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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

American membership of the League of Nations: US philanthropy and the transformation of an intergovernmental organisation into a think tank

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Abstract This article deals with the participation of the Rockefeller Foundation in the technical activities of the League of Nations. It demonstrates that American philanthropy has played a central role in the development of non-political activities, not only financially (through its massive contribution), but also intellectually (as regards the conception of the programmes it supported) and technically (as regards their implementation on the spot). In so doing, the Rockefeller Foundation contributed to turning its technical sections into international sites of contact between experts and thus to changing the League's original purpose, centred on political activities, by promoting the rise in power of technical activities, which became central within the League system from the beginning of the 1930s. American philanthropy thus played a central role in the transformation of the League of Nations, from the Parliament of Nations to a think tank focused on expertise in international problems.

Keywords League of Nations · USA · Rockefeller Foundation · Expertise · Think tank

Introduction

Among researchers, not to mention the wider public, the history of the League of Nations is still associated with the idea that it failed to prevent the tragic sequence of events that led to the outbreak of the Second World War. In this traditional narrative, the organisation, founded in 1919, is considered to have been handicapped from the start, not only by American withdrawal but also by the fact that it was little

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more than a club for the victors. In spite of its dynamism in the 1920s, which led to the birth of the idea of collective security, the League of Nations is presented as being animated by naïve idealism and in a state of collapse by the early 1930s, incapable of offering a response to the challenge of totalitarian regimes that called the fragile post-Versailles order into question. Viewed from this perspective, the crises that led to the Second World War (the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, German rearmament and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939) reflected the incapacity of the League of Nations to fulfil its original mission of maintaining world peace. The lessons of this failure, so the argument goes, were learned in 1945 through the founding of a new international system that was at once truly universal and founded on the primacy of those great powers that would henceforth play the most important stabilising role during international crises.

This interpretation of the League's history as a failure was put forward by the majority of historians and political scientists specialising in international relations for half a century. While there is certainly some truth in this interpretation, it does not fully reflect the complexity of the organisation's history. Recent research on the League of Nations, mostly conducted by historians, has brought some new elements to the attention of the scientific community that allows the history of the League to be reconsidered. First, they have demonstrated that the League's history cannot be reduced to the failure of collective security, since it promoted a large number of initiatives in many other fields. Second, they have shown that the USA was involved in the activities of the League; and third, they have suggested that the interaction of public and private actors is a major key for understanding the history of the League, which is much more complex than it had been portrayed for 50 years. This article seeks to explore this complexity. Through the analysis of the participation of the Rockefeller Foundation in the technical activities of the League, it demonstrates that American philanthropy has played a central role in the development of non-political activities, not only financially (through its massive contribution), but also intellectually (as regards the conception of the programmes it supported) and technically (as regards their implementation on the spot). In so doing, the Rockefeller Foundation contributed to turning its technical sections into international sites of contact between experts and thus to changing the League's original purpose, centred on political activities, by promoting the rise in power of technical activities, which became central within the League system from the beginning of the 1930s. The USA, and in particular private philanthropic actors, thus played an important role in the historical evolution of the League of Nations, which is characterised by an important shift from the Wilsonian project of becoming the parliament of nations (Throntveit 2011) to a kind of think tank, the central activity of which was to develop expertise on international questions, notably in the fields of health and economics, which will be examined here.

This article is divided into five sections. The first section briefly analyses the recent historiography of the League of Nations, while the second reveals the central role of the Rockefeller Foundation in the development of the technical activities of the League. In the third and fourth sections, the foundation's role is analysed in greater detail: part three focuses on its role in the development of the

Epidemiological and Economic Intelligence Services set up by the Health Organisation and the Economic and Financial Organisation, respectively, while part four examines the activities of the International Studies Conference of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. Finally, a conclusion will propose some further lines of inquiry for historians and political scientists concerning the reassessment of the history of the League of Nations, the international system and its relationship with the USA.

The League of Nations: new historiography

There is of course a large historical literature on the League of Nations. But until recently, the League of Nations barely registered on the radar screen as a research topic in either history or political science. In her now classic study, MacMillan (2001) humorously summed up the situation, writing that 'only a handful of eccentric historians still bother to study the League of Nations. Its archives, with their wealth of materials, are largely unvisited'.[1] This situation changed suddenly in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and there is now a growing body of research that has substantially renewed the historiography of the League of Nations. The combined effect of the end of the Cold War, the process of globalisation and the re-emergence, especially in Europe, of international problems stemming from territorial reorganisation after 1918, has seen a revival in historians' interest in the organisation.[2] The growth of historical research on the League of Nations is also the consequence of the rise of transnational approaches to history. Whether described as world history, global history, transnational history, connected history or *histoire croisée*, all such approaches, whatever their methodological differences, seek to write history on a global scale.[3] In such an undertaking, international organisations offer an ideal field of study (Kott 2011). Since the League of Nations was the first attempt in the history of humanity to regulate international relations and coordinate cooperation in multiple areas, it is a prime research field for writing history on a global scale. While the new historiography of the League of Nations has not neglected political questions,[4] it has above all turned its gaze in other directions, focusing notably on the work of the so-called 'technical' sections and on organisations linked to the League of Nations which, in the course of the interwar period, took on the important tasks of international normalisation and harmonisation in numerous fields including economics,[5] health,[6] intellectual

[1] MacMillan (2001), 83.

[2] See Pedersen (2007) and also the site *History of the League of Nations* <http://www.leagueofnationshistory.org/homepage.shtml>, which lists researchers working on the League of Nations as well as their published and ongoing research.

[3] There is a rich body of historical research on the subject. See Saunier (2013), Iriye and Saunier (2009) and Douki and Minard (2007).

[4] See, for example, Kitching (2003), Webster (2005) and Pedersen (2015).

[5] Decorzant (2011) and above all Clavin (2013).

[6] Borowy (2009).

cooperation,[7] refugees,[8] transport[9] and labour.[10] These studies have demonstrated that technical activities, far from being of secondary importance, were in fact a central part of the activity of the League of Nations. They have also revealed another face of the League: that of an organisation which frequently took new initiatives, in contrast to the image of an organisation paralysed by political rivalries, a reputation that it has still not managed to shake off. Finally, focusing on these activities has also made it possible to highlight the important role of the USA in the League of Nations,[11] contradicting the still widespread misconception that this country remained aloof from the organisation. The role of private actors as lobbyists for US membership of the League of Nations has been well known for a long time (Josephson 1975; Kuehl and Dunn 1997). However, more recent works have analysed the participation of US philanthropic foundations in the activities of the League (Lavelle 2007; Rietzler 2011a, 2011b; Tournès 2012, 2014, 2015; Ekbladh 2015). The findings of this body of research are convergent: in the view of scholars focusing on the history of the construction of knowledge and on the circulations of individuals, ideas and practices, there is no doubt that the USA was deeply involved in the League's activities; therefore, they should be considered as members de facto, though the American government was not a member de jure. In spite of the fact that they were not in a position to determine the official position of a government, private actors mustn't be considered of secondary importance; ignoring or minimising their activities has led to a misinterpretation of the history of the League of Nations. The conditions of their participation will be examined below, through the example of the Rockefeller Foundation's action in support of technical sections.

The Rockefeller Foundation

Supporting the technical activities of the League of Nations was part of a wider global intellectual project developed by the major American philanthropic foundations, and particularly the Rockefeller Foundation, during the early twentieth century. The objective of the Rockefeller Foundation was to use the resources of science to solve the problems of the modern world and ensure, as its founding charter put it in 1913, 'the well-being of Mankind throughout the world'. Undeniably, this 'well-being' had certain distinctively American features, but that is not the issue that concerns us here. Instead, the analysis that follows will focus on the Rockefeller Foundation's faith in the power of science, which was bedrock of its policy of promoting scientific activity all around the world from the 1910s onwards.[12] From the start, the foundation's support for the technical activities of the League of Nations would be one of its principal international investments.

[7] Renoliet (1999).

[8] Kévonian (2004).

[9] Schott and Kaiser (2014).

[10] Van Daele et al. (2010) and Kott and Droux (2013).

[11] Tournès (2015).

[12] For an overview of this project, see Tournès (2011a), chapter 2.

This process was launched in agreement with the Secretary General of the League of Nations, Eric Drummond. Indeed, in November 1919, Drummond was convinced that the membership of the USA, even with reservations, would be preferable to its non-participation.[13] He thus initiated a strategy aiming to integrate the USA at all costs. The cornerstone of this strategy was the development of technical activities: numerous members of the League believed that the USA would be attracted to the League if it became a body for 'international cooperation'[14] in these fields rather than creating a system of collective security incompatible with American diplomatic traditions. Such activities, however, only featured marginally in the Covenant, as only Article 23 mentioned the handful of sectors in which the League was likely to intervene, notably the 'equitable treatment for the commerce of all Members of the League', 'the traffic in women and children', 'the traffic of opium and other dangerous drugs' and 'the prevention and control of disease'. For his part, Woodrow Wilson was not very interested in these fields, which he considered secondary in comparison with his central ambition of making the League of Nations into a global parliament. Nevertheless, despite their marginal role in the Covenant, the League's technical activities rapidly expanded. Their existence, in fact, was one of the real innovations of the League of Nations, not only because of the diversity of their fields of activity but also because of the flexible way in which they operated, notably through the association of non-member states, which allowed them to achieve a degree of universality that the Assembly of member states could never come close to achieving. To circumvent the American refusal to join, the Secretariat thus constructed a League system on two levels: the first, that of collective security, was reserved for member states; the second, that of technical cooperation, was open to all and would allow for the integration of the USA. Moreover, the rapid expansion of technical activities was due to the support of American philanthropic foundations, particularly the Rockefeller Foundation: without this support, and in the absence of sufficient funding from the member states, the technical sections would have been forced to live from hand to mouth. This fact becomes clear when one analyses the conditions of their financial support.

Throughout the interwar years, American philanthropic foundations, and especially those of the Rockefeller network, were major financial backers of the technical activities of the League of Nations, particularly the Health Organisation, the Economic and Financial Organisation, and the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. This support was fundamental as the League faced budgetary shortages throughout its history and an increasingly wide gap emerged between the expansion of its technical activities and the growing reticence of governments to increase their financial contributions. From the 1930s, the economic crisis brought the growth of the League's budget to a halt, and the restructuring of the organisation during this period was in large part based on the need to save money.[15] In these conditions, the search for external funding rapidly became unavoidable if technical activities were to be developed.

[13] Drummond to Fosdick, 22 November 1919, Raymond Fosdick Papers, Princeton University, 1/2.

[14] Deibel (1972), 46.

[15] Ranshofen-Wertheimer (1945), 223.

Between 1922 and 1945, private American organisations of all sizes provided an estimated sum of between 5.6 and 6.6 million dollars to the League of Nations. If one takes only those funds offered to the Secretariat to support the activities of the technical sections, the total still amounts to 3.9 million dollars. In order to assess the importance of this funding, it is of course necessary to compare it to the global budget for technical activities (excluding salaries, buildings and pensions), which can be estimated at around 135 million gold francs between 1922 and 1945 or around 26 million dollars. The American contribution alone therefore amounts to 15% of the total budget.[16] By way of comparison, the proportion paid by the principal contributor to the League of Nations, Great Britain, amounted to 9.4% of the organisation's total spending in the year 1925, that of the second biggest contributor, France, 8.3%.[17] Even if this comparison is somewhat artificial, since the contribution of the member states went not only towards activities but also towards salaries and the upkeep of buildings, this proportion gives an idea of the level of the American contribution: if one considers only the technical activities, the USA was undoubtedly among main contributors, and probably even the biggest.

To be more precise, the multiple organisations of Rockefeller philanthropy were by far the most involved in this funding, notably the Rockefeller Foundation which, from 1922 to 1945, contributed an estimated total sum of between 2.9 and 3.5 million dollars, principally to the Health Organisation (at least 2 million dollars between 1922 and 1937), to the Economic and Financial Organisation (at least 800,000 dollars between 1931 and 1946) and to the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (at least 140,000 dollars between 1932 and 1939). This can be taken further: the Rockefeller contribution, already significant in itself, is even more significant when compared to the budget of particular sections. Thus, in some years, the Health Section, the Economic and Financial Organisation and the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation saw 40% of their budget coming from American funding (excluding salaries). And if one goes down to the level of individual projects undertaken by these sections (for example epidemiological intelligence in the Health Section, to which we will return later) the American contribution is sometimes closer to 100%, which means that certain projects would not have existed without American financial backing, no budget having been foreseen for them.

Finally, it should be noted that funding from the Rockefeller Foundation was granted for periods of several years (generally for 3–5 years), unlike the endowments from the member states which were granted on an annual basis and always susceptible to be revised downwards. So, as well as being a godsend for the annual budget, these grants also allowed the technical sections to develop long-term policies, which would be one of the major achievements of the League of Nations. It was undoubtedly for these reasons that, over the course of the history of the League of Nations, the American financial contribution was hardly ever opposed. Only in exceptional cases, such as in 1934 when the Spanish delegate Salvador de

[16] For the detail of the calculations, see Tournès (2015), 120–126.

[17] SDN. Répartition des dépenses pour le septième exercice (1925), Mémoire du Secrétaire général, Genève, 1925.

Madariaga expressed reservations about the renewal of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, was it ever called into question.[18] On the whole, American funding was always welcome, particularly because it also made it possible for the League to secure the United States' participation in the organisation.

Intelligence: epidemiological and economic

The main targets of Rockefeller funding to the League of Nations were epidemiological intelligence and public health documentation. In November 1921, the Provisional Health Committee created a Epidemiological Intelligence Service charged with collecting information on the incidence of epidemics in Eastern Europe and circulating it among national health authorities. Initially, this service barely had any funds at its disposal, so a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation arrived just in time for its activities to be launched: by 1924, in fact, Rockefeller funding was providing 92% of its budget.[19] These grants would be renewed without interruption until 1937.

The aim of the service was to centralise, treat and disseminate health data on a global level in order to promote the League of Nations' policies of fighting epidemics. The work of data collection was inseparable from the process of harmonising statistics: the members of the service soon realised that it was 'impossible to compare information from countries with effective statistics services with those countries in which such organisations [were] inadequate or non-existent'.[20] With the financial, technical and intellectual support of the Rockefeller Foundation, they therefore began a process of harmonising international health statistics. In fact, it was on the recommendation of the foundation that, in the summer of 1922, Ludwig Rajchman, medical director of the Health Section, contacted Edgar Sydenstricker, the head of the Statistics Office at the Public Health Service, the American 'ministry of health'.[21] Sydenstricker was an authority in the field of health statistics; granted leave by his administration, he ran the Epidemiological Intelligence Service from January 1923 to March 1924, playing a major role in its organisation and guiding its work.

In autumn 1922, the service published the first instalments of *Epidemiological Intelligence,* dedicated to monitoring the situation of epidemics in Central Europe and in Russia, and compiled with the help of statistics provided by national health administrations and treated and harmonised by the service.[22] From 1923, at the behest of Sydenstricker, this publication became longer and more systematic: it was

[18] Prentiss Gilbert (American Consul in Geneva) to Cordell Hull (Secretary of State), 29 January 1935, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md., RG 84/452.

[19] Budget pour 1924, League of Nations Archives (hereafter LoN) 12B/R866/26652/26652.

[20] Blayac (1932), L'Organisation d'hygiène de la Société des Nations. Thèse pour le doctorat en médecine, Université de Toulouse, 37.

[21] Rose (Rockefeller Foundation) to Rajchman, 21 July 1922, SDN 12B/R839/26117/21836.

[22] Gunn to Russell, 24 August 1926, Rockefeller Foundation archives (hereafter RF), Rockefeller Archive Center, Pocantico Hills, 1.1/100/20/170.

transformed into the monthly *Epidemiological Report* taking stock of the situation of epidemics in the 27 countries of Europe as well as in the USA, some Latin American countries, colonial Africa, British India, several countries in Asia, Australia and New Zealand. From 1924, these monthly reports were compiled into an *International Health Yearbook* of several hundred pages, which contained not only statistics but also overview reports on the activity of over 20 countries (including the USA) in the field of health policy. In the space of 2 years, the Epidemiological Intelligence Service had therefore become an institution for public health monitoring before that term had been coined.

When Sydenstricker left the Epidemiological Intelligence Service, it was another American who succeeded him: doctor Otto R. Eichel, head of vital statistics at the New York State Department of Health,[23] who remained in this post from March 1924 until his death that December.[24] To support him, the Health Section also recruited an American Deputy Director recommended by the Rockefeller Foundation, Frank Boudreau, an epidemiologist at the Department of Health of the State of Ohio. In 1933, Boudreau was promoted to Director of the service, a post which he held until his return to the USA in 1937. Even more so than Sydenstricker, Boudreau left his mark on the activity of the Epidemiological Intelligence Service. When he arrived, he was particularly involved in setting up the recently created Singapore bureau. The creation of this bureau is revealing of the process by which the League of Nations established global knowledge on public health questions; it also bears witness to the specificity of the policy of philanthropic foundations in relation to that of the American government, which was reticent during the 1920s towards any rapprochement with the League of Nations, including in the technical field. As far as health was concerned, the US government preferred to support the Paris-based *Office international d'hygiène publique* (International Office of Public Hygiene, OIHP) which had been created in 1908 and of which the USA was a member, and it attempted to prevent this organisation's absorption into the League of Nations Health Organisation in order to avoid ending up within an organisation under the authority of the League of Nations. But the Rockefeller Foundation's support for the Health Organisation ran counter to this policy. The opposition between these two positions was in evidence during the creation of the Singapore bureau, which was immediately supported financially by the Rockefeller Foundation, while the American government lobbied for the OIHP to be made responsible for the collection of global epidemiological data. But thanks to the generous donation of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Singapore bureau was able to set up a radio broadcast for transmitting epidemiological data collected in Asia to Geneva. The Epidemiological Intelligence Service, thanks to its technological equipment and statistical know-how, was thus able to synthesise and disseminate the data more quickly than the OIHP. Ultimately, the OIHP would be bypassed by the Geneva-based information service, to which countries gradually began sending their data

[23] Journal of the American Statistical Association (1924) The League of Nations Health Service. 19(146): 243–236.

[24] Otto Eichel. League of Nations Search Engine, http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/5461, accessed 5 April 2014.

instead. The collection of statistics progressed well: in 1924, 62 local or government administrations provided statistics to the *Epidemiological Report*; by 1926, this figure had risen to 116, and covered two-thirds of the world's population.[25] By the end of the 1920s, it was the service in Geneva, not the OIHP in Paris, which was the main authority on public health monitoring. In this case, the initiative of the Rockefeller Foundation went against the aims of the American government. But by the end of the 1920s, the USA had abandoned its support for the OIHP and, de facto, joined the Rockefeller organisation in supporting the Health Organisation.

It should be noted that the collection and processing of data by the Epidemiological Intelligence Service was also made possible through the development of the League of Nations documentation services, in which the American contribution was also crucial: in 1927 thanks a personal donation of 2 million dollars by John D. Rockefeller Jr., the League of Nations built a new library allowing it to centralise its documentation services and to develop an effective cataloguing system.[26] At the end of the 1930s, the activities and documentation of the Epidemiological Intelligence Service were integrated into it. At this point, the League of Nations became the leading centre for health documentation and analysis in Europe and the world.[27]

The second specialist institution on global problems to have its financial future secured by the Rockefeller Foundation was the Economic Intelligence Service created within the Economic and Financial Organisation (EFO). Again, when the League of Nations decided to create this service in 1931, with the aim of developing scientific research on the global economic crisis, it did not grant it a sufficiently large budget for it to function properly. It was therefore necessary to wait for a Rockefeller subsidy, granted in spring 1933,[28] before it was able expand its activities. The foundation supported it without interruption until 1946. The aim of the foundation was to make it a 'global centre'[29] gathering and synthesising work undertaken elsewhere and working on the international economy, notably on the causes of depressions. Through its financial support, the Rockefeller Foundation intended to make the EFO more independent from the League of Nations (and thus from national governments) in order give its experts more room for manoeuvre. As such, the financing of the EFO, like indeed the other technical sections, was clearly part of the Rockefeller strategy to set up something resembling a global government of experts working in parallel to the political authorities. In substance, this was what Edmund Day, the head of the Social Science Division, wrote to one of the foundation's trustees, Raymond Fosdick, in December 1933. Day believed that the League of Nations had been badly thought out from the start, and given a mission—implementing the peace treaties—that it was not capable of maintaining. It would have been better, he argued, if the League had concentrated its energy in two fields: firstly the organisation of conferences leading to large-scale projects, and secondly

[25] Rockefeller Foundation (1926) Annual Report, 249.

[26] Tournès (2011b).

[27] David H. Stevens, Notes on the Library of the League of Nations, 1 July 1937, RF 1.1/100/90/833.

[28] Van Sickle to Loveday, 3 May 1933, SDN 10B/R4520/4072/4072.

[29] Day to Gunn, 18 January 1932, RF 1.1/100/18/148.

the consolidation of scientific expertise. As such, Day believed that the foundation should, through its funding, contribute towards the development of a semi-autonomous body that would be free to work on issues of its own choosing, while the EFO had its hands tied when it came to undertaking studies that would have been considered sensitive by the governments of the great powers. The circumstances seemed favourable to the Americans: at the same time, in fact, the Italian government was advocating a change in the structure of the League of Nations, and Day believed that this presented a window of opportunity to rethink the global aims of the League: the foundation might be able to use the opportunity to transform it into an expert body on international economic problems.[30] In summer 1933, one of the Rockefeller officers visited Geneva and met Eric Drummond just before he left the Secretariat; the two men agreed that Rockefeller funding should not only continue but increase. This would indeed be the case in the years that followed.

The first objective assigned to the Economic Intelligence Service by the League of Nations assembly was to synthesise the studies undertaken around the world on economic cycles in order better to understand the processes behind the alternation of phases of economic growth and contraction. This work, undertaken during the years that followed,[31] would be funded in large part by the Rockefeller Foundation. The staff required to undertake this research was recruited in coordination between the head of the Economic Intelligence Service, Alexander Loveday, and the Rockefeller officers Van Sickle and Kittredge: Loveday recruited John Bell Condliffe, a former secretary of the Institute of Pacific Relations (financed by the foundation), and former Rockefeller fellow Gottfried von Haberler. Haberler worked for the service from spring 1934 to spring 1936 and published the study *Prosperity and Depression* at the end of his contract,[32] which immediately gained a wide audience among economists.[33] However, the work of Haberler was only the first part of the vast project undertaken by the service with Rockefeller funding. The second part involved subjecting Haberler's theories to rigorous statistical analysis in order to test them against economic realities and formulate strategies for the prevention of future crises. In order to do so, the service recruited the Danish economist Jan Tinbergen,[34] who undertook this work in collaboration with numerous European economists including Dennis H. Robertson of Cambridge University,[35] the Norwegian Ragnar Frisch, the Swede Erik Lundberg, the Dane Charles Koopmans and Haberler himself who, having returned to the USA, remained in contact with the research of the service. The work of Tinbergen was mainly based on public statistical data from the USA, Britain and France, as well as on the large amount of material amassed by the Economic Intelligence Service and on the research

[30] Day to Fosdick, 8 December 1933, RF 2-1933/100/78/623.

[31] Endres and Fleming (2002), 30.

[32] Haberler (1936) *Prosperity and Depression. A Theoretical Analysis of Cyclical Movements.* Geneva, League of Nations.

[33] Rapport d'activité pour la période 1938–1939, SDN 10B/R4520/4072/4072.

[34] John Van Sickle diary, 4–8 October 1935, RF 1.1/100/18/149.

[35] Alexander Loveday, Note on work done under Rockefeller grants, 25 September 1937, RF 1.1/100/18/150.

undertaken by various research institutes studying the European and American situation.[36] In 1939, Tinbergen published his results in two large works which immediately became international benchmarks for understanding economic cycles.[37]

The Rockefeller grant given to the Economic Intelligence Service also allowed it to improve its gathering of international economic, financial and trade statistics considerably. This work had begun in 1920, with the creation of the *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, the data in which would be compiled annually from 1926 in the hefty *Statistical Yearbook*. From 1932, John Bell Condliffe published an annual *World Economic Survey*, which provided a summary of the research undertaken by the service. In their activity of gathering and analysing statistics, the staff of the Economic Intelligence Service came up against the same problem as their colleagues in the Epidemiological Intelligence Service in the Health Section, namely the lack of harmonisation between different countries. In 1936, Loveday approached the foundation, which offered him a grant to fund travel by economic statisticians in order to increase harmonisation between national statistics agencies and the League of Nations.[38] The money allowed officials from various national statistics services to visit those 'model countries'[39] possessing centralised[40] and well-organised statistics services: between autumn 1938 and summer 1939, at least eight visits were organised, the itinerary of which was established in cooperation between Loveday and the Rockefeller officers.[41] At the end of each trip, the participants wrote reports which were sent to the Rockefeller Foundation and to the League of Nations, the completed research being compiled by the committee of expert statisticians at the League of Nations, which incorporated it into its ongoing reflection on the comparability of global statistics. This was the start of a process which led to the establishment of national account systems and which crystallised during the Second World War, although this largely took place outside the committee of statisticians, whose work was interrupted by the outbreak of the war.[42]

Coordinating international economic expertise

The main objective of the Rockefeller Foundation in funding the technical sections of the League of Nations was to transform the League into a body that would coordinate the numerous specialist projects that the foundation was already funding all around

[36] SDN. Service d'études économiques. *Vérification statistique des cycles économiques. 1. Une méthode et son application au mouvement des investissements*, par Jan Tinbergen, Genève, 1939, pp. 163–175.

[37] Tinbergen J., *Statistical Testing of Business Cycles Theories: I. A Method and its Applications to Investment Activity*, February 1939; *II. Business Cycles in the United States of America, 1919–1932*, August 1939.

[38] Van Sickle to Kittredge, 4 December 1936, SDN 10B/R4548/27741/27741.

[39] Rosenborg to Loveday, 22 December 1936, SDN 10B/R4548/27741/27741.

[40] Letter of 25 August 1937, SDN 10B/R4548/27741/27741.

[41] Kittredge to Loveday, 19 May 1938, SDN 10B/R4548/27741/27741.

[42] Vanoli (2002), 37 sq and 173–175.

the world. During the interwar years, the Foundation funded dozens of higher education institutions and research projects in the fields of medicine and the social sciences.[43] Between 1930 and 1946, in the field of economics alone, the Rockefeller foundation subsidised 46 institutions working on international economic problems, half of them outside the USA, notably in western Europe (Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland), in northern Europe (Sweden, Norway, Denmark), in central and eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria) and in a handful other countries (Canada, China, mandate Lebanon). While the institutions that received the largest endowments from the foundation were American (the National Bureau of Economic Research, the universities of Harvard and Chicago, the Social Science Research Council), the London School of Economics and the League of Nations came next on the list. The foundation invested a total of over 10 million dollars in this field between 1930 and 1940.

Yet it soon became clear to the trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation that the work undertaken in all of these institutions needed a level of coordination that the Foundation alone was not capable of providing as it lacked the necessary intellectual capital. Indeed, even though it was staffed by officers with an academic profile, the foundation was above all an institution for the management of science and thus not equipped for co-ordinating scientific research, especially on such a vast scale. This was the reason that it turned to the League of Nations, and in particular to the EFO, which had similar aims: to undertake an analysis of the world economy.

From the start, like the other technical sections of the League of Nations, the EFO created many expert committees in multiple fields, which rapidly became international sites of contact for experts. While their political influence was weak, owing to their consultative character, their intellectual legitimacy rapidly became uncontested as a result of the quality of their work. The Rockefeller Foundation viewed this scientific quality, along with its role as an international site of contact, as the great strength of the League of Nations. But the EFO also had a major drawback for the foundation: it was under the control of national governments, notably those of Britain and France, and its preference for free trade[44] ran counter to the policies of Britain and France policies during the 1930s, which sought to overcome the crisis more through protectionism within their own empires than through the globalisation of trade. As such, the EFO was not free to undertake work on such sensitive issues as the analysis of international trade.

In order to tackle this problem, the Rockefeller Foundation took control of another body within the League of Nations: the International Studies Conference (ISC).[45] This had been created in 1928 by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) in order to coordinate the work of European specialists on international questions.[46] In 1932, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

[43] Tournès (2007).

[44] Clavin (2013), 103–104 and 126–128.

[45] On the history of the ISC, see Riemens (2011) and Tournès (2015, ch 8).

[46] League of Nations. International studies conference, *Collective Security. A Record of the Seventh and the Eighth International Studies Conferences*, Paris 1934–London 1935, edited by Maurice Bourquin, Paris, 1936, p. ix; see also *L'Europe Nouvelle*, 4 June 1932.

and above all the Rockefeller Foundation began to support it financially. From 1935 onwards, and especially after 1937, the American presence became even stronger: in total, the Rockefeller Foundation gave the IIIC 140,000 dollars to finance the ISC between 1932 and 1939[47]; in the last year, its subsidy amounted to 2.9 million francs, or 'more than the total of government subsidies'[48] from all the states that were part of the IIIC, making the foundation by far the biggest contributor, ahead of the French government. By 1935, the foundation was already contributing over half of the funding of the ISC, and by 1939 this figure was practically 100%, which amounted to 46.4% of the total budget of the IIIC.

The massive financial involvement of the Rockefeller Foundation had immediate consequences for the organisation of the ISC: the foundation completely overhauled its administration, imposing the economist John Bell Condliffe as director in 1937 against the advice of Henri Bonnet, the head of the IIIC.[49] This takeover made the ISC effectively independent from the IIIC, as it was Condliffe and not Bonnet who managed the Rockefeller funding.[50] From this moment on, the foundation completely reoriented the ISC's intellectual agenda: originally dedicated to questions of collective security, after 1937 it would focus on the study of international trade, which could not be done at the EFO because of French and British reticence. International trade would be the theme of the last two International Studies Conferences, which were held in Prague in May 1938 and Bergen in August 1939.

Once it was in charge of both the budget and the scientific programme of the ISC, the Rockefeller Foundation tried to encourage it to take on the task of coordinating all the research that the foundation was already funding in various institutes in the USA and in Europe. As part of this plan, the foundation encouraged the creation of national committees of the ISC in several countries. These committees were made up of the numerous institutes that were already being funded individually by the foundation; the foundation financed these national committees on the condition that they undertake collective research projects within the programme set out by the Executive Committee of the ISC, on which Rockefeller officers were present. In total, at least twenty national committees were created between 1936 and 1938, notably in Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia and Romania, as well as in the USA, Japan, Australia, Mexico and

[47] Note du service des relations internationales et des sciences sociales relative à la subvention Rockefeller 1935–1937, UNESCO-IICI A/II/28; Conférence permanente des hautes études internationales. Dixième réunion du Comité exécutif, Paris, 15 January 1938. Annexe B: subvention de la fondation Rockefeller, UNESCO-IICI K/XI/1/23; Kittredge to Bonnet, 21 April 1939, UNESCO-IICI A/II/28.

[48] Renoliet (1999), 316.

[49] Kittredge to Walker, 28 October 1937; memorandum by Kittredge, 28 September 1938, RF 1.1/100/105/955; Kittredge to Walker, 28 October 1937, RF 1.1/100/105/955; Bonnet to Condliffe, 7 July 1937, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace-European Center (hereafter CEIP-CE), Columbia University, I/33/2.

[50] Condliffe to Bonnet, 26 January 1938, CEIP-CE I/34/3.

Brazil. Many former fellows of the Rockefeller Foundation could be found at these institutes working on economic questions.

The logic behind this complex system (of fellows, research institutes, national committees and plenary meetings of the ISC) was clear: to coordinate a division of labour between experts around the world in order to obtain a global perspective on the problems of world trade. The conferences in Prague and Bergen served to map out this collective project. The 1939 Bergen conference was held in dramatic circumstances: initially meant to begin on 27 August, it was brought forward by 2 days because of the rise in international tension caused by the German-Soviet pact signed on 23 August. It ended on 29 August, rather than on 2 September as planned. Despite the context, the atmosphere was studious: it brought together 45 participants from 14 national committees from both Europe and beyond (Mexico, Canada, Australia). Together, these committees produced a total of 89 memoranda on very diverse subjects.[51] Each produced a memo on the evolution its own country's trade policy during the 1930s, accompanied by an overview of political, economic and social conditions in that country, and the legislation in force there. It is noteworthy that both Japan and Germany also produced memoranda, despite the fact that their committees were no longer part of the permanent conference after their departure from the League of Nations. When added together, these studies amounted to a panoramic overview of the foreign trade of the world's major nations. Most national committees also produced several other studies, however, so that numerous other subjects were addressed including the control of currency exchange, the economic consequences of limiting migration, the influence of cartels on the organisation of international trade, international borrowing, regional economic agreements in Europe, international migration and international monetary organisation. The aim of the Bergen meeting was to synthesise all these works in order for a global vision of international trade to emerge from the sum of national trade policies. Three days after the end of the meeting, Germany invaded Poland. But work continued, and the results of the meeting were published in late 1939 and 1940 in the form of several studies, with John Bell Condliffe playing a crucial role in their production.[52] In these publications, experts emphasised the notion that the policy of laissez-faire in international trade had been discredited once and for all,[53] and that international cooperation needed to be improved by both increasing the role of existing international organisations and, if necessary, creating new ones.[54] Published at the outbreak of war, their analysis of the future of the world economy presented a clear set of alternatives: one was that the totalitarian states would win, leading to the world being divided into a system of regional blocs, each dominated by one of those

[51] See the complete list of participants and the memoranda in Condliffe J. B. (1940), The Reconstruction of World Trade. A Survey of International Economic Relations. New York: W.W. Norton, 395–405.

[52] International studies conference. Twelfth Session. *Economic Policies in Relation to World Peace, A Record of the Study Meeting held in Bergen from August 26th to 29th 1939*, Paris, 1940. And above all Condliffe (1940), op. cit.

[53] Condliffe (1938) Markets and the Problem of Peaceful Change. Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 11.

[54] International studies conference. *International Monetary Organization*, by M. A. Heilperin, Paris, 1939, p. 56. See also Condliffe, *Reconstruction, op. cit*., pp. 355 *sq*.

states (Russia, Germany, Italy, Japan) or by the USA, with the British Empire destined to collapse as it was not supported by a strong enough internal market. The other possibility was that the democracies would win and that the opening of international trade would give rise to a global system in which the USA would be the clearly dominant power. While these studies past almost entirely unnoticed in the difficult circumstances of the year 1939–1940, they contained many of the ideas that would go on to shape the organisation of the world economy after 1945. The intellectual foundations of the post-1945 order were therefore laid even before the outbreak of the war.

Conclusion

While it has only been possible to offer a partial survey of the activities of technical sections of the League of Nations here, what emerges very clearly is the development of a high level of expertise on international problems. By collecting information and quantitative data, harmonising international statistics and bringing together experts from many countries to investigate numerous questions, the League of Nations thus became a think tank before the term was coined, developing in parallel to such institutions as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Institute of Pacific Relations, all of which maintained relations with the League. Given that the Rockefeller Foundation played an important role in the development of the League's expert activities, three final observations can be put forward regarding issues that merit further inquiry by historians and political scientists specialised in the international system and the interwar period.

The first observation concerns the way in which the 1930s should be interpreted. Although, from a political perspective, that decade was marked by the League of Nations' descent into the abyss, it was in certain respects a golden age for its expert activities, which gave the League of Nations a real intellectual legitimacy at the very moment its political legitimacy was in decline. This decade also saw the development, away from the spotlight, of the ideas that would play a central role in the reorganisation of the world after 1945. The 1930s were not only, therefore, a period of decline: they can also be considered as a founding moment in the process of constructing the post-1945 international order. Several indications support this interpretation. The first is that, from the early 1930s, the League of Nations began a process of reform which led to the Bruce reform and, ultimately, to the creation of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The second is the discrete but real return of the USA to the international system after its withdrawal in 1919: this can be seen in the Rockefeller Foundation's growing support for the technical activities of the League, as well as in the US government's decision to join the International Labour Organization in 1934 and in its slow but steady conversion to free trade, starting in 1934 with the passing of the Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act. These elements demonstrate that the reorganisation of the international system that took place between 1939 and 1945 needs to be situated within a longer-term process that began in the early 1930s.

The second observation concerns the fact that the activity of the Rockefeller Foundation not only led to the de facto entry of the USA into the League of Nations system but also contributed to shaping the League of Nations in a way far removed from the Wilsonian project, a project which the Foundation's directors nevertheless claimed to represent. This was notably the case of Raymond Fosdick, a former student of Wilson's at Princeton University, treasurer of his presidential campaign in 1912 and former Undersecretary General of the League of Nations, which he left in 1920 before creating the League of Nations News Bureau and joining the Rockefeller Foundation in 1921. Yet, by leading the Rockefeller Foundation into its massive and continuing support of the League of Nations for the rest of its existence, this convinced Wilsonian played a decisive role in the de-politicisation of the activities of the League and in its transformation into an expert body. This was a long way from the objective pursued by Wilson, who wanted it to become a parliament of nations: a political organisation in the strongest sense of the term. Here there is a paradox which deserves to be examined in greater detail in order better to understand the logic of American internationalist circles in the interwar years,

The third and final observation concerns the widely held notion that the failure of the international system of the interwar years was above all the fault of the Europeans, as the USA had not participated in it. This argument tends to be used to legitimise a posteriori the major role played by the USA in the process of reorganisation that led to the United Nations after 1945. However, if one accepts the idea that the USA did in fact participate in this international system, as this article has shown, it follows that it should also be held accountable for its failure, in the same way as the European powers, particularly since its considerable activities contributed towards delegitimising the League system and encouraged its disintegration. Indeed, by supporting technical activities, the Rockefeller Foundation helped to make them autonomous from the central administration of the League, not only when it came to their budget but also because, from an administrative perspective, such support led to changes in the structure of the sponsored organisations: this was notably the case of the International Studies Conference, which the Foundation managed to make independent from the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation so that it could manage the Rockefeller grant without having to submit to the authority of the Parisian office. It was also the case of the Economic, Financial and Transit Department of the EFO: the foundation fully funded its move to the USA in the summer of 1940 and all its activities for the rest of the duration of the war.[55] American support for technical activities, while allowing for their expansion, therefore simultaneously contributed to delegitimising the central institutions of the League of Nations, leading to its fragmentation in 1939–1940, and thereby facilitated the process of constructing a new international organisation, which led to the foundation of the United Nations.

[55] On this episode, see Clavin (2013, chapters 8 and 9), Tournès (2014, 2015, chapter 9) and Ekbladh (2015).

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