

## UNKNOWN HISTORY: LE CORBUSIER IN FRONT OF THE 'ACADEMISM' OF JAN DE RANITZ IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE NEW UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS AT NEW YORK (1946)

UNA HISTORIA DESCONOCIDA: LE CORBUSIER FRENTE AL 'ACADEMICISMO' DE JAN DE RANITZ EN LOS PREPARATIVOS PARA LA NUEVA SEDE DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS EN NUEVA YORK (1946)

Jan Molema

**SUMMARY** Soon after the second world war the general assembly of the United Nations decreed that the seat of the organization were to be located in the United States of America. A search commission started a research of the possibilities in this country. The commission amongst others counted three experts: the Frenchman Le Corbusier, the Soviet–Russian Bassov and the Dutchman Jan de Ranitz. Le Corbusier worried about the composition of the commission: *"I am obliged to inform you about the characteristic distressing situation here in NY in the commission for the Headquarters of the UN created by one of the members of the commission, that I am part of: the Jenkheer de Ramitz (sic!), who graduated from the university of Delft and tries to get a position from which he may drag down everything into the darkest academic catastrophe."*

In this article I will explain what happened in New York in 1946. A fight between big 'frames of mind', incapable to butch an inch where it came to principles of town planning.

**KEY WORDS** United Nations Headquarters; Le Corbusier; Jan de Ranitz; Van Eesteren; CIAM; Delft

**RESUMEN** Poco después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas decretó que la sede de la organización debía estar ubicada en los Estados Unidos de América. Una comisión para la búsqueda de un emplazamiento comenzó a investigar las posibilidades de este país. La comisión contó, entre otros, con tres expertos: el francés Le Corbusier, el soviético-ruso Bassov y el neerlandés Jan de Ranitz. Le Corbusier estaba preocupado por la composición de la comisión: *"Me veo en la obligación de informarle sobre la angustiosa situación creada aquí en Nueva York en la comisión para la Sede de las Naciones Unidas, provocada por uno de los miembros de la comisión, y de la que yo formo parte: Jenkheer de Ramitz (¡sic!), quien se graduó de la Universidad de Delft y que trata de conseguir una posición desde la que puede arrastrar a todos a la más oscura catástrofe académica"*. En este artículo voy a explicar lo que sucedió en Nueva York en 1946. Una lucha entre grandes "estados de ánimo", incapaces de ceder una pulgada en el campo de los principios urbanísticos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE** Sede de las Naciones Unidas; Le Corbusier; Jan de Ranitz; Van Eesteren; CIAM; Delft

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"EVERY STANDARD OF FRIENDSHIP AND COMMON DECENCY WAS FLOUTED" <sup>1</sup>

Everyone with some knowledge of architecture and its recent history is familiar with the name and possibly (some of) the works of Le Corbusier, be it in reality or from pictures. This is because Le Corbusier was a great architect, but he was even greater as a propagandist of his own doings. Jan de Ranitz, on the other hand, is practically unknown; also in his own country, though Dutch townplanners are familiar with his name and his office. But recently, when I gave a lecture in that studio, it turned out that really nobody there knew about De Ranitz' battle with Le Corbusier in New York in 1946. In my article I try to lift the veil which covers that important episode in both the career of Le Corbusier and of Jan de Ranitz.

Jonkheer ir. Jan de Ranitz was born on 21 January 1909 in Breda, went to secondary school in Nijmegen, Amersfoort and Utrecht<sup>2</sup>. Then he moved to Delft to study architectural engineering. He was first president of

the 'kroegcommissie' (which manages the use of the club building, the 'societeit') and then of the senate of the Delftsch Studenten Corps of Delft. After graduating in 1934 he worked with ir. D. Roosenburg (grandfather of Rem Koolhaas) on different urban and landscape projects. On January 1, 1938 he was nominated Inspector of Public Health (Public Housing), stationed at Middelburg. Here he stayed till 1948. During WW II, the Germans temporarily detained him with other Dutch intellectuals in a special camp, Sint–Michielsgestel. In 1948 he established an important design studio with his study friends ir. J.A. Kuiper en ir. F.J. Gouwetor. He died in Rotterdam on 4 December 1993.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt died, on April 12, 1945, the first act of his successor Harry S. Truman was to announce that: *"the United Nations Conference on International Organization would take place as planned on 25 April, in San Francisco"*. At the end of that conference a commission was installed, which had to find a definite location for the headquarters of the United Nations. Initially

1. This article is an adaption of a chapter of the book (published in Dutch) Molema, Jan; Leemans, Suzy: *Jan Albarda en De Groep van Delft. Moderniteit in een behoudende omgeving*. Heiningen: Jap Sam Books, 2010, Nederland. The book describes the activities of a group of students in the 1930's at the department of Architecture of Delft Polytechnic (now University).

2. 'Jonkheer' is an honorific to show that someone does belong to the nobility, but does not possess a title. Ir. is an abbreviation of 'ingenieur', in this case someone who graduated from the Polytechnic of Delft.

1. Caricature by Jan de Ranitz of a meeting of the Headquarters Commission of the United Nations Organization. From left to right: Gavrilovic, Moore, Sir Angus (Fletcher), Khalidy, Yu, Bassov, Opposition hung, De Ranitz, Uriart, the 'Invisible Rabbit Harvey', Le Corbusier fighting against the windmill 'Academism'. Exact date unknown, but before end of 1946.



vicinity of New York. It will be the task of the commission to set up an investigation for the most suitable location for the UN administrative machine and make an urban sketch plan for the building in which the UN will reside. Through the appointment of jhr de Ranitz, who received his diploma of architectural engineer in Delft in 1934, the Netherlands will without any doubt be represented in this international commission by an in all aspects competent man. Shortly after his graduation in Delft the architectural office Roosenburg contracted jhr De Ranitz; in that position he designed some extension plans for villages in Zeeland, such as Cloetinge. In 1938 he was nominated inspector for mass housing in Zeeland and West-Brabant. Directly after the invasion in May 1940 he made the first plans for the urban reconstruction of Middelburg (...)<sup>4</sup>.

In the National Archive (Den Haag) we found letters in which De Ranitz, as Inspector of Public Health, announces his appointment in the 'Headquarters Commission' to the Royal Governor in the province Zeeland and to the Minister for Education, Art and Science. Both letters are dated 28 February 1946<sup>5</sup>. De Ranitz wrote that the Minister for Foreign Affairs sends him to America for about 4 months

the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands were against a location in the United States of America<sup>3</sup>. After a lot of hubble-bubble about a variety of issues, it was decided however to look for a location within the USA. During the next assembly in London the Norwegian social democrat Trygve Lie became the secretary general and he installed a new entity: the Headquarters Commission, which had to find an adequate location before the end of the year. There existed a preference for two sites in New York, but also other offers were investigated. The 'Headquarters Commission' consisted of nine members of whom three were 'experts': the Frenchman Le Corbusier, the Soviet-Russian Bassov and the Dutchman De Ranitz (figure 1). On 23 March 1946 the Dutch architectural magazine BOUW announced De Ranitz' appointment: *Nederland in de UNO-architectencommissie. De aanstelling van jhr ir J. de Ranitz.*

*'After nomination by the minister of Public Works and Reconstruction, the minister of Foreign Affairs has appointed jhr ir. J. de Ranitz Dutch representative in the international commission, which must prepare the building of the centre of the new organisation of the United Nations in the*

3. Dudley, George A.: *A Workshop for Peace: Designing the United Nations Headquarters*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994, p. 8.

4. *Bouw*. Vol. 1 n° 12, 1946, p. 314.

5. Nationaal Archief. Archiefnr.: 2.14.69. 'Inventaris van het archief van de Afdeling Kunsten en taakvoorgangers van het Ministerie van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen over de periode 1945-1965. Depot 102A, briefnrs.: 265/2-e en 266/2-e.'

from the beginning of March 1946 on as the Dutch representative in a commission, which had to make a study for the United Nations of the offered sites for the location of their headquarters in the United States of America. It stays unclear (for the time being) how De Ranitz was precisely nominated and appointed<sup>6</sup>.

#### A WORKSHOP FOR PEACE

In *A workshop for Peace, designing the United Nations Headquarters* the architect George A. Dudley has extensively reported about the coming into being of the main seat of the United Nations. About the 'Headquarters Commission' he noted: *'A ladder of reports produced General Assembly Resolution 8, adopted 14 February 1946: 'the Permanent Headquarters . . . shall be established in Westchester and/or Fairfield counties . . . Now the Assembly formed a 'Headquarters Commission' to make an exhaustive study of that area and report back by early fall. France picked Le Corbusier as its Delegate to the Commission, to defend modern architecture and town design in a problem of world importance'. Another member was Russian structural engineer Nikolai D. Bassov, who would join Le Corbusier later on in the U.N. Board of Design for the Headquarters.*

*The Commission also had to help the Secretary-General arrange 'temporary installation of the organs of the United Nations . . . the General Assembly in September . . . and housing the Delegates' – despite a war-induced shortage. 'Troubles of the moment were more than adequate,' said (Trygve) Lie.*

*Despite the restriction to sites in the two counties adjoining New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Boston kept pressing the Commission, which held thirty-eight meetings, hearing from thirty added candidates, with what Site Search Committee assistant Sorenson called 'confusing vigor'<sup>7</sup>.*

What strikes us is, that Le Corbusier and Bassov are mentioned, also elsewhere in Dudley's book, but not De Ranitz. What to think about this? Was he present in New York or was he not?

#### LE CORBUSIER IN NEW YORK, 1946

Le Corbusier was there without doubt. On 4 July 1946 he writes, as the French member of the Headquarters Commission, a letter to C. van Eesteren, president of the CIAM<sup>8</sup>:

*Monsieur Carl<sup>9</sup> van Eesteren, Architect*

*Dear friend,*

*I send you some words to tell you that your presence here is highly desirable for taking part, as an expert from your country, in the nomination of the new commission for the site and the buildings of the UN; this commission will be responsible for the spirit that will lead the construction of the General (Head)quarters of the UN.*

*I hope that your Government will not hesitate to send you here. I will send you sufficient documentation with the next courier.*

*Friendly yours,*

*Le Corbusier*

*Headquarters Commission<sup>10</sup>.*

6. The (Dutch) vice-secretary general Adriaan Pelt and/or the Delft architectural engineer ir. A.H. van Rood may have been instrumental here.

7. Dudley, George A.: op.cit., p. 12.

8. This letter is to be found in the archives of NAI, Rotterdam. Archive: Eest. Inv.nr.: IV. 293, UNO-gebouw. Other information from this archive is registered under the same inventory number.

9. sic! Van Eesteren's first name was Cor(nelis).

10. Original text in French:

*Monsieur Carl van Eesteren, Architecte*

*Cher ami,*

*Je vous envoie ce mot pour vous dire que votre présence ici est tout à fait désirable pour participer, en tant qu'expert de votre pays, à la nomination de la nouvelle commission de l'Urbanisme et des Batiments de l'UN; cette commission sera responsable de l'esprit qui dirigera la construction du quartier Général de l'UN. J'espère que votre Gouvernement n'hésitera pas à vous déléguer ici.*

*Je vous envoie par prochain courrier une documentation suffisante.*

*Amicalement à vous,*

*Le Corbusier*

*Headquarters Commission*

2. A portrait of Jan de Ranitz by the Bauhaus artist Paul Citroen (21<sup>st</sup> october, 1965).



a complete foreigner in the art) tries to get a position from which he may drag down (with the most naïve conviction and innocence) into the darkest academic catastrophe<sup>13</sup>.

The definitive version of that letter, as received by Van Eesteren, is dated 5 July 1946. This we find in the Van Eesteren archive at the NAI. In this version the name of De Ranitz is not mentioned, but all other allusions about him as a person are maintained. The tenor of the letter is certainly identical to the one of the draft. De Ranitz was there, in New York! (figure 2).

The same day, 5th of July, Le Corbusier sends a second letter to Van Eesteren and also to all delegates of the CIAM: "of all countries that take part in the Organisation of the United Nations". For that matter with the annotation: 'highly confidential'. He stated: "I agreed upon this message with personalities of the U.N.O., in perfect accord with José Luis Sert, Vice-President of the CIAM, and Papadaki, Secretary General of the CIAM in the U.S.A. This message is extremely abridged, but I hope that you will understand from it the whole value and meaning, as well as the necessity to intervene without a day of delay".

And further ahead in the same letter: "Therefore you must, cher ami, immediately visit your Government to request to designate and send to New York, to the General Assembly of the U.N. in Septembre 1946, the expert Mr. X, ... member of the CIAM, or a trusted representative of the CIAM (professional or non-professional in architecture and urbanism, but capable to maintain the sublime idea of Architecture and Urbanisme, at the moment of the construction of the H.Q.G. of the U.N."

Also of this letter the Parisian archive contains a draft, which ends as follows: "There is always a possible danger: thus, for ex. Holland has had here in the site commission, of which I am a member, a very honest Jenkheer de Ramitz

Right at that moment the Headquarters Commission was due to report its findings. In September of the same year a new commission was to be installed, whose task would be to design the headquarters' complex. Le Corbusier worried seriously about the composition of that new commission. It is highly probable, that the 'documentation suffisante' he mentions was a letter of which we find a draft in the Parisian Archive Le Corbusier<sup>11</sup>. Here we quote that draft partly, inclusive clerical errors:

My dear Van Eesteren

I am obliged to inform you about the characteristic distressing situation here in N York in the commission for the Headquarters of the UN created by one of the members of the commission I am part of: the Jenkheer de Ramitz<sup>12</sup>, who graduated from the university of Delft, eng(ineer) arch(itect) and public health inspector in Holland (worker, serious but

11. Nr.: D1 19387 T.

12. Apart from the drafts the archive contains transcriptions, drawn up by the archivists. In the transcription of the letter mentioned above we read 'Jenkheer de Ramitz'. Reading the original we understand that Le Corbusier indeed was thinking of Jonkheer de Ranitz.

13. Original text in French:

Mon cher Van Eesteren

Je suis obligé de vous signaler la pénible situation caractéristique créée ici à N York dans la commission du Headquarters de l'UN par l'un des membres de cette commission dont je fais partie; le Jenkheer de Ramitz, diplômé de l'université de Delft, ing arch, et inspecteur de la santé en Hollande (travailleur, sérieux, mais complètement étranger à l'art) cherche à conquérir une place, du haut de laquelle il entrainerait (avec la plus ingénue conviction et innocence) l'UN dans la catastrophe académique la plus noir.

man, who is a complete reactionary in architecture and in town planning and against whom I am obliged to fight violently since some time. Holland must send an enlightened man".<sup>14, 15</sup>

#### HOW VAN EESTEREN (RE) ACTED

Since November 1930 Van Eesteren had been the chairman of the CIAM<sup>16</sup>. In September 1947 he was unexpectedly dismissed, through Le Corbusier, and nominated honorary president. This, to his own belief, had sidetracked him. The Catalan Josep Lluís Sert, befriended with Le Corbusier, became the new chairman. Le Corbusier himself became vice-chair. Van Eesteren has shown later on, that he had never understood from which this 'putsch' had originated<sup>17</sup>. We found in the Van Eesteren archive his reply to Le Corbusier's pressing letters. Van Eesteren reacted quite indifferently at the words of Le Corbusier. Furthermore, his answer is dated 26 August 1946. In other words, Van Eesteren had the infuriated, if not desperate Le Corbusier one and a half month waiting for an answer.

Monsieur Le Corbusier,  
24, Rue Nungesser et Colli  
Paris, France

My dear Le Corbusier

Your letters from New York about the future centre of the U.N. have interested me much. As the representative of Holland has been nominated by the Counsel of Ministers on recommendation of the Minister of Public Works, you will understand, that it is not so easy to find an occasion to intervene with the promise of success. Recently I have not seen any possibility to act. These days Sandberg has promised me to occupy himself with it through another ministry where he has good contacts. So again, we must wait. When you have any news about this affair, please let me know. Because of all sorts of difficulties (about trips and also finances) that the different delegates of CIRPAC have, I do not see yet a possibility to fix a date for the reunion. When would you be back in Europe after your next visit to the U.S.A.? <sup>18</sup>

14. Inv. nr.: D1 19389T.

15. Original text in French:

"de tous les pays qui font partie de l'Organisation des Nations Unies" (...) 'très confidentiel'.

"J'ai convenu de ce message avec des personnalités de l'O.N.U., en accord parfait avec José Luis Sert, Vice-Président des CIAM, et Papadaki, Secrétaire Général des CIAM en U.S.A. Ce message est extrêmement raccourci et j'espère que vous en comprendrez toute la valeur et la signification, ainsi que la nécessité qu'il y a d'intervenir sans un jour de retard."

"Il faut donc, cher ami, immédiatement voir votre Gouvernement pour demander la désignation et l'envoi à New York, à l'Assemblée Générale de l'U.N. en septembre 1946, de l'expert M. X, ... membre des CIAM, ou homme de confiance des CIAM (professionnel ou non-professionnel de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme, mais capable de maintenir l'idée élevée de l'Architecture et de l'Urbanisme, au moment de la construction du Q.G. de l'U.N."

"Il y a toujours danger possible: ainsi, par ex. la Hollande a possède ici dans la commission de site dont je fais partie un homme très honnête et travailleur Jenkheer de Ramitz qui est un réactionnaire complet en architecture et en urbanisme et contre lequel je suis obligé de lutter violemment depuis quelques temps. La Hollande doit envoyer un homme éclairé."

16. Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne.

17. Telephone call with Auke van der Woud, Summer 2008, for which we are thankful.

18. Original text in French:

Monsieur Le Corbusier

24, Rue Nungesser et Colli

Paris, France

Cher Le Corbusier,

Vos lettres de New York à cause du futur centre de l' U.N. m'ont beaucoup intéressées. Comme le représentant de la Hollande est nommé par le Conseil des Ministres sur recommandation du Ministre des Travaux Publics, vous comprenez, qu'il n'est pas simple de trouver une occasion d'intervention promettant du succes. Il y a peu de temps je ne voyais pas aucune possibilité d'agir. Ces jours-ci Sandberg m'a promis de s'en occuper par voie d'une autre ministère où il est bien introduit. Alors il faut de nouveau attendre. Si vous aurez des nouvelles à cause de cet affaire tenez moi au courant. A cause des difficultés de toutes sortes (de voyages et aussi financières) existantes pour les différents délégués du C.I.R.P.A.C. je ne vois pas encore la possibilité de fixer une date de réunion. Quand vous rentrerez en Europe après votre prochaine visite de U.S.A.?

## THE THORNY ISSUE

The question arises whether there is a direct link between both incidents. And what issues had De Ranitz brought up to upset Le Corbusier to such extreme? Once more the draft by Le Corbusier to Van Eesteren, dated 5 July '46:

*"After two month of presence work he finished an enquiry report as follows<sup>19</sup> :*

*'No building should be higher (en Altitude) than the Assembly Building. In the event a five floor building is constructed (Sub – basement, basement, 3 floors) the area covered by the building will be 192.000 Sq ft. It will have a width of 48' and a length of 4000', or 1200 mètres."*

What was wrong? Well, this conclusion formulated by De Ranitz obstructed Le Corbusier's (only) chance for his skyscraper. So the gentlemen were in dispute:

*I have refused him the right to make such conclusion suggestions. He has answered me: "The same right as you have". I have retaliated: "you forget the difference!" I have added: "You refer (to) Washington?" Answer: "All architects will approve me." He seeks to obtain the position of techn director of the technical office of the future 'commission of buildings and constructions' of the UN Headquarters.*

*He is a scrambler, a man full of confusion, who believes himself to be a genius in the organization of the scheme. He interrupts in all questions. I repeat: if he stayed home, I could not care less, and I will be happy if he feels happy.*

19. Original text in French:

*Après deux mois de présence travail il a conclu un rapport d'enquête par ceci:*

The rest of the letter was written in English.

20. About Adrianus Pelt (1892-1981): [www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn2/pelt](http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn2/pelt): "In the beginning of 1946 he was nominated as one of the three adjunct secretary-generals of the UNO, leading the largest department of the secretariat, that of conferences and general services."

21. Archive Le Corbusier, Paris [01 19 389]. The rest of the letter is very difficult to read and reproduce, but corresponds in content and intention with what George A. Dudley wrote about the attempt of Le Corbusier to have as many members of CIAM in the commission as possible, a straightforward assault, which was bound to flop.

22. Original text in French:

*Je lui ai refusé le droit de faire telles conclusion suggestions. Il m'a répondu: 'autant le droit que vous!' J'ai riposté: 'vous oubliez la différence !'. J'ai ajouté: 'Vous referez Washington?' Réponse: 'Tous les architectes m'approuveront'. Il cherche à prendre le poste de directeur techn du bureau technique de la future future 'commission des bâtiments et constructions' du Headquarters de l'UN.*

*C'est un embrouilleur, un homme plein de confusion, mais se croyant un génie de l'organisation du schéma. Il intervient dans toutes les questions: Je le répète: s'il restait chez lui, il me serait parfaitement indifférent et je serais heureux qu'il soit heureux. Mais au coeur du formidable et magnifique problème de l'UN, il constitue un danger immense.*

*J'ai Je l'ai dit hier à Pelt (Hollandais, secrétaire général adjoint) et lui affirmant nettement mon point de vue.*

*Morale: Il faut avertir votre gouvernement qu'il doit éhang qu'il ne peut pas se faire représenter par un homme de la réaction. La Hollande a une réputation mondiale en architecture. J'avais fait confiance à de Ramitz (sic !) pendant des semaines. Mais il représente, le frein, l'anti art et l'anti progrès. Or l'UN sait présenter au monde une oeuvre de demain éblouissante et je vous promets que le program me s'y prête! Soyez habile et sans haine mais ferme comme une barre de fer.*

*But in the heart of the formidable and magnificent problem of the U.N. he is an immense danger.*

*I've-Yesterday I told Pelt (Dutchman and adjunct secretary general) and he confirming in a neat manner my point of view<sup>20</sup>.*

*Morale: We must inform your government, that they must éhang that they can not have them represented by a reactionary man. Holland has a world reputation in architecture. I trusted De Ramitz during weeks. But he represents the brakes, the anti art and the anti progress. Yet, the UN will be able to present to the world a dazzling building of tomorrow and I promise you that the program will make me do it!*

*Be smart and without hatred, but firm as an iron bar!<sup>21,22</sup>.*

Having read this, it is surprising, that George A. Dudley has not included Jan de Ranitz, but it is in a way explicable. His book treats only in a rather restricted way the developments before 1947; and therefore those in the Headquarters Commission. But it is all the more remarkable, if not strange, that Dudley did relate Le Corbusier and Bassov, repeatedly, with that period.

As becomes clear from Dudley's report, there was an ordinary power game going on in New York. A critique on Dudley's book in the New York Times ascertained: "A major drama was being played out beneath the design board's generally polite deliberations: an attempt to prevent the solidarity of modernism from cracking beneath the pressure

*of its own contradictions<sup>23</sup>. And Le Corbusier was no Milk-sop! De Ranitz for that matter received support later on from outside the commission, amongst others from Lewis Mumford. From the same article in the NYT we quote: "But some observers, such as Lewis Mumford, believed the architects had actually sacrificed functional efficiency to the grand formal gesture. While the Secretariat's slim, 40-story slab was a potent symbol of modernity, Mumford felt that its users would have been better served by a cluster of low-rise structures". So was De Ranitz indeed withdrawn? Or has he simply, through Le Corbusier's manipulations and Dudley's incompleteness, been deleted from history?*

## BROTHERLY LOVE

Inquiry about the affair at the United Nation's information offices merely resulted in the finding of an article in Time, also searchable on Internet.<sup>24</sup> "Brotherly Love, Monday, Dec. 02, 1946. (...) Soft Music. Philadelphia's hosts never missed a bet. There was a concert by the famed Philadelphia Orchestra, a luncheon at the Art Museum (under pictures by Matisse, Gauguin and Reynolds). In a helicopter provided for the delegates, Holland's Jan de Ranitz and Dr. M. P. M. van Karnebeek plopped down near Philadelphia for a hearty greeting by a local farmer & family."

That much is clear: on 2 December 1946 De Ranitz was still (or again) in the United States. He was the only one of the, apparently then still active, Headquarters Commission, who mounted a helicopter to survey from above the sites that Philadelphia had available. His approach was totally different than Le Grand Corbu's. It did not help much though. When Rockefeller Jr, just a few days later, made an amount of \$ 8.500.000 available to buy a lot on Manhattan, work was over for the commission. On 15 December the General Assembly accepted Rockefeller's offer, which included the nomination of Rockefeller's personal architect Wallace K. Harrison as Director of Planning. Business as usual! And De Ranitz could go home

forever. Not Le Corbusier, but that part of the story is sufficiently known.

In June 1947 De Ranitz reported in the architectural magazine *Bouw*: "Calculation of ground surfaces in built-up areas, some American figures". And what do we read on the same page? An anonymous article under the headline: "The accommodation for the U.N.O. A grandiose (example of) ground speculation"<sup>26</sup>. We may well accept, that De Ranitz wrote both, but the second as 'member' of the editorial staff of *Bouw*. The article reads as follows:

*Soon after the war the general assembly of the United Nations in London decreed that the seat of the new world organization were to be located in the United States of America. A search commission started a research right away of the different possibilities in this country<sup>27</sup> ; the commission had nine members, of which three were experts: the Frenchman Corbusier, the Soviet-Russian Bassov and the Dutchman jhr ir J. de Ranitz<sup>28</sup>.*

*The commission was very active. She made a profound study during many months, for which also the plane proved to be very useful and especially accommodation in Westchester was contemplated. But the U.N.O. general assembly would not accept this, so hurriedly some more possibilities had to be researched in San Francisco, Boston en Philadelphia. Political confusion though made a decision very difficult and, in spite of all the lovely preparations the general assembly of the U.N.O. just took a decision –head over heels–, to set all seriously elaborated plans aside and instead of these to accept John D. Rockefeller's offer, which had dropped out of the air. Rockefeller had spent an amount of 81/2 million dollars to purchase a site, in the heart of New York's Manhattan at the waterfront. The site though is not vacant, but exists in six densely built-up blocks, between Fifth Avenue and East River and between 42nd en de 48th Street. The buildings consist in factories, warehouses, dwellings and other, and will all be demolished. A costly redevelopment, I may say.*

23. Muschamp, Herbert: "Books of the Times: The Many Hands That Built the U.N" (22 July 1994). In *New York Times*. (22 July 1994). <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/22/books/books-of-the-times-the-many-hands-that-built-the-un.html>

24. *STATES & CITIES: Brotherly Love*. In *Time Magazine*. (cited 15-March-2013) [time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,887238,00.html](http://time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,887238,00.html)

25. 'Berekening van grondkosten in bebouwde kernen, enkele Amerikaanse cijfers.'

26. 'De huisvesting van de U.N.O. Een grandiose grondspeculatie.'

27. 'In this country' suggests that De Ranitz wrote this whilst still in the USA.

28. De Ranitz being the only entitled member!



3. Part of a page of the Dutch periodical BOUW, June 1947.

3

*The broker, William Zeckendorf, of the firm Webb and Knapp, boasts, that he has sold the grounds for a very modest price (only 20 dollar per ft2 or 215 dollar per m2) to Rockefeller. The reason for this generosity becomes clear though, when we subsequently are informed, that Webb and Knapp already have purchased practically every lot on Fifth Avenue in the vicinity of the U.N.O. site and that the value of these lots, after Rockefeller's donation and the plans of the U.N.O. became public, has doubled.*

*Zeckendorf imagines, that these parcels offer a very attractive place for new embassies, big international hotels etc. He even thinks to found a musical centre, which shall leave room for the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and an airport. As a clever site speculator he has already purchased big areas and is continuously busy to extend the possessions of Webb and Knapp.*

*Thus it becomes clear that the plans to establish a centre for the United Nations have led to a grandiose ground speculation, that –and this is the worst, as demonstrated by the way, in which all this is commented upon in the American magazines– in the United States is common business, taken for granted. On the photograph indicated, where the U.N.O. building (a skyscraper), in accordance with the fiercely disputed design by Wallace Harrison, should arise. At the left the East River” (figure 2).*

29. Le Corbusier: *Creation is a patient search*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960. Translated by James Palmes. Introduction by Maurice Jardot.

30. Bouw. Vol. 6, n° 2, 1951, p.28.

#### AND LE CORBUSIER?

*Le Corbusier, creation is a patient search* was published in 1960<sup>29</sup>. There Le Corbusier looked briefly back, obviously embittered across his U.N. experiences. Thus we read on the pages 137–138: “L–C was sent to New York by the French government, as delegate to the ‘site commission’ (nine members from all countries) for UNO to defend modern architecture and town design in a problem of world importance. In New York L–C was stupefied, flabbergasted, by the discussions, and activities of this commission. By the sixth week he had left it, declaring ‘I am returning to Paris, but I will let you have a minority report beforehand’”. And on page 151: “By 26th February 1947 L–C had everything ready in New York. Harrison had told him ‘Hurry; the other experts of the commission will be arriving on 15th March’. The rest we know. A new skyscraper, which every one calls the Le Corbusier building, has appeared in New York, the first of its kind. L–C was stripped of all his rights, without conscience and without pity. Every standard of friendship and common decency was flouted.”

Le Corbusier and ‘Jenkheer De Ramitz’ never could become friends. All in all, why such fuss? Big ‘frames of mind’, incapable to butch an inch where it came to principles of town planning (even in 1951 De Ranitz wrote an article in Bouw entitled: “High rise, keep(s) you head cool”. (Het hoofd koel bij hoogbouw)<sup>30</sup>. Is it surprising, that the United nations gave in to the American capitalist’s temptative offer? After all New York is called The Big Apple! (figure 3). ■

meer aantrekkelijke plaats zullen bieden voor nieuwe gezamenstapgebouwen, grote internationale hotels e.d. Hij denkt zelfs aan de stichting van een muziekcentrum, dat plaats zal bieden voor de Metropolitan Opera, het New Yorks Philharmonisch Orkest en aan een vliegveld. Als handig grondspeculant heeft hij reeds grote oppervlakten aangekocht en is hij nog voortdurend bezig, het best in handen van Webb and Knapp uit te breiden. Zo blikte de plannen tot stichting van een cen-

trum voor de Verenigde Volken geleid te hebben tot een grandiose grondspeculatie, die – en dat is ook het ergste – tijdens de wijde, waarop dit alles in de Amerikaanse veldschriften wordt vermeld, in de Verenigde Staten heel gewoon en vanzelfsprekend wordt gevonden. Op de foto is aangetoond, waar het U.N.O.-gebouw (een wolkenkrabber), volgens het fel omstreden ontwerp van Wallace Harrison, zou moeten verrijzen. Links op de afbeelding, East River.

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ongedateerd, vermoedelijk eind juli 1946 De Ranitz New York 2e verslag van Jhr. Ir. J. de Ranitz. Lid voor Nederland in de Headquarters Commission van de United Nations, (18 p.)

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6 juni 1946 De Ranitz, New York brief met maandrapport (7 p.) aan de Minister van Buitenlandsche Zaken, Plein 23 ‘s-Gravenhage

18 september 1946, Van Kleffens, Nederlands vertegenwoordigr in den Veiligheidsraad der Vereenigde Naties, brief aan de Minister van Buitenlandsche Zaken, Plein 23 ‘s-Gravenhage, stelt Van Karnebeek voor als Nederlandse vertegenwoordiger in de Headquarters Committee.

NB Van Kleffens heeft het over een memorandum van De Ranitz en een ‘gedrukt rapport met 26 annexes, kaarten, enz.’ Waar is dat? ‘Meerdere leden van de Headquarters Commission schijnen zijn overtuiging althans in groote lijnen te deelen,’

Ongedateerd en zonder afzender, ‘Aanteekening aan Mr. Beucker Andreae’ n.a.v. bovenvermelde brief van 18 september.

Ongedateerd en zonder afzender, Headquarters, aantekeningen vermoedelijk van staf van Van Kleffens (achterzijden bevatten gedrukte tekst betr. Veiligheidsraad) reactie op brief van Van Kleffens

5 december 1946 Van Karnebeek, tekst uit te spreken als vertegenwoordiger van de Nederlandse Delegatie bij de V.N. op zitting van de Algemene Vergadering gericht tot Mr. Chairman (Trygve Lie).

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