Broqueville, Charles Marie Pierre Albert, Baron de

By Laurence van Ypersele

Charles de Broqueville (1860-1940) with Henri Clooten (1849-1925)
Charles de Broqueville (on the right), chief of the Belgian government during the First World War, photographed with General Henri Clooten (on the left).
Agence Rol: Le baron de Broqueville ministre de la guerre belge en conversation avec le général Clooten, n.p., 1914; source: Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rol 43182, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6932598r.
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Broqueville, *Charles* Marie Pierre Albert, Baron de
Politician, member of the Catholic Party
Born 04 December 1860 in Mol (province of Antwerp), Belgium
Died 05 September 1940 in Brussels, Belgium

Summary

Charles de Broqueville, chief of the Belgian government during the First World War, acted as liaison between the king and the Belgian government. He supported the king in his attempts to obtain peace and his efforts to break free from the Allies.

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Political Office

A member of the Catholic Party, Charles de Broqueville (1860-1940) started his political career as a provincial council member from 1886 to 1892. Subsequently, he was elected as a member of the House of Representatives from 1892 to 1919 and of the Senate from 1919 to 1936. Most notably, he occupied a number of ministerial responsibilities: minister of railways, post and telegraphs (1910-1911), head of government (1911-1918), and simultaneously minister of railways, post and telegraphs (1911-1912), of war (1912-1917), of foreign affairs (1917) and of national reconstruction (1917-1918), as well as minister of home affairs (1918-1919).

World War I

On the eve of the First World War, the Catholic Party, dominated by its conservative and antimilitary wing, had been in power for thirty years. Still, de Broqueville, who was aware of the international situation and of the risks run by Belgium in case of a crisis, did not hesitate to repudiate his electoral promises of 1912 and actively support the king in his efforts to reinforce the army: in 1913 he obtained the vote for the generalized military service, reorganized the high command and increased the arms supply.

But it was too late. On 4 August 1914, he enlarged his Catholic government, giving two liberals, Paul Hymans (1865-1941) and Eugène Goblet d'Alviella (1846-1925), and one socialist, Emile Vandervelde (1866-1938), positions as ministers of state, in order to have a non-official government of national union (it would be official by January 1916). Confronted with the rapid progression of German troops, the government followed the king and the army to Antwerp. In October 1914 the government found shelter in Le Havre, whereas Albert I, King of the Belgians (1875-1934) settled in La Panne, close to his army.

Throughout the conflict, de Broqueville acted as liaison between the two. He supported the king in his attempts to obtain peace and his efforts to break free from the Allies. Furthermore, de Brocqueville protected Albert I with the ministerial countersignature. However, the two men had divergent opinions: the king considered that as commander-in-chief he did not need the signature, whereas de Broqueville held the opposite view. Therefore, in May 1918 the king replaced him as head of government with Gérard Cooreman (1852-1926). Yet, in the very same month, de Broqueville was appointed a minister of state. He was given the title of baron in 1919 and count in 1920.

After the War

After the Great War, de Broqueville served as Minister of National Defense from 1926 to 1932, of agriculture in 1932 and Prime Minister from 1932 to 1934. He died in Brussels on 5 September 1940 at the beginning of the second German occupation. Louis de Lichtervelde (1889-1959), his secretary, drew an excellent portrait of the man:

de Broqueville had a quick intelligence, an infallible memory, an innate tact both in political and social life; he had to a rare extent an acute sense of political manoeuvre; he handled men with a consummate skill and was able to address everyone in his own language so as to convince or seduce them. He had a taste for authority and the sense of State. He advised his king with great independence and with absolute devotion.[1]

Laurence van Ypersele, Catholic University of Louvain

Notes

1. de Lichtervelde, Louis: Charles de Broqueville, in: Biographie Nationale de Belgique, t. XXIX, Bruxelles, H. Thiry-Van Buggenhoudt, 1956-1957, pp. 376-377. ↑

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Citation

Laurence van Ypersele: Broqueville, Charles Marie Pierre Albert, Baron de, in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer D. Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10068

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Metadata

Regional Section(s)
Western Europe > Belgium

Thematic Section(s)
Power

Subjects
Politics, law > Institutions > Governments
Politics, law > Institutions > Monarchy
Politics, law > Institutions > Parties, confessional
Politics, law > International relations > Exile, politics

Author Keywords
Exile Government; Le Havre; Ministerial countersignature

GND Subject Headings
De Broqueville, Charles

LC Subject Headings
Broqueville, Charles, baron de, 1860-1940

Rameau Subject Headings
Broqueville, Charles (1860-1940

Key Person(s)

Vandervelde, Emile; Hymans, Paul; Cooreman, Gérard; d'Alviella, Eugène Goblet; Lichtervelde, Louis de; Albert I, King of the Belgians

Key Location(s)

Brussels; Le Havre; Mol

Title

Broqueville, Charles Marie Pierre Albert, Baron de

Author(s)

Laurence van Ypersele

Article Type

Encyclopedic Entry

Classification Group

Persons