Soldiers' Reconciliation

René Cassin, the International Labour Office, and the Search for Human Rights

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Reconciliation is the search for an alternative way of configuring hostile parties, locked in the hatred and bitterness unleashed by war and violence. One set of identities – that of soldiers killing other soldiers on the other side of the line – is muted by the construction of another set of identities, coming out of combatant status but moving away from war. Here the moral authority of soldiers, as men who know what Walt Whitman termed the red business of war, is decoupled from the conflict which brought them into uniform in the first place. Thereafter the door is at least ajar, leading to other encounters with those whom they would have tried to kill on the battlefield. Those post-combat meetings help engender solidarities, an unlikely alliance of former enemies determined after the end of hostilities to make another murderous war unthinkable.

I want to tell the story of one such effort. To be sure, in the short term, it failed, but in the process of creating a new kind of veterans' politics, a series of ideas emerged which had long-lasting consequences. These are the interests former soldiers had in constructing a norm of international affairs above that of the nation state. States, Raymond Aron tells us, are those institutions defined by their right to wage war. Veterans in the interwar years challenged the absolute sovereignty of states precisely because of the lethal consequences of decisions to go to war for everyone caught up in them. Veterans had rights that superceded the writ of the states, which had sent

them to war; those rights were human rights, shared by men without limbs or eyes or faces or minds, all over the world. They deserved pensions and prosthetic devices and a new start in life not because of their nationality but because of their individual and collective dignity. This turn from charity to entitlement is one of the key preliminary stages in the creation of a new kind of social movement, a human rights movement, which took shape in the Second World War, and which after 1970, has mushroomed into a significant social, political, and moral force all over the world.[1] Reconciliation after one war led to reconciliation after a second, and even more embittering and devastating calamity.

In this chapter, I want to trace this crooked path of reconciliation, a twisted journey leading in directions no one in 1918 had ever imagined. To do so, I will tell the story of René Cassin, who would go on to frame the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968. In 1914, he was almost killed in combat, and joined with other disabled veterans to create the French veterans' movement.[2] In the interwar years, René Cassin became a soldier in another kind of war, one waged against war itself. His point of entry into international politics was the international veterans' movement, launched with the aid of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva in the early 1920s. There too, between 1924 and 1938, he served as a member of the French delegation to the League of Nations (LON). His place at the table in Geneva was as the official representative of the French veterans' movement. Year after year, the *Union fédérale des anciens combattants et mutilés de guerre* (UF) formally nominated him for this post. Indeed, Cassin himself drafted the letter signed by the Federation's president, making this request, and dispatched it to the Prime Minister's office. And each year until 1938, Cassin travelled to Geneva and spent the month between about the 10th of September and the 10th of October at work on League of Nations' business. After the disas-

1 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). My interpretation differs from Moyn on the significance of pre-1970 developments, but on the later period, his book is now the standard work.

2 Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *René Cassin et les droits de l'homme. Le projet d'une generation* (Paris: Fayard, 2011).

trous Munich accords of 30 September 1938, he decided not to return to the LON, which to all intents and purposes, had collapsed.

Over the years he spent in Geneva, he was joined by a remarkable assembly of men, in the ILO, in its early days under Albert Thomas, and in the LON itself. In 1926, for instance, Aristide Briand, Louis Loucheur, and his old friend from student days in Paris, Marcel Plaisant, served on the League's first commission, devoted to juridical questions. Léon Jouhaux, the designated representative of the French trade union movement, served on the second commission, devoted to economic questions. In the same year – 1926 – Cassin joined Paul-Boncour, Jouhaux and Henri de Jouvenal on the third commission, which focused on disarmament. In other years Cassin also served on the fifth commission, devoted to humanitarian matters, and on the sixth commission, responsible for what were termed political questions.

In Geneva, he also served alongside and formed friendships with distinguished jurists and politicians from many other countries. It was in Geneva that he met Eduard Beneš, foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, and Nikolas Politis, foreign minister of Greece. Both were pillars of the League, and dominant figures on the commissions on which Cassin served. Both made important contributions to the development of notions of human rights and state sovereignty at the very time Cassin began to write substantially about these matters. He presented his thinking to the Institute of International Law in Geneva and The Hague Academy of International Law. It is evident that his work in these years prepared the ground for the effort he made alongside many others during the Second World War and after to frame a new international rights regime.[3]

In Geneva, Cassin saw why the theory of absolute state sovereignty was in need of fundamental revision. The League sought collective security, but rested on the premise that its members enjoyed absolute state sovereignty. This contradiction ultimately tore it apart. In the 1920s, in the glow of the Locarno agreements, there seemed to be a commonality of interest among sovereign states in finding alternatives to war as a means of settling conflicts between states. But after the economic crisis of 1929, that consensus – always precarious, though palpable enough in the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1926 – evaporated. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 opened a

3 Ibid., chapters 5-6, and 9.

decade of disasters for the League of Nations, a sorry spectacle Cassin saw at first hand. While he and his colleagues continued to work on disarmament and other matters of common concern, the League crumbled, and then collapsed after the Munich accords of 1938.

In this chapter, I tell the story of Cassin's engagement in international affairs in the ILO and the LON in the hopeful years of the 1920s. His leadership in a veterans' effort of reconciliation rested on a second tier of the identities of millions of soldiers: that of mutilated men, men wounded or disabled who had a claim – moral, political, and financial – on the countries which had called on them to fight. The rights of disabled men to care, treatment, prosthesis, and a living pension was not a national right; it was a human right, one that was independent of the nationality of the legless, armless, eyeless, or brain-damaged men. By shifting veterans' politics from the level of international reconstruction to the level of transnational rights, they formed one of the first effective bridges between the two sides in the Great War.

That wounded men had the right to care was inscribed in the work of the Red Cross ever since the Battle of Solverino in 1859. But that association was an effort of charity, conducted by those who had not fought. The veterans' movement I discuss here was led by disabled men themselves, and their struggle for recognition provided a basis for what we now term rights talk. Twenty five years later, when the Second World War required a second effort of reconciliation, veterans were there too, making human rights the project of a generation, the war generation of 1914-18.

THE THIRD WAY, THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, AND VETERANS' POLITICS 1919-25

For veterans, there were three paths out of the Great War. The first was towards communism. Henri Barbusse's war novel *Under fire* (1917) had won the *Prix Goncourt*, international acclaim and a wide readership. Royalties helped launch Barbusse's *Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants* (ARAC) which took heart from the hopes of social transformation kindled by the Bolshevik Revolution. The second path was that of battle-hardened nationalism, of the kind the *Union Nationale des Combattants* (UNC) expressed, thereby keeping alive the spirit of camaraderie and bit-

terness towards Germany. Cassin helped forge a third way, an internationalist veterans' movement aligned with the League of Nations and committed towards reconciliation between the two enemy camps after the war.

From the start, Cassin was a League of Nations man. He helped the nascent organization create its working library of books and official statistics and reports, and gathered support among those who saw in the League the only hope against communism on the left and strident nationalism on the right. It is this middle-of-the-road, progressive line that he forged in the UF. He did so with other men like Henri Pichot, who had suffered in combat with German forces, but who came to be committed to transcending the iron bitterness of the war.

Cassin was not at all averse to joining the inter-Allied veterans' organization, *La Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants* (FIDAC). But he was against a political and cultural quarantine of German and Austrian veterans. Why should justified contempt for the old guard of the *Kaiserreich* pollute the atmosphere long after those responsible for the war had been overthrown? This is a question Cassin and Pichot, through their service and their suffering, had earned the right to ask. They were moral witnesses to the war, men who had faced the enemy, and had bled for their country.[4] What they said commanded respect. Pichot had spent eleven months in a German prisoner-of-war camp, and another six months at home recuperating from wounds received at the end of August 1914, wounds and the maltreatment of which, almost cost him his left leg.[5] He was initially convinced that German culture and the German people were rotten through and through, but abandoned his initial *amertume* and used his fluent German to argue in both Germany and France for reconciliation.[6]

As we have noted, Cassin had been fortunate to survive his combat experience, and had cried *Vive la France*, when hit by enemy fire on 12 October 1914. The defeat of Germany was a moral victory to him, a victory for the right. But his unshakable view was that the only way to prevent the return of war was to forge an international order which would block the de-

4 Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

5 Fond Pichot, Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter: AN), AS 43 1 and 2.

6 Fond Pichot, AN, AS 43 2. Pichot's account of his military service and his extraordinarily detailed account of the treatment of his wounds contain all the venom of a die-hard nationalist.

scent into armed conflict, when international tensions rose. His was the view of Lord Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, who said time and again that had in the summer of 1914, had there only been a League, a place for the Great Powers to bring their grievances, the war would never have occurred.[7] After 1918, that conviction made Cassin and many other veterans turn towards Geneva, the seat of the new League of Nations.

By no means did all French veterans share Cassin's and Pichot's views. But what is remarkable is the degree to which their internationalist position became the middle way, the dominant position among French veterans in the inter-war years. From the spring of 1920 on, Cassin joined inter-allied meetings of veterans, where he and others put the case that the best defense of France was the strengthening of the democratic forces represented in the Weimar Republic.[8]

The man who forged the links between the UF and the LON was Adrian Tixier. Tixier like Pichot was a teacher. Tixier had lost his left arm in the Battle of the Frontiers in 1914, and like Cassin, he had won the *Médaille Militaire* and the *Croix de Guerre* for bravery. Tixier returned to the classroom in 1915, and served as president of one of the early veterans' organizations, the *Fédération des mutilés du Tarn*. He joined the UF, and then in 1920, accepted the invitation offered by Albert Thomas, director-general of the ILO, to come to Geneva and take up the post of secretary responsible for disabled veterans in the new organization.

From the outset, Tixier worked to make the ILO a meeting point for veterans from countries on both sides of the war. The advantage he had was that the ILO, an independent satellite of the LON, could offer a venue for the discussion of purely technical questions of interest to veterans: questions concerning different approaches to retraining and reeducating wounded veterans, as well as different developments in prosthetic surgery and technology going on all over Europe and beyond. The political arena was elsewhere, a few streets away in the League of Nations. Thus from mid-1920 on, Tixier did everything he could to point out to British, French or Belgian veterans the benefits arising from an exchange of information and

7 Que fait la Société des nations?, 1, League of Nations Archives, Geneva, Mantoux papers.

8 Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939*, vol. 1 (Paris: Fondation Nationale de la Science Politique, 1977), 75.

experience with disabled men and their representatives in Germany or Austria, whose wounds and whose difficulties in coping with disability and with finding and keeping a job were very similar to their own.

There is no doubt that this was a sleight of hand. Tixier wanted the ILO to provide the venue for regular meetings of veterans from all combatant nations, both to forge an international organization with its own voice, and to imbed this large and influential population in the culture and overall work of the LON. The problem was, though, that there were many veterans' groups in Britain, France, and elsewhere unwilling to sit down together with their former enemies. The question was how to get around them.[9]

Discussing technical matters was one way to do so. Already in 1920, an inter-allied veterans' meeting was held in Brussels, during which a *Centre de prothèse internationale* was born. At the same meeting, the Allied veterans decided to enter into discussions with the ILO "pour les questions internationales intéressant les mutilés". This confirmed an earlier resolution at the 1920 UF Congress at Nancy to work towards an international meeting of veterans at Geneva.

In January 1921, Tixier wrote to the UF, asking if it would participate in such a meeting to discuss "législation internationale des victimes de la guerre". Cassin as secretary-general of the UF, replied favorably, since this request was in line with the *Conseil d'administration's* decision to discuss technical matters among other veterans' organizations; such a meeting would in no way constitute the creation of "une Fédération internationale des victimes de la guerre".[10] So much for Allied veterans' sensibilities. Cassin insisted that the initiative had to come from the ILO, not from the UF. A majority of the *Conseil d'administration* supported Cassin's position, giving him a

"mandat de représenter éventuellement l'Union Fédérale à toutes conferences internationales qui pourraient être organisées pour le BIT de Genève, en vue de l'étude

9 See Tixier's reports to Albert Thomas, Historical Archives of the International Labour Organization, Geneva (hereafter: ILO Archives), as well as articles in *Après la bataille*, 25 August and 5 September 1920, as cited in Prost, *Les Anciens combattants*, vol. 1, 76, n. 131.

10 Tixier papers, ILO Archives, MU/7/3/1 et seq.

d'une unification des mesures de protections édictées par les different pays en faveur des mutilés, réformés et veuves de guerre".[11]

The first such meeting was held on 12-14 September 1921, when delegates from the UF, the British Legion, and the Italian veterans' movement sat down in Geneva with representatives of the German *Reichsbund* and the Austrian *Zentralverbund.* Pichot and Gaston Rogé were unable to attend; Cassin was the sole spokesman for the UF. He felt some apprehension, he wrote, in starting down this path, sensing

"la conscience des grands devoirs à accompli envers tous les invalides, toutes les familles victimes de cette guerre, envers aussi notre France ravagée, dont les devastations, dont l'effort de relèvement et l'esprit pacifique, si souvent ignorés ou méconnus, devaient être mis au première plan dans une conférence visant aux soulagement des souffrances".[12]

Tixier and the head of the ILO Albert Thomas welcomed the delegates. Among them was General Sir Frederick Maurice, representing the British Legion. There were delegations from Italy and Poland in Geneva, alongside German and Austrian delegates. Both countries had participated in the work of the ILO since 1919.

This very first encounter of veterans' representatives from both sides was a delicate moment. And yet Cassin saw this meeting as the right time and the right place to begin to construct a different kind of veterans' *internationale*. Surely, he said, disabled men should benefit from developments in care and treatment, whatever their origin. If they lived outside their country of origin, they had to have the right to receive pensions and to obtain medical assistance. Cassin knew that there were employers' organizations alongside trade union groups attached to the ILO: here was the natural place to discuss retraining and job placement. From these points of mutual interest, he argued that veterans could construct a common front, based on the view that the Treaty of Versailles had opened the way towards a peaceful future.

11 Entente internationale, *La France mutilé*, 26 January 1921.

12 René Cassin, La Réunion de Genève, *La France mutilé*, 25 September 1921.

Cassin himself witnessed the way the German delegate to the meeting, Schumann, representing the *Reichsbund*, took up the challenge, and

"responded by making a declaration which everyone listened to with rapt attention, especially by the French delegation. He said he came not only to *manifest* a pacific spirit, in denouncing war and revenge, but in order to *recognize* the debt in reparations that Germany owes to our country. They were committed to take all steps to ensure that the German government pays this debt, and also to struggle against all those efforts to overthrow the Weimar Republic and to resurrect the imperialist principles of the pre-war period."[13]

Here was the opening Cassin had hoped for: a public commitment by German and Austrian veterans to accept the terms of the peace treaty and to work together with their former enemies on matters of mutual interest. Deeds, to be sure, had to follow words, and Cassin expressed a certain reserve in reporting to French veterans what had happened in Geneva. His aim was clear: "To remember so that we do not fall into a trap; to act everywhere to lessen the suffering and to see justice done."[14]

Not all Allied veterans were persuaded that they could work with German and Austrian veterans. Suspicions were still set in stone; it would take time, Cassin believed, to dissolve them. A second step towards building an international veterans' movement took place in Geneva in March 1922, which was the convening of the first ILO-sponsored meeting of experts on problems of war disability. Tixier and Cassin worked hand-in-hand to prepare this meeting. Cassin suggested names of possible delegates, and hoped that labour and employers' leaders could be persuaded to come; perhaps, Cassin suggested, someone from the *Comité des forges*.[15] That was not possible, but others accepted the invitation. One was Dr Ripert, an expert on prosthetic medicine who had worked at the *Centre de prothèse de St Maurice*, and joined Cassin in the French delegation in Geneva.[16]

Between 2 and 4 March 1922, Albert Thomas himself presided over the meeting of delegates from Austria, France, Britain, Germany, Poland, Italy

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Cassin to Tixier, 26 November 1921, ILO Archives, MU/7/3/1.

16 Pichot to Tixier, 31 January 1922, ILO Archives, MU/7/3/1.

and Germany. Their recommendations were uncontroversial: veterans should have the right to treatment and care wherever they resided; there should be a center of documentation on developments in prosthetic and orthopedic medicine – a point on which Cassin insisted – and a fully international exposition on the care of disabled men; veterans' organizations should work closely with other associations, including the Red Cross and the *Comité d'hygiène* of the LON.

The only bone of contention concerned how this initiative cut across the work of the *Centre de prothèse internationale*. Here Tixier was clear. The Brussels meeting of 1920, including an exhibition of prosthetic appliances, was part of the work of the permanent Inter-Allied committee on medical care of the disabled; they rejected the idea of a fully international association to deal with these questions. That is why they did not participate in the March 1922 meeting in Geneva; it was therefore necessary, Tixier felt, that the ILO move into the area they refused to inhabit. Cassin seconded Tixier: there were matters on which the Inter-Allied committee was the competent authority; and others, fully international matters, on which the ILO was the competent authority. They should work in parallel.[17]

This was easier said than done. Six months later, Tixier took the next step, once again in tandem with Cassin. On 26 September 1922, he wrote on behalf of the ILO inviting the UF and other veterans' groups to come to Geneva the following year for a second meeting of experts. On 3 October 1922, Cassin, then President of the UF, stated that, after consultation with the Executive Committee, his organization was happy to accept the invitation. Such a programme, he said, "fits perfectly the ideas of the Union Fédérale". Cassin asked Tixier further to send him any information he had about "the legal and economic organization of the supply of prosthetics through cooperatives in Austria and Czechoslovakia". Following his line of argument in March, Cassin added that the UF's decision was without prejudice to the work of the *Centre de prothèse internationale* in Brussels. It was time, Cassin wrote, to seize the moment, one which was "exceptionnellement favorable à tous points de vus".[18]

17 Meeting of committee of experts, March 1922, Procès-verbaux, 11, ILO Archives, MU/7/3/2.

18 Cassin to Tixier, 3 October 1923, ILO Archives, MU/7/3/3.

Getting other associations to join the meeting was not so simple. On 10 November 1922, Tixier wrote to Albert Thomas in no uncertain terms: "I will not deny that establishing cordial relations among veterans of the Great War on both sides is a delicate matter." There were those who would not sit down with German veterans, but he believed that after "negotiations, perhaps protracted, we will be able to establish a formal programme and fix a specific date acceptable to all the major associations of men wounded in the Great War".[19] The UNC refused to go, but other Allied groups, like the British Legion, accepted the invitation.

The ILO did indeed convene a second meeting of experts on disabled veterans' matters in Geneva in July 1923. This time the focus was on job placement, and on the conditions disabled men faced on the job in many different countries.[20] Delegates attended from South Africa, Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Britain, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Red Cross. Cassin was joined by Pichot and Rogé from the UF, as well as Monsieur Gauthier, head of *L'office regional de la main d'oeuvre de Paris.* The deliberations, Cassin later noted, were helpful in negotiations on French legislation passed a few months later on the mandatory employment of disabled veterans.[21]

These discussions, while intrinsically useful to veterans, were eclipsed by the increasingly tense reparations crisis. In January 1923, French and Belgian troops had occupied the Ruhr Valley. German inflation assumed astronomic proportions. In January 1922, the exchange rate was roughly 200 Deutschmarks to the dollar; in July 1923, the rate was 350,000 to the dollar; month after month the spiral continued. In this atmosphere, little could be done to promote international understanding. Though Tixier kept trying to find common ground among veterans' groups, he knew he had to await the end of the crisis.[22]

The parallel efforts of the new German Chancellor Gustav Stresemann in Germany and the new French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand created

19 Tixier to Drummond, 10 November 1922, ILO Archives.

20 Meeting of 31 July to 2 August 1923, Procès-verbaux, ILO Archives, MU/7/4/2/2.

21 Rapport de René Cassin à la Commission de la Paix sur la C.I.A.M.A.C, 3, AN, Fonds Cassin, 382 AP 10.

22 Tixier to Cassin, 16 March 1923, ILO Archives, MU/7/5/1.

the conditions for rapprochement. Currency stabilization, through the Dawes Plan, and greater Franco-German understanding, leading to the Locarno Treaties of 1925 broke the log-jam in Geneva as elsewhere. Here was the moment Tixier had been waiting for. But once again, it took a parallel effort by Cassin and the UF to bring about the creation of CIAMAC, the first fully international association of veterans of the Great War.

CIAMAC

In effect, improved relations between and among the Great Powers still left many ex-soldiers and other nationalists suspicious of the LON in general and the ILO in particular. For that reason, Tixier, identifed unalterably as a League of Nations man, could not himself convene a meeting of veterans' groups without alienating many potential delegates; that job was done by Cassin and the UF.

Here begins a story of eight years of work both in the field of international veterans' affairs and in the corridors of the League of Nations itself. From 1924 on, Cassin served as a French delegate to the League. At the same time, he launched, with the assistance of the Secretariat of the ILO, la *Conférence internationale des associations des mutilés et d'anciens combattants*, known by its acronym, CIAMAC. Since the two sides to Cassin's Geneva years form one integral story, we first deal with his work with *anciens combattants* in this organization in the years before 1933, before turning to his parallel activity within the League itself. Both show his broadening and deepening approach to the difficult task of healing the wounds of war, an approach, which prepared the ground for his work on human rights during and after the Second World War.

Cassin was fully aware of the differences between the UF and other French veterans' groups on questions of working with old enemies. He and Tixier reached the unavoidable conclusion that they simply had to go ahead on their own with the plan to create a body in which old soldiers from both the Allied and the Central powers could come together to discuss issues of mutual interest and to defend the peace.[23]

23 Tixier to Cassin, 15 October 1925, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5.

On 7 August 1925, Paul Brousmiche, then President of the UF, wrote to Albert Thomas, asking him to provide a venue for an international meeting of all veterans' groups to be held later that year in Geneva. With Thomas' support, Tixier wrote back to the UF saying that the good offices of the ILO were at the disposal of the organizing committee of CIAMAC. Tixier found two rooms in the University of Geneva, on the ground floor, to enable disabled men to attend the meeting without difficulty. The ILO provided translators and secretarial staff, who gathered in the *salle d'attente des professeurs* of the University, adjacent to the rooms set aside for the meeting, whose date was set as 18-19 September 1925. The ILO provided no financial support, save negotiating a fee of 2 francs for the rent of the meeting rooms. This was formally a UF affair.[24]

On 18 September 1925, Brousmiche welcomed delegates from eleven countries to Geneva. He saw the meeting as a reflection of the growing power and confidence of veterans, who felt impelled to speak out on a broad range of domestic and international issues. Disabled men, in particular, had to voice their views on war and peace. After the formalities were over, the delegates got down to business. And business was not easy. Tixier explained to Thomas that it took five to six hours of negotiation before a text was agreed, committing all delegates, including the German delegation, to support unequivocally the Covenant of the League and the obligatory arbitration of future international disputes. Tipping the balance towards agreement was the rapport developed between Rossmann, the German delegate and Socialist member of the *Reichstag*, and Pichot, whom Tixier termed "the most convincing speak and also the best journalist in the UF".[25]

The next day the delegates were greeted formally by Eric Drummond, the Secretary General of the LON, by the president of the League's Assembly, the Canadian Raoul Dandurand, and by Joseph Paul-Boncour, the French President of the Council, with whom Cassin worked in the French delegation.[26] The publicity was good for CIAMAC, but some journalists tried to reduce this initiative simply to an LON public relations exercise. Tixier took care, with Thomas' prodding, to distance himself from

24 File on September 1925 meeting of CIAMAC, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5.

25 Tixier to Thomas, 22 September 1925, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5/1.

26 Drummond to Thomas, 25 September 1925, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5/1.

CIAMAC, which thereby became one of the first of a breed of political groups we now term 'non-governmental organizations'.

The originality of CIAMAC was that it was a political group speaking up on behalf of ex-soldiers, people with rights. They had no intention of taking or giving charity, and hence were at one remove from the Red Cross and its allied organizations. They were also at one remove from the governments of their members, and were emphatically not paid by nor responsible to the states from which they had come. "The role of CIAMAC", wrote Cassin in 1930, "is not to stand in the place of governments, but to make known to them popular sentiment" in more than one country.[27] Their responsibility was to all the men who had fought in the war, and those whose courage and whose suffering gave them the moral authority to speak out on a whole range of issues. They were non-denominational, and hence had none of the advantages nor any of the disadvantages of the Vatican. They represented a generation of men in uniform, their families, their widows, their orphans, their dependents. They spoke for those millions of men and women for whom the war of 1914-18 was a catastrophe. And for whom was it not? For disabled men like Cassin, Pichot and Tixier, theirs was a moral crusade, a crusade against war. From the outset, their primary aim was to help build a durable peace, and to work to strengthen the League of Nations.[28]

This pacifist voice is what Cassin and his colleagues in the UF transferred to CIAMAC. It was a forum for the discussion of matters of common interest, in the same way as the experts' committees had been. But it was also a voice for understanding across the divide between former enemies, and throughout the later 1920s, before the onset of the world economic crisis undermined the fragile democracies of Germany and the rest of Europe, CIAMAC pressed its campaign to ensure that no future generation of young people would know the ravages of war. Even before Germany was admitted to the League of Nations in 1926, German delegates came to Geneva, to CIAMAC, to prepare the way for their country's re-entry into the community of nations.

CIAMAC met for a second time in Geneva on 30 September to 2 October 1926: 80 delegates from 10 nations and 20 organizations attended. The

27 Cassin on CIAMAC, 1930, 15-16, AN, Fonds Cassin, 382 AP 10.

28 Ibid., 4.

hope was that Col. G.R. Crossfield, the British president of FIDAC, could attend and open the meeting, but he was barred from doing so by nationalists within his own organization.[29] As before, the UF, as an allied veterans' group, participated in FIDAC; but FIDAC refused to have anything to do with CIAMAC, tainted by the presence of former enemy soldiers. These tensions erupted within the French delegation as well. Some who attented, Tixier learned, probably from Cassin, aimed to disrupt the meeting and destroy the organization.[30] They wanted to force the German delegates to state publicly their acceptance of the war guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles, article 231; this would have compromised them at home. Pichot got around this, by asking for a majority vote, yes or no, on the matter within the French delegation. The no's won the vote; the French delegation spoke with one voice. They did not raise the issue, and the storm faded away. For Cassin, as much as for Tixier, five years of slow and steady work had paid off. How moving it was, Tixier told Albert Thomas, to stand together at this meeting, with all these old soldiers, and feel the emotion of the moment of silence they observed to pay their respects to the dead of the war.[31] CIAMAC was launched.

Cassin saw the association as reflecting the interests of a wide body of veterans. In terms of membership, the French, German, and Polish associations predominated. The first service they offered was to bring the experience of other veterans to the aid of individuals in different countries dealing with laws and regulations concerning disability payments, services, and pensions. In addition, its independence from all other bodies – including, Cassin insisted a bit disingenuously, from the LON – enabled it better to work "towards a rapprochement of the countries divided by the war".[32]

In 1927, CIAMAC's annual congress was held in Vienna. Cassin was there together with Brousmiche, Viala, and a priest who was very active in the UF, Bernard Secret. He was a prominent member of the Catholic social movement, was apparently a particular favorite among Austrian Catholics. In Vienna there were 17 delegations in attendance, all, in Tixier's opinion, "resolutely pacifist". The absent organizations were the American Legion,

29 Ibid., 5.

30 Tixier to Thomas, 5 October 1925, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5/1.

31 Ibid.

32 Cassin on CIAMAC, 1930, 6, AN, Fonds Cassin, 382 AP 10.

the British Legion, and the fascist association of Italian veterans. The profile of CIAMAC was centre-left. Half were socialists, radical socialists, or social democrats. What mattered most, Tixier wrote, was their power to challenge ardent nationalists who claimed to speak for the war generation.[33] Here was the pacifist alternative.[34]

In the following year, 1928, CIAMAC met in Berlin, from 9-11 August. Now there were 100 representatives in attendance, coming from 25 delegations. Secret introduced a motion, passed by acclamation, affirming that all disabled men had a right to reparation for the wounds they had incurred in the service of their country. Once more, their position was to demand justice, not charity. The one ticklish moment in the meeting was a complaint by a Polish delegate about certain "incessant aggressive tendencies among German nationalists". This potential embarrassment was defused by Rossmann who said that "the commitment to the principles of the renunciation of war and obligatory arbitration of international conflicts applies to all countries including Poland, and the German people will never permit the use of force to modifier the status quo in Europe".[35] If only that had been true. Unbeknownst to the delegates, the years of hope were coming to an end. The economic crisis of 1929 put paid to the vision that CIAMAC could help forge from soldiers' solidarity a weapon to defend the peace. Meetings in Warsaw in 1929 and in Paris in 1930 showed how braided together in substance were the efforts of CIAMAC and the work of the LON. Its International Commission, established in 1929, was in constant contact with Geneva, as well as with national commissions in each member state of CIAMAC. In the annual meetings in Paris in 1930 as well as in Prague in 1931, Cassin and Rossmann were joint *rapporteurs* on progress and impediments in the path towards a system of arbitration, collective security, and disarmament. But despite all their efforts, the tide had turned. Just after the Prague meeting, in September 1931, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria became the first of the major shocks that were to destroy the foundations of the LON, and of CIAMAC as well.

Throughout its early years, CIAMAC's leaders had hoped to preserve a kind of peace in its dealings with FIDAC, the old Allied veterans' organiza-

33 Tixier to Thomas, 15 October 1925, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5/1.

34 Correspondence and papers on CIAMAC, AN, Fonds Cassin, 382 AP 10, dos. 1.

35 Tixier to Thomas, 17 August 1928, ILO Archives, MU/7/9/5/4.

tion. In 1932, the gap between them became unbridgeable. CIAMAC met in Vienna on 1-3 September 1932; FIDAC chose precisely the same day to hold its annual convention in Lisbon. The British veterans chose FIDAC; then in 1933, the Nazis came to power, and promptly arrested a number of men who had attended CIAMAC meetings. With the major Italian veterans' organizations refusing to come, the entire *raison d'être* of CIAMAC vanished rapidly. The vision Cassin and Tixier had had of a powerful pacifist veterans' association, bringing former enemies together, had been a chimera. The group soldiered on until 1939, but it was – like the peace itself – doomed to destruction.[36]

CONCLUSION

Cassin knew what had been lost, but he also enumerated what had been gained, in particular in defence of the rights of disabled men and their families to decent treatment and adequate pensions. In Danzig, the work of CIAMAC had helped bring sightless veterans under the aegis of the LON, with a subsequent increase in their pensions. The same had been true in Bulgaria. The centre for documentation on the treatment of disabled men was a source of reference for those working on behalf of disabled men everywhere. These were small gains, but real ones. They established in microcosm what CIAMAC stood for in general: the notion that veterans everywhere had rights, defined not only by their nationality but by their humanity. They were not supplicants, but citizens, men who had fought and bled for their countries, and whose well-being was a matter not of charity but of natural justice.[37] What they demanded went beyond citizenship, and by moving in that direction, they presented an option of solidarity, which offered an alternative to the sterile nationalism of the interwar years. Their failure was palpable, but out of it came a precedent central to a later reconciliation with which we are still living today.

36 Files on CIAMAC meetings in the 1930s, ILO Archives, MY/7/9/5/13-17.

37 Cassin on CIAMAC, 1930, 9-11, AN, Fonds Cassin, 382 AP 10.