

The administrative culture(s) of the League of Nations Secretariat

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Introduction

In reality, however, it is indeed surprising that, to ensure the life of so large a brain, so relatively slight a body was found to be sufficient.¹

—Internal report on the history and development of the Secretariat, 1944

It seems obvious that the League of Nations was the first institutionalised form of what we today would call an international (not only regional) and universal organisation, combining general and specific policy areas. Nevertheless, it was also quite different compared with post-1945 institutions, above all the United Nations (UN). From a legal and administrative perspective, international law expert Richard Collins neatly summarises the League's birth as some form of culmination of the process of international organisation until then: »From the point of view of the modern law of international organisations, then, the League is seen as largely systematising these more *ad hoc* diplomatic and administrative practices into a more permanent, more recognisably modern institutional form.«² As the League mostly constituted a British-French enterprise, based on the ideas of US President Woodrow Wilson,

it also did not substantially question an assumed Western superiority in the world and thus perpetuated a corresponding mindset and administrative culture. It relied, however, on the British experience of developing an imperial administration.³ It changed the administration of colonialism, as it managed affairs in former colonies from the Geneva-based Mandates Section.⁴ Despite the League's failure to prevent the events leading to the outbreak of the Second World War, recent years have witnessed some recognition of other features of the Geneva organisation, providing a more nuanced picture.⁵ Usually, the International Civil Service (ICS) counts as one of the few achievements of the organisation that was worth copying after 1945 for the new United Nations. Since many consider the ICS the core of international bureaucracies, the article aspires to delve deeper into its supposed administrative culture.

Unlike studies on existing international institutions, it is not possible to conduct interviews in this regard. We are thus left with the archive material and research literature that touches upon this issue, or rather contains implicit notions of such a bureaucratic culture. This includes looking into the preparation and management of files, internal communication and decision-making

as important parts of a specific bureaucratic culture. Also, the use of archive material differs between studies on national and international bureaucracies: »Through their practices, agents of the administrative field produce documents – archives – that they use to legitimize both themselves and the state.«⁶ This was initially not the case at the League. Maybe it was after all not yet a true IO, with a professional ICS, but rather an embryonic project of some selected few who built up a *sui generis* bureaucracy around ideas they believed to be the appropriate ones? Instead of discussing the philosophical, semantic and practical dimensions of the terms ›culture‹ and ›administrative culture‹, I refer this task to corresponding studies⁷ and will ask these questions: How did the founders of the LoN understand administrative culture and how did the ›international‹ character of the Secretariat form this culture? What was the original administrative culture(s) of the League's international civil service?

Administrative culture

How can we determine what administrative culture is? One of the pioneering theorists in public administration, Fred W. Riggs, summarised various aspects of administrative culture such as »shared belief and practices«, people sharing a culture, shared attitudes, and improvement.⁸

From an imperial British perspective, Patrick Joyce's »The State of Freedom. A Social History of the British State« can be helpful as regards the conceptualisation of administrative culture. Joyce identifies a »bureaucratic man« and underlines the importance of a component of the bureaucracy often perceived as a dull element in British history: the filing system. Taking a closer look at the imperial bureaucracy in India, Joyce describes the file as the »central unit by which state information is assembled and knowledge produced«. But beyond the abstract information, he also emphasizes the »real files«, meaning the »spatial organization of the documents« and the »physical act of writing.« This makes it possible to analyse the »process of framing, and hence harnessing and redirecting, the various agencies of persons and things so as to give them new form, and hence a new capacity for action in the world.«⁹ Joyce neatly outlines

how the British elites, shaped by education and social norms, formed a common mentality and a bureaucratic ›habitus‹.¹⁰

However, these accounts of the multifaceted categories to take into consideration for the analysis of administrative culture refer clearly to national systems. Thus, they do not adequately consider the peculiar features of international bureaucracies, such as geographic distribution, national representativeness, and cultural diversity in terms of attitudes, practices and differing administrative systems. This means that international organisations' administrative cultures in general and the League's in particular need additional categories of analysis. The League is insofar particular, as it was the first institution that had a self-image of a universal organisation (in terms of membership and policy areas) and also the first that aspired to establish a truly international secretariat with international civil servants. The Covenant for the new organisation, attached to the Peace Treaty of Versailles of 1919, only vaguely described the provisions for the Secretariat. Article 6 of the League's Covenant provides that the Secretariat should be set up at the institution's seat, even though the first months, the *travaux préparatoire*, took place in London. Furthermore »The Secretariat shall comprise a Secretary General and such secretaries and staff as may be required.« The Secretary-General was supposed to appoint the »secretaries and staff« with the Council's approval, where the great powers dominated. The member states had to pay for the League's expenses.¹¹ Article 7 provided that »all positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women. Representatives of the Members of the League and officials of the League when engaged on the business of the League shall enjoy diplomatic privileges and immunities.«¹²

Ranshofen-Wertheimer identified a distinct »international administrative technique« in the League's Secretariat: Even though national and international administrations are essentially »generic« and employ the same »rational processes of organization that have evolved since centralized government and professional civil service emerged in the eighteenth century«, there are differences. As the secretariat with the international civil service was newly established in 1919, it could

choose from various national experiences or opt for a combination of different models. And here, the first location of the headquarters in London and the appointment of the Scot Eric Drummond certainly favoured the British civil service.¹³ Another factor that makes it problematic to apply analytical categories based on national bureaucracies is that international administration used to embrace »ministerial organization«, mostly from foreign ministries, instead of »municipal law-enforcing machinery or social and housing agencies«. As the international administration in the early years had not established its executive functions but relied on national entities to execute its policies, it seemingly had more of a consultative and advisory role: »In this respect, the difference between the two kinds of administration is not one of international versus national administration, but of ministerial administration properly speaking versus operational administration.«¹⁴ Ranshofer-Wertheimer further detected the main difference between national and international administrations in the different policy-makers they have to respond to. While national bureaucracies belong to the executive and are under constant surveillance of the legislative arm of the national government, international administration constitutes the only continuous part of an international institution: »Its policy-shaping bodies are not legislatures but diplomatic bodies.«¹⁵ Ranshofen-Wertheimer accordingly concludes:

*It was this basic constitutional difference in the relationship between administrative and policy-shaping bodies in national and international affairs that imposed upon the League Secretariat the need for creating its own technique and procedure in regard to its leadership as well as in its office organization, its external relations, and its staff management.*¹⁶

Moreover, the application of an international treaty or various, conflicting, or less clearly defined treaties provides a more ambiguous legal framework for the international civil servant compared to the national counterpart. In addition, the human factor plays a decisive role, as an international civil servant must not only obey to the bureaucratic rules but also neglect assumed national instincts.¹⁷

Research on the international civil service

The growing literature on international organisations as bureaucracies and the contemporary role of the international civil service (ICS) shows a popular trend in political science, public administration, or organisation studies. However, these studies have often tended to mostly content themselves with only cursory or even passing remarks about the historical development of the ICS. Even though some observers have identified an »international turn« among historians and a »historical turn« among IR scholars, the history of the international civil service only recently received more attention. The new wave of studies focusing on international organisations as bureaucracies, often connecting Public Administration with IR approaches,¹⁸ has largely marginalised this historical perspective and focused on contemporary (and often Western-dominated) institutions, rather than on continuities since the establishment of the League's Secretariat.¹⁹ To address the questions of the predominant administrative culture, and if lessons of the League's ICS still matter today, it is relevant to ask whether there was a strategy at the outset of the League's civil service and to what extent it was successful. At the establishment of the League's secretariat, Eric Drummond, the first Secretary General of the League, had to balance the various practical internal challenges and external political pressure and expectations. Were he and his core staff capable of outlining a systematic approach to the composition of the Secretariat and the regulation of recruitment practices? Traditional studies on the origin of the international civil service have focused on the role national governments, especially the great powers, played. Barros tellingly named his book on Drummond and the Secretariat »Office without Power«.²⁰ Nevertheless, the majority of studies, overwhelmingly authored by former League officials, concluded that the endeavour of an international secretariat was successful.²¹ Ranshofen-Wertheimer created the narrative of the »great experiment«: The League's staff was »largely composed of members of the upper-middle class, was socially more homogenous than the ILO«. League and ILO secretariats »had a devoted staff, developed an *esprit de corps* transcending national and

social disparities, created strong loyalties. Both had proved that international administration is feasible, that it can be efficient, and that the concept of international civil service is practical.«²² Susan Pedersen's excellent review article on the League mostly corroborates this positive assessment, despite acknowledging spy activities and less effective temporary staff.²³ Benjamin Auberer has analysed administrative debates about world order during the Second World War (1941-44), led by former League officials at Chatham House in London, who mostly defended the League, its secretariat and their own role in it.²⁴ The report that came out of these gatherings did most likely have some impact on the establishment of the UN secretariat. Even though scholars have lauded the ICS as a successful invention, the majority of studies emphasise the overwhelming role of nationality in the construction of the secretariat and composition of the civil service.

Nevertheless, recent research has contributed to the nuance of the narrative of a »great experiment«. I have argued that even though nationality had a major impact, there were some systematic and some ad-hoc decisions at the medium level, in which the role of national governments and great powers had considerable influence on recruitment, but not always the ultimate impact since other factors (qualifications, language skills, belonging to a specific region/culture, balancing) also could be decisive.²⁵ Gram-Skjoldager and Ikononou presented a new and more systematised interpretation, arguing that the foundational years of the League's Secretariat witnessed a quite sophisticated institutionalisation of recruitment practices, balancing the aspirational autonomy of the service with the necessary dialogue with governments and great powers.²⁶ In the overall architecture of the League, Gram-Skjoldager and Ikononou are certainly right when they claim that Drummond and his early allies had to find the right mix to please great powers while trying to guarantee the Secretariat's most possible independence. Drummond had to manage several dilemmas: »The League Secretariat existed through the will of states; yet needed to exist autonomously of the same. It built primarily upon principles of national administrations; yet had to create its own unique permanent multinational bureaucracy to act and cope in the diplomatic sphere.«²⁷ The art was to secure »absolute autonomy« for Drummond and the

secretariat and at the same time to maintain a close dialogue with leading member states to mirror existing hierarchies. In other words, it was all about equilibrating this tension and establishing both autonomy (from the members) and legitimacy (from the dominant powers).²⁸ One could argue that the need to talk to »leading member states« and to reflect existing orders in power and prestige ushered in a dilemma: In the given framework, the »absolute autonomy« of the secretariat was per se a mere illusion. Concretely, at the set-up of the institutional leadership, the nationalities of Under-General Secretaries and Directors of Sections mattered tremendously.

Establishing the Secretariat: The administrative culture(s) of the League of Nations

Historical choices: Drummond sets up the Secretariat

Newer research has emphasised the role of the League's first Secretary-General, the Scotsman Eric Drummond, in the set-up of an international Secretariat and self-understanding of the evolving international civil service. As the Covenant of the League of Nations did not mention the administration in much detail, Drummond interpreted its role in his way, mirroring to some extent the British civil service, its file organisation and decision-making that had socialised him. Unlike the more political (following the French tradition) director of the International Labour Organisation, Albert Thomas, Drummond was a »civil servant, self-effacing and reared in the tradition of anonymity.«²⁹ One alternative candidate for the highest position, Maurice Hankey, would most likely have continued the previous practice of appointing national delegates to work in the secretariat, rather than employing staff loyal only to the institution. Great powers (the US, Britain and France) agreed that this was not the way to go and preferred a rather »international body«.³⁰

Officially, of equally qualified candidates the one should be preferred whose nationality was inadequately represented.³¹ This provision, even though only one factor in recruitment practices in reality, appears similar

to today's hiring rules concerning gender equality/non-discrimination against people with disabilities, for instance.

Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou argue that key features of the League's »institutional capacity and identity« were formed through institutionalising recruitment practices between 1919 and 1923, considering two elements:

on the one hand, the shielding of all processes of staffing in order to secure absolute autonomy for the Secretary-General, and thus the Secretariat, in such questions; and, on the other hand, within certain limits, establishing a close dialogue with leading member states and developing hiring practices that to a remarkable degree reproduced existing hierarchies of power and prestige. Skillfully balancing these two considerations, Drummond managed to build the Secretariat's autonomy and legitimacy among member states.³²

Once appointed, Drummond used the unspecific parts of the Covenant to structure the secretariat's sections around themes (economy and finance, health, transport, disarmament, mandates, etc.) instead of geographical regions to make sure that the administration worked across national and regional borders.³³ Had the sections operated independently from each other, according to a report from 1944, they may have only followed their own special interests and not the League's overall goals as such. This allegedly also prevented »the splitting up of the Secretariat into more or less divergent groups.«³⁴

The Balfour Report, named after the former British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, better known for the 1917 Balfour Declaration, dealt for the first time with the League's staff matters:

I emphasise the word »International«, because the members of the Secretariat once appointed are no longer the servants of the country of which they are citizens, but become for the time being the servants only of the League of Nations. Their duties are not national but international.³⁵

The emphasis on the »international« suggested an understanding that, taken literally (meaning

potentially representing most of the member states), the administrative culture was subject to renegotiation as various conflicting bureaucratic understandings supposedly might compete with the once established British-French reading of Weber's notion. However, this never happened, as the Eurocentric conviction was at the very heart of the League's Secretariat.

The Noblemaire report of 1921 justified the high salaries in the difficult initial stage of the Secretariat: »We admit that the salaries which we propose we based on those of the highest-paid Civil Services in the world, i.e. those of the British Empire.«³⁶ Thus, the »Noblemaire principle« was born and is still in use today for professional staff in international administrations. Since Geneva became the city in which the League set up its headquarters in November 1920, the administrative culture was also affected by hosting the organisation in French-speaking Switzerland close to the French border. The Noblemaire Report of 1921 mentioned that Geneva was too expensive for maintaining the League's workings,³⁷ and the recruitment of local staff for minor posts was certainly contributing to a certain Francophone-Swiss culture at least at the medium and lower levels and everyday business.

The necessary distinction between different phases of the directors in the Secretariat³⁸ as well as a nuanced view on the different ranks in the League's staff show that studies on the first »international civil service« have tended to highlight the significance of the Secretaries-General, the Under-SGs and the Directors of Section, rather than lower-ranking positions or even locally recruited personnel. Former staff member Ranshofen-Wertheimer provided a telling insight from his own experience:

The Secretaries-General of the League kept somewhat aloof from their personnel. Many officials, even those belonging to the First Division, had no opportunity to establish personal contact with them. [...] Drummond only appeared in front of the staff on rare occasions, often when negative administrative changes had to be announced.³⁹

The representative character of the League's bureaucracy as a key legitimising factor had a tremendous impact on the organisation's administrative

culture. The League of Nations administration experienced something similar to what Patrick Joyce has called the »formation of state persons« in Great Britain.⁴⁰ Highly influenced by the British understanding of bureaucracy, it developed a »common sense« and intrinsic understanding of administrative procedures and filing. This reflected power relations within the respective societies but also among the different nationalities of the League's employees. Nevertheless, also the organisation of files – mostly influenced by Drummond's directives – adapted to a large extent the British filing system,⁴¹ which also included the system of the »ladder« analysed by Patrick Joyce.⁴²

According to Pastuhova, the League's classification system functioned »well«, even with finding files of the first eight years later on thanks to the »subject« and »name indices« or, if the name of the topic were unknown, with the »outletter files« of a specific section.⁴³ Given spy activities in the Secretariat and occasional pathologies of bureaucratic systems, her overly positive assessment, however, may be doubted:

Any file could be located without delay by the Classification Branch, since each file had a card on which the dispatch and receipt of the file were accurately noted. For the same reason, no document could ever be mislaid or lost.⁴⁴

Perceptions from 1944

A review of existing research on the Secretariat and the first truly international civil service has now been complemented by an analysis of the initial years of the League aimed at identifying administrative culture(s) of the Secretariat. Now, a look at a retrospective insider evaluation from 1944 shall provide another angle on the administrative culture of the League: In that year, a report was prepared on the »history of the development of the Secretariat«, especially given the upcoming creation of a new international body, the United Nations.

In November 1944, the League's treasurer, Seymour Jacklin, informed the Director of Personnel, Valentin Joseph Stencek, about a request by the Secretary-General, Sean Lester, to draw up a report based on several already existing reports on the administrative

machinery: the Balfour report (1920), the Noblemaire report (1921) and the Committee of Thirteen report(s), including possibly the Fourth Committee discussions and staff regulations. Lester urged that the report be prepared »using all necessary staff to ensure speed«.⁴⁵ This was a sign that the »great experience« was deemed exemplary for the set-up of the UN's civil service. Stencek then turned to Henri Gabriel Vilatte, the Chief of the Personnel Office (Second Division), but soon decided not to divide the work on the report, as a holistic view of the history of the Secretariat was considered important. As a result, Vilatte prepared the first part of the report alone in an »intense week«, consisting of the duties of the Secretariat, the allegiance of the staff and staff composition.⁴⁶

Vilatte's report

The report can be found in various parts in the personnel files (League Archives). According to the report, the »international« character of the Secretariat is not explicitly mentioned in the Covenant (articles 2 and 6), but »evident from the terms of the Preamble«: »This international character manifests itself in three distinct aspects: 1) the duties of the Secretariat; 2) the allegiance of the staff; and 3) the composition of the staff.« As concerns the duties, this nonchalant remark appears telling: »At no time does there seem to have been any difficulty concerning the international character of the activity of the Secretariat. No need seems to have been felt for determining more precisely or in greater detail this character, which is thus to be taken as sufficiently clear of itself.«⁴⁷ This is clearly proof of the dominant view on the functioning, but also the international character and thus the administrative culture of the Secretariat – colonialism, intra-European balancing, a civilisational hierarchy and uncontested bureaucratic norms and Weberian work ethics seemed to constitute the common denominator.

The problems arose concerning the staff's allegiance and composition. Due to the circumstances, Drummond's initial appointments proved to be provisional also because of the delay in ratifying the Treaty of Versailles. For his part, the Rapporteur of the Fourth Committee (Sir James Allen) stated in the

Assembly: The staff »should cultivate to the utmost the spirit and esprit de corps which is not only national but is international.«⁴⁸ Long-term engagements of staff members were not deemed possible due to the need to have changing representations of member states in top positions of the League. Noblemaire reiterated this in his speech at the Second Assembly (Rome) in 1920 by emphasising the »principle of rotation imperative«: »We desire, with very rare exceptions for which there are good reasons, that each higher official, after a term of seven years, shall give place to another of different nationality.« The rotation principle was not considered relevant for lower categories; it was cheaper to recruit local staff. The age limit was set at 55 years.⁴⁹

The director of the Political Section, Paul Mantoux, regarded this rotation imperative as a problem, however, since staff members would be looking for new positions and then leave the League earlier than the seven years – this would cause instability in the Secretariat. Thus, Mantoux continued, the civil servants' »independence must inevitably be compromised by the need for finding new situations.«⁵⁰

The Noblemaire report had proposed a rotation of high officials after seven years of service with only rare exceptions of officials remaining: »The exception had, however, become almost the rule and this had entailed two consequences – first, the representation of different nationalities in the ranks of the high officials was not ensured in any satisfactory manner and, secondly, this permanency of the high officials was an obstacle to the advancement of younger officials.« And in the uncommon cases of officials leaving, they tended to appoint a national of their own country rather than of another.⁵¹

The Committee of Experts believed that »very high salaries« for high officials would guarantee getting the best candidates and prevent people from leaving too early. However, League officials compared themselves with similar administrative positions in national bureaucracies and found disadvantages in terms of promotion options, jobs, and pension security:

Thus, the Secretariat was faced with a threat not only to its independence but even to its very existence, since there was a risk that the quality of its staff might rapidly decline. This threat was all the more

serious because, for reasons of economy, the initial salaries granted to the candidates were no longer fixed at so high a level as during the early years of the League of Nations, with the result that the situations that could be offered were less attractive to persons of first-class quality.⁵²

The Indian representative, Sir William Meyer, held that posts should also be filled proportionally to the budget contributions of a country and nationals of non-member states should not be employed.⁵³ Meyer leveled the criticism that some countries were disproportionately represented in the League's secretariat (due to networks, language skills and geographic factors) but also that US citizens were employed even though the United States was not a member state. This proposal was in reality circumvented, as best shown by the number of US citizens serving in the Secretariat (even though the US certainly contributed to the budget of the League in other ways than through regular member payments).

The increasingly diverse staff »gave rise to difficult problems and thus staff regulations were needed.« However, to prepare and employ them was described as »a difficult task.« But also here, the report concludes, the League did well:

Something may now be said of the agent for carrying out the policy that has just been defined, i.e. the Personnel Office. All that will be done here is to point out how important it is that it should be so constituted as to discharge its duty faithfully, without deviations of any kind. In particular, it must see to it that there is no possibility of any suspicion of preconceived preference or hostility in regard to any category whatsoever of officials, either on the ground of their nationality or on that of their social origin, or for any other reason. Scrupulous equity on its part is absolutely essential, otherwise there would be created amongst the staff a feeling of uneasiness or even of insecurity and this would be bound to have a harmful effect on the very spirit of the institution itself.⁵⁴

The self-proclaimed impartiality was based on a supposedly unconscious bias that was common at the time, as it was normal to distinguish between »technical« (health, statistics, standardisation etc.) and political

(war, peace, minorities etc.) areas. The contemporary equivalent of today's intersectionality was category, nationality, and social class.

Despite the critical discussions and acknowledged hurdles, the overall assessment of the Secretariat was quite positive:

It may be unhesitatingly asserted that the structure adopted for the Secretariat made it possible to build up a complex organ whilst, at the same time, reducing to the minimum the financial burdens imposed on States Members, without this reduction being achieved to the detriment of the quality of the staff recruited.⁵⁵

The report went on lauding the Secretariat: »Owing to its magnitude and its diversity, the Secretariat has also been able to offer a resistance to particularist influences – technical considerations, philosophical tendencies, the aspirations of certain social circles and even the direct or indirect pressure of States – greater than could have been offered by bodies more limited in number.« Within the limited and Eurocentric understanding of the time, Vilatte's study concluded: that »the structure adopted facilitated the creation of a real international atmosphere.«⁵⁶

Finally, the Secretariat and its ICS were indirectly suggested to be maintained as the bureaucratic structure in the next IO:

To create a permanent international secretariat, such was the object in view of 1919, and the conclusion which clearly emerges from the present study is that the three terms of this mandate have been scrupulously observed.⁵⁷

Analysing the administrative culture

It seems obvious that Sir Eric Drummond introduced a bureaucratic concept at the heart of the League that strikingly resembled the internationalised version of the British civil service. This understanding of administrative culture – with the leading figure(s) preferably acting in an impartial and even invisible

way – was mixed with more procedural French and (later) other bureaucratic traditions and increasingly by the perceived necessity to balance the smooth and effective functioning with a somewhat representative international composition of staff. At the top level of the Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-Generals and Directors of Sections, the geographic distribution was monopolised by the great powers and thus subject to power considerations. However, if we look at the medium level (Members of Section), the picture is more nuanced, depending on the policy area and the constellation. Even though Drummond always seemed to consider the entire staff composition, sometimes it was not the nationality as such, but the composition of the Section or the belonging to a certain (world) region (Latin Americans, Eastern Europeans, Scandinavians, e.g.) that mattered more. This regional background turned out to be decisive for two reasons: 1) the leadership's (mostly Drummond's) desire to present the League as internationally representative, and 2) the »necessity« to have staff with the corresponding knowledge and language skills in conflict regions.⁵⁸ Gram-Skjoldager and Ikononou identify a general strategy in the recruitment practice of the League's early years, balancing merit vs. nationality, independence vs. support from the Council and Assembly, high vs. low posts, great vs. small powers and European vs. non-European member states.⁵⁹ Gram-Skjoldager herself questions the »great experiment« narrative as it mostly described the higher-ranking staff and less so a different reality for lower ranks.⁶⁰ I argue that sometimes at the medium level the very fact that various variables came into play made some personnel decisions unpredictable – which I deem less strategic, but rather ad-hoc, even though an overall conception certainly existed at the higher echelons.

Belonging to an imagined group of countries seemed to be a guiding principle when the composition of the general Secretariat or individual sections affected recruitment policies. Scandinavians (Danes, Swedes, Norwegians), for instance, were underrepresented in the general sections. This was, however, somewhat compensated by an overrepresentation in specialised sections (Mandates, Minorities), in which »Great and Continental Powers had conflicting interests«.⁶¹ Scandinavian candidates often applied with good

chances due to their perceived ›neutrality‹ in the ›Great War‹, but also in terms of their assumed neutrality concerning colonialism and corresponding challenges in the Mandates Section. Pablo La Porte analysed the drafting of the mandates and identified a conflict between articles 119 and 22 of the Covenant: who oversaw administering the former colonies – the allied victors or the League? There was a group in the secretariat that fought for the latter. Accordingly, this historical example can be neatly connected to the constructivist interpretations of international organisations as rule- and law-making actors in international politics.⁶² An internal 1944 report corroborates this view:

Whilst there were some who held that the Secretariat should confine itself to playing the part assigned to it by the Covenant, others thought, on the contrary, that, from the standpoint of international collaboration, nothing but advantage could be gained if its power of initiative was developed and rendered legal.⁶³

In addition, the Scandinavians' alleged administrative and language skills also came in handy for politically sensitive posts.⁶⁴ Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou even argue that the Scandinavian dominance in some specialised areas such as economics and finance (many Swedes) helps explain why these sections continued working well after the war broke out – in contrast to the general sections that were abandoned or too conflict-laden to function properly. Many Scandinavians thus continued working for international institutions after 1945.⁶⁵

Latin Americans were also regarded as one group, even though the big countries, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, often received a special status. At the same time, the officials in charge of recruitment considered Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans closest to Europeans and thus a good match for the secretariat. Here, we can identify a civilisational hierarchy, which could also come into play if a non-Western candidate presented a European or North American university degree.⁶⁶ Thomas Fischer observes that Drummond apparently expected others to adapt to the prevailing Western civilisation, diplomatic tradition, and communication culture: Efficiency was key, less so a more intercultural sensitivity in the multicultural cosmos of international

staff. Therefore, candidates with living experience and a degree awarded in Western countries seemed to be most likely to adapt to the organisation culture and the implicit esprit de corps of the League's diplomatic and administrative machinery. In accordance, Fischer emphasises that Drummond seemed to be against too many non-European employees and justified the hiring of better-qualified Europeans with high expectations in terms of efficiency.⁶⁷

Conclusions

How to describe the administrative culture of the League's secretariat? The founders of the League as well as Drummond and the first directors and high officials of the administrative machinery did not explicitly define what the bureaucratic culture of the organisation should be. Initial debates revolved around a) the international character of the secretariat, b) the »international« loyalty of the staff (in contrast to national loyalties), c) the national (and regional) representativeness of the staff composition, and d) how to guarantee the first three aspects while hiring the best officials and maintaining a smooth functioning. The recruitment of many British and West Europeans in the formative years also contributed to a rather homogenous culture, which also included the British filing system. Even though gender equality existed as an eventually empty promise, gender, race, class identity and other aspects of diversity beyond national and, to some extent, representative geographic distribution hardly played a role at that time. The »international« character was by and large defined in two ways: a) by securing an internationally representative staff and b) by securing an »international mindset« among the professional staff.

How did the founders of the League understand administrative culture and how did the »international« character of the Secretariat form this culture? The leadership of the League (Secretary-General and Under-SGs) and the section directors did not explicitly define administrative culture. Implicitly, however, it became clear that an international administration should guarantee certain standards (impartiality, rules, efficiency, reliability) predominant in Weberian

notions of bureaucracy, with the addition of a more or less geographical distribution (at least as regards the League's membership) and a more international outlook in its works.

What were the origins and administrative culture(s) of the League's international civil service? The origins were an implied compromise between British and French administrative traditions, while the British obviously prevailed in the first years due to Drummond's role as head of the Secretariat, including its quite influential filing system. The belief in a more »humanized« form of colonialism, the preference for peaceful relations in Europe, different levels of »civilization« and a de-facto belief in (white) men's superior skills over women or non-Europeans were uncontested cornerstones that affected the League's administrative culture. According to the prevailing narrative of the successful »international experiment«, these implicit paradigms also seemed to contribute to a comparably smooth functioning of the League in the first years of its existence: Correspondingly, the international civil service appeared quite homogenous in terms of race, gender, and »internationalist« mindset, somewhat legitimised by few »non-Western« officials who were mostly believed to share the necessary bureaucratic and internationalist approach.

And does this »international« experiment still matter for today's international organisations? The League's administrative culture in its foundational years matters less today as most international secretariats are much more diverse and complex than the embryonic administration of the newly established LoN was. However, it could matter again if new (especially intra-Western) IOs may be established as novel institutions or alternative forms of existing global organisations as the result of ongoing transatlantic quarrels, Western-non-Western antagonisms, or conflict between democracies and authoritarian rulers.

In sum, the following politically sensitive assumption cannot be completely discarded: The performance of the international civil service in the first ten years of the League's existence appears more »effective« in conventional terms because its staff was seen as more homogenous, composed mostly of Europeans driven by post-war internationalism and willing to build bridges but also to keep a realistic balance of nationalities within

a Eurocentric world order. It also showed the required sensitivity regarding inter-imperial rivalries to secure the great powers' support for the League project. The increasing heterogeneity in the 1930s, and massively since the 1960s and again after 1990, led to a much more diverse ICS that did not share these common values, diplomatic culture, and *gentlemen's* (hardly *ladies'*) *agreement* to find the right balance between national representation and common international good. Today, commentators predict a revival of great power rivalry, which implicitly would bring a weakening of multilateralism and thus existing IOs and the rule-based order with it. Since its very establishment, the ICS has been used to pressure from governments (big, small and alliances). However, are the concepts of the 20th century, such as international organisation, multilateralism and global governance, including the concept of an idealised ICS, under threat of disintegration in the wake of new visions of world order and returning waves of nationalism in international politics? Maybe this is too dramatic a picture, as IOs and the ICS still can adapt and show nations – small, big and in blocks alike – that they will benefit from institutionalised cooperation in the long run. A fresh look at the early years of the League's ICS insofar promises to be still relevant today, as Sir Eric and his close allies had to take account of the multiple challenges in a war-torn Europe and establish rules for an accepted, but largely independent service. International cooperation meant in 1920 mostly guaranteeing intra-European peace and considering inter-imperial rivalries. Today, the scenario seems more complicated: More actors are more extensively involved in today's processes of international organisation such as states, civil society organisations, the private sector (multinational companies), and other epistemic communities (the »Third UN«⁶⁸), transnational networks and foundations. In accordance, the architecture of international relations has gone beyond mere *international* affairs and become much more complex. Even though the origins of the international civil service in the 1920s do show similarities to later challenges and mechanisms of the UN service, the situation has become more multifaceted, which makes it difficult to draw direct lessons from the early years of the League's administration.

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- 17 »A poor national official is in all likelihood also a poor international administrator. But a good national official will not necessarily make a good international civil servant. [...] While the national official of comparative rank must have the rare quality of being able to think, and often to act, contrary to all his political and social instincts, the international administrator must frequently think and act contrary to his national instincts – the most severe test to which a civilized person of the twentieth-century world can be subjected.« Ranshofen-Wertheimer: *The International Secretariat*, p. 10.
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Abstract

The chapter discusses the administrative culture(s) of the League of Nations Secretariat in the foundational years and asks what constituted the original administrative culture(s) of the League's international civil service. The main argument is that decisions in the formative years of the League's Secretariat led to an internationalised Western bureaucratic model, balancing autonomy and legitimacy concerns. While efficiency was essential, acquiring an international character for the secretariat seemed rather more desirable than mandatory. These factors had a decisive impact on the administrative culture in the League's early years (and beyond).

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