

GENEVA  
AND THE CALL OF INTERNATIONALISM  
A HISTORY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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JOËLLE KUNTZ

**GENEVA**  
*and the call of internationalism*  
**A HISTORY**

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## INTRODUCTION

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**T**he city of Geneva has always served a practical purpose. Already in pre-Roman times it was the site of a bridge over the Rhone at the point where the river flows out of Lac Léman on its search for the Mediterranean Sea. In the Middle Ages Geneva was the site of bustling fairs. During the subsequent Renaissance, the city took in Protestant refugees with their arts, crafts, skills, and capital, as well as their customs, which would put it on the map of Europe. As generation succeeded generation, the inhabitants of Geneva turned their river crossing into an international centre, where for over a century people have developed and negotiated projects aimed at promoting international welfare and cooperation. Chance has played a part in this, as have political circumstances; but the Genevans too have played their part, by embracing the opportunities in which they have been not only bystanders but also actors.

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PREVIOUS PAGES: *View of Geneva*, by Hans-Rudolf Manuel Deutsch, 16<sup>th</sup> century.

“International Geneva”, as it has come to be called, has its own history, forged by chance events but also by outstanding personalities, both local and foreign; and it is also shaped by the memories and by all the traces of the past that continually recreate a community's collective state of mind and heart.

This history is divided into defining moments or episodes, which form the chapters of this book. First there was the Reformation (1536), when Geneva seized the radical opportunity for spiritual and political independence from its surroundings; and then the humanitarian era with the founding of the Red Cross (1863), which launched the city along the path of international law; next, the League of Nations (1920) when Geneva became the laboratory for peace diplomacy (sadly an ill-fated venture); and finally the United Nations Organization (1946), which gave the city its present role as a centre for activities aimed at improving our world.

Needless to say, in all these periods Geneva could not have become what it did without Switzerland. Its Reformation came in the wake of the Reformation in Bern and Zurich. The development of its humanitarian traditions went hand in hand with those of the Swiss Confederation — the state that signed and endorsed the international conventions. Geneva became the seat of the League of Nations because a majority of Swiss followed the Swiss Federal Council in voting to join the new organization. Today, as a member of the United Nations, Switzerland co-finances UN structures and administers diplomatic relations. Our Geneva is a Swiss Geneva, both by inclination

and by belonging; and its contract with the Confederation is one of unquestioned mutual interest — the only negotiable item is the breakdown of costs.

Each of these defining moments when Geneva has made its mark came at a time of major upheaval in European or world history. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was the split in Western Christian unity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the appalling slaughter of cataclysmic wars, which led to the new forms of international cooperation of the League of Nations and the UN; and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is the manifest shared destiny of all the peoples of the world following the collapse of the totalitarian ideologies and the growing awareness of the environmental threat hanging over the planet.

Nestled on the peaceful shores of its lake, beneath the seemingly eternal gaze of Mont Blanc, Geneva is still very much present in the whirlwind of the modern world and exposed to the countless issues that hope alone enables us to confront. An artistic expression of our troubled times can be found in the ceiling of the Human Rights Council Chamber in the Palais des Nations, the work of Spanish artist Miquel Barceló, completed in November 2008. Above our heads is this nightmarish vision made up of layers of paint on an araldite base whose ravaged stalactites, caverns, crevasses, coruscations, splashes and splatterings of every dizzying hue and unexplainable shade represent the sky, our sky. Listening to the Martinican poet Edouard Glissant, beneath this ceiling donated by the King of Spain on behalf of the Alliance of Civilisations, we hear the new words and see the new forms needed for a world that is

POST TENEBRAS LVX



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forever one and forever diverse, forever opaque and unpredictable; words and forms that shake and tremble in the face of all this surrounding chaos.

Thus in Geneva, a Catalan from the Old World and a West Indian from the New World, brought together by the King of Spain — the country that funded Christopher Columbus — have given artistic expression to the “geopoetics” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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PREVIOUS PAGES: *View of Geneva, southern aspect, by Matthäus Merian, 1642.*

## CHAPTER I

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### THE RELIGIOUS RIFT : GENEVA COMES TO THE RESCUE OF EUROPE'S PROTESTANTS

**I**n the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Geneva's trade fairs had dwindled as a result of competition from Lyon. It was now a town of some 13,000 inhabitants, with a population of modest artisans whose modes of work and trade remained relatively simple, and who were Republicans at heart. When Geneva abolished the Catholic form of worship in 1536, following the example of Zurich and Bern, it was not for pressing religious reasons but to protect itself from two unwanted forces. These were, firstly, neighbouring Savoy, which had always wanted to absorb Geneva into its territory; and secondly its ruling prince-bishop, who was in thrall to the House of Savoy. The cause of independ-



*Calvin's farewell imagined by the painter Joseph Hornung around 1830.*

ence coincided with that of religion. With the Reformation Geneva became a state, around which a French theologian, Jean Calvin, built a strict, orderly, hard-working and self-assured Protestant republic. Calvin agreed to return to Geneva after his unpopularity had caused him to be driven out. What if he hadn't?

Over the next two centuries, tens of thousands of Protestants who were suffering persecution in Italy and France found refuge in the city, bringing with them their skills as silk workers, jewellers, clock and watchmakers, printers and bankers. Most importantly, they also brought a knowledge of the world and the ways of trade.

Geneva, the "Protestant Rome", had an ideology, a civic spirit, but also a worldliness. Its "merchant aristocracy", to use historian Herbert Lüthy's term, had an international dimension stemming from its origins, alliances and business dealings, as well as from the personal lives of its great families, whose members were to be found in all the European centres.

On this foundation Geneva built a reputation which magnified the city in its own eyes and fuelled its ambition. Comforted by this high self-esteem and by its independence and political liberties, the Calvinist citadel carved out its place in both Switzerland and Europe, skilfully taking advantage of whatever opportunities came its way.

On the religious front, Geneva's form of worship spread,

through John Knox, on his return to Scotland after staying with Calvin in Geneva, and also through a couple of hundred English exiles who had rejected the Anglican Church. Their translation of the Bible into English, the “Geneva Bible”, travelled to the New World with the first puritan pilgrims in the *Mayflower*. As F.F. Roget writes in his biography of John Knox, for three-quarters of a century this Bible was the final word in all households, and through it “the Genevan concept of the church and the Genevan concept of the state won a place in the heart of the Anglo-Saxon race”. Perhaps this explains the early English and American affinities for Geneva, and later their preference for this city when it came to choosing the seat of the League of Nations.

Calvin was a statesman and lawmaker as much as a theologian. His religious doctrine had its counterpart in a political doctrine whose international impact was such that it would overthrow social relations not just in the diminutive Republic of Geneva but also across much of northern Europe. The system he established was based on work, seen no longer as a form of penance but as a form of prayer. Like the other reformers but in a much more radical way, Calvin introduced the discipline of work as an exercise in piety, imposed on man for his salvation and for the glorification of God. As Lüthy wrote, “this was a new value system for a new society”. In Our Father’s house there was now only one dwelling place, “and that

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*The Geneva Bible, translated in 1562, which travelled to the New World with the Mayflower.*



was a workshop". There was no longer any room for the poor and the needy.

Geneva became a workshop, and at its head Calvin put the elite of the French and Italian exiles, forming an oligarchy whose status as martyrs for the cause won them respect. As they grew in prestige, they were equally quick to close the circle that had opened to let them in. The "new" families merged with the "old", perpetuating themselves by intermarrying or by absorbing new members, and gained a virtual monopoly of power in the various councils that came to run the Calvinist State of Geneva. To use the word first coined ironically by foreign observers, and then adopted by this patrician elite for itself from 1734-1738 onwards, the city was an "aristo-democracy".

In Geneva, European Protestantism had its own sovereign republic, the bulwark of the "International Huguenots". "Elsewhere", Lüthy points out, "the Protestant refugees were either assimilated into their host country's society or formed a group outside that society; in Geneva, however, it was the Protestant exiles who assimilated a city after its inhabitants had dispossessed themselves by handing it over to Calvin". Lüthy mentions native Genevans so anxious to enjoy refugee status that they rewrote their own life history to share in the prestige of having suffered at the hands of the Catholics.

As religious passions ebbed over the centuries, Geneva's internationalism became a part of its culture. It was something built into the city's prosperity and the wide horizons required by international trade and banking. Under the *Ancien Régime*, Geneva's elite was experienced in dealing



with the outside world. At the same time, it was comfortably embedded in a vast network of mutual trust among the Protestant trading houses with their personal contacts in all the capitals and trading ports as well as family ties that were constantly being renewed and were constantly active. Inevitably, this experience of the world at large was transmitted to a broad section of the local population.

Geneva also contrived to put itself on the European artistic and scientific map. Its Academy, emerging from a strictly Calvinist shell, attracted scientists and scholars. Poets and writers described the beauty of its surroundings.

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*Pendant watch created by Jean Rousseau (1606-1684), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's great-great-grandfather. Geneva, c.1640.*

In 1751 it entered illustrious company by being included in volume VII of Diderot's Encyclopaedia, in an article written by D'Alembert at the suggestion of Voltaire. The article is a paean to the city's political organization, spirit of independence, intellectual life, moral sobriety and appeal to "eminent foreigners". "Unfortunately", D'Alembert added, "Geneva has no theatre". Having learned from Voltaire about Geneva's propensity to lecture the rest of Europe, he wrote that, if there were any, "Genevan actors would serve as a model to the actors of other nations ... and a small republic could claim the glory of having reformed Europe in this respect, and this is perhaps more important than one thinks".

Rousseau, who prided himself on the title "Citizen of Geneva", was deeply annoyed, seeing this "artful seduction of his homeland" as one of Voltaire's "dirty tricks". The two writers had already fallen out, but now — as it was a matter of Rousseau's Geneva — he saw it as his duty to respond. This was the origin of their famous quarrel over the theatre: Rousseau versus Voltaire, spirit of Geneva versus spirit of Paris, a return to the simple, natural life versus the artificial civilization of the theatre. That Geneva served as the setting for such an argument between such great names in the world of letters is a measure of the city's dimension on the international stage.

## CHAPTER II

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### THE MORAL RIFT : A COMMITMENT AGAINST WAR

**I**n 1854, a Geneva student by the name of Henry Dunant, together with his friend Max Perrot, created the Christian Alliance of Young Men, which from the outset he called a "World Alliance". As his present-day biographer Corinne Chaponnière writes, it was "the thrill of the idea of universality" that the future founder of the Red Cross felt on establishing this first global YMCA. Where else, other than in Geneva, could universality be "thrilling"?

Dunant was born in 1828 into a family of the Protestant bourgeoisie mindful of the last fifty years of turmoil: the downfall of the French monarchy on which Geneva had become dependent, the occupation of the city and then of all Switzerland by Napoleon's armies, the Emperor's final

defeat after terrible warfare and bloodshed, and finally Geneva's joining the Swiss Confederation in 1814-1815.

The patrician families of Geneva had chosen to join Switzerland by calculation rather than enthusiasm, since independence was no longer an option in the face of the French and Austrian threats. Yet for Geneva to become part of Switzerland was not a foregone conclusion. A reluctant population had to be convinced of the benefits that would ensue. As historian Irène Herrmann points out, it had to be made clear that joining Switzerland did not mean jeopardizing Geneva's "superiority", and that "our beloved homeland would continue living up to its illustrious past and would not be placed in a position of inferiority unworthy of it". Geneva felt it had been blessed by history and, confident that its own Republic was more advanced, considered it a matter of duty to let the rest of the Swiss share its advantages. With this messianic streak, it put itself forward as a "lighthouse steadfastly standing watch over independence and civilization on behalf of the Confederation"; the only way Geneva could become Swiss was by holding the torch of the enlightenment for the rest of Switzerland.

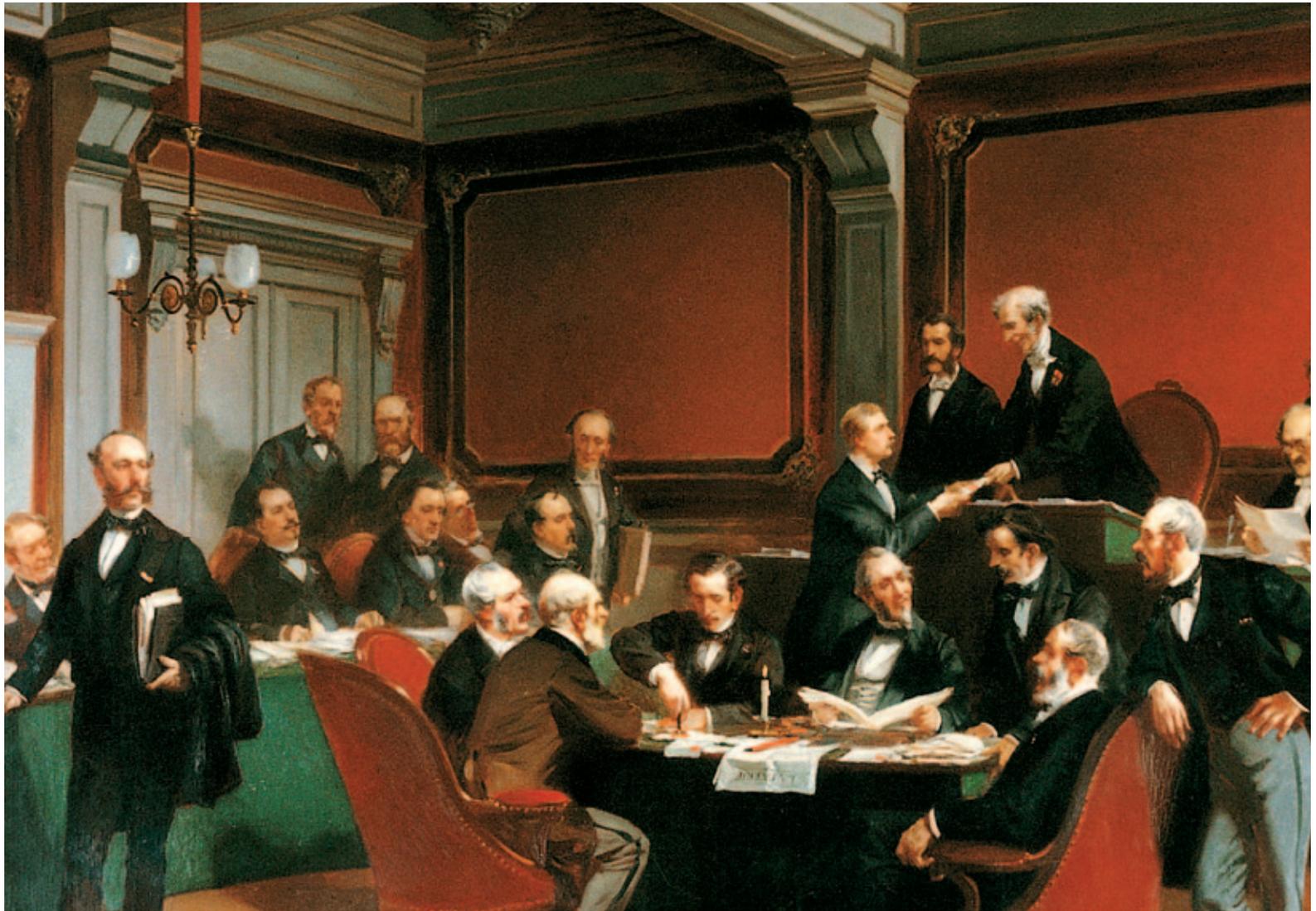
Dunant's youth was steeped in this glow of Genevan self-assertion. Alongside his faith in Geneva he found a renewed religious faith, joining the "Church of the Awakening", an evangelical movement which sought to further reform the Reformed Church and was based on active charity, a literal reading of the Bible and evangelical proselytizing. A man obsessed with religion in a city obsessed with itself was about to revolutionise the laws of war out of concern for the plight of human cannon-fodder.



First, chance had to intervene. Dunant's business affairs in Algeria were going badly and he travelled to Italy, chasing after Napoleon III in the hope of getting a long-promised water concession for his mills. In the spring of 1859 the Emperor, whom Dunant idolized, had invaded Piedmont with an army of 120,000 men to drive out the Austrians and honour his promise to support the cause of Italian unity. Dunant expected to find him at Castiglione, and journeyed there alone in a carriage through mud and rain, unaware that a few kilometres away, at Solferino, the crucial and

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*The battle of Solferino, 24 June 1859, by Charles Armand-Dumaresq. The Red Cross armband is an anachronism, as the emblem was adopted only in 1863.*



also the bloodiest battle in this Italian war had just taken place. On arriving in Castiglione he met with an appalling sight. The town was a vast charnel house resounding to the cries and groans of casualties from both sides, who had been carried there in their thousands. What shocked Dunant most was that no arrangements whatsoever had been made to come to the aid of the wounded and dying soldiers. He spent several days helping to tend them and organise rudimentary hospital arrangements together with the local population, whom he urged not to make any distinction between the casualties on the basis of nationality. He resumed his journey in pursuit of the Emperor, but in vain. His Algerian business went bankrupt.

A year and a half later he wrote *A Memory of Solferino*, in which he recounted in starkly sickening and shocking terms the sufferings endured in the battle. He concluded by setting out the ideas on which the Red Cross would be founded. A society of volunteers should be organized in peacetime to be ready to help care for the wounded in times of conflict; and there should be an internationally accepted and respected convention proclaiming the principle that they should be able to do their work without being hindered by the hostility between enemies.

The book was an immediate success. Although Dunant was flying in the face of the triumphant nationalism of the day by championing the universal cause of all victims of war, he won the support of many public law experts, phi-

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PREVIOUS PAGES: *The signing of the Geneva Convention at Geneva City Hall, 22 August 1864, by Charles Armand-Dumaresq.*

losophers, churchmen and readers in general, and received favourable messages of interest from thirteen sovereigns, in particular from the many German duchies, principalities and kingdoms that existed at the time.

In Geneva, Dunant's ideas were especially attractive to Gustave Moynier, the president of the Geneva Public Welfare Society. Corinne Chaponnière notes that "the cause of war casualties suddenly made him feel that a window had opened on a new, less domestic, much wider and bolder world". As it happened, a welfare congress was due to take place in 1863 in Berlin, and Moynier persuaded the members of his society, including the famous General Dufour, to attend and urge European governments to set up a corps of volunteer medical personnel. A committee of five (Moynier, Dunant, Dufour and two doctors, Théodore Maunoir and Louis Appia) was formed, which soon began calling itself the "Permanent International Committee". Then came the bad news that the Berlin congress had been cancelled. Moynier reacted by boldly proposing that an international conference be convened in Geneva instead, and his unexpected initiative was warmly endorsed by the other committee members.

Invitations were addressed to governments and philanthropic organizations across Europe, while Dunant personally called on all the great and the good who had previously expressed their interest in his idea, urging them to send a delegation to Geneva.

The conference, attended by thirty-one delegations from sixteen countries and chaired by General Dufour, began work on 26 October 1863 in the Athénée palace. After three and



*The army of General Chauzy on the Loire near Paris in January 1871, by Edouard Castres. The red cross appears for the first time in an image of war, here on the top of the coach.*

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a half days of debate, ten resolutions were adopted, along with three recommendations: in each country in time of war a local committee and its affiliated sections should assist the army medical services; in peacetime they should make preparations for their future relief work; they should wear a distinctive sign; and they should exchange their experience through the intermediary of the Geneva Committee. The conference called on governments to facilitate the activities of the committees and their sections, and to proclaim the neutrality of ambulances and military hospitals and



*The 1,200 volunteers of the International Prisoners-of-War Agency outside the Musée Rath, Geneva, 1914.*

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medical personnel; and it recommended that their distinctive sign, as well as the flag to be placed on ambulances and hospitals, be the same for everyone. This sign would soon be the red cross on a white background, the inverse of the Swiss flag.

Within a year ten national societies for the relief of war casualties were set up. France, on which Dunant relied heavily, called for a diplomatic conference to study whether the resolutions and recommendations adopted in Geneva could become an instrument of the international law; and proposed that Switzerland convene such a confer-

ence. The Swiss Federal Council was amenable and invited twenty-five states to Geneva for 8 August 1864, sixteen of which attended.

On 22 August, twelve of the sixteen states adopted the “Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field”. This was the first stone in the edifice of humanitarian international law, which has since grown steadily in line with the needs that have emerged from the realities of war.

As a result, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) now had a legal status and framework for its purpose. It set up an information agency in Basel that transmitted news of the wounded and prisoners of war to their families during the Franco Prussian war of 1870. This service was further developed in Trieste during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877, in Vienna during the war between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1885, and in Belgrade during the Balkan wars in 1912-1913. Its full potential was realized during the First World War: 1200 Genevan volunteers worked in the Musée Rath to collect information on prisoners of war and transmit it to their families. Romain Rolland, who himself participated in the Agency’s “holy work”, described this as “a pure beam of light in these tragic years”; and in 1917, the writer Stefan Zweig called it an “oasis of genuine internationalism, of friendly relations among all peoples, in a spirit of fraternity rather than hostility”.

Through these efforts, the ICRC became popular not only with the millions of families whose distress it had eased, but also with governments — that of the United States in particular — whose prisoners of war benefitted

greatly from the Agency’s attentions. The president of the American Red Cross and US President Woodrow Wilson therefore supported the creation in 1919 of the League of Red Cross Societies for the purpose of continuing humanitarian activities in time of peace; if not, as some suspected, of turning it into an instrument of American policy.

The ICRC became the centre of efforts, both cultural and legal, to combat the savagery of war and protect the dignity of its victims.

This twin movement involving both civil society and governments — the former obliging the latter to restrain their arbitrary violence, and the latter partially agreeing to do so — was something new. The ICRC would be a Non-Governmental Organization if it were not for the fact that its freedom of action depends entirely on the legal protection of states.

Behind this early private-public partnership lay the Geneva of Dunant and Moynier, a Geneva that was Protestant and aristocratic, and that educated its people and trusted in the capacity of the powerful to be enlightened and carry out good policies.

Of course, not everyone was capable of being enlightened. For their first international conference at the Athénée, the Genevan founders had been careful to exclude from their initiative Geneva’s cantonal government where the “reds” Radicals — whom they loathed as usurpers — were in power. Again, not all civil society was concerned, only that part of it which was receptive to the ideas of work, reason, moderation and proper behaviour. The Catholics, who now formed a majority after the redrawing of the frontiers



of 1814-1815, did not participate spontaneously, still less the secular movements of the Genevan democratic revolution. For a long time, the ICRC was run by the exclusively Protestant Genevan “upper crust”. An understanding of humanitarian charity as practised in Calvin’s city, in their genes. Universalism was the watchword — provided it was Genevan and Protestant. Only in 1948 was the organization’s first non-Genevan, non-Protestant president elected.

Dunant died a ruined man, banished from the Genevan aristocracy for the sin of bankruptcy. Like Rousseau, he was an exile from the city whose name he had embellished. He was awarded an unexpected Nobel Prize in 1901, but this did not heal his bitterness at the sight of others receiving the honours and rewards he considered his by right.

Nevertheless, he left his mark by questioning the legitimacy of war as a political instrument; and did so at a time when peace, hitherto a moral value preached from the pulpit, became a tangible political concept, something which could be negotiated. The seeds had now been sown in the ground prepared by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Emmanuel Kant.

Dunant had forerunners in his own city. There was Count Jean-Jacques de Sellon, with his belief in the inviolability of the human person. In 1830 he founded a peace society that erected a marble monument dedicated to peace, the first of its kind. He also had his opponents. Following the founding of the Red Cross, its leaders had to face the

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PREVIOUS PAGES: *The Japanese Red Cross in action during the Russo-Japanese war*. Illustrated album, Japan, 1904-1905.



*Smallpox vaccination campaign, People’s Republic of China, 1955 — Eat milk and fish for good health, Amiskin, Chilean Red Cross, 1953.*

criticism that by humanizing war they were also helping to make it more acceptable. Moynier’s reply was that “as much as and even more than anyone else, we want people to stop killing each other and repudiate the vestiges of the barbarism they have inherited from their ancestors. But we believe that these human passions and their deadly consequences will be with us for many years to come. Why, then, if we cannot get rid of them altogether and immediately, should we not try to alleviate them? Surely that is our charitable duty.”

Pacifism was spreading in Europe and in the United

States. As early as 1816, a peace society was founded in London. In 1867 came the International and Permanent League for Peace in Paris, the same year in which Nobel filed his patent for dynamite. This League called on all men and all countries to uphold the principles of mutual respect. Its moral, apolitical stance suited Dunant and Moynier. In the same year, however, French followers of Saint-Simon convened in Geneva the founding congress of a more extreme organization, the League of Peace and Freedom. Why in Geneva? They claimed to have some reliable and loyal friends there and appreciated the liberal attitudes of many Genevan citizens in a city “that was and remained the refuge of so many exiles” under a “democratic government in a neutral, republican country”.

The congress opened with over 1000 participants of every persuasion - revolutionaries, including Bakunin, trade unionists, priests, women for peace, men of letters including Dostoyevsky, and countless others. Garibaldi, the hero of Italian unity, was invited and arrived, acclaimed by the crowds. Tumultuous debate led to the conclusion that peace could not exist without freedom; if necessary, freedom should be won by violence. “Only slaves have the right to make war on tyrants”, thundered Garibaldi. Just political institutions could alone preserve the precious gift of peace. Discussions centred on the topic of the United States of Europe, an idea launched by Victor Hugo twenty years earlier, federation being the most peaceful form of relations among nations. The League’s magazine bore the title *The United States of Europe*, and its editor was the Genevan Elie Ducommun, vice-president of the

League and Nobel Peace Prize winner 1902.

The same reasons that had led the pacifists to choose Geneva — tolerance, a warm welcome, reliable local friends — had led the International Working Men’s Association (IWA) to hold its first congress in Geneva the previous year. For a week in September 1866, some sixty delegates, including many Swiss and Genevans, met in the Brasserie Treiber to draw up the statutes of the First Socialist International, overshadowed by the two great seminal figures of Karl Marx, who inspired the English movement, and Proudhon, inspiring the French. They discussed all the social, political and cultural issues that were to dominate the next century: working conditions (especially the eight-hour day), the role of women in society and emancipation. There was the first public confrontation between collectivists and mutualists, the latter winning the day. Typically, the Genevan section proposed the setting up of a mutual assistance society within the IWA, an idea that was taken up for further study. Two years later, a spectacular building-workers’ strike caught the attention of the entire international left-wing movement, and Geneva became a melting pot of all the militant tendencies. And it was in this Geneva that the anarchist organizations influenced by Bakunin created their own International in 1873, and the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions held its founding congress in 1880.

Geneva had always been universalist by inclination, but in those years it became internationalist by opportunity. The external political circumstances of war, tension and repression enhanced its position as a haven. With its 65,000 inhabitants it was now the largest city in Switzerland, and

found itself in demand as a meeting centre. Between 1863 and 1874, nine congresses were held in Geneva, dealing with peace, limiting war by law, improving working conditions, the role of women, and so on.

Aside from the successful congress of the League of Peace and Freedom, these gatherings had only few participants. One could hardly have guessed at the time that these would be the historical roots of Geneva's future international status. For example, when in 1864 the diplomatic conference was meeting in the City Hall to draft the first Geneva Convention, the headline news of the day was that a disputed election to the Council of State had caused a riot in the town, in which the mob had locked up the government and several people had been killed. The birth of the Red Cross was of interest only to its founders. It was only later, when it actually set to work — and especially during the First World War — that its stature grew and its birthplace became noteworthy. What happened to Geneva could be likened to what happened to Stendhal, who reflected: “Now as I write my life in 1835, I make many discoveries. I discover the what and wherefore of events.”

On the other hand, the Alabama arbitration of 1872 immediately set Geneva on a pedestal as a centre for peace. The city was chosen for its neutrality and accessibility during the fraught times of the Franco-Prussian war to host the five judges (including Jakob Stämpfli, former president of the Confederation) who had been charged with resolving the ten-year-old conflict between Great Britain and the United States relating to the American Civil War. Washington claimed damages from London for having delivered the

*Alabama* to the South, which had fitted it out as a warship to hunt down Northern vessels. The law of neutrality was at stake: Great Britain, although declaring itself neutral during the conflict, had given one of the sides a powerful weapon.

The judges met in a chamber in the City Hall made available by the State of Geneva. Now known as the Alabama Room, this was the room in which the Geneva Convention had been signed. They found that Great Britain should pay the United States 15.5 million dollars. London stoically accepted. The Peace Society welcomed the judgment and above all the fact that it was accepted in a calm and dignified manner by the entire English nation, as proof that the authority of law could triumph. The Society spoke admiringly: “The refusal to fight to defend one's interests, which would have been seen as cowardice not long ago, has now made way for the principle of arbitration”. Today legal historians consider that even before the arbitration the United States and Great Britain were ready to reach an understanding, as neither of them envisaged going to war over an affair that had dwindled in importance compared to their other common interests. For many years this Geneva arbitration was hailed by the peace movement as a model of reasonable behaviour between States. In the climate created by the Franco-Prussian war, it stood as an example.

In this connection, Count Sclopis, the Italian judge who had chaired the Court, wrote in 1872: “I have sometimes wondered why the Washington Treaty establishing the Court of Arbitration stipulated that we should meet on Swiss soil to accomplish our task. I soon realized why. We needed to find a climate that was as favourable as possible

for our discussions, where a spirit of freedom combines with the serene and austere observance of public order in a country where tradition is both the criterion of present action and the safeguard of the future.”

After the First World War, arbitration was included in the Protocol for the peaceful settlement of conflicts, also known as the Geneva Protocol. However, the seat of the Permanent Court responsible for its application was set up at The Hague, where the International Peace Conference proposed by Tsar Nicolas II had been held in 1899.



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*Flag bearing the emblem of the Red Cross used during the Franco-Prussian war by Dr. Patay.*



# PROCLAMATION au PEUPLE de GENÈVE

CHERS CONCITOYENS, CHERS CONFÉDÉRÉS, HABITANTS DE GENÈVE !

Le Gouvernement de la République et Canton de Genève vient de recevoir de Paris les deux télégrammes suivants :

*Ai le grand plaisir de vous annoncer que la Conférence a désigné Genève comme siège de la Ligue des Nations.*

*Conférence Paix confirme à l'unanimité le choix de Genève, Belgique par organe Ministre Hymans fait généreusement sacrifice à solidarité internationale. Chaudes félicitations patriotiques.*

C'est avec une émotion infinie et dans un sentiment de profonde allégresse et de vive reconnaissance que nous vous communiquons la nouvelle d'un événement dont la date restera à jamais gravée au cœur des citoyens, fiers des marques de confiance que les Peuples unis viennent de donner à notre Chère Patrie Suisse, en choisissant Genève comme lieu de leurs assises.

Votre Conseil d'Etat, aidé de nombreuses bonnes volontés, travaillant en silence depuis plusieurs semaines pour obtenir ce résultat et il a la joie de voir aujourd'hui aboutir ses efforts.

Avec lui vous vous en félicitez, car notre ville qui passera au rang de Capitale morale du Monde en retirera certainement de puissants avantages.

Mais ce à quoi nous voulons surtout penser à cette heure, c'est aux grands et nobles devoirs qui se dresseront devant nous, Genève qui fut si intimement liée à tous les grands mouvements d'idées dans le passé, Genève, cité des Franchises d'Adhémar Fabri et cité de la Réforme, qui fut la Patrie de Rousseau, le berceau de la grande œuvre humanitaire de la Croix-Rouge et le siège du premier arbitrage international, Genève s'efforcera d'être à la hauteur de la tâche magnifique qui lui incombera désormais.

Genève qui fut de tout temps une terre de liberté mettra ce qu'elle possède de meilleur à la disposition de ceux qui viendront chez elle travailler pour la liberté des peuples.

Genève, dont le passé est fait de lutttes pour l'indépendance accueillera avec une légitime fierté ceux qui dans ses murs décideront de l'indépendance des nations.

Genève, qui enfanta l'auteur du « Contrat social » précurseur de la « Déclaration des droits de l'homme » sera bien placée pour servir de berceau à la législation qui fixera le « Droit des peuples ».

Genève, qui créa les grandes œuvres internationales de charité et de piété, de morale et de paix, deviendra le lieu où pourra se poursuivre en toute tranquillité, l'œuvre des Nations qui, par l'arbitrage international, assurera la paix universelle.

Genève, enfin, dernière venue dans la Confédération sera heureuse et fière de pouvoir faire rayonner sur toute la Suisse la chaleur d'un foyer d'activité bienfaisante pour le monde tout entier.

CHERS CONCITOYENS,  
CHERS CONFÉDÉRÉS,

Réjouissons-nous sans réserve, puvoisons notre petite cité, faisons entendre le joyeux carillon de nos cloches, saluons avec joie l'aurore de cette ère si pure de puissante reconstitution qui se lève, mais surtout, montrons-nous dignes de la confiance qui a été placée en nous.

Votre Conseil d'Etat adresse, en votre nom, l'expression de sa reconnaissance aux représentants des Puissances pour nous avoir honorés de cette insigne faveur et au Haut Conseil Fédéral pour nous avoir aidés à l'obtenir.

PEUPLE DE GENÈVE!

*Apprête-toi à faire dignement ton devoir, et à bien recevoir les hôtes illustres qui désormais te seront sacrés ;*

*Reste simple et selon les traditions emploie-toi à bien servir l'humanité ;*

*Fais que, dans l'avenir, le nom de cette Genève que tu chéris soit toujours plus respecté et toujours plus aimé.*

*Et maintenant tous ensemble faisons monter notre gratitude à Celui qui tient dans sa main les nations et qui les a inclinées vers une œuvre sans exemple dans les annales du monde.*

**Vive la Société des Nations !** **Vive Genève !**  
**Vivent les Peuples unis !** **Vive la Confédération Suisse !**

Genève, le 29 avril 1919.

John GIBNOUX, Président du Conseil d'Etat.  
Henri FAZY, Vice-Président \*  
Jacques GAVARD, Conseiller d'Etat.  
Julien BUISSEAU, \*  
Jacques BUTTY, \*  
Victor DUSSEILLER, \*  
Albert FERRENOUD, \*

## CHAPTER III

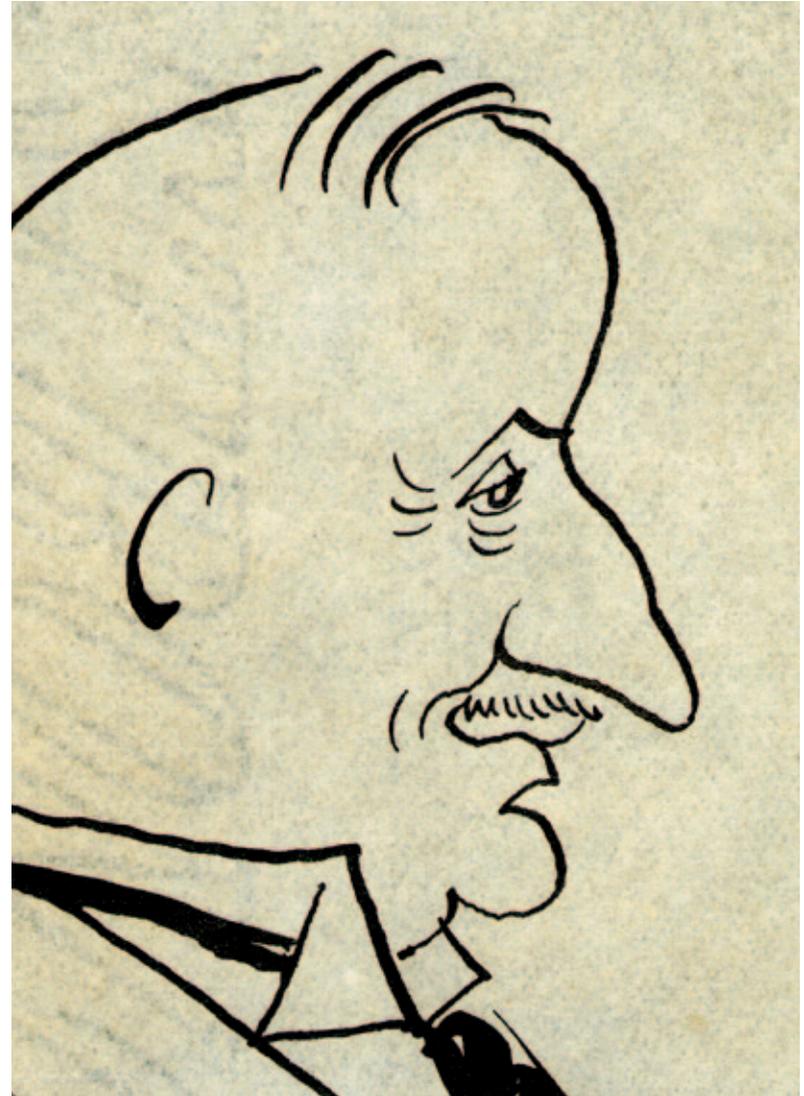
### AFTER THE CATASTROPHE OF 1914-18 : A LIGHT SHINES IN GENEVA ?

The first Assembly of the League of Nations opened in Geneva on 15 November 1920 amid great popular enthusiasm. On behalf of the host country, whose accession to the organization had just been approved by referendum, the president of the Swiss Confederation, Giuseppe Motta, welcomed the ministers and ambassadors representing the forty-one states present. In an inspired speech, he addressed the vexed question of why Geneva had been chosen over Brussels as seat of the League of Nations. "If the reasons that determined the choice had simply been recent heroism and noble sacrifice, there could have been no competing with the Belgian cause. The sufferings of the Belgian people will live on in posterity." However, the

reasons that had determined the choice were precisely not (Belgium's) occupation by Germany, but rather the fact of having avoided being occupied: "Through a piece of luck that seems almost miraculous, given its small size and geographic situation in the centre of the turmoil, Switzerland maintained its neutrality from beginning to end," Motta observed. He thanked the Assembly for not having obliged the Confederation to renounce its military neutrality upon joining this "new international order", implicitly endorsing President Wilson's thinking: that the future must be built not on the memory of suffering but on the hope for peace, as had miraculously existed in Switzerland during the four years of the World War.

Addressing the Council of the League of Nations, which attempted a last-minute diversion in favour of Brussels (a capital city where daily life would no doubt be more pleasant for its permanent staff), President Motta pleaded for Geneva. He acknowledged that November was not a month in which the city was at its most attractive but, he said, "Of all Swiss cities it is Geneva, through its history and through its spirit, that takes the keenest interest in the concerns of international life and cares most deeply for its ideas. That is why it was predestined to become the cradle of the Red Cross. The Secretariat of the League of Nations will be at home in Geneva, and public opinion will support its work."

Giuseppe Motta pointed to the clear link between Dunant's city and the seat of the great pacifist hopes of



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*Giuseppe Motta, by Emery Kelen.*

the beginning of the twentieth century that had been embodied in the Covenant and League. The Brazilian delegation went one step further. Pointing out the “happy circumstance whereby this first meeting of the League of Nations was held in Geneva”, it proposed that a wreath of flowers and laurels be laid on the statue of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, author of the *Social Contract*. Canada alone spoke against the motion.

In this quest for historical roots, only Calvin was missing. He was of course out of place in this very secular forum. However, Geneva had just dedicated a monument to the Fathers of the Reformation, in the form of a wall which included, alongside statues of the towering theologians (Calvin, Farel, John Knox and Théodore de Bèze), other figures and texts that incarnated freedom of conscience, tolerance, justice and liberty, all values proclaimed by the drafters of the Covenant of the League of Nations. These austere figures of the “Protestant Rome”, set in stone by Bouchard and Landowski between 1907 and 1917, may have made a last gesture on behalf of Geneva: after all, Wilson also explained his preference for Geneva by saying “because I am a Presbyterian”. He was the son of a Scottish-born minister and had received a strict religious upbringing. He never concealed his deeply-held faith: “Never for a moment have I had one doubt about my religious beliefs. There are people who believe only so far as they understand. I am sorry for such people.”

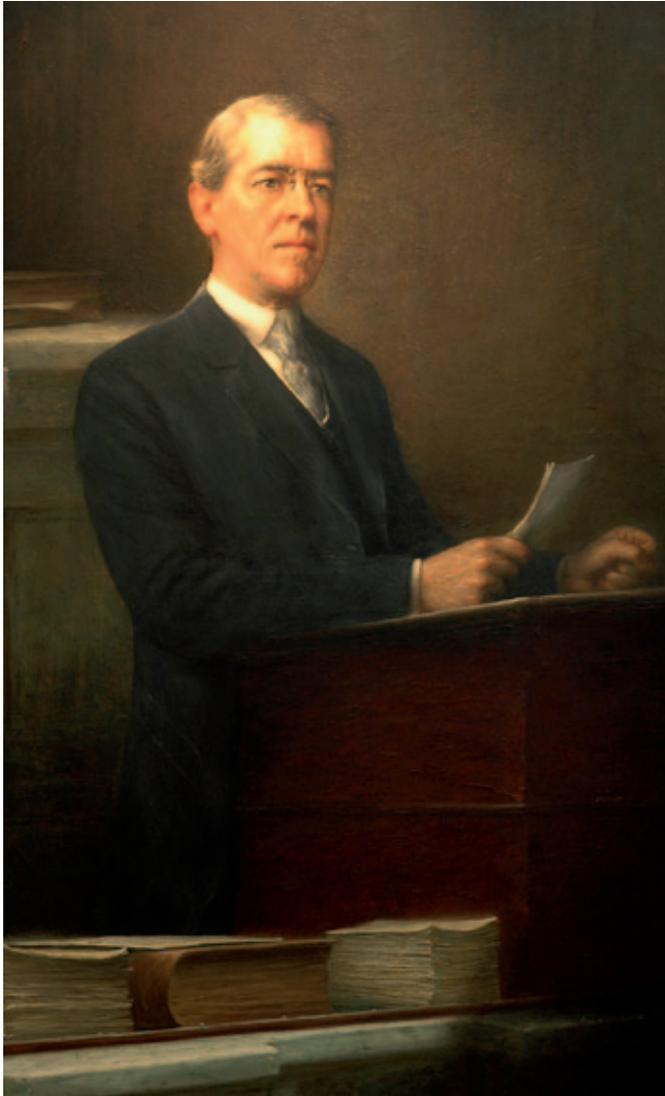
Wilson was the man to whom the Federal Council had sent a small delegation in 1917 to obtain deliveries of grain to replace the supplies that no longer arrived from



*A crowd of thousands lines the streets between the Salle de la Réformation and the National Hotel on the day of the inauguration of the League of Nations.*

Russia and Romania. The three-man delegation included a Genevan born in New York, William Rappard, who had attended Harvard and still had friends from those days who were well connected to the Wilson administration. There was no time for dallying. An impoverishment of Switzerland could further drive a wedge between the German-speaking and French-speaking parts of the country, whose views on the war, Germany and peace, diverged greatly. Several political scandals had revealed the size of the gulf. Hungry, Switzerland might tear itself apart.

The delegation was received at the White House.



Wilson said he understood the Swiss concerns but wanted assurances that any grain delivered by the United States would not reach Germany or Austria. He stressed that the United States harboured very friendly feelings towards Switzerland.

Rappard then contacted Colonel House, Wilson's alter ego, who arranged another meeting — a private one this time — with the President. In the White House drawing room, Rappard stressed Switzerland's special situation at the geographic heart of Europe. He quoted from a book the President had written when a professor at Princeton, in which he said concerning the association of Swiss cantons: "Germans, Frenchmen and Italians, if only they respect each the other's liberties as they would have their own respected, may by mutual helpfulness and forbearance build up a union at once stable and free". The President mentioned his project for a League of Nations, which Rappard praised while pointing out how difficult it would be for Switzerland if a league were formed from which Germany, its biggest neighbour and supplier, was excluded. The two men parted on good terms.

The Washington meetings of the three members of the Swiss delegation led to an agreement on grain supplies. Rappard left a good impression on Wilson and House, who would in future use him as a trusted contact on Swiss affairs.

He was helped by the fact that his friend Gustave Ador, president of the Red Cross, was elected to the Federal

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*Woodrow Wilson, by Adolfo Müller-Ury. Oil on canvas, 1919.*

Council in 1917. Ador was wholeheartedly anti-German, and one of a growing number of supporters of Switzerland's joining the future League, a cause strongly advocated by the Geneva pacifists.

On 31 January 1919, Rappard informed the Swiss authorities as follows: "There is a rumour that the English have proposed to the Americans that Geneva should be the seat of the League of Nations, and the Americans welcomed the idea. I put the question straight to Mr. House the day before yesterday, who said that the news as such was premature but he did not consider it at all unlikely."

As his biographer, Victor Monnier, recounts, from then on Rappard tirelessly defended the cause of the neutrals in the future organization and the cause of Geneva as its seat. He met Wilson again in Paris on 12 February 1919. The candidacy of The Hague had been put forward, but the English opposed it, and the American President did not want the League to be set up in a monarchy.

On 22 March 1919, the League of Nations Drafting Commission discussed Article VII of the Covenant, which should specify where the headquarters were to be located, and Geneva's cause made further headway. Exceptionally, Swiss Federal Councillor Félix-Louis Calonder agreed to travel to Paris to propose Switzerland and Geneva. The American President urged that the offer be accepted. Representing Belgium, Paul Hymans defended Brussels, recalling that his country "had during the war stood as the emblem of the cause of law and had made such sacrifices to that sacred cause as to win the world's admiration". To this Wilson replied: "Generally speaking, it

would seem desirable to remove the League from the influence of current events and keep aloof from a state of mind that could lead us back upon the paths from which we are now emerging."

A few days earlier, Colonel House and the president of the American Red Cross had met and agreed that the headquarters of the International Red Cross and of the League should be "if not adjoining at least close", another point in Geneva's favour. Finally, on 10 April 1919 the League's Commission held a night-time meeting at the Hotel Crillon in Paris on the question of where the League's headquarters should be located. It was a lively meeting. A sub-committee presented its case for Geneva. Belgium again pleaded for Brussels. Great Britain, represented by Lord Robert Cecil, who had worked with the Red Cross during the war, defended Geneva. His arguments were countered by France, supporting Brussels as the symbolic victim of the kind of illegality and injustice that should never be allowed to recur. President Wilson declared: "We all wish to rid the world of the sufferings of war. We shall not obtain this result if we choose a town where the memory of this war would prevent impartial discussion. The peace of the world cannot be secured by perpetuating international hatreds. Geneva is already the seat of the International Red Cross, which has placed itself at the service of both groups of belligerents, and which, so far as possible, has remained unaffected by the antipathies provoked by the war. Moreover, Switzerland is a people sworn to absolute neutrality by its Constitution and its blend of races and languages. It was marked out to be the

meeting place of other peoples desiring to undertake a work of peace and cooperation.”

Put to the vote, the proposal of Geneva was carried, and again at the plenary meeting of the Peace Conference. The city’s name was included in Article VII of the Covenant, although with the proviso that the Council of the League could at any time decide to choose another location.

And that is exactly what the Council did. With Wilson back in the United States (where the League was unpopular) and seemingly removed from the decision-making process, a group of Frenchmen (one of them Jean Monnet, the future architect of the European Common Market) working in the League’s General Secretariat set about scheming in favour of Brussels. They obtained the unanimous agreement of the Council for the inaugural meeting of the League to be held in the Belgian capital. Their aim was to create a state of affairs in which Article VII of the Covenant could then be modified. Wilson was angry, especially after the Swiss people had voted in favour of joining the League on 16 May — a vote in which the question of where to locate the headquarters had played a role. Since he was empowered to convene the meeting, Wilson was not afraid to stand up to the Council by stating, on 17 July 1920, that the Assembly’s first meeting would be held “at the city of Geneva, seat of the League of Nations, on 15 November at 11 a.m.”.

Motta could now afford to be magnanimous towards Belgium, and proposed to delegates that Paul Hymans be elected unopposed to the presidency.

Another eminent person who had been at work on

behalf of Geneva was the trade-unionist Albert Thomas, former French Secretary of State for artillery and munitions during the war. He was admired for having pressed for the introduction of socially acceptable conditions in armaments manufacturing, and in 1919 had been elected Director-General of the International Labour Organisation. The ILO, a counterpart institution to the League, was created by the Treaty of Versailles and the Covenant in response to the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917. It established a system of tripartite negotiations among workers, employers and governments. The aim was that the same principles of reasonableness and fairness should apply in industrial relations as would now apply in relations among states. This should be done internationally, since “the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries”, as stated in the preamble to the ILO Constitution.

The Covenant stipulated that the ILO should be located in the same place as the League. Thomas, however, was well aware of the web of intrigue surrounding the League’s headquarter, which was delaying the permanent establishment of the ILO. The latter already had a staff of around a hundred officials who were being shunted between London, Washington, Paris and Genoa. The Director-General, who had a clear preference for Geneva, a city not under the sway of the Entente governments, obtained from his Governing Body the authorization to reserve a building in Geneva. This was the “La Châtelaine” boarding school in Pregny, on which the Red Cross also had its eye. The



building's owners agreed to hold the property for the ILO until 10 June, after which they would turn to the other prospective buyer. When the ILO Governing Body met in Genoa on 3 June, Thomas obtained an explicit decision in favour of Geneva. On the grounds that he could not "sacrifice the future of the Office and its life to the hesitations or combinations of the Secretariat of the League of Nations", he persuaded the Governing Body to adopt a resolution "deciding, pending a final decision by the League, to establish the seat of the office at Geneva as stipulated in the Peace Treaty". Thomas had forced the issue most undiplomatically, and his success was due not only to his stubbornly tenacious character but also to the steadfast support of the pro-Geneva camp.

*Mural by Dean Cornwell, the famous American "Dean of Illustrators", commissioned for the ILO by the American Federation of Labor.*

The International Labour Office was the first organization of the League to take up quarters in Geneva (provisionally in La Châtelaine), even before Wilson had confirmed that the League would indeed have its seat there. Its own building was built on a lakeside site between 1923 and 1926 by the Swiss architect Georges Epitoux in a Protestant interpretation of Florentine architecture. It illustrated the optimistic "international Geneva" of those years: its art deco ornamentation reflects the joy of work in freedom and dignity. The building, repeatedly enlarged and transformed, was renamed the William Rappard Centre

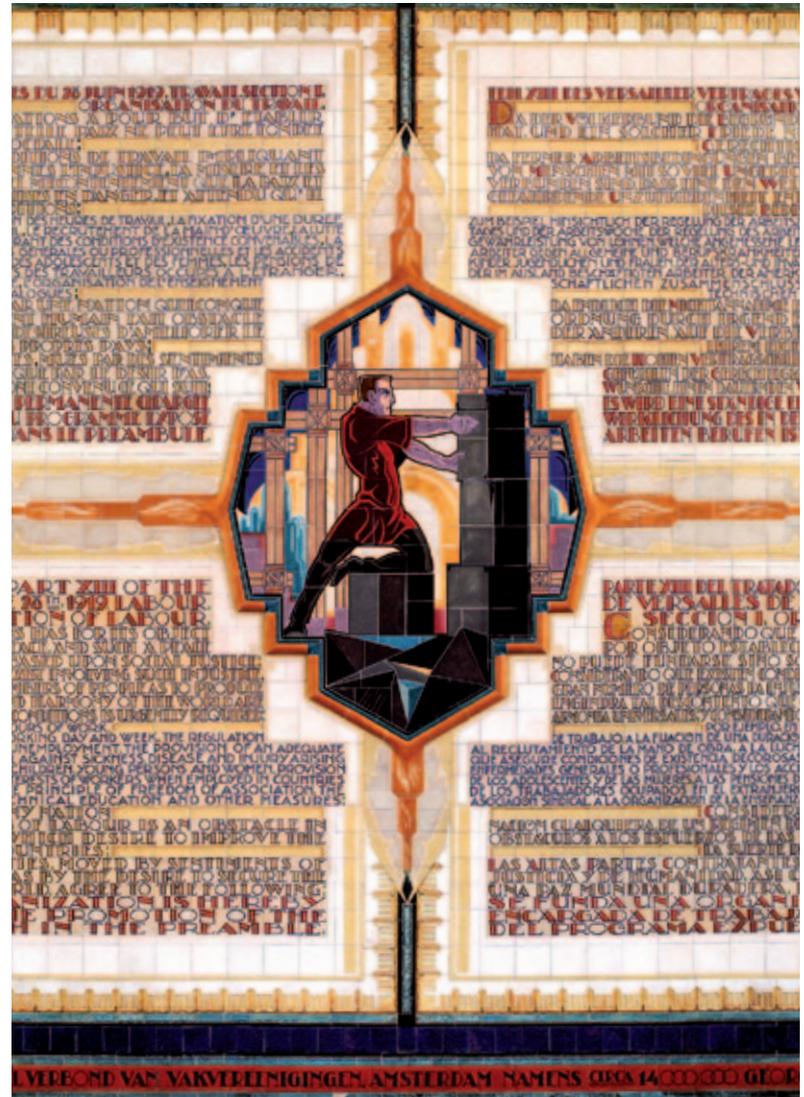
in 1975, and is today the headquarters of the World Trade Organization.

Finding a building for the League of Nations was more difficult. The Secretariat was housed in the Hotel National and the Assembly in the Salle de la Réformation; for nine long years many difficulties had to be overcome before the first stone of the Palais des Nations was laid in the Ariana park. The architectural competition stipulated that the building should “symbolise the peaceful glory of the 20th century”, and it was certainly majestic. It was inaugurated in 1937 — a fateful time, as this was the decade that saw the League’s security policy fail in China (1932), Ethiopia (1936) and Poland (1939), as well as the formation of the Axis led by Nazi Germany (1936). The League was an Ark amid the flood of hatred that was engulfing the world.

Over twenty years, the League had acquired as many enemies as friends, and it was fashionable to deride it. Geneva became synonymous with excessive idealism that was out of tune with the reality of international political relations. At the time of the Protestant oligarchy it had been mocked as “the cavern of the self-righteous”; now the disillusioned pacifists were calling it the “bureaucrats’ crossroads”. All the same, the Palais was the biggest public building in Europe, and one of the most impressive.

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*Delft ceramic panel, a 1926 gift of the International Federation of Trade Unions, reproducing in four languages the Preamble to Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles, which became the ILO’s Constitution. The panel was designed and made by the Dutch artist Albert Hahn Jr.*





*Basic project for the Palais des Nations submitted by architects Henri-Paul Nénot and Julien Flegenheimer; Carlo Broggi, Camille Lefèvre and Joseph Vago also worked on the final project.*

In Albert Cohen's novel *Her Lover*, the pathetic civil servant showing his wife around the building echoes the general state of awe: "Imagine, 1,700 doors, all with four coats of paint ... and there are 1,900 radiators, 2,300 square metres of linoleum, 212 km of electric wiring, 1,500 taps, 57 water hydrants and 175 fire extinguishers! It all adds up, doesn't it? It is enormous, enormous. For instance, how many lavatories do you reckon we have got here? ... 668," he said, barely keeping his emotions in check."

It was with the League of Nations and the ILO that

international Geneva as we know it really came into being. Energy and excitement flowed from these global institutions into the small, rather dreary city of 120,000 inhabitants (170,000 for the canton as a whole). It had lagged behind Brussels in terms of infrastructure, meeting places and the public spaces of a radiant capital city. In Geneva, everything needed to be built. The ILO attracted representatives of the three parties to its negotiations on the international standards that should govern labour relations — governments, trade union federations and employers. The League spawned diplomatic missions with their ambassadors and legal experts, disarmament specialists, and technical experts of all kinds in all the areas the organization had to deal with: hygiene and health, transport,

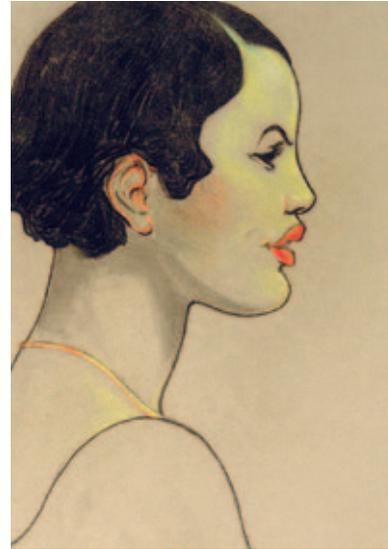


*The lessons of Salamanca, José-Maria Sert, Council Room ceiling, 1936. Five men symbolise fraternity by holding one another by the wrist, with Salamanca cathedral in the background.*

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economic issues, refugees, protection of children, slavery, trafficking in women, and so on.

Moreover, the League attracted a constellation of committees, associations, societies and unions seeking to get close to the heart of such a promising institution. These included the International Peace Bureau, previously in Bern, the League for the United States of Europe — Young Europe, the World Jewish Congress, the International League for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples, the International Philarmenian League, the forerunner of the International



*Miss Pantip Devakul represented Siam at the LON Assembly in 1929. Drawing by Virginia Oakley, 1929.*

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Students Service and the Nansen Office for Refugees, to mention but a few. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom left Zurich in 1919 to establish its headquarters in Geneva, where Clara Guthrie d'Arcis had already, in 1915, founded the World Union of Women for International Concord. Catholics were also active: in September, at the same time as the inauguration of the League of Nations Assembly, they established the Geneva International Catholic Weeks "to raise the voice of Christian morality and politics".

The post-war period was one of hope, and 1925 saw



*Die Mütter (VI), Käthe Kollwitz, 1922-1923, one of seven engravings on wood in the League of Nations museum, depicting the sufferings endured during the First World War.*

the creation of the International Bureau of Education, which addressed the question of education worldwide; the International Broadcasting Union, to spread understanding among peoples; and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, aimed at promoting universal, cultural and scientific exchange (its members included some of the greatest scientists and thinkers of the day, Bergson, Curie, Einstein and others). Another development in this field was the opening in 1927 of the Graduate

Institute for International Studies, the first such establishment in Europe to specialise in research on international relations. It was designed to provide high-calibre recruits for the League of Nations, and was housed in the Villa Lammermoor, where Alexandrine Barton had once held the best attended diplomatic salon in Switzerland. Many of its teachers and students were to make their name both in the Institute and in Geneva.

Between 1920 and 1939, Geneva grew and modernized, adapting rapidly to its new role. To live up to the privilege of having been chosen, it built a new railway station, an airport, wireless communications and new hotels. But it then found itself at the heart of the schizophrenia that overwhelmed the League of Nations between 1933 and 1937: it had all the intellectual, political and diplomatic tools needed for peace, but at the same time was aware that it could not tame the flames — stoked by human passions — that were looming over the world. Crisis, doubt and discord crept their way to the very top of the Secretariat.

In 1939, with its neighbours now at war, Switzerland cut its ties with the League. In 1938 it had already announced its return to full neutrality so as not to have to apply economic sanctions against Italy, which had been found guilty of aggression against Abyssinia. But under the pressure of a Germany that was tempted to plant the Nazi flag on a League it abhorred, the Confederation distanced itself even more plainly: it stopped paying its contributions, cut off all contact with the Secretariat, and terminated the agreements linking it with League activities, and in particular its Radio-Nations wireless broadcasting station.

After the French defeat in 1940, with the German armies on the border of Switzerland and threatening to occupy it, the League and ILO sent away their core services to the United States, Canada and Great Britain. Of the 580 officials, barely 100 remained in Geneva, doing what work could still be done, such as registering treaties and updating documentation on what had been accomplished so that at some future date everything would be ready for a new start. The fuel oil to heat the building came from the stock recovered by the League from the liquidation of the assets of Radio-Nations.

For the next five years, the Palace of Peace in Ariana Park was mothballed. Its guards had nothing left to do other than dusting its dry taps and polishing the kilometres of linoleum where the sound of footsteps was now a faint memory.

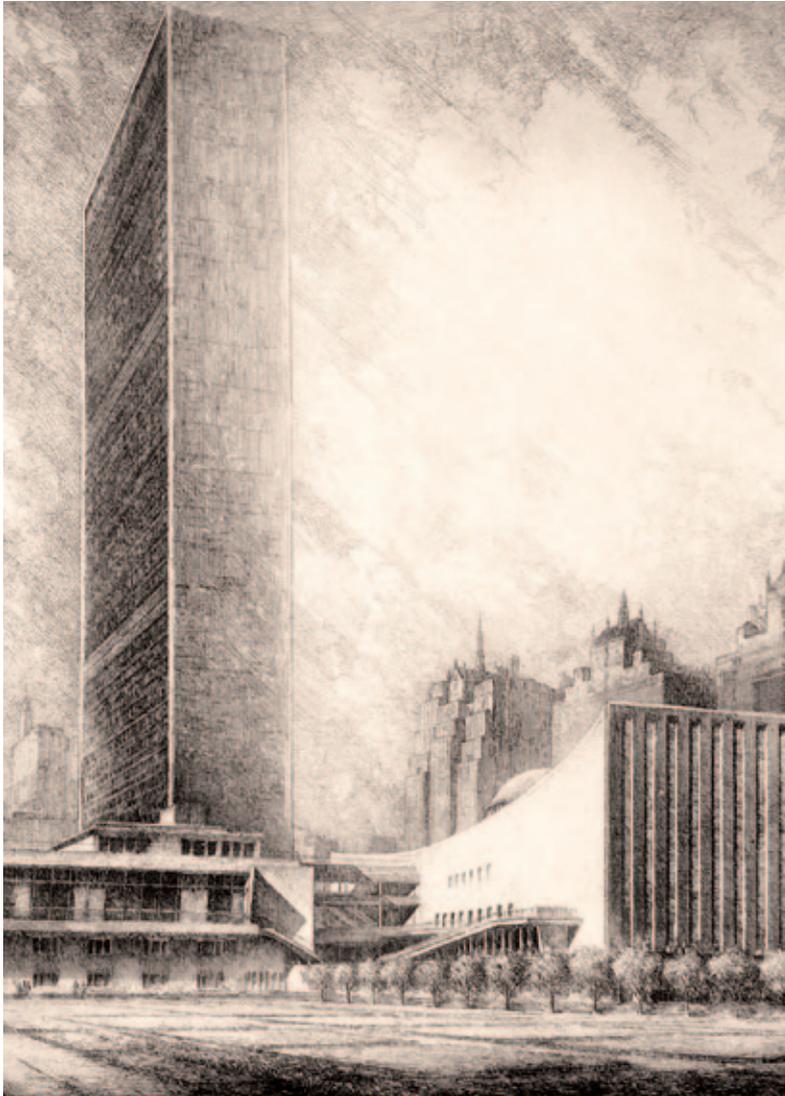
## CHAPTER IV

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### GENEVA AND THE UNITED NATIONS : SERVING THE GREATER GOOD

**A**fter the Second World War, the rivalry between Geneva and Brussels was transformed into a form of understanding. Albeit with differing situations, roles and status, the two cities came to symbolise the competition between Europe and the United States throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The headquarters of the United Nations was placed in the United States — as one of the great power on the winning side — and more specifically in New York, because the Rockefeller family provided the site. Europe no longer had the weight to challenge the decision. According to William Rappard, this choice was not “an objection to the former seat of the League of Nations or Switzerland”, but



above all the result of “the attraction of the New World”. As the League was to be dissolved, he was worried about what would happen to his home town of Geneva. In that connection he had met René Cassin, representing France in the procedure for winding up the League. “Along with most of his colleagues, he [Cassin] is wholly determined to do everything to prevent the looting of the League of Nation’s library in Geneva” he told Max Petitpierre, chief of the Swiss federal Political Department (foreign ministry). “His aim was to protect the European heritage. He made it clear to me that the United States, having won over the headquarters issue, was feeling some apprehension and even distrust over what it saw as an attempt to erode its victory by retaining some United Nations services in Geneva”.

While Switzerland was a friend of the United States, it was wary of the international system the US was establishing through the United Nations Charter, with a Security Council in which the major powers had a veto. This was clearly an alliance of the victors: the Swiss Confederation had no place there, and perhaps international Geneva no longer served any purpose either.

It was agreed in 1946 that the League building would become UN property. But if it were to house political activities, what would become of Swiss neutrality in the event of a crisis? Would it be necessary to ask the United

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*United Nations headquarters in New York, created by an outstanding team of architects, including Le Corbusier, led by Wallace Harrison. The building was inaugurated in 1953.*

Nations to leave? The memory of 1939 was still very much alive. Initially the Swiss suggested that only UN technical bodies should be placed in Geneva. The British objected: the United Nations should feel at home everywhere. Agreement was reached at the end of 1946. It was noted that Switzerland would not be held responsible in any way for the activities of the United Nations and its agencies, and that in the event of conflict between member states military operations would never be directed from Swiss territory. As for practical arrangements, the assets of the League were transferred to the UN, whose officials serving in Geneva would be granted diplomatic treatment and immunity.

Once the United Nations was “also” established in Geneva, the International Labour Office could be brought back from Montreal to its old building on the shores of Lac Léman. Europe had won over America, although it was only a small victory as the first budget voted by the UN General Assembly for the Geneva Office amounted to only 800,000 dollars, or three million Swiss francs, one-tenth of the League’s budget when at the height of its powers. In 1946, of course, only eleven out of twenty-five European states were members of the United Nations. The continent lay in ruins.

Geneva was helped by some new ideas whose seeds had been planted in the closing years of the League of Nations, when it had become clear that the League’s political failure was offset by work in the service of human welfare. These reform proposals, set out in the Bruce Report, were aimed at relieving the organization of the burden of col-

lective security. It could thus redirect its activities primarily to economic and social questions that were considered more likely to be tackled successfully in the shorter term.

These ideas were now applied to the UN, underpinned by the spread of “functionalism” — the prevailing theory that peace stemmed from the ability of states to resolve their problems together and thus create a transnational civil society concerned with finding solutions in all spheres of human activity. Functional international agencies, specializing in different areas, would encourage the development of independent professional communities that could gradually erode nationalism in the name of the higher shared interests.

These ideas were not very far from those of Jean Monnet on Franco-German reconciliation through the pooling of the coal and steel industries. The thinking that created the European Common Market in Brussels would produce a cluster of specialized agencies for world improvement in Geneva too, albeit without the same political ambition or economic resources.

These agencies associated with the new organization, although independent (in line with President Franklin Roosevelt’s wish to protect the technical specialists by keeping them separate from the political centre), were scattered between Paris, London, Rome, Vienna, Washington and later also Nairobi, Copenhagen and Bonn. Most, however, settled in Geneva for practical and also historical reasons, insofar as they continued activities begun by the League of Nations. This was the case with the World Health Organization, the Office of the High Commissioner

for Refugees, the International Telecommunications Union and the International Labour Organisation. A major centre of international life, important enough for most states to accredit diplomatic missions and assign experts of all kinds, thus grew up around the European Office of the United Nations in the Palais des Nations. The latter housed a number of UN bodies, including the Economic Commission for Europe.

Today Geneva has twenty-eight international organizations, 121 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and one or more diplomatic missions representing 166 countries: a total of some 30,000 jobs. Every year, hundreds of conferences bring together tens of thousands of delegates or experts.

Highly specialized technical organizations in such fields as patents or telecommunications, meteorology or trade legislation, work side by side with the constellation of human rights organizations dealing with assistance to refugees, monitoring of migrations, humanitarian relief

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*Fridtjof Nansen, by Axel Revold. Having won fame as the explorer of the frozen Arctic Ocean in 1882, Nansen became a world star by crossing Greenland on skis. He was appointed Norwegian ambassador to the League of Nations, and named High Commissioner for refugees, displaced persons and prisoners of war. In that capacity he created the passport that bears his name, thanks to which refugees who had become homeless could reside legally in the country that issued such a passport. This illustrious action won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922 and was a justification for maintaining the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva after the Second World War. Oil on canvas, 1946.*





*The Palais des Nations today. In the background on the left is the ICRC building and at the very back the ILO.*

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of every kind and oversight of respect for human rights in general. There is not a single sphere of human activity (even sexual activity since the appearance of AIDS) that is not dealt with by some agency, organization, programme, commission or council of the UN with an office in Geneva.

While the political centre remained in New York, Geneva's functional specialization left all sides the leeway they wanted. But it also created a split between the goals pursued in each area and the resources made available, between utopia and political reality. As a general rule, Geneva had to deal with the idealistic goals — a role

which suits it so well, given also that it can live with the inevitable disappointments.

The UN, including its Geneva cluster, is continually being overhauled. A dozen reforms have been carried out or attempted since 1946. For the most part, Switzerland has supported these efforts, both as a small country that is fundamentally hostile to the dominance of the Big Powers embodied by the Security Council, but also because it is a nation that tends to believe that the desirable should be rendered possible: “where there's a will there's a way”.

As a UN member since 2002, after having received every assurance that its permanent armed neutrality would not be jeopardized, Switzerland immediately contributed to reforming the Commission on Human Rights

(which was achieved in 2006), and the Security Council — which, however, has made little headway.

Switzerland's accession to the UN strengthened Geneva as a centre for multilateral negotiation. The Confederation had already been playing its part, in particular financially, in the specialized agencies to which it belongs, and as host country responsible for diplomatic and practical issues concerning the United Nations (including its buildings). In 1964 it set up (with Geneva, after a contested local referendum) the International Organizations' Building Fund (FIPOI) for the purpose of making the necessary buildings available on economically favourable terms.

In those heady days of the UN's inception, "international Geneva" won back its place in the hearts of the Swiss, and the trauma of the League of Nations was forgotten. The Swiss federal government was quick to see the advantage: during the Cold War, the UN Geneva Office had retained two important activities as a result of being located in a neutral state. One was disarmament, which enabled the representatives of East and West to negotiate nuclear arms reduction in a neutral spot. The second was the hosting of major political conferences — on Indochina in 1954, Laos in 1962, and development in 1964. In 1955, Geneva hosted the first meeting of the Big Four (USA, USSR, Great Britain and France) since the 1945 Potsdam meeting, and in 1985 it hosted the Summit at which Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev met to discuss ways to end the Cold War. For decades, until 1989, scores of more discreet meetings between envoys of East and West placed Geneva at the centre of a net-

work of intensive informal communication.

For most Swiss political leaders "international Geneva" (not to be confused with the canton of Geneva, a part of the Confederation on the same footing as all the others) has become a cornerstone of Swiss foreign policy — a niche of interests and expertise that must be defended in the same way as Britain, for example, defends its City of London, Paris defends its fashion industry and the United States supports its Silicon Valley. For Switzerland, international Geneva is an asset and an outlet, boosted by an attractive tax policy for any economic organization wishing to establish its headquarters there; and for the international officials it undoubtedly provides a setting that facilitates their work: a single phone call is all that is needed, for example, for a trade director to meet a patents director to discuss a matter of common interest over lunch; or for a High Commissioner for Refugees to dine with his or her counterpart for human rights and hammer out a solution to some difficult issue. Following a question on the WHO's management of epidemics, a joint research programme can be launched by Geneva University and the Graduate Institute for International Studies and Development, and so forth. The city's compact size and the important tasks entrusted to it are conducive to thought, discussion, negotiation — and hope.

It is almost as if a spell had been cast, returning Geneva to its roots: to that Geneva of old that shared Calvin's belief in personal responsibility before God and Rousseau's belief in human freedom — and which also believed in its own abilities, just as Horace-Bénédict de Saussure believed



*The Globe, one of CERN's new symbols, is a ground-breaking wooden construction by Hervé Dessimoz and Thomas Büchi. Designed for Expo 02 in Neuchâtel in 2002, it was given to CERN by the Swiss Confederation.*

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in his, when he set out to climb Mont-Blanc to study its icy expanses, or like Henry Dunant, who was idealistic enough to imagine ways of reforming warfare.

Denis de Rougemont, who appealed to the European Conference on Culture in Lausanne in 1949 to establish an atomic laboratory in Europe, belonged to this family of prophets. Together with a handful of physicists from France, Italy and Denmark, he voiced the wish to see a revival of a European science that had been decapitated by the brain drain of German scientists to the United States

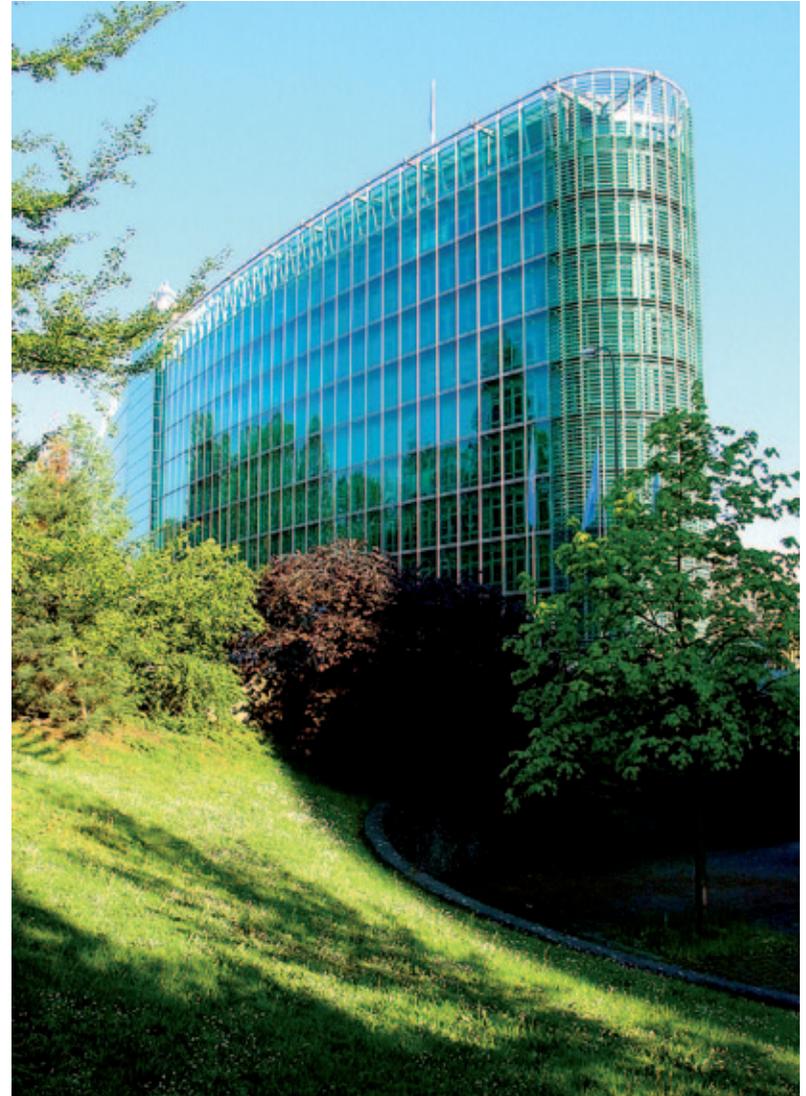
during the Nazi period. This call was heard, repeated and developed; and finally in 1954 the European Nuclear Research Centre, CERN, jewel of Geneva's multinational "intellectual cluster", commenced operations in the suburban village of Meyrin. It had the support of neighbouring France, but was opposed by the Genevan communists, who launched an unsuccessful referendum against it.

Belief in the peaceful use of the atom and in the advancement of mankind and its inventions thus prevailed in Geneva; and later on, when CERN invented the World Wide Web, the believers could deservedly feel that they had been in the right. While particles collide at unimaginable speeds in the tunnels bored at vast expense beneath the foothills of the Jura, it is the Web that has won universal recognition. Would it be going too far to see this as a sign of Geneva as the birthplace of the communication society?

Indeed, would it be too much to see a connection with the fact that Geneva also hosts the seat of Christian ecumenism, the World Council of Churches, with its faith in transcending the doctrinal divisions between churches?

Robert de Traz foresaw this when he wrote an essay on the *Spirit of Geneva* in 1929: "This spirit of Geneva, still intermittent, local, and displayed by but a few persons, is a spirit which comprises a desire for liberty and universality, a confidence in man, provided he submit to rules, an inexhaustible curiosity as to ideas and people, a compassion for all miseries combined with an urge to invent, to ameliorate, to administer with method; this spirit, I say, escaping suddenly from its natural repre-

sentatives, grows gigantic, adopts new significance even at the risk of weakening itself, and becomes the ideal of innumerable foreigners of all races who, scattered over the world, are often ignorant of Geneva's past history. It ceases thus to be the exclusive attribute of the Genevans, and is invoked by most nations on earth. The very name, 'Geneva', comes thus to transcend any local or particular significance, and is transformed by a strange experience into a symbol."



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*World Meteorological Organization (WMO) building, one of the first "green" buildings, was designed by the architects Rino Brodbeck and Jacques Roulet for a natural transfer of heat.*

## CONCLUSION

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**O**f all the great defining moments that marked the development of today's international Geneva, the most decisive was the moment when the League of Nations was founded in 1920. Geneva and Switzerland were then joined in a fruitful paradox: because Switzerland was neutral and deliberately aloof from the turmoil of international competition, Geneva could exist in the midst of this rivalry and yet provide a framework for the efforts aimed at taming it. Until 1939, the name of Geneva was seen as epitomizing the pacifist ideal and also as its foil. Whether one believed in the League of Nations or not, around the world the League was synonymous with Geneva.

The League never reached its twentieth birthday. And yet, despite its dramatic end, its nineteen years of life established such a novel and necessary form of international relations that, after the Second World War, it led to a similar organization of nations, in which the shortcom-

ings of the first attempt had been corrected. Switzerland once again kept a low political profile, to assure Geneva's international role. And for another forty years, protected and helped by the Confederation as the jewel in its diplomatic crown, the city housed the international community's main bodies of social, technical, scientific and economic cooperation. In and around Geneva an expertise in international cooperation developed, attracting new organizations that clustered around the older ones. In this way, the core of professional competences grew still further. This success was also due to Switzerland's inoffensive stance during the Cold War and during the period of decolonization, as well as its geographical location in the middle of a divided Europe.

Things changed in 1989. There was no longer a Berlin Wall, no longer a communist power in Moscow, no longer a world divided in two with states allied accordingly; no longer a political barrier to trade. Some poor countries grew richer and rich countries grew afraid. This was called globalization. The UN was buffeted by political storms, both desired and rejected; it was more necessary than ever and yet forever disappointing expectations. If the UN Security Council lost its legitimacy, could the rest of the Organization retain its own? If world governance shifted towards more modern institutions for which a need was now felt, who would continue to finance the old United Nations family, now more criticized than cherished?

Along with these uncertainties concerning the longer-term future, Geneva faced one certainty: henceforth, any city with good infrastructure anywhere in the world could

host summit meetings, permanent secretariats, international conferences or multilateral organizations. In the 1970s there had already been a battle between Geneva and Vienna over the siting of new United Nations offices, and the UN Office at Vienna was finally opened in January 1980. With a staff of only 4,000, it is not on a par with the Geneva Office.

The competition among candidate cities to host international organizations has become fierce. To obtain the WTO in 1995 against its rival Bonn, Geneva and Switzerland had to offer exceptional blandishments. This revealed the cost of the economic and social efforts that now had to be made to hold on to such organizations. Geneva and Switzerland were prepared to pay this price, but were also backed by historical factors: the WTO was the successor of the GATT, which had been based in Geneva. There was also the cluster rationale — grouping together international activities together to benefit from economies of scale.

This clustering, however, has led to a shortage of space, congestion of services and skyrocketing prices. Geneva is now a leading financial and banking city and a major centre for commodity trading; it has an expanding watch-making sector, and is host to many transnational companies. It needs not just ambition but fervour to cope with the consequences of its own success, as it overflows into France and the neighbouring canton of Vaud, bringing down walls and frontiers as resistance fades.

When not stymied by a referendum of protesting citizens, the authorities do obtain land and put up buildings. Roads are needed, as are buildings, schools, public

transport and libraries. There is also a need for an overall vision to maintain the quality of life in Geneva, and to ensure that the city remains open to all, universally. Some twenty states still do not have a diplomatic representation at the UN Geneva Office. Bankers, industrialists, world captains of industry, have all made their contributions, believing that the private sector should share in the common endeavour.

In any event, Geneva has something in its favour that New York does not: non-political institutions in which rules and standards are being drafted to meet the needs of modern societies: patents, standardization, telecommunications, health, climate, working conditions, trade rules and so on. Every day thousands of small-scale negotiations proceed, succeed or give way to other negotiations in this specialized platform for creating a connected, if not coherent, world. At the same time, with the major humanitarian endeavours of the High Commissioners for human rights and for refugees and the International Organization for Migration, the international community has in Geneva a laboratory for the coexistence of its societies. Here, solutions are sought even if they are not always found.

The people of Geneva, like the Swiss in general, are only partially aware of these lofty ambitions, which are not always perceptible amidst the daily routine. Yet they are here, fed by remembrance of the past and strengthened by the achievements of the present. And at times they become visible — and can be seen to be thriving and full of self-confidence.

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FOLLOWING PAGES: “*The Uniplanetary System, in memory of Galileo Galilei*”, installation by Brazilian artist Alex Flemming, exhibited in 2010 in the conference room of the World Trade Organization.



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