

Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä

“Collaboration of the press in the organisation of peace”

The League of Nations as a catalyst for important intellectual trends

I. Introduction

The first draft of this chapter was presented as a conference paper already nearly 40 years ago.¹ It was the United Nations International Year of Peace 1986, and the conference was entitled “Communication and Peace: The Role of Media in International Relations”. A broader context was the rise of the “Third World” or “Global South”, with the United Nations calling for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The forgotten story of the League of Nations and the mass media turned out to be surprisingly topical for ongoing debates on international communication, which throughout the 1980s were concerned with global media policies, including calls for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).²

The reason making Nordenstreng look at media-related activities of the League of Nations was his book on the history of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), under preparation in the mid-1980s.³ The book was intended to be a normal celebratory volume for the 40th anniversary of the IOJ, but the prehistory of the Organization since the first-ever journalists’ conference in Antwerp in 1894 proved so fascinating that it occupied the whole book, making it Part I of a three-volume series entitled *Useful Recollections*. A separate book was published 30 years later, presenting a full history of the international associations of journalists.⁴ Seppä, for her part, focused on international organizations in her studies in the 1980s and also served as a secretary for social sciences at the Finnish National Committee for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This naturally led to topics of moral disarmament and the League of Nations⁵ and also to her later interest in the United Nations⁶.

Accordingly, in 1986 the topic attracted considerable attention among international communication researchers as well as among journalist union leaders. However, little further research

¹ Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tarja Seppä, “The League of Nations and the Mass Media: The Rediscovery of a Forgotten Story” (XV Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR/AIERI), New Delhi, 1986), https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2019/12/f0b91383-the_league_of_nations_and_the_mass_media.pdf.

² See: Seán MacBride, *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order (Report by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems)*, Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow (London, New York: K. Page; Unipub, 1980); George Gerbner, Hamid Mowlana, and Kaarle Nordenstreng, eds., *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall, and Renewal*, The Communication and Information Science Series (Norwood, N.J: Ablex Pub, 1993).

³ Jiri Kubka and Kaarle Nordenstreng, *Useful Recollections Part I: Excursion into the History of the International Movement of Journalists* (Prague: International Organization of Journalists, 1986).

⁴ Kaarle Nordenstreng et al., *A History of the International Movement of Journalists: Professionalism Versus Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁵ Tarja Seppä, “Moraalisesta aseidenriisunnasta ja sen merkityksestä rauhanurvaamiselle [in Finnish: On Moral Disarmament and Its Meaning to Peace Keeping],” *Raubantutkimus* 2, no. 3 (1986): 57–75.

⁶ Tarja Seppä, *Responsibility to Protect as a United Nations Security Council Practice in South Sudan* (Tampere: Tampere University, 2019), <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/115336>.

followed on the topic, and even the present authors were engaged in other issues, Nordenstreng reverting to the topic only occasionally⁷ and indirectly in his project on the history of the international movement of journalists.⁸ After all, our paper of 1986 was just an offshoot of a broader study on doctrines of international communication – not a project itself focusing exclusively on the League and the media. It took until the late 2010s for a research program at Bremen University to raise the topic in its own right.

Our early exercise led us to discover historical material under three subtitles:

- “Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace” – activities related to the general operative conditions of the press, with landmarks such as international expert conferences in Geneva (1927), Copenhagen (1932) and Madrid (1933).
- “Moral Disarmament” – activities related to the first Disarmament Conference in Geneva (1932-33).
- “Modern Means of Spreading Information Utilised in the Cause of Peace” – activities related to cinema and broadcasting, including the 1936 landmark Convention on the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace.

These will be revisited below. Then we review the context and the heritage of the League of Nations for the post-war world and its media. First, however, we summarize the main characteristics of the League of Nations.

2. The Idea of the League

After World War I, with its horrors still fresh in people’s minds, it was believed that a new era was to begin in international relations. Power politics and covert diplomacy were regarded as major reasons for the outbreak of war. Now the time had come to replace them with *international cooperation*, *collective security* and *open diplomacy*.⁹

The Covenant of the League of Nations was part of the Treaty of Versailles. The formulation of the Covenant was the work of a special committee established by the Paris Peace Conference. The committee was chaired by the President of the United States (US), Woodrow Wilson, who wanted the drafting of the Covenant and the establishing of the League to be an integral part of the whole Peace Conference, giving it priority over other difficult problems¹⁰. Peace was to be the supreme value and goal. The League used “peace propaganda” – a positive phrase at the time – as a means to world peace.¹¹

⁷ Kaarle Nordenstreng, “The Forgotten History of Global Communication Negotiations at the League of Nations,” in *The World Summit on the Information Society: Moving from the Past into the Future*, ed. Daniel Stauffacher and Wolfgang Kleinwächter (New York: UN Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (ICT Task Force Series 8), 2005), 119–24, <https://sites.tuni.fi/kaarle/nordenstreng-publications/>.

⁸ Nordenstreng et al., *History of the International Movement*.

⁹ On the organization of this so-called open diplomacy by the Information Section of the League, see the chapter by Stefanie Averbek-Lietz in this book.

¹⁰ Inis L. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1971); George Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

¹¹ Tomoko Akami, “The Limits of Peace Propaganda: The Information Section of the League of Nations and its Tokyo office,” in *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations*, ed. Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi J. S. Tworek (London: Routledge, 2018), 70–71.

Activities related to peace were multilateral and were intended to shape “norms of global governance”¹². The Covenant has been described as “a testament to the aspiration of man to govern his affairs by reason, to assert the concept of justice into the settlement of international disputes and to enshrine the collective interest of all nations a supreme above the interests of any group of nations or of any individual nations”¹³. In the preamble:

The High Contracting Parties,
 in order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security,
 by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war,
 by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations,
 by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and
 by the maintenance of justice and scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another,
 Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.

Disarmament also emerged after World War I as a principal objective and was recorded in the Covenant’s Article 8, which begins as follows:

The Members of the League recognize that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.

Disarmament was not considered to entail only material disarmament but also moral disarmament.¹⁴ Moral disarmament was to be achieved through education, intellectual collaboration, legislation, cinema, broadcasting and the press. Especially the latter three could be used to influence public opinion.¹⁵

¹² Preserving peace was an established objective in international thinking long before the League. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 was a predecessor of international organizations, followed by the Concert of Europe, meeting from 1830 to 1884. Finally, the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 strove to regulate the laws of war as a means to preserve peace. See Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe, and Roger A. Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 4th ed. (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2004), 4-5.

¹³ Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, 15.

¹⁴ League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and Intellectual Co-Operation* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1927), <https://archives.unige.ch/the-league-of-nations-and-intellectual-co-operation>, 43.

¹⁵ James Fry and Saroj Nair, “Moral Disarmament: Reviving a Legacy of the Great War,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 40, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 1–45.

One of the leading ideas was that the League should work in public and give wide publicity to its activities, thereby marking the dawn of open diplomacy. The League relied upon the impact of public opinion in international relations. Wilson called the League “the court of public opinion”¹⁶.

It was natural, then, that the League assigned quite a new role to the mass media – it was indeed possible to speak of a “close and almost constitutional link between the League, the Press and general publicity”, as noted in a booklet *The League of Nations and the Press*, presented at the International Press Exhibition PRESSA in Cologne in 1928¹⁷. This publication begins with the following characteristic statement:

It was the clear intention of the founders of the League of Nations that it should mark the beginning of a new era in international relations; and it was equally clear that in their minds one of the essential conditions was a complete departure from the old methods of secret diplomacy. From the beginning, the guiding principle of the new organisation has been to give the widest publicity to its activities, and nowadays publicity as a rule means the Press. The League works in public – that is to say, in the presence of and with the Press. The Press and publicity are part and parcel of the general conception of the League of Nations, and this has involved the establishment of relations which are entirely novel as between an official organisation and the independent newspaper world.

The role of the press was stressed already at the Paris Peace Conference, but no measures were taken at that time.¹⁸ It was through the League that the press achieved a new and institutionalized role in international relations, reflected by developments such as the gathering of foreign correspondents at the League.¹⁹ The press was indeed incorporated into the system of international relations in an unprecedented manner – comparable only to the step, taken much earlier, when the press assumed its central role in liberal democracy by operating as the fourth power next to the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.²⁰

¹⁶ Claude, *Swords into Plowshares*, 52.

¹⁷ League of Nations. Secretariat, *The League of Nations and the Press: International Press Exhibition, Cologne, May to October 1928* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1928), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/the-league-of-nations-and-the-press-2>, 7; Stephanie Seul, “Trägerin des europäischen Gemeinschaftsgedankens – lebendige Magna Charta des Friedens: Die politische Dimension der PRESSA Köln 1928 und ihr Wiederhall in der zeitgenössischen deutschen und internationalen Presse,” in *Die Pressa: Internationale Presseausstellung Köln 1928 und der jüdische Beitrag zum modernen Journalismus*, ed. Susanne Marten-Finnis and Michael Nagel, Band 1 (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2012), 57–104.

¹⁸ See United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information, “The Freedom of the Press: Some Historical Notes” (E/CONF.6/4, February 11, 1948). The proposals of 1918-19 originated from President Wilson’s chief communication advisor, Walter S. Rogers, whose papers were published in 1944, in Report of the Team of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University in New York.

¹⁹ Paul Franklin Douglass and Karl Bömer, “The Press as a Factor in International Relations,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 162 (1932): 241–72.

²⁰ See Birgit Lange, *Medienpolitik des Völkerbundes* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991). For the journalistic body and its traits, see the chapter by Arne L. Gellrich and Erik Koenen in this book.

3. “Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace”

On 16 September 1925 the delegate for Chile, Eliodoro Yanez, addressed at the 12th plenary session of the League Assembly:

We must stimulate among the people that new spirit which the war produced and which the League of Nations is trying to spread throughout the world. (...)

I can conceive no more effective method of forming this new spirit than by influencing the minds of peoples through the Press and moulding the future generations in the schools.

With regard to the Press, I suggest for your consideration the idea of unifying its directive action on public opinion and its moral influence over Governments.

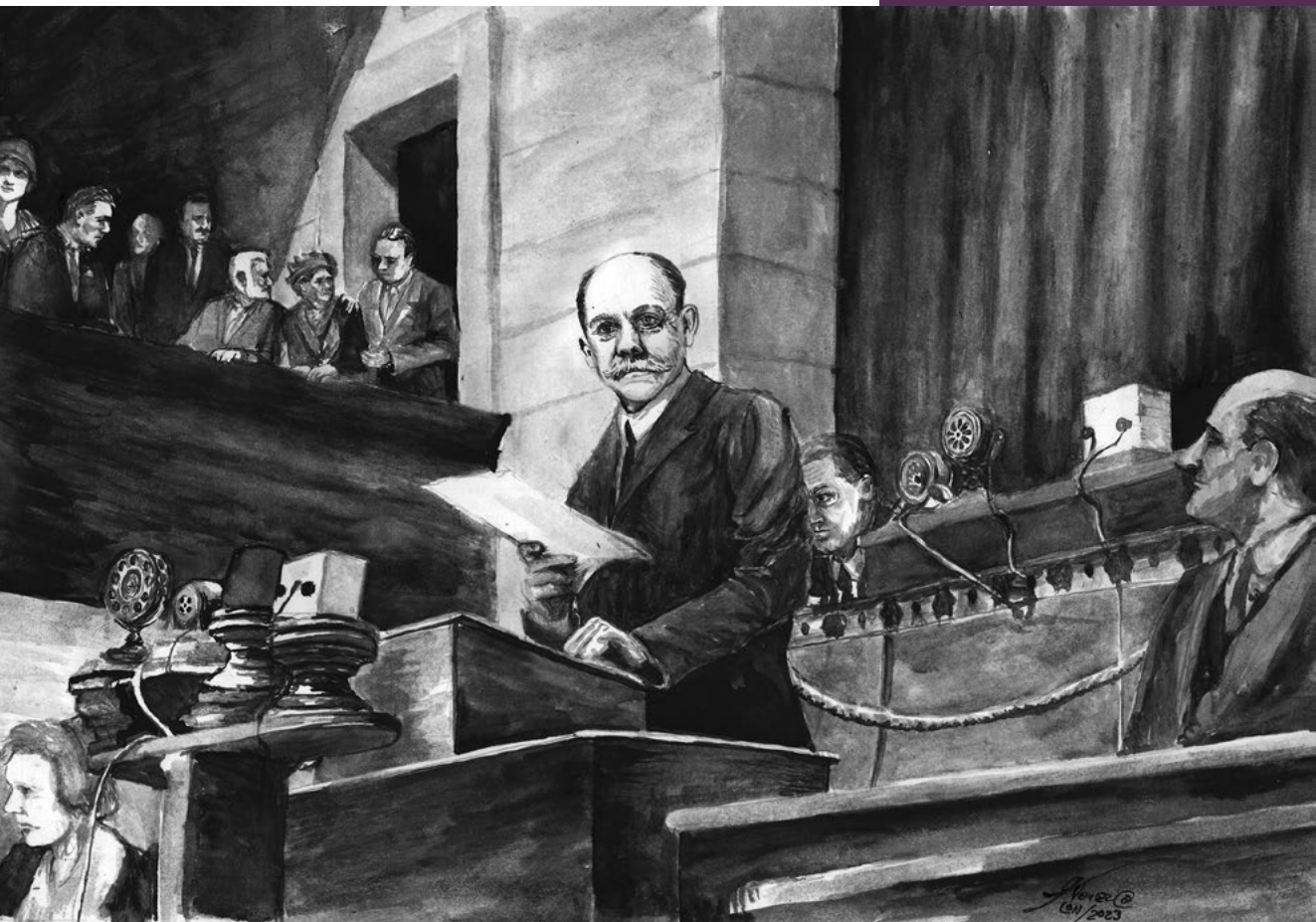
Journalism has in every country but one meaning in its spirit and in its essence, because it is and should be the reflection of the ideas of liberty, progress and morality.

A universal bond of feeling unites all men and all peoples on the question of peace and the welfare of the working classes. The Press is the vanguard of these ideas, and that is why I submit the following draft resolution to the Assembly. (...)

I wonder if this idea can be considered as coming within the scope of the action and mission of the League? Can the League call upon the Press of the entire world to collaboration in the work of world fraternity, in that powerful intellectual movement which will be the best guarantee of security, disarmament and arbitration? I believe it can.

If the League of Nations is not legally entitled to do so, it at least possesses the moral authority to take this step, and I think it should do so.²¹

²¹ League of Nations, “Co-Operation of the Press in the Organization of Peace: Resolution of the Sixth Assembly” (C.611.M.196.1925, October 12, 1925), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/co-operation-of-the-press-in-the-organisation-of-peace-resolution-of-the-sixth-assembly>. All the following quotations are from original League documents (however without giving references in each case). We have used the codes of original documents copied from the physical archives in 1986, while nowadays the documents can be found at <https://archives.ungeneva.org/lontad>.



The Chilean delegate Eliodoro Yanez speaking before the Assembly. (reconstructive watercolour rendering based on contemporary photographs, Arne Gellrich)

The initiative was welcomed by a number of delegations – Spain, Uruguay, the British Empire, France, China... Among the interesting details in the debate on the Chilean proposal (in the sixth Committee of the Assembly, dealing with political questions) was the intervention by the Hungarian delegate, Albert Apponyi. According to the proceedings he

recalled that at the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference which took place in Paris in 1900, he had sponsored a similar proposal which had been submitted to that meeting. That attempt had entirely failed, because it had been too ambitious. It had aimed at imposing a certain guidance on all organs of the Press; this was contradictory to the very nature of the Press, the organs of which were jealous of their freedom.

In appealing to the Press to collaborate in the work of universal conciliation, care must be taken not to repeat this mistake; no attempt should be made to dominate the Press or to make it dependent on any organ of the League of Nations, but it should have access to the sources of information at the disposal of the League. If the Chilean proposal were applied in this sense, it might bear fruit.

The Belgian delegate, Paul Hymans, was entrusted with summarizing the results of this debate to the full Assembly on 25 September 1925. He wrote in his report:

I need not emphasise here the part played by the Press in international life. The newspapers are fundamental to all the judgements which public opinion in each country passes on the other nations of the world. It is for this reason that the Press can exercise a considerable influence in favour of the establishment of better international relations and can contribute more effectively perhaps than any other institution to that moral disarmament which is the concomitant condition of material disarmament.

The Chilean proposal is undoubtedly a bold one. The Press, like all great Powers, is rightly jealous of its independence. We must therefore approach the vast and delicate problem raised by this resolution with great circumspection. I wish to make it clear at the outset that the League of Nations does not wish to interfere in the affairs of the Press, and will only interest itself in them if the journalists themselves consider that its assistance would be valuable. (...)

The following is the text of the resolution which I ask you to adopt:

The Assembly,

Considering that the Press constitutes the most effective means of guiding public opinion towards that moral disarmament which is a concomitant condition of material disarmament;

Invites the Council to consider the desirability of conceiving a committee of experts representing the Press of the different continents with a view to determining methods of contributing towards the organisation of peace, especially:

(a) By ensuring the more rapid and less costly transmission of Press news with a view to reducing risks of international misunderstanding;

(b) And by discussing all technical problems the settlement of which would be conducive to the tranquillisation of public opinion.

This *Resolution on Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation on Peace* – a slightly modified version of the original Chilean proposal – was adopted unanimously on the same day. It was the first resolution on the role of the mass media to be adopted by the League Assembly – indeed the first overall position regarding the mass media that has ever been taken by the international community through its multilateral organization.

It is a remarkable resolution not only because of its historic nature but also due to its political and professional substance. It sets the agenda for the deliberation of technical problems, not only in loose relation to a political context but explicitly subordinated to the overall objective of peace and international understanding. In this respect, it can be seen as an early version of the 1978 Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO – a shorter but more outspoken version than had been produced by the international community 53 years later.²² Moreover, the 1925 resolution combines press and disarmament – two topics which, over time, have become increasingly controversial.

The resolution was followed by a round of consultations with various countries and international associations (replies from more than 25 countries by March 1926), a meeting of 16 news agencies in August 1926, a meeting of press bureaux of 17 countries in October 1926, as well as an ad hoc committee drawn from the members of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations in January 1927.

On the basis of these preparations, the League Council decided at its 44th session in March 1927 to convene a *Conference of Press Experts in Geneva in August 1927*²³. The Conference, according to its declaration,

brought together sixty-three experts, twenty assessors, and thirty-five technical advisers, from thirty-eight countries, Members or non-Members of the League, representing not only the different continents of the world but also the different categories within the Press itself, of newspaper proprietors, news-agency representatives, journalists, and directors of official Press bureaux.

The declaration went on to express the appreciation of the Conference among other things “of the principle laid down by the Council and Assembly of the League that there should be no interference whatsoever with the independence of the Press”. At the end of the declaration the Conference

²² Kaarle Nordenstreng and Lauri Hannikainen, *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*, Communication and Information Science (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub. Corp, 1984).

²³ The Final Report of this Conference of Press Experts was published as League of Nations document: League of Nations, “Conference of Press Experts: Geneva, August 1927: Final Report” (Conf.E.P.13, October 25, 1927), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/0000676844-d0015>. See Emil Eiby Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor: The League of Nations and the Combating of ‘False Information,’” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon Ikonomou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 188–99; Heidi J. S. Tworek, “Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations,” *Medien Und Zeit* 25, no. 4 (2010): 16–28.

Adopts the following programme in order that journalists may have every facility in residing, travelling, securing news and improving their professional equipment, and that news itself may be free at the source, expedited in every possible way in its transmission, protected before and after publication against unfair appropriation, and given the widest possible dissemination, to the end that the work of the Press may be made more effective in its responsible mission accurately and conscientiously to inform world public opinion and hence to contribute directly to the preservation of peace and the advancement of civilisation;

And adopts the following special resolutions, based on technical, professional, and international considerations, as the first steps towards carrying this programme into effect.

The resolutions cover, mostly in great detail, more or less technical questions such as press rates, the coding of press messages, the improvement of communications, the transport of newspapers, postal subscriptions to newspapers, the protection of news, the professional facilities of journalists (with 10 sub-points) and censorship in peace time. But among “Miscellaneous Resolutions” there are also two which directly address the politically sensitive content of the mass media:

Publication or Distribution of Tendentious News

Fully cognisant of the fact that the publication or distribution of obviously inaccurate, highly exaggerated, or deliberately distorted news or articles is calculated to cause undesirable misunderstandings among nations and suspicions detrimental to international peace;

And desiring to promote among people the growth of mutual understanding, necessary to world peace;

This Conference expresses the desire that the newspapers and news agencies of the world should deem it their duty to take stringent measures to avoid the publication or distribution of such news or articles, and should also consider the possibility of active international cooperation for the attainment of this purpose, which is in conformity with the spirit of the League of Nations.

Moral Disarmament

The Conference makes a warm appeal to the Press of the world to contribute by every means at its disposal to the consolidation of peace, to combat hatred between nationalities and between classes which are the greatest dangers to peace, and to prepare the way for moral disarmament.

The latter of these was adopted unanimously (as was the case with most of the resolutions), but the former was adopted by 27 votes to two. Here is an early indication of the controversy surrounding the role of the media in international relations – in particular with respect to the content of communication. However, the dominant feature of this Conference was harmony in the spirit of the League, as is aptly articulated by the closing words of the President, Lord Harry Burnham, proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*:

Public opinion is, in the long run, the sovereign power in the government of men. As the trustees of public opinion, we Pressmen have a heavy and constant responsibility to our fellows. All I can hope and pray is that this Conference has deepened and enlarged our consciousness – not a class consciousness, but a general consciousness – of what we owe to mankind, still in the making and re-making, in giving such light and leading as we can to concord and collaboration for the common good.

The results of the Conference were welcomed by the League Council at its subsequent 46th session in September 1927. One of the speakers on that occasion was Sir Austen Chamberlain:

It is obvious that the large body of resolutions passed by this important gathering merit, and must receive, the closest attention of the Governments. (...) There is, however, one resolution which has not yet been mentioned, which I read as a promise of cooperation with the Members of this Council and with all men of goodwill in all parts of the world. I refer to the resolution entitled “Moral Disarmament” (...) I am sure that the collaboration of the Press in such a work is of equal consequence, and may be of even greater influence than anything that statesmen can do, and I welcome this assurance and this pledge that the Conference is prepared to devote its energies to this work.

The Council referred the most technical issues to the Organisation for Communications and Transit, while other resolutions including those on the protection of news and on the professional facilities of journalists were followed up by the Council in consultation with different governments. No spectacular achievements seem to have resulted in this area in the course of the following few years.

The next major step was taken in the early 1930s, in the context of the 1932-33 World Disarmament Conference – and a deteriorating international situation. The *Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press was convened in Copenhagen in January 1932*. The scope of this Conference was less technical than that of the 1927 Geneva Conference and its main resolutions were concerned with inaccurate news reporting, the rest covering follow-up of the Geneva Conference and cooperation of official press bureaux.²⁴ The resolutions on inaccurate news include, among others, the following:

The Committee of Heads of Official Press Bureaux believes it its duty to proclaim that the campaign against the dissemination of inaccurate news is one of the necessities of international life, and, as regards the methods of pursuing this campaign, to formulate the following observations:

One of the most effective means of combatting inaccurate information is the rapid spread of accurate and abundant information through the agency of the Press Bureaux. Should accurate news not be forthcoming, there is the risk that the Press may show a tendency to seek its information at other and less well-informed sources and to accept, without verifying it, information which is often inaccurate and sometimes tendentious (...).

²⁴ The Final Document of this Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press was published as document: League of Nations, “Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace” (C.96.1932, January 25, 1932), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/collaboration-de-la-presse-a-lorganisation-de-la-paix-collaboration-of-the-press-in-the-organisation-of-peace>.

(Committee of Press Representatives),

Solemnly confirming to the Conference that the international Press, while maintaining its integral right to a fully justified liberty, intends to play its part as distributor of information by propagating only news which, in good faith, it regards as accurate and truthful;

Considering that the most effective means of combating the dissemination of false or inaccurate news is for the Official Press Bureaux, as far as their information is concerned, to furnish authentic news as quickly as possible (...).

(Committee of International Organisations of Journalists),

The Committee considers that the measures that may be taken to avoid the dissemination of inaccurate news should never affect the freedom of the Press, but that this freedom involves the responsibility of journalists as its necessary corollary.

In this spirit, the Committee notes that the international federative organisations represented at the Conference guarantee the intention of their national sections to enforce the observance of the code of honour of journalism by their members and, in the event of serious infractions, to exclude the guilty persons from the said associations and to deprive them momentarily of their status as members of these groups.

The Committee notes the existence of an International Court of Honour, founded by the International Federation of Journalists as a result of the joint initiative of that Federation and the International Association of Journalists accredited to the League of Nations (...).

The Copenhagen Conference was followed by the *Second Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press, convened in Madrid in November 1933*.²⁵ It was convened on the basis of the hope expressed by the 13th Assembly of the League of Nations that definite proposals might be made with a view to “giving effect to some of the principal suggestions offered by the Press Organizations during the enquiry into the problem of the spread of false information which might threaten to disturb the peace of the world and the good understanding between nations”.

The Madrid Conference reviewed the action taken under the Copenhagen resolutions and considered various related problems, such as the right to correct false information in the international field, the intellectual role of the press, broadcasting and international relations, and the status of press correspondents in foreign countries. According to the Conference Report, the discussions “showed that all those who participated remained faithful to the spirit of the resolutions adopted by the Copenhagen Conference of 1932”. The Madrid conclusions also “noted that certain progress had been made on the lines indicated in the principal resolutions of the Copenhagen Conference.” Two main ideas were emphasized as a particular result of the Copenhagen Conference, “namely, freedom of the press, full authentic information communicated as soon as possible to the press”. Eleven interesting resolutions followed, with a number of reservations and pronouncements by individual delegates. Among the unanimously adopted resolutions were the following two, relating to the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation, founded in 1926 as the technical secretariat and executive body to the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation of the League:

²⁵ Second Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press, Madrid 1933, see League of Nations, “League of Nations Official Journal,” (vol. XV, no. 2 (Part II), 1934).

The Conference,

having noted the first and very notable volume published by the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation concerning the “intellectual role of the press”, which it hopes will be translated into several languages and be circulated as widely as possible.

Addresses its warmest congratulations to the Institute on the successful initial results of this enquiry.

And trusts that the enquiry will be continued with the same success in order to develop, through the press, a better mutual understanding between the nations.

The Conference,

having noted the results of the enquiry carried out by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation on broadcasting and international relations.

Considers it desirable that the broadcasting services in the various countries should be maintained in such a way as not to affect the good understanding between nations.

And regards it as particularly necessary, in respect of information services, that the agency, newspaper, or official organization responsible for such services should always be indicated by the transmitting station.

Another resolution concerned the continuation of these conferences:

The Conference,

gratified by the results already achieved in the meetings at Copenhagen and Madrid,

expresses the desire that such meetings should be periodical and that a Committee, appointed for the purpose for each Conference, should be responsible for preparing the organization of the new Conference in agreement with the Government of the inviting country and with the cooperation of the Information Section of the Secretariat of the League of Nations after previous consultations with the various press groups concerned.

However, this resolution was never implemented. The mounting contradictions in the international political atmosphere brought these activities to a halt.

4. “Moral Disarmament”

From the very outset, questions related to disarmament assumed a prominent role at the League of Nations. As early as during the war Woodrow Wilson had demanded that disarmament be made an essential part of the coming peace order. There were many prominent men at the League who thought that the most important question was to secure the implementation of the pledges of Article 8 and that the League would probably not survive unless the arms race could be ended, and the level of world armaments reduced.²⁶

Also, from the beginning, moral disarmament²⁷ was understood to be an essential aspect of the general concept of disarmament. Thus, for example, the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, founded in 1922²⁸, set itself the aims “to work for moral disarmament and international reconciliation by developing intellectual co-operation among countries through the world and to assist scientific work and place intellectual life on a higher level by that co-operation”.²⁹

The League started to prepare a World Disarmament Conference in 1925 – the year of the first mass media resolution. In December 1925 the Council set up a body, a Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, to prepare a draft treaty on which the Conference would begin its work. The Council had advised the Commission to concentrate solely on the technical problems of disarmament. The obvious problem was that disarmament was not and is not a technical issue. This had already been noted at the First Assembly of the League (1920) which pointed out to the necessity of considering the whole series of political, social and economic problems.³⁰

It was not before 1930 that the Commission produced a Draft Convention for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments. This was intended to provide a framework by means of which the limitation and reduction of armaments might be achieved. It was not an approved document; the disagreements were not just between the countries but also within them. But this gave the coming Conference freedom to consider any other text or proposal which might be submitted.

At the last session of the Preparatory Commission on 9 December 1930 the Polish delegation drew the Commission’s attention to the particular aspect of security: the achievement of general moral disarmament.³¹ The connection between material and moral disarmament was stressed – a point already made in the press resolution of 1925 – and a “moral detente” was considered necessary both for relations among nations in general and also specifically for the success of the coming

²⁶ Philip Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference 1932-33: And Why It Failed* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), 54.

²⁷ See “League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation Research Guide: Moral Disarmament,” United Nations Archives Geneva, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lonintellectualcooperation/moraldisarmament>.

²⁸ See “League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation Research Guide: Initial Steps and Institution of the ICIC,” United Nations Archives Geneva, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lonintellectualcooperation/ICIC>.

²⁹ League of Nations. Secretariat, *League of Nations and Intellectual Co-Operation*, 43. On this committee, see also the chapter by Jürgen Wilke in this book.

³⁰ Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, 189-190. See also League of Nations, “League of Nations Official Journal,” (no. 2, February 3, 1932), 10-11.

³¹ League of Nations, “Documents of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference Entrusted with the Preparation for the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Series X. Minutes of the Sixth Session (Second Part) of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference” (C.4.M.4.1931.IX, January 15, 1931), <https://archives.un Geneva.org/documents-of-the-preparatory-commission-for-the-disarmament-conference-entrusted-with-the-preparation-for-the-conference-for-the-reduction-and-limitation-of-armaments-series-x-minutes-of-the-sixth-session-second-part-of-the-preparatory>, 415-416.

Disarmament Conference. The Polish delegation further pointed out to the obvious contradictions between demands for the reduction of armaments or demands for total disarmament and increasingly violent propaganda of hatred tending to promote disorder and even war – false information about other countries appearing in the press. The demand was that by and with the press world public opinion must be convinced of the absolute necessity of practical results in moral disarmament:

It would certainly be possible, by mutual undertaking, to arrest the hate-inspired propaganda; it would certainly be possible to compel States to rectify false information about other countries which is current in public opinion or appears in the Press or in literature; it would certainly be possible to have war propaganda recognised as a crime by the law of all countries. Many other measures could also be contemplated.

The Swedish government also brought this problem and the question of the press to the attention of the Special Committee for the preparation of a Draft General Convention to improve the Means of Preventing War in a letter, dated 25 April 1931.³² The letter stressed the function and influence of the press during periods of international crisis:

It is impossible to exaggerate the danger that may arise in such cases from irresponsible press campaigns and the publication in the newspapers of inaccurate or biased reports regarding international relations, and real value might attach to a formal condemnation of such journalistic methods by the Governments. I realise, of course, how dangerous it is to give any impression of wishing to interfere with the principle of the freedom of the press; this principle is one of the foundations of Swedish public law, and the Swedish Government holds that it should in no case be violated. At the same time, there are circumstances in which aggressive propaganda against a foreign Power may take such offensive forms, and assume such a threatening character, as to constitute a real danger to peace. In such cases the Council of the League, when endeavouring to settle the conflict, should be able to discuss what steps can be taken to put an end to such propaganda. This idea has been suggested to me by the President of the Swedish Red Cross, and I think it is worthy of consideration.

As a basis for the Special Committee's discussions, the Swedish Government submitted the following proposal which may have been embodied in the Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War:

The High Contracting Parties undertake to give wide publicity, in the cases referred to in Article 2 of the present Convention, to the Council's recommendations for the maintenance of peace and the settlement of the dispute, and to the statements on the dispute published by the Council.

³² League of Nations, "Special Committee Appointed to Prepare a Draft General Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War. Communication from the Swedish Government" (C.268.M.123.1931.VII/C.P.G.2, April 30, 1931), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/special-committee-appointed-to-prepare-a-draft-general-convention-to-strengthen-the-means-of-preventing-war-communication-from-the-swedish-government>.

They further undertake to endeavour, so far as their national laws permit, to suppress all verbal or written propaganda designed to prevent a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

The aim of this proposal was to prevent the general public from receiving information from one side only. The Committee basically agreed with the Swedish proposal but considered that the second paragraph could not be inserted into the Convention in view of the diversity of national press laws and the absence of common legislation.³³ The Drafting Committee adopted on 14 May 1931 the following text as one of the Articles prepared for the “Preliminary Draft General Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War”:

The High Contracting Parties undertake to provide, by the means at their disposal, such publicity as the Council may recommend for its deliberations and recommendations when a dispute is brought before it in the cases contemplated by the present Convention.

The Polish delegation took up the Swedish proposal on the same day (14 May 1931) and submitted to the Committee the following resolution³⁴, which was adopted and further submitted to the Assembly:

The Special Committee,

Being aware of the danger which, in the event of an international crisis, may arise from irresponsible Press campaigns and publicity given in the Press to inaccurate and tendentious information;

Recognising that aggressive propaganda against a foreign power may in certain circumstances constitute a veritable threat to the world;

Requests the Assembly to consider the problem and examine the possibilities of finding a solution.

The Spanish delegation, at the 12th session of the Assembly, on 10 September 1931, also touched on the problem of moral disarmament from the point of view of the press. The proposal of the Spanish delegation was largely based upon the same considerations as those of the Swedish and Polish delegations: the press could have a great influence on relations between the peoples, and it was in the interest of peace that the press should receive and disseminate information as correctly and impartially as possible.³⁵

The Assembly decided to refer the Spanish draft resolution, which also concerned the co-operation of women in the organization of peace, to the Third Committee for scrutiny. After due consideration, the Third Committee decided to address these two questions – women and the press – separately and submitted the following draft resolution on the Press³⁶ to the Assembly:

³³ League of Nations, “Minutes of the 63rd Session of the Council,” in *League of Nations Official Journal*, vol. XII, no. 7, 1931, <https://archives.unige.ch/league-of-nations-official-journal-12th-year-no-7-july-1931>

³⁴ League of Nations, “Special Committee for the Preparation of a Draft General Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War” (C.P.G./Comité de Réd./P.V.2, 1931), <https://archives.unige.ch/kpqt-5n3f-ty68>.

³⁵ Regarding the notion and concept of “propaganda” as discussed among the inner circles of the League, see the chapter by Stefanie Averbek-Lietz in this book.

³⁶ Resolution A.48.1931, see League of Nations, “Records of the 12th Ordinary Session of the Assembly. Plenary Meeting. Text of Debates”, in *League of Nations Official Journal: Special Supplement*, no. 93, 1931; see also League of Nations, “Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Committee for Moral Disarmament. The Co-operation of the Press in the Organisation of Peace” (Conf.D/CDM/3, March 15, 1932), <https://archives.unige.ch/0000676634-d0003>.

The Assembly;

Considering that the organisation of peace demands an international spirit freed from all prejudices and misconceptions;

Convinced of the necessity of ensuring that Press information shall be as impartial and complete as possible;

Requests the Council to consider the possibility of studying with the help of the Press, the difficult problem of the spread of information which may threaten to disturb the peace or the good understanding between nations.

The Assembly adopted this text, which in its own roundabout way came to signify how the international situation had begun to deteriorate. It was on the basis of this resolution that the Conference of Governmental Press Bureaux and Representatives of the Press was convened in Copenhagen in January 1932.

This landmark resolution – the outcome of Polish, Swedish and Spanish initiatives – was followed by another landmark document: a Polish Memorandum on moral disarmament.³⁷ Dated 23 September 1931 and addressed to the delegations of the Disarmament Conference, it pointedly emphasized the value and urgency of moral disarmament and suggested that the question in its entirety be examined at the Conference. As the memorandum concerned the practical attainment of moral disarmament in its suggested spheres, namely the press, education, broadcasting, theatre and cinema, it raised the question: “How to counteract movement against peace and assure a moral detente by concerted action of the Governments.” The aim of moral disarmament was not merely to disarm people’s minds but to transform them with a view to establishing a firm psychological basis for the future development of the international community.

Concerning the role of the press in the attainment of moral disarmament, the Polish Government referred to the earlier resolutions on this matter and stated further that the press might exert, during times of crisis but also in daily life, if it so desires, a salutary influence by calming people’s minds or then play a disastrous role by causing hatred and mistrust. It suggested some remedies in the latter case: punishment for a person publishing a report containing false and biased information; the right of reply; the setting up of an international disciplinary tribunal for journalists to combat press excesses; establishing an international information bureau to prevent false representations of the international situation.

Moral disarmament had long been discussed in the League. It was nothing new, but as stated in the Polish Memorandum: “Moral disarmament will make no headway if we rest content with words. What is needed is action.”

The Disarmament Conference started its work in February 1932. The General Commission of the Conference had decided to refer the question of moral disarmament to the Political Commission of the Conference, which in turn decided to set up a committee to study the question of moral disarmament.

³⁷ League of Nations, “Moral Disarmament: Memorandum from the Polish Government” (C.602.M.240.1931.IX., September 23, 1931), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/memo-of-17th-sept-1931-from-the-polish-delegation-at-geneva-on-moral-disarmament>. See also League of Nations, “League of Nations Official Journal,” (no. 38, March 16, 1932), 293-295.

The first task of the Committee on Moral Disarmament was to define the various fields it should explore. For this purpose, it instructed a sub-committee to prepare the agenda of its work. Having approved its proposals, the Committee established its agenda³⁸ as follows:

1. Questions concerning intellectual co-operation and technical means of spreading information, including the problems of education, utilisation of cinematography and broadcasting;
2. Questions concerning the co-operation of the Press;
3. Questions of a legal character.

The Committee appointed sub-committees to study each of these questions. Finally, in November 1933, the Committee produced a Preliminary Draft concerning moral disarmament for insertion in the General Convention for the Limitation of Armaments, which was submitted for examination to the General Commission of the Conference. The text consisted of a preamble and four articles.

The preamble of the draft text reads as follows:

The High Contracting Parties,

Considering that moral disarmament is one of the essential aspects of the general work for disarmament;

Considering that the reduction and limitation of armaments depend to a large extent upon the increase of mutual confidence between nations;

Considering that as far as public opinion is concerned a sustained and systematic effort to ease tension may contribute to the progressive realisation of material disarmament;

Considering that the inter-dependence of States calls not only for their co-operation in the political sphere, but also for an effort of mutual understanding between the peoples themselves;

Being resolved to do whatever lies in its power to induce the nationals to display in any public discussion a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect;

Being convinced that the success of the measures adopted in one country to ensure moral disarmament is largely dependent on the application of similar measures in other countries;

Recognising that the League of Nations has placed at the disposal of the various states the Intellectual Co-operation of certain tasks connected with moral disarmament, although a different procedure may have to be adopted to meet special situations.

³⁸ See League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 38, March 16, 1932), 295; League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 39, March 17, 1932), 304; League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 55, April 26, 1932), 441-442; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Moral Disarmament" (Conf.D/CDM/24, July 25, 1932), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/0000676634-d0025>. See also League of Nations, "Conference for The Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Political Commission. Committee for Moral Disarmament. Agenda of the Committee. Report By M. Szumakowski" (Conf.D/CDM/9, April 25, 1932), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/0000676634-d0010>.

The four articles cover questions which made up item 1 of the Committee's agenda: questions concerning education, broadcasting, cinematography and the co-operation of the intellectual world – only one aspect of the problem of moral disarmament. It was stated that when the Committee addressed items 2 and 3 – press questions and legal issues – articles related to these can always be added to the existing text.³⁹

The Press Sub-Committee met in June 1932. On 28 June 1932 the Polish delegation submitted a draft resolution concerning the assistance the press might render the work of moral disarmament. In the draft resolution the part played by the press in the development of international relations was recognized, and the convening of an international conference of qualified representatives of the press was proposed for the purpose of considering the problem of moral disarmament, as far as it concerned the press.

The Sub-Committee adopted the Polish draft resolution as a basis of discussion and wanted to consult the representatives of international journalists on this matter. After this exchange of views, the Sub-Committee proceeded to prepare a preliminary statement to be submitted to the Committee on Moral Disarmament as soon as it would be ready.⁴⁰

However, in December 1933 the Committee was still expecting to consider the question of the co-operation of the press in the work of moral disarmament. It seems that this consideration was never properly processed, although the necessary data had been collected. Yet in various statements and resolutions the role of the press was given great importance in the work for moral disarmament, notably in relation to public opinion; the press was seen not only as the embodiment but at the same time as a great motive power of public opinion.

Towards the end of the Disarmament Conference the international situation was constantly deteriorating, and what happened outside the League had dire effects on the fate of the Conference. Philip Noel-Baker, the British statesman and Nobel Prize winner who at that time was Personal Assistant to the President of the Disarmament Conference and later wrote a book about the Conference and on the reasons why it failed, stated that the chances of success for the Conference had been held much greater if the time for it had been earlier, in 1931 or even 1930.⁴¹

³⁹ League of Nations, "Moral Disarmament. Text Adopted by the Moral Disarmament Committee of the Disarmament Conference" (Conf.D/CDM/36, November 20, 1933), <https://archives.un Geneva.org/moral-disarmament-text-of-convention-adopted-by-the-moral-disarmament-committee-of-the-disarmament-conference>. See also League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Committee for Moral Disarmament. Report on the work of the Committee. (Rapporteur: M. Komarnicki, Poland)" (Conf.D/CDM/37, December 1, 1933), <https://archives.un Geneva.org/t2w8-newp-5fsx>; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Political Commission. Committee on Moral Disarmament" (Conf.D/CDM/19, May 30, 1932), <https://archives.un Geneva.org/0000676634-d0020>. For the whole process, see Conf.D/CDM/15-39. Regarding the role of cinematography in the media ensemble of the League, see also the article by Jürgen Wilke in this book.

⁴⁰ See League of Nations, "League of Nations Official Journal," (no. 98, June 30, 1932), 790-792; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Political Commission. Committee for Moral Disarmament. Documentation of the Committee" (Conf.D/CDM/2, March 15, 1932), <https://archives.un Geneva.org/0000676634-d0002>; League of Nations, "Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Moral Disarmament" (Conf.D/CDM/24, July 25, 1932), <https://archives.un Geneva.org/0000676634-d0025>.

⁴¹ Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, 59.

The same assessment was confirmed at the symposium “The League of Nations in retrospect” in 1980, where it was stated that “the Disarmament Conference came far too late” and that “the collapse of the Disarmament Conference cannot be imputed to the League of Nations”.⁴²

As pointed out by Noel-Baker, in many countries there were people who thought the League and disarmament were utopian nonsense, since “whatever you do, war will come”⁴³. Such an attitude was apparent among certain circles both within and outside governments. It was not only a spontaneous stance but also something deliberately mobilized by anti-disarmament lobbies. For example, in Britain some private arms manufacturers were keen to support and re-arm Hitler, and this support of the military-industrial complex had the effect of creating an illusion of public support for the militarist ministers in the government.

The same occurred in France: since before the First World War the most important French newspaper, *Le Temps*, was under the control of the Comité des Forges – the Private Arms Manufacturers of France. In 1930 the Comité bought control of *Le Journal des Débats*, one of the most important organs of political opinion in France. The Comité also acquired control of most of the other Parisian newspapers and journals. According to Noel-Baker⁴⁴, through these organs of the press the Comité waged a merciless campaign against the League and its Disarmament Conference in France. A similar testimony is given by Thomas Davies.⁴⁵

In Germany, the Hugenberg Konzern bought more than half of all the daily newspapers; it bought all the press advertising agencies; it bought *Die Woche* and the other leading weekly and monthly periodicals; it bought the German movie enterprise UFA and the new Radio Broadcasting Service. This all was used against the Treaty of Versailles, against the League and against disarmament. And it worked. As Noel-Baker noted, in this struggle the internationalists won all the arguments, but the bureaucrats and militarists won all the material victories that count.⁴⁶

5. “Modern Means of Spreading Information Utilised in the Cause of Peace”

The “modern” methods utilized in the cause of peace gained favor in the League of Nations at the beginning of the 1930s, along with the general development of movie and broadcasting media. The first manifestation of these media emerging outside the conventional press was the attention devoted to the educational use of “cinematography”. The movie was thus not primarily considered a political factor related to peace but rather a method of education within the overall framework of “intellectual co-operation”. Obviously, up to then cinema as an entertainment and artistic medium had not yet proven a cause of any major international concern, although its moral implications at the national level were fully appreciated from the outset – film censorship being one of the consequences.

⁴² Zara Steiner, “Introductory Essay,” in *The League of Nations in Retrospect / La Société des Nations: Rétrospective* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 4–5.

⁴³ Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, 60–61.

⁴⁴ Noel-Baker, 62–63.

⁴⁵ Thomas Davies, “France and the World Disarmament Conference of 1932–34,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 770.

⁴⁶ Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, 4.

As far as the particular aspect of educational movie at the League is concerned, it was not just an incidental question but became an institutionalized part of the broader area of the activities in intellectual co-operation, for which a technical unit had been established, the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation⁴⁷, based in Paris – along with those for health, communication and transit, and economy and finance. In addition, a separate International Educational Cinematographic Institute⁴⁸ was established in Rome to “encourage by means of useful action and suggestions the production, distribution and exchange of educational films”.⁴⁹

Radio – or “broadcasting” as it came to be called by the 1930s – was the real “modern means” that gained ground in international politics at the League. Here, too, a point of departure was the educational application of the medium: on 24 September 1931 the League Assembly passed a resolution relating to intellectual co-operation, in particular to an enquiry being carried out by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation on the educational aspects of broadcasting, and this resolution recommended that the enquiry “should cover all the international questions raised by the use of broadcasting in regard to good international relations”. The source of inspiration for this extension was obviously the consideration of moral disarmament within the framework of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, in particular the Polish Memorandum quoted above (dated on 23 September 1931 – the day before the adoption of the League Assembly resolution on intellectual co-operation).

The Assembly resolution of 24 September 1931, backed by the consideration of moral disarmament, launched a five-year process which culminated, on 23 September 1936, in the adoption and signing by the plenipotentiaries of 28 states of the *International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace*. An authentic account of the preparations between 1931 and 1936 is to be found in the League of Nations document⁵⁰ which served as the basis of the diplomatic conference convened in Geneva to adopt the Convention.⁵¹ Its essence finds expression by the first four articles, after a preamble recognizing “the need for preventing, by means of rules established by common agreement, broadcasting from being used in a manner prejudicial to good international understanding” and prompted by “the desire to utilise, by the application of these rules, the possibilities offered by this medium of intercommunication for promoting better mutual understanding between peoples”:

⁴⁷ See United Nations Archives Geneva, “League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation Research Guide: Initial Steps and Institution of the ICIC.”

⁴⁸ See League of Nations, “International Educational Cinematographic Institute. Report to the Council on the Second Session of the Governing Body of the Institute” (C.3.M.1.1930.XII, December 17, 1929), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/international-educational-cinematographic-institute-report-to-the-council-on-the-second-session-of-the-governing-body-of-the-institute>.

⁴⁹ On this institute, see the chapter by Jürgen Wilke in this book.

⁵⁰ See Annex of League of Nations, “Preliminary Draft International Convention on the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace” (C.L.44.1936.XII, March 17, 1936), <https://archives.ungeneva.org/preliminary-draft-international-convention-on-the-use-of-broadcasting-in-the-cause-of-peace>.

⁵¹ The Convention was signed by 28 states, including the United Kingdom and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). By August 1938 it was ratified by 25 states, with accessions by 13 states. See “International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace,” accessed November 8, 2023, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280046246&clang=_en.

Article 1.

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to prohibit and, if occasion arises, to stop without delay the broadcasting within their respective territories of any transmission which to the detriment of good international understanding is of such a character as to incite the population of any territory to acts incompatible with the internal order or the security of a territory of a High Contracting Party.

Article 2.

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to ensure that transmissions from stations within their respective territories shall not constitute an incitement either to war against another High Contracting Party or to acts likely to lead thereto.

Article 3.

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to prohibit and, if occasion arises, to stop without delay within their respective territories any transmission likely to harm good international understanding by statements the incorrectness of which is or ought to be known to the persons responsible for the broadcast.

They further mutually undertake to ensure that any transmission likely to harm good international understanding by incorrect statements shall be rectified at the earliest possible moment by the most effective means, even if the incorrectness has become apparent only after the broadcast has taken place.

Article 4.

The High Contracting Parties mutually undertake to ensure, especially in time of crisis, that stations within their respective territories shall broadcast information concerning international relations the accuracy of which shall have been verified – and that by all means within their power – by the persons responsible for broadcasting the information.

The adoption of the Broadcasting Convention was no doubt a landmark, both with regard to the mass media and to the League itself against the background of the deteriorating international relations. However, in reality it was too little too late, while international propaganda over the radio escalated especially in Nazi Germany but also elsewhere, reaching its height during World War II. After the war there followed the Cold War from 1948 on and the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (1949), followed by that of the Warsaw Pact (1955), and the radio remained the main platform of foreign propaganda, with its own stations in the US (Voice of America, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe), the United Kingdom (UK) British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, Germany (Deutsche Welle) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Radio Moscow).⁵² The Convention of 1936 remained in force but was increasingly forgotten.

⁵² For an example, see Nelson Ribeiro and Stephanie Seul, "Revisiting Transnational Broadcasting: The BBC'S Foreign-Language Services during the Second World War," *Media History* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 365–77.

Yet it survived until the new millennium, by which time television had largely superseded the radio as the main channel of international communication.⁵³

In general, we may subscribe to the words of Egon F. Ranshofen-Wertheimer, who, after serving at the League Secretariat, wrote a book about it, putting the League activities in the field of the mass media in the following perspective:

In later years, when mounting international dangers loomed more and more in the foreground, the accent shifted from technical and professional questions to the broader implications of the work of the press. The discussions centred chiefly around the possibility of combating and rectifying inaccurate news “the dissemination of which may disturb the maintenance of peace and the good understanding between the peoples” without in any way impairing the freedom of the press. In the later stage these deliberations were extended to include the role of broadcasting in international relations. The abandonment of democratic government by an increasing number of countries, and with it the progressive destruction of the liberty of the press and of the professional independence of journalists after 1933, cut short the plans for a continuation of these activities by the League.

These efforts to secure a proper status to international journalists and closer collaboration between official and unofficial elements, and to emphasize the responsibility in the preservation of peace of all those charged with the spreading of news, may not have led to tangible results. But they were part of a great endeavour to strengthen the forces actively engaged in the maintenance of peace. Like similar efforts in other fields of the League’s activities, they were not strong enough to prevent the headlong rush to the abyss the moment the accumulated danger elements tended toward open military conflict.⁵⁴

Our paper of 1986 ended here. Meanwhile other overviews have been presented of the League’s achievements as seen by scholars in political history and political science, notably Pedersen⁵⁵ and Ikonomou and Skjoldager⁵⁶. The following is our view of the overall context of the League’s story and its heritage in today’s world – in general and in the media world in particular.

⁵³ Formally, the Broadcasting Convention remains to this day a valid part of international law – one of the 33 treaties originating from the League of Nations, see United Nations, “League of Nations Treaties,” accessed November 8, 2023, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/LON.aspx?clang=_en. After having been transferred to the United Nations, it has received a dozen more ratifications and also some denunciations, notably by Australia, France, Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The number of states which still formally adhere to it in the 2020s is over 40 (some of them with reservations). See “International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace, Geneva, 23 September 1936”, United Nation Treaty Collection, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDGS/Volume%20II/LON/PARTII-1.en.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), 213-214.

⁵⁵ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091–1117.

⁵⁶ Haakon Ikonomou and Karen Gram-Skjoldager, eds., *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019).

6. The context and heritage of the League of Nations

At the time of the League in the 1920s and 30s the world was very different from today: a population of about two billion living in less than 80 independent states, compared to today's population of nearly eight billion in almost 200 states. The number of territories under colonial rule was several dozens, and the total population living in them can be estimated to be up to one billion, accounting at the time for half of humanity. This is shown graphically in an animated map on the rise and fall of the European colonial empires.⁵⁷

Let us not forget the political and intellectual climate prevailing in the (Western) world in the early years of the League. Nordenstreng's presentation⁵⁸ at the Bremen project workshop in November 2019 listed the context after World War I as follows:

- *Parliamentary democracy* prevailed, as in the Weimar Republic
- *Radicalism* proceeded in liberal ideologies
- *Progressivism* promoted social reforms, including trade unions (International Labour Organization/Office, ILO)
- *Modernism* flourished in culture and beyond
- *Pacifism* accompanied peace movements against militarism
- *Idealism* figured in politics and political science
- *Decolonization* was gaining momentum in Asia, Africa and Latin America (precipitated by Japan's unprecedented victory over Russia in 1905)

These are only a few aspects of a complex political and cultural context which, moreover, changed above all with the rise of fascism in Germany and elsewhere. However, the list serves as a reminder of the importance of the context for the activities in the League.

In a longer development perspective from the League to the post-World War II United Nations, certain megatrends shape the world. Decolonization was an obvious one, but equally fundamental was an international order based on multilateralism and peaceful co-operation. The League provided a forum for this, with emerging norms and principles of solidarism and pluralism. Global norm-setting took different ways and forms.⁵⁹ The two major contextual trends are briefly revisited below.

⁵⁷ Zack Beauchamp, "500 Years of European Colonialism, in One Animated Map," *Vox*, January 16, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2014/5/8/5691954/colonialism-collapse-gif-imperialism>.

⁵⁸ Kaarle Nordenstreng, "Collaboration of the Press in the Organisation of Peace: Guiding Public Opinion Towards Moral Disarmament' The League of Nations Promoting a Vital Intellectual Trend" (Workshop on Transnational Communication History of the League of Nations, Bremen, 2019), <https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2020/02/3010fb58-bremen-presentation-slides-update.pdf>.

⁵⁹ See Tomoko Akami, "Beyond the Formula of the Age of Reason: Experts, Social Sciences, and the Phonic Public in International Politics," in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon Ikonoumou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 161–72.

Decolonization

Decolonization is a historical megatrend in both the political and intellectual sense. It is worth noting that in spite of general support for moral disarmament, the Disarmament Conference made only little progress in this field. As states continued to invest in military purposes, fewer resources were available for economic and social development, although the connection between disarmament and development was accepted and also subsequently endorsed by the United Nations.⁶⁰

However, some justice-related issues in the economic and social fields were successful. As Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss⁶¹ state, both the League (1920) and the ILO (1919) were “ahead of the curve”⁶². The League of Nations Mandate System⁶³ was established under Article 22 of the Covenant⁶⁴:

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The mandates thus established were turned into United Nations trusteeships.⁶⁵ As Adam Roberts notes, although, like the Covenant, the United Nations Charter makes no mention of “decolonization”, there was “an implicit assumption that the days of European colonialism were numbered”⁶⁶. This continued the process originating in Article 22 of the League Covenant.

In December 1960 the United Nations General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples⁶⁷:

⁶⁰ Fry and Nair, “Moral Disarmament: Reviving a Legacy”, 38-39.

⁶¹ Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly, and Thomas George Weiss, *Ahead of the Curve?: UN Ideas and Global Challenges* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 206.

⁶² See also Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 1108–1112; Akami, “Beyond the Formula of the Age.”

⁶³ The League of Nations Mandate System has been called a second phase in the history of colonization and its decline. The first phase was marked by the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-1885. The third one found expression by the United Nations Charter, chapters XI, XII, XIII (see Nele Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship,” *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 47–95, note 11). For the critique of the League of Nations’ Permanent Mandate Commission (PMC), see Florian Wagner, “Naturism, the Permanent Mandates Commission and the Denial of the Violent Nature of Colonialism,” in *The League of Nations: Perspectives from the Present*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikononou (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019), 78–89.

⁶⁴ See also Denys P. Myers, “The Mandate System of the League of Nations,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 96, no. 1 (July 1921): 74–77; Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System”; Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, 1099-1107; Taina Maarit Tuori, “From League of Nations Mandates to Decolonization: A History of the Language of Rights in International Law” (Helsinki, University of Helsinki, 2016), 31-80.

⁶⁵ Tuori, “From League of Nations Mandates”, 5; Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System.”

⁶⁶ Adam Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations,” in *Order and Justice in International Relations*, ed. Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell (Oxford University Press, 2003), 57.

⁶⁷ United Nations General Assembly Resolution, “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” (A/RES/1514(XV), 1961), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/206145>.

The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.

This declaration shows how justice and order are related. More of the kind was to follow.⁶⁸

The United Nations Charter mentions human rights several times. Taina Tuori has discussed the League of Nations Mandate System and its rights language: how and when human rights notions appeared in the language concerning mandates.

The struggle for rights is a matter of global development with a large cast of actors with often contradictory motives. Idealists, old colonial hands, politicians and international lawyers operated under rapidly changing global circumstances and public opinions in different countries negotiating, manipulating and bargaining through the epochal changes from the rule of colonial empires towards decolonization and rights.⁶⁹

The League had paradoxical responsibilities. As Pedersen remarks: “On the one hand, the League was to promote emerging norms related to trusteeship and human rights; on the other, it was to do so without undermining the principle of state sovereignty”⁷⁰.

Idealism, solidarism, pluralism

Woodrow Wilson’s famous “Fourteen Points Speech” to Congress in January 1918 introduced his idealism.⁷¹ Wilson’s idealism reflects liberal ideas in international relations and political theory: a world at peace would be based on co-operation between democratic states able to resolve their disputes by peaceful means and with liberal democratic faith in public opinion. The League of Nations was an attempt to institutionalize international political problems on a rational basis.⁷² Through idealism there came rationalist thinking which could bring to the fore ideas of change: people can make their own institutions and a new order.⁷³ However, as indicated by the need to establish the Mandate System, the world was not an equal place for all peoples; there was a need to change the colonial system to ensure a more peaceful world.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations”, 57-62. See also “United Nations and Decolonization,” United Nations, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/about>.

⁶⁹ Tuori, “From League of Nations Mandates”, 3.

⁷⁰ Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, 1107.

⁷¹ Yale Law School, “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed November 10, 2023, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp. See also Fei Huang, “The 1919 Moment Revisited: Two Versions of Self-Determination and the Background of League of Nations” (Communication History of International Organizations and NGOs, Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research, University of Bremen, 2021), <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/zemki/events/conferences/communication-history-of-international-organizations-and-ngos>. She refers to two competing versions of self-determination, namely the Wilsonian version and the Leninist version. She argues how Wilson’s “Fourteen-point principle” was a response to Lenin’s “Peace Decree principle”. She argues further how these two versions of national self-determination are intertwined and could be called the Lenin moment and the Wilson moment.

⁷² Akami, “Beyond the Formula of the Age”, 166-167.

⁷³ Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1984), 28-36; Osmo Apunen, *Kansainvälisen politiikan metodologiset perusteet: oppihistoriallisia ääriäiviöjä erään tieteenalan vaiheista [in Finnish: The methodological foundations of international politics: Contours of the history of a discipline]*, Julkaisu / Tampereen yliopisto, politiikan tutkimuksen laitos, rauhan- ja kehitystutkimuksen yksikkö 44 (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1991), 102-123.

⁷⁴ Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System”; Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations.”

This also reflects normative ideas, and the League was intended to work to that end. The League has been much criticized for this idealism or utopianism.⁷⁵ As E.H. Carr has said: “Rationalism can create utopia, but cannot make it real”⁷⁶. And further: “The utopian makes political theory a norm to which political practice ought to conform. The realist regards political theory as a sort of codification of political practice.”⁷⁷ Most studies on the League published after 1946 have been realistic analyses of its “decline and fall”, thus mainly ignoring the normative aspect.⁷⁸

The idea that a system of states can be based on “a true ideology” in all states, that conflicts of interest are no longer important and order is achieved in this way differs from the solidarist idea of international society, which is based on the idea that there are still conflicts of interest among states but that these are resolved by common rules and norms. However, the idea that states sharing the same ideology would be more peaceful, as they have no conflicts of interest over ideology, differs from the idea that the very ideology they have would eliminate conflicts of interest.⁷⁹ Wilson envisaged the League according to a solidarist idea but also saw it as a league of democratic states, thus combining these two. The same is reflected in the United Nations Charter.⁸⁰

International society is also a specific approach in international relations theory, the so-called “English School Approach”⁸¹, based on rules, norms and institutions, meaning that it is “a norm-governed social arrangement, rather than simply the expression of power and interest”⁸². Such an idea of international society is reflected in the Covenant of the League of Nations (1919), The Kellogg-Briand Pact/The Paris Pact (1928), the United Nations Charter (1945) and the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg (1945).⁸³

When theorizing on international society, concepts like pluralism and solidarism emerged, referring respectively to *order* and *justice*. Pluralist and solidarist conceptions differ in their perceptions of the institution of war, sources of international law and the status of individuals.⁸⁴ In different historical times they may be different.⁸⁵

⁷⁵ See Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*; Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Machiavellian Utopia,” *Ethics* 55, no. 2 (January 1945): 145–47.

⁷⁶ Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 27.

⁷⁷ Carr, 12.

⁷⁸ Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, 1091; Akami, “Beyond the Formula of the Age.”

⁷⁹ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995), 236–237. The so-called liberal peace theory refers to the idea that democratic states do not fight each other but can fight non-democratic states, see e.g. Michael Doyle, *Liberal Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁸⁰ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 236–237.

⁸¹ Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014).

⁸² Chris Brown, *International Society, Global Polity: An Introduction to International Political Theory* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015), 77.

⁸³ Hedley Bull, “The Grotian Conception of International Society,” in *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, ed. Herber Butterfield and Martin Wight, First Edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), 51.

⁸⁴ Bull, “Grotian Conception of International Society”, 52–53; Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

⁸⁵ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 39, 49.

However, pluralism and solidarism are not irreconcilable but rather two sides of the same coin, as they reflect the restrictions and opportunities in international society.⁸⁶ As international society is a norm-governed social arrangement, it is not based solely on power and interest and thus differs from a realist conception.⁸⁷

Martin Wight⁸⁸ has discussed international theory on the basis of three traditions, namely realism (a system of states), rationalism (international society) and revolutionism (a world society) and sees them as being interdependent. However, from the point of view of this book, the international society aspect is the most relevant. The United Nations Charter tries to bridge solidarist and pluralist aspects of international society.⁸⁹ Such an idea can also be found in the League of Nations Covenant.⁹⁰

The practices of intellectual co-operation were already familiar before the League⁹¹, as the League in its entirety would not have been possible without pre-existing international intellectual life. The contribution of the League activities in this field were the co-ordination of previously established organizations and associations.⁹² The International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation and its executive organ, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, can be considered a precursor of UNESCO. As Alvin LeRoy Bennett notes, there is a world unity in international co-operation, “in the inseparability of political, economic, and cultural aspects of closer international relationships”⁹³.

However, intellectual co-operation is not the only way to world peace⁹⁴, but it has its place. The aim of moral disarmament was not merely to disarm people’s minds⁹⁵ but also to establish a basis for the future development of the international community.

The Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments – Disarmament Conference (1932-33) – adopted a broad definition on disarmament and moral disarmament and was an essential part of it. Fry and Nair state how “moral disarmament” refers to ethical obligations to disarm, but also to how moral considerations go beyond this meaning: “a focus on disarmament through society’s development, both economically and from a human dimension”⁹⁶. They take moral disarmament to be a human-centred concept like the concept of human security, which means the security of people,

⁸⁶ Buzan, *Introduction to the English School*, 84; Bull, “Grotian Conception of International Society”; Hedley Bull, *Justice in International Relations*, 1983–84 Hagey Lectures (University of Waterloo, 1984).

⁸⁷ See Seppä, *Responsibility to Protect as a United Nations Security Council Practice in South Sudan*, 48-66.

⁸⁸ Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, ed. Gabriele Wight, and Brian Porter (Leicester: Leicester University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991).

⁸⁹ James Mayall, ed., “Introduction,” in *The New Interventionism, 1991–1994: United Nations Experience in Cambodia, Former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, LSE Monographs in International Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4-5; Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations”, 53-56.

⁹⁰ Roberts, “Order/Justice Issues at the United Nations”, 49, 55.

⁹¹ Alvin LeRoy Bennett, *The Development of Intellectual Cooperation under the League of Nations and United Nations* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI University Microfilms International, A Bell & Howell Information Company, 1950), 1-13.

⁹² Bennett, 261-262.

⁹³ Bennett, 268-269.

⁹⁴ Bennett, 269.

⁹⁵ See UNESCO, “Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution>.

⁹⁶ Fry and Nair, “Moral Disarmament: Reviving a Legacy”, 4-5.

in their daily lives, and not only the security of states.⁹⁷ The Disarmament Conference defined moral disarmament as broadly as human security is defined.

Moreover, moral disarmament was defined as “a concept that bridged the League’s efforts within disarmament and the press”⁹⁸. Likewise, the press was clearly seen “as an arm of disarmament”⁹⁹.

7. Subsequent developments in media and communication

At the time of the League, media meant the printed press – newspapers, magazines, books – and its electronic corollary, radio broadcasting as well as cinema. Television became a mass medium only in the 1950s, mainly in the industrialized countries, but it expanded rapidly, so that in the last quarter of the 20th century it was the dominant medium around the world, accompanied by video recorders and satellite transmissions.

With the new millennium, the media sector went through a “digital revolution”, whereby the transmission and recording capacities of audio-visual media grew exponentially, boosted by the Internet and smart mobile phones. The whole concept of one-way mass communication has been revolutionized by user-generated content and all sorts of social media. The information and communication technology (ICT) became a new global infrastructure of an “information society”.

Nevertheless, mass media and journalism at its core have retained a central place in this new era of “media ecology”. Hence, it is possible and indeed important to examine the intellectual heritage of the League’s media policies in the post-war United Nations. Here we only present an overview of relevant developments.

The first special sessions of the new United Nations, the United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information convened in Geneva in March-April 1948, became a reservoir of proposals, following up the League’s work in the media field within a post-war freedom of information context.¹⁰⁰ The Conference adopted over 40 resolutions and three draft conventions: the so-called “US Convention” on the Gathering and International Transmission of News, the “French Convention” on the International Right of Correction, and the “British Convention” on the General Principles of Freedom of Information.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the Conference initiated a Draft International Code of Ethics for Information Personnel.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ See S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History*, United Nations Intellectual History Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁹⁸ Seidenfaden, “From the Gallery to the Floor”, 193.

⁹⁹ Tworek, “Peace through Truth? The Press and Moral Disarmament through the League of Nations”, 17.

¹⁰⁰ John B. Whitton, “The United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information and the Movement Against International Propaganda,” *American Journal of International Law* 43, no. 1 (January 1949): 73–87.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Economic and Social Council Resolution, “United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information” (E/RES/152(VII), 1948), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/212470>; Whitton, “The United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information and the Movement Against International Propaganda”, 74.

¹⁰² See Lars Bruun, *Professional Codes in Journalism* (Prague: International Organization of Journalists, 1979), 94-95.

However, most of these were frozen by the Cold War which actually erupted around the Conference, leading to escalating antagonism between the US-led West and the USSR-led East.¹⁰³ A major permanent outcome remains Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), drafted in the Conference and approved as part of the Declaration in December 1948.¹⁰⁴ The only outcome at the level of international law was the Convention on the International Right of Correction (1952).¹⁰⁵ Unlike Article 19 of the UDHR, it proclaims peace and international understanding as the supreme values. However, this 1952 Convention had no lasting significance, due to a minimal number of ratifications; like the 1936 Broadcasting Convention, it remains a curiosity in international law. In short, the 1948 United Nations Conference largely expunged the peace and moral disarmament heritage of the League.

The same orientation towards freedom rather than peace dominated the media policies of UNESCO in the 1950s and 60s. Its Communication Sector also became increasingly involved in promoting media and literacy in developing countries – a policy in line with the geopolitical interests of the US.

Yet, in the 1970s UNESCO began to follow up the idea laid down in the preamble to its Constitution of 1945, that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. A major achievement was the 1974 *Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*¹⁰⁶. This comprehensive tool of UNESCO’s Education Sector had no equivalent in the Communication Sector. Yet the same spirit was given some prominence in the 1978 *Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*¹⁰⁷ and in the 1980 Report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ The burgeoning tension between East and West led to a split in the international movement of journalists, which was widely united at the founding of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) in 1946 but became bitterly embroiled in the Cold War; see Nordenstreng et al., *History of the International Movement*, 125–42.

¹⁰⁴ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. For background, see Kaarle Nordenstreng, “International Communication, Media and Journalism Research in the Light of 70 Years of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights” (Symposium, University of Passau (Germany), 2018), <https://sites.tuni.fi/uploads/2020/06/b2c9f70c-passau-presentation-by-nordenstreng-on-15-november-2018-1.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations General Assembly Resolution, “Convention on the International Right of Correction” (A/RES/630(VII), 1953), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/211445>.

¹⁰⁶ “Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-Operation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,” UNESCO, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-education-international-understanding-co-operation-and-peace-and-education>. See Kaisa Savolainen, “Education as a Means to World Peace: The Case of the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation,” *Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research*, no. 398 (2010).

¹⁰⁷ “Declaration on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War,” UNESCO, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/declaration-fundamental-principles-concerning-contribution-mass-media-strengthening-peace-and>. See Nordenstreng and Hannikainen, *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*.

¹⁰⁸ MacBride, *Many Voices, One World*; Kaarle Nordenstreng and Juan Somavia, “Revisiting 45 Years of History in Communication Policies,” *Media Development* 67, no. 2 (May 15, 2021): 5–10.

At that time UNESCO and the United Nations followed the trend of the NWICO – a miscellany of ideas and policies stemming from the geopolitical interests of the Non-Aligned countries in the South and the Socialist countries in the East. Media issues also achieved a higher profile through the *United Nations Committee on Information*.¹⁰⁹

However, a neo-liberal turn boosted by private media corporations in the West succeeded in halting these developments in the 1980s, and by the end of the millennium UNESCO's Communication Sector had practically nothing left from the heritage of the League and its Institute of Intellectual Co-operation – indeed, little remained from the constitutional objective of peace. These topics were relegated not only by Western political interests guarding the free flow of information but also by another megatrend: the ICTs leading to Internet governance becoming the main topic at the historical World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).¹¹⁰

The developments in the first two decades of the new millennium have again signified a change of course, while increasing hate speech and fake news, facilitated especially by the social media and accompanied by the concentration of Internet-based platforms into the hands of a few private giants, have created concern about the toxicity of communication, with an “infodemic” alongside the pandemic, threatening to disrupt relations between people. Paradoxically, these developments are bringing back normative considerations into media policies and imbuing the heritage of the League with new relevance.

8. Conclusion

The main objective of the League of Nations was to consolidate peace:

Firstly, the League represented Wilson's idealism: a world at peace was “to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war” (preamble to the League Covenant). Furthermore, “peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety” (Article 8).

Secondly, the League reflected a broad concept of peace with disarmament as an integral part, entailing not only material disarmament but also moral disarmament. This was to be achieved through education, intellectual collaboration, the press, broadcasting and cinema by disarming people's minds. It was moreover intended to transform them with a view to establishing a firm psychological basis for the future development of an international society. What mattered most was security for people in their daily lives and not only the security of states.

¹⁰⁹ “Committee on Information,” United Nations, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/coi/>.

¹¹⁰ “World Summit on the Information Society,” International Telecommunication Union, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/>; “World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS),” UNESCO, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/wsis>. For an overview, see Robin Mansell and Kaarle Nordenstreng, “Great Media and Communication Debates: WSIS and the MacBride Report,” *Information Technologies & International Development* 3, no. 4 (June 1, 2006): 15–36.

Thirdly, the League applied its normative approach to various fields of international life, including the mass media. This provided a controversial heritage for media policies under Cold War conditions: any normative articulation of the media, especially its content, was viewed in the Capitalist West as a potential threat to freedom, while for the Socialist East and the Non-Aligned South normativity was natural. The League's heritage had its ups and downs at UNESCO, but throughout the years its essence remained relevant – not least in the contemporary “post-truth” era.

In short, the League represented idealism for peace and co-operation. It came under criticism from the rising school of realism in international relations but stood for the emerging principles of solidarism and pluralism, reflecting decolonization, justice and order. These elements furnished the idea of an international society which evolved with the League and prevails to this day.

The League was no historical failure: while failing to prevent World War II, it did lay the foundations for the United Nations and the post-war international order.

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