

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Smash the liègeoise

November 19, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

But it would be desirable in this respect, ecclesiastics and seculars, nobles and bourgeois, to unite, to make one family, for all but one public fund. and that all contribute in proportion to their property and their faculties. For this purpose a general meeting would be necessary; it would be necessary to put aside any *esprit de corps* which tends only to bring several states into a state by diversifying interests; which is the greatest of the political evils. It was quite anxious that all of them were devoting themselves to Patriotism; else then no sacrifice would be worth it, or rather there would be no sacrifice to make! Then the barriers of trade disappeared, then the equality between the poor and the wealthy increased the general prosperity.

— From a pro-Liege Revolution pamphlet (https://books.google.com/books?id=_WtAAAAAcAAJ), illustrating the frivolity of liberal nationhood and equality before the law more generally

There is nothing in life like demolishing a good Cathedral. Why not, say, Saint Lambert's Cathedral? Erected by Bishop Notger in glorious Ottonian style, the first of the prince-bishops of Liege, around the year 1000 and named after the assassinated martyr Saint Lambert to whom a basilica with his relics had already been established, it was to ultimately be torn starting in 1794.

The motion would be passed on February 19, 1793 by the French-allied Provisional Central Administration, briefly interrupted a month later by a short-lived Austrian restoration. With the return of the French, it so went that on July 28, 1794 the issue of demolishing the Cathedral was put on the agenda substantively.

The plan? Well, at first, the cathedral will be stripped methodically “for the benefit of the Republic” so-called, then an auction will complete the emptying of the ancient monument's movable property, then the demolition of the building will be completed, slowly, spreading over a long period, because the cathedral should in the interim be exploited as an open-pit mine.

On August 3, 1794, it is decreed that the lead must be scraped off as quickly as possible for the production of bullets. So too with the brass. Wood was torn off for bridge construction. A symbol of *pride and hypocrisy*, these men called the cathedral.

Leonard Defrance, at the head of this project, wrote (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120315170906/http://www.tresordeliege.be/newsite/fr/cathedrale/st-lambert-2.html>): “If the secular tyrants with their satellites have forcibly built bastilles to keep us under the yoke, the more skillful priests have had other kinds of bastilles built to chain reason: these bastilles of the Church, it is here and there that they have imperiously dominated the human species.”

By November 1794, 298,200 pounds of lead and 44,818 pounds of copper and bronze have already been delivered to the French. Paintings and ornaments were taken out. Between March 21 and June 6, 1795, there was held a public sale of the furniture of the cathedral: paintings, sculptures, organs, sacerdotal clothing, liturgical books, mausoleums, pavements, altars, once more they reassured “for the benefit of the Republic.”

By 1795, the grand altar and the walls would be crushed. Reportedly, the awful skeleton of the debris would remain for 6 years afterward until Buonaparte gave the city of Liege direct ownership of the remains in 1801.

So the lifespan of Saint Lambert’s Cathedral ended after a run of 8 centuries.

Yes, we are dealing with a familiar pattern here. The middle class isn’t happy with some specifics of electoral policy in someone’s hereditary possessions, and it must *smash*. Yes, goy, the yoke of priestcraft is what’s keeping irreducible, beautiful Reason down in the gutter!

Of course, various sections of craftsmen and burghers have long used rioting as a political tool in the context of urban class conflicts. But this was no riot, fam. It was a revolution. There was no washing the blood off their hands, for the deed done was a cold and calculated removal of a symbol of dynastic and episcopal continuity so as to bring in the Year Zero that much closer.

You want a *republic*, monsieur? Then the Prince-Bishopric of Liege was a shining example of its time.

Now, one of the oldest known charters of what is today Belgium, was the Charter of Huy (Huy being a dependency of the prince-bishopric) conferred by Bishop Theodouin in 1066 as a form of compensation for the financial aid that the burghers had offered for building fortifications.

Much of it has been lost, though it dealt extensively with issues of serfs, creditors, debts and oaths. By the surviving fragments we know (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/05cinqa.htm>) that the privileges included the right of the burghers of Huy, at the death of the bishop, to keep the castle of their city and cover the costs by the income from the city; that if a prince of Liege violates the privileges of the city, the inhabitants will be able to invoke the assistance of the duke of Lorraine and that of the other barons, and that the citizens of Huy will be obliged to follow the prince to the war only eight days after those of Liege themselves have gone into campaign.

By 1195 (other sources identify it as 1198), the prince-bishop Albert de Cuyck expanded the burghers’ privileges in a series of 23 points. (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/06sixa.htm>) These include: “The citizens of Liege owe neither tailles nor corvées; they owe military service only in the case where a fort of the principality is besieged or taken by the enemy” (1); “The bourgeois of Liege can not be attracted, against his will, to a court of justice superior to that of the aldermen of the city” (7); “When a citizen has been condemned to death for his crimes, he will be executed, but all his property will pass to his wife, his children or his relatives” (8); “No citizen of Liege, can be arrested or detained without a prior judgment of the aldermen” (14).

The very strict proprietarian standard of household inviolability is quite notable, as a contemporary historian comments (<http://www.histoire-des-belges.be/au-fil-du-temps/moyen-age/principaute-de-liege-du-9e-au-14e-siecle/les-chartes>): “The domicile is inviolable to the point where it is not permissible for the master or the aldermen to enter a house, to apprehend a thief or make a seizure, without the consent of the person who lives in it.”

Why, it sounds like that there *rule of law* I keep hearing about, in the making.

With the bourgeoisie expanding after this 1195 concession, there would begin a stratification between “grands” and “petits.” The grands were the patricians in control of the city councils as aldermen, often coming from professions as cloth merchants, money changers and iron masters. The petits were the organized craftsmen and the shopkeepers.

Between 1298 and 1384, there were various battles, skirmishes and conflicts of varying intensity that ended with 7 different treaties and privileges. An ongoing private war between the Awans and Waroux noble families related to a marriage dispute would prove to be of assistance to the playing hand of the petits advancing their interests.

Two events are the most notable, however. They are spaced 3 years apart from each other.

The first was an episode in 1312 dubbed the Mal Saint-Martin, which was supposedly influenced by a 1302 massacre in Bruges of the French garrisons by a Flemish militia who were resisting Philip the Fair’s attempts at annexation.

Now already by 1302, to contain the popular tide somehow, the aldermen had consented to sign a treaty whereby the council could henceforth, without the consent of the trades, neither establish taxes, nor incur public revenues, nor raise militia, nor grant to the prince free gifts. However, enforcement was lacking and the aldermen’s willingness to execute the provisions quite reluctant.

In 1312, it was time to appoint a new *mambour*, who was essentially the regent appointed by the chapter of Saint-Lambert during the vacant seat of the throne of St. Lambert, or the absence of the prince-bishop.

Arnould de Blankenheim was the popular choice, but the (by now declining) nobles, particularly the Warouxes, responded with an alliance with the grands for a coup. The petits would exact their vengeance like this (van Hasselt, 1844):

It was in the middle of the night. The people assembled at once in arms, and seconded by the provost of the chapter, who hastened with his canons, his partisans, and his servants, marched against his enemies. A fight began. The provost was one of the first to fall. At break of day there was still fighting but the burghers kept gaining ground. They eventually drove some of the nobles into homes where they entered to slaughter them. The rest managed to reach St. Martin’s Church, where they were soon besieged by the reinforced people of a troop of peasants and workers from the nearby coal mines. In vain did the nobles seek to maintain themselves by barricading themselves in the building. The besiegers enveloped it on all sides, making unheard of efforts to penetrate it. Seeing that it was impossible to shake the door, the furious multitude piled wood, straw, barrels of tar, and other flammable materials around the church, and the fire was cheered by the crowd. In an instant the flame burst forth from all sides, and the fire embraced the refuge of the knights, who soon became entangled in a vast inferno. The frames light up the tower crumbling and all the nobles perish under the ruins of the temple. They were two hundred.

So, after turning the nobles (along with many patrician grands) into roast beef, the petits would be rewarded with the Peace of Angleur in 1313, a radical measure for the time. It replaced familial lineage with membership of a craft as the necessary qualification for magistrates. More specifically: “They will not be admitted to the Council of the City, unless they are enrolled in a trade or in one of the 25 corporations [trades].” There would be a few kinks along the way with the older regime being temporarily restored on a few occasions, but after 1384 the principles established in Angleur were to become fixed.

This would have the effect of establishing de facto civic equality between petits and grands.

However, the definitive charter of Liege, indeed the one considered its primary law and most striking legal testament, would come 3 years later under the prince-bishop Adolph de La Marck, a loyalist to Philip the Fair. The resulting Peace of Fexhe (1316).

The Peace of Fexhe established the *Sens du Pays*, a tripartite estate-based parliament consisting of: the First Estate, represented by the clergy of the cathedral; the Second [noble] Estate, represented by fifty-two knights and a squire, to whom the counts of Looz and Chiny had joined as belligerents; the Third Estate finally, represented by the masters, aldermen and jurors of the cities of Liege, Huy, Dinant, Sint-Truiden, Tongeren, Maestricht, Fosses, Thuin and Couvin, and all the “common country” of the bishopric.

The provisions can be summarized thus:

1. Old franchises in good cities and the country are maintained;
2. No one can be arrested except by order of the aldermen. Everyone must be tried according to the law and by sentence of the aldermen’s court;
3. Confiscation of property is prohibited;
4. The laws are made by the Sens du Pays, that is to say the unanimous agreement of the Estates, assembled and composed of the representatives of the 3 orders: the clergy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie of the principality;
5. The laws and customs can only be changed by the Sense of the Country;
6. If the prince violates his commitments, his subjects grant themselves the right of resistance, but only after appeal to the College of Canons of Saint-Lambert;
7. The prince-bishop at his accession, as well as the canons, the government officers, the aldermen, the masters in time, the jurors of the communal council, the governors of the trades, are all obliged, upon their taking office, to take an oath to “hold and warder” the pact of Fexhe, emanation of the will of the country.

An implicit right to resistance makes this unusual, indeed.

By George, I think it’s a republic!

There would follow a period of resistance against the expansionist efforts of the Dukes of Burgundy. From 1581 onward, the prince-bishops of Liege would all come from Bavarian lineages, in an effort to strengthen the Counter-Reformation in an age of Schmalkaldic Leagues, Wittenberg Capitulations, Cologne Wars and other fruits of Luther rocking the Reich, and also to better serve Habsburg military interests.

Now, at this point the electoral regime in the city of Liege itself worked on an indirect basis, as established by the Regiment of Heinberg in 1424. It provided for 22 non-removable commissioners, including 6 who were appointed by the prince and 16 who were elected by the 32 parishes of the city. These 22 commissioners had to designate annually a bourgeois elector in each of the 32 trades of the city, while the bourgeois had in their turn to elect the 2 masters in time (bourgmestres) — the diarchy.

No surprise, the iron law of oligarchy being what it is, the 32 electors were easily bought off and managed. In 1603, this would change when Ernest of Bavaria instituted a more direct system cutting off the commissioners and substituting them with a selection process involving the 32 guild corporations of the city. In 1613, Ferdinand of Bavaria would reverse this and go back to the Heinberg system of commissioners.

As conflict played out on the streets between loyalists (chiroux) and democrats (grignoux), Maximilian Henry of Bavaria promulgated the Regulation of 1684, the governing document of Liege (and only the city of Liege proper) for the next century. It partially abrogated provisions of the Peace of Fexhe. A somewhat complicated system (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/11onzef.htm>), it would nevertheless ensure peace until 1789.

It worked like this: there were 16 chambers representing all 32 trades and all burghers in general, who were now required to join one of them to be represented. Each chamber consisted of 36 persons: 20 patrician grands of “ancient lineage,” 10 merchants and 6 artisans. They all serve lifetime tenures and are initially appointed by the prince-bishop; upon death or resignation, the remaining members present the prince-bishop with the name of a new candidate.

These 16 chambers meet once a year. They will each choose 3 persons in their midst by lot. Of these 3, the first designated by the ballot, will be elector of the mayors; the second, a member of the city council; the third, without charge or employment.

There follows a system based on successive lots and eliminations:

The election of mayors will take place on Sunday after St. Lambert; it will take place in the following manner: in each room, the lot will designate three persons who will be led by the commissary at the town hall; there, fate will designate among these three, one to be elector of the burgomaster and another to be communal councilor; the sixteen electors will designate among the members of the sixteen chambers (excepted) three candidates who have the required qualifications; among these three, fate will designate one of the two bourgmestres; the prince, on his side, will also present three candidates taken from the sixteen chambers, and the fate will designate among these three the second burgomaster; the sixteen communal councilors of the chambers will be reduced to ten by lot; the sixteen municipal councilors appointed by the prince and taken from the sixteen chambers will also be reduced to ten by means of fate; these twenty, with the two burgomasters, will form the communal council; no one may be a second time either elector of a bourgmestre or bourgmestre or communal councilor until after an interval of four years...

It's intricate, certainly, but...

*By George, it's **still** a republic!*

There was, however, one crucial oversight.

They forgot to include a constitutional protection of human rights.

I mean, how can you possibly omit this key component unless one is a fool or a tyrant?

Steadily, the Enlightenment creeped in (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/12douze.htm>) to Liege.

The big break for Jacobinism would arrive with the election of François-Charles de Velbruck as prince-bishop in 1772. Although his affiliations with Freemasonry have not been conclusively proven, virtually all of his contemporaries assumed it.

The historian Georges de Froidcourt reports that in 1780, an indiscreet traveler entered the palace of Liege in the absence of the prince and found, to his astonishment, in the office and in the bedroom, a number of selected books: literature, political economy as well as agriculture; by the bedside he discovered Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois*. When Velbruck had his portrait painted in the costume of grand pageantry, he placed with a book in his hand: Mirabeau's *L'Ami des hommes*.

Besides suppressing the Jesuits (of course — a more interesting exercise is to figure out who *didn't*), he embarked on a radical reform of public schooling that also integrated girls' education. He founded free schools for boys and girls in Liège and in several towns and villages across the country. Having seen how neglected the education of poor children is, in 1775 he founded a vast public library in which he had the books of the libraries of the city as well as those of the Jesuit colleges removed throughout the country collected and he required the printers to provide free of charge for this library a copy of each printed work under a grant.

He thought it essential to give the poor girls a sort of education that puts them in a position to educate their children if they one day become mothers: it is not a question of multiplying convents, "There are enough good nuns," he says, "and not enough good mothers; the great virtues, instead of being confined in cloisters, must also serve to sanctify the world."

(Apparently, a necessary prerequisite to good motherhood involves reading Voltaire.)

In 1779, Volbruck would help start the Society of Emulation, where he "deals personally with the statutes and the organization, bases prizes of eloquence and literature, proposes topics of competition, attends the public sessions where the ideas of the Encyclopedists are developed, he listens without skipping the speeches and the poems where one proclaims the sovereignty of the people, the love of liberty and equality, the hatred of tyranny, political despotism and religious intolerance."

(In 1794, with the revolution nearing its triumphal closure, a member of the Central Administration would report that Velbruck's portrait was the only one not to be vandalized: "No portrait of Velbruck was attacked; the images of Ferdinand and Maximilian of Bavaria have been struck with the knife of vengeance, that of Velbruck is still intact and seems to say to the people of Liege that he loved so much: 'I was a prince, but I was an honest man.'")

In 1784 following Volbruck's death, his successor César-Constantin-François de Hoensbroeck stepped in, much less enthusiastic about this Enlightenment business, being a strict Gallican.

Now, Hoensbroeck ended up doing something *heinous*.

He did something *reprehensible*.

He did something *unforgivable*.

He...

closed down a gambling house in Spa in June 1787.

Now, you might think this is something trivial, but dammit man, you don't understand, if I can't play cards and smoke my fags at a fine establishment, I have no choice but to overturn a diocese and proclaim a republic. That's how it works.

Deprived of a place to win fat stacks and with the Bastille being stormed two years later as a catalyst, the revolution was on, baby.

The message in the Gazette de Liege for August 20, 1789 included (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/12douzec.htm>): "You must have witnessed this revolution to get an idea of it. Never, perhaps, have the feelings of such universal glee burst with so much true patriotism. Divisions and opposed parties united, to form only a people of friends and brothers."

Did it now?

Come September 1789, we get the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen pour le Franchimont* (<http://www.senlime.be/si/Franchim.html>) following the seizure of the city hall and citadel and Hoensbroeck's exile, which states in part: "All men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can only be based on the common good," and that "The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man; every citizen can therefore speak, write, print freely, except to answer for the abuse of this freedom in the cases determined by the law."

But, most strikingly of all, is the dogmatic final statement: "Any society in which the guarantee of rights is not assured, nor the separation of powers determined, *has no constitution*." [emphasis mine]

As it turns out, all those century-old charters amounted to nothing without an explicit separation of executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Either way, this actually made Liege a republic a good couple of years before France.

Hoensbroeck is restored by the Austrians in January 1791, but died on June 3, 1792. His successor, the last prince-bishop of Liege, François-Antoine-Marie de Méan, lasted about 5 months until General Dumouriez defeated the Austrians at the Battle of Jemappes and entered Liege by November 28, issuing the following proclamation:

Brave liegois, a people worthy of liberty, a fraternal people of the French, and soon yours; the enemy is busy on your frontiers. You have no fortifications to defend your homes, but you have indomitable hearts and arms of iron. May your numerous young people be formed into battalions, mad with the flags of liberty. Join us, we will fall down the ramparts of Maastricht, and let us march on to the Rhine... All the peoples between this river and the Meuse must be joined to you, formed by alliance, and conquered. I count for twelve or fifteen thousand citizens. You have promised them to me.

Jean-Nicolas Bassenge, one of the chief architects of the revolution liegeoise, goes on to draft a report in 1793 for joining Liege to France, writing (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/12douzel.htm>):

We repeat, it is up to the nation, by expressing its wish, by giving itself to France, to instruct the administrators-general of the country to discuss these questions which concern the salvation of the citizens. France herself will feel that justice requires us to fulfill above all these sacred obligations. The Liegeois, by bringing to the Republic, in the heart of the Convention, the wish of all the hearts freely given in the primary assemblies, will expose to these representatives of the first people of the world, that they have accomplished this duty so dear. France will applaud; she will see that the Liegeois too is worthy of liberty; that they know how to be free and just, since, first, they have followed the movement which the French have impressed upon the universe; since, first, they made their efforts to set off on their footsteps towards the temple of liberty.

To be French, to be German, to be Liegeoise? Bassenge and the “patriots,” for all their pretense of liberty and equality, acted no differently from a Croatian high noble savor electing its next king after a succession crisis (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election_in_Cetin). After all, such problems are universal.

Another brief restoration follows after the Austrians push back the French at the Battle of Neerwinden. By 1794, however, the French conclusively recapture the prince-bishopric, and enact the revolutionary tribunals (<http://perso.infonie.be/liege06/12douzeu.htm>) for prosecuting the so-called “enemies of the French people,” a category which included anyone who refused to accept their assignats (paper money).

The National Convention annexed Liege in 1795, permanently ending its separate identity as a state, and beginning their work on destroying Saint Lambert’s Cathedral as was described in the introduction of this essay. Barbarism took precedence, because the taste of the middle classes for Voltaire, Rousseau and gambling houses could not be satiated.

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2. [dissentingsociologist](#) says:

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They won the rights of Man, but didn’t read the fine print that says you only win the rights at the cost of your liberties. Ha ha, serves them right.

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