The Belgian Contribution to Global 1968

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The calendar year of 1968 is almost universally associated with student unrest. Belgium fits into this picture rather well, with major student mobilisations in Leuven and Brussels occurring in the first half of that notoriously restless calendar year.[1] Yet all-inclusive assessments of the social movements and political reconfigurations happening that year, not only in Belgium but elsewhere in Europe and North America as well, must go beyond the relatively narrow confines of university student milieus. For the purposes of this essay, I propose also to address fresh developments occurring within the worlds of labor and cultural productions. In terms of political developments, particular attention will be placed on discussions affecting the forces composing the traditional Old Left, i.e. social democracy and communism, with special emphasis given to the rise of a New and – eventually – a Far Left. Mention will likewise be made of important reverberations of such trends in the lifeworld of Catholicism. Leaving aside certain national peculiarities, all aforementioned categories of analysis are crucial for an understanding of 1968 around the world.

A proper analysis of 1968 in Belgium and elsewhere, however, needs to do more than to broaden the avenues of inquest beyond the university milieu. A thorough assessment of 1968 likewise needs to extend significantly the chronology of events. Social movements and political upheavals rarely fit into the arbitrary templates established by the calendar. And so it was with the events which are conveniently subsumed under the generic label "1968". With the sole exception of neighboring France, on balance the calendar year of 1968 itself was rarely the undisputed highpoint of social movement activity, though it was often marked by particularly noteworthy single events. To

[1.] I wish to thank several Belgian colleagues for various forms of assistance in assembling this piece. Rik De Coninck was an important resource in the early stages of my work. Guy Zelis helped me obtain copies of unpublished theses on the Belgian worker priest phenomenon already more than half a decade ago. Patricia Quaghebeur also aided me in obtaining copies of hard-to-find publications. Nicolas Naif was of much-appreciated help in a number of areas. Louis Vos was of great assistance in facilitating access to a number of publications that are difficult to obtain from abroad. Last but not least, Rik Hemmerijckx gave me indispensable support for a variety of tasks, not the least of which his offer to read through an earlier version of this text.

place 1968 into a satisfactory explanatory context, it is therefore incumbent to regard this particular year as an important moment in a series of consecutive restless years that, all combined, shaped what can be regarded as a red decade. Much of Western Europe, North America and other portions of the world in which 1968 remains a point of reference until today witnessed an ascending cycle of radicalisation and politicisation leading ever further to the left beginning in or about 1965/1966. More often than not the calendar year of 1968 catapulted such political effervescence for the first time into the range of vision of the public at large. But the cycle of social movement mobilisation did not stop then. In fact, again virtually everywhere in the developed world, the radicalisation continued further to deepen and affect ever larger segments of the industrialised world, so that the first half of the 1970s in the vast majority of states witnessed a far more widespread radicalisation and polarisation of societies than the decade of the 1960s itself. This transnational mobilisation cycle began to ebb and decline in or around 1975/1976.

In the following pages, thus, emphasis will be placed on the way in which Belgian peculiarities by and large fit in rather well into the patterns described above. In terms of the prominence of certain social actors and political movements the Belgian 1968 ran parallel to developments elsewhere. Obvious particularities and prominent exceptions only serve to confirm the general rule of "1968", i.e. the years 1965/1966 to 1975/1976, constituting a *transnational* moment of opportunity and crisis. This exposition of the Belgian dimension of "1968" will commence with some observations on certain developments in the world of culture which, for the most part, preceded the late 1960s but which, in hindsight, can be seen as helping to prepare the terrain for the subsequent social and political explosions in and after 1968.

1. VANGUARDS IN THE CULTURAL SPHERE

The tracing of continuities between cultural ferment and subsequent political unrest is fraught with many obvious dangers. To begin with, some degree of cultural innovation has occurred in all historical periods, but only on rare occasions have political revolts ensued. More crucially yet, the existence of direct links between such widely differing practices – i.e. cultural and political revolt – is notoriously difficult to verify. Nonetheless, certainly with hindsight, it appears that the dozen or so years preceding 1968 were an exceptional period of cultural non-conformity in many portions of the western world which, especially when combined with certain – if initially embryonic

– new political ideas and practices, resembles the fertile period of cultural and political experimentation in the dozen or so years preceding the European revolutions of 1848. Seen in this light, the decade of the 1950s, often regarded as "the American century" or as a period of stultifying conformity accompanying stupendous economic growth, can also be regarded as the spawning ground of new cultural traditions which grew in importance to become widely regarded innovations in the decade of the 1960s and which eventually oftentimes became identified with "the spirit of 1968".

In North America, the Beat poets and the closely associated so-called San Francisco Renaissance are prominent examples of such nonconformist cultural productions which served to leave a mark on an entire generation of American (but not only American) youth. Any assessment of 1968 in the United States without due attention to this (sub)culture would miss its mark. At the same time, the example of Beat culture may also serve as an excellent confirmation of the realities, the limits, the chronology and the contradictions of this cultural critique. The Beat poets emerged as a current in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but they did not obtain any serious measure of popularity and fame until the 1957 publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, the latter itself penned in less than three weeks' time in April 1951. Yet, at the same time, of the entire array of creative individuals associated with this trend, it was only Allen Ginsberg who became closely identified with the social movements of "1968". The emblematic Kerouac himself, who died on 21 October 1969, always remained politically rather conservative; a biographer asserts when discussing the 1960 presidential elections:

> "Though he had, on principle, never voted – 'avoid the authorities' – had he done so, Jack Kerouac would have chosen Richard Nixon" (McNally, 1979, 280).

And even Ginsberg himself became a fixture within America's protest culture primarily because of his public persona and image and not because of any specific involvement in the politics of that era.

To the best of my knowledge, there exists no comprehensive study of the influence of American Beat culture on Belgian society.[2] My comments on

[2] As readers of this journal need not be reminded, many serious historical investigations written by Belgian authors, which would easily find a publisher in most other western European states, remain unpublished, most often in the form of *licentiaatsverhandelingen* or *mémoires de licence*. Access to such unpublished sources is not always easy or automatic, even in the event that one has obtained knowledge of the existence of such a thesis. Such obstacles are multiplied for researchers based outside of Belgium. I therefore lay no claim to an exhaustive knowledge of all extant historical studies on the host of topics addressed in this essay.

cultural non-conformity in Belgium in the years prior to 1968 will therefore be focussing on certain other developments in the artistic sphere, most notably in the areas of writing and the visual arts. For in the post-World War II era in particular, in comparison to other countries experiencing similar processes, "radical" Belgian artists played a disproportionately prominent role, if on occasion in movements which became most famous outside of Belgium proper.

Perhaps the most important Belgian to play a role in such artistic ferment was Christian Dotrement, who, together with other Belgians (but also, to be sure, French, Danish and Czechoslovak co-thinkers), all of them socialised into the vibrant atmosphere surrounding the development and growth of Surrealism, founded the Revolutionary Surrealist group in late October 1947. Influenced in part by the nonconformist communist philosopher and sociologist of everyday life, Henri Lefebvre, the circle around Dotrement strove to set free utopian longings by means of a simultaneously political *and artistic* challenge to the strictures stultifying contemporary societies. "He who has the experimental spirit must necessarily be a communist", wrote Dotremont in the editorial of the first and only issue of the group's journal, *Le Surréalisme Révolutionnaire*.[3] This iconoclastic grouping turned out to represent a mere preparatory phase to the establishment of a far more well-known and somewhat less short-lived artistic current, in which Belgian artists once again assumed central roles: Cobra.

Cobra emerged out of a November 1948 conference in Paris. In addition to former members of Revolutionary Surrealism, Cobra attracted other individuals belonging to the Belgian artistic *avant-garde*, including Pierre Alechinsky and Serge Vandercam. Cobra, which survived as an intact group complete with its own magazine and separate publications until November 1951, was based in the Netherlands and Denmark as well as Belgium, but Dotrement played an especially pivotal role. The simultaneously political and cultural critique continued the tradition established by the Revolutionary Surrealists. Their magazine, *Cobra*, considered itself the "publication outlet of the international front of experimental vanguard artists", and the lead article in their fourth issue, for instance, underscored the insurrectionary spirit behind the enterprise, its title giving away the programmatic intent: "The Revolution Will Be Made By Our Desire".[4] The short-lived infatuation with official communist politics could not long survive such iconoclastic outbursts. In October 1949, an éclat erupted precisely on the issue of artistic

[3] Citation taken from Lambert (1983, 22). Another source consulted for the trajectory of Revolutionary Surrealism is Stokvis (2004, 144-147).

[4] An excerpt from this issue's front page is reproduced in Stokvis (2004, 186).

freedom within the Belgian Communist Party with Dotremont at the center of this row. Dotremont and Alechinsky returned their party membership, and in 1950 the Brussels-based Éditions du Cobra published Dotremont's *Le 'Réalisme Socialiste' contre la Révolution*. An early precursor of disaffection with Old Left politics?

2. THE SITUATIONIST TRADITION

The Second International Exhibition of Experimental Art, held in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Liège, turned out to be the final act officially organised in the name of Cobra. The movement subsequently dissolved, although the Cobra spirit survived. Each activist went their own way. "The only common bond that remained was Christian Dotremont" (Lambert, 1983, 197). It took half a dozen years before a successor organisation was founded. The Situationist International (1957-1972), just like its predecessors, never included more than a handful of full-time activists, but unlike its predecessors it evolved into an increasingly politicised radical force. The unofficial founding congress of the Situationist movement (the official "birthday" of the group occurred in July 1957) took place in September 1956 in the provincial town of Alba in Piemonte, Italy. Once again, Christian Dotremont was to preside over the proceedings, but illness prevented him from attending. The only Belgian present was Jacques Calonne, a Cobra musician. And in the first years of the Situationist International (SI) Belgians were not necessarily in the forefront of its activities. Yet, even in this first phase of Situationism, when, in the best of the traditions of Revolutionary Surrealism and Cobra, the SI focussed primarily on cultural and artistic actions, Belgians and Belgium played a more than secondary role. In the second half of the 1950s, the Brussels Taptoe Gallery, run by the Belgian member of the SI, Walter Korun, became a (within relevant circles) prominent European platform for Situationist and other vanguard art. Korun likewise played a critical role in organising several Situationist public scandals at the occasion of the famous 1958 Brussels World Exposition, at the same time that a number of Situationist artists, including Belgium's Maurice Wyckaert, participated in the official exhibitions on show in various pavilions.

In the early 1960s occurred an important turn in the orientation of this cultural vanguard. Leading Situationists grew increasingly disenchanted with the International's primary orientation towards the world of art. The SI's undisputed intellectual figurehead, Guy Debord was well-known for his unattrib-

uted adaptations of quotations from Marxist classics. In early 1963 Raoul Vaneigem copied Debord's literary technique: "Our era no longer has to write out poetic orders; it has to carry them out" (Vaneigem, 1997a, 329).[5] Already in their earlier "artistic" phase, Situationist critics had minced few words. The 1958 Amsterdam Declaration, for instance, opened up with the following pronouncement:

> "The situationists must take every opportunity to oppose retrograde forces and ideologies, in culture and wherever the question of the meaning of life arises".[6]

By the early-to-mid-1960s, cultural critique took second rank to political invective. In terms of personal politics, this meant that yet another Belgian took center stage in the activities of a cultural vanguard grouping. With the relegation of the artistic critique to second place, the Dutch Constant Nieuwenhuys withdrew from activities on behalf of the SI. Guy Debord's lieutenant, so-to-speak, now became Raoul Vaneigem, born in Lessines (Hainaut), a graduate of the Free University of Brussels.

Vaneigem, a student of Lautréamont, had been introduced to Guy Debord by none other than the gadfly communist cultural critic, Henri Lefebvre. In 1963 Raoul Vaneigem spelled out the implications of the SI's political turn: "What do we demand in backing the power of everyday life against hierarchical power? We demand *everything*".[7] The accompanying practical reorientations, in the eyes of a perspicacious observer, Laurent Chollet, "transformed the most political of all artistic movements into the most artistic of all political movements" (Chollet, 2000, 84). SI activities, this statement correctly implies, continued to be shaped by unusual methods.

It would lead too far to detail any further the subsequent development of the SI. It should be noted here that the actual impact of Situationism on Belgian political practices in 1968 are difficult to trace. This concrete link with the student rebellions of 1968 is much more visible and apparent in the cases of West Germany and, above all, France.[8] But the fact that the only prolific

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5. The programmatic article from which the citation is taken was published in the 8 January 1963 edition of *Internationale Situationniste* with no author given, but the usually well-informed historian of Situationism, Roberto Ohrt, suggests that this piece was "in all probability" written by Vaneigem; see Ohrt (1990, 272).

6. "The Amsterdam Declaration", reproduced in Wigley (1998, 87).

7. I have relied on the translation in Vaneigem (1997b, 334), emphasis in the original.

8. Dumontier (1995) and Viénet (1968) are stimulating if not exactly impartial overviews of Situationist activism in late 1960s France. Böckelmann and Nagel (2002) opens interesting perspectives with regard to the legacy of Situationist teachings on the West German student Left. Some of the most well-known activists in the German New Left, amongst them Rudi

writer (apart from Guy Debord himself) who shaped the Situationist imagination in the most openly political phase of the fifteen-year-long history of the SI, Raoul Vaneigem, was a Belgian should be highlighted in any overall appreciation of the Belgian contribution to global 1968. Moreover, of the two books which popularised the Situationist critique, Guy Debord's *La Société du Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, it was Vaneigem's incendiary oeuvre, translated into English as *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (2001), which became a bestseller amongst the generation of 1968, and not the far more esoteric and theoretical classic by Guy Debord, which only began to make a significant impact on the reading public years after the fires of the hastily built barricades had been extinguished.[9]

3. PROVOCATIVE NETWORKS

Vaneigem's trademark volume, published literally on the eve of the Paris revolt in November 1967, had actually been written between 1963 and 1965 but had been rejected by thirteen prospective publishers in a row. Raoul Vaneigem received back his manuscript with a negative response from Gallimard, the latest in this sequel of disappointments, the very same day that the *Figaro littéraire* gave prominent coverage to a new phenomenon on the brightening horizon of cultural mixed with political critique, the Amsterdam-based Provos, who, the *Figaro* journalist correctly claimed, had been heavily influenced by Situationism. Vaneigem recalls:

> "That same evening Queneau [the Gallimard editor in question] sent me a telegram requesting that the manuscript be resubmitted".[10]

For a primarily Belgian readership, it would be redundant to spell out the details of the Provo project. It may suffice to recall the extraordinary abilities of this motley crew of media-savvy dropouts, happening artists and political iconoclasts to draw national and international attention to their highly unusual admixture of ludic provocations. In the two short years of the Provos'

Dutschke, Bernd Rabehl and Dieter Kunzelmann, had learned the tricks of their trade in the milieus of situationist-inspired cultural rebels.

9. At least three fascinating studies of Situationism should be on the reading list of anyone wishing to deepen their knowledge of this mere handful of brilliant and quixotic individuals who helped prepare the terrain on which 1968 could flourish: Plant, 1992, but above all the two lavishly illustrated and perceptive works by Ohrt (1990) and Chollet (2000).

10. Footnote to the "Preface to the First French Paperback Edition" in: Vaneigem (2001, 14).

public performance spectacles, they helped shape Amsterdam into the Mecca of youthful rebels from many corners of world, arriving in droves in the search for inspiration and the holy grail. The significance of Provo in the slow but steady development of "1968" – in the Netherlands, but certainly not solely in the Netherlands – was its role as the spiritual and organisational bridge, the missing link so-to-speak, between the countercultural/artistic and the openly political phase of the Sixties. The Provos (May 1965-May 1967) personified more than any other contemporaneous group the creative unity of art and politics precisely at the moment when the combined explosive force of the cultural and the generational revolt erupting throughout industrial societies turned into an openly political revolt.[11]

Within the Situationist International the contribution of Belgian activists had been far more prominent than the impact of the movement on radical politics in the Belgian state. By contrast, Dutch Provo activism had almost immediate repercussions on the Belgian countercultural scene. One milieu in which "provocative" happenings were immediately well-received was constituted by the burgeoning micro-communities of literary rebels grouped around a number of small experimental magazines.

> "For a while, they were termed 'angry young men' or literary delinquents [*nozems*] and caused above all agitation and offence in literary circles. Their most prominent magazines were *Bok*, *Komma*, *Yang*, *Mep* and *Daele*" (Coenen, 2000-2001, 118).

To a greater extent than was the case in neighboring Holland, the Belgian Provos – particularly in their "capital city", Antwerpen – were sustained by non-conformist practitioners of various arts, a fact which was in all likelihood a direct product of the particularly pronounced participation rates of Belgian artists in a variety of earlier iconoclastic movements, briefly touched upon in preceding sections of this essay.

But, in Belgium too, Provo organisational methods found adherents in a variety of social settings. The strongest groupings emerged in Antwerpen and Brussels, though smaller towns, above all in the Flemish half, also saw Provo circles spring up.

> "Apart from artists, beatniks, *boknozems* and some francophone supporters, there existed a fourth specific milieu associated with Provo in Belgium: the Dutch-language university student milieu, above all in Gent" (Pas, 2003, 276).

[11] Two indispensable monographs stand out amongst the few academic studies of this phenomenon: Mamadouh (1992), which has the advantage of linking the Provo heritage to subsequent social movements which transformed the Netherlands into a veritable testing ground of extra-parliamentary radical strategies; and Pas (2003), now the most comprehensive investigation of Provo itself.

Leuven, by contrast, just like the francophone portions of the Belgian state (with the notable exception of francophone activists in Brussels), was far less affected by the provocative spirit radiating across the border from the neighbor to the north. The most compelling explanation for the lesser powers of attraction of Provo in Leuven and in Wallonia was the solid implantation of competing activist traditions in these locations, the student movement in Leuven and certain forms of left nationalism in Wallonia, about which more below. Only where there were no locally dominant social-movement-oriented radical groups did Provo fall on receptive ears.

But even in Leuven, as the student movement developed after 1966, the spirit of Provo did not go undetected. "One could smell, see and hear it", wrote the main figurehead of the Leuven student movement, Paul Goossens, in his memoirs a quarter of a century after the events (Goossens, 1993, 47). Ludo Martens, when editing the journal of the Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond (KVHV), *Ons Leven*, shocked not only the Catholic community when he published in February 1967 the infamous "sex issue", where this previously taboo subject was frankly discussed in an unabashedly "provocative" manner. And, indeed, both Paul Goossens and Ludo Martens were amongst a number of Leuven students who, at various times, made the pilgrimage to Koen Calliauw and his Antwerp Provo supporters in the heyday of the Provo era.

In a recent licentiaatsverhandeling, Joris Verschuren has eloquently reconstructed the various loose networks, ties of friendship and relationships that enabled Provo to take root and prosper in Belgium. Focusing on Antwerpen, Gent and Brussels, Verschuren shows how the respective Provo activists in these various locations had close contacts with important non-conformist artists, in Antwerpen notably including such figures as Ferre Grignard, Derroll Adams, Wannes Van de Velde, Nic Van Bruggen, Remco Campert and the ubiquitous Hugo Claus. But even in Gent, the student-based Provos counted on crucial links to the local countercultural communities, amongst the latter Walter De Buck and "Roland van Campenhout, the Belgian blues legend, who ran his own coffeehouse in Gent", a café heavily frequented by Provos (Verschuren, 2002-2003, 106). The leading light amongst the Gent Provos, Sieg Van de Cruys, for a while even lived together with Roland.

But the networks of sociability not only graphically underscore the close connection between artistic and political revolt, they likewise left manifold traces for the subsequent development of social movements in the Belgian state. Koen Calliauw joined the Belgian communist youth organisation in 1968, later on becoming editor of the *Rode Vaan*. Ludo Martens soon emerged as the driving force behind Belgian Maoism, and he remains their

Great Helmsman until today. But this fertile network of likeminded rebels not only helped shape the post-1968 political party spectrum on the Belgian Left. Second-wave feminism, in Flanders initially exemplified by *Dolle Mina* above all else, can be regarded as a byproduct of the experimental communities surrounding Provo. The two most well-known feminists at the origin of Flemish *Dolle Mina*, Chantal De Smet and Roos Proesmans, had close connections to the loose networks involving Provo. In late 1969, for instance, Chantal De Smet lived together with Armand Sermon and Mong Rosseel in the Sleepstraat in Gent. Sermon and Rosseel had been an integral part of the Provo community in Gent. Sieg Van de Cruys, when in Antwerpen, lived together with Roos Proesmans.

4. CULTURE REBELS IN 1968 BRUSSELS

The particular prominence of artistic rebellion in Belgium may also account for the (in international comparison) unusually visible role of artists in one of the highpoints of the calendar year of 1968, the rebellious atmosphere engulfing certain parts of Brussels. The Free University of Brussels became a hotspot of revolt, as had other campuses around the world by then. The main assembly hall of the ULB became a quasi-permanent forum for discussion for a number of weeks. Similar open meeting spaces around the world were usually festooned with revolutionary slogans of varying sorts. But the Brussels equivalent was draped with an immense canvas, painted by Roger Somville in a marathon session in his studio, Somville delivering each finished section every morning for almost ten days in a row, each piece immediately hoisted onto the walls by enthusiastic students. To be sure, the huge banner painted by Somville prominently included insurrectionary slogans, but these "texts" were integrated into the overall work of art rather than freestanding demands.[12]

The second symptomatic act showcasing the centrality of artistic revolt in the Belgian variant of "1968" refers to the famous occupation of the Brussels' Palais des Beaux-Arts. The central temple of the Belgian arts establishment contained space for multiple exhibitions, a large concert hall, a theater, a cinema and a café, and it became a natural target for insurgents. Indeed, it seems that on the night of 28 May 1968 two separate groups of Belgian artists were

[12] For a photo of a central section of Somville's contribution to the students' cause, see Govaert (1990, 12-13). A greater selection of reproductions of Somville's painting can be consulted in *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (1988, 67-69).

preparing to take the Beaux-Arts by storm. A team of Flemish writers and artists, amongst them the ever-present Hugo Claus, were hedging plans to capture the palace when, unbeknownst to them, another group, headed by Roger Somville, pre-empted the Flemish writers' best intentions by taking over the *art nouveau* complex, draping two banners across its façade, "one proclaiming 'mass meeting' [*assemblée libre-volksvergadering*], the other 'occupation-everyone welcome' [*occupation-bezetting*, *ouvert à tous-open voor allen*]" (Govaert, 1990, 157).[13] Similar acts occurred elsewhere in Europe at the very same time, perhaps the most famous incident being the takeover of the Paris Odéon National Theatre, which became a central clearinghouse for the French student revolt. But, symptomatically, whereas the Odéon remained in the hands of the rebels "only" from 15 May to 14 June, the "misappropriation" of the Palais des Beaux-Arts continued until the very end of August.

5. LEUVEN VLAAMS

There is no need to emphasise the centrality of university student revolts in 1968 throughout the world. In Belgium, three centers of activity stood at the apex of this most obvious element of 1968: the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and the Rijksuniversiteit Gent (RUG). Student ferment at the KUL first captured national attention in May 1966, with a subsequent highpoint in January and February 1968. The ULB experienced a bout with student occupations in May-July 1968. "May 1968" in Gent occurred in March 1969. Belgium thus did not fundamentally differ from other countries affected by the "virus" of student unrest. There is, however, one particular aspect of the Belgian university revolt which makes it stand apart from all the rest.

To the best of my knowledge, it has thus far been completely ignored by the relevant scholarship that the very first university town in all of Europe, which erupted in scenes of open revolt during the social movement cycle associated with the calendar year 1968, was not Paris or Berlin or any other location which has entered the annals of university revolt, but the formerly somewhat sleepy Brabant town of Leuven. Long before campus explosions rocked Turin, Frankfurt, Barcelona and elsewhere, students in Leuven took matters literally into their own hands. When, on 13 May 1966, the Belgian

[13] For two suggestive pictures of the atmosphere in the occupied Beaux-Arts, see Hooghe & Joris (1999, 178-179).

episcopacy mandated the continuation of operations in Leuven as a bilingual institution, the accumulated discontent of the student forces behind *Leuven Vlaams* broke through all barriers. News of this decision became public on 15 May. Irate students organised a rally in front of city hall for 16 May. Paul Goossens recalls how he suddenly found himself at the top of the flight of outside stairs leading up to the magnificent city hall with a microphone shoved in front of his face. Later on an accomplished speaker, but for the moment nervous and uncertain what to say, he limited his first speech to three short sentences. "Tomorrow we shall go on strike out of protest." This spontaneous, unplanned announcement fell on open ears. The second announcement was even more outrageous: "The academic year has now come to an end. (Tremendous jubilation)". The third sentence amplified in front of the growing crowd filling the Grote Markt warrants a brief digression onto the closing passage of the 13 May episcopal declaration. The bishops had ended their text with an invocation of assistance from "higher forces".

> "May the Holy Ghost give light and strength so that the University of Leuven, in the future as in the past, will fulfill its important and indispensable mission."

The third sentence shouted by Paul Goossens into the microphone on 16 May ran as follows: "And upon special request from the Holy Ghost the Catholic University of Leuven shall from now on be pluralist". Goossens then added in his reminiscences: "That was a direct hit".[14]

Anybody familiar with the movement behind *Leuven Vlaams* will realise that the ensuing radicalisation of the Leuven student body was by no means a natural, expected or predictable trend. The Flemish nationalist agitation behind *Leuven Vlaams* even in hindsight appears most unlikely to have spawned a radical student Left, increasingly operating and agitating with little regard for their adult "mentors", the latter generally located on the Center and Center-Right of the political spectrum, including vocal supporters of the Far Right. But the inner dynamic of social movements in Leuven, as elsewhere in this turbulent period, once again produced unexpected results. This is not the time or place to detail the path of nearly continuous radicalisation of the Flemish Catholic student elite. It would indeed be a most rewarding task to reconstruct the shift in focus of the Leuven student revolt from a movement focusing on *Leuven Vlaams* and *Walen buiten* to an agitation slowly switching to a mobilisation demanding *Bourgeois buiten*, a slogan with the advan-

[14] All citations from Paul Goossens' maiden speech are from Goossens (1993, 40). The citation from the "Verklaring van de Bisschoppen van België betreffende de Katholieke Universiteit van Leuven", is taken from the reprint of this document in *Dossier Leuven* (1968, 124).

tage of a double meaning, depending on predilection or circumstance, of anti-francophone and anti-elite sentiments. May it suffice to remind readers that the secularisation and radicalisation of the Leuven student revolt emerged forcefully in the months and years following May 1966. Soon, chants and slogans demanding *Bischoppen buiten* or *A bas la calotte* could be heard in the city's streets. A movement which had originally gotten off the ground by the combined efforts of the Flemish Catholic elite had been turned on its head. By January 1968 the boiling point was reached. Paul Goossens recalls:

> "Even the most bourgeois-seeming individuals continuously shouted with clenched fists: 'Revolution;' and people who, two weeks earlier, still personified moderation and tranquillity turned out to have become frightful agitators. The entire Leuven student body seemed to have been infected by a rebellious virus and had become propagators of the most radical points of view" (Goossens, 1993, 97).[15]

The May-July 1968 mobilisation at the ULB has been ably covered by Serge Govaert in his *Mai 68*. And the events surrounding the ULB's *assemblée libre* fit in exceedingly well with the chronology of events in neighboring France. The *maart-beweging* at the RUG in 1969, by contrast, has yet to be reconstructed by historical scholarship.[16] The brief but vehement altercations at the RUG were certainly powerful testimony that the spirit of 1968, first kindled in Leuven in 1966 and then finding confirmation in the spring of 1968 on the campus of the ULB, was not unique to Leuven and its neighboring metropolis of Brussels. Still, even and especially for the overall appreciation of the student movement dimension of the Belgian 1968, what is most striking is the continued absence of any overarching monographic study which would include at the very least events in Leuven, Brussels and Gent. In most other matters, the Belgian student 1968 conformed, in outlook and inner dynamic, to the outlines of similar rebellions elsewhere in industrial societies at the very same time.

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15. It should be noted here that, curiously enough, there exists still no comprehensive monographic study of the student movement in Leuven after 1966. Louis Vos has done more than anyone else to bring crucial issues related to the Leuven "affair" to the attention of a larger public; see Vos et al. (1988) or, amongst many other of his publications, Vos (1978; 1993). Other studies focus on the overall movement behind *Leuven Vlaams*; e.g. the well-informed study by Laporte (1999) includes the student movement as merely one of several important pieces of the puzzle. A work of synthesis on the student movement in Leuven, ideally covering the first half of the 1970s as well, remains to be written.

16. Still today, a key resource for any attempt to understand March 1969 at the RUG is the document collection, quickly assembled and stencilled soon after the events: *'Tis maar een begin* (1969). The detailed specialised study by Du Chau (1985-1986), proves beyond a doubt that the necessary materials for a general account of the *Gentse Maartbeweging* are readily available.

There is yet one more way in which the Belgian student movement in its overall trajectory fits in rather neatly into transnational patterns around the world. For, another one of the constants in social movement practice in global 1968 was a phenomenally high participation rate of high school students in the contestations of that era. And so it was in the case of Belgium. Space constraints mandate the limitation of this discussion to one particular moment in the history of the Belgian 1968. Between 23 January and 6 February 1968, with Leuven under siege and other Flemish universities in turmoil, tens of thousands of Flemish high school students grabbed this window of opportunity to express their solidarity with the Leuven students and to press for democratisation at their own institutions, the latter usually far more dictatorially run than any of the universities. Sometimes encouraged by emissaries from Leuven, often *alumni* returning to their high school *alma mater* to stir up the crowd, the number of demonstrators and the locations of such rallies speak for themselves. Small provincial towns witnessed extraordinary assemblies of angry young students. Here are some figures for towns most non-Belgians will have never heard of: Mol (1.500), Lommel (1.500), Bilzen (3.000), Diest (3.500), Izegem (1.500), Tielt (1.500), Puurs (1.000), Eeklo (1.500), Waregem (2.000), Maaseik (1.000), Menen (800), Veurne (700); not to mention the even larger crowds in more prominent towns.[17] The succeeding half-dozen years likewise saw Belgian (and not just Flemish) high school students in the forefront of many subsequent radical mobilisations.[18] And there is yet one more parallel between Belgium and the rest of the world that should be highlighted in this context. Secondary school mobilisations in Belgium and elsewhere have been almost universally neglected in the relevant literature on 1968.

6. THE PLACE OF LABOR IN 1968

The universal recognition of the centrality of student unrest in any overall appreciation of 1968 has frequently led to the neglect of other dimensions of 1968 which, depending on location and circumstance, have played an equally – if not more – important role in shaping the politics and culture of that era. Particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, 1968 is quite frequently seen as a unique student-based or, at best, a youth affair devoid of serious conse-

[17] The figures are taken from Martens and Merckx (1978, 32-39).

[18] Note, for instance, the brief survey of radical ferment in Belgian secondary schools between 1969-1973 furnished by Chauvier (1973, 27-28).

quences in other social quarters of the late industrial world. In particular the working class dimension of 1968 has been occluded from many accounts of 1968. Such an approach is, of course, a reflection of the fact that in many "northern" European states and certainly in North America working class involvement in 1968 was in actual fact a rather marginal occurrence. Naturally, even those surveys of 1968 which relegate workers' action to the footnotes of history usually grant some exposure to the general strike of May/June 1968 in France. But this recognition is usually coupled with comments on the exceptional nature of French politics and society, generally serving to underscore the supposed difference between the French 1968 and 1968 in other parts of the world.

What such student-centered visions of 1968 refuse to recognise is the fact that, in more than half of continental Europe, the working class dimension of 1968 was at least as crucial to the trajectory of 1968 as student mobilisations. Especially if 1968 is defined as a mobilisation cycle extending from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, any serious assessment of social movements in Italy, Spain, France and Portugal – but it would be easy to consider other national cases as well – cannot but note the social and political weight of radical ferment in labor relations in these national contexts at the very least. And Belgium fits in exceedingly well into this pattern of development characteristic of – at a minimum – Mediterranean Europe. In Belgium, workers' struggles during these years never undermined the social and political cohesion of society to the same extent as was the case further south. But elements of significant radicalisation affected Belgian labor relations far more than comparable developments in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Scandinavian states, the Netherlands and certainly the United States.

Unlike the relative wealth of scholarly attention devoted to the phenomenon of working class radicalisation in Mediterranean states, the literature on Belgian labor unrest remains rudimentary. For all practical purposes, we still have to rely to a large extent on the pathbreaking assembly of materials collected and published a quarter century ago by Jaak Brepoels (1981). But what emerges from this (in the Belgian context) modern classic by Brepoels and in more recent surveys of this period is a picture of labor unrest, radicalisation and new forms of organisation in the world of Belgian labor which literally cries out for a thorough and critical updating of the state of the art in this matter.

7. BELGIAN WORKERS IN 1968

Belgian labor relations in the modern age remain one of the great unknowns for most academics outside the Belgian state. Yet such widespread ignorance of class struggles in the Belgian state is not warranted by any particularly pronounced passivity or quiescence on the part of Belgian workers and their organisations. Indeed, there are a number of particularities which should call for serious transnational attention. The emergence of the quasi-syndicalist radical leftwing *renardiste* current in the years of underground resistance to the Nazi occupation, for instance, essentially bypassing the Communist Party on its left, is literally unique in all of occupied Europe. The postwar integration of this current in the FGTB/ABVV moderated its impact over time, but the legacy of André Renard continued to influence the socialist trade union confederation long after Renard's premature death in 1962.[19]

The strikes of 1960-1961 were only one manifestation of the particular combativity of (sections of) Belgian labor. Largely unsuccessful in obtaining their aims, for the remainder of that decade Belgian labor remained rather quiescent. The 1960-1961 strike wave therefore did not directly influence the revitalisation of Belgian labor starting in 1968 and reaching a crest in the first half of the 1970s. Nonetheless, even prior to 1968 some interesting developments could be observed on the trade union front. Trade union unity in action had traditionally been a rather elusive goal, with the coexistence of two strong but competing socialist and Catholic federations a powerful obstacle. Here the early 1960s did see the beginnings of meaningful cooperation in the shape of local and then regional united fronts.

> "One has to wait until 1965 for the emergence of trade union united fronts on a national level. They will persist without major dissensions until 1977 only to become obsolete in succeeding years" (Coenen, 1999, 221).

The attentive reader may note that the dates listed by Coenen neatly conform to the period of social movement mobilisation focusing on 1968 put forth in this essay for the phenomenon under investigation in industrial societies as a whole.

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[19] The singlemost detailed and convincing analysis of the impact of André Renard and his *Mouvement Syndicale Unifié* remains the work by Rik Hemmerijckx; see Hemmerijckx (1986) and now Hemmerijckx (2003); but note also Alaluf (2005) and Tilly (2005). On the more long-range legacy of *renardisme* see Moreau (1984).

Yet there was more to the slowly emerging spirit of 1968 in the world of Belgian labor than trade union federation united fronts. As Patrick Pasture cogently notes in an important article on the intellectual and activist history of self-management in Belgium, "from 1965 onwards, the FGTB began once again to express interest in workers' control" (Pasture, 2003, 146). Similar sentiments affected the world of Catholic labour in the Belgian state.

> "Starting in the second half of the 1960s, the KWB [Katholieke Werkliedenbond] demanded not only co-participation for workers at their workplace but also within other societal domains" (Nauwelaerts, 1994, 528).

Workers' control and co-participation were, of course, not the same thing, but concepts and definitions often covered up more than they served to explain. The path towards radicalisation continued apace. By 1971 a new quality of discussions began to affect both national federations. As to the FGTB, it was "in 1971 that it rejected co-participation and came out in favor of workers' control". With regard to the Catholic federation, it was likewise in 1971 that a sea change occurred when

> "the CSC [Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens] declared itself explicitly in favor of self-management, not only on the company floor but on all levels of society" (Pasture, 2003, 144, 146).[20]

This qualitative *durcissement* of both federations' strategies, however, was not entirely a product of internal debate and trade union practices. For by 1970 a major new wave of working class mobilisations had begun to crop up throughout the Belgian state, which often bypassed official trade union federations and which introduced new practices of labor agitation on factory floors. The first major militant strike to capture national attention was the October-November 1968 strike by Ford workers in Genk, where the trade union still played a supportive role but had major difficulties in keeping control over a surprisingly restless workforce. A militant strike at Caterpillar in Gosselies near Charleroi in December 1969 suggested that the 1968 strike at Ford-Genk would perhaps not remain an exception that would confirm the rule of labor struggles which, after 1960/1961, had by and large remained under the control of "safe" official channels. A new quality was reached, however, in January-February 1970 when 21.000 mineworkers in Limburg downed their tools. Official trade union confederations refused to recognise

[20] Note also, for instance, the interesting observations by Van Outrive (1974, 3-38), which graphically demonstrate the changing terms of debate in trade union circles belonging to both federations.

this spontaneous work stoppage. Yet this did not spell the end of this particularly militant action. Strikers created their own leadership by electing a strike committee to guide their mobilisations. After 44 days the miners were forced back to work without many meaningful gains. But a pattern had been established and a model to be followed elsewhere.

Between 1970 and 1976 a series of unusually militant strikes captured the national imagination, and though they differed in some respects from case to case, certain features applied to many of these actions. A significant percentage of them broke out spontaneously against the will of trade union representatives. Often occurring in industries without a long trade union tradition, immigrant workers and young workers were frequently in the vanguard of these strikes. Qualitative demands, such as a refusal to accept speed-ups or particularly authoritarian foremen or managers, often took center stage vis-à-vis traditional quantitative demands focusing on salaries. Accordingly, new methods of struggle on the factory floor could be noticed, such as unilaterally imposed reductions of line speed or workforce imposed reductions in operating hours à la *autoriduzione* in Northern Italy. New forms of workers' self-representation were created. As official unions frequently refused to sanction these strikes, the respective workforces usually elected their own autonomous strike committees irrespective of union membership or citizenship. Such strike committees

> "organised general meetings, transformed the strikes into an active movement, were responsible for the organisation of solidarity, the administration of the strike funds, and imposed themselves as a kind of pressure group both towards the official trade unions and their employers".[21]

In every single one of the aforementioned respects, this development of autonomous, militant strike actions and associated activities closely conformed to similar patterns developed elsewhere in southern Europe in particular in precisely the same years, a development which, as mentioned above, catapulted workers' struggles into the forefront of events in a series of states. And, again similar to developments in Portugal, Italy and Spain (but, curiously enough, not in France), some of the Belgian autonomous strike committees continued to operate far beyond the moment of the termination of

[21] Citation taken from Rik Hemmerijckx, "Belgium and the Workers' Dimension of the 1968 Protest", paper presented at the international conference on "'1968' und die Arbeiter: Ein europäischer Vergleich", DGB-Bildungswerk, Hattingen, Germany, 11-13 February 2005, pp. 9-10, to be published in German translation (Hemmerijckx, 2006a) and in French (Hemmerijckx, 2006b). This section of my essay, of course, also heavily relies on Brepoels (1981, 51-110). For the Limburg strikes see also De Rijck and Van Meulder (2000, 656-671).

the respective strikes, which had given rise to these committees in the first place. Indeed, in both Flanders and Wallonia, there were attempts to establish coordinating committees of such local strike committees, the *Groot Arbeiderskomitee* and, respectively, *Rencontres Ouvrières*. Last but not least, some of these labor actions also witnessed workplace occupations and on a number of occasions the continuation of production and the sale of manufactured goods under workers' self-management.[22] Belgian politics and society may not have been shaken to its foundations by militant grassroots-impelled labor actions as were some countries further south, but the overall experiences affecting the world of Belgian labor were nonetheless quite remarkable.

8. THE BELGIAN NEW LEFT

Apart from manifestations of student insurgency, 1968 throughout the world is most well-known as the activist highpoint of the New Left. Indeed, the years before and after 1968 constitute – on a transnational scale! – one of two volatile moments when existing organisations of the Left experienced major shake-ups, reorientations and the founding of new traditions. The first such movement was, of course, the period at the very end of and following World War I, when the previously hegemonic social democratic tradition suddenly became confronted with a powerful competitor to its left: Third International Communism. By the 1960s both social democracy and communism had come to be regarded as permanent fixtures of the Old Left. But it was also in the course of the 1960s that dynamic new challenges arose to the left of the Old Left. Whether called *Nouvelle Gauche*, *Nueva Sinistra*, *Nueva Izquierda*, *Neue Linke* or *Nieuw Links*, a New Left began to capture the attention of the activist public and, as the decade of the 1960s progressed, such new organisations increasingly became a magnet for the radicalising activist Left. Belgium, once again, fully conformed to this international trend.

As was the case elsewhere, the origins of such changes can be traced to the 1950s. Given the relative weakness of Belgian communism vis-à-vis Belgian social democracy, it was only logical that New Left sentiments were most prominently visible within the social democratic Left. Animated by the entire kaleidoscope of non-conformist radical activists and thinkers present on the Belgian scene, an assortment of influential individuals ranging from the Trotskyists Ernest Mandel and Guy Desolre via independent left socialists

[22] On *autogestion* in Belgian industrial disputes of those years, see Brepoels (1981, passim); Pasture (2003, 149-150); and Coenen (1999, 228).

such as Marcel Liebman and Marcel Deneckere to the leading figures of radical Walloon labor-based nationalism such as André Renard and Jacques Yerna began to ruffle the feathers of an increasingly complacent Old Left. As was the case with fledgling New Left formations elsewhere, newspapers and magazines gave structure and coherence to this innovative trend. *La Gauche* first appeared on 16 December 1956, with the Flemish detachments ably served from 1958 onwards by *Links*.[23]

If there was a distinct Belgian contribution to the emergence of this New Left, it can perhaps be located in the relative centrality of the handful of Trotskyist militants involved in these schemes. Whether due to the relative weakness of the Moscow-oriented communist tradition compared to most other European states, or whether due to particularly able interventions by key representatives of the Trotskyist tradition, the tiny number of supporters of the Fourth International managed to leave a lasting mark. Already in October 1954 they had left a similar imprint on the outlook of the *Jeunes Gardes Socialistes* (JGS), when the forces backing Émile Van Ceulen obtained majority support at the JGS national congress. Nowhere else in Western Europe or North America did Trotskyist activists manage to obtain similar victories at this time.

The inner life of Belgium's New Left, of course, underwent plentiful permutations during the long and winding road to 1968. The alliance with the forces of left-wing Walloon nationalism were often tenuous at best, and by the mid-1960s this unhappy marriage no longer survived. But by then major events had occurred which radically altered the preconditions for New Left work. In December 1964 the national congress of the Belgian Socialist Party (PSB/BSP) declared continued membership in the PSB/BSP incompatible with the holding of leading positions in the left nationalist *Mouvement Populaire Wallon* (MPW) – the latter having emerged as an important force in the wake of the 1960/1961 general strike – and with further collaboration in the political and editorial projects of *La Gauche* and *Links*. Though most editors of *Links* thereupon entered a compromise with the BSP and remained within the social democratic fold, the vast majority of the supporters of the MPW and of *La Gauche* rejected such conciliatory gestures and henceforth operated outside of the large tent constituted by social democracy. In a series of closely related moves the PSB also forced the JGS against the wall. On 21

[23] The key source for the genesis of the Belgian New Left is now Latteur (2000), but see also Witte et al. (1984); Sacré (1975); and Vander Taelen (1979-1980).

March 1965 a 90% majority of JGS delegates opted for the severing of ties with the mother party it had been part of since the JGS' foundation in 1886.[24]

9. THE OLD LEFT AND THE NEW

What had brought about this ferment on the social democratic Left? This is not the time and place to illustrate and analyse the differences between the Old Left and the New. It may suffice to draw attention to what can be regarded as the most important difference gradually separating these two tendencies. What best explains the growing alienation of postwar activists from the politics and the organisations of the Old Left was the ever-growing distance between Old Left politicians and the great variety of social movements making headline news between the 1950s and the 1970s. It was a process which was most pronounced in social democratic milieus, but which likewise affected communist practices, if most often to a lesser degree. What makes Old Left behaviour between 1848 and 1948 differ from its outlook after 1948 is that, roughly speaking, up to 1948 social democratic and communist parties were generally oriented towards – and identified with – critical engagements with all sorts of social movement activities, be they working class strikes, suffrage movements, abortion rights campaigns or antifascist struggles. Clearly, the degree of concrete Old Left involvement and the nature of their support to such actually existing social movements was – and remains – subject to debate. But there was little question that, despite many contradictions and hesitations even in the golden age of the Old Left, their fundamental identification with social movement activism crucially contributed to their political identity and their popularity.

The post-World War II decades, by contrast, turned out to be the period when Old Left parties began to sever their umbilical cord to actually existing social movements. Social democracy but also, if at first to a lesser extent, communism – two political currents born in the heat of struggle out of vibrant and highly contested social struggles – increasingly came to be identified as passive bystanders, if not outright opponents of the most dynamic social movements taking place in the decades of the postwar boom. With few exceptions on the social democratic side, Old Left machine politics abandoned a new generation of activists. Where communism remained in opposition to the *status quo*, they generally retained a degree of credibility, although

[24] The trajectory of the JGS can be followed in Blommaert (1979-1980), but see also Lorneau (1984).

their usually craven acceptance of repression in Eastern European radical revolts severely tarnished their image even in the West. In addition, Western European communism's increasing conversion to parliamentary socialism virtually ensured that Moscow-oriented communism was no longer regarded as a natural ally for an insurgent New Left.

In Belgium this process is born out by the electoral fortunes of the PCB/KPB (Parti Communiste Belge/Kommunistische Partij van België). The last significant upswing in electoral returns followed the 1960/1961 wildcat strikes. The subsequently emerging social movements, notably the student insurgency and grassroots worker protests outlined above, left few positive traces on the electoral front. In fact, after the relative highpoint of 1965, the PCB/KPB entered a period of permanent electoral decline.[25] Another telling indication of the relative irrelevance of actual social movements to the fate and outlook of Belgian communism is the fact that the remarkable recent study of Belgian communism between 1954 and 1982 by Nicolas Naif, which comprehensively and convincingly embeds the evolution of postwar Belgian communism within the series of debates raging inside international communism, pays virtually no attention to the impact of the social movements under discussion in this essay on the evolution of PCB/KPB policy. Here is what Rik Hemmerijckx has to say about the fate of Belgian communism in the turbulent first half of the 1970s:

> "In fact, the only party that suffered from the competition of the New Left parties was the Moscow-oriented Communist Party. In the seventies, the PCB/KPB was only a shadow of what it had once been, but in some industries they still held some positions. The fact that the new Far Left parties manifested themselves in the same social and political milieus caused a serious electoral loss for the PCB/KPB and prevented the younger generation from joining the traditional communist Old Left" (Hemmerijckx, 2006a; 2006b).

Similar observations by definition also applied to the PSB/BSP which, in the period of most noticeable political agitation, the years 1968-1974, was continuously immersed in coalition cabinets responsible for government policies.

[25] I have consulted the table of Belgian communist post-World War II election returns in Naif (2004, 259).

10. THE BELGIAN NEW LEFT (1964-1968)

To return to 1964, the year when the largest of all New Left parties in the industrialised world, the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) in Italy, separated from its social democratic milieu and set up shop as an independent organisation. December 1964 was, as noted above, the crucial month when the PSB/BSP expelled *La Gauche*, the MPW and the JGS. Belgian political traditions and social conditions did not approximate the volatility of the Italian cauldron where the PSIUP could count on a membership of 150.000. Nonetheless, the Belgian New Left, even when forcibly removed from the confines of social democracy, continued to leave a mark on politics and society. The strongest contingent of New Left forces, the left nationalists in Wallonia, soon struck out on their own. The current around François Perin initially still joined forces with the eclectic non-nationalist dissident Left to found the *Parti des Travailleurs de Wallonie* which, less than two weeks after its kickstart, was rebranded *Parti Wallon des Travailleurs* (PWT). In the Brussels agglomeration, the unrepentent erstwhile leftwing critics of the PSB/BSP set up the *Union de la Gauche Socialiste – Bond der Linkse Socialisten* (UGS-BLS) and in Flanders the *Socialistische Beweging Vlaanderen* (SBV). In October 1965 these forces joined together in the *Socialistische Arbeiderskonfederatie/Confédération Socialiste des Travailleurs* (SAK/CST). In the May 1965 elections, these forces experienced an immediate success and managed to elect three members of parliament. But the honeymoon period did not last very long. All three successful candidates had run on joint tickets with other forces. Only the Trotskyist Pierre Le Grève, a member of the UGS running on a joint ticket with the PCB/KPB, became a founding member of the federation of New Left organisations, the CST/SAK. The two other freshly elected members of parliament had run on joint tickets including the PWT, but they had gone in different directions by October 1965. Both François Perin and Robert Moreau were chosen on *Action Commune Wallonne* tickets, including the PWT alongside much larger forces of the "mainstream" Walloon nationalist Left. Moreau had never been a member or even a supporter of the PWT. With the founding of the *Parti Wallon* in late June 1965, the current around François Perin split from the PWT, taking a majority into the *Front Wallon*. The PWT which helped found the CST in October 1965 was all but a shadow of its former self.[26]

[26.] Information on these processes has been culled, for the most part, from Latteur (2000) and Vrancken (1986-1987).

From 1965 onwards, then, Belgium's heterogenous New Left proceeded along different organisational tracks. The *Parti Wallon* soon mutated into the *Rassemblement Wallon*, and it would lead too far astray to debate the question whether left nationalism in Wallonia after 1965 can reasonably be included in the New Left fold. The much tinier forces around the CST/SAK, still including a mixture of different left socialist and dissident communist traditions, continued to operate for a number of years, though diminishing in size and effectiveness, despite the fact that the JGS – never an official member of the CST/SAK – remained closely associated with this current for the remainder of the 1960s. Another tendency on the non-dogmatic and pluralist Left became associated with the forces around the magazine *Mai* (1968-1973), incorporating a few individuals formerly associated with the organisations composing the CST/SAK but notably including a fresh cohort of young activists emanating from the student struggles at the ULB.[27] But by 1967 a third strand of the colorful Belgian New Left emerged from an unsuspected corner of the Belgian state. The student struggles at the KUL began to make their unique contribution to the history of the Belgian Left.

The *Studentenvakbeweging* (SVB) first emerged as a current operating within the radicalising KVHV in early 1967 but soon began to function autonomously, emulating its model in the Netherlands to the north. Quickly becoming the key force constituting the radical vanguard behind *Leuven Vlaams*, it found imitators elsewhere, most prominently amongst the backers of the *Gentse Studenten Beweging* (GSB). Until about 1970, the SVB/GSB must be considered a constituent part of the pluralist Belgian New Left, and it far outdistanced the stagnating organisations affiliated to the soon moribund SAK/CST. In or about 1969, however, a further evolution began to be sharply noted within the rapidly evolving Belgian (New) Left. A process suddenly began to get underway which, once again, was all but identical in virtually all other countries experiencing global 1968.

11. FROM THE NEW TO THE FAR LEFT

For, not only in Belgium but, once again, literally everywhere else, the honeymoon of New Left politics generally only lasted until 1968. As if choreographed behind the scenes but in reality quite independently from each other, in virtually every single country that had experienced the presence of a fledgling New Left in the run-up to 1968, moves got underway to construct

[27] The sole existing study of this fascinating journal remains Van Cutsem (1980).

an entirely different political project that was designed to avoid the pitfalls of the Old Left and the shortcomings of the New Left at the same time. One of the hallmarks of New Left organisations had generally been an openly pluralist approach not only in terms of their ideological outlook but with regard to organisational practices as well. The inner life of the New Left had largely been characterised by the absence of constraint, widely differing local practices, and a willingness to tolerate most forms of internal dissent. Then, suddenly, between 1969-1971, a flurry of party-building activity set in just as a few years earlier grassroots decentralisation had been the watchword of the day. In Barcelona, Paris, Turin, San Francisco and Berlin, New Left organisations were abandoned almost overnight for newly-founded revolutionary parties or – where a measure of moderation still held sway – circles of like-minded "revolutionaries" who set themselves the task to construct such parties as soon as the necessary critical mass of activists had been assembled. What had happened to bring about this sudden switch which, organisationally, denoted the transition from the New Left to the Far Left?

Two factors shall be singled out for brief mention in this context. One such catalyst for this strategic reorientation amongst the New Left was, paradoxically, the impact of the French May/June 1968 events, which were intensely studied, often by obligatory pilgrimages to the capital city on the Seine, by this generation of mostly youthful activists around Europe and the world. Many participant-observers began to question previously held assumptions in the wake of the May defeat. How could such a tremendous social movement, uniting broad social strata in a joint campaign to paralyse a modern industrial state in a three-week-long general strike, quietly end with a mere wage increase and then the reinforcement of the Gaullist state? Aiming to avoid a repetition of the French post-May 1968 defeat, the New Left's eyes were suddenly opened to the perceived lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution half a century earlier. Here, or so it seemed, the organisational antidote to New Left lack of structure and disorganisation was beckoning for anyone who cared to see. A tightly organised – certainly by comparison with New Left structures – political party would be capable of leading the wished-for assault on the foundations of the economic and political order. If decentralised social movements had been able to rock – though not to capsize – the boat of advanced industrial society, how much more effective would centralised action turn out to be?

The second factor behind the demise of New Left organisational practices was a direct result of the encounter of radicalising New Left students with the seemingly autonomous and leaderless, but energetic and militant grassroots worker revolt breaking out in the wake of 1968. Students in Berlin, Barce-

lona, Bologna and Birmingham had flocked to support wildcat strikes as soon as the latter began to break out. Originally in part emboldened to take radical action by the example of the student vanguard "taking on the state", worker actions now in turn deeply affected the further course of action by (mostly) student militants. Once again, the lack of effective organisation seemed to explain why this suddenly appearing new form of worker protest may have led to partial victories in specific locations around relatively limited demands but why it could not turn the tide vis-à-vis the relationship of forces on a national scale. The example of Petrograd between February and October 1917 once again seemed to point out the road to victory.

In most countries the years between 1968-1971 served as the crucial turning point in this evolution from the New to the Far Left. Loose networks of New Left circles evolved into self-styled Leninist combat parties. Two variants filling the void in every single country that had experienced 1968 were Maoism and Trotskyism. The rationale behind this particular menu of options for the burgeoning Far Left will have to remain unaddressed for reasons of space. What is important in this context is the fact that, once again, as any reader familiar with the Belgian Far Left of the 1970s can testify, Belgium fits the bill exceedingly well.

Between 1968 and 1971, the SVB and GSB became increasingly interested in the Marxist and, eventually, the Maoist critique. At the occasion of the all-important Limburg mine workers strike in early 1970 the Flemish student radicals set up *Mijnwerkersmacht*, graphically underscoring their rapidly growing interest in working class matters. By September 1970 *Mijnwerkersmacht* mutated into *Alle Macht Aan de Arbeiders* or AMADA for short. The first dozen issues of AMADA's homonymous newspaper appeared with the universal radical symbol of a clenched fist in its masthead. From October 1971 onwards the clenched fist was replaced by the heads of Marx, Engels, Lenin… and Stalin and Mao! And AMADA was only one amongst a number of erstwhile New Left groupings turning to Leninist Far Left organisational principles. AMADA, a product of Flemish student unrest, had initially virtually no presence in the francophone portions of the Belgian state. Here a 1963 pro-Chinese split-off from the PCB/KPB around Jacques Grippa had sown the seeds of Maoism early on. Reinforced by a wave of new recruits emanating from the 1968 student struggles at the ULB, the first post-1968 francophone Maoist organisation was created with the telltale name of *Université-Usine-Union* (UUU). A split in December 1970 led to a name change adopted by the majority of UUU militants: *Tout le Pouvoir aux Travailleurs*; the similarity of its identifying label with AMADA was more than circumstantial. Meanwhile, the pluralist JGS and the remnants of the SAK/CST, in-

creasingly attracted to the ideas and practices of the Trotskyist hard core present within this organisational spectrum for many years, in late May 1971 formed the Revolutionary Workers' League (LRT/RAL).[28]

12. ECHOES OF RADICALISATION WITHIN THE OLD LEFT?

It would have been surprising if the growth and development of a New and a Far Left, feeding and being fed by unprecedented waves of student and worker insurgency, would not have called forth some echoes amongst the mainstream organisations of the Old Left. And, indeed, in many countries affected by the spirit of 1968, social democratic parties, especially the latter's youth wings, sooner or later got caught up in the feverish atmosphere exuded by New and Far Left activity. The revitalisation of French socialism in the 1970s after its almost complete disappearance in the run-up to 1968 occurred in many ways under the auspices of a renovated ideological outlook influenced by the language and the symbolic markers of 1968. German social democracy experienced a last bout of youthful activism in the first half of the 1970s. In the case of the British Labor Party, the radicalisation process started later and only reached its climax in the 1981 campaign for deputy leadership which the insurgent Tony Benn lost to Denis Healey with the narrowest of all margins: 49.875% versus 50.426%. Even the more rigidly structured communist parties were on occasion shaken by grassroots activism. The leftwing challenge to the leadership of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) came to a head in 1968 with the expulsion of the *Il Manifesto* current in November of that year.

In Belgium, such reverberations of social movement activism within Old Left parties was a rather guarded affair. Belgium social democracy, having successfully removed the New Left challenge in late 1964, subsequently was rather immune to the spirit of 1968. Paul Goossens' comments in this regard reflect realities only too well:

[28] This paragraph cannot even begin to do justice to the process leading to the establishment of these "mainstream" tendencies of the Belgian (and international) Far Left. Of the Belgian Far Left, AMADA has undergone more academic scrutiny than others; see Versteegh (1999-2000) and Segers (2004). There are no comparable studies exclusively discussing the Trotskyist Far Left. However, with Nélisse (1980) we are furnished with a highly perceptive and refreshingly analytical survey of the entire Belgian Far Left, which includes both Maoist and Trotskyist traditions.

> "The Leuven student leaders had absolutely no contacts with the Socialist Party which then still called itself Belgian." "Only years later under Karel Van Miert, when socialism in Flanders for no good reason had sunk to worrisome levels, did an opening occur. Much too late, of course, but still too early for the leadership in many red fiefdoms who resisted such incursions to the last possible moment. With the exception of Léo Collard, not a single Socialist leader after 1968 gave as much as a hint that they had understood anything at all about the movement" (Goossens, 1993, 122).

It was Léo Collard, who, on May Day 1969, called for a *Rassemblement des Progressistes* primarily aimed at left-leaning critics on the Catholic front, whom he hoped to interest in a common cause. This attempted opening to the wider world, of course, in the end found positive echoes neither in the world of Catholic labor nor, most definitely, within Socialist ranks, and it was soon buried as a stillborn initiative.[29]

As elsewhere in Western Europe, Belgian communists' slow and hesitant move towards Eurocommunist ideas cannot be regarded as a response to the radicalising initiatives erupting in the milieus of the New and then the Far Left. The move towards Eurocommunism was, by and large, accompanied by further moderation – and not radicalisation! – of communism's strategic outlook, exemplified by the Italian Communist Party's (PCI) offer of a historic compromise with Christian Democracy and the PCI's embrace of austerity politics. In Belgium, of course, communism in the years under investigation was for all practical purposes a marginal and declining force, rendering even the thought of similar overtures to its far more powerful competitors to its political right the stuff of idle dreams. The PCB/KPB was therefore in a situation where serious listeners were generally only to be found on its political left or in the volatile left nationalist Walloon communities. This situation helps explain such rather unusual (when compared to communist electoral politics elsewhere in the western world) electoral alliances as the series of electoral blocs with the Walloon working class Left or the forces of the SAK/CST in 1965. There cannot have been many instances when, in the 1960s, a communist party campaigned together with forces to its left and thus, as in the case of the 1965 Brussels campaign, helped elect a leading Trotskyist to national parliament!

Such flexible electoral tactics were in all likelihood more the result of overall weakness rather than conviction. The one exception to this rule was the case of the Borinage section of the PCB around René Noël and his supporters in the PCB. A leading communist activist in the antifascist World

[29] The most detailed and serious analysis of Collard's call can be found in the materials composing the second part of Coenen & Govaert (1999).

War II underground, Noël, one of the few vocal critics of Soviet interventionism in Hungary and Poland in 1956, throughout the 1960s and 1970s opted for an open-minded alliance politics, including forces on the PCB's left. Twice his campaign led to tangible successes. In a coalition with Left Catholics, independent left socialists and left Walloon nationalists, Noël's *Union Démocratique Wallonne* (UDW) on 21 November 1964 won four out of thirteen seats in Cuesmes. A re-vote held in June 1965 gave the UDW an absolute majority of seats. Soon thereafter the unusual coalition fell apart, but only to reappear in new disguise and on a larger scale in the 1970s. The *Union Démocratique et Progressiste* (UDP), assembling a similar array of pluralist left forces, in June 1971 obtained 21.5% of the vote in Mons. Once again, a re-vote, in November '71, only increased the UDP's return (27.5%). This time the UDP coalition held together for half a dozen years, although by 1974 the Catholic Left and other non-communists began to lapse into inactivity. Nonetheless, René Noël's UDW and UDP experience showed that there was support for PCB strategic turns that did not necessarily point in the direction of greater moderation.[30]

13. THE SPIRIT OF 1968 AND THE CATHOLIC WORLD

The most remarkable reverberation of the spirit of 1968 in purportedly mainstream political camps, however, could be recorded in Catholic milieus. Here, again, Belgian peculiarities were by no means out of sync with processes in other parts of Catholic Europe. The radicalisation of politics and society between 1965/1966 and 1975/1976 in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, for instance, cannot even begin to be understood without a recognition of the singular contribution of Left Catholicism, whether on the student, worker or the openly political New and Far Left front. Some brief descriptions of the Belgian dimension of this transnational phenomenon will close this essay on the place of Belgium in global 1968.

In earlier sections of this essay, ferment in the world of Catholic labour has been mentioned on more than one occasion. The Left Catholic component in the Borinage UDP, for instance, found organisational expression in the *Groupement Politique des Travailleurs Chrétiens*, a formation which has yet to be studied in any detail. The radicalisation of the CSC/ACV (alongside

[30] For the history of the UDW and UDP, see Lewin (1999a; 1999b); Naif (2004, 114-117, 124-127, passim); and Maerten (2005).

ferment in the FGTB/ABVV) was likewise noted earlier, but it is surely worth highlighting that, in the words of a keen observer of the Catholic pillar in Belgian society,

> "the CSC appeared to be more prepared than the FGTB to accept and support the workplace occupations and especially the self-management initiatives…" (Pasture, 2003, 149).

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of the positive turn towards progressive Catholicism in the aftermath of Vatican II.

One direct result of the thaw affecting Vatican deliberations was the revitalisation of the worker priest experience that had characterised the first wave of Western European Left Catholicism, which had come to an end by the mid-1950s. It was Pope Paul VI who agreed to the resurgence of this innovative apostolic movement, and on 21 January 1966 the long-awaited Vatican approval to renew such initiatives arrived at the office of the Bishop of Liège. The total number of clerical volunteers for full-time industrial labor soon surpassed the tiny number of Belgian worker priests a generation earlier. The Liège and Charleroi teams, emerging from a decade of hibernation, were soon joined by a team in Brussels, then in 1968 by Gent, in 1969 by Namur, in 1970 Antwerpen and in 1974 in Hasselt. The highpoint of post-Vatican II worker priest activism in Belgium was reached in 1974, with 51 ordained priests having chosen to wear the working class blue.[31]

What literally jumps into the eye of the observer is the clear-cut parallel between the rise and fall of "1968" as a whole, in Belgium and elsewhere, and the statistical record of participation rates in the Belgian worker priest experience. Just as, in general, the highpoint of overall radicalisation in the mobilisation cycle spanning the years 1965/1966 – 1975/1976 was located not in 1968 itself but in the early-to-mid-1970s, the number of Belgian worker priests steadily rose from 1965 to 1974, diminishing in number in every single one of the succeeding half dozen years (De Greef, 1985, 75, includes a graph detailing this evolution). Nothing demonstrates the synchronicity of Catholic and secular radicalisation more persuasively than a brief summary of the corresponding evolution of two representative Belgian Catholic youth organisations.

The Flemish *Katholieke Studentenactie* (KSA) organised young Flemish Catholics over the age of six. Given the separate organisational existence of the KVHV – initially in the forefront of the Leuven student insurgency – uni-

[31] Some information on this process can be gathered in the relevant pages of two theses: Gaëlle (1994-1995, 143-154); and De Greef (1985, 72-83); citations taken from Gaëlle (1994-1995, 154).

versity students were not the primary targets, though KSA members included some. What interests us here is the contingent of KSA activists aged sixteen and above. In a remarkable reconstruction of this brand of KSA activists between 1965 and 1979, Ingrid Depoorter has persuasively drawn up a picture of a previously rather traditionally oriented Catholic youth organisation suddenly, in or about 1969, casting about for different ideological and activist guideposts. As elsewhere in the Flemish half of Belgium, the radical dynamic behind *Leuven Vlaams* was central to this repositioning of the 16+ age group within the KSA.

> "The influence of 'Red Leuven' on the KSA became apparent especially after 1971. With several years' delay, the opinions of that new generation of students began to affect the KSA. This process came about when the first generation of members, those who had lived through 'May '68,' left the KSA after 1971 and were replaced by a new generation which was marked even more decisively by leftwing currents" (Depoorter, 2000, 74).

From 1972 to 1975, writes Louis Vos, the undisputed authority on Belgian students, within the pages of the *Werkgemeenschap +16* newspaper, the aptly-renamed *Aksiekrant*, now jointly published by the similarly radicalised *Jong Davidsfonds*, "criticism of the capitalist establishment based on a left-wing or Marxist social analysis provided the red thread" (Vos, 2001, 169). Vocal KSA contingents in these years were a permanent fixture of protest demonstrations on a variety of topics, marching and chanting alongside members of AMADA and RAL.

The francophone *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (JOC), unsurprisingly, if anything surpassed the KSA in radical sentiments and revolutionary phraseology employed in publications and other interventions in the public sphere. Here, once again, the years 1969-1974 were central to this experience of Catholic radicalisation towards the political Left. A few examples, recorded by Paul Wynants in an important contribution to this theme, may suffice. In 1964, the JOC leadership habitually ended all internal correspondence with the formula, "*tous unis dans la même amitié partagée dans Notre Seigneur*". By 1974 four words sufficed: "unis dans la lutte" (Wynants, 2003, 102). The JOC/JOCF (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine) chose the occasion of May Day 1974 to self-proclaim itself a "revolutionary workers movement" (*Ibid*., 107). And graphic illustration of such changing trends is provided by a poster produced by the JOC at this time which reproduces portraits of individuals who have been "executed because they struggled with and for the people" (*Ibid*., 103). Next to the predictable Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, the collection of symbolic figures included the

Colombian priest and guerrilla fighter Camillo Torres; the French Maoist student Pierre Overney, drowned while fleeing French police; Rosa Luxemburg; Che Guevara; and the Catalan anarchist Salvador Puig Antich, one of the last victims of Francoist "justice" in dictatorial Spain.

14. CONCLUSION

One prominent red thread of the preceding pages has been the exemplary way in which Belgian social movements fit well into a much larger, transnational trend. At the same time, a number of peculiarities make the Belgian 1968 a particularly fruitful target for comparative investigations. The prominent role of both Flemish and Walloon nationalism in the politics of that era; the lines of continuity between Catholic students at the KUL evolving into the most dynamic organisation of the Belgian New Left, the SVB, and subsequently towards a long-lived variant of international Maoism; the relatively early showdown between the Old and the New Left within Belgian social democracy; the promising alliance between communist forces, independent left socialists, Walloon nationalists and Left Catholicism in the Borinage; and, last but not least, the pivotal role played by Belgian artists in preparing the intellectual and activist terrain of 1968; these and other particularities of the Belgian state make 1968 in Belgium a natural target for activist and scholarly interest alike.

Or so one would think. Yet, once again, Belgium remains one of Western Europe's least well-known territorial states, certainly in academic circles outside of its national boundaries. The few serious transnational or comparative studies of 1968 generally leave Belgian conditions consistently unaddressed. And even within Belgium the phenomena associated with 1968 have yet to generate even one single serious, all-inclusive monographic study.[32] Perhaps this cursory survey and assessment of the Belgian 1968 can serve to stimulate further and more detailed studies of this matter.

There remains, however, at least one more feature that requires brief mention. When assessing global 1968 within the European context, Belgium, for all intents and purposes, appears to perform in some respects an unusual role. Spanning the linguistic and cultural boundaries between northern and southern Europe, Belgian social relations include characteristics of both European

[32] The all-too-brief, telegram-style article by Guy Vanschoenbeek in the "May 1968" issue of the *AMSAB Tijdingen*, however, shows that such a project – in principle – can be done; see Vanschoenbeek (1993, 3-11).

traditions. In 1968, this unusual position at the juncture of "two Europes" resulted in a (for northern Europeans) unusually prominent working class insurgency and radical ferment in important segments of its Catholic milieus. By contrast, unlike southern European radical traditions, the Belgian New and Far Left remained a largely student-based affair. Once again, the observation may hold true that Belgium was (and remains) Europe's northernmost "Mediterranean" society.

ABBREVIATIONS

AMADA	Alle Macht Aan de Arbeiders
CSC/ACV	Confédération des Syndicats chrétiens/Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond
FGTB/ABVV	Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique/Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond
GSB	Gentse Studenten Beweging
JGS	Jeunes Gardes Socialistes
JOC	Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne
JOCF	Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine
KSA	Katholieke Studentenactie
KUL	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
KVHV	Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond
KWB	Katholieke Werkliedenbond
LRT/RAL	Ligue Révolutionnaire des Travailleurs/Revolutionaire Arbeidersliga
MPW	Mouvement Populaire Wallon
PCB/KPB	Parti Communiste Belge/Kommunistische Partij van België
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano
PSB/BSP	Parti Socialiste Belge/Belgische Socialistische Partij
PSIUP	Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria
PWT	Parti Wallon des Travailleurs
RUG	Rijksuniversiteit Gent
SAK/CST	Socialistische Arbeiderskonfederatie/Confédération Socialiste des Travailleurs
SBV	Socialistische Beweging Vlaanderen
SVB	Studentenvakbeweging
SI	Situationist International
UDP	Union Démocratique et Progressiste
UDW	Union Démocratique Wallonne
ULB	Université Libre de Bruxelles
UGS-BLS	Union de la Gauche Socialiste-Bond der Linkse Socialisten
UUU	Université-Usine-Union

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1968 in België en elders

GERD-RAINER HORN

SAMENVATTING

Deze bijdrage focust op de Belgische dimensie van de globale '68-beweging. '1968' is een metafoor voor een langere periode van intense mobilisatie van verschillende sociale bewegingen, die begint in 1965/1966 en ongeveer tien jaar later eindigt, een tijdspanne die men als een 'rood' decennium kan beschouwen. In dit overzicht staan ontwikkelingen centraal in verschillende sociale en politieke omgevingen: de radicale gisting in de culturele sfeer in de jaren die culmineren in 1968; studentenbewegingen; activisme in de wereld van de arbeid; de herverkaveling van de Belgische linkerzijde; en radicale ontwikkelingen in de wereld van het Belgische katholicisme.

De onderliggende gedachte van de openingsparagraaf over rebellie in de culturele sfeer is dat non-conformistische tendenzen en trends die zich aanvankelijk enkel in artistieke kringen manifesteerden, ook ruimte creëerden voor een grotere tolerantie in de politieke wereld. Na het revolutionaire surrealisme en Cobra, komt de evolutie van de Situationistische Internationale en Provo aan de beurt.

Studenten van universiteiten en hogescholen speelden een centrale rol in de Belgische protestbewegingen van het rode decennium. Bijzondere aandacht gaat naar de interne dynamiek van de protestbeweging rond *Leuven Vlaams*. Hiernaast komt ook de beroering in de arbeidersbeweging aan bod, of die nu het resultaat was van radicaliserende vakbonden van katholieke of socialistische herkomst dan wel van hoofdzakelijk autonome stakingscomités buiten de traditionele vakbondsstructuren. De Belgische linkerzijde werd herverkaveld in een Oud, Nieuw en Uiterst Links.

Deze bijdrage eindigt met te benadrukken hoe parallel de evolutie van '1968' in België verliep met de rest van de Westerse wereld. Er zijn echter ook verschillende Belgische bijzonderheden die suggereren dat België een geschikt terrein is voor internationale vergelijkingen. Het Belgische 1968 ligt ergens tussenin de ervaring van de mediterrane landen waar de sociale orde een klasse-doorbrekende evolutie kende tijdens dit decennium, en de Noord-

Europese staten waar de protestbewegingen ertoe neigden meer gebaseerd te zijn op studenten en op de middenklasse.

1968 en Belgique et ailleurs

GERD-RAINER HORN

RÉSUMÉ

Cette contribution analyse la dimension belge du mouvement de "mai '68", pris dans son ensemble. En effet, 1968 est une métaphore visant une période beaucoup plus longue qui connaît une mobilisation intense de différents mouvements sociaux. Débutant en 1965/1966 pour se terminer environ dix ans plus tard, celle-ci peut être qualifiée de décennie "rouge". L'étude se concentre sur les évolutions perçues dans divers milieux sociaux et politiques à l'époque. Citons la radicalisation progressive de la sphère culturelle qui culmine en 1968, les mouvements étudiants, l'activisme dans le monde ouvrier, le remembrement de la gauche belge et certains changements radicaux dans le monde du catholicisme en Belgique.

L'idée sous-jacente du premier paragraphe sur la rébellion dans le milieu culturel montre que les tendances non conformistes, sensibles uniquement dans les cercles artistiques au départ, créent également un espace de tolérance plus grand chez les politiques. L'Internationale situationniste et le mouvement Provo succèdent alors au surréalisme révolutionnaire et au mouvement Cobra.

Le rôle des étudiants des universités et des écoles supérieures est déterminant dans les mouvements de protestation de cette décennie "rouge". La dynamique interne qui se développe autour du *Leuven Vlaams* mérite certes une attention particulière. L'agitation du mouvement ouvrier entre également en ligne de compte, qu'elle résulte, soit de la radicalisation des syndicats catholique ou socialiste, soit de l'initiative de comités de grève indépendants, externes aux structures syndicales traditionnelles. Ajoutons que la gauche belge se restructure en une aile traditionnelle, une orientation nouvelle et une gauche extrême.

La présente étude évoque enfin les éventuels parallélismes existant entre l'évolution de 1968 en Belgique et du monde occidental. Cependant, certaines particularités belges font de ce pays un terrain d'investigation prometteur dans le domaine des comparaisons internationales. En effet, La Belgique de 1968 se situe environ à mi-chemin entre l'expérience des pays méditerranéens et celle des États de l'Europe du Nord. Dans les premiers, les défis à l'ordre social établi traversent les classes. Dans les seconds, les mouvements de protestation émanent plutôt du milieu étudiant et des classes moyennes.