

ANTI-COMMUNIST ACTIVISM IN BELGIUM, 1930-1944¹

Rudi Van Doorslaer

Wollweber

Anyone who knows Belgium will not be surprised to learn that our story begins in **Antwerp**, an international port of vital importance to the Belgian economy and a nerve centre where antagonistic social forces meet. On 10 November 1937, the Italian steamer *Boccacio* entered Dock No. 53. Louis Schokkaert, one of the dockers taken on to unload the vessel, contrived to leave a small package on board without being noticed. Some ten days later, the *Boccacio* sank off the coast of Brittany with the loss of one officer. The sabotage was the work of Antwerp-based members of the Wollweber group.² Ernst Wollweber, a Communist who had been elected to the Reichstag in 1928, was the head of both Profintern's seamen's section and of the clandestine KPD organisation that smuggled propaganda into Nazi Germany. He had been selected by the Communist *International* to organise clandestine units to sabotage ships carrying supplies to the Nationalists in Spain. The organisation's European bases were in Germany, the Baltic countries, Scandinavia, Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium. Wollweber had given responsibility for The Netherlands and Belgium to Joop Schaap, who came originally from Rotterdam. His lieutenant in Antwerp was a lorry driver called Alfons Fictels, who succeeded in recruiting a number of dockers to help him in his clandestine work. We will not go into any details about the attempted sabotage in Antwerp when an initial attempt to sabotage a German vessel in September 1937 came to nothing. In November, the action against the *Boccacio* had the desired result. In June 1938, a third attempt against the Japanese cargo vessel *Kasij Maru* was also successful: a large explosion occurred in the Channel and the ship was forced to make for the nearest port.

These illegal activities naturally attracted the attention of the police. According to the charges brought against the Wollweber group by the Volkgerichtshof in Berlin in 1942, 'By 1938, police investigations were going ahead on an international scale.'³ The Germans had in fact started a major investigation in late 1937; it was carried out by the Gestapo and was headed by Richard Heydrich.⁴ In Belgium, investigations were co-ordinated by Georges Block, the superintendent in charge of the Police Judiciaire's [Criminal Investigation Department] political bureau in

Annverp. Given the nature of his position, Block was of course in close contact with the **Sûreté Publique** and military counter-intelligence.

In Belgium, as in the rest of Europe, a number of different police departments were involved in political issues. The **Sûreté de l'Etat**, for instance, had originally been responsible for the surveillance of foreigners. The **Sûreté Publique** was subdivided into the Police des Etrangers, the Commissariat **Général aux Délégations** Judiciaries and the **Sûreté de l'Etat** itself, and was responsible to the Minister for Justice. Officially, the **Sûreté** had no intelligence functions, except in wartime.⁵ The **Sûreté Militaire** and its counter-intelligence section were responsible to the Minister for National Defence; in time of war they became the Third Section of the High Command. The Police Judiciaire also had its own political sections. Although its personnel were employed by the Ministry of Justice, they were directly responsible to the public prosecutor, the Procureurs du Roi and the Procureurs **Généraux**.⁶ Finally, the local police forces had had political sections since the nineteenth century; they were responsible to the Bourgrnestre and, indirectly, to the Minister for Justice.

Georges Block used the classic tactics of infiltration to track down those responsible for the sabotage that had taken place in **Antwerp**. It is unlikely that he had any success before 1938. In August 1936, Julien Lepomme, a docker and former boxer from **Antwerp**, was arrested after a series of burglaries. Later that year he was sentenced to four years imprisonment, but was released early in 1938. Lepomme, who had been a member of the Communist Party for years, was soon recruited into the clandestine Wollweber organisation by Schaap and Fictels. Block also recruited him as an agent. It has proved impossible to discover from Belgian sources just what the **Antwerp** Prosecutor's Department knew about the Wollweber group. German sources, on the other hand, tell us a great deal.⁷ On 12th July 1938, Gestapo chief Heinrich Muller wrote to Schmidt-Rolke, the German Consul General in **Antwerp**, and told him that Berlin knew only that a group of Communists connected with Profintern's seamen's section was at work. Six days later Schmidt-Rolke replied, telling Muller that he had learned from the Police Judiciaire in Annverp that the leaders were Schaap and Fictels. In October, Muller informed the Consul General that on 25th October he would, on Heydrich's orders, be visiting **Antwerp**, together with Streckenbach, the head of the Gestapo in Hamburg. They wanted to have a meeting with the Police Judiciaire, but no such meeting appears to have taken place. A few weeks later, Streckenbach once more set off for **Antwerp**, on 'private' business. This time he did succeed in meeting Jozef Celis, the chief superintendent of the Police Judiciaire. The Consul General had done his work well.

An anti-Bolshevik alliance with Germany?

How are we to explain these contacts? The German police had been trying to organise an international campaign against Bolshevism since 1936. Between 30th August and 13th September, representatives of the police forces of fourteen or fifteen countries met in Berlin to exchange ideas.' Belgium was represented by officials from the *Sûreté Publique*. During the *Parteitag* that took place in Nuremberg after the congress, administrator Robert de Floy was presented with a German decoration. It is difficult to say whether or not the conference had any concrete results. In October, de Floy did receive certain information from Heydrich, but the contents have never been disclosed. On the other hand, what Heydrich and Himmler wanted is perfectly clear: mutual cooperation, both in terms of intelligence and concrete action against any political movement (i.e. of the left) that might threaten the security of any of the contracting states. Any exile who opposed National-Socialism came into that category. It is unlikely that any official treaty was signed, although that was of course what Himmler wanted. It is, therefore, also unlikely that Belgium was represented at the 1938 Berlin Congress. Research into the *Wollweber* group has shown that no Belgian delegate attended the conference held in Hamburg and Berlin in September 1938. On the other hand, the *Police Judiciaire's* colleagues in the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway did accept Germany's invitation.⁹

The fact that contacts were established between the German and Belgian police forces is obviously not an isolated incident. On the contrary, it is quite in line with Belgian foreign policy in the late thirties. In 1936, Belgium broke off the military pact that had been signed with France in 1921. The new policy of neutralism and independence reflected the Establishment's reluctance to be drawn into a possible conflict between the Popular Front government in France, which had ties with the Soviet Union, and the Nazi government in Berlin. Moscow and Berlin were already at war in Spain, and the conservatives, backed by the Court, opted for Berlin. The new line on foreign policy was welcomed in Berlin and it was probably in order to strengthen the new spirit of cordiality that the *Sûreté's* representatives were invited to Berlin. At the same time, contacts between the Belgian *Sûreté* and the French intelligence services, which had previously been very close, became almost clandestine. Belgium's absence from the 1938 Anti-Bolshevik Conference may have owed something to the country's historical links with its First World War allies and to a reluctance—or inability—to become too closely identified with Germany. It should also be remembered that although the military men in the counter-intelligence service were staunchly anti-communist, they had no illusions as to the *Abwehr's* plans for Belgium.

Antwerp

To return, however, to **Antwerp**. Both German and Belgian reactions to the activities of the Wollweber group have to be seen in terms of a broader context. The economic activity of the port was a vital link in the Belgian economy, which was primarily based upon import-export trade. Trade with Germany had increased considerably since **1933**. Many anti-fascist **émigrés** from Germany passed through **Antwerp**, and the town also had a Jewish population which was mainly concentrated in the diamond trade. Camille Huysmans, the mayor, was the secretary of the Second International and was to become its president in February **1940**. He took a strong anti-fascist line and was therefore in an extremely difficult position. As he had little confidence in Block's political bureau, he established his own political police force in April **1937**. This was the *Dienst der Bijzondere Opdrachten* (Special Missions Unit) and its main tasks were to prevent Communist agitation in the docks and to uncover German plots. These were difficult tasks which implied the use of tactics like infiltration and they often brought the Special Missions into conflict with the agents of Block and Celis. Lepomme, for instance, supplied the Special Missions Unit with information about the work he was doing for Block, but there is nothing to prove that he was not also passing on information to Block. The Special Missions also recruited agents from the German **émigré** groups in order to track down spies working for the Gestapo and Abwehr.

It must also be remembered that when Huysmans was made **Bourgmestre** of **Antwerp** in **1933**, he came under violent attack from the Right, not least because of the welcome he gave the emigrants. The German Consul took every possible opportunity to use economic pressure and political arguments against him.¹⁰ The information German agents gathered on agitators in the port was passed on to the 'right' newspapers and was used to influence opinions in Brussels. In May **1938**, the German Consul General informed his superiors that the **Sûreté** had decided to use the national Gendarmerie to arrest undesirable aliens rather than the local police forces."

Industry and the Church

For the Special Missions Unit, anti-communism was primarily a means to avoid being attacked by the Right and by the employers' associations. An examination of one of their actions teaches us a great deal about their intentions. It also takes us to the very centre of the anti-communist campaign. In June **1938** the BTB, the transport union which worked with the dockers, plastered **Antwerp** with posters showing a picture of a certain Noel, a well known Communist militant on the docks. The poster gave his real name as Leon de Ridder and it also gave the number of his SEPES membership card. The **Société d'Etudes Politiques, Economiques et Sociales** was an organisation specialising in anti-communist intelligence

and propaganda and was founded in **1925**. It described itself as the Belgian section of the Entente Internationale Contre le Bolchevisme, which had been founded by Théodore Aubert in Geneva in **1924**. Its General Secretary was Jean Spiltoir, a former army officer who, in the early twenties, had been the leader of the Union Civique, a para-military strike-breaking organisation. The aim of SEPES was 'to promote the idea of class collaboration, the only principle that can give the country the social peace it requires if it is to go on existing and developing. That is why SEPES is fighting the most active enemy of social peace: communism'.¹² SEPES gathered intelligence on Communists, both at the national and the international level, socialists, trade unions and on separatists (in other words, Flemish nationalists).¹³ In ideological terms, it represented the right wing Catholic tradition of Belgian nationalism. Initially, it financed its activities by undertaking intelligence and protection missions for SURCOMIN (Sûreté Commerciale et Industrielle), which had been set up by Spiltoir in **1925**. In the early thirties, it began to receive money from the Comité Central Industriel, the most powerful employers' association in Belgium.¹⁴ This new development coincided with an outbreak of spontaneous strikes in the Hainaut coalfield, where the miners had begun to turn against the socialist trade unions. For the first time since its foundation in **1921**, the Communist Party had at last found a mass audience. Not even the economic crisis of the previous two years had given it that.

SEPES had some thirty bases throughout Belgium, most of them staffed by ex-officers who had worked in the censorship and intelligence units of the Belgian army during the occupation of Germany. Since at least **1936-37**, the strings had been pulled by the director of a company owned by the Société Générale.¹⁵ Marcel de Roover had served as a volunteer with the Force Publique in the Belgian Congo in the First World War. In **1919** he was appointed as Belgium's representative to General Denikin in White Russia. After a diplomatic posting to Sofia in **1920-26**, he became a director of SOGECHIM (Société Générale Industrielle et Chimique du Haut Katanga).¹⁶ In **1941** he became a director of BRUFINA, the Banque de Bruxelles's holding company, and thus entered the orbit of Baron Paul de Launoit. De Roover, who in **1966** became Belgium's representative on the World Anti-communist League, played a central role in anti-communist activities in Belgium before, during and after the Second World War.

In **1937**, when De Roover began to support Spiltoir, SEPES began to work closely with the Concentration de Propagande Anti-Communiste (COPAC). When COPAC was officially founded in **1938**, its president was Vicomte Charles Terlinden. With Terlinden, we enter the world of the far Right. He was a Ligue Nationale sympathiser (the Ligue Nationale was the most important fascist organisation in the country prior to the rise of Rexism), worked with all the Franco support committees and was

President of the Comité d'action pour l'Universalité de Rome, which received support from Mussolini's propaganda services. The leading light in COPAC was Félix André Morlion, the Dominican priest who also ran the Centrale de Presse Catholique. COPAC and SEPES began to cooperate more closely: in 1938 Emile Stappaerts, a former army officer who worked closely with Spiltoir, became both director general of SEPES and treasurer of COPAC. In general, SEPES functioned as an intelligence service, with COPAC working as a huge propaganda machine propelled by Morlion's shock brigades. The coordination and intensification of the anti-communist movement coincided with the major Communist upsurge that occurred in Belgium after the great strike wave of 1936 and the victory of the Popular Front in France.

According to the Reichssicherheitshauptamt in Berlin, SEPES was a *getarntes Büro* (Secret bureau) of the Belgian Sûreté Militaire.¹⁷ There is, however, no proof that this was in fact the case. According to Carl Peters, the co-founder of SEPES and the organisation's head in Antwerp, SEPES had excellent contacts with both the Sûreté de l'Etat and the Antwerp Police Judiciaire,¹⁸ but that does not necessarily imply that information was not also supplied to the military in Brussels. SEPES does not appear to have had direct links with the Gestapo, but in September 1937 it did send a list of Communist agitators, some of whom were German emigrés, to the German Embassy in Brussels. It also called upon the Belgian authorities to deport them.¹⁹

SEPES's best-documented publication was probably *Le Port d'Anvers et le communisme*, which appeared in July 1938. It dealt at length with the smuggling of propaganda into Germany. It is quite obvious that SEPES could not have acquired this information unless it had contacts in the police or without using infiltration tactics. Which takes us back to Leon de Ridder, alias Leon Noel. He had been a member of the Communist Party since 1929 and was a member of a group working with seamen and dockers. De Ridder made himself so useful that Peters paid him out of SEPES funds and tried to provide him with a cover story by getting a company in the docks to employ him. That cannot have proved difficult, as, according to Special Mission sources, de Ridder often visited the offices of the Centrale des Employeurs du Port d'Anvers. The CEPA had long been pressurising the city council to improve trade relations between Belgium and Germany. De Ridder was eventually unmasked as a double agent by Huysmans's Special Missions Unit and the information was passed on to the BTB. The Special Missions had two aims: making the Communists look ridiculous and discrediting the Right. After all, conservative newspapers like *La Métropole*, *De Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Volk en Staat* and *De Nieuwe Stad* regularly published information supplied by SEPES.

The Popular Front and the Phoney War

The examples we have looked at show how the political and social events of the thirties and especially the rise of Communism after 1936 led to increasingly savage repression. The repression was organised by a state apparatus (the political police, whose main task was the surveillance of the Communist Party) and by a variety of networks organised by militants from the far Right Nationalist movement and led by individuals from the world of high finance and from the Catholic Church. Two other events had a profound influence on anti-communism: the outbreak of civil war in Spain in 1936 and the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact in 1939.

It was only natural for those who were fighting Communism to look for its areas of weakness. After the so-called plot of 1923, fifteen Communist leaders were arrested, but they were released after spending four months in prison. The trial, which had been meant to destroy the Party completely, became a propaganda success for the Communists and a defeat for both the Sûreté and the Public Prosecutor. From that point onwards, anti-communist action became both more sophisticated and more effective. The weak point in the campaign the Communists organised in solidarity with the Spanish Republic was, of course, the recruitment of volunteers for the International Brigades. In January 1937, the Communist recruiting organisation was declared illegal, and any volunteers who were found to be making for Spain were called into the army. A second and equally effective intervention was organised by SEPES and COPAC. The Communists had not been very selective in their recruitment of volunteers, and the conditions in which the shock units had been forced to fight in Spain led to considerable discontent amongst some of the Brigaders who had returned to Belgium. COPAC and SEPES gladly took the opportunity to give them financial help—with money from industry—and to organise them.²⁰ During the municipal elections of 1938, COPAC mounted a major propaganda campaign around the issue. The campaign was typical of COPAC's strategy. That almost the entire press was anti-communist was not enough for COPAC, as the press did not have sufficient impact upon the groups that were most at risk from Communism, namely the working classes.

The signing of the Soviet-German pact in August 1939 made it perfectly clear that the Communist movement took its orders from Moscow. Rather than making a frontal attack on the Party, as it did in 1923, the government decided to close down its press. This, it claimed, was in line with its policy of neutralism, but it in fact had more to do with Communist agitation in the mines and in the army. The witch hunt was on.²¹ In March 1940, both houses passed a law providing for the defence of 'national institutions'. A bill to ban the Communist Party was dropped, as no political party in Belgium has any legal status. The witch hunt continued throughout the phoney war and ended with the arrest of

several hundred Communists when Germany attacked Belgium on 10 May 1940. Together with the Flemish nationalists, the Rexists and thousands of German and Austrian political refugees, including many Jews, they were deported to the south of France.³²

The Occupation

As a result of the pact with the Soviet Union, the SIPO-SD (Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst) did not make a direct attack on the Communist Party when it reached Brussels with the German troops. After some hesitation, it accepted that its presence was legal. The Communist press, however, remained banned. For the German military administration (and its Belgian secretaries general),³³ the main priorities were economic recovery and a return to social stability. When, in the last months of 1940, the Communist Party began to denounce the 'new order's' social demagoguery, militants began to be arrested. In the meantime, the German police began to make preparations for an intelligence operation. The Gestapo was already well informed about minor issues like the Wollweber group, the emigrés and Comintern agents, and the Party's leaders and representatives were known to everyone. Its image of Belgian Communism as a whole was, however, somewhat fanciful. The Gestapo therefore needed information and the obvious place to look for it was in the files held by the Belgian political police.

In the first week of July 1940, the German Military Administration ordered the arrest of those responsible for the internments and deportations of 10 May. The Flemish nationalists had already been calling for such measures. Those arrested included the prosecutor Ganshof van der Meersch and four officials from the *Sûreté de l'Etat*. Together with Georges Block, Robert de Foy and Fernand Louwage, who were respectively the *Sûreté Publique's* administrator general and its inspector-general, were taken to Berlin.³⁴ While Block was in Berlin, the German Police, armed with lists of what they wanted, visited the Prosecutor's Office in Antwerp and seized a number of files. Shortly afterwards, a number of secret files were 'discovered' in the *Palais de Justice* in Brussels. They too were forwarded to Berlin. In the meantime, Heydrich informed Reeder, the head of the German Military Administration in Belgium, that de Foy was not to be prosecuted for his part in the events of May 1940 because he had collaborated with the Reichssicherheitshauptamt in the months leading up to the invasion.³⁵ The three Belgian police officers remained in Berlin until 14th August 1940, but it is improbable that that had anything to do with the May arrests. It has to be seen in terms of the long-standing connections that existed between officials of the German and Belgian police forces. A number of points seem to support that interpretation. Shortly before the invasion of the Soviet Union, the head of SIPO-SD in Brussels received a detailed list of Belgian Communists from

Berlin. He was astonished when Muller told him that the information had been supplied by individuals who had been held by the Belgian police during the victorious march to the West.²⁶

In Antwerp, developments were more concrete. The SIPO used the Police Judiciaire's files to draw up a voluminous report on the Communist Party's organisation in Belgium.²⁷ The author of the report was Max Gunther, a Gestapo agent whose real name was Emiel Van Thielen, a native of Antwerp. He had taken German nationality and had already played an important role in the Wollweber investigation. Together with Block, he had been responsible for rolling up the Wollweber network by arresting Fictels in August 1940 and his collaborators in December 1940.²⁸ Block had introduced his agent Lepomme to Gunther, who in turn recruited into the service of the Gestapo. Lepomme was killed by the resistance in August 1942.²⁹ On 11th November 1942, the Volksgerichtshof in Berlin condemned the Antwerp-based members of the Wollweber group to death and, with the exception of Alfons Fictels, they were all executed. Fictels died at Gros-Rosen in March 1942.

The help the Antwerp Police Judiciaire gave the German police in 1940 and 1941 was not an isolated incident. The files of the Police des Etrangers held no secrets for the German police. In Liège, both the mayor and the public prosecutor supplied the Germans with lists of local militants.³⁰ The evidence we have collected suggests that until the Soviet Union's entry into the war, the occupying forces could count on considerable help from Belgian magistrates and from certain police units. The indirect contribution they made by supplying information on militants was quite in keeping with the prevailing atmosphere in the Belgian administration during the first year of the occupation. As late as October 1941, a report drawn up by Colonel Dethise, the Commandant of the Gendarmerie, argued that the Communist Party, the terrorist groups ('which may be the same thing as the Party'), the VNV and Rex, all represented a threat to state security.³¹ By deciding to stay at their posts in the administration, the economy, the magistrature and the police, the leading figures in the Belgian establishment were opting for what they saw as a continuation of the pre-war policy of neutralism. In other words, they chose 'the lesser evil'. Their policy of independence and neutralism was not, however, simply an expression of their desire to take a neutral stance in the international conflict between Germany, France and Great Britain. It was an ideological position designed to promote the political, economic and cultural influence of Germany.³² As early as 1936, the Belgian establishment had decided to open the country up to German influence because it thought that, from an ideological point of view, France was no longer a reliable ally. This was clearly a class reflex, and the same attitude prevailed during the first year of the occupation. The 'realist' option of the 'lesser evil' was based upon the assumption that Germany and Great Britain would reach

a compromise peace and that Belgium would be absorbed into the German sphere of influence. It is important to note that the split between the king and the government (the king insisted on staying with his troops after the surrender, whilst the government wanted to continue the struggle from abroad) helped to reinforce and popularise hostility towards the political parties and parliamentary institutions and a desire for a strong executive personified by the monarch. Attempts to rally political and military forces to the king have to be understood in terms of this reactionary climate.³³

A description of all the attempts that were made to do this would be beyond the scope of this article. But it is illuminating to look at the political positions of the instigators of the anti-communist activity of the thirties. COPAC's spokesman Vicomte Charles Terlinden issued a long manifesto putting forward his ideas as to what should be done after the departure of the Germans. He argued that the king would be 'the man of the hour' and would have to establish a 'military-style' provisional government. A number of military associations which recruited both men on active service and reservists had been formed, the most important being the Lkgion Belge. Commander Charles Claser, the founder of the Lkgion, had originally been thinking in terms of anti-German resistance but joined forces with Terlinden, who became the Légion's political commissar. Terlinden's programme was simplicity itself: a strong regime capable of halting a Communist offensive and with the king there to prevent the politicians returning.³⁴

In the autumn of 1940, General Biebuyck called for the formation of a 'Rassemblement National et Social des Anciens Combattants autour du Roi', with the slogans: 'The king will think for us. His will shall be our will and he will lead us to a better future.' The real leader of the Rassemblement was its Secretary General, Marcel de Roover. Thanks to him, links were established between the military associations and far Right political movements like the Mouvement National Royaliste and the Lkgion Nationale.

De Roover, Terlinden and others like them wanted to turn the military associations into a pro-monarchist authoritarian army, but their ambitions were not to be fulfilled. In the early summer of 1941, the Lkgion Belge adopted the line taken by the Allies and by the Belgian government in exile in London. In December 1942, it was recognised as the official clandestine army of Belgium. It is better known by the name it used at the Liberation: *Armée Secrète*.

Despite these later developments, until the summer of 1941, the main preoccupation of these groups was anti-communism. SEPES's Secretary General Jean Speltoir was already in contact with the VNV and in Antwerp the entire right-wing began a concerted anti-communist campaign. Although separatism represented a major threat to the Belgian

nationalists, they did not reject the possibility of a tactical anti-communist alliance out of hand. During the occupation, the main problem facing the *Légion Belge*, which was still thinking in terms of a compromise peace and a German withdrawal, was the neutralisation of the VNV. It was in that context that the head of the *Légion's* intelligence service in Brabant read a report on the VNV to the *Légion's* commander.³⁵ An agreement had already been reached to obtain information from Spiltoir, who 'currently has contacts in Flemish circles'. According to Spiltoir, the VNV leaders were coming to terms with reality and their separatism was now a thing of the past: 'In a Belgian Kingdom, the Flemish will be loyal supporters of the king.' The programme outlined by Spiltoir was not lacking in clarity: 'Flemish nationalism is one of the most resolute and best armed enemies of revolutionary Communism, both in Flanders and in Belgium as a whole. We now have an opportunity to integrate Flemish nationalism into a united Belgium. The threat it represented when it was in opposition will probably vanish.' When asked for his opinion of the report, Marcel de Roover said that he thought Spiltoir was being somewhat optimistic, but added that he had received information suggesting that the VNV was moving in the right political direction. The *Légion's* political intelligence unit was working closely with 'Ztro', the intelligence service set up by BRUFINA and the Banque de Bruxelles, and it was also collecting information on Communist activities at this time. That was of course completely in line with its earlier activities.³⁶

All these preparations had become meaningless by the summer of 1941. Great Britain was still holding out, and in June the Soviet Union entered the war, followed by the United States. The war had become a war for freedom and democracy and a war against oppression and dictatorship. 'Realism', with its profoundly conservative and reactionary connotations and its note of anti-communism, was about to be replaced by resistance and a resurgence of democracy.

Anti-Communism in decline

As Germany attacked the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941, the German police arrested hundreds of Communist militants and sympathisers in Belgium in an operation known as Summer Solstice. Although Summer Solstice has not been analysed in any detail, it does seem that pre-war activities were the main criteria for arrest.³⁷ This suggests that the Germans were acting on the basis of information supplied by the Belgian police and had not succeeded in penetrating the clandestine structures established by the Communist Party. The Communists then increased their efforts to liberate the country, beginning an armed struggle and active at the political and trade union levels. During this second phase, the German police sought the active collaboration of the State Prosecutors in their attempts to break up the Party's clandestine organisation, but after

1942 they were faced with an increasingly lax attitude on the part of the Belgian magistrature.

In this context, it is instructive to look at the correspondence exchanged between Armand Tilman, a former officer with the Police Marine who had transferred to the Police Judiciaire at the beginning of the occupation, and a deputy public prosecutor in Brussels.³⁶ Tilman, whose work in Antwerp had mainly been concerned with Communist activity and who had worked closely with Block and Celis, wanted the courts to take repressive action against the Communists. Until 1941, he was listened to, but after 1942 the public prosecutor changed his tone. The explanation for the change is both political and pragmatic; the Soviet Union was now an ally and there could be no question of using systematic and organised repression against illegal Communist actions against the occupying forces and their Belgian collaborators. Tilman was forced to limit his activities to gathering intelligence; no action could be taken until it was proved that the Communists were going to provoke a civil war in an attempt to seize power.

Although there is no documentary evidence, it seems improbable that the deputy public prosecutor was simply expressing a personal opinion. It is much more likely that his views reflected a general current of opinion within the Belgian establishment, all of whose members had contacts of some kind with the Belgian Government in London. As late as July 1942, that same government was, it should be remembered, still describing Claser's Legion Belge as a para-military fascist organisation whose one aim was the seizure of power and the restoration of the king to the throne. When a major section of the Establishment began to change its attitude, it became much easier for the Communists to establish contacts with groups that had previously been hostile. Despite the savage repression organised by the German police, the Communists had succeeded in extending their activities and their influence was now much greater than it had been before the war. The fact that some police units were headed by German-appointed supporters of the 'new order' and were still hunting down Communists merely served to increase Communist influence. In April 1943, Secretary General Gerard Romsee, who was a former member of the VNV leadership, established a 'Service d'Inspection' inside the Ministry of the Interior. It was headed by Tilman, who had broken off his relations with the magistrature and Block in 1942. Tilman systematically went ahead with his anti-communist activities and collaborated directly with the Gestapo. As a result he was condemned to life imprisonment. In 1948, he himself admitted that his great mistake had been his failure to understand the objective and subjective aspects of anti-communism.³⁹ He had, in other words, failed to understand that anti-communism was merely one element within a reactionary ideology that had been forced into retreat since 1942.

Conclusions

Anti-communism is older than Communism itself. This apparent paradox conceals an important truth about anti-communism: it is simply a continuation of a policy that was used against the labour movement throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Communism first appeared in organised form after the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The Communist Parties of the Western world were formed as sections of an International. Moscow became the centre of their world.

In both Belgium and other countries, the bourgeois state defended itself against the Communists' self-proclaimed aim of taking power, by force if need be, by simultaneously strengthening its repressive apparatus and by adapting it through the introduction of universal suffrage and social laws. Once the crisis of the First World War was over, those who had had to be forced to accept social and political democratisation against their will saw Communism as the main enemy in their attempts to **turn** back the tide of history. Professional anti-communists were thus able to use these elements in their struggle against any form of social change. The task **mobilised** only a small fraction of those who defended reactionary ideas, but the architects of anti-communism were still close to the centre of political, economic and social **power**.

We have seen how the economic crisis and the subsequent rise of Communism in Belgium led to a reaction on the part of both the state apparatus and the private networks organised by the big industrialists and even sections of the clergy. We have also seen that the connections between the private and public sectors were at times very close indeed.

After **1935**, this reaction was **only** one element within a general anti-democratic shift to the Right that resulted from a serious crisis in a country threatened with economic collapse. The same change, together with the fears of the bourgeoisie, also explains the move towards a policy of so-called neutralism and independence in foreign affairs. The result was 'Finlandisation' at the hands of Germany. The Communists became outlaws in the 'real' Belgium of the bourgeoisie.

The campaign of May **1940** and the occupation, could not alter the balance of power. On the contrary, the climate of **1940** and early **1941** was extremely reactionary and led some people to believe that a 'new order' was about to emerge in Belgium. Their hopes were to be disappointed. By the summer of **1941**, the nature of the war had changed. The Belgian establishment had no alternative but to turn to those whose victory now seemed certain. This naturally worked to the advantage of the Communists. For the **first** time in their existence, they were tolerated and even enjoyed the support of the anti-fascist democratic majority in occupied Belgium.

Anti-communism went into temporary retreat, but after the defeat of

Germany it became even more virulent than it had been before the war. The Cold War led to new heights of anti-communism, both in Belgium and throughout the Western world. Anti-communism became a reflection of the struggle between the two countries which had emerged from the war as superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States. The new conjuncture gave many anti-communist elements in Belgium a new lease of life and enabled them to return to their old activities. For their part, the Communists left the Government in 1947 and thus returned to the marginal position they had always occupied in Belgian society.

NOTES

This article derives from a detailed study of the history of anti-communism in Belgium written in collaboration with Etienne Verhoeyen. Our ambition was to produce a study of Belgian **anti-communism** during the Cold War, and we hope that it will soon be available in book form. I would like here to express my thanks to my friend Verhoeyen for his invaluable help.

For the activities of the Wollweber organisation in Belgium and the Netherlands, see H. Dankaart and R. Van Doorslaer, 'De aktiviteiten van een kommunistische sabotageorganisatie in Antwerpen en Rotterdam. De organisatie Wollweber', *VMT Cahier 1*, Gent 1979.

3. *Oberreischsanwalt beim Volkersgerichtshof, Affaire contre Schokkaert e.a.*, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R6011, 75.
4. *Internationale sloopsabotage 1936-1940, Rapport* BNV, no. 20, Rapport du Service de Renseignements des Pays-Bas de l'immediat après-guerre, Cited, H. Dankaart, *Uit het leven van anti-fascisten*, 1982, (unpublished manuscript).
5. It acquired intelligence functions in March 1940, when it became part of the Ministry of Defence.
6. The Police Judiciaire became responsible to the Public Prosecutor in 1919, when Europe was going through a period of serious social agitation.
7. PAB, Pol. *Geheim 8, Sabotageakte auf deutschen Schiffen*, Bonn, Archives Auswartiges Amt—Wilhelmstrasse, Generalkonsulat Antwerpen.
8. A. de Jonghe, 'De strijd Himmler-Reeder om de benoeming van een HSSPF te Brussel, deel 38', in *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de tweede wereldoorlog*, 5th December 1978. The fifteen countries were Belgium, Bulgaria, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, Uruguay and Yugoslavia.
L. de Jongh, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, Deel I, Voorspel*, The Hague 1969.
10. H. Balthazar, 'Camille Huysmans en Duitsland (1936-1940)', in *Bijdragen tot het C. Huysmans-onderzoek*, Antwerp 1971.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Bulletin de la SEPES*, 8ième année, no. 2, 15th March 1932.
13. The Flemish movement originated as a petty bourgeois reaction against French influence in Flanders. In the nineteenth century French was in effect the dominant language of the Flemish establishment. The movement had members in the traditional Catholic, liberal and socialist parties, but it was not until after the First World War that it developed its own political structures. The maximalist wing of Flemish nationalism, which wanted a 'Groot-Dietsland' (union between the Netherlands and Flanders) was represented by the Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond (VNV), which was founded in 1933. The VNV developed pro-Nazi

views and enjoyed considerable influence in the second half of the thirties. During the occupation, it became the main collaborationist movement in Flanders.

The right-wing and far Right patriotic Belgian nationalists were obviously opposed to the Flemish separatists who wanted to divide Belgium, even though there were ideological similarities between the two movements.

M. José Gotovitch, interview with Carl Peters, 24th March 1972. *Interviews Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Historiques de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale (CREHSGM)*.

15. The **Société Générale** is so large that its history is virtually that of Belgium itself. It was founded in 1822 and by 1840 its holding company had a controlling interest in most of the country's metallurgical and textile industries. After the First World War, the **Société Générale** extended its influence to the colonies, gained control over the docks and consolidated its hold on basic industries.
16. 'Biographie de Marcel de Roover par A. Lederer', in *Biographie belge d'outre-mer*, VII, fascicule A, 1972.
Übersicht über die Verwaltung, Polizei, Nachrichtendienste Und Waltanschaulichen Gegnerkriese in Belgien, n.d. [1940], Archives GREHSGM.
18. Cf note 11 above.
19. H.E. Tutas, *Nazionalsozialismus und Exil*, Munich and Vienna, 1975.
20. R. Van Doorslaer, 'Les volontaires gantois pour les Brigades Internationales. Motivations du volontariat pour un conflit politico-militaire', *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, 6, 1980.
21. R. Van Doorslaer, *De KPB en het Sovjet-Duits Niet-aanvalspakt, 1939-1941*, Brussels 1975.
22. J. Gotovitch and J.G. Libois, *L'An 40. La Belgique occupée*, Brussels 1971; C.H. Valeminck, *Dossier Abbeville. Arrestaties en deportaties in mei 1940*, Louvain 1977.
23. A secretary-general was the highest official in the ministerial administration. In time of war he could replace a minister and had extensive legislative and executive power.
24. Statement made by Eggert Reeder, 14th November 1948. Van Falkenhausen trial, item 113. Archives CREHSGM. *De Roode Vaan*, 28th November 1945.
25. A. De Jonghe, *op. cit.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Die kommunistische Organisation in Belgien (III. Internationale)*. The document was found in the archives of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt in Berlin in 1945. Author's archives.
28. *De Roode Vaan*, 28th November 1945.
29. *Het Vrije Woord*, (the Communist Party's clandestine newspaper for Antwerp), September 1942.
30. Boulogne-Destexhe trial, *La Dernière heure*, 25th September 1946.
31. *Rapport de l'Etat Major de la Gendarmerie du 13 octobre 1941*. Author's archives.
32. Dirk Martin, 'De Duitse "vijfde kolonne" in België 1936-1940', *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, XI, 1980, 1-2.
33. F. Balace, 'Psychologie de l'officier belge face à la défaite: juin 1940-automne 1941', *Actes du Colloque d'histoire militaire belge, 1930-1980*, Musée Royale de l'armée et d'histoire militaire, 1981; J. Gotovitch and J.G. Libois, *op. cit.*
34. F. Balace, *op. cit.*
35. *Carnet des comptes rendus des séances du commandement de la Légion Belge, séance du lier août 1941*. Archives of the author.
G. Bastien, *L'Armée secrète, Mémoire de fin d'études*, Ecole Royale Militaire.

37. J. Gotovitch, 'Introduction à l'lude de la déportation. Le convoi du 22 décembre 1941', *Cahiers d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, I, 1967.
38. *Mémoire de défense rédigé par Armand Tilman dans la prison de St Gilles, 1948*. Author's archives.
39. *Ibid.*

Translated by David Macey