

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXI-12

**Norman Ingram.** *The War Guilt Problem and the Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1914-1944.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780198827993 (hardcover, \$90.00).

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INTRODUCTION BY WILLIAM D. IRVINE, YORK UNIVERSITY, EMERITUS

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Norman Ingram has long been recognized as a distinguished scholar, well known for his mastery of the sources, elegant writing, and incisive analysis. In his recent book he does not disappoint. On this point all of our commentators, Andrew Barros, Charlotte Faucher, Talbot Imlay, and Donald Reid are in agreement,

The *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH) was founded in 1898 by a few score Parisian intellectuals in support of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish French artillery officer who was unjustly convicted of treason in 1894. Their numbers grew exponentially in the following decades, reaching a peak of 180,000 in the early 1930s. The founders of the *Ligue*, most of whom were of a moderately conservative persuasion, envisaged its role to be that of defending individual victims of injustice. Early on, though, new members of the LDH, who were mainly drawn from the political left, put forth a much wider conception of human rights, one extending to a broad range of political, social, and economic issues. As a result, by 1911 virtually all *Ligue* members were supporters of the political parties of the Left, for whom the war-origins debate did not seem beyond the organization's remit. Periodically, in the inter-war years, some would wonder if diplomatic history was really what the *Ligue* should be spending its energies on. But the invariable counter was that if the fate of one French army officer was an appropriate concern for the LDH, surely too were the deaths of 1.4 million French men in an arguably avoidable war.

Scholarship on the *Ligue* has generally fallen into two categories: that written by French scholars, who by and large treat the LDH with a high degree of reverence,<sup>1</sup> and that of North American ones (Canadians mostly), who are a good deal more critical.<sup>2</sup> Ingram, who is already well known for his trenchant analyses of the various factors that ailed the LDH in the interwar years, is clearly in the latter group.

The subject of Ingram's current book is the internal debate within the LDH over the origins of the First World War. Roughly speaking, there were two camps. The majority in the *Ligue* held that Germany was responsible for the war and therefore that the Treaty of Versailles was entirely legitimate and the enforcement of its terms was essential to preserve the peace. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's seizure of power only confirmed their long-held suspicions about an inherently aggressive Germany and their belief that Nazi Germany could be contained only by collective security. The "minority," by contrast, believed the origins of the war to have been more complex and that both France and Russia bore a greater responsibility for the conflict than Germany. It followed that the Treaty of Versailles, which had been imposed upon Germany, was unjust and that its substantial revision was the key to preserving the peace. Hitler in power was but the direct consequence of the illegitimate Treaty and the obtuse resistance of the allied powers to its modification. Peace could now only be preserved by appeasing Nazi Germany.

These opposing positions led to long, bitter, and dysfunctional struggles within the *Ligue*. Contrary to what Donald Reid writes in his review, "slurs, slander and name calling" were commonplace in the internal debates within the *Ligue*. The vituperative nature of these debates owed something to the penchant of the majority for treating the minority with condescension, ridiculing its members as ill-educated amateurs. This was unfair. Amateurs they may have been, but their

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Emmanuel Naquet's, *Pour l'Humanité: La Ligue des droits de l'homme de l'affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014). The outlier here is Wendy Perry's dissertation "Remembering Dreyfus: *The Ligue des droits de l'Homme* and the Making of the Modern French Human Rights Movement" (Ph.D. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> By way of example, see William D. Irvine, *Between Politics and Justice: La Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1898-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Cylvie Claveau, *Une sélection universaliste de l'altérité. L'Autre à la Ligue Des Droits de l'homme et du citoyen en France 1920-1940* (Saarbrücken: Presses universitaires européennes, 2010).

version of the war's origins was not so very different from that of distinguished historians like Sidney B. Fay, or, for that matter, contemporary historians like Christopher Clark.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, leaders of the majority could be a bit amateurish as well. In 1915 Victor Basch (soon to be the *Ligue*'s president) responding to the claim of the minority that the Franco-Russian alliance had served no purpose save dragging France into a war over some obscure quarrel in the Balkans, asked, in the absence of that alliance, what would have happened to French security at the time of the two Moroccan crises or the Schnaebelé affair. This was a fairly feeble argument. Irritating though they were for French colonialists, neither of the Moroccan crises represented any threat to French security. As for the April 1887 Schnaebelé affair, in which French police official Guillaume Schnaebelé was captured while on an espionage mission in Germany, leading to almost a fortnight of sabre-rattling before both nations backed down, it was a minor matter, largely the fault of the French, and had in fact taken place seven years before the Franco-Russian alliance was signed. This is something of an undergraduate howler. Similarly, Basch would also argue in 1915 that the order of mobilization on the eastern front was of critical importance and he would insist, not very convincingly, that Austria had mobilized before Russia. When later evidence emerged showing that Russia had been the first to mobilize, the majority first ignored it and then later contended that the order of mobilization did not matter all that much after all.

With regard to the Treaty of Versailles, the majority would in time attempt to sit on both sides of the debate. They conceded that this was in fact a treaty that had been imposed on a vanquished enemy who was given no chance to defend itself and therefore juridically irregular. But they also insisted that the terms of the Treaty were nonetheless entirely legitimate and should be enforced. This was a Jesuitical formula that meant next to nothing. The Germans would hardly be mollified with concessions about process without concessions about substance. When dealing with criminal cases where a guilty verdict was rendered without due process (the Dreyfus case comes to mind), the *Ligue* was not in the habit of dispensing with due process on the assumption that the defendant was guilty.

In the history of the 1930s, the stance of the majority now seems wiser and more admirable, but only in the light of our subsequent knowledge. The minority were of the belief that Hitler's foreign policy demands were limited to undoing the territorial clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. To be sure, an attentive reading of Chapter 14 of *Mein Kampf* would have disabused them of that illusion. But few people in interwar Europe read that volume, and fewer still took it seriously. So the minority felt justified in thinking that if the much-ballyhooed principle of national self-determination meant anything, it ought to be applied to Germany and to the millions of German-speaking people in Austria, the Sudetenland, and Danzig, most of whom seemed quite eager to be incorporated into the Reich.

That said, nothing whatsoever justifies the outpourings of people like the pacifists and future collaborators Léon Emery and Félicien Challaye in the last days of the peace. Here we have members of the LDH (and do note that they were still members of the *Ligue*, albeit no longer of the Central Committee) extolling the many progressive aspects of Hitler's Germany, an analysis informed by an ill-disguised anti-Semitism.

To be sure, these people were in the minority, and, strictly speaking, a minority within the minority. But it is worth looking at what the majority was saying at the same time. The controversy over the Moscow Show Trials featured members of an association that prided itself on being 'the conscience of democracy' asserting that Soviet Russia in 1936 was somehow a democracy. The majority also gullibly adopted in 1937 the scandalously dishonest report on the trials by *Ligue* legal counsel Raymond Rosenmark (whose appalling closing language I do wish Ingram had quoted in full). Among other things, Rosenmark argued that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin should be praised for having had the courage to establish revolutionary tribunals to deal with his enemies.

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<sup>3</sup> Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, 2 vols., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

Of course it is still the case that a benign contemporary reading of Nazi Germany is more odious than a comparable reading of Soviet Russia. From that perspective, the minority would indeed seem disgraceful. But it is worth remembering that before 1939, when the minority was making its arguments, Stalin had killed far more people than had Hitler. Nazi judicial murders numbered in the hundreds, and concentration camp victims were around 25,000. These are disturbing numbers to be sure, but they should be put against those of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, who in 1936-37 alone executed just shy of 700,000 and imprisoned well over a million people.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that by the end of the 1930s no one in the LDH seemed capable of conforming to the values which ought to have informed the organization can be traced back, as Ingram has expertly done, to the whole debate about peace and the appropriate strategies for preserving it. Appeasement meant searching for the positive aspects of Nazi Germany; collective security and the need for a Soviet ally meant declaring Stalin to be a democrat. This was not what the *Ligue* thought it would be about when it was founded in 1898.

Imlay, Barros, and Faucher all raise in different ways a very important and perceptive question: just how much impact did the LDH actually have on French public policy? Imlay suggests that I have exaggerated the *Ligue*'s political "irrelevance."<sup>5</sup> Upon some reflection I am inclined to think that I (and, albeit to a lesser degree, Ingram) in fact erred in the opposite direction. It is easy to do. Any outfit that had more members than all of the French political parties put together, whose members included more than a third of the deputies in parliament, cabinet members in virtually every government and a fair share of the inter-war premiers, ought to have had some considerable political clout. Certainly the political right, which was given to assiduously scrutinizing matters like these, was forever decrying the fact that France was under the occult dictatorship of the *LDH*. But a hard look at the evidence suggests otherwise. The Popular Front government of Léon Blum is a good example; 29 of his 33 ministers belonged to the *Ligue* and often (including Prime Minister Léon Blum and Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos) were current or past members of the *Ligue*'s Central Committee. So one logically might assume that this government's policy with respect to civil-war torn Spain would be that of the LDH. But as Victor Basch would bitterly observe in 1937, this was simply not the case. Strikingly, much of the *Ligue*'s energies in the inter-war years were taken up with the anger of *Ligue* militants over the fact that *Ligue* ministers seemed capable of totally ignoring *Ligue* principles (the Paul Painlevé and Edouard Herriot affairs, in which *Ligue* members came under fire from within the LDH for their conduct while holding government positions, being classic examples).<sup>6</sup> The LDH probably did better when intervening on legal matters (which is what they should have been doing all along), but one is struck by how often the LDH's carefully argued and compelling legal briefs fell on deaf ears with French ministers who also belonged to the *Ligue*.

Faucher quite rightly notes that, its sanctimonious declarations to the contrary, the *Ligue* was very much an old boys' club. The small number of women who played an active role could be found on all sides of any debate, including the war guilt question and, ironically, women's suffrage.

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<sup>4</sup> Among many works, see, for example, Lothar Gruchmann, *Justiz im Dritten Reich 1933-1940* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009) 900; Timothy Snyder, "Hitler vs. Stalin: Who Was Worse?" NYRB Daily (blog), *New York Review of Books*, 27 January 2011, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/01/27/hitler-vs-stalin-who-was-worse/>; or Snyder's *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See also his comments in the H-Diplo roundtable on *Between Justice and Politics*: <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/BetweenJusticeandPolitics-Roundtable.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Both were founding members of the *Ligue* and frequently served as premiers or ministers in the inter-war years.

If my own experience is anything to go by, this fine book will be greeted with some indignation by some scholars of the topic in Paris. Everywhere else it will be greeted for what it is: an exceptionally fine piece of scholarship and an important contribution to our understanding of inter-war France.

**Participants:**

**Norman Ingram** is Professor of Modern French History at Concordia University in Montreal. He was a Commonwealth Scholar in Modern European History at the University of Edinburgh where he took his Ph.D. in 1988 under the supervision of the late Professor Maurice Larkin. From 1988 until his appointment to Concordia University in Montreal in 1992 he held a Killam Post-Doctoral Fellowship, and then a Canada Research Fellowship at the University of Alberta. His first book, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, re-published 2011) was widely and positively reviewed (thirteen scholarly reviews) on both sides of the Atlantic in newspapers and journals ranging from *Die Zeit* and the *Times Literary Supplement* to the *English Historical Review* and the *Historische Zeitschrift*. He has held Visiting Fellowships at Magdalen College, Oxford, the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, and at the University of St Andrews.

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## REVIEW BY ANDREW BARROS, UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

When it comes to pacifism in twentieth-century France one has to think of Norman Ingram, and in particular his path-breaking study *The Politics of Dissent*. Before I came to know him, like many others working on inter-war France I had read and been influenced by this work. In it he highlighted the emergence of a post-war “new-style pacifism” (*pacifisme nouveau style*), which rejected seemingly everything in favour of peace.<sup>7</sup> Ingram’s latest study takes up that idea in his examination of how the largest and most important human rights organization in the world, the *Ligue des droits de l’homme* (LDH), grappled with the question of the origins of the First World War. Their struggle with this issue was more than academic. In examining *Die Kriegsschuldfrage* as it unfolded west of the Rhine, Ingram argues that this debate “lies at the heart of the dissenting new-style pacifism” that arose in the LDH (1). The consequences for the LDH and the country were considerable. It “caused the implosion of the *Ligue* and the emergence of new-style pacifism in France” both of which assisted in the “development of pro-Vichy sentiment.” To follow this battle over the origins of the war is to follow the gestation of the idea that the LDH, and the country, had fought the terrible conflagration of 1914-1918 under “false pretences.” It exposed what is for Ingram the LDH’s central paradox: the need to “square the circle of its commitment to human rights with a doctrinaire Republican political engagement” (2). Unable to resolve this internal contradiction, the *Ligue* owed its decline not to the German invasion of 1940, but to the legacy of its unquestioning patriotic support of the *Union sacrée*.

This places the war-guilt debate in an unexpected and original setting, one that Ingram is perfectly equipped to explore. Building on previous studies of the LDH, notably by Emmanuel Naquet and William Irvine, he dramatically changes the chronology of the organization’s decline by clearly placing its beginning in 1914, when the *Ligue* supported the government, and its justification for war.<sup>8</sup>

One of the strengths of this work is the important archival research that lies behind it. For example, thanks to the end of the Cold War, previously unavailable archives of the LDH, as well as other French sources from this period, were returned to France from Russia, where they had ended up after a wartime sojourn in the hands of the Nazis. In the case of the LDH this material is now held at *La Contemporaine* (formerly *La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine*) in Nanterre. To this one has to add the research Ingram conducted in Germany, particularly in the archives of the German Foreign Ministry and the *Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte* which highlights another of his strengths, which is linguistic. That helps explain the important comparisons drawn between British, French, and German pacifism during this period (see, for example, 10-12).

One of the advantages of this wider perspective is the ability to examine, from both sides of the Rhine, the attempts of the LDH to understand what was happening in Germany, and build bridges with its German counterparts. Chapters 5 and 6 provide telling examples of just how poorly the LDH understood the disintegrating situation in Weimar, much less the importance of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. It was “cosseted in a comfortable view of Germany’s contrition” (136) is the damning, and convincing judgement offered by the author. The LDH’s record of dealing with the Nazi regime over the course of 1933-1936 is examined in the following chapter and found equally wanting. If in 1936 the best that both the majority and the new-style minority did was wake “up to the fact that the League of Nations was the last

<sup>7</sup> Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Emmanuel Naquet, *Pour l’humanité: La Ligue des droits de l’homme de l’affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014) and William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l’Homme, 1898-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

great hope in the struggle against Hitler,” albeit for very different reasons and aims, then it really was “too little, too late” (215).

While the book is very much alive to this European setting, its focus is on the LDH and France. It is primarily a careful examination, especially via the publications, debates, and correspondence of the LDH, and in particular those of its most important members, of the rise of new-style pacifism, something that was an inexorable part of the unfolding war-guilt debate. What began as a small wartime minority who questioned and investigated the official justification for war against Germany became an increasingly important, and vocal, group inside the LDH. Ingram closely studies the evolution and enlargement of this group, its thinking and its power over the course of the war and then the tumultuous inter-war period and in to the Vichy era. This is the core of the book and his mastery of the question and his analysis are extremely impressive.

In many ways the key moment in this story was the LDH’s 1937 congress. There the organization witnessed, in Ingram’s phrase, “the Aventine Secession,” referring to the Italian deputies who in 1924 left Parliament in opposition to Benito Mussolini. Held at Tours, this meeting was “a showdown” (217). On one side stood the majority, increasingly ready to defend France against an ever more menacing Nazi Germany, in particular in Spain where civil war had recently erupted. On the other was the minority, which argued for mediation and against coercion in the face of the growing danger of war. As Ingram puts it, “the difference was that the minority in 1937 seemed incapable of appreciating the gulf separating Hitler and [Kaiser] Wilhelm II, so convinced were they that a replay of 1914 was about to take place” (218). Nor were Germany and Spain the only problems threatening the peace or calling out for a defence of human rights at this time. For example, both groups were also locked in a bitter struggle over what, or what not, to say about the purge trials in Moscow. In the end the minority were crushed, their positions rejected by an overwhelming majority of those present and seven key members of the new-style pacifism movement resigned from the *Comité central* of the LDH. This “schism” (217) dividing the LDH was part of a process of decomposition, as the organization’s membership dropped dramatically during the period 1936-1939 (239-241). The following year, while the overwhelming majority of the members of the *Comité central* manifested their *anti-munichois* views, a key member of the minority, Félicien Challaye visited Germany and returned full of compliments for Nazi social policies while remaining uncritical of the regime’s treatment of Jews (247). It is not surprising that he and other member-believers in new-style pacifism had a less than distinguished record during the war and Vichy regime. As this trenchant account makes clear, the LDH’s centre had not been able to hold.

Even the best historians of pacifism, and here I would include Ingram’s work with that of Martin Ceadel,<sup>9</sup> have to grapple with an essential problem so beautifully laid out by John Cairns over a quarter of a century ago: “Pity the pacifists in this violent century so uncertainly expiring after having by some unmeasurable hairsbreadth, it seems, squeaked past global nuclear catastrophe. If ever there was a marginal group in history it is they.”<sup>10</sup> Less eloquently phrased than Cairns’s observation, the question is whether this study of the LDH significantly changes our understanding of France in this period. Ingram is certainly right to point to its political importance as France’s only human rights organization and the numerous politicians, including government ministers, of the time who were members, notably during the Popular Front. With a membership that reached 180,000 at the beginning of the 1930s it certainly played a noteworthy role in French politics (3-5), although, as he shows, by the end of the decade that number had dropped precipitously. Yet while the importance of political events, domestic and foreign, on the LDH and the evolution of its debate over the origins of the war is repeatedly laid out, there is a great deal less on the effect of this growing division inside the LDH on French political life. For example, what was the impact of the LDH’s 1937 schism on the larger course of French politics? What was the role of the majority-minority civil war inside the LDH which Ingram has examined with such care and sophistication in the politics of a nation

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<sup>9</sup>Among Ceadel’s studies see his *Pacifism in Britain: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); *Thinking About Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup>John C. Cairns, book review of *The Politics of Dissent*, *Canadian Journal of History* 27 (1992), 145.

of some forty million people facing a frightening return to modern industrial war? Clearly the LDH was directly addressing this existential issue, but to what extent does its fall say something about the politics of France and its fall?

This question should not take away from the fact that this is not simply an excellent study of the LDH and an original and important contribution to the massive literature on the debate over the origins of the First World War. It makes many salient comparisons between the evolution of inter-war pacifism in France, Britain, and Germany. It links France's experience during the First World War with its descent into the Second in an innovative way by situating the origins of the LDH's fundamental difficulties in dealing with the "German problem," both Weimar and Nazi, in its 1914 embrace of a patriotic defence of the country. As Ingram's deft analysis shows in this illuminating and cautionary study, neither the LDH's majority nor its minority were able to resolve their contradictions and live up to the ideals they were fighting for.



## REVIEW BY CHARLOTTE FAUCHER, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

As events commemorating the centenary of the First World War are winding down, scholars continue to debate many aspects of the conflict, including the conventional periodization of 1914-1918, which for historians like Norman Ingram seems wholly inadequate given the centrality of the war for public discussion in interwar France.<sup>11</sup> Norman Ingram's latest monograph contributes to this conversation through an analysis of one of France's most important cross-party republican groupings of the First World War and interwar period: the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH). The archives of the LDH had long been presumed lost, as its papers were seized by the Nazis in June 1940 when they entered Paris. However, they were returned to France from the former Soviet Union in 1991, and Ingram has made fascinating use of these documents (including congress minutes, from 1916 and throughout the interwar period), to trace the changing and varied positions of the *Ligue*'s members in regard to 'the German question.' But telling the history of the LDH and the question of war guilt only on the basis of French sources would be incomplete, as the *Ligue* was in contact with its German equivalent and was, at times, also monitored by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ingram thus also considers diplomatic, media and private German sources that are essential in helping him highlight the reach of the *Ligue*'s debates beyond the French border.

Ingram sees his work as one of recovery, writing in the introduction that "the *Ligue* has suffered from an almost total amnesia on the part of historians of France as it also has from historians of human rights" (3). He acknowledges two exceptions: the books of William D. Irvine and Emmanuel Naquet that were significant in highlighting the centrality (for Naquet) and the vast network of committees (Irvine) of the *Ligue* in French political life.<sup>12</sup> Ingram builds upon these analyses while also offering a sharper understanding of the *Ligue*'s inner working as well as a re-appraisal of French pacifism, democratic practices, and republicanism in the interwar period. As he forcefully argues, the majority of *Ligue* members were patriots who left unquestioned France's post-war attitudes towards Germany; but a significant number were "revisionists, that is to say, people who believed that the Treaty of Versailles needed to be revised, and the assigning of unique war guilt to Germany (and its allies) thrown out" (8).

Ingram does not write an institutional history of the LDH but rather an analysis of the attitudes of its members towards a very specific question that occupied the group between 1914 and 1944: the war guilt problem in France. One of the book's many strengths lies in how it shows that the war guilt question not only caused the fall of the Weimar Republic and contributed to the rise of Nazism, but also had strong political ramifications in France. This is important, because it was in this context, and within the milieu of the *Ligue*, that a new style of pacifism emerged in France, a topic with which Ingram has engaged previously.<sup>13</sup> In the introduction, Ingram defines pacifism as follows: "Old-style pacifism was a heritage of the nineteenth-century. It was bourgeois, liberal, internationalist, and collaborative in orientation towards French political society. New-style pacifism which emerged from it by the end of the 1920s, was on the other hand radical, absolute, often socialist or even anarchist, and sectarian in orientation" (1-2).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Gewarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War failed to End, 1917-1923*, (London: Allen Lane, 2016). This was also a recurrent question at the conference 'No End to the War: Cultures of Violence and Care in the aftermath of the First World War' organised by the Centre for the History of War at the University of Manchester and the War, Conflict and Society research group at Manchester Metropolitan University in January 2019. <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/artshumanities/rah/events/detail/index.php?id=9439> [accessed on 19 July 2019].

<sup>12</sup> William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1898-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Emmanuel Naquet, *Pour l'humanité: La Ligue des droits de l'homme de l'affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939*, second edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011).

As Ingram skilfully establishes through a very detailed chronological analysis of annual congresses, there was never one common opinion within the *Ligue* about what attitude the group should adopt regarding the question of the origin of the war, or about the content and application of the peace treaties that followed the Armistice. Some members, for example, found it impossible to square their deep republican belief with a support of France's alliance with Tsarist Russia and then Soviet Russia; likewise, many were uneasy when engaging in discussion about nationalism in the peace treaties. Thus, Ingram distinguishes between these internal debates and the public face of the LDH. In the interwar period the Spanish Civil War, the Moscow Purge Trials (1936-1938), and the Munich agreement proved just as divisive. Ingram shows that this segmentation was the result of members' contradictory understandings of the nature of the *Ligue* (for example, as a political vs as a judicial group) and their competing reading and manipulation of history, especially pertaining to France's responsibility for the war.

This book will attract the interest of scholars well beyond the field of First World War studies and interwar Europe. For example, the *Ligue's* focus on the problem of war guilt allows for an engaging examination of the role of history and historians in France's public debates in the first half of the century. In the early 1920s, *Ligue* members approached the war origins debate by stressing the significance of the Russian general mobilisation, its timing and the role of France in allowing it. It was then that the historian of international relations, Pierre Renouvin (1893-1974), intervened to argue that "although Russia was the first of the Great Powers to order a general mobilization, it had done so with no aggressive intentions and was still trying to arrive at a peaceful resolution of the conflict" (93). Later, in the early 1930s, when the *Ligue* was still grappling with this issue, members continued to express the opinion that it was only thanks to historical expertise that they might be able to reach an enlightened decision. Regardless of which side they found themselves on regarding German war guilt and the fairness of the Versailles treaty, they bowed to historical knowledge. But they only expressed their attachment to such expertise when the historians' conclusions suited their own arguments. It would be interesting to know more about how this group fits in with, or disrupts, longer term narratives about historians' involvement in the French and European public sphere, and also what studying the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* tells us about historians' networks and the wide ranging audiences to whom they spoke.

Connected to historians' involvement in public debates, Ingram makes broader points that tie in with an issue that has been high on the agenda of the academy over the last few years: 'fake news.' The notion of 'fake news' has become one of the defining characteristics of our recent past: most famously, in the guise of certain politicians brandishing this term, accusing the media of spreading misinformation. In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries declared 'post-truth' to be its "word of the year."<sup>14</sup> As historians of diplomacy and propaganda know, this is not a new phenomenon. Ingram shows that members of the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* turned to the vocabulary of lies, truth, and facts to support their argument and undermine the claims of their opponents. For example, in 1921, Emile Kahn, the socialist politician and general secretary of the LDH, opposed those he called 'the neo-historians' who supported the view that Serbia had tried to provoke the war. To him, the war guilt lay with Austria and Germany, not with Serbia or Russia. In his contribution, "he also offered proof of events in the recent past in which Austria had been guilty of fabricating evidence in certain disputes" and further explained "The charges against us [the majority] are charges of heresy. ... To their paradoxes, let us continue to reply with texts and facts. But let us not flatter ourselves that we will convince them: their starry eyes will never open." (91-92). Over a decade later, as the *Ligue* weakened with the emergence of contesting minorities, the question of fact and the production of knowledge remained central to the debates (224). Accusations of lies were also employed to describe the attitudes of belligerents in the post-war period; writing in 1923, the member of the Lyon section Louis Guétant explained that "shirking behind a barrier of lies, fearing peace more than war," the French government had refused offers of peace made by the German government preferring instead the "instrument of oppression" that was the Treaty of Versailles (133). As scholars are currently engaging in the historicization

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<sup>14</sup> "Word of the Year 2016 is...", Oxford Dictionaries, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016> [accessed on 14 August 2019]

of the usage of notions such as facts, lies and truth,<sup>15</sup> one wonders if a particular terminology developed within the context of the LDH, or whether it mirrored a wider phenomenon that took place within French civil and political society.

Overall, the microcosm of the *Ligue* (its congresses, regional meetings and publications) offers a fantastic case study for scholars working on processes of knowledge production; what is perhaps less clear at times is how exactly the *Ligue* reached arenas outside its direct remit, especially at the political party or governmental level. To be sure, Ingram convincingly highlights that a substantial number of *Ligue* members were at the same time members of political groups or had influence on the state. But I would have been interested to learn how certain points discussed within the group, such as the questions of France's attitude towards Russia for example, returned to influence discussions outside the group. Can we find evidence that *Ligue* members fed arguments back into other political or social circles, or indeed even to influence policy? Ingram pays attention to this in the context of the declining influence of the *Ligue* from the mid-1930s on, but the impact of the *Ligue* on public and political debate since 1914 comes across less clearly in this book (240).

Related to processes of knowledge production, I was struck by the male and female imbalance within the *Ligue*. The scholarship has showed that the gender ratio within the *Ligue* was unfavourable to women and that the group had an ambivalent position regarding women's suffrage.<sup>16</sup> What Ingram adds to works on the gendering of the *Ligue* within the context of the war guilt debate is that women were also kept out from participating in discussions. In the introduction, Ingram refers to the first female president of the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*, Madeleine Rebérioux, who served between 1991 and 1995.<sup>17</sup> But for the period under consideration in the book, very few women are mentioned and a small number appear as members and contributors in two main instances: first in 1916 when the *Société d'études documentaires et critiques sur la guerre* was formed, a dissenting minority within the *Ligue* that challenged the consensus around the war effort. On the periphery of the *Ligue*, this group included a few women (Jeanne Halbwachs, Marcelle Cappy, Marie Schappler, Ethel Sidgwick, Marthe Bigot, Hélène Brion and Madeleine Rolland) but they do not seem to have intervened within the *Ligue* itself. Secondly, when committee member, left-wing activist, journalist and writer Magdeleine Paz did seek to add to contemporary debates (specifically, concerning the *Ligue's* position on the Moscow purge), the *Ligue's* Bureau decided that because the Central Committee had already formed a commission to examine the Moscow trials, comprised of three men, "it would be 'inopportune' to begin a 'polemic' in the pages of the *Cahiers* before the commission had reached any conclusions" (219). While this was another blatant case of the *Ligue's* majority cherry-picking its arguments in support of its refusal to criticise the Soviet Union in the Moscow trial affair, one does wonder what the absence of women, at a time when women were elsewhere engaged in international or national organisations,<sup>18</sup> reveals about the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Ulf Schmidt, and Stefan P. Goebel, eds., *Propaganda and Conflict: War, Media and Shaping the Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); James Crossland: Fake News is Old News," *History Today*, 23 October 2018., <https://www.historytoday.com/history-matters/fake-news-old-news> [accessed on 15 July 2019].

<sup>16</sup> Anne-Martine Fabre, "La Ligue des droits de l'homme et les femmes au début du XXe siècle," in *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, n°72, 2003. Les Droits de l'homme au XXe siècle. 31-35, <https://doi.org/10.3406/mat.2003.948>; Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics*.

<sup>17</sup> On Rebérioux see Ellen Crabtree, "The Historical Militancy of Madeleine Rebérioux, 1920-2005", (PhD thesis, Newcastle University, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Campbell, "Building a Movement, Dismantling the Republic: Women, Gender, and Political Extremism in the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français, 1927-1940" *French Historical Studies* 35:4 (2012): 691-726, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-1627090>; Rebecca Rogers and Myriam Boussahba-Bravard, eds., *Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876-1937* (London: Routledge, 2017) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315196534>; Carol Miller, "Geneva—the Key to Equality": Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations', *Women's History Review* 3:2 (June 1994): 219-245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029400200051>.

and the French public sphere during the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps Bonnie G. Smith's forceful argument about the gender of history speaks to the gender of human rights expertise in interwar France too.<sup>19</sup>

This finely written book makes an important contribution to the debates about the origins of the First World War in France, and to a lesser extent in Germany. It provides a detailed analysis of how pacifists grappled with the question of war guilt and continued to read contemporary developments through the lens of the First World War. *The War Guilt Problem and the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* is a timely publication that provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate the currency of civil society individuals (including historians) in public debates, especially with regard to their expertise in a world where some have loudly proclaimed the irrelevance of experts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Ulf Schmidt and Stefan P. Goebel, eds. *Propaganda and Conflict, I*.

## REVIEW BY TALBOT IMLAY, UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL (QUÉBEC, CANADA)

Norman Ingram is probably best known for his study of inter-war French pacifism. *The Politics of Dissent* recounted the growing split between a *pacifisme ancien style*, which was dominant before 1914 and whose proponents advocated mandatory international arbitration of inter-state disputes while also accepting (however reluctantly) the principle of national defense, and the adherents of a *pacifisme nouveau style* who increasingly opposed any and all war.<sup>21</sup> Ingram subsequently trained his sights on the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH), an omnipresent political advocacy group in France that emerged from the pre-1914 Dreyfus Affair. Over the years he has published a variety of articles and book chapters on the LDH's history between 1914 and 1944, providing readers with aspects of the larger study.<sup>22</sup> But the long anticipated book-length treatment has now appeared, pulling together the various strands. In some ways, the new book complements *The Politics of Dissent*, for French pacifism regularly appears in the various chapters. And yet, intriguingly, one of Ingram's principal arguments is that pacifism was less important to the LDH's inter-war history than one might think.

Ingram is not the first scholar to have examined the LDH's history.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, his focus on its relationship to the 'war guilt' question – the question of which country or countries was/were responsible for the outbreak of war in 1914 – offers a new perspective. As Ingram shows, the LDH in August 1914 shared with much of the Third Republic's political establishment the belief that the war was just, that it was a defensive conflict imposed on France by Imperial Germany's invasion. The LDH thus participated in the *Union sacrée*, the wartime political truce of the left and right in defense of France and/or the Third Republic, depending on one's politics. As the war dragged on and its deadly and destructive effects became manifest, however, a small minority within the LDH began to question the assumption of Germany's sole responsibility – and, by implication, France's complete innocence. There was the question of Germany's ally, Austria-Hungary, and its role in precipitating events due to Vienna's determination from the beginning to crush Serbia. But a bigger question mark hung over Russia, France's ally, whose decision for general mobilization on July 30<sup>th</sup> appeared questionable, if not downright reckless. And then there was the question of France's part in the Russian decision. Had the French encouraged the Russians to take the decision and, if so, did this not complicate the issue of responsibility? Although the LDH's majority stuck resolutely to its view of the war as just and defensive, these questions persisted and the minority grew more determined as the war continued.

Victory and the Versailles Treaty exacerbated rather than ended the war-guilt debate. Whereas the majority within the LDH viewed the treaty as justified, especially the infamous Article 231 that attributed responsibility for the war (and thus for reparations) to Germany, the minority questioned not only the claim of Germany's sole responsibility, but also the treaty's very legitimacy as the German signature had been attained through coercion. As for Article 231, the minority viewed it as indefensible on historical grounds, although many of its members endorsed reparations for practical reasons – that Germany had caused the damage even if it was not solely responsible for the outbreak of war. Faced with minority pressure, the LDH leadership made some concessions, for example accepting that Article 231 had been coerced, without however abandoning

<sup>21</sup> Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> For example, see "The Crucible of War: The Ligue des droits de l'homme and the Debate on the 'Conditions for a Lasting Peace' in 1916," *French Historical Studies* 39:2 (April 2016): 347-371; "La Ligue des droits de l'homme et le problème allemand," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 124:2 (June 2010): 119-131; and "Selbstmord or Euthanasia? Who Killed the Ligue des droits de l'homme?," in *French History* 22:3 (September 2008): 337-357.

<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel Naquet, *Pour l'Humanité: La Ligue des droits de l'homme de l'affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014); William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, 1898-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Cylvie Claveau, "L'Autre dans les Cahiers des droits de l'homme, 1920-1940 : une sélection universaliste de l'altérité à la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen en France," Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 2000.

its core belief in the justness of France's cause and Germany's preponderant, if perhaps not unique, responsibility. Ingram appears to sympathize with the arguments of the minority, commenting in several places that its position was the more historically accurate one. In refusing to accept this reality, he suggests, the LDH's leadership blinded itself to the pernicious effects of the Versailles Treaty and its clauses (not least Article 231) on German politics. It did not help matters that the LDH's sister organization and principal German interlocutor, the *Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte*, reinforced the *Ligue's* misconceptions in contending that large swathes of the German public accepted Germany's primary responsibility for the war. As Ingram remarks and the LDH's leaders should have known, the *Liga* was a strikingly marginal organization in Germany with no political influence. Worse still perhaps, the ongoing tensions over the war-guilt question reduced the LDH's ability to act as an instrument of Franco-German reconciliation during the 1920s—"the great decade of what might have been" in Ingram's felicitous phrase (8).

The situation only deteriorated during the 1930s following the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, as the war-guilt debate became intertwined with the increasingly urgent question of whether France should oppose Nazi Germany's expansionist ambitions, if necessary by force. For most of the majority, the eventual response would be a reluctant yes. Much of the minority, however, answered no, contending that the problem was not so much Nazi Germany but the Versailles Treaty, which was itself the product of a disastrously false understanding of the origins of the war in 1914. The proper response to Nazi Germany, accordingly, was treaty revision – or appeasement. The pressing task became the avoidance of a repetition of 1914, when war supposedly could have been avoided by a more prudent approach on the part of the great powers, not least Russia and France. Infusing the minority's position was a combination of *pacifisme nouveau style*, outlined by Ingram in his earlier book, which rejected war as the absolute evil, and of an increasingly virulent anti-Communism that viewed the Soviet Union (much like Tsarist Russia in 1914) as a war-monger.

Torn by internal divisions, the LDH experienced a schism at its 1937 Congress when minority leaders quit the organization. Afterwards, the LDH quickly declined so that when the Germans arrived in France in 1940, they found not a powerful political adversary but a hollow shell. In Ingram's telling, it was not France's defeat but the war-guilt question and its rippling effects that paralyzed and eventually killed the LDH.

Ingram's book is a tour de force: imaginatively researched in both French and German archives, forcefully argued and eloquently written. For historians, one of the more striking aspects of the book is the oft-expressed belief that sound historical research alone could ultimately provide an objective answer to the war-guilt question. The belief seems rather naïve now, but its persistence underscores the extent to which the inter-war period needs to be read forward from 1914-1918 and not backwards from 1939-1945.

But for all its strengths, the book raises at least two questions that arguably require further treatment. One concerns the relationship between the LDH and France's Third Republic. Ingram contends that the *Ligue* can be seen as the embodiment of French republican political culture at the time. There are reasons to agree with this assessment. As he notes, *Ligue* members were omnipresent among the regime's political elite, providing scores of government ministers; and fully 85% of Prime Minister Léon Blum's 1936 Popular Front government belonged to the LDH. That said, there are at least two reasons for pause. One concerns William Irvine's argument that the *Ligue* evolved into little more than a social and patronage club possessed with fading political purpose and principles.<sup>24</sup> If so, it is not clear how much the *Ligue's* history can tell us about inter-war French politics more generally. But even if Irvine arguably exaggerated its political irrelevance, the *Ligue* does seem to have become more closely identified with the left and centre-left as French politics grew more polarized during the 1930s, effectively precluding any Republican consensus. The *Ligue*, as Ingram notes, publicly backed the Popular Front but the latter had a galvanizing effect on the centre-right and right, which would increasingly dominate French politics in the run-up to 1940. And much of the centre-right and right was exercised not so much by the war-guilt question as by the perceived nexus between revolution and war – the fear that a new war would decisively boost the left, leading to a renewal of the

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<sup>24</sup> Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics*.

Popular Front or even worse. As a result, by the late 1930s much of the centre-right and right had veered into pacifism, partly from a visceral hatred of war but also from the fear of war's political consequences. Before 1939 one slogan had been 'better Hitler than Blum'; but by 1939-1940 it had become 'better war against the Soviet Union than against Nazi Germany.'

The second and related question concerns the role of pacifism. Ingram, intriguingly in light of his previous book, downplays its importance to the *Ligue's* interwar history. In his determined focus on the war-guilt question as the source of all the LDH's difficulties, pacifism becomes something of an epiphenomenon – a by-product of a larger problem. At times, Ingram seems to argue that it was the war-guilt question that fueled pacifism (at least for the minority) rather than the devastating experience of war itself. One wonders, though, about the direction of the causal arrow. Consider a counter-factual: if, as expected at the time, the Franco-Russian armies had imposed a rapid defeat on the Central Powers in 1914, would the war-guilt question have been as urgent? It is true, as Ingram shows, that minority voices within the LDH began questioning the war-guilt thesis in 1915-1916, but by then France had already suffered immense losses with no rapid end in sight. In any case, is it possible that during the war the true issue was not so much the war-guilt question as it was the legitimacy of waging this particular war until victory—an endeavour that was turning out to be far more costly than anyone had predicted? And is it possible that, for some people at least, wartime opposition to the Great War afterwards morphed into a questioning of the legitimacy of war itself, whether defensive or not?

This process—the development of a *pacifisme nouveau style* in reaction to the carnage of 1914-1918—was not confined to France. But there was at stake a particularly French element: the principle of national defense which had long underpinned the relationship between French Republicanism and war. For the LDH minority during 1915-1918, bringing the war to a rapid end (which implied a negotiated peace and thus something less than outright victory) required demonstrating that the war was not one of national defense—that responsibility for the war was shared, including France. Afterwards, as *pacifisme nouveau style* gained ground, the imperative became to deny that any war could be justified by national defense. And what better way to do this than to delegitimize the Great War? In any case, by the 1930s the focus of pacifists was not on the last war but on what they rightly feared was the coming war.



## REVIEW BY DONALD REID, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

Norman Ingram's *The War Guilt Problem and the Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1914-1944* does what few historical monographs do. A very well-researched and written work of history, it raises fundamental questions about historical interpretation that will be of interest to a wider public. Ingram's study of the debate in the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH) over the origins of World War I also encourages a rethinking of important elements of the history of the LDH. For some, the long debate over the responsibility for the war took the LDH away from its mission, dating from its origins in the Dreyfus Affair, to protect the individual and individual rights. However, the defense of Dreyfus and the debate over war guilt both had their origins in the relations of France to Germany. For anti-Dreyfusards, Dreyfus embodied 'the Jew' as the internal enemy by which Germany would undermine France. There are several substantial histories of the *Ligue*, but Ingram's particular focus on the debate over the origins of World War I suggests another narrative for the history of the LDH.<sup>25</sup> The *Ligue* had its origins in the Dreyfus Affair, a manifestation of the French-German conflict. Ingram argues that the LDH crippled itself by addressing French-German conflict during and after World War I. In an innovative section, Ingram examines the *Ligue's* cultivation of its relationship with its German counterpart, the Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte, and its use of this group as a mirror to find evidence for its questionable claim that important elements of German society accepted their nation's "war guilt." The first incarnation of the LDH collapsed with the June 1940 defeat of the Third Republic and the Occupation. The *Ligue's* major roles and dangers were inextricable from the relationship of France to Germany.

Ingram chronicles the conflict of the majority and the minority within the LDH over the origins of the war. The debate centered on Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty that made Germany and its allies 'responsible,' rather than guilty, for the war. Determining responsibility is a managerial practice. Guilt is a religious and legal term resolved by penance or punishment for the offense committed, rather than the assessment of damages. Ingram shows that from the beginning the majority and the minority of the *Ligue* thought in terms of the guilt of anthropomorphized states. The absolute nature of 'guilt' and 'innocence' underlay the nature of the debate, even after the majority recognized that acting as prosecutor and judge in assigning guilt to Germany was problematic and turned to the language of responsibility, though not to their responsibility for the situation of interwar Germany.

Ingram's book points to one direction for future studies of the LDH, that of the social composition of the leadership and the members of the two factions.<sup>26</sup> In 1922 the leader of the majority, Victor Basch, disparaged the lack of education of his critics in the minority (84). The leadership of the majority included a large number of university professors, i.e. Alphonse Aulard, Albert Bayet, Victor Basch, Ferdinand Buisson, Jacques Hadamard, Théodore Ruysen, and Gabriel Séailles. Several of them were in turn the sons of university professors, i.e. Bayet, Hadamard, and Ruysen. The minority leadership drew from *lycée* professors, i.e. Michel Alexandre, Félicien Challaye, René Château, and Léon Emery; and from journalists and writers, i.e. Mathias Morhardt, René Gérin, Fernand Gouttenoire de Toury, Georges Pioch, and Séverine. Citing the case of Gérin, Ingram argues that during the interwar years the majority could no longer dismiss the minority as uneducated (149) and this is true. Gérin went to the *Ecole normale supérieure* (ENS) and was an *agrégé*, but he pursued writing in the public sphere rather than an academic track. In the American sense of the terms, the majority was led by academics; the minority leadership was composed of intellectuals whose prominence did not come from university positions. Furthermore, leaders of

<sup>25</sup> On the history of the Ligue, see William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1898-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Emmanuel Naquet, *Pour l'Humanité: La Ligue des droits de l'homme de l'affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014); and Wendy Ellen Perry, "Remembering Dreyfus: The Ligue des droits de l'Homme and the Making of the Modern French Human Rights Movement" (Ph.D thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998). An issue that Ingram does not address is the extent to which other conflicts in the Ligue followed the division over responsibility for the war that he examines.

<sup>26</sup> I draw here from the biographical study of members of the Central Committee in Perry, "Remembering Dreyfus," vols. 2-3.



the minority which emerged in the interwar years, like Gérin and Emery, had been born too late to have experienced the Dreyfus Affair directly; their identity was shaped by World War I.

Ingram deals very well with the debates over war guilt within the LDH. Movements on the political extremes often generate conflicts between a majority and a minority articulating more radical positions, i.e. the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks (the minority which named itself the largest). This is less common in institutions like the *Ligue*, whose central position in the Third Republic can conceal conflicts like that between the majority, a bulwark of the Republic, and the minority, which called, in the name of republican principles, for revelation of a degree of French war-guilt responsibility, that, in the eyes of the majority, threatened the republic itself. The debates also reveal particular qualities of the *Ligue*. They were heated, but remained at a fairly high intellectual level. In many political organizations, slurs, slander and name-calling would have been much more pronounced. Participants read and responded to one another's positions. The LDH did not split until 1937, more than twenty years after the conflict between the majority and the minority began. Ingram's analysis of the ongoing discussions are an excellent intellectual history of a political debate, a genre that would not work well in many political organizations.

The conflict between the majority and the minority had the qualities of a struggle between establishment and anti-establishment elements of the intelligentsia of the Third Republic. The anti-establishment minority initially drew from figures like the union leader Alphonse Merrheim and the feminist and anarchist-leaning Séverine. As Ingram shows, the minority criticized the *Ligue* leadership for believing that by 1914, the *Ligue* "had become the Republic" (89). Under the majority, the LDH took the role of the guardian of the Republic, rather than its conscience. It had been established to protect individuals from injustice, particularly that of the state, but the majority had become the advocate for the Republic in the international sphere. That the LDH was enmeshed in the war origins controversy and the issue of defending or refuting the legitimacy of the French republican state raises the problematic position of a rights organization rooted in the nation-state. Are rights inherent to all, and does the danger to them come from an external power, particularly that of the state, or is the republican state to be defended as necessary in order to codify and protect the rights of the individual?

The war-guilt problem presents important questions for a wider audience. Ingram shows that the minority was more often correct than the majority, both in terms of accuracy (which nation mobilized first?) and of principles (the rights of nationalities). As practicing historians, we are wary of a society seeking to learn from history or to correct historical inaccuracies in order to render justice. Ingram's study offers the chance for an interested public to see that what we learn from history is that learning from history requires analysis of the historical context in which this learning is done and in which efforts are made to apply what has been learned. As Ingram clearly explains, the minority showed that the explanation for the outbreak of World War I in Article 231 was incorrect, but its final effort to rectify this error took place in the very different context of the Nazi Germany era. (243) The majority may have been wrong about the specifics of the origins of the war and contributed to the demise of the Weimar Republic, but their policies on the eve of World War II were arguably better for human rights and for the republic than those of the minority, if not always realizable in a new historical situation. In sum, it is important for historians to examine questions like which army mobilized first, but knowing the answer may not always lead citizens to support better policies in situations that are shaped by the original answers.

Reflection on the origins of World War I may have been more valuable long afterwards than it was in the interwar years. That the minority argued that France and its allies were not innocent in the outbreak of World War I may have made it difficult for it to take fully into account Hitler's aggressive policies. The majority may have been wrong to focus on the purported aggression of the German Empire, but thinking in this way did prepare it better for confronting Hitler. As long as the outbreak of World War I was argued in terms of guilt and responsibility, it could not become a site where contesting powers thought out in a fruitful manner how to prevent a devastating war in the future. This happened most clearly after the individuals who engaged in World War I were largely gone and the threat of war was in the hands of nuclear powers.

Norman Ingram's *The War Guilt Problem* thoughtfully examines how one of the canonical debates in diplomatic history, the origins of World War I, played out in a leading institution of the French Third Republic and how this debate helped

create conditions for World War II. Clearly written and argued, it raises issues of importance to audiences of concerned citizens in France and in the world, of today's version of rank-and-file LDH members a century ago.

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 RESPONSE BY NORMAN INGRAM, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
 

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As the Revd Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch wrote very recently in the *London Review of Books*, “It is rarely a judicious choice for an author to respond to a review.”<sup>27</sup> No doubt he is right. My trepidation is allayed by two facts: first, an author’s reply is understood to be part of the scholarly exercise in an H-Diplo roundtable; and second, all four of the reviewers to whom I am responding have been extraordinarily kind in their comments on my book, something which makes my task immeasurably easier. So, my first duty is to thank Andrew Barros, Charlotte Faucher, Talbot Imlay, and Donald Reid for taking the time to read and comment on *The War Guilt Problem and the Ligue des droits de l’homme, 1914-1944*, and William Irvine for his introductory remarks. I value this exercise greatly and hope that they will receive my responses to their questions in the spirit of generosity in which they were given.

All of the reviewers agree that the book is a significant addition to our historical knowledge on a variety of levels. Andrew Barros writes that I have placed “the war-guilt debate in an unexpected and original setting.” He notes that I have “dramatically” changed the “chronology of the [LDH’s] decline by clearly placing its beginning in 1914, when the *Ligue* supported the government, and its justification for war,” asserting that “one of the strengths of this work is the important archival research that lies behind it.” Talbot Imlay suggests that “Ingram’s book is a *tour de force*: imaginatively researched in both French and German archives, forcefully argued and eloquently written.” Charlotte Faucher agrees, arguing that “this finely written book makes an important contribution to the debates about the origins of the First World War in France, and to a lesser extent in Germany. It provides a detailed analysis of how pacifists grappled with the question of war guilt and continued to read contemporary developments through the lens of the First World War.” Finally, Donald Reid concludes that “*The War Guilt Problem* thoughtfully examines how one of the canonical debates in diplomatic history, the origins of World War I, played out in a leading institution of the French Third Republic and how this debate helped create conditions for World War II. Clearly written and argued, it raises issues of importance to audiences of concerned citizens in France and in the world, of today’s version of rank-and-file LDH members a century ago.”

The reviewers also raise questions for further discussion. Faucher and Reid draw parallels between the events of the 1930s and today. Faucher, for example, sees similarities between the debate on war guilt and today’s fascination with “fake news,” and states that as “scholars are currently engaging in the historicization of the usage of notions such as facts, lies and truth, one wonders if a particular terminology developed within the context of the LDH, or whether it mirrored a wider phenomenon that took place within French civil and political society.” Reid sees lessons for today in the need to historically contextualise political debates, writing that the “war-guilt problem presents important questions for a wider audience,” positing that the *Ligue*’s “minority showed that the explanation for the outbreak of World War I in Article 231 was incorrect, but its final effort to rectify this error took place in the very different context of the Nazi Germany era.” The LDH was acutely aware of the dangers of “fake news,” both during the Great War and on into the 1930s. The Spanish bombing of the German battlecruiser the *Deutschland* in Ibiza harbour, for example, was the subject of an intense debate about “fake news” at the *Ligue*’s 1937 congress.

One of the major questions which seems to exercise several of the reviewers is whether the travails of the *Ligue des droits de l’homme* mattered, and whether the *Ligue*’s debates had any resonance within broader French society. Faucher, for example, gently takes me to task for allegedly failing to demonstrate the impact of *Ligue* debates on French (or indeed European) political society and decision-making. She writes that “what is perhaps less clear at times is how exactly the *Ligue* reached arenas outside its direct remit, especially at the political party or governmental level.” Barros asks, “what was the impact of the LDH’s 1937 schism on the larger course of French politics? What was the role of the majority-minority civil war inside the LDH ... in the politics of a nation of some forty million people?” I argue that it is absolutely clear that the LDH had

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<sup>27</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch in the letters section of the *London Review of Books*, 15 August 2019, 4.

enormous political influence in France, from before the First World War to the Popular Front era, although that influence began to wane in the wake of the schismatic 1937 Tours Congress.

By French standards, the *Ligue* was a huge political organisation, with over 180,000 members by the early 1930s, making it far bigger than either the Communist or the Socialist parties. It was instrumental in the formation of the French Popular Front. Its yearly congresses attracted hundreds of militants from across France and even from far-flung outposts of the French empire. By the early 1930s, the LDH had local sections in almost 2,500 towns and villages of metropolitan France. These sections did not exist merely on paper, either; they received visiting speakers sent out either by the Paris headquarters or by the powerful regional federations. The speaking tours covered the map of France: in the period from 1 June 1930 to 20 May 1931, for example, 1,222 speaking engagements by members of the *Comité central* of the *Ligue* or its delegates took place. The largely Paris-based leadership of the *Ligue* represented the cream of the French intellectual and political elite. That leadership was massively well-connected to both the Radical and Socialist parties. At certain key moments in the debate on the war-guilt problem, for example, it is highly likely that the French foreign ministry allowed Victor Basch, the vice-president of the *Ligue*, access to the files of the Quai d'Orsay so that he could rebut the charges of the minority.

For its part, the German Foreign Office took a strong interest in the debates of the *Ligue* (especially those pertaining to the war-guilt question), its relationship with its German counterpart, the *Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte*, and the visits to Germany of LDH delegations. When the Nazis arrived in Paris in June 1940, the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR) and the Gestapo made a beeline for the *Ligue's* headquarters in the fourteenth arrondissement where they seized the *Ligue's* papers, ultimately transporting them back to Germany for analysis. Before their removal to Berlin, however, the Germans combed through the documents in Paris and used them to provide the necessary background for a massive police operation which saw the seizure of the papers and the interrogation of the leaders of 171 sections of the *Ligue* in thirteen occupied *départements* of northern France. To suggest that all of this does not constitute evidence of a significant political importance seems counter-intuitive.

Faucher also tackles the question of gender in the LDH, a topic on which William Irvine has written extensively.<sup>28</sup> She underlines the anomaly of a group dedicated to human rights in which “very few women are mentioned.” There certainly were influential women within the LDH. One has only to think of Suzanne Collette-Kahn, Madeleine Pelletier, Aline Ménard-Dorian, the journalist Séverine, Jeanne Alexandre, and Jeanne Challaye, among others. It is not my purpose here to delve into the reasons for *Ligue* inaction on the question of women's rights—others, including Irvine, have done that—but in response to Faucher's question I would comment that the division within the voices of women on the war-guilt problem seems to have paralleled that of men on the same question, which is to say that the majority of women appear to have supported the majority (male) position on the war-guilt issue, with a significant minority opposing it. It is well-nigh impossible to determine gender differences in voting at the *Ligue's* annual congresses. It is, however, possible to note the positions of male and female members of the *Comité central*. It is also worth noting, as indeed the police reports do, that a significant percentage of the people who attended the wartime meetings of the *Société d'études documentaires et critiques sur la guerre*, which was one of the originators of dissent on the war-origins question, were women. Important, too, is the fact that several of the prominent voices at the 1916 *Ligue* Congress, which debated the essential question of the hour, “The Conditions for a Lasting Peace,” were also women. I long ago devoted one third of my book on French pacifism specifically to feminist pacifism;<sup>29</sup> in the book under discussion, I am of course deeply aware of French women's contributions to the

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<sup>28</sup> See William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: the Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1898-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Irvine, “Politics of Human Rights: A Dilemma for the Ligue des droits de l'homme,” in *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 20:1 (Winter 1994), 5-28.

<sup>29</sup> See “Part III. *Thèmes et variations*, Or Feminist Pacifism in Interwar France” in Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991 and 2011), 249-310.

question, but as Irvine demonstrated, the *Ligue* was by and large a peculiarly male institution. As an historian, one plays the cards one has been dealt.

Barros, despite writing many generous things about the book, cannot help but wonder “whether this study of the LDH significantly change[s] our understanding of France in this period.” He quotes from an otherwise positive review of my 1991 book on interwar French pacifism by my MA supervisor at the University of Toronto, John Cairns, who suggested that pacifists are to be pitied because “if ever there was a marginal group in history it is they.” This line of thought strikes me as what E.P. Thompson in another context called the “enormous condescension of posterity.”<sup>30</sup> It is also redolent of a certain international history approach to the past. But surely one of the developments over the last few decades has been a broadening of the scope of international history, which is no longer seen as merely the province of historians with a neo-Rankean fixation on foreign offices, intelligence services, and military general staffs. Barros is right to comment on the paucity of new approaches to the old problems of 1914 and the impact of the First World War. In terms of new interpretations, one needs to expand the field beyond the shores of Europe, something which has been successfully done by Erez Manela and Susan Pedersen.<sup>31</sup> Within Europe, however, re-evaluations and, to an extent, new interpretations continue to emerge, even if these fly in the face of received wisdom; here I am thinking particularly of Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914* and Sean McMeekin’s *July 1914: Countdown to War*, which, in my view, have much to commend them.<sup>32</sup>

All four of the foregoing analyses look at the Great War and its aftermath through an international lens. What is innovative about my work, however, is that it sharpens the focus of the impact of the Great War, and in particular the question of war guilt, on one of the main victorious powers, France. The traditional historiography examines the question of war guilt uniquely as a function of its impact in Germany.<sup>33</sup> Until my book, no thought has been given to the question of the war-guilt problem as it played itself out in France. *The War Guilt Problem and the Ligue des droits de l’homme* makes three big arguments. The first is that long before the Nazi invasion of May 1940, the war-guilt problem almost destroyed the *Ligue des droits de l’homme*, an organisation of undoubted importance and influence during the Third Republic. The decline of the *Ligue* is not to be ascribed, therefore, to the Nazi invasion of France; rather, the decline set in with the support of the LDH for the *Union sacrée* in 1914. Second, the war-guilt problem and the “historical dissent” that it incarnated were the catalyst for the emergence of a new style of French pacifism. That is of import or interest only if one assumes that pacifism is of historical significance. I plead guilty as charged: I am one of those historians who believe that the history of pacifism is an

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<sup>30</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 13.

<sup>31</sup> See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), who writes that “there were few Germans who were not left aghast” at the Treaty’s terms (424). For recent German appreciations of the Treaty and its impact, see Eckart Conze, *Die Grosse Illusion: Versailles 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt* (Munich: Siedler, 2018); Klaus Schwabe, *Versailles: Das Wagnis eines demokratischen Friedens, 1919-1923* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019); and Jörn Leonhard, *Der überforderte Frieden: Versailles und die Welt, 1918-1923* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018). Even Gerhard Weinberg, who argues forcefully that the Germans, objectively speaking, had little to complain about, admits that “Blinding many in Germany to a recognition of the long-term implications of the war and the settlement was a series of moral issues, of which by far the most dramatic was that of war guilt.” See “The Defeat of Germany in 1918 and the European Balance of Power”, in Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11-22.

important historical subject.<sup>34</sup> But the war-guilt problem pre-dated and was independent of the pacifist question (see more on this below); it generated a pacifist reaction, not the other way around. This book is about the war-guilt problem and its effects, one of which was the emergence of new-style pacifism; its focus is not primarily the history of pacifism. And finally, I argue that the three traditional ways of looking at reactions to the Vichy regime (collaboration, resistance, accommodation) need to be nuanced by a fourth: the privileging of peace as an “ethic of ultimate ends” which in turn was based on a reading of the war-guilt question.<sup>35</sup>

This leads me to a fourth observation, this time in response to Imlay’s review. He questions, as do Faucher and Barros, the extent to which the *Ligue* was politically important in the Third Republic. He does this by raising one of Irvine’s theses, to the effect that—in Imlay’s words—the “*Ligue* evolved into little more than a social and patronage club possessed with fading political purpose and principles.” There is certainly something to this argument, but it applies above all to the local level of *Ligue* politics. At the federation and national levels, issues of political principle were the order of the day. Irvine’s analysis is a deeply-researched, iconoclastic examination of the *Ligue* which moves the debate well beyond the rather triumphalist approach of Emmanuel Naquet and other writers on the subject.<sup>36</sup> My book seeks to further problematise the rather Whiggish approach of Naquet by demonstrating how one question in particular – the war-guilt problem – paralysed and ultimately came close to destroying the LDH. But there are other problems with Imlay’s argument, too. He asserts that somehow the *Ligue* moved toward the left and centre-left during the tumultuous 1930s. In fact, the *Ligue* had always been on the centre-left and left. Imlay’s statement that “by the late 1930s much of the centre-right and right had veered into pacifism, partly from a visceral hatred of war but also from the fear of war’s political consequences” is curious. The centre-right and right in France (and probably elsewhere, too) were never ‘pacifist’ in any meaningful, principled sense of the word. That they were opposed to the Popular Front and the LDH was a given, but they were never actually “pacifist.”

This brings me to a fifth and final observation, once again in response to Imlay’s review: the question of pacifism. Imlay is intrigued that, in his view, I have “downplay[ed]” the importance of pacifism to the *Ligue*’s interwar history. Not at all. I am clear that one of the effects of the war-guilt debate within the LDH was the emergence and development of the new-style pacifism. What was a three-page analysis of “historical dissent” in my 1991 book on French pacifism has now become an entire book.<sup>37</sup> Imlay is right to suggest that this makes of pacifism “something of an epiphenomenon—a by-product of a larger problem,” but he does not accept the argument that this epiphenomenon was the result of “the war-guilt question that fueled pacifism (at least for the minority) rather than the devastating experience of war itself.” In fact, unlike British

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<sup>34</sup> Since the 1960s, peace historians have been very active in America where they founded the Conference on Peace Research in History which went on to become the Peace History Society. In Germany, the *Arbeitskreis historische Friedensforschung* continues to be very active. The most important peace historian of his generation was Peter Brock, whose prolific, temporally and spatially wide-ranging, high-octane scholarly output on the history of pacifism remains unsurpassed. His position as doyen of peace history studies has been taken now by the Oxford historian, Martin Ceadel, who in a long series of highly-original books has had an enormous impact on how we think about the history of pacifism. Any list of books written by peace historians would be far too long for this footnote and undoubtedly incomplete, but a few names are essential: in France, Maurice Vaisse, Nicolas Offenstadt, Jean-Michel Guieu, Yves Santamaria; in the United States, Charles Chatfield, David Patterson, Roger Chickering, Sandi Cooper, Harold Josephson; in Germany: Karl Holl, Jost Dülffer, Gottfried Niedhart, and Dieter Riesenberger; in Canada: Jo Vellacott and Thomas Socknat.

<sup>35</sup> The idea of an “ethic of ultimate ends,” drawn from Max Weber’s philosophy of religion, undergirds Martin Ceadel’s analysis of pacifism in Britain during this period. See Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> See Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics*, and Emmanuel Naquet, *Pour l’Humanité: La Ligue des droits de l’homme de l’affaire Dreyfus à la défaite de 1940* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> See my discussion of “historical dissent” in *The Politics of Dissent*, 122-125.

pacifism, which, according to Martin Ceadel, was a relatively “harmonious” creature, French pacifism was anything but.<sup>38</sup> It shared with its British cousin what Ceadel calls the ‘humanitarian’ inspiration—the reaction to the carnage of the Great War—but, as I argue, to this was added a volitional, historical argument in France. This sharply differentiates the French case from that of the British. Beginning in 1915, and continuing all the way down to the collapse of France in 1940, was the growing conviction that the First World War had been fought under false pretences. To respond, then, to Imlay’s counter-factual question, if, by some miracle (not at the Marne), the Franco-Russian armies had quickly triumphed over the German army in 1914, then clearly the moral urgency of the war-guilt question would not have been the same—for any side. But they did not. As I argue in my conclusion,

“If the Great War had been fought under false pretences, if the Germans were not uniquely responsible for it, if the Franco-Russian alliance shared some of the responsibility for its outbreak, then 1.4 million young Frenchmen had died in vain, to say nothing of the millions of combatants from the other belligerent nations. That, in turn, explains the evolution toward pacifism and the increasingly entrenched opinion of the minority which refused to brook the idea of a new crusade against Nazi Germany. Fixated as they were on the sins of the fathers, they could not see that the sons faced a new foe who was to wreak unspeakable horrors on Europe” (267-268).

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<sup>38</sup> See Martin Ceadel, “The Peace Movement between the Wars: Problems of Definition,” in *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Richard Taylor and Nigel Young (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 75. For the conflicted history of interwar French pacifism, see Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent*.