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A SKETCH OF THE INTERALLIED ORGANIZATIONS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR PERIOD AND THEIR RECORDS

THE creation of numerous interallied organizations during and after the first World War was one of the phenomena of the period. Not for a hundred years had anything like it been seen. Just as within the framework of the government of the United States, the demands of the times brought to light the inadequacy of old machinery, so in the field of international affairs the great powers found it difficult to operate through the usual diplomatic channels.[1] Thus the same period that witnessed the creation in Washington of the Relief Board, the Council of National Defense, the Committee on Public Information, the Fuel Administration, and many other emergency agencies, also witnessed the creation in Europe of various interallied bodies such as the Supreme War Council, the Allied Maritime Transport Council, and the Interallied Rhineland High Commission. Sir Maurice (now Lord) Hankey, the secretary of the British War Cabinet, attended no fewer than 488 international meetings between 1914 and 1920.[2] With such experience behind him he surely had some warrant for predicting that "diplomacy by conference has come to stay." The importance of international organizations was indeed well recognized at the time somewhat as it was in the post-Napoleonic period when Castlereagh tried to conduct European diplomacy by conference.

But apparently it was not recognized at the time nor has it been recognized since that the location and custody of the records of such bodies are also important. Every government that participates in an international organization ought to be in possession of the facts concerning the records created by such an organization. The archivist of

[1] Norman L. Hill, *The Public International Conference* (Stanford University, Calif., 1929), 13-15.

[2] Sir Maurice Hankey, *Diplomacy by Conference* (London, 1920), 3.

the United States, as the custodian of the noncurrent records of the United States government, should have the custody or know the location of the records created by all international organizations in which this government participated during and after the first World War. He lacks much of this information.[3]

An examination of a considerable number of books, pamphlets, and articles dealing more or less directly with the international organizations of the first World War period that appeared between the years 1920 and 1943, suggests that this lack of information is fairly universal. The reasons are not far to seek. During that time attention was focussed upon the records relating to the background of the war rather than upon the war itself; and several European governments in response to the current interest published volumes of selected documents on the pre-war period.[4] These same governments kept their foreign office records closed for the period after 1914 and indeed long before that year. In 1939 our State Department opened its records for the war years to a restricted group of persons. Since the international organizations by definition dealt with foreign affairs it followed naturally that their records also would be under restriction. Not until 1942 did the United States government begin to publish from the records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace a series of volumes containing documents created at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.[5] It was the first participating government to publish any of these papers. In such circumstances it would be strange rather than the reverse if information in regard to either location or contents of the official records of interallied bodies were generally available. Yet this information should rightfully be in the possession of all the governments concerned.

[3] The National Archives, *Handbook of Federal World War Agencies and Their Records, 1917-1921* (Washington, 1943), *passim*. This compilation contains brief articles on more than fifty international agencies.

[4] The three most notable series were: *Die grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914* (40 vols., Berlin, 1922-1927); *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London, 1926-); *Documents diplomatiques français, 1871-1914* (Paris, 1929-).

[5] State Department, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919. The Paris Peace Conference* (Washington, 1942-). Four volumes have appeared to date. Volumes I and II extend from the Armistice of November 11, 1918, to the first meeting of the Council of Ten on January 12, 1919; Volumes III and IV contain the minutes of the Council of Ten and the Council of Foreign Ministers. Professor Bernadotte E. Schmitt has recently hailed the appearance of the first two volumes in a review article entitled, "The Paris Peace Conference of 1919," *Journal of Modern History*, XVI (March, 1944), 49-59.

No doubt one of the reasons why the records of the international bodies have attracted little attention even in official circles is that the representative of each participating nation usually if not always maintained in his own files copies of documents created by or acted upon by the organization. In these cases the organization as such cannot be said to have had any records.

The Supreme War Council may be used as an example. This body, created at Rapallo on November 7, 1917, consisted of two representatives (one political, the other military) each from Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States. President Wilson designated Edward M. House and Tasker H. Bliss as the American representatives. The council normally met monthly at Versailles, France. There it established in permanent residence a British section, a French section, an Italian section, and an American section, each headed by the member of the council who was serving as his country's military representative. In accordance with this arrangement General Bliss headed the American section. It should be stated at this point that the military representatives held numerous meetings apart from the monthly meetings of the council.

In his report of February 6, 1920, on the Supreme War Council, which he submitted to both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of State, General Bliss took pains to describe the organization's system of record keeping.[6] At its second meeting (the first at which the American representatives were present), held in Versailles on December 1, 1917, the council provided for the establishment of a joint secretariat to maintain a "record of the discussions and decisions of the Supreme War Council and of the Military Representatives." The council's resolution outlining the duties of this secretariat reads as follows: "The permanent secretarial staff of the respective countries will, in concert, organize a Joint Secretarial Bureau for the production and distribution of the notices, agenda, protocols, and procès-verbaux of the Supreme War Council, and for such other collective business as it may be found desirable to entrust to it."[7]

In line with this resolution, each military representative designated a member of his staff to serve as secretary for his section. The four secretaries so named constituted the joint secretariat of the

[6] The text of this report is in State Department, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920* (Washington, 1940), II, 199-303.

[7] *Ibid.*, 238.

Supreme War Council. They proceeded to organize "a system of records and of preparing agenda" for the council "and all its immediately dependent agencies."

So much for plans and initial steps. Would they prove effective? Would a Britisher, a Frenchman, an Italian, and an American, each representing his own country, be able to develop jointly a workable system of record keeping for an international organization like the Supreme War Council? The answers to these questions are in the affirmative. General Bliss' description of the system and the reasons why it developed as it did will bear quotation. He wrote: "Since each section [of the Supreme War Council] necessarily had a considerable amount of correspondence with its own government and its own army headquarters which was of no interest to the other sections and in some cases of a character such that it could not properly be given to them, and since it was foreseen that upon the dissolution of the Supreme War Council each government would want a complete record of its operations, the idea of a single central room of archives or record files was from the very beginning considered inadvisable. Each section, therefore, kept its own records according to the methods in vogue in its own government service; joint records, such as minutes, joint notes, joint reports, etc., being made in quadruplicate and translations into the various languages compared by the four secretaries acting together. In this way there was an authenticated and identical copy of such joint records for file in each section."[8]

General Bliss is not clear in regard to the preparation of minutes of the meetings of the Supreme War Council. He appears to discuss only the minutes of the meetings of the four military representatives.[9] It is interesting to note that such minutes were not taken down at each meeting. Instead, the secretary whose chief had acted as chairman of a meeting (the military representatives held the position of chairman in rotation) drafted the minutes immediately thereafter and then circulated them among the different sections, usually within twenty-four hours of the close of the meeting. This first draft was subject to correction by the persons who participated in the meeting, "provided the corrections were submitted within a reasonable length of time." The final draft was signed by the military representatives in quadruplicate. They also signed the same number of copies of their

[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*, 239.

joint notes and recommendations. It may well be doubted that the documents created or acted upon at meetings of the council itself received the same attention. In all probability the four busy and ubiquitous political members, consisting of Colonel House and the prime ministers of Great Britain, France, and Italy, left to their military colleagues the task of signing final drafts in quadruplicate.

The Supreme War Council then did not create a single group of records. Each of its four sections maintained separate files, consisting of (1) official copies of minutes, resolutions, reports, notes, and other documents approved by the council as a whole or by the military representatives acting as a separate group, and (2) the records of the section acting as a separate unit. The records of the American section, comprising three four-drawer file cabinets, have been physically located in the National Archives building since the fall of 1943. It may be presumed that that part of its records falling within the first category is duplicated in London, in Paris, and in Rome. Of course only an actual inspection and comparison of the four groups of records would prove whether there is complete or merely partial duplication.

In his report on the Supreme War Council, General Bliss states that the methods in regard to records adopted by the council "were subsequently adhered to for the work of the Peace Conference."[10] At the first session of the peace conference, in truth, a set of rules of the conference was adopted which provided for the creation of a secretariat "to draw up the protocols of the sessions, classify the archives, provide for the administrative organization of the Conference and, generally, ensure the regular and punctual working of the services entrusted to it."[11]

This secretariat consisted of the secretary general, P. Dutasta, and one representative each of the United States, the British Empire, France, Italy, and Japan. The American representative was Joseph C. Grew. In examining this organization one detects a difference between it and that devised by the Supreme War Council to care for its records. The latter had a joint secretariat, not a secretariat headed by a secretary general. On paper at any rate the records system of the peace conference was one of central control. The rules indeed state specifically: "The head of the Secretariat [the Secretary

[10] *Ibid.*, 238.

[11] These rules are printed in State Department, *The Paris Peace Conference*, III, 172-175.

General] shall be responsible for the safe custody of the protocols and archives." It is not stated specifically that the records were to be placed in a central file room. Yet the archives were to be "accessible at all times to members of the Conference." How else could they have been thus accessible except in a central file room?

Whatever those who prepared the rules may have had in mind as to a central file room they indicated in plain language that "All petitions, memoranda, observations and documents addressed to the Conference by any persons other than the Plenipotentiaries must be received and classified by the Secretariat." Communications of "any political interest" were to be summarized in a list for circulation among all the plenipotentiaries. "All these documents shall be deposited in the archives."

A veil of mystery hangs over the eventual contents of the "archives" of the secretariat as a whole. It seems reasonably certain that such records do exist, probably in Paris, but just as certain that they include no documents of importance. The rules did not require the deposit of committee minutes in the archives. Moreover, each of the five great powers represented at the peace conference maintained its own group of records. The records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, which are preserved by the State Department in Washington, consist of 537 bound volumes.[12] Similar groups of records, it appears certain, are retained in London, Paris, Rome, and Tokyo.

In the case of miscellaneous minutes, petitions, and memoranda, such papers were more than likely addressed to individual plenipotentiaries or their national delegations rather than to the peace conference. Ray Stannard Baker has penned a vivid description of the varied petitions, resolutions, and letters that came personally to President Wilson before and during the peace conference. Doubtless similar, if less voluminous, documents could be found among the private papers of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Orlando, and others.

Indications are that the national delegations at the peace conference received copies of the minutes created by a particular commission, council, or committee only if one of its members served on that commission, council, or committee. For example, Japan should not possess a set of the minutes of the Council of Four because no repre-

[12] The National Archives, *Handbook of Federal World War Agencies and Their Records*, 22.

sentative of Japan participated in its deliberations. And if a member of a committee missed a meeting, he might not receive the minutes of it. The United States government does not, or at least recently did not, possess minutes for the meetings of the Council of Four at which President Wilson was not present. The Division of Research and Publication of the State Department, which is now editing and publishing in part the records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, has attempted to complete its set of these minutes by obtaining copies of the minutes for the days when Wilson was absent.

No information has come to light in regard to the manner in which these and other minutes were approved. It is known, however, that Sir Maurice Hankey attended the meetings of the Council of Four for the purpose of taking down its minutes. His record of what transpired at its 206 meetings in 101 days (including fifteen Sundays) occupies "ten large foolscap volumes."[13] We are not told whether the contents of these volumes are in longhand or in typescript. Nor do we know who now has the custody of Hankey's volumes. The processed copies, legal size, of the minutes of the Council of Four which are preserved in the Woodrow Wilson papers in the Library of Congress and in the Division of Research and Publication of the State Department are not signed. Yet that department accepts these copies (as well as copies in similar form of minutes of other peace conference organizations) as authentic and official. Is it possible that the members of the council made corrections on Hankey's first draft which was then processed? The tremendous pressure of business may explain their neglect to sign copies in quadruplicate as was done by the military representatives of the Supreme War Council.

So far as the value of drafts of minutes is concerned, it is well to remember that an operating committee almost certainly consulted and based its current decisions upon earlier decisions as recorded in final, official copies of minutes, rather than in drafts of minutes. A careful student of the Council of Four, however, might conceivably wish to examine rough drafts of its minutes in search of possible corrections and other changes in the handwriting of Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Orlando. But few persons would ascribe the same importance to such rough drafts that they would to the rough drafts of a highly important single document like the American Declaration of Independence. At the same time, if rough drafts

[13] Sir Maurice Hankey, *op. cit.*, 16-17.

of peace conference minutes do exist every government concerned is entitled to know this and where they are deposited.

Thus far in this discussion nothing has been said about the records of international organizations which served in an administrative capacity. Obviously the records of many of the interallied committees consist largely if not exclusively of minutes which could be duplicated and distributed to all the participants. Just as obviously the records created in the course of business by a large administrative organization like the Interallied Rhineland High Commission could not feasibly be duplicated. This raises the question as to the ultimate possession and custody of such records.

The Interallied Rhineland High Commission, established in 1919, exercised executive, legislative, and judicial authority over six million people in the Rhineland for a period of twelve years. One representative each of France, Great Britian, the United States, and Italy originally sat on the commission. Paul Tirard, the French representative, served as president. Pierrepont B. Noyes, a State Department official, was the first American representative. When the United States Senate in 1920 refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, Noyes was recalled. Our government then appointed Major General Henry T. Allen, the commander of the American Army of Occupation in the Rhineland, to sit as American observer at meetings of the high commission. Allen served in this double capacity until 1923 when he was recalled and his army was withdrawn, following the French occupation of the Ruhr. American participation in the affairs of the Interallied Rhineland High Commission had ceased.

With these facts in mind it seems clear that the United States government has an interest in the records of the commission for the period from 1919 to 1923 but not for the period after Allen's departure to 1930. Both American representatives in succession participated fully in the affairs of the commission, although unofficially and without vote. Writing in 1923, Robert E. Ireton, a former legal adviser to the commission, declared that the American representative or observer had "enjoyed the right to discuss every question that came before it and to express his views and his Government's instructions if any." . . . "His opinion was not only welcomed but respected, and no meeting was held without him or his deputy. America shared uniformly with her allies in representation on all

committees and other agencies of the Commission."[14] This view regarding the active nature of American participation is confirmed in a degree by General Allen's published journal.[15]

But what about the location of the records of the Interallied Rhineland High Commission? Fortunately there is light on this matter. In its last report the Commission des archives diplomatiques states that they are deposited in the archives of the French Foreign Office in Paris.[16] According to this same report, these and other "international archives" were so deposited "by virtue of the last peace treaties." The texts of the treaties, however, do not contain any such provision.[17] The Paul Tirard papers relating to the Interallied Rhineland High Commission were deposited in the Archives Nationales in Paris in 1934.[18]

No information is available, however, in regard to the volume and contents of the records which the high commission created in the course of its activities. It seems virtually certain indeed that both the War Department and the State Department possess copies of the minutes down to 1923. From them, of course, much could be learned about the work of the high commission from 1919 to early 1923. There is also General Allen's correspondence with the State Department from 1920 to 1923, of which the War Department has a set of bound volumes. These volumes are in the National Archives building in the legal custody of the War Department. Nevertheless, the fact remain that the French government has the custody of the main body of records created by the high commission. It is not

[14] Robert E. Ireton, "The Rhineland Commission at Work," *American Journal of International Law*, XVII (1923), 461. In praising the work of the high commission, Ireton quoted favorably Pope's famous couplet:

"For forms of government let fools contest
Whate'er is best administered is best."

Noyes feared the effects of its administration. He wrote: "During the 14 months in which I worked as a member of the Rhineland Commission, I became daily more shocked that any responsible man should be willing to curse the world with such a hatred and war breeding institution as this." Pierrepont B. Noyes, *While Europe Waits for Peace . . .* (New York, 1921), 49.

[15] Henry T. Allen, *My Rhineland Journal* (Boston and New York, 1923), 269, 291. See also Paul Tirard, *La France sur le Rhin: Douze Années d'Occupation Rhénone* (Paris, 1930).

[16] Ministères des Affaires Etrangères, *Rapport sur les Travaux de la Commission des Archives Diplomatiques Pendant les Années 1921 à 1936* (Paris, 1937), 8.

[17] See *The Treaties of Peace, 1919-1923* (2 vols. in one, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924).

[18] Direction des Archives de France, *Etat des Inventaires des Archives Nationales . . . au 1er Janvier 1937* (Paris, 1938), 119-120.

known at this time whether the other governments concerned with the fate of these records agreed to award them to France. Possibly the political tension of the period prevented the raising of the question.

Enough has been said perhaps to make plain that our fund of information about the records of the interallied bodies of the last war is both inadequate and unsatisfactory. No doubt this situation is due partly to the secrecy customarily maintained by every government in regard to records dealing with recent foreign relations. Even if one of several governments participating in an international agency wishes to make known the location and contents of the records created by the agency, it cannot rightfully act without first obtaining the approval of the others. As early as 1931 the American Historical Association began to petition the Secretary of State to publish the documents relating to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.[19] But conservatism in the State Department and the opposition of foreign governments prevented until 1942 the appearance of the first volumes. If the State Department had acted in this matter before overcoming the objections of the other participating governments, it would have seriously jeopardized future friendly relations with them. Zealous historians in their eargerness to get access to important documents have at times found it difficult to appreciate the reasons underlying the long (to them) delay in the publication of such papers.

Indications are that the records of those interallied bodies which exercised purely diplomatic functions have been carefully preserved. In due course their contents should become known. There is reason to fear, however, that the opposite is true with respect to the records created by the interallied agencies concerned primarily with economic matters and that their records have not been carefully preserved. Among such agencies may be mentioned the Allied Maritime Transport Council,[20] the Interallied Wheat Executive, the Interallied Petroleum Conference, and the Interallied Food Council. The records created by agencies like these were too far removed from regular diplomatic channels to attract the protective wing of a watchful foreign office. In the world of records their lot has been that of orphans or worse. Many have fallen into private hands.

[19] S. F. Bemis and G. G. Griffin, *Guide to the Diplomatic History of the United States, 1775-1921* (Washington, 1935), 816, n. 15.

[20] Records of the American section, known also as the American Shipping Mission, are in the National Archives. See *Handbook*, 25.

One example may be given. In 1926, E. M. Flesh, liquidating trustee of the United States Grain Corporation, wrote to H. B. Smith, United States commercial attaché in London, to inquire about some records there relating to food shipments during the war. Smith learned upon inquiry that the records of the Wheat Commission (the Interallied Wheat Executive?) were in charge of the Board of Trade and that "quantities of statistics" had been destroyed years before. He did not consider it wise to press the matter further. In replying to Flesh, he wrote: "This whole thing is a rather delicate question for there is a general tendency to connect anything of this kind with the Debt settlement. You have no idea how intense the feeling is here on that subject and I have naturally had to proceed and must proceed in the future with great caution, especially to avoid the impression that the information is wanted for official purposes."[21]

The letter suggests that there was lacking a clear understanding as to the custody and use of the records of economic international bodies in which the United States had had representation. The lesson should be taken to heart. In the present war various types of interallied agencies are operating and creating records. If formal agreements were made now in regard to the future possession and maintenance of such records, one source of possible friction between the United Nations in the days to come might well be avoided. It is surely within the province of the National Archives to promote the adoption of such agreements.

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[21] Smith to Flesh, London, October 8, 1926, National Archives, Grain Corporation, 232A1. This letter was kindly called to my attention by Miss Lillie Bontz.