

Spectacular peacebuilding:

The League of Nations and internationalist visions at interwar World Expos¹

The interwar years have long been considered an era of political and economic crisis characterized by the ascendance of belligerent nationalisms, simmering anti-colonialist tensions and world economic collapse. Though the 1920s had seen the emergence of the League of Nations, the world's first major intergovernmental organisation, 'a distortion of historical vision has featured nationalism [and particularly ultranationalist aggression] in the foreground' of narratives recounting the era.² Substantiating such accounts, historians and political scientists have spotlighted the League's faltering, taciturn or ineffective responses to processes such as the Manchurian Crisis, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, global rearmament and the rise of communism and fascism: events that emphasized the era's politically fractious nature. A newer wave of studies has contested this view. Spurred by the transnational turn in historical study, these accounts have begun to illuminate the period's importance as a seedbed for internationalism by exploring the organizational structures, societies, movements and 'technical' work of the League that laid the groundwork for the rapid expansion of internationalist working in the second half of the twentieth century.³

This chapter contributes to revisionist work on internationalism in the late 1930s. Like the surrounding chapters, it moves away from dematerialized accounts of diplomatic negotiation, but pushes our focus beyond the bounds of conventional understandings of international conferencing to explore the visual and material culture of two exhibitions representing the League of Nations at the much more open mass gatherings of people at two World Expositions. The histories of international conferencing and of World Expos are intimately intertwined. The latter have always served as sites for the staging of a vast array of conferences, congresses and meetings that various international organisations, associations and interest groups have scheduled to coincide with them.⁴

¹ The author was a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow while conducting research and writing for this chapter and so would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust.

² Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 8.

³ See for example, Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (eds) *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Daniel Laqua (ed.) *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴ Each of the two Expo editions that are the focus of this chapter provided venues for hundreds of such events. The Paris Expo of 1937, for example, hosted the IIC's International Studies Conference on Peaceful Change and the First International Yiddish Culture Congress. Amongst those held at The New York World's Fair were meetings of the International Youth Congress and the International College of Surgeons. See: N. Underwood, 'Exposing Yiddish Paris: The Modern Jewish Culture Pavilion at the 1937 World's Fair', *East European Jewish*

Moreover, the League's first Secretary-General, Eric Drummond, described the organisation's Secretariat as, 'nothing more and nothing less than a permanent conference of representatives'.⁵ Therefore, by focusing on exhibits of the League of Nations at World Expos, this chapter analyses the materiality of the twentieth century's first self-confessed unending conference, though rearticulated within the spectacular register of the World Expo circuit. In doing so, our focus is shifted away from the forging of internationalisms in Geneva and the restricted conferencing spaces of the political elite. Instead, this study draws our attention to the public sphere and the ways in which the League of Nations advocated a range of internationalisms to attract and sustain a broad community of international supporters.

Specifically, this chapter foregrounds an analysis of the spaces, sights and sounds of two projects supported by the League's Department of Public Information: the *Pavillon de la Paix* staged at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* held in Paris in 1937 and the League of Nations' Pavilion produced for the New York World's Fair of 1939. In each case, time and place inflected the range of internationalisms that the League was willing to be associated with, so that across the two expositions a significant shift can be discerned in the ideologies advocated and aesthetics deployed within displays promoting the organisation. Whilst it was shrewd in the context of the pre-war exposition of 1937 in Paris – overseen by the leftist alliance of the Popular Front government – to celebrate internationalist sentiments and styles associated with Socialism, two years later in the United States it was not. The New York World's Fair had been dedicated to the 'world of tomorrow', but increasingly after the event's opening the pavilions of the phantom states of Europe – including Czechoslovakia, Poland and Belgium – came to haunt the Expo's landscape.⁶ In this atmosphere of uncertainty, the League opted for a more politically ambivalent and conservative aesthetic.

Like all world's fairs and *expositions internationales* since their emergence in the mid-nineteenth century, the major World Expos of 1937 in Paris and 1939 in New York were enthusiastically promoted by their host nations as exemplary sites for fostering internationalism: spaces invested with audacious global aspirations in which causes and challenges beyond the reach of single nations could be pursued. Edmond Labbé – *Commissaire General* of the Paris Exposition – declared, for example, that the event under his charge 'must serve the interests of the world economy and the cause of peace' while the New York World's Fair operated under the motto,

Affairs (2016) 46.2, 160-175; New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁵ Eric Drummond, 'The Secretariat of the League of Nations', *Public Administration*, 9 (1931), 228-229.

⁶ Marco Duranti, 'Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939-40 New York World's Fair', *Journal of Contemporary History* (2006), 41.4, 663-683.

‘building the world of tomorrow’.⁷ Yet, despite organisers’ internationalist aspirations, analyses of these two expositions have echoed the tone of broader histories of the interwar era, judging them to be ill-fated or contrived expressions of peace that purposefully camouflaged simmering hostilities, jingoistic nationalisms and even outright threats of war between states.⁸ Indeed, scholars have generally dismissed the statements of fraternal goodwill routinely adopted by host nations of international expositions across their broad history as empty gestures: sentiments ‘ridiculed by displays of military technology, imperial conquest and abject racism’ woven in and amongst the melee of competing national exhibits.⁹ While it is patently clear that the built environments of international exhibitions are replete with the competitive architectural gestures of participant nations, which have drawn much attention in the existing historiography, this chapter will demonstrate that major World Expos at the end of the interwar period also attest to ‘the vitality [and multiplicity] of internationalism[s]’ extant in the late 1930s, through an exploration of the plural internationalisms advocated by the League of Nations in Paris and New York.¹⁰

War and peace at the Paris exposition of 1937

Between May and November 1937, the gates at the Exposition Internationale in Paris recorded a total of 31.5 million entries to the fairgrounds.¹¹ At the heart of the exhibition stood the Eiffel Tower, which had been erected as the gateway to the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889. Four decades later, the viewing platforms within this iconic Parisian landmark once again offered scores of visitors an elevated platform from which to gaze out in all directions at the vast cultural spectacle feted by organisers as a great space of international exchange promoting peace amongst nations, itself situated in an interwar Paris of ‘exhilarating cosmopolitanism’.¹² Yet for those who gazed out in a north-westerly direction towards the new *Palais de Chaillot*, panoramic views of the built

⁷ ‘Les Participations Étrangères à l’Exposition Internationale de Paris’, 23 Juillet 1936, *Participations Étrangères Généralités*, Archives Nationales de France [hereafter ANF] F¹² 12143. Translation by the author.

⁸ Rika Devos, Alexander Ortenberg, and Vladimir. Paperny (eds) *Architecture of Great Expositions 1937-1959: Messages of Peace, Images of War*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) 1-22; Robert Kargon, et al., *World’s Fairs on the Eve of War: Science, Technology, and Modernity, 1937–1942* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017) 83-107.

⁹ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: MUP, 1988) 17.

¹⁰ Daniel Laqua, ‘Preface’ in Laqua (ed.) *Internationalism Reconfigured*, p.xii.

¹¹ Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World’s Fair* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998) 30.

¹² ‘Les Participations Étrangères’, *Participations Étrangères Généralités*, ANF: F¹² 12143; James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the seeds of third world nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

environment were disturbed by a scene of confrontation.¹³ Here, as many contemporary sources registered, was an alarming face-off between the thrusting Soviet and towering Nazi pavilions on the far-side of the Seine.

On 15 July 1937, the right-wing Parisian weekly *Candide* published a full page of satirical cartoons about the expo by popular illustrator Albert Dubout.¹⁴ In the bottom left-hand corner was an image bearing the caption ‘It’s them fighting again!’ [Fig. 8.1]. Above, a line drawing shows animated versions of the Nazi and Soviet pavilions in conflict: the eagle atop the Nazi pavilion screeching in alarm as the (un)idealised Socialist figures surmounting the Soviet pavilion lunge towards it, causing the whole building to lean comically forwards. In Dubout’s rendering, the elevated, architectural hostilities cause a commotion in the boulevards below where anxious fairgoers run into one another in panic or leap into the Seine to avoid the ruckus.¹⁵ This image has been repeatedly analysed and reprinted in case studies examining the pavilions constructed by Germany and Russia in 1937, but a key detail has remained unnoticed in each instance. At the centre of this chaotic image of bilateral confrontation, diminutive but unmistakably present, is the representation of another specific pavilion erected for the 1937 exposition, a pavilion that embodied international accord: the *Pavillon de la Paix* or Peace Pavilion.¹⁶

[Figure 8.1 here]

Figure 0.1. “It’s them fighting again!” Detail from ‘Dessins de A. Dubout: A L’Expo’ *Candide*, 15 Juillet 1937.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département Droit, économie, politique, JOD-125

[ark:/12148/bpt6k46894901]. Source: gallica.bnf.fr

The Peace Pavilion was situated on the Place du Trocadero and comprised a semi-circular building partially surrounding a 50-metre-high pillar, topped by an illuminated star, known as the *Colonne de la Paix* or Peace Column. The pavilion’s interior exhibits dramatized the longue durée of modern war and peace and were split into three main sections: ‘the destruction of war’; ‘the efforts

¹³ See Andre. Devambez, *The Exhibition of 1937, view of the Eiffel Tower* ([Painting] 1937) oil on canvas, 217x189cm, Rennes Museum of Fine Arts.

¹⁴ Though Dubout himself did not share these right-wing leanings.

¹⁵ ‘A L’Expo: Dessins de A. Dubout’, *Candide*, 15 Juillet 1937, 9.

¹⁶ See, for example, Danilo Udovički-Selb, ‘Facing Hitler’s Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47.1 (January 2012) 18; Karen Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 58; Devos, Ortenberg, and Paperny (eds) *Architecture of Great Expositions*.

of humanity for the maintenance of peace'; and 'the coordination of peace forces'.¹⁷ Particularly in its latter sections, the pavilion's exhibits advocated for specific organisations and concrete actions that could constitute an international movement for peace. Chief amongst these was galvanizing support to strengthen the League of Nations. One room was dedicated entirely to the League but displays that championed the organisation and its key principles could be found throughout the pavilion's interior as well as on its façade. A passionate case was made for the League as the crucial vessel through which the principles of international cooperation and collective security could be pursued thereby enabling a permanent peace. While subsequent scholarly accounts of the 1937 exposition seem to have all but forgotten the Pavillon de la Paix, a range of contemporary sources show that exposition organisers, international journalists and leading French politicians as well as large swathes of the visiting public saw it as a powerful symbol of shared anti-war sentiment across national borders.

Aerial views, offered by the many fairground maps published in souvenir guidebooks, brochures and leaflets, show the Peace Pavilion located at the apex of the exposition site directly opposite the *Entrée d'Honneur*, the main gateway into the fairgrounds.¹⁸ The Peace Pavilion's Organising Committee decided to cover the interior concave surface of its external façade with decorative features celebrating the League of Nations, which were floodlit for ease of viewing by day or by night. These included: a large-scale world map with shaded areas showing member and non-member states; and all twenty-six articles of the League of Nations' Covenant engraved upon a series of large stone-like slabs embedded within the wall's surface. By this means, every visitor who entered the exposition via the *Entrée d'Honneur* would have unavoidably encountered this monument to peace and internationalism with its cartographic depiction of League principles and advocates.

Coverage of the Peace Pavilion's inauguration gave a sense that it had obtained a position of special significance within the context of the exposition.¹⁹ Marcel Cachin, leading communist politician and editor of *L'Humanité* took this opportunity to publish his take on the pavilion's symbolic significance. On 8 July 1937, Cachin declared the pavilion to be a powerful 'sign of Universal Peace' and a vital monument to 'the defence of collective security and the necessary solidarity of

¹⁷ 'Visit the Peace Pavilion', RUP 137, IISH.

¹⁸ *Exposition Internationale de Paris 1937: Arts et Techniques* (Paris: L'illustration, 1937); 'Visit the Peace Pavilion' RUP 137, IISH.

¹⁹ 'French President Lebrun Opens the International Exposition 1937' *Our Roving Camera Reports*, 25 July 1937, *Reuters Archive – British Pathé*, Film ID: VLVA7C4I71IT94GRWCWIV9US7D7G; 'Paris Exhibition Opened' *Pathe Gazette*, 1937, *British Pathé Archive*, Film ID 941.16; 'Le Pavillon de la Paix a été inauguré hier après-midi à l'Exposition' *Le Peuple*, 10 Juillet 1937; 'L'inauguration du Pavillon de la Paix' *L'Humanité*, 8 Juillet 1937; 'Le Monument de la Paix', *Le Petit Journal*, 10 Juillet 1937, *Pavillon de la Paix*, ANF F¹² 12143.

all'. He went on to assert that the Peace Pavilion would not only act as a symbol of solidarity but – like the many fairground venues that would host international conferences and congresses during the period of the exposition – it would also function as an active site of internationalist working, where ‘the representatives of groups who want to fight effectively against the war all over the world [would convene].’²⁰

While entrance to the exposition cost six Francs, the Peace Pavilion - standing just outside the boundary of the fair - was accessible to all, admitting visitors free of charge.²¹ Its accessibility meant that the pavilion quickly became a rallying point for pacifists and anti-war activists just as Cachin had prophesied. [see figure 8.2]. Coverage in the French press highlighted two events as particularly noteworthy. Just over a month after the inauguration of the Peace Pavilion, in mid-August, a large demonstration was held there by representatives of youth for peace organisations from up to 25 different nations, with many donning national costume to highlight the rally’s international nature.²² The marches coordinated by these groups involved the laying of wreaths at the foot of the Peace Column and then culminated in the delivery of anti-war addresses by three youth delegates from India, Belgium and France.

[Figure 8.2 here]

Figure 0.2. Carte Postale showing the exterior of the Peace Pavilion captioned ‘Cher.... Le Pavillon ou la nuit – avec un immense foule d’Ancien Combattants...’. Source Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix Archives, International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam)

A month or so later, on 8 September 1937, WWI veterans’ organisations arranged for a particularly poignant anti-war ceremony to take place adjacent to the Peace Column. In the presence of various dignitaries and gathered international publics ‘the torch that transported the famous flame of the Arc de Triomphe [from the tomb of the unknown soldier] to the ossuary of Douaumont ... was deposited at the foot of the Peace Column.’²³ In doing so, this ceremony admitted the exposition’s ephemeral monument to Peace into a circuit of sacrosanct memorial sites,

²⁰ ‘L’inauguration’, *L’Humanité*, ANF F¹² 12143.

²¹ ‘A l’Exposition’ *L’Humanité*, 26 Aout 1937, ANF F¹² 12143.

²² ‘Au pied de la colonne de la Paix’ *Excelsior*, 15 Aout 1937, ANF F¹² 12143.

²³ The Douaumont ossuary, inaugurated in 1932, contains the material remains of at least 130,000 unidentified French and German soldiers who died in the Battle of Verdun. ‘Le Flambeau de la Paix’ *L’Humanité*, 10 Septembre 1937; ‘La Flambeau de Verdun au Pavillon de la Paix’ *L’Homme Libre*, 10 Septembre 1937, ANF F¹² 12143 (Paix, Pavillon de la).

revealing the tone of public response to this new landmark as well as the emotional investment made in it, however temporarily, by a range of anti-war campaigners drawn from many different nations worldwide. Yet just beneath the apparent open, anti-war internationalism enabled by the Peace Pavilion a more politically partisan internationalism of the left was also being promoted at this site.

A pavilion in partnership: The League and the RUP's proletarian internationalism

Leftist leanings could be discerned in various elements of the Peace Pavilion's displays. Across its five rooms Socialist ideals and a broad proletarian internationalism were implicitly championed through the use of Communist- or Marxian-style rhetoric and the adoption of visual conventions that approximated Socialist Realism. One of the most notable examples of such left-wing advocacy could be found in the pavilion's third – and largest – room, which was assigned the theme 'the great peace forces'.²⁴ Here the pavilion's Organising Committee planned, as the room's central feature, 'a huge painting representing the seven great divisions of mankind: peasants, workers, intellectuals, ex-soldiers, religion, women and youth'.²⁵ Expanding on their design brief, the Committee gave further instruction as to the specific social settings in which these 'great divisions' should be represented as having acted. They explained, 'for the Section concerning Workers' and Peasants' Movements we should like to give the impression of a factory, of a harvest field, of a co-operative store'. This delineation of peace movements into schematic social and spatial typologies is telling. The vision it intended to offer viewers – with the transnational social categories of 'peasant' and 'worker' clearly playing a central role – was one of collective international struggle populated by the familiar stock figures of a global communist imaginary. Moreover, the Committee suggested that 'the important dates of the different congresses of the First, Second and Third Internationals ...' should be explicitly commemorated. Notably, given this volume's focus on conferencing, ambitious early proposals for the 'interior arrangement' of the wider space which would house this painting suggested that it could take the form of 'an immense congress chamber' in order to give visitors an immersive experience of a congress in-session as well as permitting 'special use [by] approved organisations' during the exposition.²⁶

In its final form it seems the pavilion contained no such mock congress chamber, though the 'huge painting' set to represent the 'seven great divisions of mankind' was actually arranged as

²⁴ 'Visit the Peace Pavilion' RUP 137, IISH.

²⁵ 'International Peace Campaign: The Message of the Peace Pavilion', RUP 137, IISH.

²⁶ 'Suggestions for interior arrangement of the Peace Pavilion' RUP 137, IISH.

seven separate painted panels.²⁷ The panel representing ‘Youth’ strongly approximated visual conventions of Socialist Realism, which had recently become the Russian Soviet state’s artistic style of choice [figure 8.3]. For visual arts in the Soviet Union, what this resulted in was ‘the production of a visual super-reality’ in which realist styles were used to create highly idealized scenes that uncritically glorified Soviet life.²⁸ The panel depicting Youth in the Peace Pavilion’s ‘grande salle’ conformed to many facets of this aesthetic style.²⁹ At its centre, it depicted a group of vivacious, youthful figures. Some wore workers overalls; others were clothed as stereotypical peasant figures including a woman right-of-centre wearing a long tunic and headscarf. Several of the figures carried farming or labouring tools, amongst them both a sickle and a hammer. As the group marches forward with purpose towards the viewer, beaming smiles and bright eyes adorning the face of each figure gazing outwards, the idealized scene conveys a mawkish optimism every bit the equal of cloying artworks that depicted Stalin amongst the cheery youth of the Soviet Union.³⁰ Its sense of collective movement also unmistakably resembles the forward progression embedded within Vera Mukhina’s sculptural duo *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* that topped the nearby Soviet Pavilion. Leaving no room for confusion as to the politically partisan message being visually championed here, the panel representing youth peace movements was topped with the tagline ‘Youth of the world unite to defend peace’: an unquestionable echo of the Communist Manifesto’s famed final lines.³¹

[Figure 8.3 here]

Figure 0.3. Mural depicting Youth movements for Peace within the ‘Grand Salle’ of the Peace Pavilion. Detail from a promotional booklet published by the RUP. Source Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix Archives, International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam)

²⁷ No congress chamber is mentioned or depicted within the many souvenir postcards and brochures produced to promote the Peace Pavilion nor is it mentioned within related press coverage on file at the Archives Nationales de France, ANF F¹² 12143 . ‘Cher... Voici la grande salle’, RUP 137, IISH.

²⁸ Evgeny Dobrenko, ‘The Epic Retreat: Political Culture and Cultural Policy in 1930s Stalinist Russia’ in Rosa Ferré (ed.) *Red Cavalry: Creation and Power in Soviet Russia between 1917 and 1945* (Madrid: Casa Encendida, 2011), 372; Andrew Ellis, *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970*. (Milano: Skira, 2012) 37.

²⁹ ‘La Jeunesse’, *Le Pavillon de la Paix* (Paris: Editions du RUP, 1937), RUP 140, IISH; Agnès Humbert, ‘Expo 1937’ *La Vie Ouvriere*, 19 Aout 1937, RUP 136, IISH.

³⁰ See, for example, Vassili Svarog, *I.V. Stalin and members of the Politburo among children in Gorki Park* ([Painting] 1939), oil on canvas, 200×300cm. Tretjakov Gallery, Moscow.

³¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1848] 2012), 102.

That the visual and discursive clues outlined above, and threaded throughout the pavilion, were promoting a proletarian internationalism is shown to be all the more plausible when we scrutinize the organisation chiefly responsible for the Peace Pavilion project. It was led by a fairly new, short-lived and long forgotten pacifist organization known in French as the *Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix* (RUP) and in English as the *International Peace Campaign* (IPC). The RUP had been publicly founded little more than six months prior to the opening of the Paris exposition, in September 1936. Yet, by the time of the expo's opening in May 1937 the RUP had apparently expanded exponentially. It now claimed a membership of more than four hundred million adherents worldwide and a very prominent space on the exposition fairgrounds. Historian Rachel Mazuy reveals, France's Socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum played a crucial role in allocating a permit and subsidy to the Peace Pavilion's organising committee ensuring both this structure's existence and prominent location.³² Mazuy also shows that key personalities within the (French) communist sphere played a crucial, but deliberately obscured role, within the RUP's founding: notable amongst these were Pierre Cot, socialist politician and government minister who became President of the RUP and Louis Dolivet an adept propagandist with links to the Comintern.

Like the very existence of the RUP itself, the partnership between this organisation and the League to deliver the Peace Pavilion was very much a collaboration of convenience born out of a specific historical moment. While the popular front government was leading in France and with the prospect of world war looming large – threatening to undercut the League's *raison d'être* – a collaboration with the RUP to achieve a noteworthy presence at the Paris Exposition was expedient. Just as advantageous for the League, two years later, at the New York World's Fair of 1939 was an alignment with quite different values and interest groups.

An appeal to American psychology? The League at the New York World's Fair of 1939

In January 1938 just six months after the inauguration of the Peace Pavilion in Paris the League's Supervisory Commission submitted a report for consideration by the Council. In this document the views of a group of anonymised 'prominent and representative' Americans were compiled vis-à-vis the desirability of staging a League pavilion at the New York World's Fair of 1939.³³ Summarising these views, the document advised, 'to be effective and to avoid all possible criticism [the League]

³² Rachel Mazuy, 'Le Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix (1931-1939): Une organisation de masse?' *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 30 (1993), 40-44.

³³ Those consulted were listed as: Admiral Stanley, Mr Johnson and Mr Holmes and Mr Whalen of the Fair Corporation as well as Norman H. Davis, Shotwell, Haskell, Fosdick, Eichelberger, J.C. Dunn and Mrs H.G. Leach.

should be housed in a separate pavilion and stand entirely on its own, and should not in any case be combined with any other efforts such as those of various peace or other organisations'.³⁴ Given that the League had collaborated with the RUP – a prominent peace organisation – only six months earlier, it's hard not to see this sentiment as a direct reflection on the compromises made and partisan allegiances revealed during that project.

While signing up as a solo exhibitor for the New York World's Fair may have ensured that the League was more likely to be seen as politically impartial by American fairgoers, it did mean that the full weight of the project's expense would fall squarely on the organisation's shoulders. In retrospect the League calculated that actual expenditure on the New York project totaled two million Swiss Francs.³⁵ Significantly more than the estimated 12500 Swiss Francs that the League had contributed to the Peace Pavilion project staged in Paris.³⁶ Though quite restrained in the scheme of the fairgrounds, the League of Nations pavilion staged in New York offered visitors six full rooms of visually-rich, floor to ceiling exhibits, while the pavilion's exterior was designed to convey grandeur and dignity. Aesthetically it took on a monumental neoclassical style akin to contemporary American civic and memorial architecture clearly intended to be an imposing and significant addition to the fairgrounds (figure 8.4).³⁷

[Figure 8.4 here]

Figure 0.4. Artist's impression of the League of Nations Pavilion, New York World's Fair. Source: League of Nations Archives, United Nations of Geneva.

In 1939, with its membership shrinking and the outbreak of war in Europe, the drive to gain broad US support for a League of Nations seems to account for the organisation's much heavier investment in the New York World's Fair. In early 1939 a member of the League's Information Section observed 'Roosevelt moves to the front as leader of the democracies ... in the new League,

³⁴ 'Participation of the League of Nations in the New York World's Fair (1939): Annex to the Report of the Supervisory Commission', 27 January, 1938, International Exhibition New York, 1939: Place for Participation of the Secretariat, General and Miscellaneous, League of Nations, (50-31578-26744 [R5764]) United Nations Archives. Hereafter GM, LN (Reg. no.) UNA.

³⁵ 'Aide-mémoire' (Conversation Pelt/Field)', 17 August 1967, New York World's Fair: Demolition of the League Pavilion, GM (50-40163-26744 [R5770]) UNA.

³⁶ 'Participation du Secretariat a l'Exposition de Paris 1937': Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne, Paris 1937, GM (5B-28829-14775) UNA.

³⁷ See, for example, the New York County Courthouse (completed 1927); the Montsec American Monument (dedicated 1937); and the Washington DC Jefferson Memorial (begun 1939).

whatever form it may take, the United States is bound to be prominent'.³⁸ This context of expected future leadership from the US is a crucial point. Whilst Woodrow Wilson had been a key architect of the League and Americans had undertaken significant collaborative projects with it through both public and private channels, the US had never become a member.³⁹ Through the New York fair key League personnel hoped to convince US audiences that the best way to continue their collaborative relationship was through US membership of the League. To this end League officials preparing the organisation's pavilion for New York continually underscored the importance of 'appealing to American psychology'.⁴⁰

In their quest to achieve cultural resonance with the fair's host nation, League personnel consulted with pavilion commissioners from past Expos as well as notable Americans.⁴¹ Arthur Sweetser, a key member of the League's Information Section (1919-42) and an American national himself, took a leading role in these discussions. Amongst those he consulted was New York-born author, playwright and diplomat Clare Boothe Luce who is remembered as a staunch advocate of Catholicism. Luce suggested that 'the idealistic and philosophical heart' of the League should take centre-stage within the pavilion. She opined that American visitors would be 'com[ing] in off the street rather exhausted; they would appreciate a cool, quiet, religious-like place in which to repose for a moment; they would then immediately get the atmosphere and spirit of the League'.⁴² Given her well-documented religious allegiance, it stands to reason that Luce was more specifically proposing that the League design an exhibit that would resonate with New York's Catholic, and strongly anticommunist, majority who were 'a powerful force in city political and cultural affairs'.⁴³ Like many American Catholics at that time, Luce harboured strong anticommunist sentiments. Indeed, the 'American Roman Catholic Church' has been identified as the 'backbone of American

³⁸ Correspondence John H. Hall to Adrian Pelt, 20 April 1939, New York World Fair, 1939: Installation of Room I, GM (50/36746/26744 [R5770]) UNA.

³⁹ Pitman B. Potter, 'Note on the Distinction between Political and Technical Questions', *Political Science Quarterly* (1935) 50, 264-271.

⁴⁰ Correspondence John B. Whitton to Adrian Pelt, 28 September 1937, Invitation and Acceptance, GM, LN (50-26744-26744 [R5764]) UNA; Report by the Director of the Information Section: Annex 1, 23 December 1937, International Exhibition: Participation of the Secretariat, GM (50-31578-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

⁴¹ These included the commissioners of pavilions for Switzerland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Canada and the Vatican at the Paris Expo of 1937 as well as, 'Government officials, political leaders, officers of several foundations, representatives of peace organisations, officials of the New York Fair Corporation.': Report by the Director of the Information Section: Annex 1, 23 December 1937; Correspondence Noel H. Field to Joseph Avenol, 25 December 1937, , International Exhibition: Participation of the Secretariat, GM (50-31578-26744 [R5764]) UNA

⁴² Correspondence Arthur Sweetser to Adrian Pelt, 19 June 1938, International Exhibition: General Correspondence respecting participation, GM, LN (50-31578-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

⁴³ 'Catholics in New York: Society, Culture and Politics 1808 to 1946' *Museum of the City of New York*, <https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/catholics-new-york> accessed 20 November 2020.

anticommunism for most of the movement's history'.⁴⁴ With this audience in mind, the influences of both anti-communism and Roman Catholicism can be discerned in the content both presented within and absented from the League's US pavilion.

In Room One, the pavilion's displays opened with an exhibit representing the 'long historical process which culminated in the League of Nations'. Beginning with Pharaoh Rameses II, this section offered a selection of 'portraits, quotations and documents recall[ing] some of the great men and historical events' that had furthered international cooperation.⁴⁵ Yet Socialist activities were notably absent. In the League's gendered narrative of internationalist history staged in New York 'great men and historical events' associated with communist internationalism found no mention in direct contrast to plans for its Parisian Peace Pavilion.⁴⁶ Instead, in 1939, the League's origins story contained prominent references to a range of religious figures, including St Augustine, Erasmus, Francisco Suarez and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Elsewhere in the pavilion explicit religious references continued.

Among the Health Section's exhibits in Room Two were allusions to figures from Christian scripture. Above a cartographic panel showing the global networks facilitated by the League's 'creat[ion of] an international epidemiological intelligence service' was a bas-relief in wood showing a man carrying a wounded figure: with the title 'The Good Samaritan' (figure 8.5).⁴⁷ The association of these two figures – a hero and a victim of biblical genealogy – with the medical work of the League conforms to an ossified iconography of humanitarian action. This iconography is particularly associated with narratives of 'humanitarian medicine', dating back to the late nineteenth century, which built upon the tried and tested tropes of a visual culture developed alongside missionary and reformer activities stretching back centuries.⁴⁸ Moreover this bas-relief alluded to historically significant representations of Christianity's most sacred and central characters. The entwined composition of the sculpture's two central figures aped the shape and form of Michelangelo's Pieta:

⁴⁴ Richard G. Powers, *Not Without Honor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) p.51; Patrick J. McNamara: *A Catholic Cold War: Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., and the Politics of American Anticommunism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); 'Clare Boothe Luce dies at 84', 10 October 1987, *New York Times*.

⁴⁵ 'Building World Order – Glimpses of History', Pavillon de la SDN Salle No.1, Cab4, dra4, LN, UNA; 'III. League of Nations Pavilion at the New York World's Fair', *Monthly Summary of the League of Nations*, 19, 3, March 1939, 113-124.

⁴⁶ 'Suggestions for Interior' RUP 137, IISH.

⁴⁷ 'Salle II: Bas-relief d'Honoré (sur bois)', Cab4, dra4, LN, UNA; 'League of Nations Pavilion' [Leaflet], New York World's Fair: Publicity for the League Exhibit, GM, LN, (50-35195-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

⁴⁸ Sonya de Latt and Valérie Gorin, 'Iconographies of humanitarian aid in Africa' in Christina Bennett, Matthew Foley and Hanna B. Krebs (eds) *Learning from the past to shape the future: Lessons from the history of humanitarian action in Africa* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI, October 2016) 15- 29; Davide Rodogno and Thomas David, 'All the World Loves a Picture: The World Health Organisation's Visual Politics, 1948-1973' in Davide Rodogno and Heide Fehrenbach (eds) *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015) 223-248; Michael Barnett (ed.) *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*, (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

a Renaissance-era marble representing the Virgin Mary cradling the body of Christ after the crucifixion, which has been part of the Vatican's art collection since the sixteenth century.

[Figure 8.5 here]

Figure 0.5. 'The Good Samaritan' a bas-relief in wood which was displayed among the Health Section's exhibits in Room Two of the League Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. Source: League of Nations Archives, United Nations of Geneva.

The aesthetic links between the pieta and that created for the League pavilion in New York signal a much more direct influence by the Roman Catholic church upon the League's Expo project courtesy of the French Catholic priest Père de Reviere de Mauny, a Jesuit known for his creative endeavours.⁴⁹ Reviere was the commissioner of the Vatican Pavilion (*Pavillon Pontifical*) at the 1937 Paris Exposition and after informally advising the League for a time, he quickly became a key player within the their New York pavilion project team.⁵⁰ In July of 1938, Secretary-General Joseph Avenol informed all departments that he had retained the services of Reviere 'as [a] technical adviser, to draw up complete plans for an appropriate League exhibit and Pavilion'.⁵¹ Working with a group of artists and architects in Paris, Reviere set about transforming each League department's vague plans into striking multimedia displays. Some of these were the same artists who he had worked with on the Vatican pavilion for the 1937 Expo and there were clear transferences from one context to the other.

There were striking similarities between the aura and architectural dimensions of spaces created within each pavilion. The floorplan for the League's 1939 pavilion shows five antechambers that formed an outer ring surrounding the central rotunda space. This circular sixth room was described by organisers and in press releases as 'the culminating point' of the pavilion. It was carefully designed to encourage reverence for the League's 'ideal and objective' of collective security via international cooperation through creation of a religious-like shrine that venerated this

⁴⁹ Reviere was the author of *Paysans de l'Eau* (1932) showcasing an extraordinary collection of photographs he had taken while on a mission in China.

⁵⁰ *Guide du Pavillon Pontifical à l'Exposition 1937* (Paris: éd. De l'Art sacré, 1937) Bibliothèque Nationale de France [hereafter BNF]: FRBNF40364716: <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40364716h>

⁵¹ 'Appointment of Technical Adviser' [Memo] 16 March 1938, New York World's Fair: Services of Rev. Père de Reviere de Mauny as Expert, GM, LN (50-33181-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

work as ‘the apotheosis of human solidarity’.⁵² The high-ceilinged room was dimly lit. At its centre stood an elevated sculptural group of five female figures with their arms outstretched forming a protective ring within which was placed ‘a tree in wrought metal’ (figure 8.6). This collection of symbolic forms was intended to ‘represent the five continents, forming a circle to protect the Tree of Peace’. The pavilion’s elevated external peristyle was situated directly above this room and so the sculptural group at centre was seen ‘under the full light falling from the dome’.⁵³ Correspondence between the League’s Finance and Information Sections gives insight into the sonic dimensions of the space. These archival documents explain that ‘on the advice of Father de Reviers’ there was ‘a loud speaker installed hidden in the ceiling of room six’ which facilitated the ‘play[ing of] some good classical music ... to enhance the impression’ made upon visitors by the exhibits in this room.⁵⁴

[Figure 8.6 here]

Figure 0.6. Installation view of Room Six within the League Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair showing lighting and architectural features surrounding central sculpted figures (here at left). Source: League of Nations Archives, United Nations of Geneva.

There was a very similar use of height, light and sound in the Vatican pavilion of 1937. Its form followed centuries old patterns of Roman Catholic architecture – replete with high altar, baptistry, crypt, cloisters, a free-standing bell tower and a sanctuary - with the latter particularly standing out as a model for Room Six of the League pavilion. Summing up the main features and effects of this space in his introductory statement for the published guide to the Vatican Pavilion, Reviers effused, ‘before the altar, at the call of the Light, feel the universality and the holiness’.⁵⁵ It is telling that these words alluding to the supra-national allegiances that the curatorial team hoped would be inspired by the Vatican pavilion’s sanctuary could easily have been describing notable features and the atmosphere created within Room Six in the League’s pavilion at New York: key elements of which had been influenced by Reviers’ own sense of what constituted an impactful sacred space. Clearly architectural conventions and iconographies drawn from Roman Catholicism

⁵² ‘III. League of Nations Pavilion’ *Monthly Summary*, p.124; NYWF Press Department, Release 668, UNA; Room Six was designed by H. Le Roy who also designed the Vatican pavilion’s Crypt for the 1937 Exposition: ‘League of Nations Pavilion’ [Leaflet], UNA; *Guide du Pavillon Pontifical*, 29, BNF.

⁵³ ‘III. League of Nations Pavilion’ *Monthly Summary*, 124.

⁵⁴ Correspondence Adrian Pelt to John Bieler, 7 July 1939, International Exhibition: Participation of the Secretariat – Finances, GM, LN (50-32763-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

⁵⁵ Père de Reviers de Mauny, ‘Au Visiteur du Pavillon Pontifical’, *Guide du Pavillon Pontifical*, 5, BNF.

provided a significant blueprint for the League pavilion's central space, though they were not the only influence here.

A technical League: Accommodating multiple internationalisms

On the 'dark' wall surrounding the League pavilion's shrine-like sanctuary in Room Six were a series of 'four frescoes representing scourges such as War, Famine, Epidemics and Exile'.⁵⁶ These allegorical depictions were intended to represent major global threats to the League's central goal of world peace through collective security. The fresco depicting war was particularly striking. The bottom third of the image shows the ruins of warfare. Angular buildings jut from the ground on the left which is covered in a tangled mess of figurative forms suggesting multiple casualties. At its centre, a figure clutches at the child in their arms while bending backwards in an unnatural way in an attempt to avoid the inescapable aerial bombardment descending from above. At top, endless planes fill the air with smoke and projectiles as they race across sky. The descending barrage is anthropomorphized as the huge and terrifying forms of the four men of the apocalypse hurtling with alarming speed towards the victims below.⁵⁷ The fresco offers a forceful and passionate indictment of war, but not of any conflict in particular.

Though the aggressive actions of the Axis Powers in Asia, Africa and Europe had set in motion a spiraling global conflict, the League offers no direct condemnation of these contemporary acts, only a repudiation of the notion of war. This reluctance to confront the most flagrant examples of war-making to hand, even within a fair that ultimately found no place for a Nazi pavilion, confirmed that the League could be persuaded to a taciturn response in the face of significant acts of aggression and suggested that the League was willing to advocate a politically indiscriminate internationalism.⁵⁸ This abstracted denunciation of war also marked a significant departure from the curatorial choices made in executing the Peace Pavilion at the Paris exposition in 1937. In Paris, a pavilion entirely dedicated to the themes of war and peace housed emotive exhibits explicitly condemning aggressive actions by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy including the invasion of Abyssinia and the bombing of a school in the Spanish city of Getafé. Both used photographic images to show the actual environmental and human devastation resulting from these incidents.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ 'III. League of Nations Pavilion' *Monthly Summary*, 124.

⁵⁷ 'Salle VI 'La Guerre' Fresque de M. Untersteller' [Photograph] Salle VI, Cab4, dra4, LN, UNA.

⁵⁸ See James J. Fortuna, 'Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World's Fair', *Fascism* (2019) 8,2, 179-218.

⁵⁹ 'Travel with I.P.C.', RUP 137, IISH.

Reticence to explicitly confront contemporary political disputes in the League's New York pavilion has been interpreted as a move to secure US support. The League was keen not to lay itself open to the 'charge of attempting propaganda in a non-member state' and even sought to reassure US audiences, by press release in 1938, that 'nothing in the nature of political propaganda' would be contained amongst its exhibits.⁶⁰ In his analysis of the League's New York pavilion, historian David Allen argues this project was part of a public process of League reform, that actually sought to recast the League 'as a less political body' focused on facilitating technical cooperation between states with much greater scope for non-member involvement.⁶¹ The picture of League reform intimated by the New York pavilion – with its focus on accomplishments in the social, economic and health spheres – was very much in-line with the League's internal Bruce Report of 1939, recommending that it focus on 'technical' (rather than political) work. Both have been interpreted as 'aligning the League more consciously with prevailing American policy toward it'.⁶² Preparing the League, or its already anticipated successor, for US leadership in the postwar era was undoubtedly a key motivation behind this organisational recasting. Yet in the uncertain era of world war, some anticipated the emergence of an alternate world order headed by fascist powers. A developing strand of scholarship compellingly argues that in steering the organisation away from entanglement in political disputes through a programme of reform key League personnel – right up to the Secretary-General himself – had this future in mind.⁶³ Marco Moraes has recently revived enquiry into the purported fascist leanings of Joseph Avenol the League's Secretary General and top official from 1933 to 1940.⁶⁴ He contends, amongst other events, that Avenol's fascist sympathies were revealed through his leadership of the League's administrative response to aggressive imperialist actions by the Japanese in Manchuria. He suggests Avenol reduced League activities there at the time of the crisis in order to facilitate Japanese annexation in contradiction of the Covenant. Actions which, at best, reveal Avenol to be one of the interwar era's arch-appeasers and, like many of his colleagues a chronic imperialist.

⁶⁰ New York World's Fair Press Department, News Release: 296, International Exhibition, GM, LN, (50-31578-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

⁶¹ David Allen, 'Internationalist Exhibitionism: The League of Nations at the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940' in Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzor and Heidi J.S. Tworek, *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations* (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), 91-116.

⁶² Allen, 'Internationalist Exhibitionism', 94-95.

⁶³ Madeleine Herren, 'Fascist Internationalism' in Sluga and Clavin (eds) *Internationalisms*, 191-212; Kargon, et al., *World's Fairs*, 83-107; Devos, Ortenberg, and Paperny 'Introduction: Messages of Peace and Images of War' in Devos, Ortenberg and Paperny (eds) *Architecture of Great Expositions*, 1-22.

⁶⁴ Marco Moraes, 'Competing Internationalisms at the League of Nations Secretariat, 1933-1940' in Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Haakon A. Ikononou (eds) *The League of Nations – Present Perspectives* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2019); James Barros, *Betrayal from Within – Joseph Avenol, Secretary General of the League of Nations, 1933-1940* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969). Also see Elisabetta Tollardo, *Fascist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922–1935*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Echoing the imperialism advocated by its leading bureaucrat, the League's New York pavilion also offered a prosaic display on the work of its Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC, see figure 8.7). The PMC was the branch of the League created to oversee imperial administration of African, Pacific and Middle Eastern territories taken from the German and Ottoman Empires in the course of WWI. For key stakeholders the aim of this committee was the internationalizing of the imperial system.⁶⁵ The panel representing this work in the League's New York pavilion was located in Room Three, centred on a cartographic mapping of mandated territories and, undoubtedly for the benefit of the gathered American audience, was headed by a plaque containing an extract from Woodrow Wilson's fifth point. 'Colonel' House, Wilson's chief advisor at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, explained that this point was concerned with making 'colonial administration ... a matter of international concern' by instating 'a code of colonial conduct' and was therefore, in part, a basis for the creation of the PMC.⁶⁶ In the decades to follow, both the Wilsonian moment and the fora generated by the PMC were successfully exploited by anti-imperialists and anti-colonial nationalists to validate their causes. Yet neither Wilson's framework for peace nor the PMC had been devised as tools to dismantle the imperial system.⁶⁷ Rather, each for their own ends sought to make competing colonial systems 'more humane' more transparent and more open (to other imperial powers) thereby lending the imperialist world order greater legitimacy.⁶⁸

[Figure 8.7 here]

Figure 0.7. Installation view of Room Three within the League Pavilion at the New York World's Fair showing display panel titled 'Wards of Civilization' representing the work of the Permanent Mandates Commission.

Source: League of Nations Archives, United Nations of Geneva.

Though the League's pavilion panel on the work of the PMC made no direct comment on broader systems of colonial administration, it nevertheless betrayed the organisation's subscription to an imperialist world order. For instance, this display featured at its centre a large map of Africa with the words 'wards of civilization' emblazoned across its entirety. Though League mandates in

⁶⁵ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶⁶ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1918, Supplement 1, The World War, I*, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1930) 405-413.

⁶⁷ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p.xii; Miguel B. Jerónimo, 'A League of Empires: Imperial Political Imagination and Interwar Internationalisms' in Jerónimo and Monteiro (eds) *Internationalism*, 107.

⁶⁸ Pedersen, *Guardians*, 3-4

Africa accounted for only a small minority of its landmass what the inclusion of this civilizational language signified was the PMC's advocacy of a system of imperialist internationalism stretching across the whole continent. Indeed, most members of the 12-person commission were 'retired diplomats or former colonial officials' for whom the 'language of civilizational stages, of 'backward peoples' and Western guidance' were second-nature.⁶⁹ Indeed, Article 22 of the League's Covenant – concerned with the reasoning behind the mandates system, the terms of mandatory administration and the creation of the PMC – was suffused with this language: decreeing that the mandatory powers or 'advanced nations' were bound by 'a sacred trust of civilization' to guard the 'well-being and development' of mandates, 'inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.' The League's PMC display in New York, and indeed the material form of the pavilion itself exemplified this worldview and its justifications.

A caption attached to an early artist's impression of the League's New York pavilion explained that it was, designed to, 'symbolis[e] the fundamental philosophies of the [League, being] ... composed of two parts. The lower section is pentagonal, signifying the five continents and five races of man. The upper structure is a circular colonnade typifying unity and cooperation.'⁷⁰ Even at this base level then, the League's pavilion and core philosophy were revealed to rest upon a notion of global racial divisions: an understanding of humanity that had been routinely organised into a discriminatory, white supremacist, hierarchy for centuries. Continuing this pattern of thinking inside, below the PMC's cartographic display, was another large panel bearing the dual title 'Mandates - Slavery'. The implicit connection here was that endeavouring to completely suppress slavery in all its forms and minimise use of forced labour was an obligation impressed upon mandatory powers from the outset.⁷¹ The left-hand side of this panel offered a paraphrased listing of key obligations and principles from Article 22. The right-hand side presented a record by date of key actions taken to eliminate slavery worldwide, before and during the tenure of the League. The conjoining of these two lists – under the title 'mandates – slavery' – exemplifies a sleight of hand, widely employed by imperial powers of the time, that presented imperial(ist) rule as a form of humanitarian work aimed at casting colonial (and in this case mandatory) systems as progressive spaces in which social justice and economic development were pursued on behalf of local populations guarded by the 'sacred trust of civilization'. Indeed, this panel ended with the somewhat premature claim that 'the council of the League of Nations concluded in 1939 that slavery and the slave trade were approaching

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2-3

⁷⁰ Artist's impression of League Pavilion, New York World's Fair Press Department, News Release 668, International Exhibition, GM, LN (50-32763-26744 [R5764]) UNA.

⁷¹ Though the PMC spent much time debating what was meant by these clauses: Pedersen, *Guardians*, 233.

extinction'.⁷² The reality was quite different: as historian Susan Pedersen confirms, 'mandated territories were not better governed than colonies across the board and in some cases were governed more oppressively' with practices of forced labour actually expanded in certain mandates under PMC oversight.⁷³ Pedersen claims that 'by 1939 the mandates system had very few defenders' and given the popularity of anti-imperialist rhetoric in the US alongside the championing of national self-determination by key political figures we might expect that it would find no welcoming party in the Big Apple either.⁷⁴ Yet, the gap between rhetoric and reality can be capacious. Though Americans had a long history of disavowing – and selectively forgetting – their nation's imperialist activities it was nonetheless a colonial power in the late 1930s, which justified its extraterritorial activities using a racialized developmental worldview, one which colonized peoples and their domestic allies in the US recognized and lobbied against.⁷⁵ This tension between American imperialist ambitions and their disavowal was perfectly reflected in the awkward presence of the PMC panel within the League's New York pavilion, which seemed to want to champion internationalist imperialism, yet was unsure about how to articulate its achievements and aspirations.

At the New York World's Fair the League offered a pavilion project that had been managed in-house by its own Department of Information. Yet this did not result in advocacy of a more unified or coherent set of internationalist philosophies. Advocating anti-war sentiment remained a prominent element of the 1939 pavilion's exhibits, reflecting the League's founding *raison d'être* of collective security. Yet sensitivity to the non-member status of the US and its conscious distancing from the mounting European conflict, as well as the possibility of an Axis victory, resulted in the abstraction and diffusion of this message. What came to the fore in the League's New York pavilion was a functionalist internationalism that accommodated a range of ideologies and movements including a form of religious internationalism, courtesy of a special advisor from the Roman Catholic Church, as well as an unsurprising nod to the Wilsonian Moment and an awkward restatement of imperialist internationalism.

⁷² 'Mandates – Slavery' [photograph: credit Jannelise Rosse] Cab4, dra4, LN, UNA.

⁷³ On the expansion of forced labour in Rwanda see: Pedersen, *Guardians*, 4, 233-260.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12

⁷⁵ See Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016); Brenda Gayle Plummer, 'The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934' *Phylon* 43,2 (1982) 125-143.

Conclusion

In the post-war era landmark conferences at Bretton Woods, Yalta, San Francisco and the like once again became the spaces in which heads of state hammered out the terms of peace. It was at such gatherings too, that the League was finally decommissioned in 1946 following the inauguration of a new United Nations in 1945. In these moments of future-focused anticipation, the spectacular pre-war sites of internationalist dreaming at World Expos in Paris and New York may have been distant memories, yet they had played their part in rehearsing the alignments and foregrounding the agreements made later. Indeed, this study shows how the delicate diplomatic negotiations that underpin the very existence of much internationalist working can take place in the visual, as well as verbal, register and in open public, as well as restricted private, fora.

In the late 1930s the world was in flux as was the League of Nations. The habitually shifting sands of the global political economy had become feverishly accelerated due to the manoeuvres of belligerent fascist and communist states, as the period also hailed the arrival of an irreversible tide of anticolonial nationalisms. Yet this warmongering, uncertainty and advent of postcolonial nation-states did not result in a vacuum of internationalism but rather a proliferation of internationalist movements, philosophies and systems. The World Expos held in Paris in 1937 and New York in 1939 drew much of this internationalist activity momentarily together in peerless sites of spectacular display uniquely configured to reflect the geographic specificities of the host nation. For the League, which had previously been reticent to take part in such public extravaganzas, these events became valuable spaces in which to experiment with various internationalist alignments. With the League's future very uncertain League bureaucrats, external advocates and expo officials in favour of the organisation's World Expo participation were able to push it beyond its customary risk-averse stance and realise two such projects to significant financial cost in the space of a few years. Reflecting the highly selective global vistas on display at each of these interwar World Expos the internationalist visions that the League inhabited at each changed as the organisation travelled, responding to the unique geopolitical configuration of each event.