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EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION
IN BELGIUM

By

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By WALTER A. MONTGOMERY.

CONTENTS.—Economic recovery and educational connections—Historical sketch of Belgian education—Education during the German occupation—Educational reconstruction—University reconstruction—The University of Brussels.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND EDUCATIONAL CONNECTIONS.

Belgium's progress in rehabilitation has been most marked of all the countries devastated by the World War. In resumption of operation of the iron and steel industries, of coal mining, of railroad rebuilding, of the sugar factories, of cotton spinning, of rebuilding residences and communal buildings, the Government, private initiative, capital, and labor of all grades have cooperated in a way deserving to be a model to the other governments of the world.

M. Delacroix, chancellor of the exchequer, presenting the budget to the Parliament, well summarized the task lying immediately before the country in words which have educational as well as economic import:

Our financial situation will improve by degrees. This year we shall have a budget which will approximately balance. The next year, when we are in a position to estimate the possible amount of indemnity we are to receive, we shall take steps to reduce the national debt. Taxation will have to be well distributed in order that there may be no unfair burdens. Justice is necessary, certainly, but it is imperative to meet our financial requirements. Everybody is spending too much. That must stop. All ranks of society must economize. The laborer is ready to work, if only he can be assured that his efforts have other results than the mere enrichment of his employers.

The interest of the country lies in increased production. It is a very real necessity. War has impeded civilization. We have to make up lost time. Economy is necessary. Always economy. Our opportunity is at hand. The past lays upon us responsibility, and we have no right to compromise the future of our country.

Economic and material rehabilitation have gone hand in hand with the intellectual and the educational. According to the reports of the Anglo-Belgian Union, Belgian cooperation, under the leadership of the noted author, Emile Cammaerts, has organized popular lectures throughout Belgium for the purpose of spreading knowledge of modern countries. All are illustrated, and treat of subjects of vital bearing on the future well-being of Belgium.

The economic revival is accompanied by an extraordinarily active intellectual revival. All universities and schools are crowded far beyond their capacity, and the minister of science and art, M. Jules Destrée, is even contemplating restoring entrance examinations to universities in order to eliminate those who are less fitted for higher studies. Not less than five or six literary reviews have been lately founded in Belgium, and a generation of new writers, including some remarkable younger poets, is coming to the fore.¹

One of the signs of educational awakening in Belgium was resumption of the publication of the journal of primary education, entitled *L'École Nationale*. Suspending publication with the invasion in August, 1914, it is now revived under the slightly different but more comprehensive title *L'Éducation Nationale*. Its first numbers, November 1 and 15, 1919, outline a statesmanlike program for the reconstruction and revivification of Belgian education. It does not regard the task as a piecemeal one, or segregate the several departments of education. It rather coordinates and makes each live by organic contact with the other. Belgian education is treated under 14 aspects by the most noted educational thinkers of that stricken country. Each sees in education the first and most powerful agency in the rehabilitation of the country.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF BELGIAN EDUCATION.

In order the better to understand what Belgium has in the way of educational foundations on which to build, it may be well to summarize the chief events and currents of Belgian education before the World War. The organic educational law of 1842, which marks for Belgium the beginning of a modern educational system, was repealed by the law of 1879, carried by the Liberal Party. After a trial of five years, it was supplanted by the law of 1884, carried by the Catholic Party, and constituting in essence a return to the law of 1842. In 1914, just before the war, a new school law, with compulsory attendance from 6 to 14 years as its most prominent feature, was passed by Parliament, but did not, of course, go into operation.²

EDUCATION DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

The International Bureau of Teachers' Associations, to which the German Teachers' Association also belonged, had its headquarters in Belgium. At the outbreak of the war the bureau was transferred to Holland. According to *Neue Bahnen*, January-February, 1915, page 215, the International Union made special efforts to ameliorate the condition of Belgian teachers. They endeavored to secure the return

¹ Abridged from "The Present Situation in Belgium," *The New Europe*, May 6, 1920.
² Facts taken from *La Réforme de l'Enseignement*, by M. Léon De Paeuw, Brussels, 1919.

of the Belgian teachers to their schools, in which they were seconded by the German military authorities, who promised that the teachers who should open their schools again would be permitted to go on with their work undisturbed. Their presence, it was hoped, would help to restore order and nominal activities in the occupied territory.

Among the population there was a strong desire to have the schools resume their work even in places that had suffered much during the invasion. In Brussels the Germans claim that instruction had suffered virtually no interruption. Schools were opened in Luttich on October 1, 1914, in Antwerp November 9, in Louvain December 1. The German Advanced Modern School in Brussels was also to resume its work at as early a date as possible.

In the *Neue Bahnen* for August, 1915, a correspondent, Walther Kluge, writes of the Belgian schools (none were in session where he was):

The school buildings had been commandeered; furniture removed or piled haphazard in the rooms. Biblical pictures, very indifferent as works of art, hung on the walls.

According to a statement of a Belgian teacher, a compulsory law was to have gone into effect in 1914. The teacher did not like the State school—a class of schools conducted parallel with those conducted by the clergy. The teachers did not concern themselves with politics—they were neutral.

The salaries of the teachers were apportioned on a pro-rata basis of the population of the district, creating four salary classes. Every two years an increment of 100 francs was added to the basic salary, rising to a maximum in each of the four classes of 2,000, 2,750, 3,100, and 3,400 francs, respectively.

From the training colleges a teacher might procure a diploma for each of several branches. The more diplomas he had, the better his pension status. Assuming that a teacher must be retired on a pension with 25 years of service, and has had a salary of 3,000 francs, the number of his diplomas was added to his years of service, and the sum multiplied by his salary, and the product divided by 50. (Example: $25 + 2 \times 3,000 + 50 = 1,620$ francs.)

Anything like a uniform standard of education was impossible in view of the many classes of schools—State schools, schools accredited by the State, schools conducted by the clergy, and still others. To this feature of Belgian education must be ascribed the lack of laws for compulsory attendance.

The schools and the teachers look to France for their models in educational administration. Though the Flemish people are of Germanic origin, their education certainly is not.

An inquiry made of 34 persons, between the ages of 14 and 62, showed that some had attended school only 1 year; others ranged from 1 to 13 years of attendance. Some could not write their names.

EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION.

Complete reorganization of the entire Belgian system of primary and agricultural instruction, with close adaptation to the needs of the reconstruction and war period, are the aims of the governmental and educational authorities, according to the first information furnished since the war by the department of sciences and arts. It is

anticipated that the program and schedule of studies of the primary and normal schools will be the first points of attack.

The new organic law of primary instruction expressly provides for the installation of State instruction along practical lines for pupils of 12 to 14 years. These schools are to be modeled after the continuation schools projected by the English education act of 1918.

The devastated schools of Flanders are in actual process of reconstruction. The Province of East Flanders has voted a preliminary loan of 10,000,000 francs to aid the individual communes in the establishment of 700 to 800 classes in the public schools, in addition to those existing before the war. This does not include those destroyed by the German occupation.

Number of pupils in the primary schools in Belgium in June, 1920.¹

	Public schools.	Free (denominational).
Schools.....	4,827	3,132
Classes.....	13,575	11,212
Boys.....	326,088	156,975
Girls.....	187,310	289,739
Teachers (men).....	8,086	3,048
Teachers (women).....	7,512	8,004

¹ Figures taken from the organ of the Belgian Teachers' Association.

The school law passed October 13, 1919, modifies the organic law of primary education in quite a number of its articles, chiefly in those that fixed the salaries of teachers. Following are the main lines of the changes:

ARTICLE I. The communal council fixes the salary of communal teachers on the following bases:

1. A minimum salary of 3,000 francs for men teachers and of 2,000 francs for women.

2. An allowance for residence fixed as follows for several classes:

In communes of 5,000 inhabitants and less, 200 francs.

In communes of 5,001 to 40,000 inhabitants, 300 francs.

In communes of 40,001 to 100,000 inhabitants, 400 francs.

In communes of more than 100,000 inhabitants, 500 francs.

This allowance shall be doubled—

(a) For married men teachers and for widows and widowers with one or more children.

(b) For heads of schools.

ARTICLE II. The teacher is entitled to 10 annual increases of 100 francs, followed by 10 biennial increases of 150 francs, up to the sum necessary to increase the minimum allowed by law up to 2,500 francs.^a

For women teachers the scale of increases is fixed, respectively, at 80 francs and 120 francs up to 2,000 francs, the minimum allowed by law.

ARTICLE V. An allowance for administration, calculated on the basis of 100 francs a class, is granted to school heads officially, to the teachers in charge of instruction, who also have the oversight of five classes or less. This allowance can not be less than 200 nor more than 600 francs.^b

The *Moniteur Belge* of March 27, 1920, published a series of royal decrees establishing a Higher Council of Public Instruction, reorganizing the existing conseils de perfectionnement for higher, middle, normal, and primary education, and designating the members of the four groups.

By the terms of these decrees, the Higher Council of Public Instruction, composed of 15 members named for a term of four years, is charged with the duty of establishing the coordination of the different divisions of education in which the State is interested. It meets at the call of the minister of sciences and fine arts, or at the request of at least half its members. The director general, the secretary of public instruction, sits with it, but has only a consultative voice in its deliberations. The council is to give its advice upon matters submitted to it by the minister.

Every member may also submit to the council matters for consideration which seem useful to him, and call for their examination and a vote thereon for governmental guidance. The council may meet separately or with one or the other of the conseils de perfectionnement. It may delegate one or more of its members to attend, with consultative voice only, the deliberations of one of these councils.

The higher council may study every question concerning education, even if it be not submitted to it by the minister. It may, with the authorization of the minister, institute investigations, consult specialists, and take charge of temporary inspections and traveling missions, under the direction of the minister.

The regulations governing the three conseils de perfectionnement are along the same lines. It is to be noted that the council for higher education, consisting of 21 members, will have the power finally, when the question shall concern the interests of the universities exclusively, to deliberate with its body reduced to only the representatives of that division.

The council of middle education, consisting of 10 members, may divide into two sections, the first having to do with the athenées, the other with the middle schools. It is to give its advice upon the competitive examinations, upon the national expenditures for this division of education, upon examinations, degrees, certificates, all as limited by legal dispositions; it examines the textbooks used in this division of education, and proposes instructions to be given to inspectors.

The council of normal and primary education, composed of 15 members, embraces two sections, the normal and the primary. It gives its advice upon all matters submitted to it by the minister or

by one of its members. The minister submits to the council the reports of the provincial inspectors on the situation of primary education. The council examines the books and teaching materials submitted to it by the minister or by its members.

To sum up, the reform instituted by M. Destrée, the minister, consists first of conferring upon the three councils existing before the German occupation and now reorganized, the rights of initiative they did not possess before and, by the establishment of a higher council of public instruction, in coordinating the labors of the councils in such a way as to fill in gaps, avoid duplication, and establish the necessary links between the various divisions of education.

The opening session of the four councils, meeting together, was held March 30, 1920. The minister in a moving appeal called upon all the members to labor together for Belgium's reconstruction, and urged especial attention to matters concerning moral and civic and esthetic education, the conditions of admission to higher studies, the professional preparation of teachers of secondary education, and the improvement of primary normal education.

The Federation of Christian Teachers of Belgium met in Brussels in August, 1919, the first time since 1913, with a large number of members present. Complaint was voiced of the delay of local councils in the payment of teachers' salaries long in arrears, some as far back as the opening of the war. Resolutions were passed urging the passage of a law incorporating the following principles: Equality before the law of all schools, whether free or official; graduated salaries; salaries for men and women teachers, paid by the State, with 3,000 francs as minimum and 6,000 francs as maximum; bonuses for teachers who had fought in the war.

The official Belgian League of Education has reorganized, meeting (1920) in Brussels, and following the same general lines as the French league of the same name, urging immediate legislation along the following lines: Organization of the fourth grade, education of abnormals, assistance to poor scholars, reform and development of normal education, publication of works concerning popular education, technical education, and popular agricultural training and apprenticeship.

Before the invasion Belgium manifested progressive spirit in the matter of allowing girls access to higher studies. The same spirit is shown in the reestablishment of the Girls' High School at Brussels. This institution, however, is intended for girls who do not intend to prepare for university courses, or for the professions. Its purpose, as announced, is to train "women who are to play an important rôle in the intellectual and moral development of Belgium."

The schedule of hours follow the same lines as the *athénées* which admit girls, but its subjects of instruction are widely different: Psychology, history of French literature, history of foreign literature, historical criticism, history of the ancient civilizations and the Orient, history of Greek and Roman civilizations, national history and political institutions of Belgium, social and economic studies of modern times. Latin and Greek courses are elective.

The city of Brussels has established the normal studies necessary for the training of teachers of manual arts, especially for fourth-grade children. They will extend over two years, with eight hours weekly. The first year will be devoted to woodworking, metal working, technical and ornamental drawing, technology, use of tools, and wood carving.

In the second year the studies of the first will be enlarged upon, and in addition studies in industrial hygiene, trigonometry, elements of mechanics, and special methodology of manual arts will be offered.

Similar schools for girls are projected, to be opened as soon as possible.

The new free (popular) University of Brussels has secured the site occupied by the French section of the exposition of 1910 and will at once erect an adequate building. For this, among other subscriptions, the provincial council of Brabant has granted a million francs.

UNIVERSITY RECONSTRUCTION.

At the session of the Belgian Parliament on September 10, 1919, the premier communicated to the Chamber of Representatives a letter from Mr. Herbert Hoover, which, after accounting for all maintenance expenses of the Commission for Relief in Belgium and estimating a balance of 150 millions of francs still remaining, proceeded to set forth a financial project for the restoration and development of higher education in that country.

According to Mr. Hoover's statements—

The war and its economic effects demonstrated the supreme importance of higher instruction for all social classes and especially for the masses. It is necessary (a) to open schools of higher education for the sons and daughters of those who have not now the means to send them to such schools; (b) to increase the revenues of such schools in such a way that they may render to the community the services justly to be expected of them and that they may be able to receive new development in the future.

Mr. Hoover proposed that—

1. Thirty-seven per cent of the sum of 150 millions be applied to the establishment of a national educational foundation managed by a commission composed of Belgians and Americans. The revenues of this foundation shall be intended as maintenance grants to the children of families in moderate circumstances in order to permit them to proceed to higher education.

2. Sixty-three per cent of the 150 millions shall be appropriated at once to the following institutions: The Universities of Brussels, Louvain, Ghent, Liège (13.33 per cent for each); school of mines at Mons (3 per cent); Colonial Higher School (6.66 per cent).

The Chamber of Representatives accepted the donation with profound gratitude and appreciation of its meaning for the future of Belgium.

The National Educational Foundation has thus at its disposal a capital of 55,000,000 francs, which it is hoped may be still further increased after the final settlement of all accounts of the Relief Commission. This foundation will be incorporated by a law yet to be passed. The revenues will be devoted especially to the establishment of local and traveling scholarships for needy students. The trustees of the foundation have as their aim to make such selections of beneficiaries as shall introduce a truly educational élite into the universities. On the other hand, a portion of the revenues will be appropriated for the extension of learning and granted to professors to permit them to travel, to pursue scientific research, and to publish specialized works which their personal resources do not permit them to issue.

The sum total assigned to institutions of higher education is fixed, subject to change, at 95,000,000 francs—20,000,000 for each of the four universities, 10,000,000 for the colonial school, 5,000,000 for the school of mines. Of this sum, an advance of 20,000,000 was turned over in September.

Interesting legal complications have resulted from these donations. The free Universities of Brussels and Louvain have been incorporated by law since 1911; but the State Universities of Ghent and Liège are not on this footing. They desire, however, to obtain this status by law. The scheme outlined by Mr. Hoover now proposes to divert the 4 million intended for higher education not to the State but to the universities themselves. The latter hail this with delight, for they perceive in the decree of incorporation a measure which will confer upon them, in the eye of the State, an autonomy which they have never enjoyed and do not now enjoy. They see in it also far-reaching consequences, not only for material enrichment but also for the recruiting of their scientific and professorial staffs.

The announcement of the donation of the commission for Belgian relief has aroused delight and no less surprise in scientific circles. The preliminary steps to the decision of the commission were known to only a few privileged members, though they involved many long and minute investigations into educational matters. The genesis of the final act may be traced back to April, 1916. While the war was in full progress, delegates from the four universities and the national relief committee, undaunted and still full of confidence in the ulti-

mate issue of the conflict, meeting for routine work, dared to look beyond that into the field of the nation's educational needs. With the increase of the sums at the disposal of the committee, their plans took a wider scope and came to include educational matters as well.

The donation attains two ends at once, the democratic and the scientific. It has received universal commendation both in Belgium and France. In the latter country it has been commended even by that section of the French press which is inclined to question the future of purely scientific studies in the increasing democratization of modern society. The combination adopted, that of carrying higher education to its highest degree of perfection and at the same time making it freely accessible to the youth of the masses, affords the best of all solutions yet devised for the problem of the future relations of science and democracy—a problem universally regarded as one of the most serious that has to be faced in modern education.

A vital feature of the scheme is the stipulation that no portion of the donations is to be touched for the construction of buildings. It is intended that they be entirely devoted to the improvement of the conditions of life for the professors and students, and the endowments of laboratories and libraries.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRUSSELS.

Three new courses have been instituted this year in the University of Brussels. One, in pedagogy, has been established independent of the faculties. Courses are open to teachers of the secondary and primary education, as to candidates for the doctorate of philosophy, letters and sciences, who propose to follow a career in the *athénées* (corresponding to the French *lycées*). In order to appreciate more fully the meaning of this new regulation, the reader is reminded that, since the abolition of the higher normal schools in 1890, the teaching force of the secondary schools has had to be recruited among the doctors sent out by the universities. However, it is recognized that if the scientific preparation of this type of teachers is satisfactory, their professional and pedagogical preparation is by no means so. It is to remedy this situation that the University of Brussels has established the interrelated unit of courses making up the pedagogical section: Biology, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, methodology, physical education and hygiene, history of pedagogy, ethics, and history. These courses are reinforced by practical exercises in teaching, in experimental psychology and pedagogy, and in social studies tending to bring teachers and students together.

After two years of attendance on these courses, practical exercises, grouped studies, and two examinations, the students obtain a

certificate of pedagogical studies. Fifty students enrolled for 1919-20.

Officially dependent upon the faculties of the university, the Government has established a section of technical aviation, the courses in which are reserved for engineers having a diploma. They embrace lectures and recitations upon the mechanism and construction of planes, on aviation motors, on the law of the air, hygiene, aerial photography, aerology, wireless telegraphy, map making, and laboratory examinations.

A section in romance philology has been founded under the faculty of philosophy and letters, embracing research study into the French language and literature and kindred languages.

The University of Louvain is rising rapidly from its ruins. Its courses were resumed in November, 1919, when over 3,000 persons, including those taking single courses and adults pursuing night courses, were enrolled. The faculties of medicine and science have initiated new laboratories in temporary quarters and are seeking to give thorough instruction. Work in restoration of the world-famous library, for which subscriptions were begun in May, 1915, is under way under the auspices of an international committee of intellectuals representing 37 distinct nationalities. With this a special Belgian committee works in cooperation. On the very day of the armistice it had already catalogued 80,000 volumes, sent by friends during the enemy's occupation.

A group of scientific men have taken the initiative in establishing an institute of higher education for women, which will be put under the patronage of the University of Louvain.

The visit of the British university delegates on mission to Belgium, November, 1919, was an episode of great educational and international interest. Ten representatives of every grade of British university institutions composed the mission. They visited a representative of every grade of higher institution in Belgium. Formal conferences with Belgian educational authorities and informal discussions were held for the arriving at ways and means of mutually benefiting the educational situation of the two nations so closely allied in the fire of adversity. Extensive interchange of professors and of students was aimed at, and many definite conclusions were reached. The Belgian authorities evinced deep interest in the organization of the British universities bureau and planned the establishments of such among their own higher institutions.³

³ Abridged from report of the mission in London University Gazette, April 7, 1920.