

Legacy and New Challenges: Networks and Thinking about the League of Nations before the Great War

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This article provides the neglected background of the League of Nations movement and of its thinking about the causes of war and the conditions of peace. Previous research about the movement have focused on its activity during the First World War and the inter-war period, despite the fact that the post-war plan emerged from an older European intellectual tradition. The study, therefore, contextualises the pro-League movement into this rich legacy by exploring two broader contexts: the pre-war backdrop to the evolution of the movement and the history of ideas about war and peace up to the eve of the Great War. In the pre-1914 period, the future pro-League activists already had networks of influence that became the basis of the movement. Even though they drew upon the intellectual legacy going back more than several centuries, the problems they faced differed from those of their predecessors – the breakdown of the Concert of Europe and the rise of nationalism. These problems led the pro-Leaguers to not only develop fresh perspectives on the causes of war, but also conclude that a new world order should be established. By revealing the background of the pro-League movement, this article introduces the deep intellectual foundation that shaped the evolution of the League and that still influences today's international relations.