

*Johan Oldebarnevelt's account of the Truce Negotiations of 1608*

Introduction: In 1598 Archduke Albert of Habsburg and his wife Isabella, the daughter of Philip II, became sovereigns of the southern Netherlands. The Duke of Parma, who had succeeded in reconquering the southern Netherlands for Spain, but failed to follow this up with a campaign in the north. After his death in 1592, the military initiative passed to the Republic under the able military commander, Prince Maurice of Nassau, who reconquered the eastern and northeastern provinces from Spain but also achieved some military victories south of the great rivers. The Archduke, whose military forces were led by the competent Genoan general, Ambrogio Spinola, offered the Republic complete autonomy under his sovereignty as long as the Republic allowed complete freedom to Catholics to practice their religion. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, a political leader and Land Advocaat of Holland welcomed this opportunity to bring an end to the war. Although Maurice opposed the talks, negotiations took place in Brussels from February to October, 1608. The talks were followed by further negotiations in The Hague and Antwerp, which produced a truce in 1609. The document below is a description of the negotiations of 1608 by the Republic's chief negotiator, Johan Oldebarnewelt, published by A. J. Veenendaal, ed., *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt: Bescheiden betreffende zijn staatkundig beleid en zijn familie*, Vol.II (The Hague, 1962), pp. 232-235. Translated from Dutch by Herbert H. Rowen, ed., *The Low Countries in Early Modern Times: A Documentary History* (New York, 1972), pp. 109-12

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Spinola {the commander of the armed forces of the southern Netherlands}, with Richardot and Mancicidor. Richardot declares for them that after the resolution of the Lord States, they had been inclined to depart, but had not wished to do so without taking their leave of the assembly; that they were in great sorrow because they had come here in accordance with the instructions of the King [of Spain] and the Archdukes, their masters, who were sincerely resolved to change the prolonged war of forty years into a good peace. They even came here [The Hague] at the cost of the reputation of their king and princes, since it would have been reasonable that we [the Dutch] should have gone to them, but having come here they had negotiated in all friendliness with the commissioners of this side. They had accorded the first point concerning sovereignty and freedom; saying that in all other points they had compromised to the limits of what their powers permitted and their instructions tolerated. That when there had arisen a dispute over several points, they had agreed to send Father [Jan Neyen], the Commissioner-General, to Spain, where it was true, he had remained longer than they expected, which they regretted no less than my Lords the States. That under pressure they had finally proposed the point concerning the Roman religion, in accordance with the instructions which

they had had from the beginning but which they had not thought wise to propose when they saw that it could not be stomached here, hoping that the King could be brought to change their instructions, or that a better basis could be found here for a fruitful proposal on the same matter; that in this matter nothing had been sought that would profit the King's purse a single penny but only what he owed to the Lord God in satisfaction of his conscience and for the relief of the Catholics in this country. That we [the Dutch] had at once cut off the entire negotiation without a single word concerning communication or relief; that they had been surprised and disappointed, especially because we did not want to listen to them any longer. That a proposal concerning a final truce had then been made to the ambassadors of the kings and princes; that they had declared that they could not accept it under the terms of their instructions and asked sufficient time to receive further instructions from Spain. That a resolution was then taken upon this matter so harsh and precise, ordering them so definitely to leave, that they believed that they had never heard its like, and that they had reason not to be satisfied with it but were ready to follow the orders.

They said further that they hoped that we would not return to the rigors of war and cause further spilling of blood, calamities and miseries of war, and wanted those who were inclined toward war to think over the matter and to examine in their consciences why they wished to expose the country and its good people to the miseries and calamities of war, and to consider too that they could easily come under accusation and rue a renewal of the war and having broken off this negotiation or caused it to run into difficulty in this way.

Our reply was that in so far as they were sorry that the conclusion of the negotiation did not correspond to its beginning, the sorrow of my Lords the States was no less than theirs, for they had hoped to change the war into a good peace and had acted in the negotiation with fear of God, and they too had always tried to achieve this, truly desiring that the spilling of blood and the calamities and miseries of war should cease to the extent that this was in their power; but it was their intention to have their freedom recognized by the king of Spain and Their Highnesses [the archdukes] in proper form, and that without this the whole negotiation would be rejected. That a clear declaration had been made to the commissioners, Pater Ney and Verreycken, that there was no hope of obtaining anything in the question of religion because it would conflict with

the freedom of the country, and my Lords the States knew what their proper conduct was on behalf of their subjects; that they [the ambassadors] had been urged in the beginning of the negotiation to put this question aside if it was their intention to speak of it, so that there would be no useless quarreling; that this point was raised now, after such a long delay, in addition to the ban on negotiating regarding the Indies, and they persisted in so many other disagreements, that my Lords the States had legitimate reason to cut off the negotiation, especially since they observed that they were wrong in having believed that His Excellency and the other lords [ambassadors] would not let themselves be used in an affair where a good outcome was not to be expected. And although when this had been done the deputies of the Lords the States declared that they had completed their duties, the commissioners remained free to propose to my Lords the States whatever they might approve and that this has not been refused, so that there was no adequate reason for complaint in this regard.

As for the second point concerning the resolution on the truce, [the Dutch commissioners] said that my Lords the States had been here in large numbers for a long time and saw that the delays by Spain were endless, and therefore they preferred that the lords commissioners await their further instructions at Brussels rather than here, where they caused great inconvenience to themselves and to the Lords the States; and that the resolution had been put in precise form in order to bring the provinces to agreement. But when this was balanced against the delays on the other side, the punctiliousness of the resolution was mitigated, and for that reason they did not believe that the responsibility could rightly be placed upon them, and that no difficulty would have been made over a few days' further stay if the business could have been moved along ....

Spinola replied when they rose that his purpose when he came here was only to bring the negotiations to conclusion for the common welfare and that if this could not be done he would depart with thanks for the resolution of the Lords the States, but otherwise, in order to bring such a good work to a happy end, would gladly remain here for some time with increased inconvenience.

Nothing further was said except goodbyes. Spinola left for Brussels, leaving the ambassadors to continue the negotiation.