The League of Fiume

One of the most interesting aspects of Fiume foreign policy is the attempt to set up an Anti-League of Nations, the League of Fiume, which took a stand against the great Imperial powers, in defence of colonized peoples.

The project for the creation of a League of Oppressed People had deep roots in D’Annunzio’s thought, for he had conceived of his Fiuman enterprise in “universal” terms almost from the beginning. Il Comandante was not content to see the scope of his action limited to the city of Fiume, and he had established contacts with other foreign movements very early on.

 [...] The guiding spirit of the Lega di Fiume was Léon Kochnitzky, the Belgian poet who had come to Fiume late in the fall of 1919, left the city during the crisis of December, and then returned in January to become the head of the Ufficio Relazioni Esteriori. This Fiuman “foreign office”, acting with very little money and only a handful of men, attempted to enlist the support of foreign movements – and foreign powers – on behalf of the Fiuman “cause”. At first Kochnitzky (with the assistance of Eugenio Coselschi, Ludovico Toeplitz, Giovanni Bonmartini, Henry Furst, and others) was content to gather statements of support from the representatives of movements sympathetic to D’Annunzio. By early spring there was abundant evidence that an “anti-League of Nations” would be able to count upon a wide range of support, and Kochnitzky decided to request the creation of a formal organization.

There was good reason to be optimistic about the league as one learns from a long series of memoranda that Kochnitzky prepared for D’Annunzio during the last week of March and the first half of April, listing the nations and movements that were either already committed to the project or that were expected to join the cause in short order.

Kochnitzky saw the league as the vehicle for shattering the old order and establishing a world governed by the principles expounded in “Italy and Life”. It was, then, part of the sharp turn to the Left that characterized the policies of the Command during this period, and Kochnitzky significantly maintained that it was essential to acquire the support of the Soviet Union for the Lega. He considered this inevitable, claiming that Communist Russia, “like all spiritually alive elements of our time,” could not fail to recognize the value of the new “International”. Further, Kochnitzky urged D’Annunzio to support the Hungarian Communists and to issue an attack against Horthy’s regime. Such a stance would demonstrate the principles of “Fiumanism” upon which the new league would rest. Similarly indicative of Kochnitzky’s conception of the Lega is a statement in a note to Il Comandante on 29 March: “While the presence of representatives of the Montenegrin Court seems scarcely desirable in Fiume for various reasons, it would instead be useful if one or more leaders of the Montenegrin insurrection against Serbia attended [...]”.

With genuinely global aspirations, the League of Fiume aimed to unite all of the following:

I. – Representatives of oppressed peoples: Fiume of Italy, the Islands, Dalmatia, Albania, German Austria, Montenegro, Croatia, German Irredentists now under Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, France and Italy (with reservations: autonomy) and the Pseudo-League of Nations, Catalonia, Malta, Gibraltar, Ireland, the Flemish, Islam, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, India, Persia, Afghanistan. India, Burma, China, Korea, The Philippines, Hawaii, Panama, Cuba, Puerto Rico.

Oppressed races: The Chinese in California, the Blacks of America.

The Israeli problem.

II. – Representatives of the countries unjustly damaged by the Treaty of Versailles: Russia, Romania, Belgium, Portugal, Siam, Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey, The Holy See.

III. – Delegations of parties and groups sympathizing with “Fiumanism”, mainly Italian, French, English and American.3

very well,” he told Il Comandante on 29 March, “that we can run into grave difficulties, given the internal situation in Fiume, and the numerous expulsions of the working-class elements …”}

Léon Kochnitzky

Léon Kochnitzky was a Belgian musician and man of letters. During the Fiume episode he was appointed to establish contacts with the French press, as head of the URE, the Office for External Relations. He was the guiding spirit of the Lega di Fiume, an “anti-League of Nations” the aim of which was to “bring together in a compact formation the forces of all the oppressed peoples of the earth: peoples, nations, races, etc, etc, and use this to combat and triumph over the oppressors and imperialists, who (like the British Empire, for example) aim to impose their financial might on the most sacred sentiments of men: faith, love for one’s country, and individual and social dignity”. Buoyed up by left wing revolutionary ideas, he supported the Soviet councils and, like Mario Carli, found himself in opposition to the monarchic, nationalist fringe in Fiume. He later became a talented art critic. Like Furst he was possibly excessive in the expression of his revolutionary ideas with D’Annunzio, and this led to various misunderstandings over the Fiume experience.4

It is crucial to stress that Kochnitzky’s conception of the Lega di Fiume was of a piece with the design for the Republic of the Carnaro. Both committed the Command to an alliance with radical socialist forces, and both demonstrated D’Annunzio’s willingness to embrace the fundamental tenets of the European Left. Consequently, the plans for the league were subject to the same pressures as the plans for the Carta del Carnaro: as the internal position of the Command was weakened by the attacks of the National Council, and when attempts to ally with Socialists failed (whether within Italy or on Europe-wide scale, as in the case of the talks with Vodovosoff), the project was threatened. Kochnitzky was aware of these problems, and explicitly linked the destiny of the league to the political situation in Fiume: “I know

4. Ibid, pp. 73-74.
The league was placed in serious jeopardy by the events of early April, and by Easter, Kochnitzky’s messages to D’Annunzio were tinged with apprehension. On Easter Day he wrote: “I hope the League of Fiume will not give the world the grotesque spectacle of the ‘League of Nations’: impotence-indecision”.

But the grandiose plans of the Belgian poet could not survive the shock of the first half of April, and the League of Fiume slowly disappeared, at least in the form Kochnitzky had conceived it.3

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“Anti-League of Nations”
Is Projected by d’Annunzio

FIUME, April 19 (Associated Press).—Gabriele d’Annunzio is forming an “Anti-League of Nations,” consisting of minority elements in all countries of “oppressed, peoples” which will be called “The League of Fiume.” He has invited a conference at Fiume on May 15. Delegates are expected from Egypt, Ireland, Turkey, Persia, Montenegro, Hungary, and India.

Leon Korchmitfsy, d’Annunzio’s “Secretary for Foreign Affairs,” said to The Associated Press: “We will include in the League of Fiume all peoples which the Peace Conference has put under the heel of peoples of other races. D’Annunzio has used the good points of Bolshevism in his constitution and rejected the bad ones. The poet believes in a great national spirit, but Bolshevism would kill this. We have chosen for the league a flag with a red field and gold serpent, signifying revolution and eternity.”

Ludovico Toeplitz de Grand Ry

Henry Furst (1893 – 1967)

Henry Furst, known as “the Cardinal,” or “the last Don Quixote,” was an American theatre director, writer, literary critic and translator, of German origins. With fluent spoken and written English, Italian, French and German, he was a Minister of the Italian Regency of Carnaro in 1919, when he convinced Gabriele D’Annunzio to recognize the Republic of Ireland before the British King did. Radically left wing, he was convinced that communist society could triumph on a global level, and attempted to influence D’Annunzio’s decisions, with the help of Léon Kochnitzky.

“I made contact with all the discontented in various countries around the world: with Zagloul Pascià in Egypt, not yet Prime Minister but head of the Fellah party; with Kemal Pacha, the powerful head of the Young Turks, who looked set to take power imminently. In Fiume we founded L’Anti-Société des Nations, in opposition to the iniquitous Treaty of Versailles.”


8. Source: http://digilander.libero.it/culturaviva/furst.htm
Whitney Warren (1864 – 1943)

Whitney Warren was an American architect, co-founder – together with Charles D. Wetmore – of Warren and Wetmore, a firm that had one of the most extensive practices of its time and was known for the designing of large hotels. After World War I they were entrusted with the reconstruction of the historic library of the Univ. of Louvain, Belgium, which had been destroyed by the Germans, who again demolished it in 1940.

In October 1919 Warren went to Fiume and offered his services to Captain Gabriele D’Annunzio. In mid August 1920 D’Annunzio and the National Council of Fiume appointed the eminent architect their representative in America.

Harukichi Shimo

Harukichi Shimo was a Japanese writer who founded the magazine Sakura (Naples 1920). From 1921 to 1926 he was professor of Japanese at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples. Sakura translated the works of Japanese poets and writers. His diary of the Fiume experience contains photos of events, including one of him in Ardito uniform.  