

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1916)

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

**Brand WHITLOCK**

### Chapter **XXXI**. The deportations / Francis Joseph's mass.

By one of those ironies that are so implicit and so inevitable in the scheme of things that they must affect the purely philosophic observer of life as monotonous, the winter came on very early that year of the deportations, and was the most severe that Belgium had ever known. In November it was already cold, a cold the more bitter because of the humidity of the Low Countries. Fuel was scarce ; the Germans were taking great quantities of coal from the mines down in the Borinage ; they controlled the railways, and as they used all the wagons to carry their troops to the Front, or the *chômeurs* and coal to Germany, the barges on the canals were the only remaining means of transport, and before November was gone the canals were frozen over, the barges could not move, and coal for use of the Belgian population could not be brought to Brussels. One of the saddest sights of those sad times was that presented to me one cold morning as, in my selfish furs, I drove along the boulevard ; the tramway had been torn up and working men were putting in ballast — some sort of slag or cinder, or what one will. Along those tracks

for two blocks women and children were clustered like flies in a black, solid mass along the tramway, bent over with bags or baskets, grubbing with their half-frozen fingers for tiny bits of coal. It was one of those humiliating spectacles, not infrequent in times of peace, but abounding in time of war, of the indignity that life heaps upon the poor.

It happened to be the day of King Albert's *fête*, and there were the usual Masses at Sainte-Gudule and at Saint-Jacques-sur-Caudenberg, the usual crowds, "*Vers l'Avenir*" its last chords gliding into "*La Brabançonne*", then swelling loudly and more loudly, then the demonstration, the shouts, the cries for the King and the nation, and the usual arrests. The Germans were parading their *mitrailleuses* to cower the restless people, angered that day more than ever by the publication in the Brussels journals of a French translation of von Bissing's interview with the correspondent of the ***New York Times***, in which, as Lancken had predicted, he explained and tried to justify the deportations.\*

The interview was in the conventional tone of hypocrisy, though there was too much of Parisian sophistication in the *Politische Abteilung* to permit him to boast a patronizing intimacy with the Ahmighty ; I do not know, indeed, that he was that way disposed ; at any rate Brussels was spared that. It was all that Brussels was spared ; the interview added irony to insult and injury by the

pretense that the deportations were in the Belgian interest. Whatever reluctance he may have had in adopting the policy, he now warmly justified its execution ; as one might have anticipated, it was based on the customary premise that it was really England who was to blame, in that by her blockade she had doomed the Belgian population to a demoralising idleness and prevented the success of his efforts for *la reprise du travail* ; and this seemed to von Bissing to be sufficient reason for "evacuating" the working men, who were "living on public charity". It was neither a "cruel sacrifice for the nation nor for the population", but a "necessity provoked by the war", and "a godsend for the labourers and the country". He endeavoured to avoid "every possible injustice", and had given "strict orders that the selection of men to be sent to Germany should be performed with the greatest fairness, on the basis of the lists of the unemployed who had refused the work offered them". In short, said the Governor-General, "we must bring happiness to those who in spite of themselves hesitate and are evasive. If we adopt compulsion toward them, it is done in the most human manner possible. If, in certain isolated cases, it is not possible to avoid rigorous treatment, the victims have only to blame those who prevented them from enlisting voluntarily".

The very same day there were *affiches* ordering the restoration of the ruined towns of

Belgium \*\*, and the injustice of such a demand deepened the indignation of the people. Indeed the *affiches* at that time seemed to rain down grief and calamity on the land. One of them a few days later announced that the contribution to be paid by Belgium for the year 1917 would be fifty million francs a month, an increase of ten million francs a month over the former contribution, and von Bissing had signed the decrees the same day on which he gave out his interview, stating that the Belgians had been seized and borne off to German mines and quarries solely in the interest of Belgium, which was too poor to support idlers. Another decree of that same day announced that Brussels, Schaerbeek, and several other communes would thereafter be *communes flamandes*, which meant that only the Flemish language would be used in the criminal courts — a part of the plan for the division of the country, and the precursor, many felt, of a decree ordering Flemish as the sole language in use in the schools. And as though the *mitrailleuses* and all this were not enough, a Zeppelin, with horrid whirr of motor, circled low and menacing over the city.

Then on November 20 there was a great red *affiche* on the walls, and a red *affiche* was usually either the signal or the seal of tragedy. This *affiche* ordered that after November 21 all public establishments, hotels, shops, restaurants, theatres, cinemas in all Brussels were to close at

eight o'clock in the evening. No one, unless he were a German or a citizen of a neutral country or of a country allied in war with Germany, could be abroad in the streets without a written permission from the *Kommandantur*. The reason given for this measure was that there had been "*demonstrations*" at Sainte-Gudule and at Saint-Jacques-sur-Caudenberg on the King's *fête*, those pathetic demonstrations of sorrow, and of the hope that was trying so hard to keep itself alive. But Brussels thought it was a precautionary measure for the night when the slavers should come to Brussels.\*\*\*

Indeed, turn where one would in Brussels or in Belgium those days one saw the evidence of some new injustice. Whenever I drove past Quatre-Bras I would see the sentinels arresting the women with the potatoes which they had thought to take to their hungry children at home. I cannot forget that picture — the women, their meek heads bowed under their thin black shawls, and bent in the pathetic resignation of the patient poor, being led away to prison. "*L'emballage*" the peasants called it, and to accomplish it there were new and zealous sentinels detailed at that spot which I had seen change in three years from a gay and lively cross-roads, with a popular inn where cyclists and automobilists paused for luncheon or tea, to a grim sentinel-post where every passer-by was halted,

and many searched, and often dragged off to prison.

Those who had so confidently hoped that the war would not endure another winter were giving up that hope ; the offensive of the Allies, of which Brussels was just then incapable of appreciating the military results, had been to waiting Belgium but one more failure, and from Rumania there was the news of the German victory that seemed so inevitably to arrive with every autumn. And winter was already there — a winter whose snows, some said, would be the shroud of Belgium.

Thus, even when friends gathered together, this sorrow, this pervading sense of tragedy, was never absent. I had gone out one afternoon to van Holder's studio for the unveiling and presentation of a picture that had been painted in those summer days when van Holder's garden was all abloom with flowers and sweet with their perfumes. The steadily falling rain, the garden all sodden and dead, the line of men and women under dripping umbrellas, the gathering in the studio, every one depressed by the war and by personal bereavement, the touching little speeches — and van Holder just informed by his physician that he must go to Switzerland — all this made the moment one the impression of which endures ...

I got into my motor to go to the *Orangerie* ; it was twilight, vague figures were scurrying through those sad, deserted streets, hurrying homeward

before the hour of the German curfew. And this was Brussels, once so beautiful and gay and light-hearted in its careless liberty.

Would the long nightmare ever end ? Would the land that reeked of German injustice, and bled from German brutality, ever be delivered ? Must the little nation, the brave little people that had preferred honour above all, and so instantly flung itself before the German legions at Liège and Namur, and saved Paris, and standing again along the Yser, saved Britain and America and all that their civilizations had wrought — must it drain the cup of sacrifice to the dregs ? ...

It is not a pleasant incident to record in connection with an old man's death, a man whose long life devoted to the pursuit of the vain pomp and glory of this world had been prolonged through so many dark and tragic years, but there was no sorrow in Brussels when the death was announced of the Emperor Franz-Josef. A diplomat told me that in the presence of the hideous deeds in which the last of the many wars the Emperor had known was so prolific, the aged Habsbourg had one day sorrowfully exclaimed :

*"Der Krieg hat gar nichts elegantes mehr".*  
(*"The war is no more elegant"*)

And perhaps that is why, when their old Imperial enemy died in the midst of a war in which not one of the tenets of chivalry had been left unbroken in its relation to them, the Brussels

people lifted their eyes indifferently to the staff of the Legation in the Rue Montoyer where the flag of the dual monarchy hung *en berne*.

"*L'incroyable*", they called him in their incorrigible Brussels mockery.

Villalobar and I went to offer our condolences to the Baron von und zu Franckenstein, the Austrian Commissioner who occupied the Legation where we used to go to see the Clarys in the old days, and a few days later we all went to the solemn requiem High Mass in Sainte-Gudule for the repose of the soul of his late Sovereign.

Ruddock and I drove to the old pile in the cold and clammy atmosphere of the fog that rolled its grey billows through the city. There on the parvis was a group of German staff officers, tall, massive men, gigantic in the dim refracting light of the fog. Standing there in their long, grey great coats, the grey covers on their helmets, strange, weird, terrible silhouettes against the grey fog bank, waiting for the Governor-General to arrive, they looked like monstrous grey ghosts of anthropoids. Villalobar was in one of the handsomest of his many uniforms, a great black cloak with an enormous silver cross on it, and a *chapeau de bras*, with *plumes*. I in my *pelisse*, glad for once that American diplomats have no uniform in which to hide themselves, since Marcy decreed that they should be democratic and conspicuous, took my place beside him in the choir — we were almost on



the horns of the altar. Lancken was there, holding the great silver helmet that made him Lohengrin when he wore it. The chancel, hung in black velvet with silver ornamentation, was transformed into a *chapelle ardente*, the arms of the Habsbourgs high over the altar, and drawn up on either side were platoons of the Imperial Guards in their *opera-bouffe* uniforms of white with red piping, and with drawn swords. Then the high *catafalque* under its velvet pall, with a mass of gorgeous chrysanthemums. The choir was filled with German officers of high rank, and the nave and transept were thronged with officers of lower rank and with soldiers, and the diplomats were there, Mahmoud Khan and Alberto Blancas and Poussette in black, and Cavalcanti in uniform, and the Nonce, shown to the episcopal chair, making the sign of the cross and folding his hands in their violet gloves.

The Governor-General, with all his decorations, the broad orange ribbon of the Black Eagle *en sautoir*, entered, accompanied by Franckenstein and two of the Guards in the comic uniforms. He walked with those stiff, almost automatic, movements, a figure to remark, with his leather skin, shining pomaded hair, his brilliant sick eyes. But he entered with sovereign airs, to the ruffle of drums, to the prominent place reserved for him before the altar, bowed to left and right — and the Mass straightway began.

The celebrant was a chaplain of the German army, or perhaps it was the Austrian army, and he had another chaplain to serve him, their grey trousers and tan boots conspicuous below their priestly vestments. There were two other priests, but no altar boys — there were none to be had, I dare say — but instead there were common soldiers, grey haired, in soiled, ill-fitting uniforms of grey, but solicitous, painfully anxious to please, and besides a big boy scout with an adolescent moustache, and two tonsured monks, one of whom stood with piously folded hands wearing a vacant smile and an expression of silly, almost degenerate meekness.

After the mass, one of the army chaplains preached vehemently, growing very red, pouring forth his harsh gutturals from a thick throat ; he extolled the late Emperor, to whom he referred as a Prince of Peace, and, with some inaccuracy in his historical knowledge, said that he had never drawn the sword in war until his eighty-fourth year, when he was stabbed foully in the back.

I stood there in that cold church — one could see one's breath — with the reflections that always crowded on me in that place, whose scenes, were they reproduced, would form a pageant of the history of the world since the time Godefroid de Bouillon went forth to the crusades. Now it was filled with the grey hordes that had poured down out of northern fogs to overrun the world, led by

those men standing there, stalwart, strong, with brutal, rapacious faces, yet gloomy, too, in sodden melancholy, but with no thought of receding — that grey deluge ! Villalobar was at my right, whispering his interesting gossip, his amusing observations on everybody ; Harrach was on my other side, pointing out now and then some notable, identifying some order on the grey breasts, assiduously assigning every one his rank ... There was an enormous man in uniform towering a head above the others, blond, with a heavy, preoccupied expression, enormous yellow moustache, purblindly peering through glasses. "*Un professeur d'histoire ; très fameux*" whispered Harrach ... You will have to peer deeply into our epoch, O famous historian, and with clearer vision than any German yet has shown, to perceive the truth in this complicated mass of human deviltry ! ... Far across the chancel there was a Chinese face, grinning humourously, one of the military attachés down at the *Grand Quartier Général*, come up with other *attachés* to see the show ...

The priests were walking slowly about the *catafalque* with candles and censer and aspersion — *requiescat in pace*. Were the pale immaculate ghosts of Italian patriots who died in foul dungeons under Austrian misrule half a century before pressing forward in hosts to behold the young monarch who had wronged them so, old now, his long reign ended at last? ...

That afternoon Mr. Gregory came to the Legation to report that the slave gangs were seizing, more and more, the men of the C.N. and of the C.R.B. and I had a telegram from London to the effect that the British Government would stop the *ravitaillement* if the press continued.

The next morning Villalobar and I went over to the *Politische Abteilung* ; Baron von der Lancken had gone to Berlin ; we saw Count Harrach instead. We were as near to despair as we had ever been ; we had tried every resource of diplomacy, of tact, of politeness ; many and many a time I had put some particularly hard communication into French in order to soften its sometimes too peremptory tone, but now the time for all this was gone. There was a species of relief in the fact, the relief that comes now and then with desperation, those moments when fate may at last be defied to do its worst. I did not translate the latest British Note into diplomatic French ; I flung it on to the table and said to the Count :

"*Lisez-la*".

He read it, and before he could comment I said :

"*Et vos hommes saisissent les employés du Comité National et de la C.R.B. tous les jours ; et ces Juifs enlèvent les bestiaux de nouveau, ils passent la frontière tous les soirs.*"

The Count looked up at us.

"*Si vous voulez que le ravitaillement craque — qu'il craque*", I said.

And the Marquis nodded grave acquiescence. The Count's face was serious and concerned.

"*J'écrirai à Berlin*", he said.

"*Non, télégraphiez*", said the Marquis.

"*Non*", I added, "*téléphonez*".

The Count left the room in a hurry. An instant later he was at the telephone, calling up Berlin.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

Footnotes.

## Translation :

### \* The Question of the Unemployed

The Berlin correspondent of the ***New York Times*** has interviewed His Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor-General in Belgium. Commenting on this interview, the ***North German Gazette*** publishes a long article. Every one knows the eagerness with which we place under the eyes of our readers, to whom above all information is necessary at this time in order that they may reasonably understand events, official and unofficial writings from which one may obtain a sane appreciation of facts. It is in that spirit we reproduce hereafter the article of the ***Northern German Gazette***. It treats a question which

concerns every Belgian in the highest degree at this moment, and for this reason will be read by every one with interest.

*« As a result of the economic strangulation of Belgium, which England undertakes without any regard for the latter, more than a million of impoverished Belgian men, women, and children find themselves to-day depending on public charity. By suppressing the importation of raw materials and by forbidding the exportation of finished products England has condemned more than half a million Belgian working men to a chronic state of inactivity which demoralizes them. They and their families are to-day a charge on the communes. In order to put an end to this state of things, which becomes every day more intolerable and as injurious for the whole of the Belgian people as for individuals, I first issued decrees in order either to induce unemployed Belgian working men to go voluntarily into Germany, or to cause to be transported there those who by instinct are afraid of labour and who refuse to accomplish for good wages a work adequate to their capacities. »*

Such was the thesis that the General-Colonel Baron von Bissing, Governor-General in Belgium, formulated Monday in the course of an interview that he accorded me in his home at Berlin. It is worth while to consider it. His Excellency, moreover went farther ; he pointed out that he considered the evacuation of the "*professional*"

unemployed as a measure of defence against the blockade of Belgium and Germany by England, the world-wide economic war having attained now a new phase which seems to approach its culminating-point.

The Governor-General expressed himself as follows :

*« In withholding raw materials England tries to bring Belgian industry under her control. She tries systematically to put Belgium under the economic yoke with a view of using her later in the course of the economic war that she is preparing against Germany after the military war. Belgian men of affairs have told me that in this economic war Belgium will have to struggle not only against the competition of Germany but also against that of England, and that they considered it indispensable, especially in view of this double competition, that Belgian industry remain in activity. The evacuation of Belgian working men is not a heavy sacrifice either for the country or for the population. It is a necessity of the war, and at bottom a benefit for the working men and a good thing for the country.*

*In order to explain it, I must go back as far as December, 1914, the date when I entered upon the discharge of my functions. Ever since that day I have recognized the danger that Belgium was running by the lack of labour, and I have tried to remedy it.*

*The implacable economic blockade of Germany by England at the same time affected Belgium. Its economic policy, which depends, as you know, on the importation of raw materials and the exportation of finished products, was struck a mortal blow by it. The result is a great increase in the number of unemployed and of the charities which it is necessary to give them. The long duration of the war has brought about many abuses in these charities and provoked an impossible social situation. This is why I have asked the Belgian communes to give employment to the greatest possible number of their unemployed by undertaking public works. Now, this measure finally resulted in time in leading the communes with heavy debts disproportionate to the work undertaken by them, and momentarily unproductive. It was necessary, then, to put a check on this expenditure and to limit the works for the unemployed. I then made new efforts in order to obtain the importation in Belgium of raw materials. I went so far as to send those in whom I have confidence to England with the mission of informing themselves whether or not something could be done to save industrial Belgium and the economic standstill from which she suffered. I was disposed to agree not to use for the needs of Germany the products manufactured by Belgian labour out of these raw materials, and to authorize the exportation of 75 per cent, of them. But*



*inexorable England turned a deaf ear to all representations that were made to her in favour of Belgium.*

*Before I was obliged to take new measures about thirty thousand Belgian working men had gone voluntarily to Germany. There they were placed on the same footing with German working men, and they gain wages at a rate unknown in Belgium. They were able to send to their relatives the money necessary to support them. They were given leaves of absence which they asked to return to their country, and were authorized to take their families to Germany. I had hoped that thus voluntary labour would more and more increase. Then, unfortunately, there was felt the effect of an active propaganda which our enemies carried on by the aid of all imaginable means, and by which they put forward the argument that the Belgians who enrolled themselves to go and work in Germany were not patriotic. This propaganda was made in families of working men who had found work in Germany or wished to go there to seek it, and was pushed to the point of drawing up black list with the names of these working men. It finished, naturally, by stopping the departure of these volunteers.*

*However, the complaints which in the meantime were addressed to me because of the lack of labour were becoming more and more intolerable, and they caused me to publish my*

*decree of May 25 of this year. This decree did not provide any obligation to work, except in the case of non-employed persons who refused without good reason to accept for an adequate salary labour equal to their capacities. Every motive based on international law was expressly admitted as a valid reason. No working man could be compelled to take part in war work, and every information according to which Belgian working men have been compelled to do such labour is contrary to the truth. »*

In response to a question of his interlocutor, the Governor-General replied that he had contemplated the Rhenish Prussia and Westphalia as the regions particularly proper to receive the evacuated Belgians, and that this evacuation was effectuated in the most humane manner.

Baron von Bissing continues:

*« We tried to avoid every kind of injustice. I gave severe instructions that the choice of men to be sent to Germany should be made with the greatest care, on the basis of the lists of unemployed who had refused work offered to them. Each case was the object of a special inquiry made in the presence of the competent Burgomaster. The families who remain in Belgium will be attended to by us until those who are charged with their support are able to send them a part of their wages. The wages in Germany are fixed at a minimum of 8 marks a day, while the*

*average wage in Belgium is not more than 3,5 to 4,5 marks. Besides, the food in Germany is better for them. The offers of work in Germany are brought to the attention of the interested persons either verbally or by means of great posters on the walls, and the mass of labourers who ask work is increasing every day. Despite this, in those parts of Belgium which are included in my administration — that is to say, outside of the two Flanders — there still remain between four and five hundred thousands of unemployed ; that is to say that, including their families, out of five and a half millions of inhabitants of which the Belgian population is composed, more than a million persons are dependent on public charities. »*

As concerns the motives for which the working men are sent to Germany rather than to be forced to work in Belgium, the Governor-General says :

*« As I said to you awhile ago, Belgian industry depends absolutely, so far as raw materials are concerned, on overseas countries. As the English blockade prevents these materials from arriving here, Germany is the only great country with which Belgium has commercial relations. Germany did not apply to Belgium, as she did to enemy countries, the law which prohibited payment, and German money goes into Belgium continuously. Hundreds of thousands of persons being without work in Belgium, and as*

*there is plenty of work to be found in Germany, the use of the Belgian working men in Germany has become, therefore, an economic and social necessity.*

*I have heard it objected that the sending of innumerable Belgian working men in Germany destroys the family life of these working men. I shall only say that it is precisely the present situation in Belgium which creates the gravest dangers for the family life. Besides, those working men who voluntarily engage to work in Germany can remain in communication with their families, and will obtain from time to time permission to return to their country. They will even be permitted to take their families with them. Several thousands of Belgian working men have already gone voluntarily to Germany ; they are placed there, I repeat, on the same footing as German working men and receive wages at a rate unknown in Belgium, so that instead of living on public charity and becoming paupers, it is possible for them to gain an easy situation in life.*

*The wages they receive are a benefit not only to isolated working men and to their families, but also to the Belgian economic policy, because they increase the amount of money sent on a great scale from Germany into Belgium. The number of Belgian voluntary working men would be much greater if they were not subjected to all sorts of influences to induce the labourers not to accept*

*work in Germany. But in spite of themselves, we must make happy those who hesitate and who tergiversate. If we exercise any constraint on them, we exercise it in the most humane manner possible. If in certain cases it has not been possible to avoid using rigorous treatment, those who are the victims of it must blame only those who have prevented them from working on their own accord. »* (November, 15, in ***La Belgique***)

Bissing frequently gave out interviews, all of them "*carefully prepared*". About this time the following appeared in ***La Belgique*** :

### **Translation :**

## **The Administration of Occupied Belgium**

The ***Düsseldorfer Tagesblatt*** reproduces an interview granted on November 17 to its Director, M. H. Brauweiler, by Colonel-General Baron von Bissing, Governor-General in Belgium, at the château of Trois-Fontaines.

The interview turned on the subject of the complaints voiced recently by several Catholic newspapers against the German administration in Belgium concerning the equality of treatment demanded for the Catholic and the Protestant religions. Baron von Bissing protested particularly against the reproach made that he wishes to

*"protestantize"* Belgium. He feels that he has shown conclusively on different occasions that he is far from having such an intention. In order that his accusers may recognize the injustice of their reproach, it is sufficient to state that the opposite party has made exactly the opposite complaint. He follows therefore a middle course.

Concerning the appointment of functionaries in Belgium, Baron von Bissing says that he regrets that at the beginning only a very few applications were addressed to him by Catholics, but at this time he is satisfied to be able to retain the ones he has. He does not believe, moreover, that an increase in the number of Catholic functionaries would be of essential benefit to the administration.

Concerning the University of Ghent the Governor-General said that the small number of Catholic professors is explained by the fact that his efforts looking toward the retention of Catholic professors have not had, to his regret, the success for which he had hoped ; his efforts have met with a very strong resistance.

Finally Baron von Bissing expressed himself as follows concerning the general intentions of his administration and the ends toward which it is aiming, in view of the criticisms uttered in certain circles in Germany which reproach him with an excessive mildness :

*« My program is simple. I am not here to molest the country or to adopt reprisals, but to govern it in the interest of Germany.*

*Whoever considers the truly difficult nature of the task of assuming the responsibility of the administration of an occupied country, and of collaborating therein, knows that it can not be assumed otherwise than as I have done it. I must bear in mind as much as possible the particularism of the country and the character of its population. If I acted otherwise I should not only make my work more difficult, which after all would be of no importance, but I should impede the progress of German activity. I am guided by law and by justice, and it is my duty to respect the provisions of international law. When I am obliged to punish I do so — that also is a duty which my responsibility requires of me — but I punish only after having considered my duty, and in accordance with my conscience. And is the fact not a merit, which even those who reproach me with having been too mild must recognize in me, that the principles of my administration have prevented disturbances in a country situated so near the rear of the Western Front ?*

*I am an old soldier and I should not be pleased to find myself forced by necessity to proceed by force of arms against a defenseless population. The best service that I can render to the Emperor and to the country is to govern here in*

*such a manner that bloody sacrifices may be spared our troops, and that it may be necessary to withdraw from the battle-front only the smallest possible number of soldiers. If it is for governing in this way that I am reproached I consent willingly to assume the responsibility for it. »*

**Translation :**  
**\* \* NOTICE**

The communal administration has received from His Excellency the Governor-General the order to begin, on January 1, 1917, to demolish the buildings which, as a result of operations of war, have been damaged or destroyed to such an extent which renders it impossible to use them for their former purpose.

For certain ruins situated along the railroad the date fixed for the beginning of the work of demolition may be advanced.

The proprietors of such buildings, on demand, will be exempted from the obligation to tear them down if they can prove that they really occupy them and are able to reconstruct them without delay. Such requests must be addressed to the Civil Commissioner before January 1, 1917. Those who make such requests will have to declare at the same time in writing, at the communal administration, that they have made a demand for exemption.



The declaration of such a demand of exemption, when made to the communal administration, will operate as a suspension of the work of demolition until a decision can be reached and the communal administration be notified.

The communal administration must notify the proprietors of all buildings in ruins, even those proprietors who are absent but who can be notified by the post, that the commune is obliged to begin to demolish them if they do not demand and obtain an exemption.

Demands for subsidies for reconstructing buildings that have been damaged by acts of war may be addressed to the Civil Commissioner.

Louvain, December 13, 1916.

LUBBERT, Oberst und Kreischef.

### **Translation :**

## **Notice Concerning the Reconstruction of Destroyed Buildings**

Referring to my circular relative to the demolition and to the reconstruction of buildings destroyed by acts of war, I charge the communal administrations to begin vigorously the work of demolition envisaged by this circular. It should be remarked that thus is offered an excellent occasion to give continuous work to the unemployed, and that the present season when agriculture requires

fewer arms than at any other time of the year, is admirably adapted to this labour.

The pretext so often invoked that the Belgian law prohibits communal administrations from disposing of the property of those inhabitants who are absent or who do not consent to reconstruct their buildings, and that consequently they are not authorized to demolish the buildings in question, is reduced to nothing by the decree issued by His Excellency the Governor-General and bearing date September 12, 1916.

Besides, attention is specially drawn to the great advantage that will result from the fact that important subsidies are provided for the demolition and reconstruction of damaged buildings. These subsidies are accorded without any obligation of restitution or of payment of interest. It will be well to introduce as soon as possible the demands for these subsidies in order that the payment may be made in as little delay as possible.

The German authority expects that the communal administrations will energetically push forward this work.

The Civil Commissioner by the Imperial Kreischef  
of Brussels, v. Wedderkop.

## Translation :

### \* \* \* NOTICE

On November 15 large political demonstrations were held in the churches of Sainte-Gudule and of Saint-Jacques-sur-Caudenberg, and continued on the spaces before the two churches.

On this occasion the Germans were insulted by the crowd.

For this reason I order as follows :

On and after November 21 and until further orders, all public establishments serving for amusement, hotels, restaurants, cafes, and shops must be closed at 8 o'clock in the evening.

The present decree is applicable to the whole agglomeration of Brussels., The only exception made will be for restaurants, etc., that have obtained from the *Kommandantur* permission to remain open for a longer time.

From 8.30 in the evening till 4 o'clock in the morning no one can circulate in the streets except those who will have obtained a written permission from a German authority.

The said interdiction does not apply to persons of German nationality, or persons of Allied or neutral countries. These persons must prove their nationality by showing their certificate of identity.

The said interdiction is not applicable either to functionaries of the communal police in uniform, or to employees of the tramway companies and the societies of night watchmen and other similar enterprises, on condition that they wear the uniform of their society and prove their quality of employees.

Infractions of the present regulations will be punished either by a fine which may go as high as 10.000 marks and by imprisonment for not more than three weeks, or by one of these punishments to the exclusion of the other. Besides, the public establishments serving for amusement, restaurants, cafés, shops, etc., may be closed for a period of time more or less long.

The tribunals and military commandants are competent to try the said infractions.

The Governor of Brussels and Brabant,  
Hurt, Lieutenant-General.  
Brussels, November 18, 1916.

French translation : « *Les déportations* » in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre XXIV (1916) in *La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles* ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 377-380.

**Paul MAX** (cousin of the *bourgmestre* **Adolphe MAX**) reproduces “fac-simile” of the article “*Question des chômeurs*” (19161115) in his *Journal de guerre* (*Notes d'un Bruxellois pendant l'Occupation 1914-1918*) :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>

[http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publications/Fichier\\_PDF/Fonte/Journal\\_de%20guerre\\_de\\_Paul\\_Max\\_bdef.pdf](http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Fichier_PDF/Fonte/Journal_de%20guerre_de_Paul_Max_bdef.pdf)

It would also be interesting compare with what [Louis GILLE](#), [Alphonse OOMS](#) et [Paul DELANDSHEERE](#) told about the same days in **50 mois d'occupation allemande** (Volume 2 : 1916) :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>

It would also be interesting compare with what Charles TYTGAT told about the same days in **Journal d'un journaliste. Bruxelles sous la botte allemande** :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>