,” Ginebra, 1939, VII, Oficina Internacional del Trabajo.
 22. Lovsky, alias Ambrosetti, to Tomba, Mexico, 13 May 1936, leg. 495, series 17, exp. 3, RGASPI. At the 1936 conference in Geneva, worker delegates from Mexico denounced these events. See also Jill Jensen, “From Geneva to the Americas: The International Labor Organization and Inter-American Social Security Standards, 1936–1948,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 80 (Fall 2011): 225; and Tomba to Tómbola, also known as Vargas, Córdoba, aliases of Miguel Contreras, leg. 495, series 17, exp. 3, RGASPI.
 23. In 1936, Lombardo Toledano exchanged messages with Lovsky (a Pole), Miguel Contreras, Nicolás Repetto, Enrique Dickmann, Benito Marianetti, and Francisco Pérez Leirós (Argentines), and Elías Lafertte, Salvador Ocampo, and Bernardo Ibáñez (Chileans). See Lovsky, alias Henry, Mexico [letter probably sent to the CSLA], 5 May 1936, leg. 495, series 10, exp. 357, RGASPI; Lovsky, alias Henry, to Tómbola, Mexico, 26 May 1936, leg. 495, series 17, exp. 3, RGASPI; Lovsky, alias Godoy, to Tómbola, Mexico, 8 May 1936, leg. 495, series 17, exp. 3, RGASPI; Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “Mensaje al proletariado de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica,” *Revista Futuro* (May 1936): 5; and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “Carta de la C.T.M. a las centrales sindicales de América Latina,” Mexico City, September 1936, in VLT, *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, tomo III, vol. 4 (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos y Sociales Vicente Lombardo Toledano, 1996), 348–54.
 24. Signatories included Francisco Pérez Leirós, Pedro Chiarante, and Antonio Sánchez (Argentina); Elías Lafertte, Luis Solís Solís, Juan Díaz Martínez, and Isidoro Godoy (Chile); Felipe Ortiz (Bolivia); Rafael Burgos (Colombia); Mario Masi (Paraguay); Arturo Freire and José Lazarraga (Uruguay); and Rosendo Naula (Ecuador).
 25. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, speech at the inauguration of the Workers University of Mexico, 8 February 1936, in *Testimonios de nuestro tiempo, CTM 1936–1941*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: 1981), 83.
 26. Resolution of the Second Congress of the CGOCM to attend the Congreso Nacional de Unificación Proletaria, 19 February 1936, in VLT, *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, tomo III, vol. 4, 61.
 27. *Estatutos de la Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, in *Testimonios*, vol. 1, 66–80.
 28. Fabián Herrera León, “Méjico y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Los orígenes de una relación, 1919–1931,” *Foro Internacional* 204 (April–June 2011): 336–55.

29. Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Robert Boisiner, exp. RL 41/3/2: "Relations with the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico," Mexico City, 15 August 1925, Archives of the International Labor Office (hereafter AILO); Fernand Maurette to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Geneva, 25 June 1926, in *La libertad sindical en México*, Vicente Lombardo Toledano (Mexico City: Universidad Obrera de México, 1974), 16.
30. Patricio Herrera González, "Vicente Lombardo Toledano: Nexo entre los obreros latinoamericanos y la OIT," *Trabajadores* (Universidad Obrera de México) 91 (2012): 23–28.
31. Adolf Staal, "Reporte anual de funciones," Geneva, 24 September 1936, exp. P. 2310: "A. Staal du service du personnel," AILO.
32. Adolfo Staal to Rodolfo Piña Soria, Geneva, 26 November 1936, exp. RL 41/3/2: "Relations with the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico," AILO. Piña Soria's reply came a few months later: "At the Latin American Congress we are conducting active propaganda work, and on this topic I shall send the required reports in a timely fashion," in Rodolfo Piña Soria to Adolf Staal, Mexico, 11 February 1937, exp. RL 41/3/2: "Relations with the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico," AILO.
33. Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Harold Butler, Mexico, 26 March 1937, exp. RL 41/3/2: "Relations with the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico," AILO.
34. "Congreso de trabajadores de la América Latina," *Revista Internacional del Trabajo* (Geneva) 16, no. 6 (December 1937): 548–49.
35. Report [possibly written by Hernán Laborde] on the founding of the CTM, the politics of Lázaro Cárdenas, and their consequences for Mexico and Latin America, sent to the Comintern, 2 June 1936, leg. 495, series 108, exp. 185, RGASPI.
36. Lovsky, to Tóbola, 26 May 1936, RGASPI. Naula, a militant Ecuadorian communist; Lafertte, Salvador Ocampo, members of the Chilean Communist Party; Miguel Contreras, member of the Communist Party of Argentina; and Francisco Pérez Leirós, a militant in the Socialist Party of Argentina, collaborated on the convocation for the Labor Congress in Latin America.
37. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "Mensaje al proletariado de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica," *Revista Futuro* (May 1936): 5.
38. Comité Nacional de la CTM, "Se adhiere la C.T.M. a la Federación Sindical Internacional," *Excélsior* (Mexico City), 10 July 1936.
39. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "Carta de la C.T.M. a las centrales sindicales de América Latina," Mexico City, September 1936, in VLT, *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, tomo III, vol. 4, 348–54.
40. Informe del Comité Nacional al IV Consejo Nacional de la CTM, Mexico City, 27 April 1937, in *Testimonios*, vol. I.
41. The labor organizations present at the Latin American Labor Congress in Mexico City included the General Confederation of Labor of Argentina, the Federation of Labor Unions of Bolivia, the Confederation of Colombian Workers, the Chilean Confederation of Workers, ten labor groups from Cuba, the National Labor Congress of Ecuador, the National Confederation of Workers of Paraguay,

the Peruvian Workers Central, Organized Labor of Nicaragua, Venezuela's Confederation of Labor, two workers' groups from Costa Rica, the Committee for the Organization and Unification of Workers of Uruguay, and, of course, Mexico's CTM. The congress was also attended by León Jouhaux, general secretary of France's General Confederation of Labor; Ramón González Peña, president of the General Union of Workers in Spain; Eduardo Fimmen, president of the International Federation of Transport Workers; Ragnar Casparsson, a delegate from Sweden's Confederation of Workers; S. Guruswami, a delegate from India's Railroad Workers Union; and Adolf Staal, the delegate from the ILO; and John Lewis, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

42. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, speech at the inauguration of the Latin American Labor Congress, 5 September 1938, Mexico City, in VLT, *Obra Histórico-Cronológica*, tomo III, vol. 8, 104–5.
43. S. Guruswami, "Quince mil millas de viaje para traeros el saludo angustiado y fraternal del proletariado indio que sufre y que lucha," in *La C.T.CH. y el proletariado de América Latina* (Santiago: Editorial Antares, 1939), 23–24.

PART THREE

INTELLECTUAL AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION



“The Spirit of Harmony” and the Politics of (Latin American) History at the League of Nations



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During the hot summer of 1924, the League of Nation’s International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC)—ten men and two women of science and culture—met on the shores of Lake Geneva to discuss how increased cooperation in their fields could contribute to the League’s success in keeping the peace. For the Argentine ICIC member Leopoldo Lugones, it was clear that the ICIC should focus its attention on the teaching of history, as the political conscience of the broad public was based on it. Instead of national narratives, there should be histories of civilization, “of communication and of peace,” to foster the conscience of the “genus humanum.” Lugones assured the ICIC that this was not only his personal view and that he spoke “in conformity with the spirit of harmony typical of the Latin American Republics.”¹ Lugones was not alone in according history an important role. Even though the League of Nations (LN, or League) was certainly a forward-looking organization, the new world order it hoped to bring about needed its own foundational narratives—histories less focused on conflict between nations, military exploits, or heroic civilian populations and more on interdependence and cooperation.

The League’s interest in history was thus rather goal oriented. In the short term, the organization advocated the revision of school textbooks, which should at least be freed of incendiary passages concerning other countries. A number of scholars have examined initiatives such as the Casares resolution of 1926 and generally judged them to be a failure for the lack of tangible

results directly attributable to the League's efforts.² Recent evaluations are more nuanced, especially when the focus shifts from the great European powers to the Scandinavian or Baltic countries.³ Moving on to Latin American actors adds important strands to the narrative about history at the League. The League has been considered an essentially European organization for too long, which has led to an overemphasis on a European chronology that paints the 1930s as a period of decline and obscures continuities between the 1930s and the postwar world. But also from the vantage point of the historiography of the Americas, a fresh look at the League of Nations is desirable.

For Latin Americans, participation in the League soon became an ambivalent undertaking. On the one hand, the League appealed to the idealism that had been evident in Latin American efforts to arbitrate conflict. A certain prestige was associated with membership, in that the League offered a seat at the table with the European powers. Moreover, some hoped that the League would provide a counterweight to the United States in the Western Hemisphere. On the other hand, the League proved unwilling to address the question of the Monroe Doctrine enshrined in the covenant. As a result, a number of countries eschewed active participation in the assembly or withdrew after a few years.⁴ However, beyond formal participation in the strictly political organs of the League, Latin American intellectuals and diplomats engaged with a variety of League bodies, such as the League of Nations Health Organization or the Intellectual Cooperation Organization. This entrance onto the international stage provided an opportunity to project to the global public an image of Latin America and to develop a regional consciousness, fostering regional integration.

Latin American delegates to the League assemblies as well as diplomats and intellectuals involved in the various organs of cultural and educational cooperation positioned themselves in the debates about history and history textbooks. They were at the forefront of initiatives to revise nationalist histories and pursued the same aim in the inter-American sphere. They also seized the opportunities the League offered to develop their own historical narratives. On the suggestion of Roberto Levillier, an Argentine historian and diplomat, the League Assembly agreed in 1934 to sponsor a multivolume history of the Americas, to be written under the tutelage of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) in Paris. This project, however, highlighted thorny questions about how to interpret the history of the Western Hemisphere. Which role should be accorded to the indigenous

populations in shaping present Latin America? How best to describe Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule? In the few years until the League's de facto demise, these questions could not be resolved and the pioneering project did not come to fruition. Nevertheless, the contributions of Latin American intellectuals to these initiatives are too frequently glossed over in accounts that suggest that the League was a vector of worldwide diffusion of European ideas and policies.⁵

REVISING HISTORIES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

League of Nations efforts to reform history writing and textbooks emerged from a broader context. In the wake of World War I, teachers' unions and professional organizations from several countries in Europe demanded measures to make history books less nationalistic.⁶ In the Western Hemisphere, the parallel tendencies of US-sponsored Pan-Americanism as well as Latin American *arielismo* provided a crucial backdrop for Latin American participation in the debates on history writing in Geneva and Paris. Both the advocates of asserting the common aspects of the “American” experience as well as those who insisted on cultural differences between “Anglo-Saxons” and “Latins” agreed it was necessary to teach the history of the American hemisphere in a nonnationalistic way.⁷ The horrid spectacle of World War I only strengthened such arguments. At the 1916 Inter-American Scientific Congress, a number of participants called for better teaching of the history of the Americas.⁸ Such discussions carried over into the Fifth International Conference of American States, held in 1923 in Santiago, Chile, where several recommendations invoked a common historical past. One advocated safeguarding historical remains so that an “adequate” American history could be written; another recommended establishing a course on “continental fraternity.”⁹ The scientific congress held in 1924 in Lima proposed that a commission of historians should collectively write a textbook on the history of the Americas, “aligning its tenor with the criterions of American solidarity and the history of humanity.”¹⁰ So when the League of Nations took up the subject of revising and rewriting history in the mid-1920s, it was entering a field that already had a certain tradition on both sides of the Atlantic.

Beginning in 1920, the League of Nations Union and the French Association for the League of Nations attempted to steer the organization's attention toward the issue of teaching history. Within the ICIC, in 1923 US

delegate Robert Millikan submitted a first proposal to revise history textbooks. Elaborating on this as a member of a subcommission, Julien Luchaire recommended that the ICIC produce its own textbook in English and French—but the ICIC did not even discuss the matter.¹¹ During its 1924 session, Argentina's Leopoldo Lugones presented his plans to reform education as to change “public conscience” through education. History was particularly called on in this regard in that the basis of “the political conscience of the modern world, including the conceptions of patriotism and humanitarianism, was historical information.” Lugones proposed that the “purely narrative history of each country and individual continents should be transformed into the history of civilization.” Even political economy could be used to show that “all nations were mutually dependent and complementary.”¹² Unfortunately, the ICIC chair postponed the discussion of the proposal to the following year’s session.

In 1925, Lugones did not attend the meeting, but his substitute Juan Antonio Buero, a former Uruguayan foreign minister, brought up the proposal again and added that, in several Latin American countries, similar reforms were being discussed. But the ICIC rejected the proposal, considering that it was “not . . . necessary to translate it into a concrete suggestion, nor would the Committee propose that useless text-books should be produced.”¹³ Lugones’s emphasis on history beyond the nation-state as well as the suggestion to deemphasize wars did not sit well with some commission members. The Spaniard Julio Casares, for instance, thought it “premature to attempt the teaching of any subject, and especially of history, from an international point of view.”¹⁴ The ICIC did, however, embrace the so-called Casares resolution, which provided a procedure if any country thought that a textbook contained inflammatory or incorrect material and should be revised. Thus, in 1925, the ICIC at the League of Nations rejected the proposal that Lugones had offered “in the spirit of harmony.”

In the Western Hemisphere, the notion of a history beyond the nation-state was more present. Although no traces remain of a Pan American Union commission to write a textbook of the Americas, the notion was still in the air when the 1928 Conference of American States at Havana created the Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia (IPGH). The IPGH took up its work in Mexico in 1929 and was supposed to foster, among other things, more inclusive and less nationalist and bellicose histories of the Americas. At a series of international meetings of educators, such as the 1930 Inter-American Congress of Rectors, Deans and Educators in General at Havana, the 1931

American University Congress at Montevideo, and the 1934 Second Inter-American Conference on Education at Santiago, the question of how to teach history and the need for less nationalist textbooks were discussed.¹⁵ The topics remained on the agenda throughout the 1930s, also at several high-level international conferences of American states, in Montevideo in 1933, Buenos Aires in 1936, and Lima in 1938. A series of multilateral as well as bilateral conventions for the revision of textbooks resulted from these efforts.

Opinions diverged on the themes that these new histories beyond the nation-state should emphasize. Actors intent on fostering Pan-American ideals, many of them hailing from the United States, privileged a hemispheric perspective, to create a “history of the Americas.” From the Latin American side, the alternative was to emphasize the special relationship with Europe and to approach history from a “universal” point of view. History teaching should foster “universal solidarity” rather than animosities toward any other country.¹⁶ Nevertheless, given the resources that the Pan American Union was able to put up for congresses and institutes, such revisionist projects were more likely to follow the Americanist track. The League of Nations, by contrast, seemed to offer a friendly environment for universalists. But writing history within an organization such as League was fraught with its own difficulties.

WRITING A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAS: THE LEVILLIER PROPOSAL

Many Latin American diplomats and intellectuals living in Europe recognized that knowledge about Latin America was rather thin in the Old World. Some expatriates, such as the Peruvian Francisco García Calderón, attempted to mitigate that situation by publishing on Latin America—both in book form and in serials, in French. At the League of Nations, Latin American delegates saw the ICIC and particularly the IIIC as a conduit to spread knowledge about their countries. One important such initiative was the publication of a series of Latin American classics, the Collection ibéro-américaine, that a group of Latin American delegates to the Paris Institute pushed through against the initial resistance of the ICIC. The collection portrayed Latin American republics as cultured, with their own great classics.¹⁷

So it was not a complete novelty when the Argentine Roberto Levillier (1886–1969) proposed to the 1934 League Assembly that the League sponsor an ethnographic and historical series on pre-Columbian and colonial Latin

America in the form of an international collaboration.¹⁸ Coming from a country that had eschewed participation in the League for more than a decade, this proposition might have been a testing of the waters where failure would not have grave diplomatic consequences. Levillier cleverly seized the moment just after the publications of the Ibero-American Collection had been positively mentioned and he insinuated that the League needed to encourage further well-organized collaboration of scientists. He argued that, in past years, archeologists and historians had made extraordinary research findings in the Americas, but that they were achieved by individuals or teams “who work by themselves, without connections, nor common goals.” The scope of his project would be beyond the means of one particular country or region, as he aspired to “write the history of diverse cultures and investigate their entanglements,” which he considered “knowledge of universal interest.”¹⁹

Yet, there was more to Levillier’s proposal than met the eye. Avoiding the phrase “Black Legend,” Levillier hinted that recent scholarship based on archival sources about the colonial period had “completely rectified the erroneous ideas held about the role of Spain in the foundation of America.”²⁰ The subtext was not lost on some of those present. Spain’s Casares warmly endorsed the proposal and hoped that an impartial approach would bring to light the “truth, agreeable or not” about Spanish colonization. The Guatemalan Virgilio Rodríguez Beteta, by contrast, emphasized the necessity of diffusing knowledge about pre-Columbian civilizations.²¹ Finally, the Colombian educator Nieto Caballero named the specter in the room, but only to declare diplomatically that people in Latin America did not obsess about the Black Legend anymore, as there was considerable affection for Spain—especially now that she was “a sister republic.” After further expressions of support for the project by the Bolivian Adolfo Costa du Rels, the Venezuelan delegate Caracciolo Parra Pérez (himself a historian), Pedro de Alba of Mexico, and some European delegates, the League Assembly mandated the IIIC and the publication committee of the Collection ibéro-américaine to elaborate a publication plan and a budget, to be presented to the next assembly.²² The establishment of such an expert committee was the dominant mode of functioning of the League of Nations. Even though these commissions were supposedly formed on the basis of competence only, invariably, concerns about geopolitical balance and budgets influenced decisions.

A savvy diplomat, Levillier knew how to work this system. To assuage the Ibero-American Collection Committee, Levillier submitted a list of no fewer

than thirty-three authors from many different countries: fifteen Latin Americans (led by four Argentines), fourteen Europeans (including five Spaniards but only one Portuguese), and four historians from the United States or Canada. The long list was not the result of scientific considerations but was designed “to satisfy the committee members with their various nationalities” who would all like to see their countries represented. Levillier urged Paul Rivet, the French anthropologist who was supposed to deliver a list of authors for the pre-Columbian period, to do the same.²³ The project received a green light from the committee as well as the IIIC.

Yet it became clear quickly that, far from appealing to supranational ideals, the Levillier proposal was viewed by many as a way to redress perceived slights in the historical record. The Portuguese delegate Julio Dantas hoped to rectify public opinion on the “accidental” Portuguese discovery of Brazil and emphasize the “very advanced knowledge of nautical science” in Portugal. The Poles wanted the collection to address Polish immigration to Latin America and the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga pleaded for more extensive coverage of the Dutch experience in the Indies.²⁴ Virginia de Castro e Almeida, a Portuguese filmmaker and author of children’s books, was anxious to “defend our historical truth” about the conquest and colonization of Brazil.²⁵

However, the fact that there was as of yet no budget for the Levillier Collection (as it soon became known) had consequences for the expert panel supposed to advise on the series. For preliminary meetings in December 1934 and February 1935, the IIIC could only invite interested parties resident in Paris (or not too far away), such as Rivet, Gonzalo Zaldumbide, Parra Pérez, García Calderón, and de Castro Almeida.²⁶ Rivet of course was a specialist on pre-Columbian civilizations, but IIIC director Henri Bonnet, who had replaced Julien Luchaire in 1931, extended invitations also to people with rather thin credentials. Zaldumbide and García Calderón, for instance, were no experts, simply cultured men who were closely linked to the IIIC, and de Castro de Almeida had good political connections, which she promised to use to elicit financial support from the Portuguese government.²⁷ Spanish League veteran Salvador de Madariaga was invited, as well as Ernest Martinenche, a French Hispanist—neither was a specialist on the history of the Americas.²⁸ Bonnet also wrote to a few Latin Americans, including Ricardo Donoso of Chile, Affonso Celso of Brazil, and Ricardo Levene of Argentina. Hugo Barbagelata, the Uruguayan historian and government delegate to the IIIC, harshly criticized the choice of so-called experts and

refused to lobby his government for any funding for the project. Bonnet admitted that it was more of a patronage committee than a committee of experts—a problem he hoped to address once funding had been obtained.²⁹

From inside the IIIC, the half-Brazilian Dominique Braga, secretary of the Ibero-American Collection, wanted to invite the entire publication committee by default—as had been originally mandated by the League Assembly. This would have added Gabriela Mistral, Victor Andrés Belaunde, Alfonso Reyes, Jaime Torres Bodet, Mariano Brull, and the progressive Spaniard Enrique Díez Canedo to the committee.³⁰ The Cuban diplomat Brull moreover suggested the participation of Fernando Ortiz, an eminent Cuban intellectual who had written extensively about Afro-Cuban culture and who was working on his major book, *Contrapunteo cubano*.³¹ But Bonnet (or Levillier) did not accept any of these suggestions. Indeed, they relieved Braga of the responsibility for the project, considering him too close to the “indigenists.” At the IIIC, it was now Bonnet and the German Margarethe Rothbarth who dealt with this dossier.³²

The immediate concern for Bonnet, however, was to obtain funding for the project. He went to Geneva for the ICIC meeting with the argument that, just like the Ibero-American Collection, the Levillier project could serve as a model for other regions of the world.³³ However, the ICIC members found Levillier’s project unfeasible. What Bonnet presented in Geneva—a series with some fifty volumes—was already a slimmed down version of Levillier’s grandiose plans.³⁴ Those with some experience with League matters and the ICIC—including Zaldumbide and Parra Pérez—recommended instead an accessible synthesis for the “broad public.”³⁵ As for financial support, the idea was to ask the League Assembly for a modest contribution until subscriptions began to cover the cost of producing and translating the volumes. This made it even more important that the books be sellable.³⁶

The number of interested governments, however, was small. The US National Commission on Intellectual Cooperation (US NCIC) reported that the opinion of a specialist was “distinctly unfavorable.” Waldo G. Leland did not approve of the “experts” involved and thought that an effort should be made to find “the most qualified scholars,” for instance, at the International Committee of Historical Sciences or the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History.³⁷ When the IIIC did not react, the US NCIC did not even discuss the Levillier proposal any further.³⁸ Neither did the Carnegie Endowment, the powerful US foundation, support the project even though James Brown Scott had expressed some interest at one point. Herbert Bolton, one of the preeminent Americanists in the United States, did not reply to Levillier’s

letters. Of course, Bolton at the time had already started to propagate his notion that the republics of the Americas shared a common history—a notion that was gaining traction in the context of the Good Neighbor Policy and the associated Pan-Americanism—and might not have been thrilled at the prospect of a rival effort.³⁹

The British Academy similarly “condemned [the Levillier plan] as much too ambitious.” ICIC president Gilbert Murray could not even find anyone to become a member of the patronage or expert committee.⁴⁰ Political considerations might have played a role in this broad rejection, given that neither the United States nor Great Britain were sympathetic to supporting a League-funded history of the Americas that aimed so clearly at the rehabilitation of Spanish colonialism. Levillier’s approach was problematic even among those who thought that a history of the Americas was a valid enterprise for the League and the IIIC.

THE LEAGUE, THE BLACK LEGEND, AND “NEUTRAL” HISTORY

Apart from audience, budget, and experts, other profound disagreements hampered the project. In an arena where diplomats were ubiquitous, discord was generally expressed obliquely and in muted terms. Reacting to Levillier’s list of volumes, Zaldumbide objected to the many volumes dedicated to conquerors like Hernán Cortés or Bernal Díaz and asked for more coverage of broader processes of conquest.⁴¹ The Chilean delegate Rivas Vicuña wanted the emphasis not on European expansion, but on the pre-Columbian period, to make clear that “a very flourishing civilization” existed before the Europeans’ arrival.⁴² The first to drop the diplomatic language was Gabriela Mistral, for whom the Levillier proposal was an “admirable undertaking” but at the same time “a thorny enterprise.” Mistral admitted to her indigenist sympathies, pointing out that she had long worked for the “recognition of these impressive cultures.” She had certain misgivings about many of the Spanish intellectuals, recalling Spanish colleagues at US universities “heaping hate on me” when she taught classes on indigenous civilizations. She warned Braga that the Spaniards would want to take the lead and pleaded with him to include French, German, and US specialists on the committee so that they could “impose criteria of veracity and not of negative prejudices against these

indigenous peoples.”⁴³ As if to illustrate Mistral’s concerns, the first reaction to the news of the League project came from the Institute of American Studies at the University of Madrid, which declared that it was the institute’s “inevitable duty” to collaborate in the venture.⁴⁴

Levillier’s intention to destroy the Black Legend, meanwhile, earned accolades in Spain.⁴⁵ The conservative Catholic paper *El Debate* cited Levillier in the sense that the Black Legend was a “fabrication” that Bartolomé de las Casas had invented in a state of “charitable delirium.”⁴⁶ The monarchist *ABC* printed a half-page photo of Levillier together with a “Salute” from Count Santibañez del Río, who expressed his gratitude that Levillier proclaimed “our truth” and stopped the calumny of Spain.⁴⁷ Shortly afterward, Levillier was honored with the “banda de la Orden de la República” in a formal ceremony at the Interior Ministry.⁴⁸ Thanks to Levillier—an Argentine—Spain could be proud of her history again.

Evidently, the IIIC needed to present the Levillier initiative in a different light. A short exposé on the project, written after Levillier’s lecture tour in Spain and repeatedly reworked, presented the project as a contribution to the “rapprochement of peoples.” The Old World, after having civilized the New World, could now collaborate with it in the reconstitution of a “common history.”⁴⁹ The IIIC attempted to get the indigenists on board by stating that recent archeological findings attested to the “surprising degree of civilization of the indigenous societies.” Yet, the text still held on to notions of a Spanish and Portuguese civilizing mission: “the actions of the civilizing peoples, [when we make them] better known, will be more appreciated by those who today benefit from the long-term results of this initial effort.”⁵⁰

Despite the IIIC’s attempts to tone down Levillier’s mission, some, such as Mistral, worried that the project would hurt the League’s reputation. Mistral’s “frank and radical opinion” warned of the consequences should the League become embroiled in a polemic about the Black Legend. A consul in Madrid, she had followed the press on Levillier’s lecture cycle and was shocked by the aggressive dismantling of Bartolomé de las Casas. Even in Spain, she wrote to Bonnet, journalists and religious scholars came to the defense of de las Casas. Latin Americans would not understand League support for attacks on the one colonizer whom many Latin Americans could admire and might react with stupefaction if not anger.⁵¹ In a private letter to the Mexican intellectual Alfonso Reyes, she fumed that Levillier was “anti-American” and “disgusted by the *indio*.⁵² Indulging in the

essentialism typical of the time, she argued that Levillier had “the approach of a European in his blood” as Argentina was the “*least American*” country in Latin America.⁵³ It was Spain’s right to fight the Black Legend, but, she insisted, “our America is of divided opinions in this matter.” In short, Mistral acknowledged Levillier’s project neither as American nor international. In the end, she saw only two possibilities: that the League drop the project entirely, or that the series be directed and financed by Spain exclusively.⁵⁴

Mistral’s letter brought out the tensions in the scholarship sponsored by an international organization. She revealed the notion of neutral science to be illusory and yet upheld the idea that the League was supposed to function from a neutral position. Mistral implicitly also acknowledged that whoever paid the piper called the tune—and Latin Americans were not going to pay to have one of their heroes dismantled. Bonnet tried to assure Mistral and others that the project contained “not a single line of judgments on historical events” or on de las Casas.⁵⁵ Yet, feigning innocence became more difficult for Bonnet because Levillier did not take well to criticism. Criticisms and suggestions angered the Argentine to such a degree that he dropped all pretenses with Bonnet. According to Levillier, the opinions of others were irrelevant given that, in this matter, only two of them were true experts: Paul Rivet and himself. He admitted his intention to “destroy the Black Legend in its roots and forever” and to play up the “European civilizing mission.” And, because the texts “need[ed] to give the impression of being rigorously objective,” Spain could not engage in the project on its own because the “political, moral and scientific effect” would not be as profound. The reason Levillier tried to rally “the old European powers” to the cause was that “the more foreigners that participate in the works, the better for Spain.”⁵⁶ As far as the budget was concerned, Levillier assured Bonnet that Spain was determined that the “collection be published, whatever the cost.”⁵⁷ Levillier’s letter reduced the ideal of international collaboration to a smoke screen to hide a particular agenda. Bonnet must have been embarrassed by Levillier’s outburst. He did not reply, nor did he refer to this letter in subsequent correspondence. Nevertheless, Bonnet seems to have sided with the Argentine-Spanish axis, suggesting that they could go ahead with an editorial commission consisting only of Levillier, a number of Europeans plus a US citizen, and holding out the hope that if there was funding, the IIIC could hire a Spaniard to work on the project.⁵⁸

AMERICANIZING LEVILLIER'S PROJECT

The financing was still the linchpin of what was now called the American Ethnographic and Historical Collection. In February 1935, the IIIC sent out 1,400 letters to academic institutions, introducing the collection and offering subscriptions. The IIIC also asked government delegates to secure a subscription from their countries. By July, only fifty parties had agreed to subscribe.⁵⁹ The ICIC in Geneva, however, was willing to extend the project only if it could go forward without funding from the League.⁶⁰ Because the fifty subscriptions were far from enough, only government subsidies could save the project. The hope was that Spain, Portugal, and the Latin American governments would appropriate some money. However, as Spain became engulfed in civil war in the summer of 1936, that possibility became remote. The one ray of hope was a subsidy of twenty-five thousand francs by the Argentine government that Levillier was able to secure. The IIIC declared that it could not hire anyone for the project, but at least it assigned the secretarial work of the project to its archaeology department.

Just when the project threatened to founder, it was picked up again in the Western Hemisphere. In late 1936, the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace in Buenos Aires provided a venue to garner attention for the project. At this most important conference, where even US President Franklin D. Roosevelt made an appearance, the question of moral disarmament as well as the revision of history textbooks took up much time at the committee dealing with intellectual cooperation. Its recommendation that Latin American governments should support the American Ethnographical and Historical Collection triggered increased interest among Latin American republics.⁶¹ The Mexican NCIC proposed that they extend the collection up to the twentieth century and turn it into a history of "*American civilization*" and also suggested potential Mexican contributions to the pre-Columbian section.⁶² In Brazil, the NCIC appointed a subcommittee to discuss the League project and the Chilean NCIC also began to collaborate.⁶³ The Second Congress of American History, which took place in Buenos Aires in July 1937, accepted an Argentine resolution for professional societies to support the project.⁶⁴

The shift to a more American cast of characters became evident at the expert committee meeting in June 1937. Of course, Levillier and Rivet were there, as was Francisco García Calderón, but newcomers were as well: Luís Valcárcel, director of the National Archeological Museum in Lima, a

pioneering indigenist with close connections to José Carlos Mariátegui and the circles around the review *Amauta*; José Nuñez y Dominguez, subdirector of Mexico's National Museum; and Waldo Leland, historian and member of the US NCIC. This group decided that the series on American civilizations before the arrival of the Spaniards could go ahead as soon as they had enough funds for the printing.⁶⁵ The series on colonization, which had been Levillier's main concern and, in terms of volumes, outweighed the pre-Columbian sections three to one, was postponed.

This was a bitter reversal of fortunes for Levillier, who redoubled his efforts to raise more money. Apparently he received a promise from the Mexican government to contribute and solicited additional money in Argentina. In the spring of 1938, he informed Bonnet of his lobbying successes and asked that the IIIC “really should take up *the plan of the historical part*.” Spain's Civil War would soon be over and the country would be able to participate in the venture again.⁶⁶ Bonnet did not seem in a hurry and informed Levillier that he would take up the subject only during summer. Levillier appears not to have answered, but most likely was not happy that the IIIC was dragging its feet. At any rate, in October 1938, the Argentine government cited vague “present circumstances” in asking that the League refund the twenty-one thousand Swiss francs that Argentina had already paid to support the project. This might have been a reference to the privileged treatment of the ethnographical part that Levillier was not that interested in, perhaps to the Spanish Civil War or to the generally bleak panorama at the League. At any rate, Bonnet immediately refunded the money.⁶⁷ The only firm financial basis for the project had vanished, sounding the death knell for an international, League-based Ethnographic and Historical Collection. Already at the 1938 inter-American conference in Lima, it became clear that the project was now under the patronage of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of Buenos Aires. The delegates suggested “morally” supporting the project. A similar recommendation was passed at the first American Conference on Intellectual Cooperation in Santiago in early 1939.⁶⁸ As a purely Argentine affair, however, the project of an Ethnographic and Historical Collection did not generate the same interest as it had when it was associated with the League of Nations. However, the Pan-American Institute of History and Geography was more than ready to pick up where the League of Nations had left off: it not only founded the long-running *Revista de historia de América*, but also planned a “general history of the Americas.”⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

In the context of the mid-1920s, the view beyond the nation-state that Lugones advocated seemed too radical to the Commission on Intellectual Cooperation, which decided that the world was not ready for history “from an international point of view.” A few years later, the spirit of harmony that Leopoldo Lugones had invoked could have been harnessed to write a history of an American civilization. Roberto Levillier’s agenda of whitewashing Spanish colonialism, however, raised resistance and slowed down the project. With Latin American involvement in intellectual cooperation increasing throughout the 1930s, the project became less and less what Levillier had envisioned. Finally, by the late 1930s, the faltering League of Nations could not be relied on to provide an institutional framework for the Ethnographic and Historical Collection.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the need to write history differently remained a major topic in inter-American conferences throughout the 1930s and 1940s. A number of official conventions took up the revision of history books in the Western Hemisphere, and the issue occupied many intellectuals and professional societies.⁷¹ During the war, initiatives continued to flourish. The United States played an important role, but other actors also put considerable resources into narratives about the Americas through new journals, new textbooks, or the revision of old ones.⁷² After World War II, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization engaged in similar initiatives and institutionalized research on history teaching on a global scale. The Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind, as the project was called after 1952, also focused less on political history and more on transcultural exchanges. Eurocentric visions were challenged time and again by Asians, Africans, and Soviets.⁷³ The last of the six volumes appeared in 1975, twenty eventful years after its conception. Perhaps, then, Lugones’s vision in the mid-1920s had just been too far ahead of its time.

NOTES

1. League of Nations, International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), Minutes of the Fourth Session (hereafter ICIC Minutes), A.20.24, XII, 35–36, League of Nations Archives (hereafter LNA).
2. Georg Eckert, “Internationale Schulbuchrevision,” *International Review of Education* 6, no. 4 (1960): 401–2.

3. Mona Siegel and Kirsten Harjes, “Disarming Hatred: History Education, National Memories, and Franco-German Reconciliation from World War I to the Cold War,” *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2012): 370–402; Thomas Nygren, “International Reformation of Swedish History Education 1927–1961: The Complexity of Implementing International Understanding,” *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (2011): 329–54.
4. Thomas Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen: Lateinamerika und der Völkerbund, 1920–1936* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012).
5. See Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); as a counterpoint, see Madeleine Herren, *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865: Eine Globalgeschichte der internationalen Ordnung* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2009).
6. Siegel and Harjes, “Disarming Hatred,” 333.
7. For a wartime view of the problems of Pan-Americanism that could partially be addressed by shifting historical emphases, see the chapters “Prerequisites” and “Fallacies” in Roland G. Usher, *Pan-Americanism: A Forecast of the Inevitable Clash between the United States and Europe’s Victor* (New York: Century Co., 1915), 203–31.
8. Ernesto Quesada, “La universidad como factor en las relaciones americanas: Discursos pronunciados en la Asamblea General de las Facultades de la Universidad Columbia en honor de los delegados al Segundo Congreso Científico Panamericano,” *Conciliación internacional: División Panamericana, Boletín* 11 (1916): 12, 18.
9. James B. Scott, *The International Conferences of American States, 1889–1928: A Collection of the Conventions, Recommendations, Resolutions, Reports, and Motions Adopted by the First Six International Conferences of the American States, and Documents Relating to the Organization of the Conferences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 261–62.
10. *Report of the Delegates of the United States of America to the Third Pan American Scientific Congress, Held at Lima, Peru, December 20, 1924 to January 6, 1925* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1925), 54.
11. *School Textbook Revision and International Understanding*, 2nd rev. ed. (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1933), 10–12.
12. ICIC Minutes, Sixth Session, C.445, M.165, 1925, XII, 19, LNA.
13. Ibid., 20.
14. Ibid., 14.
15. IIème Conférence Panaméricaine d’Education, September 26, 1934, Po132/3, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes.
16. Congreso Universitario Americano, Montevideo 1931, cited in Alexandra Pita González and Rogelio Ventura Rodríguez, “La convención sobre la enseñanza de la historia: Educar para la comprensión americana,” *Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales* 18 (2006): 5.

17. Even this undertaking was delicate: some committee members considered a translation of Bolívar's letters offensive for Spain and asked that the collection only incorporate literary works. Juliette Dumont-Quessard, "De la coopération intellectuelle à la diplomatie culturelle: Les voies/x de l'Argentine, du Brésil et du Chili (1919–1946)" (PhD diss., Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, June 2013), 183–90.
18. A lawyer, Levillier had shown an interest in literature and history early on, writing for *La Nación* and publishing the book *Orígenes argentinos* in 1912. A member of the Radical Party, he spent fifteen years as diplomat in Europe (Spain, 1919–1922; Portugal, 1927–1931; Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Finland, 1931–1934) before he was named ambassador to Mexico (1934–1937) and Uruguay (1937–1941). Retired from diplomatic service, he dedicated himself to research on colonial Latin America. Ramón Equerra, "La vida y obra de Roberto Levillier," *Revista de Indias* 31 (1971): 387–402; Ricardo R. Caillet-Bois, "Roberto Levillier (1886–1969)," *Revista de Historia de América*, no. 71 (1971).
19. "La XVe Assemblée de la S.D.N. commente et approuve l'oeuvre de Coopération intellectuelle en 1934," *La Coopération Intellectuelle*, 43/44 (1934), 375.
20. Ibid. Interestingly, the version printed in *Coopération Intellectuelle* does not correspond completely to the—much shorter—version in the official minutes of the League. According to the minutes, Levillier proposed research on "Spanish America" and wanted to limit the project to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century history only. The effect of the revision was to make the project more international in scope, but it is not clear what was actually said in Geneva in September 1934. See DD.X.6, 291–92, International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), UNESCO Archives (hereafter UA).
21. Rodríguez Beteta (1885–1967) was an elite diplomat, but was devoted early to the study of the Quiché Maya. He was also a founder of the Guatemalan Society for Geography and History in 1924 and published a book on Central American independence in 1926.
22. "Projet de collection ethnographique et historique sur l'origine de la civilisation américaine," *La Coopération Intellectuelle* 57/58 (1935), 435.
23. Levillier to Bonnet, 13 December 1934, DD.X.6, 227, IIIC, UA.
24. ICIC Minutes, Seventeenth Session, PV 7.
25. De Castro e Almeida to Bonnet, 16 June 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
26. Bonnet to Parra Pérez, Rivet, Zaldumbide, and García Calderón, Castro de Almeida, 15 January 1935, DD.X.6, 209, IIIC, UA.
27. It was clear that such support came with a price: if Portugal contributed financially, it would probably demand that the material concerning Portuguese activities should be written by a Portuguese national. De Castro e Almeida to Bonnet, 16 June 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
28. Bonnet to Martinenche, IIIC, DD.X.6, 146, UA.
29. Barbagelata to Bonnet, 13 April 1935, A.II.27, IIIC, UA. Of course, Barbagelata made a living bringing Latin America closer to European book audiences. As he

- was just publishing his own history of the Americas, *Histoire de l'Amérique Espagnole*, he might not have appreciated the competition by the IIIC.
30. Braga to Bonnet, 18 February 1935, DD.X.6, 84, IIIC, UA.
 31. Fernando Ortiz pioneered the concept of transculturality in anthropology. It has seen many editions and critical analyses since. *Contrapunteo del tabaco y el azúcar: Advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su transculturación*, Biblioteca de historia, filosofía y sociología 8 (Havana: J. Montero, 1940).
 32. Braga to Montenach, DD.X.6, 152, IIIC, UA.
 33. ICIC Minutes, Seventeenth Session, PV 7, PV 8.
 34. Emboldened by the positive Spanish reactions, Levillier let slip at one point that he envisioned a series of more than two hundred volumes, including original sources. DD.X.6, 102, IIIC, UA.
 35. ICIC Minutes, Seventeenth Session, PV 8, 1; Parra Pérez to Bonnet, 14 April 1935, DD.X.6, 244–47, IIIC, UA.
 36. DD.X.6, IIIC, UA. It is not clear when the decision to cut down to fifty volumes was taken—different versions of minutes of the same meetings differ on this point. The meetings must have been heated for the minutes to record prolonged and “animated” discussions. In the case of the Ibero-American Collection, the IIIC decided that each volume was financed by the country of origin of the featured author.
 37. Leland to Rothbart, 22 June 1936, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 38. Minutes of the meeting of the American National Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 12 December 1936, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 39. Though Bolton left the publishing of a textbook on the history of the Americas to others, he was gratified by the publication efforts inspired by his approach, most notably also by his colleague Silvio Zavala through the Pan American Institute of Geography and History. Russell M. Magnaghi and Herbert E. Bolton, *Herbert E. Bolton and the Historiography of the Americas*, Studies in Historiography no. 5 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 70–71, 96–105.
 40. Murray to Bonnet, 17 May 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 41. Zaldumbide to Bonnet, 11 February 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 42. ICIC Minutes, Seventeenth Session, PV 7, 10.
 43. Mistral to Braga, 26 November 1934, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 44. Antonio Ballesteros Beretta to Henri Bonnet, 3 October 1934, DD.X.6, 290, 283, IIIC, UA. Bonnet replied politely, but remained uncommitted to any course of action.
 45. Newspaper article, 16 January 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 46. *El Debate*, 17 January 1935.
 47. ABC, 26 January 1935, another article appeared on 29 January 1935.
 48. ABC, 2 February 1935.
 49. For a discussion on the notion of civilization within the League’s Intellectual

- Cooperation see Daniel Laqua, “Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order,” *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011): 229–33.
50. DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 51. Mistral to Bonnet, 24 May 1935, DD.X.6, 204, IIIC, UA.
 52. Mistral to Alfonso Reyes, 3 March 1935, in Luis Vargas Saavedra, *Tan de Usted: Epistolario de Gabriela Mistral con Alfonso Reyes* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 1991), 103.
 53. Emphasis added. DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 54. Ibid.
 55. Bonnet to Mistral, 2 July 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 56. Emphasis added. Levillier to Bonnet, 10 July 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 57. Levillier to Bonnet, 24 May 1935, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 58. IIIC Executive Committee, December 1936, DD.X.6a, IIIC, UA.
 59. A.II.27, IIIC, UA.
 60. XII.A.2, C.327.M.220.1937, XII, 14–15, LNA.
 61. Not surprisingly, the issue was brought up by the Argentine delegation. *Diario de la Conferencia Interamericana de Consolidación de la Paz* (Buenos Aires, 1936), 652.
 62. Emphasis in original. Reyes to Bonnet, 17 June 1937, DD.X.6a, IIIC, UA.
 63. Montarroyos to Bonnet, 11 April 1937, DD.X.6, IIIC, UA. The subcommittee included the director of the National Library, the National Commission on Intellectual Cooperation (NCIC) member representing the Brazilian Institute of History and Geography, as well as anthropologist Edgard Roquette Pinto, Alcides Bezerra, and Renato Almeida.
 64. Levene to Bonnet, 16 July 1937, DD.X.6a, IIIC, UA.
 65. DD.X.6, IIIC, UA.
 66. Levillier to Bonnet, 4 April 1938, DD.X.6a, DD.X.6, Folder 3, IIIC, UA.
 67. DD.X.6, 3, IIIC, UA.
 68. Comisión Chilena de Cooperación Intelectual, *Primera conferencia americana de comisiones nacionales de cooperación intelectual: Actas e informes* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1939); Cordell Hull, *Report of the Delegation of the United States of America to the Eighth International Conference of American States, Lima, Peru, December 9–27, 1938*, Conference series 50 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 173.
 69. Russell M. Magnaghi and Herbert E. Bolton, *Herbert E. Bolton and the Historiography of the Americas*, Studies in Historiography no. 5 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 101–3.
 70. Corinne A. Pernet, “Twists, Turns and Dead Alleys: The League of Nations and Intellectual Cooperation in Times of War,” *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 3 (2014): 342–58.
 71. The Chilean Commission on Intellectual Cooperation, for instance, examined

- textbooks even though the Chilean government had not ratified any convention in that regard.
72. In Mexico, the journal *Cuadernos Americanos* was founded in 1942 and is still in print; in the United States, however, a whole slew of new textbooks appeared. Breanna Robertson, “Textbook Diplomacy: The New World Neighbors Series and Inter-American Education during World War II,” *Hemisphere: Visual Cultures of the Americas*, no. 4 (2011).
73. Katja Naumann, “Avenues and Confines of Globalizing the Past: UNESCO’s International Commission for a ‘Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind’ (1952–1969),” in *Networking the International System: Towards a Global History of International Organization*, ed. Madeleine Herren (Berlin: Springer, 2014).

Latin America at the Crossroads

The Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation,
the League of Nations, and the Pan American Union



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In 1921, the League of Nations (LN, or League) founded the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC). Five years later, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) was inaugurated, designed to be the executive organ of the ICIC—and a way for France to maintain its cultural influence all over the world, as the institute was located in Paris and the French government provided, at the beginning, for its financial needs. The International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation (IOIC) gathered the ICIC and IIIC. Mostly European rooted, the IIIC nevertheless attracted many Latin American governments and intellectuals: national committees were created in several countries and national delegates were appointed in Paris.¹

Meanwhile, the Pan American Union was developing its program in intellectual cooperation on a hemispheric scale. Since the Fourth Inter-American Conference in Buenos Aires in 1910, the topic had been on the agenda. Moreover, in 1917, a section of the Pan American Union was created to facilitate intellectual cooperation; in 1929, it became the Office of Intellectual Cooperation with an expanded scope of action. This new committee was meant to deal with everything related to “the cultural development of the Continent.” The previous year, during the Sixth Inter-American Conference in Havana, a resolution was adopted calling for an Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IAIIC).

The relationship between the League of Nations and the Pan American Union under the umbrella of intellectual cooperation has not benefited from extensive scholarship. Because the proposed IAIIC would have competed with the IIIC, however, it fuels the debate between universalism and regionalism. This is clearly how European representatives perceived the proposal even though they refrained from criticizing it openly.

On this issue among others, Latin America stood in the middle of the rivalry between Europe and the League of Nations on one hand and the US-influenced Pan American Union on the other. The projected IAIIC found itself at a crossroads of diverse and at times diverging stakes and interests, and its story sheds light on the role and position of a Latin America torn between influences from both sides of the Atlantic. It also provides an understanding of the relationship between the League of Nations and the Pan American Union through a little-known angle, enables an understanding of Pan-Americanism through intellectual cooperation, and avoids reducing Pan-Americanism to the bilateral relationship between the United States and Latin America.

THE IAIIC PROJECT

Despite tensions over judiciary and political issues, the 1928 Havana conference at which the IAIIC was proposed saw many advances in intellectual cooperation. Nine topics on this theme were on the agenda and, as a result, the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History was formed in addition to the IAIIC resolution. The Inter-American Congress of Rectors, Deans, and Educators in General, which took place in Havana on 20–23 February 1930, appears to have continued what started in 1928.

This second meeting in Havana led to a panegyric of inter-American cooperation. Ricardo Dolz, senator and dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Havana, proclaimed in his speech, “Our continent offers, in the matter of intellectual cooperation, lofty and indefatigable labour which allows us to cherish hopes of progress.”² He continued in detail:

My hopes are based upon the more than twenty treaties, conventions, or agreements reached in this important sector of our civilization by the American nations. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, the United States, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay, and

other nations have adopted rules and regulations concerning intellectual cooperation. Scholarships are established for students by Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, the United States, and other countries. Organizations for the advancement of university relations have been created in Argentina, Chile, the United States, Paraguay, and other states; and in addition to this inter-American conference, there have been almost a hundred conferences, missions, institutes, congresses, scientific organizations, sections of cooperation, associations, colleges, federations, confederations, voyages, museums, and offices, etc., which have furthered relations in the fields of international law, science, medicine, social welfare, education, etc. Each deals with governmental relations, international and municipal law, sciences in general—archeology, geography, history, chemistry, agriculture, architecture, medicine . . . all of which the cultured countries of the Western Hemisphere brought into being through their devoted labor for the glory of American civilization.³

Intellectual cooperation thus appeared a rich field of exchange in the hemisphere and not just an instrument of North American influence.⁴ The Havana conference demonstrated this well, Mexican and Cuban representatives having initiated the creation of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History. In the same vein, the IAIIC resolution originated in Brazil: in 1926, Xavier de Oliveira published a series of articles in *Jornal do Brasil* asking for the creation of a body for intellectual cooperation on the scale of the American continent. The same was again suggested by Pedro Erasmo Callorda, a representative from Uruguay at the Havana conference, and reported on by the Argentine delegation.

The institute came into being thanks to a resolution adopted on 18 February 1928. Its Article 1 established it “with a view to assisting and systematizing the activities that tend to establish intellectual cooperation in the branches of science, arts and letters between the nations of the American continent.” Article 2 proclaimed the IAIIC’s aims:

- a. To stimulate and systematize the exchange of professors and students, whether from universities or high primary schools, of the different American countries;
- b. To promote in the secondary and superior schools of all American countries the creation of special chairs of history,

- geography, literature, sociology, hygiene and law, principally constitutional and commercial law, of all the signatory states;
- c. To favor the creation of a university town, or students' home, in the countries of America.⁵

The institute thus initially targeted schools and university exchanges. This distinguished it from the League of Nations' IIIC, the actions of which seemed limited to intellectual circles and for which it had been criticized. The importance given to education in the IAIIC project stemmed from intellectual exchanges, mainly of university students and teachers, between the United States and Latin America from the nineteenth century to the end of the 1920s.

The organization of the IAIIC, however, was very similar to that of the IIIC.⁶ "Under the direction of the Governing Board of the Pan American Union," the IAIIC, like the IIIC, would be made up of a "central coordinating office" led by a director "assisted by a technical and clerical staff." Moreover, "National Councils for Intellectual Cooperation in each of the American Republics" would be made up of representatives from universities as well as "other institutions of higher education, academies, associations, institutes, museums, libraries and similar bodies devoted to the advancement of the arts, letters, [and] sciences."⁷

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF INTELLECTUAL COOPERATION AND THE PAN AMERICAN UNION: BETWEEN CORDIALITY AND DISTRUST

Between the Havana conferences in 1928 and 1930, exchanges took place between the Pan American Union and the League of Nations' IIIC. But previous relations between the IIIC and the United States had shaped the cautious attitude of the IIIC toward the project of the IAIIC.

In a protest against the refusal of the United States to join the League, US intellectuals, convinced of the inevitability of international interdependence, became very active in international cooperation. Throughout the existence of the ICIC, a representative of the United States was appointed.⁸ The American Committee on Intellectual Cooperation was even created in 1926. Private institutions such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

and the Rockefeller Foundation contributed increasingly to finance the IIIC's special accounts. The Rockefeller Foundation financed most of the International Studies Conference, organized under the auspices of the IIIC. US support for international intellectual cooperation was considered very important in Europe: it was a guarantee of legitimacy and prestige but also financially crucial.

Accordingly, it was in the IIIC's interest to be on good terms with the United States and all the institutions in which it took part. That is why the ICIC and the IIIC could not but cooperate in the activities of the IAIIC when they were asked to do so.

Following the 1928 resolution creating the IAIIC, Heloise Brainerd, chief of the Education Office of the Pan American Union, wrote to Alfred Zimmern, assistant director of the IIIC, "to ask what you consider the most fruitful activities of the Paris Institute. There are many lines of work that a regional Institute such as is proposed could take up, but as it will doubtless be limited in funds and personnel, we are anxious that it shall undertake only those that promise most."⁹ "Another point on which I would like information," she added, "is with regard to students from Latin-American countries who are studying in Europe."¹⁰ She wanted "to know how much is being done to attract these students to European centers, and by what agencies."¹¹ By appealing to the IIIC, Brainerd showed that the Pan American Union did not ignore its accomplishments. Nevertheless, her objective was to set up an organization that would compete with intellectual cooperation designed in Europe.

Furthermore, the IAIIC's national councils could compete with, or even substitute the national committees that the League of Nations had so much difficulty establishing in Latin America. The executive secretary of the US national committee, David Thompson, was aware that such a possibility could make the IIIC reluctant to collaborate. He wrote confidentially to IIIC director Julien Luchaire and suggested that existing national committees serve as national councils. "Any new National Council or Committee which may be organized," he added, "should operate as part of the Intellectual Cooperation Organization [IOIC] of the League of Nations as well as of the Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation."¹²

Thompson thereby presented himself as an advocate of the IIIC and the League of Nations. He even suggested that the creation of the IAIIC would encourage the creation of national committees in the countries where they did not yet exist.¹³ Yet he elaborated on his strategy:

I think it is very important that this Inter-American development should be received with the utmost cordiality by the Intellectual Cooperation Organization of the League of Nations and that it should be considered a regional grouping of intellectual cooperation agencies which at the same time should be encouraged to form part to [*sic*] the whole international activity in this field. . . . I hope that you will feel the same way about it, for the Latin American States are attempting to realize in the Western Hemisphere an agency analogous to the Institute under your direction.¹⁴

Thompson thus deprecated the IAIIC as nothing but a regional organization while viewing it as an important competitor for the Institute of Paris. He co-opted an important Latin American claim to having a distinct identity within a largely European institution. Thus did Thompson introduce the threat of Latin American disaffection for the League's work in intellectual cooperation. This threat had to be taken seriously because European cultural influence, especially that of France, was fading in Latin America to the benefit of the United States.

European actors in intellectual cooperation were privately wary of the IAIIC threat. In public, the ICIC in 1929 "welcome[d] with interest the project of the creation of an Inter-American Institute for Intellectual Cooperation" and "hope[d] that in this frame built from a universal point of view, the collaboration with the Inter-American Institute will work successfully on intellectual cooperation."¹⁵ Behind these cordial words, however, was the desire of the League of Nations—and therefore of Europe—to remain the leading actor in intellectual cooperation. The League cleverly presented the American project as deriving from the European organization. Officials feared that the future Inter-American Institute could also be an instrument for US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.

Previously, in June 1928, the secretariat of the ICIC had sent to Luchaire of the IIIC a report on the resolutions adopted at the Havana conference.¹⁶ It wished to draw Luchaire's "attention to [the resolution] which indicates the approaches adopted in order to create an Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation," revealing the secretariat's concern with the scope of the resolution. Soon after, Georges Oprescu, the general secretary of the ICIC, warned Luchaire that "the Americans want to fully reproduce the activity of the ICIC."¹⁷ From the beginning, those in charge at the IOIC were



Julien Luchaire, director of the Paris International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation from 1925 to 1930. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

aware of the danger that the IAIIC could represent. Nevertheless, to avoid a conflict with the United States, they remained cautious.

THE LATIN AMERICANS' ATTITUDE

The IAIIC never saw the light of day, notably because of the reactions among the Latin American intellectual community. This project even seemed, according to Jean-Jacques Renoliet, “to entail a reaction in favor of the International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation and the League of Nations on the part of Latin American States.”¹⁸ He mentioned that the 1936 Pan-American Conference called for the creation of national committees by Latin American states. The League of Nations’ secretariat considered this a

way to avoid “the creation in Washington DC or anywhere else in America of a continental Institution that would only complicate and maybe even significantly reduce the very coordination which was the responsibility of the IIIC.”¹⁹ From the Havana conference in 1928 to 1939, many Latin Americans, indeed, claimed their attachment to the IIIC and therefore to Europe and France.

Chile’s and Ecuador’s officials had expressed some reluctance to support the IAIC in their correspondence with the IIIC’s director. In a long letter to Luchaire about the Inter-American Institute, Ecuadorian Gonzalo Zaldumbide explained that Uruguay’s delegate to Havana proposed a Pan-American project of academic collaboration “whose main idea was to call a university presidents’ convention,” which was at odds with IIIC purposes, but also that “for the rest, he had been inspired by the Intellectual Cooperation Institute’s statuses, goals and functioning, without naming it.”²⁰ Zaldumbide reported that he had “tried to oppose the discussion about this project but to no avail,” emphasizing that “the intensification of North American influence on the cultural and intellectual cooperation field should not be encouraged,” for the United States was already strong enough economically.²¹ He advised instead strengthening the relationships with the IIIC, given “how important it was to keep in touch with Europe concerning everything that is connected to education, training and developing culture.”²² According to Eugène Pépin, a former Quai d’Orsay jurisconsult and an assignment manager for Pan-American conferences who was in Havana in 1928, Zaldumbide’s intervention was crucial to protecting the IIIC and France’s interests: “Thanks to Mr Zaldumbide, . . . this Institute’s scope of action was reduced so that it would not undermine the prerogatives of the Parisian one; he also obtained that the teaching of the French language and French literature was maintained as part of the organization’s program.”²³

Zaldumbide was not the only Latin American trying to reassure IIIC leaders and French diplomats. In 1930, Francisco Walker Linares, a kingpin in the Chilean Committee for Intellectual Cooperation, was glad that the latter was born “before the creation of a national council linked to the Pan American Union, as was recommended at the Havana Conference.”²⁴

Later, in 1936, during the Buenos Aires Pan-American Conference, Colombia and Bolivia raised the idea of a Pan-American institute once more. And once more, several Latin Americans showed their loyalty to the IIIC. Indeed, the final convention included no mention of the Colombian and Bolivian proposal but instead a recommendation to create national

committees in the countries where they did not yet exist. This was also true of Colombian Max Grillo, whose article published on 29 November 1936 in *El Tiempo* was a stirring defense of the IIIC and France.²⁵

In the wake of WWI and during the peaceful respite allowed by the legal organization of the League of Nations, the country which received the heritage of Antiquity—during the modern age and like no other Latin country—created, under the auspices of the League, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, whose hard work shines like a steadfast and serene beacon through the disorder and concern which hold sway over the spirit of the new generations. What an amazing task the Parisian Institute has achieved. It has intervened in all the fields of intellectual activity.²⁶

Antonio Aita, from the Argentine Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, also argued against a project that he deemed embodied “the dispersion of endeavors” of the IIIC and “represented another reason for getting away from Paris and Geneva.”²⁷ The loss of overall legitimacy of the League at that moment, reinforced by the coming of World War II, lent urgency to the calls to not further diffuse its power through the IAIIC. Aita and Grillo were perfectly aware that the Old World’s situation, already undermined by World War I and likely to fall into chaos once more, could deal a fatal blow to the attachment of Latin American states to the IIIC.

The reaction of those intellectuals can seem contradictory since the idea of an Inter-American Institute was raised by Latin Americans in 1928 and in 1936. Furthermore, Zaldumbide in 1928 and Grillo in 1936 did not condemn such a project wholesale and were aware of its relevance. At the end of his article, Grillo wrote that “the initiative of Bogota’s PEN Club during the Buenos Aires Conference through the voices of Colombian delegates, which consisted in suggesting the creation of an American Intellectual Institute based in a Spanish-speaking city, deserves an applause from the similar associations which already exist on the Continent.” He continued, “America is called upon to maintain the cultural values which are today under threat in European nations because of the bloody confrontation of antagonistic interests which already imperiled the Western civilization once.”²⁸ Because war had broken out in Europe, the IAIIC could appear as a legitimate heir and successor of the IIIC, which would probably suffer from the conflict.

In 1928, Zaldumbide had tried to explain to the director of the IIIC why his opposition to the IAIIC was not easy to defend given that its “main goal . . . would be to increase the intellectual connections between the [Latin American] Republics.”²⁹ Zaldumbide could not “sabotage a project which conveyed so many good intentions and whose dangers were either denied or overlooked.”³⁰

Yet, like Aita, Walker Linares, and others, Zaldumbide feared that the IAIIC might lead to the “intensification of North American influence on the cultural and intellectual cooperation field” and to a “fully-fledged Pan-Americanism” that would tend to “detach [Latin America] from Europe.”³¹ For those intellectuals, the United States was already present enough in Latin America economically, and maintaining ties with Europe culturally and intellectually could ensure a certain balance.³²

In 1928, after the Havana conference, French diplomat Pépin shared these concerns and wavered between pessimism and hope about the larger geopolitical question—Latin America’s ability to stay equally independent from the United States and from Europe:

All Latin American Republics need US financial help too much to show a clear independence. . . . One may understand why the United States of America, by creating exclusively American institutions, is trying to attract and keep other American countries in its orbit while striving to free them from any European ascendancy and reduce their relationships with the rest of the world. This is the reason why an American Institute of History and Geography as well as an American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation were created. . . . But American Republics have become aware of the danger; they cannot forget either that Europe is also one of their clients.

This yearning of the United States of America for a general governance can be found in its endeavors to organize Pan-Americanism. With its secretariat, its General Manager, its periodic conferences while waiting for its Court of Justice, the Pan-American Coalition is trying to oppose the League of Nations. However, during the last Conference the Latin American Republics understood even more clearly that their only real way to resist American absorption was to cling to the League of Nations even tighter.³³

In addition, some concern was expressed, from 1930 on, about the isolation that an IAIIC might create. During the Havana congress of rectors and deans, attendees debated “the presence of ‘Inter-American’ in the title” of the future institute because it “would seem to limit its activities” and “would forbid a larger outlook, whereas there are no frontiers to the Republic of Letters.”³⁴ The president of the Brazilian Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Miguel Ozório de Almeida, who was in charge of writing the report on inter-American intellectual cooperation in general during the 1937 General Conference for National Commissions held in Paris, later recalled Latin Americans in 1930 fearing that the IAIIC “would not appear as a separation move—the creation of an exclusively American intellectual cooperation group independent from the main international trend.”³⁵ This fear, as he later said, was largely shared within the IOIC, rumors of “a separatist movement” being common at that time.

Latin American intellectuals’ concern about a possible turning away from the League’s IIIC and their reluctance vis-à-vis the IAIIC can thus be explained by their mistrust of the United States. Their attachment to the IIIC can also be considered as a result of their Francophilia. France, and therefore the IIIC, remained a reference point of intellectual and cultural prestige. The cultural diplomacies of Argentine, Chile, and Brazil, for example, were partly built on the connections between the intellectuals of these countries and their counterparts in France. These connections were source of legitimacy in international cultural relations, for these nations as for Latin American intellectuals. It was therefore in the best interests of the nations to defend the IIIC. The League of Nations’ International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation can thus be considered as an opportunity for Latin American nations to achieve a necessary balance between Europe and the United States, between universalism and regionalism in order to protect their interests and their autonomy in the international arena during the interwar period.

NOTES

1. The national commissions were meant to be an intermediary between each member state’s organs of intellectual life and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC). The national delegate was supposed to be the intermediary between the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) and the member state’s government.

2. *Inter-American Congress of Rectors, Deans, and Educators in General* (1928), *Report of the Chairman of the Delegation of United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931), 19.
3. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
4. On this topic, see William Spence Robertson, *Hispanic-American Relations with the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923); and Juan Manuel Espinosa, *Inter-American Beginnings of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1936–1948* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977).
5. *Inter-American Congress of Rectors*, 13–14.
6. The text of the project was joined to a letter sent to Julien Luchaire, director of the IIIC. 18 April 1929, A.XI.11, UNESCO Archives (hereafter UA).
7. *Ibid.*
8. George Ellery Hale in 1922, Robert Andrews Millikan from 1923 to 1932, and James T. Shotwell from 1933 to 1939.
9. 22 January 1929, A.XI.11, UA.
10. *Ibid.* This information would be “a) such statistics as may be available as to numbers, and if these are incomplete, the estimate of any well-informed person; and b) the extent to which such Latin American students receive financial aid from either European governments, universities or international organizations.”
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*: “I think also that it affords an opportunity for the Secretariat to make another effort with Latin American governments for the establishment of National Committees of Intellectual Cooperation.”
14. *Ibid.*
15. *La Coopération Intellectuelle*, September 1929, 601.
16. 14 June 1928, A.XI.11, UA.
17. 21 June 1928, A.XI.11, UA.
18. Jean-Jacques Renollet, *L'UNESCO oubliée: La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle (1919–1946)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999), 255.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Gonzalo Zaldumbide to Julien Luchaire, 22 July 1928, A.I.121, UA. Zaldumbide (1884–1965) was a writer and a diplomat. From 1923 to 1927, he was appointed at the Ecuadorian Legation in Paris. He was also member of the committee of experts in charge of the Ibero-American collection created by the IIIC. From 1927 to 1929, he was appointed at the Ecuadorian Legation in Washington.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Correspondance politique et commerciale no. 199, 28 February 1928, Eugène Pépin au Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris (hereafter AMAEF).
24. Francisco Walker Linares to the director of the IIIC, 28 October 1930, Santiago, A.III.46, UA. For more on Walker Linares, see Yannick Wehrli, “Francisco

- Walker Linares: Un actor del internacionalismo ginebrino en Chile, 1927–1946,” in *América Latina y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Redes, cooperación técnica e institucionalidad social, 1919–1950*, ed. Fabián Herrera León and Patricio Herrera González (Morelia: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2013), 63–97.
25. Maximiliano Grillo (1868–1949), a Colombian writer and diplomat, was known for his Francophilia. He was the author, among other texts, of a paper titled “Augusto Sandino, hero of Hispanic America” (published in the review *Repertorio Americano*, vol. 16, no. 31, 1928), a statement against North American imperialism.
 26. This article was joined to a letter sent by the French plenipotentiary minister in Bogotá to the French minister of foreign affairs. The title of the article is not mentioned. Max Grillo, *El Tiempo*, 29 November 1936, file 1859, Série Société des Nations, AMAEF.
 27. Antonio Aita to Dominique Braga, 16 June 1939, A.III.17, UA.
 28. Grillo, *El Tiempo*, 29 November 1936.
 29. Gonzalo Zaldumbide to Julien Luchaire, 22 July 1928, A.I.121, UA.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Besides, in the 1930s and 1940s, the US State Department developed its own campaign in cultural diplomacy, which was mainly designed to increase US influence in Latin America. On this topic, see Juan Manuel Espinosa, *Inter-American Beginnings of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1936–1948* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 1976); Darlene J. Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012); and Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: US Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
 33. Eugène Pépin to the Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 28 February 1928, “Correspondance politique et commerciale no. 199,” AMAEF.
 34. *Inter-American Congress of Rectors*, 13.
 35. Miguel Ozório de Almeida, “Report on Inter-American intellectual cooperation: Its beginnings, its evolution, its organization,” speech delivered at the General Conference of the National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation, Paris, July 1937, A.III.56, UA.

Between National and International Science and Education

*Miguel Ozório de Almeida and the League of Nations'
Intellectual Cooperation Project*



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From a certain perspective, modern science seems quite paradoxical: it insists on being considered a collective endeavor and yet has no more apparent concern than original, personal work.

—Miguel Ozório de Almeida, 1934

Brazilian physiologist Miguel Ozório de Almeida was president of the Brazilian Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (BCIC), which was linked to the League of Nations' (LN, or League) intellectual cooperation project. In this position, he appropriated scientific internationalism, which marked international debates in the interwar period, to help Brazil forge stronger scientific ties with other countries and develop its intellectual life.¹

The epigraph is taken from notes he made for a book on the philosophy of science.² He never in fact finished the book, but the drafts reveal a man of science who not only studied physiology but also reflected on the limitations and potentialities of his profession in a world in which the trauma of World War I marked international scientific relations.

In recent years, historians of science have increasingly focused on the local context in which knowledge is produced, based primarily on the conception that science is a system of socially produced and legitimized beliefs.³ Contributing to this debate, Latin American historians of science have

reflected on the history of scientific production in the region, arguing that the international circulation of science is neither linear nor one way, but instead involves negotiations and adaptations.

In addition, historians of international scientific relations have pointed out that scientific internationalism should be understood as a historical phenomenon and therefore as a social practice determined by the relationships established between researchers from different countries in specific historical contexts.⁴ The constitution and expansion of nation-states throughout the nineteenth century coincided with the development of international conferences and associations, and therefore also with the institutionalization of an international scientific community. In this sense, nationalism and internationalism were part of a single process.⁵

The tense relation between the two was particularly heightened during World War I. As Brigitte Schöder-Guderhus aptly points out, despite scientists' putatively internationalist ethos, in times of heightened international tension they tended to be just as nationalistic as common citizens.⁶ Although the "mobilization" of scientists for the benefit of warring states may have created schisms, intrigues, and rifts, it also led to a "demobilization" after the war that lent a moral overtone to scientific internationalism, associating it with the idea of the neutrality and universality of scientific knowledge.⁷

The internationalism of scientific endeavors thus grew into a value shared by groups of scientists who sought to collaborate internationally in a given historical context. Investigating Miguel Ozório de Almeida as a Brazilian representative in the League's intellectual cooperation project provides an opportunity to problematize the internationalist ethos and the scientists' daily work, as well as how some projects of the League became a forum for Latin American scientists to develop their internationalism.

OZÓRIO DE ALMEIDA'S INTERNATIONALISM, OR, THE SCIENTIST'S WORLD

In his career, Ozório de Almeida (1890–1953) gained prominence at both the national and international levels.

After earning his doctorate from the Medical Faculty of Rio de Janeiro in 1911, in 1917 he was appointed professor of the physiology of domestic animals at the School of Higher Education in Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine and joined the Brazilian Academy of Science. In 1919, he was

hired by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute to work as an assistant in its new physiology department, but left the job in 1922 because he felt that working conditions there were not conducive to the pursuit of his research. In 1927, the director of the institute, Carlos Chagas, invited him to rejoin the ranks of the institute, this time as director of the physiology laboratory. In 1935, Ozório became a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and was appointed president of the Brazilian Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. He was also dean of the University of the Federal District. In the 1940s, he represented Brazil at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, where he took part in the project named “History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Humankind—from Pre-History to the Twentieth Century.”⁸

Historians have written next to nothing about Ozório de Almeida’s work with the League of Nations, generally portraying him as a scientist concerned with popularizing scientific knowledge and a linchpin in Brazilian-French relations.⁹ Mention is also made of his work alongside his brother and sister, Álvaro Ozório de Almeida and Branca Ozório de Almeida, in the private laboratory they set up in their parents’ home.¹⁰ The siblings also shared ideas about what was hindering the development of intellectual life in Brazil and were engaged in activities in the Brazilian Academy of Science and the Brazilian Association of Education.¹¹

Although Ozório de Almeida promoted scientific research in Brazil and defended higher education reforms, he also sought to forge close ties with scientists from other countries and ensure recognition abroad for practical scientific work produced in Brazil. In the 1920s, he grew closer to French physiologists (Louis Lapicque, Henri Piéron, and Eugène Gley) and the group began to cooperate scientifically, producing coauthored works and spending time at each other’s laboratories.

Ozório de Almeida’s research and reading in the years after he first traveled to Europe established him as a man of science mindful of the dynamics of international science and reflections about the production of scientific knowledge by authors such as Léon Brunschwig, Émile Meyerson, Henri Bergson, Pierre Duhem, John Dewey, Ernst Mach, Hans Reichenbach, and Georges Urbain.

Ozório de Almeida’s scientific work reveals his interest in transforming empirical data derived from routine laboratory work into more general theories. This can be seen in his effort to formulate, as an outcome of long years of empirical and mathematical study based on a conception of the universality

of scientific knowledge, a general theory of nervous excitation. This conception went hand in hand with a defense of internationalism. Ozório de Almeida defended the universality of knowledge, the autonomy of the scientific community, and the crucial value of scientific internationalism in a period of international conflicts when he supported the role of Brazilian scientists in the scientific international community.

In a 1937 lecture, Ozório de Almeida spoke out in favor of the creation of a “French-Brazilian foundation” to fund long-term bilateral research, stating that “it is the right and also the duty of Brazilian researchers to collaborate on the great issues of science.”¹² Scientific exchange between countries, he argued, was indispensable for the formulation of general theories: “In the domain of biological research, we often see a Brazilian researcher interrupting his work without being able to provide the level of generality necessary for its conclusions, because he cannot test it on animals commonly used in European laboratories but which do not exist in Brazil. Meanwhile, on our travels through Europe we have often come across European researchers who would benefit from doing experiments in Brazil on animals and plants that would not withstand the journey and do not exist in Europe.”¹³ In other words, Ozório de Almeida saw cooperation between countries as essential to the progress of science. His defense of internationalism can also be seen in his involvement in the League’s intellectual cooperation project.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

The League of Nations provided a crucial forum for scientists such as Ozório de Almeida to develop their internationalism. At the League, he defended the circulation of scientific and intellectual knowledge and the role of Brazilian scientists in national and international context.

The League’s intellectual cooperation project was effectuated through the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), and forty-five national committees.¹⁴ The ICIC was an advisory organization of the League created in 1921, held its first meeting in Geneva in October 1922, and counted among its distinguished members Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Salvador de Madariaga, and Paul Valéry. In 1924, France first put forward a proposal to create an international institute to make the work of the

committee permanent, and the IIIC was subsequently inaugurated in Paris in 1926. The institute counted on financial support from the French and other governments with national delegates. Brazil was one such country, whose diplomat Elizeu Montarroyos began working at the institute in 1928.

The ICIC and IIIC were established to reflect on the role of the intellectual in society at a time of “crisis in intellectual life” defined by the ramifications of the Great War, the 1929 financial crisis, and the tense international relations of the interwar period. They aimed to ascertain the state of intellectual life in different countries and encourage intellectual work, especially through reflecting on forms of financing.¹⁵

Daniel Laqua notes that these groups were more than diplomatic entities because they also served as forums for debate between individuals and combined academic or scientific activities with public interventions. For Laqua, cooperation helped certain groups establish their credentials as intellectuals, who might either want to be included and recognized and take part in the establishment of the new social order or to distance themselves from and criticize it.¹⁶

In 1923, a group of intellectuals who would meet at the Brazilian Academy of Letters became the Brazilian Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. Aloysio de Castro, a physician, was its first president, a position he maintained until 1932. The physician and anthropologist Edgard Roquette-Pinto was its second president. The BCIC was largely inactive, however. In 1935, Ozório de Almeida chaired the committee and set about giving it a new lease on life.

OZÓRIO DE ALMEIDA AT THE BCIC

The social network that Ozório de Almeida sought to weave within Brazilian and French intellectual circles in the 1920s was instrumental in his involvement in the League of Nations’ intellectual cooperation project. This involvement predated his presidency of the Brazilian committee, Elizeu Montarroyos’s efforts to get him on the international committee in Geneva having begun in the early 1930s.

In a confidential memorandum sent in early 1931 to Aristide Briand, responsible for intellectual cooperation issues at the ICIC and France’s representative on the Council of the League of Nations, Montarroyos stated that Aloysio de Castro, president of the BCIC, would be leaving the ICIC

in the forthcoming renewal of its membership.¹⁷ If the universality of the League of Nations was to be maintained, Montarroyos argued, the council should pick a competent Brazilian to take de Castro's place. He urged the Brazilian government to put forward the name of Ozório de Almeida. Negotiations continued for years. It was only in 1939 that Ozório de Almeida, who also chaired the Brazilian committee, became a member of the international committee.¹⁸

Even before this time, Ozório de Almeida was a regular participant in events within the ambit of the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project—further proof of the effectiveness of his network in Europe, especially in France. In 1933, for instance, he wrote one of the texts compiled in *Pour une société des esprits* (For a Society of the Mind), whose other contributors were Henri Focillon, Salvador de Madariaga, Gilbert Murray, Alfonso Reyes, Tsai Yuang Pei, and Paul Valéry. In it, Ozório de Almeida both stressed that the intellectual order should serve as a model for political life and underlined the importance of scientists adopting a moral stand and scientific methods.¹⁹

It is curious that in the very year Ozório de Almeida published this text defending the importance of intellectual life for the development of national and international politics, he also published a novel in Brazil titled *Almas sem Abrigo* (Unsupported Souls) that portrayed the harsh intellectual environment in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1900s.²⁰ In his narrative of the life of a mathematician and his friend, a lawyer who dreams of becoming a writer, Ozório de Almeida discusses the difficulties Brazilian intellectuals faced. Young Carlos (the mathematician's lover) and his friend Lauro, with a passion for literature, both dream of helping Brazil foster an independent intellectual output. However, in a society that undervalues intellectual life, these two souls receive no support (thus the novel's title). The novel mirrors Ozório de Almeida's ideas in his essays on Brazil's scientific culture and higher education. Even so, he insisted that he was not a pessimist but a realist, and if he depicted the country in those terms it was to encourage change.²¹

Ozório de Almeida was the quintessential man of science in his laboratory and university work, but he also sought solutions for the country's problems. His aspirations and those of many other intellectuals of his generation reverberated in the projects of the Getúlio Vargas government, especially those related to establishing universities, which were headed by the minister of education and health, Gustavo Capanema. Capanema saw culture as

seminal for the nation and spearheaded several important educational reforms, which Ozório de Almeida followed closely.²²

In the 1930s, many intellectuals saw the possibility of providing support for the country's intellectual life. Ozório de Almeida himself held top positions in the Vargas administration in the early years—as director of the Ministry of Agriculture's Institute for Animal Biology (1933–1934), as director general of the National Department of Health and Medical and Social Welfare (1934–1935), and as dean of the University of the Federal District (1935), where he also lectured in the philosophy of science. The short time Ozório de Almeida spent in each position and ambiguous passages in his writings on the changes he witnessed in the country indicate ambivalence in his relationship with the government. This became clear when he took over as president of the BCIC in 1935.

The BCIC presidency symbolized many of the scientist's internationalist aspirations because it could showcase the best of Brazilian intellectual life to other countries. His term coincided with the desire of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to harness the BCIC's activities to help consolidate Brazil's cultural diplomacy.²³ Ozório de Almeida proved capable of capitalizing on this development and of breathing new life into the BCIC.

Ozório de Almeida displayed his internationalist skills in the correspondence he exchanged with the director of the IIIC, the French diplomat and intellectual Henri Bonnet. In Bonnet's first letter to Ozório de Almeida in February 1936, the Frenchman wrote of his pleasure to learn that Ozório de Almeida had agreed to chair the Brazilian committee and of Bonnet's hopes to receive him shortly in Europe.²⁴ Ozório de Almeida replied that he had already been chairing the committee for a year, but that so far nothing had been achieved because of the obstacles he encountered when he took over.²⁵ However, he did announce that he had just sealed an agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Intellectual Cooperation Service. The committee would now have access to the ministry's infrastructure, such as a meeting room and typists.

These changes undoubtedly increased the level of state control over the committee's activities, because the head of the Intellectual Cooperation Service would now serve as the committee's general secretary. However, the new links with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided material assistance that the committee much needed: not just infrastructure, but also funding for business trips.

In June 1936, Bonnet congratulated Ozório de Almeida on the new agreement with the ministry and invited him to take part in the Intellectual Cooperation Month (*Mois de la coopération intellectuelle*), due to take place during the International Exposition in Paris in 1937.²⁶ Ozório de Almeida replied that he had had a long conversation with the new minister for foreign affairs, Mario Pimentel Brandão, and that it had been decided that, while in Paris, Ozório de Almeida would also take part in the Ninth International Congress on Philosophy and the Eleventh International Congress on Psychology.

Ozório de Almeida embarked for Paris in 1937 and took part in the conferences, lectures, and meetings, as well as the *entretien* “The Impending Fate of Letters,” which the IIIC organized. After this, he wrote an article about it in a Brazilian magazine in which he explored the relationship between intellectuals (including scientists) and the state. According to him, the *entretien* dealt with the difficult questions of funding of intellectual endeavors as well as the autonomy of intellectuals.

During the deliberations for the final text of the *entretien*, the debate had become more heated because of the following sentence: “The committee admits that the fate of letters is related to freedom of speech and to the moral and economic independence of creative spirits.”²⁷ Alessandro Pavolini, an Italian intellectual and president of the Fascist Confederation of Professionals and Artists, questioned this last sentence of the text, which initially contained the term *freedom of thought* rather than *freedom of speech*. The Italian regarded the use of freedom of thought as outdated.

Ozório de Almeida’s article was published in *Revista do Brasil* in 1938 at a time that as president of the BCIC he found himself facing the same issue. As he said in a speech at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that very year, the ministry’s material support for the committee was essential.²⁸ However, Ozório de Almeida stressed the role of intellectual cooperation at a time when much was being done to “denigrate, destroy, crush reason; cultivate, develop, glorify instinct.”²⁹ He warned of the great likelihood of a new world war, and declared that “obscurantism is on the rise and no longer hides its favorite weapon: attacks on freedom of thought or at least the expression of thought. I believe I have already said once: true freedom of thought is essentially the freedom to seek out the truth and aspire to give it characteristically individual expression.”³⁰

This was no banal declaration about freedom of thought. Although Ozório de Almeida did mention international rivalries and the imminence

of war, his declaration was likely designed not just to state his position toward what he called the “threats of the moment” in the international scenario, but also the political transformations underway in Brazil, since the 1937 coup d'état that heralded the new regime, the Estado Novo.

In this speech and in other texts, Ozório de Almeida took up issues of freedom of speech, violence, political myths, and the manipulation of the masses in quite a different way from, for example, Francisco Campos, a jurist whose text essentially justified Vargas's authoritarian regime.³¹ According to the scholar Marcelo Jasmim, Campos's pattern of discourse (a “rhetoric of imitation”) was manifested in two ways: the imitation of the nation, with the defense of the “adaptation” of legal institutions to the true national “reality,” and the imitation of the time, or the idea that the new government was the most suitable institution for a period in history in which traditional institutions of liberal democracy had clearly failed.³²

Ozório de Almeida was an opponent to the dictatorship and its rhetoric and used the forum of the BCIC mainly to call for intellectual independence:

War and violence: what predominates is force; destruction; decadence and obscurantism; the victory of the instinct and the annihilation of reason; submission to those who willingly give up their humanity and, finding nothing within themselves to justify any self-love, are satisfied with the idea of belonging to a strong group, be it a corporation, society or nation. . . . It is clear that intellectuals who know how to see, who have the habit of study, who strive to predict, are alarmed. One of our companions spoke about them here in this committee a few days ago: they have very limited power, but very great influence. This influence is sometimes very slow and late in being manifested visibly, but one day, sooner or later, it becomes clear. It may be depleted but it is never destroyed by the negation of the only means available for its exercise: the freedom to express one's thoughts, to expose to the light of day the results of one's research.³³

To a certain extent, the League's intellectual cooperation project itself symbolized opposition to dictatorial regimes and the defense of freedom of speech.³⁴ With the outbreak of World War II, the activities of the ICIC and IIC were phased out and finally suspended in 1941 when Germany invaded

France. Before then, however, the project served as a forum for intellectuals, especially scientists, to develop their internationalism and defend the funding of intellectual activities and the autonomy of intellectuals.

The last publication of the IIIC, titled “Information sur la coopération intellectuelle,” was a compendium of letters sent in by intellectuals from neutral countries in response to issues raised by Ozório de Almeida on 16 September 1939, shortly after the start of the war, on what position they should take.³⁵

Ozório de Almeida wrote his own letter to intellectuals from neutral countries when he was in Paris for the intellectual cooperation project. The idea for this correspondence had come up during one of the dinners of the Cercle de la rue Tournon or Cercle de Fénelon, a group of intellectuals, diplomats, and scientists from France that included Bonnet, Paul Rivet, Madame Vacher, Henri Laugier, Louis Lapicque, Paul Langevin, Henri Piéron, Pierre Janet, Jacques Hadamard, Jean and Francis Perrin, Louis Rapkine, Marcel Mauss, Paul Valéry, and Henri Focillon. They normally met once a month to dine and debate.³⁶

In his letter, Ozório de Almeida argued that, although nations could maintain neutrality in the face of the current political and diplomatic disputes, intellectuals must take a stance. He called for the defense of a “society of the mind,” now more than ever necessary. He also defended the idea that the neutrality of nations could not restrict freedom of thought, and that scientists should always seek the truth and base their actions on it. He complained of political leaders who had no scruples about masking the truth to control the masses and said that distorting facts was worse than censorship.

Ozório de Almeida’s letter was also an indirect criticism of Brazilian authoritarianism and the apathy of the country’s intellectuals. He wrote it soon after he heard that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had suspended the BCIC’s activities because of the war. In a private letter to Bonnet, Ozório de Almeida recounted the news with evident annoyance. When he had been in Paris, he wrote, he had received a telegram from Rio announcing that the minister of foreign affairs, Osvaldo Aranha, had stopped a series of committee lectures. He ended the letter in a rallying tone: “So be it! We will have battles, but I am sure that with my support Oswaldo Aranha will turn back to the right path. In any case, if necessary, I will set up the Brazilian committee outside the ministry and we will do our work at liberty. The government will surely lose far more than we will.”³⁷

On his return to Rio, Ozório de Almeida set about resuming the activities of the BCIC. It would appear that he gradually managed to reinstate it. He wrote to Bonnet in November 1939 that censorship did not allow for any expression of opinion. He had written several articles on the war during his trip to Paris but had so far been unable to publish them. He also said that Aranha was in poor health, which was why he had not yet received Ozório de Almeida, even after Ozório de Almeida sent the minister a copy of his letter to intellectuals of neutral nations and Aranha promised to have a long conversation with him. Ozório de Almeida concluded that only after meeting with the foreign minister would he be able to decide on the future of the committee. He would attempt to convince Aranha that it was a matter of placing freedom of thought above all national or international political considerations.

In a later, more buoyant letter, Ozório de Almeida wrote that Brazil's intellectual cooperation work was on a solid footing. He had met Aranha at a large reception on 15 November and had found him very receptive, inviting Ozório de Almeida to an exclusive meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ozório de Almeida also mentioned that he and his wife were hard pressed to fit in all the official and diplomatic engagements they were invited to. He therefore felt that what he described and wrote should translate everyone's sentiments precisely, even if for "mysterious reasons" others were unable to express them for themselves.³⁸

When the activities the IIIC had developed came to a halt when the Germans invaded Paris, Henri Bonnet arrived in the United States with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. There, along with James Shotwell, president of the National Committee of the United States of America on International Intellectual Cooperation, he became involved with debates to maintain the activities of intellectual cooperation during the war.³⁹ In the early 1940s, establishing a temporary center for international cooperation in America was placed on the agenda. Ozório de Almeida took part in the debates and was appointed as president of the committee, which was formed in 1941 in Havana during the Second American Conference of National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation.⁴⁰ At the same time, the discussion "The position of America in the world crisis created by the war" was held and a manifesto, signed and translated to Portuguese by Ozório de Almeida, was written to "mobilize the conscience of North and South America against anti-democratic doctrines and propaganda and against the spirit of indifference or appeasement."⁴¹

Ozório de Almeida's relationship with the Vargas administration was ambiguous, marked by support and criticism. As president of the BCIC, he sought to maintain relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when doing so would help him obtain the support he needed. However, as president of the BCIC, he also opposed the Vargas dictatorship after 1937.

CONCLUSION

Ozório de Almeida was just as mindful of the workings of international science and the philosophical problems of scientific activities as he was of reflections about the value of science and scientists to society. He saw men of science as linchpins in the development of closer ties between the intellectual and political orders. For him, scientists as intellectuals were important for their methods, their moral stance, and their respect and unflagging quest for truth. This line of thinking was consistent with that of the time, when effort was put into justifying the neutrality of science and defending the engagement of scientific intellectuals in the public arena.

International historiography has analyzed the concerns of European intellectuals with the loss of prestige of intellectual activities after World War I. A sense of loss drove them, prompting them to engage in international and national initiatives to stimulate intellectual work, especially in debates on financing and the relationship between intellectuals and the state.⁴²

In Brazil, this period was also marked by a sense of loss that Brazilian intellectuals repeatedly expressed in discourse. However, unlike in Europe, this debate derived from the awareness of backwardness in intellectual life at a time of major transformations in Brazilian society. This awareness drove intellectuals to take part in associations, such as the Brazilian Academy of Science and the Brazilian Association of Education, and to join the state bureaucracy to discuss the future of higher education and scientific research in the context of changes in intellectual life and the expansion of the public sector.

Ozório de Almeida's activities in these initiatives highlighted the tensions and alliances between the rationale of scientists and the state apparatus related to institutionalization and professionalization of the country's intellectual life. His defense of scientific internationalism point to a personal strategy to make himself heard in the international scientific community as well as in Brazilian politics. It also informs us about the concepts of science he shared with other scientists of that time.

At the League of Nations, Ozório de Almeida defended the universal and peaceful nature of science. He also tried to reinforce the idea that intellectual cooperation was a two-way movement in which Latin American countries also contributed to the scientific and intellectual progress of humanity. He saw cooperation between countries as indispensable to formulating general theories and therefore essential for the progress of science. Drawing on a conception of the universality of scientific knowledge, he thus defended the internationalism and participation of the Brazilian scientists in the international scientific debates. This position reflected his involvement in movements to improve Brazilian intellectual life, in the context of transformations of Brazilian society during the early years of the Vargas government. In addition, through the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation project, he could also criticize dictatorial regimes and defend the autonomy of intellectuals and the freedom of speech during the Estado Novo.

NOTES

1. This article was assisted by the scholarship from Capes—Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education (Brazil) and the Grant-in-aid of the Rockefeller Archive Center (New York).
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20. Ozório de Almeida, *Almas sem abrigo—romance* (Rio de Janeiro: Ariel, 1933).
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28. Ozório de Almeida, *Ensaios, críticas e perfis*, 212.
29. Ibid., 214.
30. Ibid., 215.
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Rudolf Kraus, South America, and the League of Nations' Permanent Commission on Biological Standardization



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A number of specialists have studied South America's participation in the League of Nations (LN, or League), yet few have addressed it inside the LN Health Committee or taken South American contexts into account. This chapter endeavors to identify the reasons for the absence of South America in the discussion on standardization of sera and vaccines production that the LN Health Committee promoted and for the region's initial lack of interest in the project. In a broader sense, the goal of the chapter is to help clarify how international organizations operate, observing the priorities of the LN Health Committee's Permanent Commission on Biological Standardization (PCBS) and the context of biological products manufacturing and trade in some countries of South America. An additional intent is to confront the LN's universalistic discourse with regional demands and contexts through scientific debates and initiatives.¹

The chapter takes as its point of departure the scientific trajectory of Rudolf Kraus, who headed four bacteriological institutions that made biological products in Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Vienna, and Santiago between 1913 and 1932. In addition, Kraus engaged in the discussion on biological standardization by publishing papers and corresponding with the director of the PCBS. While in South America, Kraus stimulated inspection practices in the South American countries and thereby laid the ground for discussions on standardization of sera and vaccines production. Because inspection requires a comparison with standards, the debate about quality control of

biological products intersected with discussions on standardization of production. The continent's official engagement in PCBS efforts began largely in response to Kraus's efforts and the research area he established that was devoted to standards.

BIOLOGICAL STANDARDIZATION IN EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR I

The outbreak of World War I heralded a new era in scientific relations in the manufacture of biological products, sera and vaccines in particular. The most significant consequence in South America was the temporary suspension of various imports—opotherapeutic products, antityphus vaccine, antidifteric and antitetanic sera, which promoted openings of private laboratories to feed a market left hungry by this sudden shortage.²

The war also created a huge arena for experimentation, in which a variety of products and procedures were broadly incorporated, including tetanus serum, blood transfusions, and the typhus vaccine.³ After the war, many doctors gained confidence in new technical methods applied to medicine and in the new quality of medical care provided to armies.⁴ The war afforded a matchless opportunity for experimenting new treatments and diagnostic methods.⁵

Debates on the standardization of biological products began in the 1920s, prompted by realization of discrepancies in diagnostic data and in the nomenclature used in biomedical research.⁶ The challenges encountered in exchanging data during the conflict were well documented in the report on the first conference on standardization, which the LN Health Committee and British government sponsored.⁷ This document makes clear the significant confusion during the war about serum diagnosis of syphilis and administration of tetanus serum. The widespread use of animal products in treatment and diagnostic procedures—which in contrast to synthetic products could not be precisely quantified—occasioned these inconsistencies in nomenclatures and measurements.

Concern over standardization thus went beyond the need to render data uniform; it also, for example, paved the way for comparative epidemiological studies. The discussion over standardization intended to reach a consensus on the best method of manufacture for each biological product, which involved also political aspects. Before the war, Germany had produced most

of the standard for antidiphtheria serum available and had distributed it to various European institutes. During the hostilities, however, the supply was suspended, leading to a shortage at many serum therapy and research institutions. Concern over decentralization of the availability of standards stemmed from the fear that other countries would once again find themselves at the mercy of Germany, which dominated research on standardized production.⁸

The first expert meeting to discuss standardization of biological products convened for three days at the British Ministry of Health in London on 12 December 1921 under the LN Health Committee's auspices. Representatives of serological and bacteriological institutes from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Poland, and Switzerland were present. The attention centered on the methods of production of antidiphtheria, antitetanus, antimeningococcal, antipneumococcal, and antidysenteric sera and the serum diagnosis of syphilis.⁹ Two additional meetings occurred in Paris in 1922 and Edinburgh in 1923, where discussions on standardization rendered the establishment of the German antidiphtheria serum as universal standard.¹⁰

The list of collaborators and participating institutes included "friends and colleagues from the little world of the Serum Institutes." With the sole exception of the group from the Pasteur Institute in Paris, most had trained at Paul Ehrlich's laboratory in Frankfurt am Main and followed the protocols he formulated.¹¹ In 1923, the PCBS was created within the LN Health Committee and entrusted to the leadership of Thorvald Madsen, who had been head of the early 1920s meetings. The State Serum Institute of Copenhagen that Madsen directed was charged with storing the standard serum; the National Institute for Medical Research in London was to hold the standards for vitamins, hormones, and drugs.¹²

To date, no thoroughgoing studies of the role of the expert committees created under the LN Health Committee have been undertaken; in the sole paper on this topic, Iris Borowy did an in-depth analysis of only some of the committees. According to her, the PCBS was one of the LN's most successful endeavors in international scientific cooperation in that its work proved productive and harmonious.¹³

Most historians continued to interpret the cooperation between the LN Health Committee and non-European countries within the framework of the European context. None analyzed local circumstances, such as those in Latin American countries. In light of this, and because the council of the

PCBS consisted solely of Europeans, even though non-European experts and institutes participated, Borowy's use of the expression "international scientific cooperation" raises some questions.

The LN was multifaceted in terms both of the subject matter it addressed or highlighted and of its form of representation. Patricia Clavin best illustrates the organization's transnational nature: "At every level of its operations in disarmament, economics, finance, and welfare, the League was formally inter-governmental in control, highly multinational in the range of personnel it employed, and both international and transnational in its operations."¹⁴ From a transnational perspective, we can identify the flow of people, objects, and ideas independent of state borders—that is, exchanges that transpired without regard to state or national priorities. The PCBS was dubious in this sense: although it brought together scientists who were circulating transnationally even before its creation, these individuals were still affiliated with European government institutions.

Brazil's withdrawal from the LN at the close of the 1920s was a factor in the organization's attempts to attract Latin American countries, especially through its technical commissions. Cooperative efforts with Brazil date to 1922, when Carlos Chagas became a member of the LN Health Committee; he stayed on even after Brazil had officially withdrawn from the League. In 1925, an LN Health Committee member, Léon Bernard, visited Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina to gather public health data. Two years later, a mission headed by Madsen traveled through the same countries in the company of Chagas and Argentine physician Gregorio Araóz Alfaro, where they paid visits to public health and research institutes. Latin America's participation in the LN Health Committee has yet to be studied, though an article by Paul Weindling provides an overview of the beginnings of cooperation.¹⁵

A dialogue focused more directly on biological standardization only commenced in the 1930s, when a conference on the serum diagnosis of syphilis was held in Montevideo and the Argentine scientist Alfredo Sordelli became a PCBS member.¹⁶ Despite efforts to draw Latin Americans into LN Health Committee activities, the permanent commissions were for the most part made up of Europeans; furthermore, Latin American representatives would likely have been less assiduous in their participation in the Geneva's meetings than their European peers, given that the geographic question would certainly come into play.

Nevertheless, South America joined the standardization discussion only later because there had been neither any interest in adopting the standards

set out by the PCBS nor financial conditions for doing so. The adoption of a standard might require changes in the manufacturing process for biological products because the strength of the product might not meet the strength demanded by the standard. For instance, the adoption of the antidiphtheria sera standard could have demanded more horses—the animal commonly used in the manufacturing—because the sera quantity would be not enough to reach the standard measures, which would increase the cost of production. Moreover, standard samples would need to be purchased regularly, which would entail another expense for public institutions already hard hit by the postwar financial crisis.

The lack of interest can also be explained by the dissimilarities between microorganisms from European and South American regions, which hindered the establishment of one standard for the entire gamut of microorganisms. At that time, scientists in Brazil were already aware of these dissimilarities.¹⁷

INSPECTION PRACTICE AND BIOLOGICAL STANDARDIZATION: ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, AND CHILE, 1913–1932

The scientific history of Rudolf Kraus is useful in demonstrating the peculiarities of biological products inspection in different contexts because he directed state bacteriological institutes in Argentina, Brazil, Austria, and Chile. Inspection depends on the availability of standards, and attention to the standardization issue began to appear in South America institutes. Inspection was becoming a concern in view of the growth of the private laboratories and the absence of quality control of many products.¹⁸ Kraus's directorship of the bacteriological institutes of Buenos Aires and Santiago established inspection activities and thus pioneered the interest in this issue and the biological standardization discussion. The same interest arose in Brazil.¹⁹

Kraus came to South America in 1913 to head the National Hygiene Department's Bacteriological Institute in Buenos Aires. By this time, he had already earned a reputation in Europe as a noted bacteriologist; he was editor of one of the first manuals on immunology and had received the French Legion of Honor for achieving control over the cholera epidemic in the Bulgarian Army during the Balkan War (1912–1913).

Kraus's scientific trajectory is quite unusual compared with other European bacteriologists in South America because of his permanence in three institutions, two of which he actually set up. Although the Argentines had long intended to create the Bacteriological Institute in Buenos Aires, it was in fact organized by Kraus, who remained in charge until 1921. That same year, Kraus received an invitation to head the Butantan Institute in São Paulo, where he stayed for two years. In 1929, after a period in Vienna as director of the Federal Serum Therapy Institute, Kraus was asked by the Chilean government to structure and lead its Bacteriological Institute, where he remained until his death in July 1932.

At the Buenos Aires institute, Kraus implemented routine inspection of biological products, both those made at the facility and imports.²⁰ Wartime shortages and growing demand for vaccines and sera for veterinary use, due to the growth of the Argentine cattle industry, led to concerns over state control of production and trade. Within the Physical-Chemical Section, Alfredo Sordelli was responsible for research related to standards; he had studied biological chemistry and bacteriology at Emil Fischer's laboratory in Germany.²¹

By this time, the Brazilian scientist Arthur Neiva was directing the Protozoology and Parasitology Section of the Buenos Aires institute and noticed the organization of the inspection activities. When he came back to Brazil to take charge of the General Directorate of the Sanitary Service (Diretoria Geral do Serviço Sanitário) for the state of São Paulo, he highlighted Kraus's initiatives in this area: "At the Bacteriological Institute in Buenos Aires, I had the opportunity to verify the inspection of sera from the most respected scientific centers."²²

The practice of inspection, suggested by Neiva, soon reached Brazil in the form of new articles in the 1918 Sanitary Code for the state of São Paulo.²³ The new code assigned inspection responsibilities to the Butantan Institute, which was then the second most important body for bacteriological production in Brazil.²⁴ In the state of São Paulo, through the Butantan Institute, Neiva tried to replicate the activities conducted in Buenos Aires.

Rivalry between Argentina and Brazil was ignited by the territorial disputes of the mid-nineteenth century and continued through the twentieth century, when antagonisms centered on the issue of South American geopolitical hegemony and international prestige in Europe, especially within the LN.²⁵ Brazilians and Argentines felt a mixture of competition and affinity, grounded in political, diplomatic, and economic interests.²⁶

In the medical field, Argentina showed great progress over Brazil, especially in view of its many hospitals and its social assistance network.²⁷ However, Brazil was on the cutting edge in microbiological research, primarily because of research in tropical medicine at the Oswaldo Cruz Institute.²⁸ Neiva's work in Buenos Aires was an example of this friendly competition. Called to set up entomological research at the Bacteriological Institute, he took the opportunity to discreetly evaluate Argentine biological research. And before Kraus reached Buenos Aires in 1913, he visited the prestigious institute in Rio de Janeiro, an event announced in the Brazilian press.²⁹

Kraus's inspection activities in Buenos Aires made their influence felt in the friendly competition between Argentina and Brazil. Another influential Brazilian scientist called attention to the issue in 1918. Arthur Moses, director of the Ministry of Agriculture's Veterinary Laboratory, stated that the quality analyses of carbuncle vaccine Kraus had performed in Argentina inspired a study on the quality of veterinary vaccines marketed in Brazil.³⁰ His results were presented at the Second Conference of the South American Society of Microbiology, Hygiene, and Pathology, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1918, when he pointed to a great variety of efficacy from vaccines of different sellers. The study had been further motivated by the dearth of control over biological products in Brazil, which Moses attributed to the lack of specialized personnel in his country.³¹

The conference was chaired by Carlos Chagas, who had been director of the Oswaldo Cruz Institute since 1917—when Oswaldo Gonçalves Cruz died—and who had visited the facilities of the Bacteriological Institute in Buenos Aires during two scientific congresses the city hosted in 1916.³² One of them was the First Conference of the South American Society of Microbiology, Hygiene, and Pathology, funded by Kraus months earlier with the aim of prompting Latin America scientific relations. In this case, regional rivalry was more complex due to tensions between Kraus and his Argentine colleagues in respect to controlling research themes.

In this same year, Neiva exchanged many letters with the Oswaldo Cruz Institute's former director, writing about the Argentine parasitological research developments and the practice of inspection of biological products.³³ In letters with members of the Buenos Aires Bacteriological Institute, however, Neiva expressed concern over Kraus's vigorous intent to lead Latin American research on tropical medicine. Cooperation on the trade in biological products was at stake in the very competitive context of World War I. An interview with Neiva in the newspaper *O Paiz* on 17 September

expressed Neiva's attention on the marketing of Brazilian products to Argentina:

During a conversation that the illustrious Brazilian scientist [Neiva] had with Dr. Miguel dos Reis, director of the office of the American Agency here, [Neiva] stated that one of the extremely important missions that brought him to Buenos Aires was to start *negotiations between the Oswaldo Cruz Institute and its bacteriological counterpart in [Buenos Aires]* so as to put in place a system for exchanging the bacteriological products that are prepared by each of these establishments and that may be needed by Brazil or by Argentina. For example, "protosan," meant to combat *mal de cadeiras* [a parasitic disease caused by a *Trypanosoma*] in cattle *is a vaccine made by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute which is wholly unknown in Argentina*, where it could be introduced once the aforementioned exchange has been inaugurated. The same will be the case with certain preparations made by the Bacteriological Institute here, which quite naturally are not known there.³⁴

When Chagas became head of Brazil's National Department of Public Health (Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública, or DNSP) in 1920, he already had experience with the issue of selling and inspecting biological products. The concern over control of biological products in Brazil was not restricted to conversations at the Oswaldo Cruz Institute, as the presentation of Moses's work at the conference in Rio de Janeiro attested.

In the most important position in public health, Chagas had the opportunity to change the inspection rules and did so. This new issue was incorporated into federal legislation because it had become necessary to control new products reaching the market as private laboratories burgeoned in numbers. Additionally, Chagas was familiar with the modern facilities at the Bacteriological Institute in Buenos Aires and was certainly abreast of Kraus's work in assessing the quality of these products. Kraus's achievements in the evaluation of foreign and national biological products in Buenos Aires were therefore decisive in increasing Brazilian regulatory control over the manufacture of serum, vaccine, and other biological products in the 1920s.

Decree no. 14.354, dated 15 September 1920, which approved the first regulations of the newly created DNSP, is the first document that presents in-depth rules about the inspection of biological products in Brazil.³⁵ Prior

to this, decree no. 10.821, from 1914, had laid out new regulations for the General Directorate of Public Health and stipulated that the inspection of “vaccines, sera, attenuated cultures, and similar products” would be the responsibility of the National Laboratory of Analyses, which would answer to the directorate.³⁶ According to the decree that created the DNSP, “analysis of sera, vaccines, and other biological products placed on the market” would be performed by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute, which would affix a sanitary seal to its packaging once the quality of the products had been ascertained.³⁷

Under the new DNSP regulations, analyses were also conducted by “official institutes or other institutes recognized by government powers,” which would evaluate all “sera, vaccines, and biological products of foreign origin intended for human use, along with those produced within the country by private institutes or laboratories.” The main difference with earlier legislation was the number of articles dedicated to inspection activities, which were now condensed into a single chapter, “Sera, vaccines, and other biological products.” This section determined that these products could only be imported by the customs agency in Rio de Janeiro and by the states that had official institutes equipped to handle inspection; that a private laboratory could appeal and provide counterevidence if it so wished; that none of these products, whether produced nationally or abroad, could be sold without an official sanitary seal; and that importers of biological products would be fined if they placed goods on the market without prior inspection.

Although the inspection of biological products had already been established in legislation, discussions on biological standardization found no echo in Brazil in the 1920s. In the volumes published in this decade by Brazil’s leading medical periodical, *O Brasil Médico*, only one article commented on the biological standardization studies promoted by the LN Health Committee.³⁸ This particular study was conducted by Moses, who had been exploring the subject since the late 1910s, when he first started evaluating the quality of veterinary vaccines in Brazil.

The discussion on biological standardization did not resonate much in Brazil for technical, financial, and regulatory reasons, and the same can be said of Argentina and Chile. The technical stumbling block to adopting European standards was the discrepancy between the strains of bacteria in different countries and regions, something that had been noted in Brazilian medical circles in the 1920s.³⁹ The biological differences between micro-organisms found in Europe and in other regions of the world were not

taken into account in discussions over the universal standardization of the manufacture of biological products. Products prepared from bacteria, for instance, should be made from strains found where they are to be used; in other words, because strains of meningococci in Rio de Janeiro differ from strains in Copenhagen, the former should be used to produce sera or vaccines for use in Rio alone. Nor were these biological disparities taken into account when the LN expert committee was formed or during subsequent debates.

The financial roadblock was that Brazil's two main public producers of sera and vaccines grappled with a serious financial crisis throughout the 1920s, making purchases of standards difficult and hindering adoption of a standardizing model. Furthermore, because legislation was implemented only in 1923, dissemination of the use of standards in the early 1920s was minimal.

In 1922, when Kraus headed the Butantan Institute in São Paulo, he wrote an article-manifesto in an effort to draw the South American bacteriological institutes into the discussion on biological standardization promoted by the LN Health Committee. He questioned the nonparticipation of any country "from the Americas" at the first meeting on biological standardization, held in London in 1921.⁴⁰ He likewise criticized the fact that antivenom serum was missing from the agenda, given that this product was vital to all continents except Europe. Probably already aware of technical obstacles to a universal standard, Kraus saw a chance to head a scientific polemic in Latin America and therefore improve his relationship with Butantan Institute members. His earlier cooperation initiatives did not result in much prestige among Latin American scientific groups.

Kraus's involvement in the discussion on biological standardization deepened after he returned to Europe in 1923 after ten years in South America. He began by fostering the creation of an institute devoted to the inspection and standardization of medical devices and instruments in Austria, drawing his inspiration from one that already existed in technology and industry.⁴¹ From 1924 to 1928, Kraus contributed to research on biological standardization through the participation of the Vienna Federal Serum Therapy Institute in PCBS-sponsored surveys as well as through his own publications.⁴² Although he was not a member of the commission, he was an active participant in the related negotiations and maintained correspondence with the chair, Madsen, and with the LN Health Committee's medical director, Ludwik Rajchman, and its secretary, Louis Gautier.⁴³

Kraus's commitment to matters related to international scientific cooperation dates to the first decade of the twentieth century, when he first became involved in sanitary campaigns in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and neighboring countries. In 1927, Kraus and many other scientists founded the International Society of Microbiology, whose first congress was scheduled for 1929, with Kraus as secretary general.⁴⁴ Although he did not actually take part in the congress, held only in July 1930, Kraus's involvement evinces his scientific standing among European microbiologists.⁴⁵

By this time, Kraus had founded national and regional societies elsewhere and also had contacts in South and North America and Western and Eastern Europe.⁴⁶ Among the publications that resulted from Kraus's experience in South America was the book *10 Years in South America: Conferences on Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases of Man and Animals*, which provided valuable information to scientists looking for professional opportunities, and to merchants and entrepreneurs in search of markets for their biological products.⁴⁷ In regard to biological products, Kraus advised that markets were promising, especially in the veterinary field, and that government control over these products was quite tentative, favoring investment in the region.

When Kraus assumed leadership of the Bacteriological Institute of Chile in 1929, he helped draft its bylaws and added an article making the institute responsible for inspection in that country. Months later, when he took command of the foremost public health agency in the country, he implemented an inspection system based on the institute's distribution of standards to regional laboratories, many of which were prepared at the institute. One of the initiatives this institute oversaw was the establishment of standardized biological diagnostics. Through the Serology Laboratory, the institute distributed its antigen standards for the Wassermann test for syphilis to various laboratories in Chile.⁴⁸ The network for the inspection and distribution of standards that Rudolf Kraus developed in the early 1930s paved the way for the PCBS standards to be adopted. Chile ordered compliance with international standards in 1935.⁴⁹

At the end of 1920s, despite numerous League cooperation efforts and activities within Latin America, the standardization program had still not been considered. An initiative to engage South American experts in the discussion came from the Uruguayans, whose government in 1930 sponsored the Laboratory Conference on the Serodiagnosis of Syphilis. Held in Montevideo, the event assembled experts on the diagnostic reactions of

venereal disease from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay as well as European members of the PCBS.⁵⁰

Some days after Kraus's arrival in Chile, he once again proposed in a letter to Madsen that antivenom sera be included in standardization research and that he Kraus could be the PCBS delegate in South America.⁵¹ Since his proposal of 1922, the PCBS had never seriously considered the antivenom serum and no document had revealed Kraus to have participated officially in any way.

In a letter to medical director Ludwik Rajchman, Madsen confided that Kraus's suggestion about antivenom sera was interesting but that to embrace it, it would probably be necessary to approach the director of the Hygienic Laboratory in Washington. The relationship with the United States was not desired, as Madsen confided to Rajchman: "I am afraid we must deal with the Americans."⁵² Political constraints were present in the technical agencies of the League of Nations, as some authors have already stressed.⁵³

For instance, the standardization of antivenom sera only got under way in the mid-1930s and was limited to Europe.⁵⁴ The choice was not based on any recognition that it would be impossible to arrive at a worldwide standard—what was achieved only in the 2000s—but on the limited importance accorded to accidents involving venomous animals in Europe, occurrences that were in fact infinitely fewer than in Africa, Asia, and South America. European interests held sway in the directions the PCBS took, and the League of Nations in general, and the case of antivenom sera would not be any different.

The appointment in 1935 to the PCBS of Alfredo Sordelli, then director of the Bacteriological Institute in Buenos Aires, was a major step forward in being the first time a South American country had sat on the commission. Sordelli had overseen the research on standards in Buenos Aires since Kraus had introduced inspection practices and fostered the formulation of the institute's standards, given that no universal standard was in place for most biological products in the first decades of the twentieth century. Until the 1930s, interest in adapting to European standards was not on the agenda for either Brazil or Argentina, whose members of the LN Health Committee, Chagas and Araóz Alfaro, made no effort whatsoever to encourage the adoption of the standards defined by the PCBS in the 1920s. In fact, Sordelli was invited to take the place of Chagas, who died in 1934. The interest cannot be explained solely by his expertise in standardization research: his

prominence in the Argentine biomedical scientific realm was equally significant.

Rudolf Kraus's achievements in South America were many and meaningful, but the region never fully took part in the LN Health Committee discussion on biological standardization for many reasons. First, South American scientists and public health politicians were not interested in the activities of the PCBS in light of their awareness that strains of micro-organisms differed between Europe and South America. Kraus was alone in his efforts to bring together the PCBS and South American scientists occupied with sera and vaccines research. Second, the absence of regulations on the circulation of biological products in many countries during the 1920s did not require the availability of standards. Finally, sera and vaccines were traded heavily among European countries but at most only bilaterally in South America, such as between Argentina and Brazil. This meant there was no concern for comparing data, contrary to what happened in Europe following World War I.

The study of international scientific interaction that surpasses transnational borders reflects a context in which nation-states play a lesser role in people's communication.⁵⁵ In this manner, the transnational perspective applied in history has contributed to new interpretations of international scientific relations, which were previously framed by studies that focused on the macro systems of the international organizations. Thus, the analysis of backstage discussions of biological standardization contributes to understanding how the PCBS functioned and thereby underscores how international organizations work.

The LN Health Committee's PCBS standards were the closest that LN initiatives came to putting the ideal of pure international scientific cooperation into practice. More accurate analysis of technical agencies can reveal, however, whether the encounter of ideology and practice in fact occurred. The study of the technical activities of the LN is therefore a great opportunity to highlight the tensions between universalistic ideologies and local priorities, especially when areas such as science carry the idea of neutrality and a lack of social influences.

I am very grateful to the editors' excellent and pertinent suggestions on the manuscript.

NOTES

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PART FOUR

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES



Discovering Underdevelopment

Argentina and Double Taxation at the League of Nations



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In the early twentieth century, Argentina was among the top ten high-income economies in the world, and many observers—both Argentines and foreigners—believed the nation was destined to achieve great things in the economic field. Despite the damage of World War I to the Argentine economy, given its profound links with the world market, recovery was quick. In December 1920, the Buenos Aires daily *La Prensa* optimistically asserted that “Argentina is the only great American country that lends money to Europe . . . the rest are borrowers and therefore Argentina can be at the head of the big members of the League.”¹

Nonetheless, some intellectuals and politicians began to consider that Argentina was falling behind some European nations and the United States. These gloomier ideas, which pictured Argentina as a nondeveloped country, were shaped to some extent in the international forums the League of Nations (LN, or League) organized to encourage economic recovery after the war.

Historians have traditionally neglected the influence of the League in the economic ideas and policies of Latin American intellectuals and policymakers. Most historians emphasized the important role Latin Americans played within the UN system, through organizations such as the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) or the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).² Albert Hirschman, the well-known economist expert in development issues, considered that the creation of ECLA in 1948 was a turning point in the history of Latin American economic thought and

that for the first time Latin American economists were discussing reformist solutions for the regional problems.³ Yet, the ideas and the debates of ECLA had a significant antecedent in the experience of some Latin Americans who were involved in the League's activities and (re)considered Latin American place in the world economy, even within a regional framework. In fact, the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, usually known for his heterodox economic thought in the second postwar period and for his role in promoting ECLA and UNCTAD, was familiar with the League's economic debates and became involved in some of the conferences it organized.⁴

Before Prebisch in the early 1930s, other Argentine experts had been involved in the technical bodies of the international organization and in some cases reflected on that experience. The role of the Argentine representative in the League's Committee on Double Taxation, the economist Salvador Oria, is illuminating.⁵ This committee discussed the possibility of establishing multilateral tax agreements. Although it did not yield significant results, it did become the locus of different ideologies about international economic development and the origin of a major divide between European and Latin American nations. In particular, Oria elaborated alternative views on the world order and on Argentina's place in that order. Argentina wished to participate as a relevant actor in creating an international community, but at the same time its representative argued for two kind of interests, those of industrialized nations and those of nations in a different stage of development. This realization established the basis for an anti-imperialist discourse focused on economic issues and the divergences between European powers (later the United States as well) and the Latin American nations. The League thus provided an international forum in which Oria and other Latin Americans had the opportunity to contrast their views with those the European representatives defended and to think anew on Latin America's place in the global economic order. In that context, the "discovery of underdevelopment" began before the classical age of the development theory during the Cold War, and was the result of Latin Americans' reflections and participation in the international community.⁶

World War I had a profound impact on the global economy. In the immediate aftermath of the war, a wave of economic disarray and social turmoil washed over and beyond Europe, affecting belligerents and nonbelligerents alike. Facing huge deficits and debts and uncontrollable inflation, many governments, mainly in Europe, hardened their tax policies to balance their budgets and tame inflation. In addition, unions and workers pressed

governments and led them to reform tax system in a progressive direction. On the one hand, higher taxes might curb economic recovery and stimulate capital flight to places where taxes were lower. On the other, one goal was to reestablish international economic stability. According to an almost consensual view in the early 1920s, that stability depended on restoring the gold standard. This search for international monetary firmness stimulated the possibility of international coordination in fiscal matters. Since almost its creation, the League of Nations paid special attention to monetary problems, mostly European. Thus, one of its first actions was to organize the International Financial Conference in Brussels in 1920, which recommended that a committee of tax experts be created.⁷ These experts were to find the basis for future international agreements on double taxation: that is, how to extract tax payments from citizens who earned income in two countries and how to avoid making citizens pay twice for the same income in two countries.

The concern about new taxes was not only European: it also appeared in Argentina and other Latin American countries. In Argentina, President Hipólito Yrigoyen's administration unsuccessfully attempted at the end of the war to introduce a new income tax to balance the national budget.⁸ This failure marked Yrigoyen's domestic economic policies by limiting the independence of the treasury from the fluctuations of international markets. Argentina's revenues largely depended on incomes derived from import duties.

At the same time, the different fiscal policies in Europe and Latin America played a significant part in the conflicts that surrounded the Committee on Double Taxation in the 1920s. Many Latin American nations had not yet established an income tax or were struggling to make one work. They therefore distrusted the proposals of European tax experts, which focused on the income tax and aimed at exempting taxpayers from their involvement in economic activities abroad.

Acting on a recommendation of the Conference of Brussels, the LN created the Provisional Financial and Economic Committee (PFEC). This body was made up of bankers, businessmen appointed by the council of the League, and experts appointed by the states.⁹ Similar committees were created in many European countries after the war. To some extent, the PFEC was an attempt to solve the economic labyrinth of the postwar through a corporatist body, or transposing domestic solutions to international relations.¹⁰ The League's secretariat (its executive-bureaucratic body), following

the suggestion of the PFEC, created in 1922 a committee on double taxation and tax evasion. Belgium, France, Britain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Czechoslovakia sent one representative each.¹¹

Despite representing their countries, these delegates were nonetheless expected to act as independent technicians. They met in March 1923 and produced reports that provided guidelines for future discussions and established the need for a group of “savants.”¹² Its technical language aside, the Committee on Double Taxation did not part with the corporatist line that the technical bodies of the LN adopted. From its inception, the committee cooperated with the International Chamber of Commerce, which in 1924 sent delegates to the sessions of the committee.¹³

In 1925, the Committee on Double Taxation asked that new members from other countries be included in the committee. It did not, however, explain the rationale for this request.¹⁴ In 1926, the PFEC called experts from Argentina, Venezuela, and Japan to participate in the Committee on Double Taxation.¹⁵ Usually, European countries dominated the economic bodies of the LN and European interests were their main concern.¹⁶ By inviting experts from non-European nations such as Argentina or Venezuela, the League perhaps tried to legitimize itself as an authentic universal institution. Moreover, on tax issues, many Latin American governments attempted to add devices to their fiscal regimes, such as a modern income tax. Latin American countries were also important destinations for foreign investments, which made it even more important to persuade them to join the international regulation of taxation.

In 1926 and 1927, the Argentine representative on the Committee on Double Taxation was Salvador Oria, an undersecretary in the Argentine Ministry of Economy. The goal of the committee’s sessions was to produce models for future bilateral and multilateral tax agreements. These agreements were to be discussed and passed by an international conference on taxation in 1928. The sessions yielded few results, however, given the conflict among European countries and between European governments and private interests over how to monitor tax fraud and evasion.¹⁷

The committee also witnessed a bitter dispute between Latin American and European delegates. Oria was one of its most active debaters. His experience led him to reflect on themes such as imperialism and economic development, and he articulated a modern view of Argentina as a nondeveloped nation. His clash with European experts centered on three points: the source of taxation in income taxes, monopolies of foreign companies, and taxes on shipping companies.



A session of the LN Committee of Experts on Double Taxation. Salvador Oria is second from right, wearing glasses and a black suit. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

The first consumed most of the time of the experts who advised the committee.¹⁸ The report they sent to the PFEC noted that income taxes in the United States, Britain, and most of Europe were collected at the domicile of the taxpayer, not where the income had been earned. According to the experts, this determination was the most sensible option because the tax was both a personal and a global one. This method, they added, would allow agreements on double taxation to be simplified. Thus, if two nations reached a future agreement, they needed only to mutually concede an income-tax exemption to citizens with a fiscal domicile in the other country.¹⁹

The simplicity of the proposal was its main advantage, but it had drawbacks. First, the personal income tax was not a universal practice. In many of the so-called new nations, real taxes (on production or on assets) were more frequent. According to the experts of the committee, these countries “in need of foreign capital for their overall development want to have their

share of taxes on the income earned on their territories and not leave them for the countries, already often very rich, who provided capital. On the other hand, from a technical point of view, the collection of property taxes that do not require the declaration by the taxpayer's total income is generally easier.”²⁰

The experts were aware of these complications for underdeveloped countries, yet insisted on recommending a domicile-tax scheme, and the British representative became its most outspoken defender. In 1921, another Briton, Sir Basil P. Blackett, had drafted a report for the PFEC presenting a similar line of argument. Blackett acknowledged that countries with abundant natural resources, such as Australia, and those that were financial centers, such as the United Kingdom, diverged on the income-tax issue. The former was in favor of taxing at the source whereas the latter preferred taxing based on domiciles. Blackett argued that “any attempt to impose income taxation upon foreign [British] fixed yield investments, on the part of a borrowing country . . . must defeat itself.” Borrower countries depended on foreign investments, he explained, and could not afford to tax them. Furthermore, the receivers of capital obtained greater benefits from it than the lender countries and therefore should concede the tax exemption: “As between countries of different nationality, there is a *prima facie* ground for the suggestion that the advantage would be secured by the borrowing country, in the use of the marginal amount of capital attracted. In that case, the relief should be given by the borrowing country alone.”²¹ Because exports of capital were key to the British Empire, its representatives defended with passion the liberalization of financial flows and the taxation at domicile in almost every situation.²² This position did not change until the end of World War II.

Early on, Oria challenged this doctrine by asserting that the special conditions of South America had not been taken into account. First, he underlined the differences between tax systems. At the time, Argentina had no income tax, a domestic problem Oria decried. International differences were also important. As Oria said, “if European countries are—shall we say—exporters of capital, much of which is invested in Argentina, that country is an importer of capital, and is therefore antagonistic to some of the arguments in the report.”²³ Oria referred to the fact that capital exporters wanted to obtain tax relief in direct taxation from recipient countries in future tax agreements.

In the committee's session of 18 May 1926, the Venezuelan delegate, Federico Álvarez Feo, joined Oria and demanded special treatment for

debtor countries, even requesting compensation for these countries if they accepted international agreements on double taxation.²⁴ Oria explained that Argentina was working on implementing a personal income tax but would remain an importer of capitals; he therefore demanded that the clause on taxation based on domicile not be made mandatory.²⁵

European representatives rejected these proposals. J. H. R. Sinninghe Damste of the Netherlands stated that the model agreements to emerge from the committee established bases for the future and that the present situation of South America and the Dutch East Indies as debtor nations was a provisional one. In the future, underdeveloped areas would enjoy a surplus of capital and therefore the question of taxation based on domicile would not create major problems.²⁶ The British representative, Percy Thompson, supported by Belgium, adopted the harshest stance, inspired by Blackett's ideas: "if a State decides to introduce a high progressive tax on income earned in its territory, either it will no longer receive large amounts of capital from abroad, or it will have to pay the capitalists proportionately higher interest."²⁷ That is, the best option for receiver states was to refrain from taxing capital investments. Admitting that the stakes were higher for new countries, the British nonetheless defended their position with ardor. The perception of a decline in the world market of manufactures and the threats to their control of colonies led the British to adopt such a tough line. In 1928, the British position prevailed and the League of Nations recommended domicile-based income taxation in bilateral agreements.

The second controversial issue concerned foreign companies that enjoyed monopolies in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, particularly in public utilities, yet paid income taxes in their home countries. For Oria, the problem was that those taxes inflated the costs of the companies and therefore their tariffs and prices. This was an entirely new subject in the discussion, which the Argentine representative brought up on 20 May 1926. Oria's goal was to add to the final recommendations of the committee the suggestion to "avoid excessive taxes . . . to the detriment of the populations concerned."²⁸

Again European and Latin American delegates clashed. The Swiss representative, Hans Blau, stated that excessive taxation was a "remote" consequence of tax policies and not related to issues of international tax overlapping, and therefore that the Committee on Double Taxation should not deal with it. The Belgian representative, Charles Clavier, and the French one, Marcel Borduge, asserted that the law of supply and demand

would solve the problem. That is, if foreign companies charged higher tariffs to make up for the taxes paid at home, they would lose clients in their countries of operation. Clavier and Borduge did not consider Oria's argument that these companies had become monopolies in their fields. Venezuela's Alvarez Feo responded that "the law of supply and demand is hindered in several countries of South America. . . . In Venezuela we have been reduced to building a cement road along a railroad belonging to an English corporation whose tariffs are already prohibitive."²⁹ The Venezuelan introduced the theme of the inadequate working of markets in the nondeveloped countries, a theme that would be reflected on by future theorists of underdevelopment.

On 20 May, discussion abruptly ended. Oria asked for "an expression of sympathy" from the League for Latin America and her special situation. The president of the committee, the Italian Pasquale D'Aroma, interrupted him and ironically suggested to "record with sympathy M. Oria's request" rather than to sympathize with his region.³⁰

Yet Oria brought up the issue again on 12 January 1927. The Argentine proposed a clause suggesting that companies of public utilities not be allowed to increase their fares when they faced rising taxes in their home countries. This was a radical proposal, hard for European countries to accept because the increase in fares did not affect their consumers. Thompson opposed the proposal. Oria asserted that the fares of railways in Argentina, most of them British-owned, followed the movements of the income tax in Britain, and that in many Latin American countries, fare hikes had caused serious national crises. Thompson countered that price increases were the result of inflation and not correlated with tax rates in Britain. The debate went beyond technical and economic issues and took on moral and political overtones. Oria demanded from the committee and the League a demonstration of equanimity and democratic behavior, calling for every country to be treated the same way. Oria had repeatedly emphasized the undemocratic character of the committees of the League. During the 12 January session, the Dutch representative, Sinninghe Damste, acknowledged that "often people enjoying de facto monopolies hold, so to speak, the taxpayers in their hands."³¹ Nevertheless, Damste did not support Oria's proposed clause. In the end, the committee decided to not make a pronouncement on the issue and to pass the task to the future body in charge of tax matters. Oria accepted. This might be interpreted as a defeat: European countries had put off sine die a

debate on a controversial issue. Oria's insistence, however, prevented the definite closing of the debate.

The Committee on Double Taxation's third—and most conflictive—issue concerned shipping companies. Oria refused to cede the taxing of these companies to their countries of domicile. The United States and other countries had already signed bilateral agreements on the taxation of shipping companies. The experts hoped to extend this model. The combined pressure of shipping companies and chambers of commerce seemed to make an agreement feasible. In reality, these representatives of the private sector participated in the committee's session and clashed with Oria.³²

This discussion began on 21 May 1926. Business representatives and the president of the League's Committee of Transports, Yotaro Sugimura of Japan, were invited to participate. Sugimura, following the central League tenets, proposed to suppress all obstacles to free trade because they were also obstacles to "the peaceful cooperation and common prosperity of peoples."³³ His intent was to minimize and simplify the tax burden. Obviously, the shipping companies and the European representatives saw a single tax on the domicile of the firms as efficient simplification. The director of the Donau Dampf-Schiffarht Gesellschaft (Shipping Company of the Danube) added that the doctrine of taxing the shipping companies by home countries should be extended to river-based companies such as his. The representative of the English Chamber of Navigation, H. M. Cleminson, proposed something more radical than the original idea: because a company's domicile might be difficult to ascertain, he proposed taxing by the domicile of the flag of the ship. Companies asked for liberalization and simplicity. Because they found it harder to avoid income taxes at home, they tried to avoid paying taxes in the countries where they carried out their activities. Experts seemed conciliatory.³⁴

Latin Americans wanted their right to tax the economic activities of shipping companies, even if the companies were foreign, to be recognized. Oria argued that the special circumstances of South America had been neglected. He related the case of the Paraná River in Argentina, where most navigation companies were foreign: "How are we to apportion taxes fairly between France and Belgium on inland waterways while none of the countries crossed by ships is the seat of a company?"³⁵ The Dutch representative of the Dutch East Indies who accompanied Sinnighe Damste supported Oria, explaining that taxes on shipping companies using the ports of the Dutch East Indies

could not be relinquished because they contributed one million guilders to the treasury.³⁶

Cleminson's response mixed economic and political criteria. For him, the profits generated by a ship were the result of "the skill with which vessels are operated, and must be attributed to the country flag."³⁷ That is, profits were a deserved reward for the owner of the company and, indirectly, for his country. The source of profit was therefore neither the natural resources nor the cargo (as Oria argued in proposing taxing at the source). Cleminson added that a ship with a foreign owner "is virtually part of the territory of the home port, that is to say the flag under which the vessel sails."³⁸ This was an idea akin to the extraterritorial argument that European powers and the United States put forward in their dealings with Asia in the nineteenth century. Many Britons, in particular those with imperial experience, considered their participation in League bodies an opportunity to recreate imperial relationships. This is even more apparent in the conclusions Cleminson reached on 21 May: "If the League of Nations offers a clear outline, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa will follow the example set by Canada and the United States."³⁹ In other words, the League template agreements would help reestablish imperial coordination. At the same time, they agreements would be inspired by the model of peace and global trade the British Empire had given the world.

The session ended without agreement, in large part because of Oria's toughness. On 6 January 1927, the question resurged again, though without significant modifications. Nevertheless, supported by Álvarez Feo, Oria gained a small victory. Latin American delegates proposed a system of tax sharing and not of taxation according to a company's domicile. They failed in this regard, but did secure a clause that established home-country taxation as voluntary.⁴⁰

In April, Julián Enciso replaced Oria, and Argentina's role in the discussions about double taxation and the economic issues within the League soon after diminished. Argentina sent a representative neither to the International Economic Conference in May nor to the experts' gathering of 1928 on the issues of double taxation and tax evasion. Argentina also did not participate in the permanent Fiscal Committee created as a result of the 1928 conference.⁴¹

Oria's evolution after Geneva demonstrates the impact of his participation in the Committee on Double Taxation in his thinking about global inequalities. In 1927, Oria published an article in Buenos Aires reflecting on

his contribution to the committee. He portrayed Argentina as a nondeveloped nation, but not in the traditional sense of a new country—that is, a country on its way to maturity—destined to achieve developed status. Oria challenged this optimism. As he had in Geneva, he distinguished between two kinds of countries: the nondeveloped, such as Argentina and the South American sector, and the fully developed, such as the United States and those of Europe.⁴² The latter had abundant population, colonies, capital, modern transportation systems, big industries, blast furnaces, and high rates of saving. The former, on the contrary, lacked population and capital, their transportation systems were in foreign hands, their rates of savings were low, they needed foreign investments, and their manufactures were often “fictitious” and helped by “strong protectionism.”⁴³

These differences were not necessarily the result of an early stage of maturity. Oria perceived that the 1920s could mean a shift in the trend of Argentine growth. Quoting from an article published by a Spanish economist, Luis Olariaga, advisor to the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera, Oria stated that the rate of growth of the Argentine economy in the postwar period had fallen in relative terms compared with other new countries.⁴⁴

In 1927, Olariaga published a new article with a revealing title, “The Impact of the European Situation on the Economy of Ibero-American countries.” In it, he argued that European economies were complex and did not depend on foreign trade to foment their development. The economy of the “barely evolved,” by contrast, depended greatly on foreign nations. This dependency was a negative factor in the circumstance of the late 1920s, because “the interest of the Europeans for the development of some Ibero-American economies” had diminished. Facing this reality, Argentina should aim for industrialization.⁴⁵

Oria’s enthusiasm for Olariaga’s ideas was not widely shared. Many in Argentina still believed the place of the nation in the world was firm. The export economy had recovered and in 1927 Argentina returned to the international gold standard system at the exchange rate prior to the war.⁴⁶

For Oria, however, Argentina’s problems were not short term but related to its long-term dependency on world markets. This was a question of degree, however. Argentina did not enjoy the autonomy of the United States or Europe. The Argentine economist many times preferred to use the word *interdependency* over *dependency*.

He wondered, “How was Argentina placed within a [global] situation of rigid interdependency[?]”⁴⁷ This question prompted political and economic

reflections on the participation of Argentina in the League of Nations. For Oria, dependency on Europe meant that Europeans were able to control the League's council. The League thus had "an oligarchic profile that must deeply preoccupy the small states."⁴⁸

The definition of the LN as an oligarchic body resembled President Yrigoyen's position with respect to the League in its beginnings. But the problem was not only the political workings of the institution. Because degrees of development were profoundly unequal, it was not possible to expect "common formulas of international economic policy." In his participation in the Committee on Double Taxation, Oria had discovered that "Old World delegates sought to organize a regime of monitoring capital, through international agreements, in favor of the country of origin of the capital or the domicile of the company. . . . The solutions did not meet our needs, despite the unquestionable honesty of European experts."⁴⁹

As during committee sessions, Oria focused much of his attention on the issue of shipping companies. He emphasized two points. First was the scarce knowledge that Europeans had about South America, which reinforced his idea of divergent interests. "They gave visible signs of shock as they learned of the immense traffic on Argentine rivers and the tonnage and value of goods transported, and they did not think possible that such wealth could develop without national shipping."⁵⁰ Second, Oria was taken aback by the powerful private interests in the sessions of the committee.⁵¹ The corporatist experiment within the League hardly fit into the political experience of Argentina, where a 1924 attempt by corporate representatives to shape tax reform had met with wide distrust and been derailed.⁵²

Argentina did not attend the International Economic Conference of Geneva in 1927. Oria believed this absence was related to the divergent interests of Argentina and European colonial powers, but he counseled against estrangement from the international community: "How do you suppose that if the delegates representing a country like ours with vast agricultural and livestock production, with absolute territorial unity, in the physical and political sense, had attended, it would have been possible to easily coordinate their interests with those states that have a strong imperialist or colonial organization and whose dominions include peoples or territories with productions that compete with Argentine production?"⁵³ Oria wondered "whether it would be convenient to disregard the League of Nations or to link ourselves exclusively to other international organizations, such as the Pan-American Union."⁵⁴ His answer was that Argentina should continue to

participate in international forums, in particular those linked to the LN. Argentina still had reasons to trust the League. First, if Argentina had to compete as an exporter of rural commodities, how would she fare in a Pan-American system under the hegemony of the United States, a nation with a similar agrarian productive structure? Second, Oria was in “favor of the continuation of the task Argentina has already started . . . to bring out . . . the traditional feelings of a laborious and tranquil people.”⁵⁵ That is, even though the League was in the hands of European colonial powers, the ideal of a community of nations ruled by equality before international law remained intact. Argentine politicians and economists stuck to the principles of international cosmopolitan liberalism. Thus, Oria’s ideas about global inequalities were marked both by his frustrating experience at the Committee on Double Taxation and the legacy of Argentina’s economic relationship with Europe. The arrogant attitude of the European powers within the committee and the now apparent weakness of Argentine economic integration into world markets inspired criticisms that focused on Europe more than in the United States. Yet, the connections with the European global order, including the League of Nations, were not easy to break or to replace for a country like Argentina.

In 1944, Oria published a more radical essay in which the impact of his experience on the Committee on Double Taxation remained apparent. “El Estado argentino y la nueva economía” explored the transformations of economic thought and policies as a result of the global depression of the 1930s. According to Oria, the main shift was a new state interventionism, which was not only the result of economic depression but also a response to imperialism.⁵⁶ Nondeveloped countries should necessarily follow an interventionist policy: “At a certain stage of economic development, countries like ours, which have not closed the cycle of its evolution, must have a dynamic state and engage in what we call defense interventionism.”⁵⁷ Defensive interventionism faced the challenge of big international monopolies and the economic doctrines that supported them. Oria referred to the words of US Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who in 1941 asserted that “we must not allow the return of exaggerated nationalism through immoderate trade restrictions.” Oria wondered if the question of whether excessive nationalism existed “would be judged according to the power, prestige, importance and authority of each State. When will overflowing and overwhelming imperialism, which is another cruel abnormality, be contained like excessive nationalism?”⁵⁸

Oria thus connected imperialism and underdevelopment much as the theory of dependency did. He also fell into one of the intricate labyrinths of developmentalist thought. On the one hand, development followed almost natural stages. On the other, it was an unattainable order through natural economic processes and no policy was oriented to stimulate it.⁵⁹ It is still significant that for Oria the natural process of development was an international one, a process of interdependence. The evolution of his understanding of this concept and of his view of the place of Argentina in the world resulted largely from his participation in the League committee. As Oria stated after that experience, “a large majority of us at least have too arrogant ideas about our greatness and our reputation in the world.”⁶⁰

Oria’s participation in the committee had a profound and lasting impact on him and largely shaped his ideas about international economic development, ideas that became increasingly popular in his country and in the rest of Latin America in the mid-twentieth century. This opens a suggestive line of research for the future. To what extent did international organizations, among them the League of Nations or the Pan-American system, shape Latin Americans’ views on the global veconomic order even before the creation of ECLA? To what extent were Latin Americans able to shape others’ views on global economics through their participation in those organizations? The story of Argentina’s participation in the Committee on Double Taxation offers a first glimpse into these important questions.

I wish to express my gratitude to Christophe Farquet for sharing valuable archival records with me.

NOTES

1. *La Prensa*, 8 December 1920, 4. Nevertheless, this was an illusory perception based on the export boom of 1918–1920. In fact, Argentina had made a tremendous effort to cope with the payment of its foreign debts during the war, which had a deep impact on its budget and economic performance. See Carlos Marichal, *Historia de la deuda externa de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), 206–8.
2. See the reflections of Joseph Love about the lack of impact of the League of Nations on “backward” countries. Joseph L. Love, *Crafting the Third World: Theorizing Underdevelopment in Rumania and Brazil* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 13. On the importance of the UN system for Latin

- America, economic ideas see, among others, Kathryn Sikkink, “Development Ideas in Latin America. Paradigm Shift and the Economic Commission for Latin America,” in *Development and the Social Sciences*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 228–56; and E. V. K. Fitzgerald, “ECLAC and the formation of Latin American economic doctrine,” in *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions*, ed. David Rock (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 90–103.
3. Jeremy Adelman, *Wordly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 369–70. In fact, as Adelman shows (161–62), Hirschman himself had an experience as a researcher for the LN in the 1930s, exploring issues related to international trade.
 4. As Edgar Dosman states, Prebisch’s sojourn in Geneva in late 1932 and early 1933 was “a force-draft education in the theory and reality of international trade.” However, we do not know much about the impact of this experience on Prebisch’s thought and career. For some interesting—and brief—comments on this issue, see Edgar J. Dosman, *The Life and Times of Raúl Prebisch* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 78–82.
 5. Oria and Prebisch had for a while kept a friendly relationship. See Dosman, *Life and Times*, 50.
 6. For thoughtful ideas about how US elites conceived Latin America’s “underdevelopment” between 1945 and 1960, see James William Park, *Latin American Underdevelopment: A History of Perspectives in the United States, 1870–1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), chapter 5. My idea, nonetheless, is that Latin Americans elaborated their own ideas about development and underdevelopment in an autonomous way.
 7. On the Conference of Brussels and the League of Nations’ work on monetary issues, see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16–25.
 8. See José Antonio Sánchez Román, *Taxation and Society in Twentieth-Century Argentina* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2012), chapter 1.
 9. Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wesses, “Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of Its Economic and Financial Organisation,” *Contemporary European History* 14 (2005): 471.
 10. Christophe Farquet referred to the financial and economic organization of the LN as an early example of economic multilateralism. See “Expertise et négociations fiscales à la Société des Nations (1923–1939),” *Relations Internationales* 142 (2010): 5. Yet, considering the role of bankers, chambers of commerce, and businessmen within the organization, it might be also labeled an early example of international corporatism. On the corporatist essays in some European countries in the 1920s, see Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

11. Société des Nations, *Double imposition et évasion fiscale: Rapports et Résolutions présentés par les experts techniques au Comité financier de la Société des Nations* (Genève, 1925), 3.
12. Ibid., 3; Société des Nations, Commission Economique et Financière, Comité Financier, “Double Taxation,” E.F.S.74 F.18. Genève, 5 April 1923 (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Tornquist, Impuestos o389.4), 2.
13. Société des Nations, *Double imposition et évasion fiscale*, 8.
14. Ibid., 1.
15. Procès-verbaux du Comité financier, 6 June 1925, F/18e session/PV6, Archive de la Société des Nations (hereafter ASN).
16. Clavin and Wessels, “League of Nations,” 472.
17. For example, the question of bank secrecy in Switzerland hampered the advance in the control of tax evasion. See Farquet, “Expertise,” 14; and Armando M. Rocco, *La doble imposición internacional* (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, 1937), 41.
18. The economists chosen to draft the reports that served as basis for the discussion within the committee were G. W. Bruins (Netherlands), Luigi Einaudi (Italy), Josiah Stamp (Britain), and Edwin Seligman (United States).
19. Société des Nations, *Double imposition et évasion fiscale*, 14.
20. Ibid., 15.
21. Basil P. Blackett, “Memorandum on Double Taxation. Note on the Effect of Double Taxation upon the Placing of Investments Abroad,” League of Nations, Provisional Economic and Financial Committee, Finance Section, E.F.S.16. A.16 (Geneva, 1921), 40.
22. Farquet, “Expertise,” 9. See also Sol Picciotto, *International Business Taxation: A Study in the Internationalization of Business Regulation* (London: Quorum Press, 1992), 1–37.
23. Procès-verbaux du Comité d’experts sur la double imposition et l’évasion fiscale de la Société des Nations, 17 May 1926, EFS/DT/6e session/PV1, 8, ASN.
24. Ibid., 18 May 1926, 4.
25. Ibid., 7. Argentina’s first income tax was implemented in 1932.
26. Ibid., 4.
27. Ibid., 6.
28. Procès-verbaux du Comité d’experts sur la double imposition, 20 May 1926, 12.
29. Ibid., 12–13.
30. Ibid., 14.
31. Ibid., 12 January 1927, EFS/DT/7e session/PV11, 8–10, ASN.
32. The representatives of the International Chamber of Commerce participated as consultants in the sessions on the invitation of the League. They were Robert Julliard, president of the Comptoir d’Escompte of Geneva and G. O. May, Director of Water House Price Co. of New York. Also taking part in shipping discussions were Cleminson, Palanca (director of the Navigazione Generale

- Italiana), and Weinbrenner (financial director of the Donau Dampf-Schiffahrt Gesellschaft of Vienna). See *Boletín Mensual de la Sociedad de Naciones*, May 1926, 139.
33. Procès-verbaux du Comité d'experts sur la double imposition, 21 May 1926, EFS/DT/6e session/PV7, ASN.
 34. Ibid., 14–17.
 35. Ibid., 17–18.
 36. Ibid., 19.
 37. Ibid., 21.
 38. Ibid., 23.
 39. Ibid., 22.
 40. Procès-verbaux du Comité d'experts sur la double imposition, 6 January 1927, EFS/DT/7e session/PV4, 9–11, ASN. Oria repeatedly insisted that the traffic in the Rio de la Plata was significant enough to be levied. See the figures in *ibid.*, 11; and *Documents de travail du Comité d'experts sur la double imposition et l'évasion fiscale*, 11 January 1927, EFS/DT 92: Rapport du Dr. Oria, ASN.
 41. See *Boletín Mensual de la Sociedad de las Naciones*, May 1927, 146; and *Boletín Mensual de la Sociedad de las Naciones*, October 1928.
 42. Salvador Oria, “Estudio de los problemas económicos y financieros en la Sociedad de las Naciones y su relación con Argentina,” *Revista Biblioteca* (1927): 179–80.
 43. Oria, “Estudio,” 182.
 44. *Ibid.*, 178.
 45. Luis Olariaga, “Repercusión de la situación europea en la economía de los países ibero-americanos,” *Revista de Ciencias Económicas* (1927): 1120–23. Like Oria, Olariaga had experience within the League of Nations’ system. In 1922, he attended the International Financial and Economic Conference of Genoa of 1922. His concern for Spain after the colonial debacle of 1898 led him to a conservative nationalist position. See María Isabel Cepeda, *El pensamiento monetario de Luis Olariaga* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 2003), 35–39.
 46. Pablo Gerchunoff and Horacio Aguirre, *La economía argentina entre la gran guerra y la gran depresión* (Buenos Aires: Cepal, 2006), 66. Among Olariaga’s critics was the young Prebisch, still committed to an orthodox view and the gold standard. See Raúl Prebisch, “De cómo discurre el profesor Olariaga,” *Revista de Ciencias Económicas* (1927): 1130–44; and Dosman, *Life and Times*, 61.
 47. Oria, “Estudio,” 180, 182.
 48. *Ibid.*, 181.
 49. *Ibid.*, 183.
 50. *Ibid.*, 184. Oria was exaggerating. In 1916, Yrigoyen, in response to the restrictions caused by World War I, attempted to create a national shipping system with a funding of 100 million pesos, but Congress blocked the proposal. Yrigoyen then decreed the buying of six ships belonging to belligerent countries that were docked in Argentina. This first Argentine national merchant navy was a

- precarious one by international standards. See Gerchunoff and Aguirre, *Economía argentina*, 38.
51. Oria, “Estudio,” 183.
 52. See Sánchez Román, “Shaping Taxation: Economic Elites and Fiscal Decision-Making in Argentina, 1920–1945,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40 (2008): 87–93.
 53. Oria, “Estudio,” 185.
 54. Ibid.
 55. Ibid.
 56. Oria, *El Estado argentino y la nueva economía* (Buenos Aires: Peuser, 1944), 35.
 57. Ibid., 84.
 58. Ibid., 94–95. Emphasis in the original.
 59. This is one of the main points of Michael P. Cowen and Robert W. Shenton in their *Doctrines of Development* (London: Routledge, 2003).
 60. Oria, “Estudio,” 186.

Latin America and International Nutrition

Integrative Channels in the Interwar Period



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Problems ascribed to inadequate food intake and production have been frequent throughout Latin American history. In the 1930s, aspects such as backward agriculture and predominance of cash crops, as well as anthropometric consequences of poor food consumption such as the decline in adult stature, were problematized by a number of local doctors interested in nutrition.¹ Politics exerted a pivotal role in Latin America's food history and supply, and popular and scientist demands for adequate, low-priced food fueled warnings about the widespread malnutrition of workers and the general population.² These warnings underlined man-made hunger linked to inequities and low purchasing power.³

The 1930s were also marked by incipient public actions on nutrition in the region and by the aspiration of local scholars to form a community on nutrition. There was interest in both the exchange of ideas and the construction of new medical pacts. Two key intents were to promote regional integration in order to understand Latin American food problems and their determinants and to propose solutions that would promote the healthiness of Latin American peoples as related to their diets and physical growth.

The continental American agenda of the 1930s was in ebullition, featuring joint efforts from diplomatic to technical topics including health and social and political themes. The inter-American solidarity movement of Pan-Americanism encompassed strong initiatives in the field of medicine. Although in part such enterprise can be credited to US interests in military,

political, epidemiological, and continental trade solidarity, Latin American health administrators and scientists played a remarkable role in shaping and negotiating ideas and practices in this scope, guided by sentiments of concern with the health in their nations.⁴ Among the initiatives performed were the work of the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau, including its Sanitary Conferences (from 1902 on); the initiatives of the Rockefeller Foundation (since 1913); meetings such as the First Labor Conference of American States Members of the International Labor Office (Santiago, 1936) and the Pan-American Congress on Popular Housing (Buenos Aires, 1939); local treatises and regulations; and public health campaigns, training, and technical support to programs.⁵

In many of these occasions nutrition was perceived as a lacuna. Building on this momentum, the League of Nations (LN, or League) performed pioneering work on nutrition in the 1930s, which included biosocial debates on the issue.⁶ The League helped stimulate regional integrative channels, particularly by providing the first opportunity for Latin American doctors interested in the issue of nutrition to meet and promote their agenda: the LN's Third International Conference on Nutrition in 1939.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE LEAGUE'S WORK ON NUTRITION

Since Latin American independence, the pursuit of modernity increased the interest in themes considered to be barriers to it, such as health, civilization, and nations' internal integration.⁷ The debate over nutrition in this context sounded highly attractive to local physicians who, since the food and nutrition challenges that World War I had imposed—such as exemption of recruits on the basis of low body weight or stature, the need for scientific calculation of food rations, and food shortages—were trying to expand knowledge, policies, and the network of specialized practitioners on the subject.⁸ In 1927, such interest increased thanks to an LN special mission to the region and the Japanese scientist Tadasu Saiki, founder of the world's first Institute of Nutrition.⁹ The Argentine nutrition specialist Pedro Escudero reckoned as the institute to be “of an overpowering progress,” attributing it to the high “technical level, and patriotism of their chiefs.” The Brazilian scholar Josué de Castro considered the LN to have given “a wonderful contribution” to nutrition.¹⁰ A generalized wave of nutrition problems resulting

from the post-1929 world economic recession intensified problems local doctors considered the ruling elite to have historically ignored.¹¹ The region also embraced the international post-Great Depression trend of increased social conscience and unease regarding health.¹² In 1932, the Chilean government asked the LN to help conduct a national survey on popular nutrition, which revealed a distressing nutritional situation and became a reference study for local practitioners.¹³

One leading reason for Latin American nutrition scientists to organize was the League's work on the subject. Although originally envisaging European questions, the organization paved the way in terms of epistemology and belonging to a community that Latin American specialists needed to foster nutrition. The League's role in constructing the internationally reigning health paradigm that linked nutrition deficiencies to poor living standards, agricultural problems, and scarce popular knowledge was the first in history to allow the incipient international scientific community of nutritionists to acquire identity and strength as a group. In Latin America, League initiatives were considered part of the birth of nutrition as a science and of its systematization as a field of research, training, and policies.¹⁴ From 1932 on, the LN performed groundbreaking studies and held important debates on the theme. These included an influential 1935 publication connecting nutrition to public health, agreeing on technical guidelines about estimating the physiological requirements of nutrients (such as calories), creating hierarchies of food groups that ascribed great importance to "protective foods" such as fruits, vegetables, and animal products, and achieving methods to assess food habits, the status of nutrition, and the chemical composition of foods.¹⁵ The "new knowledge of nutrition," as it was called in the League, echoed worldwide. However, because a concerted international plan to raise populations' food intake was implausible, the LN put great emphasis on national and regional actions. These were to ideally be coordinated by national commissions on nutrition (NCN), central entities directed by specialists. To improve national food supply and boost international food trade, government actions were to include agricultural measures. One of the strategic tasks for the NCNs was to foster communication between national authorities. Therefore, the main purposes of the international conferences on nutrition the LN convened were to discuss the NCNs' work, report on initiatives and programs in each country, and encourage the sharing of opinions. The first and second of these meetings were held in Geneva, in 1937 and 1938, each with large European but no Latin American contingents.

The spread of LN ideas and concepts on nutrition in Latin America suggests the broad influence of the League's work in the region and how eager Latin American practitioners were to dialogue with international science. In fact, in a number of countries, malnutrition impaired height and physical conditions.¹⁶ Ideas advocated by leading Latin American nutritionists and the official positions adopted by the LN did converge at certain points. Among these ideas was that most of the population suffered from inadequate nutrition; that nutrition was a bio-social-economical-agricultural problem, requiring political and social reforms; that nutrition was an innovative science that should be present in the more marginal spaces of society and in the field of health; that comprehensive national nutrition policies and central organs should be instituted; and, finally, that surveys would allow a better knowledge of the population.¹⁷

Local authors added that Latin America was in the rearguard of nutrition research, training, and policies; that malnutrition was the worst national problem and a bottleneck to progress; that malnourished peoples suffered from low social status due to their diseases, high mortality, moral apathy, indifference to progress, and delinquency; and that states, guided by science, should adopt a protective role, especially toward the poor.¹⁸ Therefore, even before the 1939 Conference on Nutrition, the League proved crucial to regional integration by providing a common language for the construction of regional trends.

Although certain Latin American elites were optimistic that using European and US organizational models could improve regional sanitary conditions, most Latin American scientists nurtured an understanding that the national cultural, social, and political contexts should be kept in mind when adopting such ideas.¹⁹ Concepts advanced in the LN gained appreciation in Latin America, where the sense of nation and region was keen, especially because of the prevalent nutritional problems in the region and an existing political debate among doctors. The LN's work converged with a long Latin American tradition of social thought about food conditions ascribed to the colonial past, agricultural monoculture, poverty, and governmental neglect, by virtue of "semi-feudal" modes of production, landowning, and political power parallel to the state.²⁰ These conditions privileged exportation over internal consumption, impaired the cultivation of staple crops, and implied low acquisition of foods—a system maintained because landowners largely occupied decision-making positions. Nutritional problems were seen as consequences and causes of other social, political,

and sanitary troubles, like disease and backwardness. Reappropriation of the LN's work was crucial to the construction of the scientific bases on which Latin American specialists in nutrition analyzed their own societies. Some of those specialists even led such discourses to the parliamentary tribune, by virtue of their role as politicians—such as the Ecuadorian Pablo Arturo Suárez Varela, the Chilean Eduardo Cruz-Coke, and the Brazilian Josué de Castro. Local authors had underscored the responsibilities of the state in relation to public nutrition: Cruz-Coke invoked the need for government “protection, assistance and governance”; Alberto Munilla of Uruguay affirmed that the “economic and physical planning, economic and living conditions, both of rural and urban populations” should “deserve the fullest attention of the state” to ensure availability of a healthy diet to national populations; and Pedro Escudero of the Argentine pointed to official “indifference” in this regard.²¹

Such authors interpreted health as a matter of human capital in service to the state, as an imperative part of human well-being. Cruz-Coke stressed that “the fundamental structures of the nation are the bones, the head, the eyes, the muscles, the hands, the teeth of its inhabitants,” and that the reasons for national nutrition policies were “of humanitarian order. . . . and of economic order: assuring the country’s capacity for production the support of strong arms.”²² The assignment of malnutrition to social causes was unanimous. The Venezuelan scientist José María Bengoa emphasized the “social causes of malnutrition” in his country and called for “deep changes from the administrative, economic and social points of view.”²³

Part of the problem was ascribed to a certain continuity of colonial aspects. Bengoa addressed the “problems of the pre-Colombian period.” In a study of the Bolivian diet, Escudero stressed the “commercialization under a colonial basis.” Cruz-Coke affirmed that the “history of Latin America was the history of its transformation in economic colonies of the big capitalist nations.” De Castro claimed that “Brazil, as a semi-colonial country, with archaic agricultural processes and a tendency to latifundia monoculture, presents a food production much below the biological needs of their population groups.”²⁴ Laborers, mothers, infants and rural groups were under special attention, and publications like Pablo Suárez’s *Contribution to the Study of Realities among Workers and Peasants in Ecuador* proliferated in the region.²⁵ The insufficiency of the “right” foods was also part of the local claims, Cruz-Coke pointing to the low availability of “the protective foods recommended by the League of Nations,” to be produced “whatever the cost.”²⁶

THE CONFERENCE DEBATES

The Third International Conference on Nutrition, organized only for American countries, was held from 9 to 14 October 1939 in Buenos Aires.²⁷ The first meeting on nutrition ever conducted among Latin American countries, the conference had its preliminary agenda established by the LN's secretariat. Despite the League's offer to local countries to give their opinions, the final agenda merged the interests of the League and Argentina, given that, by virtue of its far more advanced institutionalization in nutrition, Argentina was the only one to accept it.²⁸ The meeting was attended by representatives from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela, as well as observers from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Paraguay. The Argentine government extended the invitation to countries that the League had not invited given their withdrawal from the League, and to international organizations such as the Oficina Sanitaria Pan-Americana. Like the preceding conferences on nutrition, the meeting had no executive character, conclusions could not be drawn in behalf of the League, and an exchange of points of view and experiences was its special focus.²⁹

Although the very first words pronounced during the meeting conveyed the renewal of Pan-American solidarity in security, Pan-Americanism was not the same driving force in nutritional issues.³⁰ Huge differences between North America's and Latin America's nutritional statuses turned the tone of the conference much more Latin American than inter-American. Even the North American delegate, the preeminent scholar Hazel Stiebling, and the president of the conference, the Argentine Pedro Escudero, failed to mention any common continental condition.

Escudero, nowadays considered to be the father of Latin American nutrition, was born in Buenos Aires in 1877, graduated in medicine in 1902, and practiced in poor areas until 1914. From 1912 to 1946 he was a professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Buenos Aires and headed the Argentine Medical Association from 1919 to 1922. In 1928 he founded the Institute of Nutrition, maintained thanks to his strenuous personal efforts. Things started to improve when in 1934 Escudero was invited by the School of Medicine of the University of Brazil to give a course on nutrition. The course yielded him greater prestige in Argentina, the regional dissemination of his ideas, and material and symbolic rewards for his institute, which in 1938 was converted into the National Institute of Nutrition. The

institution conducted research, assisted the faculty's hospital, advised the government, and—from 1935 on—trained nutritionists.³¹ Nevertheless, although the institute became the National Food Department's main agency, according to its founder it remained marginal to policy planning, “a great underutilized machine.”³² Escudero's writings contain references to government officials and academics disregarding his work.³³ He retired in 1946, frustrated by their “low interest” in nutrition. After his and his coworkers' death, the institute rapidly declined and in 1969 was closed.³⁴ These conditions help explain why, by the 1939 conference, Escudero was the most active delegate. In an effort to gain legitimacy for his controversial career, during the meeting he pushed his ideas forcefully, targeting Argentina's government and scientists as well as his peers in Latin America.

Escudero was among the main figures supporting the League's work in Latin America.³⁵ He had been chosen to chair the conference on the basis of his well-received report to the LN on how Argentina was dealing with the nutritional effects of the 1930s economic recession.³⁶ His opening speech showed that the conference would not merely reiterate the language of preceding ones. Its key idea was to contribute to regional integration through the exchange of ideas and, if possible, cooperation. Some delegates suggested establishing a regional nutritional reference center—perhaps the Argentine National Institute of Nutrition that Escudero headed—but the search for regional collaboration was much more linked to the desire to form a scientific regional community and to put the screws on national governments to foster nutritional institutionalization and come up with food policies.³⁷ The conference made it possible for participants to meet one another, to exchange ideas, and to find a common direction for nutrition as a science, a public policy issue, and a field of training.³⁸

Although a great admirer of US science and nutritional policies, Escudero believed that the meeting would foster the “spiritual union of the Latin-speaking countries around a common problem.”³⁹ In part, this accomplishment was favored by the common bases the League had established: many of the topics and much of the esoteric language the representatives used were similar to the LN's nutrition directives. The Brazilian delegate stressed that, contrary to what local doctors recommended, Brazilian people hardly consumed the “foods defined by the League as protective ones” and exalted the anthropometric standards proposed by the agency, suggesting that they be adopted by the whole region.⁴⁰ Escudero

endorsed the League's work in its "harmony between economic progress and public health."⁴¹ Jorge Restat of Chile suggested the spread of the inquiry methods the League used in his country, as well as the philosophy of nutritional vigilance of the population.⁴² José Rada of Peru proposed that the LN advise local governments on how to train new technicians and on ways to perform public nutrition education.⁴³ Escudero argued that the League "had done more for the liberation of peoples than all schools of medicine together."⁴⁴

The conference was the first analytical inventory of Latin American nutritional problems. It was also political. Delegates interpreted access to food as socially determined and defended urgent social measures, accompanied by a general claim for governments to create policies. The meeting allowed the collective outflow and reinforcement of arguments already elaborated by individual physicians in their national contexts. These were embedded in a nation-building context of the construction, on the part of the scientists, of an image of an "ideal" national people—healthy in body and mind, productive in labor, and prepared to defend the country. Such ideas gained momentum in the context of the 1930s pursuit of national modernization. The Brazilian representative, Alexandre Moscoso, stressed that "adequate feeding is the axis for the creation of a strong national people." An Ecuadorian doctor, Pablo Suárez, stated that "inadequate feeding is a depressing factor of all physical and moral energy," generating "asthenic" populations. The Bolivian delegate, Germán Orozco, affirmed that "sick and undernourished peoples are indefectibly doomed to inaction," and claimed that proper nutrition was a form of integrating the poor and the "native races" into the nation and civilization.⁴⁵ Suárez affirmed that the conference should contribute "to the salvation of the huge human capital represented by the peoples of South America, vast malnourished masses."⁴⁶ Some delegates, including the Uruguayan doctor Juan Collazo, brought forward the notion that a defective nutrition in childhood would have negative consequences in adulthood and even in the health of subsequent generations.⁴⁷

In turn, food was central to some Latin American populist projects.⁴⁸ After repeated pleas between 1935 and 1939 by local doctors inspired in part by the work of the International Labour Office as well as that of the League, groundbreaking food programs emerged such as school lunches and *comedores populares* (popular restaurants) with subsidized prices set for

laborers.⁴⁹ Their embryonic nature and narrow coverage yielded only modest outcomes, however. In the midst of the spread of populism in some countries of the region (such as Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, and Brazil), the delegate from Ecuador spoke of how political leaders availed themselves of such programs “to the benefit of their personal interests.”⁵⁰

One of the hallmarks of the conference was the unanimous interpretation of the common identity Latin American countries had given the overwhelming, generalized nutritional crisis. The most striking common condition, according to the participants, was chronic undernutrition. Several delegates ranked this as the number one condition in their country. Chile’s Restat stressed the effects of insufficient caloric intake on “the low development in weight and height of Chilean children.”⁵¹ Moscoso of Brazil claimed that the Brazilian people “eat little and poorly . . . ; most of the population is underfed.”⁵² The expression of malnutrition as a disease—and one of demographical representativeness—was key to the idea of a “communality” in morbidity. Escudero defined it as “collective hunger, mass deficiencies.”⁵³ Restat called it a “collective pathology.”⁵⁴ Despite intracountry differences in dietary habits and food availability, a general dietary portrait emerged: unbalanced diets with abnormal predominance of carbohydrates (especially through cereals such as corn and rice); low intake of fruits and vegetables, precipitating vitamin-deficiencies like pellagra, a lack of niacin; goiter in localities far from coasts due to poor soil and the iodine content of crops; and low resistance to infections such as tuberculosis.⁵⁵ Participants framed this epidemiological picture as historically, politically, and socially rooted, and as continuing from the colonial period. The Brazilian member claimed that “Brazil behaves as a colony, exporting its food production instead of devoting it to internal consumers.”⁵⁶ The Colombian participant, Javier Ferrer, affirmed the role of the state and “the need for social protection of the poor.” The Brazilian representative stated that “almost everything [in public action] remains to be accomplished.”⁵⁷ During the meeting, defective nutrition was generally linked to child mortality, low laborers’ efficiency, and reduced lifespan—all barriers to progress and modernization. The feeling of a common Latinity despite the complexity of the different national realities (as history would prove, despite shared widespread poverty and multidimensioned inequalities) reflects the predominant eagerness of the participants to walk a path together toward the institutionalization of nutrition in the region.⁵⁸

LONG-TERM RESULTS

Disseminating ideas can lead to institutionalization of public policies and to new patterns of state behavior.⁵⁹ Similarly, the participation of government officials in international movements can help craft policies even if such policies are not popular demands.⁶⁰ Such were among the long-term lessons of the Third International Conference on Nutrition, which embraced the task of “educating governments.”⁶¹ After the meeting, the Latin American scientific nutritional community pressured national authorities to take steps to institutionalize nutrition in science and policy.

Aware of the possibility that Argentina might exert a regional leadership, at the closing of the conference Escudero announced scholarships for nutrition training to all Latin American countries. The Argentine president, whose diabetes Escudero treated, authorized them.⁶² Argentina’s scholarships were extremely influential: all the first Latin American nutritionists were trained by Escudero. Their scholarships were successfully tied to the incorporation of the recipients into their government’s bureaucracy. This made a remarkable difference in their vindicating, planning, and administering food policies. Escudero’s graduates revitalized claims for improvements in the health of their peoples.

The common education of the first generation of Latin American nutritionists provided them a common scientific and cultural basis as well as a network of colleagues, contributing both to a greater level of institutional and interpersonal contact and to integration between scientific and administrative communities. However, efforts to make internal policies consumed the time and focus of national specialists, thus limiting the possibilities of regional cooperation with the initiatives under the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau.⁶³ The next conferences on nutrition to take place in Latin America would be convened by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1948 and 1950, led respectively by Alberto Munilla and Josué de Castro, two former Escudero interns, which underscores the lasting importance of specialists trained by Escudero. De Castro would even become, in 1952, the first Latin American to chair the FAO council. Latin Americans long identified the League of Nations’ work on nutrition in the interwar period with the beginning of a worldwide era of scientific nutrition. Regional knowledge and practices in the field of nutrition can thus never be separated from the League’s effort to create a new vision of the political relations linking adequate food intake to social phenomena. Both directly and

indirectly, the League played a positive integrative, invaluable role in building nutrition as a field of science, public services, and training in Latin America, a role the current generation of nutritionists continues to recognize.

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Separating the Political from the Technical

The 1938 League of Nations Mission to Latin America



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The mission, which in 1936 may have provided a remedy, was, in 1938, nothing more than palliative care.¹

—Julián Nogueira

Undersecretary-General Luis Podestá Costa departed Cherbourg on 19 March 1938 for Montevideo at the head of a League of Nations (LN, or League) mission to Latin America. In this period of international crisis, his voyage renewed the goodwill efforts of former Secretary-General Eric Drummond, who had toured the region earlier in the decade, when hope and faith in the international institution had been much more abundant.² Podestá Costa's delegation included Swedish reformer Eric Ekstrand, Uruguayan journalist Julián Nogueira, and French financial expert René Charron, all permanent staff members of the League. The representatives traveled throughout the Western Hemisphere, stopping to deliver talks on the functions of the League secretariat and meet with local experts in the field of social reform in each country.

Although the tour aimed to convince Latin Americans of the continued vitality and utility of the League's work, its participants nevertheless maintained that theirs was not a propaganda mission. Instead, they consistently stressed the separation between the political and technical aspects of the League's work. They hoped to demonstrate that the League's achievements in the area of social welfare warranted continued Latin American membership

in the organization, despite the fact that the political failures of the assembly and the council made withdrawals likely. The mission received an overwhelmingly positive response in the region, reminding many of the significance of the League's accomplishments.

But, as Nogueira concluded in a confidential memorandum after the mission's return to Geneva, the mission may have been too little too late. Nogueira had been urging the secretariat to undertake such a mission for several years, and he therefore considered its success entirely relative, arguing that two years previous it could have forestalled the impending demise of the League, but given the situation in 1938, participants could only make known the important technical work of the secretariat and seek more effective collaboration with the dwindling number of member governments.³ They won the battle, but lost the war: although the mission undoubtedly convinced many of the admirable work being done by the League in the fields of social welfare and intellectual cooperation, it failed to revive the ailing institution.

The League of Nations mission took place at a time when confidence in the international organization was at a low. At the end of March 1938, Santo Domingo's *Listín Diario* proclaimed the announcement of a "transcendent project" for the creation of a "League of American Nations" that would have made Latin American participation in the Geneva-based organization redundant.⁴ In May, shortly before the arrival of Podestá Costa's mission, the Chilean government announced its intention to withdraw from the League, causing Tegucigalpa's *El Cronista* to declare the Geneva-based organization dead.⁵ The subsequent withdrawal of Venezuela from the League caused the mission to cancel its projected trip to Caracas to avoid a repeat of the embarrassingly tepid response they had met in Santiago. The League's perceived inability to respond effectively to fascist intervention increased dissatisfaction with the international system. The well-known political failures of the League's attempt at universalism combined to cause formerly faithful collaborators to give up on the League covenant and propose a new regional organization to maintain peace in the Americas. Amid the overwhelmingly negative newspaper coverage of world affairs in which Latin American countries played little role, the Podestá Costa mission to the region appeared as a bright spot in the periodical treatment of the League of Nations and its activities.

The goodwill created by the League mission to Latin America did not prevent governments from withdrawing from the League, and the proposal

for a League of American Nations was probably a dead letter anyway. Nevertheless, the coverage generated by the voyage demonstrates that widely held attitudes toward the political failure of the League did not necessarily imply a lack of interest in its technical activities. Convinced of the utility of the League's social and technical initiatives, governments continued to cooperate in these, laying the foundation for effective Latin American participation in the postwar international system.

CLEARING THE THORN BUSHES

Skepticism about the collective security provisions of the League of Nations was widespread, and incidents of fascist aggression were frequently condemned in newspapers throughout the region. Criticism of the League's handling of the Spanish Civil War was understandably harsh given the close ties between Spain and the Americas, and the invasions of China and Abyssinia also elicited vocal criticism.⁶ Mexico's strident defense of Austria and the letter of Mexico's permanent delegate to the League Isidro Fabela declaring his government's opposition to Anschluss also appeared in the Latin American press in March 1938.⁷ Moreover, the reading public was constantly reminded of the League's earlier inexpert handling of the Chaco War.⁸ Although negotiations were by then being held under the auspices of the Buenos Aires Conference, as the resolution of the conflict dragged on and on and newspapers throughout the region covered the lack of agreement between Bolivia and Paraguay, many continued to consider the Chaco a "tremendous and shameful failure" of the League.⁹ Articles in support of the League were rare.¹⁰ The only neutral reports tended to be the bulletins the secretariat's information section prepared that appeared in newspapers throughout the region. The majority of the coverage focused on the League's litany of failure.¹¹

It was against this backdrop that Podestá Costa announced his departure for Latin America. In a radio address to the countries on his projected tour, and through the transcripts of the speech that appeared in the press, the undersecretary general outlined the goals of his mission.¹² He quoted a Chinese proverb warning that the path to a friend's house, left untraveled, becomes choked with brambles and thorns.¹³ Podestá Costa aimed to clear the overgrowth that had gathered on the path to greater cooperation with Latin American members of the League. Drummond's visit receded with each news

report condemning the League. Podestá Costa's mission sought to increase ties between officials in Geneva and Latin American governments. Although direct representatives of the League served in several Latin American countries, their day-to-day efforts badly needed a boost from such a high-profile visit.¹⁴ The coverage surrounding Podestá Costa's tour suggests that he successfully cleared through the thicket of negativity besetting the League and helped lay the groundwork for improved understanding of the value of active international participation at Geneva.

Over the course of five months, the members of the League mission traveled thirty thousand kilometers. The trip was broken into eighty legs—some by train, some by plane, some by ship, and some by automobile.¹⁵ The mission stayed only a few days in each capital, making protocol visits to heads of state and establishing contacts with local reformers and journalists. The shortest visit by far was in Brazil, which lasted only the afternoon of 1 March. The travelers, on their way to Montevideo on the liner *Asturias*, took advantage of a stop in Rio de Janeiro to disembark and meet with several Brazilian officials. Foreign Minister Osvaldo Aranha hosted a luncheon at the Jockey Club, where those in attendance professed their desire for more effective collaboration between the Brazilian government and Geneva.¹⁶ These professions of cooperation rang a bit hollow given that Brazil had withdrawn from the League in 1928 and was therefore not included on the official itinerary of the voyage.¹⁷

After Rio, the mission visited Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Colombia, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Mexico, and stopped for a short time in Washington, DC, before returning to France. The mission's longest stay was in Podestá Costa's homeland, Argentina, from 9 through 26 April, where their activities in Buenos Aires were extended because of Holy Week. The report Ekstrand made to the Advisory Committee on Social Questions on his return makes clear that the members of the mission made good use of their extended stay in the Argentine capital.¹⁸ His particular focus was on the traffic in opium and other narcotics: he reported that Argentina's cooperation in this field "left much to be desired" despite the "interest and untiring goodwill" shown by Argentina's permanent delegate to the League.¹⁹ Ekstrand had served in Buenos Aires from 1926 to 1931, and he renewed many acquaintances during the mission. They persuaded him that Argentina's recently promulgated legislation for the supervision of narcotic drugs meant that it was poised to make a significant contribution to this sphere of international activity. On 25 April, Ekstrand gave a lecture in the Blue Room



A former official of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Luis Podestá Costa became the legal counselor of the LN's secretariat in 1936 and was appointed under-secretary general of the League of Nations in 1938. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

of the Congress Building on the social and humanitarian activities of the League of Nations, reporting that because the Blue Room was seldom used for such activities, the event was a “special tribute” to the League.²⁰ Podestá Costa, who praised Ekstrand’s tireless efforts in his own report on the subject, agreed that this symbolic demonstration of the Argentine government’s willingness to cooperate with the League was indeed a significant step in the direction of increased collaboration.²¹

Whether long or short, the mission’s visits in each country did much to achieve the aims of the delegates who traveled up hill and down dale to spread the word of the League’s technical achievements and initiatives. Podestá Costa reported that the welcomes they received in Bolivia and Mexico were particularly warm and encouraging.²² They attended breakfasts



A former Swedish minister in Argentina, Erik Ekstrand was the chief of the LN's secretariat section in charge of drug control and social issues from 1931 to 1939.
Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

at Rotary Clubs throughout the region and gave interviews to the principal newspapers in each capital. Podestá Costa gave radio addresses in Uruguay and Peru, while Charron spoke in the Faculties of Economics in Buenos Aires and Lima, and Ekstrand gave talks on the social and humanitarian actions of the League in each country they visited. Podestá Costa and Nogueira renewed contacts with friends and high government officials in each country. Taken together, these activities cleared the overgrown path between the governments of the region and Geneva.

THE LEAGUE OF AMERICAN NATIONS

As Podestá Costa made his way throughout the continent, renewing personal connections and laying the groundwork for more effective



René Charron, French financial expert and member of the economic and financial section of the LN's secretariat. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

collaboration between Latin American members of the League and the secretariat, he waged an uphill battle in the press, which was consumed with the proposal the Dominican Republic and Colombia made for a League of American Nations. The idea for an American League had been proposed at the 1936 Buenos Aires Meeting for the Maintenance of Peace, and the governments of Colombia and the Dominican Republic each put forward separate plans. During the conference, it was decided that the two governments should work together on a formal project for the American republics to consider in advance of the Eighth Pan-American Meeting, scheduled to be held in Lima at the end of 1938.²³ This project was announced to great fanfare in the Latin American press: dailies in each country carried the full text of the proposal, which elicited considerable comment.²⁴ The editorial consensus was that the American League was necessary precisely because the Geneva-based organization was such an

obvious failure.²⁵ However, this periodical coverage did not necessarily reflect the prevailing attitudes toward the proposal.

Although it was perceived as a direct response to the failure of the collective security measures of Geneva, the American League's proposed articles suggested that Latin American governments were not prepared to abandon Geneva and the technical organizations that were part of its system. Several journalists were at pains to point out that the American League did not constitute a direct attack on the League of Nations. Although an American counterpart was widely believed to undermine the League, it was not necessarily incompatible with it, they argued.²⁶ Editorialists drew attention to the fact that, whereas the original 1936 proposal had called for an American Court of Justice, at the suggestion of Guatemala's president, Jorge Ubico, the project that Presidents Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and Alfonso López Pumarejo of Colombia put forward stipulated that members would continue to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.²⁷ In this new iteration, the American republics would continue to cooperate with the technical organizations associated with Geneva, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the economic and social committees of the League. While several Latin American governments were fed up with the political failures of the League, which they argued could no longer serve as a guarantee to small states, the framers of the proposed American association recognized the value of the League's technical branches.

Although some enthusiasm for the proposed new organization emerged initially—particularly among Bolivarian societies that saw in it the potential realization of the Liberator's ideas for conserving peace among the countries of the continent—the project failed to gain momentum.²⁸ In a confidential memorandum written from Montevideo near the beginning of the League's mission to Latin America, Nogueira wrote that he could "already say with confidence that the project will not pass."²⁹ The proposal for a League of American Nations failed decisively at the Eighth Pan-American Meeting in Lima.³⁰ An article out of Geneva reprinted in the region suggested that any proposal that failed to gain the backing of the United States, which would be unlikely to foot the hefty bill to create a new organization, was doomed.³¹ One of the principal advantages of participation at Geneva was that activities took place outside the US sphere of influence, something a League of American Nations could not offer. Moreover, as Jorge Tzavaras of the daily

Panamá América argued, the failures of Geneva bred skepticism that the principle of collective security could be any more effective if it were restricted to a regional organization in the Americas.³²

The proposal may have had more to do with the grandstanding of certain politicians in the region than with a clear vision for Latin American collective security. Ekstrand reported that during the mission's visit to the Dominican Republic he visited a reform school for boys, where he found one class busily engaged in copying the following from the blackboard: "A League of Nations is necessary to achieve understanding and agreement between peoples. The benefactor of our country, President Trujillo, recognizing this fact, took the initiative of creating a League of Nations among the countries of Latin America. This is further reason why the Dominican people love and admire him."³³ The "politics of panegyric" in the Dominican Republic during the dictatorship of the egomaniacal Trujillo were such that the proposal for the League of American Nations may tell us more about that country's role on the world stage than the actual threat this project posed to Geneva.³⁴ Rather, the periodical coverage of the proposal provided an opportunity to distinguish between the political and technical functions of the League.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF CHILE

Another such opportunity, but one that proved much more difficult for the League mission to handle, was the decision of Chile to withdraw from the Geneva-based organization, which was announced just as Podestá Costa and company were arriving in the Andean capital. Although the participants in the mission saw this as a major setback, once again buried in the newspaper coverage was commentary on the separation between the League's technical and political functions—perhaps the only saving grace of the affair.

Latin American governments that were active participants in international Geneva had a history of spearheading efforts to reform the organization so that it could respond more effectively to the conflicts that beset the world system in the interwar years. Because Latin American countries played such a small role in these world conflicts, proposing changes to the League charter was one of the few concrete actions they could take to document their opposition to the international tide swell of foreign interventions. In March 1938, the Chilean delegate at Geneva declared his government's insistence that

the League covenant be reformed. Essentially issuing an ultimatum, Chile threatened to withdraw if its conditions were not met. Its call for reform fell on deaf—or indifferent—ears, the bluff was called, and less than a week later the delegate announced Chile's intention to withdraw.³⁵ As per League regulations, the withdrawal would become effective two years hence. Significantly, this provision enabled a government to continue to participate in the League until its withdrawal became permanent. It also left open the possibility that at the end of the two years, Chile's delegate might announce his country's decision to reintegrate itself in the League.³⁶ A particularly vocal participant in international Geneva, the Chilean government had hosted the first meeting of the American members of the ILO and been an active collaborator in League initiatives.

Although Nogueira had written in March that he believed the Chilean government would not take a decision on the question of League membership before the council met in Geneva in May, he was mistaken.³⁷ Nogueira knew President Arturo Alessandri and several other high-ranking officials personally, but did not accompany the mission to Santiago.³⁸ Their visit, which was wracked with difficulties, overlapped with that of Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs José María Cantilo, and the mission actually stayed in Valparaiso so as not to meet up with Cantilo in the Chilean capital before his return to Buenos Aires. Nogueira thought the delay would be viewed negatively in the press because it would appear that they were afraid to cross paths with Cantilo, but Podestá Costa, Ekstrand, and Charron nevertheless waited until 4 May to make the trip up to Santiago.³⁹ Understating the issue, Podestá Costa reported that their reception in Chile was marred by a “certain coolness.”⁴⁰

Even before the arrival of the mission, attitudes in Chile toward the League were hostile on both sides of the political spectrum, and prominent politicians had made their positions known in the press. Podestá Costa thought the Chilean example was indicative of attitudes throughout the region: those on the Left, he reported, blamed the League of Nations for the abandonment of Spain, and those on the Right believed that, in the case of general war with Europe, League sanctions would prevent them from exporting essential goods (such as saltpeter, one of the mainstays of the Chilean economy) to the combatants. The idealists and materialists combined to condemn the organization most vociferously.⁴¹ Given the unsympathetic climate that prevailed in Santiago and that the public had already been exposed to vitriolic condemnations of the League, the mission's time in Chile was not particularly fruitful. Similar sentiments began to brew in Caracas, and while

the mission was in Lima they learned of Venezuela's intention to withdraw. In Quito, they heard from Charron, who had preceded them to the Venezuelan capital to meet with government functionaries on financial questions, who said that he had the distinct impression that it would be preferable to change their itinerary. On 13 June, they received instructions from Secretary-General Joseph Avenol to cancel the Venezuelan leg of their journey.⁴²

Despite protocol difficulties and the hostile attitudes the mission met in Chile, Ekstrand reported that his tours of Chilean social institutions left him "with the very clear impression that they provide positive evidence of the feelings of social responsibility which [had] lately emerged" in the country.⁴³ Chile was on the eve of the Popular Front election of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, and Ekstrand was correct to diagnose this change in attitudes toward issues of social and economic reform. The Popular Front government would bring in a whole host of measures to address pressing needs throughout the country. Moreover, the Chilean government would continue to seek effective international collaboration in the eradication of inequality. Editorialists throughout Latin America noted that Chile would continue to participate in the International Court of Justice, the ILO, and the social and technical committees of the League.⁴⁴ Although registering its dissatisfaction with the League's politics, Chile remained an ardent supporter of its social programs. Several newspapers in the region suggested that Chile's withdrawal was a symptom of the League's "crisis" in Latin America, and they publicized Avenol's fear that more Latin American countries would withdraw.⁴⁵ However, the announcement that Chile's active collaboration would continue despite its withdrawal contributed to the emerging understanding of the separation between the political and technical functions of the League.

LA GRANDE OBRA SILENCIOSA

The arrival in Latin America of Podestá Costa and his colleagues occasioned thoughtful editorial comment on the technical work of the League of Nations. From the perspective of the mission's members, this was one of the most significant results of their efforts. *El Tiempo* of Bogotá described the officials who met the delegation at the airport, the schedule of the mission's meetings with Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Rocha and President Eduardo Santos, and the guest list for the reception held in their

honor at the Palacio de San Carlos.⁴⁶ Its reporters also interviewed Podestá Costa at the Hotel Granada about the aims of the mission.⁴⁷ Even more important, the visit occasioned an editorial on Colombia's role in the League of Nations and, in response to a talk given by Ekstrand, another on the League's technical initiatives. The Colombian daily referred to this work as the "*grande obra silenciosa*" (great unspoken work) of the League, "as gigantic as it is unknown by the public."⁴⁸

The arrival of the League mission was greatly anticipated in much of the region, particularly in relatively quiet cities where such excitements were rare. *El Cronista* of Honduras reported on the impending visit with obvious enthusiasm, perhaps for this reason.⁴⁹ The projected itinerary of the mission did not include the Central American republics, so the Honduran paper was either ill informed or overly optimistic that the schedule might change. Similarly, over the course of several months *El Telégrafo* of Guayaquil devoted continued attention to the mission's progress throughout the region, from its departure at Cherbourg on 19 March through its stops in Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, and its eventual arrival in the Ecuadorian port city. All this despite the fact that the League officials were to spend just a few hours there before embarking on their rail journey to Quito.⁵⁰ Although the editors of *El Telégrafo* did not comment on the mission, the prominent coverage it received betrays both the news-hungry character of the city and their obvious approval of the mission's goals.

Podestá Costa's mission sought to give voice to the League's technical work, helping the League's Latin American supporters articulate its strengths. In this period, articles concerning Latin American participation in the social and technical aspects of the Geneva-based international system appeared in the press infrequently. A rare example is found in the Salvadoran *Diario de Hoy*, reporting on declarations made by Jorge Sandóval, the Cuban delegate to the ILO.⁵¹ The piece informed readers of Cuba's position on the need for increased cooperation between the ILO and the Pan-American system. As a rule, however, reports on these developments took a backseat to wire service items detailing Geneva's political failures. Podestá Costa's mission therefore presented a rare opportunity to discuss the relevance of the League's social and technical initiatives and their importance for Latin America.

The lectures Ekstrand delivered were essential to this aspect of the mission's goals, as most of the editorial comment appeared in response to his talks. Although as Tegucigalpa and Guayaquil were news-hungry, it certainly

appears that the Latin American public was quite interested to hear about the League's technical work. Ekstrand described that, after his lecture at La Universidad Mayor de San Marcos in Lima, numerous strangers approached him to express their interest in his work, with which he reported that "they had previously had practically no acquaintance."⁵² The audience at the university apparently filled the auditorium, as well as the doorways and hallways within earshot. *El Comercio* printed a glowing article about the lecture, which repeated much of the substance of his message.⁵³ Representatives of several technical reviews also asked for copies of his speech so that they could reprint it.⁵⁴ His lecture was of such interest that he was even asked to deliver it to the passengers aboard the *Santa Barbara* during the mission's crossing from Callao to Guayaquil.⁵⁵ The great notice his talk occasioned almost certainly increased as the mission progressed. Ekstrand reported that when he was in La Paz, it was suggested to him that he deliver his lecture in Spanish so that it would reach a larger audience; remarkably, he had been delivering it in French until that time.⁵⁶ Although one could have been confident in the educated Latin American elite's comprehension of French in that era, it is nevertheless surprising that until Bolivia he had expected his message to be well received in a language other than the lingua franca of the region. The translation could only have improved the accessibility of the information he aimed to share.

On their return to Geneva, the mission's members made a variety of recommendations to the secretariat, the majority of which involved improving the way in which the grande obra silenciosa of the League was communicated to its Latin American members. Primary among these was the increased diffusion of League of Nations publications, written in a manner accessible to the greater public.⁵⁷ Nogueira opined that the secretariat should take a page from the ILO's book: it had long made free copies of its publications widely available "*and in Spanish*," and had convened special meetings of the American members of the labor organization. As a result the ILO had developed much more satisfactory cooperation with Latin America.⁵⁸ Although Nogueira thought that Ekstrand's lectures on the social and humanitarian work of the League had been very useful, he felt these subjects were of little interest to Latin Americans, who were more concerned with questions of economics, finance, communications, labor, hygiene, and intellectual cooperation than the international drug trade. Nogueira, Ekstrand, and Podestá Costa also all suggested that League officials visit the region with greater frequency to keep up the contacts that they had established during the mission.⁵⁹ Following this

recommendation, Nogueira made another voyage to Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile at the end of 1938 to coincide with the meeting of the American Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, and to take advantage of his own vacation time at home in Uruguay.⁶⁰ Nogueira and Podestá Costa also supported a Mexican proposal that the League pay for technical delegates from each Latin American member country to attend the League assembly, where they could make substantive contributions to the meetings that happened alongside the political discussions.⁶¹ Too often, diplomatic representatives did not have specialized training or interest in the secretariat's activities, and Latin American participation in its meetings suffered as a result. Podestá Costa even suggested the creation of an internship program, where talented young Latin Americans pursuing studies in the area of economics or hygiene could come to Geneva to work and broaden their training for one or two years.⁶² These suggestions were all sound and undoubtedly would have borne fruit had it been possible for the secretariat to pursue them in any meaningful way, but the outbreak of World War II and the League's slow demise would make everything from the circulation of printed material to the inauguration of exchange programs nearly impossible. Nevertheless, the lessons learned through the League mission, both by the secretariat and the Latin American public, had been worthwhile.

CONCLUSION

The League mission set the terms of debate, and the Latin American press began to reproduce the narrative that Podestá Costa, Ekstrand, and Nogueira presented regarding the separation between the political and technical functions of the League of Nations. At Geneva a parallel process was under way whereby Secretary-General Avenol came to believe that such separation between the political and technical functions of the League was necessary for its functioning and indeed its survival, as the clouds of war appeared on the horizon in Europe.⁶³ Avenol became convinced that nonmember states' participation (particularly that of the United States) in the technical committees gave continued relevance and meaning to the League's activities. He therefore struck a commission, headed by Australia's Stanley Bruce, to reform the League. When the Bruce Commission presented its findings in August 1939, it was clear that separating the political and technical functions of the League would provide it with a *raison d'être* during the war that was about to erupt.

The League mission to Latin America therefore paved the way for the acceptance among Latin American members of the Bruce Commission's reforms. Peru's Francisco Tudela was in fact one of the members of the hand-picked group of statesmen who formed the commission.⁶⁴ Awareness of the separation between the political and technical functions of the League had emerged in the coverage of the proposed League of American Nations as well as the announcement of Chile's withdrawal. Finally, the League mission caused editorialists in the region to accept the argument that the League's political failures did not necessarily indicate a concomitant failure of the League's technical bodies.

Following several days of coverage of the League mission and its activities, *El Panamá América* concluded that though the fate of Ethiopia made good headlines, the more transcendental work of the League occurred in defense of children and women, and against the drug trade.⁶⁵ For its part, *El Tiempo* reminded its readers that whereas a small fraction of the League's 30 million franc budget went to the political arm of the organization, 2.5 million went to the International Court of Justice, 7.5 million went to the ILO, and 18 million to the League's technical branch.⁶⁶

The rhetorical strategies of the Podestá Costa mission contributed to changing the terms of the debate about the League in Latin America. Although it neither prevented the withdrawal of Latin American members from membership nor singlehandedly defeated the proposed League of American Nations, the mission did add to a growing understanding of the separation between the political and technical functions of the League, which enabled Latin Americans to continue contributing to—and even come to admire—Geneva's technical achievements. It therefore paved the way for the fuller participation of Latin America in the postwar international system that rose from the ashes of the League. Although Podestá Costa's mission to Latin America may have been seen by one of its members as nothing more than palliative care, a new world order was about to be born, one in which Latin America would be poised to contribute on a deep and meaningful level.

NOTES

1. Nogueira to Walters, Paris, 11 August 1938, file 33430, section 50, R5697, League of Nations Archives (hereafter LNA).
2. Coverage of Drummond's mission was initially found in Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo

- de Tejada, Archivos Económicos, Liga de las Naciones. See, for example, “España y el Viaje de Sir Eric Drummond a América,” *El Sol* (Madrid), 30 December 1930; and “Drummond Reviews His New World Tour,” *New York Times*, 20 February 1931. On the early participation of Latin America in the League, see Michael Streeter’s three volumes, *Central America and the Caribbean, Epitácio Pessoa: Brazil, and South America* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010).
3. Nogueira to Lester, Mexico City, 26 July 1938, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 4. “Trascendental proyecto de los Pdtes. Trujillo y López para la efectiva confraternidad de la América,” *Listín Diario* (Santo Domingo), 11 March 1938.
 5. “La muerte de la Liga de las Naciones,” *El Cronista* (Tegucigalpa), 13 May 1938.
 6. See for example, “Asamblea Popular Pro China y España Leal Habrá el Miércoles,” *El Telégrafo*, 22 March 1938. For a survey of Latin American reactions to the Spanish Civil War, see Mark Falcoff and Fredrick B. Pike, ed., *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39: American Hemispheric Perspectives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).
 7. “Comunicación del Gobierno Mexicano,” *El Cronista*, 31 May 1938. See also Marcos Kaplan, *México frente al Anschluss* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1988); and Friedrich Katz, *Ensayos mexicanos* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1994).
 8. On the Chaco War, see Leslie B. Rout, *The Politics of the Chaco Peace Conference, 1935–1939* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970); and Fabián Herrera, *La política Mexicana en la Sociedad de Naciones ante la Guerra del Chaco y el Conflicto de Leticia, 1932–1935* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2009).
 9. “La muerte de la Liga de las Naciones,” *El Cronista*, 13 May 1938. See also “La vieja cuestión del Chaco sigue pendiente,” *El Diario de Hoy*, 5 June 1938; and “Las negociaciones del Chaco causan vive preocupación en todos los países de América,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), 18 April 1938.
 10. See for example, “La Sociedad es todavía una esperanza y una idea firme,” *El Universal* (Caracas), 19 March 1938.
 11. See, for example, those articles that appeared under the heading “Información de la Sociedad de Naciones” in *El Cronista* in this period.
 12. “Una jira de buena voluntad de la Liga por latinoamericana,” *El Telégrafo*, 24 April 1938; “Misión en América Latina,” *Panamá América*, 6 April 1938; “Jira de Buena voluntad,” *El Tiempo*, 9 April 1938; “Ha salido de Ginebra la comisión de la Liga de Naciones que nos visitará,” *El Mundo* (Havana), 20 March 1938.
 13. “Una jira,” *El Telégrafo*, 24 April 1938.
 14. The activities of these officials, the League’s correspondents, are only beginning to be examined. See Fabián Herrera León, “Luis Sánchez Pontón, correspondiente en México de la Sociedad de Naciones (1933–1942),” *Revista mexicana de política exterior* 92 (2011): 127–47; and Yannick Wehrli, “Francisco Walker Linares: Un actor del internacionalismo ginebrino en Chile, 1927–1946,” in

- América Latina y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Redes, cooperación técnica e institucionalidad social, 1919–1950*, ed. Fabián Herrera León and Patricio Herrera González (Morelia: IIH-UM-UFF, 2013), 63–97.
15. No. 8587, 26 August 1938, Section d'Information, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 16. Podestá Costa to Avenol, 15 March 1939, “Mission en Amérique latine. Annexe: Liste des visites, entretiens, etc. de la mission en Amérique,” file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 17. No. 8587, 26 August 1938, LNA.
 18. Eric Ekstrand to the Advisory Committee on Social Questions, 14 March 1939, “Latin American Mission,” file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Ibid
 21. Podestá Costa to Avenol, 15 March 1939, LNA.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Yannick Wehrli, “Los proyectos de ‘Sociedad de las Naciones Americanas’: Intentos de integración política en las Américas durante el período de entre-guerras,” in *Los procesos de integración en el ámbito regional y global: Una mirada desde la perspectiva de los tres continentes (América, Asia y Europa)*, CD-ROM, ed. María de Monserrat Llairó and Proscila Palacio (Buenos Aires: CEINLADI-FCE-UBA, 2009), <http://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:34779> (accessed 19 March 2015).
 24. See, for example, “Proyecto de tratado sobre la creación de una Asociación de Naciones Americanas y exposición de motivos,” *El Telégrafo* (Guayaquil), 24 March 1938.
 25. See for example, “La Liga de las Naciones Americanas,” *El Cronista*, 17 March 1938.
 26. “Opinará Cuba sobre la Sociedad de las Naciones de América,” *El Mundo* (Havana), 16 April 1938.
 27. “La Liga de las Naciones Americanas,” *El Cronista*, 17 March 1938.
 28. “Liga de las Naciones Americanas,” *El Telégrafo*, 21 March 1938.
 29. Nogueira to Walters, Montevideo, 28 April 1938, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 30. Versions of the proposal continued to circulate thereafter. See “Un Organismo de Paz en América,” *Novedades* (Mexico City), 17 November 1944, BMLT, Archivos Económicos, Liga de Naciones.
 31. “La Liga de Naciones Americanas en manos de la Entidad Ginebrina,” *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador), 17 March 1938.
 32. “La Sociedad de Naciones Americanas,” *Panamá América* (Panama City, Panama), 4 April 1938.
 33. Eric Ekstrand to the Advisory Committee, 14 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 34. On the Trujillo dictatorship, see Lauren Derby, *The Dictator’s Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); and “In the Shadow of the State: The Politics of Denunciation and

- Panegyric During the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1940–1958,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2003): 295–344.
35. See “Chile está en favor de que se hagan reformas a los Estatutos de la Liga,” *El Cronista*, 12 May 1938; “El delegado de Chile eleva una formal protesta ante la Liga de las Naciones,” *El Cronista*, 13 May 1938; and “La República de Chile se ha retirado del seno de la Liga de las Naciones,” *El Cronista*, 16 May 1938. See also “El retiro de Chile de la Liga de las Naciones,” *La Prensa* (Managua), 17 May 1938.
 36. The Mexican government had availed itself of this loophole earlier in the decade when, citing financial reasons, it had announced its intention to withdraw, but then reversed its position two years later when a new government had been convinced by the leadership role of Francisco Castillo Nájera on the League Council that a seat at the table in Geneva was well worth the minimal financial outlay required. See Fabián Herrera, “México en la Sociedad de Naciones: Modernización y consolidación de una política exterior, 1931–1940” (PhD diss., El Colegio de México, 2010).
 37. Nogueira to Walters, Montevideo, 15 March 1938, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 38. Ibid., 2 April 1938.
 39. Ibid., 28 April 1938.
 40. Podestá Costa to Avenol, 15 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Eric Ekstrand to the Advisory Committee, 14 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
 44. “La República de Chile,” *El Cronista*, 16 May 1938.
 45. “La Liga de Naciones está en crisis con las Repúblicas Americanas por el retiro de Chile, Brasil, Venezuela y México,” *Listín Diario* (Santo Domingo), 16 May 1938.
 46. “La misión de la Liga visita hoy a canciller colombiano,” *El Tiempo*, 18 June 1938; and “El lunes visitarán al jefe del estado los 3 comisionados de la Liga,” *El Tiempo*, 19 June 1938.
 47. “La misión de la Liga,” 18 June 1938.
 48. “La actitud técnica de la Liga,” *El Tiempo*, 22 June 1938; and “Colombia y la Liga,” *El Tiempo*, 19 June 1938.
 49. “Una Comisión de la Liga de las Naciones visitará Centro América,” *El Cronista*, 4 April 1938.
 50. “Misión especial de la Liga de las Naciones sale para Sudamérica,” *El Telégrafo*, 20 March 1938; “Misión en América Latina,” *El Telégrafo*, 24 April 1938; “Una Jira,” *El Telégrafo*, 24 April 1938; and “Llegó ayer la delegación de la Liga de las Naciones que realiza jira buscando mayor acercamiento a la entidad ginebrina,” *El Telégrafo*, 4 June 1938.
 51. “El representante cubano hizo trascendentales declaraciones,” *El Diario de Hoy* (San Salvador), 11 June 1938.

52. Eric Ekstrand to the Advisory Committee, 14 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
53. “La actividad social y humanitaria de la Sociedad de Naciones,” *El Comercio* (Lima), 31 May 1938.
54. Eric Ekstrand to the Advisory Committee, 14 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. “Bref résumé des principales suggestions,” 15 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
58. Emphasis in original. Nogueira to Walters, Paris, 11 August 1938, file 33430, R5697, LNA. On the ILO, see Fabián Herrera León and Patricio Herrera González, ed., *América Latina y la Organización Internacional de Trabajo: redes, cooperación técnica e institucionalidad social, 1919–1950* (Morelia: La Universidad Michoacana, 2013).
59. Podestá Costa to Avenol, 15 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
60. See file 36043, R5697, LNA.
61. Nogueira to Walters, Mexico City, 27 July 1938, file 33430, R5697, LNA; Podestá Costa to Avenol, 15 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
62. “Bref résumé des principals suggestions,” 15 March 1939, file 33430, R5697, LNA.
63. Victor-Yves Ghebali, *La Société des Nations et la Réforme Bruce, 1939–1940* (Geneva: Centre européen de la Dotation Carnegie pour la paix internationale, 1970), 22–27.
64. Ibid., 31.
65. “Una hermosa labor,” *Panamá América*, 15 June 1938. Also see “En misión de información viene la delegación de la Liga de Naciones,” *Panamá América*, 14 June 1938; “Sobre la obra social de la Liga de Naciones habló el Doctor Ekstrand,” *Panamá América*, 16 June 1938; and “Exposición interesante,” *Panamá América*, 17 June 1938.
66. “La actitud técnica de la Liga,” *El Tiempo*, 22 June 1938.

CONCLUSION

The Distinct Integration of Latin America



ALAN MCPHERSON

If this volume demonstrates anything, it is that Latin America's experiences with the League of Nations (LN, or League) were deep and varied and left a lasting legacy. In the fields of diplomacy, economics, science, and culture, Latin Americans took part in debates, meetings, reports, and institutions about as much as their own governments and the Great Powers would allow them. Many Latin American delegates and scientists had their first—or at least their richest—international experiences in association with the League. Those experiences resulted in a success that belies the reputation the League has earned as a failed historical footnote.

Throughout these experiences, Latin Americans showed that their region was ready to integrate into the global community. However, it would do so only if its distinct identity were somehow accommodated. This tension between internationalism and regionalism affected almost all of the region's interactions with the League. Illustrating this distinct integration of Latin America are four themes. The five themes explained in the introduction provided context and defines parameters. The four addressed here—which reshuffle, but overlap substantially, with those in the introduction—focus on how the chapters in the volume offered significant evidence for each.

A first theme is the emerging distinctiveness of Latin America in international organizations. One of the signature successes of Latin America at the League of Nations was its ability to define itself vis-à-vis the global community. Paradoxically, the experience of being closer to Europeans in international organizations offered Latin American delegates a chance to forge a distinctive identity based on what they considered to be the unique or at least

the non-European traits of the region. Among the few diplomatic examples is Abdiel Oñate's retelling of Mexico's defense of Spain during the Civil War as reflecting Mexico's initiative in defining Latin America as a region devoted to nonintervention yet also to intervening multilaterally when small nations suffered external threats.

More typically, however, Latin Americans redefined themselves outside the domain of pre-World War II diplomacy, where matters affected them more directly yet were of less concern to London and Paris. José Antonio Sánchez Román, for instance, relates how Argentina's Salvador Oría used his presence on the League's otherwise obscure Committee on Double Taxation to stake out an identity for the region as "nondeveloped." As Sánchez writes, Oría argued that "the special conditions of South America had not been taken into account" when discussing taxation because Argentina had no income tax and was exploited by foreign corporations that paid taxes to their countries of origin. Oría got practically nothing he wanted but, Sánchez argues, he advanced prescient arguments that would later evolve into dependency theory.

Labor issues also came to define the Latin American approach. The interplay between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Latin America brought up differences between workers in the region, who were more agricultural, more in need of social protections, and often paid in-kind or with merchandise, but also more beholden to government control than workers in Europe were. Nutrition also brought out Latin America's specific suffering, according to Maria Letícia Galluzzi Bizzo—"food conditions ascribed to the colonial past, agricultural monoculture, poverty, and governmental neglect, by virtue of 'semi-feudal' modes of production, property of land, and political power parallel to the state." Bizzo argues that Latin Americans "reappropriated" the League's mechanisms to advance their own solutions.

In science, Juliana Manzoni Cavalcanti illustrates the distinctiveness of Latin American biologists such as the expatriate Rudolf Kraus and his colleagues in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, who argued for sera and vaccines more appropriate to the microorganisms and strains of bacteria of the region rather than of Europe.

A second theme of this volume is the introduction's fourth—tension between Latin American regionalism and the League's universalism. Efforts to single out Latin America's distinctiveness as a region had the effect of creating a cohesion among its delegates, which led to a tension between

conducting that region's business separately and integrating it within established international organizations. Mexico's defense of Spain in the 1930s was also an effort to reintegrate international politics after a long revolutionary absence. A related question was whether Latin American countries should identify first as a continent or as members of the international community. The question was important for many elites who identified Europe and especially France as the region's cultural guiding light yet recoiled at the arrogance shown in Eurocentric bodies.

The ILO, a singular legacy of the LN, was the site of much of this regionalist-universalist tension—however politely expressed by labor representatives. Véronique Plata-Stenger demonstrates how the ILO both embraced the participation of Latin Americans yet saw the possibility of a regional workers' bureau as a threat or at least a competitor. The ILO held congresses in Latin America in the 1930s with the avowed desire “to build new spaces for dialogue closer to the social and economic realities of the member states,” especially during the Great Depression. In the end, Plata argues, “the ILO’s regional action contributed to strengthening its position in Latin America” and Latin Americans benefited from being inserted into transnational networks of elites and experts. Norberto Ferreras covers territory similar to that of Plata-Stenger, but adds that the regionalization of the ILO allowed workers and specific countries to air grievances that they otherwise may not have been able to.

Bizzo sees a much less contested process of cross-fertilization in the field of nutrition. She writes that the League “performed pioneering work on nutrition in the 1930s” and “helped stimulate regional integrative channels, particularly by providing the first opportunity for Latin American doctors interested in the issue of nutrition to meet and promote their agenda.” Latin America’s nutritionists also found a willing audience in the League for their own arguments about the urgency of food programs to address the pressing needs of underfed peoples. Similarly, Letícia Pumar writes that Brazilian doctor Miguel Ozório de Almeida “appropriated scientific internationalism . . . to help Brazil forge stronger scientific ties with other countries and develop its intellectual life.” The Brazilian was himself a catalyst in the institutionalization of international science, especially between his country and France. He also defended the freedom of scientists to pursue their research unimpeded by the authoritarian governments proliferating in the 1930s in Europe and Latin America.

Cooperation was not so easy, however, in the field of broader intellectual pursuits. The League certainly had a gamut of bodies meant to create

networks of writers, poets, historians, and others, but Europe's intellectual might and the fear of US influence was so overwhelming as to discourage any regional competitors such as the Pan American Union. For these reasons and others, as Juliette Dumont relates, the proposed Inter-American Institute for Intellectual Cooperation never saw the light of day.

All of these trends contributed to a third theme—the strengthening of the Good Neighbor Policy of the United States toward Latin America. Dumont, for instance, writes of “a Latin America torn between influences from both sides of the Atlantic,” seriously invested in creating intellectual cooperation in Latin America independent of the United States. Yet European influences were on the wane, and not just because of the atmosphere of war. Parallel to the development and decline of the League and its bodies was the holding of several Pan-American conferences in Santiago, Havana, Montevideo, and Lima, that sometimes cooperated with the League but most often offered an alternative structure in which the United States was not only present but often overbearing. Yet with the coming of the war, most Latin American countries saw no option but to line up behind the security priorities of the Colossus of the North.

The fourth and final theme is that, despite its successes, Latin America’s experience at the League of Nations has to be recognized also for its failures. Practically every attempt by Latin Americans to get a resolution passed or even obtain an audience was met with rebuffs from Europeans, other Latin Americans, or the United States, which was not even a member.

My own chapter finds, for instance, that as early as the debates on the covenant of the League, Latin Americans were unable to amend it to protect the rights of small nations against the military occupations of the United States. Yannick Wehrli identifies Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia as perhaps Latin America’s most egregious collaboration in the League’s greatest failure to fulfill its responsibilities and protect member states. Peruvians, Venezuelans, Argentines, and others, because of trade interests with Italy, pressure from Italians in their nations, and sympathy for fascism, either watered down sanctions, delayed their application, or applied them partially.

In several matters, Latin Americans often found themselves shut out of important decisions, and the British and French (and sometimes only the British) dominated proceedings and did nothing to upset Washington. Fabián Herrera León’s chapter argues that Mexico’s already restrained interventions against Italy achieved nothing practical and were even muffled by Italy. Mexico did take the opportunity as the head of the Petroleum

Committee to recommend strong oil sanctions against Rome, but London and Paris overruled the committee. Herrera suspects that Mexican officials never took seriously their “defense” of Ethiopia but rather intended to stand up for the covenant.

Failures also plagued the world of intellectual collaboration and science. Several resolutions for new bodies and new endeavors were tabled, voted down, or never funded. Corinne A. Pernet examines several doomed proposals for writing a multivolume history of the Americas. Their ultimate failure always came down to a division between the Latin American Hispanophiles, who wished to eliminate the Black Legend of Spanish depredations, and the Indigenists, who wished to highlight the suffering of indigenous peoples as well as their contributions to American civilization.

Yet within failure lay the seeds of success, even if that success was merely rhetorical or indirect. Dominicans, for instance, exploited the dissonance between US President Woodrow Wilson’s rhetoric of self-determination and his occupation of the Dominican Republic and neighboring Haiti. The mere fact of becoming a member state of an extracontinental organization was, for many Latin American governments, a first and a matter of pride for a region that had felt ostracized during its first century of independence. By 1920, one-third of member states were from the region.

Perhaps most notable in its success, or at least its determination to succeed, was Mexico. As Patricio Herrera González demonstrates, Mexican labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano conducted a careful diplomacy to gain the support of both communists and the ILO in the creation of a Pan-Latin American workers’ organization. Also, Mexico alone in the region followed through on its sanctions against Italy. The chapter by Oñate praises Mexico’s willingness to stand alone, if necessary, to defend self-determination and nonintervention, especially in regimes that reflected the values of the Mexican Revolution—“a blend of classical liberalism, socialism, and native communalism”—such as that of Republican Spain. Mexican delegates argued that to claim neutrality while Italy and Germany were feeding a rebellion was tantamount to intervention, not nonintervention. Although Mexican diplomacy failed, its finest hour in the League came when it defended the legal and moral right to take sides in what became a rehearsal for World War II.

In the technical work of the League, successes were less ambiguous. They included the establishment of new standards in nutrition and sera and vaccines; the broad acceptance of a welfare state norm among labor delegates;

and the integration of Latin American scientists, economists, and other experts in transnational networks of exchange of information, which were to be more than ever influential when international organizations flourished after World War II. According to Amelia M. Kiddie, the LN mission to Latin America in 1938 publicly established the most important conceptual success of the League, which was to separate its more successful technical side from its rapidly disintegrating political side in the assembly and the council. As Europe descended into war, Latin Americans proved more than ready to appreciate the technical achievements of the League.

All in all, Latin American encounters with the League of Nations contained many contradictions. In every field they experienced failures, but also successes. They fought to be recognized as democrats in a world of fascists, except when fascism suited their interests. They pursued regionalism but wanted all the advantages of universalist organizations. And they jealously guarded their sovereignty while edging closer to an expanding Uncle Sam. As Latin America has embarked, since the end of the Cold War, on another era of integration and a renewed process of contested continental identity formation, it would behoove its leaders to look back at the interwar years for ambitions to emulate—and others to avoid.

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