

7. Visionary or clairvoyant

Belgium

September 26, in a long letter to Colonel House, Henri Lambert sets out his idea for the future of Belgium. It is worth quoting almost in full:

"...According to this evening's papers, Germany offers the restoration of Belgian independence (and consequently the evacuation of France) provided "economic concessions" are made to her. The desired guarantees chiefly concern Antwerp, where Germany has important and natural interests – this harbour being in the nature of things an outlet of very great importance for Germany. The guarantees may therefore not be illegitimately desired. The method of dealing with this question, therefore, is not by answering purely and simply that no guarantees of any kind are to be given to Germany. Of course, being stupid, this answer will very likely be made. But a truer, wiser attitude would be to say to the Germans: "You ask for economic concessions. What are yours?" And probably such a query is what Germany expects, awaits and is ready to answer.

Another German "condition" for the restoration of Belgium is that there be in the future an administrative division "between the Flemish and Walloon populations. This is desired by many Flemish and also by a not unimportant minority of Walloons. Of course, the Germans must not be allowed to try to pose as the benefactors of a part of the Belgian people. But in itself this suggestion is by no means unreasonable. The truth is that the "oppressed" are not the Flemish, but the Walloons. I have always refused publicly to take an interest in this issue but I have a very definite opinion about it: if absolute international security were established in Europe under the regime of an economic peace, the administrative separation of the two elements of the Belgian population would be a great and happy thing for both. Provided, of course, the two administratively separated parties were economically federated under a system of absolute free-trade..."



Five years earlier, another Belgian politician – Jules Destrée – with a coincidence known only to history, published in the same journal as Henri Lambert an article which adjoined Lambert's famous letter to the king of the Belgians advocating federalism. Jules Destrée, a man with socialist sensitivities, but who nevertheless had some sympathy and admiration for the courageous and idealistic attitude of Henri Lambert, probably would not disavow these remarks. The two men surely knew one another. Has either been influenced by the theories of the other?