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Victor-Yves Ghébal, *Organisation internationale et guerre mondiale. Le cas de la société des nations et de l'organisation internationale du travail pendant la seconde guerre mondiale* (Bruylant, 2013).

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Victor-Yves Ghébal, *Organisation internationale et guerre mondiale. Le cas de la société des nations et de l'organisation internationale du travail pendant la seconde guerre mondiale* (Bruylant, 2013).

Victor-Yves Ghébal (1942-2009), sometimes called Mister OSCE¹ for his fundamental research on the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe,² also published intensively on other international organisations, such as the League of Nations (LN), the United Nations (UN)³ and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).⁴ In 1975 he defended a monumental PhD thesis on the influence of war on international organisations, with the LN and the ILO during the Second World War as case studies.⁵ Strangely enough, this brilliant PhD was never published, until his colleague Robert Kolb took the initiative to do so.⁶ This unselfish act is not only a warm posthumous homage to his long-time colleague, but also a valuable contribution to the history of international organisations in general, and the LN, UN and ILO in particular. After all, Ghébal's work may be over 40 years old, but it has not lost its value. Whereas most research on the LN and ILO focuses on their peace time activities, Ghébal concentrates on the turmoil of war. This approach is interesting because it is during such times of crisis that international organisations are really put to the test. The way they are dealing with war circumstances is an indication of their structural strength. Also, they are often forced to follow suit and to make difficult choices, which contrasts with the mostly cautious nature of their peace time operations. His study also has an intrinsic value, as he has conducted a very thorough and comprehensive research, using many unpublished archival sources. With the publication of his PhD, an important study on the history of the LN, the ILO and the UN has finally been opened for the public.

The book starts in august 1939, at the eve of the Second World War. In a few chapters, Ghébal describes the contemporary status of the LN and the ILO. He tries to answer two questions: What kind of functions did these international organisations have at that moment? And in which way were they prepared for war? After all, it was obvious that war was imminent in Europe and both international organisations took a number of measures to anticipate this. The LN for instance gave extraordinary powers to the secretary general, imposed a number of budgetary and administrative restrictions and chose France as refuge for its secretariat, if necessary. Unfortunately, no political decision was taken on the future of the LN, in contrast with the ILO, where there was an official political decision to keep the international organisation active during wartimes. The ILO developed a well elaborated crisis plan with measures to be taken in case of exceptional circumstances and it also determined which of its activities would continue in times of crisis.

This preliminary part serves as stepping stone for the first main part of the book, dealing with the first, 'European' phase of the war, which started when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939

¹ OSCE Magazine March-April 2009 – Chapter : An appreciation of Victor-Yves Ghebali (fr), consulted via www.osce.org/fr/secretariat/36189.

² To be mentioned here are his three volumes on the history of the OSCE: Victor-Yves Ghébal, *La diplomatie de la détente: la CSCE, d'Helsinki à Vienne (1971-1989)* (Bruylant, 1989) ; Victor-Yves Ghébal, *L'OSCE dans l'Europe post-communiste, 1990-1996 : vers une identité paneuropéenne de sécurité* (Bruylant, 1996) ; Victor-Yves Ghébal, *The history of the OSCE from 1996 to 2003* (Bruylant, 2014).

³ Victor-Yves Ghébal, *La crise du système des Nations unies* (Documentation française, 1988).

⁴ Victor-Yves Ghébal, *The International labour organisation: a case study on the evolution of U.N. specialized agencies* (Nijhoff, 1988).

⁵ He defended his PhD at the social sciences faculty of Grenoble, France, with Jean Charpentier as supervisor and Philippe Chappal and Louis Dubouis in the jury.

⁶ Robert Kolb is professor of international public law at the law faculty of Geneva.

and which ended in 1941 with the entrance of the USA in the conflict. With the outburst of war, the LN applied its crisis plan. It kept on functioning, as there was an official will of the member states to keep the LN as permanent diplomatic link between neutral and belligerent countries. It also reacted strongly to the Russian-Finnish conflict, by excluding the USSR as member state and by organising humanitarian support for Finland. The quick defeat of France in 1940, however, deteriorated its position. It became politically isolated, as France – traditionally one of its biggest supporters – and other European member states were conquered by the Germans. The French defeat also made the plans obsolete to move its seat to France. This way, the LN had to improvise to adapt to the war circumstances. For instance, several branches were moved to the USA, such as the economic and financial services, which were housed at the University of Princeton, and the opium committee that was transferred to Washington. The ILO also reacted on the outburst of war by activating its crisis plan. It soon gained the support of its three traditional ‘stakeholders’: governments, workers and employers. During the “phony war”, it remained neutral, but the quick French surrender also forced it to improvise. After an initial rejection from the USA, it received permission to transfer the International Labour Bureau to Montréal, Canada. On the extraordinary conference of New York in October-November 1941, the ILO took its stand and officially decided to move into the allied camp. This way, it successfully adapted its structures to the state of war.

The second and most important part of the book deals with the second, ‘World’ phase of the war (1941-1945). Ghébali discusses how the two international organisations continued on their chosen paths, deepening the differences. The LN never choose the side of the allies and it neglected to develop a strategy of its own, dealing with the specific war circumstances. Especially when the USA joined the war in 1941, the LN’s prospects looked grim, as the two main partners of the allied coalition, the USA and the USSR, were not LN member states. To discuss the LN during this period, Ghébali no longer uses a chronological approach, but he develops three thematic chapters. In the first, he studies the ever changing composition of the LN members in this turbulent period. A number of countries lost their sovereignty and others voluntary retracted their membership. The member states could roughly be divided in three groups: active member states (mostly Commonwealth countries and the European countries with governments in exile), neutral member states (such as the Latin American countries) and rather reserved member states (the Axe countries and the neutral European countries). In the second chapter he analyses the LN’s institutional structures. He focuses here on the important figure of Sean Lester, the secretary general ad interim and the activities of the different LN agencies. In the third and last chapter, he discusses the functions of the LN: firstly, its humanitarian “quasi political” functions, such as the protection of refugees and the administration of the mandate territories, and secondly its technical, non-political functions, dealing with economic, financial and health issues, the control of drugs, the protection of women and children and the registration of treaties. As it turns out, the LN slowly sank away in total lethargy, which contrasts sharply with the dynamics of the ILO. The ILO decisions to move to Canada and to join the allied camp proved successful. The ILO remained very active and it succeeded in maintaining and even developing its normal activities, dealing with international labour legislation, technical assistance and spreading information. It also contributed to the foreseen reconstruction activities, by coordinating the national reconstruction plans and by assisting the economic and social agencies of the LN. In 1944, the Philadelphia conference was organised, which prepared the post-war period by redefining the principles and activity range of the ILO.

The last part deals with the post-war period. The two super powers, US and USSR, decided to discard the LN and to create a new international organisation, the UN. In two chapters, Ghébalı studies extensively how the LN was dissolved and how its remains were integrated in the UN. The ILO was not dissolved after the war, but it faced a coordination problem: how could its activities be integrated in the new system of international cooperation, without losing its autonomy? Ghébalı first analyses the changes in its constitution and second how the ILO negotiated to get the status of specialised institution, according to article 57 of the UN Charter.

Seemingly without effort, Ghébalı combines the bigger picture (the major developments of the Second World War and its direct impact on the two organisations) with a detailed analysis of their daily activities. Obviously, he mastered the topic and in order to write this book, he read huge amounts of documentation, including unpublished archive material. Moreover, the book is pleasant to read, as it has a chronological structure and is written in a very clear and direct language. Also, Ghébalı's choice to oppose the 'lethargic' LN and 'dynamic' ILO is very interesting. It shows how similar organisations acted completely different under the same circumstances. Of course, the two organisations are not just interchangeable. The LN has always been much more political inspired, while the ILO has a more technical character. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the LN made a number of strategic errors and that it never successfully adapted to the constantly changing war circumstances. In contrast, the ILO made the right choices, which allowed it to survive the war and to become the first UN specialised institution. In conclusion, this book is a must for anyone interested in the history of the LN, the UN or the ILO. The only problem may be that the book is written in French, which may exclude a number of English speaking researchers.

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