

SOURCES FOR CONTEMPORARY HISTORY IN THE
ECCLESIASTIC ARCHIVES OF THE EPISCOPATE OF GHENT

by

Jan ART

In the archives of the episcopate of Ghent, the modern period was only dealt with in a chronological inventory up to 1880. We made an attempt to put more systematical order in the funds with regard to the period from 1802 up to about 1900. The new filing was arranged as follows :

- a. the bishop's correspondence.
- b. documents issued or submitted for approval by the episcopal administration.
- c. already filed series and dossiers.
- d. anew filed series.

We also endeavoured to give a first look over the stock of records and documents kept in the vicarages, deaneries, convents and catholic teaching institutions of the East Flanders province. The results of the inquiry carried out to that purpose, have been classified according to the alphabetically ordered names of the cities and communes where the archives were kept. At last have been scrutinized the records with regard to the modern ecclesiastic history of the episcopate of Ghent who were laid down among the States Archives.

The conclusion of this investigation does not provide fully confidence : not only much records were already destroyed during W.W. I and II, but the remaining stock is frequently hard to get or not skilfully kept, and in most cases shows the greyish sameness of administrative correspondence involving wordly matters. Furthermore it appears that first rate sources can be regained in the episcopal and decanal archives, like as relation of decanal visitations, data about urban parishes and the correspondence between the bishops and their vicars.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 73-84.

YOUNG RIGHT-WINGERS AND OLD RIGHT-WINGERS
BEFORE THE CATHOLIC CONGRESS IN 1909

by

Philippe DEFOSSEZ

The Catholic Party was in power in Belgium from 1884 until the first world war. During this period its history is one of slow change which consists in the rise of a minority group, the Christian Democracy. In order to obtain recognition and, later, a real share of power, this wing, embodied in the *Ligue démocratique belge* (Belgian democratic league), founded by Helleputte and Verhaegen in 1891, had to wage a severe struggle against the *Association des Fédérations et Cercles catholiques* (Association of Catholic Federations and Circles) headed by Charles Woeste.

From the moment of their establishment as an autonomous group, the democrats had expressed the desire of calling a catholic congress which, in the

tradition of the great congresses of Mechlin, was to be a clear manifestation of the catholic unity, in a legally recognized diversity. The conservatives, who considered the christian democracy a necessary evil and whose evil spirit, Charles Woeste, claimed the title of unchallenged right-wing leader, made this congress-plan fail several times, for on such an occasion "it wouldn't be possible to restrain anyone from speaking", as Woeste himself admitted.

The death of Leo III, who was in favour of the democrats, could not but bring them in a rather uncomfortable position. Arthur Verhaegen, the democrats' leader, needed a strong tenacity to face the repeated attacks by the conservative wing who did not conceal their desire of the democrats disappearing altogether.

The 1906 legislative elections, reducing the governmental majority a little, brought about a change, by assigning more importance to the democratic group. They took advantage of this situation by claiming social reforms from the government. Moreover, on 12 April, 1907, the democrats did not hesitate to censure the government, which involved its resignation. For the first time the new cabinet, headed by de Trooz, consisted of democratic-minded ministers : Renkin and Helleputte.

On the other hand, even within his own *Fédération of circles* Woeste met with a firm opposition on the side of de Broqueville, future Cabinet-president, and Pirmez, leader of the *Jeunes Gardes Catholiques* (Young Catholic Guards). The old leader's influence was more and more contested until the war, when it had become non-existent.

Finally, the episcopal appointment of monseigneur Mercier in 1906, was to give the democrats a very strong support. The new archbishop, in his turn, again undertook the plan of the congress and defeated Woeste's opposition. When, in September, 1909, the Congress met, it had lost a great part of its first aim : the recognition of the *Christian Democracy*, which had been an accomplished fact since 1907.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 285-332.

THE PERSONNEL POLICY OF THE MILITARY ADMINISTRATION
IN BRUSSELS DURING THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF THE
OCCUPATION (June-December, 1940)
CONTRIBUTION TO THE GERMAN *FLAMENPOLITIK* (Flemish Policy)
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

Albert DE JONGHE

During the first six months of the occupation, the German *Flamenpolitik* is characterized by an undeniable reserve on the part of the Brussels military administration with regard to the "*Vlaams Nationaal Verbond*" (V.N.V., Flemish National League), though, according to the occupier, the only Flemish political organisation that could be taken into account for collaboration. Originally, the *Militärverwaltung*, preferred an administrative collaboration, within the legal framework, with the committee of the secretaries-general, which then constituted the provisional government of the occupied country. Not until

November, 1940, when a crisis threatened the relations between the military administration and the Committee of secretaries-general, did Reeder (head of the *Militärverwaltung*) think of appealing to the V.N.V. and - though to a less extent - to Rex as a counterbalance.

Anyway, the reticence towards the V.N.V., as an organisation, does not mean that the *Militärverwaltung* neglected to take advantage of the political possibilities resulting from the differences between the two nationalities in Belgium, nor that it had not thought of appealing to outstanding personalities, or persons thus considered, affiliated with the V.N.V. The occupier's interest in the *Flamenpolitik* is prove irrefutably by his policy of nominations during the first months of the occupation. In order to eliminate the officials, who did not enjoy its full confidence, and to replace them by *homines novi* the military administration handily took advantage of the administrative purification, conceived by the secretaries-general and consisting of administrative sanctions against those who had abandoned their posts in May, 1940. The ordinance of 18 July, 1940 concerning the tenure of public offices provided the occupier with an argument to remove from public life all undesirables, whether they had deserted their posts or not. This offered the considerable psychological advantage that they could eliminate anti-German people not so much because of their political opinions as because of their deserting their posts, a motive the public opinion easily accepted in the Summer of 1940. The *Flamenpolitik* certainly played a role without part in the application of this ordinance. Were not those who had deserted their posts "almost exclusively Walloons or pro-French and those among the Flemish mostly questionable persons, moved by a democratic, pro-occidental spirit and hostile to the new order ?" Here again the German necessities and the Flemish requirements go hand in hand.

Baron Snoy, secretary-general of economic affairs was one of the first victims of the ordinance of 18 July, 1940. On his return from France, he was forbidden to resume his functions. He was succeeded by Victor Leemans, a Flemish publisher, known as a V.N.V. sympathizer (August, 1940). After the war Leemans pretended that he had succeeded to this high office because his future colleagues had invited him to. In reality, the new secretary-general, having neither economic nor administrative experience, had been imposed by the military administration in spite of the Committee's opposition to his nomination. After his appointment, Reeder justified his attitude to the secretaries-general by emphasizing his candidate's competence as well as his political convictions ("ausgesprochen deutschfreundlich", his decidedly pro-German sympathies). The secretaries-general resigned themselves to Reeder's veto against keeping Snoy in office and they accepted the imposed candidate for fear that, if they refused, the very existence of the committee should be endangered with the result that a *Zivilverwaltung* should succeed to the *Militärverwaltung*.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 1-49.

A MEDIEVAL-LIKE CONFLICT DURING THE 19th CENTURY
OIGNIES-EN-THIERACHE : THE AFFAIR OF THE
520 "BONNIERS" (1)

by

L.M. DE VUYST-HENDRIX

Oignies-en-Thiérache a little village in a forest area owned woods the profits of which were shared by the villagers during the 16th century. Moreover, the latter enjoyed the right to use the woods of their lords, the barons of Vierves, vassals of the principality of Liège.

During the 17th century the inhabitants of Oignies ceded 520 "bonniers" of the communal wood and paid some 1,500 florins to the counts of Hamal, in order to obtain the amelioration of these rights of use and particularly the prolongation of the periods of pasture.

Though these conventions had brought about lots of differences, as a rule they were usually met by the Lords.

On 14 Augustus, 1772 a mandate of the Prince-Bishop imposed to the entire principality to respect a period of seven years of growth before authorizing the pasture, and prescribed to all people who had allowed premature pasture against payment of money or the grant of whatever cessions to regard them as non-existent.

The strict application of this mandate would have permitted the community of Oignies to recover the possession of the 520 "bonniers" ceded to the counts of Hamal. Yet, a status quo was decided upon and only a sum of 1,100 florins was refunded.

During the revolution the Lords of the barony emigrated and on 16 "vendémiaire" (2) of the year III the community was given possession of the 520 "bonniers" by an arbitration. However, the counts of Hamal did not rest until the woods were restored to them. By the time of the Dutch Regime this loss was an accomplished fact and as their circumstances had changed, the former Lords sold all their woods to landowners who totally ignored the former rights of use they were encumbered with. This was the beginning of endless judicial proceedings with Mr. Fosses, a former district commissioner of Philipville. Afterwards his heirs started a lawsuit which even lasted for about half a century. They went from the court of justice to the court of appeals and to the court of cassation without getting satisfaction. In 1857 they had to accept the process of the cantonment, which had been sanctioned by the jurisprudence and which supposed a division in proportion to the rights each party had to the joint thing. For a long time they still cavilled at the determination of the part of the community was entitled to.

As the rights of use had completely fallen into disuse, the balance of advantage was not in favour of the people of Oignies. Out of the 520 "bonniers" of wood, which had been ceded, only about 60 hectares remained in the possession of the community.

When, in 1920, Fosses's forests were sold again, the inhabitants of Oignies

(1) Bonnier : landmeasure of French-Flanders. Equivalent to 2,5 acres and 200 poles.

(2) 1st month of the republican calendar (22 Sept.-21 Dec.).

thought they could still claim the 520 "bonniers"; it was necessary to prove to them that everything was lost. Yet, today's old people still talk about the woods that were once "stolen", without being able, however, to tell how and by whom it was done.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 169-185.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF UNIONISM

by

Helmut GAUS

There is a tradition in Belgian historiography to consider the end of the Union between catholics and liberals a consequence of the ratification of the 24-Article Treaty by the Belgian Parliament in 1839. According to this vision, the Dutch king William thus caesed to be a common foreign enemy, both for the catholics and liberals.

There are, however, several reasons for looking upon the break of Unionism in 1839 as a consequence of the changed relative power between liberals and catholics, rather than as a result of this ratification.

To begin with, there's the date. As early as March, 1838 King William had informed London of his willingness to recognize Belgium, through which it became difficult for the Belgians to consider him a possible aggressor. Besides, the willingness did not all meet with an immediate approval in Belgium.

What was the change in the relative power between liberals and catholics in the period before and after 1830 on the one hand, and in the period between the end of 1837 till 1839 on the other hand?

Immediately before and after 1830 the leading clergy had a great impact on the lower clergy and the faithful, supporters of the democratic mennaisianism, as long as these leaders themselves advocated this tenor.

This had also been the case for justifying and motivating the resistance to William I. After the revolution of 1830, however, the new Belgian episcopacy, could no longer adhere to Lamennais' democratic convictions, because they were inconsistent with the powers the bishops claimed from the new state, and incompatible with the establishment of their authority over the lower clergy and the faithful. Indeed, Lamennais was anti-authoritarian and in favour of disestablishment. Therefore, the episcopacy had to expel the democratic convictions. However, this had to be done with great caution in order to: 1) avoid a disruption of Lamennais' followers, 2) be able to preserve the bishops' independance from Leopold I and Rome. That is why a.o. the pontifical encyclicals *Mirari vos* (1832) and *Singulari Nos*, directed against the mennaisian ideas, were not disseminated by the Belgian bishops.

Not until the end of 1837 did the episcopacy feel strong enough to start discrediting the mennaisian ideas, which had been incorporated into liberal-catholicism. This was done a.o. by prohibiting freemasonry (December, 1837), which, according to A. Simon, had been joined by the catholics, because they hoped to renew catholicism through freemasonry. In Ghent, reading liberal-catholic newspapers was likewise forbidden by the bishops (1838).

These measures clearly point at a disavowal of the liberal ideology by the

episcopacy, in other words, also a disavowal of the idea of Unionism before the ratification of the 24-Article Treaty.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 367-384.

INDUSTRIAL CREDIT AND THE SOCIETE GENERAL DES PAYS-BAS DURING THE DUTCH RULE (1815-1830)

by

Julienne LAUREYSSENS

At the beginning of the Dutch period, the financial market in the Belgian provinces was poorly developed. The most obvious deficiency was the absence of a powerful commercial bank. This situation was corrected by the creation of the "Société Générale des Pays-Bas pour favoriser l'industrie nationale" (or General Company of the Netherlands for the promotion of the national economy) by King William I. The outstanding innovative feature of this institution was that, as its name indicates, it was to promote economic development in general, including industry.

The bank did improve credit conditions in this field during the first decade of its existence, although these improvements were limited in scope.

It has made only a few direct loans to certain industrialists backed by the Dutch government. It was clearly an exceptional practice. Its short term operations, especially the discounting of commercial paper, were of relative importance, although the establishment of branches in the provinces helped to reduce the cost of credit.

It is remarkable that about four fifths of the funds involved in the discount operations benefited the coal and the metal trade. As a matter of fact, this credit was middle term, rather than short term credit, since an important part of the bills involved represented fictitious commercial transactions and were automatically renewed at maturity.

The funds thus advanced constituted not only the circulating capital of the firms involved, but were also used to increase means of production. Moreover, because of the availability of this credit, the entrepreneurs succeeded in eliminating financial intermediaries in the distribution sector of the coal trade.

Finally, the existence of the service allowed the capitalist entrepreneurs to use their own funds to buy out numerous small shareholders who blocked the management of the old coal mining companies.

Although it was not the result of a deliberate policy, by extending its loaning practices, the bank of the Société Générale thus laid the first stone of its future industrial empire, since at the outbreak of the revolution in 1830 and the following economic depression, the firms could not repay the debts accumulated during the preceding years. They constituted the first firms in which the bank acquired a controlling interest when it entered upon a career as an investment bank in 1836.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 119-140.

**REVOLT AND REPRESSION
THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS 1830-31 IN ANTWERP**

by

Rina LIS

In studying the agitation of the lower classes of the population during the former half of the 19th century, we see, either, that the "classconsciousness" of the "proletariat" is overemphasized, or that each action is degraded to a proof of assent to the bourgeois ideals.

Testing these two opinions to the events of 1830-31 in Antwerp, it appears that the aspirations of the poorer classes of the population, mainly based upon a faint sense of justice, were a ready instrument in the hands of that part of the middle classes that, under William I, felt curtailed of their economic and political needs. Many people longed for a change, not so much through hunger, as through the disenchantment after the crisis of 1829. The latter had, indeed, followed an economic expansion that had caused increasing employment. Labourers now joined the traditional paupers, which created a favourable background for all kinds of manipulations against Orangism. The disenchantment was great when the post-revolutionary period was marked by hunger, unemployment and finally a humiliating compulsory employment. In the Northern Netherlands the resulting disillusionment and aggressiveness, were looked upon as potential contra-revolutionary levers, whereas Brussels, tried to canalize the latent violence against Orangism. This was made possible by the leakage of the Van der Smissen-conspiracy, when Brussels agitators had the stirred feelings calmed down by plunderings at Orangists'-homes. This enabled the police to take measures which would intimidate any further mass revolt or which would at least direct rebellion in favour of the Belgian law and order. Threatened, spied upon, and deprived of their most combative elements the lower classes of the population were cut short of any possibility of a more autonomous and conscious action. Because of the introduction of a poor-rate and the assignment of the most distressed to a benevolent institution any form of aggressiveness was finally converted into a feeling of "gratitude" and especially of "dependence".

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 333-365.

**ANNUAL CONFESSION AND EASTER COMMUNION
THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORMS AND OF CLERICAL SUPERVISION
IN BELGIUM FROM 1835 TO 1927**

by

W. ROMBAUTS

The present paper is a contribution to the study of the traditions, created or maintained in the 19th century by bishops and clergy, in order to ensure fidelity to religious practice. The problem in its entirety must be seen against the

background of the Belgian Church's attempts to adjust to the contemporary political structure and the altered Church-state relationship, as these had taken shape in Belgium after 1830, special attention being devoted to the extent to which the maintenance of traditions from the *ancien régime* was deemed necessary.

The study concentrates mainly on the precepts in force in the diocese of Bruges, the present article being part of a broader inquiry into Easter neglect and paschal practice in the same diocese (1). For comparison, the development was traced of the directives issued by the other Belgian dioceses and by the North French bishopric of Cambray. The inquiry was extended past World War I, when the various dioceses - between 1920 and 1927 - adapted their statutes to the altered circumstances. The principal sources were the statutes of the various dioceses, pastoral manuals, and the resolutions of the assemblies of bishops and deans.

From this study it is apparent that annual confession and Easter communion continued to occupy an important place within the whole of the religious experience. Though the attitude of the various Belgian dioceses was basically the same, Bruges, throughout the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, was more conservative, emphasizing more strongly the parochial nature of these duties and adhering to a policy of close supervision by the clergy. Here the influence of the tradition of the old diocese of Ypres is noticeable. Mgr. Boussen, himself a native of this bishopric, attempted, by means of his statutes (1836-1840), to bring about the adoption of these practices by the entire diocese of Bruges. This conservative and strict attitude reveals itself most clearly in the continued application of denunciation, which survived in Bruges alone. The practice did undergo gradual modification. In smaller parishes, pastors were obliged to communicate the names of delinquents; the pastors of larger parishes could - exceptionally - content themselves with an estimate of the number of delinquents, spread over the three social classes, pauperes, cives mediae classis, and divites. The new statutes, issued by Mgr. Waffelaert in 1927, generalized the latter practice, so that denunciation henceforth possessed an informative rather than legal character. In the rural parishes such clerical supervision was apparently considered normal. In the cities, however, protests were uttered as early as the middle of the 19th century against these customs, which the clergy, through its influence, tried to maintain.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 85-118.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REACTIONS OF THE BRUGES POPULAR MASS AT THE END OF THE ANCIEN REGIME (1770-1794)

by

Yvan VANDEN BERGHE

Generally speaking the conditions of life of the lower social classes at Bruges were the same as in all other West European cities. The popular mass had

(1) W. ROMBAUTS, *Het Paasverzuim in het Bisdom Brugge (1840-1911)*. (Interuniversitair Centrum voor Hedendaagse Geschiedenis. Bijdragen, nr. 62). Leuven-Paris, 1971.

to contend with continuous price increases whereas wages remained stationary or even decreased. Without support the Bruges working-class families could not possibly make both ends meet. At Bruges, this support was remarkably well organized, but eventually proved insufficient.

From 1760 on the wage-situation and the labour-conditions of a number of journeymen worsened. Journeymen's associations, such as those of bricklayers and carpenters successfully opposed unlawful wage-deductions by appealing to the central administration in Brussels.

The unorganized textile-workers who lacked the feeling of solidarity were quite defenceless.

The popular mass showed this solidarity as consumers rather than as employees. High corn-prices always provoked reactions. Invariably these prices were imputed to hoarding-practices, to allowing corn-exports and to the laxity of the city-authorities. In the period studied by us we note two important hunger-riots which, however, interfere with political events. On October 19-20, 1771 the mass rebels against high corn-prices, but they were soon swept off their feet by the advocates of municipal particularism. A popular rising against the patriots, provoked by the royalists, results in the pillage of an alleged hoarder's home (July 30-31 and August 1, 1787).

The popular mass without political awareness is easily taken in tow. Out of hatred against the haughty traditionalistic aldermen they took side with Joseph II (1787-1789). Naturally there was no enthusiasm for the Brabantine Revolution (1789-1790). Within the popular mass a reaction could even be found against the antisocial conduct of the traditionalists.

When the Bruges Jacobin club showed up during the first French Domination (1792-1793) and advocated a progressive social program the popular mass was enthralled by it, but soon lost interest, when it grew obvious that the club could not verify its promises.

A few conclusions with regard to the mentality of the popular mass : they were not class-conscious in the present marxist meaning : in their outlook on life poor and rich people are clearly necessary. With the municipal authorities the popular mass had an unwritten covenant : they reserved the right to protest when the corn-prices ran too high or when the charitable institutions defaulted.

True, here and there an isolated voice could be heard denouncing the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Among the mass there was also a vague idea of equalization.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 141-168.

THE OPINION IN LIEGE AND THE REMILITARIZATION OF THE RHINELAND

by

Anne-Marie WEGNEZ

The remilitarization of the Rhineland, on 7 March, 1936, is a capital stage in the reorganization of the political and military power of Germany, after the first world war. The presence of the *Reichswehr* at Aix-la-Chapelle puts Liège among the outposts; the enemy motorized units could lay siege to the Ardennes in less than one hour. How was such an event felt about ?

Before 1936, the eventuality of Hitler's denunciation of the Lucerne treaty never really drew the attention of the Liège press. However, once

accomplished the commotion was lively and general. The awareness of the extreme danger Belgium was facing, a danger made public by the newspapers, resulted in an uninterrupted attention during the months of March and April. Paradoxically enough, Germany was not described as the guilty party. The countries that were mainly considered responsible were the former allies of the first world war, whose dissension and political short-sightedness facilitated the plans of the Germans. Though wishing a change, the press of Liège dared not hope for a change in the French and English attitude and saw the German action as a starting point for further claims. Moreover, prudence recommends to take new military measures. Even the Liège socialists, up to then antimilitarists, agree on this point of view. Unanimity was restored, when the task of the Belgian government had to be defined : rallying France and Great Britain and acting in close collaboration with the two friendly nations. Even though the interventions in Parliament of the Prime Minister, P. Van Zeeland, were well received this is not the case with the English attitude. The liberal papers even went so far as to reproach him for being too condescending to Germany, for his narrow-minded realism as well as for the inefficiency of his military aid. The French made a better figure and if they had to keep still before the British inaction they were not blamed for it. The British and Italian confirmation to France and Belgium, of the engagements of the treaty of Lucerne, was received with relief and the impression prevailed that any immediate danger had been avoided. On the other hand, the decision to enter into negotiations with Germany was met with scepticism and suspicion. The reason is to be found in the fear of the extreme diplomatic competency of the third Reich and in the weakness of its partners. Though vividly preoccupied by the evolution of the European crisis in March, 1936, the Liège press, reacted moderately : no panic, no diatribes against Germany, no demand for military action against the Rhineland. It took on the resignation of the principal governments concerned : the after-effects of world war I had disappeared. A new European balance was to be born out of negotiations. By thus resigning themselves to an accomplished fact, the Liège newspapers, paying more attention to the military danger, did not realize the diplomatic advantage Hitler would take of a similar attitude.

The alarm was beaten, the attention remained alert for some ten weeks. The ideological oppositions among the newspapers disappeared for a while, but it was only flash in the pan.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 51-72.

THE DEFENCE OF BELGIUM AT ITS BOUNDARIES THE OPINION OF A DIRECTLY INVOLVED POPULATION

by

Anne-Marie WEGNEZ

The military reforms introduced on the eve of the first world war proved ineffective because they had been brought about too late. Was the lesson taken to heart ? Apparently not, for it lasted until 1931, before a complete defence policy was proposed and approved of in Parliament. The plan Maglinse, requiring a complete disposition of troops along the boundary, as well as general

Hellebaut's conception of a defensive disposition as close to the boundaries as possible was rejected in favour of Galet's theory of a "strategical retreat". The fortified positions of Liège, Namur and Antwerp would be relieved and a bridge-head would be erected in Ghent in order to permit the constitution of a national redoubt.

The entry in parliament of the liberal, Albert Devèze, in December, 1932 and the aggravation of the international situation from 1933 onwards, made the controversies on the defensive policy run high. How did the important political organizations of Liège, the largest urban agglomeration of the Eastern part of the country react?

The attitude of the liberals of Liège was unanimous: the defence of Belgium was to take place at the very boundaries, any other solution meaning suicide. They won their case when, on 2 October, the cabinet had adopted Albert Devèze's plan: resistance to the utmost to the North of the Vesdre.

The catholics of Liège also claimed a defence along the boundary and they particularly paid attention to the problem of manpower. To the catholics, as well as to the liberals French help seemed indispensable.

The socialists' concern was entirely contrary to the preoccupations of the other political groups. They did not discuss the merits of a strategical plan but what they were concerned with was the very principle of national defence. Until 1934 the socialists argued in favour of common security and pacifism. As their hopes had been disappointed they devoted themselves to a new conception of nationale defence, a conception particularly advanced by Henri De Man. The socialists' coming into power in 1935 facilitated the reunion of the advocates of national defence. The left wing never paid any attention to boundary defence, on the contrary, the Galet plan seemed to enjoy their preference. The socialists also claimed that the foreign policy should deliberately remain neutral. Besides we should not overlook the fact, that the socialists, who turned down an original position, contented themselves with following the directives of the party.

Yet, as several organisations were, in this respect, troubled so much about the problem of boundary defence, they expressed a wish to influence the upper middle classes. They organized meetings in order to act upon the public opinion. Among these organisations were the municipal and the provincial councils of Liège of 1933, the "Travailleurs Chrétiens" and the "Assemblée Wallonne" of 1934, the municipal council of 1935, the "Croix the Feu", the "Union des Officiers de Réserve", the "Ancienne Garde au Rhin", the "Assemblée Wallonne" and the "Ligue pour la Défense de la Frontière de l'Est" (League for the Defence of the Eastern Boundary) of 1936. As for the public meetings, one was held by general Molitor and a speech was made by the Lord Mayor, Xavier Neujean. In 1933 meetings were organized by the "anciens combattants" and by the "Ligue d'Action Wallonne". In 1934 Albert Devèze held two meetings and in 1936 he again addressed a meeting. In 1936 the prime minister in person came to Liège and expounded his military plans.

1936 was an important period in the evolution of the defensive policy of Belgium. On 6 March, the Franco-Belgian military agreement of 1920 was rejected. This dealt a heavy blow to the defensive conception, the people of Liège were attached to. A month before, in a special issue announcing the coming rejection of the convention with France, the "League d'Action Wallonne" had warned them of the danger. But the formal denials of several ministers had aroused suspicion as to the information of the "Action Wallonne".

The remilitarisation of the Rhineland, on 7 March, 1936, made the

reinforcement of our defensive system indispensable. On 25 March, a mixed commission was charged with the study of the new military projects. All dailies in Liège expressed the fear that these negotiations might result in the surrender of the Eastern part of Belgium without any real combat. This fear proved well-founded, as in August the commission adopted the principle of "neutrality" of the national defence.

On 14 October, the king laid down the new orientation of Belgium's foreign policy which is closely connected with the military policy. Whereas the "Gazette de Liège" warmly welcomed the address by Leopold III, "Le Journal de Liège", "L'Express" and "La Wallonie" were strongly opposed to the diplomatic policy set forth in it. Yet, the most violent reaction came from "L'Action Wallonne". This magazine accused the king of having delivered up Belgium to Hitlerite Germany. On the other hand it must be admitted that the new trend entirely corresponded to the desires expressed by the majority of the Belgian, who hoped to escape the war.

The year 1936 was marked by the defeat of the Liège preferences with regard to defence, for the new international statute of Belgium implied the abandonment of a defensive system at the Eastern boundary. The efforts of the Liège press and the "Ligue d'Action Wallonne" aimed at its maintenance thus proved unsuccessful.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 241-269.

FERDINAND DOMELA NIEUWENHUIS
ON REVOLUTION

by

J.M. WELCKER

Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1864-1919), until 1879 a Lutheran minister in The Hague, became interested in Marx after reading *Capital* and especially *The Civil War in France*. In the lectures he delivered at Amsterdam and Ghent, in 1879, he accepted Marx' thoughts on a new society as a "Social Republic" of Communes set off against the State power and class rule. His main problem in 1880 and 1881 was : what is to be done after a successful revolution; what kind of measures are to be taken in the first place so as not to lose the gains of the revolution by making the wrong decisions ? He consulted G. von Vollmar, who was at that time a left-winger in the German Social Democratic Party and, in January 1881, Marx himself. Marx had changed his views originally expressed in *The Civil War in France* and stated in his letter of February 22nd, 1881, to Domela Nieuwenhuis that the Commune was not to be considered as a model of a new society, thereby taking a more realistic view of the situation in Paris in 1871. In his book *De Franse Burgeroorlog van 1871* (The French Civil War of 1871), Febr. 1881, Domela Nieuwenhuis mainly followed Marx' ideological pattern and considered the Commune as a new society in transition by quoting Marx' lines of 1871 on this subject. In 1871 Marx was inspired by the need of the image of a common front of the International and the Parisian workers against the conservative forces and also by the hope of a reconciliation between the followers of Proudhon and Blanqui and the International. These

aspects were to be an everlasting inspiration to Domela Nieuwenhuis, as was also the fact that the workers had proclaimed the Commune.

Every year, in March and in May, the Commune was commemorated by Domela Nieuwenhuis in his paper *Recht voor Allen* (Justice for All) and by his party, the Social Democratic Union. The main function of this celebration was to emphasize the solidarity of the members of the party against capitalism and the bourgeois state. As Domela Nieuwenhuis was expecting a new revolution to take place at fairly short notice, the mistakes made by the Communards were pointed out.

Thus the Commune served as an example how to make a revolution. When Domela Nieuwenhuis eventually became an anarchist - a slow process through the years 1893-1897 - Marx' concept of the new society appealed even more strongly to Domela Nieuwenhuis. The Social Democrats did no longer know Marx or Engels, who were both inspired - as Domela Nieuwenhuis saw it - by Proudhon and even Bakunin. This he considered as proof of the truth of the anarchist idea, though he believed that the main trend of history was towards "state socialism", softened by anarchist tendencies. The outcome of the big railway strikes of 1903 in the Netherlands and of the Russian revolutions of 1917 - no *social* revolution had taken place! - was a considerable disillusion. He considered Marx to be a great thinker, but he ranked Bakunin higher as a person and as a man of action.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 271-284.

THE URBAN PETITIONING CAMPAIGNS OF 1837-38 AND EARLY 1841

by

Els WITTE

During the 1830's and 1840's the political set-up in Belgium was such that the Catholic Party held the reins of power at national level thanks to the support of the many rural electors, and that the Liberal Party was remote from government notwithstanding the fact that it held a wide majority in the urban centres. So the liberals of the time turned to the local councils as a means of putting pressure on the catholic government and Parliament, making abundant use of the right of petition which the towns could assume, should urban interests be at stake.

The author examines two of these petitioning campaigns. The first took place in the period 1837-38 and proposed a change in the electoral law in favour of the liberal electorate; the second, during the first three months of 1841, opposed on the one hand a catholic bill aimed at bestowing legal status on the University of Louvain, and was on the other hand intended to put pressure on the King so that he would extend the short-lived experiment of the liberal Lebeau-Rogier government.

A close examination of the origin of these petitions in twenty of the most important towns in the country confirmed the hypothesis put forward that campaigns of this nature had to satisfy two conditions before a local council

would consent to petition. A petitioning action with essentially political objectives could only succeed if the liberals held a majority in the council and had a core of active militants to set up an efficient propaganda campaign in the council; the catholic opposition in these conditions was of no avail. This majority moreover was not required if it was a question of petitions which, although of a political nature, were indirectly linked with urban interests, such as those connected with the electoral law. Tenacious propaganda from a few militant liberals was enough to shatter the catholic opposition and assure the petitions' success.

B.T.N.G.-R.B.H.C., 1972, III, pp. 385-404.