

de arbeiders, die immers ook tijd moesten hebben voor hun familiale en religieuze verplichtingen.

Zoals al bleek uit de relatie tussen *Action Française* en neothomisme, leverde dat laatste ook inspiratie voor het denken over het nationalisme, een niet minder belangrijk fenomeen in de late negentiende en vroege twintigste eeuw. Kasper Swerts licht toe hoe de Leuvense theoloog en chemicus Désiré Nys in dat verband invloed uitoefende op Lionel Groulx, priester, historicus van het nationalisme en voorvechter van de Québécoise zaak. Nys' thomistische onderscheid tussen de essentiële vorm en de contingente materie die aan de basis lag van de hele fysische werkelijkheid inspireerde Groulx tot een denken over naties als primordiale vormen met een lange traditie, die zich echter doorheen de tijd konden aanpassen aan nieuwe maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen. Met nieuwe materie vergaan de oude vormen immers niet. Swerts' conclusie dat het neothomisme op die manier katholicisme, nationalisme en moderniteit met elkaar wisten te verzoenen lijkt plausibel, maar raakt daarom nog niet aan de belangrijkste drijfveren van katholiek nationalisme. Cinzia Sulas laat zien hoe de neoscholastiek zelfs verzoenbaar was met het voeren van oorlog.

De lectuur van deze bundel opstellen levert geen eenduidige conclusie op over de draagwijdte van het neothomisme. Hoewel het blijkbaar weinig wetenschappelijke empirie, analyse en theorievorming in verband met de grote sociale omwentelingen wist aan te bieden, heeft het normatieve debat dat het in de katholieke wereld mee aanstuurde daar wel mee een mentaliteitswijziging helpen bewerkstelligen. De aanvaarding van het principe dat alle leden van de samenleving recht hadden op een leven dat meer kwaliteit bood dan niet sterven van de honger had kennelijk tijd nodig en was noodzakelijk om zelfs maar een begin te willen maken met fundamentele sociale en economische hervormingen. Dan pas kwamen wetenschappers aan bod die de weg wezen naar alternatieven voor de rigide economische structuur van België, met weinig marge voor wat wij de welvaartsstaat zijn gaan noemen.

Het debat daarover zou nog tot na de Tweede Wereldoorlog aanhouden.

Olivier Boehme

MICHEL DUMOULIN, CATHERINE LANNEAU (EDS.)

La Belgique et les Traités de Paix, de Versailles à Sèvres (1919-1920). Actes de Colloque, Bruxelles, 09-11 mai 2019

Brussels, Académie Royale de Belgique, 2021, 468 p.

The collection under review contains 28 essays based on papers that were presented at a colloquium in Brussels in May 2019. Michel Dumoulin and Catherine Lanneau have arranged them under three main headings: “*Décideurs*” (nine essays), “*Revendications*” (six), and “*Opinions*” (thirteen) but, as they stress in their “*Conclusions*” (p. 453-459), the essays reveal five additional themes. First, several essays show that the Belgians did not speak with a single voice during the war and the peace conference. Second, a number focus on the communications between the politicians and their parties, while others concentrate on relations between the latter players and the press, lobbies, and other pressure groups. Third, while a few papers deal with territorial issues, others emphasise the importance of economic and material interests. Fourth, several essays focus on questions of personal and collective discovery and identity. Finally, there are those essays that focus on how Belgians saw themselves as reflected through the prism of other countries and international movements.

Two important pieces introduce the collection. First, in his “*Préface*” (9-12), Didier Viviers focuses on the Belgian international lawyer, pacifist, and 1913 Nobel Peace Prize winner Henri La Fontaine, who hoped to form a Society of States, but who was disappointed with the result of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's efforts. Then, in his “*Introduction*” (13-24), Sylvain Schirmann reminds the reader (13-14) of how difficult it was to draft treaties that both satisfied the desires of the allied and associated states and lived up to the promises of a new international order proposed by Wilson both before and during the peace conference.

Schirmann points to what could have been done better and, thereby, addresses issues that have been in contention in the wider historiography on Versailles and the other peace treaties that came out of the conference. Until the 1990s, the dominant view of the treaties, which was influenced by the diatribe entitled *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) penned by the economist and member of the British delegation John Maynard Keynes, was that they were too harsh and, therefore, sowed the seeds of another world war twenty years later. Territorial arrangements, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the argument went, largely ignored the principle of national self-determination, while the reparations' payments demanded of Germany and its allies were economically ill-conceived. As Robert Gerwarth stresses, however, the historiographical trend in the last three decades, especially among Anglophone historians, has been towards understanding the difficult choices that the peacemakers had to make, in the context of revolution and violence that still shook Central and Eastern Europe far beyond 1919, and towards emphasising that the choices and decisions after 1919, i.e. not to enforce the treaties' terms and ultimately to appease Germany, had more to do with bringing about another war than the Paris Peace Settlement *per se*¹.

Due to space limitations, it is impossible for me to do justice to all the essays in this excellent collection. Given my interest in the politics and diplomacy of Belgian war/peace aims, I was especially drawn to those papers which either directly focused on the political and diplomatic decision-makers or indirectly looked at the press, public opinion, and pressure groups. In many cases, the historians in question have unearthed new sources or they have brought new insights into how and why before 11 November 1918 the Belgian government had developed aims, such as abandoning obligatory neutrality, securing control over the wes-

tern Scheldt and southern Limburg with Maastricht from the Netherlands, obtaining German-speaking cantons in the east, acquiring a union with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, securing full reparations for damages caused by the German invasion and occupation, and gaining the left bank of the Congo River and the Cabinda Enclave in Africa from Portugal. In the end, in terms of territory, Belgium received the cantons of Eupen, Malmédy, and Sankt-Vith along with neutral Moresnet in Europe, but it could not get Allied support for either its aims vis-à-vis the Netherlands or Portuguese Angola. Ultimately, the British were willing to sign an agreement with Belgium on 30 May 1919, by virtue of which it became the mandatory power in Ruanda-Urundi, territories that Congolese forces helped conquer in northern Tanganyika during the war. Though the nationalist campaign in favour of acquiring Dutch territory is sometimes exaggerated in terms of its influence on Belgian policy (Balace), there is no doubt that even the hint of demands for Dutch territory caused a negative reaction in the Netherlands, which enabled the Dutch to launch a diplomatic offensive in London, Paris, and Washington that proved very effective. Bilateral talks between the Belgians and Dutch went on for years, but the damage done in 1919 could not be overcome (Klinkert).

The Belgians also failed to achieve a "personal union" with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, whereby King Albert would become Grand Duke, a solution initially supported by the Belgian steel magnate Gaston Barbanson, who, on 17 January 1919, became president of the Luxembourg firm ARBED. Though he had worked closely with the annexationist agitator Pierre Nothomb during the war, he found himself resisting the demands on the part of Belgium's steel industry, which, as Barthel stresses, wanted nothing less than the "economic conquest of the Grand Duchy." In the end, Barbanson decided that the independence of Luxem-

1. ROBERT GERWARTH, "The Sky beyond Versailles: The Paris Peace Treaties in Recent Historiography", *Journal of Modern History* 93/4, 2021, p. 896-930. SALLY MARKS, who authored books on Belgian diplomacy during the peace negotiations, such as *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (1981) and *Paul Hymans: Belgium* (2010), was a key scholar in the effort to debunk the myths about the treaties in general and about reparations in particular. See, especially, SALLY MARKS, "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty", *Journal of Modern History* 85/3, 2013, p. 632-659.

bourg would be in the best interests of his firm. As Barthel notes (155-161), the referendum held in the Grand Duchy on Sunday, 28 September 1919 delivered the “knock-out” blow to Belgian annexationism, as the Luxembourg electorate approved Grand Duchess Charlotte (r. 1919-64), who had succeeded her sister Marie-Adélaïde (r. 1912-19) on 9 January, with 77.8% of the vote and chose France over Belgium for a customs union by a margin of 73% to 27%. In the end, France was more interested in security; hence, having secured a Military Accord with Belgium in September 1920, Paris facilitated the creation of the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union on 25 July 1921 in exchange for a strong interest in the Guillaume-Luxembourg Railway².

Meeting in a Crown Council on 4 May 1919, the Belgian government decided that it would sign the Versailles Treaty, having obtained the cancellation of the war debts owed to Britain and France and the right to priority regarding German reparations' payments. Though Belgium did not get all that it had hoped for, Foreign Minister Paul Hymans, who had headed the Belgian Delegation, recommended that parliament ratify the treaty, which the Chamber of Representatives and Senate did with all those present voting unanimously on 8 August and 27 August 1919, respectively (Gerard, 80-84). Though the Germans contested the terms of the treaty, especially those pertaining to territorial transfers and reparations, they signed it on 28 June 1919. For most Belgians, the feelings they had for the enemy troops who had occupied their country were summed up by one word that adorned banners in liberated Belgian towns and cities: “Heraus!” But, as Christoph Brüll stresses (119-121), the German Foreign Minister, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, who headed the German delegation, recognised, in his defiant statement to the conference on 7 May, that his country had to repair the wrong that had been inflicted on Belgium and that, as Sally Marks noted in her *magnum opus*, reparations to Belgium was the only chapter of the treaty to which Berlin did not object officially.

Despite the loss of Eupen, Malmedy, and the other cantons, the Germans agreed, at first, to negotiate the redemption of some 6.1 billion paper German marks that were in circulation in Belgium when the war ended. The *Banque Nationale Belge* fixed the exchange rate at 1.25 Belgian francs (BF) for 1 mark, and negotiations with German Finance Minister, Matthias Erzberger eventually led to an accord on 25 November 1919 whereby Germany would buy back the marks for 7.5 billion BF. Unfortunately, it did not go into effect because Berlin also demanded an end to the liquidation of German property in Belgium and a renunciation of the extradition of war criminals, conditions which the Belgian government rejected (Brüll, 124-125). Then, in 1925, the Germans added another condition for a deal — the return of the eastern cantons to Germany. Brussels refused and Belgian-German relations deteriorated quickly (125-127).

As for reparations, the Belgians preferred cash payments to deliveries in kind because the latter method would privilege German production and labour to the detriment of Belgian workers (Depoortere, 171). The Belgian delegation had demanded a priority payment of 10 billion BF, but the Council of Four reduced this sum to 2.5 billion gold francs in cash to be paid by May 1921, when the Reparations Commission was scheduled to decide on a final sum that Germany would pay (173). Though Britain and France cancelled Belgium's war debts, the United States did not since the Senate did not ratify the Versailles Treaty. Hence, Belgium was still liable to pay back American banks over \$171 million borrowed during the war and another \$246 million borrowed after the Armistice. By virtue of an agreement reached on 18 August 1925, Belgium was to make 62 payments, interest free, on the war debt and at an interest rate of 1.35% on the post-Armistice loans. By the time of the Hoover Moratorium of 1931, Belgium had paid \$10 million (173-174). As for German reparations, Belgium received a total of 2.9 billion gold marks, most of it in kind, between 1920 and 1933 (174-175).

2. MICHAEL F. PALO, *Neutrality as a Policy Choice for Small/Weak Democracies: Learning from the Belgian Experience*, Leiden, 2019, p. 46.

In their essay, Florent Verfaillie and Dirk Luyten (297-316) note that, after the war, the Belgian courts went after not only “denunciators” and political collaborators, such as the Flemish “activists”, but also economic collaborators, especially “war profiteers.” By virtue of a decree of 31 May 1917, the crimes of “voluntary economic collaboration” and “spoliation” of Belgian citizens carried the penalties of five years imprisonment and up to 20,000 BF in fines. But determining guilt was not easy, especially since Belgian industry engaged in what would be called the policy of the “lesser evil” in World War II, i.e. working with the Germans in order to maintain production and employment. Though most of these large firms were closed down after the war, many others were able to resist collaboration thanks to the supplies distributed by the American-sponsored Commission for Relief in Belgium, which meant that Belgians did not starve. Merchants and owners of smaller businesses, as well as farmers, who supplied the Germans with victuals, found it harder to survive and, therefore, found themselves vulnerable to charges of economic collaboration. Penalties for those convicted, however, were relatively light (306-308).

As Pierre-Alain Tallier recounts in his paper (317-340), another source of income for the state came from the sequestration and liquidation of property belonging to the residents of enemy nations. However, in early 1919, there was a difference of opinion between the newly appointed Minister of Justice, Émile Vandervelde, the socialist leader of the Belgian Workers’ Party (BWP) and member of the Belgian delegation to the peace conference, and Henri Jaspar, the Catholic Minister of Economic Affairs. Whereas the cabinet authorised Jaspar to set up an Office of Sequestrations in his ministry on 24 February 1919, Vandervelde was concerned about the violation of private property rights and urged that the government wait until the peace terms concerning damages and reparations were decided before proceeding. On 10 May, Catholic Prime Minister Léon Delacroix noted that article 297 of the Versailles Treaty allowed Belgium to “retain and liquidate German property”

(325-326). On 13 December, the cabinet learned that the value of sequestered goods came to 1 billion BF and that the sales of such goods came to a total of 156,387,318 BF. By 8 November 1926, liquidations reached a sum of 22,000,000 BF. On 13 June 1929, a German-Belgian convention was signed, which said that non-liquidated goods before 9 June 1929 would revert to their original owners (329-330). In total, between 1918 and 1929, the revenue stemming from liquidations amounted to over 14.5 billion BF (336-339).

A number of other papers highlight the influence of pacifistic ideas of such figures as the French novelist Henri Barbusse on the one hand, and of the revolutionary ideas of the Bolsheviks on the other. Especially interesting is Dieter Vanderbroucke’s essay on the revolutionary aspirations of left-leaning Flemish “activists” (441-451). He stresses that the ransacking of the homes of activists and other measures of repression favoured by the dominant French-speaking elites (including Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier, Archbishop of Mechelen and moral symbol of resistance to the German occupation) helped inspire the birth of the first Flemish nationalist party — the *Frontpartij* — which grew out of the *Frontbeweging* among Flemish soldiers at the front in 1917 and 1918. Though short-lived, movements such as the *Universeele Humanistische Vereniging* (UHV), proclaimed on 6 September 1919, and reviews such as *Staatsgevaarlijk!* were subversive enough that the Ministry of Defence banned them from contact with Belgian troops in the Rhineland (Vandenbroucke, 415-418). We should also remember that public opinion in Flanders generally opposed annexationist war/peace aims, especially vis-à-vis the Netherlands.

At the current moment, with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine raging, and the efforts by the European Union, the United States, and other democracies to punish Moscow economically and to isolate President Vladimir Putin diplomatically, one can readily understand the anger that most Belgians felt towards the Germans after August 1914. The invasion came as a shock, not only because the Belgians believed that they had

done nothing to merit such an attack, but also because, even in Francophone intellectual circles, Germany and German culture were widely admired. In her essay, Geneviève Warland addresses the desire for revenge on the part of Belgian academics and how those feelings eventually dissipated (383-394).

In her piece, Laurence Boudart looks at five, mostly short-lived, Francophone reviews, which were inspired in one way or another by radical ideas, such as those associated with the review and movement *Clarté* founded by Henri Barbusse. Also influenced by *Clarté* were left-wing Flemish “activists”, who, as Vandenbroucke observes (409-410), included a good number of young intellectuals, writers, and artists and who sought much more than an independent Flanders. They aimed for nothing less than the destruction of old Belgium and a complete break with its pre-war art and culture. The views of *Clarté* were spread after November 1918 in publications such as *Staatsgevaarlijk!*, *De Nieuwe Wereldorde*, and *Opstanding*. An outstanding figure in the movement, as Vandenbroucke notes (410-412), was the poet Paul van Ostaïjen (1896-1928). By the start of 1921, the group “*Clarté*” became increasingly under the influence of Moscow and the French Communist Party. This trend alienated many young Flemings, who moved over to the social democratic wing of the BWP or to the *Frontpartij* (423). The defeat of the Spartakists in Germany and the brutal assassinations of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht shocked idealists like Van Ostaïjen, who published his third collection of poems, named *Bezette stad*, which appeared in the spring of 1921. For Vandenbroucke, it was the only Flemish book on World War I which has entered into the collective memory (424).

In his paper, Hubert Roland examines how the German question at the time of “peace treaties” was seen in Francophone reviews (427-440). Citing

the work on the author by Sophie De Schaepdrijver, Roland looks at the transformation in attitude towards things German by the Belgian writer Georges Eekhoud (428-429)³. Eekhoud, a Fleming who wrote in French, was initially hostile to the German invasion, but eventually he developed much sympathy for the Flemish cause and had several of his works printed by German publishers during the war (429). Roland then examines *Le Flambeau* (*Revue belge des questions politiques et littéraires*), which started publication clandestinely in the spring of 1918 and continued as a monthly after January 1919 until the outbreak of war in 1940. Among other writers he mentions is Paul Colin, who would collaborate with the Germans during World War II and be assassinated in April 1943. As Roland recounts (437), Colin joined the “*Ligue de solidarité des Intellectuels pour la Victoire de l'internationalité*” that began in May 1919 and which opposed the spirit of the Versailles Treaty. In his book *La Belgique après la guerre* (1920-21), Colin described the treaty as “the greatest moment of iniquity in contemporary history”. Few people in Belgium agreed with him. Eekhoud, meanwhile, revealed his “authentic pacifism” in his essay “*Des Hommes!*” (1920), in which he recounted the story of six German soldiers who were shot at the *Tir National* in Brussels because they refused to shoot other men who had been condemned to death. This generous attitude towards the enemy, as Roland notes (438), marginalised Eekhoud even more at a time when patriotism was still running rampant in Belgium. It took about a dozen years for a pacifist sentiment to develop in Belgium. Representative of this trend was the book by the doctor-writer Max Deauville entitled *La boue des Flandres* (1928), in which the author describes the suffering of all soldiers at the front, all victims of nationalism (439). Though Roland does not mention it, a similar pacifist movement was rising in Great Britain, which culminated in the publication of Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* (1933). And, in Germany, in the same year that Deauville publis-

3. SOPHIE DE SCHAEPDRIJVER, “*Ô faiseuse de crépuscule*”. Deutschlandbilder in Belgien im Ersten Weltkrieg”, in H. ROLAND, M. BEYEN and G. DRAYE (eds.), *Deutschlandbilder in Belgien*, Münster-New York, 2011, p. 292-310. This analysis is based on a reading of Eekhoud’s diary.

hed his book, Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* appeared. The tragic irony here is that at the very time that pacifism in Europe was peaking, Fascism and Nazism were on their way to demonstrating that the Great War was not "*La Der des Ders*" (or as H. G. Wells called it: "*The War to End All Wars*").

There are other essays of interest in this collection, for a specific review of which I do not have the space⁴. All in all, I would recommend this excellent book to anyone who has an interest in the world wars and the role of Belgium, in particular, and to those who are interested in the mechanics of peace-making in general. As Dumoulin and Lanneau note in their conclusion (458-459), there could have been papers on subjects such as gender, the plastic arts, film, and music, as well as on the perspectives of the lower and middle classes. I, personally, would have appreciated more coverage of how the war and peace treaties impacted that what, today, is called the "community question". But colloquia are constricted by time as are collections of essays by space.

Michael F. Palo

DAVID VELTMAN

**'Sterven in het bed waarin ik geboren ben'.
Een biografie van Felix de Boeck (1898-1995)**

Hilversum, Verloren, 2021, 400 p.

De schilder-boer uit Drogenbos is het onderwerp van een uitgebreide doctoraatsstudie en bijbehorende publicatie aan het eminente Biografie Instituut van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het boek is het resultaat van diepgravend onderzoek dat historicus David Veltman sinds 2016 voerde. Het boek biedt zich afwisselend aan als een kritische culturele, politieke en artistieke biografie.

Als biografie heeft Veltman veelvuldig uit het rijke materiaal van en rond De Boeck geput: brieven, kunstkritieken, artikels, catalogi, uitgeschreven interviews en, last but not least, gesprekken met

naasten en burens. Een schier oneindige berg informatie werd geduldig door Veltman gezeefd en geordend. Het is hier dat een eerste struikelblok op het pad van de moedige biografie geworpen wordt. Waar er voor sommige kunstenaars te weinig (ego)documenten bewaard zijn, zodat de biografie zich moet beperken tot het aaneenrijgen van interpretaties van kunstwerken, komt het soms voor dat er te veel materiaal is. Dit lijkt alleszins het geval te zijn voor De Boeck. Tijdens zijn uitzonderlijk lange leven was er weinig dat hij niet aan het papier (of aan de gewillige toehoorder aan de keukentafel van zijn boerderij) toevertrouwde: zijn uitgesproken religiositeit, zin voor mystiek, het eenvoudige leven op het land, het activisme voor de Vlaamse zaak maar ook opinies over de kunst en de kunstenaars rond hem, steeds doorspekt met filosofische beschouwingen en mijmeringen, en dit alles in een bevlogen taal. Gebruikmakend van het nieuwe medium televisie treedt hij vanaf 1956 de Vlaamse huiskamer binnen, waar men hem leert kennen als een godvrezende, welbespraakte, hardwerkende schilder-boer die de traditionele normen uitdraagt en de Vlaamse waarden koestert. Een jaar na zijn overlijden krijgt de boerderij in Drogenbos een museumstatus. Als 'FeliXart' is het ondertussen uitgebreid tot een volwaardig museum en expertisecentrum van de historische en actuele avant-garde.

Het mag gezegd dat De Boeck zelf gretig meeschreef aan het script van zijn eigen leven, wat de taak van de biografie er niet eenvoudiger op maakt. Bovendien wordt ook de Nachwuchs nog steeds streng bewaakt door een schare bewonderaars, zo leert ons Veltman. Het doorploegde materiaal legt verrassend veel tegenspraak bloot in de persoonlijkheid van de kunstenaar: traditioneel maar toch aangetrokken tot de avant-garde, buitenstaander maar toch conformist, nuchter maar vol pathos, afwachtend maar strijdvaardig, gecultiveerd maar ruw, rusteloos maar honkvast.

4. See the papers by Michel Dumoulin on Belgian capital interests abroad (129-141); Pierre Tilly on the impact of the treaties on forced labour in Africa (221-231); Pierre-Olivier de Broux on the question of social justice for workers in the wake of the treaties (233-250); Matthew Haultain-Gall on the experiences of British and Commonwealth troops in Belgium after the Armistice (267-282) and Dries Vansackere on the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp (441-451).