

REVIEWS

The institution of international order: from the League of Nations to the United Nations, edited by Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. Pp. xvi + 247. Hardback £115.00, ISBN: 978-1-138-09150-4.

Susan Pedersen, who authored the Foreword to this excellent volume, wrote in 2007 that 'the relevant question now is not 'why the League failed' but rather the more properly historical question of what it did and meant over its twenty-five-year existence'.¹ Over the past decade, numerous scholars have explored this question, illuminating legacies hidden or obscured among the conventional decline and fall narratives of the League of Nations. The co-editors to this volume, Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley, and their contributors provide a significant and meaningful contribution to this endeavour in several fundamental respects.

Many examinations of the League and its successor, the United Nations (UN), tend to treat the respective experiences as distinct chapters of history and/or approach them from a particular disciplinary or methodological perspective. This volume instead situates the League and UN on the same temporal continuum. It comprises several chapters that trace the evolution of the 'institution of international order' and its varied impacts across so-called 'critical junctures' of history, namely the aftermath of the two world wars and the onset of the Cold War. The result produces a much deeper understanding of the continuities between the two seminal organizations, the nature of the differences between them, and their combined impact in shaping the contemporary structures and discourse of global governance.

The volume is also cross-disciplinary in its orientation, seeking to engage not just students of global history but also a broader swath of international relations (IR) scholars, no doubt aided by the fact that its co-editors come from different backgrounds themselves. It therefore seeks to 'refigure the ways in which constructivist, post-structuralist, critical, and historically minded IR scholars conceive of international institutions, by providing a bridge to the new international history' (p. 3) and to 'challenge IR scholars to far more granular historicizing of how institutions work and how they effected and continue to effect change in both state policies and the broader cultures of the "international"' (p. 3). The volume plays its part in rising to this challenge, citing debates from across disciplines and blending careful attention to historical context and contingency with other key insights such as the production of ideas and norms, and the use of language.

But perhaps the even greater contribution of this volume occurs in another area where the picture is so often artificially cropped. The League and the UN are conventionally examined from a Western perspective, which shines the spotlight on activities in Geneva or New York or on great power diplomacy. The high political or bureaucratic facets of international institutions are certainly important, but they offer an incomplete understanding of these institutions overall meaning and impact (or lack thereof). Thus, the editors' 'central argument is that although the LON and UN shaped internationalism from the centre, as political proscenia, technocratic clearing houses and vehicles for world ordering, they were just as powerfully moulded by internationalisms that welled up globally' (p. 4).

The 'multi-local' approach adopted by this volume produces several excellent chapters that hold stand-alone value as case studies. Examples include an impressive account of the internationalization of the women's rights movement from the 1920s to the 1950s; an important study of the interaction between the League and Latin American countries through the respective lenses of economic multilateralism and Pan-American exceptionalism; an analysis of ideas about

¹Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112, 4, 2007, p. 1092.

personhood, state, and the international community by the Lebanese philosopher Charles Malik; and an investigation of visions of world federalism in post-war Japan. Together, these chapters highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between the institutional 'centre' of internationalism and the varieties of internationalism percolating in different regions, transnational movements, and areas of expertise.

It is now a century since the League of Nations came into being, institutionalizing not only a set of ideas about internationalism, but an accompanying language in which to express them and a set of categories by which we organize our world (from refugee to the sovereign state). Today, the 'liberal' international order is under severe stress, adding new fuel to long-standing debates over the governability of our interconnected world and increasing uncertainty about what the future may hold. While this volume certainly helps us understand how we got here, there is less analysis of what implications the past may have for our future. As Ryan Irwin notes in the Epilogue, 'There are no lessons or missed opportunities on these pages. The authors provide something more valuable: a sober examination of how the League of Nations and United Nations worked and why internationalism changed over time . . . [and] because this process was innately political, international values have always been contested and impartial' (p. 235). While this is true, where the volume really succeeds is in capturing the contested nature of internationalism across different contexts and how the 'institution of international order' served as a touchstone for so many of these debates.

If I have a quibble, it would be the need of a more fleshed-out sense of the scholarly implications of the body of work. The framing chapter outlines a 'more global approach to twentieth century internationalism' and suggests that 'by treating the League and UN as both individual entities and as an interconnected and conjoined whole, we will encourage further research on these lines' (p. 15). However, the reader is not left with a very clear idea of what exactly that research might be, which is where a brief concluding chapter might have been useful. But, as Albert Hirschman once wrote, 'this is probably all one can ask of history, and the history of ideas in particular: not to resolve issues, but to raise the level of debate'.² And this volume certainly succeeds in that regard.

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²Albert O. Hirschman, *The passions and the interests: political arguments for capitalism before its triumph*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 135.