

THE WORLD OF THE BELGIAN PEASANTRY
FROM 1830 TO 1870

by

G. BRAIVE

Within the framework of the international investigation into the peasant movements made in view of the History Congress of Moscow, the Belgian group tried to find out what the situation was in the peasant world in Belgium during the XIXth century, since it proved impossible to indicate authentic social movements here.

The study of the rare historical works devoted to this rural world for the period from 1830 to 1870 enabled us to conclude that "confronted with similar events, with a greater population-density, despite the more pronounced fierceness of the crisis of 1845-47 and the less favourable situation of the agricultural worker, the reaction of the Belgian agricultural population is quite different from the French reaction. Putting to sack of country-houses, destruction of forests, or brutal revolts are out of the question. Certainly, signs of discontent do appear, grievances really exist, but they never degenerated nor gave rise to the formation of social movements".

The works consulted are listed at the end of the article.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 171-190.

THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE BRUSSELS PROPRTIED
MIDDLE-CLASSES OF 1914

by

J. DE BELDER

The fact of having the disposal of all means of power of the establishment is not the only reason for the survival of the middle-class society. The flexible character of capitalism is attributable in the first place to a chance built-in mutation mechanism of the executive groups. Renewed executive groups adapt themselves to the contemporary circumstances more easily than a hereditary class, thus protecting the system from an undermining of its power.

This became apparent from an investigation into the social origins of the Brussels propertied middle-classes of 1914. As a sample-group we selected those eligible for the senate of 1914 who were born in Brussels. This group fell apart into three clear-cut subdivisions. The first subdivision was composed of 22 eligibles or 29.33 % and entered the top-stratum in the period between 1880-1914. Sprung from lower middle-class, these people were pre-eminently active as wholesalers and manufacturers. In the opinion of society they were the capitalists; they came into direct contact with the labourers. Materially they had reached the top and all their endeavours aimed at consolidating a substantial

financial basis, the prerequisite for integration into the top. But they did not yet belong to the decision-making élite. Their situation was still too unstable. The second subdivision, the upper middle-class, was composed of 20 eligibles or 26.66 %. Their parents had entered the top-stratum in the period between 1850 and 1880. They directed their full attention to this integration-process. The results were still limited, owing to a timid application of the appropriate means : acting as a director of limited liability companies, as a political mandatary, finding a spouse whose family was related to the decision making élite.

The third subdivision, the financial aristocracy, was composed of 33 persons, or 43.99 %. About or before 1850 their families already belonged to the top-stratum. Their integration into the group of the decision-making élite had been completed. They were directors of numerous limited liability companies and cumulated mandates in all sectors of social life. They were married into families with wide branchings in the leading circles. The latter phenomenon was so strongly marked in subdivision III that, in spite of the local limitation of the group, they formed not only a unity on the grounds of an identical evolution-pattern, but also a unity on the basis of family-relationship.

This decision-making élite of 1914 was no longer the one of the first half of the 19th century. The latter stood up for values that were progressive for the first part of the 19th century, but no longer so more for the end of it. Economic freedom could offer more to the enterprising captain of finance, manufacturer and wholesaler. The people of the third subdivision, who still lived in the shade of the first generation about the middle of the century, were very keenly aware of that fact.

The period between 1850 and 1880 witnessed the great mutation. With the new economic expansion the second generation dashed past the first, carrying along a limited part of the former élite that had not failed to see the course of the new development.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 405-449,
1973, IV, pp. 393-427.

LOUIS FRANK, PIONEER OF THE BELGIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

by

F. DE BUEGER-VAN LIERDE

Louis Frank was born in Brussels on January 22nd, 1864, of Belgian parents, but of Jewish origin. At the University of Brussels he took his degrees of philosophy and law with distinction and great distinction in 1886. In 1888 he published a pamphlet on *La femme-avocat* (the lady-barrister) : by waving aside all the objections that might have been raised in this connection, he wished to support the entry into the bar of the first Belgian woman doctor of law, Marie Popelin. Confronted with the refusal expressed by the courts of justice, he decided to devote himself to feminism. In February, 1892 his famous *Essai sur la condition politique de la femme* (Essay on the Political Situation of Woman)

was published, a substantial volume of 600 pages, of paramount importance for the origin of the feminist movement in Belgium : by its scientific value and its moderate tendency it was taken very seriously in the press. This fact partly enabled the *Ligue belge du droit des femmes* (Belgian League for the Rights of Women), founded by Louis Frank and Marie Popelin in April of the same year, to be general well accepted by the public opinion. Frank led this society as secretary-general while continuing his publications. *La femme dans les emplois publics* (Woman in Public Office) notably revealed the ardour of his feminist action. In December, 1893 domestic difficulties, due, among other things, to his omnipresence in the League, forced him to leave it. He continued asserting his convictions by articles in *L'Indépendance belge* (the Belgian Independence), and by lectures in Belgium and abroad.

He published successively : *Le Grand Catéchisme de la femme* (The Great Catechism of Woman), a summary of the feminist question, presented in the form of questions and answers, *La femme contre l'alcool* (Woman against Alcohol), several bills aiming at eliminating the inequalities of the civil code, *L'assurance maternelle* (Maternal Assurance), *L'Education domestique des jeunes filles* (The Domestic Education of Girls).

The press commented abundantly upon all these publications. But the progressist ideas of Louis Frank, his exaggerated claims - notably to the Nobel Prize for literature - together with his Jewish descent, finally turned the balance against him. He died, practically forgotten, in 1917.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 377-392.

ECONOMIC EVOLUTION AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN BELGIUM AT THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY

by

P. DEPREZ

Taking the demographic evolution as a key variable it can be said that from 1740 onward the rate of increase of the population was higher than in the previous part of the century. Two major differences in the demographic evolution can be observed : first of all the rate of increase is higher for Flanders than for Wallony; secondly the less fertile areas experience a higher rate of increase than the more fertile and hence, more agricultural areas.

Because of the limited possibilities offered by the agriculture in the less fertile areas and because of the higher rate of demographic increase, these areas have experienced a high degree of rural industrialization. This rural industry, linen industry in Flanders and iron industry in Wallony, was characterized by high production costs that adversely affected the competitiveness of the goods. In order to maintain a certain competitiveness, attempts were made to lower the production costs which was done at the expense of the wage component. This became very acute from 1780 onward. At the same time the emergence of the urban industries rendered the position of the rural cottage industry even more precarious. These changes also caused increased impoverishment of the rural masses, but more particular of the segment of the population active in the rural

industry. At the same time the economic position of the peasantry, comprising the segment of the rural population active in agriculture improved if not in absolute terms at least in a relative way. Together with improved economic and social position, the peasants tried to reinforce their political position which caused them to clash with the nobility in an attempt to eliminate the last remnants of the feudal power on which the political power of the nobility rested.

Given the fact now that the feudal system was stronger in Wallony than in Flanders we can make the following basic distinction between the peasant movements in the two parts of the country. In Flanders the rural industrial masses start to rebel against the local wealthy and middle class peasants who can count on the support of the nobility. For Wallony however, the indications are that the agitations were mainly the work of peasants against the burden of the feudal system.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 49-65.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE BELGIAN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION 1846-1913

by

J. GADISSEUR

As early as 1830 agriculture was by far the main activity of the country and its relative perfection made it an example for most of the other European states. In 1846 its production was more than 7/10 of the whole physical output, although the crisis of the linen industry and the potato disease had already endangered the prosperity of the land.

Industrial growth overturned technology as well as the markets. One could have expected that industrialization would have given agriculture new opportunities of development by producing new fertilizers or machines, by improving the standard of living and by increasing transport facilities. As a matter of fact these have exerted on agriculture a deep influence, but the delay was important. It was not before 1880-1895 that the use of improved machinery and chemical fertilizers became general. Similarly the increase of the living stock was of some importance only towards the end of the century.

If for agriculture the good of industrialization was delayed, its evil however was immediate. The shortening of labour forces and capital was cruelly resented already from 1865 on. The introduction of the threshing machine was the cause of a seasonal disequilibrium in the opportunities of employment, which was a new incitation to the migration of workers to the towns and their factories.

Routinism and smallness of their exploitation made it very difficult for the farmers to realize in time the necessary adaptations and, from 1865 to 1880 the average area of the farms diminished gradually. This life-or-death reaction contributed itself to delay the proper adaptations, which were the use of new techniques of cultivation and breeding.

During the period 1846-1913 the physical production of agriculture

increased slowly, with a rate of 0.59% a year, while in the same time the physical output of industry increased at a rate of 3.1% a year. The result was that in less than a century relative positions were reverted : shortly before the First World War agriculture contributed only for less than one third to the whole physical output of Belgium.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 1-48.

CULTIVATION-PLAN, PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTION-COSTS
AGRICULTURE IN A FEW MUNICIPALITIES OF THE
PROVINCES OF ANTWERP AND EAST-FLANDERS
(EARLY 19th CENTURY)

by

J. HANNES

W. VANDERPIJPEN

Since the middle of the 19th century censuses of the cultivated area, the crop-quantities and the yield-factors obtained have no more been exceptional. This information, which is undoubtedly important, should, however, be approached with some distrust, as the data were gathered by inexperienced people in a rather shady period (years of occupation) and from a refractory population.

The unsystematically gathered information, i.e. the yield-figures which appear from time to time in the writings of contemporaries, is likewise unreliable, as it happened but too often that only exceptional yields were worth noting. The difficulty is always that calculating a margin of error proves impossible.

All those figures eventually offer but few indications about the agrarian structure or the agrarian business economics.

A step in that direction can be taken with the assessments of the primitive land-registry, drawn up at the beginning of the 19th century in order to determine the average net income of real estate. The administration of the land-registry had no intention to carry out a thorough investigation into agriculture itself, but the result - the assessment per municipality - is a very useful agriculture-inquiry. The value of the dossiers is not so much to be found in the vast amount of figures, but in the fact that the most important aspects of the agrarian trade can be studied in their mutual connection.

The arable land was divided into different quality-classes. Together with a detailed cultivation-plan the quantity of seed is mentioned per plant and subsequently the yield-factors are stated per plant and per class of land. Thus, the yield per hectare is known. Remarkable and exceptional is the fact that a detailed reference is also made to the production-costs per plant.

By way of random test the dossiers were examined of fourteen municipalities situated in different agrarian areas. Though attention was primarily focused on a critical processing of the material, it has nevertheless become apparent that, in the domain of agriculture, Flanders was well ahead of the province of Antwerp, notably in the Campine.

This finds expression in the crop-yields, but it appears especially from the monotonous and qualitatively inferior cultivation-plan and the relatively high

production-costs in the Campine. The potato-growing which spread but slowly in the province of Antwerp, may serve as an example for this statement.

As compared to the data of the 1846 agricultural census, the crop-yields and the business-results in general were considerably lower in the beginning of the 19th century. Though it is difficult to determine the value of the 1846 census, yet everything points to a strong increase of the productivity in the former half of the 19th century. An explanation for this phenomenon is probably to be found in the generalization of the after-crops and of better fodder-plants.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 67-107.

THE SOCIALIST TRADE-UNION MOVEMENT AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR (1919-1921)

by

M. NAUWELAERTS

The years after World War I were determining for the further evolution of the Belgian socialist trade unionism. In this period the socialist trade-unions enjoyed an enormous quantitative expansion which endowed them with a power previously unknown, the more so as the co-operation of the unions was indispensable for the economic reconstruction of the country.

By incorporating the vague revolutionary aspirations of the working class into a concrete, immediate program of claims at the right moment, the unions had succeeded in rallying round them the majority of the workers in the vital sectors, and the demands of the workers were peaceably steered into reformist channels which ran parallel to the platform of the Belgian Labour Party (BWP).

Naturally, this quantitative expansion confronted the trade-unionism with reorganization-problems. The movement for concentration and unification was carried out, a strong central authority saw to a uniform, disciplined management, whereas a growing union-administration was to enroll the new unionists.

Aware of its power and position of authority the trade-union entered the struggle for "immediate social improvements". In doing so it kept emphasizing the national interest and pointed out to the workers their responsibility with regard to the production.

The unions rather soon realized their basic claims, namely the eight-hour working-day, minimum wages and union-recognition. Especially the latter meant for trade-unionism the beginning of a new era.

In a concrete form in the joint industrial councils union-recognition meant that the employers were to recognize the union-executives as equivalent partners for discussions and decisions in economic and social life. In the euphoria of the moment the trade-union hoped thus to get the ultimate control of production.

Both practice and theory were attuned to this constructive task. Revolutionary actions such as general strikes were tabooed. For that matter, the strike did not agree with the newly acquired negotiation method and was subject to very strict regulations.

In spite of its optimism with regard to the new tactics, it soon proved that the trade-union was losing its position of authority. Confronted with the first postwar economic crisis it was unable to present alternatives and had to exert itself to maintain the reforms acquired. Its task grew merely defensive.

Neither did the trade-union succeed at that moment in defining a long-term strategy. It consumed the revolutionary potential of the movement in a struggle for limited objectives, which was justified by the circumstances, it is true, but which would prove sterile for remodelling the system itself.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 343-376.

THE BANKRUPTCY OF ISIDORE WAROCQUE,
MONS BANKER OF THE EARLY XIXth CENTURY

by

J. RASSEL-LEBRUN

As the banker of a great number of manufacturers of the province of Hainault, the Mons Isidore Warocqué enjoys the general confidence of his contemporaries. His reputation is such that the difficulties he meets with after the revolution of 1830 will be imputed solely to the political disturbances. However, his credit is shrinking gradually. The Société Générale which maintains excellent relations with him and has always supported him financially, begins to doubt his real situation and, in security for its claim amounting to over 8 million francs, demands guarantees which he fails to furnish. Warocqué's debts to the Société Générale remain uncleared at the due dates. As his situation grows more and more intolerable, he applies on January 4th, 1832, for a respite from all legal actions on the part of his creditors, thus crossing the Bank's project of having him adjudged bankrupt.

Warocqué's request is backed by the majority of his debtors who still consider him a respectable businessman always worthy of their interest. The Société Générale opposes this request and consents in desisting from its claims only after being assured, on June 16th, 1832, with regard to the powers of the Commission entrusted with the winding-up of the Mons banker's business.

On August 4th, 1832 a respite of one year is granted to him and his credit balance amounts to 3,900,000 francs. Alas, the Board of liquidators soon have to admit that the opponents of the respite were right and that they were to realize only the remnants of a seemingly huge fortune.

On July 1st, 1834, Warocqué was adjudged bankrupt by the Commercial Court of Mons. The verdict of the Court provisionally setting the opening-date of the bankruptcy on November 30th, 1830, is appealed against; after long contradictory debates before different judiciary instances, in which the bankrupt, the syndics, the Société Générale, the Finance Minister... all serve their respective interests to the best of their ability, the Court of Appeals, in June, 1838, made the rather astonishing decision to set the opening-date of the bankruptcy definitely on December 27th, 1831.

By validating the onerous transactions effected by Warocqué between this date and November 30th, 1830 to the profit of certain preferential or more

exacting debtors, the decree of the Court of Appeals makes the mass of unsecured debtors lose more than 20% of the amount they would have been entitled to if the judgment of the Mons Commercial Court had not been appealed against.

What could have been the reasons for motivating the challenged decree ? That is what we tried to reveal in the present study, which is rounded off with a few considerations on the personality of the bankrupt.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 429-471.

THE DEBTOR-BOOKS OF A COUNTRY BAKER 1880-1891

by

L. SCHEPENS

Examination of two debtor-books of a baker-retailer at Langemark near Ypres, covering the period 1880-1891.

Next to bread and flour, also the most diverse commodities are sold, including clothes, tableware, etc.

The retail prices of all these articles, but especially of butter, flour and maslin, could be noted and compared with the market-reports of Ypres. Most striking is the ample margin of profit provided for by the baker. Maybe this is due to the considerable credit the baker has to advance to his customers amounting to 1,306.85 Frs. in 1880, at least half of which was never recovered.

A detailed examination of the debts contracted leads to a number of ascertainties :

1. Among the debtors a group of seasonal workers can be pointed out, the debts of whom mostly start in February, are largely cleared off in July, start rising again from August to November, with a balance which is paid in February of the following year.
2. Every year the debtors have difficulties in bridging over the period between the two harvests. The debts cumulate in the months of July to September.
3. For the period dealt with here the debts reach a summit in the years 1888-1889. After that they decrease sensibly.
4. Some families fail in clearing off their debts. Their debit is permanent.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 331-342.

NUTRITIONAL SITUATIONS IN GHENT DURING THE FORMER HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY

by

C. VANDENBROEKE

In general it is rather difficult to make an approximative survey of the nutritional situations in the past. It is, indeed, exceptional that the available sources permit a closer look at these aspects. A systematic control of the octrois, however, may lead to better founded insights. Moreover, the evolution of the consumption-tax generally reflects the social-economic events as well. Specifically for industrial centres, such as Ghent, it is possible to trace a clear correlation between consumption-situations and economic evolution.

Industrial and (or) agrarian crises are, in fact, always characterized by more or less thorough adaptations (both quantitative and qualitative) of the nutritional pattern.

But next to these short-term fluctuations, especially the pauperization-process which occurred throughout the industrialization, deserves our attention. For a number of products, such as wheat, several sorts of meat, cheese, wine, beer and gin, it would certainly be possible to assume a relative decrease of the per capita consumption during the former half of the nineteenth century. Along and together with this phenomenon, however, a considerable increase in the potato-consumption, can be observed.

However, an approximative description of the average nutritional pattern, such as it may be reconstructed for the city of Ghent, shows that, in general, the "minimum-needs" were met. For that matter, a daily intake of some 2,400 to 2,500 calories per person, seems acceptable.

Yet, the characteristic feature remains the dominant importance of starchy products, which still represented about 3/4 of the calories, in spite of the fact that a considerable meat-consumption (about 80 pounds per person and per year) formed one of the essential elements of city-nutrition.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 109-169.

THE ELECTION OF BORMS AND THE "COMPROMIS DES BELGES" The Share of Government and Opposition Parties in the Linguistic Legislature Between the Two World-Wars

by

L. WILS

In the summer of 1929 the Belgian government decided to give a solution to the Flemish problem with recognition of the Dutch unilingualism of Flanders. So far historiography indicated three elements which contributed to this capital change-over. For one thing the surprising victory of A. Borms in a

by-election at Antwerp on December 9th, 1928. In connection with this the victory of the Flemish nationalists in the parliamentary elections of May 26th, 1929. And in the third place the conclusion on March 16th, 1929 of a *Compromis des Belges* between Walloons and Flemings in the bosom of the Parti Ouvrier Belge (P.O.B. - Belgian Labour Party), in which the pro-Flemish Camille Huysmans had succeeded in bringing his Walloon political associates round to recognizing the unilingualism of Flanders. A thorough investigation resulted in the following findings.

The victory of Borms had been anticipated, but was a surprise by its volume and had, indeed, a great impact, as well as the advance of the nationalists on May 2d, 1929.

But these were but the two most striking expressions of the nationalist agitation which had increasingly worried the government since the beginning of 1928. Of importance was also the pressure exercised by the Dutch sympathizers and against which the government of the Hague would not react strongly.

The *Compromis des Belges* was, on the contrary, a pro-Walloon electoral platform containing the retention of the bilingualism of Flanders and the unilingualism of Wallonia.

The elections of May 26th, 1929 turned the balance, because they meant not only a success for the Flemish nationalists, but also a defeat for the P.O.B., whose *Compromis* seemed disapproved of by the electors.

Ever since 1913 Huysmans had advocated bilingualism after the conception which had been developed for Austria by Otto Bauer, and he remained faithful to this idea during his whole lifetime. Since 1913 the P.O.B. parliamentary group had been affected by pro-Walloon sympathies, which had grown prevalent after World War I. Only after their defeat in the elections of May, 1929 did the P.O.B. make a stand in favour of the unilingualism of Flanders, but only till 1933.

This investigation enabled us, a.o. through the use of the minutes of the cabinet council, to get a clearer insight into the government practice and the legislative work with regard to the "Flemish" problems. Though the Catholic and Liberal parties had no national executives as they have now, they each had their own program and their parliamentarians obeyed party pressure. The Liberal party and their ministers defended the Walloon (French-speaking) interests, the Catholic party and their ministers were watchful of the Flemish (Dutch-speaking) interests.

The agreement on bills was sometimes brought about in the bosom of the government after protracted negotiations of the Liberal ministers with "their friends" who were not described more fully, and of the Catholic ministers with the "Catholic Flemish Parliamentary Group" led by F. Van Cauwelaert. But by preference the ministers had an agreement concluded in the Central Section of the House of Representatives (la Section Centrale de la Chambre des Représentants), if their party-attendance there was sufficient.

The latter procedure enabled the P.O.B. to take a constructive part in the legislative work. In 1928 they didn't avail themselves of this opportunity, but in 1930-1933 they did.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1973, IV, pp. 265-330.