



Representing International Organisations in Word and Deed



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Laqua is Associate Professor of European History at Northumbria University, UK. He is the author of *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880–1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige* (2013). As a historian of modern and contemporary Europe, with a particular interest in movements and organisations whose activities transcended national boundaries, Daniel has worked on the causes promoted by socialists, anarchists, pacifists, humanitarians, student activists and anti-racist campaigners.

It is clear that many of the problems faced by our societies today require global responses – yet international cooperation continues to encounter manifold obstacles. This wider dilemma makes it highly relevant to examine past attempts to collaborate across national borders. Our new volume *International Organizations and Global Civil Society: Histories of the Union of International Associations* approaches internationalism from a historical perspective and thus makes a distinct contribution to a vibrant research field. Published by Bloomsbury in March 2019 and co-edited by Wouter Van Acker, Christophe Verbruggen and myself, the book uses the case of the Union of International Associations (UIA) to explore potential and pitfalls for the work of international organisations. The volume features the work of 15 authors whose expertise covers a range of disciplines and research areas: History, Political Science, International Relations, Library and Information Studies, Architecture, Historical Sociology and Digital Humanities.

A part of internationalism's history

For well over a century, the UIA has been engaged in substantial international documentation work. Moreover, throughout its history, it has actively cooperated with a variety of international bodies and associations. The UIA was formally established in 1910, with the Central Office of

International Institutions (1907) as its forerunner. Until the 1940s, the UIA was led by two individuals who were significant figures in their own right: Henri Lafontaine (1854-1943) and Paul Otlet (1868-1944). The former was a senator for the Belgian Workers' Party, a leading activist in the international peace movement and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (1913). The latter, a pioneering bibliographer whose original contribution to the theory and practice of knowledge organisation has received growing recognition in recent years. To them, the UIA was meant to play an active role in stimulating international cooperation. From the start, the organisation treated the growing number of international congresses and associations as expressions of “international life”. This project was intrinsic to one of the earliest ventures of the Central Office, the publication of a large-scale *Annuaire de la Vie Internationale*, and the legacies of this quest are manifest in the ongoing publication of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

Our volume covers the UIA's foundation and several ambitious undertakings in its early years – from the hosting of international gatherings to the campaign for a world capital. It also traces the UIA's reconstruction after the Second World War and its subsequent role as a data provider. Yet the book offers more than an institutional history. After all, the UIA operated within a wider

international landscape populated by institutions and activists. Accordingly, our volume discusses efforts to influence the League of Nations during the 1920s and 1930s, and it highlights the new frameworks established through and around the United Nations after the Second World War. Moreover, the UIA did not confine itself to addressing intergovernmental bodies: for example, chapters in our book examine ties between the UIA on the one side, and organisations established by feminists, urban reformers and philanthropists on the other. As such examples show, the UIA's history forms part of the broader history of internationalism, and it can therefore be used to shed light on the latter.

A broader view on the creation of knowledge about international organisations

There is a further dimension to our volume: the relevance of the UIA's data, which has proven a rich source for scholars in the field of International Relations. Our authors approach the organisation's datasets and publications from new angles, showing how one can use this material to illustrate patterns, developments and inequalities in the work of international organisations. Furthermore, several of our contributors consider the construction, uses and limitations of these datasets. We know that the collection of data is not a neutral endeavour. Indeed, the UIA's documentation and publication activities formed part of a wider project: it articulated and promoted a particular vision of global order – one in which associations and institutions were to play a major role. In this respect, our book raises important questions about the way knowledge about international organisations is being generated.



▼ Picture by Alina Grubnyak

