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Chapter 2

Mobilizing Internationalism

The Dutch League of Nations Union (1919 – 1932)

In the 1920s and 1930s, the prevention of another world war was an urgent issue, which led to novel, ideologically driven initiatives. The League of Nations promoted the idea that world peace depended on collective security through disarmament, arbitration, negotiation and international law, and on cooperation through transnational networks rather than through traditional multilateral expedients.¹ This held the promise that disputes would be settled through legal channels,² and a new generation of diplomats would enhance open diplomacy, replace the international, aristocratic elite, and democratize politics. The 1920s were also “the first ‘Golden Age’ of disarmament theory and practice.”³ For the first time, an international organization such as the League touched upon arms limitation or even arms reduction. These initiatives led to a true détente for Europe, the United States and the Pacific, particularly noticeable around 1925 – 1928. Simultaneously, pacifist organizations blossomed, on a religious, political and humanitarian basis, and became transnationally organized.⁴ Recent scholarship on interwar international relations has shown more appreciation for the novelty of these initiatives related to the League of Nations,⁵ in contrast

1 For example, see Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112/4 (October 2007): 1091–1117.

2 Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and a World Without War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 18–23.

3 Dick Richardson, “Process and progress in Disarmament: Some Lessons of History,” in *Europe in Transition: Politics and Nuclear Security*, ed. Vilho Harle and Pekka Sivonen (London: Pinter, 1989), 26.

4 Peter Brock and Thomas Socknat. “Preface,” in *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Peter Brock and Thomas Socknat (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), ix.

5 For example, see: Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Patrick Cohrs. *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations.”

with most works prior to the 1990s, which tended to emphasize the interwar crises that eventually led to World War II.⁶

The Dutch government welcomed the foundation of the League of Nations hesitantly in the beginning, due to its successful policy of neutrality during World War I. It became a member of the League of Nations, participated in the international disarmament negotiations and, on a non-governmental level, a diverse and active peace movement arose. Research on this post-war re-emergence of the Netherlands on the international scene is largely concerned with matters of foreign policy and the government's initial attempts to remain both neutral and have a greater say in international affairs, mainly its gradual and active involvement in international initiatives of war prevention.⁷ Research on the interwar Dutch peace movement is scarcer, and primarily deals with how the peace movement positioned itself regarding national defense budgets, such as the governmental proposal to reinforce the colonial fleet in 1923.⁸ However, the Dutch peace movement was involved in both national and international questions. The movement consisted of different organizations and parties that roughly corresponded to the pillarized structure of Dutch society and politics: the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP), the Protestant *Kerk en Vrede*, and the Dutch League of Nations Union (the *Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede* or *Vereeniging* for short) were the leading actors within the Dutch peace movement. Despite their differences, most pacifist organizations in the Netherlands acclaimed the creation of the League of Nations and struggled in their responses to its declining effectiveness in the field of war prevention.

This chapter deals with the Dutch League of Nations Union, focusing on the communicative strategies it chose to achieve its goals as well as its role in the international disarmament negotiations. Like its sister organizations in other

6 Examples of this old school of research are Philip Noël-Baker, *The First Disarmament Conference 1932–1933 and why it failed* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979) and Maurice Vaïsse, “La SdN et le désarmement,” in *The League of Nations in Retrospect*, ed. Arnold Angenendt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), 245–265.

7 For example, see Remco van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede. Nederland en het streven naar een nieuwe wereldorde 1919–1946* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1999); and a number of general handbooks on Dutch foreign policy in which the interwar period is a small section, such as Duco Hellema, *Buitenlandse politiek van Nederland. De Nederlandse rol in de wereldpolitiek* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 2006).

8 Henri Beunders, “Weg met de Vlootwet! De maritieme bewapeningspolitiek van het kabinet-Ruys de Beerenbrouck en het succesvolle verzet daartegen in 1923” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 1984); John Bout, “The Nature and Extent of Antimilitarism and Pacifism in the Netherlands from 1918 to 1940 and the Degree to Which They Contributed to the Quick Defeat in May 1940” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1976).

countries, the *Vereeniging* was concerned with forging Dutch public opinion in favor of the League of Nations. In doing so, it devoted much attention to the international disarmament negotiations, which may be considered a lens through which contemporaries viewed the overall functioning of the League in the field of war prevention. This chapter analyzes how the *Vereeniging* changed its communicative strategies to forge public opinion and governmental policy in favor of the League of Nations. It argues that, as the international political situation declined, moral arguments prevailed over pragmatic arguments and the Dutch peace movement changed its character accordingly. As such, this chapter contributes to our understanding of the Dutch peace movement, which was more internationally oriented than the literature has assumed. It also offers a more detailed insight into the timing of the peace movements' mobilization overall. Indeed, Sam Marullo and David Meyer have argued that peace movements tend to mobilize too late, when war is imminent and they are least likely to make a difference.⁹ However, one can observe in the 1920s widespread hope that peace would be preserved, not as a response to a threat of new war but as a reaction against militarism in the aftermath of war.

In the following pages, the chosen sources and methods used to analyze the *Vereeniging's* changing arguments are explained first. Then, the *Vereeniging* itself, the wider Dutch peace movement and the European civil society to which it belonged, as well as the international disarmament negotiations to which the *Vereeniging* responded will be introduced. The empirical part of this chapter consists of two main components, which focus on how the *Vereeniging* justified its existence and how it pursued its goals. It will argue that, as the *détente* gave way to an ever-stronger feeling of international crisis, the *Vereeniging* gradually shifted from a pragmatic stance to a more morally-driven argumentation. If it can be shown that this change of discourse heavily depended on the course of international politics, it would mean that parts of the Dutch peace movement were more internationally oriented than the relevant literature has assumed to date.

Sources and methods

The archive of the *Vereeniging* and its journal *De Volkenbond* (The League of Nations) is part of the collection of the International Institute of Social History

⁹ Sam Marullo and David S. Meyer, "Antiwar and Peace Movements," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 642.

(IISG) in Amsterdam. This source tells us much about the ideals of the *Vereeniging*, their development and the adjustment of its means and language to changing international politics toward the end of the 1920s. The archive has informative brochures, pamphlets, programs of action, and circular letters from the executive committee to the local sections. In the majority of cases these documents are voted decisions or measures. More interesting for the purpose of this chapter are the *Vereeniging's* journals, in particular the journal *De Volkenbond*. This was a platform where new directives of the *Vereeniging* took shape. It was a forum where members, supporters and critics, however minor, of the *Vereeniging* could freely express their opinions and arguments. Contrary to the propagandistic smaller journal *Voor Volkenbond en Vrede* (For the League of Nations and Peace), authors in *De Volkenbond* usually signed their writings and the editors assumed no responsibility for the contents.¹⁰ In several cases, discussions in *De Volkenbond* led to “official”, new directives of the *Vereeniging*.¹¹

To analyze changes in the argumentation of the *Vereeniging*, I draw upon Habermas' theory on communicative action and its applicability in relation to argumentative strategies of movements. Habermas notes that actors can adopt pragmatic, ethical and moral ways to justify the imperatives that are needed to solve their specific questions. Pragmatic arguments are instrumental and deal with practical questions. The point of departure is the realization of one's own interests. Reflection is rational and focuses on the realization of a feasible purpose, goal or value. Pragmatic language also tends to underline the need for compromise should interests need to be combined into a single strategy or goal.¹² This corresponds to, for example, actively addressing concrete issues or actors instead of more abstract ones.¹³ Ethical uses of practical rationality focus on the good. They deal with questions that affect one's own values in

10 IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 26, Cover 45: “Rapporten van Bestuur,” General Secretary to the Executive Committee of the *Vereeniging*, 1930.

11 For example, the initial program of action of the *Vereeniging* in 1919 contained the abolition of compulsory military service. By 1927 it was removed from the program of action due to disagreement in the executive committee (IISG, Archive Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 25, Cover 6: “Statuten van de Vereeniging voor Volkerenbond en Vrede,” 1919; *Ibid.*, File 25, Cover 14: “Rapport van de Commissie herziening Program van Actie 1926–1927”). In *De Volkenbond*, in the meantime, there was a fierce discussion on the abolition of compulsory military service and conscientious objection.

12 Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 2–3, 6, 16.

13 For instance, a pragmatic statement is: “the government should spend less money on armaments in next year's budget with the goal of having other governments do the same and thereby encourage worldwide disarmament.”

the first place, and are thus closely connected to one's identity. Ethical reflection focuses on what is good, for oneself primarily.¹⁴ Concretely, this category corresponds to evocative, occasionally emotional language, which makes use of metaphors and may tend to be formulated in the first person plural. Finally, moral uses of practical rationality focus on the right and are more universal in their intent. They deal with questions that affect the values and interests of more people than those of oneself. For moral language to be valid it needs to be abstract and it needs to be disconnected from a specific context.¹⁵ Concretely, this category corresponds to abstract, emotional language, the use of passive forms and binary oppositions, such as the self and other, logical and illogical, sound and foolish, and good and wicked.¹⁶ Such a conceptual framework inevitably presents us with an abstraction of the past, but allows us to apply our conclusions more easily to comparable case studies.

The Dutch League of Nations Union as part of an emerging European civil society

The Netherlands had a thriving peace movement during the interwar period. In 1923, 80,000 people marched the streets of Amsterdam and more than a million – a third of the adult population – successfully signed a petition against a governmental decision to reinforce the naval fleet and bolster the Dutch East Indies' defense.¹⁷ During the interwar period between 40 and 50 antimilitarist and pacifist organizations worked nationally and an equal amount worked on a regional or local level.¹⁸ These organizations were “pillarized”, which means they were either Protestant, Catholic, socialist or liberal. This was in line with the pillarized structure of Dutch society and politics, which connected people to either Protestant, Catholic, socialist or liberal political parties, schools, football clubs, hospi-

¹⁴ Habermas, *Justification and Application*, 4–6, 11–12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–7, 13–14.

¹⁶ These three categories do not have to occur only separately. They can co-exist in one person or organization concerning a specific question. For example, one can reflect pragmatically on a moral problem, and develop strategies in order to reach the goal. Accordingly, a moral problem can require various practical rationalities – pragmatic, ethical or moral ones – depending on the changing environment or situation.

¹⁷ See Beunders, “Weg met de Vlootwet!”.

¹⁸ Bout, “The Nature and Extent of Antimilitarism and Pacifism,” 7.

tals, radio and television stations, housing associations, etc.¹⁹ “Pillars” in the Dutch peace movement roughly correspond to three sources of inspiration of interwar pacifism, as coined by Martin Ceadel.²⁰ First, religion as the “oldest and most durable” inspiration found expression in the pacifist organization *Kerk en Vrede*, the then largest and currently oldest pacifist organization of the country.²¹ Even if ecumenical in theory, the organization was Protestant and almost anarchical in practice,²² in contrast to its slightly smaller Catholic equivalent, the *Roomsch-Katholieke Vredesbond*.²³ A second, nineteenth-century source of inspiration for the peace movement were political creeds such as socialism or anarchism. These inspired the SDAP which was the main instigator of the successful mobilization against the reinforcement of the colonial naval fleet in 1923, the Liberal Democratic Party (*Vrijzinnig Democratische Bond*),²⁴ and two communist parties. The anarchical International Antimilitaristic Association (IAMV), with Bart de Ligt as its tireless figurehead, was the leading and flourishing Dutch section of an international association. It was flanked by the British War Resisters’ International, some of whose leading members were also members of the IAMV, and the International Antimilitaristic Bureau, an umbrella organization for smaller antimilitaristic organizations in the Netherlands. In 1926, the IAMV joined forces with the German International Workers’ Association (IAA) and created the International Antimilitaristic Commission (IAK).²⁵

19 See the standard work on the pillarization of Dutch politics by Arend Lijphart, *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek* (Haarlem: Becht, 1990).

20 Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 13–14.

21 *Kerk en Vrede* was founded in 1924 and exists up until today. Its membership rapidly grew from 76 in 1925, 3,772 in April 1929, to 9,723 in 1933 (statistics derived from the homonymous journal of the organization, archived at the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands).

22 See also Eleni Braat, “Le pacifisme confessionnel face au désarmement dans les Pays-Bas, 1925–1933,” in *De la guerre juste à la paix juste. Aspects confessionnels de la construction de la paix dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIIe-XXe siècle)*, ed. Jean-Paul Cahn, Françoise Knopper and Anne-Marie Saint-Gille (Ville d’Ascq: Septentrion, 2008), 241–255.

23 Exact amounts of members of the *R.K. Vredesbond* are unknown. The organization has existed between 1925 and 1942 and had 70 local units in the Netherlands. Johannes B.Th. Hugenholtz, ed., *Handboek voor de vredesbeweging in Nederland* (Gouda: Mulder, 1930).

24 The Liberal Democratic Party was nicknamed the “civil servants and professors party.” It was an intellectually important party, but had little societal and political influence (Beunders, “Weg met de Vlootwet!”, 129).

25 Bout, “The Nature and Extent of Antimilitarism and Pacifism,” 68–69; Eleni Braat, “Disarmament, Neutrality and Colonialism: Conflicting Priorities in the Netherlands, 1921–1931” (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2008), 186–187.



Fig. 3: Poster of *Agitatie-Comité tegen de Vlootwet en hare gevolgen* advertising for a demonstration against the reinforcement of the Dutch East Indies' defence. IISG, BG E2/535.

A third and final source of inspiration – the major pacifist innovation of the interwar period, according to Ceadel – was utilitarianism.²⁶ “Utilitarian” pacifism did not object to war on the basis of higher religious or political principles, but on the basis of a seemingly rational weighing of the advantages and disadvantages of war, thereby concluding that war always outweighs any conceivable benefit. This utilitarian pacifism was humanitarian in its justification, although

²⁶ Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 81.

no less a dogma than religious or political pacifism. For example, it propagated that international disputes are capable of settlement by diplomatic negotiations or international arbitration. The League of Nations functioned on the basis of these principles, and a number of national League of Nations Unions propagated the organization's principles and work on a national level. The Dutch League of Nations Union is what was referred to as the '*Vereeniging*' for short in the introduction.

Founded in 1919, the *Vereeniging* reached its peak in popularity and size in 1930 when it had acquired 80 local sections and about 10,000 individual members. Mass membership, it should be noted, did not always enhance efficiency. Rather, it could also lead to internal division and apathy.²⁷ These numbers were, moreover, small compared to those of the British League of Nations Union (LNU). The LNU was by far the largest among all national associations and the driving force behind cooperation between League societies in trying to forge world public opinion in favor of the League of Nations.²⁸

The *Vereeniging* aimed "to promote the development of the League of Nations as an international legal organ, to spread the principles of peace, and to fight war." In order to reach these goals the Association organized congresses, meetings and participated in relevant gatherings. It tried to exercise its influence on children's education through its commissions for "Youth and Education" and for "Mothers and Caregivers".²⁹ Such commissions organized contests, excursions, and recommendations to government for changes in national education and, in this way, followed the successful LNU's policy on educational matters. The *Vereeniging* explored "academic questions" concerning the peace movement, and it tried to influence legislation and government policy. The most interesting and arguably most influential means to reach its goal was the publication of pamphlets and brochures and, in particular, its two journals:³⁰ *De Volkenbond* from 1925 onward, and the less frequent and propagandistic *Voor Volkenbond en Vrede* from 1928 onward.

The *Vereeniging* clearly aimed at a higher educated audience, positively predisposed towards the values and ideals of the League of Nations, aided of course by the views expressed in *De Volkenbond*. The status of those individuals expressing such views, some of them very well-known, is somewhat indicative of

²⁷ Donald S Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 125.

²⁸ See *Ibid.*, 14. On the International Federation of the League of Nations Societies, see *Ibid.*, 12–14.

²⁹ IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, *Zakagenda*, 1938, 5, call number: ZO 53503.

³⁰ IISG, Archive Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 25, Cover 6: "Statuten van de Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede," 1919.

the educated audience which they addressed: they were government representatives, public intellectuals, representatives of the armed forces, not to mention those regular authors or reporters of the journal, whose possible secondary occupations remained unmentioned. Truth be told, the journal also featured a number of anonymous authors. All these people expressed the ideals of the *Vereeniging* and contributed toward keeping discussions alive.³¹ Though favoring varying angles, the authors all tried to convince their readership of the rightfulness of their arguments in support of the League of Nations. It is the developments in the formal language in which these arguments were expressed that are striking.

The *Vereeniging* can be seen as part of an emerging global civil society³² that tried to influence international politics in the field of war and peace, based on international law, and connected local and national communities to global and transnational developments. Officially, the International Federation of League of Nations Societies (IFLNS), founded in 1919, played an important role in strengthening this global civil society, by facilitating collaboration among national League of Nations Unions to forge world public opinion in favor of the League.³³ In practice, however, the IFLNS suffered from a number of deficiencies, which considerably undermined its transnational purpose. To start, at its first annual congress, delegates failed to agree on an idea of the organization's mission. Instead, as they would again in later annual congresses, they devoted a significant amount of time to the declaration of abstract principles and proposals already in line with the League of Nations' policy. Annual congresses were con-

31 Because of the variety of authors with a comparable mindset in this article I often refer to *De Volkenbond* or the *Vereeniging* in general, whereas I specify the names of those authors with singular views. When referring to contributions in *De Volkenbond* I always mention the name of the author.

32 Neera Chandhoke, "The Limits of Global Civil Society," in *Global Civil Society 2002*, ed. Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor and Helmut Anheier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35–53; Mary Kaldor, "The Idea of a Global Civil Society," *International Affairs* 79/3 (May 2003): 583–593; Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

33 In 1922 the International Federation for League of Nations Societies included member societies specifically aimed at the League of Nations from South Africa, Germany, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Spain, Estonia, United States, France, Georgia, Britain, Greece, Haiti, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Persia, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. In 1922 Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Sweden associated through societies with a broader goal than the League of Nations specifically. Union internationale des associations pour la Société des Nations, *Bulletin no. 1. Liste des Associations affiliées à l'Union ou en relations avec elle* (Brussels: Imprimerie F. van Buggenhoudt, 1922).

cluded with formal resolutions that the IFLNS presented to the president of the League of Nations' Assembly. These thus gave the impression that the former was but a branch of the latter supranational organization rather than an independent, bottom up movement. Moreover, the steady growth of the IFLNS increasingly rendered it a liability to the League of Nations itself, as national points of view often overshadowed international interests and the congresses tended to expose dissension rather than union.³⁴

Despite the more imagined than real global civil society that the International Federation represented, it still provided a platform to annually meet with foreign sister organizations. The Dutch *Vereeniging* always attended the annual congresses. Moreover, the archives show that the *Vereeniging* actively sustained a network of international likeminded societies, also outside the framework of the IFLNS. For example, the annual report of 1926 noted, among other activities, that two board members travelled to Spain for a Dutch-Spanish joint commemoration of Hugo de Groot; the *Vereeniging* also invited Sir Arthur Salter, head of the League's economic and financial section, to inform Dutch business circles on the economic work of the League; and a delegation of the board paid an official visit to the British League of Nations Union. The *Vereeniging* planned, moreover, to draw up joint League policies with countries "in almost similar political circumstances," such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland.³⁵

Let us now move closer to discussions in the *Vereeniging* from 1919 until the beginning of the 1930s: a period when the ideals of the League of Nations, the issue of disarmament in particular, got into an ever tighter corner. The pressure is noticeable, first, in language on the justification of the *Vereeniging's* right and need to exist, and second on the pursuit of its goals, namely the international disarmament debate.

How did the *Vereeniging* justify its existence?

The desire for peace corresponded to a number of recurring trends in Dutch foreign policy, which benefitted the "raison d'être" of the *Vereeniging*. As a small European state with a large colonial empire the Netherlands strived to maintain the status quo, a foreign policy of abstentionism or neutrality, and the rule of

³⁴ Birn, *The League*, 13–14, 79–80.

³⁵ *Jaarverslag van de 'Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede' over 1925–26* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1926), 10–16, 19–20.

international law.³⁶ For these reasons, the Dutch government and peace movement both supported membership of the League of Nations and questioned its benefits. Membership corresponded to the peace loving, legalistic, and moralizing image many Dutch had of their country, and the wish to see international disputes regulated.³⁷ However, membership would also jeopardize the cherished policy of neutrality, which had become strongly embedded in Dutch foreign policy since World War I. The maintenance of neutrality during the war was, according to the government, proof that the policy actually worked, even if its success should be mostly attributed to the fact that Dutch neutrality suited both German and British interests. Also, the desire to remain neutral had evolved, starting in 1900, from a utilitarian principle to an ideological goal in itself, combined with a feeling of superiority and disdain regarding great power politics.³⁸ The League of Nations would keep in check unconstrained politics among great powers, or so its supporters hoped.

Throughout the years the *Vereeniging* gradually changed its charter and its official program of action. As a result, in *De Volkenbond* we see changing ways to express the aims and means of the *Vereeniging*.

Following its foundation in 1919, the *Vereeniging* drew up its first Program of Action. Point 1 was rather ambitious: “The fight against war as a legal means for the settlement of international conflicts.” Other relevant points from this first Program of Action were the “resolution of all international conflicts by committees, composed of impartial and independent persons” (point 2); “the speedy realization of international agreements on the limitation of armaments and on the abolition of compulsory military service” (point 3); to realize “such composition of the organs of the League of Nations, that a true representation of the people is realized” (point 4); “complete implementation of the principles, laid down in Wilson’s 14 points” (point 8); “development of the League of Nations as a legal community of all people with an orderly state government” (point 9).³⁹

36 See also Anne-Isabelle Richard, “Between the League of Nations and Europe: Multiple Internationalisms and Interwar Dutch Civil Society,” in *Shaping the International Relations of the Netherlands 1815–2000: A Small Country on the Global Scale*, ed. Ruud van Dijk et al. (London: Routledge, 2018), 99–101.

37 On characteristics of this self-image see, for example: J.C. Boogman, “Achtergronden, tendenties en tradities van het buitenlands beleid van Nederland,” in *De kracht van Nederland. Internationale positie en binnenlands beleid*, ed. Niek van Sas (Haarlem: Gotmer, 1992), 16–35; Joris Voorhoeve, “Idealisme en realisme in het Nederlandse buitenlands beleid,” in *De Nederlandse natie*, ed. S.W. Couwenberg (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1981), 80–99.

38 Van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede*, 16–17.

39 IISG, *Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede*, File 25, Cover 4: “Program van Actie,” 1919.

The following years showed promising perspectives for the League of Nations which came to solve a number of territorial conflicts and intervene, often successfully, in conflicts between and within states. In the field of disarmament, the Washington Naval Conference (1921–1922) contributed to the beginning of a postwar *détente*. The United States, Britain, Japan and France discussed the limitation and control of naval armaments. China, the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal were also present in order to discuss “Pacific and Far Eastern questions”. Even if the Washington Conference had its serious shortcomings concerning Chinese and Japanese arms limitation, it clearly led to a *détente* in the Pacific region. Also in the Netherlands, the government and public opinion gradually turned in favor of the League, especially as a number of Dutch officials obtained key positions within the Genevan organization. However, the trend was not pointed imperturbably upward. The failed ratification of the Geneva Protocol (1924) disappointed many supporters of the League of Nations. The said Protocol had sought to stipulate the consubstantial character of the peaceful settlement of international disputes, security and disarmament, i.e. the main three principles from the League of Nations Covenant. Dutch supporters of the League of the Nations had enthusiastically acclaimed the Geneva Protocol. The Dutch government, however, waited to see whether the newly elected British government would vote in favor of the protocol, which it eventually did not.⁴⁰

When, shortly afterwards, *De Volkenbond* was first published at the end of 1925, it immediately warned its readers to safeguard a rational, “academic” argumentation. The journal seemed to anxiously warn against emotionally loaded “strong phrases”, “oversensitivity” and “arid sentimentality”.⁴¹ An “emotional tone” was acceptable, the journal wrote, but it should not become dominant. After all, the *Vereeniging* did not aim at “merely invoking the heart and conscience, but [...] the common sense and national interest.”⁴²

This common-sense point of departure resonated in *De Volkenbond*. Next to being a platform for discussion, and functioning as an engine for new “official viewpoints” of the *Vereeniging*, *De Volkenbond* was also expressly used for propaganda. “But in the good, elevated sense of the word,” the journal was quick to underscore in 1925. It did not intend

to address the Dutch public with strong phrases on world peace, whose contents would, in the long run, only appear inversely proportional to the violence of the words. On the contrary, this journal will make its propaganda mostly [...] by discussing international ques-

⁴⁰ Van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede*, 69–75.

⁴¹ “Ter inleiding,” *De Volkenbond* 1/1 (15 Oct. 1925): 2.

⁴² C.H. Dresselhuys, “Een dringende oproep!,” *De Volkenbond* 1/3 (15 Dec. 1925): 2.

tions, by contemplative reports on the most important events, in particular those in and around the League of Nations. [...] What matters here is to make the Dutch public caught in the sphere of the growing League of Nations, to excite its interests for international questions.⁴³

Let us return to the official Program of Action. In 1926 the *Vereeniging* adjusted the 1919 Program of Action to current domestic and international political developments. The commission who tackled the necessary amendments probably considered the previous Program of Action too ambitious.

In a Program of Action, the practical international and national reforms that, according to the Association, can lead to the desired goal, need to be mentioned. Hence, in the Program of Action we should not place general ethical and economic principles, but rather concrete wishes, which may be realized either by national Governments or by the international League of Nations. [...] Preferably, we should not focus on the distant future, but rather include wishes, whose realization in the near future should at least not be considered entirely impossible.⁴⁴

The following years, between 1927 and 1930, saw some significant international changes, ranging from international successes such as the Briand-Kellogg Pact (1928) to gradually more disappointing developments such as the international disarmament debates in the Preparatory Commission for the Conference of Disarmament (1926–1930). This Commission had to agree on a draft convention for a future worldwide disarmament conference. Around the midst of the talks in 1928, as proposals became more concrete, contributors started experiencing more and more difficulties to reach agreements.

These developments in the international system coincided with a clear twist in how *De Volkenbond* formulated its aims and means. According to A. Anema, a prominent member of the *Vereeniging*, the main aim of his association in 1929 was “the fight against the idea of power as a dominating factor in life of the people and states among each other.”⁴⁵ In 1930, he advised his association to stay strictly impartial, far removed from “radical pacifist movements,” as well as from “groups of ultra-conservative nature.” The *Vereeniging* was supposed to

43 “Ter inleiding,” *De Volkenbond* 1/1 (15 Oct. 1925): 1.

44 IISG, *Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede*, File 25, Cover 14: “Rapport van de Commissie herziening Program van Actie 1926–1927.”

45 A. Anema, “Het doel onzer Vereeniging,” *De Volkenbond* 4/8 (May 1929): 225.

put forward, where this was possible, the foundations of a “powerful and united Dutch international policy, and of abstention, where this was not possible.”⁴⁶

A year later, in 1931, it was time again to review the Program of Action. After an initial review in 1931, it changed again in 1932. Point 1 became “the strengthening of international trust. The Association applies itself to use all legal means that can reinforce international trust between the people.” Point 2 was “the universality of the League of Nations.”⁴⁷ At this point in time, the lengthy series of talks and the ensuing draft convention of the Preparatory Commission for the Conference of Disarmament had lost much of their initial optimism.

The universal and moral abstract character of these justifications for aims and means is striking, especially if we compare them to earlier insistence around 1925–1926 to instrumentally express only feasible wishes and goals. Between the mid-1920s and the beginning of the 1930s aims and means of the *Vereeniging* had become more abstract and broader, more radical than they had been during the starting years around 1919–1920.

How did the *Vereeniging* pursue its goals?

Security and disarmament were interdependent, according to the *Vereeniging*. The former both required and could lead to the latter. Accordingly, security and disarmament could serve each other in a vicious circle, and the issue of disarmament could play a leading role in the realization of peace.

This significance of disarmament is expressed in the Programs of Action of the *Vereeniging*. In its first Program of Action (1919) it had called for “the speedy realization of international agreements on a limitation of armaments and on the abolition of compulsory military service” (point 3).⁴⁸ When it modified its Program of Action in 1926, by removing unrealistic wishes,⁴⁹ the disarmament section remained nearly unaltered. However, the wish to abolish compulsory military service disappeared from the program, because there was too much dis-

46 “Openingsrede van Professor Mr. A. Anema op de Algemeene Jaarvergadering der Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede te Hoorn op 8 november 1930,” *De Volkenbond* 6/2 (Nov. 1930): 40–43.

47 IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 28, Cover 69: “Brochure met de geschiedenis en de statuten van de Vereeniging,” 1932. See also File 28, Cover 75.

48 IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 25, Cover 6: “Statuten van de Vereeniging voor Volkerenbond en Vrede,” 1919.

49 *Ibid.*, File 25, Cover 14: “Rapport van de Commissie herziening Program van Actie 1926–1927.”

agreement on this issue within the *Vereeniging*.⁵⁰ The Dutch peace movement also disagreed regarding the topic of compulsory military service: whereas the Protestant *Kerk en Vrede* was strongly in favor of an abolition, the *Catholic R.K. Vredesbond* remained half-heartedly against abolition.⁵¹ In parallel, in 1922, the Dutch government had brought down the annual number of conscripts from 23,000 to 19,500 and reduced their training from eight months to five and a half months.⁵² It also cut back salaries of the military, all of which resulted in a lack of professional personnel and material.⁵³

In 1926 the Preparatory Commission for the Conference of Disarmament started its lengthy and strenuous work, which would last until 1930. To many supporters of the League of Nations the vision of a worldwide Conference of Disarmament had acquired such proportions that it came to embody the ideals and work of the entire League of Nations. Hopes were high when the Preparatory Commission commenced its work in 1926, and the *Vereeniging* kept a close eye on the negotiations.

Extensive, detailed reports appeared in *De Volkenbond* on the preparatory work for the Conference of Disarmament. Often the contents of these reports were rather factual, without many interpretative or concluding remarks. But when a year of negotiations had passed, the head of the Dutch delegation to the Preparatory Commission was the first to acknowledge in *De Volkenbond* that the said body was doing “a not so brilliant” job.⁵⁴ Disarmament, another

50 IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 25, Cover 14: “Rapport van de Commissie herziening Program van Actie 1926–1927.” This document notes there was disagreement regarding this issue, but it does not mention the arguments in favor or against compulsory military service.

51 The Protestant *Kerk en Vrede* was more radical than the Catholic *R.K. Vredesbond*. Moreover, the latter had closer ties to its political counterpart, the government coalition party *Roomsche Katholieke Staatspartij* (Roman Catholic State Party) than *Kerk en Vrede* had to its Protestant political counterpart, the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (Anti-Revolutionary Party). See Braat, “Le pacifisme confessionnel.”

52 Robert Wichink, “Van conservatief-liberaal tot rechts-autoritair: de reactie van het kader van beroepsofficieren op de afbraak van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht, 1918–1933” (PhD diss., Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 1994), 50.

53 An example of the bad condition of the available military material consisted of the fact that men used machine guns, which had already been used by the German and British armies and which were in a very bad state. J.A.M.M. Janssen, “Kerk, coalitie en defensie in het interbellum,” in *Tussen crisis en oorlog*, ed. Ger Teitler (Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1984), 54.

54 V.H. Rutgers, “De voorbereiding der beperking van bewapening,” *De Volkenbond* 2/8 (May 1927): 238–244.

contributor sighed, “was not one of the hits of the League of Nations.”⁵⁵ More than that, the head of the Dutch delegation to the Preparatory Commission declared that “one cannot even mention the most minor result. [...] A house under construction is not a building; it is still completely uninhabitable.”⁵⁶ Yet, *De Volkenbond* was eager to avoid the persistence of a spirit of pessimism and repeatedly declared that the Preparatory Commission was not supposed to complete the work of the Conference of Disarmament, but merely to prepare it.⁵⁷ Moreover, it was already a positive fact that government representatives had gathered in order to discuss the issue of disarmament – even if these discussions remained rather fruitless, as was readable between the lines.⁵⁸ The Preparatory Commission continued expressing its intentions to work on arms limitation without, however, committing itself to concrete technical-military agreements.

However, this good will hardly persisted. The Preparatory Commission found itself stuck and paralyzed on several occasions. In July 1926, *De Volkenbond* still acknowledged that the tasks of the Preparatory Commission were very difficult. Yet, “every now and then one asks oneself to what extent governments are sufficiently zealous to make international agreements succeed.”⁵⁹ A couple of months later, in November 1926, the journal expressed its admiration for the amount of work of the technical-military sub-commission of the Preparatory Commission, as well as the uselessness of its work. After all, *De Volkenbond* argued, the issue of disarmament was a mainly political question, which would easily overrule whatever technical advice the technical-military commission could provide.⁶⁰ In April 1928, discussions in the Preparatory Commission had attained such “a hopelessly low level, that it often did not exceed the level of political fracas.”⁶¹ The headcount of the army and navy instructed reserves were not subjected to any limitation – though the Dutch government saw this as a priority to restrain the French army. Likewise, direct limitation of war material – in contrast to indirect, budgetary limitation –, and even the obligatory publication of the quantities and types of war material, were all non-feasible measures.

55 C.A. Kluyver, “De ontwapeningsbespreking, Genève 18 mei,” *De Volkenbond* 1/8 (May 1926): 12.

56 Rutgers, “De voorbereiding,” 243.

57 Kluyver, “De ontwapeningsbespreking,” 14.

58 *Ibid.*

59 [Anonymous], “Wat er in de afgelopen twee maanden gebeurd is,” *De Volkenbond* 1/9 (July 1926): 26.

60 R.T., “October in de Volkenbondstad,” *De Volkenbond* 2/2 (Nov. 1926): 37.

61 H.J. van Meurs, “De jongste zitting der ontwapeningscommissie,” *De Volkenbond* 3/7 (April 1928): 234.

At this stage, the words of A. Anema, the abovementioned prominent member of the *Vereeniging*, are noteworthy. According to him, the frustrated disarmament negotiations needed “the thought of the positive national community of international cooperation,” and “positive cooperation in world politics.”⁶² A regular contributor to *De Volkenbond* expressed himself in similar words. In 1929, J. Oudegeest Jr. surprisingly declared that states would proceed to disarmament “if the people have a strong will for its realization and if they are ready to devise the means to guarantee lasting peace.”⁶³ Suddenly, “the moral support of the people” had become an indispensable factor for the success of the preparatory work.⁶⁴ In 1931, another contributor to *De Volkenbond* stated that “the conscience and economic interest of the world demand a fully international Peace Force and an end to national militarism.”⁶⁵ The abstraction of these wordings is striking.

The sudden and rather late interest of *De Volkenbond* in chemical warfare was another impetus for radicalizing views on war prevention. “If one sees,” an anonymous author declared in 1929, “the possibilities of chemical warfare in a sober-minded and unemotional way, one arrives – it is only one step ahead – at disarmament. [...] The solution lies in banishing war as an institution according to international law.”⁶⁶ This sudden simplification and radicalization is remarkable. It does not correspond to the carefully chosen balance between security, disarmament and arbitration, and the patience required to implement the Geneva Protocol. As the 1930s approached, broader and vaguer goals threw a different light on the role of disarmament in the framework of war prevention.

After the proceeding preparatory work had become increasingly criticized, surprisingly enough, *De Volkenbond* shifted to the use of an optimistic language regarding the end results of the preparatory work. It underlined “the worldly historical meaning” of a universal disarmament convention, “however minimal its contents may be.” Moreover, this first step in the disarmament negotiations had certainly been the most difficult.⁶⁷ “Better times are underway,” we may read between the lines.

62 A. Anema, “Groei in de Volkenbondspolitiek,” *De Volkenbond* 5/2 (Nov. 1929): 31.

63 J. Oudegeest Jr., “Het bijeenkomen van de Voorbereidende Ontwapeningscommissie op 15 April,” *De Volkenbond* 4/7 (April 1929): 193.

64 *Ibid.*: 194.

65 L. Simons, “Ontwapening,” *De Volkenbond* 7/4 (Dec. 1931): 106.

66 W., ‘De chemische oorlog’, *De Volkenbond* 4/5 (Feb. 1929): 143.

67 B. de Jong van Beek en Donk, “De zesde zitting der Ontwapeningsconferentie,” *De Volkenbond* 6 (1930): 244–249.

Even if the contents of the [...] draft treaty leave much to be desired, and especially even if the mood, among the delegates during the various sessions and on the closing day, induces to very modest expectations regarding the extent of arms limitation, whereto one will decide in 1932 – all this should not qualify the worldwide historical significance of the fact that delegates of more or less thirty governments from all over the world have drafted, for the first time, a treaty concerning the limitation of land, sea and air forces and moreover have approved it, with the exception of Germany and Soviet Russia.⁶⁸

Such optimism required some effort. Arguably, this unexpectedly positive end-note stemmed from a need to cultivate a positive mind-set among the readers of *De Volkenbond*.

Simultaneously, the *Vereeniging* had slightly changed its Programs of Action in 1931 and 1932 concerning the issue of disarmament. Instead of aiming at a “limitation” of armaments, the Program of Action in 1931 mentioned a “restriction” of armaments. This meant that an actual agreement was more important than the realization of its contents. Accordingly, the Program of Action added that

the Association shall apply oneself to promote filling the gaps in the draft convention [...]. However, in this issue, it will be led by the consideration that the realization of a convention, acceptable to all States of the World, is most needed for the preservation of Peace.

In other words, it was more important to have a feeble convention that all parties agreed upon than a strong convention that few agreed upon.⁶⁹ The subsequent Program of Action of 1932 referred to a “restriction and limitation” of armaments.⁷⁰ This modification – however slight it might seem – indicated that the *Vereeniging* was carefully curtailing its expectations concerning disarmament and abandoned the use of pragmatic arguments.

In February 1932, the long-expected Conference of Disarmament started. After it had begun, expectations sunk so quickly that, during the summer of 1932, Henri van der Mandere, one of the driving forces behind the *Vereeniging*, considered it a blessing, “a psychological guarantee,” that the Conference had

68 B. de Jong van Beek en Donk, “De sluitingszitting van de Voorbereidings-commissie voor de Ontwapeningsconferentie,” *De Volkenbond* 6/3 (Dec. 1930): 77–78.

69 IISG, Archive Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 27, Cover 60: “Herziening Program van Actie 1930.”

70 *Ibid.*, File 28, Cover 69: “Brochure met de geschiedenis en de statuten van de Vereeniging, 1932.”



Fig. 4: Photo of an unidentified protestor promoting the 1932 World Disarmament conference. LSE Library, WILPF/22/1.

not yet reached a breakdown. As long as such point had not been reached, the arms race could at least not continue uncontrollably, he essentially wrote.⁷¹

Pressing this issue demanded a careful balancing of words, a somewhat forced and artificial optimism. This is shown in a communiqué to the press on the first months of the long-awaited Conference of Disarmament and its disappointing start.

⁷¹ H.Ch.G.J. v.d. M., “Nieuw vooruitzichten voor de ontwapeningsconferentie,” *De Volkenbond* 7/10 (June/July 1932): 316.

When listening to many voices in our country, one gets the impression that the Conference of Disarmament should already be considered a failure. Even if one cannot deny that last year's expectations had been disappointing in many respects, one should not jump to such pessimistic conclusions.

Those who speak of a failure, do not have enough attention for what has been accomplished in the first phase of the conference, with the adoption of the resolution Benesj on July 23, 1932. First of all it should be stated that in this resolution have only been mentioned principles whose practical realization depends on the further results of the Conference. However, it should be considered important that principal agreement had been reached on the following point especially. [...]

Yet, the warning cannot be too great that those who expect far-reaching results from the Conference of Disarmament on the shortest term, will probably be disappointed. [...] Concerning security, a solution can come closer when the realization gains ground that "security" should not be identified with maintenance of the status quo. The objections, stemming from the recognition of this solution, could only gradually be cleared. Yet, even the willingness to cooperate to this end, can have a positive influence on the security question.⁷²

Finally, in October 1932, *De Volkenbond* warned against "a dangerous nihilism," a "crisis of confidence," a "hypertrophy of the specifically military idea of security," and it advised lawyers and specialists of the League of Nations to "break this monopoly of military information."⁷³

Conclusions

The Dutch interwar peace movement was diverse, thriving, internationally oriented and embedded in European networks. Existing literature on the Dutch peace movement has highlighted national defense issues against which it mobilized, most notably the governmental proposal in 1923 to reinforce the colonial naval fleet and the mass mobilization this led to. This chapter on the changing argumentation of the *Vereeniging* has shown that the organization was closely related to the international disarmament negotiations, and that it adapted its argumentation to the course of international politics.

This chapter has further suggested that the international civil society, which the *Vereeniging* was arguably part of, almost seemed global in the political interests shared between sister organizations around the world and through affiliation to the IFLNS. In practice, however, it was also shown that the latter orga-

72 IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, File 28, Cover 86: "Communiqué aan de pers terzake van den stand der Ontwapeningsconferentie" [exact date unknown].

73 H. Willemse, "Publieke opinie en ontwapening," *De Volkenbond* 8/1 (Oct. 1932): 10–11.

nization had too many deficiencies which caused national interests to prevail over international ones. As such, one can conclude, the *Vereeniging* was part of a largely imagined global civil society. The civil society's European dimensions, by contrast, were perhaps more real, as is shown by the bilateral, regional contacts which the *Vereeniging* entertained.

Changes in argumentation of the Dutch *Vereeniging* have shown how national members of an international civil society responded to changes in international politics. Between 1919 and 1932 the *Vereeniging* saw its principles and ideals alternately move closer to and further away from realization. Two questions predominated: how did the argumentative strategy change and why did it change as it did? Change in argument is visible, firstly, in how the *Vereeniging* justified its existence and, secondly, in how it commented on the disarmament negotiations – one of its principal goals. Despite the fact that the *Vereeniging* preferred to see itself as a down-to-earth, “academically-minded” and pragmatic association, it expressed its viewpoints in a more radical, moral and abstract manner as the international political climate grew more difficult and opportunities for the *Vereeniging* turned out grimmer.

Even stronger than Habermas notes, arguments are very sensitive to context. That is to say, in the case at hand, that the Dutch peace movement adapted its arguments as a direct response to the likelihood that its goals would be realized. Hence, this study was intended to enhance, at any small level, our understanding of the possible drives for change in the arguments used by social movements.⁷⁴ Further research may show if sister organizations in, for example, Belgium, France, Italy and the UK had comparable ways of relating to international politics, in both intensity and types of argumentation.

74 Even if several scholars have made use of Habermas' typologies, the transition between these typologies has not attracted much attention. For the use of Habermas' typologies, see for example: Helene Sjørnsen, “Why Expand? The Question of Legitimacy and Justification in the EU's Enlargement Policy,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40/3 (2002): 491–513; Marika Lerch and Guido Schweltnus, “Normative by Nature? The Role of Coherence in Justifying the EU's External Human Rights Policy,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 13/2 (2006): 304–321; Sonia Piedrafita and José Torreblanca, “The Three Logics of EU Enlargement: Interests Identities and Arguments,” *Politique européenne* 1/15 (2005): 29–59; Erik Oddvar Eriksen, “Towards a Logic of Justification: On the Possibility of Post-National Solidarity,” in *Organizing Political Institutions: Essays for Johan P. Olsen*, ed. Morten Egeberg and Per Laegreid (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1999), 215–244; Erik Oddvar Eriksen and John Erik Fossum, eds., *Democracy in the European Union: Integration through Deliberation?* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Abbreviations

- IISG: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History)
- SDAP: Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (Social Democratic Workers' Party)
- IAA: Internationales Arbeiter assoziation (International Workers' Association)
- IAK: Internationale Antimilitaristische Kommissie (International Antimilitaristic Commission)
- IAMV: Internationale Antimilitaristische Vereeniging (International Antimilitaristic Association)
- IFLNS: International Federation of League of Nations Societies
- LNU: League of Nations Union

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