

Creating the “International Mind”: The League of Nations Attempts to Reform History Teaching, 1920–1939

Ken Osborne

Abstract

After the First World War, the League of Nations, through its International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, attempted to reshape the teaching of history in its member states. The League's supporters realized that its long-term success depended in part on supportive public opinion and that this, in turn, had implications for education. Aware of the strength of national loyalties, the League sought not to abolish the teaching of national history but to suffuse it with the spirit of the “international mind.” To this end, the League promoted revision of history textbooks and curricula, retraining of teachers, and rethinking of teaching methods. National governments responded by including some study of the League in history curricula but ignored the League's broader plans. Nonetheless, the League's attempt to internationalize the teaching of history opened up a debate that continues today as schools seek to strike a balance between claims of national and global history.

Between the two world wars, the League of Nations, as part of its effort to eliminate war as an instrument of national policy, set out to reshape the teaching of history in schools. In the words of the League's Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching, reporting in 1935, “The youth of today will constitute the public opinion of tomorrow. To open it up to new horizons beyond its national frontiers, to put before it other points of view, to bring home to it the difficulties in the way of attempts made since the world war to organize the world—all this is

Ken Osborne is a Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. He has written extensively on the teaching of history in Canada. For his academic autobiography, see “A History Teacher Looks Back,” *Canadian Historical Review* 93, no. 1 (2012), 108–37. He thanks the referees and the editors of the *History of Education Quarterly* for their extremely helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this essay.

to prepare those who will create the peace of tomorrow.”¹ This essay explores why and how the League of Nations sought to reform the teaching of history and to what effect. The essay concentrates on the League’s aspirations and initiatives and refers only in passing to the varied responses of its member states, a subject sufficiently extensive as to merit separate treatment.

It would be going too far to speak of an organized League campaign to reform history teaching in schools, and the League was always careful not to challenge the sovereign authority of national governments. Equally important, it lacked the necessary resources and status to mount a thoroughgoing plan of reform. Its only tools were persuasion and argument. Nonetheless, it did what it could to promote an internationalist approach to the teaching of history to which national governments were urged to commit themselves.

With the possible exception of the League’s involvement in the revision of history textbooks, which has attracted some attention over the years, surprisingly little has been written about its interest in the teaching of history more generally. It has received some brief mention in the wider context of the League’s work in fostering international intellectual cooperation but has otherwise passed largely unnoticed both in histories of the League and in national histories of education.

In attempting to remedy this omission, this essay draws on, and seeks to contribute to, four recent developments in historiography. The first is embodied in the growing interest in the role of historical research, writing, and teaching in the construction and consolidation of the nation-state. In recent years, historians have paid increasing attention to the place of history in “writing the nation” but the League’s push to “rewrite” the nation by locating it in an international context and harnessing the teaching of national history to the cultivation of what League supporters described as the “international mind” has attracted little attention.² The second development can be seen in the growing interest in the nonpolitical work of the League of Nations and its so-called “technical” organizations. As Susan Pedersen has pointed out, this new research largely bypasses the familiar narrative of how and why the League failed to prevent war, and focuses instead on the League’s activities in such less politicized aspects of international coop-

¹“Second Session of the Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching: Held at Geneva July 10th and 11th 1935,” *Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching* 2 (December 1935), 178.

²On writing the nation, see the volumes produced by the Writing the Nations project, especially Ilaria Porciani and Jo Tollebeek, eds., *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, eds., *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

eration as child welfare; public health; the protection of refugees; a host of everyday issues involving international transport, navigation, and the like; and the promotion of international intellectual cooperation, including, as this essay demonstrates, the teaching of history.³ The third historiographical development on which this essay draws is the growing trend in the study of the history of education to examine the historical development of the subjects that comprise school curricula, including, in the case of this essay, the interwar attempt to reshape the teaching of history.⁴ The fourth development in recent historiography that informs this essay can be found in the history of the peace and antiwar movements of the interwar years, with particular reference to the efforts of peace activists to reshape the teaching of history in schools.⁵

Ensuring the Peace of Tomorrow

As a result of the First World War, history education's would-be reformers were well aware that the history taught in schools was

³Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007), 1091–1117; Ruth Henig, *The League of Nations* (London: Haus, 2010), 174–87; and Eckhardt Fuchs, "The Creation of New International Networks in Education: The League of Nations and Educational Organizations in the 1920s," *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (2007), 199–209. On intellectual cooperation more generally, see Jan Kolasa, *International Intellectual Cooperation: The League Experience and the Beginnings of UNESCO* (Wrocław: Travaux de la Société des Sciences et des Lettres de Wrocław, 1962); Pham Thi Tu, *La Coopération Intellectuelle sous la Société des Nations* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962); and Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L'UNESCO oublié: La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle 1919–1946* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999).

⁴See, for example, David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, and Nicola Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Patrick Garcia and Jean Leduc, *L'enseignement de l'histoire en France de l'Ancien Régime à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004); Elly Hermon, "Education et vérité: Aspects de la réforme de l'enseignement de l'histoire pendant l'entre-deux-guerres," *Réflexions historiques* 10, no. 2 (July 1983), 295–312; and Ken Osborne, "Voices from the Past," a series of articles on the history of Canadian history education published in *Canadian Social Studies* between 2000 and 2004 and accessible online at Canadian Social Studies, <http://www.educ.ualberta.ca/css/>.

⁵For examples of this work, not in peace activism more generally, but specifically in peace education, see Maria-Cristina Giuntella, "Enseignement de l'histoire et révision des manuels scolaires dans l'entre-deux-guerres" in *Pistes didactiques et chemins d'historiens: Textes offerts à Henri Moniot, dirs. Marie-Christine Baquès, Annie Bruter, and Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 161–90; Elly Hermon, "The International Peace Education Movement, 1919–1939," in *Peace Movements and Political Cultures*, ed. Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 127–42; and Christophe Bechet, "La révision pacifiste des manuels scolaires: Les enjeux de la mémoire de la guerre 14–18 dans l'enseignement belge de l'Entre-deux-guerres," *Cahiers d'histoire du temps présent* 20 (2008), 49–101. Also useful, though they focus more on the work of League of Nations supporters rather than of the League itself, are Donald S. Birn, "The History Teacher as Propagandist," *History Teacher* 5, no. 4 (May 1972), 17–22 and Brian J. Elliott, "The League of Nations Union and History Teaching in England: A Study in Benevolent Bias," *History of Education* 6, no. 2 (1977), 131–41.

designed to instill in students a sense of national identity and pride, often tinged with a latent bellicosity. According to military historian Michael Howard, “Whether as a result of deliberate policy or not, the schools of Western Europe in the last quarter of the nineteenth century produced a generation psychologically attuned to war”⁶; and not only in Western Europe, one might add. In the words of one Canadian educator writing in 1912, history teachers should tell their students: “Child, you belong to the greatest Empire the world has ever seen. Your fathers fought and bled for it; prepare and fit yourselves to achieve in their footsteps and to serve your country and your King.”⁷ Needless to say, with the outbreak of war in 1914, schools in all the belligerent countries intensified their efforts to instill a spirit of patriotism in their students and turned, above all, to history to do so.

For their part, history teaching’s critics argued that the overly patriotic approach to history that was taught in most schools had made the Great War possible, and perhaps even inevitable. According to a French teacher writing in 1924, teachers bore ultimate responsibility for the war. They created the overly militarized patriotism that led people to fight their countries’ supposed enemies when called upon, no questions asked “Ce ne sont pas les peuples qui sont responsables de la tuerie, mais ce sont les enseignants de toutes les puissances, lesquels n’ont pas su faire l’école”.⁸ No less a celebrity than H. G. Wells agreed, denouncing “the poison called history” taught in all of Europe’s schools that, as he saw it, had done so much, first, to make the Great War possible and, second, to turn it into the no-holds-barred slaughter that it quickly became.⁹

⁶Michael Howard, “War and the Nation State” in *The State*, eds. Stephen Richard Graubard (New York: Norton, 1979), 103. Also relevant are Manfred F. Boerneke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Forster, eds., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences 1871–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Mark Howard Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Joshua A. Sanborn, “Education for War, Peace and Patriotism in Russia on the Eve of the First World War” in *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War 1 and European Political Culture before 1914*, eds. Holger Afferbach and David Stevenson (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), 213–29.

⁷Frederick J. Ney, “Empire Travel and the Relation of the British Teacher to the Empire,” *The Western School Journal* VII (December 1912), 355.

⁸Translation: “It is not the people who are responsible for the all the killing; it is the teachers in every country, who do not know what schools can do.” Jacques Girault, “Institeurs syndiqués et enseignement de l’histoire entre les deux guerres,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, hors-série, 1984, 142, cited in *L’enseignement de l’histoire en France de l’Ancien Régime à nos jours*, eds. Patrick Garcia and Jean Leduc (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 148.

⁹H. G. Wells, *Travels of a Republican Radical in Search of Hot Water* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1939), 89–121. See also Ken Osborne, “‘One Great Epic Unfolding’: H. G. Wells and the Interwar Debate on the Teaching of History,” *Historical Studies in Education* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2014), 1–29.

According to history teaching's reformers, with the end of the war the time had come to denationalize and demilitarize education. As a British educator put it, it was only through "a reformed method of the teaching of history that we can hope to give the right bias to the young student in his outlook on foreign affairs."¹⁰ In Canada, McGill University Professor of Education Fred Clarke wrote in 1927 that "The whole spirit of our History teaching will have to be transformed, especially in the early stages, if the League is to become that supreme instrument for the common service that it might become."¹¹ In the same vein, Alfred Zimmern, an influential League supporter who played an important role in creating the League and from 1926 to 1930 served as deputy director of the League's Institute for International Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) before becoming Oxford University's first professor of international relations, wrote in 1930 that "one happy result of this movement for the teaching of the League of Nations in schools has been to lead to a reconsideration, not only of the history programs, but of the principles on which they are based."¹² In the words of the League's Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching, "The teaching of history offers very frequent opportunities of imbuing the younger generation with the ideals of an international order, the necessity for international collaboration and the ideas of humanity and peace which are at the root of the Covenant."¹³

League supporters also saw a suitably reformed history teaching as essential to the success of the League itself. Unless there was a fundamental shift in people's thinking, claimed Zimmern, the League would end up "suspended in mid-air, without any adequate foundation."¹⁴ The problem was, as Zimmern went on to argue, that such shifts, as demonstrated by the Reformation and the Enlightenment, were the result of long periods of struggle and debate; they accumulated "a long and familiar intellectual record before they reached the stage of practical

¹⁰J. Howard Whitehouse and George P. Gooch, *Wider Aspects of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), 66.

¹¹Fred Clarke, *Foundations of History-Teaching, a Critique for Teachers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 167.

¹²Alfred E. Zimmern, "Education for World Citizenship" in *Problems of Peace, 5th Series: Lectures Delivered at the Geneva Institute of International Relations August 1930* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 313. For more on Zimmern, see David Markwell, "Sir Alfred Zimmern Revisited: Fifty Years On," *Review of International Studies* 12, no. 4 (October 1986), 279–92; and Jeanne Morefield, "A Liberal in a Muddle: Alfred Zimmern on Nationality, Internationality and Commonwealth," in *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*, eds. David Long and Brian Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 93–115.

¹³Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching, "League of Nations Official Proceedings (November 1936), 1268.

¹⁴Zimmern, "Education for World Citizenship," 307.

realization.”¹⁵ By contrast, the League of Nations had sprung up almost overnight and had to contend with established ways of thinking that were cramped within “limits fixed by local systems of instruction, entitled national systems of education, in which prejudice, superstition, and even deliberate falsification may play a predominant part.”¹⁶ In these circumstances, wrote Zimmern, it was easier for people “to continue in the pre-war groove, making here and there a small verbal concession to the idea of a League of Nations, than to banish old habits in the light of new conditions and to face the whole problem afresh.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, Zimmern allowed that change might be possible once the teaching of history was reformed: “There is no reason why the international sense should not become part of the stock-in-trade of the ordinary man. A hundred years ago, it was regarded as equally inconceivable that the ordinary man should become literate or capable of reading a map.”¹⁸

Some observers took a more optimistic view, arguing that though the League of Nations was new, the ideals it embodied were not. For Clarke, the League was “the perfectly natural issue of more than a century of developing ideas and practice, accelerated indeed by the Great War, but in no sense the exclusive product of it.”¹⁹ Polish historian Oscar Halecki agreed: “Properly treated, the teaching of history may be made, without any violation of historic truth, to show that, though the League of Nations is a recent creation based on an actual Covenant, there has always existed an international League whose laws, though unwritten, have never been violated with impunity.”²⁰ Whoever was right, they came to much the same conclusion: the success of the League depended on the creation of an internationalist, peace-oriented mind-set among the world’s peoples, and this would best begin with children whose ways of thinking were still to be formed, shaped in part by what they learned in school, and above all in their history classes. For British historian and League advocate Eileen Power, schools were “the engine-rooms in which power is created to drive the machinery of the League of Nations.”²¹

Few people, and certainly no policy-makers, went as far as H. G. Wells in his denunciation of nationalism and patriotism as “base,

¹⁵ Alfred E. Zimmern, *Learning and Leadership: A Study of the Needs and Possibilities of International and Intellectual Co-operation* (London, Oxford University Press, 1928), 12.

¹⁶ Alfred E. Zimmern, *Quo Vadimus?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 12.

¹⁷ Zimmern, *Learning and Leadership*, 11.

¹⁸ Alfred E. Zimmern, “Education in International Relations: A Critical Survey,” *League of Nations Educational Survey*, 3, no. 1 (March 1932), 14.

¹⁹ Clarke, *Foundations of History-Teaching*, 95.

²⁰ Oscar Halecki, “University Teaching of International Questions in Faculties of the Humanities,” *Educational Survey* 2, no. 2 (September 1931), 23.

²¹ Eileen Power, *A Bibliography for School Teachers of History* (London: Methuen, 1921), 14.

cramping, crippling, unjust, falsifying and altogether mischievous and degrading forms into which human minds are compressed."²² Wells called for the creation of a world state rooted in the universal teaching of a global history that transcended national boundaries, as embodied in his *The Outline of History*, but most League supporters endorsed what one Canadian school jurisdiction described as the creation of a spirit of "a healthy nationalism and a reasonable internationalism."²³ As Britain's League of Nations Union put it, "World loyalty must grow out of present patriotism, as British loyalty has grown out of English, Scots and other loyalties that preceded it and survive with it."²⁴

Creating the "International Mind"

The League's educational goal was to plant the seeds of the international mind in students. It was a concept that attracted much attention from the League's educational reformers, and though their discussions sometimes became abstractly intellectual, its pedagogical components commanded general agreement. To become internationally minded did not require renouncing one's sense of national identity and patriotism but rather tempering them with the realization that other peoples had their own equally legitimate claims to identity and distinctiveness, and that acceptance of the world's many and varied identities must be combined with the recognition that all nations have no choice but to work together peacefully as one global community.²⁵ It was in this spirit that in 1916 Swedish activist Ellen Key called for creating a "patriotic internationalism." Pointing out that the world was increasingly interconnected, she argued that what was needed now was to combine a tolerant and outward-looking patriotism with a new sense of international communitarianism.²⁶ Taking the same approach, the League of Na-

²²Herbert G. Wells, *After Democracy: Addresses and Papers on the Present World Situation* (London: Watts, 1932), 102.

²³*Memoranda for the Guidance of Teachers in the Protestant Schools of the Province of Quebec* (Quebec: Council of Public Instruction, 1934), 25.

²⁴"Another Peace Society? Cosmopolitanism versus Internationalism," *Headway* (September 1928), 1.

²⁵Nicholas Murray Butler, *The International Mind: An Argument for the Judicial Settlement of International Disputes* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1913); Alfred E. Zimmern, "The Development of the International Mind" in *The Problems of Peace: Lectures Delivered at the Geneva Institute of International Relations* (Geneva: Institute of International Relations, 1927), 1–17; Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 125–35; and Joyce Goodman, "Women and International Intellectual Cooperation," *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 3 (June 2012), 357–68.

²⁶Ellen Key, *War, Peace and the Future: A Consideration of Nationalism and Internationalism, and of the Relation of Women to War*, trans. Hildegard Norberg (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1916), 119–40.

tions' education experts emphasized that internationalist education could achieve success only by working in harmony with national education policies, not by attempting to supplant them. Their 1932 message was one of many: "Further, care will have to be taken, particularly in the school, to avoid setting up the international community and the national community in contrast to each other. It is on the national community that we must build. Without the individual mother-countries the world would be a chaos."²⁷ For champions of the "international mind," nations were both a historical and political reality and a psychological necessity. They made organized social life possible and met people's need for a sense of identity and belonging. The task, therefore, was not to eliminate nationalism but to purge it of its sense of exclusive superiority. The path to world peace lay through educational, not institutional, reform.

In contrast to the concrete realities of the nation and the nation-state, the concept of the international mind lacked historical roots, emotional power, and political substance. As a League of Nations committee noted in 1935, "[I]nstruction in the aims of the League has no mystical appeal comparable to national sentiment. The community of nations exists as a fact; but it does not, one fears, as yet have any place in the consciousness of man, and consequently cannot evoke acts of loyalty."²⁸ The League's problem was that if the community of nations was to become a reality, then the support of national governments was essential; and those governments were not prepared to endorse a program that might threaten their control of education. Moreover, it is possible that the very structure of the League served to reinforce national loyalties rather than transcend them. As the Spanish philosopher Salvador de Madariaga noted in 1929, "Nations meet and discuss at Geneva as nations and thereby acquire a deeper sense of their existence, a greater sense of their importance."²⁹ As their critics pointed out, the advocates of the international mind too easily ignored the role of power in international affairs.³⁰

So far as education was concerned, the League's initial problem was that the Covenant, the internationally agreed document that governed its operations, said nothing whatsoever about it. During the 1919 negotiations that produced the Treaty of Versailles, the Belgian del-

²⁷E. Perrier, "Moral Disarmament," *League of Nations Educational Survey* III, no. 2 (September 1932), 15.

²⁸"Special Session of the Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching," *Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching* 2 (December 1935), 174.

²⁹Salvador de Madariaga, *Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards: An Essay in Comparative Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 242-43.

³⁰The standard reference here is Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1939).

egate, Paul Hymans, suggested that the proposed League of Nations should be assigned some responsibility for the development of international intellectual cooperation, with the goal of fostering *une mentalité internationale*,³¹ but his suggestion was not taken up by other governments.³² Outside the confines of the conference, however, peace activists, women's organizations, and education groups campaigned vigorously for the cause of a more internationalist education. For example, an international delegation of feminist reformers met with President Wilson to lobby for the inclusion of education in the Covenant of the proposed League of Nations. Their suggested motion read: "The High Contracting Parties will endeavor to make the aims and methods of their educational systems consistent with the general principles underlying the League of Nations; and to this end agree to establish as part of the organization of the League a permanent Bureau of Education." Wilson responded, as he did to all such suggestions: "[W]e think it is wise to confine ourselves merely to the setting up of the framework of the League of Nations, leaving the complete organization for future development."³³ Such bromides, however, hardly disguised the reality that no national governments, all too aware of the role of their schools in imbuing the young with a sense of national identity and citizenship, were willing to give the new League any power over education.

Nonetheless, the idea persisted that the League should assume some responsibility for enlisting education in the service of peace. Discussion turned into action in 1920 when Léon Bourgeois, France's representative on the League Council, proposed the creation of a standing League committee with responsibility for promoting international understanding through education, science, and the arts, with the aim that all such activity should be consistent with League ideals.³⁴ The motion creating the committee spoke of "intellectual cooperation and education," but in its final form the reference to education was dropped in order to reassure national governments that the League had no intention of interfering with their control of their schools.

Thus, in 1922 the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) came into being as an organ of the League, followed

³¹ Translation: "an international mentality."

³² David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 350. On Hymans, see Sally Marks, *Paul Hymans Belgium* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010).

³³ Fannie Fern Andrews, "Education at the Peace Conference," *Advocate of Peace* 81, no. 8 (August 1919), 248–49. More generally, see Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant*.

³⁴ For the text of this proposal, see *League of Nations Official Journal* 1 (October 1920), 448–51. See also "Organization of Intellectual Work: Report by M. Léon Bourgeois, Adopted by Council on September 2, 1921," *League of Nations Official Journal* 2 (December 1921), 1104.

in 1924 and 1925 by the Paris-based Institute for Internal Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), which acted as its administrative arm. Also in 1924, the League established a Liaison Committee of Major International Organizations, designed to facilitate information exchange and to coordinate activity in education and other matters. In 1926, the ICIC created its own subcommittee of experts (discussed further below) charged with ensuring that the world's schools taught students about the League and related matters, followed in 1928 by the creation of the Rome-based International Educational Cinematographic Institute and in 1929 by a League radio station that from time to time broadcast programs aimed at schools. Over the course of the next several years, the ICIC encouraged the creation of nongovernmental intellectual cooperation committees at the national level and did what it could to foster the work of national League of Nations associations.³⁵ As its educational commitments increased, the League Council decided that there needed to be some kind of overall coordination based in the League Secretariat in Geneva, and so in 1931 created the Organization for Intellectual Cooperation as a coordinating body.³⁶

Initially, the ICIC avoided education as beyond its terms of reference and took as its first priorities aid to intellectuals, intellectual property rights, university relations, and the compilation of research bibliographies. However, it quickly found itself involved in educational matters. As the Secretary-General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond, put it in 1921 when presenting the report of the committee that resulted in the creation of the ICIC: "The League of Nations cannot pursue any of its aims, either the general aims of co-operation as laid down by the Covenant, or even the more precise aims assigned to it by certain provisions, such as the campaign against the use of dangerous drugs and against the traffic in women and children, without, at every moment, encountering educational problems and without being obliged to ask for active help from those engaged in education in all countries."³⁷ In this spirit, the ICIC turned its attention to the

³⁵For a survey of the work and composition of national committees, see League of Nations Intellectual Co-operation Organization, *National Committees on Intellectual Co-operation* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1937). See also Thomas R. Davies, "Internationalism in a Divided World: The Experience of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies," *Peace and Change* 37, no. 2 (March 2012), 227–52.

³⁶On the Intellectual Co-operation Organization, see Pauline G. Staats, *A Study of the Educational Activities of the Intellectual Cooperation Organization of the League of Nations: 1920–1940 as Revealed in the Official Journals of the Council and the Records of the Assembly*, EdD dissertation, Stanford University, 1944.

³⁷"The Desirability of Creating a Technical Organization for Intellectual Work: Report Submitted by the Secretary-General and Agreed by the Council on September 2, 1921," *League of Nations Official Journal* 2 (December 1921), 1111.

teaching of history, a subject that League advocates saw as especially crucial for building that internationalist antiwar outlook they valued so highly.³⁸

Reshaping the Teaching of History

When the League of Nations first met in 1920, the teaching of history was already becoming a subject of public and academic discussion. When British activist Fanny Hertz compared teachers to "recruiting sergeants" in 1892 and denounced the "so-called teaching of history" for its emphasis on "battles and dates of battles," and the "exploits of successful conquerors," she spoke for many in the prewar peace movement.³⁹ In the same spirit, in 1913 the International Council of Women called on history teachers to "abate the influence now exerted by the majority of school histories to eulogize vanity and arrogance in the name of patriotism" and instead to focus on such topics as invention, the arts, trade, and "social wrongs and miseries," as well as "sociological progress," in order to promote cooperation among nations.⁴⁰ With the creation of the League of Nations, the belief that war might be prevented through the reform of history teaching entered mainstream debate. Thus, the League of Nations was able to draw on a body of work that had been accumulating since the late nineteenth century and that attracted increasing attention with the end of the First World War. The teaching of history stood accused of fostering aggressive nationalism and war, and, as a result, the way seemed to be open for setting a new pedagogical course, if the war was indeed to be the war that would end war.

Though never expressed this systematically, the League's plan to reform history teaching consisted of nine elements. One, existing textbooks had to be purged of nationalist bias and, ideally, more internationally minded books commissioned in their place. Two, emphasis had to be placed on the similarities among nations rather than on their differences. Three, political and military history must make way for greater emphasis on social history and the historical role of so-called ordinary people. Four, more attention had to be given to teaching world history organized around the theme of the progress of "civilization," a process

³⁸On the ICIC, see H. R. G. Greaves, "The Committee on Intellectual Co-operation" in *The League Committees and World Order: A Study of the Permanent Expert Committees of the League of Nations as an Instrument of International Government* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 111–38, and the references listed in footnote 3.

³⁹Fanny Hertz, "A Palm of Peace from German Soil," *International Journal of Ethics* 2, no. 2 (January 1892), 208.

⁴⁰International Council of Women, *Report on the Quinquennial Meeting held in Rome 1914* (Karlsruhe, Germany: G. Braunsche Hofbuchdruckerei, 1914), 409.

to which all nations and all classes must be portrayed as making their various contributions. Five, all glorification of war must be avoided and emphasis given instead to alternatives to war in the solution of international disputes. Six, schools must provide explicit instruction about the aims, organization, and achievements of the League of Nations. Seven, traditional didactic instruction was not enough and students had to be engaged in more experientially based activities. Eight, if students were to internalize such values as cooperation, justice, and reciprocity on an international scale then they must experience them in action in their classrooms. Nine, while pedagogy was important, the personality and enthusiasm of the teacher were the most influential factors in creating in students a true League spirit and so teacher training must not be ignored.

It must be remembered, however, that these nine points represent an after-the-fact summary of what was in reality a largely ad hoc series of suggestions and requests rather than a systematic blueprint for reform. In the assessment of a sympathetic American contemporary, the League's educational agenda consisted of "improvisations and additions which, when combined together, did not constitute a global plan to serve as a guide or suggestion for the reorientation of national systems of education in the interests of universal peace."⁴¹ Given the political realities facing the League, however, any such global plan would almost certainly have been rejected by governments anxious to protect their schools from outside interference—and especially so in the case of history, which all governments saw as an important vehicle for creating a sense of national identity and patriotism in the young.

Revising History Textbooks

According to a later UNESCO survey, in the years following 1918 the movement for the revision of history textbooks "took on the spirit of a crusade, with teachers' organizations and peace societies in the vanguard."⁴² As League advocates saw it, the need to reform history education was demonstrated by a survey of Europe's history textbooks, financed by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and published in two volumes, one in 1923 and the second in 1927.⁴³ Allowing

⁴¹ Isaac L. Kandel, *Intellectual Cooperation: National and International* (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications, 1944), 1.

⁴² *A Handbook for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids to International Understanding* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), 10.

⁴³ *Enquête sur les livres scolaires d'après guerre* (Paris: Centre européen de la Dotation Carnegie, 1923).

for some differences in degree, the findings were similar for all countries. History texts and curricula placed too much emphasis on war and conflict; they paid too little attention to countries other than their own and to the achievements of the world's many peoples; they portrayed their nations' wars as variously heroic, glorious, or necessary; and they ignored alternatives to war as a means of peacefully settling international disputes.

As a consequence, the teaching of history was an obstacle to the construction of a new international order, preserving instead the unhealthy memory of past quarrels and mistakes "le souvenir malsain des erreurs et des querelles du passé".⁴⁴ It was a message that was frequently repeated during the 1920s by a wide variety of educational organizations, all pressing the case for rethinking the teaching of history and all, to a greater or lesser extent, looking for support from the ICIC, among them the International Congress of Moral Education, the World Federation of Education Associations, the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, the International Bureau of Education, the Junior Red Cross, the International Council of Women, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the International Federation of University Women.⁴⁵ At the local level, they elected sympathetic school officials; scrutinized teaching materials; lobbied policy-makers; sent speakers into schools; organized student exchanges, essay contests, and letter-writing projects; and generally promoted the cause of peace and international cooperation through education.

In 1935, a Canadian academic summarized the views of would-be textbook reformers. While they believed that textbooks gave too much emphasis to the place of war in history, they acknowledged that the study of war should not be avoided in the history classroom. However, war should not be overemphasized, and never celebrated or glorified, and should always be shown to be the exception and not the norm in the conduct of international affairs. In this regard, the history of war should always be subordinated to the study of the "long steady development of economic and social life" so that the "achievements of peace" would form the foundation of any textbook narrative. In addition, the history of war and conflict must be taught with the strictest objectivity, with

⁴⁴Translation: "the unhealthy memory of the errors and quarrels of the past." *Enquête sur les livres scolaires d'après guerre*, vol. 2 (Paris: Centre européen de la Dotation Carnegie, 1927), 9.

⁴⁵For a survey of these organizations and their many recommendations regarding history teaching, see J. L. Clarapède, *L'enseignement de l'histoire et l'esprit international* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires, 1931).

the goal of helping students arrive at their own conclusions on the basis of a "bare statement of facts."⁴⁶

As to how textbooks were to be made to serve this reformed vision of history teaching, no clear consensus emerged. Some reformers called for the creation of a single international textbook to be used in all schools.⁴⁷ However, the ICIC, together with most university historians, always judged such suggestions to be impractical on both educational and political grounds, with Zimmern dismissing the whole idea as "fundamentally fallacious."⁴⁸ When an international conference on history teaching held at The Hague in 1932 under League auspices proposed creating a single global history textbook to be written under the League's sponsorship, the ICIC in effect killed the proposal by observing that it "deserved careful consideration" and then took no further action.⁴⁹ The ICIC also rebuffed any suggestion that it should assume responsibility for the approval of history textbooks and should commission a prototype history curriculum ready for adoption in all the world's schools. For the ICIC, political reality meant that it could not dictate policy to national governments, while its philosophical preference was not to commission a new global history program and textbook but to suffuse national history curricula with the spirit of the international mind. The ICIC agreed with Zimmern that "The road to internationalism leads through nationalism, not through levelling down to a gray and indistinctive cosmopolitanism, but by appealing to the best elements in the corporate inheritance of each nation."⁵⁰ An alternative suggestion was that national history textbooks should be circulated to other national governments and to groups of teachers and experts for comment and revision, and there were a few tentative efforts in this regard, though only the much-praised (though not imitated) Norden agreements among the Scandinavian nations achieved any concrete results, with others never getting past the discussion stage, as in a South American agreement of 1933, inter-Balkan talks in the early 1930s, and Polish-German talks between 1937 and 1939.⁵¹

⁴⁶Watson Kirkconnell, "War and Peace in the History Class," *Western School Journal* 30, no. 6 (June 1935), 200–204.

⁴⁷See, for example, Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), 140.

⁴⁸Zimmern, *Learning and Leadership*, 34.

⁴⁹*League of Nations Official Proceedings* (November 1932), 1803. For more on the conference, see George T. Hankin, "The International Study of the Problem of History Teaching," *History* 19, no. 73 (January 1934), 30–36.

⁵⁰Alfred E. Zimmern, *Nationality and Government with Other Wartime Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1918), 85.

⁵¹For the Norden agreements, see Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO, *A Study of History and Geography Textbooks* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952), 1–11; Henrik Aström Elmersjö, "The Norden Association and International Efforts to Change

The procedure that the League of Nations adopted was embodied in the Casarès resolution approved by the League Assembly in 1926, and its wording is revealing in its tentativeness. Its preamble explicitly described its recommended process as one "whose extreme elasticity seems of a nature to obviate any risk of wounding national susceptibilities."⁵² In fact, the Casarès procedure relied entirely on voluntary effort organized through the various nongovernmental national committees on intellectual cooperation (CICs). First, when a national CIC found something it thought objectionable in a history text, it notified the CIC of the country where the text was published. Second, the CIC receiving such a request, once satisfied as to its validity, had to ask the text's authors and publishers to change it. If they refused to do so, no explanations were required so that, in effect, a de facto national veto was created, though a few years later the ICIC was given the power to act as mediator (never in fact exercised) in the case of intractable disputes. Third, requests for revision had to be limited to factual errors; the raising of interpretative objections was explicitly forbidden, though this seems rather to destroy the purpose of the whole exercise. And, finally, national CICs were asked to identify those national textbooks that they found to be especially balanced. In the event, the Casarès procedure was rarely used, with the IIC noting in 1936, ten years after its adoption by the League, that it had been "assez rarement appliquée."⁵³

For the League, the IIC took a particular interest in textbook revision. From 1929 onward, the institute's monthly journal, *La Revue de la Coopération Intellectuelle* (renamed the *Bulletin* from 1932) contained a regular feature describing developments in the campaign to revise history textbooks. However, the institute reported on what was

History Education 1919–1970: International Organisation, Education and Hegemonic Nationalism," *Paedagogica Historica*, 51, 6 (2015): 727–43. See also Raul d'Eca, "The Convention on the Teaching of History Signed at the Seventh Pan-American Conference," *World Affairs* 97, no. 2 (June 1934), 109–13; Robert J. Kerner and Harry N. Howard, *The Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente 1930–1935* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1936), 30–40; and Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastward: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 131–36.

⁵²Pham Thi Tu, *La Coopération Intellectuelle sous la Société des Nations* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962), 156; and Spencer Stoker, *The Schools and International Understanding* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 193–94.

⁵³Translation: very seldom used. "Révision des manuels scolaires," *Bulletin de la coopération intellectuelle*, 61–62 (janvier–février, 1936), 701. For an example of an unsuccessful Franco-German venture in textbook revision, see Bernadotte E. Schmitt, "War Guilt' in France and Germany," *American Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (Jan. 1938), 321–41. Also relevant is Mona Siegel and Kirsten Harjes, "Disarming Hatred: History Education, National Memories, and Franco-German Reconciliation," *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (Aug. 2012), 370–402.

happening in various countries rather than taking any independent action of its own, as exemplified by its 1932 compendium *Le révision des manuels scolaires* (an English-language version appeared in 1933 with the title *School Textbook Revision and International Understanding*). As the ICIC itself reported, "One is struck by the number of enquiries that have been undertaken and the number of resolutions adopted, but also by the comparative ineffectiveness of this vast movement of public opinion."⁵⁴ The primary reason for this state of affairs was that the relevant public opinion was in fact not all that vast. Textbook revision was not something that gripped policy-makers, newspaper editors, publishers, or shapers of public opinion more generally.

Nonetheless, the ICIC found the subject of textbook revision important enough to create a Subcommittee of Experts on the Revision of Textbooks in 1932, though it achieved little by way of concrete results. The ICIC drafted a model treaty in 1934 concerning the revision of textbooks, but no government adopted it. A 1937 "Declaration Regarding the Teaching of History (Revision of School Textbooks)" met a similar fate. Only twenty-eight governments (roughly half of the League's member states) signed on, while others hedged their bets, as in the case of the United States, who declared its sympathy with the declaration but said it had no constitutional authority to sign it, and Canada, whose government said it supported the declaration in principle but did not think "there would be any object in signing it at present."⁵⁵ The provisions were that history texts (1) should give as "large a place as possible" to the histories of other nations; (2) should describe the interdependence of peoples, past and present, and (3) should avoid prejudicial statements about other nations; and that (4) all countries should establish committees of teachers to ensure that history was taught appropriately.⁵⁶

Action was initiated, albeit unsuccessfully, on another front in 1932 when, in connection with the meetings of the long-awaited international disarmament conference, the conference organizers responded to a Polish proposal calling for the creation of a "moral disarmament" committee. The ICIC offered its services and a moral disarmament committee was created, charged with the task of preparing an agreement that would impose educational obligations on signatory governments. Among other things, signatories would have promised that their schools would not create or propagate "hatred, contempt or misunderstanding" of other peoples and would emphasize the interdependence

⁵⁴"Editorial," *League of Nations Educational Survey II*, no. 2 (September 1931), 7.

⁵⁵For more on these developments, see *League of Nations Official Journal* 18 (December 1937). The U.S. and Canadian responses are described on page 1017.

⁵⁶Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision* (Paris: UNESCO, 2010), 6.

of the world's countries while also including information about the League in textbooks and curricula. With the collapse of the general disarmament conference in 1934, however, the committee's work came to nought.⁵⁷

The most puzzling aspect of all this attention to the revision of history textbooks in the 1920s and 1930s is the assumption that textbooks were so powerful. Few would-be reformers of history education in the interwar years seem to have asked whether students were really influenced by the textbooks they used in their history classes. A 1933 Canadian survey of history texts found them to be reasonably balanced but concluded that the one outstanding feature they had in common was that they were "dull and uninteresting."⁵⁸ The would-be textbook revisers ignored the growing volume of complaints from school inspectors and others that textbooks all too often reduced history lessons to pointless exercises in memorization devoid of either understanding or interest. Pedagogically speaking, the major weakness of textbooks was not that they promoted an excess of nationalism but that they killed many students' interest in history as a subject of study—hence, for example, the popularity of the British spoof of textbook history, *1066 and All That*, first published in 1930, with its satirical treatment of history as memory work and patriotic sentiment.⁵⁹

Teaching History beyond the Textbook

Revising history textbooks was only one element of the League's educational agenda. Its education experts also saw teacher training as crucial, especially in the case of elementary schoolteachers who usually did not have the university training in history required of their secondary school colleagues. In a burst of overstated optimism, the ICIC's

⁵⁷"Committee on Moral Disarmament," *League of Nations Educational Survey* 3, 2 (September 1932), 49–60. For the Polish proposal and the ICIC's intervention, see *League of Nations Educational Survey* 3, 1 (March 1932), 119–25. See also Elly Hermon, "Le désarmement moral, facteur dans les relations internationales pendant l'entre-deux-guerres," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 39, no. 156 (October 1989), 23–36.

⁵⁸Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Toronto Branch, *Report of the Canadian School History Textbook Survey: Reports of Readers Correlated and Appraised by Professor Peter Sandiford* (Toronto: Toronto Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1933), 59.

⁵⁹Walter C. Sellar and Robert J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England, Comprising All the Parts You Can Remember, Including One Hundred and Three Good Things, Five Bad Kings and Two Genuine Dates* (London: Methuen, 1930). The book's full title reveals its approach. Note also its description of the Great War: "King Edward's new policy of peace was very successful and culminated in the Great War to End War. This pacific and inevitable struggle was undertaken in the reign of His Good and memorable Majesty King George V and it was the cause of nowadays and the end of History." (p. 113)

experts argued that if these teachers could be “imbued at the training college with the conviction that international co-operation is the normal method of conducting world affairs, the fire of idealistic enthusiasm thus kindled would enlighten and inspire generations of children and thousands of citizens.”⁶⁰ However, the League never went further than asking governments for information about their training programs and requesting that those programs include some study of the League of Nations and its work. In 1928, in an attempt to reach teachers directly, the League began publishing a monthly magazine highlighting its educational work, reprinting scripts of talks, and providing summaries of League activities that teachers could adapt for classroom use: the *Educational Survey* in English and *Recueil Pédagogique* in French (in 1934 they were retitled *Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching* and *Bulletin de l'enseignement de la Société des Nations* and ceased publication in 1938).

In part prompted by the initial findings of the Carnegie textbook survey, the League requested its member states in 1923 and again in 1924 to ensure that their schools taught students about the aims and organization of the League, while also teaching them to see international cooperation as the preferred method of resolving disputes. In 1924, the League took a further step and asked its member states to submit annual reports on their teaching about the League and the concept of world solidarity, though, more often than not, these reports were found to be insufficiently informative to be useful and were sometimes used by governments to publicize a particular grievance.

Of more lasting importance was the League's appointment in 1926 of a “subcommittee of experts for the instruction of youth in the existence and aims of the League.” In its 1927 report, the subcommittee recommended that formal schooling at all levels should include instruction both in the aims and achievements of the League and in the importance of international cooperation. In addition, schools were urged to organize special events at which the League and international cooperation would be the focus of attention, to create essay contests and international letter-writing projects, to include questions on the League in tests and examinations, and to exploit the educational potential of film and radio. At the same time, every effort was to be made to ensure that textbooks embodied a “spirit of mutual conciliation.” The teaching of history, in particular, was to be centered on the theme of civilization and its growth, which was to be portrayed as a process to which all nations and peoples contributed, while also showing that “co-operation is normal and strife abnormal in the life of civilized mankind and that in the world

⁶⁰“International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation: Sub-committee of Experts for the Instruction of Children and Youth in the Existence and Aims of the League of Nations,” *League of Nations Official Journal* 8, no. 10 (October 1927), 1219.

of today co-operation must be ever more widely extended." Equally important, teachers had to ensure that teaching about the League was more than a formal exercise so that cooperation must "permeate all the child's surroundings." And, not least, teacher training programs must be created to show teachers how to achieve all this. Finally, the subcommittee recommended that governments organize a series of national conferences to inform teachers about these proposed changes and report back to the League on what progress was being achieved.⁶¹ Consistent with its built-in deference to the sovereign authority of national governments, the League sent the report to member states, but only asking them "to take such action as seemed possible."⁶²

From the 1927 report of its subcommittee of experts onwards, the League stressed the importance of moving beyond didactic instruction in the teaching of history and embracing activity-based teaching methods. In this spirit, some schools (though just how many is impossible to ascertain) involved students in such activities as debates, pageants, school visits and student exchanges, letter-writing campaigns, and mock League assemblies, though critics such as Zimmern dismissed all such pedagogy as mere "fancy dress internationalism" and called instead for "more fundamental and less recreative" approaches to teaching.⁶³ In addition, national League of Nations Societies, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Junior Red Cross (which one Canadian observer described as, in effect, the "junior section" of the League of Nations⁶⁴), and other similarly inclined organizations created student branches in schools; sponsored essay contests; and organized conferences, festivals, and special events on the themes of peace and international cooperation. Commemorative anniversaries such as Remembrance Day, International Goodwill Day, and, in British territories, even Empire Day, were also used to elaborate on League themes. Many teacher organizations played their part in publicizing the work of the League, and some teachers' professional magazines devoted considerable space to League activities, to the extent that in 1928 a Canadian teacher felt driven to protest, asking "Do you not think the League of Nations has been worn threadbare in our monthly magazine?" and

⁶¹For the text of the subcommittee's report, see *League of Nations Official Journal* 8, no. 10 (October 1927), 1209–20, reprinted in William D. Angell, ed., *International Law of Youth Rights: Source Documents and Commentary* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1995), 57–69.

⁶²*The League of Nations from Year to Year: October 1926–October 1927* (Geneva: League of Nations Information Section, 1927), 102.

⁶³Zimmern, "Education in International Relations," 17.

⁶⁴Junior Red Cross, "Western School Journal 20, no. 1 (January 1925), 215.

drawing an indignant response from the local branch of the League of Nations Society of Canada.⁶⁵

For League advocates, the problem with history curricula was not only that they were too narrowly national but also that, as a result, they were too focused on a narrative of political and military events. By contrast, social history placed more emphasis “upon the likenesses of nations, upon their interdependence, upon the debts which the civilization of each owes to that of others.”⁶⁶ In addition, the conventional emphasis on political history all too often resulted in history books dwelling on what divided people rather than what they had in common: “Everywhere man interests himself in the same things; he founds religions, he builds houses, he clothes himself more or less elaborately, he makes verses. These similarities are the normal, and it is in the normal that the common history may become clear.”⁶⁷ Seen in this light, social history offered a way of enfolding national history in a wider transnational setting, thereby providing the League with a possible solution to its perennial problem of how to make history education less nationalist in a world where the sovereign nation-state was the preferred form of political organization.

League supporters saw this emphasis on social history as possessing another advantage: school-age students, especially in the earlier grades, would find it easier to understand and, therefore, more interesting. In Clarke’s words, “What we have to do is to take family relationships and houses and food-getting, and clothing, and money and shops, and postage-stamps, and communications and policemen, and dust-carts, and . . . try to see what they mean and how they are related.” And such teaching, Clarke argued, could easily be linked to the League of Nations and its work: “The League of Nations itself is merely a cumbrous and panoplied instrument for achieving in other fields just that kind of cooperation for which the postage-stamp stands.”⁶⁸

Probably the League’s most prominent spokesperson for a more student-centered approach to history teaching was psychologist Jean Piaget, director of the Geneva-based International Bureau of Education and a frequent collaborator with the League. Too many teenagers, he wrote in 1935, “look back with distaste on lessons in civics which are too theoretical, too abstract, and too often described national institutions as perfect, or, in any event, as sacrosanct.” Instead, teachers should

⁶⁵“Letter to the editor,” *The Manitoba Teacher*, December 1928, 13. For the reply from the local League of Nations Society, see “A Reply from Judge Stubbs,” *The Manitoba Teacher*, February 1929, 26.

⁶⁶Power, *A Bibliography for School Teachers of History*, 11.

⁶⁷Eileen Power, “The Teaching of History and World Peace,” in *Evolution of World-Peace*, ed. Francis S. Marvin (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 187.

⁶⁸Clarke, *Foundations of History-Teaching*, 59–60.

adopt approaches that "link up the past with present-day situations and problems, and constantly appeal to the intelligence, reason, imagination and common-sense of the young: 'This is the problem: What would you do? What else could have been done? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these solutions?'"⁶⁹

Not all historians agreed. The historian's duty, they insisted, was to describe the past as accurately as possible, letting the chips fall where they may. Writing in 1921, British medievalist F. M. Powicke argued that efforts to internationalize the teaching of history were "immoral" because they made the writing and teaching of history subordinate to the promotion of "a political cause, however noble, while professing to give impartial instruction about the past."⁷⁰ In 1922, another British historian, F. J. C. Hearnshaw of the University of London, protested that League supporters were "trespassing upon forbidden ground" by trying to control how teachers taught history, while their efforts, no matter how well intentioned, could only encourage all kinds of "embarrassing activity on the part of all sorts of propagandist Leagues."⁷¹ A 1923 Canadian report on the teaching of history and civics similarly noted that "There are grave dangers in assuming too readily that instruction is a natural medium for teaching either patriotism or internationalism."⁷² In 1928, the International Committee of Historical Sciences created a Commission on Teaching History that sponsored a survey of history teaching in schools, with an eye to the possible reshaping of history curricula along League lines. The relevant information was gathered and various national reports were published, but no further action resulted, largely due to the reluctance of many academic historians to become involved in school questions and to their fear that League advocates were turning history into a propaganda tool rather than respecting its scientific objectivity.⁷³

⁶⁹Jean Piaget, "Some Suggestions Concerning League Teaching," *Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching* 2 (December 1935), 188–89. See also his "Is Education for Peace Possible?" *Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching* 1 (December 1934), 17–23 and "The Spirit of Solidarity in Children and International Co-operation," *League of Nations Educational Survey* 2, 1 (January 1931), 11–27.

⁷⁰Frederick M. Powicke, "History Lessons and the League," *Manchester Guardian*, 12 March 1921, reprinted in Powicke, *Modern Historians and the Study of History: Essays and Papers* (London: Odhams Press, 1955), 160–61.

⁷¹*The Times*, 14 January 1922 and 23 January 1922 cited in McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations* (Manchester, University of Manchester Press, 2012), 23.

⁷²National Council of Education (Canada), *Observations on the Teaching of History and Civics in Primary and Secondary Schools of Canada* (Winnipeg: Office of the General Secretary, 1923), 10.

⁷³See Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Toward a Global Community of Historians: The International Historical Congresses and the International Committee of Historical Sciences 1898–2000*, edited by Jürgen Kocka & Wolfgang Mommsen in collaboration with Agnes Blansdorf (New York: Berghahn, 2005).

Others rejected the charge. According to prominent British historian G. P. Gooch, writing in 1930, "It is childish to accuse or suspect of propaganda those of us who endeavour to relate the new institution to the main stream of European history . . . If we have written history in the right way there is no need to alter a comma because the League of Nations came into being in 1920."⁷⁴ For Gooch, as for Rafael Altamira, one of Spain's leading historians, there was no contradiction between teaching history as a form of disinterested intellectual inquiry and using it to build a more peaceful world.⁷⁵ The University of London's R. W. Seton-Watson agreed, arguing that, while historians should never be propagandists, the study and teaching of contemporary history was nonetheless "one of the essential foundations on which a new world and a new mentality must be constructed."⁷⁶

More radically inclined reformers were not so sure. In France, for example, the national elementary schoolteachers' union, in the mid-1920s, came close to demanding the elimination of history from the curriculum altogether. In the words of Gaston Clémendot, the teacher who led this campaign, writing in 1924, "When people cease to fight by cannon fire, they continue the fight with history textbooks. And the battle by text paves the way for battle by cannon. History is a permanent state of war between nations."⁷⁷

The League Admits Defeat

In his 1929 inaugural lecture as Regius Professor at Oxford Powicke challenged all those League of Nations advocates who hoped to transform the teaching of history: "The persons who go about urging us to revise our teaching of history in the light of the League of Nations do not appear to realize that, in so far as they are historians and are not trying to force historical study into the service of politics, they are not controlling, and cannot control, the stream of thought, but are like bits

⁷⁴George P. Gooch, "History as a Training for Citizenship," *Contemporary Review* 137 (January/June 1930), 347–52, 347, 350.

⁷⁵Rafael Altamira, *Problèmes modernes de l'enseignement en vue de la conciliation entre les peuples et la paix morale* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1932).

⁷⁶R. W. Seton-Watson, "A Plea for the Study of Contemporary History," *History* 14, no. 53 (April 1929), 17.

⁷⁷Mona L. Siegel, "History is the Opposite of Forgetting': The Limits of Memory and the Lessons of History in Interwar France," *Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 4 (December 2002), 779. For more on Clémendot, see "A contre histoire: Gaston Clémendot, instituteur pacifiste, 1904–1952," *Histoire et politique: Revue électronique du Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po* (novembre-décembre, 2007), <http://www.histoire-politique.fr>. More generally, see Barnett Singer, "From Patriots to Pacifists: The French Primary School Teachers, 1880–1940," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 3 (July 1977), 413–34.

of wood, being carried along by it."⁷⁸ By the mid-1930s many League supporters were beginning to think he might be right. In 1934, Gilbert Murray, president of the ICIC since 1928, lamented what he described as "a certain loss of courage in the nations that have hitherto believed in peaceful education, since so many of their neighbours are blatantly training the young in war and hatred."⁷⁹ Simply put, the League's attempts to reform the teaching of history had been overtaken by events. In 1933, Japan and Germany withdrew from the League, followed by Italy in 1937. In 1934, the Geneva Disarmament Conference broke up without reaching any agreements. In 1935 and 1936 the League failed to take action against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and was sidelined in the Spanish Civil war. The 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact that had supposedly outlawed war proved to be worthless. In these circumstances, the international mind seemed increasingly difficult to attain.

This shift in mood goes some way to explaining why the ICIC in 1937 renamed its Advisory Committee on League of Nations Teaching to the Advisory Committee on the Teaching of the Principles and Facts of International Cooperation. A few years earlier, the International Federation of League of Nations Societies had made a similar move, resolving at its 1934 congress that "It is no longer sufficient merely to introduce into all schools an explanation of the aims of the League, the machinery it has created and the results it has obtained. All means of maintaining and developing an international culture in the minds both of children and of adults must be reinforced."⁸⁰ Thus, by the late 1930s, British schools were converting their student League of Nations branches into international affairs discussion groups.⁸¹ It is as if too close an association with what many observers increasingly saw as a failing organization was considered to be more of a handicap than an asset.

More mundanely, the ICIC realized that many schools were teaching their students something about the League, but all too often in the form of a few factual lessons devoid of any trace of the international mind. Some jurisdictions included a compulsory question on the League in their end-of-year high school history examinations and authorized the use of specially written booklets on the League in their schools, but, even in jurisdictions that supported (albeit selectively) the League's educational initiatives, most students seem to have remained impervious to

⁷⁸ Frederick M. Powicke, *Modern Historians and the Study of History: Essays and Papers* (London: Odhams Press, 1955), 177.

⁷⁹ Gilbert Murray, "International Education Today," *Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching* 1 (December 1934), 15–16.

⁸⁰ *International Federation of League of Nations Societies Bulletin* 35 (January–March 1935), 25–26.

⁸¹ McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, 122.

the claims of the international mind. In response, the ICIC belatedly re-defined its educational goals. As its Advisory Committee noted in 1938, "The aim is no longer to teach about the League of Nations itself, but to imbue teaching with the separate methods and traditions of that international cooperation of which the League is to-day the most important form." To put it another way: "The first idea of propaganda—or, if it is preferred, of propagation—has been replaced by the idea of study."⁸²

History teaching often took on a pro-League tone in North and South America, Britain and the British dominions, and Western Europe more generally, though without diminishing the emphasis given to the teaching of national and patriotic themes.⁸³ On an individual level, some teachers incorporated the ICIC's recommendations into their teaching, but their freedom of action was limited by the pressure of external examinations, curricular mandates, and parents' and supervisors' expectations. More fundamentally, the League's efforts to use history to cultivate the international mind faced the dissonant reality that students' lives were saturated by what Michael Billig calls the "banal nationalism" of everyday life. As Billig observes, "One cannot step outside the world of nations, nor rid oneself of the assumptions and common-sense habits which come from living within that world."⁸⁴ Moreover, in Asia, as in the colonial possessions of the European powers, in Eastern Europe, and the Middle East (not to mention Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany), nationalist leaders sought not to create the international mind but a new sense of collective identity rooted in an inward-looking version of national history. Reflecting on his long involvement with the League, Britain's Viscount Cecil wondered why it had failed to achieve the high hopes of its supporters, and concluded that the reason was that "a mass of patriotic sentiment and tradition stood in its way."⁸⁵ Despite its name, the League of Nations was a League, not of nations, but of governments, all intent on the pursuit of their national interests—a "squirmy heap of patriotisms" in H. G. Wells's dismissive phrase.⁸⁶

⁸²"Work of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation at its Twentieth Session," *League of Nations Official Journal* 19 (November 1938), 921.

⁸³For examples of League teaching in action, see Olive E. Shropshire, *The Teaching of History in English Schools* (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications, 1936); Mona L. Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism and Patriotism, 1914–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) esp. 123–59; and McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, 103–31.

⁸⁴Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 37.

⁸⁵Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, *All The Way* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), 163.

⁸⁶H. G. Wells, *Travels of a Radical Republican in Search of Hot Water* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1939), 121.

A particular, and unresolved, pedagogical problem was that, for many students, schooling was limited to the elementary grades while many educators believed that formal teaching about the League was inappropriate at that level. As the ICIC explained in 1932, its education experts "especially in the field of primary education, talk on the customs and living conditions of the different peoples, and their folklore and recite folk songs, in preference to lectures dealing directly with the League, which are apt to make the League appear as a very remote and often tedious subject."⁸⁷ In addition, teachers were advised to seize every opportunity to talk to students informally about "the existence of the League and briefly suggest the ideals of peace and fraternity among nations."⁸⁸ It was presumably in this spirit that the principal of a Canadian normal school told teachers in 1934: "In every school in Manitoba may their [*sic*] be a few minutes spent in telling children about the League and its good intentions, and its dependence upon the good-will of Canadians." To which he added, "Little need be said about the disappointments and failures."⁸⁹

What we do not know, and what is probably impossible to ascertain, is just what impact studying the League of Nations had on students. In 1934, a Canadian observer reported that Canadian students left school with only a "sketchy notion" of Canadian history and "an even more inadequate idea of world history."⁹⁰ In the United States, an investigation of social studies teaching in New York State reported that few classes went beyond the memorization of isolated facts and current affairs were largely ignored. To which a reviewer added the comment that "most social studies teachers can substitute the name of their own state for that of the Empire State and feel perfectly at home."⁹¹ In England, an American observer reported that many teachers had little regard for history as an academic subject, with the result that its teaching, including teaching about the League of Nations, left much to be desired.⁹² It seems that the result was that students left school knowing but, as with most historical information learned in school, soon forgetting some basic facts about the League, and without acquiring any particular attachment to it or,

⁸⁷*The League from Year to Year: October 1st, 1931–December 31st, 1932* (Geneva: League of Nations Information Section, 1933), 150.

⁸⁸"International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation: Sub-committee of Experts for the Instruction of Children and Youth in the Existence and Aims of the League of Nations," *League of Nations Official Journal* 8, 10 (October 1927), 1217.

⁸⁹William A. MacIntyre, "The League of Nations," *Western School Journal* 39, no. 12 (December 1934), 315.

⁹⁰S. B. Watson, "A Layman's View of the Teaching of History," *Canadian Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (June 1934), 155.

⁹¹Edgar C. Bye, review of *High School and Life: The Regents' Inquiry*, by Francis T. Spaulding, *The Social Studies* 30, no. 6 (October 1939), 282–83.

⁹²Shropshire, *The Teaching of History in English Schools*.

indeed, to the ideals of the international mind that it claimed to embody. Thomas Nygren's description of Sweden seems to hold true for all countries: "Questions regarding solidarity and cooperation promulgated by the League of Nations . . . had no dramatic impact on Swedish history teaching."⁹³ As a French normal school principal observed in 1934, "Does war count among the worries of our students? They think of it a little, but one has the impression that they do not think about it much."⁹⁴ The 1931 assessment of a Canadian historian seems to apply to all countries: "Canadians are not hostile to the League but they are not yet internationally minded."⁹⁵

Scorned by such critics as Wells and ferociously satirized by George Bernard Shaw, the ICIC was unable to shake the curricular dominance of nation-building history in schools.⁹⁶ In the retrospective judgment of the deputy secretary-general of the League, the ICIC "rendered many useful services" but proved unable to cope with the "dangers of national hatreds and national ambitions"—ambitions, one might add, that were all too often rooted in people's (mis)understanding of history.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, if nothing else, the ICIC offered an alternative vision of what history teaching might be while also lending its support to such pedagogical trends as the turn to social history and student-centered teaching methods that were taking shape independently of anything the League did. For the American Historical Association's Commission on the Social Studies, for example, reporting in 1934, the ideal social studies curriculum should give students "a broad and comprehensive conception of the evolution of civilization . . . embracing the diverse contributions of races and peoples, religions and cultures, and giving a broad perspective of the fortunes, problems, and achievements of mankind" while also including study of "the rivalries, the conflicts of interest, and the underlying causes of war among the nations, and of all efforts directed towards the promotion of peace and the rational ordering of the life of mankind."⁹⁸ Except for the omission

⁹³Thomas Nygren, "International Reformation of Swedish History Education 1927–1961: The Complexity of Implementing International Understanding," *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (June 2011), 351.

⁹⁴Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France*, 225.

⁹⁵Frank H. Soward, *Canada and the League of Nations* (Ottawa: League of Nations Society of Canada, 1931), 36.

⁹⁶H. G. Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1931), 700–703; George Bernard Shaw, *Geneva* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), esp. Act 1.

⁹⁷Frank P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 190.

⁹⁸American Historical Association and August C. Krey, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the Commission* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1934), 51–53.

of any explicit mention of the League, the League's Subcommittee of Experts could not have said it better.

One could argue, albeit not too strenuously, that the ICIC helped lay the groundwork for such post-1945 pedagogical developments as the turn to world history and global issues courses in schools, and, most recently, for the transnational history embodied in the Organization of American Historians's *La Pietra Report* and the (literally) universalist approach of Big History.⁹⁹ More specifically, the ICIC laid the foundation for the creation of UNESCO in 1945. Thus, for example, UNESCO began its constitution with a statement that knowingly embodied the thinking of the ICIC: "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." Moreover, such ICIC stalwarts as Murray and Zimmern were active in the discussions that led to the establishment of UNESCO, with Zimmern serving as secretary-general of its founding conference. In fact, had it not been for a sudden illness, Zimmern seemed set to become UNESCO's first secretary-general.¹⁰⁰

Apart from the entrenched strength of the tradition of national history in the schools, there is also a very down-to-earth reason for the ICIC's lack of immediate success: it simply lacked the resources and the status it needed if it was to achieve its goals. To quote the deputy secretary-general of the League of Nations, it was "created amidst skepticism" and "hindered in its natural growth by lack of funds."¹⁰¹ In the assessment of one committee member, American historian James Shotwell, it was "looked at askance by governments and never taken seriously by the world of scholarship and science."¹⁰² Moreover, not all governments were persuaded that intellectual cooperation (including education) should be a League priority. According to Gilbert Murray, the ICIC's long-serving president, "It was sometimes said at Geneva that the only subject on which all the (British) Dominions and the Mother Country were sure to be unanimous was in voting against intellectual co-operation," though he added that "The gibe was not quite

⁹⁹See, for example, David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004) and Ross E. Dunn, "The Two World Histories," in *National History Standards: The Problem of the Canon and the Future of Teaching History*, eds. Linda Symcox and Arie Wildschut (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2009), 55–69.

¹⁰⁰John Toye has argued that the British government took advantage of Zimmern's illness to withdraw their support for him, fearing that his classicist humanism left him too unsympathetic to the claims of science. John Toye and Richard Toye, "One World, Two Cultures: Alfred Zimmern, Julian Huxley, and the Ideological Origins of UNESCO," *History* 95, no. 319 (July 2010), 308–21.

¹⁰¹Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 193.

¹⁰²James T. Shotwell, foreword to Isaac L. Kandel, *Intellectual Cooperation: National and International* (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications, 1944), ix.

true; the imperfectly Anglo-Saxon Dominion of India always dared to approve of the intellect."¹⁰³

In the words of one historian, "Ultimately, perhaps any effective League was impossibly Utopian, while any practicable League was no more than a verbal disguise for the continuation of existing practices."¹⁰⁴ This certainly describes the experience of the ICIC, which found itself trapped between an unrealizable vision of a future utopia and the day-to-day exigencies of political practicality in its attempt to reshape the teaching of history. In any event, from the mid-1930s onward the League-inspired reform of history teaching lost much of whatever appeal it had once commanded. With the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe and Japanese militarism in Asia, military rearmament, not moral disarmament, had become the order of the day.

¹⁰³ Gilbert Murray, *From the League to the U.N.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Roland N. Stromberg, "Uncertainties and Obscurities about the League of Nations," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33, no. 1 (January 1972), 140.