Questioning ‘Isolationism’ in Interwar Canada:

The World Disarmament Conference and Canadian Civil Society

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“All is not hopeless if the people of the world act.

1) No rearmament.
2) Substantial reduction of armaments.
3) Abolition of aggressive weapons within a definite period, with the elimination of all bombing from the air, of all air weapons in general, and of poison gas.
4) Limitation of expenditures to prevent rivalries in armament.
5) Effective supervision of existing armaments and of arms manufacture and trade.
6) A permanent organization to carry out the above provisions and to carry on the work begun at the World Disarmament Conference.

Let everyone who reads these measures memorize them and repeat them to his neighbour. Canada can have a great influence at the conference… What we have done we can do again if Canadians will simply do their utmost to create public opinion in favour of these measures.”

There remains a myth in historical narratives of Canada’s interwar legacy: confined to North America, Canadians were far from concerned with the ongoings of internationalist politics, and like their nation, isolated themselves from the rest of the world. Born in Kingston, Ontario, Alice Amelia Chown (1866-1949) was a Canadian leftist, feminist, pacifist, and activist. As her letter to Toronto’s The Globe demonstrates, she was also an internationalist who believed in the contributions of the Canadian public in creating global peace. Her letter in 1933 was just one of many produced by Canadians across the country that reflected such sentiment. To internationalists such as Chown who were preoccupied with the League of Nations and its initiatives, the World Disarmament Conference was an epochal moment, threatening to cast the world towards either war

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2 Alice Chown has been heralded as one of the foremost female thinkers of the Canadian leftist movement. She was the daughter of Edwin Chown and Amelia Anning, and a relative of the methodist minister, S.D. Chown. Advocating for fair employment and the abolition of sexual harassment in the workplace, she joined strikers in 1912 in a protest against Toronto’s T. Eaton Company, for which she was arrested. A staunch feminist, Chown questioned maternalism and the role of women in Canadian society. Her 1921 novel, The Stairway, probed the question of sex in an attempt to discover if there is a correct way for both sexes to live and love together. Her thinkingly has been deemed remarkably modern. She consistently pushed the boundaries of her era, joining many other female leftists in calling for discussion on gender and the private sphere moving into public discourse. For more on Alice, see: Ian McKay, Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People’s Enlightenment of Canada. 1890-1920 (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008), 267-68, 275, 297-301, 302, 314-315.
or peace. By advocating for international cooperation and arbitration, many Canadians demonstrated a clear understanding of internationalism and the responsibility both the Canadian state and its people had in lending their support. As such, Alice Chown is but one example of numerous Canadians who challenge the myth of the interwar period. While Canada was far removed from Geneva, Canadian civil society spoke in the language of internationalism, believing that they had a role and responsibility in determining the outcome of the World Disarmament Conference [WDC] and the fate of international peace.

The WDC was an assembly sponsored by the League of Nations, the international governmental body founded in the ashes of the First World War. The League and the Wilsonian doctrine upon which it was founded were the first attempts to synthesize diplomatic relations into a transnational organization and phenomenon. It is admittedly difficult to assert that the League, constructed under the auspices of utopian ideals of collective security, disarmament, and inter-governmental cooperation for the express purpose of creating and maintaining sustainable global peace, was able to live up to such lofty goals. In turn, the League has not been treated kindly by academics the world over. Failure to include major powers such as the United States and Japan

3 The League of Nations has often been described as a “Great Experiment,” and rightfully so. The League was a revolutionary enterprise, the first organization of its kind. Its architects—US President Woodrow Wilson and Britain’s Lord Robert Cecil, amongst others—envisioned an international organization that would level the power politics that threatened diplomatic relations. Wilson’s ideals permeated throughout the League’s Covenant. The organization was to discriminate against no nation, race or ideology, allowing them to coexist as self-determinate entities acting harmoniously towards a the common goal of international peace. The organization succeeded and failed on the premise of collectivism, that is, the joint organization of all member parties bound by the League’s Covenant. It is for this reason that Wilson did not envision or construct the League as a strictly legal body. He wanted the organization to be pragmatic, set up in "general form and agreed to and set in motion." The League was an entity and idea that was meant to evolve under the collective aspirations of the nations of which it was composed. See: David Fromkin, “What is Wilsonianism?” World Policy Journal 11, no. 1 (1994), 100-11; Robert W. Tucker, “The Triumph of Wilsonianism?” World Policy Journal 10, no. 4 (1993), 83-99; John A. Thompson. “Wilsonianism: The Dynamics of a Conflicted Concept,” International Affairs 86, no. 1 (2010), 27-47; James Aver Joyce, Broken Star: The Story of the League of Nations, 1919-1939 (Swansea: C. Davies, 1978), 23-51.

in League proceedings, the Manchurian Crisis (1931), Germany’s withdrawal from the World Disarmament Conference (1932-4), and the Abyssinia Crisis (1935-6) highlight some of the many failings of the League and its ideals.⁵

Undoubtedly the League’s most important initiative was the project of disarmament. After years of preparatory commissions, this project culminated in 1932-3 with the WDC.⁶ The Conference was the fulfillment of the League’s ambition, as outlined in Article VIII of its Covenant, to reduce the levels of armaments in the world.⁷ It was also related to the League’s doctrine of collective security, as outlined in Article XVI.⁸ The leading figures of the League believed that peace and international cooperation would be furthered, and recourse to armed violence hindered, by a comprehensive agreement on disarmament. Conversely, the notion of collective security was a deterrent for any nation bold enough to challenge the League and its

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⁷ The League of Nations. “The League of Nations Covenant.” The League of Nations—Official Journal. Geneva: League of Nations (February 1920), 5. Article 8 reads, “The Members of the League recognize that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations...The Members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to warlike purposes.”

⁸ The League of Nations. “The League of Nations Covenant,” 7-8. Article 16 of the Covenant reads, “Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants...it shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League...It shall be the duty of the Council in such case to recommend to the several Governments concerned what effective military, naval or air force the Members of the League shall severally contribute to the armed forces to be used to protect the covenants of the League. The Members of the League agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this Article...”
covenant. To do so meant economic sanctions and/or military opposition by the world’s greatest powers, a combination that would, in theory, dwarf whatever threat could be conjured by the opposition of the League. In doing so the international community would be able to regulate and uphold norms of international behaviour. As such, disarmament was considered the “first task” of the League, member governments, and public mobilization that supported the organization and its transnational endeavours. Disarmament and collective security were undoubtably the most pressing initiatives of the League, but they were also the most contentious issues in Canada for both political and public discourse. Any holistic study of Canada and the League of Nations must stem from an understanding of the country’s stance on these issues.

When the WDC opened on 2 February, 1932, fifty-nine states congregated with the hope of abolishing the greatest threat to international peace. The proceedings were the culmination of preparations that had begun as far back as 1927. While the League had previously assembled at other conferences, with some discussing the question of disarmament, those prior to the WDC failed to draw as much diplomatic and public support. International and national organizations came together, sending petitions to their delegates, or congregating in Geneva, to make it known that the world called for disarmament. At its time it stood as the largest international demonstration supporting the League of Nations. Canadians were amongst the millions united around the world, sending both a delegation to the conference and a peace petition signed by half a million Canadian citizens.


Despite being the culmination of five years work, and being backed by a hopeful and organized public sentiment, the conference was doomed for failure. As one Canadian observer claimed, “The trouble lies in that each country sees the situation through its own glasses. It does not think of disarmament in terms of World Cooperation, but rather as a means of saving its particular self.”\footnote{R. A. Kanigsberg, “Why Disarmament Conferences Fail,” \textit{Saturday Night Magazine}, 22 October, 1932.} The assessment was apropos. Plagued from the onset by diplomatic rivalries, nationalistic policies, and logistical hurdles, the conference served as more of an antagonism to international peace than a resolution.

Throughout the conference Germany set the terms of debate. Having been “officially disarmed” vis-a-vis the Treaty of Versailles gave the German state leverage over the other belligerent powers, who, despite having significantly cut armament budgets by 1932, were still more heavily armed than Germany. The French government was especially wary of German proposals to revise the Versailles restrictions, and the general equality of power, fearing that the Germans secretly planned to increase their military. These fears were compounded by the fact that the French army, despite being one of the largest in Europe, was mismanaged and largely ineffective. Such fears were translated into French policy that called for heightened security measures. The French proposed all civic aviation internationalized in order to prevent its use for military purposes. Additionally, they proposed an international police force overseen by the League, giving the organization “the teeth” it needed to enforce arms regulation. French attempts to create a united front with the other belligerent powers against the Germans failed.

German delegates were adamant that disarmament was only viable if every nation was willing to reduce their arms to the level enforced upon Germany through the Treaty of Versailles.
They did concede to maintain the reduction of heavy weapons if enabled to produce defensive weapons. Such a distinction was one of the largest logistical hurdles to the proceedings. Any headway made ultimately came back to defining what entailed offensive and defensive weaponry, and how they should be regulated differently, if at all. When the conference stalled in the summer of 1932, one observer noted, “Do you know what was their conclusion after six months of work? That the offensive character of a weapon depends upon the intention of the one who employs it.”

The United States proposed all nations cut arms in stages of one-third increments. While they supported the German claim for judicial equality, they were more sympathetic to French disarmament rather German rearmament. Great Britain approached disarmament warily, reluctant to make concessions that threatened its own dominance. For its part, Great Britain sought to be the arbitrator between Germany and France, whose rivalry threatened the whole proceedings. Similarly, Japan challenged both the logistics and spirit of the proceedings when it invaded China on the eve of the conference, refusing to concede to the League’s demands to withdraw. As such, in addition to the challenges at the conference itself, the first six months to a year of the WDC was unsuccessful because it was largely preoccupied with handling the war in Manchuria.

A series of German ultimatums threatened to have them leave the conference. Either they were afforded equality of rights or they would leave the proceedings. They made good on such threats, leaving the proceedings before the end of 1932. Understanding that the whole initiative was threatened by the absence of Germany, a subconference was held in Geneva to discuss

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their demands. The four nations present—Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States—agreed that one of the principles “that should guide the Conference on Disarmament should be the grant to Germany, and to the other disarmed Powers, of equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations.”¹³ Such a proclamation encouraged Germany to come back to the conference, but only for a short while. With the rise of Hitlerism and Adolf Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of the Third Reich in December 1932, Germany’s further participation in the WDC was simply a formality. By the end of 1933, both German and Japan had removed themselves from the WDC and the League of Nations, and rushed headlong towards rearmament. Simply put, the WDC saw the League’s ideal of collectivism fail in disastrous fashion, and along with it, much of the support from the world’s people.¹⁴

In Canada, support for the League was by no means unanimous, with detractors of the organization appearing across the country, and most notably in the province of Quebec. Overwhelmingly, League supporters were hesitant to commit to political endeavours that entangled them in European politics, but they actively endorsed the organization and its campaign to reduce arms and promote peace. Despite realistic criticism of the League, Canadians were extremely supportive of the ideals of international cooperation embodied in the League’s Covenant, and reiterated much of the same rhetoric as that seen in Alice Chown’s letter to The Globe. Canada and Canadians were part of a global milieu that was built upon the cooperation of all peoples and all nations. While supporters of the League may have been far removed from Geneva and the

¹³ Edward Bennett, German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933 (Princeton, 1979), 267. Quoted in Steiner, 792.

WDC, they felt no less responsible for the success of its initiatives, and the creation of international peace.

This paper will examine Canadian public opinion on the WDC, utilizing newspaper editorials, letters-to-the-editor, editorial cartoons, and an examination of Canada’s League of Nations Society (LNS), to demonstrate that public opinion and policymakers often employed the same rhetoric when discussing collective security and disarmament, and conversely, issues of war and peace, but adopted to different approaches to these issues. Traditional scholarly interpretations of Canada and the League of Nations, focusing exclusively on upper-level diplomats and politicians, tend to adopt an over-simplified binary of internationalism versus isolationism, wrongfully making Canadian public opinion synonymous with the diplomatic isolationism enacted by the Canadian government and League delegation. While the Canadian state was partial to isolationist politics, not all Canadians were isolationists.

Bearing this geopolitical situation in mind allows us to reinterpret Canada’s stance towards the world as one that was fundamentally internationalist, especially on questions of collective security and disarmament. While Canadians were far removed from the League and its proceedings in Geneva, public organization and discourse enabled supporters to evaluate and interpret the League’s initiatives, placing themselves and their country within the political, social, and economic values of the League of Nations. In turn, Canadians positioned themselves within internationalist political paradigms rapidly developing during the interwar period.15 Many historians of interwar Canada describe a country poised on the brink of an isolationist continentalism,

with a widespread sense of the country as a “fire-proof house” far removed from European troubles. They have paid little attention to the extent to which many Canadians favoured far more involvement in the world through the League of Nations, a body that enjoyed mass support in the country.\textsuperscript{16}

In observing the interwar peace movements of the United States and Great Britain, Cecilia Lynch has rightly observed that terms such as isolationist, internationalist, and pacifist have a definitional elasticity that needs constant contextualization in order to have true validity. In much of a similar manner, T.P. Socknat’s work on Canadian pacifism gives great attention to the varying degrees and brands of pacifist movements. Examining the internationalist rhetoric of the Canadian public must be subjected to the same critical analysis, contextualization, and categorization in order to be more holistically representative of the movement. Failure to do so designates Canadian interwar internationalism as monolithic, giving little attention to the nuances and variations of each stream of political discourse.\textsuperscript{17} Before I discuss Canadian public opinion with respect to war and peace in the 1930s, I shall analyze the misleadingly broad terms—“internationalism” and “isolationism”—that too often are used in the literature to over-simplify the positions taken up by many Canadians.


\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Paul Socknat, Witness against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 5-10.
Canadian public opinion with respect to the WDC should be approached in a similarly sophisticated way. Canadian journalists and their readers were engaged in the mutual construction of a discourse about war, peace and diplomatic norms. Canadians believed that they and their country had a role in maintaining international peace. The ideals of internationalism—responsibility for world leadership, collectivism, arbitration, peace—permeated throughout public discourse. Many believed that Canada’s relationship with Great Britain was an example of such ideals actualized. Historians were not wholly incorrect in their summary descriptions of official Canadian policy in the interwar period. A theme of isolationism does run through much of Ottawa’s approach to the world. At the same time, it was not the only theme, and the more evidence one considers about the attitudes of Canadians outside official circles, the less persuasive the traditional descriptions become.

**Deconstructing Analytical Myths: Internationalism versus Isolationism**

The deconstruction of the isolationism/internationalism binary is a necessary first step to any fuller understanding of interwar Canadians’ attitudes towards war and peace. Such terms were undoubtedly present in interwar discourse in Canada about the world, but if used in an acritical way, they can lead us to a misleading assessment of it. Application of such terminology is useful because it aids in placing Canada within large theoretical paradigms from which conclusions can be made regarding the nation’s political and historical legacy. As I examine civil responses to the League of Nations and WDC, such language is vital in conceptualizing the reali-

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ty that Canadians partook in the rhetoric of international diplomacy and international society, and as such, must be deemed internationalist. Such an argument contests the myths of historical narratives which fail to contextualize Canadian public opinion throughout the interwar period, making it synonymous with the diplomatic isolationism enacted by the nation’s government.

However, adherence to such strict definitional structures threatens to overlook the complexity of such terms and their manifestations within the Canadian population. The definitional elasticity of these terms denote different meanings across a vast array of peoples, geographic regions, and times. Simply put, internationalism has multiple definitions and is understood today as a vastly different concept than during the interwar period. The same can be said of isolationism. Failure to consider such a reality is one of the leading factors that has lead much of Canadian historiography to such a stark geopolitical orientation. The League of Nations was the first international organization of its kind, representing in its time the greatest achievement in international diplomacy, arbitration, and global governance. However, holding membership from inception to collapse, including a tenure as a council member in 1927, has not been enough to persuade scholars that Canada was one nation amongst many participating in the first mass movement of internationalism. I contend that the reason for this is the strict definitional understandings of internationalism and isolationism, and a reluctance on the part of Canadian scholars to extend their interpretations beyond the realm of realpolitiks.

There is a great deal of scholarship, often termed ‘realist’ that neglects the role of civil society in the making of diplomatic policy. This critical position often entails three arguments: the effectiveness of civil mobilization is difficult to analyze from a diplomatic standpoint. The effectiveness of public organizations, movements, or the general population, in enacting benefi-
cial policy change within their respective governments is held suspect. The influence of civil peace movements has largely been deemed negative, with critiques claiming that peace advocacy caused diplomatic appeasement, isolationism, and conversely, war. The other critique is that peace movements inject an unwarranted utopianism into the realm of politics in the hopes of folding international relations into a moral continuum. And finally, “public diplomacy” simply weighs down the effectiveness of diplomatic relations. All critiques are different branches of a classical realist approach that see political interpretations as exclusively bound to the tangible results of diplomatic negotiations, conventions, arbitration, and the like. As such, public opinion and civil society have no stake in the determination of a country’s geopolitical orientation.

As will be demonstrated, adherence to such a lens reasonably leads scholars to the conclusion that Canada throughout the interwar period was bound by continentalist isolationism. While being a member of the League of Nations, it gave little effort to foreign endeavours associated with internationalist politics and embodied in the League Covenant. The Canadian government sought the prestige of being a part of an international organization, feigning internationalism, but was reluctant to lend support to initiatives that were at odds with national policies.

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The question at hand is where the Canadian population falls within such an interpretation and such large theoretical paradigms?

Scholar C.P. Socknat’s highly influential Witness Against War examines Canadian pacifism during the interwar period and stands as the closest interpretation of civil internationalism during the period. His work demonstrates that peace advocacy permeated throughout the country, finding voice across a vast spectrum of geographic, economic, linguistic, gendered, and political divides. Amongst many others, peace was spoken in the rhetoric of feminism, communism, and religiosity.

The numerous groups Socknat examines demonstrates the fluidity of pacifism, rather than it being a monolithic concept. On the subject of disarmament and the WDC, organizations such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WIL) were instrumental in raising awareness and distributing the LNS’s petition that was eventually sent to Geneva.24 The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) would sponsor a national questionnaire amongst Canadian universities, finding that students overwhelmingly favoured peace over war, and thought the latter preventable.25 In Kingston, Queen’s University students, led by Winifred Kydd—the future dean of women at the school—gathered in Convocation Hall to discuss the League of Nations and prospects for peace.26 The Student Christian Movement (SCM) composed a petition signed by ten thousand Canadian students sent to Prime Minister R.B Bennett urging action

24 Socknat, Witness Against War, 127-133.
25 ibid., 154-158.
26 ibid., 156; Queen's Journal, 29 January, 1934.
at the WDC, and that the opinion of Canadians be heard.27 Similarly, the three branches of the Society of Friends (Canadian Quakers) composed an appeal sent to Bennett at the onset of the conference expressing their joint advocacy for disarmament.28

Despite the rhetorical fluidity and theoretical overlap between groups, Socknat rightly delineates his subjects as pacifists, separating them from internationalists. Pacifism denotes an outright advocation for the abolishment of war through non-resistance and non-participation. Internationalists distinguished themselves from pacifists by advocating sanctions, collective security, and an economic critique of war which enabled international conflict resolution and participatory mechanisms on security, humanitarianism, and economic welfare. While the Canadian pacifist movement did work with internationalists, eventually embodying some of their doctrine, the two were completely separate entities. Similarly, Canadian internationalists, of which I am concerned, had pacifistic tendencies but cannot be deemed pacifists.29

While both supported the League of Nations and disarmament, internationalists stopped short of pacifism, not embodying the utopianism or idealism for which the pacifist tradition is commonly criticized.30 Internationalists understood the League of Nations as an organization and ideal prone to fail. The League and the liberal internationalist doctrine that it embodied were simply the most effective way to prevent war, and mediate a sustainable resolution in the event

27 Socknat, Witness Against War, 156.
28 ibid., 158-160, 302. The appeal was the first time the three branches of the Canadian Quakers ever jointly composed a document to represent their organization. The three branches of the Society of Friends were the Genesee Yearly Meeting (Hicksite), the Canada Yearly Meeting (Conservative), and the Canada Yearly Meeting (Orthodox or Progressive).
29 Lynch, Beyond Appeasement, 35-38; Socknat, Witness Against War, 1-10. For a global examination of the pacifist movement and its slow melding with internationalism, see: Peter Brock and Nigel Young, Pacifism in the Twentieth Century (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 102-130.
30 ibid., Beyond Appeasement, 5.
of its occurrence. War was a reality that must be contended by all governments and peoples who relied on the League’s success and its hope of achieving peace. Unlike pacifists, internationalists were not opposed to armed intervention or economic sanctions as a mean to prevent or subdue conflict. These were options to be utilized upon the failure of diplomatic arbitration. As such, internationalists held the belief that turning away from the responsibilities of international politics was one of the greatest threats to peace. War could not be prevented by one nation alone, rather, it was created and sustained by the cooperation of all.

Cecilia Lynch’s work *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements* is a pioneering work on civil mobilization during the interwar period, and a vital supplement to my deconstruction of the internationalist/isolationist binary. Lynch takes an interpretavist approach to the study of international relations, extending beyond realpolitiks, to include civil society in diplomacy. Her interpretavist approach seeks to address the weaknesses of traditional international relations theory by making international action by social agents meaningful, rather than manifestations of economic or political structures. Furthermore, her approach highlights the role of social agents in “social contestation” for which society is viewed vis-a-vis the state, nationally and internationally.31 Her contention is that the social agents that comprise peace movements exert an influence over national and international politics and diplomacy by enunciating widely-shared norms of behaviour. She states,

Norms provide a contrast to material and individualist theorizing to provide an understanding of the social fabric of international life. Norms are not merely regulative or constraining behaviour, but also enabling, or constitutive of particular practices ad institutions….Norms are thus the means which allow people to pursue goals, share meanings, communicate with each other, criticize assertions, and justify action….These reasons may appeal to generalized principles (ethical or pragmatic), rules of behaviour, or shared un-

derstandings of self-interest, but they are in effect ‘guides’ to behaviour that are understood to whom the appeal is made.\textsuperscript{32}

In essence, civil society has the capacity to dictate how nations and international bodies conduct themselves. Civilian populations can act like a pressure group, dictating government policy, regardless of intentionality. For example, the WDC civil mobilization around the world was so pronounced, amassing huge numbers of disarmament petitions, the League of Nations was forced to create a “Petitions Committee” to subdue their influence. While the League actively worked with and encouraged the participation of civilian populations, the uncanny support for the disarmament initiative led the League to fear civil mobilization enacting greater influence over the WDC than even participating states.\textsuperscript{33} In the case of the interwar period, such norms of behaviour to which the League supporters enforced were the ideals enshrined in the Covenant, and most particularly, the process of collective security and disarmament.

Such a distinction is vital because its enables a diplomatic body to reside as two geopolitical entities simultaneously. Norms are not necessarily representative of state policy, and can exist of their own rite. In the case of Canada, the government may have approached the League of Nations and disarmament from a standpoint of isolationism, but advocates of the League pushed for internationalism. Internationalism meant the willingness to take on responsibility of world leadership, rather than intervene militarily as it is often understood today.\textsuperscript{34} It will be demonstrated that League advocates spoke of such things as peace, arbitration, collectivism in a

\textsuperscript{32} Lynch, \textit{Beyond Appeasement}, 14.


\textsuperscript{34} Lynch, \textit{Beyond Appeasement}, 126.
manner similar to Lynch’s definition of norms. These ideals were spoken of with the conviction and hope that Canada should embody and enforce them upon all those for whom the League was responsible. If all nations adhered to such ideals, international politics was the most realistic prospect for peace. As such, Canada resided in the interwar period within a duality: their nation was diplomatically isolationist, but their people thought internationally. This fact must be reflected within scholarship on Canada’s legacy of international relations.

Isolating Canada: Policymakers and League Historiography

While Canada was one of over fifty nations in attendance at the WDC, virtually no scholarship has focused on the nation’s position with regards to disarmament. In fact, relatively little work has been produced on Canada and the League at all. The most important text on the organization is undoubtedly Richard Veatch’s *Canada and the League of Nations* (1975), which provides the most comprehensive diplomatic examination of Canada’s relationship with the League. W. E. Armstrong’s *Canada and the League of Nations: The Problem of Peace* (1930), and George Eastman’s *Canada at Geneva* (1946) are older but valuable texts as well. These are the few stand-alone studies amongst numerous chapters and portions of other texts which briefly discuss the League, such as John Brebner’s highly influential *North Atlantic Triangle* (1966), Brian McKercher’s *The North Atlantic Powers in a Changing World* (1996), and volume two of C.P. Stacey’s two part series on the history of Canadian external affairs, titled *Canada and the Age of Conflict* (1981).

While each author clearly explores the Canadian state’s diplomatic position in the League, none pays attention to the ways in which the League played a role in Canadian civil so-
ciety. Conversely, this has translated into a reluctance to examine the League, seemingly for fear of dredging up the same tired arguments. Thus, the trend of scholarship on Canadian international relations during the interwar period is twofold: to orient Canada as isolationist, and to saddle the nation with continental ties to the United States and international ties to Great Britain. While neither of these interpretations is incorrect, both are far from comprehensive. Focusing resolutely on high politics, they discount the extent to which support for the League had become a widely-shared sentiment across Canada.

The reason for this is understandable. Canadian scholars of the interwar period have long adhered to classical interpretations of political history which privilege individuals in positions of governmental power, they are, in turn, reluctant to give voice to the general population. This problem is further compounded when considering the League of Nations due to the fact that each prime minister during the League-era was distrustful of the organization’s unscrupulous powers and their implications on the Canadian state. While Robert Borden, Arthur Meighen, Mackenzie King, and R.B. Bennett all waxed eloquent in public statements about the League, in private correspondences or diaries they would all express doubt. Beyond the prime ministers, historical interpretations of other Canadian diplomats have focussed on Canada’s opposition to

Article X of the League Covenant, and the Riddell Incident in 1936. One of the League’s most fundamental articles, Article X bound members into an alliance system as a measure to deter war, encouraging diplomatic relations and international peace. In the eyes of League members, Canada’s opposition to Article X spoke to the nation’s reluctance to take seriously the principle of collective security, while casting doubt on the viability of the system as a whole. Scholars have overwhelming cited this as indicative of Canadian isolationism.

The Riddell Incident, coined as such by historians Robert Bothwell and John English, occurred in 1936 when Walter Riddell, Canada’s permanent delegate to the League of Nations, sponsored Canada for League initiatives without the consent of the government. Riddell instructed the League that Canada would support the implementation of economic sanctions against Italy as a response to the recent Abyssinia Crisis. Canada was applauded both at home and abroad for acting in accordance with League initiatives and altering a course of perceived political isolationism upheld throughout much of the 1930s. When it was later revealed that Riddell did not act in accordance with the Canadian government, nor were his actions representative of Canadian policy, the Canadian government officially repudiated Riddell’s proposal. Numerous press outlets

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swiftly altered to disavowing both Riddell and his actions. Both incidents emphasize Canada’s pull away from the League and international affairs. As such, there has been little literature to challenge the interpretation that Canada was fundamentally isolationist, leading historians to generally characterize Canadian public opinion vis-à-vis as isolationist.

Even within theoretical discourses fundamentally transnational in composition, such as Brebner’s conceptual North Atlantic Triangle—a pioneering examination of the reciprocal relationship between Canada, Great Britain and the United States—Canada has been relegated to isolationist and junior partner. While the scope of Brebner’s analysis extended far beyond the League of Nations, considering economics, geography, race, and much more, his final chapter, titled “Maelstrom,” focusses on international diplomacy, and to a large extent, Canada’s relation with the League. According to Brebner, the years 1932-onwards were characterized by isolationism despite the country’s opposition to Japanese and Italian militarism, with Canadian diplomats overwhelmingly viewing the country’s geopolitical position as a hinderance to legitimacy in international affairs, and a clear sign that they should recede into continentalist politics. No mention of the WDC is given.

Years later Brian McKercher would reassess Brebner’s theories doing little to revise the existing ‘isolationist’ stereotype. McKercher himself would state, “the Canadians were pursuing self-interest above all else…they wanted the British connections [to the

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40 John Bartlet Brebner, North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 308-316.
League] without the responsibilities.”⁴¹ And on the WDC, he would claim, “British interventionist diplomacy was designed to promote peace and security while the Americans and Canadians receded into isolation.” Similar to other diplomatic histories, McKercher unjustifiably conflates Canadians with the Canadian state.⁴²

However, while diplomatic histories provide valuable insights into the League’s successes and failures, dependence on the “history from above” approach results in scholars overlooking a vital aspect of the interwar period, wrongfully interpreting the League of Nations as a solely elitist institution. Scholar Carolyn Biltoft has demonstrated that understanding the “language of peace” is fundamental to any conceptualization of the League, and that this language wasn’t solely dictated by governmental bodies. While the League Assembly was ultimately a delegation of elite political voices, it was designed to privilege and foster popular opinion by being as transparent as possible in its processes and policies.⁴³ The League had numerous international publications intended for public distribution, including an armaments yearbook, enabling the public to track the progress of the organization’s primary initiative.⁴⁴

Within Canada, the League of Nation’s Society (LNS), a League sponsored body, would commonly republish League documents within their own publication, titled, *Interdependence*, encouraging readers to use primary documents and opinion pieces to formulate their own under-

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⁴² ibid., 122


standing of the League’s affairs. The publication also included a section which reprinted press opinion from across the country regarding the League and its corresponding affairs, being mindful to represent both liberal and conservative ideologies, as well as French and English-language papers.\textsuperscript{45} While such a material has pitfalls in its obvious bias towards the League of Nations, its existence and popularization in the early 1930s leading up to the WDC is indicative of the League’s push to be a public entity, and to have disarmament become a public issue.

Issues of \textit{Interdependence} published during the WDC included discussion questions to prompt dialogue amongst friends, family, or colleagues, with one issue asking, “Why should Canadians be interested in World Peace?” and subsequently, “How is Peace to be maintained—by force or cooperation?”\textsuperscript{46} Another issue during the WDC even included a section specifically for children, making the issues of international affairs accessible to the youthful mind, attempting to encourage Canadian children to be politically and internationally minded from a young age.\textsuperscript{47}

In the words of the man who inspired many to support the League, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, the struggle to achieve disarmament could only be sustained through mobilizing ‘the organized opinion of mankind.’\textsuperscript{48} Furthermore, the liberal internationalist policies that the League embodied and enforced also privileged public opinion and mobilization. Constitutive of the school of liberal internationalism is the notion that social movements can act hegemonical-


\textsuperscript{47} The League of Nations Society, “International Affairs for Young Canadians,” \textit{Interdependence} (Ottawa: The League of Nations Society, April, 1932), 56-60. The section is prefaced by a quote from Mary Carolyn Davies which states, “You who are young, it is you, it is you who must make the dreams of the world come true.”

ly and exert considerable influence on governments or international institutions and their policies. While scholars agree that foreign policy is not shaped exclusively by the pressures, constraints, and opinions of any domestic collective, a group which has legitimately articulated concerns may capture the attention of its government, and in some cases, influence its objectives.

Historian Denis Stairs observes that domestic opinion, reflected in and guided by the press, has long been considered a significant shaper of Canadian foreign policy. Despite its intention to not be a pressure group, in the later years of its existence, the LNS was able to exert considerable influence on the government’s policies in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but had little success thereafter. The extent to which newspapers, editorials, and letters-to-the-editor had a direct affect on policymakers during the interwar period is difficult to ascertain as there is no conclusive evidence demonstrating a correlation across the nation between opinion and policy. However, as Denis Stairs has argued, any useful analysis of Canada’s international legacy must be done so alongside an assessment of public opinion, despite its difficulty to gauge.

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51 LAC, King Papers, vol 86, King to Gouin, 6 September, 1923. Quoted in Page, “The Institute's Popular Arm,” 52. In 1923 Canadian newspapers unanimously renounced Mussolini’s rejection of the League’s ability to regulate the Corfu Crisis, which had put the organization in a precarious position. Then President of the LNS, Sir Robert Borden, along with the rest of the LNS, decided to use the Society to respond to public sentiment and pressure the Canadian government into declaring outright support from the League during the crisis, and its president, Sir Robert Cecil. Prime Minister Mackenzie King informed the Canadian delegates that public opinion demanded support for the League, telegraphing them in Geneva, “Believe Canadian opinion strongly with Cecil in urging necessary reference differences Italy, Greece to League. Sir Robert Borden also this view. Strong stand by Canadian representatives for League method of settlement would meet general approval” (sic).

52 Stairs, “Publics and Policymakers,” 222-223.
Certainly regional opinion had an influence on policymakers, as the voices of J.W. Dafoe, editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*, and Georges Pelletier of *Le Devoir* in Quebec demonstrate. Both stand as examples of the diversity of Canadian press opinion, and the difference of opinion with regards to the League. Dafoe’s *Manitoba Free Press* was unabashedly internationalist, commonly advocating for the League and Canadian involvement, while *Le Devoir* was a reflection of Quebec’s wariness for the organization and international politics, concerning itself rather with domestic issues. Canadian policy-makers interested in the League and its record understood how important public opinion was for it. All would make public statements encouraging support by the Canadian government and its people, but would personally redact such proclamations.

While historians admit that Sir Robert Borden pushed for Canada’s independence during the Paris peace negotiations and the formulation of the League of Nations, his actions stemmed from a desire to see Canada draw closer to the British Imperium. Borden had no genuine desire to see Canada become a internationalist nation in line with the League’s Covenant and the internationalist policy it fostered. Prime Minister Mackenzie King outwardly expressed great enthusiasm for the League, and an unequivocal desire to uphold its mandates, making public statements claiming that,

Canada perhaps as much as any country in the world is united in its efforts to further the work of the League of Nations. It is united in that effort because this country holds


54 Bothwell and Hillmer, *The In-Between Time*, 10.
strongly to the cause of peace and desires to see peace furthered not only within its own borders but amongst the nations of the world.\textsuperscript{55}

Furthermore, later during the height of the disarmament crises of 1933-1934, King would claim that “it is not sufficient that we, as liberals, should express by words and resolutions our support for the League of Nations. We must become militant in our advocacy of those policies which may serve to strengthen the League in its work.”\textsuperscript{56} However, amongst colleagues King would commonly express his disinterest or fear of the organization, instructing them “not to get too far into European politics and entanglements.”\textsuperscript{57} Despite being his closest friend and political ally, King nearly broke ties with Ernest Lapointe—the French-Canadian Minister of Justice—over the issue of Canada and the League, and the country’s appointment to the League Council in 1927.\textsuperscript{58} While seeing value in the organization, the Prime Minister had no true desire for Canadian involvement.

While historians such as Richard Veatch concede that Prime Minister R.B. Bennett (in power from 1930-35) was comparatively more supportive of League involvement than his predecessors, his foreign policy lacked substantial initiative, and did not extend any farther than a verbal commitment to the organization and its mission. Arguably, Bennett did more for the League than any other Prime Minister, subduing an attempt within parliament to pull Canada from the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Canada, Department of External Affairs, \textit{Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 4, 1926-1930} (Ottawa, 1971), 623.
\end{footnotes}
organization, and conceding under pressure to send a larger delegation to the WDC.\textsuperscript{59} However, during the disarmament crisis, despite public statements approving disarmament measures sponsored by the League, Bennett would shirk away from following the organization and his colleagues’ recommendation to impose economic sanctions as a preventative measure for war and the maintenance of peace.\textsuperscript{60} Similar to King, in private correspondences Bennett would express his doubts for Canada and the League, infamously noting, “Canada is not an important member of the League insofar as we are an active member from the North American continent… I have thought about going to the League… I ask: What can one man do who represents only ten and a half million people?”\textsuperscript{61}

Of course, one must be mindful that these are the opinions of only three men, and are in no way representative of Canada as a whole, nor its body of elected officials. However, as numerous historians have asserted, one must take special note of the opinion of Canada’s prime ministers during the interwar period because each one was his own Secretary of State for External Affairs, thus wielding immense influence over Canada’s foreign policy. Because the prime ministers were personally disinterested in Canadian internationalism and the League, it translated into a lack of support within the government as a whole. Beyond Borden, King, and Bennett, there were only a handful of ruling-politicians who were truly internationally minded and in-


\textsuperscript{60} Veatch, \textit{Canada and the League of Nations}, 133-142. J.S Wordsworth was one of the most vocal advocates to push Bennett for economic sanctions. For more on Wordsworth, see: Kenneth McNaught, “J.S. Wordsworth and War” in \textit{Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). J.S Wordsworth would propose that Canada cut off its nickel export to limit the production of arms, which Bennet inevitably disapproved of fearing the economic repercussions.

volved with the League. There was former Queen’s University professor and Undersecretary of External Affairs, Dr. O.D. Skelton, and the French-Canadian Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe. In addition, there was Raoul Dandurand, who represented Canada on the League Council, and Walter Riddell, Canada’s permanent representative in Geneva.

In due course Canadian historiography has done well in its endeavour to disassociate these individuals from the burgeoning internationalism of the interwar period. While O.D. Skelton was certainly interested in the League and its use as a means to assert Canadian autonomy, he was far from an advocate of the League, falling closer in political ideology to Mackenzie King. Furthermore, Skelton was one of Canada’s greatest advocates for stronger economic and political ties to the United States, and a distancing from the British Imperium. At best Skelton was neutral with regards to the League, and continentalist in what he deemed the best course for the country, a fact that has been emphasized when discussing his relationship with the Canadian government and his influence on international affairs.62

For Ernest Lapointe, despite being an advocate of the League, scholars have rightly noted that he continuously had to balance League advocacy and public sentiment in his home province of Quebec, where support for the League and extensive ventures into foreign politics was comparatively lower than the rest of the country. Even though Lapointe would serve as the president of the LNS, he did so reluctantly, seeing no other suitable candidate at the time.63

Dandurand and Riddell were far from isolationists, as they were two of the most vocal proponents of participation in the League. However, Dandurand’s political legacy is miscon-


63 Macfarlane, Ernest Lapointe and Quebec’s Influence on Canadian Foreign Policy, 193-94, 200, 221.
strode, known more for his infamous remark in one of the earliest sessions of the League rather than accomplishments on behalf of Canada’s participation at Geneva. Speaking of Canada’s geopolitical relation to the League, Dandurand claimed, “the risks assumed by the different states are not equal. We live in a fire proof house, far from inflammable materials.” Dandurand, a devout internationalist, was hardly providing in this famous phrase a distillation of his philosophy, and was merely summarizing what he took to be the state of affairs. His catch-phrase has caused him to be misremembered, and has been used as evidence of Canada’s regression into continentalist isolationism, and a reluctance to take on any sizeable role in League affairs. And finally, Riddell is known more for the aforementioned “Riddell Incident” than any achievements in Geneva.

Other individuals interested in the League included George Drew, Agnes MacPhail, and J.S. Woodsworth, amongst others. Despite interest in the organization and their advocacy for it within parliament, they had no tangible influence in dictating the course of Canada’s League affiliation in a manner like Skelton, Dandurand, Rowell, or the prime ministers. Furthermore, such individuals represented a very small minority within the government, and as limited a presence within histories of Canada and the League. Beyond those directly involved with the League, and the few individuals with a personal interest, the Canadian government simply did not encourage greater participation or interest with the organization and its initiatives.

The most pointed example of the organizational disinterest in the League can be found in an examination of the Canadian delegates sent to represent the country and its interests. Between 1920-1939, of the fifty-two individuals who represented the state as delegates to the

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League Assembly, thirty-six only attended a single time. Of these delegates, a total of eighteen different people served as First Delegate, the individual who would act as spokesperson and liaison on Canada’s behalf. As such, scholars have deemed the Canadian delegation as amateurish, with both its policy and spokespeople lacking in continuity. Often the government utilized delegate appointments as a public relations tool, choosing candidates with no prior governmental experience, selecting them simply based upon their interest in the League or their association with the LNS. Such a fact can be interpreted in two manners: that the Bennett government acknowledged the need for the League and the disarmament initiative to have public backing beyond government officials, or an indication of Canadian isolationism, this time within the actual support structure of the League itself. The first is plausible but lacks the evidence to make such a definitive assertion, whereas the latter has been upheld as the motivation behind the government’s appointments.65

Regardless of the motivation, supporters and critics back home did not take kindly to the organizational disinterest and mismanagement of Canada’s League affiliation. The state’s inconsistent delegation and foreign policy would lead one Saturday Night editorial during the WDC to simply question, “Is Canada Treating the League of Nations Seriously?” The author’s critique was scathingly apropos: if Canada—its people and government—did not commit “faithfully to this high calling” then the whole enterprise would fail. The League, Canadian delegates, and the public shared a reciprocal relationship. If Canada did not send properly educated and experienced government officials then the country could not adequately support the League. Conversely, without experienced delegates, Canada could not wish to foster greater support and interest

for the organization from its populace. Without both, Canada was contributing to the League’s
demise and the failure of the upcoming WDC.66

The critique by Saturday Night Magazine is but one telling example of the challenge in
reconciling Canadian public opinion with the country’s League of Nations legacy, as told through
political historiography. Dependent upon the close analysis of a few prominent people, Canadian
historiography harps on Canada’s opposition to the League and the country’s headlong rush to-
wards continentalism. It pays little attention to the League as a public organization whose very
existence was contingent upon a population far larger than that of elected politicians. Further-
more, Saturday Night’s editorial sought to inculcate in its readers appropriate norms of in-
ternational behaviour, i.e., those required for a peaceful world, in turn hoping that readers could
influence the government to follow and support such norms. By ignoring such civil dialogues
Canadian political legacy is misconstrued as being elitist and isolationist, and diminishing the
voice of Canadian citizens intent on constructing a better world through the ideals and practices
of international diplomacy.

**Speaking Peace: Public Opinion on the World Disarmament Conference.**

When R.B. Bennett wrote in his diary, “Canada is not an important member of the League inso-
far as we are an active member from the North American continent,” scholars signalled it as an
indication of the country’s diplomatic position with regards to the League’s highest initiatives.
What is rarely cited is Bennett’s position just a few lines prior, in which he proclaims, “I still be-
lieve, however, that it [the League] has played a great part in forming a public opinion that is so

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66 W. L. Grant. “Is Canada Treating the League of Nations Seriously?” *Saturday Night Magazine*, 31 De-
cember, 1932.
rapidly developing that I am not without hope that it will control the attitude of European gov-
ernments.”

Such statements were made because it was generally accepted that the success of the
League and its initiatives were predicated upon the backing of public opinion. As historian
Michael Pugh explains, the League and the liberal internationalist political theory upon which it
was founded,

elevated the idea of public opinion as a check on government… ‘Open diplomacy’ was a
transparency mechanism that, in theory, would break a monopoly of privilege and the
legacies of dynastic warmongering and territory swapping. It would also democratize for-
egn policy in ways that would avoid international misunderstandings and ensure that
those vulnerable to war would have a say about peace…They also exuded a spirit of
transnationalism, arguing that global public opinion would play a role in the system.

Such ‘open diplomacy’ is an extension of what Cecilia Lynch has characterized as normative be-
aviour—the ever-evolving conduct in which international organizations and societies should
adhere. As Lynch has demonstrated, in the same manner that governments dictate policy, public
opinion has the capacity to influence and dictate these international norms of behaviour.

For those mindful of the League’s initiatives, they understood the organization and its
theoretical foundation as a fundamentally public endeavour which both fostered and survived on
public mobilization. On the onset of the WDC, discussing armaments and war in a letter to the
Globe, Alice Chown wrote, “What the League has achieved is a miracle. What it needs to
achieve is greater and more miracles. It will achieve its possibilities, but how soon depends on

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Bothwell and Hillmer, The In-Between Time, 111-112.

68 Pugh, Liberal internationalism, 3.

69 Lynch, Beyond Appeasement, 1-38.
the public opinion which supports it.”

Similarly, the Halifax Chronicle would state in an editorial published during the early stages of the WDC, “It is to be remembered that the League is only an infant and the marvel is that it is so soon exercising so great an influence as it is. It is a clearing house of world opinion, the most sensitive barometer of world opinion existing, a world conscience, if you will.” And even in Quebec, where support for the League was markedly lower than the rest of the country, the Montreal Gazette would write, “Disarmament conferences have brought plainly enough to light the highly technical and vastly complex problems which have to be faced...It is to be fervently hoped that the combined pressure of hard times and awe aroused public opinion will result in definite progress towards a substantial reduction of armaments when the Geneva conference resumes its labours.”

For those across the country whose attention had been captured by Geneva, it was believed that the success or failure of the League was dictated by public mobilization in support of its initiatives. While not all opinions were optimistic, even those critical voices could acknowledge that the potential failings of the League would be as much a by-product of poor public sen-

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timent as it would be diplomatic folly. Though imperfect, the League stood as the only venue to construct sustainable global peace. Until another alternative arose, it was the only hopeful prospect throughout the tenuous years leading up to and throughout the WDC.

The global tension was reflected throughout Canadian observations of the global milieu, and was cast as a remarkably stark binary. Whether one supported the League or not, it was clear that Canadians believed that the WDC would produce either war or peace. And if the result was to be peace, it would be because Canada did their part in rallying alongside other nation’s in support of the League and the cause of peace. By the early 1930s the Canadian press clearly demonstrated that few longed for further global conflict. The trend continued into 1932 and the eve of the WDC, with supporters of the League, as Carolyn Biltoft would state, “speaking the peace” of international politics. In order for the WDC to be successful, all nations and their people would have to rally behind the premise of international arbitration and cooperation.

The one exception came in the province of Quebec. French Canadians had long been wary of the League of Nations due to Canada’s connection to the British Empire. Throughout the

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75 Biltoft, “Speaking the Peace,” 23-76.
early years of the country’s involvement with the League, there was a very large group of imperialists amongst Canadian anglophones who viewed the organization as a means for Canada to consolidate closer to the Empire. Conversely, many Canadians—both anglophones and francophones—feared that such action would threaten the country’s political autonomy, and contribute to the League turning into a satellite of British rule. Such a fear was hardly confined to Canada, as many early critics of the League around the world shared a similar sentiment.

While support for the League in Quebec was comparatively smaller than the rest of the country, there was not a complete disavowal of the organization as some scholarly works have expressed. Many French Canadians supported the League but feared its misuse, or feared Canada foolishly being tethered to European affairs. For those in Quebec who supported the League, the organization was to be a means to assert Canada’s autonomy, rather than subdue it. This was one of the many reasons that Ernest Lapointe, the fervent internationalist, fought so hard for Canada’s appointment to the League Council in 1927. Not only would the appointment mean added international responsibility and prestige for the country, but it was a means to appease the critical voices in his home province who feared Canada losing its autonomy. For French-Canadians fearful of the League of Nations, Canada’s seat on the Council, and later the Statute of Westminster in 1931, were assurances that Canada’s forays into international politics was not a threat to its independence.

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Throughout the WDC the *Montreal Gazette* was a vocal advocate of disarmament, and of the merits of internationalism and peace, and espoused much of the same rhetoric as other newspapers across the country who supported the League. It followed the proceedings closely, providing readers with both regular news updates and editorial opinion. However, while being one of the province’s largest, it was an english-language paper and is not entirely indicative of Quebec opinion.

By 1932 Quebec’s French-language press was relatively mum regarding the League of Nations. Save for the odd news article which updated readers on the debates and logistics of the conference, papers such as *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* payed little attention to the latest developments in Geneva. Compared to english papers across the country, the French-language-press produced virtually no opinion pieces on the WDC.\(^79\) While this in itself is not an indication of a disapproval of the League or the WDC, it is very telling in its own rite. If French-language-papers were representative of French-Canadian opinion then the League was not a threat, but it was neither something worthy of preoccupation. *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* were far more mindful and committed to domestic affairs than anything to do with international politics, the League of Nations or otherwise. It seems that by 1932 and the duration of the WDC, French Canadians were content with the country’s relationship with the League, opting to neither outwardly support or disapprove of the organization. However, years after the WDC, with the League limping to its demise and war seemingly an imminent reality, french-language papers such as *Le Devoir* and

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L’Action Nationale were extremely aware of Canada’s place in the world, the global peace movement, and the impact it would have on French Canadians.⁸⁰

Across the rest of the country newspapers were filled with editorials and letters-to-the-editor regarding the dark skies that descended over Geneva. The international outlook regarding the WDC was understandably bleak due in large part to the Manchuria Crisis which began almost simultaneously alongside the conference. As such, a great deal of public discourse in Canada regarding the WDC melded synonymously with discussion on the Manchuria Crisis and Japanese militarism. While not all agreed on the manner in which the League had handled the crisis, Canadians were unanimous in their disavowal of Japan’s militarism and their disinterest in adhering to their League obligations. Nationalistic policies by any country, especially resulting in militarism, were a direct threat to the peaceful diplomacy that the League had fostered and was trying to maintain. However, observers rightly pointed out that despite the preventative efforts of the League, and the best intentions of the Covenant, Japan’s actions continued and had gone largely unopposed. Manchuria signalled a reality check for Canadian supporters of the League. The incident re-

vealed the imperfections of the League’s processes and ideals, leading many to question if it could recover from its disastrous mismanagement of the crisis.81

Manchuria was a harsh blow to League sentiment in Canada, as even critics of the organization were hopeful for successful results at the WDC. Canadians understandably questioned what the incident would mean for the success of the League moving forward, and more pressing-ly, if it would set a precedent for the coming WDC, resulting in its failure and internationalist ideals.82 The harshest of critics simply pointed out how Manchuria had demonstrated the apparent uselessness of the League. In a scalding editorial regarding the League’s management of Manchuria, the Globe wrote,

The League is about as useful as a bathing beach life-guard who has a wonderful coat of tan but who cannot swim…The League’s contribution to the maintenance of peace in this crisis was to offer to mediate. When Japan declined the offer the League heaved a great sigh of relief, and the League Assembly turned back to the discussion of such things as calendar reform, labor conditions in Liberia, more complete cooperation between the po-ets, painters and luncheon clubs of the various nations.83

If the League could not prevent Japanese militarism, nor could it persuade the country to retreat from seized Chinese territory, then what hope did the League have to achieve global disarmament? Furthermore, what stopped other belligerent powers, such as an increasingly demanding Germany, from following in Japan’s footsteps? Overwhelming though, it was questioned what


was to become of peace. If the League stood as the only body to arbitrate peace, then its failure surely meant an unwanted alternative.84

Interestingly, those following the League responded as one might not expect. Despite the League’s failures with Manchuria, and the debate regarding the usefulness or plausibility of the Covenant’s ideals, it was still widely held that international organization and arbitration presented the most fruitful prospects for peace. Most public scorn was directed at Japan and the doctrine of militarism and nationalism rather than a disavowal of internationalism. “The League can only be effective as an arbitrator when those implicated are willing to place all the cards on the table. The League cannot well suggest ways of agreement when each party reserves to itself the monopoly of deciding the merits of its complaints against the other,” declared the *Manitoba Free Press*.85 “It is a mistake to say that the League is finished because it could not stop Japan,” stated *The Vancouver Sun*. “It has at least minimized hostilities and the experience it has gained will make it a genuine and potent force in world affairs.”86

Though the organization had clearly failed, the League’s initiatives were upheld by its civil supporters, and there was an effort to reemphasize its ideals, hoping that greater support by League members and their backing polities would prevent a similar situation from occurring again in the future. As supporters believed the League to be the conclusive form of international cooperation, they looked hopefully towards the future and far beyond Manchuria, understanding


that the development of the organization would sustain trials. The League of Nations was still young, and like an infant taking its first steps, it was bound to fall.

The Manchuria Crisis certainly shook the League and its supporters, enlightening idealists to the reality that the organization would be prone to failures, despite its best intentions. But the incident also encouraged supporters to call for greater support of the League and international norms of behaviour. Manchuria had been a harsh demonstration of the alternative to the liberal internationalist ideals embodied in the Covenant. While diplomats at Geneva had made mistakes, the League was too important to be destroyed by them.87

Even the LNS, undoubtably the most vocal advocate for the League in Canada, would question the League’s lax position in managing Manchuria. Norman McKenzie, then University of Toronto professor and future president of the University of British Columbia, would ask in an LNS essay, “What of Disarmament?”

Then what is to be the attitude of those who have been wholehearted supporters of the League? The belief that the League offered security from aggression is gone, as is the hope that war between its members would be unknown. But there remain the fundamental ideas on which the League is based: notably that war is expensive and destructive, that even success does not guarantee the results the victor contemplated, and that enquiry, arbitration and judicial settlement are in the long run, and the larger percentage of cases, preferable to a settlement reached by war.

Most notable of McKenzie’s essay is his theorization of the League as a concept. He states, “And by the League I do not mean an organization in Geneva alone. The League is an idea.” As long as the organization and its public backing adhered to the idea of the League of Nations then the principal failings of its proceedings could be overcome. For supporters of the League, the institution, its Assembly, and those who made up its governing body were imperfect and bound for

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failure. But the ideals which informed it were not. Peace remained a plausible ideal and an achievable reality. As such, civil supporters within Canada demonstrated a self-awareness of the organization and its ideals, rather than a fanaticism.

In a 27 January editorial, while supportive of the WDC, claiming it to be “the positive road to peace,” *The Vancouver Sun* asserted that public opinion no longer had interest in the upcoming conference because of the League’s prior failures to enact such measures. While the *Sun* was right in noting that the WDC had been the culmination of many attempts to enforce disarmament during the interwar period, they were incorrect in their assertion that Canadians were disinterested in the conference’s implications. Heading into the proceedings of the WDC, Canadians were by and large supportive of the conference as an initiative to promote norms of international behaviour needed to create and sustain peace. Editorial opinion stressed Canada’s support for the conference and the country’s ability to conjure up such widespread support for the delegates, but also for the disarmament movement as a whole.

With the help of the LNS, Canada was able to produce a petition of five hundred thousand signatures denouncing the rearmament of Europe. This petition was to be presented at the WDC by Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and the state on behalf of the Canadian people. For a


90 Andrew Webster, *From Versailles to Geneva: The Many Forms of Interwar Disarmament*.


92 Page, “The Institute's 'Popular Arm,'” 55.
country of ten and half million citizens, the half a million signatures represented 5% of the Canadian population. However, there were undoubtedly more who shared a similar ideology, but were unable to sign the petition due to the budgetary and geographical restraints of the LNS and its branches. The *Montreal Gazette* would correctly assert that the petition was “a good index of the trend of public opinion” with regards to disarmament, concluding that despite the recent difficulty of peace proposals, the conference presented hopeful and encouraging prospects, all the more attainable because they had the backing of an interested and supportive public.93

Beyond disarmament, the petition was also a testament to how far the LNS and general support for the League had come within Canadian civil society. When the LNS was formed in 1923 it was intended to be a round-table group of intellectuals informing and educating the Canadian public about the merits of the League and its ideals, rather than being a pressure group that enacted influence over the Canadian government. However, such a position led the initial years of the LNS to a dismal failure. After eighteen months of operation, the LNS had spent over ten thousand dollars on expenditures, distributed 6000 issues of the society’s initial publication, the *Bulletin*, and 300 monthly summaries of the League proceedings to Canadian libraries, newspapers, and prospective members. The result was $1,155 in income, and a paltry 437 individual and four corporate memberships nationwide.94

The LNS began to succeed more dramatically after it changed its mission statement. It decided it must become an activist as well as educational body. It began emphasizing the need for international cooperation and Canada’s role in such a partnership. The conviction was that

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93 “To Arm the League?” *The Montreal Gazette*, 8 February, 1932

94 Page, “The Institute’s ‘Popular Arm,’” 43.
Canada had the ability to alter the League from being a European club into a truly international organization. As the success and failure of the League of Nations was dictated as much by public support as it was government support, the LNS preached that Canadians were equally as responsible for the League’s survival as the bureaucrats in Geneva.

Aided by Canada’s appointment to the League Council in 1927, the LNS saw a remarkable increase in support from both the Canadian state and the general population. In 1927 alone, over 3000 individual information requests were answer, and approximately 98,000 pieces of literature mailed out to interested parties. The federal government opted to aid in funding the LNS, offering free office space and utilities in Ottawa, as well as a $750 grant for the distribution of materials, which was subsequently increased to $3000 the following year. By 1927 membership had increased to 6,251, and the Society boasted seventeen branches across the country. Within only a year that number skyrocketed to roughly 250,000 paid and affiliated members. In those five years alone membership rose an astounding 57,904%, certainly a respectable number for a nation deemed isolationist.

The WDC petition was a by-product of the LNS’s remarkable success and the call from its members to move from educational body to pressure group. The Canadian Institute for International affairs was formed in 1928 with the intention of being the outlet for popular opinion on League affairs, enabling the LNS to have a more persuasive presence on the government by not splitting its efforts with pandering to the public. Additionally, the Bulletin was scrapped for the more theoretically and politically opinionated, Interdependence. The tactic worked: Despite

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95 Page, “The Institute’s ‘Popular Arm,’” 48-49. This number represents both paid membership and corporate affiliation, which comprised the majority of the LNS’s calculation of this figure. Individual membership peaked at 13,407 in 1928.
hesitation by the Canadian government, it was agreed that support within the country for the WDC’s prospects were far too great to not present the petition before the League members. As such, the LNS petition was the most tangible and successful example of Canadian internationalist sentiment during the interwar period, and signalled the height of popularity for the League and the ideals of the Covenant. Canadians civil society sought peace, and believed it achievable through the abolition of global armaments and the adherence to international diplomacy. That the LNS’s support drastically fell after the failure of the WDC is but further indication of the epochal nature to which Canadian supporters of the League viewed the events transpiring in Geneva. 

While many did express doubt about the WDC’s ability to achieve successful disarmament, virtually no editorial or letter-to-the-editor denounced the initiatives of disarmament, peace, or international relations. In a long opinion piece in *Saturday Night Magazine*, titled “Why Disarmament Conferences Fail,” R.A. Kanigsberg observed that the true threat to disarmament would be each nation turning on their international obligations to the League and each other, reverting to nationalistic policies. The abandonment of “World Cooperation” would start the world into a spiral of militarism and rearmament that would surely threaten global peace. The capitalization of ‘World Cooperation’ is telling of Kanigsberg’s political ideology, exalting internationalism in much of the similar manner that McKenzie did while writing for the LNS. Numerous other editorials and letters would reiterate Kanigsberg’s position, believing that where general disarmament failed international cooperation would sustain international peace. Thus, if

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96 Page, “The Institute’s ‘Popular Arm,’” 48-56.


genuinely adhered to, internationalism was a policy which transcended nationalistic, militaristic, and economic divisions. As a political observer, Kanigsberg was insightful and prophetic, as the turn from internationalism to nationalistic diplomacy has been upheld by scholars as one of the primary causes leading to the inevitable failure of the WDC and the disarmament movement as a whole. 99

Pertaining directing to the WDC and disarmament, observers were especially critical of the nationalist policies of the France, Germany, and Japan. On the precipice of either war or peace, nationalism threatened to rupture international ties, undermine the League and WDC’s ability to act as an arbitral body, thus sabotaging the prospects of peace. 100 For some, it was vital that Canada be actively involved in the WDC and persuasively demonstrate to other bellicose powers their ability to create and maintain peaceful relations with other nations. It was believed by many that Canada’s long and peaceful position with the British Empire was a microcosmic demonstration of the potential which lay within the League of Nations if international cooperation and arbitration was enacted successfully. 101


Editorials were also mindful of the United States’ role in the establishment and maintenance of peace, and were highly critical of the country’s reluctance to partake in international affairs. As numerous authors have demonstrated, beyond the Wilson administration, the United States’ foreign policy would be characterized as isolationist, choosing to observe global affairs from afar. It is telling that the most notable critic of the United States’ isolationist policy, and the greatest advocate for the country’s involvement with the League of Nations, was Canadian-born Columbia University professor, and research director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, James. T. Shotwell.

In numerous texts and lectures, most notably On the Rim of the Abyss (1936), a scathing appraisal of American isolationism, Shotwell would press for US internationalism. Alongside the LNS, and with the backing of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [CFEIP], Shotwell helped create a lecture series and conferences on Canadian-American internationalism which took place in Kingston, Ontario. Additionally, he edited a series of books on the subject, all published on behalf of the CFEIP.102 For Shotwell, the US’ reluctance to partake in League

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102 Berger, The Writing of Canadian History, 149-158. Four conferences were held between 1935 and 1941. They alternated every two years between Queen’s University and St. Lawrence University, both in Kingston, Ontario, and Canton, New York.
affairs threatened to undermine the institution and cast the world into conflict. Global peace was only achievable if all nations and people—especially those directly implicated in its design—chose to participate in its creation.103 Shotwell believed that the U.S., although not a League member, could play a direct role in fostering peace through its influence on war debts, reparations, and trade tariffs, all of which were perceived as impediments to disarmament.104 Many Canadians supported this stance, citing the US’ lack of involvement in League proceedings as one of the major obstacles to its success.105 Maclean’s Magazine printed a pointed criticism of the US in an essay, titled “The League of Insincerity,” in which George Drew wrote,

The United States can hardly expect the rest of the world to take its good advice about disarming while they assume the role of Mars and give every evidence of believing that the way to peace is to be so much stronger than your enemy that he will not dare to attack you, in spite of having renounced war as an instrument of national policy by their signature of the Briand-Kellogg Pact.106

If Canadian diplomats wanted the country to draw closer to the US in economic and political isolation—as has been consistently reiterated by scholars—much of the Canadian public did not reciprocate such sentiment. Supporters of the League saw the whole of North America as having


a vital role in the development and maintenance of international peace. A shift to continentalism would be avoiding the country’s international obligations and responsibility. Even amongst those critical of the League, many realized Canada was not so far removed from European affairs as to avoid the consequences of the WDC’s failure. If the League and its initiatives failed then Canada, alongside other League members, would bear the responsibility and consequences that came from the failure of internationalism.\textsuperscript{107}

Often times public discourse was expressed through cartoons rather than editorials or letters. Newspapers such as Toronto’s \textit{Globe}, \textit{The Vancouver Sun}, \textit{Maclean’s}, \textit{Saturday Night Magazine}, and especially \textit{The Manitoba Free Press}, included political cartoons alongside or in lieu of an editorial opinion.\textsuperscript{108} These cartoons were simple but clearly expressed the concern which their editors had over international peace and its relation to the League’s proceedings. Additionally, they were a simple means to express complex ideas about international politics and norms of diplomatic behaviour, drawing readers far beyond the confines of Canada’s borders into a visualization of the global milieu. Political cartoons were another manner in which League advocates demonstrated their internationalist thinking.\textsuperscript{109}

During the Manchuria Crisis political cartoons were reflective of the opinion that Japanese militarism was a threat to international peace, with the country commonly depicted as


\textsuperscript{108} A collection of editorial cartoons to supplement the reader is available at the end of the essay under Appendix.

\textsuperscript{109} Iro Sani et al. “Poltical Cartoons as a Vehicle of Setting Social Agenda: The Newspaper Example,” \textit{Asian Social Science}, 8, no. 6 (2012), 156-164.
Mars the God of War.110 Garbed in armour, brandishing a sword, or ignoring the pleas of the League or neighbouring China, Japan was depicted as dangerous, rash, and uncooperative. Villianized through these cartoons, such depictions undoubtedly cast Japan as the antagonist to peace, catalyzing war.

The WDC was depicted as epochal, signalling either war or peace for the world. In one instance the World stands in the hallway of the WDC and behind two doors on either side of it are an angel and a tiger, representative of war and peace.111 Another showed the World barred by a wall of cannons and bayonets as it tries to return the Dove of Peace back safely into its cage,112 while another shows it literally drowning from the weight its armaments.113 Overall, cartoons depicted the League and the WDC with an air of cynicism, demonstrating the importance of disarmament for many Canadians, but also the realistic expectation that the conference would amount to little success because political elites could not let go of their nationalistic endeavours and their thirst for war.114

In all the cartoons of the WDC and League affairs the World is depicted as being humanoid. In essence, the World is as a man with a globe for a head, dressed in a top hat and a suit. Within this series of cartoons, the situation in which the World finds itself, and the state of his attire, were ways for newspapers to express to their readers broad themes of international rela-


113 “He Might Float If He’d Let Go,” *The Manitoba Free Press*, 13 April, 1933.

tions. For example, as the WDC’s proceedings continued over the two years, with hope diminishing as it went, cartoons increasingly depicted the World as more disheveled and distraught. In the case of the Manitoba Free Press its cartoons on armaments and war and peace which we published during the WDC culminated in one printed shortly after Germany withdrew the proceedings. The World is a Christ-like figure, weighed down by a sword carried on its back, representative of a cross. Viewed in isolation the message is clear: armaments are a burden to the world. Relative to the other cartoons in which the World is distraught or burdened but is surviving, the biblical connotation of this one is serious and jarring. Like Christ walking through Via Dolorosa to his eventual death after the verdict of Pontious Pilate, the World walks to its death following the closing of the WDC.\textsuperscript{115}

Throughout the proceedings of the WDC, caricaturizations of each belligerent power were produced, but the depictions of authoritarian nations were overtly negative. Japan, Germany, and Italy were all depicted insidiously, a clear representation of their perceived threat to peace. Interestingly, amongst the numerous WDC cartoons there are none that depict Canada in isolation. Cartoons on other issues, such as the Imperial Economic Conference (held in Ottawa in 1932)\textsuperscript{116} make clear demarcations between Canada and other nations of the world. However, in

\textsuperscript{115} “The World’s Cross,” The Manitoba Free Press, 16 October, 1933.

\textsuperscript{116} The Imperial Economic Conferences were gatherings of the British Empire and its colonies, meeting periodically between 1887 and 1937. The 1932 conference was held in Ottawa between 21 July and 20 August, garnering press coverage from across the country. The primary issue discussed at the 1932 conference was the gold standard and trade tariffs. For more on the conference, see: Andrew S. Thompson, Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932 (New York: Longman, 2000); David S. Jacks, “Defying Gravity: The Imperial Economic Conference and the Reorientation of Canadian Trade,” Explorations in Economic History 53 (2014), 19-39; Norman Miners, “Industrial Development in the Colonial Empire and the Imperial Economic Conference at Ottawa 1932,” Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 30, no. 2 (2002), 53-76.
the series on the World used throughout the WDC there is no such distinction. The message is clear: Canada and the World; rather, they are one and the same.

The political cartoons associated with the WDC and issues of collective security clearly demonstrate that those interested in the League viewed the issues of international affairs as being their own, and in turn, their responsibility to remedy. They also saw it as their responsibility to inform others of the dire situation leading to the failure of the League, its ideals, and ultimately, the WDC.

Furthermore, the humanoid conceptualization of the World denotes an active agency within collective opinion. The World is something depicted as being able to move and breathe. It is not an abstract, but is rather an entity. Such a depiction is reminiscent of the Wilsonian and liberal internationalist doctrine upon which the League was founded, and Celicia Lynch’s conceptualization of civil mobility and normative behaviour. While the institution of the League of Na-
tions was confined to Geneva, if constructed and actualized by a willing public, its ideals were to know no bounds. The League of Nations was as much Canada, as it was Britain, or France, or any other nation. These cartoons demonstrate that Canadian public opinion was actively engaged with the fate of the League, even if it seemed incapable of changing it.

While such conclusions were not unreasonable, these cartoons lacked nuance and any appropriate explanation. They were intended to convey a pointed and easily accessible message to the reader, representative of that particular newspaper and editor. While these cartoons were in no way representative of Canadians as a whole, the newspapers in which they were printed were some of the largest and most popular serials in the country, undoubtedly reaching a vast audience. For even the Canadian who was not interested in League affairs, and who did not have any desire to follow its proceedings and press responses to it, editorial cartoons would have been a quick and affective way to express and inform readers of the global milieu, getting even the most reluctant reader to think internationally.  

**Conclusion: Thinking Internationally.**

The WDC would limp to its eventual death in 1934, but would cease to be relevant from a diplomatic standpoint by October 1933 when Germany opted for rearmament, thus pulling itself out of the conference and the League of Nations as a whole. With the failure of the WDC, Canadian observers quickly turned to the question of whether the League could retain its ability to act as both a political and moral force. Initial reflections rightfully questioned the validity of

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the international system, but directed much of their scorn at the failure of collectivism rather than the League’s failed attempt to actualize such an ideal. In a similar manner to previous discussion on the Manchuria Crisis, advocates of the League pointed to German nationalism as a sabotage to the WDC proceedings, indicating that the ideals of disarmament, and in turn, peace, were only attainable if each nation arbitrated harmoniously towards a common goal.119

As the Halifax Chronicle would state, “It takes a long time to recreate a world…Men should not be disheartened because the dreams they dreamed then and the ideals that strengthened nerve and hearts are not yet established. The astonishing thing is that the world has held so steady in spite of temptations to take the rash and reckless way of despair.”120 For a while those within Canada that supported the League and the ideals of internationalism clung to the hope that such ideals could overcome the failures of the WDC. The League’s prestige and effectiveness had certainly been hampered, but the world had not yet plunged into war. Despite the blows to

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such a goal, peace was still a plausible option. But over time this rhetoric diminished as well, with only the most vehement internationalists and idealists, such as J.W. Dafoe of *The Manitoba Free Press*, continuing to discuss the League in any positive manner.\(^{121}\)

As has been demonstrated, the success of the League and the international system it was founded upon were predicated on the backing of public opinion and support. Thus, the *Canadian Forum* was correct in its observation that a growing lack of media and editorial coverage of the League represented a growing disenchantment with the organization and its ideals.\(^{122}\) In the little that Canada did speak about the League, the language of peace and internationalism had gone decidedly sour. In 1936 historian Frank Underhill wrote of Canada and the League that “the Collective System is dead. It now becomes a subject for learned investigation by professors of history in their Ph.D seminars.”\(^{123}\)

Such cynicism is understandable and has been reflected within decades of scholarship following the League’s existence that questioned the merits of studying an organization synonymous with futility. The League of Nations was a diplomatic failure, and by extension, so were public mobilizations that advocated on its behalf. If such an appraisal is correct, what promise comes from recontextualizing Canada’s interwar legacy to one inherently internationalist, advocating diplomatic norms embodied in the League and its ideals? One could rightfully argue that despite Canada’s vast League sentiment leading up to and throughout the WDC, Canadians did little to alter the course of their country’s diplomatic position, or the fate of the League.


Such an assessment fails to conceptualize the success of the League of Nations in being the antecedent to the United Nations [UN]. Had the League of Nations truly been a resounding failure, international organization would have been a premise never revisited, let alone so soon. The UN was not an inevitability waiting to materialize and must be understood as the culmination of a internationalist process which began with the League of Nations. As Cecilia Lynch argues, “interwar peace movements first legitimized global international institutions.” Despite its eventual failure, “their efforts to popularize, support and make effective the World Disarmament Conference of 1932 was the defining moment of their adherence to claims that universalist international organizations…provided the most legitimate framework for solving arms races and for providing an alternative to state management of conflict,” leading to the development of the UN.124

Similarly, if the internationalist sentiment developed throughout the interwar period truly amounted to nothing, Canada would not have given such strong support for the UN. This is certainly not the case. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to examine completely, numerous scholars have demonstrated that Canada, from both a diplomatic and civil perspective, welcomed and actively participated in the UN and became a major proponent of the internationalist

124 Lynch, Beyond Appeasement, 187-188.
norms in which it embodied. The interwar period was thus the vital testing ground for a Canadian internationalist movement that permeated strongly following the Second World War and onwards.

By adhering to theoretical perspectives championed by Cecila Lynch, that civil society and civil mobilizations have the capacity to partake in upholding and constructing norms of diplomatic behaviour, this paper has demonstrated that Canada’s interwar legacy required a re-contextualization. Narratives which adhere to classical realist interpretations, privileging only policy-makers and realpolitiks have long oriented Canada as isolationist. Doing so fails to consider the way in which support for the League of Nations became a mass movement throughout the interwar period.

Supporters of the League of Nations partook in a self-aware, self-critical dialogue regarding the merits of internationalism. Despite upholding the League’s initiatives, Canadians were not hesitant to criticize the organization or the disarmament movement. Editorial opinion, letters to editors, editorial cartoons, and internationalist organizations such as the LNS demonstrate that Canada spoke peace through internationalist rhetoric, but was not above subjecting

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internationalism to close critical examination. Unlike popular interpretations of Canadian historiography which makes League supporters synonymous with pacifism and utopianism, internationalists did not endorse unrealistic or idealist perspectives on the League. While Canadians were hopeful for the WDC’s success and the League’s ability to foster international peace, public opinion realized there were legitimate challenges facing the movement, and only international cooperation could mediate them. However, they clearly expressed that Canada had a role in establishing and maintaining international peace.

From a diplomatic standpoint it is difficult to assert that Canada was anything but isolationist. However, public advocacy of the League complicates this historicization and challenges scholarship to reconceptualize Canada during the interwar period. Canadian public opinion demonstrated that being European, or residing on the European continent, were not prerequisites for League advocacy. Nor was being confined to the North American continent—the so called ‘fire-proof house’—a hinderance to partaking in international discourse. While Canada may have had little to offer materially within the disarmament movement, with many citing that the country had little in the way of armaments to reduce, advocating for disarmament and the League meant engaging in international politics bent on constructing sustainable peace. Simply put, Canadian public discourse saw itself as greater than the sum of its parts. Canadians conceived of issues of war and peace as issues which could be discussed through the open channels of transnational political discourse. As they described and often participated in the movement surrounding the WDC, Canadians were plainly of the opinion that their supposedly “fire-proof” house afforded them no protection from the looming world catastrophe.

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Caption: “Simon: Ah… I’ll bet a million on ‘disarmament.’

Bookie: A million?

Simon: Yes — But only fun. You know — I don’t play for keeps.”
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