

BELGIANS HAVE SURVIVED WAR BETTER THAN FRENCH SAYS WRITER AFTER AN INSPECTION OF BOTH STRICKEN LANDS

"Devastated Belgium" Not as Cruelly Hurt as Invaded France; Germans Ruthless Towards Captured Industrial Region.

Belgian Gaity Survives the War But France Is Sad.

Belgium, which has been called "the martyred nation," is not so thoroughly ravaged, nor is the spirit of the people so depressed, as is the case with France, especially with France in those northern provinces that met the German invasion, writes Karl B. Lamb, a former American officer who was attached to the board named by the Peace conference to investigate industrial war-damage in both countries. He found Belgium, by the large in rather a gay mood, while France, even the portions of it which had not been converted into ruins by German ruthlessness, was far from cheerful. As for the material damage, he reports that Belgium has been far more lucky than her neighbor to the south. A recent issue of the New York Evening Post carries his personal interpretation of conditions in the two countries shortly after the end of the war. In January he was appointed to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace as a member of the Industrial Damage board, and shortly afterwards found himself in Belgium as assistant chief of the International Section of the Belgian Mission. The party to which he was attached arrived in Brussels to find it "a city of gaiety," he writes.

Hotels and cafes were crowded with people of all descriptions; English, Canadian, and Belgian officers and men were everywhere, while music, dancing and drinking kept up until early morning every day in the week. As members of the American Peace Commission, we soon met many of the best of Brussels, and they did their utmost to make our stay pleasant. Indeed, hardly a night passed without a dance or entertainment of some kind.

At that time an American officer was something of a curiosity in Brussels, but toward the end of our visit this gaiety became less "hectic." In fact, the Belgian people have passed through three distinct stages since the armistice. First, a state of exuberant happiness caused by their sudden freedom and the return of their army and King; secondly, a period of depression when they found that prosperity did not immediately knock at their door; and thirdly, a feeling of determination to take up the work of again building their industries and reconstructing their homes.

In traveling through France and Belgium one notices immediately the difference in the attitude of the people. France is far from gay; she can not be, for, as we know, the nation has lost about 1,250,000 men, over fifty per cent of its youth—men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty—Belgium on the other hand, has not lost the same comparative percentage. When the German Army first swarmed through Belgium it traveled so quickly that Belgium did not have time to mobilize as completely as did France and England, with the result that the army driven across the front-

ier was small. In addition, the Belgian army did not carry on any great offensive except during the last months of the war, when they operated in conjunction with their Allies; nor were they subjected to the heavy German offensives which struck other parts of the line.

Our first stop upon arrival in Brussels was to go to the American Embassy, through which we were put in touch with the Belgian officials who were to cooperate with us in our work. Our plan of procedure, briefly, was to find out the condition of the industrial plants before the war and to compare it with the existing condition. Mr. Henri Janssen, Ministre des Affaires Economiques, supplied us with lists showing the location and size of every factory operating in 1914. We had great difficulty in obtaining similar data for France. We also found that a committee (Comite Central Industriel de Belgique) had been formed, which included subcommittees representing every branch of industry. Four information thus gained working data were compiled.

In making an estimation of the damage incurred it was necessary to take many outside factors into consideration. It was found, for example, that the cost of replacing machinery, stock buildings and so forth was from



two to three times the prewar cost of the same items, the exact figure depending on the industry under consideration. Then, also, the economic as well as the material damage had to be considered. To my mind this economic damage is by far the greater of the two. If an organization is intact its factory can be destroyed without producing as serious an effect as if the organization itself were disbanded and its customers lost, because a new factory can be built and the organization again go to work. This dispersion of organizations took place to a large extent in both France and Belgium and has produced a rather serious condition of disorganization.

However, it is remarkable fact that France met the adverse conditions suddenly imposed upon her by the advance of the German armies over her industrial center with great intelligence, courage, and foresight and many industries were quickly reestab-

lished in the more southern departments. In August, 1914, only thirty-four per cent of the prewar employees were at work in France. This shows how greatly mobilization first affected industries. In July, 1917, there were more employees at work than before the war started, even tho the greatest part of the nation's manpower was in the field.

This is all the more remarkable when we consider that the factories in the invaded area represented about thirty per cent of the industrial output of France and that the invaded departments have furnished by far the greatest percentage of her iron ore, pig iron, and steel, coal, sugar, and textiles.

Luckily it was found that a fairly accurate estimate of the damage due to the war could be obtained by covering a rather small percentage of the plants, inasmuch as most of the capital invested was contained in a minority of the factories.

"We have heard much of 'devastated Belgium,'" writes Mr. Lamb, "but it can be definitely stated that the material damage in Belgium is very much less than the world has believed." He gives some reasons for German partiality as between French and German industrial establishments.

French industries were affected much more seriously, as Germany, through hatred of the French and the fact that she did not expect to hold much of the country, systematically wrecked everything possible. On the other hand, she expected to retail Belgium, and if only for selfish reasons had little desire to destroy her industrial potentialities beyond the removal of certain machinery and other things she needed to carry on the war.

Many Belgian factories were running continuously from 1914 to 1918. For example, candy and sugar (manufactured from sugar-beets) were obtainable in Brussels in January in considerable quantity, but it was impossible to obtain them in Paris; and another example, the chemical plants in Belgium had been in operation under German supervision. The general manager of the largest chemical firm in Belgium said, in answer to my question as to what material damage they claimed: "Captain, we can claim no material damage (degrats Materiel) whatever. We were in operation during the entire four years of German occupation."



This condition was much more prevalent than we had thought possible. Only a small part of Belgium was actually in the war-zone, and this part contained very few large factories. The material damage due to shell-fire only occurred during the first week or ten days of the German advance, and then only in a few isolated spots and in small amount. The division of the indemnity imposed upon Germany gives a clear idea of the difference between industrial damage in France and Belgium. The latter is to receive only one-eighth as much as France.

In taking material from Belgium the Germans used three methods of requisition. The first was to pay in cash for material taken. Knowing the Boche as we do, it is not surprising that this method was not popular. The second method was to give a receipt for the material showing the value, quantity, and other details. The greatest amount was taken in this way. The third method was to confiscate directly. This method, as far as I could judge, was used only where material has been hidden by the Belgians with the hope of saving it, except in the case of certain products desired for the immediate use of the army during the first month or two of the war.

But even requisitions were not as great as had been reported, for during the last years of the war Germany hypocritically tried to change public opinion; but be it to the everlasting credit of the Belgian people that they did not swallow this hypocrisy, even when it was rammed down their throats in typical German manner.

At the time I was in Belgium the country was suffering from a very serious labor situation, and from direct accounts I have received this condition has not improved much. It should be realized that the Belgian people are only beginning to recover from the first exuberance caused by their relief from the German yoke, and that while there is plenty of labor available there is still a great amount of work to be done in efficiently distributing that labor and caring for it until the country is again in a better financial condition. The Belgian working-classes seemed rather dazed. They are not going back to the war-zone in any numbers, for they can get no supplies there, but are living in cities and towns in the interior, where they often become a burden upon the Government or their neighbors.

These facts, according to the writer, make it plain that American manufacturers must not make the mistake of overestimating future business opportunities in Europe. He continues:



BIG HAWK TRIES TO IMITATE AIRPLANE IN PLEASEING THE CROWD

CATAWAUGUA, Pa.—Are birds of the air jealous of airplanes, a question mooted among naturalists, has been answered in the affirmative to hundreds of Catawaguans who witnessed the antics of a monster hawk that attempted to outdo the stunts of an aviator here.

The human flier had circled over the town nearly 15 minutes when suddenly a pair of hawks appeared at a great height close to the aviator and appeared to be, according to their position, intently watching the latter's evolutions. Then one of the birds made a dive toward the earth and in the sight of a great crowd of people who were viewing the flier's maneuvers executed a series of stunts that soon turned the attention of the spectators from the aviator to the hawk, which did the spiral glide, the loop the loop, the dip of death and many other feats.

The hawk kept up its performances as long as the aviator was in sight, and when the latter flew away the bird rejoined its mate and disappeared amid the applause of the crowd.

In fact, in my opinion, no more serious mistake could be made than to indulge in a buoyant feeling of security for the expansion of American industries if such feeling of security is chiefly based upon the future demands of our Allies.

This important point should be brought to the attention of our over-optimistic business men, who may not be informed at first hand regarding actual conditions. The statement does not imply that there is not an immediate world-demand for certain goods and raw materials, but rather that a careful study should be made of the conditions of foreign industry, labor and finance.

Another point of importance strengthening this belief, and a point perhaps not generally known in this country, is that both France and Belgium look with a feeling of antipathy and almost of horror upon any great influx of foreign products, with the corresponding outpouring of capital. France in particular, would rather go slowly and carry on reconstruction as far as possible herself with her own labor than suddenly to cast her money broadcast into foreign markets while her labor is idle, her returned soldiers are looking for work, and her finances are at a low ebb. Such a condition would do much to bring on social disorder. In fact, the French Government some time ago took definite steps to prevent this condition, a step not difficult to understand when we consider that the year of 1917 and 1918 alone showed an unfavorable balance of trade of about \$2,000,000,000 francs.

Some interesting facts were brought to light in talking to business men in France and Belgium. The great majority feel that they have spent enough money in America, and are apt to look upon us as a nation of great potentiality, but one more or less money-mad.

French business men are rather conservative in their methods in that they like to do business in the way to which they are accustomed, and prefer to deal in their own units (such, for instance, as the metric system of measurement). These may seem small points, but they are some of these little things which may do so much to make or mar business relations.

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