



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.¹

D'ANNUNZIO MAKES APPEAL TO JUGOSLAVS

*In Message to the Croats He Urges
Co-operation Against the
League of Nations.*

The New York Times
New York, 9 October 1919.

D'ANNUNZIO BACKS IRISH GRIEVANCES

*Poet Says That He Will "Carry
the Torch" to "Unhappy
Egypt" as Well.*

The New York Times
New York, 12 December 1919.

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

[the aim of the League is 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 aim to impose their financial might on the most sacred sentiments of men: faith, love for one's country, and **individual and social dignity**".²

Léon Kochnitzky

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 [...]"

1. Michael Arthur Ledeen, *D'Annunzio: The First Duce*, Piscataway, Transaction Publishers, 2002, pp. 177-179.

2. De Felice, *D'Annunzio politico 1918-1938*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1978, p. 73.

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

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

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

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

3. De Felice, *D'Annunzio politico 1918-1938*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1978, p. 73.) and Wikipedia, http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leone_Kochnitzky

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.⁵

D'ANNUNZIO POURS OUT ABUSE UPON WILSON

Fiume's Champion Says President "Crucified Justice with Fourteen Pointless Nails."

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FIUME, Jan. 11.—In a formal interview on the proposed settlement of the Fiume problem, Gabriele d'Annunzio answered the questions: Would he resist? Would he accept a compromise? Would he blow up the port of Fiume? He answered them all. Later in an informal talk he leaped from subject to subject.

"What if we perish beneath the ruins of Fiume?" the commandante asked. "The spirit of our resistance will leap forth, watchful and active. From the dauntless Sinn Fein of Ireland to the red banner which in Egypt unites the Crescent and Cross, all insurrections in spirit against the devourers of raw flesh, against the exploiters of weaponless peoples, will catch flame anew from our sparks flying afar.

"That voracious empire which has possessed itself of Persia, Mesopotamia, New Arabia, the greater part of Africa, and which is never glutted, can bring down upon us those same aerial slaughterers who in Egypt were not ashamed to massacre the rebels bearing no arms other than the branches of trees.

"Weaponless, we will be armed. The new crusade of all poor impoverished nations is the new crusade of all men who are free against the nations which usurp power to accumulate riches.

"The new crusade will reestablish that true justice which a cold-hearted maniac crucified with fourteen pointless nails, with a hammer borrowed from the German Chancellor of 'scrap of paper' fame."

Of the French, d'Annunzio had the following to say:

"When the National Council took over the Government of Fiume to exercise it until a plebiscite should be taken, the French command arrived and wanted to make the harbor a French naval base. The French bullied us, as unanswerable documents proved today, under the pretext of needing a base for supplying their army in the East; but only a few tons of goods passed through Fiume, and they could just as well have been shipped through Saloniki, or elsewhere."

Of the attitude of the Peace Conference toward Fiume, he said:

"To recognize any yoke whatsoever before having fought tooth and nail to shake off and shatter it is the surest sign of slavery. We have shaken off the ancient yoke and we are resolved to shake off the new yoke. With that art of forgery, which is typical of the reverend council of forgeries, known as the Peace Conference, the new yoke bears the name 'Liberty'; they name Fiume 'a free city.' Fiume, a 'free city,' would in a short time become a nest of traffickers, brokers, usurers, and political grafters.

"Fiume is the extreme Italian guardian of the Julian Alps, the extreme fortress of Latin culture. Our cause is the greatest, most beautiful that today is opposed to the dementia and vileness of the world. It extends from Ireland to Egypt, from Russia to the United States, from Rumania to India."

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

FIUME, April 10 (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 Kochnitmky, 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.”

The New York Times
New York, 20 April 1920.

Plans to Bomb Premiers with Leaflets of His League of the “Oppressed.”

FIUME, April 27 (Associated Press).—D’Annunzio’s “Foreign Office” gave to The Associated Press today the text of a message which will be dropped from airplanes on the next Council of Premiers. D’Annunzio planned to shower the San Remo conference, but did not start soon enough. The message reads: “The league of Fiume, a coalition of peoples oppressed and wronged by Anglo-Saxon hegemony, by the pseudo League of Nations and by the Peace Conference, has been constituted.”

“Gabriele d’Annunzio, defender of Italy’s eastern frontier, is its chief. He has already obtained the adherence of Ireland, Egypt, India, Persia, Afghanistan, the whole of Islam and the oppressed peoples of the imperialistic Belgrade Government, including the Croats, Montenegrins, Albanians, Bulgars and Macedonians. These will find at Fiume the support they lack to organize a fight against their despots.

“The league will combat the Government of Hungary, defiled by crimes which are the shame of Europe, and of Turkey, coveted by rapacious merchants. In contrast to the pseudo League of Nations, it will cause the rights of nationalities to prevail.

“The peoples enslaved by the British Empire and by the United States must be delivered. The Germans, made subject by hateful Governments thirsty for vengeance, must be restored to their country. The monstrous edifice built by the International Bank over the bodies of 10,000,000 dead must be destroyed.”

The New York Times
New York, 29 April 1920.

“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”.⁶

Ludovico Toeplitz de Grand Ry



Ludovico Toeplitz de Grand Ry.

Ludovico Toeplitz de Grand Ry was an Italian film producer. He attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain funding for the Fiume undertaking through his father Giuseppe, a Polish Jewish banker and financial officer of the *Banca Commerciale Italiana*. Another polyglot, Toeplitz was joint head of the *URE* (Office for External Relations) with Kochnitzky.⁷

Henry Furst (1893 – 1967)



Henry Furst.

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.⁸

6. Ludovico Toeplitz, *Ciak a chi tocca*, Milano, Edizioni Milano Nuova, 1964, p. 49.

7. Source: http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impresa_di_Fiume#cite_note-25

8. Source: <http://digilander.libero.it/culturaviva/furst.htm>

Whitney Warren Joins d'Annunzio.
 FIUME, Oct. 7. (Associated Press.)--
 Whitney Warren, a prominent American
 architect, has arrived here from Paris,
 and will offer his services to Captain
 Gabriele d'Annunzio.

The New York Times
 New York, 9 October 1919.

**WARREN SEES FIUME
 A SYMBOL OF RIGHT**

**D'Annunzio's New Representa-
 tive in America Declares It
 Will Never Be Given Up.**

COUNTS ON OUR SYMPATHY

The New York Times
 New York, 16 August 1920.

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.



Whitney Warren.

**D'ANNUNZIO SIGHS FOR EAST.
 Calls West a Bank of "Ruthless
 Transatlantic Plutocracy."**

FIUME, Feb. 6.—Gabriele d'Annunzio, speaking at a banquet he had given in honor of the Japanese poet, Harukichi Sciemoi, who is his guest, said:

"We wish to pay homage to this messenger of the Rising Sun, the envoy of that empire which every minute has awaited the whirr of my wings. More than once I have cried out:

"Let us forget the West, which hates us and does not want us. Let us turn our backs on the West, which every day debases itself more, infects itself, dishonors itself in stubborn injustice and obstinate slavery. Let us separate ourselves from the degenerate West, which forgets the splendor of spirit and has become an immense bank in the service of the ruthless transatlantic plutocracy."

"From the Fiume of Italy, gate to the East, let us hail that Far East which for seven centuries has been joining slowly but surely the Latins."

The New York Times
 New York, 9 February 1920.



Harukichi Shimoi in Ardito uniform.

Harukichi Shimoi

Harukichi Shimoi 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.⁹

9. Source: http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impresa_di_Fiume#cite_note-28