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**A failed attempt to build a modern state. On the office spaces of the Belgian ministries during the 1930s**

*General outline of the research*

My PhD research (expected to be finished in 2016) deals with the architecture of the administrative office complexes built for – and by – the Belgian government, 1918-1970. While ministerial office buildings have rarely received the attention of architectural historians, art historians, and urban historians, my research project attempts to analyse these buildings as significant ‘markers’ of state power in the urban landscape. A large part of the Brussels city centre, for instance, is dedicated to government office complexes – and to this end, complete residential quarters have been demolished. Up until now, however, very little was known about the architectural ambitions of the commissioners (i.e. the ministries), the architects, and the engineers of these complexes. It is clear, however, that the office buildings constitute the (often neglected) ‘efficient’ component of the state apparatus, while other building types – such as houses of parliament, pavilions at world fairs, state-run museums, courthouses, etc. – constitute the explicitly ‘representative’ component (which has benefited from much more historical research). It is my aim to analyse the ways in which ‘efficient’ government architecture could also carry a representative connotation: after all, these buildings helped to establish the popular image of a ‘modern’ and ‘efficient’ welfare state. Moreover, I want to analyse the discourses on ‘rational’ administrative organisation, which were propagated by many Western countries during the interwar era, and which influenced the architectural conception of many government office buildings – thereby giving my research a transnational, comparative dimension. In general terms, I hope that my research will contribute to our understanding of the process of ‘tertiarisation’ (as it is called in French) of the 20th century European city. In what follows below, I will give a brief summary of my research results concerning the Belgian ‘administrative architecture’ during the 1930s, focussing mainly on (plans for) the interiors of the offices.
Introduction

On ne pourrait assez insister sur l’importance du cadre matériel au point de vue du travail et de la situation morale des agents. Pour bien travailler, il faut travailler dans la clarté et dans la joie. […] Choisir un habitat convenable est aussi pour l’État une question de prestige. Les ‘Bureaux’ sont pour le public la manifestation quotidiennne du régime: il confond l’administration avec le cadre qui l’entoure, et a une tendance à mépriser un État qui vit paressseusement dans un logis poussiéreux. La notion de la dignité et de la qualité du Service public […] est étouffée par un cadre vétuste, mal ordonné, souvent malpropre. En vivant médiocrement, l’État se détruit lui-même, par il affaiblit, chez le citoyen, le sens de la grandeur et de la vitalité de la Nation.¹

With these resolute words, the high-ranked civil servant Louis Camu concluded his final official report on the Belgian ministerial office buildings. At the time the report was released – in January 1940 –, Camu had been investigating the ‘efficiency’ and the ‘rationality’ of all public administrations for more than three years. In October 1936, he was appointed as ‘Royal Commissioner for Administrative Reform’: a new function, created on request of the centre-right Prime Minister Paul van Zeeland. Between 1935 and 1937, Van Zeeland was in charge of two consecutive governments of ‘national unity’, which were supported by catholics, liberals, and socialists. Amidst a raging economic crisis, and confronted with the rise of domestic fascist organisations, Van Zeeland and his coalition partners were determined to strengthen Belgian state power: while the democratic institutions were be kept formally intact (at least on the short run), the executive and the state’s administrative services were to be given more autonomy and scope. This way, Van Zeeland attempted to find a middle ground between outright authoritarianism and ‘impotent’ parliamentarism.² Within this constellation, technocratic expertise was valued highly: Van Zeeland, for instance, appointed the mining engineer Max-Léo Gérard as an extraparliamentary Finance Minister. Although he had a downright conservative political agenda, Gérard perceived himself as ‘un ingénieur chez les ministres’, and he devoted much time to the reorganisation of his department, in order to make it more ‘efficient’.³ In a similar vein, Van Zeeland’s Minister of Public Works (and later on Finance Minister), the internationally well-known Marxist theoretician Hendrik de Man, was a strong advocate a state-led (or so-called ‘planist’) economy, which was to be directed by largely autonomous ‘commissioners’.⁴

Louis Camu, however, was probably the most outspoken technocrat of all – and actually the only one in late-1930s Belgium who succeeded in getting some aspects of his ideas durably realized.⁵ At first, his task was rather limited in scope: as Royal Commissioner, Camu was charged with investigating the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of all official administrative services, particularly those of the ministries. Moreover, he was asked to suggest measures for improvement. From 1938 onwards, after two changes of government, Camu’s powers virtually surpassed those of a minister, as he became responsible for controlling and even enforcing the implementation of his reform plans. This major task, which fitted perfectly with his extraordinary personal ambitions, was only brought to a halt because of the outbreak of the Second World War. Even though he was labelled a Liberal, Camu did

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³ G. Kurgan-Van Hentenyk, Max-Léo Gérard. Un ingénieur dans la cité (1879-1955), Brussels 2010, 156.
⁵ For a general outline on Camu’s work as Royal Commissioner, see: P.-O. de Broux, ‘De Camu à Copernic. L’évolution de la fonction publique en Belgique’, in Administration Publique (Trimestriel), 2005 (3-4), 158-177.
not possess a pronounced political profile. Instead, he had a ‘profound distrust of politics’,\(^6\) and during his mandate, he repeatedly expressed sharp criticism against his ministerial colleagues – whom he considered to be insufficiently receptive towards his proposals for administrative reform. These proposals fell apart in two main categories. On the one hand, Camu successfully sought to improve the recruitment procedures for civil servants, by imposing mandatory examinations, and by standardizing the rules for advancement – all with the aim of eliminating nepotism and arbitrariness. On the other hand, the Royal Commissioner wanted to ‘rationalise’ the working methods in the state administration, by eliminating superfluous services and employees, and by enhancing the performance levels of those remaining. As becomes obvious from the quotation above, Camu attached particular importance to the ‘cadre matériel’ of the civil servants: not only because he believed that modern office rooms and equipment were of supreme importance for the well-functioning of the public services, but also because he saw such offices as indispensable embodiments of ‘prestige’ and ‘grandeur’. According to Camu, these two qualities were totally foreign to the Belgian civil service – and consequently, they were also foreign to the nation itself. However, Camu’s proposals concerning the office spaces would largely remain unexecuted.

![Louis Camu (1905-1976) in the 1930s](image)

In this paper, I will look more deeply into Camu’s reformist agenda for the offices of the Belgian civil servants between 1936 and 1940. Three questions serve as the underpinning of my enquiry. First, I seek to investigate Camu’s urge for renewal: why did he consider the existing ‘bureaux’ to be intolerable? Second, I will explore the types of office space that were proposed by Camu and his small team of collaborators, as well as the motives for these choices. Lastly, I aim to retrace the intellectual influences behind Camu’s proposals. Hence, I will primarily shed light on the discourses concerning office spaces, while stressing the existence of close ties between those discourses on the one side, and idealized – or even utopian – visions of the ‘perfect state’ on the other. Up until now, these ties have been largely neglected by historians of architecture and political historians, as most research (both in Belgium and elsewhere) tends to focus on those examples of state-(sponsored) architecture which are explicitly designed to be ‘representative’ from the outside – such as houses of parliament, law courts,

state-run museums, county halls, and so on. As will become clear, however, (the interior of) ministerial office buildings could equally be a vector of representativeness.

**Administrative ‘slums’**

When Camu’s *Commissariat Royal* started activities in 1936, its offices were located in the *Shell Building*, a modernist office complex in the city centre of Brussels. This building, designed by the Belgian architects Dumont and Van Goethem, had been erected at the beginning of the 1930s by petrol multinational Shell, which – following a common practice at that time – put one wing of the building out to lease. This way, Camu found himself in the remarkable company of co-tenants such as the renowned Belgian architect Henry van de Velde, who then worked as ‘artistic counsellor’ for the Belgian Ministry of Public Works. Another tenant was the Brussels-based *Institut International des Sciences Administratives* (IISA), which was founded in 1930, and devoted itself to ‘the study of public administration with a unitary and all-inclusive vision of the phenomena investigated’, thereby dwelling upon expertise from lawyers, economists, psychologists, political scientists, etcetera. With its hyper-advanced technical equipment and its ‘rational’ interior layout, the Shell Building drew attention from the architecture magazine *Bâtir*, which dedicated an entire issue to the edifice in 1934. The editors of the magazine observed that the air in the building was filtered, humidified, and heated, according to the seasonal needs, while the office spaces themselves were separated from each other by ‘des cloisons susceptibles d’être déplacées chaque fois que s’imposera une répartition nouvelle’. Thanks to the large number of outside windows, all employees could benefit from ‘un maximum de lumière’; through glazed partitions, daylight could penetrate into the internally-situated corridors.

From this modernist vantage point, Camu and his collaborators would investigate all aspects of the Belgian public service – and there is few doubt that the design of the Shell Building (as well as the above-mentioned tenants) served as an important source of inspiration for Camu’s own proposals on the office architecture of the Belgian government.

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9 *Bâtir*, 1934 (2).
In 1937, Camu released his first official report about the Belgian ministerial office buildings.\textsuperscript{10} Having studied political sciences and economics, the Royal Commissioner possessed no \textit{a priori} expertise concerning office management. In his report, however, Camu regularly referred to texts of ‘administrative scientists’, probably with the aim of associating his own work with the aura of objectivity and irrefutability these ‘scientists’ claimed\textsuperscript{11} – although Camu did recognise that good administrative practices had less to do with ‘science’ than with ‘\textit{un certain nombre de règles de bon sens}’.\textsuperscript{12} One of the administrative scientists mentioned in the report, was Camu’s fellow-countryman Louis Rigaux, a high-ranked civil servant at the Ministry of Communication. Within transnational networks on administrative expertise, Rigaux was an important figure: for the sixth IISA conference in Warsaw (1936), for instance, he had prepared a memorandum on ‘\textit{la rationalisation dans les administrations et entreprises publiques}’, which partly dealt with office spaces – and which was explicitly praised by the Swiss delegate Oskar Leimgruber.\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, Camu’s report was strongly influenced by the French \textit{ingénieur-conseil en administration} Paul Planus, who had recently published a booklet with the meaning title \textit{L’organisation matérielle d’un ministère}.\textsuperscript{14} Finally, for the architectural conception of his plans, Camu made an appeal to the architects Jean-Jules Eggericx and Raphaël Verwilghen, who were two of the most renowned Belgian modernists during the interwar period – as well as adherents of a Taylorism-based functionalism, and \textit{protégés} of Henry van de Velde.\textsuperscript{15}

Camu’s report opened with the constellation that the majority of the circa 160 office buildings which were in use by the Belgian government, had to be abandoned. For reasons of historicity, only a handful of 18\textsuperscript{th}-century edifices in the Rue de la Loi – the Belgian equivalent of ‘Downing Street’ in the UK – could be kept in use as official residences for the ministers, or as offices for the ministerial cabinets. Camu also took a benevolent stance towards the Ministry of Railways building, which dated from 1894, and was one of the last major office complexes the Belgian government had constructed for its own administrations. The five-storey building had a comb-shaped floor plan, which maximized the amount of sunlight that could penetrate into the offices, and which also facilitated natural ventilation – thereby meeting the typical demands of late-19\textsuperscript{th} century \textit{hygiénistes}. Using the Ministry of Railways building as an example, Eggericx and Verwilghen stated (in an internal memo to Camu) that Belgium had been ‘\textit{un des premiers pays continentaux qui comprit la nécessité d’une conception rationnelle et utile de l’immobilier de bureaux}’.\textsuperscript{16} However, if this was true, it was also clear that the country had fallen victim to the dialectics of progress, since the 1937 report diagnosed many of the other office buildings with numerous shortcomings. Camu used a floor plan of an edifice used by the Ministry of Finances as a generic example to illustrate this point (see image below): the corridors were ‘\textit{obscures et non aérés}’, the courtyards were ‘ombres’, the office windows were of the ‘\textit{minima}’ type, the number of toilets was insufficient, there were redundant ‘\textit{cheminées décoratives}’, and – last but not least – most office rooms were conceived as ‘\textit{bureaux individuels}’. In a word: most office buildings were ‘\textit{vétustes}’, not only because they were insufficiently maintained, but chiefly because they had not been conceived as office buildings in the first place. After all, ministerial offices were often located in

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{10} L. Camu,\textit{ Rapport sur les bâtiments des administrations centrales de l’État}, Brussels 1937.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Compte rendu du \textit{Ve\textsuperscript{em}} Congrès International des Sciences Administratives, Warsaw 1936, 241 and 586-619.
\item\textsuperscript{14} P. Planus, \textit{L’organisation rationnelle d’un ministère}, Paris 1936.
\item\textsuperscript{16} AAM, Records of architect J.-J. Eggericx, inv. nr. 296 (\textit{Rapport concernant la construction eventuelle d’immeubles de bureaux pour les administrations de l’État}, 12.04.1937).
\end{itemize}
former bourgeois mansions, which could barely accommodate around twenty civil servants each. Many of these buildings were bought or rented by the government on an ad hoc basis: every time a new department was created or existing services expanded (which happened continuously), new premises were occupied.17 Ironically, even the fact that Camu had his own office in the Shell Building, was a manifestation of this phenomenon – although it was rather exceptional for the Belgian government to rent space in such a state-of-the-art building.

In order to enhance the cogency of his argument, Camu provided some additional examples of the Belgian ‘taudis administratifs’. Some offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, for instance, were located in a former café, where ‘les accessoires de ce commerce – évier, pompe, etc., ne furent même pas enlevés’. An even more notorious situation could be encountered in a building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where sixty civil servants had only one toilet at their disposal.18 One of Camu’s collaborators, André Molitor, would later recall in his memoirs that this particular toilet was the only place foreign diplomats could use when they had expressed ‘le désir de s’isoler un instant’.19 Camu’s criticisms were echoed by some newspapers: in the Flemish weekly Elckerlyc, a certain dr. Bertijn described the air in the overly heated, unventilated ministerial offices as being ‘saturated with black, cheap, breath-taking tobacco smoke’, causing headaches and dizziness. Although complaints about

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17 Camu, Rapport sur les bâtiments, passim.
18 Ibid., 18-19.
unsanitary working conditions were a topos that was reiterated by many office reformers in Western countries. Bertijn went so far to even observe signs of degeneration among the civil servants:

Every time the weather gets colder, [...] the ‘bureaucrats’ are severely affected. All of them have at least caught a cold, while many have the flu. Hear those unfortunates coughing, sneezing, hawking, spitting, ... on the offices desks and the files, which go through all hands, and are even leafed through by the Minister and his secretaries. [...] Consequently, after years of enfeeblement, the civil servants have turned into a corps of consumptive patients. Slowly, because of illness and all kinds of psychological reasons, they develop an aversion towards their office. [...] Those wretches cannot stand each other any more. They become timid, distrustful, depressed. [...] They start longing for seclusion and solitude. This is why they hide themselves so often behind screens, behind piles of books and files, in order to be left alone, and to avoid the mocking gazes of their colleaugues – be these real or imaginary...

**Discipline by means of rationality**

With his verbose critique, Bertijn touched upon another issue that was tackled prominently in Camu’s report: the lack of surveillance. The exclusive use of ‘bureaux individuels’ in the office buildings made it virtually impossible for the ‘chefs de bureau’ to control their subaltern personnel efficiently, while it also impeded the development of ‘peer pressure’: ‘Le rendement d’un agent isolé ne subissant ni le contrôle de ses collègues ni de celui de ses chefs est fatalement diminué.’ In such circumstances, ‘les volontés les plus tenaces fléchissent, l’activité se lasse [et] les mieux intentionnés perdent courage’ – after which ‘des habitudes de paresse et de laisser-aller’ would inevitably take over. As a solution, Camu proposed the exclusive deployment of ‘vaste bureaux à cloisons vitrées, de manière à permettre un contrôle effectif.’ While this plea for so-called ‘open offices’ (i.e. large, un compartmentalized spaces) was obviously in line with the then-current practices of large private corporations in many countries, it was also consistent with Louis Rigaux’ recommendations at the 1936 IISA conference, which advocated the construction of ‘locaux de travail en commun’, designed for providing ‘un certain confort – non le luxe’. However, Camu’s rather obstinate emphasis on the necessity of supervision seemed to have been particularly inspired by the work of Paul Planus, who had considered the ‘groupement des employés dans de grands bureaux’ as ‘fondamentale’. (For that matter, both Camu and Planus were tributary to the hugely influential work of the French administrative scientist Henri Fayol, who had stressed the need for constant supervision in his famous reference book *Administration industrielle et générale*, which was first published in 1918.) In his report, Camu cited a passage from Planus’ study, which fiercely rejected individual offices:

*Sous prétexte de travaux personnels à assurer ou de visites à recevoir, les chefs de tous grades sont installés dans des bureaux individuels, et le personnel exécutant est complètement livré à lui-même. Il y a là une conception absolument fausse de la dignité qui s’attache au grade. C’est une des raisons principales de la faible production d’un personnel recruté pourtant avec

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21 F. Bertijn, ‘Hygiënische wantoestanden in de rijksbesturen’, in *Elckerlyc*, 1938 (22) and 1938 (30) [translated from Dutch].
23 *Compte rendu du VIème Congrès*, 602-603.
beaucoup de soin, mais qui est placé dans des conditions favorisant par trop la flânerie ou des occupations extra-administratives.  

This postulate, which was clearly grounded on an ‘empirical’ objectification of a deeply held distrust vis-à-vis subaltern clerks, had a logical consequence: the future offices of the higher-ranked employees also had to be equipped with glazed partitions. ‘Les chefs de service ou les chefs de bureau’, Camu stated, ‘ne seront séparés de leurs agents que par une cloison vitrée’. Interestingly, while ‘le personnel de direction’ was duly entitled to individual offices, these too had to be equipped with ‘cloisons vitrées permettront un contrôle de leur activité’. At this point, a certain degree of vagueness invades Camu’s discourse. While it is obvious that the members of direction had to be able to see their lower-ranked employees, who was supposed to control them? Those few civil servants who were ranked even higher (such as the secretary-general), or maybe even the minister himself? While this indeed might have been the intention, Camu’s texts still provide another clue. In a report on the recruitment procedures for the civil service, the Royal Commissioner stated that ‘les hauts fonctionnaires doivent constituer un véritable corps où règne un esprit de dévouement à la chose publique; ils seront ainsi ce qu’ils doivent être: les piliers de l’État et les modèles du civisme’. In other words: the top-ranked civil servants were supposed to be the only employees with a fully internalized work ethic, as opposed to the lower-ranked clerks, who needed constant supervision to enforce a work ethic upon them. Camu did seem to assume, however, that the top-ranked civil servants could act as uplifting ‘role models’ for the other employees. Thereby, he ‘democratized’ the ideal of surveillance: while the office labour in the planned new offices would remain organized along strict hierarchical lines, high-ranked civil servants would not receive privileges when it came to the ‘transparency’ of their personal office spaces.

Using a noted concept from Michel Foucault’s study Surveiller et punir, one can discern that Camu had a marked desire for the unremitting presence of multiple ‘disciplinary gazes’. In this, Camu was hardly an exception: from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards (up until the emergence of a ‘human relations’ inspired discourse on office management after the Second World War), many office managers were obsessed with ‘surveillance’ and ‘control’. For instance, on a conference about ‘le rendement du travail de bureau’, which was held in Brussels in 1941 (and which was opened by Camu, who had – by then – gained a reputation as a full-blown ‘administrative expert’ himself), each of the circa fifteen speakers emphasized the need for monitoring and observing employees, with the aim of improving efficiency levels and reducing overhead costs. However, Camu’s 1937 report was not only preoccupied with cutting costs, since for the author, there was also a political rationale to the ‘disciplinary gaze’. This stance is best exemplified by Camu’s proposition that even the members of the public had to partake in the ‘panoptic’ office management regime:

Les services en contact fréquent avec le public devront être installés au rez-de-chaussée dans des salles à guichets qui ne seront séparées de lui que par des cloisons vitrées. Il est inutile de

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26 Planus, L’organisation rationelle, 30; Camu, Rapport sur les bâtiments, 19.  
28 In Germany, a similar deduction has been made by: H.-J. Fritz, Menschen in Büroarbeitsräumen, München 1982, 97.  
31 Le rendement du travail de bureau. Rapport présenté à la journée d’étude du 18 octobre 1941, Brussels 1941.
This way, Camu foreshadowed a link – which was at once functional and symbolic – between architectural transparency and democratic transparency. This link would internationally come to the fore after the Second World War, mainly in the context of parliament buildings – with Hans Schwippert’s design for the West-German Bundeshaus (1949) as the first prominent example.

For the architectural elaboration of his proposals, Camu’s assisting architects Eggericx and Verwilghen proposed the construction of a large, new office complex in a functional modernist idiom, in which all ministerial offices could be centralized (see image below). For both the internal and the external appearance of this so-called ‘cité administrative’, Eggericx and Verwilghen drew heavily upon Ernst Neufert’s architectural design manual Bauentwurfslehre, which had first appeared in 1936, and which had also been pre-published by the German periodical Bauwelt (1935). At the instigation of Eggericx and Verwilghen, a series of images from Neufert’s chapter ‘Bürobauten’ was integrally reprinted in Camu’s report as an example worthy of imitation – including a scheme for a standardized ‘tiefen Büroraum mit erhöhtem Lichteinfall, lichttechnisch günstig geformter Decke und Glaszwischenwände’ (see image below). The floor plan and the façades of Eggericx’s and Verwilghen’s own design for the cité administrative, on their turn, were strongly modelled after the internationally acclaimed I.G.-Farben-Haus in Frankfurt (built by architect Hans Poelzig between 1928 and 1931, and equally depicted in Neufert’s design manual). While Camu’s ideas on office management were principally shaped by the work of French authors (such as Planus and Fayol), Germany was clearly the model country when it came to office architecture. Thus, Belgium’s traditional self-image as a country where ‘Germanic’ and ‘Romance’ spheres of culture converged, was confirmed by its office planners.

Bird’s-eye view of the planned cité administrative. Drawing by Eggericx and Verwilghen from the 1937 report

Technocracy vs. tradition and politics

Camu’s 1937 report was a programmatic document, written with the aim of securing the necessary funds for the erection of the *cité administrative*. Strangely enough, its publication barely elicited any parliamentary discussion (neither in the positive, nor the negative sense): a reaction which seemed to confirm Camu’s critique that the Belgian political class had always been indifferent towards the subject of ministerial office buildings. However, the government did provide the Royal Commissariat with the financial means to work out a comprehensive preliminary design for the complex. In January 1940, Camu released a second (and last) report on the state offices, which contained a series of drawings by Eggericx and Verwilghen, including a floor plan and an axonometry of a prototypical office wing (see images below). Here, one can see how Camu’s original plea for an office layout enabling an all-encompassing panopticism was subtly diverted on a couple of points. The lower-ranked employees were indeed located in ‘collective’ offices, but these were certainly not the vast ‘open offices’ used in many private companies, since the smallest one was destined for hardly four clerks, while the largest one could only accommodate sixteen. It is possible that the plea for open offices from the first report had aroused opposition from the worker’s unions, causing Camu to minimize his schemes: after all, already in 1937, the Royal Commissioner had suspected that the implementation of open offices would provoke serious ‘résistances de la part des administrations’. Nevertheless, the drawings from the 1940 report did feature glazed partitions, enabling the ‘*chef de bureau*’ – who received a personal office – to oversee his subordinates. This head clerk was then supervised by the adjacently located ‘*sous-directeur*’, who was – on his turn – supervised by the ‘*directeur*’, all of them having offices of equal size. This way, the offices formed a ‘panoptic’ enfilade, which closely resembled a spatially laid-out organisation chart. Yet, one functionary was exempt from taking a place in this enfilade: the ‘*inspecteur-général*’, who did not only receive an office that was half as large as the other’s, but whose office was also unequipped with glazed partitions. Hence, it seems that Camu’s ‘democratic’ ideals from 1937 had been subjected to a reality check: an inspector-general clearly could not be treated in the same way as his inferiors.

35 See note 1.
Axonometry and floor plan from the 1940 report
For that matter, it was not the only reality check Camu would be confronted with. Between 1937 and 1940, a considerable number of civil servants and politicians strongly resisted his new rules for recruitment and advancement in public service, thereby clinging to former attainments and privileges. At the same time, the Royal Commissioner repeatedly expressed his disillusion with the slow pace by which his reform proposals were implemented in the different ministries – while he even threatened to resign from his function.37 Here, it becomes clear that there were limits to the extent in which administrative reform – and consequently, social reform – could be effected top-down in interwar Belgium. Much in the same way as Jeremy Bentham’s famous late-18th century ‘pantoptic prison’ had been conceived as a scheme for control and ‘re-education’ (which de facto would turn out to be utopian),38 Camu’s proposed cité administrative was an idealized scheme the enforcement of a high-minded working ethic. It appeared as a locus of national grandeur, efficiency, order, and control, in which all the frictions and subversions of the past would be cancelled out: a perfect public service, staffed by the perfect employees, housed in the perfect building. It is highly unlikely, however, that this total inversion of the actual situation ever could have been realized in such a politically influenced environment as the Belgian civil service.

37 Molitor, Servir l’État, 28.