

LEOPOLD I AND EUROPEAN INTERVENTION
IN THE SECESSION WAR
SEPTEMBER 1862 - JANUARY 1863

BY

Francis BALACE

King Leopold the First of the Belgians played a not unimportant part in the diplomatic struggle that went with the Civil War in the United States. The aim of that diplomatic struggle was, as far as the Confederates were concerned, to be granted official diplomatic status by the European powers. This was of course strenuously opposed by the Federal government. There was much sympathy for the Southern cause in influential segments of official circles in Belgium. The king himself had his own reasons for interfering: his son in law, Maximilian, was trying to establish his authority over Mexico, a close neighbour of the Confederation.

From the very start of the Civil War, the Secessionists sent an emissary to Brussels, Ambrose Dudley Mann. Mann was expected to work on the French and English governments, using Leopold's influence.

When the cotton crisis became acute, some politicians in England considered the feasibility of recognising the Confederate government (September 1862). Palmerston took king Leopold into his confidence and Leopold himself made suggestions to Napoleon III (October 15, 1862).

The talk was about an armistice and a mediation of the European powers in the conflict, and the French emperor eventually toyed with the idea of a joint mediation by France, England and Russia.

He made his proposals known to the English cabinet via Leopold's agent, Jules van Praet, but, as Russia rejected the whole scheme outright, England too gave in. In any case, the overall military position of the South was now deteriorating fast. This helps to explain why in January 1863, Mann endeavoured to ask for official diplomatic recognition of the Confederation by Belgium, hoping that this would be a start, but England and France did what they could to discourage Belgium and Rogier refused the demand for diplomatic recognition.

King Leopold was by no means happy with the failure of his endeavours to achieve an European intervention in the Civil War, and he was especially irate at Palmerston. But the decline of the confederate military power gave him no chance to try again, and he merely went on advocating till the end a compromise between the antagonists.

METROLOGY OF THE THE COALTRADE AT LIEGE
IN THE 19TH CENTURY

BY

Nicole CAULIER-MATHY

When they try to calculate the production of the collieries of Liège, historians use the cartload, and at that a uniform cartload of 1.800 kilos. Actually, in the first half of the past century two different kinds of carts (the "tombereau de Liège" and the "voiture de Meuse") were used. Neither of them had a uniform capacity, even if in 1844 it was decided that the former should be equal to 16 hectoliters, the latter equal to 24 hectoliters.

Another difficulty was that, whereas the capacity of the carts was expressed in hectoliters, the actual production of coal was expressed by its weight.

From 1845 on, all official records express the quantities in weight and no longer in terms of capacity. The conversion rule is 1 hectoliter equal to 90 kilos. Before 1823, on the other hand, there is no such general rule at all. For that reason, one should be very careful when trying to use the figures of coal production as given in the documents.

LOUISE VAN DEN PLAS
AND THE "FEMINISME CHRETIEN DE BELGIQUE"

BY
Paul GERIN

The catholic feminist movement in Belgium owes a huge debt to Louise Van den Plas (1877-1968), who actually launched that movement in 1902, and started in 1905 the publication of the paper *Le Féminisme chrétien de Belgique*.

The belgian movement felt strongly the influence of the French feminism of Marie Maugeret and Marie Duclos. Even so, it is much more politically minded, much more related to social and economic realities.

The feminist movement of Louise Van den Plas was by no means the only one, but it gained more and more ascendancy over catholic and neutral feminists.

The basic aim, of course, was the franchise. From 1912 onwards, the drive becomes stronger. The coming of the war explains a temporary lull, but when the war was over, Louise Van den Plas and her followers started again.

THE TOWNS HASSELT, MAASEIK, ST.-TRUIDEN AND TONGEREN
IN LIMBURG.
STATISTICS BASED ON THE LAND REGISTRY, 1842-1844

BY
Jules HANNES

The land registry is a historical source of the first importance, but rarely used. This is a pity, for there is no other document that gives in such minute detail a description of each lot. This goes for the "Tableau indicatif primitif". On the basis of these descriptions, one can find out about the cultivation, the relative value of the different kinds of land, the number and importance of the buildings used for industry, the houses, etc. It is true that a tremendous amount of work is required to bring out that information, but it is so basic that the work will have to be done sooner or later.

What is more, the land survey office has compiled excellent statistics. To all practical purposes they can be used as a summary of the "Tableau indicatif primitif". Unfortunately, these statistics are lost in all Belgian provinces except Limburg. J. Hannes publishes the statistics for the towns of Hasselt, Maaseik, St.-Truiden, Tongeren, for the years 1842-1844, so as to make easier a comparison with the general census of agriculture, industry and population taken in 1846.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY IN HOUSING. ANTWERP ABOUT 1834

BY

Jules HANNES - Catharina LIS

How rich are rich people, how poor are poor people? This is a much vexing question, especially when asked for the last century. The problem is to construct a kind of pyramid, where everyone has a definite place according to his wealth or lack of it. But how to build such a pyramid? The authors started from the assumption, that there exists a correlation between the value of the habitation of the individual and his financial situation. The value of the habitation is indeed well known, at least at a definite moment of the past century, owing to the compilation of the land registry. This goes, in Antwerp, for the year 1834.

We do know, for that year, the value of any dwelling in Antwerp. The next step is to find out about the wealth of the people living in the most expensive houses and, on the other hand, of the people living in the least expensive.

As regards the richest people, we can derive a fairly accurate idea of their place in the hierarchy of wealth by using the returns of the licence fee, a tax related to the importance of their business. It appears that there is a striking degree of conformity between both series. The same goes for the poor people living in shabby dwellings. Here one can know more or less how poor they are because they are the people on relief.

On first sight, one would feel that this is a case of making sure in a painstaking way of what was known beforehand. But this would be a false assumption: for most of the 19th century, and for most towns, the documents (e.g. licence fee) helping us to gain insight into the real wealth of people are lost. But the land registry records are fairly well preserved.

As it has been by now established that the correlation between the value of the inhabited house and the wealth situation is extremely high, the method developed by the authors makes it possible to reconstruct the real hierarchy of wealth or poverty for any given population.

THE RESIGNATION OF ALPHONSE NOTHOMB AS PRESIDENT OF
THE "ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTIONNELLE ET CONSERVATRICE",
BRUSSELS, FEBRUARY 21, 1892

BY

Jean-Pierre HENDRICKX

The Belgian constitution of 1830 has been widely acclaimed as "the most liberal constitution of its time". This may be true in 1830, but one cannot go further and consider the Belgian political system as the most liberal of that century. Actually, when one considers the electoral practice, it appears that Belgium was trailing most occidental states in the second half of the century, and the conservatives were very effective in restricting the right to vote to a very limited number of citizens. Of course, the battle for a more generous way of looking at things political was joined very early, but without tangible results before 1890.

In November 1890, the radical m.p. Paul Janson succeeded at last in bringing before Parliament a proposal aiming at change. Actually, most catholics (the catholic party held the majority in Parliament) felt by no means inclined to follow the suggestion of Janson, but there existed a small fraction of democratic-minded catholics ready to go as far as universal suffrage.

One of them, possibly the most influential, was the member for Turnhout, Alphonse Nothomb. However, he was in a very awkward position, since this very progressive thinking politician was at the same time chairman of the "conservative association" of Brussels, i.e. the organisation of the Brussels conservatives, firmly committed to the fight against any change in the ballot system.

It was known, of course, that the chairman and the members of the conservative association did not see eye to eye in the matter of the electoral system, but no one expected what happened on February 21, 1892, when the meeting of the "conservative association" convened. As soon as the proceedings started, Nothomb resigned his chairmanship, claiming that he could not reconcile the views of the association on the matter of electoral organisation with what his conscience told him to fight for.

A shell, exploding in the midst of the meeting, could not have done more harm. Catholics could not appreciate that an influential catholic leader had "deserted" his party on the eve of a decisive election. The big guns started barking at poor Nothomb: the leading catholic papers — *Bien Public*, *Patriote*, *Courrier de Bruxelles* inter alia — could not find epithets strong enough to stigmatize such treason.

As for the opposition — the liberals — they gloated over the whole affair. There was now ample proof, they repeated, day after day, that the "great catholic party" was falling apart at the seams.

As for Nothomb, he did not yield an inch, repeating time after time that he had been bowing to the dictates of his conscience and his political integrity.

Such may after all be the case, but it is hard to believe that it is the whole case. But what about the whole case? Did Nothomb act in conjunction

with prime minister Beernaert, who may have hoped to weaken the arch-conservatives of his party, the followers of Woeste? Has one the right to conjecture that no less a power than the king himself — Leopold II — was driving Nothomb toward a realignment of the political forces (bringing liberals and progressive catholics together)? May Nothomb have had in mind to achieve on his own the coalition of progressive forces in Parliament at the price of breaking up the traditional party lines?

We do not know and, apparently, will never know. Nevertheless, Nothomb's political courage appears more than just a whim, and we feel justified in having stressed the importance of the event.

SLUM-SANITATION : A CENTRAL PROBLEM IN THE WAY OF LIFE
OF THE WORKING PEOPLE. (ANTWERP, 19TH CENTURY)

BY

Catharina Lis

One of the most inescapable consequences of the growth of the industrial town (and even of the not so industrial town) in the past century is, that housing conditions of the factory workers and poor people rapidly took a turn for the worse. The accumulation of demographic, economic and social pressures made the actual housing conditions the very embodiment of the squalid way of life of the 19th century factory worker, and more attention should be paid to the problem of the slums in the 19th century than has been in the past.

In Antwerp — and in most Belgian towns — the basic problem in matters of working class housing was not so much the lack of space as the population increased, than slum construction as a highly profitable investment, in the shape of a huge number of small dwellings built around an inner court or a small street. There was no individual sanitation nor individual water supply. People had to help themselves from a small number of installations for common use. The reason, of course, was to keep the cost of the building of the slum as low as possible. The result was that life in a slum was a constant fight for water and sanitation.

The three heavy cholera epidemics of the 19th century had terrific effects in these slums, and this made a slight impact on the minds of the upper classes. The first attempts at sanitation in the towns are the result of that shock. Surveys and projects were contemplated. But there were the owners of the slums to consider too, and it soon became clear that they wanted to keep things as they were. The fight lasted for nine years, and yielded, as far as slum-sanitation is concerned, negligible results : in no more than half of the slums was some work on sanitation done, and even there, no more than shortlived improvements were achieved. This goes to say that research on the fight for slum-sanitation yields its real dividend in a good knowledge of the basis indifference amongst the wealthy towards the very right to existence of the poor.

THE "SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE" AS A PRESSURE GROUP. A CASE STUDY :
THE REAL ESTATE SPECULATIONS OVER THE BRUSSELS COURT
OF JUSTICE, 1838-1840

BY

Els WITTE

In 1837, the "Société Générale", the biggest financial corporation of Brussels at the time, developed a huge project of real estate speculation : to have a brand new district of Brussels raised just outside town.

A real estate partnership was duly established, including of course the partners and managers of the corporation. Most of them were people of the highest social ranks, some even were very influential politicians. To make the idea more palatable to future buyers of real estate, the promoters of the real estate project hit on the idea of having a new court of justice, which was to be constructed, in the middle of the new contemplated district. They were quite ready to grant the building site free of any charge. One can understand why : the court of justice would make the new quarter a real part of town; real estate prices would soar. Big business was ahead !

But, alas, another project had already been approved : a blue-print of the new court established in the very middle of the old town. A fight flared up, because, out of electoral considerations, the influential Brussels "liberals" stood up for the interests of the barristers and the tradesmen living in the center of town. They waged war against the "capitalists" of the "Société Générale".

The "Société Générale" made the government act on its behalf. This was easy for the corporation, for the government was in dire need of a loan. What is more, some of the people most interested in the real estate project held functions of strategic importance in the making of the final decision.

But the "liberals" were in control of the town council that had a say in the matter. Eventually, the bankers were defeated. Of course, it is of little importance to us that the court was built on one site rather than on another, but the whole matter gives us an extraordinarily clear insight indeed into the way the powers worked — bankers, government, town council, liberal party, freemasons, etc. — into the ways and means they used to stir up public opinion in one direction or another — newspapers, petitions, financial strings pulled, personal abuse, arousing of hate against high finance.

Nothing was left out, and for that very reason, this matter, unimportant as it looks on first sight, is highly significant of the way pressure groups of around 1840 act to achieve their aims.

ELECTIONEERING BEFORE THE TIME OF POLITICAL PARTIES

BY
Els WITTE

After Belgium became independent in 1830, it lasted nearly twenty years before there came actual party organisation. How did one get oneself elected in that period? One has to consider two quite different possibilities, depending on the candidate's view: did he, generally speaking, subscribe to the ideas of the "catholics" or to those of the "liberals"? The basic difference between the two tendencies was that the liberals had their strongholds in the towns, amongst the businessmen and the intellectuals, and resented the interference of the church in matters of government whilst the catholics had their strongholds in the country, their most faithful partisans being amongst landholders, and felt strongly that the catholic church owed to itself to strengthen its grip on the nation as much as possible.

Let us consider first the case of the catholic candidate: certainly, the strong organisation of the church would take up his cause: the bishop would take the lead, and make known the name of the approved candidate to the deans, who got instructions on how to organize the political drive: the actual canvassing and propaganda was to be carried out by the parish priest and the curate, as being closest to the electors. To achieve their aims, the priests used religious and moral pressure.

But a catholic candidate stood a very good chance, in the period before 1847, of benefitting from the support of the governmental agencies too: with very few exceptions, the catholics were in office all the time from 1834 to 1847, and as the spoil system was in use, most officials held political beliefs, closely connected with those of the cabinet.

The part the officials had to play in electoral work was supervised and organised by the ministers themselves, and the instructions laid down were transmitted from the ministers down to the governors, from the governors to the burgomasters, and from those to the petty officials, even the policemen, or to the more influential members of the judiciary. What ever pressure was applied by those agents consisted of pledges, outright commands or threats.

Let us consider now the case of the liberal candidate: he did not stand as destitute as one might think: if the church worked against him, the freemasonry was on his side: the freemasons aimed more and more at political influence during these years, and they acted as electioneering aids. But of course, the freemasonry was in no way as strong as the catholic church, and this accounts for the fact that the liberals had to organize themselves into a political party very early (1846). The catholics could afford to go on living for a long time without a straight party organisation.

The whole of those more or less active electioneering aids was supplemented, of course, by friends and relatives: the actual numbers of voters were small. This put a premium on the candidate's own social position.

The actual mechanism of electioneering given here is based on the intimate political correspondance of a catholic member of parliament (F. Bethune) and on some masonic records.