

4. Reform of international trade

Economic peace agreement



"How to explain that after four years of the most terrible of lessons, leaders have not yet realised that there is no other effective "strategic defence", no other lasting security than justice? O Mankind, heal thee of "great men" for whom such obvious ideas remain those of dreamers... "In the near already visible future, men will know still less security than they experienced in the past. Within perhaps ten years a new international catastrophe, combined this time and complicated by social cataclysm, will appear inevitable if not imminent."

– Henri Lambert (April 8, 1919 – *Rotterdamsche Nieuwe Courant* – *Gazette Charleroi*).

During the crisis of the thirties, Henri Lambert took up his pen again to denounce the incompetence of politicians and of the League of Nations. For him *"The forces of association remain helpless when left in the presence of energies of dissociation that are greater or likely to appear more pressing and more violent. Association, if it occurs, will then remain inconsistent and unreliable. This is the case with the League of Nations, as at present established. It is ineffective, inoperative, because the economic causes of discord generally outweigh the political motives of concord. Based on errors or equivocal economics and thus not able to reclaim or even inspire, clearly, openly, the realistic and fundamental needs, of all stable and sustainable international agreements, its own policies become, directly or indirectly, a cause of insecurity and war."*

As the establishment of a disarmament conference approached in February 1932 he wrote in December 1931 that *"That is why, given also the urgency for Europe to take decisions, the author of these lines proposes, in place of the "Conference on Disarmament," ...a meeting of delegates of the states, with a view to the free and voluntary execution of the following international convention that would give to the last treaty – that of Versailles – the moral basis and validity that it lacks."*

ECONOMIC PEACE AGREEMENT

The European nations, inviting all other nations to follow in the path of progress, morality and economic peace, agree:

Article 1

The colonies of European nations will, within three months from the date of signing this treaty, open to the trade and general activities of nationals of all European and non-European countries under conditions of absolute equality with respect to economic rights.

This implies that trade, industry and the establishment of people shall enjoy complete freedom, that is to say, the regime of "open door".

(N.B. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa (and, where applicable, British India) may take part as independent states outside Europe, not as "colonies".

Article 2

The European states agree gradually to phase out their present metropolitan customs duties during the ten years from this date. They give up all other provisions allegedly protecting the interests of their nationals and disruptive of free international competition. They will defer to the Bill of Rights and Duties of Peoples.

For the gradual abolition of customs and other protectionist measures, each state will choose the ways and means best suited to the particular conditions of its economy, so as to lead to their abolition by the end of ten years. In any event, customs duties cannot be reduced by less than 5% annually.

Article 3

The European nations, inviting all other nations to join them, will convene, within three months after signature of this agreement, a conference to consider – in the spirit of good will, good faith, loyal cooperation and solidarity now possible – all issues of common interest whose solution is considered necessary to the economic, social and international prosperity of humanity.

This conference may be held under the auspices and forms of ordinary sessions of the League of Nations, it acquires, by sections 1 and 2 of this agreement, the foundation and character necessary for effective and fruitful collaboration of the peoples, now really "partners".

Certainly, he declares, *"some observations may be made concerning this draft convention of economic peace. But the questions to ask about it are, above all, these: Is there any other way that economic peace can resolve the international crisis and avoid the renewal of a general European war, with all its consequences? Can one imagine economic peace in a form other than international economic freedom? In the event that the answer to both these questions is negative, would it not be better, would it not be more intelligent to endeavour to accept the project than to invent objections to it?"*

Thus, Henri Lambert launched his final appeal: political peace could not be established except on a basis of economic peace. Once again he was not heard... Meanwhile World War II was in preparation...