

## INVENTING INTERWAR DIPLOMACY: WHY THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC WAS REPRESENTED BY SOCIALISTS, CONSERVATIVES, AND WOMEN AT THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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Every September during the 1920s and 1930s, delegations from around the world converged on Geneva to attend the Assembly of the League of Nations. This annual gathering transformed the Swiss city: crowds of people filled the streets speaking a multitude of languages, the worldwide press crowded into the city's salons, and motorboats crisscrossed Lake Geneva to the luxurious hotels where diplomats took up residence.<sup>1</sup> Foreign ministers and even the occasional prime minister or chancellor served as delegates alongside ambassadors and specialized envoys, some of whom were women. This cast of characters would seem familiar to twenty-first-century diplomats. However, when considered alongside our professionalized diplomatic corps of the present, the elected parliamentarians milling around as national delegates, substitute delegates, and technical advisors in interwar Geneva seem out of place. Even more surprising from our vantage point, a number of these legislators came from opposition parties, appointed as national delegates by governments that they themselves opposed.<sup>2</sup> Having members of the United States Congress, especially Democrats, wandering around the halls of the United Nations representing Donald Trump's administration seems absurd to us, but during the interwar years the practice of using opposition politicians as diplomats was common. This article will examine interwar innovations on the international diplomatic stage by focusing on the German experience joining the League of Nations and dispatching delegates to the League's Assembly.

Narratives of failure and collapse have long dominated the historiographies both of Weimar Germany and of the League of Nations. Historians of interwar Germany have wrestled with accounts that read Weimar as the prologue to the Third Reich or as the final stepping stone of a *Sonderweg* that started in the nineteenth century and ran to the horrors of the Holocaust. Detlev Peukert worked to pick up the pieces of a post-*Sonderweg* historiography in his path-breaking 1987 book *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der Klassischen Moderne* by

1 "Aus meinen Erlebnissen beim Völkerbund," n.d., N 1626/3, Nachlass Thusnelda Lang-Brumann, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

2 "List of Assembly Delegates and Substitutes," League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>; First Assembly of the League of Nations, "Official Guide and List of Members of Delegations" (Offices of the Secretariat: Geneva, 1920).

rescuing Weimar from these master narratives of failure and arguing that the period was marked by experimentation with modernity that should be explored on its own terms. Peukert highlighted the paradox of Weimar — “the hopeful picture of avant-garde cultural achievement and the bleak picture of political breakdown and social misery” — so he constructed a narrative that recognized the enduring contradictions of Weimar while appreciating its role as a laboratory in providing open-ended answers to the issues of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Fritzsche’s superlative 1996 review essay “Did Weimar Fail?” summed up post-Peukert scholarship on Weimar Germany as a “disavowal of the master narrative of the Republic in the name of the eclectic experimentalism of Weimar.” Fritzsche moved past Peukert’s fixation on Weimar’s dualism to draw the logical conclusion that since “historical actions appear more indeterminate and open-ended,” the Third Reich was also a “legitimate, if extreme, outcome” of the Republic’s freedom and experimentation.<sup>4</sup> Fritzsche himself saw the roots of a National Socialist consensus emerging during the republican years, and he turned to continuities beyond 1918 or 1933 to reframe the question of Weimar’s failure.<sup>5</sup> Other historians including Nadine Rossol have been wary of treating Weimar as merely the “antechamber of the Third Reich,” but all of these innovative historians have been keen to rescue Weimar from older historiographies of fragility and collapse.<sup>6</sup>

Another institution trapped in historical narratives of failure was the League of Nations. Both the League and the entire postwar international settlement brought about by the Paris Peace Conference have been seen as doomed from birth. Woodrow Wilson himself set up this narrative of failure when he campaigned for the League by promising it would bring peace: “I can predict with absolute certainty that within another generation there will be another world war if the nations of the world do not concert the method by which to prevent it.”<sup>7</sup> The League was Wilson’s solution to prevent war, and by his metric, the League failed. However, like Weimar scholarship of the last few decades, scholars have recently turned to reconsider the bad reputation that has tarnished the League and interwar diplomacy more broadly. Historians including Patricia Clavin and Susan Pedersen have focused on the League’s involvement in promoting economic development and in unwinding empires through mandates.<sup>8</sup> Scholars such as Glenda Sluga and Mark Mazower have written the League into much longer narratives of internationalism and global

3 Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1993), xiii.

4 Peter Fritzsche, “Did Weimar Fail?” *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 3 (Sep 1996): 631.

5 Benjamin Ziemann and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, “‘Machtergreifung’. The Nazi Seizure of Power in 1933,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 3 (Sep 2013): 326.

6 Anthony McElligott, *Weimar Germany* (2009), as quoted in Nadine Rossol, “Performing the Nation: Sports, Spectacles, and Aesthetics in Germany, 1926-1936,” *Central European History* 43, no. 4 (Dec 2010): 616.

7 Woodrow Wilson, “Appeal for Support of the League of Nations,” accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/ww40.htm>.

8 Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015).

governance that understand the organization in a longer context that looks beyond the supposed failure of preventing the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Scholars of interwar internationalism, therefore, have taken similar historiographical steps as historians of Weimar: reevaluating an overarching narrative of failure by looking for continuities beyond the bookmarks of catastrophic world wars.<sup>10</sup>

This article will bring together an interest in the Weimar Republic with the world of international interwar diplomacy, both historiographies that are currently very much in flux. Although Weimar historians are often less inclined to ask research questions that look beyond the borders of interwar Germany, Weimar scholarship tends to emphasize the rich world of experimentation during the 1920s and 1930 more so than historians of the interwar global arena.<sup>11</sup> The historiographic rescue of the League of Nations has been to put it in dialogue with late nineteenth-century internationalism or the work of the United Nations; however, the interwar years were also replete with new ways to think about diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> There was interwar flirtation on the international stage with the principle that diplomats and delegates should represent the people, who were seen as sovereign in more countries than ever before. Some countries explored dispatching the people's representatives — elected parliamentarians — to international conferences, which this article will explore in depth.<sup>13</sup> This contribution will take a page out the Weimar historians' commitment to explore interwar "eclectic experimentalism" on its own terms in considering how interwar Europe's diplomats also experimented with new forms of diplomacy and representation.<sup>14</sup>

## I. Interwar diplomatic experimentation: The Assembly of the League of Nations

The First World War was the moment when the "old diplomacy" — secretive, behind-the-scenes negotiations led by aristocratic plenipotentiaries — faltered. Nineteenth-century practices in which noble diplomats represented princely houses and honed their skills traveling between Europe's royal courts had failed to prevent a cataclysmic world war. By 1918, a nascent "new diplomacy" was gaining traction. This was to be open, public, and directed by democratic officials through "direct conferences of statesmen or political leaders, as opposed to negotiation by professional diplomats."<sup>15</sup> This world of interwar summits and assemblies was a dramatic break from the prewar diplomatic past, in that diplomats were to be democratically

9 Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York, 2013)

10 Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2002).

11 See, for example, a recent conference report on Weimar historiography where only one panel touched on transnational topics: Sebastian Schäfer, "Tagungsbericht: Die Weimarer Republik als Ort der Demokratieggeschichte," *H-Soz-Kult*, July 29, 2019, <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8381>.

12 Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2017).

13 Mai'a K. Davis Cross, *The European Diplomatic Corps: Diplomats and International Cooperation from Westphalia to Maastricht* (New York, 2007); Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its evolution, theory and practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London, 2011).

14 Fritzsche, "Did Weimar Fail?," 631.

15 Davis Cross, *The European Diplomatic Corps*, 106.

accountable, if not elected politicians themselves. Within this new diplomatic system, the League of Nations marked the most radical break with the old order. On paper, the League was to embody open, democratic Wilsonian diplomacy in the form of a transparent international organization dedicated to peace.<sup>16</sup>

Within the League system, the organization's Assembly was at the forefront of advancing new trends in diplomacy, pulling private negotiations into public view and channeling the "organized opinion of mankind" into international decision-making.<sup>17</sup> The League's Covenant laid out the power and structure of the Assembly before any other part of the organization. However, the Covenant was also exceptionally vague, specifying only that the Assembly would be made up of representatives of each member state, that each member could cast only one vote, and that the Assembly could "deal at its meetings with any matter within the sphere of action of the League or affecting the peace of the world."<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Covenant did not even specify how often the Assembly was to meet, and some negotiators in Paris imagined that it would only come together once every four years. The Assembly eventually adopted a rhythm of meeting annually, usually in September, which mirrors the practice the United Nations General Assembly follows today.<sup>19</sup>

The League's Assembly never gained a central role in the minds of contemporaries, especially since its powers were circumscribed compared to the smaller Council.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, sessions of the Assembly did serve as a backdrop for moments of highly publicized political drama at the League, including Emperor Haile Selassie's 1936 speech to the international community decrying the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.<sup>21</sup> Woodrow Wilson had earlier argued that the Assembly was to be "the forum of opinion, not of action ... it is the body where the thought of the little nation along with the thought of the big nation is brought to bear upon those matters which affect the peace of the world ... The assembly is the voice of mankind."<sup>22</sup> Since the Assembly was supposed to be the premier international debating society designed to sway global public opinion, who could be better as delegates than parliamentarians, national politicians experienced in debating and shaping a country's public opinion? A number of countries adopted this view and dispatched elected national politicians to the annual meetings of the Assembly.

From the first convocation of the Assembly of the League of Nations in 1920, national delegations were heterogeneous. Delegates,

16 Hamilton and Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, 163.

17 *ibid.*, 163.

18 Frederick Pollock, *The League of Nations* (London, 1920), 190.

19 Michel Marbeau, *La Société des Nations: Vers un monde multilatéral, 1919-1946* (Tours, 2017), 67-69; Margaret E. Burton, *The Assembly of the League of Nations* (Chicago, 1941), 47.

20 C. Howard-Ellis, *The Origin and Structure & Working of the League of Nations* (Boston, 1928), 127.

21 "Summary of the Ethiopian Emperor's Address to the League," *New York Times*, July 1, 1936, <https://www.nytimes.com/1936/07/01/archives/summary-of-the-ethiopian-emperors-address-to-the-league.html/>

22 Woodrow Wilson, "Address at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium in San Francisco, California," 17 Sep 1919, The American Presidency Project, accessed 20 February 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117386>

substitute delegates, and special technical advisors included everyone from governmental ministers to famous professors, leaders of the opposition, appointed senators, and backbench legislators. There were roughly three types of delegations: those led by ambassadors, those dominated by governmental ministers, and those that incorporated parliamentarians. In this breakdown, the ambassadorial delegations represented the more traditional form of diplomacy spearheaded by professional diplomats and foreign service officials, the ministerial delegations put representatives of the national executive at the forefront, and delegations that included parliamentarians were underpinned by a belief that legislators had a role alongside the sitting government in the conduct of foreign policy. Of course, these are not rigid categories; ministerial delegations often included ambassadors and parliamentary delegations were sometimes led by a foreign minister, but these categories are nonetheless useful in tracking change over time in who attended the League's Assembly as official delegates.<sup>23</sup>

Focusing specifically on the composition of the forty-one national delegations dispatched to the First Assembly in November 1920, slightly less than a majority — the delegations of twenty countries in total — consisted of special envoys, ambassadors, or other national representatives. All of these ambassadorial delegations in 1920 represented countries outside Europe and were generally made up of special envoys or diplomatic staff who were already based on the continent. These were delegations of convenience that avoided the expense and time of long sea voyages for delegations attending the League's Assembly. In the second category of delegations, there were those that prominently included current or former government ministers. Nine countries sent such ministerial delegations to the First Assembly. These delegations were closely associated with the government in power in their home country and were dominated by foreign ministers. These ministerial delegations amounted implicitly to a vote for diplomacy dominated by the country's executive, spearheaded by leading national statesmen. Thus, twenty-nine of the delegations to this first League Assembly were composed similarly to how delegations to the United Nations or to international conferences look today; they were made up primarily of foreign ministers, ambassadors, and special envoys.<sup>24</sup>

However, twelve delegations to this first assembly of the League of Nations included current or former parliamentarians. Among the parliamentary delegations to the First Assembly, four included

23 "List of Assembly Delegates and Substitutes," League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>

24 World Peace Foundation, "The First Assembly of the League of Nations," *A League of Nations IV*, no. 1 (Feb 1921), 203-205; First Assembly of the League of Nations, "Official Guide and List of Members of Delegations" (Offices of the Secretariat: Geneva, 1920); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, "List of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs Since the Forming of the First Government in 1811," last modified 23 Sep 2014, <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/diplomatic-tradition/ministers-through-history>.

politicians from political parties not represented in the national government at the time. In a parliamentary system, a sitting government is challenged by an opposition, so a strong indicator of a belief in parliamentary involvement in diplomacy was a national government appointing members of its own opposition to represent the country abroad. For example, the French delegation included two former prime ministers who were then serving in the French parliament, one as the president of the French senate and the other as a deputy. Both men had been active in diplomacy at the League of Nations previously, but officially their political parties were not supporting the conservative National Bloc government then in office in Paris. The British delegation to the Assembly included a Conservative, a Liberal, and a Labour MP, although the Labour Party had withdrawn from the governing coalition earlier in 1920. The 1920 Danish and Swedish delegations had been expressly created to include as wide a political spectrum as possible. The Danish delegation boasted parliamentarians from two left-wing parties that were not represented in the sitting conservative Danish cabinet. The Swedish delegation included two once-and-future prime ministers — one socialist and one conservative — as well as a liberal and an aristocrat, all of whom traveled to Geneva while a caretaker government without party-political backing ruled in Stockholm.<sup>25</sup>

During the course of the early 1920s, there was a general trend towards more and more Assembly delegations including parliamentarians.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, in 1920, twelve nations — or almost 28% of the total League membership — sent delegations that included parliamentarians to the League’s Assembly.<sup>27</sup> By the 1925 Assembly, twenty-three countries, or over 43% of the total League membership sent delegations that included legislators. Unlike the 1920 Assembly, by the 1925 Assembly, parliamentarians or former parliamentarians came from much farther afield; some legislators traveled all the way from Cuba, Venezuela, and Uruguay to Geneva.<sup>28</sup> However, over time, the practice of using parliamentary delegates lost steam among League members. The compilers of the League of Nations’ annual list of Assembly delegates did not always include the most robust job descriptions for each delegate, but it is nevertheless clear that by 1932, only twelve of fifty-eight members of the League dispatched parliamentary delegates who were not simultaneously ministers. Moreover, far fewer of these parliamentary delegations included politicians who represented the opposition. In 1932, for example, only the Norwegian and Danish delegations still included opposition

- 25 World Peace Foundation, “The First Assembly of the League of Nations,” *A League of Nations IV*, no. 1 (Feb 1921), 203-205; First Assembly of the League of Nations, “Official Guide and List of Members of Delegations” (Offices of the Secretariat: Geneva, 1920).
- 26 Burton, *The Assembly of the League of Nations*, 98.
- 27 World Peace Foundation, “The First Assembly of the League of Nations,” 203-205.
- 28 Booklet “List of Delegates and Members of Delegations (revised),” Geneva 1925, M3609/1, National Archives of Australia-Canberra.
- 29 *Thirteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations: List of Delegates and Members of Delegations (Revised)*, (Geneva, 1932); “Thirteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, Geneva, September 26 - October 17, 1932,” League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/13thordinaryassemb.htm>; List of Delegates and Members of Delegations (Provisional), Thirteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations, 1932, N 1310/163, Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz.

politicians.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, this interwar experiment in parliamentarian-diplomats fizzled out within a few years, leaving us a diplomatic world dominated by responsible ministers and foreign service officials rather than elected representatives of all political persuasions.

## II. The domestic roots of foreign policy: Stresemann opts for parliamentarians

The Covenant of the League of Nations took up the first 26 articles of the Treaty of Versailles that Germany signed to bring an end to the First World War. However, the new German republic was not a founding member of the League. Initially ostracized by the former Entente countries, Germany turned to the east and opened up to another diplomatic black sheep, Soviet Russia, through the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann then pushed for Germany to rejoin the European diplomatic world now centered in Geneva, petitioning to join the League for the first time in 1924. Germany's demand for a permanent seat on the League's Council and pushback from former Entente powers meant that Germany's membership was delayed for two years. The Locarno treaties finally paved the way for Germany to join the League in 1926.<sup>30</sup>

As Germany's admission to the League appeared on the horizon, the German Foreign Office readied proposals on the delegation the country would dispatch to the 1926 League Assembly. This was to be Germany's official debut at the biggest event on the international diplomatic calendar, so the Foreign Office poured time and energy into the proposals that officials drafted for the foreign minister. The League's Covenant limited each state to three official delegates, but the Assembly's rules permitted three substitute delegates and an unlimited number of technical advisors. Substitute delegates and technical advisors could, however, represent their country in the Assembly's committee meetings.<sup>31</sup> Since committees met simultaneously, many countries sponsored large delegations so they would be represented in the Assembly's six major committees and any specialized commissions.<sup>32</sup> When the Foreign Office proposed potential delegation members for Germany's first appearance at the League, the goal was to have one main delegate and one expert assigned to each of the Assembly's six committees, so the delegation had space for twelve members, supported by a whole entourage of typists, translators, and support staff.<sup>33</sup>

Bureaucrats at the German Foreign Office drew up three lists of proposed delegates to send to Geneva, and each list represented a

30 For an overview of this diplomatic history, see Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (New York, 1978), 498-533.

31 Burton, *The Assembly of the League of Nations*, 96-97.

32 Marbeau, *La Société des Nations*, 68.

33 Aufzeichnung betreffend die Zusammenstellung der deutschen Delegation für die Bundesversammlung 1926, R 96940, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

different way to think about who should represent Germany abroad. The first list was “selected purely on the basis of one’s portfolio and primarily takes into consideration the topics that will presumably be addressed [in the individual committees].” This list privileged professional bureaucrats and diplomats at the Foreign Office who specialized in a specific topic. The proposal was that consuls would be sent to some committees, the state secretary to another, and the foreign minister would lead the delegation; this plan was in the style of ministerial delegations that other countries dispatched to the League Assembly. This is the type of delegation we see most in our world today, and perhaps the prominent place that the Foreign Office civil servants gave this proposal in their presentation to Stresemann hints that this was their preference.<sup>34</sup>

The two other proposals attempted to incorporate “as much as possible all parties, including the parties just to the right and left of the government that are not in the cabinet.” One list included only the foreign minister and members of the Reichstag who represented the governing parties, along with the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which were not in the cabinet at the time. Another list from the Foreign Office tried to balance party politics with incorporating cabinet members and included government ministers based on their party affiliation, alongside token representatives from the conservative DNVP and the socialist SPD; unlike the first two proposals, this list put forward an exclusively ministerial delegation ditching both professional diplomats and parliamentarians.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann went with the most parliamentary delegation to the League Assembly that was possible; he invited parliamentarians rather than ministers to Geneva. The minutes of the German cabinet show very little engagement with this appointment of delegates. In the cabinet discussion, one minister asked that an expert from his ministry be added to the team, but then the minutes simply record: “The *cabinet* accepts the recommendations of the Foreign Office.”<sup>36</sup> The decision had essentially been left up to Stresemann, who did not explicitly lay out his reasoning for the whole cabinet. After the Assembly, a state secretary reported back to the cabinet: “the composition [of the delegation] was a particularly good one, especially because of the particular connections and relationships in Geneva, where it is not only the politics of ministers that matter, but issues are worked back and forth through

34 Aufzeichnung betreffend die Zusammenstellung der deutschen Delegation für die Bundesversammlung 1926, R 96940, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin.

35 Aufzeichnung betreffend die Zusammenstellung der deutschen Delegation für die Bundesversammlung 1926, R 96940, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin.

36 Günter Abramowski, ed, *Akten der Reichskanzlei: Die Kabinette Marx III und IV*, Band 1 (Boppard am Rhein, 1982), 184.

journalists, deputies, parliamentarians, [and] friends of the individual delegations. It was shown to be highly useful also to have German parliamentarians there.”<sup>37</sup> Access to this informal diplomatic world in which parliamentarians participated could have been one reason for Stresemann’s decision to go with a parliamentary delegation, or perhaps he wanted to follow the precedent set by countries like Sweden, Denmark, and France, which often dispatched a number of parliamentarians from the leading parties.<sup>38</sup>

Stresemann’s decision to build a Reichstag-heavy delegation also conveniently made him the most influential delegate, since he was the only member of the German cabinet in Geneva. This delegation thus centralized control of foreign policy around Stresemann, rather than ceding power to other ministers. Any professional diplomats who went to the League served in Stresemann’s ministry, and the parliamentarians were only amateur diplomats unable to challenge his expertise or authority. In subsequent yearly reports to the cabinet, Stresemann continued to echo the benefits of a mixed German delegation that included parliamentarians: “in comparison to the delegations of other Great Powers [Germany’s] was assembled particularly well.”<sup>39</sup> It just so happened that having members of the Reichstag from various parties as his fellow delegates bolstered Stresemann’s own control of the delegation and German foreign policy.

### III. German parliamentarians as delegates in Geneva and mounting domestic criticism

Dispatching members of the Reichstag rather than ministers or professional diplomats to the League of Nations encountered pushback in Germany as soon as the delegation took up its work in 1926. The Bavarian state representative in Berlin communicated to the Chancellery that “[s]ending parliamentarians to Geneva has brought about concern in a number of circles in Bavaria that surprisingly enough has not yet been expressed in the [national] press.” This report mentioned principled constitutional opposition in Bavarian newspapers to “entrusting parts of the Reichstag with the roles of the executive.” The state government also took a hard line against the “fusion of the legislature and executive.” The Bavarian official pointed out that the other republican legislative body, the Reichsrat, in which the German states were represented, had not been included in the delegation to Geneva.<sup>40</sup> The self-interested implication was that members of the Reichsrat — which would likely include a Bavarian — should have been considered if the cabinet insisted on sending legislators.

37 “[Genfer Verhandlungen.]” in “Akten der Reichskanzlei. Weimarer Republik” online, accessed 20 Sep 2017, [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma31p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_83/para3\\_1.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma31p/kap1_2/kap2_83/para3_1.html)

38 Burton, *The Assembly of the League of Nations*, 98.

39 “Bericht über die Genfer Völkerbundstagung” in “Akten der Reichskanzlei. Weimarer Republik” online, accessed 20 Sep 2017, [https://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma32p/kap1\\_1/kap2\\_72/para3\\_1.html](https://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma32p/kap1_1/kap2_72/para3_1.html)

40 R 43-I/2242, Bl. 304-305 quoted in “Akten der Reichskanzlei. Weimarer Republik” online, accessed 21 Sep 2017, [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma31p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_83/para3\\_1.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma31p/kap1_2/kap2_83/para3_1.html)

The decision to dispatch parliamentarians was also opposed by elements within the German political parties asked to contribute members to the Assembly delegation. When Stresemann's Foreign Office approached the polyglot history professor and DNVP Reichstag member Otto Hoetzsch to serve as a substitute delegate and as Germany's lead representative on the League's budget committee, the DNVP's chairman reached out to the Foreign Office directly with a general argument against parliamentarians going to the League at all. The DNVP leader enumerated current political disagreements with the cabinet's policies and objected to sending Hoetzsch or any other parliamentarian to Geneva to support the standpoint of a cabinet in which the party was not represented.<sup>41</sup> Within a year, in 1927, the DNVP's principled objection to sending parliamentarians to Geneva evaporated, since by then the DNVP had joined the German cabinet. Hoetzsch, who had been asked not to go to the League by the party leadership in 1926, showed up in person at the Foreign Office in June 1927 to express his committee preferences for the upcoming Assembly.<sup>42</sup> Soon thereafter, the DNVP party in the Reichstag approved Hoetzsch's attendance.<sup>43</sup> The following year, however, the DNVP once again refused to send a delegate to Geneva. Elections in May 1928 dealt a blow to the party and brought a grand coalition under a socialist chancellor to power. The DNVP was again excluded from the government, and when the Foreign Office approached a DNVP politician about attending the Assembly in 1928, he refused.<sup>44</sup> Attendance at the League's Assembly by a conservative DNVP parliamentarian was thus wholly contingent on whether the party was in government or not. The DNVP's objections were couched in principled terms, but in reality, political participation in the cabinet determined their willingness to dispatch someone to Geneva.

Unlike the DNVP, the SPD sent a representative to the League's assemblies starting in 1926, even when the socialists were not represented in the German cabinet. The socialist who consistently attended the Assembly was Rudolf Breitscheid.<sup>45</sup> Breitscheid came from a liberal middle-class background, studying in Marburg, joining a *Burschenschaft*, completing a dissertation on colonial economics, and then working as a liberal journalist during the waning years of the Kaiserreich. After pitched arguments within the Wilhelmine liberal political camp, Breitscheid turned his back on the liberals to join the Social Democrats during the First World War. During the Weimar years, he was actually much more oriented towards the left flank

41 Fritz T. Epstein, "Hoetzsch, Otto" in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 9 (1972), [https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118838180.html#ndbcontent;Westarp to AA, likely Bülow, 26 Aug 1926, R 96940, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin](https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118838180.html#ndbcontent;Westarp%20to%20AA,%20likely%20B%C3%BClow,%2026%20Aug%201926,%20R%2096940,%20Politisches%20Archiv%20des%20Ausw%C3%A4rtigen%20Amts-Berlin).

42 Bülow, Aktennotiz, 1 Jun 1927, R 96941, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin.

43 Hoetzsch to Stresemann, 28 Jul 1927, R 96941, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin.

44 Lindeiner-Wildau to Schubert, 22 Aug 1928, R 96942, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin.

45 "List of Assembly Delegates and Substitutes," League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>

of the SPD. Breitscheid rose through the ranks of the parliamentary party and became an important foreign policy spokesman for the SPD.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the biggest socialist opponent of sending parliamentarians to the League was Rudolf Breitscheid himself, who protested against the practice every year. Breitscheid's concern was that the socialists were being



used as fig leaves by conservative governments and got little in return. Breitscheid's objections to sending parliamentarians to Geneva gained traction within the SPD in 1927, and Foreign Minister Stresemann personally reached out to the SPD's leadership to argue that the socialist participation was crucial for German foreign policy success: "Precisely because at this very moment as we await important decisions, the Social Democrats staying away [from Geneva] could be easily used by the French right to draw certain conclusions." Stresemann invoked the famous historian Leopold von Ranke: "For this very important conference, let the phrase 'primacy of foreign policy' [*Primat der Außenpolitik*] guide your decisions."<sup>47</sup> With lofty language, Stresemann called on the SPD to cast aside domestic political concerns and select someone to attend the Assembly.

Stresemann's letter was discussed at a meeting of the SPD's party leadership. Breitscheid was not in Berlin to make his case opposing his own appointment as a League delegate, but the party leaders considered Breitscheid's objections and rejected them. The SPD's two main arguments for continued participation at the League were

**Figure 1. Rudolf Breitscheid (center) and two French socialist politicians in conversation during a League of Nations Assembly session in Geneva (September 1928). Private conversations and behind-the-scenes deals were a feature of interwar diplomacy in Geneva, and elected parliamentarians had access to different international networks than foreign ministers or professional diplomats.**  
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46 For more on Breitscheid, see William Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar*

*Republic, 1929-1933* (Lanham, MD, 2009), 48-69, and Peter Pistorius, "Rudolf Breitscheid, 1874-1944:

Ein biographischer Beitrag zur deutschen Parteiengeschichte," PhD diss., (Universität zu Köln, 1970).

47 Gustav Stresemann to Müller, 30 Jul 1927, N 2200/2, Nachlass Hermann Müller, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

rooted in party-political concerns. The first was the fear that if the SPD did not send someone to Geneva and negotiations were unsuccessful, the conservative German cabinet would blame the lack of progress on the SPD's absence. Second, the SPD leaders looked to the efforts of Dutch socialists to encourage the conservative Dutch government to send Dutch social democratic politicians to the League Assembly. Breitscheid's presence at the League would strengthen the Dutch claim by showing that opposition socialist politicians attended and performed their duties well at the League Assembly.<sup>48</sup> Despite the SPD party leadership's decision to continue sending a socialist German parliamentarian to the League, Breitscheid did not let the issue rest; behind the scenes, he continued raising objections to sending parliamentarians who were not from the governing coalition to the League. Publicly, however, Breitscheid acquiesced to the SPD leadership's decision.<sup>49</sup> Confirming his attendance at the League Assembly one year, he wrote to the state secretary in the Foreign Office: "As a good soldier, I must obey and push aside my reservations about which you already know."<sup>50</sup>

In practical terms, what did it mean for Germany to send a delegation of parliamentarians to Geneva for the Assembly? Why did the DNVP and Rudolf Breitscheid of the SPD find it so repugnant? Officially, German parliamentarians were considered substitute delegates. Because the number of full delegates to the Assembly was restricted to three, the German Foreign Office ensured the three main delegates were the foreign minister and two high-ranking bureaucrats. Parliamentarians were substitutes, but they still had a role to play as the lead German representative in Assembly committee meetings. However, not being full delegates seemed to some parliamentarians to be a slight.<sup>51</sup>

During the twice-daily German delegation meetings in Geneva for discussing common positions on Assembly business, the members of the Reichstag were presented with a draft proposal or position that had been worked up in advance by the Foreign Office. Breitscheid complained that the parliamentarians often lacked any information on the process of how these positions were developed. The German delegation was also not always unanimous in its decisions; however, the foreign minister had the upper hand, since the two leading civil servants from the Foreign Office were the only other full delegates. "Both civil servant delegates felt like subordinates in the delegation meetings and did not express opinions that diverged from those of their superior."<sup>52</sup> This set-up meant that the foreign minister had a

48 Abschrift: Müller to Breitscheid, 3 Aug 1927, N 2200/2, Nachlass Hermann Müller, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

49 Breitscheid to Müller, 8 Aug 1927 and Müller to Breitscheid, 10 Aug 1927, N 2200/2, Nachlass Hermann Müller, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

50 Breitscheid to Schubert, 3 Aug 1927, N 2200/2, Nachlass Hermann Müller, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

51 Letter from Breitscheid, n.d., NY 4126/23, Nachlass Paul Levi, SAPMO, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

52 "Aus meinen Erlebnissen beim Völkerbund," n.d., N 1626/3, Nachlass Thusnelda Lang-Brumann, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz; Letter from Breitscheid, n.d., NY 4126/23, Nachlass Paul Levi, SAPMO, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

set bloc of three full delegates loyal to him. The SPD made clear in advance that “by agreeing to participate in the delegation we are, of course, not taking responsibility for the politics of the cabinet.”<sup>53</sup> However, Breitscheid pointed to this rigged system, with the foreign minister’s viewpoint determining the positions of the civil servants and thus the entire delegation, as an example of how parliamentarians were co-opted into the government’s standpoint.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, however, Stresemann complained that the parliamentarian delegates did not always present a united public face for the entire delegation. When Breitscheid was asked to comment on the news of the day by journalists during the Assembly in 1927, he “expressed himself critically to others outside the delegation”; Stresemann characterized this as “unfortunate,” emphasizing the importance on presenting a united front to the outside world.<sup>55</sup> Both Breitscheid and Stresemann’s own characterizations of the delegation reveal that it was not as united or uniform as the German Foreign Office had hoped.

Nevertheless, having German parliamentarians attend the League of Nations Assembly meant that the Reichstag’s political parties were keyed in to what was happening diplomatically. For instance, Breitscheid once wrote directly from the Hotel Métropol in Geneva to the socialist leadership in Germany about a curious conversation he had with Aristide Briand, the French foreign minister. Breitscheid had met privately with Briand for about 45 minutes, and Briand expressed the opinion that “if you in Germany had a left-leaning, democratic government, the Rhineland issue would be solved in three months.” Essentially, Briand offered to end the French military occupation of the Rhineland if Germany changed its political direction. This was a concession Foreign Minister Stresemann had been trying to win from Briand for some time and one that might benefit the SPD’s standing in German politics. Rather than capitalizing on this information for an internal party-political reason, Breitscheid dutifully communicated the conversation to Stresemann, who used this knowledge as a starting point for a future negotiation with the French. However, Breitscheid also wrote from Geneva to the SPD to keep his socialist parliamentary colleagues in the loop.<sup>56</sup> Parliamentarians’ participation at the League Assembly tied a political party more closely to the cabinet’s diplomatic approach — something Breitscheid objected to — but it also meant that political parties were kept well informed and personally involved in Germany’s foreign policy.

As happened in this private conversation with Aristide Briand, a delegation of parliamentarians could help open diplomatic doors

53 Abschrift: Müller to Breitscheid, 3 Aug 1927, N 2200/2, Nachlass Hermann Müller, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

54 Letter from Breitscheid, n.d., NY 4126/23, Nachlass Paul Levi, SAPMO, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

55 “Bericht über die Genfer Völkerbundstagung,” “Akten der Reichskanzlei. Weimarer Republik” online, accessed 13 Jun 2019, [https://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma32p/kap1\\_1/kap2\\_72/para3\\_1.html](https://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma32p/kap1_1/kap2_72/para3_1.html)

56 Breitscheid to Müller, 8 Sep 1927, N 2200/2, Nachlass Hermann Müller, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

for German foreign policy. However, Breitscheid never let up on his criticism that serving in a delegation representing a cabinet of which he was not a member meant that he lost too much political freedom: “The parliamentary members [of the delegation], who in the end cannot completely forget their own party affiliation, sometimes end up in all the more difficult and possibly desperate situations if they are not informed from the very beginning about all the details of an initiative. If we do not simply want to be reduced to being the mouthpiece of official government policy, there will always be differences [in our actions].” Breitscheid was especially worried about the balancing act required of parliamentarians as diplomats: “If he [a parliamentarian-delegate] only parrots the official line of the bureaucrats or of the delegation in his many private conversations, he just becomes a robot. If he expresses independent points of view, then there is always the danger of being portrayed as a dangerous obstructionist.”<sup>57</sup>

The question of whether or not to continue sending German parliamentarians to Geneva was discussed in the cabinet after Stresemann’s death in 1929 and again after a conservative minority government took over from the grand coalition in 1930. The cabinet records reflected growing concern about sending parliamentarians to the League, and ministers mused about transitioning to sending only cabinet representatives.<sup>58</sup> In the end, however, the German government abandoned sending parliamentarians to the Assembly only in 1931 when Rudolf Breitscheid finally persuaded the SPD to refuse to send a German socialist to Geneva. Breitscheid’s persistence paid off, and he successfully convinced his socialist colleagues that it was impossible for him to represent the German cabinet’s position on a customs union with Austria at the League Assembly. The SPD backed Breitscheid’s position, and the party also rejected the government’s suggestion of at least sending a Social Democrat to Geneva among the technical advisors. Breitscheid helped torpedo the entire delegation’s make-up when he pointed out to the Foreign Office that if the government sent parliamentarians only from right-wing parties, without any socialists in the delegation: “Domestically and abroad, one would get the impression that the government was making a concession to the right, or that it wanted to orient itself towards the right.”<sup>59</sup>

As a result, less than a week after Breitscheid announced that no socialist would go to the League, the German foreign minister decided “not to include parliamentarians or former parliamentarians in the

57 Letter from Breitscheid, n.d., NY 4126/23, Nachlass Paul Levi, SAPMO, Bundesarchiv-Berlin-Lichterfelde.

58 Vermerk, 9 Oct 1930, R 96944, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

59 Aufzeichnung „Ganz geheim!“, 6 Aug 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

delegation to Geneva.”<sup>60</sup> Several lawmakers who had been planning to attend the Assembly were abruptly told that they were no longer needed. One of these rebuffed parliamentary delegates, Thusnelda Lang-Brumann of the conservative Bavarian People’s Party (BVP), took to the radio to speculate about the reason she thought the government was not sending parliamentarians to the Assembly: “[The Chancellor] seems to think that parliamentarians can pursue their own political goals in Geneva.”<sup>61</sup> When read beside archival evidence about Breitscheid’s opposition to the practice of sending parliamentarians to Geneva, Lang-Brumann’s comments did not capture the whole situation. In fact, Breitscheid and others’ disappointment that they were unable to pursue their own political goals in Geneva and were instead too closely tied to the standpoints of the government led to the SPD finally pulling the plug on the practice of using members of the Reichstag as diplomats. Although other countries, including France, continued sending parliamentarian-dominated delegation to Geneva until the eve of the Second World War, Germany elected to stop sending legislators in 1931, in large part because of the party-political objections of the SPD, mixed with the specter of a foreign policy disaster if only right-wing parliamentarians attended.<sup>62</sup> Thus, domestic political issues in the early 1930s determined the composition of the German delegation far more than international political concerns.

### III. Women’s organizations and female parliamentarians at the League of Nations

Just as nineteenth-century aristocratic norms in diplomatic practice were giving way to new ideas of who should represent the nation on the international stage, the interwar years marked a moment of transition for women in politics throughout large parts of Europe. Movements for women’s suffrage gained steam during the First World War, and there was a rapid expansion of voting rights for women in the wake of the conflict. Postwar elections in Central Europe in particular brought a surprisingly large number of women to political office. However, the interwar expansion of political participation for women was not universal. Although German women, for instance, made great political strides forward, on the other side of the Rhine French women could not even vote, much less serve in parliament.<sup>63</sup>

When women entered national political life following the First World War, there was a similar push for them to take an active role on the

60 Bülow to Geheimrat von Kamphövener, 12 Aug 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts-Berlin.

61 “Aus meinen Erlebnissen beim Völkerbund,” n.d., N 1626/3, Nachlass Thusnelda Lang-Brumann, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz.

62 “List of Assembly Delegates and Substitutes,” League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>

63 “France marks 70 years of women’s voting rights,” France 24, created 21 Apr 2014, <http://www.france24.com/en/20140421-france-womens-voting-right-anniversary>

international stage. An organized transnational women's movement, largely spearheaded by wealthy Anglo-American women, had existed since the end of the nineteenth century and pushed for an expansion of women's participation in the new international institutions of the interwar years.<sup>64</sup> In 1919, a legal guarantee regarding women's political participation was written into the Covenant of the League of Nations. After the first draft of the treaty had not mentioned women at all, representatives from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and the International Council of Women lobbied the Allied leaders to include guarantees regarding women's participation in League institutions directly in the Covenant.<sup>65</sup> In the end, their activism paid off, and Article 7 in the Covenant was explicit: "All positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women."<sup>66</sup> One international women's activist called Article 7 "women's great charter in the League."<sup>67</sup> Practically speaking, however, this article did not bring about the millennium. Although Dame Rachel Crowdy took the helm of the League's social issues section and made history as the first woman to lead a major department of the Secretariat, she was also the only woman who did this.<sup>68</sup> While many women were appointed to the League's civil service section, they were often clustered in clerical positions or jobs associated with "women's issues," reflecting the gendered expectations of the day.<sup>69</sup> Although no woman ever held a seat on the League's Council, over time, there was movement towards reserving seats and positions for women at various multilateral conferences hosted by the League of Nations.<sup>70</sup> This trend of including more women in the work of the League was not brought about by male politicians intuiting that the spirit of the age was turning in favor of women's political participation but came about because of the constant pressure of organized national and international women's groups on governments and political leaders.

The very first League Assembly included three women—Anna Bugge Wicksell of Sweden, Kristine Elisabeth Bonnevie of Norway, and Henni Forchhammer of Denmark. Anna Bugge Wicksell was a Norwegian-born Swedish lawyer who later served as the first woman on the League's Permanent Mandates Commission Kristine Bonnevie was a Norwegian biologist and the country's first female professor; she also served a term in the Norwegian Storting before going to Geneva as a delegate in 1920. Both Wicksell and Bonnevie served as substitute delegates; Henni Forchhammer was officially a "Technical Advisor on Women's Questions" for the Danish delegation.

64 Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, "Rethinking the History of Internationalism" in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds. (Cambridge, 2017), 4-5; Deborah Stienstra, *Women's Movements and International Organizations* (New York, 1994), 48-61.

65 Margery Corbett Ashby, "Preface," in D.M. Northcroft, *Women at Work in the League of Nations* (London, 1924), 1.

66 "Frauen im Völkerbund" Manuscript, n.d., N 1626/3, Thuseld Lang-Brumann, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz; Burton, *The Assembly of the League of Nations*, 98.

67 Ashby, Preface, 1.

68 "Crowdy, Dame Rachel Eleanor (1884-1964), social reformer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed on July 29, 2019, [https://www.oxforddnb.com.unr.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32647](https://www.oxforddnb.com/unr.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32647).

69 Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, 1997), 215.

70 On reserving seats at conferences for women, see League of Nations, *Official Journal* (April 1927), 388-389; Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 215.

Nevertheless, Forchhammer was the first woman to speak to the Assembly, delivering an address on the trafficking of women and children. These three Scandinavian women returned to the Assembly in 1921 and were joined by the Romanian substitute delegate Elena Văcărescu/Hélène Vacaresco. Văcărescu was a French-educated poet from a wealthy Romanian aristocratic family who lived in Paris. Her presence at the League was particularly surprising, since women did not even have the right to vote in Romania until later in the 1920s.<sup>71</sup> However, like her Scandinavian colleagues, Văcărescu became a perennial figure at the League's Assembly.<sup>72</sup>

The women at the League of Nations, including those who were not parliamentarians, often attended the Assembly because of domestic political machinations that were similar to those that brought elected parliamentarians to the League. Once a woman had attended the Assembly on behalf of her country, a precedent was set, and that spot in the delegation virtually became reserved as a women's seat. Sometimes, as in the case of the earliest female delegates to the League Assembly, the same women were appointed to the Assembly year after year. This is similar to Rudolf Breitscheid becoming the German cabinet's go-to socialist to send off to the League every autumn. However, some countries wanted to send a different woman to the League each year; this practice was followed by Australia and the United Kingdom, both of which included one woman in their delegations starting in 1922.<sup>73</sup> Dispatching a female delegate to the Assembly became such standard practice, that when the British foreign secretary wrote in 1936 to the prime minister enumerating which ministers should be sent to Geneva in the British delegation to the League Assembly, he concluded: "In addition, there will have to be one woman delegate, who would normally be a Member of Parliament."<sup>74</sup>

In Germany, domestic pressure played the biggest role in determining which women would represent the country at the League. In 1926 — Germany's first year in the League — one woman was among the technical advisors dispatched to Geneva, almost by happenstance. This official was Gertrud Bäumer, one of the few high-ranking female civil servants who served as a department head in the German ministry of the interior. Bäumer had founded German women's organizations, edited feminist publications, and was the longtime partner of Helene Lange, the doyenne of the German women's rights movement. In 1926, Bäumer was sent to the League of Nations Assembly to work with Rudolf Breitscheid as the expert advising him

71 Northcroft, *Women at Work in the League of Nations*, 2-9.

72 Constantin Jordan, "Hélène Vacaresco à la Société des Nations: autour d'une correspondance privée des années 1926-1927," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (2010): 287-309, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-446699>

73 Memo "LEAGUE OF NATIONS ASSEMBLY", n.d., A 981 / LEAGUE ASS MISC 1, National Archives of Australia-Canberra; Women Representatives of Commonwealth of Australia at Assembly of the League of Nations, n.d., A 981 / LEAGUE ASS MISC 3, National Archives of Australia-Canberra; "List of Assembly Delegates and Substitutes," League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>

74 Anthony Eden to Prime Minister (Stanley Baldwin), 15 June 1936, FO/954/14B, pp. 553-556, National Archives-Kew.

in the Assembly committee on humanitarian issues. As a technical expert, Bäumer took part in the meetings of the committee but not in the private discussions of the German delegation. Most importantly, however, Bäumer was not only a bureaucrat; she was also a member of the Reichstag for the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP).<sup>75</sup>

When Bäumer returned to Germany after the 1926 Assembly that she had attended in her capacity as a bureaucratic expert, she put on her politician hat for a frank discussion with DDP members. In this conversation, Bäumer directly criticized German policy at the League, expressed skepticism about representatives from other countries, and accused some of the Assembly committees of dilettantism. When Bäumer's criticisms were made public, rather than treating her like a fellow parliamentarian and colleague, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann challenged her as a subordinate bureaucrat, complaining to her civil service superior at the ministry of the interior and asking him to raise these concerns formally with Bäumer.<sup>76</sup> Stresemann's anger explains why Bäumer was not invited back to the League in future years and illustrates the tension that could emerge in dispatching civil servants as delegates. For 1927, someone else needed to be found to serve in the social and humanitarian committee, where — as a result of the gendered expectations of the period — women were most often assigned.<sup>77</sup>

Bäumer's fall from Stresemann's good graces coincided with the Bavarian state government's previously mentioned opposition to sending parliamentarians to the League of Nations.<sup>78</sup> This confluence of events led to Thusnelda Lang-Brumann taking Bäumer's spot in the humanitarian committee. Lang-Brumann was a teacher, had been active in Munich's city politics, and was a member of the conservative Catholic regional Bavarian BVP party. She seemed perfect for the German Foreign Office in 1927: she was a woman, she was not Gertrud Bäumer, she was a member of the Reichstag, and she was Bavarian. Even though the BVP represented only a small part of the governing coalition, adding a BVP member of the Reichstag would curry favor within the parliamentary party and would hopefully allay the concerns of the Bavarian state government.<sup>79</sup> Adding another female member of the Reichstag seemed necessary, since Bäumer attended the previous year and inadvertently set the precedent that at least one woman should be included in the delegation. After Lang-Brumann attended the Assembly and learned the ropes in Geneva in 1927, the Foreign Office kept reappointing her, and most of the other

75 Stresemann to Dr. Külz, 23 Oct 1926, R 83524, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin; Ingrid Sharp, "An Unbroken Family?" Gertrud Bäumer and the German Women's Movement's Return to International Work in the 1920s," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 2 (2017): 245-261, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1080/09612025.2016.1181337>.

76 Stresemann to Dr. Külz, 23 Oct 1926, R 83524, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

77 Northcroft, *Women at Work in the League of Nations*, 5.

78 See, R 43-1/2242, Bl. 304-305 quoted in "Akten der Reichskanzlei. Weimarer Republik" online, accessed 21 Sep 2017, [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma31p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_83/para3\\_1.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/ma3/ma31p/kap1_2/kap2_83/para3_1.html)

79 Thusnelda Lang-Brumann, Datenbank der deutschen Parlamentsabgeordneten, accessed 2 Feb 2018, <http://www.reichstag-abgeordnetendatenbank.de>.

parliamentary delegates, almost out of inertia, for each subsequent Assembly.<sup>80</sup>

Beginning in 1930, however, German women's organizations started pushing back against Lang-Brumann, hoping that another German woman, who was more active in the world of liberally-minded German women's organizations, would take her place. Gertrud Bäumer, whom Lang-Brumann had replaced at the League, was very active in these national and international women's organizations. Bäumer reported to a German diplomat in 1930 that at an international women's association meeting there was a debate on a draft resolution "that the [national] associations attempt to ensure that their governments dispatch female delegates to the League of Nations who are experts." Bäumer and the other German women at this meeting took the resolution to be directed against Lang-Brumann and fought hard to convince the association not to pass it.<sup>81</sup> However, the fact that Bäumer reported this failed resolution to a German diplomat, knowing that her message would be recorded and sent to the Foreign Office, suggests that she and German women's organizations already had Lang-Brumann in their sights and wanted her replaced with a woman more active in the German women's movement.

When the foreign minister finally decided to end parliamentarians' participation in the League Assembly "due to general political concerns" in 1931, this provided the Foreign Office with the opportunity to find someone other than Lang-Brumann for the delegation.<sup>82</sup> The Foreign Office's state secretary asked bureaucrats to reach out to the German women's organizations for a list of potential delegates to the League, and five women's names were passed along to the Foreign Office.<sup>83</sup> Because parliamentarians were not being dispatched to Geneva anymore, "an old desire of the women's organizations to select a person from their ranks [as a delegate] could be easily fulfilled. Earlier we were unable to accommodate the wishes of the women's associations."<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, the Foreign Office appointed Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, who was active in the German Association of Women Academics but had no political party affiliation.<sup>85</sup>

One is tempted to agree with the German women's organizations that Lang-Brumann was a token female parliamentarian sent to the League because she checked a number of political boxes at the right time. However, this does not do justice to Lang-Brumann's commitment to her work or to her pioneering position as a woman at the League of Nations. Her devotion to internationalism and to the

80 "List of Assembly Delegates and Substitutes," League of Nations Photo Archive, last modified October 2002, <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>

81 Excerpt from letter from Generalkonsul Völckers, 29 Apr 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

82 von Kamphoevener to Lang-Brumann, 14 Aug 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

83 Konzept, v. Kamphoevener to Staatssekretär, 13 Aug 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

84 Bülow to Reichsminister, 13 Aug 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

85 Konzept, v. Kamphoevener to Staatssekretär, 13 Aug 1931, R 96945, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin.

League is evident in her papers, where there is an unsigned manuscript entitled “Frauen im Völkerbund” (Women at the League of Nations) in which someone wrote caringly about all the female delegates at the League — from Scandinavia to Australia — and especially highlighted Lang-Brumann’s work in Geneva. Lang-Brumann also gave a rare radio interview about attending the League Assembly, the transcript of which is preserved in the archive.<sup>86</sup> Lang-Brumann took her role at the League seriously, despite the machinations at a party-political level that pushed her into the role as a convenient Bavarian woman in 1927 and eventually ushered her off the stage in 1931.

### Conclusion

In the wake of the First World War, the world of international diplomacy was in flux, and many countries used this freedom to bring new groups onto the global stage. Rather than stuffy, unelected aristocrats, democratically empowered ministers traveled to foreign capitals for negotiations. Men and women who were elected parliamentarians traveled to Geneva to represent their countries at the annual Assembly of the League of Nations. Liberal female activists who had long built international connections to advocate for women’s suffrage were appointed as specialists for multilateral conferences. During the 1920s in particular, there was an obvious international trend towards appointing more and more non-traditional diplomats to national delegations at the League of Nations. This was undoubtedly part of an interwar *Zeitgeist* encouraging experimentation on the international stage. This is analogous to the experimentation in politics, culture, and society that historians of Weimar have studied in recent decades.

However, as is evident in this German case, the underlying causes for these international delegate appointments were rooted far more in domestic political contexts than in copying the decisions of other countries. The historian Norbert Götz has explored the Scandinavian delegations to the League of Nations, which also included both parliamentarians and women starting with the First Assembly of the League. Götz identifies a “coincidence of institutional similarities” challenging the contemporary idea of a progressive “Nordic model” of international diplomacy. The Danish decision to send an opposition parliamentarian to the League was designed to tamp down opposition objections that the government was too pro-German, and pushback

86 See the folder N 1626/3, Nachlass Thusnelda Lang-Brumann, Bundesarchiv-Koblenz.

in the Norwegian Storting led to parliamentarians attending the League from Norway.<sup>87</sup> What Götz discovered in Scandinavia was true in Germany too. The politics of the early 1920s that led to delegations made up of parliamentarians and including women resulted from immediate domestic political concerns. These decisions then set national precedents about the composition of diplomatic delegations in the future. There was never a universal model that demanded dispatching parliamentarians or women to the League, but there was a certain path dependency for delegation composition after women or elected parliamentarians had been appointed one year.

On the whole, this article has not highlighted ideological arguments for including parliamentarians in national delegations on the international stage. The same can be said for principled debates about why women — either elected politicians or from the organized women's movement — should represent their countries. Perhaps to the chagrin of historians of political thought, the German bureaucrats deciding who to dispatch to Geneva did not consider robust theoretical arguments about who should represent the nation abroad at any length, at least they did not write memos about these concerns. Of course, these overarching ideas are implicit in any slate of delegates put forward for an international conference. Should delegations be dominated by the executive in the form of cabinet ministers, or should they give voice to the parliamentary opposition, or should they do both as Stresemann's delegations did at the League of Nations? In our diplomatic present, these questions have been answered in favor of the executive, supported by a professional diplomatic corps. During the 1920s and 1930s, that conclusion was not foreordained. There was an interwar flexibility that enabled unlikely men and women to join the ranks of official diplomats and delegates. The fact that domestic *Realpolitik* determined who those people would be does not diminish the innovation and experimentation during this period.

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87 Norbert Götz, "Blue-eyed angels' at the League of Nations: The Genevese construction of Norden," in *Regional Cooperation and International Organizations: The Nordic model in transnational alignment*, eds. Norbert Götz and Heidi Haggren (London, 2009), 30-32.

