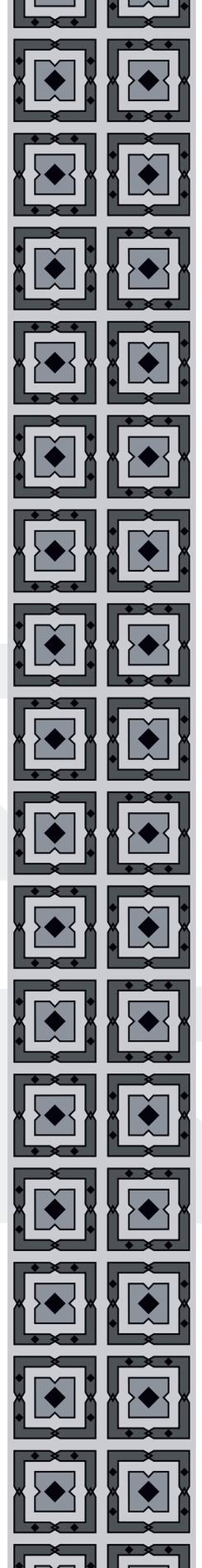


Centre William Rappard

LEADERS, ARTISTS AND SPIES



Taking Centre Stage

If it is true that “the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist”,⁴ then numerous people who have worked at the Centre William Rappard have greatly contributed to the building’s rich history. This chapter opens with short biographies of a selection of civil servants who have made a special contribution to the history of the building, including William Rappard, the ILO’s first Directors-General Albert Thomas and Harold Butler, and GATT Directors-General Eric Wyndham White, Olivier Long and Arthur Dunkel.

■ **William Emmanuel Rappard** (1883-1958), diplomat and professor of economic history, was born on 22 April 1883 in New York, the son of Genevan and Basler parents. After schooling in Geneva, Rappard studied law, history and economics in Berlin, Munich, Harvard, Paris and Vienna, and joined the International Labour Office in Basel. In 1911 William Rappard was appointed lecturer at Harvard University and became acquainted with the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and his entourage. The Swiss Federal Council entrusted Rappard with the mission to represent Switzerland in discussions with the Allied powers during both World Wars and, particularly, in the 1919 peace negotiations that led to the Treaty of Versailles.

Using his knowledge of international law and Swiss neutrality, William Rappard convinced the “Big Four” leaders to favour Geneva

ILO Preparatory Technical
Conference on the Coal-Mining
Industry, January 1930. ◀

William Rappard at the meeting
of the ILO Governing Body, 1951. ▶

over Brussels and other European cities as the seat of the League of Nations and the International Labour Office. He maintained that various international institutions and movements were enticed by the “splendor and charm of her [Geneva’s] natural surroundings, by her moral and intellectual traditions of freedom, and by the independence and the very insignificance of her political status”.⁵

Rappard was appointed member of the Mandates Commission in the League of Nations (1920-1924), Swiss delegate to the International Labour Office, and later to the United Nations Organization. During World War II, Rappard took an active part in the work of the International Committee for the Placing of Refugee Intellectuals, set up in Geneva in 1933. As professor of economic history at the University of Geneva, Rappard taught public finance and international relations. He was twice Rector of the University of Geneva and, with Paul Mantoux, co-founder of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, where he taught from 1928 to 1955. William Rappard died on 29 April 1958 in Geneva. The Centre William Rappard and the Chemin William Rappard in Bellevue, a town near Geneva, were named after him.



■ **Albert Thomas** (1878-1932), politician and first Director of the International Labour Office, was born on 16 June 1878 in Champigny-sur-Marne, near Paris, the son of a baker and his artisan wife. While studying history in Paris, Thomas joined the Socialist Party and supported human rights and lay educational movements. During World War I, he assumed various strategic responsibilities in the French government. He was in charge of the National Railway Services where he had to mediate between the General Staff and the Ministry of Public Works. Subsequently he was asked to organise the production of ammunition and in 1916 was appointed Minister of Armaments. He travelled twice to Russia to coordinate the war efforts on the Western Front.

With a vast experience in negotiating and communicating with the workers and their unions, Thomas started the Association for Social Studies and Documentation in Paris, which published *L'information ouvrière et sociale*. From the end of the war, he represented the French workforce in the peace negotiations, and strongly contributed to international labour legislation and to the creation of the International Labour Organization in the Treaty of Versailles. Delegates from member states, workers and employers elected Albert Thomas as the first Director of the ILO which, after a short period in London, was established in Geneva in 1920.

Among staff members, he was a born leader and someone who “listened to complaints about rooms, about salaries, about the dull nature of the work or its unsuitability to the complainant’s capacities and ambitions, even about domestic problems or difficulties. He listened and he gave advice.”⁶ After an intensive period creating the legal and organizational structure of the ILO, Albert Thomas, aged 54, died suddenly in Paris on 7 May 1932 and was buried in the cemetery of Champigny-sur-Marne. Streets in Paris, Lyon and other cities have been named after him.

The city of Geneva celebrated him in 1937 with a monumental statue by Paul M. Landowski in the Place Albert-Thomas in Rue de Lausanne, in front of the Centre William Rappard. It is decorated with representations of workers from different trades and continents, and quotes from Thomas’s speeches summarising his thinking: “Labour must transcend all competitive struggles, it is not a commodity.” ■■■



◀ Albert Thomas arrived in Geneva in 1920 to lead the ILO. He was received by the French professor of political economics Edgar Milhaud.

“One general complaint in the early days [when the ILO was housed in La Châtelaine, currently the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross] arose out of the position of the Office itself, some half mile or more uphill from the nearest tram-line on which there was an infrequent service. Albert Thomas decided to investigate for himself how far such complaints had a real justification. He abandoned his car and chauffeur one morning and a gratified staff watched him with discreet amusement as, perspiring profusely, he propelled himself up the long slope of the Route de Pregny on a borrowed bicycle. The experience was conclusive and led to the establishment of an autobus service which delivered the staff from that fatiguing climb.”⁷



Centre William Rappard

Leaders, Artists and Spies

“Many roads lead to Geneva, and all are beautiful. Run along the edge of the lake from Lausanne and the east with the pine-clad ridge of the Jura on the right and the whole gorgeous panorama of the Mont Blanc chain on the left. Or come from the south down the valley of the gray, rushing Arve from Chamonix, or from the west through the narrow gap of Bellegarde, through which the Rhone sweeps its majestic torrent. Or better still take Napoleon’s route from the north over the Sickle Pass, which winds its way down in generous curves to the broad vale of Lac Léman. ... The world affords many glorious spectacles, but none more glorious than the Geneva scene.”⁸



Harold B. Butler in his late 30s. ▶

■ **Harold Beresford Butler** (1883-1951), international civil servant and Director of the International Labour Office from 1932 to 1938, was educated at Eton and trained in the British Ministry of Labour. He was an important contributor to the creation of the International Labour Organization in 1919. Butler was the Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference in Washington, which thanks to his organisational skills and vision was a notable success. During the peace conference in Paris, Harold Butler prepared the first draft of the Preamble to the ILO Constitution, and Albert Thomas appointed him Deputy-Director of the ILO in 1920, going on to become Thomas’s successor in 1932.

His main areas of responsibility in the ILO were internal organisation, administration and finance, with a special focus on recruitment and personnel, which was a challenging experience for the international civil service during a period of rampant nationalism. Butler succeeded in creating a group of dedicated and loyal staff in spite of the difficulties presented by different languages, different systems and methods of working and, particularly, different ideologies. Furthermore, he was responsible for most executive decisions during the construction and further expansions of the Centre William Rappard.

Butler took over as Director in 1932 under the cloud of the Great Depression, mounting unemployment, and increasing social turmoil resulting from the financial and economic crisis. After lengthy and difficult negotiations, he reinforced the Organization by bringing the United States into the ILO in 1934, and took steps to intensify relations with other countries. He sent officials on mission to Latin America, Asia and the Middle East, and the first regional conference was held in Santiago, Chile, in January 1936. In 1937 he travelled to Asia and subsequently published a study on labour problems in the region.⁹ Under his guidance, the Governing Body was expanded to include seven non-European countries among the 16 governments represented in the ILO.

In 1938 Harold Butler resigned from the ILO under pressure from the French government, and was appointed first Warden of the recently created Nuffield College, a graduate school of Oxford University specialising in social sciences. During World War II, Butler became regional commissioner in England and British Minister in charge of



information services in Washington. He was appointed Chairman of the European League for Economic Cooperation and was a member of the ILO Fact-finding and Conciliation Commission on Freedom of Association. Harold Butler died on 26 March 1951 at the age of 67.

■ **Eric Wyndham White** (1913-1980), an economist, presided over the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) between 1948 and 1968. White was born on 26 January 1913 in England. He was educated in London and graduated as a lawyer in 1938. During World War II he started his career in the British Government where he was first active in the Ministry of Economic Warfare.

In 1942 White started a diplomatic career and was involved in preparing the way for the International Trade Organization and the UN Conference on Trade and Employment in Havana, Cuba, in 1947. The

International Trade Organization never entered into force since its Charter was never approved by the United States Congress for fear that it would interfere in domestic economic affairs. Meanwhile, White got involved in forming a secretariat for the GATT, and on 4 April 1948 was appointed its first Executive Secretary. On 23 March 1965 he was elected the GATT Director-General, a post that he held until 30 April 1968. His tenure covered six rounds of multilateral negotiations, including the Kennedy Round, which cut tariffs on industrial goods sharply.

White's most controversial achievement involved doubling the GATT's membership during the 1960s with the addition of many newly independent countries. This transformed the GATT from a club of wealthy nations into a genuinely global organization. However, its critics pointed out that to undercut the appeal of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Eric Wyndham White ■■■

▲ Eric Wyndham White (centre), with David Owen of the GATT Secretariat (left) and UN General Counsel Abraham Feller (right) during the Havana Conference on the Charter of the International Trade Organization, March 1948.



Centre William Rappard

Leaders, Artists and Spies



■■■ allowed the new members to join without binding or liberalizing their tariffs, creating a situation that would plague the GATT system for years to come. However, the United States Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal considered White “a towering figure in the trade field. I don’t know what we would do without him during critical periods”.¹⁰

For his service to international trade, White was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George in 1968, an honour bestowed on individuals who have served admirably the British Government. After the Kennedy Round, he resigned from the GATT. Eric Wyndham White died on 27 January 1980 in Ferney-Voltaire, France. He was aged 67.

■■■ **Olivier Long** (1915-2003), lawyer and diplomat, and Director-General of the GATT, was born on 11 October 1915 in Petit-Veyrier, Geneva. He studied law and political science and in 1943 joined the International Red Cross in Geneva and travelled across wartime Europe negotiating prisoner-of-war exchanges. After the war, Long joined the Swiss Federal Government in Bern, filling positions in the Political and Trade Departments and, in 1955, became Federal Council Delegate for Trade Agreements.

Long had close personal ties with many leading French politicians, and as a result became a behind-the-scenes mediator between De Gaulle’s Government in Paris and the Algerian National Liberation Front. He subsequently returned to commercial diplomacy, playing a prominent role in negotiations that led to the creation of the European Free Trade Association, a trading bloc set up in 1959 by seven European countries that did not wish to join the six-nation European Community, or Common Market. His next appointment was as Swiss Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Malta in 1967-1968.

On 5 May 1968, Long became Director-General of the GATT, succeeding Eric Wyndham White. Long’s directorship in the GATT was marked by the largest reductions in tariffs since World War II. Representatives of the leading industrial nations met in Tokyo in 1973, setting off a six-year free-trade effort that became known as the Tokyo Round. These were difficult years for proponents of free trade. When oil prices quadrupled at the end of 1973 – the result of actions by the

◀ Olivier Long in the conclusion of the Tokyo Round, 12 April 1979.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) – the twin shocks of recession and inflation rippled through the world economy. National currencies became exceptionally unstable, and industries everywhere pleaded with their governments for protection against foreign competitors. Olivier Long managed to hold the world’s democratic industrial powers, as well as some 20 developing countries, to the free trade commitments they had made at the start of negotiations. Not only did many tariffs drop, the Tokyo Round also represented the most comprehensive effort until then to eliminate other sorts of trade barriers, like quotas and export subsidies.

In 1975 Olivier Long decided to cover the Delft panel by Albert Hahn Jr. in the entrance hall of Centre William Rappard because he thought the text of the ILO Constitution was inappropriate for the trade organization’s headquarters. He remained in charge of the GATT until his retirement on 30 September 1980. Long taught international law at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva and published books and articles on economics and political science. Olivier Long died on 19 March 2003.

■■■ **Arthur Dunkel** (1932-2005), economist and Director-General of the GATT, was born on 26 August 1932 in Lisbon, the son of Walter Dunkel and his wife, Berthe Lerch. A Swiss citizen, Arthur Dunkel studied economics and graduated in 1956 from the University of Lausanne. That year he joined the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. He was successively Head of the sections of OECD affairs in 1960, cooperation with developing countries in 1964, and world trade policy in 1971.

In 1973, Dunkel was appointed permanent representative to the GATT and delegate of the Federal Council for Trade Agreements. He was GATT Director-General from 1 October 1980 to 30 June 1993.



Arthur Dunkel during a press interview ►
at the Centre William Rappard, 1990.

He presided over the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, which have been recognised as the most innovative phase in the history of multilateral trade. Dunkel strengthened the foundations of the GATT and paved the way for the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995.

With a prophetic sense for the impending upheaval awaiting the world economy in the 1980s, Arthur Dunkel “pressed ahead with his Uruguay Round agenda to defuse the economic and political pressure points that were swelling the ranks of the protectionists. He also went a long way towards softening the antagonism between North and South by giving the silent majority a voice and the wherewithal to benefit from, but also to assume responsibilities within, the system. ... The Dunkel Draft, in the end, was what anchored the Contracting Parties down, providing the lifeline to an eventual [Uruguay Round] agreement.”¹¹ However, the Dunkel Draft was burnt in public in some parts of the world, presaging the demonstrations which would accompany future WTO conferences.

“His childhood abroad, and his upbringing and education in different cultures gave Arthur Dunkel a deep-rooted view of the international system. He strongly believed – and this is becoming a rare commodity today – that barriers are harmful, and that the best way to cross barriers is to work and live together, to develop rules based on the universal values of fairness and equity. Arthur Dunkel’s country was the world. ... [he] did not fear long meetings, even in the middle of the night, and understood the need for dialogue, for talking, and even more for listening...”¹²

Dunkel taught at the universities of Geneva and Fribourg, where, for 25 years, he lectured on international negotiations. He held honorary titles from the universities of Fribourg (1980) and Basel (1992). Arthur Dunkel died on 8 June 2005 in Meyrin, Switzerland. ■



Emerging from the Shadows

Diplomats and international civil servants working in the offices and meeting rooms of the Centre William Rappard have occasionally become renowned in another field. A number of writers, musicians, painters, sculptors and others are among former and current staff members of international organizations that were housed in this building. Sometimes their works directly refer to the Centre William Rappard itself. Moreover, some years ago spies chose this location – whether for nationalist or less chivalric reasons – to develop equally creative careers in the field of undercover operations.

■ **Alice Rivaz** [born Alice Golay] (1901-1998), served at the ILO for more than 25 years as a shorthand-typist, documentalist and research assistant. She used her experiences at the ILO as the inspiration for her greatest literary work, *Nuages dans la main* (1940). The novel's main character, Alain Saintagne, is an ILO staff member who works in one of the offices of the Centre William Rappard in the 1930s. Alain is a daydreamer who wishes to volunteer for the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War but decides not to. Furthermore, he is a frustrated poet and, though he is married to Madelaine, Alain feels unrequited love for the beautiful pianist Christiane Auberson.

Alain approaches the building every day from the lakeside and describes his experience as follows: "That is how the office often appeared: a large park shaded by old trees, a grey façade hiding behind branches. But following the little pathway covered with dead leaves – spring squill and primroses crowding around the trunks in the springtime – one arrived at a car park, where suddenly, rather than the beautiful old bourgeois residence one might have expected, there emerged a massive and ugly factory-like construction... The vast





◀ Seventh session of the ILO Textiles Committee, 1966.

Alice Rivaz giving full rein to her artistic creativity in Geneva, circa 1940. ▶



administrative quarters built on the scale of an industrial plant, with just as many employees, just as many people, just as many windows lined up along the façades and the corridors.”¹³

The perception of his working place as a dull and depressing factory is made all the worse by Alain’s own disappointments. His life is far removed from what he had hoped for, and is marked by misfortune in love, the wrong professional career, and the desire to pursue an artistic career rather than work as an international civil servant. “He was averse to using the main entrance, flanked as it was by two statues representing justice and peace – one entered with justice on the right and exited with justice on the left, but it could easily have been the other way around: the two stone women looked so much alike that it was always difficult to know what they really stood for.”¹⁴

The building is a metaphor for the character’s soul, with his sorrow and frustration being mirrored by the anonymous identity of the stern statues at the main entrance. In her preface for the 1987 edition, the author explains that in the 1930s “a bad conscience developed among those who wished to fight supporting the Spanish Republicans but did not have the moral courage to resign their posts at the ILO, the Organization to which they were tied through a permanent contract providing work security and a generous salary to support their families.”¹⁵ Alain’s wife Madelaine takes the decision to intervene to save her family. From a public telephone booth in the Cornavin railway station, she calls Alain’s supervisor Monsieur Barsac and implores him to give a more exciting assignment to her husband so that he will change his mind about giving up a stable and highly esteemed position. As a result, Alain feels obliged to remain with his employer and is unable to fulfil his dreams and change his life.

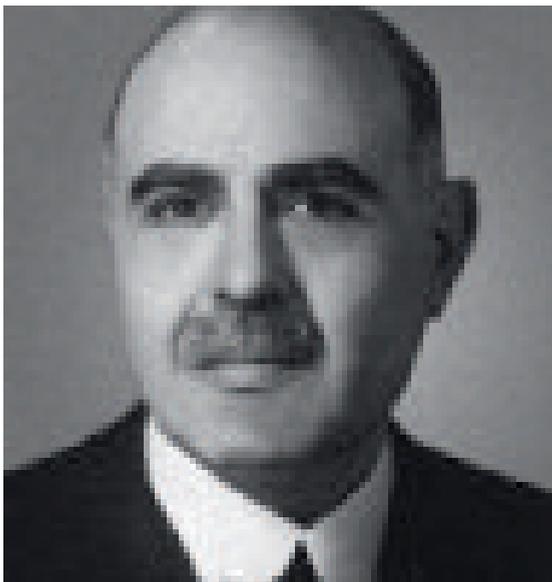
The daughter of a socialist schoolteacher and politician, Alice Rivaz studied piano at the Lausanne conservatory and in 1921 ■■■





Centre William Rappard

Leaders, Artists and Spies



Personnel file photo of Albert Cohen in 1949. ▲

■■■ took typing courses to prepare for office work. She was recruited to work for an ILO conference and joined the busy offices of the typing pool in 1925, under the strict command of Geneviève Laverrière, who we recognise as the authoritarian and beautiful Mrs Fontanier in Alice Rivaz's *Comme le sable* and *Le creux de la vague*. She went on to become documentalist of newspapers in the Documents Service.

In 1946, when the ILO returned to Geneva from Canada following the end of World War II, Rivaz worked first as a registry clerk and then as a research assistant in the Employment Section. But Rivaz was longing to do her literary work, as she wrote in her diary: "At the Office: 8 hours; Working at home for the Office: 2 hours minimum; four journeys by tram of each ½ hour: 2 hours; three meals: 2½ hours. Total 14 hours. Under these conditions, how can I dream of writing, even notes in my diary?"¹⁶

Eventually, she was awarded a grant and dedicated her life to a successful literary and artistic career. Alice Rivaz died on 27 February 1998 in Genthod, Switzerland. A memorial plaque has been placed at Av. Théodore Weber, number 5, where she lived from 1932 until 1992.

■ **Albert Cohen** worked at the ILO from 1924 to 1931. He subsequently rejoined the ILO in the 1950s. His masterpiece *Belle du Seigneur* received an award from the French Academy in 1968. Since then, it has been one of the bestsellers of prestigious French publisher Gallimard.

Adrien Deume is an indolent international civil servant in Albert Cohen's *Belle du Seigneur*. "Finally, he straightened up, reread the paragraph he had to rewrite, and groaned. Right. OK. He'd do it at once. 'At once', he yawned. He got to his feet, made for the safe haven of the gents, a legitimate procrastination. ... He looked at himself in the tall mirror. With one hand on his hip, he admired himself. This suit, light brown with small checks, really looked a treat, and the jacket emphasized his waist neatly. 'Adrien Deume, man of fashion', he confided once again to the mirror, while he tenderly combed his hair which he lovingly and expensively washed every morning with eau-de-quinine ... 'Well done, old man. And now, to work!' But first, a glance at the *Tribune*, just to keep abreast of things."¹⁷

Bookstore at the ILO, circa 1937. ►

Cohen joined the ILO the same year that the Centre William Rappard was opened and, resumed his career in the United Nations after World War II. As with Alice Rivaz, Cohen's working experience served as a source of inspiration to create his fictional universe of characters such as Adrien Deume, Solal des Solal, Ariane and several others. He started writing *Belle du Seigneur* in the 1930s, but left it unfinished. Augmented and corrected, it was published by Gallimard 30 years later in 1968.

"At peace with his conscience, he walked up and down in the corridor, checking from time to time that his flies were not undone. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks. If anyone saw him hanging about empty-handed, what would they make of him? He hurried back to his office, returned, breathing hard with a fat file under one arm which made him look earnest and busy. Fine, but even so, hanging around slowly still made him look idle. So he strode purposefully down the whole length of the corridor."¹⁸





Adrien Deume is always attentive to the possibilities of social progress. He is married to a member of the Geneva aristocracy, Ariane Corisande d'Auble, who is seen as a trophy by the young, ambitious and rather indolent official. "If you'd seen the offices they have in ministry buildings in Belgium, you'd realise how luxurious things are here. ... Here the atmosphere is very different from the International Labour Office, where everybody has to go at it hammer and tongs, I say 'has to' but in fact they love it, it's another world, you know, all those trade unionists and left wingers ... League of Nation officials were much

better paid than those in the ILO, who all had to be in on time and were kept hard at it all day. There was no comparison. You see, darling, we are on the same footing as the Diplomatic."¹⁹

The Deputy Secretary-General Solal gives Adrien Deume the much-desired promotion and sends him on an extended mission abroad. Taking advantage of the situation, Solal seduces the belle Ariane, and the couple starts a hectic life, which eventually becomes boring and self-destructive. Solal loses his post at the League of Nations and is rejected by his friends and former colleagues in ■■■

▲ Girl Guides visiting the ILO, August 1927.



Centre William Rappard

Leaders, Artists and Spies



■■■ Paris and Geneva. On 9 September 1937, they commit suicide in Geneva's Hotel Ritz.

Albert Cohen (1895-1981) was born into a prominent Jewish family in Corfu, present-day Greece. At the age of five, he moved with his family to Marseille. He studied in France and Switzerland and graduated in law from the University of Geneva (1917). Cohen became a Swiss citizen and was the editor of the *Jewish Review*. In March 1924 he joined the ILO working *pro bono* in Albert Thomas' office. From October 1926 to December 1931, Cohen worked in different positions at the ILO, including posts in the Diplomatic Division and the Native Labour Division, where he was in charge of analysing press articles on working conditions in African and Asian colonies. By the end of World War II, he was working in London as the legal counsel of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees.

He significantly contributed to the drafting of the "London Agreement" of 15 October 1946 regarding travel documents for refugees, displaced and stateless persons. This document served as the basis of the 1954 Convention Travel Document, the *laissez passer* passport, issued by the United Nations Organization, and still in force. Cohen later resumed his career at the ILO in the Section of Migration. In 1957 he turned down the post of Israeli Ambassador to Switzerland in order to pursue his literary career. Albert Cohen died on 17 October 1981 in Geneva, and was buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Veyrier, Switzerland.

■ **Wilfred Benson** was a colleague of Albert Cohen in the ILO's Native Labour Division. The Englishman got into serious problems with the Organization after the publication of his *Dawn on Mont Blanc: being incidentally the tragedy of an aggravating young man*, published in 1930 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf.²⁰ As Aamir Ali recounts in his interesting article about Benson's book, the main character Roger Maiteland comes to Veagen (an anagram for Geneva) to join the staff of the International Institute of Racial Peace – a thin disguise for the League of Nations and the ILO.

The story goes on to relate the relationship between Roger and a young dancer whom he rescues, and then marries. It describes "the secretarial life of the Institute, composed of people of many nations,

◀ Wilfred Benson in the 1930s.

thrust together by their work, some of whom are trying hard to pretend that nationalism is dead in them, and others being far more cynically realist than normally they would be."²¹

In the book, the characters' nationalistic tendencies feature prominently, especially when mentioning "Anglo-French rivalry and mutual suspicion."²² The authorities of the ILO and the League of Nations reacted as soon as the book was published. Deputy-Director Harold Butler remarked: "the most objectionable feature of the book ... is its constant insistence on the bad blood which exists between the officials of the different nationalities – particularly between the British and the French."²³ Butler thought that ignoring Benson's book "would suggest that members of the staff were entitled to write whatever they pleased about the Office or the Governing Body, provided that they draped it in a transparent veil of fiction."²⁴

The book was considered a serious breach of discipline and a bad lack of judgement by its author, who on 30 June 1930 received a sanction signed by the Director, Albert Thomas. It stated: "The book portrays the League atmosphere in so damaging a light as to be calculated to bring it into serious discredit. I consider that your action in publishing such a book is most reprehensible, and in order to mark the reprobation which I feel for the gross disservice which you have rendered to the Office, I have decided to inflict upon you a severe reprimand."²⁵

Nevertheless, the incident had little effect on Benson's career. He moved to London in 1940 and four years later was appointed Chief of the ILO Dependent Territories Service. A promotion followed as he rose to the rank of Counsellor in 1946, when Benson was recruited by the United Nations. Other works include a few technical monographs such as *Social Policy in Dependent Territories* (1944) and *A People's Peace in the Colonies* (1943), and earlier titles such as *The Foreigner in the Family* (1929) and *As you were* (1930).



■ **The Red Three spy network.** During more than 80 years of its existence, in both war and peace time, the Centre William Rappard has welcomed representatives of many nations and has been a meeting place for all kinds of people from different countries. It is not so surprising therefore to learn that the building was once referred to as “a spy centre”.²⁶ This shady past came to light when details were revealed of the *Rote Drei* (The Red Three) Soviet espionage network in Switzerland during World War II. The eventual victory of the Soviet forces on the Eastern Front owed much to the intelligence that Russia was able to gather about German intentions. A large part of that intelligence came from the Swiss-based *Rote Drei* spy ring.

According to the historian Jaci Eisenberg, the spy ring was established by the Hungarian cartographer Sandor Rado (1899-1981) upon his arrival in Geneva in 1936, to furnish the Soviet Union with information on German plans obtained through different informants and reliable sources in Germany. The *Rote Drei* was composed of three groups, including one operating from the ILO offices. This group was run by Rachel Dübendorfer (born Heppner, codenamed “Sissy”), a Polish-born stenographer in the German language section who joined the Office in 1935. Other members of this group were Christian Schneider (codenamed “Taylor”), a German translator who joined the Office in 1926, the Lithuanian lawyer Alexandre Abramson of the General Information Section, and his polyglot cousin Hermine Rabinovitch, who was able to work in ten languages and volunteered in the Cooperatives Section.

Sandor Rado made contact with Rudolf Rössler, a German political emigrant living in Lucerne who had reliable sources in Germany that provided valuable military intelligence. When the ILO was relocated to Canada in 1940, Rachel Dübendorfer moved to Bern to direct the undercover activities of the Sissy group. Christian Schneider and Alexander Abramson also remained in Switzerland. Hermine Rabinovitch went to Canada on her own, and was appointed on temporary contracts in the Cooperatives Section and later as a Research Assistant. She played a key role in the transmission of funds between Soviet contacts in Ottawa, New York and Geneva.

It was only in the last years of the war that the Germans could identify the sources and put pressure on the Swiss to pick up members

of the *Rote Drei*. Rado went into hiding and later left Switzerland for Paris, and Cairo. He was deported to the Soviet Union, where he was sent to the Gulag until 1954. Rabinovitch voluntarily resigned from the ILO but was unable to enter the United States. She made her way to Paris, and was eventually deported to Israel in September 1950. Abramson resigned from the ILO in October 1947. The Swiss authorities arrested Rachel Dübendorfer and Christian Schneider on 19 April 1944, putting an end to the Red Three spy ring. ■

▼ ILO librarian Robert Henri Graf looking through the organization’s photo collection. Graf compiled the most extensive catalogue of the works of art at the Centre William Rappard in 1951.

