

Belgian socialism at the liberation : 1944 - 1950*

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The general trend of social-democratic parties in many countries of Western Europe since World War I has been towards increasing integration within the political system (1). To be sure, this tendency has been matched by a corresponding evolution of political, economic, and social structures in such a way as to accomodate the interests of the working class. The evolution of social-democracy and of society have thus been reciprocal.

This phenomenon has certainly occurred in Belgium. During and after World War I socialists participated in governments ; between 1935-1939 they played an important role leading or participating in several governments. Hendrik de Man developed a theoretical justification for « governmental socialism ». But the experiments of the 1930's proved abortive ; Belgium could not escape from the outside world, and De Man's efforts were poisoned in part by his declining faith in political democracy.

Out of the occupation came a new impetus towards socialist integration into the political system. The *pacte de solidarité sociale*, made in 1944 under the occupation, marked the beginning of a consensus on the welfare state ; in a sense, the socialist program on social policy became

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(1) Cf Val LORWIN, « Working-Class Politics and Economic Developments in Western Europe », *American Historical Review*, January 1958.

the Belgian program (2). Belgian socialists spearheaded the economic reconstruction. There was no sharp break between the party of the post and pre-war years, now however, conditions facilitated, rather than hampered, its development as a partner within a consensus society.

The years 1944-1950 constitute a logical framework for analysis. These were years of economic reconstruction. Politically, they were years in which unfinished business of the occupation was liquidated — in particular, the Royal Question.

This study of the PSB is thematic rather than chronological, i.e., chronological treatment occurs within each subsection. The first section deals with the party in terms of ideology, structure, and leadership — the basic question is to what extent the party changed in the post-war years. The second section considers the policies supported and implemented by the PSB in the economic and social realm, and the party's attitude towards the outbreak of the Cold War. The third section concentrates on the political activity of the party, and ends with a brief assessment of the party's role in the Royal Question.

I. Continuity and change in the PSB.

Doctrine.

The period of 1944-1950 represents a time of relative somnolence in terms of theory and doctrine. Whereas in the 1930's, the party was wracked by debates between those supporting Hendrik de Man and Paul Henri Spaak's new versions of socialism, and those supporting the traditional Belgian reformist synthesis, the period following the war witnessed no such animation. The 1930's had been exceptional — the amplitude of the crisis was such that the party was forced into rethinking socialist doctrine. The PSB has always been, by the admission of its leaders, a party more concerned with practice than with pure theory. Unlike the French socialists, it was not a party of intellectuals, nor was it especially successful in attracting intellectuals after the war.

Ironically, the increased tendencies towards governmental participation were not reflected by a modification of party doctrine in that direction

(2) For the work of the Comité d'Etudes des Problèmes d'Après Guerre, cf Kapitein R. PERNET, *Algemene Politieke Voorbereiding van de Bevrijding van België door de regering te London*, Krijgsschool/91 Division, February 1975, pp. 21-24. For material on the party during the occupation, Jan REGNAERTS, «De Illegale Aktie van de BWP tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog», Documentation de l'Institut Emile Vandervelde, January 1974 and Nic BAL, «De Illegale partij van 1940 tot 1944» in *Geschiedenis van de socialistische arbeiderbeweging in België*, Antwerp, 1960. On the activity of the trade union movement, Dore SMETS and Jef RENS, *Historique du Centre Syndical Belge à Londres 1941-1944*, FGTB, 1976.

but rather by a rigidification. The more theory and practice diverged, the more adherence to the old doctrine seemed necessary. During the Resistance, there had been discussion about replacing or modifying the Charter of Quaregnon. But by the time of the first party congress after the war in June 1945, the idea was rejected (3).

The federation of Liège had wanted to modify the charter, but a commission under Victor Larock advocated retention in a report to the first post-war congress. There were others who supported change. The federation of Ghent called for discussion on the basis of the Liège proposal. Herman Vos declared that the present charter was not likely to gain the support of all those who might be attracted to socialism. He particularly criticized its exclusive concern with the proletariat. Vos was strongly applauded by the Congress, but it was old Louis de Brouckère who carried the day: « You think you are confronting innocent novelties. Beware, they may lead to fascism ». In the end the Charter was unanimously maintained, but following a suggestion of the Brussels federation, a preface was attached to satisfy some complaints, in particular to emphasize the universal message of socialism.

Refusal to alter the Charter was in part the result of a backlash against De Man. It was De Man's political evolution during and after the defeat that seemed to substantiate the charge that doctrinal change could lead to fascism. The tragedy was, that for many militants, the De Man case probably demonstrated that any innovation in the realm of doctrine was dangerous. For Larock and Buset, the Charter represented the position of orthodox reformism they had advocated against De Man and Spaak. But whereas for these two, the doctrinal issue was highly significant in terms of what they felt to be the party's proper orientation, this was probably not the case for most participants at the Congress. For them, the Charter was probably a kind of talisman that guaranteed the party's faith in its past. Others doubtless shared the point of view of one speaker, who commented: « Like De Brouckère (sic) I am disappointed to hear you discuss formulas and commas ! » In a way, the party was resolving definitively the doctrinal debate of the 1930's, rather than examining new post-war realities.

An examination of subsequent party meetings indicates little concern about doctrine or long-range program. Although the issue of participation was frequently discussed, it was no longer considered a matter of abstract importance, but a practical question in terms of current politics.

One of the few occasions when a discussion touching on doctrine did take place was at the Congress of November 1949 (4). Significantly,

(3) For the debate on Quaregnon, cf *Peuple*, June 12, 1945.

(4) *Peuple*, November 7, 1949.

this Congress followed an electoral defeat; the party was now out of the government. Léo Collard remarked that the party should direct more attention to the middle classes; Leburton discoursed at greater length on the need to ponder method, organization, and doctrine. The party had to define its vision of socialism more clearly, and distinguish it from the *dirigisme* which followed the war. « Do we want to become the vast popular party of wage-earners and the self-employed, or shall we be a class party including only the mass of wage-earners ? ».

This theme was taken up by Spaak, who complained that the previous session of the Congress had been overly concerned with specifics: « ... we cannot have powerful movements unless we have a clear and enthusiastic doctrine... People are not very anxious to speak of doctrinal revision in the party. We should however have the courage to examine in depth certain points. » Spaak then went on to tell the Congress that he had just read the *Communist Manifesto* for the first time (eliciting some ironic comments from the audience), and concluded that its schema was out of date. Socialism had a message for the entire world.

The problem was, of course, that Belgium was too compartmentalized a society for the party to hope to make a great electoral breakthrough by means of a change of doctrine. So long as it could not hope to make significant inroads into Catholic or Liberal strength, it was far easier and safer to attempt to mobilize its own clientele using familiar slogans. The disastrous electoral failure of the Union Démocratique Belge (UDB) in 1946 indicates how little the war-time experience had changed the voting behavior of the population (5).

Whatever doctrinal discussion did take place at this time took place in the pages of the *Cahiers socialistes*, a review published independently of the party, although most of its editors, like Raymond Rifflet, were party members. The *Cahiers* refused to become an organ of the party; not until 1953 did the *Cahiers* fuse with *Socialisme* (6).

The group of the *Cahiers* was not monolithic, and the articles are relatively heterogeneous. Although each author was free to publish what he wanted, the articles were discussed and criticized before publication. Thus, there was a real *esprit d'équipe* animating the review. The *Cahiers* cannot easily be placed within the traditional left-right spectrum. Their frequent stress on moral values identifies them with socialist humanism (a natural response of intellectuals to the highly bureaucratic PSB), but their emphasis on worker participation in management of

(5) On UDB, J.C. WILLIAME, *L'Union démocratique belge (UDB), Essai de création « travailliste »*, CRISP, *Courrier Hebdomadaire*, 743-744, 26 November 1976.

(6) Interviews with Georges Goriély and Raymond Rifflet.

business places them on the left. They stressed « autogestion » before the word had come into being.

In summary, the review stressed the importance of the socialist ideal. The *Cahiers* saw its goal, not as the creation of a party, but as a means of « shaking the general apathy and aiding in the assembling of men of good will around the socialist mystique » (7). The *Cahiers* opposed the tendency of the trade unions to integrate themselves into society : « It must be admitted that trade-unionism has failed in its mission, which was to provide the workers with an organization which was not a means of channeling their discontent, but on the contrary, an instrument of emancipation, education, and active participation in the economic life of the nation » (8). It criticized the retention of Quaregnon, and the pragmatic opportunism of the party. But instead of advocating revolution, as did the Action Socialiste before the war, it called for *comités d'entreprise* to create worker participation in the management of factories as a first step towards socialist society.

The *Cahiers* took an iconoclastic position on the Royal Question : « *Struggle is justified only when it is at the same time edification...* Now, what do we see ? That the first crystallization of public opinion — of socialist opinion in particular — is based on the royal question, whose solution, no matter how radical, will do nothing to advance the cause of socialism in the least » (9).

Another important role of the *Cahiers* was the creation of the Belgian branch of the Mouvement Socialiste pour les Etats-Unis de l'Europe in 1947. The *Cahiers* consistently stressed the European idea — which was then considered to be « on the left » — at a time when it was still not a matter of concern for most Belgian socialists (10).

The *Cahiers Socialistes* did not have much influence on specific decisions by the PSB. It did, however, have considerable indirect influence on the party and beyond, for example, on left-wing Christians. Many of the *Cahiers'* positions were close to those of the left-wing syndicalism represented by André Renard ; it is not coincidental that Raymond Rifflet was named editor of Renard's weekly *La Volonté* in late 1946. In addition, there were contacts with Spaak's entourage and with Maurice Lambiotte, editor of *Synthèse*. Nevertheless, the whole direction of the review was contrary to the tradition of the PSB. The vast majority of the party and its leadership acted as if they believed that by slow piecemeal reforms the condition of the working class

(7) *Cahiers socialistes*, no. 1, November 1944, p. 37.

(8) *Ibid.*, no. 8, October-November 1945, p. 30.

(9) *Ibid.*, no. 5, July-August 1945, p. 42.

(10) On European integration, vide G. MARCHAL-VAN BELLE, *Les Socialistes belges et l'intégration européenne*, Institut de Sociologie, ULB, 1968.

could be improved. As Léo Collard pointed out : « The political struggle in Belgium is more a struggle of positions than of movement » (11). This approach had borne fruit in the past ; there were few who did not favor employing it in the future. This was a journal of intellectuals, and no socialist party in Europe had less room for intellectuals than the PSB.

Structure.

Unlike the relative immobilism in the realm of theory, there was considerable change in party structure after the war. This took the form of the abolition of the principle of collective affiliation, by which members of socialist trade unions, cooperatives, and mutual societies had been automatically party members. The abolition of collective affiliation raised the issue of the nature of the relationship between these four movements. By the end of the period, however, the cohesion of the movement was largely restored, thanks to the development of L'Action Commune. The change in structure turned out to be more a change in form than in content.

It seems that the desire to end collective affiliation emerged in both the party and trade-unions during the war. Party leaders felt that the preponderance of trade union votes had forced the party into participation during the 1930's, with the added consequence of the « politique d'indépendance ». Trade union leaders had a variety of motives. Some undoubtedly felt, as one person aptly put it, that the party was « un pousseur sur les syndicats ». André Renard and his supporters, deeply influenced by French syndicalism, wanted to create a trade union movement independent from politics, which would also help unite the working class. Other leaders, who were dedicated party members, like Louis Major, were doubtless influenced by tactical considerations. After the war, the communists were strong. In order to keep hold of the communist workers, trade-unionism had to be separated from the PSB. But later, when communist strength waned, such leaders were more than happy to reestablish close ties (although not collective affiliation).

The questions of administrative structure were discussed at a special party congress in October 1945. Unanimously, the congress ratified a decision that had already been made during the Resistance to change the party's name to *Parti Socialiste Belge*. There were several reasons. The name « socialist » no longer frightened people as it had a century before. « Socialist » seemed more universal than « worker ». The Congress was faced with two demands for a party structure based more clearly

(11) *Peuple*, July 11, 1949.

on regions. Liège, the center of Walloon sentiment, wanted an organization based on three regional centrals; Antwerp a congress for each of the two regions. In the ensuing discussion, it became clear that these ideas were distinctly in the minority. Collard rejected Liège's proposal on behalf of the Borinage; the delegate from Ghent did likewise with regard to that of Antwerp: « The Ghent socialists... reject all separatism. The PSB must remain the cement of Belgian unity, necessary for the working class and for socialism. » Such was also the opinion of Charleroi and Brussels. The motion was defeated by an « enormous » majority. The Congress chose a bureau composed of seven francophones, seven neerlandaphones; four members were elected without distinction. Thus, both regional ties and national unity were respected (12).

The Congress also voted the principle of individual affiliation, although permitting organizations to pay for the party cards of their members. These cards would have to be delivered by the local branch of the party, however. In fact, the Congress was doing little more than ratifying the decisions of the FGTB's congress of December 1944. There, Paul Finet's report calling for trade union autonomy had run into considerable resistance. Sonnevile (Mouscron) declared that the unions should remain a branch of the PSB, as did Arthur Gailly. Finet made it clear that independence did not mean an end to parallel action. The closeness of the vote (74:61:2) indicates how much resistance there was to put an end to the old system (13).

By 1947, the four movements were coming closer together. The Congress of Cooperatives of that year voted for adhesion with the party, the mutual societies did likewise the next year. The situation was less clear with respect to the trade unions, where *unitaires* and *apolitiques* opposed intimate relations. This was less true in Flanders than in Wallonia. Collective adhesion, by which organizations could pay all or part of their members dues to the party, was seen as a « pact of friendship and mutual assistance, conceived between autonomous organizations » (14).

The Congress of 1947 discussed the idea of socialist *groupes d'entreprise*, an idea which was opposed by Liège. Merlot felt that at Liège, where the communists were strong, it would lead to the creation of communist cells. He argued that whereas it was supported by all political

(12) *Peuple*, October 8, 1945.

(13) *Peuple*, December 27, 1944. On the situation of the trade unions cf. Achille DELATTRE, *Souvenirs*, Imprimeur, 1957, Joseph BONDAS, *Un Demi siècle d'action Syndicale 1898-1948*, Imprimerie « Excelsior », n.d. I made use of interviews with Louis Major, André Genot, and Léon-Elie Troclet.

(14) Parti Socialiste Belge, *Rapports présentés au Congrès des 25, 26, 27 octobre 1947*, Nivelles, n.d. p. 25.

militants, it was opposed by all trade union militants. Buset strongly supported the idea, but proposed that the party take into account the special situation in Liège. « We consider the apolitical character of the trade union movement to be an error. The working-class forces are barely sufficient to bring about its goal ». The motion was unanimously passed (15).

In the next few years, relations between party and trade unions became closer. This was due to the habits of the past, to the close interlocking relationship of party and union leaderships, and to the decline of the communist party, which by 1949 had lost its positions of power in the trade union hierarchy. In Flanders, where the left was weak, the need for close cooperation was much stronger than in the south. Finally, the Royal Affair was instrumental in drawing together the various parts of the socialist labor movement (16).

In a society dominated by *verzuiling*, such close relationships were not surprising. The constituents of the four socialist organizations were basically the same. There was little to be gained by removing the appellation « socialist » from an organization recruiting almost exclusively from that *zuil*. Although the post-war communist upsurge had temporarily made it tactically necessary to separate party from trade unions in order to hold onto communist rank and file, the upsurge proved remarkably short-lived. The only impediment to close relations of party and unions was the syndicalist tendency in Liège represented by Renard. But that was not so easy to eliminate.

Leadership.

There was a considerable change in the personnel of party leadership after the War. Vandervelde had already died in 1938 ; De Man had been discredited, some of the older generation had died naturally in the course of time, several younger leaders, like Delbrouck and Truffaut had died heroically in the Resistance.

The older generation was still represented in the public eye by De Brouckère and Huysmans, two members of « a generation when every one was stubborn » as Huysmans once put it when he and De Brouckère were on opposite sides of a debate. De Brouckère, despite his keen intelligence, had always been a doctrinaire. He was revered, but politically isolated. Huysmans found the consecration of his career in 1946 when he became Prime Minister (17).

(15) *Peuple*, October 28, 1947.

(16) On the reactions of organizations, cf Victor LAROCK, « Naissance de l'Action Commune », in *Les Fastes du parti 1885-1960*, Parti Socialiste Belge, n.d.

(17) On Camille HUYSMANS, cf *Etudes de la Personnalité de Camille Huysmans*, Antwerp, 1971.

The three most important people in the party organization were probably Achille Van Acker, Max Buset, and Paul-Henri Spaak. Unlike the period of the 1920's, there was no single « Patron ». Max Buset became President of the party in 1945, succeeding Achille Delattre, who had replaced Achille Van Acker, head of the underground party, in 1944. Buset played a crucial role in the party. Before the war, he had been strongly anti-neutralist; an early supporter of the Plan, he soon became an opponent of De Man. He was determined that the party should not become a party of the petite-bourgeoisie. Asked at the Liberation whether he wanted to become Minister, he answered jokingly: « I prefer to be Commissaire du Peuple ». It wasn't completely a joke. One reason that Buset commanded such authority in the party was that he devoted himself completely to the party, never becoming a minister. This gave him a moral weight in the bureau that neither Spaak nor Van Acker wanted to oppose. Politically, Buset was of the center left in the Vandervelde tradition — he was one of those strongly committed to maintaining Quaregnon.

Achille Van Acker had emerged as a major leader during the resistance. After the Liberation, he took charge of the economic reconstruction and social reforms emerging from the *pacte social*. Van Acker was uninterested in principles; he was the total pragmatist, but a pragmatist who had a sense of the man in the street and the confidence of the working class, in part because he had been a worker (18). Paul-Henri Spaak was also a pragmatist, but his pragmatism was more focused on the exercise of political power than in concrete programs. For him, politics was the pursuit of the possible. He had an extraordinary capacity to synthesize ideas, even concerning subjects of which he was totally ignorant. It has been said that he welcomed differences of opinion because they gave him greater flexibility to maneuver. He was also a powerful orator. The war had done much to eliminate memories of Spaak's conduct during the 1930's. He was indispensable in any socialist government (19).

Victor Larock and Herman Vos were two outstanding party intellectuals. Larock was political director of the *Peuple*, and later became the leading party spokesman on the Royal Question. Vos, a former Flemish nationalist, had become a socialist before the war. Léon-Elie

(18) On Achille VAN ACKER, Jan GROOTAERS, *Achiel Van Acker in het parlement, 1927-1974*, Belgisch Instituut voor Wetenschap der Politiek, 1975.

(19) On SPAAK, aside from *Combats Inachevés*, Paris, 1971, cf J.H. HUIZINGA, *Mr. Europe, A Political Biography of Paul-Henri Spaak*, London, 1961, and Jacques WILLEQUET, *Paul-Henri Spaak; un homme, des combats*, Brussels, 1974.

Troclet, long-time Minister of Social Affairs, was a lawyer, son of one of the founding fathers of the party.

Among trade union leaders who played a role within the party were Louis Major, who became secretary-general of the FGTB. A pragmatist, highly anti-communist and rather anti-intellectual, Major was an indefatigable organizer and speaker. Paul Finet also played an important role after the war.

Many people exercised an important role in party deliberations as a result of their local political or trade union positions, membership in Parliament, or direction of a socialist organization. Antoine Spinoy was burgomaster of Mechelen, Edouard Anseele was leader of the Ghent machine, Henry Fayat and Henri Rolin were leading members of Parliament, Isabelle Blume was president of the Femmes Socialistes.

Examination of the composition of the Bureau of the PSB after the war affirms the contention that there had been considerable change in the leadership personnel. The Bureau of 1938 included six francophone and six Dutch-speaking members. Of the former, Vandervelde had died, Wauters had ceased to play a direct role in the party, Gailly was not reelected. Although Delattre was elected to the Bureau of 1945, he retired in 1947. Spaak and Buset alone continued either as members of the bureau or the executive. The two francophone *suppléants* of 1938, Merlot and Rolin, however, were elected as full members in 1945. De Brouckère, who rarely remained long in an official leadership position, was elected in 1945 but resigned in protest over the creation of a coalition with the PSC in 1947. Of the six Dutch-speaking members, only one, Van Acker, served in the post-war Bureau.

Thus, of the twelve full members of 1938, only four continued in the post-war Bureau, and one of those only for a single term. If *suppléants* are included, the figure is six out of fourteen.

The composition of the new Bureau indicates that power had by and large shifted to a younger generation, a generation generally identified with the internal resistance (Spaak and Rolin, who were in London, constitute the main exceptions). The Bureau elected in 1945 remained virtually unchanged throughout the 1940's and 1950's. The change in composition of the leadership however, did not imply any significant change in political orientation, although the stability of the post-war Bureau does indeed indicate a stability in political orientation as well.

One striking difference between the 1930's and the post-war period was the lack of factionalization. Although there were differences over specific issues, there was no fundamental ideological conflict in the immediate post-war years. The relative tranquillity of the PSB was not really challenged until after 1958.

II. The PSB and major policy options.

Economic and social policies.

The party's main concern following the war was reconstruction. Indeed, the main reason for bringing down the Pierlot government in 1945 was the feeling that reconstruction was not proceeding with sufficient energy. In Achille Van Acker, the party found a Prime Minister who centered his administration on «The Battle of Coal», and who maintained close relations with the English. In stating that the party's main concerns involved reconstruction, one might ask, to what extent was the party simply reconstructing capitalism? To what extent was it creating something new?

The economic and social policies of post-war Belgium would seem to present a study in contrast. Social reforms were large and important, and emerged through a general consensus attained during the war between business and labor. Fiscal measures, implemented by Camille Gutt were radical in method if not in purpose, and were fully supported by the PSB. *Dirigisme* was a necessity, in Belgium as elsewhere in order to cope with enormous dislocation. Yet the socialist call for structural reforms remained almost completely ineffective. Whereas France by 1946 had nationalized its key industries and had established the Monnet plan, Belgium remained a country of free enterprise (20).

This seeming paradox can be explained, at least in part, by the strong tendencies towards consensus politics in Belgium. The First World War, which had polarized politics in many countries, had brought the parties in Belgium closer together. The Union Sacrée met with virtually no opposition from the POB, and the party remained in government after the end of the war. A series of social reforms was the result. The same thing happened after World War II. At least in terms of class relations, the war produced increased solidarity. The *pacte de solidarité sociale* of 1944 outlined a series of important social measures, which were largely implemented by Van Acker and Troclet after the war. In the realm of structural reforms, however, there was no such consensus. Neither Catholics nor Liberals supported nationalizations (whereas the MRP in France did). Unlike in France, there was little feeling that «all was possible». Belgium seemed to experience neither the passionate hopes that characterized the Liberation of France, nor the bitter disappointment that followed. Although at the beginning, some socialists may

(20) For the official party view on economic reconstruction, cf Edmond LEBURTON, «L'Œuvre de Redressement», *Les Fastes du Parti*, op. cit., pp. 183-201. On Gutt's financial policies, Camille GUTT, *La Belgique au Carrefour*, Paris, 1971, pp. 169-185.

have hoped that fundamental reforms were possible, it soon became clear that they could only be a long-term aim. The main goal was thus to get the country back on its feet, and to achieve social progress. By supporting Van Acker, the party made it clear that bread and butter issues were paramount.

As in most European countries after the war, *dirigisme* was necessary. The shortage of commodities, the destruction of the war, the need to ration an inadequate amount of food made a return to the free market out of the question. The socialists supported *dirigisme*, although well aware that *dirigisme* was not the same thing as socialism. But if *dirigisme* was accepted, grosso modo, by all the parties, it was conceived as a temporary expedient. Their goal was a return to economic liberalism. In a certain sense, it can be argued that the PSB's success in managing the economy after the war (and controlling working class demands for salary increases) made possible an ultimate return to liberalism. The party's economic policies were predicated on strong support for Camille Gutt's financial program, the goal of which was to maintain the stability of the franc, by cutting down on excess monetary circulation. This policy had much in common with that of Mendès-France's program, which De Gaulle decided ultimately not to implement. The PSB had always opposed devaluation, on the grounds that the working class suffered most from it. This position was reiterated by Victor Larock, Max Buset, and Louis de Brouckère, who asserted that the most important problem of the day was maintaining the value of the franc.

The logical result of the Gutt program was the need for a policy of wage and price controls. This was a policy followed by Van Acker and his successors. It was not an easy task. Van Acker hoped that by granting initial wage increases of around 40 %, and by implementing the great reforms of social security, he could then hold the line. He naturally faced some trade union opposition, especially from the heavily communist *Comités de Lutte syndicale* (CLS), but with the PCB in the government, such opposition was unlikely to be wholehearted. On 18 May 1945 Van Acker declared to the Senate that civil mobilization would soon be extended to the whole country « ... a miner must remain a miner, a baker a baker ». No strikes would be tolerated ; their leaders would be arrested. The newspaper *Le Travailleur* was closed for calling for a general strike. Van Acker even suggested a kind of conspiracy theory to explain why strikes were taking place : « The strikes we are witnessing have not been ordered by the trade unions. But the leaders haven't had the courage to tell the truth. A stranger was travelling around the country and the strikes followed him » (21). If civil mobi-

(21) *Peuple*, May 19, 1945.

lization represented the stick, social reforms represented the carrot for the working class. Van Acker was determined to win the « Battle of Coal » and attain economic recovery, and he would let nothing stand in his way. The policy followed by Van Acker was pretty much that followed by all succeeding socialist governments in this period. The fact that it succeeded indicated the enormous discipline of the Belgian working class. The socialists were lucky that the communists supported this policy when they were strongest. By 1947, when they began systematic opposition, they had lost most of their influence on the working class.

If the economic policies followed had not created the ideal, they had at least averted the worst. As the Report to the Congress of 1947 indicated: « This is not to say that the situation of the workers is enviable, or even satisfactory. But it shows at least that the Party, the trade unions, and the government, equally concerned in the interest of the workers not to open the sluice-gates of inflation, have done their best under very difficult circumstances » (22). Spaak observed at the Congress that if the socialists had not been in power, it wouldn't have been possible to reconstruct the country.

The achievements in social policy, which represented a great breakthrough for the Belgian working class, cannot be detailed here. There is no question, however, that many socialists shared Max Buset's feeling that « the social security we have created will be the great accomplishment of the century » (23).

The deterioration of the economic situation in 1948, before the Marshall Plan could have much effect, led to attempts by the communists to foment strikes whose real purpose was political. Such was the case of the Gazelco strike of February 1948, which led to Van Acker's reimposition (as Minister of Labor) of civil mobilization, and the revocation of some workers (for which he was criticized by Anseele). In a sense, the party escaped from its difficult position when it was forced back into the opposition.

At the same time as the socialist ministers pursued their pragmatic economic policies, the party put great apparent stress on the importance of structural reforms. In December 1944 Louis de Brouckère had written that the powers of High Finance had been able to overthrow the Pouillet-Vandervelde government, the French Popular Front, and the

(22) *Rapports*, op. cit., p. 62.

(23) *Peuple*, September 22-23, 1946. For the details of social legislation, *De Sociale Vooruitgang in België sedert de Bevrijding*, Brussels, 1949.

English Labor government. He concluded that the PSB had to proceed to major socialization or renounce socialism (24).

In early 1945, the socialist deputy Craeybeckx (Antwerp) deposed three projects for the nationalization of armaments, electricity, and credit. These projects naturally remained abortive. They did provide the basis for a large number of articles stressing the importance of nationalizations. But as the Report to the Congress of 1947 stated: « From the socialist point of view, it (the government) has not brought about the reforms of structure we should have liked to see implemented. But a certain impulse has been given in that direction. But one might also ask: where is the current of opinion, where is the political majority that would have been necessary to transform the economy » (25). The party could claim little more than the municipalization of the Brussels and Antwerp tramways, and certain reforms in the coal industry as structural reforms.

Periodically, discontent arose against socialist ministers for not having accomplished more. In January 1948, at a meeting of the General Council Spinoy criticized Spaak's economic program for not creating « the instruments necessary for the realization of the structural reforms we want, and which imply the transformation of the regime of property ». Anseele asked whether Belgium would remain the only country with a liberal economy. Spaak replied that the party had no choice, that new elections would not change the balance of forces. What Spinoy wanted required a majority which did not yet exist (26). The fall of the Spaak government put an end, at least temporarily, to the debate.

In the course of half a decade in government, the PSB had accomplished virtually nothing in the way of structural reforms. It was argued that the party could do nothing, because there was no national consensus on the issue, because the other parties were opposed, because coalition governments are governments of compromise. But the compromise works both ways. It is clear that the PSB was not prepared to make structural reforms a precondition for government participation because it considered other issues priorities: economic reconstruction, the Royal Question, etc. In addition, many party and trade-union leaders (like Van Acker and Louis Major) simply didn't take the matter very seriously. In practice, the party traded the support of the working class in reconstruction for tangible social benefits. That should surprise no one — the PSB was simply being faithful to its reformist tradition. What would have been surprising would have been any other conduct.

(24) *Peuple*, December 4-5, 1944.

(25) *Rapports*, op. cit., p. 59.

(26) *Peuple*, January 23, 1948.

The PSB and the Cold War.

The socialist dream of a just peace based on international organization proved just as impossible after World War I as after War II. Opposed to the division of the world into two blocs, the party struggled against the tide of the Cold War, as long as it was possible.

At the political congress of the party in September 1946, Spaak argued that international organization was the only way of saving the peace, but complained that the domination of the world by the Big Powers, and their veto power in the U.N. Security Council, made any constructive action impossible. He stressed the dangers of the developing fear and incomprehension between the « anglo-saxons » and the Soviets. All the blame was not on one side. The Iron Curtain was not a fiction, but there was the danger of individuals on the other side who contemplated a war. The role of the social-democrats was to provide a bridge between the two worlds. For this reason, it was necessary to reconstruct the socialist international (it was typical of the PSB to put untoward faith in the possibilities of a socialist international — which had repeatedly proven itself ineffective) (27).

In April 1947 Victor Larock wrote in the *Peuple* that both the US and USSR were imperialistic. The danger was not that of a sudden attack of one against the other, but of an antagonism which could eventually degenerate into armed conflict. Europe was becoming increasingly divided. If the US wanted to help restore peace in Europe, it should try to assist rather than dominate. It should support the democratic forces, not the conservatives and reactionaries as in France and Italy. The article concluded in a rather utopian fashion that only an international socialist program could resolve these problems (28). In July, Buset minced no words when he wrote: « If the Marshall Plan were to be present only in the form of economic collaboration, it could be a great hope. But it is to be feared that it comes in the stride of dangerous and stupid politics of Truman » (29). A few months later, he declared that he didn't foresee the danger of war, and that Belgium did not belong to any bloc (30). Nevertheless, it proved more and more difficult not to choose between the two superpowers. At the Congress of October 1947, the tensions of the Cold War were manifested in a debate on foreign policy.

Isabelle Blume praised what the social-democrats of Eastern Europe were doing for the cause of peace, and claimed that the truth of what

(27) *Peuple*, October 1, 1946.

(28) *Peuple*, April 20-21, 1947.

(29) *Peuple*, July 30, 1947.

(30) *Peuple*, October 16, 1947.

was going on behind the Iron Curtain was distorted. Nagy, for example, was the « organization of the Hungarian reaction against land reform ». Blume argued that although it wasn't admitting it, Belgium was joining one of the blocs. She criticized the recognition of the Greek government by Belgium and stated that the Marshall Plan could be accepted only with extensive precautions. Wasn't its goal only to preserve capitalism ?

Louis de Brouckère declared that the international situation was grave, two blocs were being constituted. Some Americans felt that the only solution to the economic crisis was war. Blume's position would bring Belgium into the eastern bloc. De Brouckère insisted that it was necessary to constitute an independent force ; what was necessary above all was a strong International — a rather utopian solution.

Spaak strongly attacked Blume, and expressed his astonishment at hearing the positions of the PC integrally defended at a socialist congress. Spaak argued both that Belgium had maintained her independence, and that in fact there was only one bloc, the eastern bloc. The nations of Western Europe, in order not to irritate the USSR, had not organized themselves into a bloc as the eastern European nations had. He defended participation in the Marshall Plan, and the government's policy on Greece. (It should be noted that at this time, the issue of European unity had not become a matter of great interest to the party as a whole) (31).

In the following months, the international situation worsened. The Comintern conference in Warsaw marked a sharp reversal of communist policies in the West. In France, insurrectionary strikes occurred. Similarly in Belgium. Van Acker, per interim Minister of Labor, decreed civil mobilization : « The government can no longer tolerate that by means of certain professional demands anarchy dominates our country and that a minority of trouble-makers might destroy in a few weeks the magnificent efforts accomplished since the liberation to restore our country » (32).

In a major speech at Gouy-les Pieton, Spaak defended governmental economic policy. Communist propaganda was not intended to gain the demands of the workers, but to bring about the failure of the Marshall Plan. But without the Marshall Plan, Belgium would suffer economic collapse. The communists did not want this aid because if Europe could reconstruct itself democratically and with prosperity, communism would disappear (33).

At the Congress of the FGTB in March 1948, the atmosphere was highly charged. The behavior of the PC in promoting strikes was attacked,

(31) *Peuple*, October 28, 1947.

(32) *Peuple*, February 16, 1948.

(33) *Ibid.*

the communists were accused of betraying the working class. Dejae, the communist leader, and a member of the secretariat, declared : « We shall bring about unity to realize here the popular democracy instituted in Czechoslovakia ». Libaers threatened the trade unionists with the same kind of fate their counterparts suffered in Czechoslovakia if they didn't face up to what was happening. By reducing the number of secretaries from six to four, and then by electing four non-communists the congress eliminated the communist leaders without losing communist rank and file membership (34). The policy of trade union unity paid off.

Events in Czechoslovakia had their impact on the party as well. At a meeting of the General Council in March, Larock charged the USSR with turning aggressively against the West, and discussed the fate of the socialist parties in Eastern Europe. The communists had won because they controlled the means of repression. The Council unanimously accepted the idea of a Western Union, economic and military (35).

The Congress of November 1948 attested to the fact that the debate on foreign policy was virtually closed. Larock, in his report, pointed out that neither the US nor the USSR were models, but supported the Atlantic Pact, with the understanding that this would not involve Belgium in non-European matters. Baccus argued that the « bolshevik dictatorship and American capitalism were responsible for the present mess » and regretted that Spaak's latest speech at the UN was too indulgent to American capitalism. It became clear that although the party, and Belgium as a whole, might refuse to identify intellectually with one of the two blocs, circumstances forced them politically into the Western bloc. Isabelle Blume once again protested that in choosing the Atlantic pact, Belgium was choosing on which side she would make war. Her hope was that the European working class could act as mediator (36).

Six months later, the FGTB decided to withdraw from the Fédération Syndicale Mondiale (FSM). Ironically, it was André Renard who acted as rapporteur for the motion. Renard, who had hoped to create working class unity, now argued that it was the communists who had killed the FSM by not accepting the democratic tradition of the West. The vote, 612,122 to 78,181 with 5,392 abstentions shows how much communist support had been reduced (37).

Belgium socialism entered the western bloc with its eyes open. It chose what seemed to be the lesser of two evils. Unlike the French socialists, it had maintained its working class base.

(34) *Peuple*, March 2, 1948.

(35) *Peuple*, March 16, 1948.

(36) *Peuple*, November 7, 1948.

(37) *Peuple*, May 30, 1949.

III. The PSB and Belgian politics.

The PSB and Governmental participation.

The period of 1944-1950 can be divided into three phases in terms of socialist governmental participation. In the initial six months following the liberation, the party participated in a kind of Union Sacrée under the leader of the war-time cabinet, Hubert Pierlot. For the next five years, socialists led every government (Van Acker, Huysmans, Spaak). Following the elections of 1949, as the Royal Question became the center of politics, the party returned to the opposition, where it remained until the elections of 1954. Although the party had been willing to enter governments before World War II, it is certain that the experience of the post-war contributed to making participation seem a normal part of the political game.

The Pierlot ministry was based on the government of 1939 with the addition of the communists and socialists. By the end of 1944, the socialists were showing impatience with the government. On 21 October, an editorial in the *Peuple* entitled « Diriger » complained about the government's lack of leadership. It was followed on 6 December by an article of Victor Larock entitled « Le Regroupement des Forces ». Larock pointed out the danger to political democracy when the government no longer represented the popular will, stressed the desire for major change of the working class, the resistance, and the young, and argued that only the implementation of a socialist program and the creation of a great « Parti du Travail » could bring about these changes. This notwithstanding, there was no point in bringing about the fall of the government, since any new government would be under the control of the same parliament. The socialists should continue to fulfill their responsibilities, and at the same time, plan for the future.

The party's attitude was more militant by February. The party wanted Pierlot to shake up his cabinet. It felt that Pierlot was not showing sufficient leadership in the face of traumatic problems of coal, food supply, and the *épuration*. Moreover, it was hampered by a certain popular resentment against the « men of London ». When the socialists left the government, Pierlot resigned; the Regent called Achille Van Acker as *formateur*. Van Acker formed a government with five socialists, six Catholics, four liberals, and two communists. The party had already made it clear that it would insist on the participation of the Parti Communiste (PC). Anything else would seem directed against the PC and would result in systematic opposition. « The communists could not, as during the first months after the liberation, be involved simultaneously in governmental participation, virtually reduced to a symbolic presence,

and street agitation, where they ran the risk of being *debordé* at any moment » (38).

Faced with the rise of communist influence at the liberation (both politically and through the *Comités de Lutte Syndicale*), in large part due to their resistance role, the socialists adopted a policy which proved to be successful. First they insisted that the communists be associated with the government. The communists would be in no position to systematically attack the government for whatever went wrong. At the same time, the socialists, not the communists, received credit for the great social reforms of the period. Second, elections were postponed until 1946. By that time, the PC received 12 % of the vote and 23 seats. Earlier elections would certainly have registered a stronger communist showing. With time, the experienced socialist trade union leaders were able to regain their positions; unlike in France, the superior organizational experience of the socialists proved decisive. At no time were the communists able to take the initiative. Between the liberation and 1950, the PSB successfully recovered its dominance of the non-Catholic Belgian working class.

The thrust of the Van Acker government was towards economic reconstruction and social reforms. Very soon, however, the government became enmeshed in the Royal Question. On 16 June 1945, when the King announced his intention to return, Van Acker resigned. Attempts by the King to constitute a government failed. On 19 June a law was passed making the two chambers in joint session the judge of when the King's inability to reign had ceased. The identification of the PSC with the King made its continuation in the government impossible: On 2 August 1945 Van Acker constituted a second cabinet, composed of socialists, communists, liberals, and two members of the *Union Démocratique Belge* (UDB), a new party whose weakness would only be discovered in the general elections. In January 1946 parliament was dissolved, the government considering that it had fulfilled its mission. The socialists received 69 seats, the PSC 92, the PC 23, the Liberals 17 (a decline of 16) and the UDB only 1. The elections did not give a clear mandate to any party. The Bureau of the PSB called for another Van Acker government without the PSC. The PSC itself could not constitute a government, and its position on the Royal Question made it very hard to find a coalition partner. There was considerable difficulty in forming a government. An all-socialist minority government under

(38) *Peuple*, editorial, « Ce n'est pas l'heure des exclusives », February 9, 1945. The Van Acker government benefited from good relations with the English. More information on the role of the English in Belgian politics at this time will be forthcoming when Jules GERARD-LIBOIS' *L'An 45* is published.

Spaak lasted only 10 days. The confusing political situation led to a serious discussion in the General Council of 28 March 1946.

At the meeting, Van Acker expressed preference for a government of the four major parties, because of the severity of the economic problems facing the country. A left government, he argued, wasn't really left-wing except in its being anticlerical. De Brouckère, on the other hand, strongly opposed a quadrapartite. It represented a renunciation of democracy, moreover, De Brouckère felt that the PSC was dominated by supporters of Leopold, some of whom were fascists. Huysmans, however, felt that it was better to have certain people in the government rather than in the opposition, and supported a Van Acker cabinet. Liège, on the other hand, preferred a left government, or dissolution. Spaak complained that the party had sincerely attempted to establish a left government, but had met resistance. Dissolution would accomplish nothing. To De Brouckère, he replied that no government was just as dangerous to democracy as a quadrapartite. If there were no other way to fill the vacuum, he would support a quadrapartite (39). When on 29 March the PSC refused a quadrapartite, a new Van Acker government with the liberals and communists was formed; Van Acker saw its goal as a battle of coal, prices, and exports.

The government was threatened by the PC's support for strikes in opposition to wage and price controls. On 10-11 June, Victor Larock wrote in the *Peuple* that the PSC had thought the government wouldn't last long. Now it wanted the PSB to drop the PC. But even though the PC's positions were determined by supranational considerations, the socialists would support communist participation so long as they didn't play a double game. In the end, the government fell because of Henri Rolin's interpellation of the Liberal Minister of Justice, Van Glabbeke. By this time, Van Acker had had enough of the PC and of the left formula. On 22 July he declared: « How do you hope to accomplish structural reforms with a government that doesn't have a sufficient majority ?... as for me, I would prefer to work in the galleys than to direct a left government. I have warned you. If it is necessary, I will return to the ranks like a disciplined soldier » (40). But agreement with the Catholics was impossible, and Camille Huysmans formed another left government.

The Huysmans government was not a particularly strong government, since Huysmans, unlike Van Acker, gave much greater freedom to his ministers. It continued the same basic policies as the previous government.

(39) *Peuple*, March 29, 1946.

(40) *Peuple*, July 23, 1946.

The main surprise was that it lasted as long as it did, since its majority in the Senate was highly precarious. The possibilities for a left government were constantly decreasing, as the international situation worsened. Spaak had said in October 1946 that the role of Belgium was to be an element of comprehension between the East and the West. So long as that was possible, the PSB could also be a link between the communists and the bourgeois parties within Belgium. This became more and more difficult. On 12 March 1947 the government fell when the communists refused to accept an increase in the price of coal to 629 francs per ton. It did not seem at first that this was necessarily the end of communist participation, only later did the event seem decisive, especially when seen in the light of the end of communist participation in France and Italy. In an editorial of 21 March 1947 in the *Peuple*, Larock conjectured that the communists wanted to enter the opposition, not as the PSC argued, because they were told by Moscow, but because the experience of power is difficult for a party whose members consider themselves revolutionaries.

When Spaak made it clear that he wanted to establish a government with the PSC and the Liberals, he unleashed one of the hottest debates of the post-war period in the General Council. The idea of joining with the party which had been its main adversary of the Royal Question did not set well with many members. Buset, Larock, and De Brouckère opposed the move, preferring another démarche to the communists. De Brouckère felt the PSC had never really deconfessionalized and was proto-fascist. A majority of socialists from Flanders and the PSC could impose their views on the Walloon socialists. De Brouckère threatened to quit his position in the party leadership and return to the ranks if the party voted to collaborate with the PSC. Nevertheless, a motion favoring collaboration with the PSC was passed 122:65:1 (41).

Collaboration with the PSC was only possible so long as the Royal Question was kept in the background and the status quo maintained. The main source of conflict so long as the Royal Question was latent was the school issue. In May 1948 a dispute over subsidies for technical education led to the resignation of the government, which was then reconstructed. Nevertheless, the issue was far from passé in the party; a motion supporting a Spaak compromise with the PSC won out 145:72:5 (42). In a country where a party was more concerned about rallying its own potential supporters than in getting support from other groups, the issue of schools was not an easy one on which to compromise.

(41) *Peuple*, March 19, 1947.

(42) *Peuple*, May 16-17, 1948.

The socialists were in no rush to call new elections before autumn 1949, but collaboration between PSC and PSB became increasingly difficult. The budget provided the immediate cause of the breakup of the government, and the calling of elections. These elections constituted a major defeat for the PSB (43). The PSC came close to a majority, close enough so that it was tempted to try for an absolute majority the next year, when it succeeded.

The PSB went from 31.59 % to 29.64 % of the total vote ; the combined vote of the PSB and PC declined from 44.27 % to 37.24 %. The report to the Congress of 1949 explained this defeat as follows : « Thus the Belgian bourgeoisie, following the example of other European countries, has shown its determination to put an end to the concessions following the war, and to take back control in its class interests of the economic and social orientation of the country » (44). The PSC lacked only two votes for an absolute majority in the lower house, but it had an absolute majority of nine in the Senate. Thus, in a joint session it would have a majority of seven.

The situation was now reversed : « If, for the four years following the liberation, it was we who made demands in the name of the working class in all ministerial negotiations, it is no longer so » (45). The PSB was condemned to opposition until 1954. Ironically, it was as a party of opposition that it won one of its greatest victories — that of preventing the return to the throne of Leopold III. This in turn prepared the way for an electoral comeback in 1954.

The PSB and the Royal Question.

This is not the place to retrace in detail the history of the Royal Question. Our consideration must be restricted to the discussion of certain aspects of the relationship of the PSB to the problem (46).

It would be a mistake to believe that the intransigent position of the PSB in 1950, when it was prepared to use almost revolutionary means to prevent the return of the King, corresponded to its position in 1945. To be sure, in 1945, many socialists were not prepared to accept the return of the King *sine conditione*. Van Acker and Spaak were probably willing to accept Leopold's return provided that he renewed his oath to the Constitution, declared that a state of war had never ceased to exist between Belgium and Germany, and got rid of his

(43) For an analysis of the cause of the defeat, cf Parti Socialiste Belge, *Rapports présentés au Congrès des 5 et 6 novembre 1949*, pp. 42-49.

(44) *Ibid.*, p. 15.

(45) *Ibid.*, p. 22.

(46) I am indebted to the late Victor Larock for having allowed me to interview him on the subject.

entourage. Certainly, there were many who preferred abdication. When Van Acker, Spaak and other ministers went to see Leopold on 12 May 1945, it seems that most of the government preferred abdication, but held as a substitute settlement the above conditions. In addition, Leopold's wife would be made a countess by the Regent, and not reign as queen (nor would their children).

Why did the Royal Question become so important for the PSB ? It must first be noted that it was Leopold's obduracy which made a compromise settlement impossible in 1945. Men like Van Acker and Spaak were forced into a hard-line position. Second, when the King's cause became the PSC's cause, when the Catholic ministers left the Van Acker government, the issue became a partisan one. Third, for those who had participated in the resistance, the King's behavior seemed indecent. Either Leopold was right, or the Resistance was right. Fourth, was the increasing identification of the King with the extreme right and the Flemish Catholics, what the PSB called the *Léo-rexistes*. Socialists accepted the monarchy as a symbol of national unity, but Leopold was now becoming a cause of national disunity.

Another major factor was the fact that the behavior of the PSC and of Leopold went counter to the basic rules of Belgian politics. Belgium had been evolving into a consensus society, in which all fundamental issues which involved an alteration of the status quo were decided through consultation of all major groups. An arithmetic majority, in other words, was not sufficient for major changes. When the PSC, by virtue of a few extra seats in Parliament (which the socialists believed came from the fascist right anyway) attempted to resolve the Royal Question, and to foist Leopold on the country, the socialists reacted as if legality had been tampered with. Indeed, the tacit constitution of Belgium, if not the official constitution, *had been* tampered with. This seemed to justify an extraordinary reaction. In other words, if the PSB seemed willing to use revolutionary means, its goal was really more conservative — the preservation of the existing unofficial system of consensus politics which it had followed in the past five years.

One might say, rather ironically, that the PSB never better showed how much it had integrated itself in the Belgian political system than when it stood up against the King in 1950.



How successful was the PSB between 1944 and 1950 ? If the primary goal of the party leadership was reconstruction — of the party organization and of Belgian society in general — the results were probably

satisfactory. If on the other hand, success meant a renewal of the party and the creation of a different kind of society, the verdict must be negative.

At the Liberation, the PSB was faced with the problem of rebuilding its organization, severely damaged by the events of the last five years. It had to confront the consequences of the end of collective affiliation, and the loss of cohesion between the four organizations formerly united. It had to contain a serious communist advance into its former bailiwicks. By 1950, the party had long since reestablished itself on a sound organizational basis, relations with the FGVB, mutual societies and cooperatives had been resoldered, and the Communist party had ceased to be of much consequence. The Royal Affair had helped recreate solidarity in the movement. Indeed, the degree of unity within the party was much greater than before the war; factionalism was non-existent.

In electoral terms, the party had regained its pre-war strength, but did not surpass it. If the Royal Affair had helped to rally the party's traditional clientele, it had not helped much in attracting new constituents. Likewise, the FGVB grew much more slowly than the Catholic unions in the post-war period.

The PSB approached the problem of national reconstruction as if its main goal was to rebuild Belgium as it had been before the war but with increased welfare programs. The party felt that it had done its duty in helping to get the Belgian economy back on the tracks, but was not particularly concerned that what was restored was an essentially liberal economy. The party was in large part dominated by the spirit of Van Acker, who was determined to «get on with the job», barely questioning the nature of the job. With the exception of a few proposals which seem not to have been taken very seriously, the PSB held out no alternatives to the *status quo ante*.

Where the party was most militant, it was militant about issues that were not quintessentially socialist, but rather were related to the radical political tradition. Such was the case with the schools issue, even more so with the Royal Question. In other words, the party was most militant when it came to issues that united its members on political ideology but repelled most others. It is not unlikely that a more imaginative political and social program might have attracted members of the intelligentsia and the christian left.

The party responded to issues that arose, but showed little prescience about the issues that would emerge in the late 1950's or early 1960's. Thus, the Congo and the possibility of a federal system in Belgium were largely ignored. Likewise, with the exception of André Renard and his friends (who were not always *personnae gratae* in the party),

the idea of planning was barely discussed — this at a time when Jean Monnet had established the Commissariat du Plan in France.

The restraint and « modest egoism » of the PSB have been held as examples of political maturity and wisdom, but they may well have represented an intellectual hardening of the arteries. The men dominating the party shared neither the doctrinal background of the generation before them, nor the technocratic training of the generation after them. Under their guidance, the PSB might rightly be said to have become one of the three « traditional » parties of the Belgian political system.

Summary : Belgian socialism at the liberation : 1944-1950.

The period 1944-1950 witnessed the successful reconstruction of the Belgian Socialist Party. Despite some modifications of structure and leadership personnel, the party retained many of its pre-war characteristics. There was no significant modernization of doctrine. In particular, its role as a party of government was accentuated. The PSB played a major role in increasing social welfare programs and restoring the Belgian economy, but made few structural reforms. Despite opposition to a division of the world into blocs, it was eventually forced into the American camp. The PSB's main political accomplishment was preventing the return to the throne of Leopold. By the end of this period, the PSB had largely become a party of the status quo.

