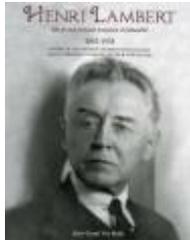


## 4. Reform of international trade

### Protectionism: source of international conflict



*"In the search for causes of the current crisis we have forgotten and are greatly losing awareness that, the phenomenon being global, it is necessary to find the causes, or at least one cause acting globally."*

– Henri Lambert (1933)

Increasingly concerned since the early 20th century by the rising tensions and rivalries between European powers, informed by his contacts of an impending disaster from 1912 on at least, Henri Lambert apprehended the approach of a catastrophic conflict for Europe and the world. The premises and consequences of a war that would be monstrous were now at the heart of his anguish and his reflections as a pacifist clairvoyant concerning the root cause of the coming conflict. Thus, from 1913 to 1920 Henri Lambert launched into the writing of fifty articles published in Europe as well as in the United States. He began in April 1913 by alerting Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, by a long open letter outlining basic moral considerations and highlighting that the economic origin, the root cause of the great conflict that was threatening, was generalised nationalist economic protectionism. He therefore proposed to launch an economic conference to begin the ending of such protectionism. In 1918, Henri Lambert wrote that: *"I proposed this solution to Sir Edward Grey in an open letter, published by the League of Free Trade in Paris, which was read, I think, by most governments and leaders in Europe."* No doubt it was read, but it was unfortunately misunderstood or underestimated by them, starting with Sir Edward Grey, and of no known effect or reaction among major European leaders.

To abolish war and establish peace, it is necessary to trace and address the root causes of antagonisms. Thus for Henri Lambert it is economic circumstances that dominate national and international relations. It is therefore necessary to increase awareness and understanding of those great economic truths, both at the level of peoples and that of their leaders, who are so often in ignorance of the operation and effects of economic mechanisms. It is this mission that he undertook in the spring of 1913, a mission to which he kept ceaselessly throughout the course of his struggle.

The act of exchange and division of labour are put at the heart of the problem, as they are central to his *New Social Contract*, as well as his finalist philosophy. For Henri Lambert the division of labour and international free trade are essential: ***"for the full implementation" of the destinies of humanity calling for an irresistible progress to take place in social and international peace, whether because of ideas or because of the violence of wars and uprisings.*** Thus, he was convinced that ***"in the conditions of modern warfare, there cannot be a powerful nation in terms of arms that is not, at the same time, a major economic power. Inevitably, such a nation will, or will eventually, become a free trader. Due to its needs and its power of expansion and penetration, it cannot develop otherwise. The strength of its arms, will sooner or later, place it in the service of free trade. It will require free entry amongst others, and being economically strong, and at the same time will not hesitate to grant it at home. This nation will not be long, indeed, in realising that the indefinite enrichment of a country is only possible through the enrichment of other countries, that are its customers or suppliers: free trade will find itself introduced through arms, and progress will be established by war. But at what cost in terms of humiliation and suffering for the vanquished!"*** For him, therefore, the enemy is protectionism, an economic and social system that is "regressive, violent, and almost barbaric", but that will be defeated by ideas or by force. This is this dilemma that faced Europe in 1913. It is the scope of this dilemma that he sought to explain to Sir Edward Grey.

