

7. Visionary or clairvoyant

World War II or European Construction

In November 1914, he wrote an article, *The Economic Cause and Solution to the European Crisis*, which was first published in French in London in January 1915, then translated into English for *Papers for War Time*, with the title *The Ethics of International Trade*, as also in Italian and German, and circulated freely in all the belligerent countries.

In this article, Henri Lambert tried to convince the leaders not only with theoretical arguments, but also moral and spiritual ones: *“they have a duty to God, to humanity, to strive to reconcile the warring peoples in truth and justice, because sooner or later after the incalculable sacrifices of men and things”* – he wrote three months after the start of hostilities – *“we must find a solution to the conflict and we know his proposals in this regard.”* Supposing, he says, *“that the victors impose unequal customs treatment on the vanquished, forcing them into economic inferiority, and that humanity goes back into the system of the slavery of peoples, in modern form.*

Is there a wise man, or one of common sense, who thinks one can reduce and maintain in slavery in any form or by any means whatsoever other peoples from now on, and which will be hundreds of millions before a century has passed? Half a century would not pass before a righteous reversal of the oppressed, favoured by the fatal dissensions of the oppressors – and what kind of alliances last half a century? The reversal of roles would take place to the applause of all peoples who have remained outside this conflict and foreign to its consequences.

A sad presentiment, marked by such lucidity, written at the very beginning of hostilities that all the world thought would be short. He polishes the solution to the European problem that he had already earlier outlined. This conference appealed to his wish to bring together immediately all the nations of the world in favour of an armistice, in a neutral country, convened in order to sign an agreement between all the colonising peoples opening the colonies "of all to free trade of all." The British dominions would also take part as independent states. This conference should also seek to obtain a second convention *“by which nations, as many as possible, would undertake to gradually reduce their metropolitan customs duties.”* Both agreements would have a duration of one century and would also apply to future colonies. If all customs duties could not be removed overnight, at least everyone should be able to have equal economic treatment regarding all colonial markets. This would effectively internationalise the colonies, a solution he had already proposed for the Belgian Congo and all its common contractual zone a few years earlier in 1908.

And Henri Lambert adds in another text the same year:



“This (third) solution of the European matter is the only one of a lasting nature, that is to say allowing gradual and permanent disarmament, leaving some hope of avoiding revolutions, anarchy and the renewal sooner than later of a war (of revenge and justice) more terrible and more serious than the present one, which we will inevitably bequeath to our children.” A lucid and sinister prediction!

In a letter dated September 24, 1917 addressed to Colonel House, he also warned that the social situation in France, Belgium, Italy and England would become ***“within a maximum of three years after re-establishment of peace ... very acute, maybe extremely grave. This is an absolute certainty. The only prospect and hope of not seeing a similar situation develop in Germany is through a peace without injustice and oppression – a “peace without victory”. If the peace concluded were oppressive and spoiliative, an extraordinary opportunity for a war of revenge and liberation would be afforded to Germany within 10 years.”*** His lucidity was in no way delusionary. Its pessimism, which allowed for grasping especially stark wording, sadly only shortened the deadlines.