

Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured. Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, I. B. Tauris, London 2011, XVII + 255 S., geb., 59,50 £.

Throughout the last decade historians have come to study in any possible way the ideas and outcomes of transnationalism. “Transnational history” has replaced by now much of what was formerly subsumed under the – now almost old-fashioned – term of “international history”. The well-composed collection of essays, edited by Daniel Laqua in 2011, proposes a rapprochement of these apparently so distinct research fields. In nine chapters the volume thoroughly covers the ground of internationalist ideas and practices in the interwar period, particularly focusing on the role of the League of Nations and its manifold sub and lobby organisations. In outlining the newly emerging international order and the institutionalisation of international foundations in the immediate post-WWI period, the book intends to uncover the roots of transnational structures and movements. At the same time it suggests that transnational activities were not just the precondition for international contacts, but they were actually driven by ideas and ideals of internationalism (p. xii). Divided into three major sections (A: Infrastructures and Ideas of Internationalism; B: The League of Nations and the Efforts of Non-State Actors; C: Transnational and National Contexts of Advocacy) the volume details simultaneously the vital impact of foundations and institutions as well as of individual actors on the institutionalisation and professionalisation of international cooperation. To study, what Paul Weindling termed in 1995, the dynamic and versatile development “from treaties and conventions between nation states to the establishment of a brave new world of international organization”¹ appears to be the central intention of the book.

At the same time various chapters equally take the problematic prehistory of this newly emerging international “brave new world”, namely the history of World War I as a moment of international crisis, responsibly into account. Although a symbol of Europe’s social, economic and political breakdown, the Great War, as it is convincingly argued, paradoxically paved the way towards an extensive expansion of internationalism and forms of unprecedented peaceful cooperation. In his chapter on municipalism Stefan Couperus describes a powerful internationalist illustration of post-war Europe by a Dutch painter in which “[t]he globe of the world [is] pulled out, by two horses, from an inferno of war into a calm, illuminated and fertile lawn of peace” (p. 84). Confronted with many of such overtly optimistic images and discourses by contemporaries, the volume succeeds in critically analysing primarily the newly emerging internationalist discourses and ‘big ideas’ and to a lesser degree also their actual practical implementation.

By means of nine case studies (for instance on philanthropic, humanitarian, feminist, pacifist or economic activism) the contributors study different embodiments of transnational communities of experts (p. 128), whose activism aimed at transcending purely national interests and at increasing international mobilisation. Although the volume slightly tends to emphasise more the positive effects of the League’s activism and its partner organisations, particularly the conceptual and thought-provoking introduction by Patricia Clavin points out that “transnational encounters [often] seek to exploit or even reinforce barriers” (p. 2). In her chapter on East-West women’s organisations Marie Sandell goes along this path of reasoning, providing an excellent insight into the ways in which the emphasis on “international co-operation and sisterhood” (p. 173) involuntarily reinforced notions of national difference. Her chapter is the only one, which also properly problematises the colonial character of East-West cooperation, which was built upon the perception that non-Western, thus apparently backward, participants were in urgent need of Western assistance. By however integrating a chapter on British activ-

¹Paul Weindling, Introduction: Constructing International Health between the Wars, in: *idem* (ed.), *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918–1939*, Cambridge, MA 1995, pp. 1–16, here: p. 2.

ism against slavery in Africa the volume strives to go beyond the mere (West-)European focus and opens up the transnational perspective to trans-continental activism. But here again international activism appears to have been much limited to conventions and debates, seldom allowing for the ideas' long-term implementation.

This was however different in the sphere of economic cooperation, which the articles by Frank Beyersdorf and Yann Decorzant outline in great detail and with much success. Facing the disorganised state of financial affairs in the immediate post-war period, the world of economics could witness the establishment of "a new [internationalist] economic order" (p. 136), which was then perceived as the decisive precondition for Europe's much-needed economic stabilisation. The question of 'how to promote peace' not only through financial support but in particular through the transfer of knowledge and expertise is examined in Katharina Rietzler's well-researched piece on the American Rockefeller foundation. Also Daniel Laqua's concluding chapter on interwar pacifism illustrates by means of the "Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte" the "aspirations and practices of actors who worked for reconciliation" (p. 210). The outcome of these attempts, Laqua also acknowledges, were fairly limited as they were – due to the emotionally charged question of guilt – "handicapped from the start" (p. 218). This chapter and the book in its entirety offer a very nuanced picture of the variety of internationalist actors and agencies of the early post-war period in a highly comparative framework. In presenting their individual case studies the well-chosen international contributors of the book dare to acknowledge on the one hand the great idealistic potential and influence of the League of Nations and to point on the other hand to its sometimes rather limited practical efficiency. All in all, the book is a very good read and offers a nice introduction into the topic both for academics as well as for students.

Friederike Kind-Kovács, Regensburg

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