Between the crisis of democracy and world parliament: the development of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the 1920s[*]

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Abstract

The Great War created new challenges for the proponents of pre-1914 cosmopolitanism. This article explores this theme by studying the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international association of members of parliament active in the interwar period. The IPU is first taken as a case study to discuss the difficulty of clearly differentiating between national politicians and agents of international civil society during the years between the wars. The article then shows how pre-war liberal internationalists had to reorient after the First World War, and how socialists and nationalists brought new agendas to the realm of international cooperation at the non-governmental level. These new perspectives shaping the international system even led to far-reaching plans for a world parliament. However, the IPU's history also shows how domestic political polarization contributed to the failure of interwar internationalism.

Keywords Inter-Parliamentary Union, internationalism, League of Nations, parliamentary democracy, world parliament

Introduction

Among the many political developments of the interwar period, three have received particular scholarly attention in recent years. First, there is a growing interest in the international civil society that developed during these years, with various movements, associations, and ideas that brought together people from very different backgrounds.[1]

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[1] See, for example, Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Carl Bouchard, *Le citoyen et l'ordre mondial, 1914–1919: le rêve d'une paix durable au lendemain de la Grande Guerre en France, en Grande-Bretagne et aux Etats-Unis*, Paris: Pedone, 2008; Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds.,

Secondly, researchers interested in the origins of international governance are rediscovering the international organizations and regimes that emerged during this period.[2] Finally, there is the question of the increasing political polarization of the era, and the crisis of parliamentary forms of government. Though this is often studied in a national context, the international aspects are increasingly being recognized, if only through a comparative approach.[3] While many works of high quality have been published on these individual developments, the connections between them have not been explored in detail. The aim of this article is to analyse these connections by looking at one organization that was at the intersection of all three developments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

There are four reasons why an analysis of the IPU contributes to this field of research. First, looking at the IPU during the interwar years helps to illuminate the ambiguous nature of international civil society in this period. Second, the IPU members can be considered agents of international civil society, who sought to turn an assembly of parliamentarians into a world parliament. A closer look at this project thus connects research on international civil society with the debate about new approaches to international governance in the wake of the Treaty of Versailles. Closely connected with the possibility of the IPU becoming a world parliament is the third point, namely the argument that the IPU, as it was during the 1920s, can be regarded as a precursor of the European Parliament. The similarities between the IPU and the development of the European Parliament highlight the significance of non-governmental debates on regional and international cooperation after the First World War. Finally, the IPU provided a forum for debate between very different political currents, mirroring the general polarization in Europe at the time. This places the study of the IPU at the intersection of research on early international civil society projects and the analysis of democracy's political crisis in the 1920s and 1930s.

This article begins by discussing the IPU's place in the existing literature, including works on the well-researched origins of the organization. It then addresses the question of the IPU's role within the international civil society landscape of the interwar years.[4] Here, I argue that national parliamentarians, members of the state-sphere in their home countries, acted in the IPU as civil society representatives at the international level. The following sections sketch the development of the IPU before 1918, and present the different concepts of a world

parliament that originated in the organization after the First World War. In this context, it is argued that attempts of IPU members to give their organization greater political weight resemble the evolution of the European Parliament, now considered a powerful supranational legislature. Finally, it is shown how internal frictions in the IPU reflected the general political polarization of the interwar period, and how the growing crisis of parliamentary democracy was perceived as a transnational phenomenon in the IPU.

The IPU, officially founded in 1889 and still in existence today, has always been an organization of members of parliaments of different countries, with the general aim of fostering peace and international cooperation. From shortly after its creation, a professional secretariat maintained contact with members, organized study groups, and prepared the regular conferences that were at the heart of the organization's work. As authors such as Ralph Uhlig and Claudia Kissling have shown, the IPU emerged in the context of the 'first globalization' in the 1880s.[5] In its early days, it very much resembled other internationalist movements of the time. Though each such movement had its own agenda and identity, their aims often overlapped, the rhetoric was similar, and often the same figures were active in different organizations at the same time.

In the case of the IPU, the closest connections were with international pacifism. According to Martin Ceadel, the peace movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was 'genuinely concerned with the moral, ethical, and analytical problems posed by war, and determined to propound solutions to them, irrespective of whether the public or government [was] interested'.[6] Though Ceadel only very briefly mentions the IPU, his definition nonetheless holds true for the inspiring figures of the inter-parliamentary movement as well.[7] Many of the protagonists of the early international peace movement also promoted the IPU and vice versa. This included not only the German-speaking Bertha von Suttner, Alfred Fried, and Ludwig Quidde, but also Frédéric Passy, Albert Gobat, and Henri La Fontaine, to name only a few. Furthermore, a number of congresses were held in parallel around this time, enabling delegates to take part in both events.[8]

The IPU always tried to maintain a distinct profile, with a focus on recruiting members of parliaments, and, until 1914, a concentration on international arbitration.[9] Owing to its liberal-bourgeois membership and its intellectual foundation in pacifist internationalism, the IPU can nevertheless be considered part of the wider spectrum of transnational associations,

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5   Ralph Uhlig, *Die Interparlamentarische Union, 1889–1914*, Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1988; Claudia Kissling's dissertation also includes a summary of events in the Union between 1914 and 1945, based on IPU publications: Claudia Kissling, *Die Interparlamentarische Union im Wandel, Rechtspolitische Ansätze einer repräsentativ-parlamentarischen Gestaltung der Weltpolitik*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006, pp. 31–143.

6   Martin Ceadel, *Semi-detached idealists: the British peace movement and international relations, 1854–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 6.

7   When the term 'pacifist' is used in the following article, however, this mostly refers to what Ceadel has called 'pacificism'. According to Ceadel, *Idealists*, p. 7, pacificists believe 'that the abolition of war will be achieved only by improving the structure either of the international system or of its constituent states and that until this has been achieved defensive military force may be needed to protect these reforms'.

8   See for example Dietrich R. Quantz, 'Civic pacifism and sports-based internationalism: framework for the founding of the International Olympic Committee', *Olympika: the International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 2, 1993, pp. 1–23; Sandi E. Cooper, 'Pacifism in France, 1889–1914: international peace as a human right', *French Historical Studies*, 17, 2, 1991, pp. 359–86.

9   Uhlig, *Interparlamentarische Union*, p. 130.

and it falls in line with case studies such as the ones written on the feminist movement and the international peace bureau.[10] The organizations studied by Berkovitch, Joll, and others remained relatively stable in terms of membership and agenda after the war. Some of the aims were modified, as the League of Nations offered a new forum for voicing international and transnational issues, but the protagonists and constituencies were largely the same. Others, such as the International Peace Bureau, quickly lost their pre-war influence, as their means and aims became outdated.[11] The IPU managed to maintain a high degree of continuity, but, owing to its potential claim to universality, it was also able to extend its self-proclaimed mandate. With the inclusion of new social groups into parliamentarianism, the membership and agenda of the IPU expanded. This has not been studied in detail, as many of the studies on early internationalism effectively end in 1914 (for example, Uhlig's analysis of the IPU's early years, or most of the work done on the International Peace Bureau).

It is this connection of the IPU's development with the changing role of parliaments in Europe that links the Union to the discourse on new forms of international governance during the interwar period. As Susan Pedersen points out, the origins of today's mechanisms for solving international problems are located in the League of Nations and in interwar attempts to create international, or even supranational, bureaucracies.[12] Examples can be found in the studies on environmental governance, public health, or economics and finance, which show a hitherto overlooked impact of the League.[13] Together with the general rediscovery of the League by diplomatic historians, these studies partly reverse the image of an organization that was doomed to fail from the beginning, and they expose the modernity of many of its activities.

What is usually left aside, however, is the question of accountability and popular control of these mechanisms. This seems particularly striking because there is a considerable debate among scholars and the informed public about an alleged democratic deficit in today's international and regional institutions, including the European Union.[14] This debate, however, is usually focused on contemporary affairs and not grounded in historical analysis.

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10 For the feminist movement, see Nitza Berkovitch, *From motherhood to citizenship: women's rights and international organization,* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999; Leila Rupp, *Worlds of women: the making of an international women's movement*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997. For the specific case of the abolitionist movement, see Anne Summers, 'Which women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation', *History Workshop Journal*, 62, 2006, pp. 214–31. For the development of the Second International, see, for example, Julius Braunthal, *History of the International*, London: Nelson, 1966, vol. 1, chs. 7–16; James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, pp. 30–55.

11 See, for example, Enrica Costa Bona, 'Le Bureau international de la paix et la Société des Nations' in Marta Petricioli and Donatella Cherubini, eds., *Pour la paix en Europe: institutions et société civile dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 36; Helmut Mauermann, *Das Internationale Friedensbüro 1892 bis 1950*, Stuttgart: Silberburg Wissenschaft, 1990, pp. 214–17.

12 See n. 2.

13 David Philip Miller, 'Intellectual property and narratives of discovery/invention: the League of Nations' draft convention on "scientific property" and its fate', *History of Science*, 46, 2008, pp. 299–342; Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: understanding the work of its economic and financial organisation', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 2005, pp. 465–92; Anna-Katharina Wöbse, 'Oil on troubled waters? Environmental diplomacy in the League of Nations', *Diplomatic History*, 32, 2008, pp. 519–37.

14 See, for example, Erik Odvar Eriksen and John Erik Fossum, eds., *Democracy in the European Union: integration through deliberation?*, New York: Routledge, 2000; Richard Falk and Alexander Strauss, 'Toward global parliament', *Foreign Affairs*, 80, 1, 2001, pp. 212–20; Daniele Archibugi, 'Cosmopolitan democracy and its critics: a review', *European Journal of International* Relations, 10, 3, 2004, pp. 437–73.

Those authors who look back, such as Steve Czernovitch, do indeed find the end of the First World War as a turning point for the engagement of the people with international organizations.[15] But Czernovitch merely concentrates on the interaction of individual movements with the emerging League, and does not ask if the League itself could not have directly engaged with the people whom it eventually addressed. This is understandable, insofar as a world parliament today sounds rather utopian. But other international bodies have developed rather refined institutions to incorporate the voices of elected representatives. These institutions include the European Parliament, but also the Andean Parliament, the Parliamentary Assemblies of NATO, the Council of Europe, and ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The improbability of a current world parliament therefore does not make the study of earlier projects for an international mechanism of popular representation less relevant. Since the IPU understood itself as an international parliament in the making, the analysis of its development directly contributes to the research on early institutions of international governance.

Finally, a study of the IPU also helps to shed light on transnational aspects of a problem hitherto mostly studied in the national context, namely the crisis of representative democracy between the wars. Originally, this crisis was mostly perceived in terms of individual states, with many historians looking at the failure or the problems of parliamentary systems in their own countries. In particular, the German case has been thoroughly analysed.[16] Often drawing, at least partly, on these works on the Weimar Republic, the study of why the 'second wave' of democracy largely failed has been extended to other countries.[17] Comparative works such as the volume edited by Horst Möller and Manfred Kittel have managed to expose common aspects of this crisis that occurred in different states of Europe.[18] In the last decade, the comparative perspective has been further enlarged by studies of the crisis of democracy as a European phenomenon, and parallels between authoritarian regimes have been traced across the continent.[19]

What has mostly been overlooked by these studies, however, is that the crisis of democracy also had a transnational dimension. In the IPU, members of parliament, the very protagonists of representative government, met across borders and tried to find common responses to the challenges of dictatorship and civil war. This article therefore brings together research on an international civil society organization with the analysis of European attempts to defend the embattled concept of liberal democracy. But before we can look at the history of the IPU in greater detail, we have to elucidate the Union's actual place in the sphere of international civil society between the two world wars.

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15 Steve Charnovitz, 'The emergence of democratic participation in global governance (Paris, 1919)', *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 10, 1, 2003, pp. 45–77.

16 See, for example, Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik: die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933*, Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1964; Ricardo Bavaj, *Von links gegen Weimar: linkes antiparlamentarisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Diets, 2005; Ursula Büttner, *Weimar: die überforderte Republik*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008; Ian Kershaw, *Weimar: why did German democracy fail?*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990.

17 See n. 3, and Alan Siaroff, 'Democratic breakdown and democratic stability: a comparison of interwar Estonia and Finland', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 32, 1999, pp. 103–24; Erwin Oberländer, ed., *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001.

18 Möller and Kittel, *Demokratie*.

19 See n. 3, and also Karina Urbach, ed., *European aristocracies and the radical right, 1918–1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

The IPU between the state and civil society

As many IPU members aimed to become part of an international parliament, recognized in international law, this raises the question of the extent to which the members of the IPU can actually be perceived as representatives of an evolving international or global civil society. There are different definitions of civil society, both in the national and international spheres. As Mary Kaldor has pointed out, most refer to a market economy and the rule of law, and have a normative aspect.[20] Another aspect that most definitions have in common is a negative one, in that they agree on what civil society is not. Influenced by the Hegelian concept of the term, they depict civil society as different from individual initiative, state actions, or purely economic market transactions.[21] In other words, civil society organizations are required to conform neither to the economic imperatives of the market nor to the political imperatives of the bureaucratic state. This might seem to mean that members of parliament are not civil society actors, because parliament is the institution that gives legitimacy to the state, and is therefore closely associated with the latter. In many republican systems, one can even argue that parliament is at the very top of the state hierarchy, as all government actions are ultimately dependent on its support. There are, however, good reasons to include IPU members in a description of international civil society, and these arguments raise new questions about the distinction between civil society and the state in the international sphere during the 1920s.

First of all, members of the IPU had a democratic mandate that only applied to a domestic context. Outside their polities, they could still define themselves as parliamentarians by occupation and as supporters of representative government. But their mandate did not include any obligation to act outside the polity in which they had been elected. Put differently, they could possibly claim to represent their constituents on very general ideological and party terms, but they really attended IPU conferences as individual activists for international cooperation. Each member could decide, if he or she wanted, to be associated with the organization or not.[22] Through the attribution of the status of honorary member, politicians could take part in IPU activities even after the end of their mandate. Indeed, a number of the Union's most active members made ample use of this provision, such as the German pacifists Ludwig Quidde and Walther Schücking.[23]

Secondly, it has already been mentioned that the leaders of the IPU who organized conferences and prepared meetings and resolutions were, with very few exceptions, also

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20 Mary Kaldor, *Global civil society: an answer to war*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, pp. 11f.

21 See, for example, Alejandro Colas, *International civil society: social movements in world politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, pp. 1ff.; David L. Brown, *Creating credibility: legitimacy and accountability for transnational civil society*, Sterling: Kumarian Press, 2008, p. 1; Gideon Baker and Charles Chandler, 'Introduction: global civil society and the future of world politics', in Gideon Baker and Charles Chandler, eds., *Global civil society: contested futures*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 2. See also Jürgen Kocka, 'Zivilgesellschaft als historisches Problem und Versprechen', in Manfred Hildermeier, Jürgen Kocka, and Christoph Conrad, eds., *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft in Ost und West: Begriff, Geschichte, Chancen*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2000, pp. 19, 21–6.

22 Today, the IPU does not have individual politicians as members, but the parliaments as organizations: see Statutes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Article 3, 2009, http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/statutes-new.htm (consulted 7 January 2011).

23 Quidde was only a national parliamentarian during the time of the Weimar Constitutional Assembly in 1919 and 1920, but remained active in the IPU throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

active in numerous other international bodies and associations. These included the International Peace Bureau, international conferences on education, the International Federation of League of Nations Societies, the Socialist International, various Esperantist organizations, and international lawyers associations. These organizations, which are generally seen as part of civil society, worked in very similar ways to the IPU with regard to their means and aims. Furthermore, the IPU as an organization entertained close contacts with many of these bodies, as well as with others, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the International Federation of Trade Unions.[24]

The IPU therefore fits rather well into the broader picture of international civil society during the 1920s. It is true that, before 1914 and after 1920, the Union was mainly financed by grants from foreign ministries, and was therefore ultimately state-funded. IPU history shows, however, that this did not lead to real political dependence on the state. In several countries, including Germany, Belgium, and France, IPU delegations pursued policies that were decidedly different from the national government's line. More important still, the IPU was not the only civil society organization that was dependent financially or politically on the state: the League of Nations Societies and the Red Cross associations are two obvious examples. In one way or another, many bodies and organizations that one would define as elements of civil society received some kind of protection or subsidy from the state in which they were based, ranging from tax exemptions and the provision of school buildings and town halls for meetings to direct financial support.[25]

It therefore seems difficult to maintain a clear distinction between 'the state' and civil society as abstract notions. While this was already true at the national level, it applied even more to international civil society, where visas, transport, and means of communication were under state control but where the state was also dependent on civil society to prepare the groundwork for new policy initiatives. The interwar period seems to have been a period when the distinction between international civil society and state-based international relations was even less clear than in preceding decades. As empires collapsed and new states and international institutions were created, the personal and political exchange between state and civil society was a two-way street.

As parliaments are places where civil society and state intersect, the IPU provides ample examples of this phenomenon in the international sphere. Walther Schücking, who was an internationally active law expert and IPU supporter, was quite suddenly appointed a member of Germany's official delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference. Albert Thomas, a French trade union leader and member of parliament, was elevated from opposition politics and activism in the cooperative movement to the position of magistrate, then to head the Ministry of Ammunition, and finally to the newly created International Labour Office. Schücking and Thomas did not get these appointments because they supported the IPU, but their membership in numerous overlapping networks of international civil society activity

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24 In 1921, for example, the WILPF secretary Emily Balch asked the IPU Secretary-General Christian Lange to use his influence in order to persuade Fridtjof Nansen to become a member of the League of Nations' Permanent Commissions on Mandates. IPU Archives, Box 35, Balch to Lange, 11 February 1921; Lange to Balch, 16 March 1921, Geneva. See also, for example, IPU Archives, Box 748, International Federation of Trade Unions to Inter-Parliamentary Union, 13 November 1922.

25 For a case study, see Christine Adams, 'In the public interest: charitable association, the state, and the status of *utilité publique* in nineteenth-century France', *Law and History Review*, 25, 2007, pp. 283–321.

predestined them for postings in diplomacy, which had not been the case before 1914. Others, such as the British general Edward Spears, left government service and were very active in bodies like the IPU before being called up again for official posts at a later stage, having gained further negotiation experience and inter-cultural skills.[26]

At its origin, the IPU was a loose group of activists with a common interest in international arbitration. In this sense, it was a classic civil society group. Had it succeeded in becoming a global lower house within the institutional framework of the League of Nations, it would quite clearly have left the realm of civil society. But since it never accomplished this aim, it can be considered to be a civil society organization, albeit one having a special relationship with the state, with the explicit hope of gaining a more official status in the future.

Parliamentary diplomacy before 1918

We now turn to the early development of the IPU, which provides the background for the changes that came after the Treaty of Versailles. Like many of the organizations mentioned above, the Union evolved out of a rather loose network of like-minded individuals into a more sophisticated organization. For the IPU, this development took more than twenty years from the first exchange of letters in 1887 between its founders, Frederic Passy of France and Randal Cremer of Britain, to the establishment of a permanent bureau with a paid Secretary-General in 1909. The chronological proximity to other internationalist movements is indeed striking. The international feminist movement held its first congress in 1888, and the founding conference of the (Second) Socialist International took place in 1889.[27] Compared with their socialist or feminist counterparts, the early IPU members were fairly well equipped with financial resources and access to national elites. Most of them were upper-class liberals, who believed in international arbitration as a rational way to civilize international anarchy.

For the founders of the IPU, peace was a moral ideal, which was defined as the absence of war between states, and which did not imply a general questioning of states' sovereignty or domestic distributions of power. The international legal order, as projected by the early inter-parliamentarians, did not provide for any supranational institution. Even the most ambitious designs of a 'civilized' international society relied on the idea that a state would voluntarily agree to follow the decision of an international court of arbitration. By 1913, the IPU had grown to twenty-four national groups and could claim credit, at least partially, for having provided the inspiration for the two Hague Peace Conferences.[28] The vast majority of the approximately 3,500 formal members, however, merely expressed a general agreement with the aims and principles of the IPU, and did not become active internationalists. Only a small minority took part in the main bodies of the organization, the governing council and the executive committee,

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26 For Schücking, see Andreas Thier, 'Walther Schücking', in Hans Günter Hockerts, ed., *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2007, vol. 23, pp. 631–3. For Thomas, see Martin Fine, 'Albert Thomas: a reformer's vision of modernization, 1914–32', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12, 1977, pp. 545–64; Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Compte rendu de la XXVIe conférence tenue à Berne et Genève du 22 au 28 août 1924*, Geneva: Bureau interparlementaire, 1925, pp. 569–72. For Spears, see *ibid.*, pp. 20, 146, 152f., 252–60. All three remained active in the IPU after having left parliament.

27 See, for example, Berkovitch, *From motherhood*; Joll, *Second International*, pp. 30–55.

28 See Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Rapport du secrétaire général au conseil interparlementaire pour 1913*, Brussels: Bureau interparlementaire, 1913, p. 7; Uhlig, *Interparlementarische Union*, pp. 900ff.

which met several times a year. Yet the IPU, like other networks mentioned, regarded its project as a success, and looked forward to a future of growing influence.[29]

When the July Crisis of 1914 developed into a general European war, the organization was taken completely by surprise, but it continued to function and contributed to the formulation of peace. Its well-funded pre-war organization permitted the secretariat to maintain its work during the conflict, and to preserve parts of the network through mail and personal visits by the Secretary-General to most belligerent states in 1915 and 1917.[30] While the organization formally continued to exist, however, the First World War was more than just a temporary interruption in a series of IPU conferences. Many of the pre-war pacifists realized the need for a fundamental change of the international order to prevent a repetition of the events of summer 1914. In most countries of Europe, groups were formed to discuss what this new order should look like. IPU members were active in a number of these groups, particularly in Germany, France, and Belgium, as well as in the neutral states of Scandinavia and the Netherlands. In the early stages of the war, it was even possible to hold an international meeting in Amsterdam to form the Central Organization for a Permanent Peace, in many ways a kind of wartime substitute for the Union. With regard to the IPU, it is important to highlight the fact that many of its key protagonists took part in the debates that preceded the formulation of the basic principles of what Arno Mayer has labelled 'new diplomacy'. Initially developed by oppositional groups who fought the belligerent policies of their national governments, these ideas eventually became the official Allied war aims when the United States entered the war in 1917.[31]

When the war came to an end, the main pre-war project of the IPU, the development of international arbitration law, had lost much of its appeal, mainly because the Central Powers had consciously breached international agreements and thus demonstrated the limits of traditional international law. Nevertheless, the parliamentarians defended the importance of the Hague Conferences, and took them as a starting point for the establishment of a League of Nations, based on the legal equality of all members. The leadership of the organization was thus, in spite of the horrors of four years of war, optimistic that the war would result in a more peaceful international order.

The first thirty years of the IPU's existence therefore laid the foundations for the developments of the interwar period. The founding generation of liberals had been successful in building up an organization, and they had seen the rise of new concepts of international politics to an unexpected prominence. At the same time, the horrors of the First World War created a severe crisis for all internationalist projects, forcing protagonists to reorient themselves. And while parliamentary democracy emerged as the uncontested moral victor from the war, the Russian Revolution and the restriction of civil liberties in all belligerent countries had shown that the trend towards stronger parliaments could be reversed quite suddenly.

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29   See, for example, Daniel Gorman, 'Ecumenical internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45, 1, 2010, pp. 51–73; Daniel Laqua, '"Laïque, démocratique et sociale"? Socialism and the Freethinkers' International', *Labour History Review*, 74, 3, 2009, pp. 257–73.

30   Owing to budget surpluses, the IPU secretariat had accumulated a reserve fund of 100,000 Belgian Francs in 1914.

31   See, for example, Arno Mayer, *Political origins of the new diplomacy, 1917–1918*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959, ch. 9.

Ideas of an international parliament

From the point of view of the internationalists in the IPU, the creation of the League of Nations was the most important outcome of the First World War. During the closing stages of the war, when it became apparent that some kind of supranational body would be created, hopes were raised in the IPU that the organization might find a place within the institutional framework of the coming League. At the request of the British scholar and diplomat Alfred Zimmern, the Secretary-General of the Union prepared a memorandum on how a parliamentary assembly could be created at the League. The memorandum was sent to the official British delegation, and there is some evidence that it lay behind a proposition that was tabled by General Smuts in February 1919.[32] The proposition was turned down, not least by President Wilson, who was concerned that the capacity of the League's council to enforce the will of the civilized world might be reduced to a debating club made up of national legislators.

Internationalist civil society activists did not accept this setback as final. The belief that the League of Nations needed popular support, as well as reform to include political input from below, was widespread among those who had advocated international cooperation before the war. The Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions embraced the idea of an international lower house, with at least some representatives from the working class.[33] Support for the International Labour Organization, with its tripartite structure, reflected this approach to international relations, but the original concepts were much more far-reaching.[34] The International Federation of League of Nations Societies also argued in favour of popular representation at the League, though their preferred solution was to choose national delegates in the League's Assembly in a representative manner. If delegates were chosen based on the composition of domestic legislatures, the Assembly would automatically gain the character of an international parliament.[35] In the realm of commerce, the International Chamber of Commerce has been described as the 'World Parliament of business', because of the impact that it had on the League.[36]

However, it is little wonder that the IPU regarded itself as most likely to claim the title of world parliament. The feeling was that the structure of the IPU predestined it for complementing the League. As the IPU's committee for organizational questions phrased it,

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32 David Hunter Miller assumes that the Smuts proposal was inspired by a socialist resolution, but the design of the assembly that Smuts proposed was much closer to the IPU proposal. See David Hunter Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928, pp. 218ff., 272–5; IPU Archives, Box 258, Christian Lange, 'The Inter-Parliamentary Union and its place at the League of Nations: popular representation at the League', unpublished memorandum sent to Zimmern, 5 February 1919, London.

33 See, for example, Reiner Tosstorff, 'The international trade-union movement and the founding of the International Labour Organization', *International Review of Social History*, 50, 2005, pp. 399–433.

34 *Ibid*. See also Jasmien Van Daele, 'Engineering social peace: networks, ideas, and the founding of the International Labour Organization', *International Review of Social History*, 50, 2005, pp. 456ff.

35 Norbert Götz, 'On the origins of "parliamentary diplomacy": Scandinavian "bloc politics" and delegation policy in the League of Nations', *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, 40, 3, 2005, pp. 263–79.

36 Steve Charnovitz, 'Two centuries of participation: NGOs and international governance', *Michigan Journal of International Law*, 18, 183, 1996–97, p. 222.

'the existence of one calls for the existence of the other'.[37] As became clear in the internal discussions, there was a near-consensus that the Union's aim should be to gain influence at the League of Nations.[38] There was little debate that a more important role for the IPU as a universal organization, including greater weight for its resolutions, should be attained. Since the US group was opposed to the IPU becoming publicly associated with the League of Nations, no reference to such plans was made when the Union's statutes were modified during the 1920s. Yet the non-American members were quite explicit that they intended the eventual transformation of the Union into an international lower house, as part of the League. The working paper of the Union's committee on organizational questions, cited above, clearly stated that a reference to the League 'would very probably have been adopted if the representatives of the American group had not vetoed it'.[39]

The project of a world parliament had therefore to be pursued quietly. As Henri La Fontaine phrased it in 1924, 'without saying so too loudly, the Union should strive to become the Popular Chamber of the League of Nations'.[40] A number of concrete steps towards this aim were adopted and implemented. To improve the Union's representative character, each delegation's number of votes was linked to the size of its country's population.[41] A general debate was included in the yearly Assembly to mirror ongoing debates in the League's Assembly.[42] The working committees were encouraged to professionalize themselves, and to seek expert advice from outside, in order to come up with innovative proposals that would give the IPU a more prominent profile in public debate.[43] Furthermore, indirect influence over the League was sought through those IPU members who were also part of their national delegations to the League's Assembly.[44]

The idea that the IPU should merge with the League to act as an international lower house was not only discussed within the relatively small group of IPU leaders such as La Fontaine and Lange. The debate about the Union's future also received input from national delegations. Especially among German-speaking IPU members, the idea that the League needed to be complemented by a parliamentary assembly enjoyed considerable popularity during the entire 1920s. This was partly because Germany remained excluded from the League of Nations until 1926, but could take part in IPU debates on an equal footing with the victors of the First World War. Such projects for an international legislature were supported by right-wing and left-wing politicians alike, who both began to join the

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37 IPU Archives, Box 491, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Commission pour l'étude des questions politiques et d'organisations, Comité de rédaction pour le développement de l'Union, Annexe à la circulaire de convocation, "Développement de l'Union"', 26 August 1926, Geneva, p. 3.

38 IPU Archives, Box 8, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbaux du conseil interparlementaire', 7 and 8 October 1919, Geneva, p. 2.

39 IPU, 'Développement de l'union', p. 2.

40 IPU Archives, Box 491, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Comité restreint de rédaction du comité d'organisation', 1 February 1926, Geneva, p. 9.

41 *Ibid.*

42 IPU Archives, Box 416, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbal de la commission pour l'études de questions politiques et d'organisation', 27 August 1926, pp. 9ff.

43 IPU Archives, Box 387, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Commission d'organisation, institutions des commissions permanentes', 26 April 1922, pp. 1–3.

44 IPU, 'Développement de l'Union', p. 9.

Union after 1918. For racial (*völkisch*) nationalists, the work in the IPU and the call for a world parliament opened the possibility of defending their concepts of an international society based on ethnic groups, and not on states. Delegates from German-speaking areas in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or the Baltic States would officially represent their national parliaments, but effectively teamed up to defend the interests of a 'Greater Germany'.[45]

For moderate socialists, in contrast, a League with a popularly elected assembly could partly substitute for the hopes that had rested on proletarian internationalism until 1914. The Social Democrats in the IPU accepted the existence of nation-states as a fact, but regarded the League of Nations as a vehicle to promote social progress on an international scale. For this, however, the League needed a forum, where the voices of the workers' parties could be heard in a direct way. The underlying concepts concerning international relations reveal how much the international system had changed. The pre-1914 idea that sovereign states were the main actors in international relations, and that their existence was legitimized by their historic past, was challenged by socialism and nationalism alike. Whereas the ethnic nationalism of people such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck saw 'racial' groups as the real actors of international life, left-wing politicians regarded social class as the essential category.[46] While these ideas were not new, both ideologies were thought to have been confirmed by the political and economic upheaval in Europe. The prevention of war through arbitration thus almost disappeared from the IPU agenda, to be replaced by the common problems that parliamentarians faced at home: minority issues, social legislation, and the promotion of commerce in times of rising trade barriers. These different topics were connected with the IPU's earlier interest in international law, in the ambitious concept of a declaration of rights and duties of states.[47] This latter project indicated that the parliamentarians did indeed see themselves as an embryonic international legislature.

The most developed, and arguably most realistic, proposal to create a world parliament was presented by the German Social Democrat Eduard David. He had been minister of finance during the turbulent times of revolution, had made his mark as a theoretician of the reformist Social Democratic Party (SPD) right, and had tried in vain to push the German leadership towards a less imperialistic peace at Brest-Litovsk.[48] His world parliament proposal of 1924, which won a US$2,500 prize from the American philanthropist Edward Filene, argued that the IPU should develop towards progressive incorporation into the League of Nations.[49] According to the plan, members would lobby their governments to increase financial support for the Union, so that the Secretariat could expand its work and

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45   See, for example, for minorities and colonies, IPU Archives, Box 419, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbal de la commission des questions ethniques et coloniales', 6 and 7 April 1923, Basel, p. 60.

46   For the role of international forums such as the IPU in the conceptions of German racialist groups, see Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat? Deutschland und der Minderheitenschutz: zur Völkerbundspolitik der Stresemann-Ära*, Marburg: J.G. Herder-Institut, 1988.

47   IPU Archives, Box 418, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Commission pour l'étude de questions juridiques, Procès-verbal', 27 May 1925.

48   David's idea was to use the opportunity of German dominance in eastern Europe to establish a system of benevolent hegemony with limited self-determination for the peoples concerned. Freed from tsarist autocracy, they could have slowly moved towards prosperity and democracy without challenging German supremacy. See John L. Snell, 'The Russian revolution and the German Social Democratic Party in 1917', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15, 1956, pp. 339–50.

49   Eduard David, *Die Befriedung Europas*, Berlin: Hensel und Co Verlag, 1926.

create publicity for the Union's resolutions. The raised public profile of the organization, according to David, would give its decisions the necessary moral force to be supported and enforced by the League. Formal establishment as the League's parliament would eventually follow. The tasks of the world parliament would be to vote the budget of the League, but also to introduce motions of its own.[50] These would set aims and guidelines for the League and thus provide a direct link between national electorates and the League's executive organs. In David's conception, this development would bring about the 'pacification of Europe', and would provide the framework for solving the continent's political, economic, and social questions.

It is interesting to note that David's original plan, which won the prize in 1924, was slightly different from the version that was published in 1926. The original proposal included the call for German admission into the League, and a permanent seat on the council. It also argued that the IPU should support a revision of the Treaty of Versailles to rewrite those clauses that 'humiliated' Germany, thus implementing the 'principle of equality' in international relations.[51] Together with the promotion of a European economic community (discussed below), David's original proposal therefore reflected both German national interests and a genuine belief in internationalism. The best way to support both seemed to be the creation of a world parliament out of the IPU.

During the second half of the decade, this approach was much more than an old politician's dream. As even a 'realist' such as E. H. Carr has acknowledged, the period prior to 1930 was the heyday of the League, when pacifists and governments alike believed in the increasing importance of international mechanisms to deal with common problems.[52] David's proposal was warmly received within the IPU, and its recommendations became the leading theme of the commission that debated organizational questions.[53] In 1929, several governments, most notably the French and the Danish, increased their subsidies, as David had proposed. At the same time, the League intensified its links with the IPU, sending observers to some of its meetings.[54] The German government, under the influence of Stresemann's foreign policy, signalled its willingness to follow the French move and give a subsidy within reasonable limits. At this crucial point, however, it was the German IPU group itself that only voted for a moderate increase. While the exact reasons for this are not clear, it seems that, as the economic crisis had begun, the Parliamentarians feared that they would be blamed for wasting money on internationalist projects.[55]

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50 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–31.

51 Archiv der Sozialen Demokratie, 1/EDAG000002, Personal Papers Eduard David, Eduard David, 'Die Befriedung Europas' (draft), 1924.

52 E. H. Carr, *International* relations *between the two world wars: 1919–1939*, London: Macmillan, 1947, p. 98.

53 See n. 37; IPU Archives, Box 416, Minutes of the Committee on Organizational Questions for the years 1927, 1928, and 1929.

54 In late 1927, the Secretary-General of the IPU, Christian Lange, even managed to convince a League official, Arthur Sweetser, of the David Plan. Sweetser wrote an enthusiastic introduction to a memorandum prepared by Lange, to be presented to the League's Secretariat. IPU Archives, Box 519, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'The Inter-Parliamentary Union and its possibilities of development', unpublished memorandum, October 1927.

55 See University of Münster, Germany, Nachlass Walther Schücking (private papers of Walther Schücking at the University of Münster, Germany; henceforth NWS), 13/13, 067, Walther Schücking to Christian Lange, 19 January 1929, Berlin(?).

The different attempts to give the IPU a more official role in international relations, with a real supranational potential, not only mirrored later efforts to establish a world parliament – which have failed to date – but also anticipated aspects of regional, and especially European, integration – which have had much more success. From the very start, the most vocal support to strengthen the IPU came from European members. The American delegation was not averse to a stronger IPU, and indeed the 1925 Conference in the USA and Canada became one of the high points of parliamentary diplomacy during the interwar years. However, the absence of the US from the League of Nations meant that they could not support the inclusion of the Union in the League. The Europeans, in contrast, were not only able freely to advocate merging the organizations but also treated European affairs as a special concern for the IPU. David made this quite clear in his proposal, when he saw an international parliament as a key factor for the pacification of Europe. Along with the upgrading of the IPU, he proposed the creation of an inter-parliamentary study group, to come up with plans for an economic union of central and western Europe, and to create a specific body of European members of parliament at the IPU.[56] Such a study group was indeed formed, and several measures to bring about a customs union in Europe were included in IPU resolutions.[57] In regional questions, the IPU therefore had a very strong European bias.

However, the idea of inter-parliamentary work as a component of regional integration was not restricted to the European context. In 1925, the Cuban delegation proposed a special association of American IPU members to form a parliamentary assembly for the Union of the Americas. Moreover, the Scandinavian countries had set up a Nordic Inter-Parliamentary Union well before 1918, which was rather successful.[58] Such projects were of course not restricted to the IPU but were common currency among international thinkers of the interwar period. They also lacked an initial foundation in international law that went beyond the states' tacit agreement expressed by financing national IPU delegations.

Yet one should be aware that, in the 1920s, the IPU was taking a path that could be compared to the early stages of the European Parliament or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Both were originally constituted of national parliamentarians in delegations of a largely non-representative size, who met once a year with their colleagues from other countries. Their functions were to monitor the activities of the executive bodies of the respective organizations, and to pass motions of symbolic, or at best consultative, character. The European Parliament, in particular, first witnessed initiatives from among its members to enlarge its powers and legal status, which were only later written into international treaties. The title 'European Parliament', for example, was first used by parliamentarians, before being recognized by member states several years later. More important than this symbolic act was the passing in 1984 of the 'Draft Treaty Establishing the European Union', inspired by Altiero Spinelli. While the project of the treaty failed, it provided an important impetus for the Single European Act in 1986, and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.[59] In the Inter-Parliamentary

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56 David, *Befriedung*, pp. 13–16.

57 IPU Archives, Box 417, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbal, Sous-commission pour l'entente douanière européenne', 9 July 1926, The Hague and 11 June 1927, Paris.

58 See n. 35; Knud Larsen, 'Scandinavian grass roots: from peace movement to Nordic council', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 9, 2–3, 1984, pp. 183–200.

59 See, for example, Wilfried Loth, *Entwürfe einer europäischen Verfassung: eine historische Bilanz*, Bonn: Europa Union Verlag, 2002, pp. 24–30; Martin Große Hüttmann, 'Vom abstrakten zum konkreten

Union in the 1920s we can observe similar initiatives from members to expand the assembly's political role, which enjoyed great support and only failed in the harsh political and economic climate after 1929.

Different currents of internationalism

The debate surrounding the strengthening of the League of Nations through the creation of an international legislature effectively displays different currents of internationalism. For most pre-war liberals, the League was ultimately a product of the Hague Peace Conferences. They had hoped for the establishment of a permanent institution based on the spirit of The Hague, with equal rights for each state and with a progressive development of international law. Many called themselves pacifists, not to oppose the use of force in all circumstances, but rather to express their belief that a peaceful international society was possible through international law, namely arbitration law. They had not, however, dreamt of a world government, and they saw the nation-state, and not the individual, as the main subject and bearer of rights and duties. An international assembly of legislators in this vision would have been instrumental in setting rules of conduct for states when dealing with each other, but would not have intervened in intra-state business. This was a concept that even appealed to some Republicans from the USA.[60]

The events of the First World War, and especially of the years 1917–19, forced these pacifists to adjust to a different kind of international society. The sovereignty of the state was no longer sacrosanct, and questions regarding the constitutions of individual states became issues of international concern. The League of Nations that was finally created had yet to fulfil the high aspirations of its Covenant. But there seemed to be a real potential for it to become a supranational authority, possibly with armed forces under its control.[61] To most of the pre-war pacifists these were, in principle, positive outcomes of the war.

However, pacifists saw the danger of the League becoming an instrument for the hegemonic aspirations of individual countries, and they thus remained loyal to the pre-war promotion of international law, while replacing arbitration with a codified system of international law. This system was still to be based, to a large degree, on sovereignty for each nation-state, but it could be enforced by the League. As inter-parliamentarians, they pursued different strategies to come closer to this aim. They supported the idea of the IPU becoming an international legislature to codify and develop existing international law, and acting as an oversight body for the League. At the same time, they promoted IPU resolutions that reflected their understanding of international law, such as the above-mentioned declaration of rights and duties of the state.

Systemgestalter: die Rolle des Europäischen Parlaments in den Regierungskonferenzen bis Nizza', in Andreas Maurer and Dietmar Nickel, eds., *Das Europäische Parlament: Supranationalität, Repräsentation und Legitimation*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2005, pp. 35–45.

60 Republican Party, *Platform of the Republican Party of the State of New York*, New York: Republican Party, 1920, pp. 2ff.; League of Nations Archives, IPM/IPB Archives, Box 309.

61 For the French attempts to create a general staff or an international army at the League of Nations, see for example Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: the Paris conference of 1919 and its attempts to end war*, London: John Murray, 2001, pp. 101ff.; Ruth Henig, *The League of Nations*, London: Haus Histories, 2010, pp. 36f. The best-known proposal to create an international police force from outside official circles came from Lord David Davies: see Brian Porter, 'David Davies: a hunter after peace', *Review of International Studies*, 15, 1989, pp. 27–36.

As experts on international law, they also contributed to the work that was already going on at the League itself, such as the commission to codify international law.[62] The core group of liberal internationalists, who held the main posts in the IPU, thus managed to readjust to the new realities without relinquishing their beliefs in a legalistic peace among states.

For moderate socialists, the situation was quite different. In most countries, they had been political outcasts until 1914. Only during the war and in the immediate post-war years had they been given access to the state as an instrument to implement policy. In the international realm, most parties had at least paid lip service to the Second International's vision of post-capitalist peace. This official party line had not prevented moderates in many countries from building ties to the bourgeois peace movement, including the IPU. Those who supported these connections also supported the goal of using the state to enact social policies, instead of waiting for all-out revolution on Marxist lines. Men such as Henri La Fontaine in Belgium or Eduard Bernstein in Germany often came from a personal background similar to the liberals, and could agree with them on many issues of peace and international law.[63] After 1917, the currents that they represented gained the upper hand in most European social democratic parties. The parties that took up government responsibility not only shed their far-reaching plans for the immediate socialization of the economy but also accepted that the state as the main actor of international relations was not going to disappear soon.

It is thus unsurprising that those social democratic parties that had directly or indirectly participated in their governments joined the IPU immediately after the war. The Swedish, German, French, British, and Belgian socialist parties had basically boycotted the organization before 1914, but soon their contingents at inter-parliamentary conferences surpassed those of other parties. In contrast, the socialist parties that did not break with their revolutionary aspirations did not send any delegates at all. While parties such as the Austrian and Norwegian socialists quickly ended their flirtations with Moscow's newly created Comintern, maintaining inter-party cooperation with their sister parties elsewhere, they refused any association with liberal internationalism. During the 1922 IPU Conference in Vienna, for example, the Austrian Socialist Party daily lauded the speeches of their German comrades in the SPD, but poured scorn on the Conference as such.[64]

While the moderate social democrats accepted the means and working conditions of liberal internationalism, their agenda was more ambitious. Key issues for them were not so much the rules that governed interstate relations but those that applied within national societies and across borders. Within the IPU, socialists could quickly agree with comrades

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62 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Compte rendu de la XXIIIe conférence, tenue à Washington du 1er au 7 Octobre et à Ottawa le 13 Octobre 1925*, Geneva: Bureau interparlementaire, 1926, pp. 459–521; Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Compte rendu de la XXIVe conférence, tenue à Paris 25 au 30 août 1927*, Geneva: Bureau interparlementaire, 1928, pp. 168–78, 460–521; IPU Archives, Box 418, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbal de la sous-commission pour la codification du droit international', 2 and 3 April 1927, Geneva.

63 Henri La Fontaine was the only socialist politician of any importance who worked in the IPU before 1914. Eduard Bernstein did not attend any conferences but had become IPU Secretary-General Lange's interlocutor during the latter's attempts to invite German socialists. Bernstein had cordial relations with other bourgeois pacifists as well. After 1918, he became an active member of the German group. See, for example, IPU Archives, Box 235, Christian Lange to Eduard Bernstein, 8 July 1913, Brussels; NWS, 1/1, 032, Eduard Bernstein to Walther Schücking, 14 July 1915, Berlin.

64 'Interparlamentarische Konferenz', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 29 August 1922; 'Interparlamentarische Union', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 31 August 1922.

from other countries on resolutions that defended working mothers, called for the control of international trusts, or demanded common safety standards in Europe.[65] Their vision of an international parliament, as the David proposal shows, looked much more like a national legislature on an international scale. Just as these parties had shifted their national aspirations from socialist revolution to parliamentary work, they hoped to pursue their policies through such work at the international level. Such a League, with an international lower house and a strengthened International Labour Organization, came much closer to a world state than the conceptions of liberalism. However, since the realization of this project seemed remote for most of the 1920s, there was more cooperation than disagreement among social democratic and liberal internationalists.

This could not be said of the more extreme right-wing parliamentarians, who also joined the IPU during the 1920s. In most cases, they had not regarded liberal pacifists as idealistic and naive, as most socialists had done, but treated them with outright contempt and hatred. Unlike social democrats, they did not find their way to internationalism because they had joined national governments but as the result of a loss of power in many parts of Europe. This was especially true of German-speaking nationalists, but also affected Hungarians and other delegates from eastern Europe. In most cases, they still felt disdain for representative government, while quickly learning to use its rules for their own causes and to gain public recognition. This applied even more to a forum such as the IPU, where resolutions were of a mostly symbolic character and people could not be held directly responsible for their actions, as was the case in national parliaments or the League of Nations. In the IPU, German nationalists could take part as Polish, Lithuanian, Yugoslavian, or Italian delegates, and argue that they were only defending their internationally guaranteed rights as minorities.[66] International justice and equal rights were thus used to defend irredentist claims.

The former German governor of Tanganyika, Heinrich Schnee, is a case in point. Schnee had a conservative nationalist background, and during the Weimar Republic he became one of the most prominent protagonists of German colonial revisionism.[67] After 1933 he tried, with little success, to get the restitution of the former German colonies onto the Nazi agenda. Nevertheless, he remained in the all-NSDAP Reichstag until 1945, after having held a seat for the right-wing DVP between 1924 and 1932. In other words, Schnee had an understanding of representative democracy and of internationalism that was quite different from either the pre-war liberals or the socialists. Yet for some time he shrewdly used the IPU to pursue his agenda, criticizing an alleged deterioration of conditions in the former German colonies since the end of German rule, and calling for French and British colonies to be similarly put under the control of the League of Nations.[68] Later he drafted a number of

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65   See, for example, IPU Archives, Box 417, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbal de la commission pour l'étude des questions économiques et financières', 30 and 31 August 1926, pp. 3ff.

66   In 1925, for example, the prominent right-wing politicians Kurt Graebe and Karl Tinzl attended the IPU Conference as members of the Polish and Italian Groups, but their main contribution to the debate was to blame their respective governments for discrimination and to call for a common defensive front of the (German) minorities against 'Bolshevism'. Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Conférence 1925*, pp. 563–8, 711–15, 729–32.

67   Ralph Erbar, 'Heinrich Schnee', in Hockerts, *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 23, pp. 280ff.

68   Heinrich Schnee, 'Zur 25. Konferenz der Interparlamentarischen Union in Berlin', *Der Weg zur Freiheit: Halbmonatsschrift des Arbeitsausschusses Deutscher Verbände*, 8, 1928; IPU Archives, Box 419,

reports and proposals for IPU conferences that seemed to reflect the general tone of international cooperation. But his true focus was on European 'equality' with regard to colonial affairs. This equality would give Germany a right to colonial mandates, to the same level of armament as Britain or France, and to an economically and demographically dominant position in Europe. On the public stage, he quite explicitly stated these demands. During the 1925 Conference in Washington, for example, he stated 'What Germany needs is more land to grow food for its population …. How could Germany be a member of the League of Nations with equal rights, if she were excluded from the society of the advanced nations? She must ask and receive, as such, colonial mandates.'[69]

In most cases it seems unlikely that people such as Schnee seriously embraced the principles of international cooperation as promoted by the IPU. Even within the organization, the liberal leaders saw the danger of being exploited by people whose interests were opposed to their own beliefs. The German liberal pacifist Ludwig Quidde wrote to Schücking and Secretary-General Lange in 1925, 'Pleasing as it is if right-wing deputies supportive of international understanding join the Union, it would be dangerous if they, to strengthen their position in the German group, attract fellow party members who are indifferent or outspokenly hostile to the Union's aims. I think this danger is rather real.'[70] He proposed that all members should have to sign a declaration of support of the IPU's aims. When this project did not advance, he reiterated his proposal in the following year, stating that

> the reason for this request is the increasing infiltration of the German group by elements that are strongly nationalist and reactionary in terms of foreign policy. At a quarrel during the group's last session, the opposite camps clashed quite heavily. Social democratic members told me afterwards, they doubted if, in the long run, participation [in the group] was possible for them.[71]

Yet the participation of right-wing groups also brought a greater dynamic and publicity to IPU conferences, which thus reflected the general political situation in most of Europe. Right-wing members were thus tacitly accepted, and nothing was done to exclude them from the groups of Germany, Italy, and other countries. When it came to more controversial questions, however, the range of political opinions made any consensus that went beyond flowery phrases nearly impossible. Tellingly, it was the debate on the foundations of the IPU's claim to legitimacy – the controversy over the future of representative government – that revealed this dilemma most clearly.

Parliamentarianism in crisis

When looking at the IPU debates of the 1920s, it is interesting to note that, from the First World War onwards, the Union associated democracy with parliamentarianism, and began

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Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbal du comité de rédaction de la commission des questions ethniques et coloniales', 4 and 5 April 1924, Geneva, pp. 1, 4, 7ff.

69 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Conférence 1925*, pp. 570ff.

70 IPU Archives, Box 491, Ludwig Quidde (?) to Walther Schücking and Christian Lange, 8 May 1925, Munich.

71 IPU Archives, Box 491, Ludwig Quidde to Christian Lange, 26 June 1926, Berlin.

to understand itself as a defender of both. It is difficult to determine exactly when democracy and parliamentarianism began to be seen as nearly coterminous. However, when President Wilson proclaimed that it was the Allies' aim to make the world 'safe for democracy', the IPU secretariat already interpreted this as a pledge to representative government, and it was most probably not alone in doing so. The end of the war did indeed bring a wave of newly established parliamentary systems, and parliamentarianism seemed to have triumphed over its critics. Yet this positive momentum did not last. The powers of democratically elected legislatures were quickly circumscribed by authoritarian governments, which claimed a higher kind of legitimacy than the people's will.[72] Even where parliaments remained strong, the critics of this system of government, on the right and on the left, became louder and increasingly aggressive.

As the IPU was explicitly an organization of parliamentarians, it was quick to realize the importance of this challenge to its founding principles. As early as 1924, the Swiss delegate Horace Micheli spoke of 'the very severe criticisms and attacks' that representative democracy had to face, and initiated the creation of a study group to deal with the 'crisis of parliamentarianism'.[73] This group met several times over the following years, and managed to obtain academic expertise from some of Europe's most respected scholars in the field, among them Harold Laski from the UK, and Gaetano Mosca from Italy.[74] A major report of the study group was presented by the former German chancellor Joseph Wirth at the 1928 conference, and it was vigorously discussed by the assembly. The report and the ensuing general debate revealed that nearly all members shared the feeling that parliamentary democracy faced a period of crisis, and that reform was necessary if the system was to be preserved. In other words, the parliamentarians self-consciously addressed the future of representative democracy as a transnational problem.

At the same time the ensuing debate showed that the organization had reached its limits in integrating different political currents. By 1928, Egyptian and Irish nationalists sat next to British Tories, and Italian fascists directly faced German socialists. On paper this had led to an impressive growth in numbers, both in actual members and in terms of people indirectly represented by the organization. But when it came to such a highly political issue as the meaning of democracy, the conflicts between these groups made an open dialogue almost impossible.

A key element of the resolution that was presented was the promotion of the first-past-the-post system in national elections, as opposed to a relative majority system. Some delegates welcomed this proposition; others were fiercely opposed. Apart from the recommendation of concrete measures, the delegates were not even able to agree on a common definition of what kind of parliamentary democracy was to be defended. Left-wing politicians embraced universal suffrage and civil liberties as the founding pillars of any democratic system, and argued for

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72 By the end of 1926, the countries where an authoritarian regime had triumphed over attempts to install a liberal representative constitution included Russia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Poland, Lithuania, and Portugal. Of these, Poland, Hungary, and Italy sent numerous IPU delegations.

73 See IPU Archives, Box 8, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Procès-verbaux du conseil interparlementaire, XIX', 21–29 August 1924, Bern, p. 14; Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Conférence 1925*, p. 119.

74 See Inter-Parliamentary Union, *The development of the representative system in our times: five answers to an enquiry instituted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union*, Geneva: Bureau interparlementaire, 1928.

social legislation to win the working class for representative government. Though the tone remained polite, it was obvious that they regarded dictators like Mussolini as their principal adversaries. The Italian delegates refused to accept any kind of direct or indirect criticism of the fascist system, and claimed that they had 'fortunately corrected the excesses of parliamentarianism and reinforced the principle of political representation on a truly Roman basis'. Just as Carl Schmitt in Germany had recently separated the concepts of democracy and parliamentarianism, the fascist deputy Solmi redefined political representation in an authoritarian way, stating that fascist 'reforms' had in fact saved the 'essential basis of parliamentary government' and solved all the problems listed earlier by Wirth.[75]

Even without the extreme stance of the Italians, and in spite of the efforts of those who moderated the discussion, all the assembly could do was to agree to disagree. While, on a general level, the members were conscious that they shared common problems, political polarization prevented them from taking a unified position and passing a strong resolution in defence of parliamentary democracy. Internationally, the prospects for a strong League of Nations, and potentially for a more important role of the IPU, were still improving during these years. But the domestic polarization of party politics prevented the IPU from adopting a common definition of its future role and from turning its representative potential into political currency.

The main arenas in the fight over parliamentarianism and national constitutions were obviously within each state. As the debate in the IPU shows, however, many members of parliament could understand each other on these issues across national borders. Even the disagreements reflect a high degree of political understanding. When a French socialist reacted furiously to the speech of an Italian fascist, it was because he could identify with his Italian comrades, imprisoned or killed, and because he knew that right-wing groups at home would readily agree with the Italians' notion of parliamentary government without democratic 'excesses'.

Conclusion

The IPU as an organization of moderate parliamentarians had to face questions about its legitimacy, even before the international climate became frosty from 1930 onwards. When the Depression made parliamentary systems collapse, and semi-authoritarian states became dictatorial, the prospects of a world parliament run by internationalist deputies rapidly declined. It was thus only for a short period, roughly between 1924 and 1930, that the IPU enjoyed wide public support and extensive media coverage of its meetings. Even then, the Union could not develop serious leverage to implement its resolutions. Yet as an international civil society organization with strong political links to the state, and with ideological ties to the League of Nations, it was a fascinating forum for transnational debate. The connections between the changing international system, the initial stages of a global civil society, and the domestic contexts of the key protagonists were obviously extremely complex. There are nevertheless four main conclusions that can be drawn from the history of the IPU, and that add to our understanding of these connections.

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75 Inter-parliamentary Union, *Compte rendu de la XXVe Conférence tenue à Berlin du 23 au 28 août 1928*, Geneva: Bureau interparlementaire, 1929, p. 349; Carl Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1926, pp. 5–23.

First of all, the IPU's attempts to assume an international role and turn itself into a world parliament deserve scholarly attention because they are very similar to the developments in later international assemblies, including the European Parliament. In all cases, members of parliaments decided themselves to work towards greater responsibility beyond the nation-state. This chapter of the history of parliamentary diplomacy thus adds to the understanding of the origins of the European Parliament, because it shows how natural it was for many protagonists to think of an international legislature with its focus in Europe. The attempts of the IPU to gain international recognition and political weight display a hitherto overlooked dimension of popular representation and democratic participation in international governance.

Secondly, the IPU provides a case study for investigating the broadened political base of international civil society activity in the interwar period. Formerly disconnected, liberal pacifists now communicated with moderate socialists and conservatives about a range of new topics. Hence the example of the IPU shows how the First World War brought many new rifts and conflicts but also prepared the ground for the internationalization of new fields of governance. It does so from a perspective that is truly representative, insofar as most IPU members could feel that they had the support of their home constituencies.

Thirdly, the IPU's history between the wars highlights that, despite being a largely national phenomenon, the crisis of parliamentary democracy also had a real transnational dimension. While further research on this is needed, this article has tried to show how the protagonists of parliamentarianism had a vivid sense of the challenges that their system faced, and tried to find common solutions that could be applied across Europe and beyond.

The fourth and final conclusion concerns the links between the IPU and the emergence of a global civil society. Civil society and the state are always connected by various interdependent relations, and parliaments are a focal point. But as old elites were questioned and new ones recruited, and as new and stronger parliaments emerged from the turmoil of the First World War, these connections quickly increased, opening up new opportunities for civil society groups to influence the political agenda. The example of the IPU underlines once again that this phenomenon also had an international dimension, as civil society organizations tried to leave their mark on the changing system of international relations. With regard to the concept of global civil society, the development of the IPU during the 1920s therefore has a twofold importance. Through its semi-official status and close contacts with various other international non-governmental organizations and movements, the Union was itself part of the wider continuum of global civil society. The development of the IPU after 1918, with both severe crises and times of rising membership and financial resources, therefore serves as a good example for the general dynamic of international civil society during the interwar years. But the fact that the creation of a world parliament was advocated by serious and professional politicians arguably also shows an increasing perception that a global constituency was emerging, in which people shared the same hopes and problems across national borders. This sense of a shared political fate was both the product and the source of legitimacy for global civil society activities and causes. The changing scope of the project of the IPU, from a liberal club of proponents of international arbitration to a self-styled international legislature in the making, reflects the growing importance of the idea of a transnational body politic, an idea that is at the heart of the concept of global civil society.

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