

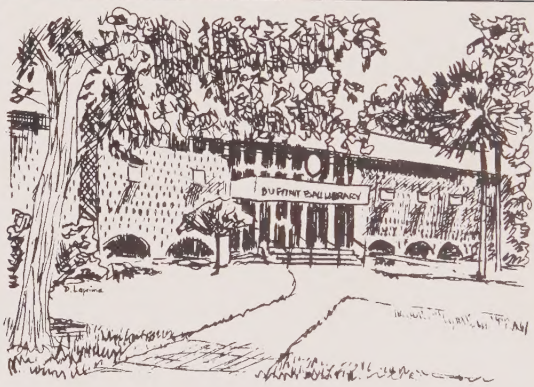
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The Democratic Socialism of Emile Vandervelde

*Between
Reform
and
Revolution*

Janet
Polasky






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**The Democratic Socialism of
Emile Vandervelde**



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Between Reform and Revolution

Janet Polasky



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suspect that David was a Belgian in some former life, given the ease with which he adapts to life in Leuven, learning math in Dutch and honing his soccer skills in the midst of his circle of Flemish friends. Marta, not as convinced of the need to leave Portsmouth every summer, did assure me that when she grew up she wanted to be a writer; her books however, will have more pictures. Written at the margins of David and Marta's childhood, it is to them that I dedicate this book.

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Figure 1 "Plus de guerre! Plus de militarism!" by Jean Maillard from *Emile Vandervelde vu par Jean Maillard* (Paris: L'Eglantine, 1932)

Introduction

When James Joll published *The Second International, 1889–1914*, he did not labor to justify the significance of his subject. In the decades after the Second World War, the reasons for studying the history of European Socialism seemed obvious. “For at least fifty years international Socialism was one of the great intellectual forces of Europe,” Joll simply observed, noting that “people as striking and as diverse as Lenin and Bernard Shaw, Rosa Luxemburg and William Morris, Jean Jaurès and Benito Mussolini” had coalesced to lead this “genuinely international force.”¹ The Second International was also important, Joll explained, because “its weaknesses and mistakes contributed to the rise of Communism.”² According to Joll, the “great growth of interest in the history of international Socialism before the first World War” led to the publication of a second edition of his book in 1974.³

The recent demise of Marxism-Leninism seems to have changed all that. Colleagues now ask skeptically why anyone would want to study or write about European Socialism. They are not asking, Why yet another comparative study of Socialism? Since the publication of the second edition of Joll’s history, few studies of the Second International have appeared, despite the opening of significant new archival collections. Rather, they are reacting to the televised depictions of the former Communists – the Poles, Czechs, and East Germans – destroying the physical and intellectual icons of the Soviet era and flooding to the West in search of refrigerators and other tangible symbols of capitalism. They are asking, Why study the history of European Socialism when we are no longer compelled to understand it as “the link between the original teachings of Marx and the Marxism Leninism which is the official creed of some nine hundred million people”?⁴ The collapse of the Soviet empire not only resulted in the destruction of statues of Lenin and the renaming of Russian streets and cities, it apparently buried the history of Socialism as well.

1. James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (1955, reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*

3. James Joll, *The Second International*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

In response to my colleagues' bewilderment, I repeat James Joll's original description of the vitality of the first years of a European Socialist movement guided by a remarkable collection of Russian, British, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Austrian, Polish, and Belgian leaders. The Second International did not in fact disappear because the history of European Socialism was decoupled from Communism. And it is precisely because the Soviet empire has collapsed that we need to return to the history of European Socialism.

Our fascination with the ideologies of the two superpowers has obscured the history of an indigenously European Socialism. For seventy-five years, historians and political scientists have recreated the divisions of a post-Russian Revolution bipolar world in their analyses of the Second International. Their histories split the first European Socialists into two irreconcilable blocs – the revisionists, who supported gradual reform, and the orthodox Marxists, who advocated violent revolution.

The Socialists themselves, however, told a different story. The first president of the Second International, Emile Vandervelde, identified three rather than two groups of Marxists within the Second International before the First World War. He distinguished “reformist socialism” and “revolutionary syndicalism” from a third current, which he labeled “democratic socialism” in 1918.⁵ This book takes up that perspective. It is a history of democratic socialism as it evolved at the center of European Socialism between 1889 and 1938.

The “relaunching of Europe” in 1992 lends new urgency to this study. We no longer live in a bipolar world, and yet that perspective still dominates our historiography. Democratic socialists such as Jacques Delors seek their forefathers in a turn-of-the-century Socialist movement that they have been told was divided between two rival camps, the revisionists and the orthodox Marxists.⁶ Not surprisingly, Delors looks to the German Socialist Eduard Bernstein's nineteenth-century critique of Marxist theory to understand the roots of his socialist vision for Europe.⁷ In the curiously circular way in which historians' perspectives are influenced by their own present and then in turn circumscribe the visions of their readers, the possibilities for a socialist future open to social democrats such as Delors have been limited by the bipolar interpretation

5. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme contre l'état* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1918), p. xxiii. In following Vandervelde's use of democratic socialism as distinct from social democracy, I recognize the ambiguity in both contemporary and current use of the two related terms.

6. See, for example, Jacques Delors, “Europe: A New Frontier for Social Democracy,” in Neil Kinnock, ed., *Europe without Frontiers* (London: Mansell, 1989).

7. For an analysis of Bernstein's revisionism, see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

of their history. Defining democratic socialism as revisionist, Delors confines his vision for the European Union to expanding the free market for labor and capital within Europe.

Democratic socialism did not originate as a critique of Marxist theory, but as an affirmation of Socialists' faith in Marxist revolution. The first democratic socialists accepted Marx's historical dialectic, believing that the revolution was imminent. As the potential of parliamentary democracy unfolded, they stretched their interpretations of Marxist strategy. They adapted Marx's revolutionary strategy pragmatically to meet the different national opportunities and obstacles that they encountered along their way. This book traces the beginning of that uniquely European path as it wended its way from Marx toward social democracy. In telling the story of the first democratic socialists and their struggles to define what they called "revolutionary reformism," it recalls the Marxist origins of democratic socialism.

I have focused on a self-described "major bit player,"⁸ Emile Vandervelde, whose leadership of the European Socialist movement spanned the two critical generations that defined democratic socialism between 1889 and 1938. During the "heroic years" of the Second International, Vandervelde traveled, climbed mountains, dined, and corresponded with German, French, British, Dutch, and Russian Socialist leaders, most of whom were at least a decade his senior. Many of these comrades, including Vandervelde's revered traveling companion Jean Jaurès, perished in the First World War; others died shortly thereafter. Vandervelde subsequently sought the comradeship of a new generation of Socialist leaders. The interwar Socialist movement was dominated by men such as Ramsay MacDonald and Léon Blum, who had risen to prominence within their national parties rather than in the International.

Vandervelde's resolute optimism helped to sustain the democratic socialist movement for fifty years, through war, revolution, and governmental participation. In 1900, as the newly elected president of the Second International, Vandervelde tentatively predicted that the socialist revolution would not be the work of a proletariat degraded by crushing poverty. Instead, workers with the strength to overturn the capitalist system would build the new socialist world. After the First World War, he prophesied that the socialist revolution was at hand. Socialism would not arise from the smoldering ashes of the capitalist apocalypse, he predicted; it would be built on a foundation of hard-won reforms. Throughout, Vandervelde asserted his ties to Marx, citing examples from Marx's later writing to show that Marx too had adapted "Marxism." Nevertheless, by 1930 the

8. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d'un militant socialiste* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1939), p. 147.

democratic socialists had clearly settled into a strategy that Marx would not have recognized. It is important to remember that their path had been a gradual one, defined en route at a series of critical junctures – sometimes consciously, more often not.

From his place at the geographical as well as the ideological crossroads of Europe, Vandervelde, a Belgian, led the British, German, French, Italian, Polish, Dutch, and Russian Socialists along the democratic socialist path. A typically Belgian amalgam of idealism and pragmatism, Vandervelde forged compromises. He borrowed from the theoretical debates of neighboring Germany, the impressive labor movements of Britain, and especially the revolutionary political traditions of France. In the 1990s, when Brussels is synonymous with the European Union, it should probably not surprise us that it was a Belgian who brought Europeans together and defined democratic socialism as a European strategy for implementing Marxism at the turn of the century.

It is not only their fascination with capitalism and communism that has led historians to ignore the center of the Second International. The cause is geographical as well as ideological. Historians and political scientists tend to migrate to the larger countries of Europe, attracted by the more colorful revolutionary leaders and the more systematic theorists on the periphery of the Socialist movement. Despite the recent revival of comparative history, the history of European Socialism still consists for the most part of a collection of national histories of the larger Socialist movements. Given the explicitly international character of the Second International and the Labour and Socialist International, as it renamed itself after the First World War, it is especially ironic that these histories of British, French, and German Socialism are written in isolation from one another and from the International, and in ignorance of all the smaller national movements.⁹ As a case in point, despite its prominence at the time, the history of Belgian Socialism is virtually unknown outside of Belgium itself.¹⁰

Karl Marx recognized the importance of Belgium as the first industrialized society on the European continent. In the middle of the

9. Even Gary Steenson in his recent comparative study of the Second International admits that he was forced to neglect Belgium because of the language of the sources. Gary Steenson, *After Marx, before Lenin: Marxism and the Socialist Working-Class Parties in Europe, 1884–1914* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991).

10. Belgian histories of Belgian Socialism include Mieke Claeys Van Haegendoren, *25 Jaar Belgische Socialisme* (Antwerp: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1967); Jan Dhondt, *Geschiedenis van de socialistische Arbeidersbeweging in Belgie* (Antwerp: S. M. Ontwikkeling, 1960–69); Marcel Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges, 1885–1914* (Brussels: Vie Ouvrière, 1979); and Andre Mommen, *De Belgische Werkliedenpartij; Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van het reformistisch Socialisme, 1880–1914* (Ghent: Masreel-Fonds, 1980).

nineteenth century, he called it “the paradise of European capitalists.” Industrialized at the end of the eighteenth century, the Belgian economy continued to flourish after the establishment of Belgian independence in 1830. Throughout the nineteenth century Belgium’s Liberal government, in quintessential fashion, encouraged but refrained from regulating industrial development – hence Marx’s interest in Belgium.

At the turn of the century, Vandervelde adapted Marx’s description to justify the location of the executive offices of the Second International in Brussels. He reminded German and French Socialists that underneath the Belgian capitalist paradise lurked the hell of the European proletariat. The precocious industrialization that had enriched a class of enterprising capitalists had impoverished the sizable industrial proletariat that had powered it. With its depth of experience, the mature Belgian proletariat was ready to lead the socialist revolution in Europe, setting an example for other countries to follow, Vandervelde suggested.¹¹

Although in several chapters I draw upon the history of the Belgian Workers’ Party, as case studies in the evolution of democratic socialism, this is not a history of the Belgian working class.¹² To complement the growing body of work by labor historians who are writing the history of European Socialism “from the bottom up,” I have approached the Second International “from the top down.” That historiographical division is reflective of rifts within the European Socialist movement itself. Just as the workers relied on the Socialist leaders at the turn of the century and the leaders clearly needed the proletariat, so too the history of European Socialism must be drawn from both sides.

In a review in the *American Historical Review*, Mary Jo Maynes recently referred to what she called “biography in a new key.”¹³ Set in context, she suggests, individual and group biographies allow us to explore significant historical questions. In my book Vandervelde’s struggles for universal manhood suffrage, for the release of the indigenous peoples of the Congo from Leopold’s rule, for the building of comradeship and hence peace in Europe, for an Allied victory in the First World War, for the democratization of the Russian Revolution, and for the rebuilding of war-torn Belgium and the maintenance of peace through diplomacy in interwar Europe serve as a lens through which to view more clearly the history of democratic socialism. Events that were arguably significant to Vandervelde’s life – for example, his participation in a Masonic lodge or his leadership of the temperance movement – are introduced only if they

11. Emile Vandervelde, *La Belgique ouvrière* (Paris: E. Cornely & Cie., 1906).

12. For a history of the Belgian working class, see Patricia Hilden, *Women, Work, and Politics: Belgium, 1830–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

13. Mary Jo Maynes, *American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 861.

altered the course of the European path to social democracy. If the “personal” can be distinguished from the “political” in the life of Emile Vandervelde, and I am not sure that it can, it enters only at the margins of my story.¹⁴

Conscious of the irony, Belgian workers affectionately called this well-educated son of the Brussels bourgeoisie “Le Patron,” or “The Boss.”¹⁵ Vandervelde shared his middle-class background with most of the leaders of the Second International. His voracious reading of Proudhon, Marx, and Darwin would lead him to discover the proletariat in 1886. But that same reading ultimately distanced Vandervelde from the workers. The first chapter of this book examines the influence of European positivist thinkers on the emergence of democratic socialism at the end of the nineteenth century.

Socialist leaders in Belgium channeled the momentum of the proletariat into their campaign for universal manhood suffrage. The Belgian Workers’ Party pursued its battle to win the vote for the working class through three general strikes with a fervor unmatched anywhere else in Europe. These three general strikes for universal manhood suffrage are the subject of the second chapter. Invoking revolutionary rhetoric to argue for reforms and employing traditional working-class tactics to gain access to the governmental system, the Belgian Workers’ Party embarked on the democratic socialist path. According to Rosa Luxemburg, for better or worse, European Socialists learned “to speak Belgian” at the turn of the century.

Those same Socialists, “who entered, almost as if [they] were burglars, into the most bourgeois Parliament of Europe,” immediately confronted “the new colonialism” of the European powers.¹⁶ The Socialists’ attempt to define their anti-colonial position is the subject of the third chapter. Vandervelde spearheaded the attack against the personal empire ruthlessly carved out by Belgian king Leopold II in the center of Africa. In 1906, he joined the British critics of colonialism in concluding that only annexation of the king’s colony by the Belgian Parliament would rescue the indigenous peoples of the Congo from capitalist exploitation. Vandervelde’s moral

14. Vandervelde seems to have purposefully distanced historians from his private life. Traces of his private life have all but disappeared from the public record. The memoirs that he left reveal the public monument that he wanted to bequeath to future generations. Even more than other examples of this genre of memoirs, Vandervelde consciously chose to tell his story with a public voice. For example, although he recounts at length his mountain retreats with other young male Socialists, he never once mentions his disabled sister for whom he cared in his own home after the death of his mother in 1896. I have used citations from these *Souvenirs* extensively but cautiously, to allow Vandervelde’s own voice to be heard.

15. See, for example, *Le Peuple* 3 May 1925. “Il n’y a qu’un patron qui soit sympathique à la classe ouvrière belge: c’est Emile Vandervelde,” the writer noted.

16. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 48.

arguments, documented extensively with “facts” drawn from his readings, correspondence, and travels to the Congo, distanced him not only from the majority of European Socialists, but from the indigenous peoples of Africa as well.¹⁷ Although repudiated at the time, Vandervelde’s “socialist colonialism” did come to define the majority Socialist position toward European colonies after the First World War. Its resonances could be heard, for example, among Dutch Socialists after the Second World War in their discussions of ending the colonial regime in Indonesia.

My fourth chapter focuses on life at the center of the Second International. The debates over militarism and ministerial participation that dominated the congresses of the Second International before the First World War have been well chronicled by a number of historians. They are the backdrop to this story. The significance of the Second International, for Vandervelde as for many of his contemporaries, however, was also to be found in the international comradeship of mountain hikes and late dinners after the meetings of the Bureau of the International. That daily life is the core of this chapter.¹⁸

For decades, the published records of the congresses of the Second International have been our only guide to the history of this organization. My study of the Second International begins with these sources but is based primarily on research in the Camille Huysmans Archief, which according to Georges Haupt, the only historian previously granted access to the bulletins, minutes, and correspondence of the Archief, “restores the interior face of Socialism, which has escaped our investigation.”¹⁹

The First World War shattered the shared Socialist vision just as it destroyed the international comradeship at the center of this European Socialist movement. The first European Socialist to accept a cabinet post – in August 1914 – Vandervelde served simultaneously as president of the International and minister to the Belgian king; his dual role is explored in chapter 5. Cut off from the half of the Socialist movement who supported governments on the other side of the trenches, Vandervelde recovered his sense of comradeship and belonging within the Belgian government in exile. While he publicly charted the course of national commitment that so many European Socialists would follow during and after the war, Vandervelde wrestled privately with his choice in a revealing daily

17. This scientific objectivity resembles that described by Thomas Laqueur in “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

18. This chapter takes seriously Tony Judt’s stricture that we need to reconnect “politics and the private world” in our histories of Socialism. Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 42.

19. Georges Haupt, *La Deuxième internationale, 1889–1914, Étude critique des sources. Essai bibliographique* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1964), p. 57.

correspondence with Camille Huysmans.²⁰

The First World War and the Russian Revolution forever altered European Socialism. The October Revolution definitively divided the believers – the Communists – from the now self-defined proponents of national reforms – the social democrats. My sixth chapter begins in the spring of 1917 when Vandervelde, along with Albert Thomas, Arthur Henderson, and Leon Trotsky, arrived at the Finland Station. Unlike Thomas, who joined Kerensky's inner circle, Vandervelde struggled from the outside to understand the Russian Revolution within the framework of his Marxist analysis of the French Revolution. In 1922, Vandervelde returned to Moscow as a lawyer for the Second International to defend the Socialist Revolutionaries. Pilloried by Lenin as the most bourgeois of national socialists, Vandervelde labored for two more decades in a series of articles and speeches to understand the theoretical implications of Lenin's and then Stalin's attempt to stage a political revolution in an economically backward society.

Socialists throughout Europe faced a radically altered political world in 1918. Vandervelde did not hesitate to lead the Belgian Socialists back into the government after the war. Under his influence, the Belgian Workers' Party proceeded further along the path of democratic socialism in the 1920s than any other European Socialist party. This governmental participation is the subject of chapter 7. Not until 1930 did he pause to compare the Belgians' experience in tripartite government with the opposition strategies pursued by their French, German, and British counterparts. Considering Belgium's bold experiment in reformism within a Marxist context, Vandervelde began to conclude that Socialists throughout Europe might be better served by returning to their prewar strategy of the barricades. The experience of the British Fabians who found themselves with an accumulation of reforms but without any ideology was instructive to Vandervelde.

At the same time, Vandervelde agonized over the disintegration of the European Socialist movement. By voting war credits and rallying behind their governments, the former Socialist comrades had generated antagonisms that the Treaty of Versailles did little to assuage. The rivalries over Marx's heritage arising from the Russian Revolution had caused even deeper fissures that could no longer be papered over with compromises negotiated at international congresses. The challenge of rebuilding the International is the focus of my eighth chapter. Vandervelde meanwhile

20. The Camille Huysmans Archief generously opened its large collection of letters between Huysmans and Vandervelde as well as the files of the International to me. I would like to thank Herman Balthazar, Governor of the Province of West Flanders, and Denise DeWeerd, Acting Director of the Belgian Royal Library, for helping me to secure that access.

Introduction

tried working through the official channels opened by the “new diplomacy” of the 1920s to restore European peace.

In 1929, the growing menace of Fascism convinced Vandervelde to accept the presidency of the International. Together with the Austrian Socialist, Friedrich Adler, who served as secretary of the Labour and Socialist International, Vandervelde alerted French and British Socialists to alarming developments beyond their borders.

In the last years of his life, examined in chapter 9, Vandervelde acknowledged that the weakness of the International was directly related to the strength of the Socialist parties at the national level. The “national socialism” of a younger generation of Belgian Socialists in particular alarmed the seventy-year-old Vandervelde. In 1936, it was in vain that Vandervelde appealed to Socialist leaders throughout Europe to come to the aid of the beleaguered Spanish proletariat. By then, European Socialists had traveled too far along the path toward social democracy; they were too firmly entrenched within their national governments. Unable to dissuade his own party from recognizing Franco’s regime in Burgos, Vandervelde, the consummate insider, died an outsider.

Vandervelde’s principled democratic socialism evolved between revisionism and orthodox Marxism. Throughout his life, he hoped and planned to build a revolution on the foundation of the reforms the Socialists gradually won. The story of Vandervelde’s revolutionary reformism challenges our traditional bipolar division of the Second International.

Of Positivism and Peasants

It was no coincidence that the man who presided as “le Patron” of the European socialists was born in Brussels in 1866 of progressive middle-class parents. “One would have to search far and wide to find a Brussels family that was more thoroughly bourgeois than mine,” Emile Vandervelde reminisced.¹ His father, a Freemason and member of the Brussels bar, served as a justice of the peace in Ixelles, one of the wealthiest Belgian communes. His mother, who guided the education of the Vandervelde children and supervised the household on the Chaussée d’Ixelles, also managed a suburban Brussels factory with her brother-in-law.

Vandervelde’s comfortable childhood surroundings and university education did not differentiate him from the other Socialists who oversaw the reemergence in 1889 of the European Socialist movement, the Second International. In contrast to the Socialist rank and file, most of the leaders of the Second International were raised and educated within the middle class.

Sheltered by the material security enjoyed by the Brussels bourgeoisie, Vandervelde grew up surrounded by discussions of the social questions that preoccupied intellectuals in Brussels, the traditional refuge of European political émigrés. The deeply felt secular humanitarianism engendered in Vandervelde from an early age would ultimately bring him to socialism. He used the tools of scientific analysis that he learned as a student at the university to buttress his moral convictions.

On the occasion of his election to the Belgian Parliament in 1894 as the representative of the miners and industrial workers of Charleroi, Vandervelde acknowledged, “Theoretical socialism, born of pity, remains separated from practical socialism which is born of suffering.”² His goal over the next forty years would be the synthesis of the two strains of socialism. Vandervelde continued to strive to unite the intellectuals who

1. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d’un militant socialiste* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1939), p. 12.

2. Emile Vandervelde, “Les Institutions économiques du parti belge,” *Annales de l’Institut des sciences social* (1894).

observed and the workers who suffered into a revolutionary movement that won reforms from within the system they were struggling to overthrow. In hindsight, that the son of a Brussels magistrate and a factory manager would lead the Belgian Workers' Party seems paradoxical. Their class differences, however, only rarely troubled the mutual respect that Vandervelde and the workers had for each other. According to Jef Rens, a Socialist who came to know Vandervelde during the last five years of the latter's career, "For the workers, he was 'le Patron' in the full sense of the word. But a boss the workers themselves had chosen and whom they sincerely loved, as children love a parent."³ Both paternalism and a certain distance shaped Vandervelde's idolization of the working class. The militants' pride in the energetic charisma of their intellectual leader brought the crowds to hear him wherever he spoke.

In Academic Circles

Vandervelde enrolled in the Université libre de Bruxelles at the age of fifteen. He left his parents' home on the hill above the Etangs d'Ixelles to walk up the Chaussée d'Ixelles to the center of Brussels where the university was then housed. At first Vandervelde joined the Jeune garde libérale, the Liberal students' circle, where he continued discussions of social concerns begun in his parents' salon. When he later looked back at the list of students who had also passed their exams at the Université libre de Bruxelles with distinction, he noted the names of Liberal leaders Paul Hymans and Louis Franck; Léon Delacroix, named prime minister in 1918. The world of Belgian politics into which Vandervelde would move as he rose within the Socialist movement was an intimate one. His family and education had prepared him to circulate with ease in these circles.

Throughout his years at the university, Vandervelde diverted himself by participating in the outings of the alpine club. All too typically, he would abandon the other young men enjoying their trout dinners on the shores of a mountain lake as he pushed on to scale higher peaks and discuss social theory with his companions Louis de Brouckère and Henri La Fontaine.⁴

Vandervelde read voraciously as a student. He later recalled how he was filled with awe, visiting the house of fellow law student Jules Destrée, by this future Socialist leader's collection of books and art. Destrée introduced Vandervelde to the writing of Alexandre Herzen.⁵ Vandervelde graduated in law and joined the bar in 1885.

3. Jef Rens, *Rencontres avec le siècle* (Paris: Gembloux, Duculot, 1987), p. 32.

4. See Vandervelde's descriptions in *L'Uri Rothstock* (Brussels: F. Hayex, 1885).

5. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 21.

Two years later, Vandervelde returned to the university. This time, he decided to pursue his studies in the fields of biology, embryology, physiology, and psychiatry. His study of the law had trained him to process information “mechanically,” he explained, while his second course at the ULB taught him to think “organically.”⁶ The positivist methods that he practiced as a budding academic in the 1880s and 1890s would profoundly influence Vandervelde’s approach to socialism.

Drawn to the theories of Charles Darwin, Vandervelde initially turned his attention to the developmental connections between social institutions and natural phenomena. He applied theory to the sociological observations that he had begun to document in his first years at the university. Based on evolutionary theories of random genetic adaptation and natural selection, Vandervelde outlined a dialectic of economic development to explain the progress of industrialization in Europe. Together with Jean Demoor and the botanist Jean Massart, Vandervelde compared the economic development of Belgium to the struggle for survival and the patterns of selection that had been observed by biologists among animal and plant species.⁷ Based on their sociological observations and guided by evolutionary theory, Vandervelde and his colleagues concluded that socialism would inevitably succeed capitalism. The transformation would be slow and gradual, they predicted, noting that “regression always accompanies progress; the destruction of old structures is the necessary consequence of new institutions.”⁸

Massart and Vandervelde went on to study parasites, which they defined to include all organisms that lived off the labor of others in the natural world as well as within economic institutions.⁹ They described in precise biological terms how human parasites drew their sustenance from their hosts. The “predatory parasites,” for example, who had been rendered “incapable of destroying the groups or individuals they had previously attacked, were reduced to exploiting those who were now stronger than themselves.”¹⁰ The first victims of the “struggle for survival,” they now attacked weaker organisms. Other types of parasites had simply learned to depend on their hosts as a means of surviving without actually working themselves. Based on their analysis of the relationships that linked entrepreneurs to their laboring hosts, Vandervelde and Massart sketched their prognosis for the evolution of these human relations in Darwinian

6. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 26.

7. Emile Vandervelde, Jean Demoor, and Jean Massart, *L'Evolution régressive en biologie et sociologie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1897).

8. Vandervelde et al., *L'Evolution régressive*, p. 107.

9. Emile Vandervelde and Jean Massart, *Parasitisme organique et parasitisme social* (Paris: Librairie C. Reinwald, 1898).

10. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

terms.

Vandervelde completed his thesis, *Enquêtes sur les Associations professionnelles d'artisans et d'ouvriers en Belgique*, in 1891.¹¹ He copiously compiled statistics on the growth of workers' organizations in Belgium, which he graphed and analyzed union by union. Based on that empirical foundation, he prophesied the coming of socialism in vivid metaphors drawn from the natural sciences. Some workers had become Socialists, he explained, "unconsciously attracted – like those inferior organisms that fly blindly and mechanically toward a ray of light; but others have gone in that direction – ahead of events and foreseeing the future – like migrating birds, who do not wait for winter to fly to the land of the sun."¹²

Although comparisons of labor unions and workers' cooperatives with plants and animals faded from Vandervelde's work after 1900, he had been well trained in the traditions of positivism. For the rest of his life, he carefully documented fervently held beliefs with a profusion of facts gleaned from his own observations and from his reading. After his election to the Belgian Parliament in 1894, he never addressed the Chamber without a battery of statistics to support his arguments for supplementing workers' pensions or alleviating suffering in King Leopold's Congo. The examples that he cited in all of his speeches of the wretched housing conditions of workers in Ghent or of the almost feudal exploitation of the rubber harvesters in the jungles of the Congo were based on meticulous research. As a government minister after 1914, but also as president, first of the Second International, and then of the Labour and Socialist International, Vandervelde traveled, he observed, and he collected mountains of evidence to support each of his decrees and manifestoes. According to his secretary, Jules Messine, "Nothing was left to chance, everything was studied, foreseen, decreed, and then translated in clear and precise formulas."¹³

In a curious way, this documentation distanced Vandervelde from the victims of oppression whom he so often rose to defend. Rather than sharing their suffering, he inquired into it and reported on it. Vandervelde was driven by his humanitarian concerns to fight oppression even when his positions forced him to stand alone against his political allies. But, like many of the other leaders who molded the democratic socialist tradition in Europe at the turn of the century, he remained within the middle-class world in which he had been nurtured and educated.

In the end, Vandervelde never secured the academic career within the

11. Emile Vandervelde, *Enquêtes sur les Associations professionnelles d'artisans et d'ouvriers en Belgique*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Imprimerie des Travaux Publics, 1891).

12. Vandervelde, *Enquêtes*, 2: 79.

13. Jules Messine, *Combat* 7 January 1939.



Figure 2 Emile Vandervelde at his desk, 1894. Institut Emile Vandervelde



Figure 3 On board the *Eglantine* off the coast of Tréguier, 1900. Institut Emile Vanderveelde

university for which he had prepared and initially seemed destined. According to his own account, just as he was about to receive the degree that would have allowed him to teach, the university reclassified the “agrégation” degree that he had earned, making it a “doctorat spécial” and thus preventing the young Socialist from teaching. Denied access to the academic community through the front door, Vandervelde suggested that he nevertheless managed subsequently to enter “through the window.”¹⁴ He participated in the founding of the Université nouvelle in Brussels, collaborated on research at the Institut de sociologie Solvay with Hector Denis and Guillaume De Greef, and eventually was invited to teach courses at the Université libre de Bruxelles on the “history of social doctrine.”¹⁵ The socialist convictions that originally prevented Vandervelde from attaining a university career eventually became the subject of his lectures.

Collectivism

Vandervelde discovered the working class through reading – first Proudhon, a gift from his mother, and then Marx. His circle of friends at the university included the sons and daughters of members of the First International. On the advice of Victor Arnould, a participant in the Paris Commune of 1871, Vandervelde picked up and read Pierre Proudhon’s *Capacité politique des classes ouvrières*. “I became overnight a disciple of Proudhon, a mutualist, all the more fervent, all the more fanatical, because I knew no other Socialist, because I had not yet read a single line of Lassalle or Karl Marx,” he recalled.¹⁶ Vandervelde was moved by Proudhon’s arguments against the accumulation of unearned property. In fact, Proudhon’s moral indignation would continue to guide Vandervelde long after he discovered Marx’s class struggle. By the time he completed his thesis in 1891, Vandervelde had begun to read the economic treatises of Karl Marx.¹⁷ The third volume of *Capital*, in particular, impressed him. With no apparent effort, Vandervelde integrated Marx’s class struggle into the moral schema that he had derived from Proudhon. His reading brought him to Socialism, but along a gradual course that allowed him to build upon the humanitarian instincts nurtured in him as a child of progressive

14. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, pp. 31–2.

15. Vandervelde’s lecture notes and course outlines are in the Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

16. Emile Vandervelde, “Comment je devins socialiste,” *L’Avenir Social* 9 (1904): 48. Proudhon had found exile in Belgium between 1858 and 1862. The young Vandervelde was surrounded by Proudhon’s disciples. See J. Bartier, “Proudhon et la Belgique,” *L’Actualité de Proudhon* (1967); and Roger Picard, “Emile Vandervelde et ses doctrines économiques,” *Revue économique internationale* 4, no. 2–3 (December 1939): 327.

17. André Mommen, “De jonge Vandervelde en Marx,” *Socialistische Standpunten* 4 (1973): 236–42.

Brussels liberals.

Shortly after the formation of the Belgian Workers' Party in 1885, Vandervelde joined the Ligue ouvrière d'Ixelles. Belgian Socialists had begun to organize politically in 1879, but it was not until 1885 that fifty-nine sections of the political and syndical movements came together as the Belgian Workers' Party.¹⁸ In 1887, Louis de Brouckère and Vandervelde organized the first Socialist student group – the Cercle des étudiants et anciens étudiants socialistes – in an effort to bridge the gulf separating the Maison du Peuple, the headquarters of the Belgian Workers' Party in the center of Brussels, from the university. They appealed to other intellectuals “who will come to Socialism, as we did: by reasoned conviction and a feeling of uncoerced revolt against the injustices of the prevailing social system.”¹⁹

In 1891, Vandervelde wrote his first article for *Le Peuple*, the daily newspaper of the Belgian Workers' Party.²⁰ In his discussion of the class struggle, he explained Marx's prediction that the working class would wrest the means of production from the bourgeoisie. He added his belief that revolution for the collective ownership of property need not necessarily be violent. In a second article addressed to intellectuals on the left, Vandervelde explained why piecemeal reforms could not fully alleviate the injustices of the capitalist system.²¹ The capitalist system as a whole needed to be transformed, he proclaimed to workers and bourgeois alike. That realization had brought him to the Workers' Party.

Vandervelde labeled his early economic theories collectivist rather than socialist. Under the influence of the Belgian Socialist leader of the First International, César De Paepe, he defined his goal as the collective appropriation of the means of production and distribution.²² Entrepreneurial capitalists were swallowing up small property owners, disgorging them as propertyless laborers, Vandervelde explained.²³ After

18. See Maxime Szejnberg, “La Fondation du Parti ouvrier belge et le ralliement de la classe ouvrière à l'action politique, 1882–1886,” *International Review of Social History* 8 (1963): 198–215; Louis Bertrand, *Histoire de la démocratie et du socialisme en Belgique depuis 1830* (Brussels: Dechenne & Cie., 1906–7), p. 381; and Robert Abs, “Les Statuts du Parti ouvrier belge de 1885–1894,” *Socialisme* 94 (July 1969): 466–72.

19. Vandervelde, “Comment je devins socialiste,” p. 49.

20. Emile Vandervelde, “La Lutte des classes,” *Le Peuple* 17 December 1891.

21. Emile Vandervelde, “Les Travailleurs intellectuels,” *Le Peuple* 27 December 1891. In a 1921 article in *Le Peuple*, he reminded the Socialists that they were not just a party of manual workers. In that article he also appealed to his fellow Socialists to work to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Emile Vandervelde, “Les Travailleurs intellectuels,” *Le Peuple* 25 December 1921.

22. Emile Vandervelde, “Le Collectivisme,” *Revue Socialiste* 9 (February 1894): 129–46.

23. Emile Vandervelde, *La Décadence du capitalisme, Conférence donnée au Jeune Barreau de Bruxelles, 7–4–92* (Brussels: P. Weissenbruch, 1892), p. 4.

the revolution, Vandervelde assured the artisans and peasants, the collectivist society would protect small property owners while expropriating capitalist-controlled industries to serve the interests of society.²⁴ In the new collectivist society, laborers would be inspired to join together and cooperate to produce for the common good. Democratization of the government would coincide with economic revolution.

In 1901 Vandervelde published *Le Collectivisme et l'évolution industrielle*.²⁵ Intended to introduce readers outside of Germany to Marx's analyses of economic development and his theories of value, Vandervelde's work appeared in French, Dutch, and English. Vandervelde provided a concrete, example-laden outline of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and then traced the subsequent development of capitalism. The property of peasants and the livelihood of artisans had been expropriated by capitalist entrepreneurs, he explained. Contrary to Marx's most dire economic predictions, Vandervelde acknowledged that some small firms had managed to survive. At the turn of the century the proletariat had certainly not been reduced to abject poverty either. But, he insisted, Marx's long-term trends were still valid. He dismissed as shortsighted the economic revisionists such as the German Socialist Eduard Bernstein who contended that societal improvements since Marx's death had proved Marx to have been wrong in his predictions of the imminent demise of capitalism.²⁶

Inevitably the division of labor under capitalism would lead to the increased interdependence of the ever more fragmented workers, Vandervelde predicted. Capitalists would begin to fight among themselves to secure monopolies. In the end, according to Vandervelde, the expropriators would be expropriated, allowing "the collective appropriation of the means of production and exchange, the social organization of work, and the apportionment of surplus value among the workers."²⁷

The Agrarian Crisis

As an irrepressible social scientist and aspiring Socialist leader,

24. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, *Les avantages de la propriété communale* (Ghent: Volksdrukkerij, 1910).

25. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Collectivisme et l'évolution industrielle* (Paris: Société Nouvelle de Libraire et d'Édition, 1901).

26. Vandervelde distanced himself from revisionists such as Bernstein who presented the first critique of Marxism from the inside. François Fetjő argues that in part Marx's authority derived from his ability to arouse hope in his followers. I think Vandervelde recognized that. He always explained that he was working from within Marxist traditions. François Fetjő, *La Sociale démocratie quand même* (Paris: Editions Robert Lafont, 1980).

27. Vandervelde, *Collectivisme*, p. 10.

Vandervelde was particularly intrigued by the forces of capitalism that he saw transforming the countryside all around his new home in La Hulpe, to the south of Brussels. A severe agrarian crisis was threatening rural Europe as grain prices plummeted and peasants were driven from their lands.

Marx and Engels had analyzed the ties of the peasantry to property. Would a rural proletariat rise as the allies of an urban proletariat, come the revolution? they had asked. Ever since the revolutions of 1848, socialists had tried to understand the rural conservatism that had elected Napoleon III in France.

Vandervelde posed the same basic questions as Marx and Engels. He published six major monographs on the Belgian rural crisis of the 1890s: *La Question agraire* (1897), *L'Influence des villes sur les campagnes* (1899), *Les Villes tentaculaires* (1899), *La Propriété foncière en Belgique* (1900), *L'Exode rural et le retour aux champs* (1901), and *Le Socialisme agraire* (1908).²⁸

Vandervelde explored the exodus of workers from the countryside. He contrasted the Belgian flight to urban centers with the smaller migrations occurring in France, Britain, and Germany.²⁹ The unique relationship between the urban and rural economies of Belgium had evolved as the intended result of the construction of an extensive railroad network in the middle of the nineteenth century, he explained. Built for transporting raw materials to manufacturing sites, the rail system would also shuttle laborers back and forth from their rural residences to their urban workplaces. Therefore, in contrast to the patterns developing in other industrializing countries where the ranks of the urban proletariat swelled, most Belgian workers never moved to the cities. They migrated daily.³⁰ On workdays, residents of villages throughout Belgium boarded trains and left for their jobs in the industrial centers at the other end of the train lines. They returned to the countryside in the evening, far removed from what industrialists feared were the temptations of the unions and urban night life. The agricultural depression of the early 1890s exacerbated this daily exodus.

28. Emile Vandervelde, *La Question agraire* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière, 1897); Emile Vandervelde, *L'Influence des villes sur les campagnes* (Brussels: Annales de l'institut des sciences sociales, 1899); Emile Vandervelde, *Les Villes tentaculaires* (Paris: G. Bellais, 1899); Emile Vandervelde, *La Propriété foncière en Belgique* (Paris: Schleicher frères, 1900); Emile Vandervelde, *L'Exode rural et le retour aux champs* (Brussels: A. Vromant & Cie., 1901); and Emile Vanderveldé, *Le Socialisme agraire* (Paris: Giard & E. Brière, 1908).

29. Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme agraire*, pp. 154–5.

30. Ernest Mahaim's pioneering study of the system of workers' coupons for train travel pays homage to the statistics collected by Vandervelde as well as his analysis. Ernest Mahaim, *Les Abonnements d'ouvriers sur les lignes de chemins de fer belges et leurs effets sociaux* (Brussels: Mische & Thron, 1910).

By the 1890s, rather than urban jobs attracting the workers, the lack of rural employment seemed to be driving them out in ever greater numbers.³¹

Vandervelde explained that the forces of capitalism were encroaching on the Belgian countryside. Based on the cadastres for the 2,609 Belgian communes, “twenty thousand volumes that were gathering dust in the provincial archives,” he documented the entrepreneurial expropriation of peasant land.³²

His comparison of the landholding statistics of 1898 with those of 1834 confirmed Marx’s predictions that capitalist landowners were confiscating and consolidating peasant holdings. But Vandervelde’s findings also indicated that peasant proprietors had not completely disappeared over the course of the nineteenth century. Statistics, Vandervelde concluded, could not tell the whole story. Based on his own observations, he noted that the small farmers who continued to own and cultivate their own fields worked the poorest lands, while the large landowners were gaining control of the most fertile areas.³³ In very fertile regions such as La Hulpe, capitalism was turning the peasantry into a rural proletariat. Elsewhere, some peasants continued to eke out a meager living from the rock-covered hillsides.

Vandervelde concluded that Marx had been wrong to expect that the capitalist transformation of agriculture would mimic the industrial revolution. Vandervelde pointed, for example, to the significant national variations in landholding patterns.³⁴ But according to Vandervelde, Marx had correctly explained the most significant factor in the rural crisis: the separation of property ownership from the cultivation of the land.³⁵ Increasingly, capitalists owned the land that the peasants farmed, Vandervelde explained. Even in regions of Belgium where large landholders had not introduced capitalist techniques of cultivation on their estates, they rented out their fields to peasant tenant farmers.

Vandervelde drew upon his studies in testimony to the Belgian Parliament. Proposals to raise the cost of tickets for the workers’ trains in an attempt to force peasants to remain on faltering farms would only increase rural suffering, he argued. Vandervelde also warned that attempts to protect small landholders and to restrict agricultural imports were futile. The capitalist expropriation of inefficient peasant producers could not be reversed and the past restored. A revolution was needed to restructure agriculture, he proclaimed. Capitalism had caused the crisis.

31. Vandervelde, *L’Exode rural*; Vandervelde, *Les Villes tentaculaires*, pp. 18–21; and Emile Vandervelde, “L’Exode rural et les trains ouvriers,” *Le Peuple* 11 April 1906.

32. Emile Vandervelde, *La Propriété foncière*, p. 76.

33. Vandervelde, *Essais sur la question agraire en Belgique* (Paris: Editions du Mouvement Socialiste, 1902), p. 35

34. Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme et l’agriculture*, p. 87.

35. Emile Vandervelde, “Livre III et la théorie,” *L’Avenir Social* 2 (1897): 98.

Of Positivism and Peasants

Recognized along with German Socialists Karl Kautsky and Georg Von Vollmar for his expertise on agrarian questions, Vandervelde criticized the range of socialist panaceas.³⁶ He traced collectivist schemes back to the models of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier and dismissed them as utopian. Vandervelde also rejected the growing number of reform proposals that promised palliative measures to the peasants in the hope of winning their votes immediately. But he also questioned the practicality of Friedrich Engels's all-encompassing proposals for the collectivization of the land. Vandervelde disagreed with Engels's assertion that "the transformation of the capitalist enterprise into a socialist enterprise is here (in the countryside) fully prepared for and can be carried into execution overnight, precisely as in Mr. Krupp's or Mr. von Stumm's factory."³⁷ Finally, Vandervelde denounced his contemporaries who sat back to let history take its course. Vandervelde could not watch conditions worsen and people suffer. He had to act. He could not wait for the rural crisis that he knew was inevitable.

Vandervelde called on his fellow Socialists to go among the peasants and convince them to collectivize their own lands. The Socialists were to explain to the peasants that by joining their small fragments of land together, they would realize the efficiency of large property holding. They would be able to purchase the equipment that lay beyond the reach of independent small farmers, for example. The Socialists would thereby help the peasants to lay the foundations for the cooperative republic of the future.

Vandervelde recognized the particular interests of the peasants that divided them from the workers. But, he argued, both groups could be brought to realize their common plight as victims of capitalism. Many of the reforms that were already part of the Socialists' platform were applicable to rural as well as urban laborers, he pointed out. A few additional reforms to alleviate rural suffering could be incorporated into the Socialists' platform without encouraging the peasants' illusions about the future of small landholders under capitalism, he explained.

Vandervelde's argument for what he would later call "revolutionary reforms" positioned him in the center of the Second International. His analysis of the agrarian crisis placed him to the right of Karl Kautsky, who viewed the peasants as the adversaries of the working class and who supported the elimination of all individual ownership of land. But Vandervelde did not go as far as the German revisionists who sought to

36. G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought: The Second International* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956–58), vol. 3, part 2, p. 629.

37. Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant Question*, cited by Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), vol. 2, part 2, p. 413.

include provisions for returning land to the peasants in their party platform. Vandervelde contended that European Socialists could fight for remedies to ease the plight of the peasants as well as that of the workers. The reforms that would alleviate oppression would ultimately advance the revolution for a collective society.

Engels watched skeptically as Socialists throughout Europe concentrated on this reform. In a letter to Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue, he confessed his fears that the Socialists would end up completely abandoning the Marxist revolution in their zeal to act. "That is the misfortune of all extreme parties when the time approaches for them to become 'possible,'" he lamented, warning, "Our party cannot go beyond a certain limit in this respect without betraying itself, and it seems to me that in France as in Germany we have reached that point."³⁸ For the next four decades, Vandervelde continued to stretch his tie to Marx's revolution as reforms became ever more possible. Finally, at the end of his life, Vandervelde too began to wonder if in fact the Socialists had "reached that point." But by then it was too late to turn back. The Second International was firmly embarked on the path toward social democracy.

38. Engels to Lafargue, 17 December 1894, cited in *ibid.*, p. 439.

Parler Belge: The General Strike for Universal Manhood Suffrage

In 1886, “the Belgian proletariat finally woke up from its time-honored slumber,” Emile Vandervelde recalled in the study of the general strike that he published in 1914.¹ Belgian working-class militants in what Karl Marx had called “the capitalist paradise” might be inclined to dispute Vandervelde’s claim that they had been asleep throughout the nineteenth century.² In fact, it was the year that Vandervelde discovered the workers, that he “awakened” and enthusiastically joined twenty-five thousand men and women demonstrating in the streets of Charleroi to memorialize the ten laborers who had been killed by soldiers during the recent strike, as well as to demand amnesty for the strikers and to ask for universal manhood suffrage. “I found myself, with our Workers’ League, on the plateau of the upper city. We shivered at the sound of the Marseillaise; we piously saluted the red flags decked out in mourning that were returning from a procession to the cemetery of Roux,” he recalled of his first foray into workers’ politics. “In the human wave, rolling toward the future, I was baptized anew. I felt myself tied, for my whole life, to this working and suffering people.”³ Shortly thereafter soldiers dispersed the marchers; the twenty-year-old student returned to his books.⁴

The Catholic government responded to the violent demonstrations of 1886, first by honoring the soldiers they had dispatched to quell the demonstrations, and then by launching an inquiry into working conditions throughout Belgian industry. The response of the leaders of the nascent Belgian Workers’ Party was no less equivocal. Most of them condemned the strikes as reckless adventures. In his history of Belgian Socialism,

1. Emile Vandervelde, Louis de Brouckère, and Léon Vandersmissen, *La Grève générale en Belgique* (Brussels: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1914), p. 16.

2. See Patricia Hilden, *Women, Work, and Politics: Belgium, 1830–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

3. Emile Vandervelde, “Comment je devins socialiste,” *L’Avenir Social* 9 (1904): 47.

4. Except for this brief foray to observe the workers in the streets, few indications of his later interest in the working class are evident from his youth. By 1888, Vandervelde had not yet even achieved sufficient notoriety to merit his own police dossier. Dossier Vandervelde, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

Vandervelde also later chastised the miners for going out on strike “demanding higher wages and a bettering of their conditions in vague terms . . . [without] the slightest hint of organization or strength in the uprising.”⁵ The Socialist militants who favored the tactic of direct action subsequently abandoned the Belgian Workers’ Party, founding the short-lived Parti socialiste républicain, or Republican Socialist Party.

Despite the party leaders’ critical reaction to the demonstrations of 1886, the Belgian Socialists acknowledged the usefulness of strikes. Over the next two decades, the Belgian Workers’ Party followed the lead of militant workers in the streets and declared three general strikes, in 1893, 1902, and 1913. The efficient Belgian transportation networks that linked together the highly organized proletariat of the densely populated industrial regions allowed the strikes to gather momentum quickly. Each time, however, it took a more forceful push to convince increasingly reluctant party leaders to support the strike. Once it was officially sanctioned, the Socialists worked to organize the strikes, to discipline the proletarian demonstrators, and above all to ensure order.

The Belgian general strikes focused discussions among the Socialists of the Second International on the most effective tactics of democratic socialism. Although mass strikes had long been discussed by leaders of workers’ movements throughout Europe, especially the French Confédération générale du travail, the Belgian Socialists were the first European party to channel the general strike into a campaign to achieve a political goal. They tried to steer a middle course through European Socialist debates between reform and revolution, and between syndicalism and parliamentary politics.

Leaders of the Belgian Workers’ Party argued that universal suffrage held the key to political and economic change. Back in 1830, the franchise established by the Belgian Constitution had been hailed as the most liberal in Europe. The *suffrage censitaire* had granted the vote to those who paid significant taxes. In 1867, the head of the government, Frère Orban, saluted his forefathers’ foresight in excluding “the laborers and farm workers” from the political process.⁶ This paragon of Liberalism saw the voting restrictions that excluded workers from the suffrage as the last bulwark protecting nineteenth-century bourgeois society. The Catholics concurred. Speaking in Liège, the bishop of Angers compared France, with its “ruling class that no longer rules,” and Belgium. “In Belgium, you still have a ruling class because you do not have universal suffrage,” he concluded.⁷

5. Emile Vandervelde and Jules Destrée, *Le Socialisme en Belgique* (Paris, V. Giard & E. Brière, 1898), p. 87.

6. Frère Orban cited in Marcel Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges, 1885–1914* (Brussels: Vie Ouvrière, 1979), p. 77.

7. Mgr. Kernaeret cited by Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 78.

The leaders of the fledgling Belgian Workers' Party shared the Catholic and Liberal expectations that universal suffrage would indeed open the door to revolution. Vandervelde predicted that with the abolition of suffrage restrictions, Socialists representing the proletariat would fill the Parliament. "Then laws would be enacted by the common people to benefit the common people, rather than by the leaders for the leaders as they are today," he prophesied.⁸ Then the socialist revolution would finally begin in Belgium.

The Belgian leaders cited Friedrich Engels to justify their channeling of the general strike for political reform. In his introduction to the 1895 edition of Karl Marx's *Class Struggles in France*, Engels had proclaimed the end of "rebellion in the old style."⁹ Now that the capitalist forces of order could quell a riot with artillery, Engels advocated "an entirely new method of proletarian struggle" – universal suffrage.¹⁰ Through the electoral system and with Parliament as a forum, "by the end of the century we shall conquer the greater part of the middle strata, petty bourgeois and small peasants, and grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all other powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not," he had predicted.¹¹

Rather ironically, two decades later, after universal manhood suffrage had finally been achieved and Belgian Socialists had become fully engaged in governmental politics, Emile Vandervelde looked back with longing on these first two decades of struggle to achieve suffrage as the heroic years.¹²

The deployment of the general strike in the Belgian struggle for universal suffrage revealed many of the contradictions in Belgian Socialist theory and practice in this prewar period. The Belgian Workers' Party used revolutionary rhetoric to argue for political reform while at the same time relying on a traditional working-class strategy – the mass strike – to gain access to the governmental system. Although the party leaders effectively laid the foundations for the strategy of social democracy with their politically oriented strikes, they also distanced themselves from much of the rank and file of the Belgian working class. The Belgian general strikes for universal suffrage may well have taught the entire Second International to "parler belge," as Rosa Luxemburg observed; but she too soon saw the full implications of the evolving strategy of the democratic socialists.

8. Emile Vandervelde, *Vingt Ans après, Lettre ouverte aux travailleurs belges* (Brussels: Veuve D. Brismée, 1905).

9. Friedrich Engels, "Tactics of Social Democracy," in Robert Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 567.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 566.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

12. Emile Vandervelde, *Cinquantenaire du Parti ouvrier belge* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1936), p. 25.

1893: The Bulwark Begins to Crumble

On 10 August 1890, between seventy-five and one hundred thousand men and women, including Emile Vandervelde, gathered in the streets of Brussels for a massive demonstration for universal suffrage. Before dispersing, the self-declared “workers and democrats of Belgium” vowed “to struggle unceasingly until the day when the people have won a fatherland of their own through the establishment of universal suffrage.”¹³ It was that march, together with subsequent smaller regional demonstrations, that finally drove a reluctant Parliament to begin discussing genuine constitutional reform.

Responding to the success of their demonstrations, the Socialist leadership called an extraordinary congress of the party for September 1890. There, a young Emile Vandervelde first assumed the role that would soon become characteristic, that of an intermediary who forged compromises. On the one side stood Walloon delegates mostly representing the miners of the Borinage, who loudly proclaimed their impatience with the limited demonstrations in Brussels. With the support of miners in France, England, Germany, and Austria, they demanded that the party proclaim a general strike immediately to win an eight-hour day and suffrage. On the other side, Flemish and Brussels delegates counseled moderation, fearing that violent actions by the Walloon militants would jeopardize their peaceful campaign for constitutional revision. In the end, Vandervelde negotiated a compromise resolution. As he would do again and again over the next half century, Vandervelde reconciled the interests of the Flemish delegates and their leader Eduard Anseele; the center, which usually supported the party leadership; syndicalists in Brussels and Liège; and finally, the more militant delegates from the mining regions of the Borinage and Charleroi. The Belgian Workers’ Party promised to declare a general strike if – as everyone expected – Parliament voted down the proposed revision of the electoral law.¹⁴

The miners did not wait for a party declaration. On 1 May, militants in the Liège, Charleroi, and the Borinage basins launched their strike. As the work stoppage spread north to the Brussels region and to Ghent, enlisting metalworkers as well, the number of strikers quickly swelled to over one hundred thousand. Party leaders condemned the strike as premature. Partial strikes by impatient workers only delayed the declaration of an effective general strike, Jan Volders complained.¹⁵

13. *Le Peuple* 12 October 1890, p. 1.

14. Jules Messine, “Emile Vandervelde, Sa Vie et son oeuvre,” p. 32. Unpublished manuscript, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; and L. Delsinne, “Emile Vandervelde,” *Socialistische Standpunten* 5–6 (1963): 390.

15. Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, pp. 87–8.

Finally, unable to check its momentum, the party reluctantly announced its support for the strike. After three weeks, the workers' tactic succeeded. The Parliament voted unanimously to consider a revision of the Constitution. Meeting in the Conseil général, the council of delegates from the regional federations, party leaders responded with joy and relief. They called off the strike.

But the strike did not end, because in fact the party lacked the ability to control the movement's rank and file. The miners of Charleroi refused to return to work. They stayed away from the mines to press their economic demands.¹⁶ The Charleroi miners were not alone in their outrage at the party's timidity. Although most of the workers had heeded the party's order to halt the strike, they joined the miners in their demand that an unlimited and immediate general strike be called.

A year later, the Socialists returned to the question at their annual congress, in June 1892. Vandervelde proclaimed his support for the militants' position, although he maintained his commitment to working first through legal channels. "More than ever, it is imperative that we win universal suffrage," he argued. "And to win it, come what may, we are resolved, if and when it is necessary, to declare a general strike."¹⁷ His proviso was to be significant. The general strike was to be the tactic of last resort.

In the summer of 1892, the Belgian Socialist daily *Le Peuple* took up the miners' chant with daily headlines proclaiming "For the People," "Universal Suffrage," and "The General Strike." Vandervelde contributed one article to the mounting momentum: "Voters on the Right and Universal Suffrage."¹⁸

Throughout the fall of 1892, Socialist leaders waited, attentively watching the Catholic-dominated Parliament. Only after a parliamentary commission openly rejected universal manhood suffrage did they reopen their discussion of a general strike. At the party congress at the beginning of April 1893, Vandervelde rose in support of the militants' cause. He brazenly challenged the veteran Socialist leader Jan Volders. Volders had allied himself with parliamentary progressives in an effort to forge a compromise. "Parliamentary politics are for the Chamber," Vandervelde declared. "We are not parliamentarians, but men who know what they

16. For two different perspectives on the strike, see Andre Mommen, *De Belgische Werkliedenpartij: Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van het reformistische Socialisme, 1880-1914* (Ghent: Masreel-Fonds), p. 90; and Vandervelde and Destrée, *Le Socialisme en Belgique*, p. 111.

17. Emile Vandervelde, *La Grève générale* (Paris: Librairie du Parti Socialiste, 1912), p. 95.

18. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Constituants de la droite et le suffrage universel," *Le Peuple* 17 July 1892.

want.”¹⁹ The Socialists as yet had no place of their own within the Chamber. He rejected coalitions with individuals from bourgeois parties as ineffective. At the same congress, Emilie Claeys, a Ghent factory worker, forcefully argued for women’s suffrage.

The Parliament’s final rejection of universal suffrage on 11 April 1893 forced the Conseil général of the party to declare a general strike. Vandervelde was elated. “For the first time, the general strike was the result of a formal decision by the workers’ organization,” he rejoiced.²⁰ According to Vandervelde, this general strike would be completely different from all the previous strikes because it had been officially proclaimed by the party.

On 12 April the former opponent of the general strike Jan Volders addressed “a veritable sea of people” in the streets of Brussels.²¹ That evening the civil guard prevented three thousand demonstrators from ascending the Montagne du Parc. “Brussels is under siege,” *Le Peuple* announced.²² Arm in arm, leading a massive procession toward the cathedral of Saint Gudule, Volders and Vandervelde were arrested.²³ Three days after their arrest and subsequent release, Vandervelde and a number of Socialist leaders were chased through the streets into alleys by soldiers wielding bayonets. As the strike spread to other regions of the country, the violence escalated. Miners in the Borinage cut telephone and telegraph lines, pillaged homes, and built barricades. The Boraines justified their violent reputation, hurling rocks and broken pottery at the police. One woman was killed by mounted troops in Jolimont. Twenty thousand striking workers took to the streets in Ghent as the work stoppage again spread north to Flanders. Although Vandervelde chastised the crowds for their attacks on the police and property, he more vigorously condemned the violence of the forces of order.

Vandervelde’s appeals for calm went unheard as the number of bloody confrontations between demonstrators and police escalated. Six strikers in a crowd of eight thousand were killed in the Borinage. Five died in a battle with the firefighters of Antwerp. Hundreds more were wounded in similar skirmishes all over Belgium. After a massacre at the Maison du Peuple, the front page of *Le Peuple* cried out: “Hundreds Wounded as Blood Seals the Vote of the Parliament.”²⁴

19. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1893*, p. 32.

20. Emile Vandervelde, *La Grève générale en Belgique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1914), p. 65.

21. F. van Kalken, *Commotions populaires en Belgique (1939–1902)* cited in Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 100.

22. *Le Peuple* cited in Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 101.

23. *Le Peuple* 16 April 1893, p. 1.

24. *Le Peuple* 21 April 1893.

The extent of the well-publicized violence caused the Parliament to reconsider its position. Vandervelde told the crowds awaiting the results of Parliament's vote on abolishing *suffrage censitaire* that if Parliament "decrees political equality, an army of labor will joyfully reenter the factories. If they refuse us, we will become the army of the Revolution."²⁵ On 17 April Vandervelde, Louis Bertrand, and Jan Volders met with parliamentary radical Paul Janson. The Socialist leaders promised to call off the strike if Parliament would at least abolish the *suffrage censitaire*, which granted votes only to those individuals who paid a certain *cens*, or direct tax, to the state, in favor of a system of plural suffrage. On 18 April Parliament instituted the system of plural suffrage – a variation on universal suffrage that granted extra votes to fathers, certain "qualified voters," and property holders.

Many demonstrators were outraged by the Socialist leaders' willingness to postpone the struggle for true universal manhood suffrage and to settle for a compromise with the progressives in Parliament. The system of plural suffrage with its extra votes for property owners would not give the workers the political equality for which they had so valiantly struggled. An impressive, seemingly revolutionary movement had been stopped short of its goal. The party had vowed never to accept plural suffrage at its annual congress. Since then, many workers had lost their lives and others now faced prison sentences for their participation in this first organized general strike. As the demonstrators returned to work, the gap between the leadership and the rank and file of the Belgian Socialist movement loomed ever larger.

For the leadership of the Belgian Workers' Party, the strike had succeeded. As historian Marcel Liebman notes critically, "The general strike abandoned the upper spheres of the revolution and descended to the terrain of limited political struggle."²⁶ The Belgian Socialists had proven that a general strike could be used effectively to force limited political reform through Parliament. For Vandervelde – now clearly part of the leadership – that was a significant victory.

In the first elections held after the adoption of plural suffrage in 1894, Vandervelde ran for Parliament on the Socialist list for Charleroi. The campaign, he reminisced, "was extraordinary in its bravery, its toil, its fearlessness; it was unbridled, crazy, and heroic."²⁷ More extraordinary still were the results, "a shock not only for our adversaries but for

25. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 18 April 1893, Fonds Emile Vandervelde IV 460, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

26. Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 112.

27. Vandervelde and Destrée, *Le Socialisme en Belgique*, p. 151.

ourselves.”²⁸ No one had expected more than one or two Socialists to be elected. Instead, a unified group of twenty-eight victorious Socialist deputies “entered, almost as if we were burglars, into the most bourgeois Parliament of Europe,” Vandervelde recalled.²⁹ The Belgian victory caused a sensation throughout Europe. Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky, among others, wrote to congratulate the new deputies. The general strike that guaranteed the Belgian Socialists a political voice within the governmental system became legendary.

The youngest deputy to sit in the Chamber, Vandervelde spoke from the beginning with the assurance and oratorical skill of a veteran parliamentary leader. After an interview with Vandervelde, an article in *La Gazette* concluded that, of all the new Socialist deputies, “it seems that it is Mr. Vandervelde who best and most rapidly adapted to the parliamentary atmosphere.”³⁰ Always meticulously prepared, he backed up the fervor of his ideological rhetoric with the detail of carefully compiled statistical evidence. Once, when another deputy tried to interrupt him, Vandervelde threatened to unleash his barrage of supporting examples: “Sirs, you are wrong to interrupt me,” he commented, “because before setting forth these assertions, I made sure to be as thoroughly documented as possible.”³¹ Vandervelde’s mastery impressed even the obdurate Catholic leader Charles Woeste, who observed, “Although he was only thirty years old, Mr. Vandervelde demonstrated from the beginning a broad knowledge and a self-confident eloquence.”³² The Liberals in their turn expecting that “either a major disturbance or an insurrectionary movement” would accompany the arrival of Socialists in the Parliament, were relieved.³³ Vandervelde’s expertise on every issue that he addressed won respect throughout the Chamber.

Vandervelde’s election to Parliament assured his leadership position in the Belgian Workers’ Party. As the son of progressive intellectuals from the middle class, he had the education, the culture, and the connections necessary to advance the party struggle in its new arena. The Liberal leader Paul-Emile Janson would later recognize Vandervelde as the best orator

28. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d'un militant socialiste* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1939), p. 45.

29. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 46.

30. *La Gazette* 24 October 1894 cited in Robert Abs, *Emile Vandervelde* (Brussels: Labor, 1973), p. 70.

31. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 5 March 1895, p. 875.

32. Comte Woeste, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire contemporaine de la Belgique* (Brussels: L'Édition Universelle, 1933), vol. 2, p. 21.

33. Paul Hymans, *Mémoires*, ed. Frans van Kalken and John Bartier (Brussels: Editions de l'Institut Solvay, 1958), p. 6.

in the Chamber.³⁴ Fellow Socialist Camille Huysmans acknowledged years later, “Vandervelde thus became not only the leader of our parliamentary delegation, but at the same time, the generally recognized leader of the party.”³⁵ Often to the dismay of the rank and file, especially militants in Wallonia and Socialist women from throughout Belgium, the parliamentary deputies from middle-class origins controlled the subsequent party congresses.

These leaders hoped to use their influence to legislate an improvement in the lives of the Belgian working classes. *La Gazette* reported that Vandervelde answered its journalist “with precision: ‘What are we going to do in the Chamber? It is clear: We will begin by proposing several practical laws of immediate impact, such as, for example, legislation on disability insurance, workers’ pensions, unions. Next we will take on questions with a broader impact, affirming our collectivist principles.’”³⁶ Vandervelde expected the Parliament to serve as an effective tribune for exposing the grievances of the working class. The Socialists’ first electoral success seemed to assure the Belgians, in Vandervelde’s words, “a faster journey to the promised land.”³⁷ For Vandervelde in 1893, that meant socialism as he believed Marx had defined it.

The First Defeat: 1902

The entry of the Socialists into Parliament may have changed the more radically than it did the Parliament itself. In 1899, justifying the Socialists’ electoral strategy, Vandervelde observed, “In our little country – the most industrialized in all of Europe – political evolution proceeds with the rigor of a laboratory experiment.”³⁸

When the Liberals had offered a place on their ticket to Belgian Socialists in 1891, Vandervelde had condemned the invitation as “electoral opportunism.” In response to one journalist, who commented facetiously that it would be better to have Jan Volders in the Parliament than in the street, Vandervelde had countered that the Socialist leader could better serve the proletariat in the street.³⁹ The Socialists worked from outside,

34. Jef Rens, *Rencontres avec le siècle* (Paris: Gembloux, Duculot, 1987), p. 27.

35. Camille Huysmans, “Toen Vandervelde in de Kamer verscheen,” *Socialistische Standpunten* 5–6 (1963): 387.

36. Emile Vandervelde, *La Gazette* 24 October 1894 cited in Abs, *Emile Vandervelde*, p. 70.

37. Vandervelde and Destrée, *Le Socialisme en Belgique*, p. 169.

38. Emile Vandervelde, “La Belle Alliance,” *Le Peuple* 30 September 1899. See also Emile Vandervelde, “La Situation politique en Belgique,” *Mouvement Socialiste* 15 July 1899.

39. Andre Mommen, *De Belgische Werkliedenpartij: Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van het reformistische Socialisme, 1880–1914* (Ghent: Masreel-Fonds, 1980), p. 92.

not from within the system, he had explained. Now, five years later, the Socialists, led by Vandervelde, had achieved a place inside the political system. The leaders of the Belgian Workers' Party quickly adapted, charting a new course to revolution.

All of the Socialist leaders who sat in Parliament, except Eduard Anseele, traced their origins to the bourgeoisie.⁴⁰ But it was Vandervelde who was most often singled out by the Liberal and Catholic press, not only for his middle-class roots, but also for his enjoyment of a bourgeois life. After he moved from his house in Ixelles to La Hulpe in 1898, the *Journal de Bruxelles* ran an article entitled "Le Château de M. Vandervelde."⁴¹ In 1902, *Le Peuple's* editors responded to the constant stories in "the reactionary press" against Vandervelde's "château" and his reputed millions.⁴² Vandervelde possessed a large library and a wide culture, the editor explained, but that did not disqualify him as a Socialist. Not all of the militants in the party were so easily convinced.⁴³

Le Peuple found itself embroiled in a more interesting scandal in January 1896 when Vandervelde fought a duel with a M. Vrancken, a law student, following incidents at the Alcazar Theater. The young man had apparently insulted one of Vandervelde's female companions. After a heated verbal exchange, the two men began shoving each other. As Vandervelde began to stomp on Vrancken's hat, the police arrived. Vandervelde then challenged his opponent to a duel. Sunday morning at dawn, once the fog lifted, the two men paced off the distance. After three rounds, Vandervelde wounded his opponent and the duel was stopped.⁴⁴ *Le Peuple* responded to the satire of the other press accounts with a series of articles reminding its readers that, indeed, the founder of the Belgian Workers' Party, César De Paepe, had condemned dueling after the death of German Socialist Ferdinand Lassalle in 1864. But the editors proclaimed their faith in Vandervelde, after chastising him for indulging in "this vestigial form of barbarity."⁴⁵ From now on, they trusted, Socialists would remember that the Belgian Workers' Party would defend the honor of its members; individuals did not need to protect their own names.

40. An article in *L'Union* from 1894 titled "Le Chef d'hier, le chef d'aujourd'hui" pointed out that the leadership of the Belgian Workers' Party had passed from Jan Volders, "le petit employé," to Vandervelde, "un avocat, un riche." *L'Union* 9 October 1894.

41. "Le Château de M. Vandervelde," *Journal de Bruxelles* 6 November 1898 in Hymans 330, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

42. See *Le Peuple* 28 April 1902.

43. Vandervelde was a quietly charismatic leader who drew crowds of militants wherever he appeared. But he was also subjected to a fair degree of criticism by militants for his very middle-class demeanor and style of life.

44. "Le Duel Vandervelde-Vrancken," *Le Peuple* 13 January 1896. For a rather different version of the incident, see "Un Roman de chevalerie," *Le XXe Siècle* 13 January 1896.

45. "Le Duel," *Le Peuple* 14 January 1896.



Figure 4 Standing on the tomb of Jan Volders, 1899. Institut Emile Vandervelde

Vandervelde played a major role in drafting the party program, the Charter of Quaregnon. Although delegates to the extraordinary congress in December 1893 paid little attention to the document that they were adopting, Belgian Socialists would continue to look upon this statement of principles and goals as its definitive guide throughout Vandervelde's lifetime. All subsequent attempts to amend the charter would be rebuffed. The Belgian Socialists began by refusing to adopt the German Erfurt Program, preferring to define their own eclectic blend of Marxist theory and Belgian pragmatism. It was the first attempt by Belgian Socialists to reconcile their struggle alongside the bourgeoisie for reform within Parliament with their revolutionary goals.

Clearly Marxist in inspiration, the Charter of Quaregnon condemned the capitalist regime, "which divides society into two inherently antagonistic classes, one that can own property without working and the other, forced to abandon part of its product to the possessing class."⁴⁶ After asserting that the workers would have to emancipate themselves by radically transforming society, the Belgian Socialists defined their goal as a collective society. The party's collectivist traditions were evident in

46. Emile Vandervelde, "Programme et statuts du P.O.B.," in Emile Vandervelde, *Le Parti ouvrier belge, 1885-1925* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1925), p. 465.

the details of the charter. Economic emancipation was to predominate, but the charter also called for the moral and political emancipation of the proletariat. In their political program, they listed their demands for universal suffrage at twenty-one years without regard to sex, direct legislation, educational reform, the separation of church and state, judicial reform, the substitution of an armed nation for the army, the creation of a Labor Ministry, the legal recognition of unions, the extension of protective legislation and public welfare, the expansion of the public domain, and the drafting of labor and agricultural legislation. In the end, they managed to blend together the materialism of the German Erfurt Program with their first leader César De Paepe's moralism. Vandervelde defended that moralism at the 1894 party congress, which approved the final version of the Charter of Quaregnon. He defined the Belgian Socialists as pragmatic idealists, as revolutionary reformers.

The strains within the party's strategy were readily apparent. Although in theory the Socialists could work effectively in Parliament and in the streets at the same time, in practice the campaign for electoral reform overshadowed the not entirely compatible strategy of demonstrations in the streets. When the workers went out on strike in 1895 to protest the government's restriction of the eligible electorate – the “loi des quatre infamies,” or “law of the four infamies” – Vandervelde, the parliamentary deputy, counseled greater patience. In marked contrast to his speeches in 1892, he now urged the party to head off the demonstrations. “It would be certain defeat, the loss of workers' reforms,” he reasoned. “Remain calm. That will assure us victory in the future.”⁴⁷

For the Socialists to legislate reform within the Parliament and ultimately to win universal suffrage, they had to campaign for votes among a broadly defined electorate. For the next transitional decade, the Socialists sought to remain the party of class struggle without alienating the progressive bourgeois who held the crucial keys to reform.⁴⁸ Vandervelde's long-term goal may not have changed through this transitional period, but his path toward it had. For the next five years, there was no further discussion of a general strike within the Belgian Workers' Party.

Eighteen ninety-nine marked the beginning of a new struggle in the battle for universal suffrage. The government had proposed to introduce a system of proportional representation in those districts where the Catholics stood to benefit. Vandervelde, back in the streets, appealed to the demonstrators: “To arms, comrades, to arms, rally round the red

47. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1895*, p. 42.

48. Emile Vandervelde, “Flamands et Wallons socialistes,” *Revue Socialiste* 1907, pp. 11–28.

flag . . . The revolutionary road will lead us into the government,” he proclaimed rather enigmatically.⁴⁹ Why Vandervelde decided to incite the militants after such a long silence is not altogether clear. The police regrouped in the Belgian capital to quell the disturbances and Socialist rhetoric in Parliament intensified.

The parliamentary debate over proportional representation and the spontaneous outbreak of demonstrations caused the Socialists to embark on a new crusade for universal suffrage at the turn of the century. For the first time, the Socialist and Liberal deputies joined together in a “Groupe parlementaire pour le suffrage universel et la représentation proportionnelle,” a coalition backing universal suffrage and proportional representation. As their parliamentary spokesman, Vandervelde introduced a resolution for constitutional reform in November 1901. He proposed the replacement of the system of plural votes by universal manhood suffrage. The subsequent parliamentary defeat of the proposition increased the agitation inside and outside of Parliament. As demonstrators’ dynamite and police bullets echoed through the streets, Vandervelde advised his fellow deputies in the Chamber: “I don’t hesitate to tell you, sirs, that calm will reign as long as the workers who have been awaiting justice for years have any hope, no matter how small, that their cause will triumph peacefully and legally.” But, he warned, “contrary to those who suggest that we have the power to decree peace and war, I must inform you that we are not in control of the events.”⁵⁰ The threat of spontaneously escalating violence worried the leadership of the party as well.

At the party congress in March 1902, Vandervelde was forced to defend the Socialists’ parliamentary strategy against charges that they had granted too many concessions to the Liberals, including giving up the fight for women’s suffrage. He argued that in contrast to 1892, a strong Socialist parliamentary delegation supported by the Liberals could win universal manhood suffrage through legal, peaceful methods. If the legislative strategy failed, he promised the party would declare an immediate general strike.

Disorderly demonstrations in Brussels followed the reconvening of Parliament on 8 April 1902. Walloon Socialists again called on the party to declare a general strike, but the majority of the Socialist leaders feared that they would be unable to control the spreading unrest. Vandervelde spoke to a crowd in front of the Maison du Peuple in Brussels on 11 April. Typically, he advised the workers to maintain their enthusiasm while

49. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 22 June 1899, p. 2, cited in Mommen, *De Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, p. 146. See also IV Fonds, Emile Vandervelde 460, Institut Emile Vandervelde for the clipping reporting the arrest of the demonstrators.

50. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 13 March 1902, p. 932.

remaining calm. Only a disciplined, organized resistance – inside Parliament and outside on the streets – would convince the government to enact reforms. Disorder produced bloodshed, not change, he argued. As he spoke, the determination of the demonstrators seemed to excite and to energize him. That night he returned, placing himself between the police and the battling demonstrators.⁵¹ After an inconclusive meeting of the party's Conseil général, the demonstrations spread. Governmental repression increased.

Finally, on 13 April 1902, the Conseil général declared a general strike. It effectively disclaimed any responsibility for its decision, however, explaining, "A majority of the working class had already decided to proclaim the general strike."⁵² Vandervelde heralded the decision. "On 14 April the working class spontaneously changed tactics. The riots ceased; the general strike began."⁵³ The demonstrations of April 1902 were significantly larger than those of 1893. Headlines in *le Peuple* celebrated the dignity and calm of the ever-growing crowds in the streets.

When parliamentary debate resumed on 16 April, Vandervelde championed the determination of the 300,000 demonstrators in a speech to the Chamber. In the streets and in Socialist meetings, he pointed to the hopeful signs of parliamentary progress.⁵⁴ When the Chamber defeated the Socialists' proposal for constitutional revision on 18 April 1902, the Conseil général resolutely vowed to continue the strike.

That evening, the civil guard fired on a procession of demonstrators in Louvain, wounding fourteen and killing six participants. The headline in *Le Peuple* the next day read, "Shocking Execution in Louvain."⁵⁵ At a meeting at the Maison du Peuple, Vandervelde in mourning conceded: "I recognize that it is no longer possible to win democracy by force . . . It would be foolhardy to allow our admirable proletariat to be massacred."⁵⁶ The Conseil général voted an end to the strike.

The Conseil knew that its decision to halt such a powerful movement would be unpopular. Some Belgian Socialists muttered that in France such a massacre would have inspired the Socialists to declare class war, not to bow their heads in defeat. Vandervelde attempted to justify the leadership's interruption of the strike at an extraordinary congress of Belgian Socialists on 4 May 1902. Party leaders had hoped to spare the unions and the workers further suffering in the face of sure defeat, he explained. Some demonstrators had already begun to trickle back to work, he observed, and

51. *Le Peuple* 13 April 1902.

52. *Le Peuple* 11 April 1902.

53. Vandervelde, *La Grève générale en Belgique*, p. 80.

54. *Le Peuple* 15 April 1902; *Le Peuple* 18 April 1902; and *Le Peuple* 19 April 1902.

55. *Le Peuple* 19 April 1902.

56. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 19 April 1902.

enthusiasm for the strike had appeared to be waning.

In his final statement to the 1902 congress, Vandervelde betrayed his assessment of the real issues at stake. The next general strike would be victorious because it would be different from the general strike of 1902, he proclaimed. It would not be “a grandiose improvisation under the pressure of circumstances, but the result of long and patient preparations.”⁵⁷ In his conclusion, Vandervelde clearly established the conditions under which the Socialist leadership would sanction a third general strike. The party would be in the lead from the beginning. It would not back into another general strike. Vandervelde’s speech did not mollify the militant opposition led by Jules Destrée. Angry militants, including a significant number of women, charged that many party leaders, Vandervelde in particular, had given up the strike under the influence of industrialists with whom they met at the Brussels Masonic lodges.⁵⁸

The debate over the strike continued through the summer of 1902 in a polemical exchange between Vandervelde and Rosa Luxemburg. Immediately after the defeat of the strike, Luxemburg denounced the Belgians’ contradiction-plagued strategy. “If they cannot wait for the parliamentary majority to agree to reverse the Constitution, it is difficult to understand why they resort to the general strike with such hesitation and reluctance. And then why, even though they have recognized that it is their only viable means of struggle, all of a sudden, precisely when the strike is really taking off, do they suspend it?” she asked.⁵⁹ The Belgian Socialists had sacrificed direct action to the exigencies of parliamentary concessions, she concluded. They had caved in to pressure from the Liberals in Parliament.

Angered by the timing of her attack – “it might have been more brotherly to wait to criticize us at least until we were no longer the target of our enemies’ attacks” – Vandervelde rebuffed her charge that the Liberals dictated Belgian Socialist strategy.⁶⁰ The Liberals “had to be dragged to universal suffrage, almost like condemned men being led to the scaffold,” he complained frankly in a letter to his friend the German

57. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire*, May 1902, p. 97.

58. Vandervelde responded, “Je ne suis entré dans la loge que pour faire de la propagande socialiste et ceux qui disent que celle-ci intervient dans les affaires intérieures du PO prouvent qu’ils ne connaissent rien de la Franc Maçonnerie.” 22 April 1902, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

59. Rosa Luxemburg, “L’Expérience belge de grève générale” in R. Luxemburg and Mehring, F. ed., *Grèves sauvages. Spontanéité des masses* (Paris: Spartacus, n.d.), p. 18.

60. Emile Vandervelde to Karl Kautsky, Brussels, 30 April 1902, Kautsky 364, *Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis*, Amsterdam.

Socialist Karl Kautsky.⁶¹ In his public response, Vandervelde protested that the real enemies of the strike were not the Liberals but the six thousand bayonets of the army.⁶²

Luxemburg countered with a stirring defense of the general strike as a revolutionary weapon. True revolutionaries accepted the risk that the state could deploy their six thousand bayonets. That confrontation would lead the struggle forward toward the revolution. The defeat of the Belgian strike had demonstrated the failure of opportunism, she charged, not the impossibility of ultimately overturning a capitalist state by means of the general strike.⁶³ “If social democracy opposes the historically necessary revolution, then the only result will be to transform social democracy from the avant-garde to the rear guard.”⁶⁴ Luxemburg castigated the Belgian Socialists for their hesitant strategy of legal revolution.

Vandervelde later conceded that in the strike of 1902 the Belgian Socialists had suffered their first real defeat. In a much cited observation, the Catholic historian Cyrille Van Overbergh suggested that the collapse of the strike of 1902 meant that “the romantic period of Belgian Socialism had ended. The period of the realistic ordeal had begun.”⁶⁵ Van Overbergh’s conclusion applies equally well to Vandervelde in 1902. His participation in the first two general strikes had forced Vandervelde to understand the centrality of the proletariat in Marxist theory. He thrived amidst the vitality of the demonstrations. But he never became part of the crowd of workers. He led them and they listened. He drew on their energy as he praised them to Parliament. But in the end, he effectively distanced himself from the rank and file. The threat of repression that accompanied uncontrollable mass demonstrations contrasted sharply in Vandervelde’s mind with the potential for reform that he had begun to witness in Parliament.

For the first ten years, Vandervelde’s view of Parliament remained equivocal. He led the Socialist deputation in the Chamber and spoke often, gaining respect from Catholics and Liberals as well as Socialists for his knowledge and preparation. He resolutely and persistently opposed military expenditures, especially the fortification of Antwerp in 1905. Above all, he struggled for workers’ protective legislation, comparing the meager Belgian legislation with the far more extensive protective legislation of other countries, assembling intricate statistical tables, and

61. Ibid.

62. Emile Vandervelde, “Vandervelde défend son action,” in Luxemburg, ed., *Grèves sauvages*.

63. Rosa Luxemburg, “Réponse au Camarade Vandervelde,” 14 May 1902, in Luxemburg, ed., *Grèves sauvages*.

64. Ibid., p. 30.

65. Cyrille Van Overbergh, *La Grève générale* (Brussels: Mische & Thron, 1913), p. 149.

summarizing elegantly Socialist ideals. But he also joined with the Liberals to defend and extend state schooling at all levels and to loosen the church's hold over education.

In the midst of his most eloquent parliamentary speeches, delivered in his sonorous baritone, in which he carefully detailed the need for specific reforms, he would remind the Catholics and the Liberals of the Socialists' revolutionary goals. His calls for revolution seemed to come directly from Marx. "We do not simply want to reform our current society while respecting its fundamental principles. To the contrary, we want to radically transform society," he declared in February 1902 to a Chamber accustomed to his rhetorical flourish.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in his frequent speeches to assemblies of Socialist militants, Vandervelde denounced Parliament as a mere reflection of bourgeois society. In 1896, for example, he proclaimed categorically, "Every Socialist, precisely because he is a Socialist, must logically be antiparliamentary."⁶⁷

Vandervelde did not acknowledge any contradiction between his attack on Parliament as a bastion of the bourgeoisie and his commitment to legislative reform. The paradox of the simultaneous struggles for reform and revolution did not trouble him. Within the Parliament the Socialists fought to protect the workers from further capitalist exploitation, Vandervelde explained. Who else, he asked, would defend the workers' interests? The Liberals and the Catholics "as representatives of the ruling classes" certainly would not. They only incited a brand of "social anarchy" that profited the bourgeoisie and impoverished the proletariat.⁶⁸ Even though progressive delegates from the bourgeois parties might occasionally support reform measures, in the end their true class interests always emerged. So he concluded with the simple affirmation "Only the Parti ouvrier wants serious reforms, because it is simply the working class itself struggling for enfranchisement."⁶⁹ Vandervelde obviously believed that Parliament could effect significant reforms, but he stopped short of arguing that legislation would result in socialism. Although Vandervelde defended the Parliament more avidly with each year that he served in the Chamber, he continued to call for revolution.

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, at party congresses and in *Le Peuple*, the Belgian Socialists struggled to win a place within the system that they continued to condemn. They followed the paths of

66. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 14 February 1902, p. 678.

67. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Contrepoids," *L'Avenir Social* (1896).

68. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 27 April 1898, p. 1272.

69. Emile Vandervelde, "Vingt Ans après," p. 15. See also Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 12 March 1897, p. 857.

revolution and reform simultaneously.

In contrast to Socialist movements in France, Britain, and Germany, the Belgian Socialists never divided into clearly demarcated orthodox and revisionist factions, one supporting revolution and the other reform. By the end of almost every Belgian debate, the most outspoken proponents of the conflicting resolutions acquiesced in support of a compromise settlement. Vandervelde typically formulated the centrist resolution.

Vandervelde's stands on two significant issues during this period offer examples of his emerging strategies for forging compromises at the center of the party. On the tactical question of alliances with the progressive leaders of the Liberal Party, Vandervelde moderated his position over time to adapt to the evolving consensus within the Belgian Workers' Party. In contrast, on the issue of women's suffrage, although Vandervelde refused to accommodate his position to that of the majority, he rarely spoke out forcefully for women when consensus was needed.

On the very divisive question of alliances with bourgeois parties, at the heart of the reform-revolution debate, Vandervelde gradually resolved the potential contradiction between his initial orthodox defense of the class struggle and the revisionist demands of an electoral strategy. During the first decade that he served in Parliament, Vandervelde steadfastly maintained that the Belgian Workers' Party was a party of class.⁷⁰ He adamantly proclaimed the principle of Socialist autonomy. Auguste DeWinne complained at the 1903 annual congress: "Vandervelde wants to pursue a policy of Socialist isolation. He imagines that the Parti ouvrier is strong enough to conquer power by itself."⁷¹ Vandervelde argued that the Liberals were capitalists who could never be true allies of the Socialists.⁷²

Vandervelde rejected the premise on which the argument for Socialist and Liberal alliances was based: their shared anticlericalism. The emphasis on religion obscured the basic class interests of the Socialists, he explained, and it divided Catholic from nonbelieving workers. As long as the priests were content to concern themselves with the afterlife, the Socialists, with their concern for this life on earth, could coexist with them.⁷³ French Socialist Jean Jaurès was eventually drawn into the dispute, charging that

70. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "La Question des alliances," *Le Peuple* 18 February 1894; Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 11 April 1894; Emile Vandervelde, "La Question des alliances," *Le Peuple* 15 August 1895; and Emile Vandervelde, "On mange des merles," *Le Peuple* 20 March 1897.

71. Auguste DeWinne, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1903*, p. 29.

72. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Capitalisme clérical," *Le Peuple* 1 July 1903; and Auguste DeWinne, "Question de méthode," *Le Peuple* 2 July 1903.

73. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme et la religion* (Ghent: Germinal, 1907).

his Belgian friend underrated the significance of the Socialist struggle against the church.⁷⁴ Vandervelde replied that, having grown up in a secular house, he did not share the antireligious fervor of those who had been forced to overcome deeply ingrained childhood beliefs.

The debate over alliances resumed in 1904, this time between Vandervelde and the more revisionist Belgian Socialist Louis Bertrand. Vandervelde finally agreed not to oppose alliances in principle, as long as they respected the lines of the class struggle and Socialist ideals were not sacrificed.⁷⁵ Obviously, he did not believe that the Liberals could ever join the Socialists on the same side of the class struggle.

When it seemed for the first time that it might be possible to unseat the Catholic majority in Parliament in 1906, Vandervelde further moderated his position. Ultimately the workers would have to win the revolution themselves, he explained, but in the meantime they might consider allying with the other progressive forces. The Liberals were not to be trusted in a permanent union, but a temporary alliance might help to win universal suffrage, he conceded. He rationalized the change in his position by suggesting that it was the Liberals who had evolved over the preceding twenty years. In his report to the party in 1907, he further hedged on the issue. Defending the reformist strategy with revolutionary rhetoric, he explained that, by joining together with the Liberals against the Catholics in the struggle for universal suffrage, the Socialists were in fact fighting the class struggle.⁷⁶ He did not explain how that was actually possible.

The discussion of alliances with bourgeois parties extended naturally into the question of the participation by individual Socialists in the government itself – an issue for the entire European Socialist movement. When several Belgian Socialists raised the issue for debate in 1906, Vandervelde referred to the lessons of the problematic ministry of the French Socialist Alexandre Millerand. The congress of the Second International had already condemned such participation. Vandervelde reminded his less orthodox colleagues that the Socialists' goal was "the political and social expropriation of the bourgeoisie."⁷⁷ Belgian Socialist participation in a bourgeois government would drag the party into "a politics of circumspection, concessions, compromises, and renunciations that would make real revolutionary propaganda impossible," he argued.⁷⁸

As the discussion of ministerial participation intensified, the threat of factionalism drew Vandervelde into his by now accustomed centrist

74. Emile Vandervelde, "Anticléricalismes," *Le Peuple* 8 April 1903.

75. Emile Vandervelde, "Politique socialiste," *Le Peuple* 20 January 1904.

76. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1907*.

77. See the series of clippings concerning Vandervelde's opposition to Socialist participation in Hymans 329, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

78. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Ministérialisme socialiste," *Le Peuple* 11 July 1906.

position. Early in May 1909, the editor of *Le Peuple*, Louis de Brouckère, citing the decisions of the International, condemned the principle of Socialist participation in bourgeois governments. Bertrand objected that the International did not dictate Belgian practice. De Brouckère answered that the issue was indeed within the jurisdiction of the International; in any bourgeois government, whether French, Belgian, or German, a lone Socialist minister would be a prisoner of the capitalists. Vandervelde intervened on 16 May, taking the pragmatic position that, as long as the situation was purely hypothetical, they postpone the decision. Unlike France, no member of the ruling party had even considered offering a portfolio to the Belgian Socialists.

The debate continued through three meetings of the Conseil général in October 1909. Joined by Léon Troclet and Eduard Anseele, Louis Bertrand argued for what he called “realism,” that is, participation in a ministry. De Brouckère angrily charged that the working class had grown soft in its campaign for immediate reforms. Vandervelde finally offered a compromise that, while not excluding the possibility of participation, insisted that workers’ independence be maintained and that the Socialists continue to fight the class struggle.

At the 1910 congress the debate resurfaced yet again. Anseele insisted, “I am not debating Socialist theory, but the practical means of accomplishing the reforms on which we all agree as soon as possible.”⁷⁹ De Brouckère argued that “the revolutionary spirit is tied to the working class’s spirit of independence.”⁸⁰ In effect, Vandervelde accepted both positions. As a parliamentary pragmatist he believed in the possibility and the necessity of achieving reforms to improve the lives of the workers. But as an idealist he was unwilling to abandon the discussion of Socialist theory – of revolution and of the class struggle. In the end, his moderate wait-and-see resolution avoided the troublesome but basic issue of reform and revolution altogether. It carried the day. Neither he nor the majority of delegates to the 1910 congress were willing to concede Socialist principles to the demands of a hypothetical situation.

Vandervelde’s role in the debate over women’s suffrage reveals a more complex struggle between his principles and his desire to promote party unity. At the end of the nineteenth century, most Belgian Socialist leaders contentedly limited their struggle for “universal” suffrage to men. They expected women of the working class to be good Socialist housewives and mothers; consumers that is of Socialism. Emilie Claeys confronted these

79. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1910*, p. 30.

80. Louis de Brouckère, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1910*, p. 35.

comfortable assumptions in 1893 when she argued for real universal suffrage. Her meetings in Ghent attracted thousands of workers, both men and women, forcing the party to respond.⁸¹ The Charter of Quaregnon, after all, defined the Belgian Workers' Party as the representative "not only of the working class, but of all the oppressed, without distinction of religion, race, or sex."⁸² That forthright affirmation of women's rights would return to haunt the party as its leaders equivocated. When Vandervelde spoke in Charleroi in 1896 to a crowd of six or seven hundred people about women's rights, he presented what was then the position of the party as well as his own belief in women's equality.⁸³ In 1900, however, many Socialist leaders followed the most outspoken delegates to the annual congress, who opposed women's suffrage. They feared that women from the working class would use their votes to support the Catholics. Vandervelde acknowledged the possibility of a transitional period when women might vote as their priest instructed, but he reminded the Socialists that in the long run, as August Bebel had written, no revolution could be won without the heroism of women.⁸⁴

In 1901, Vandervelde married a politically active feminist from England, Lalla Speyer. She journeyed to Vandervelde's Socialist world from the circle of the British writer, Cobden Sanderson. She moved to Vandervelde's family home, which they would continue to share with his disabled sister.⁸⁵ Lalla Vandervelde was appalled by much of what she encountered in Belgium, but especially by the treatment of women. "I was very young and shy and lacking in self-confidence; besides, I felt that I, as a foreigner and a neophyte, had no right, in their eyes, to impose my opinion," she recalled unhappily. "The wife of a Belgian, I was told on all sides, must stay at home and look after her house and children if she has any."⁸⁶ Lalla Vandervelde did not stay home, but quickly moved into the leadership of the women's groups of the Belgian Workers' Party. She traveled through Europe and America, rarely at Vandervelde's side. They seemed to maintain quite separate lives. The Vanderveldes never had children. Their marriage ended in divorce just after the war.

81. An unwed mother, Claeys was forced out of the party in 1896 for living with a man. Party leaders were fearful of Catholic reactions to this "immorality." See Mommen, *De Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, pp. 125–6; and Hilden, *Women, Work, and Politics*.

82. Vandervelde and Destrée, *Le Socialisme en Belgique*, p. 422.

83. Dossier Vandervelde, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

84. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Suffrage des femmes," *Le Peuple* 25 October 1900.

85. Vandervelde married Lalla Speyer on 16 February 1901 in London. Louis de Brouckère served as his witness. Few traces of Vandervelde's "private life" remain. I am grateful to Robert Flagothier, former Director of the Institut Emile Vandervelde, for sharing with me one uncatalogued bundle of early correspondence between Emile and Lalla.

86. Lalla Vandervelde, *Monarchs and Millionaires* (London: Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1925), p. 36.

At that same time, the relationship between feminism and socialism became more strained within the party. The Liberals pressured the Socialists to abandon their demand for women's suffrage before the two parties forged an alliance in the struggle for universal suffrage. The Conseil général accepted that condition in October 1901. At the request of its members, Lalla Vandervelde, speaking for the National Federation of Socialist Women, agreed to suspend the fight for the enfranchisement of women until after universal manhood suffrage had been achieved.⁸⁷ Only Jules Destrée, Vincent Volkaert, and Paule Gil objected to the ploy and to the abandonment of the position that the party had so clearly stated in its Charter. Vandervelde acquiesced publicly.

Women's suffrage came up for full debate at the March 1902 party congress after the congress of Socialist Women condemned the decision of the Conseil général. Paule Gil complained, "All the Socialist congresses proclaim sexual equality, but those voices fall silent when it comes to putting principles into practice."⁸⁸ Vandervelde's behavior at the congress was a good example of that inconsistency. Jules Destrée alone rose at the party congress to defend women's rights and to question the Conseil's hypocrisy. Vandervelde then rose, assuring Destrée that, in bowing to the Liberals' conditions, the Conseil had postponed but not renounced its commitment to women's rights. Concessions were sometimes necessary, he concluded. In the end, the feminist Isabelle Gatti de Gamond affirmed the Socialist party's deferral of the demand for women's suffrage. "We are not abandoning anything; we are waiting for everything we ask to come from you," she declared.⁸⁹

Despite Vandervelde's apparent willingness to compromise, militant Walloons at the 1902 congress denounced Vandervelde as well as Destrée for jeopardizing the Socialists' struggle for universal manhood suffrage. In Parliament, Vandervelde meanwhile had continued to speak out for women's suffrage and to demand the recognition of a woman's rights as a worker and as "a human being."⁹⁰ At the Brussels Socialists' meeting where Vandervelde did not feel the pressure to maintain party unity, he threatened to resign as a deputy to the national congress if he was forced "to vote against a proposition that has all my sympathies."⁹¹

87. Hilde Wellens, "Vrouwenbeweging en Vrijzinnigheid in België rond de Eeuwwisseling (1892–1914)," Licentie, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1982. Lalla Vandervelde was relatively outspoken on the issue of the Belgian treatment of women. See, for example, her letter to *La Gazette* 24 February 1902.

88. Paule Gil cited in Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 227.

89. Isabelle Gatti de Gamond cited in Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 229.

90. Emile Vandervelde cited in Hymans 397, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

91. Hymans 397, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

Vandervelde partially redeemed his feminist credentials during the subsequent debate over a seat for Gatti de Gamond on the Conseil général. When opposition arose, Vandervelde jumped to his feet, declaring: "It is a question of principle. Do we not consider our wives, our sisters, as equals, even in responsibility? The congress will decide here whether or not it supports women's equality."⁹² Vandervelde continued to speak out over the next decade and to write in defense of women's suffrage – "to obey my conscience" – as did Lalla Vandervelde, but he never explicitly criticized the party's 1902 decision.⁹³ Nor did he do anything that would have jeopardized Socialist unity.

Vandervelde was by now an insider in the party. He was willing to make compromises that served the general interest of Belgian Socialism as he understood them. Although he stood up to party congresses to denounce the oppression of women, he was neither consistent nor convincing in his stand. Even less than the proletariat, whom he approached from the distance of a scientific observer, did Vandervelde understand women. He championed women's right to vote as part of his principled defense of the oppressed, but at a significant distance.

1913: Nous la préparons formidable et irrésistible

In 1910 the Catholic parliamentary majority slipped to six votes. Socialists and Liberals alike began eagerly anticipating eventual control of Parliament and the enactment of universal manhood suffrage. "Never have circumstances been more favorable for the democratic movement," Vandervelde wrote in November.⁹⁴ Just three years earlier, Vandervelde had despaired of the possibility of legislative reform. Speaking to an empty Chamber in 1907, he had lamented, "If the conservatives do not want universal suffrage when the workers are in the streets, they want it even less when the workers stay at home."⁹⁵ The change came when Liberal leaders began openly to advocate universal suffrage.

The Socialists and the Liberals allied in a cartel of the "deux gauches," or "two lefts," to oppose the Catholics' education project in 1911. The project favored Catholic over state schools. A number of Socialists

92. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1902*, p. 64.

93. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Le Socialisme sociétaire," *Le Peuple* 28 October 1903; and articles in *Cahiers féministes* 1903–4.

94. Emile Vandervelde, "Où allons-nous?" *Le Peuple* 13 November 1910. See also his "Pour le suffrage universel," *Le Peuple* 24 April 1910; and "Le Suffrage universel est en marche," *Le Peuple* 25 June 1911.

95. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 4 July 1907, p. 1442.

vigorously attacked Vandervelde's close ties with Liberal leader Paul Hymans. "The working class should rely on its own effort," Joseph Jacquemotte contended at the 1911 annual congress.⁹⁶ De Brouckère concurred: the differences between the Liberals and the Socialists should be emphasized, not ignored. Vandervelde justified his collaboration in the "entente des deux gauches," by explaining that these were extraordinary times. With Liberal support, the Socialists would finally achieve their goal of electoral reform.⁹⁷

Hymans and Vandervelde stood side by side at a mammoth demonstration in the Park of St. Gilles on 15 August 1911. Hymans proclaimed, "The Liberals and the Socialists, although divided by serious disagreements, know that they are united by important ideas and, without renouncing either their ideals or their independence, they pledge to assist each other for the triumph of these ideas."⁹⁸ On six stages, Liberals joined Socialists in a common appeal for universal manhood suffrage and free education.

All of their expectations for overturning the government at the ballot box were dashed in June 1912 when, instead of diminishing, the Catholic majority increased to eighteen seats. The Catholic domination of Parliament seemed fated to continue. Electoral reform through Parliament remained as distant a possibility as ever.

The anger of disillusioned workers, especially in Wallonia, led to a new wave of demonstrations in the summer of 1912 that mirrored those of 1902. By 6 June 1912, 45,000 workers had gone out on strike in Charleroi. They were joined by 40,000 in the Liège basin, and 20 to 30,000 in La Louvière. The Conseil général dispatched its leaders to Wallonia to convince the workers to return to work. All except Vandervelde were shouted down. Vandervelde's indefatigable presence at workers' tribunes throughout the Belgian provinces assured the young leader support from militants.⁹⁹ Even his promises to reintroduce the proposal for universal suffrage in Parliament were met by the strikers' calls for an immediate general strike. Cries of "Vive la Révolution" punctuated the demonstrations.

Vandervelde reported that the subsequent meeting of the Conseil général

96. J. Jacquemotte, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1911*, p. 31.

97. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1911*, p. 47.

98. Hymans 513, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels. Hymans subsequently came under criticism from other Liberals. After the publication in Liège of an interview with Vandervelde titled "Les Socialistes commandent: Les Libéraux obéissent!" Vandervelde agreed to help Hymans rectify the false impression created by the publicity of their cooperation.

99. According to Jef Rens, "il était toujours là pour insuffler force et courage aux travailleurs. Il ponctuait ses impressionnants discours de gestes secs typiques et, même parfois, en frappant vigoreusement le sol du pied." Rens, *Rencontres*, p. 27.

was “literally overrun by militants from the provinces who wanted at all costs to wrest from us a vote declaring an immediate general strike.”¹⁰⁰ The leadership consequently convened an extraordinary congress of the party to consider the situation.

The party was divided coming into the congress. Jules Destrée and the Federation of Charleroi argued in favor of an immediate general strike. Most of the Socialist leaders, still haunted by vivid memories of the defeat of 1902, hesitated. Finally after long debate, the congress arrived at its customary compromise. They agreed to a general strike, but did not set a date. Vandervelde presented the resolution. He maintained his hope that universal suffrage could be won through legislation. If in the end a strike did prove necessary, he resolved, the party would organize and plan it thoroughly and carefully. “We want a general strike. We will prepare a formidable and irresistible one. But we want it to remain peaceful, despite all provocations and incidents,” he concluded.¹⁰¹

The preparation for the general strike of 1913 was indeed formidable. Under the watchful eye of a central strike committee, a propaganda commission wrote dozens of brochures and distributed thousands of copies throughout the country. A finance commission helped the unions and cooperatives set up strike funds. Workers were urged to set money aside through a system of coupons. According to custom, common meals were planned and the exodus of children from the industrialized regions was organized.¹⁰² As the methodical preparation proceeded through the summer, daily articles in *Le Peuple* heralded “the Joyous Strike.” The front page of the paper featured a series of interviews on the topic “What do you think of the general strike?”

Vandervelde’s first article about the strike did not appear until November 1912.¹⁰³ In a remarkably frank confession, Vandervelde later avowed that, despite the vote of the extraordinary congress, “the principal leaders of the party very clearly expressed their opposition to the launching of a strike and made vain efforts to avoid it, while the masses themselves remained firm in their resolution, finally imposing on the leaders the obligation to play their part.”¹⁰⁴ Although they appeared publicly to encourage its preparation, many of the Socialist leaders privately hoped that the strike would never be declared. In 1912, twenty years after his first enthusiastic participation in the general strike of 1892, Vandervelde

100. Vandervelde et al., *Grève générale* (1914), p. 93.

101. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1912*.

102. Marcel Liebman, “La Pratique de la grève générale dans le Parti ouvrier belge,” *Le Mouvement Social* 58 (1967): p. 55.

103. Emile Vandervelde, “Pour la révision,” *Le Peuple* 21 November 1912.

104. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 56.

was no longer to be found in the streets, arm in arm with the demonstrators.

That fall Vandervelde focused his attention on Parliament, proposing yet another resolution for universal suffrage. The other members of the Socialist delegation spoke forcefully, continually referring to the wearying patience of Belgian workers and the threat of a strike. Charging blackmail, both the Liberals and the Catholics protested vigorously the Socialist pressure. In vain, Vandervelde tried to assure both parties that the Socialists would declare a strike only as a last resort.

In January 1913 the Liberal leader Paul Hymans proposed the creation of a parliamentary commission to study the question of universal suffrage. Vandervelde urged the Socialists to rescind their strike threat. To calm the workers' impatience, the Conseil général called a meeting of the strike committee.

On 8 February 1913, the Chamber voted down the proposal for constitutional revision that would have allowed universal suffrage. Four days later the Socialists' National Committee for Universal Suffrage and the General Strike declared a strike for the fourteenth of April. The two-month delay obviously opened the door for further negotiations. The mayors of the provincial capitals attempted to mediate between the Socialists and the government, obtaining from the first a promise not to strike and from the second a promise to make some conciliatory gestures. But on 12 March a majority of Parliament followed the Catholic leader Charles Woeste in refusing to reconsider constitutional revision.¹⁰⁵ The day after the vote, Vandervelde told his friend Paul Hymans of Eduard Anseele and Jules Destrée's decision to support the declaration of a general strike. Hymans recounted: "'There is nothing more to do,' he told me. 'The die is cast.' . . . I sensed that he was agitated; he was frightened of the battle into which he was being pushed despite himself."¹⁰⁶

At the party congress, Camille Huysmans and Emile Vandervelde acknowledged that trying to postpone the strike would be "like trying to swim up Niagara." Vandervelde confided to the assembled delegates: "The last six months have been among the most thankless and the most painful of my political life. For six months I have done all that was humanly and superhumanly possible to spare the working class and the country a general strike that had become inevitable."¹⁰⁷ He then asked for a place at their side in the strike.

Throughout the six-month period, in fact, Vandervelde had been negotiating in private with parliamentary leaders, with cabinet ministers,

105. For a description of Woeste's "opposition tranchante" to constitutional revision, see Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 51.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

107. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1913*.

and with influential businessmen to achieve a peaceful resolution of the suffrage question. In his memoirs, Vandervelde alluded to “the relations that, after twenty years of parliamentary activity, were finally established between the Socialist leaders and the representatives of the other parties.”¹⁰⁸ Having grown up in progressive bourgeois Brussels circles, Vandervelde was clearly a master at these relations. The ideologies of the Socialist, Liberal, and Christian Democratic leaders certainly differed, but for the most part the parliamentary leaders shared the same cultural and educational background.

Vandervelde fully expected to succeed in his negotiations to secure universal manhood suffrage peacefully. After the tumultuous events of June 1912, members of the king’s cabinet had promised Vandervelde, “As far as the revision is concerned, there is every reason to believe that inasmuch as the king can influence the politics of the government, he is in favor of reform.”¹⁰⁹ Vandervelde received similar assurances from the moderate Catholic leaders Charles de Broqueville and Jules Renkin of their support for universal suffrage.¹¹⁰ In February 1913, when public negotiations seemed to be breaking down, the president of the Chamber of Commerce of Antwerp had intervened discreetly to bring Vandervelde together with de Broqueville. Vandervelde later recalled that de Broqueville pledged to do all that he could to avoid the risks of the pending general strike in an effort to achieve universal manhood suffrage. He also informed the Socialist leader of his 1912 letter to the king in which he had vowed to renew the drive for constitutional revision after the elections of 1914. Impressed by de Broqueville’s efforts, Vandervelde received permission from the Catholic deputy to discuss this “half-open door” with Anseele, de Brouckère, Huysmans, and Destrée.¹¹¹ In the end, senior Catholic leader Woeste overpowered the more moderate de Broqueville, and all of the negotiations behind the scenes turned out to be fruitless.

Historian Marcel Liebman has condemned Vandervelde’s secret negotiations. “For a long time,” Liebman charges, “the militant had doubled as a negotiator, sacrificing internal democracy to the requirements of this external diplomacy.”¹¹² Vandervelde’s attempt to play both roles –

108. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 56.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

110. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–8.

111. See Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, pp. 58–61; and Louis de Lichtervelde, *Avant l'orage* (Brussels: Editions Universelles, n.d.), pp. 107–25. Jean Puissant has suggested that, in the beginning of 1913, the Catholics passed a message concerning King Albert’s desire for constitutional revision through the Liberals to Vandervelde, probably at a meeting of the Masonic lodge. Paul Hymans also alluded to de Broqueville’s efforts to use the Liberals as intermediaries between the government and the Socialists. Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 55. I am grateful to Jean Puissant for sharing his ideas with me.

112. Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges*, p. 167.

parliamentary negotiator and militant – failed in 1913. Obviously, the other Belgian Socialists, who were not privy to his negotiations, could not wait patiently while the Catholics publicly stood firm in their opposition to constitutional reform. Vandervelde was trapped between the trenchant opposition of Catholic leader Woeste in Parliament and the militancy of his fellow Socialists in the streets. He had failed to achieve revolutionary reform from within the system.

On 14 April 1913, 300,000 Belgian workers went out on strike. By the end of the first week the number had reached 400,000.¹¹³ The strike proceeded as planned. The Socialist Party maintained order by sanctioning only small demonstrations organized by occupation, eschewing the mass gatherings of earlier years. A cadre of Socialist leaders flanked each procession. Socialists conducted country walks and museum excursions as diversions for the striking workers; Vandervelde's wife, Lalla, organized art exhibitions and concerts; and *Le Peuple* published recipes for "soups communistes" for feeding one hundred mouths at communal kitchens. Headlines proclaimed the heroism of the peacefully striking workers.

When debate resumed in the Chamber, de Broqueville proposed the creation of a parliamentary commission "to find on the provincial and communal level an electoral formula that is superior to the current system, even as it concerns the legislative bodies."¹¹⁴ Vandervelde considered the call for a change in the legislative electorate to be a significant public concession. In fact, it proved to be so radical a departure from the traditional Catholic position that the published version of the parliamentary annals omitted the crucial phrase concerning legislative elections from de Broqueville's speech. Despite appeals from Vandervelde and Hymans, de Broqueville refused to reestablish his original remarks for the record. However, in a clever tactical move, the Liberal deputy from Mons, Fulgence Masson, seconded de Broqueville's original declaration. Negotiations between the Liberal and Catholic leaders and between Liberals and Socialists followed. Finally, with an amendment from the Catholics condemning general strikes in principle, Parliament supported the resolution establishing a constitutional commission.¹¹⁵

On 24 April 1913, the Conseil général voted an end to the strike. At the subsequent extraordinary party congress, the militants' dissatisfaction with the parliamentary leadership was once again evident. The Socialist delegation had not consulted the party before voting for the resolution. A

113. Léon Delsinne, "Les Grèves générales au XXe siècle en Belgique," *Socialisme* 68 (1965): 214.

114. Liebman, "La Pratique de la grève générale," p. 58.

115. For Woeste's version of the events see Woeste, *Mémoires*, pp. 414–25. See also Reginald de Schryver, ed., *Uit het archief Frans van Cauwelaert* (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1971), pp. 138–41.

number of militants charged that, had the strike been allowed to continue, the workers might finally have won true universal suffrage. Vandervelde told the demonstrators to be happy with their “half-victory.” A commission to study the constitutional revision had finally been established. The strike had been forceful and peaceful.

Rosa Luxemburg condemned the strike of 1913 as “an even greater defeat than that of 1902.”¹¹⁶ Once again, the Belgian Socialists had attempted to channel the revolutionary spirit of the masses. With their laborious planning and calculation, she complained, the leaders had removed not only the risks of the strike, but also its necessary shock value. Such an organized general strike under such clear party control would never lead to a revolution, she concluded. And that, as she recognized, was precisely the intention of the Belgian Socialist leaders.

The Paradoxes of the Center

Three times between 1890 and 1914, Belgian Socialists turned to the general strike as the last resort of the workers in their battles for constitutional reform. They relied on the strike as a threat against parliamentary inaction. Vandervelde quite explicitly recognized the place of this tactic in his Socialist strategy: “If the revolutionary riot must break out one day – and we ardently hope that day will never come – it must occur only after the representatives of the proletariat have exhausted all imaginable means for achieving justice.”¹¹⁷ Each time the workers took to the streets, the Belgian Socialist leaders called the attention of Parliament to the very visible and rather menacing energy of the demonstrators whom they represented but could not control. Finally, they interrupted each strike either under threat of escalating violence or the promise of governmental concessions.

Through the course of the three strikes, Vandervelde evolved from his earliest role as one of the more outspoken proponents of using the strike in 1892 to a position in 1913 that found him almost alone in counseling moderation. However, although Vandervelde called for organization and calm during the strikes with an escalating sense of urgency, he never condemned violence in principle. And while he looked more and more confidently to Parliament and its progressive leaders as the path to reform, he never explicitly disavowed his faith in the proletarian revolution.

Throughout the early period of struggle – the heroic years as

116. Rosa Luxemburg, “Où était l’esprit de résolution des chefs?” *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 16 May 1913, in Luxemburg, ed., *Grèves sauvages*, p. 48.

117. Emile Vandervelde, “Pas de réformes, pas d’argent,” *Le Peuple* 30 November 1901.

Vandervelde called them – he helped to define a new democratic socialist strategy. The Belgian Socialists worked to achieve their revolutionary goals through the paths opened by democratic reforms in the political arena. The Belgians clearly stretched Marxist theories of class struggle and of revolution as they developed their democratic socialist practice. Karl Kautsky once suggested, “They are not revisionists, because they have no theory to revise.”¹¹⁸ The Belgians certainly did not dwell on the philosophical differences that separated them. They struggled instead to define a strategy for realizing Marx’s revolution at the crossroads of European Socialism.

Vandervelde argued that the Belgian Socialists’ struggle for universal suffrage was both “more than and less than a revolution.”¹¹⁹ It was less because the demand for universal suffrage was a reformist goal. It was more because the achievement of political equality “would to some extent be the ferment for a social revolution and a decisive step toward the seizure of public power.”¹²⁰ He consciously redefined revolution as substantial, far-reaching social change. Reforms, for Vandervelde, could be revolutionary. The general strikes, the first expression of Vandervelde’s “revolutionary reformism,” marked some of the first steps on the European Socialists’ path from revolutionary international theory to reformist nationalism.

118. Kautsky to Adler, cited in Xavier Mabille, *Histoire politique de la Belgique* (Brussels: CRISP, 1986), p. 203.

119. Emile Vandervelde, interview, *L’Indépendance Belge* 30 July 1902, in Hymans 329, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

120. *Ibid.*

Defending the Indigenous Peoples of the Congo: Socialism and Colonialism

The late-nineteenth-century European race to colonize distant lands and peoples compelled the Socialists of the Second International to react. They improvised their response to the “new imperialism,” adapting Marx’s theories freely to fit this capitalist development. The colonial powers effectively set the terms of the debate, presenting the Socialists with what Vandervelde acknowledged as a “fait accompli.” As “adversaries of all forms of human exploitation, the Socialists were hostile to capitalist colonialization,” Vandervelde explained.¹ But there the Socialists’ consensus ended. Should the Socialists consider the European drive to conquer Africa as an integral stage of capitalist development? Could colonial rule be reformed? And what were the Europeans’ responsibilities to the “uncivilized peoples” of Africa and Asia?

More than any other party in the Second International, the Belgian Workers’ Party was forced to confront colonialism directly. Their king, Leopold II, had carved out his own personal empire eighty times the size of Belgium in the center of Africa. Nowhere were the abuses of colonial power more evident than in King Leopold’s Congo. Throughout Europe and America, critics of colonialism pointed to King Leopold’s domain as the center of the most oppressive of all colonial regimes.²

At first the Belgian Socialists, with the notable exception of Emile Vandervelde, simply looked the other way. As Vandervelde would later explain, by the time the Socialists had won election to Parliament, “it was in reality no longer a question of deciding whether or not to establish colonies: we already had them. It was rather a question of knowing what to do with the colonies that we possessed.”³ In fact, the colony still belonged to the king, who was willing to bequeath it to the Belgian people

1. Emile Vandervelde, “Socialisme et colonialisme,” *Revue Socialiste* March 1909, p. 206.

2. For a comparative discussion of Belgian colonialism as seen through the eyes of contemporaries, see L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

3. Vandervelde, “Socialisme et colonialisme,” p. 207.

only during the unprofitable initial years before the harvesting of rubber began to yield vast profits. The Belgian king's avaricious drive to build a personal empire at the end of the nineteenth century presented the Belgian Socialists with a difficult dilemma. Except for Vandervelde, Belgians generally ignored the colony, which they dismissed as the private affair of the king and his concessionary companies. But the atrocities of the regime attracted worldwide attention. According to historians L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, "Edwardian Englishmen who read about the red-rubber scandals in their morning newspaper were inclined to curse the Belgians as a reprehensible lot, hardly superior to Portuguese and Turks."⁴ The abuses perpetrated in his "private domain" and the power of the concessionary companies were unequaled in French, British, or German colonies. The Belgian Socialists had to act. More openly than any other European Socialist party, the Belgians struggled for two decades to come up with an effective response to colonialism that was consistent with their pragmatic Marxism.

The plight of the indigenous peoples of the Congo deeply touched Emile Vandervelde. His humanitarian feelings drove him to adopt their cause as his own. He could not rest until the abuses of colonialism had been eradicated. Vandervelde was the first Socialist to expose the brutality of the "red-rubber system" of the Congo. His drive to rescue the indigenous peoples from the ravages of colonialism led him into a bitter duel with the Belgian king.

Far more troubling to Vandervelde, his subsequent campaign for parliamentary annexation of the Congo led him into opposition to the majority of the Socialist Party. Both of his crusades for the Congo were deeply rooted in his humanitarian optimism. The Belgian Socialists as well as the leaders of the Second International recognized Vandervelde as one of their foremost experts on colonial affairs. Together with the leading anticolonial lobbyists in Britain, Vandervelde had acquired a detailed and broad understanding of the indigenous cultures of central Africa as well as the inner workings of Leopold's colonial system. He drew on that understanding in his numerous impassioned parliamentary addresses. After 1906 his support for Belgian annexation of the Congo removed him to the margins of the developing Socialist debate.

On the Socialist right within the Belgian Workers' Party and the Second International, revisionists tolerated and tried to ameliorate colonial regimes. Many of these Socialists had clearly imbibed Social Darwinism and believed that it was their mission to civilize darkest Africa. Leaders of the orthodox left either argued for international controls or explained that the colonial competition of the European powers would ultimately

4. Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, p. 214.

result in the destruction of capitalist governments. In the middle, Vandervelde pushed for immediate reforms that he believed would result in revolutionary changes for Leopold's oppressed African subjects. Certainly not exempt from the paternalism so characteristic of the era, Vandervelde repudiated the most extreme positions of the revisionists. But he was also unwilling to wait for the demise of capitalism before undoing the wrongs of King Leopold in the Congo. His anticolonialism paralleled the evolution of his revolutionary reformism, his democratic socialist strategy. That should not be surprising since the indigenous peoples of the Congo were in some ways no more distant to Vandervelde than the Belgian working class itself.

However, in sharp contrast to his eager seeking of compromise on most domestic questions, Vandervelde chose to leave Europe in 1907 rather than vote against his principles. Vandervelde's struggle to rescue the people of the Congo from Leopold's rule would be the loneliest of his political life. In 1920 the Belgian Socialists finally accepted his optimistic humanism. Then, a decade and a half after the first debates, they incorporated Vandervelde's unique position into party practice.

Leopold's Empire and Its Critics

Long before he ascended the Belgian throne in 1865, Leopold had dreamed of forging a Belgian empire. As crown prince he had eagerly studied the Dutch colonial heritage, envying their commercial prosperity.⁵ "No country should be considered complete without overseas possessions and enterprises," he explained in 1863.⁶ Finding little support for his grand projects either in the public at large or among his ministers, the king embarked alone on his course, determined to create a vast personal empire overseas. While Leopold agreed to submit to Belgian constitutional limitations at home, he expected to reign as absolute sovereign abroad.

Leopold moved quickly and decisively. In 1876, he convened a geographical conference in Brussels which marked the beginning of this work. Based on the exploration of H. M. Stanley, Leopold carved out a massive concession for himself in central Africa. When he needed the recognition of the other powers competing to define their own spheres of colonial influence, he negotiated the Berlin Acts in 1885. The United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, and

5. See Jean Stengers, "La Genèse d'une pensée coloniale: Léopold II et le modèle hollandais," in Jean Stengers, *Congo: Mythes et réalités, 100 ans d'histoire* (Louvain la Neuve: Duculot, 1989); and Ruth Slade, *King Leopold's Congo* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), pp. 35-6.

6. Léopold cited in Jean Stengers, *Belgique et Congo: L'Elaboration de la charte coloniale* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1963), p. 18.

Russia all agreed thereby to allow free trade, to outlaw slavery, to preserve the tribal organization of the indigenous peoples and to protect missionaries within their colonies.⁷ That same year, Leopold won an equally coveted recognition from the Belgian Parliament of his sovereignty in the Congo. He now ruled as sovereign of two separate lands, Belgium and the Congo. For the time being they were linked only in the person of their common king.

Leopold no longer had to think of himself as the constitutionally limited monarch of a small nation. The Congo belonged to him alone. He had acquired it with his immense personal fortune and he would make it profitable. Few other rulers in modern times have exercised such absolute power as Leopold wielded in the Congo. His economic control of his lands and their inhabitants was total. The linkage between the directors of the companies granted colonial concessions and the king's advisers and interests had no parallel outside of Belgium. For example, the president and administrator of several of the most important companies involved in the Congo also served as Leopold's financial adviser and sat in the Belgian Parliament. Eventually, the wealth of his massive colonial empire would fund the projects in Belgium of which he had dreamed as a prince.

Leopold's visions were not to be realized immediately or easily. By 1886, the Congo had drained Leopold's personal fortune. The king was therefore forced to apply to the Belgian Parliament in 1890 for a loan to subsidize his colonial expenditures. Skillful maneuvering by Leopold's chief minister Auguste Beernaert ensured that Parliament approved the loan without question.

At first, the Belgian Socialists showed little interest in the king's unprofitable colonial ventures. They ignored his edict declaring all "vacant land" in the Congo – that is, all lands without permanent agricultural settlements – to be the property of Leopold's state. The institution of a system of forced labor, the imposition of military rule, and the granting of exclusive commercial concessions in the king's other state escaped the notice of the young opposition party that as yet had no parliamentary delegates. In the 1890s Belgian Socialists were preoccupied with the more immediately pressing domestic problems of suffrage and working conditions within Belgium.

Leopold intensified his activities in the Congo after the Parliament's approval of his 25,000,000-franc loan. However, new financial difficulties brought the king back to Parliament in 1895. Rather than asking for another Belgian loan, he resigned himself to a new course of action. He would cede the economically troubled Congo to the Belgian people. But Parliament

7. Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871–1914: Myths and Realities* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 70–4.

had first to be convinced to accept his gift.⁸

Meanwhile stories of abuses in the Congo were filtering through the Belgian media from American and British sources. In 1895, an American missionary had provided graphic descriptions of the brutal treatment of indigenous laborers during the rubber harvest. British and American critics cited the missionary's accounts of unruly workers being shot by Leopold's agents. But the reports that outraged readers throughout Europe and America failed to rouse public attention in Belgium, where they were dismissed as the malicious creation of Liverpool merchants. The news of the summary execution of a British subject by a Belgian officer in the Congo later that year caused a deterioration in official British relations with Belgium.

One of the very first Belgians to echo the foreign alarm was Emile Vandervelde. By February 1895 he was writing articles for *Le Peuple* denouncing Leopold's colonialism as authoritarianism.⁹ Leopold and his industrialists exercised sole control over the vast central African region.

The mounting debts of the Congo finally alerted the Socialists to the economic abuses of Leopold's reign in the Congo. At the party congress of 1895, the Belgian Socialists launched a campaign against Belgian annexation of what was called the "Congolese cadaver."¹⁰ Echoing the position of Socialists throughout Europe, they argued that annexation would severely stretch the national budget and preempt domestic expenditures to improve the lives of the Belgian workers. In 1896, the newly elected Socialist deputies to Parliament resolved to vote both against Belgian annexation of the Congo as proposed by Leopold and against the granting of further subsidies. They opposed the king's colonial dreams because of their economic impact on Belgian workers. They decried the expenses incurred in Leopold's colonial adventure. The Liberals joined the antiannexation campaign as did many of the Christian Democrats, who were worried by the growing public antagonism to Leopold's project.

Parliamentary opposition to annexation forced the government to withdraw its proposal, leaving the Parliament in the summer of 1895 to consider yet another loan to support the king. Vandervelde opened the

8. Jean Stengers, "La Première tentative de reprise du Congo par la Belgique (1894–95)," *Bulletin de la Société Royale Belge de Géographie* 73 (1949): 87.

9. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Projets du gouvernement," *Le Peuple* 12 February 1895, and "La Volière congolaise," *Le Peuple* 20 February 1895.

10. Alain Stenmans, *La Reprise du Congo par la Belgique* (Brussels: Editions Techniques et Scientifiques, 1949), p. 105. For a discussion of the working class and imperialism in Britain, see Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). Price suggests that material arguments convinced workers on the issue. He also points to the lack of anti-imperialist leadership among the Socialists as a cause of the failure of the working class to mobilize behind the anti-imperialism campaign.

debate with the main Socialist argument: "What remains is a choice between the enterprise of the Congo and workers' pensions. You propose to grant to the king what you refuse to give to the workers."¹¹ In an article in *Le Peuple* he had observed: "If one day we manage to throw off the capitalist domination under which we are suffering and succeed in giving a true civilization to the European peoples, then it will be time to think about sharing this happy situation with races of color."¹² In the meantime, according to Vandervelde, Belgian annexation of Leopold's Congo would not alleviate oppression in the colony but would increase the level of misery at home. "In a word, we want to wait to treat the Negroes as whites until you have stopped treating whites as Negroes."¹³ One of the most outspoken of Leopold's critics, Vandervelde, in his earliest parliamentary testimony, expounded the anticolonial arguments of a unified Socialist Party.

In the 1890s, Vandervelde charged that Leopold's Congo could never be more than a "colony of exploitation." Indigenous peoples had nothing to gain from colonial contacts with Europeans. As a solution to the crisis in the Congo, Vandervelde called for the region's internationalization. Establishing international control over the Congo would be no more difficult to realize than had been the original creation of an independent Congo state by one man, he reasoned. In essence, Leopold's right to govern the Congo derived from the international Berlin Acts of 1885. Before the final vote on the subsidy, the Socialist deputation walked out of Parliament. They knew they would be outvoted on the question. A deputy from the right jeered, "You might as well go away for good."¹⁴

The terms of the parliamentary debate changed dramatically over the course of the next five years. The value of exports from Leopold's Congo increased at a staggering rate, from 11.5 million francs in 1895 to 47.5 million in 1900.¹⁵ The export of rubber rose from 580 tons in 1895 to 3,740 tons in 1900. In short, once a financial burden, by 1900 the Congo promised Leopold a magnificent prosperity. Leopold no longer needed Belgian annexation, and he was determined to fight against it. But even though the king had shifted sides on the question of annexation, he would not find an ally in the leader of the Belgian Socialists. Vandervelde's position was evolving, too. Just as Leopold declared that he did not need

11. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 26 June 1895, p. 1976.

12. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 19 January 1895. Meeting de la Fédération bruxelloise du parti cited in Stengers, "La première tentative," p. 79.

13. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 27 June 1895, p. 1987.

14. Cited in Stenmans, *La Reprise*, p. 201.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

the help of the Belgians to fund his colonial enterprise, Vandervelde was deciding that the Belgian people through Parliament had a significant role to play in the Congo.

Vandervelde's new interest was set off by shocking new accounts of the abuses in the Congo. Not unrelated to Leopold's new interest in the rapid extraction of rubber, reports again began to circulate in Britain and Belgium of Leopold's agents' cruel treatment of indigenous peoples and of subsequent revolts. The December 1899 revolt of the Budjas against the Société Anversoise pour le Commerce du Congo finally excited significant public concern.

In April 1900, the Belgian Liberal Georges Lorand called on Parliament to condemn the cruel actions of Leopold's colonial agents. He demanded that Parliament intervene immediately "to assure the eventual punishment of the guilty parties and to prevent the repetition of events that are an outrage against humanity and against civilization itself."¹⁶ Vandervelde supported Lorand's resolution, charging that brutality was the fatal consequence of Leopold's colonial absolutism.

In an important departure from earlier Socialist rhetoric that had pitted the Belgian proletariat against the indigenous peoples of Leopold's Congo as competitors for scarce public funds, for the first time Vandervelde likened the oppression of the indigenous peoples of the Congo to the exploitation of the working class in Europe. He appealed to Belgian workers: "The cause of the blacks is your cause . . . not only because you are men, but because you are workers. In the end, this politics will threaten you as well."¹⁷ Vandervelde recognized that Leopold's capitalist ventures in Africa would have dangerous consequences for his Belgian subjects as well as his African ones. Vandervelde's linkage of African exploitation to the struggle of the Belgian proletariat was not echoed within the party. It would have sounded out of place in Socialist discussions in France and Britain as well.

The Belgian Parliament approved Leopold's requests for further subsidies to the half-finished Congo railroad in 1900. Then in February 1901 the head of the government, Paul De Smet de Naeyer, informed the Chamber that he planned to bring the question of annexation back to Parliament. Vandervelde announced the Socialist intention to oppose the motion in an article in *Le Peuple*.¹⁸ Except for a small Catholic group, parliamentary leaders of both the left and the right denounced the project. Leopold himself opposed his government's project. He publicly attacked

16. Georges Lorand cited in *ibid.*, p. 223.

17. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 24 April 1900, p. 1129.

18. Emile Vandervelde, "Belgique et Congo," *Le Peuple* 22 May 1901.

the proponents of annexation, formerly among his dearest friends and closest supporters, as bad patriots.

Vandervelde addressed Parliament in the midst of the summer debate over annexation.¹⁹ He predicted that the government would keep bringing the question of annexation back to the Parliament until it had its way. But for the first time, Vandervelde did not raise objections to the government's project. He hinted rather explicitly in fact that his stand on annexation was shifting. "European civilization is destined to conquer the world," he announced, seemingly without regret.²⁰ When the Socialists replaced the capitalists in the government of European states, they too would spread civilization through colonization. But, unlike the capitalists, they would neither oppress nor exploit indigenous peoples. The Socialists would fulfill their colonial duty to improve conditions in the Congo and rule by justice rather than force.²¹

The Socialists applauded Vandervelde's address enthusiastically. Had they been listening carefully, they would have noted Vandervelde's divergence from the anticolonial position of the Socialist majority. But no one seemed to realize that Vandervelde was beginning to see the merits of parliamentary control over the Congo.

In 1901 Parliament approved a charter that removed even the feeble parliamentary controls over Leopold's colonial activity that existed and agreed to defer annexation until the king himself saw fit to pose the question. Parliament recognized Leopold's sovereignty over l'Etat Indépendant du Congo and gave their king full freedom to contract debts.

In his hour of triumph over his critics in Parliament, Leopold further extended his theater of colonial operations. He established the *Domaine de la Couronne*, or Crown's Domain – after 1906, called the *Fondation de la Couronne* – to channel the ever-increasing profits from the Congo into public works of his own design in Brussels. Under his beneficent guidance, Belgium would reap the rewards of its civilizing king, he proclaimed. With the construction of projects at the palace at Laeken, the building of the grandiose Arch of the Cinquantenaire, and the establishment of a colonial museum at Tervuren, the "builder king" expected finally to realize his dreams.²² Belgian public opinion remained blissfully unaware

19. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 16 July 1901, p. 1967.

20. *Ibid.*

21. For a fuller discussion of what Brunschwig, in discussing Socialist colonialism, calls "clear consciences," see Brunschwig, *French Colonialism*, pp. 167–86.

22. As A. J. Wauters, an expert on the Congo, observed, "Peu de temps après avoir, en dépit des prescriptions de l'Acte général de Berlin, monopolisé la plus grande partie de la récolte de l'ivoire et du caoutchouc, le roi-souverain imagina la constitution d'un domaine particulier dont il se réservait d'utiliser les revenus suivant ses fantaisies personnelles." A. J. Wauters, *Histoire politique du Congo belge* (Brussels: Pierre van Fleteren, 1911), p. 201.

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of the royal schemes. No other colonial power so blatantly siphoned the resources of its distant holdings for domestic purposes.

In Britain, Edgar Morel, a former commercial trader and editor of the *West African Mail*, mobilized a campaign of protest against Leopold's colonial system. He compared the Belgian king's assertion of absolute sovereignty over all "vacant land" in the Congo with the stance adopted by the more benevolent French and British colonial administrations. These other European powers recognized the property rights of indigenous peoples and encouraged their economic production. In contrast, Morel charged, Leopold paid his African workers a mere pittance for their forced labor.

As head of the Congo Reform Association, Morel relentlessly attacked the Belgian king as "a despicable tyrant enriching himself."²³ He warned that, unless world opinion rose up in protest, Leopold's commercial slave trade could spread throughout Africa. In May 1903, in response, the British House of Commons unanimously passed a motion calling on the signatory powers of the Berlin Acts to study the reports of abuses in Leopold's colony and to bring an end to the brutality in the Congo. They dispatched Roger Casement to the Congo to conduct an inquiry.

Georges Lorand echoed the British attack in the Belgian Parliament. That was a brave act. In contrast to Morel's large popular following in Britain, even moderate Belgian politicians condemned the British reformer as a self-interested "Liverpool merchant." Paul Hymans, for example, publicly chided Vandervelde when he began supporting Morel.²⁴ "Belgian opinion remains hesitant," Vandervelde observed in 1907. "It knows there are serious abuses in the Congo, but is distrustful of the British campaign."²⁵

Nevertheless, Vandervelde, like Lorand, allied himself more and more closely with the British campaign, frequently citing British evidence in his speeches and articles. Most of the other Belgian Socialists followed popular sentiment and dismissed the British campaign, but Vandervelde remained steadfast. "I knew Morel well. I was closely associated with his campaign," Vandervelde later recalled. "I was bitterly reproached for that. I have never regretted it."²⁶ Vandervelde and his wife, Lalla, had entered into regular correspondence with Morel by 1903. They informed each

23. Jean Stengers and William Roger Louis, *E. D. Morel's History of the Congo Reform Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

24. See Jean Stengers, "Le Rôle de la Commission d'enquête 1904-05 au Congo," *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientale et slave* 10 (1950): 709.

25. Emile Vandervelde, 10 July 1907, as cited in Stengers and Louis, *E. D. Morel's History*, p. 226.

26. Emile Vandervelde, Manuscript, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

other about their respective campaigns and exchanged publications.²⁷ While Morel only visited Belgium once between 1900 and 1910, Vandervelde, and more often his wife, met the British reformer in Britain.²⁸

At a 1911 London demonstration in Morel's honor, Vandervelde extolled the merits of the Englishman who had become so unpopular in Belgium. Morel "was already striving while others slept, he . . . compelled the blind to see, the deaf to hear; he was the one who saved the people of the Congo by appealing incessantly, indefatigably to the conscience of the civilized world," Vandervelde testified.²⁹ That may well have described Vandervelde's vision of his own struggle as well.

Vandervelde's 1903 campaign against Leopold in the Belgian Parliament paralleled the debates in the British House of Commons, a fact noted by his Belgian critics.³⁰ He argued that colonialism "in the forms that it takes under the capitalist regime" reinforces militarism, increases governmental power at the expense of popular sovereignty, and enslaves indigenous populations.³¹ Vandervelde called on Belgium as a signatory power to the Berlin Acts to intervene. Citing reports from British politicians on the right and left, he carefully documented Leopold's violation of the Berlin Acts. The Belgian king had restricted free trade, expropriated native land, and allowed the concentration of commercial profits in the hands of a small group of men. Leopold's state even encouraged cannibalism, Vandervelde charged, echoing the reports of missionaries. The myriad of graphic reports of the rubber harvest document the cruelty and coercion of the concessionary companies as well.

Leopold's agents abused workers and shot hostages during the extraction of rubber and ivory, all in order to furnish millions of francs to profit his private foundation. Since the king was so actively channeling the ill-gotten profits from his huge colony into the purchase of land in the Belgian capital, Vandervelde suggested facetiously that perhaps there was "some truth to the rumor that the independent state of the Congo is about to annex a part of the city of Brussels."³² Vandervelde called on the Belgian government to send its own study commission to investigate Leopold's abuses. Lorand seconded Vandervelde's accusations in Parliament with a

27. Papiers Morel, Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique, Microfilm, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

28. See, for example, Lalla Vandervelde's letter of 17 July 1908, Papiers Morel, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

29. Emile Vandervelde cited in Stengers and Louis, *E. D. Morel's History*, p. 250.

30. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, *Politique coloniale, Caoutchouc et mains coupées* (Ghent: Volksdrukkerij, 1903).

31. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 1 July 1903, p. 1714. See also Wauters, *Histoire politique*, p. 199.

32. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 1 July 1903, p. 1715.

long speech of his own.

Concerned by the criticism resonating both within Belgium and abroad, Leopold launched a counterattack. He bribed a number of Belgian and European journalists to assist him in a public relations campaign. In their articles, they condemned the British reformers, chiding them for not reforming their own colonies before they cast aspersions on others. When critics challenged the sincerity of his intentions, the king agreed to name an independent committee of investigation.

Leopold's commission presented its report to the king on 31 October 1905. Catholics and Liberals alike were surprised by the commission's revelations of abuses in Leopold's Congo. For the Socialists, the report corroborated the charges Vandervelde had been making for years. However, because the published report stopped short of actually documenting the charges of abuse, it had little public impact within Belgium. British calls for a public presentation of the investigators' reports, although echoed by Vandervelde, went unheeded.³³

In a substantial article in *Vie Socialiste*, "Les Belges et l'Etat Indépendant du Congo," Vandervelde argued that only the Socialists had consistently protested against Leopold's colonial reign.³⁴ At first there had been widespread public outcry against the king's colonial adventures. But that was when those adventures cost the Belgians money. Now, except for the Socialists, almost all of the Belgians had rallied around their king because his colonial exploits had turned profitable. Between 1900 and 1905, the Belgian Parliament had ignored the cries of outrage heard throughout Europe and brushed aside the opposition of the Belgian Socialists. Parliament's tacit support of the king's actions put the Belgian legislators in the untenable position "of carrying the moral responsibilities of an affair from which we don't benefit and of being deeply involved in the vicissitudes of a colonial politics over which we have no control," Vandervelde charged.³⁵ The Socialists alone persisted in retelling the "horrible stories of burned villages, of devastated plantations, of cut-off hands, and of innocent populations gunned down, all for having refused to cooperate with the rubber harvest."³⁶ In conclusion, he vowed that as internationalists the Socialists would continue to struggle against exploitation around the world and would oppose Leopold's colonial regime in the interest of defending the indigenous peoples. In fact, the unanimity

33. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Rapport de la Commission d'enquête," *Le Peuple* 7 November 1905; and Emile Vandervelde, "Le Congo léopoldien," *Le Peuple* 6 December 1905.

34. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Belges et l'Etat Indépendant du Congo," *Vie Socialiste* (1905).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

36. *Ibid.*

of Socialists' views did not go as deep as Vandervelde suggested in his account. The question of annexation would reveal deep theoretical fissures lying just below the surface.

Through his early campaign against Leopold's colonial rule, Vandervelde won recognition within his party as an expert on the Congo. He was the most frequent Socialist speaker in Parliament on colonialism and his frequent articles in *Le Peuple* stood almost alone. This period of leadership would be all too short-lived for Vandervelde.

The tone of the debate changed when Félicien Cattier, a respected Brussels lawyer, corroborated the report of Leopold's committee with his own documented study. The Belgian public finally took notice.³⁷ Cattier systematically examined the evidence and conclusions of Leopold's commission. He defined Leopold's system of property in simple terms and explained its impact on the indigenous peoples of the Congo. He compared Leopold's pronouncements on the subject of "vacant land" to those made by other heads of state. He calculated precisely the immense resources of Leopold's private domain, calling it "one of the strangest creations of the sovereign King."³⁸ Reaffirming the findings of Leopold's commission, Cattier concluded "that the regime of state exploitation must be abolished as soon as possible and be replaced by free trade. The health of the indigenous peoples as well as the economic prosperity and financial health of the state are at stake."³⁹ He then went beyond Leopold's commission, calling for the end of the *corvée*. He appealed to his audience for a new understanding of native culture, collective landholding, and African institutions.⁴⁰ Only with annexation by the Belgian Parliament, would African resources truly be used for the benefit of the Congo.

Vandervelde opened a new attack in Parliament on Leopold's Congo by citing Cattier's report. He reminded Parliament that it was no longer just the British who were alleging abuses. "When we spoke before, you could refuse to believe us, you could suspect our intentions, you had the right to ignore what was not revealed in official documents," he explained. "But today, you realize that you must understand, that you can no longer ignore, that you can no longer be deaf to the appeals and protests that are rising everywhere."⁴¹ While acknowledging the benefits of projects such as the building of the Congolese railroad, he concluded that twenty years of colonization had made the lives of the African people more miserable than ever. In balance, he admitted that the *Domaine de la Couronne* had

37. Félicien Cattier, *Etude sur la situation de l'Etat indépendant du Congo*, 2d ed. (Brussels: Larcier, 1906).

38. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 319–20.

41. Emile Vandervelde cited in Jean Stengers, *Belgique et Congo*, p. 70.



Figure 5 "Private Property" 1906 from J. C. Gould, *Picture Politics* (London, July 1906)

enriched the Belgian capital. But, in increasing the personal power of the king at the expense of the rights of Parliament, the overall result of colonization had been deleterious even for the king's Belgian subjects.

Vandervelde called for broad parliamentary support to put an end to the exploitation of the indigenous peoples of the Congo and the abrogation of parliamentary sovereignty. Because the Belgian government had lent its officials to Leopold's Congo, he reasoned that Parliament had the right to intervene in colonial affairs. It just needed the will to act. As he appealed to Catholics and Liberals as well as Socialists, Vandervelde moderated his attacks. He even hinted that together they might create "an ideal system of colonization."⁴² After subsequent speeches made by Socialist Louis Bertrand and Liberal Georges Lorand, the left resolved that Parliament should demand that the government supply further information on Leopold's colonial enterprise.

On vacation in France, Leopold was outraged by the parliamentary debate. In a letter dispatched in June 1906, he promised two reforms. But he also reasserted his complete authority over his personal colony. "My rights over the Congo cannot be shared; they are the fruits of my own labors and my own expenditure," he asserted.⁴³ The king, not the Parliament, would decide "when the time was ripe" for annexation. The authoritarian tone of his letter infuriated his opponents. "Never have such insolent commands been made to the Parliament," Vandervelde rejoined.⁴⁴ The question of parliamentary sovereignty was clearly at issue as well.

Annexation

It was Vandervelde who asked the government to bring the question of the annexation of the Congo back to Parliament in October 1906. The influential Liberal leader Paul Hymans seconded Vandervelde's appeal and the government reopened the annexation debate. Hymans called for the immediate annexation of the Congo without conditions. The king, however, had previously spelled out a set of specific conditions under which he would allow annexation to be considered by Parliament. Hymans objected, arguing that Parliament should take the king's preconditions simply as advice, not as obligations. The Socialists concurred, defending Parliament's constitutional prerogative to overrule "the Congolese autocracy."⁴⁵ They would set their own terms for the debate.

42. Emile Vandervelde, *Les Crimes de la colonisation capitaliste* (Ghent: Volksdrukkerij, 1906), p. 10.

43. Leopold cited in Barbara Emerson, *Leopold II of the Belgians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 255.

44. Emile Vandervelde, "Ce que vaut la parole du roi," *Le Peuple* 27 November 1906.

45. L. Furnémont cited in Stenmans, *La Reprise*, p. 347.

Defending the Indigenous Peoples of the Congo

Vandervelde now openly supported annexation of the Congo. He explained to his fellow Socialists, as well as to the other members of Parliament, that it was too late simply to abandon the Congo to its own devices. What had been done could not be undone. Therefore, accepting the “fait accompli,” Parliament had but two choices: either acknowledge and tolerate the atrocities or take control of the Congo. “We cannot be responsible before world opinion without having acted ourselves, without having reformed the institutions of the Congo,” Vandervelde argued.⁴⁶ His speech created a sensation on all the benches. A dramatic rhetorical duel between Vandervelde and the king ensued.⁴⁷

The end of December 1906 brought a significant change in the king’s position. The *Times* scolded Leopold; he would “do well to heed” the unanimous opinion in favor of annexation, its editors advised.⁴⁸ The publication of Mark Twain’s “King Leopold’s Soliloquy” in the United States and Theodore Roosevelt’s openly expressed interest in joining the British protest alarmed the king.⁴⁹ He finally agreed to consider annexation. His ministers quietly worked out a treaty, the *Treaté de reprise*, that he found acceptable – it maintained the Fondation de la Couronne.

Parliament seemed more disposed to work toward annexation as well. Over the opposition of the Socialists, who abstained, Parliament approved a motion authorizing a study of the annexation question. Parliamentary leaders then proceeded to name a commission to draft a treaty. Vandervelde and Louis Bertrand, representing the Socialists, served alongside Charles Woeste, a strong supporter of royal absolutism in the Congo; Auguste Beernaert, an early advocate and more recent critic of Leopold’s policies in the Congo; Paul Hymans, a reformer who admired colonial enterprise; Georges Lorand, the outspoken opponent of colonialism; and Jules Renkin, who would later serve as first minister for the Congo. It was Vandervelde’s appointment to the commission that infuriated the king.

In fact, the Socialist leader’s role on the commission should not have caused the king much alarm. Illness prevented Vandervelde from attending the initial meeting and limited his subsequent participation. Although he raised delicate questions about the size of the Congo debt, the quality of the rubber harvest, and the wealth of the royal foundation, he was much less of a presence than anyone had expected. His failure to participate actively was likely the result of his disagreements with the anticolonial position of the Belgian Workers’ Party. And while Vandervelde did not

46. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 7 December 1906, p. 155.

47. Wauters, *Histoire politique*, pp. 309–10.

48. See Emerson, *Leopold II of the Belgians*, p. 256; and E. Morel, *Red Rubber* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906).

49. Mark Twain, *King Leopold’s Soliloquy* (Boston: The P. K. Warren Co., 1905).

shrink from the opportunity to present his position forcefully within party debates, he did not readily expose his divergence from his fellow Socialists to the public. For the next year and a half, his vigorous and outspoken participation at party congresses contrasted markedly with his relative reticence on the parliamentary commission.

As the recognized Socialist expert on colonialism, Vandervelde was asked by the party to write one of the four sections of the report on the Congo that it planned to submit to the International. At the end of June 1907, an extraordinary congress of the party easily approved the first three sections of the report. Hector Denis wrote a section titled "The Principle of Colonization"; Henri LaFontaine, "The Congo as Seen Internationally"; and Léon Furnémont, "Colonial Legislation." Vandervelde's contribution bore the title "What Must the Socialists' Position Be on the Question of the Annexation of the Congo?"

The extraordinary congress rejected Vandervelde's report and refused to forward it to the International with the other three. In it, Vandervelde had reiterated his arguments for annexation. Colonization of the Congo was a fait accompli, he began. As Socialists, members of the Belgian Workers' Party had a moral obligation to do more than issue condemnations of Leopold's abominable regime. To put an end to the corruption and exploitation that flourished under Leopold's colonial absolutism, Belgian Socialists had to recognize the inevitability of annexation of the Congo, Vandervelde explained. Vandervelde argued that, although severing the ties that bound Belgium to the Congo might appear to be most consistent with Marxist theory, it was not possible in practice. He acknowledged that bourgeois colonization inherently abused the rights of "inferior races," but, he concluded, the Socialists had an obligation to bring about reform.⁵⁰ The party could not easily tolerate such an open rejection of its anticolonial position.

Vandervelde was invited to serve as the reporter for the colonial question at the party congress in June 1907. At the outset, he tactfully supported Hector Denis's argument that capitalist colonialism impeded the natural evolution of primitive peoples toward civilization. He described in detail how Leopold's regime in the Congo had reduced the Negroes to servitude. That was a repetition of his earliest arguments. But then Vandervelde boldly reasserted his arguments for annexation, charging that the majority Socialist position in favor of internationalizing the Congo was impractical.

A fierce debate ensued at the congress. At issue was the role Vandervelde had played on the parliamentary commission. Vandervelde asked the party for permission to continue his "struggle for the

50. *Le Peuple* 17 June 1907.

safeguarding of parliamentary prerogatives and native rights.”⁵¹ While he would not call public attention to the division within the party, he refused to vote in Parliament with the Socialist majority against his more and more deeply felt beliefs.

Although absent from the party congress, Louis Bertrand, the other Socialist on the parliamentary commission, addressed a letter to that congress advocating the internationalization of the Congo. Henri LaFontaine seconded Bertrand’s appeal, suggesting that tutors be engaged to introduce the African peoples gradually to civilization. On the left, the more orthodox Louis de Brouckère put forth the Marxist argument that all colonialism inevitably led to militarism and the exploitation of an “inferior” race. Eugène Hins, a veteran of the First International, then repeated the decade-old complaint of Belgian Socialist reformers that subsidies to the colony would take money away from old-age pensions for the Belgian proletariat. And Modeste Terwagne, even further to the right, suggested that the annexation of the Congo would allow Belgian Socialists to demonstrate the possibilities of colonization without exploitation. At the climax of the debate, Vandervelde threatened to resign as a parliamentary deputy unless the congress granted him the freedom to vote his conscience. They did.

That fall, the parliamentary commission met thirteen times. Together, Socialist and Liberal leaders Vandervelde and Hymans appealed to the commission to recognize equal rights for all citizens of the Congo. After discussing rights of the indigenous people for two sessions in December, however, they were outvoted. They lost, too, on the issue of parliamentary control of the colonial budget.

But just as Leopold seemed on the verge of victory, the terms of his treaty were revealed. They made public Leopold’s intention to preserve his *Fondation de la Couronne*. The foundation’s holdings were revealed to be much more extensive than anyone had expected. Vandervelde, caught for so long between the pro-government members on the commission and his fellow Socialists outside, enthusiastically, but temporarily, returned to the fold. He condemned the governmental project. When the Liberals rather unexpectedly joined the now united Socialist attack on annexation, Woeste acknowledged the impending defeat of the treaty. The British, the Americans, and even the Belgian cabinet added their pressure on the king to modify his terms.

In an editorial following the heated party congress of June 1907, the editor of *Le Peuple* praised the Belgian Socialists for boldly tackling the difficult question of colonialism in open debate. “We say courageously,” the editor wrote, “because it is only in Belgium that the Socialists as a party

51. *Le Peuple* 1 July 1907.

have dared to discuss the full implications of the colonial question.”⁵² None of the other European Socialist parties had directly confronted this difficult issue. Only the German Social Democrats attempted to set colonialism in a broader theoretical context. With few exceptions, neither the French nor the British Socialists provided leadership to the anticolonial movements in their countries.

The Second International did not take a decisive stand on colonialism. At its congresses, colonialism was debated under the broader rubric of imperialism. When it first appeared on the agenda at the Paris congress of the International in 1900, Vandervelde joined Henri Van Kol, Eduard Bernstein, and Jean Jaurès in proclaiming himself a partisan of “positive colonial politics.”⁵³ In a resolution condemning colonialism, however, the majority of delegates to the congress linked capitalist imperialism with the militarism of bourgeois governments. As historians Madeleine Reberieux and Georges Haupt have noted, pity for the indigenous peoples rather than proletarian solidarity inspired the European Socialist response.⁵⁴

Delegates to the 1904 Amsterdam congress in turn questioned the orthodox resolution that had been approved in 1900. After much debate, a compromise resolution was written that repudiated capitalist colonialism in principle but called on each national party to define its own strategy for instituting reforms to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples. The Socialists were to vote in their Parliaments against colonial expeditions, military budgets, and the oppression of indigenous peoples, but to support measures such as public works that would improve conditions in the colonies. The resolution carefully avoided the theoretical question of whether imperialism was a necessary precondition for industrialization – which would have to be endured – or a stage of capitalist development that could be fought. The International’s resolution allowed the individual Socialist parties to chart their own course.

Colonialism moved to center stage at the 1907 Stuttgart congress of the Second International. The lines of ideological division were now more clearly demarcated and mirrored the splits within the Belgian party. Three factions presented resolutions for debate. On the extreme right, the German deputy E. David argued that colonization was an integral element of civilization and thus should be pursued by Socialists in the interest of progress. The moderate Jaurès, together with the Dutch Socialist H. Van Kol and Vandervelde, countered that colonialism as it was being pursued by bourgeois governments could be neither tolerated nor denied. The

52. “La Coloniasation,” *Le Peuple* 2 July 1907.

53. H. Van Kol cited in G. Haupt and M. Reberieux, *La Deuxième Internationale et l’Orient* (Paris: Cujas, 1967), p. 21.

54. For an excellent discussion of the questions in a European context see Haupt and Reberieux, *La Deuxième Internationale et l’Orient*.

conditions endured by the indigenous peoples under European regimes cried out for immediate reform. On the left, Lenin and Karl Kautsky, who had just published his *Sozialismus und Kolonial Politik*, analyzed the economic foundations of colonialism.⁵⁵ They decried attempts to associate colonialism with progress, using the Europeans' desperate struggle to secure colonies as further proof of the validity of Marx's economic predictions. They prophesied that the European drive for colonies would result in a war between the imperial powers. At the end of the long debate, the orthodox Kautsky convinced the Stuttgart congress to approve by a narrow margin the reformists' motion with amendments. His amendments condemned colonialism in principle as capitalist oppression.⁵⁶

The Stuttgart debate carried over into the December 1907 congress of the Belgian Workers' Party. The only Belgian Socialist to criticize the Stuttgart resolution was Eugène Hins, who condemned the Second International for presuming to dictate to national parties. All of the other Belgian Socialists, from the right as well as the left, used the Stuttgart resolution to support their own positions.⁵⁷ Even Vandervelde cited the International's resolution to reinforce his argument that European colonization of Africa was inevitable. He argued that Belgian Socialists should work to bring reform to the Congo through annexation. However, in his formal resolution, he denounced colonial abuses and called on the Socialists to vote against the Congo budget that had been proposed in Parliament. In an attempt presumably to reconcile his position with that of the Socialist majority, his resolution concluded with the demand that the Congo be subjected to international controls so that the Europeans could prepare the indigenous peoples for their eventual return to independence. The orthodox Georges Hubin, one of Vandervelde's principal opponents during the debate, commended him for finally accepting the Socialist position. Ironically, it was the opponents of Vandervelde's resolution who cited Vandervelde's own annexationist arguments, drawn from earlier debates, in their dissent from the party position.

Vandervelde's relations with the party grew more strained as Parliament finally prepared to vote on annexation. *Le Peuple* published a series of editorials denouncing annexation and criticizing Vandervelde's assumption of independence from the party. Vandervelde responded in frustration, questioning the personal nature of the newspaper's attacks on his position.⁵⁸ Under siege both from within his own party and from the outside,

55. Karl Kautsky, *Sozialismus und Kolonialpolitik* (Berlin, 1907).

56. For Vandervelde's assessment of the debate, see Emile Vandervelde, "Les Socialistes et la reprise du Congo," *Le Peuple* 19 January 1908.

57. *Le Peuple* 28 December 1907, p. 2.

58. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Socialistes et la reprise du Congo."

Vandervelde grew increasingly bitter.⁵⁹

At the same time that Vandervelde was struggling to justify his support for annexation to the Socialists, between December 1907 and February 1908, public opposition to Leopold's colonial foundation was growing. That opposition lent support to Vandervelde's demands for immediate reform. A supporter of annexation in principle, Vandervelde continued to denounce the government's proposals.

The Ligue belge des droits de l'homme, as part of its campaign to denounce all violations of the rights of man, called meetings in Belgium to protest the king's foundation while the Congo Reform Association organized mass rallies in Britain. A 21 February assembly at Queen's Hall in London, attended by the lord mayor, members of Parliament, and a number of municipal officials, drafted resolutions condemning the greed of the Belgian king. The British Parliament supported them unanimously. The American government joined the British in pressing the Belgian Parliament to enact substantial reforms in the Congo before proceeding with annexation.⁶⁰

When the king's chief minister Jules de Trooz died, Leopold lost his last loyal supporter. F. Schollaert, who replaced de Trooz, was known to be hostile to the king's foundation, as were the king's secretary, Count Edmond Carton de Wiart, and the heir to the throne, Prince Albert. As Barbara Emerson explains, "Alone, morose, filled with rancor towards everyone, in February 1908, Leopold capitulated and informed the government that he would abandon the *Fondation de la Couronne*."⁶¹ That cleared the way for parliamentary approval of annexation.

Vandervelde abstained from the final commission vote on annexation on 25 March 1908. His advocacy of annexation, albeit with significant reforms, placed him in direct opposition to the majority of his party. He obviously found that position to be very difficult. While he would not compromise his convictions, he preferred to abstain rather than to jeopardize party unity.

"Le cas Vandervelde" dominated the April 1908 congress of the party. For the first time, the Socialists had made colonialism an issue during their spring electoral campaign and Eugène Hins complained that Vandervelde's "dissidence" had weakened the Socialists' position. Eduard Anseele once again challenged Vandervelde's freedom to express his own personal opinions publicly. "I am not claiming to be independent of the working

59. See Emile Vandervelde, "Les Beckmesser du socialisme international," *Le Peuple* 16 February 1908; and M. Reberioux, "Les Conflits de tendances dans le Parti ouvrier belge au moment de la reprise du Congo," *Mouvement Social* 45 (October–December 1963): 110–20.

60. Stenmans, *La Reprise*, p. 389.

61. Emerson, *Leopold II*, p. 262.

class,” Vandervelde angrily replied.⁶²

The full parliamentary debate opened in April 1908. Jules Destrée spoke for the Socialists. “We will deal with colonialism as we have dealt with capitalism,” he declared. “We will denounce its inherent evil and search for immediate reforms.”⁶³ By our example, he proclaimed, the Belgian Socialists’ opposition to annexation would demonstrate the potential of a consistent anticolonial politics to the then divided international Socialist movement.

In a series of articles in *Le Peuple* that were inspired by Kautsky’s *Sozialismus und Kolonial Politik*, Louis de Brouckère elaborated on the Belgian Socialist opposition to colonialism.⁶⁴ Colonization caused international conflict and necessarily resulted in the exploitation of indigenous peoples. Internationalization was a particularly appropriate solution for the Congo because the colony traced its very origins to the international Berlin Acts, he argued. Most, but not all, Belgian Socialists concurred.

In his May 1908 speech to Parliament, Vandervelde clearly explained his position on annexation. He first acknowledged the disagreement that distanced him from “the majority of my friends.” But, he explained, he had come to one of those moments “in political life when one has a moral obligation to speak what one believes to be the truth.”⁶⁵ He realized that he would be opposing the majority of his fellow Socialists. After establishing his vehement condemnation of capitalist colonialism, he declared his recognition of the fact that colonization would continue “as long as there are barbarous peoples and civilized peoples.”⁶⁶ Annexation held out the hope of reform to the indigenous peoples oppressed by Leopold’s regime. However, Vandervelde announced that he would vote against the proposed treaty because it did not sufficiently limit the king’s powers in colonial affairs. Leopold’s government had not provided any evidence of its intention to respect the communal ownership of vacant lands and the indigenous peoples’ rights to raw material, to end forced labor and the *corvée*, or to rechannel the revenues from the colony back to the Congo. In concluding, Vandervelde looked beyond the frustrating morass that engulfed the Congo debate. “The day will come when we will make good all the evil our country has done to the Negroes of Africa,” he

62. See clippings in Hymans 488, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

63. Cited in Maxime Steinberg, “Belgique: La Crise congolaise dans le POB, 1907–1908,” in Haupt and Reberieux, *La Deuxième Internationale et l’Orient*, p. 14.

64. See, for example, Louis de Brouckère, “Contre la politique coloniale,” *Le Peuple* 15 November, 1908.

65. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 2 May 1908, p. 1780.

66. *Ibid.*

prophesied.⁶⁷ That was the fervent hope that supported him through his lonely struggle. Vandervelde did not address Parliament on the Congo question again until 22 July 1908.

Within the party, Vandervelde openly raised the issues that separated him from his fellow Socialists. He had been moved to strike out and define his own position because he felt the urgent need to implement change in the Congo immediately and to end Leopold's absolute rule. "I do not favor annexation because I agree with the capitalist form of colonization," he reiterated. "I support annexation in the interest of the indigenous peoples. I believe that the only way out of this indefensible system of oppression is parliamentary control over the Congo."⁶⁸ He recalled that throughout the decade preceding the parliamentary vote on annexation he had appealed repeatedly for the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and the elimination of the abuses of Leopold's regime. In the end, his humanitarian concern for the rights of the indigenous peoples had led him to support annexation.

Still at odds with his friends, Vandervelde left for the Congo before the decisive votes on annexation. In his absence, the Socialists tried in vain to amend the agreement and then voted as a block against it on 20 August 1908.

The Belgian Congo

Vandervelde's two African voyages reinforced his opposition to traditional Socialist anticolonialism and deepened his fervor for annexation and reform. His time in the Congo healed the loneliness that had enveloped him throughout the discussions in the party congresses and the debates in Parliament because it reconfirmed his determination to defend the rights of the Africans.⁶⁹

Vandervelde traveled throughout the Congo, reporting in detail on the living conditions of the Africans and on the system that perpetuated the king's exploitation of the indigenous peoples. He published his observations from this first visit, from 23 July to 25 October 1908, first as a series of articles in *Le Peuple* and subsequently as a monograph, *Les Derniers Jours de l'Etat du Congo*.⁷⁰

In these publications he substantiated his decade of criticism of Leopold's regime with information gleaned from missionaries, company officials, and governmental officers. He vividly described the effects of

67. Ibid.

68. Emile Vandervelde, Manuscript, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

69. Emile Vandervelde, Manuscript, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

70. Vandervelde, *Les Derniers Jours de l'Etat du Congo: Journal de voyage*, (Mons: La Société Nouvelle, 1909), p. 142.

twenty-one days of forced labor on men in the forests of the Upper Congo. These indigenous peoples were driven from their villages, removed from their families, deprived of their accustomed foods, and forced to toil in forests, working in water up to their knees, surrounded by leopards and other dangerous animals.⁷¹ The system of forced labor quite literally returned the colony to feudal conditions, he wrote. "The posts are fortified 'burgs.' The white seigneur lives there with his knights, receiving dues in kind and in service from the serfs who live in the surrounding area and are subject to the *taille* and the *corvée*."⁷² Even the enlightened capitalists who were reaping immense profits from the system realized that, sooner or later, forced labor would have to be abolished, he noted.

Vandervelde vigorously attacked Leopold's claim that he had only harvested "vacant land." Europeans needed to understand that, prior to colonization, the indigenous peoples had owned land communally, not individually, Vandervelde explained. Leopold's agents were confiscating the products of the indigenous peoples' land. There was no such thing as truly "vacant land" in the Congo.

Vandervelde confirmed for his European audience that the Congo was truly "the cursed land of forced work, the country of blood, mud, and gold" described by the British agents.⁷³ He held Leopold personally responsible for the abominable conditions of the Congo. Recounting "the ghastly story" of a dying man whose fingers had been eaten off in a Congolese hospital during the night while the nurse was off duty, Vandervelde appealed for "an end to a state of affairs that has endured for too long." The incident illustrated the self-interested and cruel choices made by the king who "with his million-franc expenditures on the arcade of the Cinquanteaire or the decoration of his palace at Laeken, could have created hospitals for 80,000 francs each in all of the important posts of the Congo."⁷⁴

Vandervelde recounted the most gruesome stories of the suffering endured by the indigenous peoples of the Congo, in the words of historian Thomas Laqueur, "to arouse the 'sympathetic passions' and make 'is' seem, at least for a moment, to imply 'ought.'"⁷⁵ Vandervelde wanted to move his European readers to act, to end the decades of abuse inflicted by Leopold's colonial regime. He brought together the statistical details of a characteristically positivist inquiry and the compassion of an observer who had been deeply moved. Although Vandervelde's subjects were very

71. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9.

75. Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

real, not fictional like the characters in the eighteenth-century novels analyzed by Laqueur, the subjects of Vandervelde's "humanitarian narratives" were just as distant.

In his book Vandervelde condemned the missionaries, who had profited from the colonial system, but he carefully noted that, contrary to other reports, the priests in Kangu spent more on the education of their students than they earned from their labor. Vandervelde also refrained from attacking the governmental officials stationed in the Congo. They had openly shared their criticism of the regime with him during their conversations, he reported. They understood the system too well to be servile supporters.

Vandervelde did not blame the individual agents – the capitalists, missionaries, and government officials – for colonial atrocities. These men only served as "tools in the hands of stronger and more evil men."⁷⁶ But to excuse them from personal responsibility only proved further the urgency of abolishing the system altogether, he concluded.

Vandervelde reported how overjoyed he felt as he stood in Boma finally hearing the news of Parliament's vote in favor of the annexation of the Congo. He recalled his sense of wonder at the enormous possibilities that stretched before him. The models for colonial development without oppression already existed in the other African colonies, especially the British ones, he noted. The abuses of Leopold's colonial regime were so appalling that the Belgians could begin by examining existing French and British colonial regimes as the models of better systems. Among the immediate reforms that he advocated were paying the indigenous peoples for work that they freely chose to perform and recognizing their rights to communal lands. He acknowledged that reforms would be costly, but he argued that they were nevertheless indispensable. Besides, he explained, "for men who are as active, as industrious, and as energetic as the Belgian capitalists, the Congo offers an admirable field of operation full of possibilities."⁷⁷

Vandervelde's descriptions of the rivers, the forests, and the villagers of the Congo reveal the naïveté typical of a European voyaging for the first time to a distant continent.⁷⁸ Describing his initial expedition away from a European outpost, for example, Vandervelde reported: "Near the station, civilization continued to filter in, but half an hour away, in the next village, we found ourselves in the midst of total savagery. Maybe it is

76. Vandervelde, *Les Derniers Jours*, p. 71.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

78. See, for example, Henry Stanley's descriptions cited in Christopher Hibbert, *Africa Explored, Europeans in the Dark Continent, 1769–1889* (New York: Norton, 1982); and Patrick Brantinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).



Figure 6 Investigation in the Congo, 1908. Institut Emile Vandervelde

different in regions that are not yet really occupied by whites, but in all sincerity, even in the most frightful back alleys (in Belgium), I have rarely seen men who appeared so dirty, so famished, so degraded from all points of view as the Wangata.”⁷⁹ His descriptions were founded on his deep sympathy for an exploited people, but, characteristically, they also conveyed the sense that he was observing an exotic species.

His second book on Africa was less a travelogue than a call for reform. Published in 1911, *La Belgique et le Congo* was Vandervelde’s response to Belgian annexation of the Congo.⁸⁰ In it, he first narrated the history of Leopold’s colonial rule and then discussed his own proposals for parliamentary colonial rule. Leopold’s system had been based on two quite simple ideas, Vandervelde explained: forced work and the confiscation of all unoccupied “vacant land”. To emphasize the harshness of Leopold’s regime, Vandervelde repeated the now well-known stories of the baskets of hands severed from recalcitrant laborers. “One thing is unfortunately very clear,” he concluded. “Under Leopold’s regime, civilization itself, with its railroads, its steamboats, and its improved weapons has served for the most part only to intensify the pillage of natural wealth and the

79. Vandervelde, *Les Derniers Jours*, p. 103.

80. Emile Vandervelde, *La Belgique et le Congo* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1911).

exploitation of human material.”⁸¹ Grand works had been created, he conceded, but at an untold cost.

Vandervelde complained that since annexation, although the Belgian government had talked of reform, it had extended only revocable concessions to the indigenous population. The inalienable rights of the indigenous peoples had not been recognized. The government still used the terminology of “vacant lands.” And although commercial liberty had been declared, “nothing has really changed in the feudal system of land holding.”⁸² It was not surprising therefore that Belgian decrees were received with skepticism in the Congo. “If nothing is easier than the creation of a bad system,” he added philosophically, “nothing is more difficult than to reform it.”⁸³

More systematically than ever before, in *La Belgique et le Congo*, Vandervelde justified his beliefs in the possibilities of colonial reform. Countering the demand made by many of his friends that the Congo be given back to the indigenous peoples themselves, he contended that in their semicivilized state, the indigenous peoples could not be expected to govern themselves or to run their own railroads. The indigenous peoples had been pulled partway into civilization and that could not be undone. On the other hand, in opposition to the colonialists, who saw the evolution of civilization as a straight line progressing ever forward and sweeping the indigenous peoples with it, Vandervelde argued for the recognition and preservation of fundamental African institutions, such as polygamy, that were intrinsic to their culture. He proposed a series of specific reforms in transportation, health care, education, and agricultural production.

Vandervelde still defined himself as an anticolonialist. His position did not contradict the basic tenets of Marxist theory, he maintained. His was “an indigenous Socialist politics, a politics of emancipation and defense of the oppressed.”⁸⁴ He believed in the ultimate socialist goal – indigenous self-rule through the gradual withering away of colonial governments, he asserted. The key word for Vandervelde here was “gradual”. Just as Socialists chose to work to improve the lives of workers at home while they struggled to abolish capitalism, he reasoned, so too they must introduce reforms to the colonies in anticipation of eventual emancipation.

Vandervelde’s two voyages to the Congo firmly established his reputation as an expert on African colonial affairs. In his numerous articles, he described conditions in the Congo and justified his unique position as

81. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 160

83. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

an anticolonialist striving for reform.⁸⁵ Vandervelde complained that the government's colonial authorities, such as Jules Renkin, the minister of colonial affairs, never left their boats during their travels to the Congo. Few of the critics of colonialism had ever even been to Africa.

The annexation of the Congo did not end the Belgian Socialist debate over colonialism. At the November 1908 meeting of the Conseil général, Eduard Anseele and Vandervelde heatedly debated Socialist participation on the Conseil colonial and the pending parliamentary vote on the Congo budget. Still under attack by Anseele for pursuing his "socialisme indépendant," Vandervelde once again threatened to resign as a parliamentary deputy.⁸⁶ Eventually, the Conseil approved a compromise resolution. The Socialists agreed to struggle to defend the indigenous peoples and to push for reforms that would improve their conditions under the existing colonial regime. They assigned responsibility for annexation to the bourgeoisie.

Vandervelde continued to lead the parliamentary campaign to achieve reforms in the Congo. In March 1909 he questioned the minister for colonial affairs about labor conditions and the recruitment of indigenous workers. During the debate of February–March 1910, he protested delays in the enactment of the promised reforms, providing statistics to document his charges of the persistence of abuses. He pushed the government to change labor and property legislation and to ensure free trade.⁸⁷ In a second long speech in March, he denounced the transfer of revenue from the Congo to Belgium. His rhetoric had not weakened: "For a quarter of a century, King Leopold has enslaved the blacks of the Congo. He has not shrunk from employing every method to carve them up, to grind them down, to ransom them without mercy."⁸⁸ Leopold had summarily massacred the indigenous peoples in the interest of "beautifying the palace at Laeken, rescuing the Palace of Justice, creating a square in Ixelles, and buying a few stones for the basilica at Koekelberg," Vandervelde charged.⁸⁹ During the February 1911 debate, Vandervelde called again for free trade and demanded that the state regulate companies holding concessions. Throughout, he affirmed his faith in the future of the Belgian Congo, avowing his belief "that the time will come when the exploitation of man

85. Emile Vandervelde, "Au centre de l'Afrique, Le Pays des Budjas," *La Revue du Mois* 10 January 1909, pp. 43–59. See also Emile Vandervelde, "Socialisme et colonialisme," *Revue Socialiste* March 1909; and Emile Vandervelde, "Belgium and the Reforms of the Congo," *Contemporary Review* December 1909, pp. 652–9.

86. Steinberg, "Belgique," p. 120.

87. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 3 February 1910, pp. 444–5.

88. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 3 March 1910, p. 748.

89. *Ibid.*

by man will give way to the exploitation of the earth's natural resources by all of humanity, free and liberated."⁹⁰

Vandervelde soon turned his reforming zeal against the missionaries. He had become embroiled in a debate with the church over their missionary practices in the Congo. Vandervelde ultimately rejected the first part of David Livingstone's well-known triad – "Christianity, Commerce and Civilization" – although he maintained his faith in commerce and civilization.⁹¹ The missionaries' failure to understand the indigenous ways of the African communities left the people they had converted demoralized, he charged.⁹² The church countered Vandervelde's articles and parliamentary speeches with its own pamphlets. The author of one brochure suggested that Satan had attended a meeting of the Brussels Freemasons, and finding Vandervelde there, heard the Socialist vow to turn the Belgian people away from the missionaries.⁹³

Vandervelde also pushed for changes in the practices of the private companies holding concessions in the Belgian colony. These companies still limited the rights of indigenous peoples to gather their local products and to sell them throughout the colony. The private companies perpetuated the abuses of Leopold's regime, Vandervelde alleged.⁹⁴

British reformers continued to attack the Belgian government for its failure to introduce real reform in the Congo. Morel led the charge, announcing simply, "The System still endures."⁹⁵ The zeal of British critics caused even Vandervelde to distance himself slightly from them. In *Le Peuple*, he contrasted foreign distrust of the Belgian government's intentions with his own conviction that eventually, under continued Socialist pressure, reforms would be achieved in the Congo.⁹⁶

Vandervelde and Morel maintained their relations until the war,

90. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, 1910–11. Chambre des députés. Compte rendu analytique*, 1 February 1911.

91. David Livingstone cited in Winifried Baumgart, *Imperialism: The Idea and Reality of British and French Colonial Expansion, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 14.

92. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Missions au Congo belge," *Grande Revue* 10 January 1911, pp. 5–22; and Emile Vandervelde, preface to Lucien Vertongen, *La Cléricalisation du Congo* (Brussels: H. Kumps-Robyn, 1912).

93. K. Beyaert, *Onze Missionarissen. Antwoord der Belgische Vaders aan E. Vandervelde* (Brussels: Karel Bayaert, 1912), Archives, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. See also "M. Vandervelde refait ça," Archives, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven; and Eméri Cambier, "Lettre ouverte à M. Vandervelde" (1912), Archives, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

94. Emile Vandervelde, "Belgium and the Reforms of the Congo," *Contemporary Review* December 1909, pp. 153–9.

95. E.D. Morel, *The Future of the Congo* (London: Smith, Elden & Co., 1909).

96. Emile Vandervelde, 28 November 1909, cited in Stengers and Louis, *E. D. Morel's History*, p. 231.

although more and more often Vandervelde's wife, Lalla, served as the indirect conduit between the two men. She sent Morel reports from the Congo as well as news of parliamentary debates, relaying Vandervelde's reports on the spread of sleeping sickness in Katanga, for example.⁹⁷ Morel, in turn, sought information from her on the best approach to take in addressing the Belgian king.⁹⁸ Morel mused in a letter to Vandervelde: "My God, why aren't you minister of colonial affairs in Belgium and why am I not the chief of your cabinet? In three months we would have buried the system by breaking the concessions and wresting the subsidies from them. In five years we would have created an administrative machine on practical, just, healthy, and scientific foundations."⁹⁹ Morel trusted Vandervelde almost alone among the Belgians. Unlike the rest of his compatriots, Vandervelde never really seemed to lose faith in the British either.¹⁰⁰ In 1911 Vandervelde introduced the now extremely unpopular Morel at the Université nouvelle in Brussels for a speech about Nigeria.¹⁰¹ As late as 1915, although apologizing that he was preoccupied by the war, Vandervelde agreed to speak in Britain about the Congo.¹⁰²

Vandervelde was in great demand as a speaker in Britain because he defined a unique position on colonialism. Eminently knowledgeable about the most grievous example of the Europeans' exploitation of Africa, Vandervelde nevertheless addressed his audiences buoyed by his hope for reform. Within the Belgian Workers' Party, where the colonial issue was anxiously debated for a decade and a half, Vandervelde's call for parliamentary control of the Congo placed him outside the position adopted by the majority. In the more theoretical debates of the congresses of the Second International, he stood between the two German Socialists who defined the poles of anticolonialism. Vandervelde was more radical than Eduard Bernstein, who defended the right of "civilized peoples" to tutor the indigenous peoples from inferior civilizations. But he did not follow Karl Kautsky in condemning imperialism as intrinsically evil and considering it as a stage in capitalist development. Vandervelde's position

97. Papiers Morel, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

98. See in particular the exchange of letters of January 1910, in which Vandervelde was apparently at least tangentially involved. Papiers Morel, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

99. Morel to Vandervelde, 9 February 1910, Papiers Morel, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

100. See, for example, Lalla's letter to Morel relaying Vandervelde's complaints over Conan Doyle's recent book on the Congo. Lalla Vandervelde to Morel, 22 October 1909, Papiers Morel, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

101. A. Wauters, "M. Morel à l'Université nouvelle," *Mouvement géographique* 21 May 1911.

102. Emile Vandervelde, "Belgian and British Interests in Africa," *Journal of the Africa Society* 1915, pp. 266-70.

revealed his faith in the Belgian Parliament, a faith few other Socialists shared.

Above all, Vandervelde was driven by his deeply-felt concern for the Congo's indigenous peoples.¹⁰³ In the 1890s Vandervelde's revulsion at the atrocities committed by Leopold's agents in the Congo had driven him to strike out in an independent direction. A decade later, alone among the Belgian Socialists, he was willing to assume the risks inherent in annexation in order to strive for a better life for the people of the Congo. One of the earliest and staunchest nineteenth-century critics of colonialism, he acknowledged colonialism as an established fact in the first decade of the twentieth century and set about to introduce reforms.

The struggle to achieve those reforms, in opposition not only to the right but to the left as well, had proved personally trying. "It has been said, with reason, that this was our Dreyfus affair. It took more than ten years – at the price of tremendous efforts – for the truth to triumph, for Leopold's system to perish, and for a new era to begin in the Congo," he concluded.¹⁰⁴ Ten years after the bitter annexation debates, Vandervelde's indignation and his reformist zeal would finally be accepted in Socialist circles. "Misunderstood and blamed by the Socialists of 1908," Jean Stengers writes, "Vandervelde was in effect the forerunner of Socialism in 1920."¹⁰⁵ Eventually, the Socialists did adopt Vandervelde's position. Then he could look back with pride on the parliamentary reforms that had transformed the Congo.¹⁰⁶

103. Emile Vandervelde, "Socialisme et colonialisme," pp. 206–7.

104. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Meeting international de Londres," *Le Peuple* 11 December 1913.

105. J. Stengers, *Belgique et Congo*, p. 199.

106. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Deux Colonies," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 8 July 1930; Emile Vandervelde, "Au courant de la plume," *L'Avenir Social* 1930; Emile Vandervelde, "Les Deux Edouard Anseele et le programme colonial du Parti ouvrier belge," *Le Peuple* 12 June 1938; and Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 25 March 1930, 14 June 1932, and 22 February 1933.

Socialist Comrades: The Second International

Inspired by the theories of Karl Marx and guided by the praxis of working-class movements throughout Europe, Socialists from Germany, France, and Britain convened the first meeting of the Second International in 1889. In the words of Leszek Kolakowski, “The International seemed to be the first true embodiment of Marx’s dream . . . of a marriage between socialist theory and the workers’ movement, between the class struggle and the scientific analysis of social processes – two phenomena of independent origin, condemned to impotence unless they could achieve this state of symbiosis or identity.”¹ For twenty-five years, the leaders of European Socialism gathered to debate Marxist theory and to discuss national strategies. They carried on their discussions not only at the congresses of the International, but through almost daily correspondence, on mountain retreats, and late at night in their homes and in cafés.

For a quarter of a century, Emile Vandervelde presided over the European Socialist movement. The ever-present danger of factionalism along national and ideological lines called Vandervelde to a pivotal position as conciliator in the International. As president of the Second International, he also chaired the proceedings of the International Socialist Bureau, defining the compromises that resolved the arguments over Socialist theory and practice. Vandervelde has been remembered by historians neither as an original theorist nor as a fiery leader of worker rebellion. Vandervelde’s constant but subtle presence on the socialist stage has paled in the historical record next to that of a Karl Kautsky, Jean Jaurès, or Rosa Luxemburg. Vandervelde himself dismissed his presidency “of a movement spearheaded by Bebel, Liebknecht, Jaurès, and Jules Guesde,” as that of a “major bit player.”² In contrast to the historians, Vandervelde’s Socialist contemporaries, however, regarded the Belgian Socialist as the central,

1. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 2, *The Golden Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 4.

2. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d’un militant socialiste* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1938), p. 147.

though often behind-the-scenes, formulator of Socialist positions. He nurtured the comradeship that held the movement together until the war and defined the democratic socialist strategy that endured the war.

Most historians of the Second International have studied only the public debates of the International's congresses. In his own memoirs of the period, Vandervelde described those congresses only after he had recalled in vivid detail "my somewhat nomadic existence as a Socialist *Wanderer*."³ Especially in the period before his marriage to Lalla Speyer, Vandervelde traveled extensively throughout Europe, combining tourism and propaganda. Journeying by bicycle, on foot, and by train, Vandervelde observed landscapes, investigated working conditions, and discussed Marxist theory. He hiked, dined, and discussed at the rural retreats of leftist intellectuals.

Together with the French Socialist Albert Thomas, he lodged frequently in France with the renowned hostess Madame Ménard-Dorian at the Faisanderie. Victor Hugo and Victor Considérant, guests before Vandervelde's time, were remembered in portraits on the wall. During the time of the Dreyfus affair, Clemenceau had regularly frequented her salon. A relative latecomer, Vandervelde recalled a typical evening chez the elderly Madame Ménard: "The English Labor Party deputies rubbed shoulders with exiled Bulgarian agrarians, Irish Fenians, and members of the Ligue internationale des droits de l'homme. They were joined by some passing American who had come to Europe 'to investigate.' Alongside Frenchmen from the extreme left were men such as the warmonger Venizelos or the pacifist von Gerlach."⁴ For Vandervelde, "such a sojourn in Paris, far from the commotion of the center, was the most delightful thing in the world."⁵ There, he could read from Madame Ménard's vast library and converse with the Russian Socialist Alexander Kerensky, Hjalmar Branting from Sweden, and other Socialists and radicals from every political faction and movement.

In Britain Cobden Sanderson welcomed him into his political and cultural circle, which included May Morris and Burne Jones at the end of the nineteenth century. In Lausanne he lodged with Anton Suter, visiting the Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto, arguing with the young Italian Socialist Benito Mussolini, and listening to the pianist Ignace Paderewski. In Brittany a communal colony established itself at the house built by Charles Seignobos that regularly included L. Lopicque, Albert Thomas, Gustave Hervé, and Aristide Briand together with Vandervelde. Later, Vandervelde traveled with Jaurès throughout Germany and Britain,

3. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

stopping to walk through Tübingen in the rain, visiting Elizabethan sites in Hatfield, and holding meetings in local party headquarters along the way. To Vandervelde, this comradeship was the true Socialist internationalism.

Historians of Socialism have emphasized the interweaving in Socialist life of “politics and the private world.”⁶ For Vandervelde, even to suggest that there were two separate entities to be brought together is misleading. All was politics – but a politics broadly defined. Politics to Vandervelde was not simply a matter of governmental conflicts and parties. Nor was it the struggle for power in all spheres that Joan Scott has defined.⁷ Politics encompassed every human relationship. And that for Vandervelde was all of life. In his *Souvenirs*, Vandervelde wrote first about his travels and his friendships and then he recounted briefly the struggles of the congresses of the International. These friendships were the essence of international politics for him.

The poet Auguste Vermeylen suggested that Vandervelde possessed a “profound depth of sympathetic feeling.” Like a magician, Vandervelde charmed even his enemies, Vermeylen observed. At the same time, however, Vandervelde maintained an unspoken distance from even his closest companions. Despite their long friendship, Vermeylen admitted feeling doubt that he had “ever really come to know him.”⁸ In a statement that reveals much about Vermeylen’s turn-of-the-century perceptions of gender, but also something of Vandervelde’s character, he concluded: “This strong, determined leader of men is often overtaken by an almost feminine sensibility . . . a secret timidity which has an intimidating effect on other people, and yet has strange alluring power.”⁹ Vermeylen was not alone in noting the complexity of Vandervelde’s relations with his friends as well as his followers.

Vandervelde’s international Socialist comradeship was intellectual and almost entirely male. The Socialism of his Second International was centered in the predominantly lettered – world of men. Women were sometimes accepted as comrades, but on the terms set by the male leaders. Vandervelde explicitly noted the absence of women companions in the informal life of the Socialists. While men enjoyed their shared country retreats, he complained, women would have been too individualistic to

6. See, for example, Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 23.

7. Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 42.

8. Auguste Vermeylen, preface to Jean Maillard, *Emile Vandervelde vu par Jean Maillard* (Paris: L’Eglantine, 1932).

9. *Ibid.*

adapt to the communal life.¹⁰

As Vandervelde explicitly acknowledged in his memoirs, his unwillingness to speak any language other than French limited his ability to communicate. Abroad on his “socialist wanderings,” he depended on translators or on the small elite who spoke French in addition to their native language. He could only observe the workers as he walked through the streets or sat in the brasseries.¹¹

Vandervelde’s presidency of the Second International was guided by his informal, noninstitutional definition of politics. Vandervelde believed that all Socialists could share their common struggle, that they were all comrades. His charisma, as well as his moderate positions, allowed him to mediate between opposing factions. Gradually and perhaps unconsciously, by defining the compromises that held the Second International together, Vandervelde led the European Socialists along the path toward social democracy. The comradeship that flourished throughout the often divisive debates over militarism or governmental participation remained the most enduring legacy of the Second International for Vandervelde.

The Formative Years, 1889–1899

As an institution, the Second International came into existence divided. When the Frenchman Paul Brousse first invited his fellow Socialists to revive the International in Paris on 11 March 1889, both British and German Socialists immediately objected. The British, with their strong labor movement, insisted that only trade union representatives should attend. The politically-oriented German Social Democratic Party objected to the French initiative – they hoped to control any new international movement – as well as to the British exclusion of political leaders. When negotiations over representation failed to heal the divisions, the French Socialists organized two simultaneous congresses. The French Possibilists reserved a hall at the rue de Lancry where they met with the British trade unionists, while the French Marxists, led by Jules Guesde, organized a rival congress in the rue Petrelle attended by the German Social Democrats.¹²

10. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 115. The implications of Vandervelde’s offhanded explanation may well be significant, given that his comradeship foreshadowed for him the Socialist world of the future. Although Vandervelde served as a leading advocate for women’s rights, and although he married twice, his world was clearly that of men.

11. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, pp. 98 and 100.

12. James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 30–55. Concise and well thought out, James Joll’s history of the Second International is still the best guide to the debates of that organization. See also Milorad Drachkovitch, *Les Socialismes français et allemands et le problème de la guerre* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1953), p. 314.

The young Emile Vandervelde participated in this first fractured meeting of the Second International in 1889. Rather than choosing to follow the orthodox Socialists to the rue Petrelle or the revisionists to the rue de Lancry, he attended both congresses. In his memoirs he recalls, "As for me, I flitted back and forth between the two, doing nothing of any great consequence."¹³ He had friends at each. Historians have pointed to Vandervelde's unwillingness to commit to one or the other of the congresses as a sign of his immaturity. Rather, it should be taken as portending of his future role in the Second International, that of the reconciling center, the typically Belgian "proponent of unity."¹⁴

At this first congress, Vandervelde was too new to the Socialist world to play any significant role of conciliation. According to his own testimony, he simply observed the debates. He watched the leaders of the various national movements appeal for Socialist unity at the same time that they denounced other factions for deviating from true Marxism. Similarly, each of the speakers boasted, "Our bourgeoisie is, without question, the worst of all."¹⁵ In the midst of the debates over procedural questions, however, Vandervelde recorded his sense of awe at the participation of all the major Socialist leaders of Europe. They had all gathered as comrades – granted in two separate halls – to express their belief in united action by the working class.

Three hundred sixty-two delegates came together in one congress in Brussels in 1891.¹⁶ Vandervelde rejoiced: "For the first time, revolutionary Socialists and trade unionists agreed that they must all join in the class struggle. That consensus was something new and without precedent. All the world's Socialists had joined together, in accordance with the dictate of Karl Marx: 'Workers of the world unite.'¹⁷ The delegates soon divided, however, in angry debates over the admission of anarchists.¹⁸

Perhaps not surprisingly, troubled by the chaos of the Paris congress, the Belgian organizers of the Brussels congress had established formal rules for the proceedings of the second congress. Reports from each national party were published in advance of the congress and distributed to the delegates. The Belgians organized committees of delegates to

13. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 140.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Elie Halévy, *Histoire du socialisme européen* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). For more detailed discussions of the debates of the Brussels congress, see Joll, *The Second International*; Annie Kriegel, *Les Internationales ouvrières, 1864–1943* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964); and G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought: The Second International* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956–58).

17. Emile Vandervelde cited in Jean Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste international* (Paris: A. Quillet, 1913), p. 24

18. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 142.

examine each of the issues scheduled to be debated. The commission met on the first days of the congress. A designated reporter then read the commission's resolutions to the delegates. Once passed by the assembled International, these resolutions were to be considered as guides in defining the program and politics of each affiliated national movement. All of the subsequent congresses followed the same procedures.

Discussions of May Day celebrations, international solidarity, militarism, industrial legislation, the Jewish question, and women's rights dominated the agenda at Brussels. Vandervelde served as the reporter for the commission on industrial legislation. In this first of many reports to the International's congresses, Vandervelde provided an exhaustive survey of labor conditions throughout Europe, resolving that a study of working conditions and protective legislation be organized, that information be exchanged between the different Socialist movements, and that Socialists unite to resist capitalism.¹⁹ His report was typically comprehensive, based on a thorough statistical study, and acceptable to all parties.

Vandervelde's more controversial, and later regretted, intervention in Brussels came in the debate over women's suffrage and political equality. Like most of the Socialists in the Belgian delegation, Vandervelde followed Proudhon's argument for the preservation of a natural division of work between the sexes. In his speech Vandervelde cited women's political ineptitude as a justification for maintaining their place in the home and for excluding them from the public arena. When he finished, he recalled: "Liebknecht the elder loomed before me, very straight and very angry; he crushed me with his scornful reprimand: 'Very well: Courtesan or domestic slave,' he declared. 'Is that how a Socialist sees woman's role?'"²⁰ According to Vandervelde, "that was the crowning blow. On the question of socialist feminism, I had been converted."²¹ He realized his total isolation in the congress. Subsequently, he not only changed his views, but he became one of the most outspoken champions of women's political rights in Belgium. While his position accorded well with his unswerving commitment to all oppressed peoples, the speed and depth of his conversion were surprising.²²

The third congress met in Zurich in 1893 and was significantly smaller

19. *Congrès international ouvrier socialiste Bruxelles, 1890* (Geneva Minkoff, 1977), vol. 8, p. 25.

20. Liebknecht cited in Jean-Marie Boudart, "Emile Vandervelde et la III^eme Internationale," *Mémoire de licence, Institut supérieur du commerce, 1967-68*, p. 74.

21. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 143.

22. It has been suggested that this confrontation over women's rights with Liebknecht, the German Marxist, converted Vandervelde to Marxism. Roger Picard, "Emile Vandervelde et ses doctrines économiques," *Revue Economique Internationale* 4, no. 2-3 (December 1939): 327.

than the first two meetings of the Second International. The congress organizers resolved the anarchist question with “Germanic” tactics, Vandervelde noted; those anarchists who came without having been invited were physically removed from the meeting hall after an angry debate.²³ In “a rather gloomy” atmosphere, the delegates proceeded to discuss militarism, women’s work, and socialist strategy.²⁴ Engels led female admirers on picnics on the shores of the lake.

Designated as reporter for the committee considering political strategy, Vandervelde defined a moderate position between the reformists, who justified national parliamentary struggles and electoral campaigns as ends unto themselves, and the revolutionaries, who refused to work within the capitalist system that Marx had vowed to destroy. In Vandervelde’s resolution, he explained that political action at the national level both affirmed socialist principles and realized reforms of immediate proletarian interest. Although reformist in the short run, in the long term such a strategy brought the socialist revolution closer, he concluded. The resolution allowed each nation to determine its own tactics based on its particular conditions.²⁵ The congress approved Vandervelde’s resolution unanimously. Years later, the German Socialist August Bebel reminded Vandervelde that he had authored the decisive resolution that both defined the Second International as social democratic – that is, political – and excluded the anarchists. Vandervelde had forgotten his critical role. “It all happened so naturally amidst the indifference with which unanimous decisions are usually remembered,” he explained modestly.²⁶ In that same “indifferent” spirit of compromise, Vandervelde led the Second International down the first steps toward social democracy.

Vandervelde came to the 1896 London congress as the reporter for the agricultural commission but played a more significant role as general moderator. The debate over excluding the anarchists had not been completely resolved at Zurich three years earlier. Chaos prevailed in London as rival factions argued in different languages and personal feuds became entwined with ideological disputes. When the debate within the factionalized French delegation – “a deafening concert of wild clamoring” – threatened to divide the congress, Vandervelde forcefully intervened.²⁷ He denounced the forty-seven followers of Jules Guesde – many of whom were his close friends – for demanding international recognition as a delegation separate from the majority of the French

23. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 144.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Congrès international ouvrier socialiste. Zurich, 1893* (Geneva: Minkoff, n.d.), vol. 9. See also Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste international*.

26. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 144.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

deputation. Interrupted by jeers, Vandervelde reminded the orthodox French Marxists that his Zurich resolution had justified political action as Socialist praxis. Although his first appeals were drowned out by the general tumult of the third day of debate, Vandervelde the “peacemaker” emerged victorious when he presided over the fourth day of the congress.²⁸ The press heralded the dignity of the young Belgian delegate who managed to rise above and pacify the disputing factions.²⁹

By 1896 Vandervelde had joined the ranks of the recognized leaders of the Second International. In all of the photographs, he is set apart from the others on the speakers’ platform by his youthful appearance. He was frequently chosen by the Bureau as “reporter” for the commissions debating the questions that promised to be the most contentious at the congresses. Unlike Jaurès and Kautsky, he achieved prominence despite his affiliation with one of the smaller national delegations.

At the first four congresses of the Second International, Socialists from all over Europe had drawn together to debate their Marxist heritage. According to Vandervelde, when Friedrich Engels spoke at the close of the Zurich congress, “it was as if Marx had been reborn in the figure of his brother in arms. It was at once a democratic and a revolutionary Socialism that appeared before our eyes, embodied in the last glorious survivor of the heroic era!”³⁰ The Socialist community looked back to its nineteenth-century heroes and embraced their ideals. But they did not concur on the implementation of their democratic and revolutionary goals at the turn of the century. As the debates over issues such as the designation of May Day as a day of Socialist protest revealed, each national party, or rather each faction within each party, was determined to follow its own strategic agenda. For example, despite a strongly worded resolution voted on in Paris, and then reinforced in Zurich, calling for a day of work stoppages in the name of improved working conditions and peace on 1 May, the Germans repeatedly refused to risk more than the organization of selected evening activities. In the formative years of the Second International, theoretical issues were settled at the congresses by general pronouncements that left open to national parties the debate over praxis.

Ministerialism

The issue of Socialist participation in a predominantly bourgeois

28. Vandervelde had anticipated the fissures over the question of reformism and pledged to play the role of peacemaker to the splintered parties during discussions at the Belgian party congress. *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1896*, p. 58.

29. *Congrès international socialiste des travailleurs et des chambres syndicales ouvrières. Londres, 1896*, vol. 10, ed. Michel Winock (Geneva: Minkoff, 1980).

30. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 145.

government dominated the debates of the Second International for the first five years of the twentieth century. The immediate spark to the debate was Alexandre Millerand's acceptance of a French cabinet post in 1899. Was this French Socialist's presence as minister of commerce in a Radical cabinet alongside General Gallifet, the man who had suppressed the Paris Commune, a sign of progress or a signal of the betrayal of Marxist principles?³¹ The French feud over ministerial participation inevitably spilled over into the congresses of the Second International, first in arguments over the makeup of the French delegation and then in theoretical debates over Socialist strategy. How were the Socialists to wrest political power from bourgeois governments? Would the attainment of political power in the short term facilitate the ultimate overthrow of capitalism? Did reforms set back or advance the revolutionary cause?

The emergence of the issue of ministerialism – as the participation of a Socialist in a bourgeois government came to be known – marked the passage of the Second International into what Jean Longuet called an organic period of Socialism.³² According to historian Annie Kriegel, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Socialists had simply assumed the inevitability of the proletarian revolution.³³ That belief underlay the debates over national and international strategy at the first four congresses of the Second International. But by 1900 it was open to question. Socialists throughout Europe had gained seats in national parliaments. They had won concrete concessions from their governments just as trade unions had from employers. And yet they were no closer to realizing the revolutionary vision that was Marx's legacy to this first generation of twentieth-century Socialists.

Vandervelde called the Paris congress of 1900, the congress of the "Millerand affair."³⁴ Debate focused on the ninth question, "the achievement of political power and alliances with bourgeois parties."³⁵ Vandervelde, the reporter on the ninth question, presented the majority resolution; E. Ferri of Italy spoke for the minority. Vandervelde refused to condemn all participation in bourgeois governments or coalitions with non-Socialist parties. At the same time, he argued that the conquest of political power "would only succeed if it was the work of a proletariat organized as a class party engaged in a struggle against bourgeois

31. For an analysis of the implications of ministerial participation in each of the national Socialist parties, see Joll, *The Second International*, pp. 87–94.

32. Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste international*, p. 38.

33. Kriegel, *Les Internationales ouvrières*, p. 38.

34. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 147.

35. For more information on the Paris congress, see *Congrès socialiste international. Paris, 1900*, vol. 13 (Geneva: Editions Minkoff, n.d.).

parties.”³⁶ He would not rule out the possibility of temporary alliances with bourgeois parties under certain specified conditions. But, again from the other side, he affirmed that Socialists would always differ in a fundamental and undeniable way from progressive bourgeois parties because they alone represented the proletariat. In a manner typical of Vandervelde’s resolutions, it allowed the individual national parties to define for themselves the conditions that would justify the formation of alliances or governmental participation. Vandervelde concluded his report with his customary diplomacy: “The resolution that we have adopted should be seen neither as a condemnation nor as a tacit acceptance of the conduct of the French Socialists.”³⁷ The unity of the Second International would endure. Neither faction was forced to splinter off.

For Vandervelde, the Millerand affair posed a question of tactics, not of Socialist principles. And while he believed that the Second International had a duty to pronounce formally upon Socialist principles, he argued that tactics should be decided by individual national parties. In the end, he agreed with Jaurès, who had suggested that ministerial participation was only a temporary accident in the long-term struggle. The campaign for reform from within the political system could advance the revolution, according to Vandervelde.

The Paris congress had openly discussed, although it obviously did not resolve, the issue of ministerialism. The national parties divided over the issue. Arguments within the French party resulted in a formal split in 1902. That was the French strategy for dealing with differences. Meanwhile, the majority of German Socialists at their national congress strongly condemned revisionist theory and reformist practice. In their Dresden resolution, they not only attacked French ministerialism, but also condemned German revisionist Eduard Bernstein’s contention that Socialist theory needed to be amended to conform to practice. Unlike the Belgians, they did not try to persuade nor did they embrace divergent minorities.

The German Socialists came to the 1904 Amsterdam congress of the Second International buoyed by recent electoral victories and determined to silence revisionism once and for all. Together with the orthodox French Socialist Jules Guesde, they resolved that the congress should condemn “in the most decisive fashion revisionist efforts to change the victorious tactics we have hitherto followed based on the class struggle.”³⁸ The revisionists had adapted themselves to fit into the existing political order,

36. Cited in Boudart, “Emile Vandervelde,” p. 79.

37. Emile Vandervelde *Congrès socialiste international*, vol. 13 (Geneva: Minkoff, n.d.) p. 61.

38. Jules Guesde cited in Joll, *The Second International*, p. 101.

they charged. As Socialists, their goal was to overturn capitalist governments.

All of the major figures of the European movement joined in the debate over revisionism as members of the fifth commission. Vandervelde, of course, served as the reporter. As always, Vandervelde later recalled the debates as a wonderful struggle of the minds marked by a lack of personal animosity.

After four days of intense debate, together with Victor Adler, the equally diplomatic Austrian Socialist leader, Vandervelde proposed a compromise resolution. It replaced the German condemnation of revisionism with a positive statement of support for revolution: "The congress most strongly affirms the need to pursue relentlessly the Socialist strategy based on class struggle that has already proven so victorious."³⁹ German attempts to isolate the reformists, especially Jean Jaurès, troubled Vandervelde. Above all, the president of the Second International wanted to avoid a potentially fatal split within the Socialist movement.

The Adler-Vandervelde compromise did not convince the badly divided committee. Rosa Luxemburg argued tellingly: "But we are divided . . . Vandervelde and Adler would like to erase these divisions. Instead, we intend to establish them openly, as Lasalle advised."⁴⁰ The German orthodox resolution, the Dresden resolution, received the support of the majority, defeating the Adler-Vandervelde motion by twenty-four to sixteen votes within the committee.

Debate in the assembled congress promised to be passionate. Vandervelde found himself in the difficult position of belonging to the minority but being assigned the task of reporting out the majority committee resolution to the congress. In his speech, he once again attempted to reconcile the principles of reform and of revolution within the terms of the committee's resolution. "The difference between the reformists and the revolutionaries is this: the first want reforms to improve the present lives of the proletariat at the risk of strengthening the existing social structures, while the others want reforms to prepare the proletariat for establishing the new social order," he explained, declaring, "Socialists all agree on this last goal."⁴¹ Insurmountable differences did not separate the reformists from the revolutionaries, he concluded.

According to historian Patricia Vander Esch, "After the ovation for Vandervelde's remarkably subtle and impartial presentation on such a complex and thorny subject, a call for silence rippled through the assembly,

39. Victor Adler and Emile Vandervelde cited in Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste*, p. 45.

40. Rosa Luxemburg in *Congrès socialiste international. Amsterdam, 1904*, vol. 14 (Geneva: Minkoff, n.d.), p. 450.

41. Emile Vandervelde as reported in *Le Peuple* 21 August 1904.

for Jaurès was rising to speak.”⁴² Jaurès, the intended subject of the committee’s criticism, took the offensive. In contrast to the impotent Germans, he declared, the French had a revolutionary tradition to affirm and a real parliament within which to work. The German prescription of a set of revolutionary tactics would condemn the whole Socialist movement to political powerlessness, he argued. Bebel counterattacked, supporting the “revolutionaries.” In the end, the Amsterdam congress approved the Dresden resolution, which proscribed revisionist tactics.

Although Jaurès had suffered a major defeat, neither he nor the other reformists left the International. The French Socialists reunified on the basis of the Amsterdam principles, a major victory for Vandervelde’s spirit of unity and compromise. But Vandervelde, too, had been defeated at the Amsterdam congress. He had opposed the rigid prescriptions of Socialist practice voted by the congress. He was reluctant to define a Socialist theory that might exclude factions of parties from the International. “Our own working class has taught us that theoretical divisions are of little importance in comparison to the urgency of unity,” he argued.⁴³ Luxemburg’s argument for doctrinal clarity had prevailed.

The Amsterdam congress applauded Vandervelde’s good-humored cajolery and attempts at mediation. Paul Lafargue complained of the difficulty of opposing someone so “well meaning.”⁴⁴ For the first time, Vandervelde had been overruled.

In the midst of his own chronicle of the 1904 debates at the Amsterdam congress, Vandervelde reminded his readers that there was more to the congresses than impassioned theoretical arguments within the commissions. “In my papers I still have a photograph taken during one of our excursions that shows the Dutchman Van Kol belly dancing, handkerchief in hand, while Kautsky and the other very serious men cheered him on and clapped their hands to encourage him.”⁴⁵ Vandervelde also recounted with approval Rosa Luxemburg’s conciliatory offer to her French archrival Jean Jaurès to translate his speech for him and Jaurès’s reply: “Just because we disagree does not mean that we cannot work together.”⁴⁶ Despite differences in their principles, Vandervelde believed that the comradeship of struggle and deep mutual respect defined the two Socialists’ unity.

42. P. Van der Esch, *La Deuxième Internationale, 1889–1923* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1957), p. 47.

43. Emile Vandervelde cited in M. Sztejnberg, “L’Interprétation belge des décisions de l’Internationale sur le ministérialisme, 1909–1911,” *International Review of Social History* 2 (1965): 251.

44. Paul Lafargue in *Congrès socialiste international. Paris, 1900*, vol 13 (Geneva: Minkoff, n.d.), p. 723.

45. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 154.

46. *Ibid.*

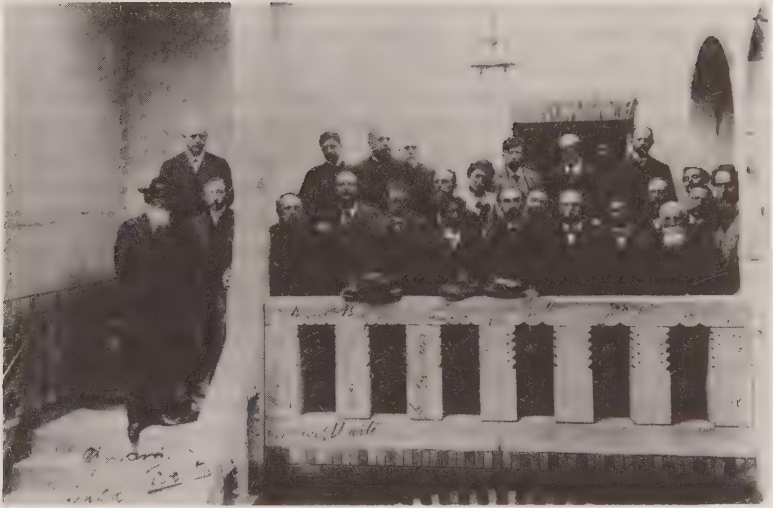


Figure 7 The Bureau of the Second International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, 1910. Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis

The International Socialist Bureau

During its first decade, the Second International had persevered as a federation without any central organization. The international congress had served as the sole link joining together the national Socialist parties until 1900. Every two to four years, the duties of convoking and organizing the upcoming congress passed to a different national host delegation. Consequently, even procedural questions, such as the admission of delegates to the congresses, were handled on an ad hoc basis. Most strategical and theoretical questions remained the province of the national parties under this loose federal structure.

In 1900, frustrated by the lack of coordination, the Paris congress voted unanimously to create a set of permanent central institutions.⁴⁷ Henceforth the congresses were to serve as a parliament for the international proletariat. The International Socialist Bureau would coordinate and carry out the resolutions of the congresses.

Two delegates from each national party sat on the International Socialist Bureau. This council had a regular attendance that varied between fifty and seventy members. A 1905 dispute over the definition of “nationality”

47. Georges Haupt, *La Deuxième Internationale, 1889–1914: Etude critique des sources* (Paris: Mouton, 1964), p. 28.

prompted Vandervelde to propose that each national party designate its own two delegates to the Bureau. He defined nationality broadly as an agglomeration of residents struggling against the same government. Among the most regular and outspoken delegates to the Bureau were August Bebel and Paul Singer for the Germans; H. M. Hyndman and Bruce Glasier for the British; Jean Jaurès, Edouard Vaillant, and Jean Longuet for the French; Pieter Troelstra and Henri Van Kol for the Dutch; Rosa Luxemburg for the Polish; Victor Adler for the Austrians; and Eduard Anseele and Emile Vandervelde for the Belgians. The Russian delegation changed from one meeting to the next. Later disputes resulted in a reapportionment of votes on the Bureau. Subsequently, larger countries received up to ten votes, while smaller ones exercised only three. The Bureau met several times a year. In the intervals between meetings, affairs were managed by an executive committee and a paid secretary.⁴⁸

The International voted to house its newly created administrative Bureau in Brussels. Jean Longuet explained that the Socialists had selected Belgium because of the political freedom of action afforded within its borders.⁴⁹ Belgium had traditionally served as a land of refuge for political exiles, including Karl Marx, who had fled from Paris to Brussels in 1845. Moreover, it was at the geographical and political center between the powerful French and German parties. The Belgian Victor Serwy suggested, rather smugly, that Belgium was chosen as the center of the international Socialist movement because "our program is the concrete expression of the aspirations of the Belgian working class and of all those who are seeking social justice."⁵⁰ The 1900 Paris congress elected Emile Vandervelde, then thirty-four years of age, as the first president of the Second International. He would serve through the war years. Victor Serwy was chosen as secretary. Together, they functioned as the administrative center of the Bureau, and hence of the International.

The tasks immediately delegated to the Bureau were "establishing contacts with all the different Socialist organizations, including workers' parties, parliamentary delegations, the press, etc.; and the codification and execution of the resolutions of the congresses."⁵¹ According to their monthly reports, in the early years, the Bureau, and especially its executive committee, spent most of its time putting together a library of Socialist newspapers and brochures, maintaining correspondence with the various national parties over the payment of dues and the seating of delegations,

48. See Lewis Lorwin, *Labor and Internationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 84.

49. Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste international*, p. 86.

50. Victor Serwy, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1895*, p. 9.

51. Bureau socialiste international, 15 December 1900, I 164, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

collecting labor statistics, and publishing the reports of their meetings.

The Bureau effectively defined its powers through its actions as the years passed by. Initially, the delegates of the smaller countries enthusiastically supported the Bureau, while the larger parties, especially the Germans, remained suspicious of a centralized structure. Edouard Vaillant, the French delegate, explained, "The International Socialist Bureau is above all an agency that coordinates, it is not an agency that directs."⁵² The congresses were to remain sovereign.

The Bureau spent most of its time planning these vast international meetings. Even discussions of the scheduling of the congresses grew heated as various delegations argued the demands of pending national elections – a reason for delay – or the urgency of international crises – motivation for calling an extraordinary session. With the dates set, national delegations proposed questions to be put on the agenda of the congress.⁵³ The Bureau chose new, or at least unresolved, issues that were of pressing and general interest. The British delegate Watts argued against one proposal to discuss immigrant labor, explaining, "It seems unreasonable to expect the International Socialist Bureau to take a position on situations that affect only two or three particular countries."⁵⁴ Questions that threatened to lead to conflicts between national parties were also generally avoided. Finally, the Bureau named the members and the reporter for each of the committees of the upcoming congress.

Between congresses, the Bureau increasingly took it upon itself to issue manifestoes in the name of the Second International. These declarations condemned the concentration camps in South Africa, called on the national delegations to celebrate May Day, and attacked Prussian oppression in Poland.⁵⁵ Especially in the beginning, each time they issued a decree, the members of the Bureau worried that they were either venturing beyond their assigned advisory role to the congresses or trespassing in the internal affairs of national parties. Should they protest American lynchings, for

52. Edouard Vaillant, *7e Congrès national tenu à Paris les 15 et 16 juillet. Compte rendu sténographique* (Paris), pp. 36–7, as cited in Haupt, *La Deuxième Internationale*, p. 32.

53. In one communication, for example, Adler wrote to Camille Huysmans asking him to submit a resolution for the Comité central des femmes socialistes d'Autriche that Adler had forgotten to propose earlier. He hoped it was not too late because, he wrote, "ce serait une vraie catastrophe pour moi et je serais condamné par nos femmes, comme ayant trahi leur cause" if it did not make the agenda of the congress. Adler to Huysmans, 8 April 1907, I 19/58, Archief Camille Huysmans, Antwerp.

54. Watts, *Compte rendu du meeting, Bureau socialiste international*, 20 September 1903, *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Georges Haupt (Paris: Mouton, 1969), p. 88.

55. See, for example, "Manifeste condamnant les camps de concentration" (Brussels, 13 November 1901). Many of the circulars are preserved in Series I, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

example?⁵⁶ Periodically, individual delegates protested the publication of specific manifestoes that they opposed.⁵⁷ Before intervening in particularly delicate questions, such as a British boycott of South Africa, the executive committee usually surveyed the opinions of all the national delegations involved, composed a manifesto, and then circulated it widely before final publication.

The Bureau struggled during the first four years of its existence to discern the fine line separating coordination from direction of the activities of the individual national parties. The members of the larger delegations vigilantly maintained the right of their party to carry out the resolutions of the International according to their own domestic strategy. "If certain parties do not adhere precisely to the resolutions of the Bureau, it is not really an instance of insubordination, it is simply a question of particular conditions and circumstances," Vaillant argued. According to Georges Haupt, Vaillant "believed that the International Socialist Bureau was to be a repository of documents to serve as a guide to the national parties who could draw upon the documentation and information that the Bureau could provide."⁵⁸ Proposals for more frequent meetings of the Bureau surfaced periodically as well. The two issues were in fact interrelated. In a 1902 Bureau debate, British Socialist Hyndman proposed meeting three times a year rather than two. A number of delegates immediately protested, reminding the Bureau of its limited advisory role. Anseele, Jaurès, Van Kol, and Kritchewsky responded by arguing that if the Bureau limited itself to issuing meaningless, vague, and general resolutions, it served no purpose. They suggested that if the Bureau met more regularly, it might initiate investigations, thus facilitating the intervention of the International in crucial international issues.⁵⁹

One of the practical limitations on the activity of the Bureau in these early years was the inefficiency of its secretary, Victor Serwy. Correspondent after correspondent complained of letters to the Bureau that were not answered.⁶⁰ A 1902 letter from the Dutch Socialists opened typically: "In response to your letter of early this month, which did finally

56. See, for example, the minutes of the Bureau meeting of 10 September 1903, *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, p. 20.

57. An example is Hyndman's argument against the lynching manifesto, claiming that it was humanitarian and not socialist. Hyndman proceeded to criticize the Bureau's action in *La Petite République*, for which he was subsequently reprimanded. *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, pp. 100–2.

58. Haupt, *La Deuxième Internationale*, p. 45.

59. *Compte rendu du meeting, Bureau socialiste international*, 29 December 1902, *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, pp. 63–4.

60. For examples of these complaints, see I 92, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

reach us even though it was not addressed . . .”⁶¹ In 1903 Henriette Roland Holst repeatedly complained that Serwy had not informed the Dutch delegation responsible for hosting the upcoming congress of schedule changes.⁶²

It was Vandervelde who had initially proposed Serwy for the position of Bureau secretary. And it was Vandervelde who had had to assume the duties neglected by Serwy during the five years of his tenure in that post. At least once, Vandervelde wrote to Serwy asking him to be more vigilant in responding to correspondence as secretary of the bureau.⁶³ Finally in 1905, Serwy stepped down, pleading overextension. Vandervelde proposed that Camille Huysmans assume the vacant secretarial position. Huysmans had been the initial choice of many of the delegates but had been passed over by Vandervelde. Huysmans now refused. Only the pleading of Bebel and Jaurès convinced him to change his mind.

With Huysmans as secretary, the Bureau and its executive committee began to operate more smoothly. Huysmans organized the library, collected newspapers, and regularly published reports. Henceforth Vandervelde was able to play a less active daily housekeeping role, freeing him for executive duties. He traveled extensively, speaking publicly as well as coordinating the activities of the national parties. From Brussels, he presided over all of the meetings of the Bureau except for one when he was ill. He participated actively in debates over questions about which he was particularly concerned, such as proposed legislation to limit the emigration of Belgian workers to France.

As time passed, the Bureau’s powers gradually increased. Discussions typically ranged from practical questions of worker emigration to theoretical issues such as what the future Socialist state would look like. Debates were intense, but often interrupted by good-humored exchanges. After one particularly long exposition by Troelstra depicting his vision of the future Socialist society, Vaillant interjected that for years Jaurès had been threatening the Bureau with a similar prognostication but had restrained himself. Jaurès replied that it was never too late to carry through on his promise. Vaillant concluded the exchange by instructing Jaurès to speak personally, not for the French Socialists as a movement.⁶⁴ Despite their national and ideological differences, a deep friendship joined the delegates together as comrades. When Rosa Luxemburg was forced to miss a session in 1907, she wrote that “she was prevented from attending our meeting because a German prison would have had to open its hospitable

61. Dutch Socialists to V. Serwy, 24 November 1902, Amsterdam, I 611, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

62. Henriette Roland Holst, I 611, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

63. Emile Vandervelde to V. Serwy, n.d., I 65/66, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

64. *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, p. 315.

doors to allow her out. She expressed the hope that the Bureau would not take up the question of the internal struggles within the Polish delegation in her absence.”⁶⁵

Beginning in 1905, the Bureau became increasingly involved in Russian affairs. Lenin and Plekhanov sent frequent letters offering their conflicting explanations of the schism within Russian socialism.⁶⁶ The Bureau discussed Russian events at length and issued numerous manifestoes, typically ending “Down with autocracy. Long live International Socialism.” The Bureau also organized public protest meetings such as one held at Hyde Park on 18 July 1906 at which Vandervelde, Troelstra, Van Kol, Sudekum, Daszynski, Vaillant, and a number of other Bureau members spoke.

As the arms race escalated and military conflict seemed more imminent, the Bureau’s activity intensified. Somewhat tentatively, the Bureau, “believing itself to be the spokesmen for all Socialists,” assumed the responsibility of organizing protests in the name of the Second International.⁶⁷ Clearly behind their initiatives was the conviction that, if mobilized, the Socialists could prevent war. “As soon as either secret or public events cause us to fear that a conflict between governments is either possible or probable,” the Bureau resolved in 1906, “the Socialist parties of the countries involved must at once, both spontaneously and at the invitation of the Bureau, enter into direct negotiations to determine and coordinate common and combined actions among workers and Socialists to prevent war.”⁶⁸ The major national delegations continued to argue over whether to call extraordinary meetings of the Bureau to discuss impending crises. Once convoked, the French and German delegates often wrangled over their nations’ roles in instigating military conflicts. Typically, the French delegates proposed that the Bureau consider “the combined action of the workers and Socialists of the countries involved to avert the European and colonial conflicts with which the governments, by their agreements, their disagreements, and their intrigues, are threatening them.”⁶⁹ The Germans then argued for inaction.

By 1912, the executive committee of the Bureau had assumed a major role in the running of the International. Neither Huysmans nor Vandervelde, both in their thirties, was intimidated by the older, more experienced delegates representing the French, British, and German

65. Rosa Luxemburg in *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, p. 272.

66. Lenin and Plekhanov to Bureau socialiste international, *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, pp. 212–16.

67. *Bureau socialiste international*, ed. Haupt, p. 136.

68. *Compte rendu*, Bureau socialiste international, 4 and 5 March 1906, *ibid.*, p. 2.

69. *Ordre du jour*, Bureau socialiste international, I 338, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

parties. The Belgians kept the Bureau from becoming entangled in ideological or personal disputes either within or between parties. Discreetly and in consultation with the leaders of the major parties, the Bureau acted with increasing resolution. Vandervelde coordinated that activity.

Militarism

Karl Marx had bequeathed a problematic legacy to the Second International on the interrelated issues of nationalism and militarism. In the decades since Marx's death, workers as well as business leaders had rallied around their flags as the European nations stockpiled arms and brandished their military might in ever more intense colonial rivalries.

In theory, the Second International dealt with the threats posed by nationalism and militarism by referring to Marx's 1848 pronouncement that the proletariat had no fatherland. Capitalists and their generals fomented wars between nations. Socialism would prevent wars as workers united across national frontiers.

In practice, however, Vandervelde explained, much had changed since the middle of the nineteenth century. "In the *Communist Manifesto*, it states that 'the proletariat has no fatherland,'" he acknowledged. "But that dates back to 1848 – the situation then was very different from what we face today."⁷⁰ The French Socialists asserted their pride in their national revolutionary heritage while the German Social Democrats, more isolated from bourgeois society, defended their own highly organized nation within a nation. Vandervelde nevertheless maintained, "Defensive patriotism is not in the least incompatible with the international principles of Socialism."⁷¹

The contradictions inherent in this defensive patriotism surfaced in every subsequent debate on nationalism and militarism within the Second International. In theory Socialists could easily agree to condemn foreign aggression. They could also unanimously condemn standing armies and support the formation of national militias. But if each nation was special, then its people deserved the right to self-defense against foreign aggression. Vandervelde's definition of patriotism in fact implied the willingness to defend a nation's democratic institutions from attack by less advanced nations. What would the Second International do when these "legitimate national interests" clashed?

70. Emile Vandervelde, in *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1913*, p. 92.

71. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 31 May 1905, as cited in C. Renard, "Un Aspect du socialisme avant 1914: Les Attitudes politiques et idéologiques du POB dans les débats sur la défense nationale (1885–1913)," *Mémoire de licence, Université libre de Bruxelles*, 1972–73.

Vandervelde frequently cited Jean Jaurès on military questions. According to Vandervelde, Jaurès had undertaken his extensive study of the army after a discussion in the corridors of the 1904 Amsterdam congress with Briand, Bebel, Vandervelde, and Volmar.⁷² Bebel had declared that, although he believed in international peace, if Germany was attacked, he would take up arms in defense of his nation.⁷³ In his *L'Armée nouvelle* Jaurès supported the right of "countries, that is, historical groups having a consciousness of their continuity and their unity," to defend their "freedom and integrity."⁷⁴ The ever-present threat of war in Europe, according to Jaurès, necessitated the presence of "armed nations." The new armies Jaurès envisioned, equipped to fight only for the defense of their nation, would differ from their conventional counterparts, he explained. The popular armies of the French Revolution, which had relied on the fervor of an aroused populace, and the Swiss militia, which called on the mass of citizens for short terms of service, served as models for Jaurès's defensive armies.

Most Socialists, including Jaurès and Vandervelde, diverged from Liberals and other progressives in their theoretical analysis of the causes of war. Almost all Socialists argued that capitalism was the root cause of armed conflict between nations. The Bureau had stated: "Wars, . . . systematically undertaken by the dominant classes with the goal of pitting nation against nation/workers against workers, appear to the proletariat as the very essence of capitalism. They will not disappear before exploitation and capitalism themselves are abolished."⁷⁵ Rosa Luxemburg and a number of Socialists on the left shared Friedrich Engels's belief that war would lead to "general exhaustion and the establishment of conditions for the final victory of the working class."⁷⁶

However, Vandervelde and the majority of the leaders of the Second International never accepted the inevitability of war. Yes, capitalism caused war, but it followed logically for them that Socialism would eventually end the threat of militarism. The Bureau's statement on war concluded with an affirmation of the reformist view: "In contrast, working people are the natural enemy of war because they are its principal victims. . . . Wars contradict the very aim of Socialism which is the creation of a new order based on the solidarity of the workers, on the fraternity of nations, and on

72. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, pp. 161–2.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

74. Jean Jaurès, *L'Armée nouvelle*, p. 303, cited in Joll, *The Second International*, p. 112.

75. Bureau socialiste international, "Aux travailleurs de tous les pays" (June 1907), I 76, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

76. Friedrich Engels, introduction to Sigismund Borkheim's pamphlet *Zur Erinnerung für die deutschen Mordspatrioten, 1806–12* (1887), cited in Joll, *The Second International*, p. 107.

the liberty of peoples.”⁷⁷ Rejecting the revolutionary implications of the left’s acceptance of war as inevitable, the Bureau reasserted Marx’s optimistic prophecy. However, its goal was clearly reform; revolution would have to wait.

The problem for the Second International then was how to prevent the capitalists and their governments from precipitating wars. When single nations had protested in isolation against the Boer War, their pleas had gone unheard. For Socialist action to be effective, it clearly had to be international.⁷⁸ The antimilitary campaign was the main question on the agenda of every Second International congress after 1904. Between the congress at Amsterdam and the 1907 congress at Stuttgart, the threat of war intensified dramatically. The Russo-Japanese war, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the Moroccan crisis all aggravated international tensions.

The International Socialist Bureau meticulously prepared the agenda and sent documentation to all delegates before the Stuttgart congress. Serious work motivated by a grave sense of purpose replaced the tumultuous debates of earlier congresses. Jaurès declared, “The International has moved beyond its period of chaos.”⁷⁹ Lenin concurred: The Stuttgart congress “signified the definitive consolidation of the Second International and the transformation of the congresses into assemblies with a profound influence.”⁸⁰ In his speech as president of the International, Vandervelde celebrated that unity. Rosa Luxemburg served as his translator.

The first question on the agenda of the Stuttgart congress of August 1907 was “militarism and international crisis.” Vandervelde was again selected to be the reporter for this key commission. Every major Socialist participated.

Debate within the commission focused on four distinct proposals. Gustave Hervé’s proposal repudiated all forms of patriotism and called for a mass strike in the event of war. Jules Guesde maintained that the issue of militarism diverted the proletariat from crucial economic questions. In his proposal, he urged all Socialists to vote in their parliaments against war credits. A third French proposition, submitted by Edouard Vaillant and Jean Jaurès, opened with the broad theoretical statement that militarism and imperialism oppressed the working class, but concluded with an assertion of the right of national self-defense. Finally, August Bebel,

77. Bureau socialiste international, “Aux travailleurs de tous les pays.”

78. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 11 August 1901.

79. Jean Jaurès cited in G. Haupt, ed., Introduction, *Congrès socialiste international. Stuttgart, 1907*, vol. 17 (Geneva: Minkoff, 1985), p. 7.

80. Lenin, *Socinenija*, 5th ed., vol. 3, 26, pp. 79–80, cited in G. Haupt, “Introduction,” *Congrès socialiste international*, vol. 16, p. 7.



Figure 8 On the way to the Congress in Stuttgart, Vandervelde, Ivelstra, Klara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg. Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeiders Beweging

explaining that wars between capitalist states were the consequence of rivalries in world markets and would end only when capitalism was overturned, resolved that the proletariat had a duty to prevent armed conflict. While more explicit than earlier resolutions in its definition of the causes of war, like the others it did not advocate specific international Socialist tactics to prevent war.

The commission immediately became enmeshed in a struggle between Bebel and Hervé. The duel was a classic statement of the differences separating the French and German Socialist parties.⁸¹ Bebel warned against forcing the German Socialists into a potentially disastrous general strike, while Hervé boasted of French Socialist victories in their antimilitary campaign. The German Social Democrats were not revolutionaries, he charged, they only understood how to win votes. Most of the Socialists sitting on the commission joined in the fray. Vandervelde and Adler intervened as peacemakers, proposing a compromise resolution. Luxemburg, together with the Russians, strengthened the compromise resolution. Finally, a subcommittee of thirteen members was appointed to resolve the dispute with two representatives of each of the six major nations – France, Germany, Britain, Russia, Italy, and Austria – with Vandervelde representing the small nations.

Vandervelde reported the results of the subcommittee's deliberations

81. See Drachkovitch, *Les Socialismes français et allemands*, p. 326

to the congress. The longest resolution ever passed by a congress, it began with a restatement of Bebel's definition of the economic causes of war linking militarism to the capitalist system. In a series of provisions, the International then pledged to coordinate the struggle against escalating armaments and urged Socialists to work in their respective parliaments to achieve a reduction in military service and to replace standing armies with militias. The resolution cited previous examples of international Socialist cooperation in the antimilitarist struggle. It concluded with Luxemburg's statement that, "should war break out in spite of all this, it is [the Socialists'] duty to intercede for its speedy end, or to strive with all their power to make use of the violent economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the people and thereby to hasten the abolition of capitalist class rule."⁸²

In his report as chair, Vandervelde reaffirmed the international solidarity of the proletariat but also acknowledged each nation's right to self-defense. He recognized the German unwillingness to launch a general strike against Germany's repressive government. He placated Jaurès. And he cited Guesde in instructing Socialists to go forth and organize their antimilitary propaganda campaign. As president, he appealed to each faction. In response to criticism that the committee had settled for "an ambiguous formula of resonant but hollow declarations that will have no practical impact," he concluded: "It is a politics of action that [the committee report] recommends. In confirming earlier resolutions from the congresses of London and Zurich, it also accentuates them."⁸³ The congress adopted the resolution.

Georges Haupt suggested in his introduction to the official report of the congress that the forces of the left had successfully exploited the breach between the moderates Jaurès and Bebel and had tactically outmaneuvered the revisionists. However, even though Luxemburg's statement prevailed as the conclusion to the resolution, this time it was Vandervelde who had the final word. In his report, he submerged the potentially divisive impact of the concrete provisions. He recognized the concerns of each faction. He did not reconcile the ideological or national differences separating the revisionists from the orthodox delegates or the French from the Germans. In Lewis Lorwin's words, he temporarily "harmonized" the conflict.⁸⁴ Vandervelde held the Socialists together.

The International Socialist Bureau's invitation to the 1910 Copenhagen congress explained: "If at Stuttgart the International outlined the main lines

⁸² Rosa Luxemburg in *Congrès socialiste international. Stuttgart, 1907*, ed. Haupt, vol. 17.

⁸³ Emile Vandervelde in *Congrès socialiste international*, vol. 16, p. 395.

⁸⁴ Lorwin, *Labor and Internationalism*, p. 93. See Vandervelde's own version in Emile Vandervelde, "Le Congrès socialiste de Stuttgart," *Le Peuple* 21 September 1907.

of antimilitary action for Socialists, it behooves us at Copenhagen to find the means of putting these ideas into practice.”⁸⁵ Jean Longuet called it “a congress of action.”⁸⁶ The congress was charged with defining a strategy for reducing international tensions and preventing war – a seemingly impossible assignment for the Second International. All participating Socialists agreed that disputes between nations should be submitted to international arbitration rather than fought out between the rival states, and all supported a reduction in armaments. But that is where the consensus ended.

In his *Souvenirs* Vandervelde reminisced that “Socialist unity was never more evident than at Copenhagen, at the congress of 1910.”⁸⁷ The Socialists had shared their hopes for peace and looked forward to the growing strength of Socialism. He would later remember the triumphal receptions given by this Socialist city. He cited *Le Peuple*’s description of his opening speech: “His face radiant, his voice ringing and nuanced with that mellow resonance that moves one and makes one’s heart tremble, our friend took note of this significant event: a free people, masters of a great city, feeling honored to welcome the Red International.”⁸⁸ Vandervelde fondly recalled excursions to the Tivoli Gardens and conversations late into the night. In fact, he dismissed the working sessions of the commissions and the debates of the assembled congress itself as unexceptional.⁸⁹

The third committee at Copenhagen was charged with the question of antimilitarism and strategy. Most of the British and French delegates joined Vaillant and James Keir Hardie in support of a resolution calling for the declaration of a general strike in armaments industries in the event of war. The German delegation angrily opposed such a tactic. According to historian M. Drachkovitch, “At that moment it seemed that the opposition between the two concepts was unresolvable and threatened the congress’s unity. Vandervelde’s mediating skills saved the day.”⁹⁰ Vandervelde proposed that the question of tactics be sent to a committee for further study and then be submitted to a subsequent congress. “I suggest that we table it for the next congress, not because it is premature or wrong, but because I am convinced that then the resolution will be unanimously approved,” he suggested with his customary diplomacy.⁹¹ Hence, the final resolution,

85. Bureau socialiste international, cited in G. Haupt, *Le Congrès manqué de l’international à la veille de la Première guerre mondiale* (Paris: Maspero, 1965), p. 27.

86. Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste international*, p. 63.

87. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 168.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

90. Drachkovitch, *Les Socialismes français et allemands*, p. 335.

91. Emile Vandervelde in G. Haupt, ed., *Congrès socialiste international*, vol. 19 (Geneva: Minkoff, n.d.), p. 331.

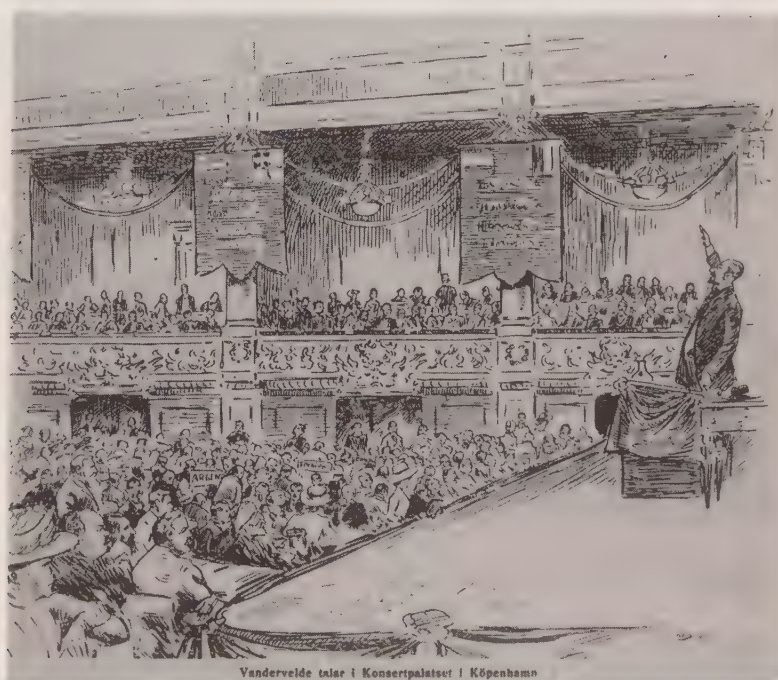


Figure 9 Vandervelde addressing the assembled delegates at the Congress of the Second International in Copenhagen, 1910. Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeiders Beweging

voted without reference to the general strike, simply reaffirmed the Stuttgart resolution. The Bureau sent a circular asking each nation to consider the Keir Hardie–Vaillant amendment before the next congress so that words could be turned into actions.⁹²

Vandervelde acknowledged, “I was frequently chosen as the reporter for the more difficult questions” because of an ability to define “resolutions that were moderate, centrist, and equally removed from the extremes of the right and the left.”⁹³ This ability to forge a consensus had held the International together, allowing each national group to follow its own domestic political strategy. However, the escalation of tensions between European nations at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century

92. Circulaire, Bureau socialiste international, Brussels, 15 December 1910, I 606D, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

93. Emile Vandervelde cited in Drachkovitch, *Les Socialismes français et allemands*, p. 335.



Figure 10 Vandervelde and Jean Jaurès after the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, 1910. Institut Emile Vandervelde

was such that a stronger, more centralized set of Socialist institutions would have been required to resolve the contradictions in the international strategy of the Second International. Vandervelde managed to hold the International together, although his revolutionary reformism seemed increasingly reformist and less revolutionary in the face of rising nationalist tensions.

The International had persevered as a loose federation of national parties without sanctions. The Copenhagen congress itself affirmed with regard to individual national strategies to be implemented in the event that war broke out: "The congress, recognizing that it would be difficult to formulate a model instruction for carrying out the resolutions of International congresses, declares that it is necessary to leave to the national parties the power to choose the form of action [to be taken] and the opportune moment."⁹⁴ The congress debated issues but passed no resolutions binding member parties to concrete antimilitary strategies.

The Copenhagen congress delegated full powers to the International Socialist Bureau to coordinate and initiate international Socialist responses to global crises. It is not clear, however, that the Bureau had any recourse to action. The Socialist leaders had no sources of information on military

94. Copenhagen resolution cited in Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, 3.1, p. 86.

crises other than that available through the press. The French sensed growing dangers, but the Germans resolutely opposed calling special meetings of the Bureau to consider military conflicts. The Germans did not want the International to intervene in their affairs.

In a 1911 article about the threat of armed conflict, Vandervelde had cited the words of Tacitus: "It is not necessary to have hope in order to act, nor is it necessary that one expect to succeed in order to persevere."⁹⁵ But it would seem that, at this stage, the Socialists still drew upon a deep reservoir of hope and optimism. At Vandervelde's suggestion, a Bureau committee consisting of Jaurès, Vaillant, Bebel, Keir Hardie, Adler, Huysmans, and Rubanovitch of Russia drafted a resolution of invitation to an extraordinary congress of the Second International to be held in Basle in December 1912. They called for simultaneous demonstrations against war in all the major towns and cities of Europe.

Vandervelde was ill, so Anseele chaired what the Socialists called the largest antiwar demonstration ever held: the Second International congress of 1912. Jaurès presented the Bureau's call for united Socialist action to prevent war. Yet again the Socialists resolved that "if war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working class in the countries involved . . . to do all they can to prevent war by whatever means they deem most appropriate. Their strategies will naturally vary depending on the acuteness of the class struggle and on the general political situation." But in a more concrete conclusion, they proclaimed: "In the event that war does break out despite their efforts, it is their duty to intervene to stop it quickly, and to take advantage of the economic and political crises caused by the war to shake up the lowest popular classes and to bring about the fall of capitalist domination."⁹⁶ Not all the delegates who enthusiastically supported the manifesto clearly understood the revolutionary implications of the conclusion. Few would follow them. Most delegates to the congress at least tacitly accepted the arguments for each nation's right to self-defense put forth earlier by Jaurès and Vandervelde.

Longuet's description of the final vote of the Basle congress sums up the enthusiasm and optimism of this last meeting of the International. "In a massive, unanimous action, all of the congress – twenty races and twenty nations standing together – affirmed its will to struggle against war."⁹⁷ Vandervelde called this display of Socialist unity "the greatest peaceful force in the world."⁹⁸

95. Emile Vandervelde, "La Tripolitaine, l'Italie, et la Turquie," *Documents du Progrès* December 1911, p. 326.

96. Manifeste Basle, 24–25 November 1912, I 174, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

97. Longuet, *Le Mouvement socialiste international*, p. 74.

98. Emile Vandervelde, "L'Internationale et la guerre," *Le Peuple* 12 November 1912.

After the Basle congress, the French suggested that the Bureau meet to consider the implementation of the antiwar resolution passed in Basel.⁹⁹ However, when the Balkan crisis subsided in March 1913, the Socialists moved on to a less urgent agenda. The Bureau met in December 1913. Without the threat of war, the discussion turned to the internal problems of the workers' movement.

Meanwhile, the Socialists continued to divide against themselves over other issues. The tensions between the various national parties persisted. But more serious were the internal divisions within the national parties. While the divisions within the French Socialists had troubled the International in the first years of the twentieth century, the British became the problem thereafter. In the summer of 1913, Vaillant resolved to force the feuding British factions to unite as one Socialist party. He convinced Vandervelde and Huysmans to bring the influence of the Bureau to bear on the British.¹⁰⁰ However, despite intense negotiating with the Labour Party and the British Socialist Party, a frustrated Vandervelde wrote privately to Huysmans in May 1914 reporting the "debacle of our joint efforts."¹⁰¹ The flurry of communications among members of the Bureau who had intervened in British affairs continued through July 1914 without success.

Vandervelde continued to write about "the armed peace" and the threat of the arms race.¹⁰² But his articles were marked by a resurgent optimism. The Socialists would celebrate in Vienna in 1914 the fiftieth anniversary of the international workers movement. Then they would have the right to proclaim "Socialism is peace."¹⁰³ Vandervelde was scheduled to be the reporter on the question of alcoholism at the 1914 congress.

The Bureau met in Brussels in July 1914, one month before the scheduled congress, in a special session. For the first time, the Germans had taken the initiative in convoking the Bureau. The purpose of the meeting was to resolve the question of whether or not to hold the congress in Vienna scheduled for 1914. Most Bureau delegates still expected that the threatening European conflict could be contained. The only decision reached by the Bureau on the first day of the meeting was to convoke the congress on 9 August in Paris instead of Vienna and to place the question

99. Huysmans promised to respond to their request as soon as Vandervelde returned from the Netherlands and forwarded copies of their letter to the Germans and the Austrians. I 31, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

100. Haupt, *Le Congrès manqué*, pp. 64–5.

101. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, I 106, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

102. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "La Paix armée," *Le Peuple* 12 April 1914.

103. *Ibid.*

“the proletariat and the war” at the head of the agenda.¹⁰⁴ Even that decision excited controversy as the British questioned the need to advance the date of the congress by two weeks. Vandervelde finally silenced the bickering by declaring in his typical manner: “We should vote because this discussion is taking too long. If the powers were as deliberate in mobilizing for war as we are in organizing our war against war, we could sleep peacefully.”¹⁰⁵

Jaurès, surrounded on stage by Luxemburg, Haase, Victor Adler, Vaillant, Keir Hardie, and Vandervelde spoke to a mass demonstration at the Cirque in Brussels that night. They met briefly the next day. In their manifesto they renewed their appeal “to vigilance and to the effort of the Socialist parties of every country to use every means to prevent their nation’s participation in the war.”¹⁰⁶ After allowing each delegate to speak, they dispersed, pledging to reassemble in a week in Paris.

Jaurès then persuaded Vandervelde to accompany him on a visit to the Ancient Art Museum before Jaurès caught his train for Paris.¹⁰⁷ When Belgian Liberal Paul Hymans met Vandervelde walking in the park on his way home, Vandervelde reassured him that Jaurès believed a crisis could be averted. Vandervelde seemed to share Jaurès’s optimism, Hymans reported.¹⁰⁸ Few foresaw the impending European war. None foresaw the rapid demise of the Second International.

Years later, when Vandervelde looked back at these first expectant years, he recalled the May Day demonstrations and the Socialist comradeship. He pictured the Socialist leaders hiking through the mountains and conversing together late into the night. Their debates had not been limited to the congresses. When Victor Adler wrote to excuse himself from the upcoming meeting of the Bureau in 1906, he did not worry about absenting himself from the decision making. He professed instead that he would most miss “those delicious hours” that he was accustomed to spending with the Vanderveldes at their home in La Hulpe.¹⁰⁹ Vandervelde longingly remembered the humanitarianism and the broad-ranging interests of his Socialist travel companions, especially Jean Jaurès.¹¹⁰ In his later years, he did not often reminisce about the debates or resolutions of the

104. For a full discussion of the meetings, see Haupt, *Le Congrès manqué*, pp. 109–15; and the minutes in I 1043, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

105. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Séance de mercredi matin, 29 juillet 1914, Bureau socialiste international, Le Congrès manqué*, ed. Haupt, p. 258.

106. Manifeste, Bureau socialiste international, I 19/32, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

107. Emile Vandervelde, *Jaurès* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1929), p. 6.

108. Paul Hymans, *Mémoires*, ed. Frans Van Kalken and John Bartier, 2 vols. (Brussels: Editions de l’Institut Solvay, 1958), p. 81.

109. Victor Adler to Emile Vandervelde, 1 March 1906, I 19/32, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

110. Emile Vandervelde, “Jean Jaurès,” *La Vie Ouvrière* August 1931, pp. 173–5.

congresses. He remembered the unity of comrades, not the ideological or national divisions.

The Socialists of the Second International had come together for twenty-five years as comrades in a common struggle. That was what the war would destroy – the friendship and the shared vision. It would also crush their faith in international unity, allowing the Socialists to turn inward after 1918.

For two decades, Vandervelde forged the compromises that guided the various congresses through the most divisive debates over Socialist theory and practice. He preserved the unity of the International by constraining discussion on the subjects of cabinet ministers in France and general strikes in Germany. In the end, his mediation defined a middle path – democratic socialism – that reconciled Marxist theory to the changing conditions of the various nations of Europe at the turn of the century.

The King's Minister and the International: A Socialist Generation at War

The declaration of war in August 1914 generated an outburst of patriotic proclamations from Socialists throughout Europe; no general strikes were declared. Instead, a majority of French, British, and Belgian Socialists lined up to support their governments following the vote of war credits by the German Socialists. The war put a quick end to the seemingly unresolvable debates over nationalism and antimilitarism within the Second International.

Belgian Socialists did not hesitate to assert their national right to self-defense when German armies attacked their country. In their manifesto of 3 August, they condemned German aggression and called on Belgian workers to rise in defense of “our neutrality and the very existence of our country.” It was not only little Belgium that they would be defending; they were fighting for “the cause of democracy and political liberties in Europe . . . against militaristic barbarism,” they proclaimed.¹

For two decades the Second International had debated the obligations of international proletarian comradeship versus the right to national self-defense. Very characteristically, once war broke out, without discussion, Belgian Socialists decided to pursue both courses simultaneously. Equally typically, through it all, the Belgian Workers' Party maintained its unity, overcoming both the distance separating Socialists who remained in Belgium and Socialists who sought exile, and the disagreements over strategies. While many Socialists within German-occupied Belgium became increasingly ardent patriots, Camille Huysmans worked in exile in the neutral Netherlands to reunite the Allied and German Socialists in the International.

Looking back, Vandervelde reflected, on a personal note, that the war

1. *Rapport du Bureau du Conseil général du Parti ouvrier pendant la guerre* (Brussels: Parti ouvrier belge, 1918), p. 50.

had marked the end of his youth.² He had turned fifty the year that he was invited by the king to serve as minister of state, an honorary title given to eminent statesmen. With the benefit of hindsight, we might consider these transitional four years as a beginning for Vandervelde as well. In serving the government, first as a minister of state in August 1914 and then as minister of procurement in 1916, Vandervelde defined a precedent for European Socialism. His acceptance of governmental responsibility while remaining a Socialist took the European Socialist movement further along the democratic socialist path. It would continue to follow that path throughout the twentieth century.

Vandervelde served simultaneously as president of the International and minister in the Belgian government, personifying the potential contradictions between Socialist internationalism and patriotic nationalism. Vandervelde's friend British Socialist Arthur Henderson experienced the agony of that conflict. Henderson was forced to resign his British cabinet position in 1917 because of his desire to participate in the International's Stockholm congress. While Henderson made a conscious choice between nationalism and internationalism, Vandervelde never did. The Belgian minister continued to argue throughout the war, both with Catholic ministers and with Socialists active in the International, that there was no contradiction between full support for the Allies and Socialist internationalism.

Vandervelde insisted that he could speak at one and the same time as government minister, Socialist militant, and president of the International. The same man who shared meals with Catholic ministers in the seaside village of Sainte Adresse where the Belgian government sought exile or joined King Albert for tea in his private garden also assisted in the planning for meetings of the International and corresponded almost daily with Camille Huysmans. Although Vandervelde continued to espouse internationalism, patriotic declarations dominated his writing and action throughout the war.

An Unaccustomed Responsibility: Minister at War

As the Belgian Parliament was meeting for the last time, on 4 August 1914, the head of the government, Charles de Broqueville, sought Vandervelde on the opposition benches. He advised Vandervelde that the king was about to call him to serve alongside the Liberal Paul Hymans and the Catholic E. Goblet d'Alviella as ministers of state. "And in times like these, one does not refuse such things," de Broqueville counseled the Socialist

2. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d'un militant socialiste* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1939), p. 280.

deputy.³

According to Vandervelde, the joyous applause of his Socialist friends at the announcement of the new enlarged cabinet convinced him to accept the appointment immediately.⁴ The next day, the Conseil général approved Vandervelde's decision with only minor dissension. Vandervelde thus became the first European Socialist to serve in a cabinet with the approval of his party. Socialists in France and Britain soon followed his example. As a prescient reminder of the conflicts that awaited them, Arthur Henderson wrote on the eve of his own appointment: "Vandervelde, let us always remember the International."⁵ Camille Huysmans would assure that neither forgot it.

Vandervelde met King Albert in the Royal Palace on the afternoon of 4 August. In his *Souvenirs*, Vandervelde was careful to distinguish "the new era" from a period in the not-too-distant past when cries of "Vive le Roi" had been met on the Socialist benches with a round of "Vive le Suffrage Universel." In 1904, "you could not have found one Belgian in ten thousand or one in one hundred thousand who would have thought it possible that ten years later, the same Socialists – those ideologues, those fomenters of the general strike – would be in the government," he mused proudly.⁶ Vandervelde would treasure his friendship with the king.

Vandervelde's attention shifted dramatically from the International to the cause of the victimized nation, "Little Belgium." Although his ministerial position was purely honorary, he busied himself with governmental responsibilities. With some reservations, Vandervelde acquiesced to de Broqueville's first request of the new minister – that he call upon his broad prewar network of friends, sending a telegram to the Russian government through the Russian minister posted in Brussels.⁷ Vandervelde cabled, not as a minister nor as president of the International, but in his own name on behalf of Belgian Socialists to appeal for Russian aid for Belgium. It was ironic, he wrote, that "in this horrible European war triggered by the antagonisms of bourgeois society, the liberal nations are obliged to count on the military support of the Russian government."⁸ It was perhaps more ironic that it was a Socialist who made the appeal.

3. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire du Parti ouvrier belge, 1885–1935; vers la souveraineté du travail* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1936), p. 50.

4. Jules Destrée recalled later that the Belgians, Socialists included, proceeded to vote war credits and emergency legislation with "une hâte qui ne connaît pas de contradiction." Jules Destrée, *Souvenirs des temps de guerre*, ed. Michel Dumoulin (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1980), p. 65.

5. Arthur Henderson cited in Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 202.

6. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 181.

7. Vandervelde recounts the incident and the resulting controversy in *ibid.*, pp. 184–7.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Vandervelde warned the Russians that if German militarism triumphed in the West, the cause of socialism would be set back for years to come. The Bolsheviks would later exploit the subsequent meeting of the president of the Socialist International with the ambassador of the Russian czar as a perfect symbol of the social patriotism of the social democrats.

Vandervelde then set off for Paris to request assistance for Belgium from President Poincaré. While he was away, the Belgian government retreated ahead of the German troops from Brussels to Antwerp. When Vandervelde returned to his house in Brussels to pack clean underwear, de Broqueville suggested that he add a winter overcoat to his suitcase. The war might not be finished within the expected six weeks, he warned.

As soon as Vandervelde had arrived in Antwerp and assured himself of his wife's safety, de Broqueville dispatched the three ministers without portfolio on a diplomatic mission to the United States. They traveled by way of Britain, stopping in London to thank King George for his aid. British press reports of their public appearances contrasted the restrained Hymans with Vandervelde who was "vivacity incarnate, striking heavy blows on the table from time to time to emphasize points he made in rapid, passionate French."⁹

The Belgian ministers arrived in New York on 11 September. Four days later President Wilson agreed to meet with them. Wilson professed his sympathy for the Belgians, but he maintained his neutrality. After their visit, he entertained the German ambassador to assure the appearance of neutrality. Disappointed, Paul Hymans, Henry Carton de Wiart, Minister of Justice, and Vandervelde then left Washington on a tour of North America that found them meeting with university audiences, reporters, and the general public in Boston, Montreal, and Chicago. In this last city, they were treated to a full English breakfast by ex-President Theodore Roosevelt. Vandervelde took advantage of the occasion to expound on the European Socialists' views of the war. Roosevelt responded to the oration by suggesting that he too was a Socialist of sorts. Although other members of the delegation assumed that the former American president was playfully indulging his zealous Belgian guest, Roosevelt's asides seduced Vandervelde.¹⁰ The two unlikely allies would meet again in Europe after the war. Before embarking from New York, the Belgians gave a formal address at a reception hosted by the president of Columbia University. President Wilson had not budged from his strict neutrality, but the delegation had won over some of the American people.

9. Cited in Paul Hymans, *Mémoires*, ed. Frans Van Kalken and John Bartier, 2 vols. (Brussels: Editions de l'Institut Solvay, 1958), p. 77.

10. Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 123. Hymans recounts that he suspected Roosevelt of playing the game of the grand bourgeois and of smiling solicitously at Vandervelde, who nevertheless took it all quite seriously.



Figure 11 Ascent in a balloon over the troops on the Yser, 1915. Institut Emile Vandervelde

In October Vandervelde followed the Belgian government further in retreat, first to Ostende and then by ship on the thirteenth of the month to the village of Sainte Adresse near Le Havre. There they would reside throughout the war, occupying the villas that stood empty. From Sainte Adresse, the Belgian government hoped to maintain official contact with London, the colonies, and the king who wished to remain behind in De Panne. The ministers in fact had little to occupy their time in Sainte Adresse. They had little territory to govern and few subjects to lead. And Vandervelde's responsibilities were obviously more limited than those of the cabinet ministers.¹¹ For the first time in his life, he had time on his hands.

Two days after his arrival in France, the restless Vandervelde convinced the French naval minister to let him tag along on his tour of Belgian battlefields. Over the next few days, Vandervelde witnessed the bombardment of Belgian troops stationed along the Yser, met General Joffre, and was summoned by King Albert to his temporary residence near Furnes, twenty kilometers from Dunkerque. Initially both the king and Vandervelde strained under the awkwardness of this meeting, because Vandervelde, "although officially a minister without portfolio, was nevertheless, at the same time and above all, the leader of the Belgian Workers' Party."¹² The meeting kindled a friendship that was frequently renewed over the course of the next two years. Vandervelde had tea with the queen in her gardens, sometimes joined by their mutual friend the poet Emile Verhaeren; he shared private conversations with the king.

As Vandervelde was leaving Furnes, the king asked him to tour the trenches and to address the troops on his behalf. He assured the Socialist minister in parting, "We are both struggling to preserve democracy."¹³ Not all proceeded smoothly on Vandervelde's first official encounter with the troops. He was met in the village of Vimereux by a rousing chorus of "The Internationale," which embarrassed him in his new government position. The king subsequently canceled the rest of Vandervelde's addresses.¹⁴ On the other hand, several years later, when Vandervelde spoke officially for the Belgian government in Italy, the Italian Socialists asserted their neutrality by officially absenting themselves from the lectures of their former comrade.¹⁵ Vandervelde dismissed both the choruses and the Socialist absences as inspired by provocateurs and pacifists. He refused

11. De Broqueville 376, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels; and Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 98.

12. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 194

13. King Albert cited in Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 95.

14. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 195.

15. Destrée, *Souvenirs*, p. 291. Once again, Destrée criticized Vandervelde for too closely following the Socialist rather than the nationalist line.

to acknowledge any contradictions between his service to Belgium and his commitment to international Socialism.

Vandervelde did not stay long at his temporary residence in Sainte Adresse. He took advantage of his "forced unemployment as a minister without portfolio and without definite responsibilities" to cross the Channel to London.¹⁶ Jules Destrée recalled that when they met Vandervelde was cranky and out of sorts. Vandervelde complained that, although he did not want to go along with Destrée to Italy, he did not know what he would do alone in London either. "I found in [Vandervelde] the same spirit of indecision and disorganization that troubled the rest of the government," Destrée commented, despairing, "Is ministerialism contagious?"¹⁷ Vandervelde was clearly bored. His new governmental position and the German occupation of Belgium severely restricted his activities.

Vandervelde rediscovered his sense of purpose in organizing British and American relief for Belgian soldiers. From his base in London, he collected donations of socks, shoes, and shirts for the troops.¹⁸ With aid from the American Red Cross, he set up lending libraries, cheap restaurants and commissaries, and nurseries for the children of mothers who worked in factories. His British wife Lalla, who had never been happy about living in Belgium, engaged in similar work on her own, traveling to America.

Vandervelde also accepted the direction of the Bureau pour la protection du travail belge à l'étranger, where he worked alongside his friend Louis de Brouckère. Given the number of Belgian workers who had sought exile in Britain, that job kept Vandervelde occupied. Prime Minister de Broqueville's conservative stand against the unionization of Belgian workers abroad caught the two Belgian Socialists in a difficult position. They accepted their role as intermediaries, seemingly unconcerned by the labor disputes that set the government against their fellow Socialists.¹⁹ Vandervelde used his positions to pressure the Belgian government with the daily concerns of workers and soldiers. This pattern would continue. If he could accomplish something concrete, he ignored the more theoretical questions raised by his actions on behalf of Belgium.

In the middle of 1915, Vandervelde confessed to de Broqueville that he had finally found in Britain "a field of activity that appeals to me and

16. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 207.

17. Destrée, *Souvenirs*, p. 98. Destrée, it should be noted, was one of the most ardently patriotic of the Belgian Socialists during the war.

18. For descriptions of Vandervelde's activities, see his letters to de Broqueville in de Broqueville 207, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

19. See the series of letters in Hymans 111, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels, as well as criticism of their activities in Marcel Liebman, *Les Socialistes belges, 1914–1918: Le Parti ouvrier belge face à la guerre* (Brussels: La Revue Nouvelle, 1986), pp. 58–61.

in which I feel that I can be useful.”²⁰ At the same time, he pleaded with government leaders to be included in important policy discussions, especially since he traveled frequently to Paris with his wife on speaking engagements.²¹

On 18 January 1916, de Broqueville called Vandervelde, Hymans, and Goblet d’Alviella to a meeting at Saint-Pierre Broeck. There, he invited the three ministers of state to join the cabinet. He proposed to name Vandervelde minister of procurement. Vandervelde laughed about his lack of qualifications for his new position: “When I was chosen as minister of procurement, I had never in my life purchased a kilo of sugar or a pound of coffee.”²² He would now be truly inside the government.

This time, the discussions among Socialists and within governing circles regarding Vandervelde’s new appointment involved substantial negotiations. For his part, Vandervelde consented to enter the government if the government pledged to grant universal manhood suffrage after the war. That condition satisfied most of the Socialists. De Broqueville also agreed to meet certain Flemish grievances. On the other side, not all the Catholics were happy with the formation of this first Ministry of National Union.²³ De Broqueville therefore asked Vandervelde to resign as president of the International during the time that he served as a minister of the Belgian government, but Vandervelde refused. If the two responsibilities were in conflict, he preferred to remain president of the Socialists, he explained. Several days later, King Albert assured him that his role within the International would in fact be useful once peace was restored.²⁴

Vandervelde justified his decision to accept a portfolio by pointing to the urgency of war; he was joining a “ministry of public safety,” he explained. With a compelling faith, Vandervelde professed his conviction that the war had changed Belgium. It had unified the Belgian people as a free society. Throughout the war, in speeches and articles, Vandervelde extolled the virtues of King Albert, who was proving himself to be a valiant

20. Emile Vandervelde to de Broqueville, London, n.d., de Broqueville 207, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

21. Vandervelde to Carton de Wiart, London, 11 May 1915, Carton de Wiart 1004, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

22. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 208.

23. Comte Carton de Wiart, for example, recounts the “grincements de dents” that met the announcement of Vandervelde’s entry into the ministry. Comte Carton de Wiart, *Souvenirs politiques*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Renaissance du Livre, 1981), p. 278. Hymans recalls that he would have preferred to continue with his diplomatic activities but Vandervelde “tenait vivement à entrer dans le ministère.” Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 882. See also de Broqueville 376, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels for extensive documentation of the decision to promote the ministers of state to the cabinet.

24. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 203.

defender of Belgian liberty.²⁵ Meeting an elderly monk midway through the war, Vandervelde marveled that ideology no longer separated the ardent Socialist from the conservative Catholic. They were both Belgians defending their country.

Returning to Sainte Adresse, Vandervelde compared his life as minister of procurement to his first days as an honorary member of the government in exile in 1914 when he had been the “sole Socialist in this colony of functionaries, . . . not having any contact with the outside world except through the daily mail that we so feverishly awaited.”²⁶ Now, two years later, he was surrounded by work and allies. His close friend Louis de Brouckère came to handle political affairs for his ministry and an active group of Socialists was recruited to assist.

More significantly, he now felt at home as a member of the inner circle of the Belgian government. In his *Souvenirs*, Vandervelde vividly describes the curious life of the cabinet at Sainte Adresse, “our little phalanstery of the Hôtellerie.”²⁷ Vandervelde made friendships there that would have been unthinkable before the war. He dined daily with the Catholic Jules Renkin, who had noticed him sitting alone and ill at ease the first day. Gradually he even won over wives, who, Vandervelde gleefully recounts, were horrified at first at the thought of conversing with a Socialist. The more traditional members of the government came to recognize that, despite his Socialism, Vandervelde shared their common cultural background. That background had allowed him to move with ease from the Socialist mountain retreats and congresses to shipboard teas with the wives of Catholic ministers. At the same time, Vandervelde came to know his former Catholic adversaries as friends, each riddled with his own idiosyncrasies. These relations would facilitate Vandervelde’s integration within the Belgian government after the war.

A village curate later recalled hosting one of the first meetings of the enlarged cabinet: “Who would have ever imagined that, in this humble house and presided over by the king, the president of the International Socialist Bureau and the grand master of the Freemasons would be sitting down with Catholic ministers?” he mused.²⁸ Much to his fellow ministers’ relief, Vandervelde restricted his role in the Council of Ministers meetings to issues of his particular concern. He questioned the membership of certain governmental committees, demanded that all men be required to

25. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, “En Belgique,” January 1915, in Emile Vandervelde, *La Belgique envahie et le socialisme international* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1917), p. 3.

26. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 213.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

28. Emile Vandervelde, “Fête patriotique belge à Paris” (18 March 1917), Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

serve in the army regardless of their family status, pleaded that soldiers be fed more than their rationed three potatoes a day, and proposed the establishment of workers' schools.²⁹

Otherwise Vandervelde shuttled between Sainte Adresse, where he dined with government ministers, and the front, where he fraternized with the working-class troops. In his speeches he proclaimed to the soldiers that it was indeed "a grand, a saintly thing to suffer for one's country and to fight for liberty."³⁰ For the first time, he felt truly useful, he recalled in his memoirs. He was at the center of the action. He even appears to have enjoyed his nickname, "Ministre des harengs salés," or Minister of Kippered Herring. The war had given him back the sense of purpose that he had lost with the fragmentation of the International in 1914. He belonged again.

Vandervelde continued his travels abroad, addressing governments and crowds on behalf of the Belgian cause. He paid repeated homage to the generation of men who marched courageously to war, valiantly defying the overwhelming odds. The Belgians were fighting then not only in defense of their nation, he proclaimed, but "for right, liberty, and civilization."³¹ In pamphlets, books, newspaper articles, and speeches, Vandervelde never tired of recounting stories of the victimization of neutral Belgium. He also denounced the Germans as "Teutonic mercenaries" who trampled divine and human laws underfoot.³²

Meanwhile, the war immobilized the Belgian Workers' Party. The first time that the party Bureau met under German occupation, it advised the executive committee of the International Socialist Bureau that the Belgians would take no part in any international conferences involving the Germans.³³ By November 1914 Vandervelde, Georges Hubin, Louis de Brouckère, Henri de Man, Jules Destrée, and Camille Huysmans had all left Belgium. Although the Conseil général granted mandates to de Brouckère and Vandervelde to represent the party abroad, communication across Belgian borders was extremely difficult. Rumors flourished. Even the exchange of ideas among the Belgian Socialist leaders who remained

29. De Broqueville 381, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels; Renkin 11, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels; and Dossier Vandervelde, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

30. Emile Vandervelde, *Dans la mêlée* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1919), p. 20.

31. Vandervelde, *La Belgique envahie*, p. 9.

32. Emile Vandervelde, "Pourquoi nous ne serons jamais Allemands"; and Emile Vandervelde, "Leur Mentalité. Réponse à l'Allemagne intellectuelle" (1914), Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

33. Bureau, Parti ouvrier belge, 4 November 1914, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 43, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent; and Leo Collard, ed., *Les Fastes du parti, 1885-1960* (Brussels: Institut Emile Vandervelde, 1960-61), p. 82.

in Belgium became difficult. The nine members of the Bureau met only at irregular intervals, enlarging their committee toward the end of the war.³⁴ Censorship of the press so separated the workers in Belgium from the leadership that some historians have suggested that the Belgian Workers' Party ceased to exist as a mass party.³⁵

Few Belgian Socialists questioned Vandervelde's dual responsibilities. Ever since the elections of 1894, the party had been moving toward participation in the Belgian government, Vandervelde perhaps more rapidly than the rest. After 1914 many Belgian Socialists, including Georges Hubin, E. Brunet and Louis Pierard, were far more outspoken in their patriotism than Vandervelde. It is perhaps not surprising that the Socialists who remained within Belgium lent even more fervent support to the Belgian cause than did Vandervelde and de Brouckère outside. So recently the hosts of the Second International, the Belgians became the most outspoken Socialist opponents of separate peace initiatives or negotiations with the Germans.

The International

Without much support from Vandervelde, Camille Huysmans kept the International alive almost single-handedly. While its president was following the Belgian government into exile and attempting to rally neutral governments to the Allied cause, the secretary of the International undertook the transfer of the offices of the International Socialist Bureau to The Hague. Since neither Vandervelde nor Anseele would travel to the neutral Netherlands, Huysmans invited two Dutch Socialists to serve on the Bureau.

Soon after the arrival of Huysmans in the Netherlands, Socialists from the neutral countries asked him to help to convene a conference of the International. They were unwilling simply to write off a decade and a half of international Socialist cooperation because armies were at war. Since most of the European Socialists had lined up behind their governments, Huysmans found his calls for a resumption of international ties supported by only American, Italian, Swiss, Dutch, and Scandinavian Socialists.

In September the Italian and Swiss Socialists convened a conference at Lugano. None of the Socialists from the countries at war joined them. Few French, British, or Belgian Socialists could be persuaded to listen to

34. *Rapport du Bureau du Conseil général sur l'activité du Parti ouvrier pendant la guerre.*

35. Mieke Claeys Van Haegendoren contrasts the Belgian experience with that of other Socialist parties during the war to explain the resulting schism between the leadership and the masses within Belgium. M. Claeys Van Haegendoren, *25 Jaar Belgische Socialisme* (Antwerp: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1967), p. 52.

a repetition of resolutions denouncing the war as an imperialistic adventure. Likewise, the Lugano delegates' calls for a meeting of the International Socialist Bureau went unanswered. In the end, the Swiss and Italian efforts met such determined resistance from the majority of the other European Socialists that the two countries' delegations formally split off from the International.

In the meantime, Huysmans encouraged the more moderate Dutch and Scandinavian plans to convene the International in Copenhagen. The Germans, however, refused to grant passports to the Dutch delegation for travel through their territory, so the meeting was canceled.³⁶ Huysmans then urged Vandervelde as president of the international body to call a meeting of the executive committee of the Bureau in The Hague for 15 February 1915. Vandervelde protested that he was overwhelmed by his governmental responsibilities – travels to the front at Furnes and lectures in London, Oxford, and Cambridge – but, he agreed to attend the meeting.³⁷ The meeting was subsequently canceled. Huysmans was troubled by Vandervelde's neglect of the International.

At the time that Vandervelde was discouraging Huysmans's attempts to reconvene the International, he was strengthening his ties with friends in Britain and France, the Allied Socialists. In London, he conversed privately with British Socialists Sidney Webb, Ramsay MacDonald, and Arthur Henderson. They discussed the coordination of assistance to wounded Allied soldiers and denounced the upcoming congress of neutral Socialists.³⁸ Vandervelde met with Edouard Vaillant, Jules Guesde, Marcel Sembat, Jean Longuet, and Pierre Renaudel in Paris. After each discussion, Vandervelde forwarded his impressions to Huysmans. He smugly reported, for example, that the French refused to consider meeting with either the Austrians or the German Socialists.³⁹

The Allied Socialists formally convened in London on 14 February 1915, the day before the International Socialist Bureau would have met in The Hague. Ostensibly, they came together to discuss points of accord and to work toward peace. However, in preliminary discussions, Jules Guesde had already made it very clear that he foresaw no possibility of negotiating a peace with an unbeaten and unrepentant German nation. His views were shared by all but a minority of French Socialists. In Britain,

36. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 13 January 1915, f127/11/33, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

37. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, London, n.d., f127/11/32, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

38. Destrée, *Souvenirs*, pp. 148 and 150; and Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, London, n.d., f127/11/32, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

39. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, London, 20 January 1915, f127/11/135a, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

only the delegates from the Independent Labour Party continued to insist that all imperialist governments be held equally responsible for the war. Vandervelde joined the ranks of speakers who vociferously denounced German aggression. Although he acknowledged that the European conflict had its origins in capitalist society, he asserted vehemently that the Allied Socialists had fulfilled their duty by resisting the Germans' premeditated criminal attack on Belgium and Serbia.

The debate over the final resolution of the 1915 London congress revealed the prevailing unease of the majority of the Allied Socialists. They easily approved the first paragraph of the resolution condemning the war as "a monstrous product of the politics of colonialism and aggressive imperialism and of the antagonisms that have torn capitalist society asunder."⁴⁰ But a second paragraph, supported ardently by Vandervelde, that placed sole responsibility for the war on "the aggression of military monarchies of Central Europe against two small nationalities" proved controversial.⁴¹ The majority of Allied Socialists bitterly condemned the German Socialists who had voted war credits, but Vandervelde's proposed assignment of guilt was too blatant for them. After heated debate, the passage was deleted. That deletion marked a blow to Vandervelde's hopes of identifying the International with the Allied cause by isolating the Germans. In the conclusion to the resolution, the Socialist delegates declared their continued support for the Allied cause, although they pledged to resist the transformation of the defensive war into a war of conquest.

The majority of the Allied Socialists had quickly reconciled themselves to living with half an International.⁴² Similarly, they made no attempt to justify the Allied war aims with Socialist rhetoric. Either they saw no need for theory in wartime or the urgency of their situation did not allow time for undertaking such a difficult task.

Whether or not Huysmans shared Vandervelde's view of German guilt, he did not allow his sense of outrage to interfere with his work at the center of the International. "Despite my aversion, despite my identity as a Belgian, I know that I am a functionary at everyone's service," he confided in a letter to French Socialist Albert Thomas.⁴³ "I have attempted to dissipate the misunderstandings and to specify the points on which we are in

40. "Conférence des représentants des partis ouvriers et socialistes des pays alliés," London, 14 February 1915, I 621/128, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp; and I 231, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Emile Vandervelde to de Broqueville, 7 November 1914, de Broqueville 207, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

43. Camille Huysmans to Albert Thomas, 30 December 1915, Bureau socialiste international 36, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

agreement. I have proposed to listen *successively* to the delegations.”⁴⁴ Driven by his conviction that “*the International must have a politics that is detached from the position of the armies,*” Huysmans saw his own position at the center of the conflict grow increasingly difficult.⁴⁵

Huysmans returned to Belgium in the spring and was then prevented from leaving for several months. Detained but not idle, he forwarded to Vandervelde proposals to establish schools for workers and soldiers based on his observations of conditions in occupied Belgium. Vandervelde in turn asked Huysmans to secure a formal mandate for him to represent the Belgian Workers’ Party abroad.⁴⁶ They also exchanged information each had gleaned about the activities of German Socialists Bernstein and Renaudel, discussed practical details such as obtaining a better exchange rate for Huysmans, worried together about the Belgian unemployed, and worked to convince the British to pay their share of dues to the International.

The two leaders appear to have maintained their friendship, despite the increasing divergence of their positions on the war. Of the two, it was Vandervelde who proved the more intransigent in his views. It was also clearly Vandervelde who had changed the most dramatically during the war, in effect abandoning the internationalism that had at least theoretically stood at the foundation of the prewar Second International. That Vandervelde worked at all to preserve amiable relations with the man who personified a peace-seeking Socialist International is further evidence of his personal commitment to comradeship.

At the end of 1915, Huysmans again proposed a meeting of the Bureau of the International in The Hague. This time he agreed to invite only the Allied Socialists. Huysmans suggested that Vandervelde personally invite the British and French delegates during his travels, but Vandervelde pressed Huysmans to extend official invitations in the name of the Bureau.⁴⁷ The reasons for Vandervelde’s concern became clear when the Italian Socialist Oddino Morgari declared his intention to attend the meeting and pressed Vandervelde publicly in Paris for an invitation.⁴⁸ Vandervelde had feared

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Huysmans replied that it would be too difficult to supply him with a mandate from the Conseil général of the party, given the problems of traveling with such documents across borders, but that he should consider himself “*comme mandataire et mandaté – et marche!*” Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 3 June 1915, The Hague, f127/11/82, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

47. Correspondence between Camille Huysmans and Emile Vandervelde for the fall and winter of 1915 in Folio 1030, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp, and in Bureau socialiste international 36, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

48. I 1046 B and C, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

such an initiative from Socialists in the neutral countries.

Vandervelde meanwhile was writing privately to Huysmans to express his growing reservations. The Germans seemed suspiciously supportive of the Bureau's efforts to convene the conference. He wondered about their motives. In November Vandervelde agreed to attend the meeting, booked his transportation, and asked that hotel reservations be made for him in The Hague.⁴⁹ Louis Bertrand then intervened from Belgium to urge Vandervelde not to travel to The Hague. Huysmans continued to appeal to Vandervelde for help in recruiting more Allied delegates to the conference, but in the end it too was canceled.⁵⁰

Relations between the president and the secretary of the International deteriorated in the first months of 1916. The press eagerly exploited their disagreements over the Bureau's continuing attempts to bring Socialists together. The newspaper *La Belgique*, for example, juxtaposed conflicting interviews that Huysmans and Vandervelde had given on separate occasions. Huysmans had reminded Socialists of the Stuttgart, Copenhagen, and Basle resolutions that had placed responsibility for war on capitalist imperialism. Huysmans had also openly spelled out the conditions under which he believed that Socialists would agree to join negotiations for peace. Vandervelde meanwhile was quoted as arguing energetically against any peace talks before the Allies had achieved total victory.⁵¹

When the Dutch press alleged that many Belgian Socialists were indeed willing to talk with the Germans, Vandervelde questioned Huysmans about the source of this misinformation. Cautioning Huysmans to be more circumspect, he invited Huysmans to visit their British and French friends to clear up the misunderstandings that had resulted from the Bureau's ambiguous pronouncements.⁵² Huysmans accepted the invitation.⁵³ Further difficulties resulted from rumors spread through the Belgian cabinet by Socialist-turned-extreme-patriot Modeste Terwagne regarding Huys-

49. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, Ridgehurst, 26 November 1915, I 1030, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp; and Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, London, 30 December 1915, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

50. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

51. "Le Cas de M. Huysmans, Le Discours d'Arnhem" and "M. Emile Vandervelde contre M. Huysmans" in *La Belgique*, 22 January 1916, in I 625, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

52. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, Sainte Adresse, 22 February 1916, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

53. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 1 March 1916, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

mans's alleged sympathies for the Germans.⁵⁴

Just as all that had calmed down, Vandervelde came across a document titled "Manifeste du comité exécutif du Bureau socialiste international" printed in *L'Humanité*. He had neither seen nor approved the declaration. He immediately dispatched an angry letter to Huysmans asking why, as the president of the Bureau, he had not been consulted.⁵⁵ Huysmans replied that he had in fact sent the draft of the manifesto to Vandervelde; it must have been seized and censored en route.⁵⁶ Huysmans finally complained that the continual sniping of Socialists in Belgium, France, and Britain, including Vandervelde, had left him tired and demoralized. He did not know how much longer he could continue without moral or financial support, he protested. Vandervelde backed off, but the differences separating the two men were obvious. Huysmans wanted peace. For him, bringing an end to the war was the primary responsibility of the International. Vandervelde, in contrast, was so happily ensconced within the Belgian government that he saw only the side of the Allies. He wanted to defeat Germany.

Vandervelde appeared to make his first concessions to Huysmans when he agreed to help organize a conference of neutral Socialists. He shared Huysmans's conviction that they too were suffering from the war and deserved a voice.⁵⁷ But after cooperating in the planning, Vandervelde did not attend. He wrote to assure Huysmans that he still supported the

54. Terwagne was writing confidentially to Carton de Wiart to inform the Belgian ministers of Camille Huysmans's too great confidence in the Germans and of his opportunism and attempts to use Emile Vandervelde while in The Hague. Terwagne to Carton de Wiart, 10 January 1916, Hymans 331, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels. Huysmans and Vandervelde were well aware of Terwagne's activities. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 24 February 1916, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp, and Bureau socialiste international 36, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. In July Huysmans wrote to thank Vandervelde for intervening in Le Havre to stop Terwagne. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 15 July 1916, I 609, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp. Terwagne subsequently wrote indignantly to Vandervelde about Vandervelde's actions, protesting that he could not serve two masters at once and would thus choose nation over party. Terwagne to Emile Vandervelde, 17 July 1916, de Broqueville 195, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

55. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, Le Havre, 8 May 1916, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

56. Problems with correspondence plagued the Socialists throughout the war. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 16 May 1916, I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp. Huysmans protested the censorship to Hymans but with little satisfaction. Huysmans to Hymans, 27 June 1916, Hymans to Huysmans, 6 July 1916, and Huysmans to Hymans, 12 July 1916. Hymans 79, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels. Vandervelde also appealed to Hymans to allow him to send his correspondence through the "legation" and promised not to write anything that might be censored. Vandervelde to Hymans, 20 July 1916, Hymans 79, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

57. Correspondence in I 1030 B, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp; and Bureau socialiste internationale, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

conference in principle; however, he could not participate because he did not represent a neutral country. Belgium had been “attacked, devastated, martyred, and conquered,” he reminded Huysmans; it had thus lost its neutrality.⁵⁸

Huysmans was by then well aware that Vandervelde’s wartime actions were guided solely by his concern for the fate of occupied Belgium. When Vandervelde did call upon the Bureau, it was to request intervention on behalf of Belgian workers who had been deported by the Germans.⁵⁹ His memorandum to the Bureau received such wide publicity that German Socialists Philipp Scheidemann and Fritz Ebert traveled to The Hague to respond to Vandervelde’s charges. They subsequently requested an official inquiry into the treatment of the Belgian workers, but, as Vandervelde later complained, the German Socialists dared make no further public condemnation of German authority. The exchange of angry allegations between Vandervelde and the Germans demonstrated that the rift between European Socialists only grew wider as the war dragged on.

Gradually, Vandervelde’s pessimism about the fate of the International dampened even Huysmans’s spirits. Contrary to the Dutch hopes, Huysmans acknowledged that a meeting of all the members of the Bureau was no longer possible. In the midst of the war it was difficult even to gather the members of the executive committee in one place. The Germans prevented Louis Bertrand and Eduard Anseele from leaving Belgium, and Vandervelde refused to travel to the Netherlands for fear that he would be stopped en route in Zeebrugge and locked away in a prisoner-of-war camp for the remainder of the war.⁶⁰

The Dutch Socialists refused to give up. They suggested a Paris meeting of the executive committee together with the Swede Karl Hjalmar Brantig and French and British delegates to be held early in 1917. Vandervelde and his secretary, Auguste DeWinne, agreed to serve as intermediaries, negotiating details between Huysmans for the Bureau and Louis Dubreuilh for the French Socialists to plan a Paris meeting for early 1917. Travel again proved the obstacle that thwarted the plans. No sooner had agreement been reached on the schedule and agenda than the French authorities refused Huysmans a visa. The government alleged that he had been collaborating with the enemy. Through the intervention of Vandervelde and the French Socialists, Huysmans finally secured a visa. The conference was canceled

58. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, 9 June 1916, I 609, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

59. The subject of deported Belgian workers touched Vandervelde personally, as his secretary Auguste DeWinne’s son, René, had been deported to Germany. I 603, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

60. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, 1 September 1916, I 662/15, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

nevertheless. Belgian Socialists inside Belgium had refused to go along with the International's plans.

Huysmans bitterly resented this rejection by his own countrymen. He reproached the Belgian Socialists for the patriotic nationalism that they had allowed to smother their sense of international responsibilities.⁶¹ He reminded Vandervelde that when the International had selected the Belgians to serve as the executive committee in 1900, they had agreed to represent the interests of Socialism as a whole, not just the particular needs of Belgium. Up until 1914, they had gracefully satisfied their dual roles. They had no excuse for shirking their international duties now.

Vandervelde wrote back to reassure Huysmans that his Belgian friends supported him. De Brouckère did share the French Socialist Jules Guesde's objections to any meeting of the International while the war was being fought. Furthermore, Vandervelde added, he could not deny that he also agreed with the reasoning of the Belgian Socialists who had opposed the meetings. Still, he encouraged Huysmans to remain in his position as "the mainspring of the executive committee."⁶²

Vandervelde urged Huysmans to rise above the influences of his environment – an obvious reference to the Dutch neutrals – and not to fall prey to impatience. "Indeed, dear friend," he added, "our situation is not always easy. I understand, better than anyone, how much patience, self-denial, and impassivity you must display in order to put up with attacks on two fronts and to reconcile your duties toward your country and toward the International."⁶³ French Socialist Albert Thomas later blamed himself and Vandervelde for failing to lend Huysmans sufficient support while he headed the Bureau in exile. Had they helped to cultivate the Belgian secretary's basic anti-German sentiments, he speculated, an invigorated Huysmans might have even won the Dutch Socialists over to the war effort.⁶⁴ Vandervelde remained adamant, unable to see any justification for Huysmans's internationalism. Any attempt to negotiate separately would only harm the Allied war effort, Vandervelde argued.

Preferring to discuss their differences in person as they had done so often in the past, Vandervelde invited Huysmans to come once again to London. He hoped to convince Huysmans "that the only means of saving

61. Camille Huysmans to Emile Vandervelde, I 1030, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

62. Vandervelde to Huysmans, Le Havre, 20 January 1917, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

63. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, Le Havre, 20 January 1917, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

64. Albert Thomas, "Journal de Russie d'Albert Thomas," ed. I. Sinanoglou, *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 14–15 (1973–74): 191.

the International in its current form is not to go against the deep and legitimate feeling of those who refuse to chase after a mirage just when the forces of liberty and democracy need to rally together in their supreme effort.”⁶⁵

All the while that Vandervelde urged Huysmans to resist Dutch influence in The Hague, he never acknowledged that his own ministerial position at Sainte Adresse might have inhibited his ability to balance national and international interests. Vandervelde never admitted to any self-doubt about his wartime role. When Vandervelde pleaded for Socialist unity and urged Huysmans not to foster division, he meant that all the Socialists should line up in support of the cause of victimized Belgium. He saw no other possible position. As he made clear with his appeal for the deported Belgian workers, in his mind the International existed to protect “the forces of liberty,” not to negotiate a premature peace with the forces of tyranny. Vandervelde persistently explained that it was precisely because he was a strong internationalist, pacifist, and Socialist that he believed that the war had to be fought to the very end. Not only were the two positions compatible, Vandervelde maintained with a characteristically optimistic faith, they were mutually reinforcing. Vandervelde insisted that the war would create the conditions under which internationalism could flourish in a Europe of free peoples.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Vandervelde not only tolerated Huysmans’s leadership of the International throughout the war, he seems to have been glad that Huysmans was doing what he was doing. Despite the clear divergence in their positions, the two leaders of the International faithfully maintained a devoted and frank correspondence throughout the war. The two friends never allowed disagreements to interrupt their exchange of ideas.

The differences between Vandervelde, the Belgian minister, and Huysmans, the secretary of the International Socialist Bureau, persisted through the spring of 1917. Vandervelde opposed any Socialist negotiations for a separate peace while Huysmans supported the efforts of Brantig and the Dutch delegates.⁶⁷ The two came together only in their opposition to Belgium’s demands that enemy lands be ceded to it at the end of the war. Such annexation claims had begun to seduce many Socialists, including Vandervelde’s own secretary, Auguste DeWinne.⁶⁸

65. Emile Vandervelde to Camille Huysmans, Le Havre, 20 January 1917, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

66. Vandervelde, *La Belgique envahie*, pp. 71–2.

67. See, for example, a telegram transmitted by the Belgian legation from Vandervelde to Huysmans on 18 April 1917 arguing against the negotiations. Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

Stockholm, Patriotism, and Peace

The convening of a Socialist peace conference at Stockholm presented the ultimate challenge to Vandervelde and Huysmans's friendship. More broadly, their disagreements over Stockholm revealed the growing divisions within the European Socialist movement. Early in the spring of 1917, Dutch and Scandinavian Socialists gathered in the Swedish capital. Their geographic isolation mirrored the distance separating their positions on the war from those of the Allied Socialists. Encouraged by the changes promised by the success of the first stages of the Russian Revolution, they sent out invitations for an International Socialist congress in Stockholm.⁶⁹ Huysmans joined the committee in Stockholm. Vandervelde refused to rally to the cause.⁷⁰

When Vandervelde stopped in Stockholm on his way to Russia, Huysmans met him at the station. "Despite our old friendship, the meeting seemed rather cold. Our temperaments at that time were so different," Vandervelde recalled.⁷¹ Victor Adler, Vandervelde's Austrian friend who had shared his centrist positions in the Second International a decade earlier, was also in Stockholm. Vandervelde ignored Adler's urgent invitation to meet with him. After three years on opposite sides of the war, Vandervelde felt morally obliged to refuse, even if it meant he would never see his gravely ill friend again. He later confessed that that decision had not been an easy one. The war had snuffed out the prewar comradeship that had been the essence of the International for Vandervelde.

By the time Vandervelde returned from Russia, the recalcitrant Belgians had agreed to participate in preliminary discussions for a Stockholm

68. Vandervelde's secretary, Auguste DeWinne, proposed projects for the annexation of parts of the Netherlands, the Rhineland, and parts of Switzerland. Both Vandervelde and Camille Huysmans were aware of these nationalist schemings, but allowed DeWinne to continue despite Vandervelde's professed antiannexationist views. In deference to Vandervelde, DeWinne did not sign articles that he published in the press. DeWinne to Camille Huysmans, 3 October 1936, Bureau socialiste international 35, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

69. The arrangements of the Stockholm congress fall outside the chapter and have been extensively written about in G. D. H. Cole, *Socialist Thought* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1958), vol. 4; Claude Renard, *Octobre 1917 et le mouvement ouvrier belge* (Brussels: Fondation Jacquemotte, 1967); Maria Sokolova, *Les Congrès de l'Internationale entre les deux guerres mondiales* (Paris: Imprimerie Meyer Ruelle, 1953); P. Van der Esch, *La Deuxième Internationale, 1889–1923* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1957); Agnes Blandorf, *Die Zweite Internationale und der Krieg* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979); and Georges Haupt, "Camille Huysmans, secrétaire de la III^{ème} Internationale," in Herman Balthazar et al., ed., *Bijdragen tot het Camille Huysmansorderzoek* (Antwerp: Stichting Camille Huysmans, 1971). Wim Geldolf, of the Camille Huysmans Archief, is preparing a study of the role of Huysmans at Stockholm based on the extensive holdings of the Archief.

70. Vandervelde, I 105, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

71. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 229.

congress. The French claimed at first to welcome the initiative and then sent the issue to a study commission where it remained for the duration. The British government at first refused passports to the delegates. British sailors then detained Ramsay MacDonald when he tried to sail from Aberdeen. Arthur Henderson's decision to participate forced his resignation from the war cabinet. The Germans, in contrast, were well represented in Stockholm by Fritz Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann, Hermann Molkenburh, Johannes Sassenbach, Karl Legien, and Richard Fischer as well as Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, Hugo Haase, and Georg Ledebour. Victor Adler headed the Austrian delegation. Although a full Russian delegation was chaired by Paul Axelrod, the fast-moving Bolshevik revolution soon stripped the Russian delegation of its credibility.

After months of discussion among themselves, although they agreed to participate in the planning of the conference, Thomas, Henderson, de Brouckère, and Vandervelde refused to meet with the German Socialists until after the Germans had been defeated. Kerensky, Van Kol, Huysmans, and Brantig pressured them in vain to relent. The Socialist members of Allied governments would agree only to separate, simultaneous Socialist congresses. The Stockholm congress thus met the same fate as all the earlier attempts to bring together Socialists from both sides of the trenches.

After the war, the Conseil général of the Belgian Workers' Party met to pass judgment on the war activities of Belgian Socialists. Vandervelde himself rose to defend Huysmans's role in Stockholm against charges that he had abandoned the Belgian cause.⁷² Vandervelde explained that he and Huysmans had in fact always agreed in principle about Stockholm. According to historian Mieke Claeys Van Haegendoren, their public semblance of accord in 1918 may well have prevented the Belgian Workers' Party from splintering like the other Socialist parties after the war.⁷³

In February 1918 Vandervelde presided over the last meeting of the Allied Socialists in London. The Belgian Socialists within Belgium condemned even that meeting, although Vandervelde was one of its organizers. They charged that the organizers had joined forces with the pacifist Zimmerwald faction.⁷⁴

The Socialists from the Allied countries issued a memorandum addressed to the Socialist parties of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and

72. *Le Peuple*, 19 December 1918.

73. Claeys Van Haegendoren, *25 Jaar Belgische Socialisme*.

74. See, for example, an editorial by Georges Hubin in *La Patrie belge* (9 May 1918), attacking Vandervelde's authoritarian tendencies for presuming to speak for Socialists within Belgium with whom he had not communicated for four years. I 43, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

Bulgaria. It contained few concessions.⁷⁵ The Allied Socialists promised to talk with the Germans if they would agree to accept all the principles set forth in the memorandum, which began by assigning responsibility for the war to German imperialism. Pointing once again, but only in passing, to the capitalist roots of the conflict, the authors explained the war as a struggle between two opposing political systems. On the one side were the nations where democratic revolutions had already triumphed and on the other were the semifeudal, semiabsolute powers. The Allies restated the justification of their participation in the war as self-defense. They cited the stories they had been telling and retelling of the burning of villages, the rape of women, and the brutal suppression of liberal freedoms by the Germans. They called on all Socialists to recognize their mutual obligation to end imperialism and promised to work together to ensure that the war did not become a war of annexation. They consented finally to discuss peace terms with those Socialists who would renounce imperialism – obviously referring to German imperialism.⁷⁶

Vandervelde's optimism about the postwar future of Europe rested on his conviction that the Germans would soon be soundly defeated. "It is not only the fate of France and Belgium that is in question," he asserted. "It is the future of democracy in the world."⁷⁷ He charged that the premature concessions offered by the pacifists and neutrals, "the Zimmerwaldians, the Kienthalers, and to a lesser extent, our friends in the 'minority' factions in Britain, France, and Italy," had almost jeopardized the possibilities for building a lasting peace.⁷⁸ All vestiges of Hohenzollern power had to be destroyed and that could be accomplished only by military defeat. Vandervelde resolved therefore to persevere, to continue the struggle for Wilson's peace, which would guarantee the self-determination of all peoples. Such a peace was possible, he asserted, because it was necessary. He cited King Albert, President Wilson, and Alexander Kerensky, not Marx and Engels, in his arguments.⁷⁹

As the war was about to end, King Albert assembled the political leaders of Belgium, including Vandervelde, at Lophem, his temporary residence. Their discussions of the postwar future of Belgium seemed to Vandervelde

⁷⁵ Vandervelde consulted Huysmans during the drafting of the memorandum. Vandervelde to Huysmans, Le Havre, 11 March 1918, I 604 A, Archief Camille Huysmans, Antwerp.

⁷⁶ *Congrès international extraordinaire*, Georges Haupt, ed., vol. 22 (Geneva: Minkoff, n.d.), pp. 338–77.

⁷⁷ Emile Vandervelde, *Pour la paix démocratique par la victoire* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1918), Hoover Library, Stanford, California.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

to be almost revolutionary.⁸⁰ In the castle of Lophem on the outskirts of Bruges, he sat with the men who had so stubbornly resisted change before the war. They openly debated the Flemish demands for linguistic equality that had surfaced during the war. Catholics as well as Liberals now appeared to be willing to implement the compromise on universal manhood suffrage negotiated in 1916 between Vandervelde and de Broqueville.⁸¹

Vandervelde later confessed that he had experienced “a strange sensation of emptiness and melancholy” with the reestablishment of peace.⁸² He had realized suddenly that “it was over. A whole period of my life had come to an end.”⁸³ No longer called to shuttle between cabinet meetings and the troops in the trenches, he lost his sense of purpose. On his way to Lophem one gloomy November day, Vandervelde paused to visit the front one last time. That experience restored his balance, he confessed. Talking to a group of young soldiers near Bruges, he saw that for them the end of the war meant the chance to return alive to their families. In Robert Graves’s memoir of the First World War, *Goodbye to All That*, when young soldiers questioned the morality of an older generation that cavalierly marched its sons off to die in the trenches, the narrator speculates about a war in which the sons dispatched their fathers to the front instead. Similarly, Vandervelde and the soldiers on the Belgian front had radically different perspectives on the war: one from the mud of the trenches and the other from the “phalanstery” at Sainte Adresse. This striking contrast between the two generations’ experiences of the war would be a significant determinant of their reactions to the next European crisis, the growing threat of fascism. The war had taught the younger generation to recoil from armed aggression while it had completed the integration of an older generation into governing circles.

Vandervelde reasserted his Socialist independence for a brief moment on the eve of the armistice. He threatened to resign from the cabinet in protest against the government’s treatment of Belgian artillery workers in Le Havre. Albert Thomas had secured civilian salaries for the French workers while the Belgian workers continued to receive soldiers’ rations. Vandervelde intervened on behalf of the Belgian workers, but without success. Now, with peace in sight, the Belgian workers remembered their militancy of old; they went out on strike. Vandervelde proposed arbitration,

80. Emile Vandervelde, “Le Droit de réponse du roi Albert,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 17 February 1930.

81. Subsequent opposition by the majority of Socialists to certain provisions of the compromise, however forced a reopening of the negotiations later. Emmanuel Gerard, *De Katholieke Partij in Crisis: Partij politiek leven in België, 1918–1940* (Louvain: Kritak, 1985), p. 59.

82. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 275.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

but the embarrassed and angry government ignored him. They would suppress the strike with force if necessary. In the end, the government relented, allowing Vandervelde to remain in the somewhat shaken and now less harmonious cabinet.⁸⁴

Shortly thereafter, the Dutch Socialist Henri Van Kol persuaded Vandervelde to join him as he ventured through the retreating German troops into the almost liberated Belgian capital. Together they waived the formalities of crossing into the zone of German occupation by offering astonished guards Dutch cigars and displaying a white flag. In that way, Vandervelde became the first member of the Belgian government who managed to make a triumphal entry into Brussels. That evening he addressed the crowds of workers assembled in front of the Maison du Peuple. According to his cabinet secretary, Jules Messine, "this reestablishment of contact between Vandervelde and the Belgian working class left an unforgettable memory in the hearts of those who were present."⁸⁵

Like Vandervelde, the other members of the government who would follow him on the road from Lophem to Brussels understood that an old era had ended. Many, though, were saddened by the realization that they could not simply pick up where they had left off in 1914. Too much had been changed by the war. The Socialists had now clearly established their place within the government. Charles Woeste, the conservative Catholic, reported his conversation with Léon Delacroix, Albert's choice for a new first minister, about the formation of a postwar ministry. When Delacroix informed Woeste that he had decided to name Vandervelde as minister of justice, Woeste asked incredulously, "M. Vandervelde, the man of the Maison du Peuple?"⁸⁶ Delacroix replied simply that he did not know where else to put him. The Liberal Paul Hymans likewise expressed his concerns about Vandervelde's participation in the government. He hoped that the Socialists would appreciate the responsibilities of their new positions and declare an end to the "parliamentary comedy" in which they had persistently blocked governmental projects through votes in party congresses and intrigues in the corridors of Parliament.⁸⁷

They need not have worried. Vandervelde's experiences during the war had established his credentials as a member of the government. In actual

84. For Hymans's account of the governmental conflict over Belgian artillery workers see Hymans, *Mémoires*, pp. 235–6. Vandervelde had threatened to resign in February 1917 as well. DeWinne to Huysmans, 9 February 1917, I 1030, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

85. Jules Messine, "Emile Vandervelde, Sa Vie et son oeuvre," typed manuscript, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

86. Comte Woeste, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire contemporaine de la Belgique*, 3 vols. (Brussels: L'Édition Universelle, 1933), 3: 59.

87. Hymans 334, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

fact, the groundwork for his integration into the world of the political insiders had been laid long before.

Delacroix boldly invited the new minister of justice, the Socialist president, to dinner at his Ixelles home. As Vandervelde approached the house in the rue de Stassart, he realized that it was the very same house that his grandparents had lived in while he was growing up. So as the Socialist discussed cabinet affairs over dinner with the new prime minister, memories of family dinners and childhood amusements flooded back.

At the same time that it was dealing with the reconstruction of a devastated country, the new tripartite government faced the formidable task of representing Belgian interests at the Versailles peace conference. Foreign minister Hymans asked each party to name one representative to attend the upcoming conference. He would represent the Liberals and he suggested that M. Van den Heuvel, a longtime minister of justice and an experienced diplomat, represent the Catholics. Much to Hymans's annoyance, Vandervelde insisted on naming himself as the Socialist representative.⁸⁸

Some of the delegates to the Socialists' extraordinary congress of 1918 were no more pleased than Hymans with Vandervelde's role. They argued that the Socialists should dispatch their own representative to Versailles. Party and national interests could not be represented by the same person.⁸⁹ Vandervelde protested that even though he would attend as a representative of the Belgian government, in his advocacy of Wilson's program he would be speaking for the interests of the Belgian proletariat as well. Once again, he prevailed. The Socialists at the party congress proceeded to consider questions of feeding the population, relieving unemployment and preserving the industrial plant of Belgium. They defined the conditions under which relations with the International could be resumed. Eduard Ansele was delegated to represent the party at the International's congress at Lausanne.⁹⁰

Vandervelde did not settle easily into his role as a member of the Versailles delegation. His difficulties were evident from the first conversations among the delegates even before they left Brussels. Van den Heuvel and Hymans had already agreed on a program of Belgian demands to present to the conference. Vandervelde attacked their demands as annexationist. Such arbitrary territorial modifications violated the spirit of Wilson's pledge, he argued. They contended that the residents of Dutch Limburg and of Luxembourg really wanted to be Belgian citizens. By the time they all finished, Hymans was convinced that Vandervelde would

88. Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 296.

89. *Rapport du Bureau*, (1918).

90. *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1918.*

support their position.⁹¹

Once in Paris, Hymans realized he had been mistaken about Vandervelde's compliance. Belgian Catholics and Liberals alike complained about Vandervelde's refusal to cooperate.⁹² Not only in private meetings of the delegation, but in interviews with the press, he attacked any proposals that appeared to be tainted by annexation.⁹³ Hymans already feared that the Belgians, as a small power, would have little hope of convincing the "Big Four" to listen to their appeal. He did not need dissension within his own ranks. On 29 April the Belgian delegation was summoned to present its case for war reparations to Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Wilson. They did not meet with much success.⁹⁴ Hymans blamed Vandervelde.

Vandervelde probably played his most useful role in Versailles as a member of the labor commission that drafted the Labor Charter. While the Big Four "decided the fate of Europe and the world," the fifteen members of the labor commission created an international labor office and model international legislation.⁹⁵ On the commission, Vandervelde recaptured his sense of purpose. He shuttled back and forth between Brussels, where as minister of justice he cast his vote for universal manhood suffrage, and Paris, where he delivered the final report of the labor commission.

The conflicts inherent in Vandervelde's wartime role did not end with his role in negotiating the Versailles treaty. Although the Belgian Workers' Party publicly approved his conduct at Versailles, the International renounced the treaty. On the other side, many members of the Belgian Parliament called for a rejection of the terms of the treaty because the delegation had not satisfied their demands for annexation. Vandervelde would continue to defend the aims of the treaty throughout the interwar period. His role in the negotiations, however, brought him little praise.

91. Hymans, *Mémoires*, p. 297.

92. Pierre Orts complained that Vandervelde was not prepared for the diplomatic responsibility. Vandervelde devoted too much time to his "coreligionnaires politiques et aux affaires de son parti," according to the disgruntled Orts. Moreover, Orts asserts without substantiation, Vandervelde acted indiscreetly, presumably receiving women in his hotel room. Pierre Orts, "Souvenirs de ma carrière," *Papiers Orts, Archives Générales du Royaume*, Brussels. I am grateful to Jean Stengers for calling this report to my attention.

93. See, for example, Hymans 150, *Archives Générales du Royaume*, Brussels; or Robert Fenaux, *Paul Hymans, un homme, un temps, 1865-1941* (Brussels: Office de Publicité, n.d.); and Woeste, *Mémoires*, 3: 61. Carton de Wiart and Clemenceau complained that Vandervelde, rather uncharacteristically, was too seduced by the pleasures of Paris to participate actively and responsibly at Versailles. Carton de Wiart, *Souvenirs politiques*, p. 30.

94. For a description of the session at Versailles, see André Tardieu, *La Paix* (Paris: Payot et Cie, 1921), pp. 250-1; or Sally Marks, *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Peace Conference of 1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 191.

95. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 29.

The war had substantially altered Vandervelde's perspective on international relations in Europe. He had imbibed the Belgian nationalism of the governing circles. His patriotic convictions would define the development of democratic socialism over the next decade. The effects of the war were equally dramatic for the younger generation. In his *Souvenirs* Vandervelde claims, "We were wholeheartedly alongside those, who younger than us, fought the war to defend 'the frontiers of liberty.'"⁹⁶ Many of those soldiers did not share this perspective. Hendrik de Man served as an infantryman in the war. The ceaseless devastation and perpetual confrontations with death convinced him that no goal, however noble, was worth another world war.⁹⁷

Although the Belgian Workers' Party maintained its unity as it moved into the government after the war, the Socialist leaders could not heal the divisions wrought by that war between a generation that fought in the trenches and one that made the decisions in their national cabinets and the Bureau of the International. Those differences would come back to haunt the Belgian Socialists in the 1930s.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

97. Hendrik de Man, "Congrès du parti ouvrier belge," 11 November 1938, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 455, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

The Russian Revolution Observed

Like the First World War, the Russian Revolution took European Socialists by surprise. Its momentum unsettled them. In 1917 they rejoiced at news of the czar's defeat, but by 1922 a gulf separated the Russian Socialists from the Bolsheviks in power. The authoritarian regime imposed by Stalin defied their Marxist analyses, completing the isolation of the Russian Revolution from the Western Socialists.

Always the attentive observer, Vandervelde struggled to understand the Russian Revolution. Three trips to Russia – in 1917, 1922, and 1930 – introduced the Belgian Socialist to the significant developments in the revolution. Throughout the course of the revolution, however, he remained an outsider, an unaccustomed position for Vandervelde. Despite his position in the international Socialist movement, he found himself increasingly unable to influence events in Russia, which progressed at a speed and in directions never envisioned by Western social democrats. Russia seemed further and further away from Belgium, ever more distant from Vandervelde's world.

The Russian Jacobins, 1917

In the earliest days of the Russian Revolution, Vandervelde joined other European Socialists in celebrating the revolutionary triumph from afar. He wrote in the early spring of 1917 to congratulate the Russian people, who had toppled the czar's regime in less than three days. "With the most powerful movement the world has witnessed since the time of the French revolution, you have just won your freedom," he proclaimed.¹ The charismatic Alexander Kerensky promised to usher in an era of republican rule, of cooperation between the newly formed Provisional Government and the impatient soviets.

Caught up in a schedule of daily audiences with Allied ministers and all-night sessions of the provisional Russian government, Kerensky too compared the exuberance of the Russian spring of 1917 to "the time of

1. Emile Vandervelde, "Aux travailleurs," March 1917, in Emile Vandervelde, *Dans la mêlée* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1919), p. 112.

the great French revolution.”² Like the Western Socialists, he heralded the birth of a new revolutionary age. But neither Vandervelde nor Kerensky had time that spring to pause to develop their comparisons of the revolutions in eighteenth-century France and twentieth-century Russia. Nor did they attempt to place them within the outlines of a Marxist theory of revolution, whether bourgeois or proletarian. Events in Russia and Europe were moving too quickly.

Practical questions continued to command Vandervelde’s attention in the first months of 1917, as they had throughout the war. Like the French and British Socialists, Vandervelde hoped that the Russian Revolution would ease the contradictions that had plagued the Allies’ wartime alliance with czarist Russia. Vandervelde had not forgotten the awkwardness of his first diplomatic mission to the Russian ambassador in 1914. For the next three years, with the czar on their side, it had been difficult for the Allied Socialists to argue that the war had aligned the forces of liberty against feudal tyranny. A Russian republic promised to be a more compatible ally. From the beginning, however, Socialists recognized that Lenin and the war-weariness of the Russian people could threaten their dreams of a democratic European alliance reinforced by the Americans.

The growing pacifist sentiments in revolutionary Russia concerned the leaders of the Allied governments as well. Consequently, they dispatched their Socialist ministers, who had so adeptly reconciled their internationalism with their support for the war, to Petrograd. Albert Thomas, minister of munitions in the French cabinet, was the first to arrive at the Finland Station on a mission to replace the conservative French ambassador Maurice Paléologue. Thomas immediately opened discussions of Allied war aims with minister of justice Kerensky and the powerful Kadet Pavel Miliukov, minister of foreign affairs. One month later, the Belgian government dispatched Vandervelde, together with Hendrik de Man and Louis de Brouckère, to Petrograd. The British government relied on Arthur Henderson to make its appeal to the Russians to stay in the war. Posted by their governments, the Socialists came to Russia to advise the Provisional Government, but also to celebrate the triumph of revolution in Russia. In this new revolutionary age, only de Man seemed especially troubled by the contradictions inherent in traveling as a representative of the Second International while being paid by his government.

By chance, Vandervelde and de Man traveled from Stockholm to Petrograd in a train compartment with Leon Trotsky. Trotsky probably remained unaware that it was the two Belgians who had intervened with the British and Canadian governments to have him released from his

2. Kerensky cited in Richard Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 173.

internment in Halifax so that he could return to Russia.³ The three travelers' versions of their trip differ substantially, though all are equally self-serving. In his memoirs, Vandervelde recounted his conversations with the fiery Russian about their shared experiences at the beginning of the war.⁴ At the other extreme, Trotsky claimed that he refused even to acknowledge the presence of the Belgian Socialists. De Man alleged that he met Trotsky privately in a separate compartment, away from the half-deaf Vandervelde.⁵ When they finally arrived after long delays at the station in Petrograd, a small Belgian deputation clutching a Belgian flag greeted them on the platform. The Belgians were dwarfed by a massive delegation of Russian workers waving red flags and singing "The Internationale." "Do you see that great demonstration, citizen Vandervelde?" Trotsky reportedly sneered. "They are not here for the ex-president of the International, but for me."⁶

According to Vandervelde, the entry of the Socialists into the Provisional Government on the eve of the Belgians' arrival in Petrograd marked the end of the bourgeois phase of the Russian Revolution. He had begun to place the revolution in its Marxist context. The Socialists would now move gradually to complete the transition to a proletarian revolution, Vandervelde predicted.

The very next day, Alexander Kerensky invited Vandervelde to the Winter Palace. "With what emotion did we shake hands in silence, sealing with that symbolic act, the union of two proletariats that had for so long been separated by the unscalable walls of czarist despotism," Vandervelde recalled.⁷ Over the next few weeks, in audiences at the Soviet and formal dinners with Mikhail Tereshchenko, the new minister of foreign affairs, Prince Georgii Lvov, Kerensky, and the Georgian Social Democrat Irakli Tsereteli, the Russians extended their friendship to the Belgian Socialists. The language barrier separated them. The Socialist revolutionary Il'ia Rubanovitch, a friend from the prewar Bureau of the International, served as translator at one soirée. The ambiguities of the Russian commitment to the war further distanced the revolutionary leaders from the Western Socialists.

Only Albert Thomas presumed to act independently of orders from his capital. He involved himself in the day-to-day politics of the Russian

3. Vandervelde and de Man had pleaded that Trotsky's pro-Western views would counterbalance Lenin's slavish orientation. Hendrik de Man, *Après coup* (Brussels: Editions de la Toison d'Or, 1940), p. 127.

4. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d'un militant socialiste* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1939), p. 230.

5. de Man, *Après coup*, p. 128.

6. Trotsky cited in de Man, *Après coup*, p. 128.

7. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 233.



Figure 12 In Russia with the Socialist delegation, 1917. Institut Emile Vandervelde

Revolution. Without consulting Paris, he openly took Kerensky's side in his struggle with Miliukov, whom Thomas condemned as an imperialist.⁸ Vandervelde, following the lead of de Brouckère, met with Russian allies from before the war, such as Georgii Plekhanov, and participated in formal gatherings at the Belgian mission. But Vandervelde was much more restrained than his French ally and he was willing to follow official channels.

At the invitation of the Russian military command, de Brouckère, Vandervelde, and de Man left Petrograd on 5 June on a propaganda mission to the Russian front. Albert Thomas had already departed for Kiev, where he joined Kerensky on his travels. The Belgians were dispatched to Galicia and the territory of Rumania to buttress the morale of the Russian troops. The Belgian general de Ryckel agreed to accompany his countrymen, choosing to serve the three Socialists as their secretary. Vandervelde clearly relished the situation. Over the course of the next few days, most of the past and future military leaders of the revolution would pass before them. They were greeted by retiring general Mikhail Alekseev and by his successor Aleksei Brusilov; as well as Lavr Kornilov, who would succeed Brusilov; and finally, Anton Denikin, who later assumed command of the

8. I. Sinanglou, ed., "Journal de Russie d'Albert Thomas, pp. 86-204," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 14-15 (1973-74).

troops of the White Russians. The Belgian foursome then journeyed to the Russian border in luxury, traveling in the train compartment that had recently served the provisional government as headquarters during the czar's abdication. Subsequent travel on foot, by automobile, and on horseback over sand-covered roads was not as easy, especially for de Brouckère, who was terrified of horses.

In Tarnopol, arguments between Lenin's supporters rallying for peace and soldiers "burning with desire to rush at the Austro-Germans" surrounded the Belgians.⁹ Addressing crowds at one camp, Vandervelde noted the red hats of Belgian soldiers. Among the company were two future deputies to the Belgian Chamber of Deputies, one to become a conservative Catholic, the other a Communist. Vandervelde harangued the troops from balconies and platforms. The Russian Revolutionaries had felled the czar in Petrograd. But he warned them: "the monster of European despotism has three heads."¹⁰ If they did not struggle on to remove the last two, the first one might reappear. He roused them to continue the struggle.

Vandervelde was just as worried that the lure of an early peace promised by the Socialists' Stockholm congress would weaken the Russian commitment to the Allied war effort. When the Belgians returned to Petrograd, they concentrated on countering the promises issued in Stockholm.

The Petrograd Soviet had enthusiastically endorsed the proposed Socialist peace conference. Marcel Cachin and Marius Moutet, French Socialists who opposed the continuation of the war, had also taken up temporary residence in Petrograd and they now openly pledged to meet with the German Socialists in Stockholm without setting any conditions on discussions there. That appealed to many war-weary Russians. After extensive conversations with British Socialist Arthur Henderson, even Thomas lent his support to the conference, although he disassociated himself from Cachin and Moutet.¹¹ Henderson had convinced him that the Stockholm congress offered the only hope of keeping the Russians in the war. If the Russian people could be told that their leaders were trying to negotiate a peace, they would be willing to continue fighting in the meantime, he reasoned.

It seemed that in all of Petrograd, only de Brouckère and Vandervelde remained firmly opposed to participation in the Stockholm congress.

9. Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 247.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 25

11. See, for example, Albert Thomas to Emile Vandervelde, 14 June 1917, Archives Emile Vandervelde II 154, Institut Emile Vandervelde; Ramsay MacDonald to Emile Vandervelde, 26 April 1917, Archives Emile Vandervelde 1091, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; and B. W. Schaper, *Albert Thomas, Trente ans de réformisme social* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959).

Tsereteli informed the Belgians, “with tears in his eyes,” that in repudiating the Conference, they were removing “the clearest ray of hope on our horizon.”¹² Kerensky also told the Belgians that he needed the promise of the Stockholm meeting to keep the Russians in the war. The Belgians could not be swayed. Vandervelde vehemently condemned the Stockholm congress organizers’ willingness to overlook the question of German guilt. He disputed the soviets’ statement that “the responsibility for the horrors of the World War rests on International Imperialism.”¹³ Asserting instead that “it is the semi-feudal Imperialism of the Central Powers which let loose the catastrophe,” he continued in vain to appeal to his Russian allies to stay away from the Stockholm congress, a potential ambush prepared by the Central European powers, and to join the Allied Socialist conference in London.¹⁴

Throughout their visit, Vandervelde and de Brouckère reported back to the Belgian government, discussing in detail the morale of the troops and the effects of the Russian Revolution on military discipline. Despite the disorganization that followed the announcement of the czar’s demise, the army had held together. Vandervelde proudly noted that for the first time in the history of the world, revolutionary troops marched under the Red flag singing “The Internationale.” The enthusiasm of the liberated Russian troops reminded him “of the heroic days of 1792,” he added.¹⁵ Troops on both sides of the trenches were tired of the war, he acknowledged, but he expected that the newly freed Russian soldiers would prove valiant in the end.

The proliferation of assemblies, committees, and soviets clearly overwhelmed Vandervelde. He described them as “the most varied and wonderful collection of elective bodies, deliberating in all conceivable places and on all possible questions.”¹⁶ He was especially impressed by the trade unions that intervened directly to protect the workers in factories and to advise governmental committees. He did worry that the jurisdictions of the new institutions overlapped, potentially giving rise to disputes in the future.

Upon his return from Russia, Vandervelde urged Western Socialists to lend their support to the Russian Revolution. The time for rendering judgments had not yet arrived, he suggested. The Russians needed more time to complete their revolution. “Russia remains part of the great alliance of nations against all that remains of autocracy in the world,” he instructed

12. Tsereteli cited in Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 238.

13. Emile Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Jean E. J. Findlay (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918), pp. 220–1.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

the readers of the book he published in September 1917, *Trois Aspects de la Révolution russe*.¹⁷ “She is fighting for her liberty and for that of others, and though the difficulties that she has to contend with are serious, they are no greater than those of the French revolution,” he concluded.¹⁸ On both counts, the revolution was to be celebrated.

Vandervelde warned the Socialists who had not yet visited Russia not to believe travelers’ descriptions of rampant anarchy raging in revolutionary Russia. The Russians had begun the arduous task of organizing a government, he reported. They had already succeeded at the local level, although they had yet to coordinate the communities and regions. That would require time. Conditioned to follow orders by centuries of authoritarian rule, the Russian peasants had yet to experience “the free practice of modern life.”¹⁹ Democracy was clearly outside the Russian tradition, Vandervelde acknowledged, but revolutions forced nations to come of age quickly. If anything, the emerging revolutionary leadership posed a greater threat from the opposite direction. They had spun their ideas in the vacuum of exile and prison cells. In their haste to forge a new world, they would need to be reminded of the social realities of Russian custom and tradition, he concluded.

Vandervelde remained quietly skeptical about Russian dreams of worker control in the factories. Nineteenth-century experiments in radical worker cooperation within a fledgling capitalist system had failed in the West, he noted. It did not seem likely that the inexperienced Russian workers could manage the struggling factories efficiently. In particular, he observed that the Russian workers seemed to waste a good deal of time in idle discussions. Typically, Vandervelde also worried about the fate of the consumer in a system managed by unskilled workers.

In sum, Vandervelde tempered slightly his enthusiastic support of the February revolution with some cautiously expressed reservations. “Certainly we are not among those who refuse to recognize the faults, weaknesses, and the sufferings of the Russian Revolution,” he explained.²⁰ “On the surface she seems in a state of anarchy. That which existed is gone forever, what is to come is not yet in being. The whole fabric of the new regime remains to be manufactured, aggravated by the fact that they are at war.”²¹ The Russian Revolution, like the French revolution before it, promised to change the world. After his first visit to revolutionary Russia, Vandervelde remained unsure of its direction. But he was willing to wait

17. Emile Vandervelde, *Trois aspects de la Révolution russe* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1917).

18. Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution*, p. 236.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

21. *Ibid.*

before passing judgment. The example of the French revolution showed clearly that revolutions traveled long and arduous routes; they were not made in six months.

Vandervelde's rather proper middle-class demeanor distanced him from the Russian Revolutionaries almost from the beginning. Curiously, in his memoirs Vandervelde chides his friend Albert Thomas for the impatience and impertinence that marked the French Socialist's encounters with Alexander Kerensky.²² But it was the bearded Thomas, with the twinkling eyes and the charismatic appeal, who accompanied Kerensky at the head of the May Day celebration in 1917. Thomas kept the Russian leadership, and with them the Russian troops, in the war on the side of the Allies.

Vandervelde shared Thomas's assessment of Kerensky as "the only one capable, by prudent and democratic policies, of reestablishing order in Russia, and reviving the war effort."²³ Like most Western Socialists, Vandervelde continued to eulogize Kerensky long after he had been driven from power. At the British Labour Party congress of 1918, while the left hissed the Russian exile, Vandervelde rose to applaud him for "the most heroic effort ever made to save, while there was still time, the Russian Revolution and the future of Russian democracy."²⁴ Kerensky, Vandervelde, and Tsereteli continued to correspond and to meet through the 1920s. Vandervelde introduced Kerensky to a meeting of the Conseil général of the Belgian Workers' Party in 1926 at which the Russian received a hero's welcome.²⁵

During the first months of the revolution, Vandervelde did not really try to fit the political changes he observed in Russia into his understanding of a Socialist revolution. Instead, he compared the Russian and the French revolutions. Like the French revolutionaries in the first summer days of 1789, the Russians had brought down the tyranny of the old regime. They were struggling to establish a regime of liberty. "And this liberty, so eagerly longed for, so dearly bought by the martyrdom of thousands of martyrs, is such a conquest, such a great boon and blessing, that it were to despair of all human nature not to believe that to defend it the Russian nation will

22. Emile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs*, p. 236.

23. Albert Thomas cited in Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky*, p. 182.

24. Emile Vandervelde cited in Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky*, p. 340.

25. See, for example, A. Kerensky to Vandervelde, 23 June 1926, Archives Emile Vandervelde III/F/40, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 4 November 1926, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 92, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent; Kerensky to Vandervelde, January 1930, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 697, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; and Kerensky to Vandervelde, 27 June 1927, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 35, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

make just such an effort as was made in 1793 by the people of France.”²⁶ In the summer of 1917, for Vandervelde the Russian Revolution still represented all the promise of a new future embodied a century earlier in the French revolution.

In Vandervelde’s observations and analyses of the Russian Revolution, there are hints, however, that he saw Russia as somehow different from the West. He recognized the depths of the Russian tradition of centralized authoritarian rule. “For the first time throughout the centuries of their history a nation of a hundred and eighty million souls is delivered from the most bloodstained, corrupt and brutal of tyrannies, and breathes at last the pure air of liberty,” he wrote.²⁷ Vandervelde’s understanding of the unique revolutionary path pursued by the Russians would haunt him on his next visit to Russia four years later.

Lenin and the Trials

It was the October revolution that forced Vandervelde to rethink his analogy between the Russian and the French revolutions. Lenin’s consolidation of power and his offensives against his political enemies more readily suggested comparisons with the Reign of Terror in 1793 than with the peaceful assemblies that had framed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789. Vandervelde feared the Bolshevik leader who had set loose a new reign of terror, and he rose to defend its Russian victims. He also began to realize the uniqueness of the Russian Revolution within his Marxist perspective.

Once again, circumstances drew Vandervelde physically into the maelstrom of the revolution. But as he became more involved, Vandervelde found himself further alienated from the tactics that were being employed in its name. Now that the Bolsheviks had firmly established their regime, he suggested, the time had come for rendering judgments. Neither the economic boycott imposed by the West nor the civil war inhibited Vandervelde’s drive to denounce a Soviet dictatorship that had silenced Marxist experimentation in Russia.

Vandervelde pleaded with the West to help the fledgling Georgian republic make a peaceful transition from feudalism to capitalism, so it could then complete the revolutionary evolution to socialism.²⁸ In subsequent articles, he cited the testimony of the people of Azerbaijan that Soviet armies were pillaging the cities and countryside, suppressing

26. Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 238–9.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Emile Vandervelde, “Le Premier Gouvernement socialiste,” *Réalisations socialistes, Notre action d’après-guerre* (Brussels: L’Eglantine, 1923), p. 168.

religious freedom and individual liberties in their wake. Fifteen thousand people had been massacred in one Georgian city alone, he reported.²⁹ Spurred by Vandervelde's denunciations, the Belgian Workers' Party issued a formal protest against the Soviet invasion of the Republic of Georgia.

Vandervelde still began most of his speeches by proclaiming his support for the Russian Revolution.³⁰ Revolutions often brought with them some violence, he conceded. But unlike the French Jacobins who had used terror to check a counterrevolutionary minority, the Bolsheviks were using violence to impose their minority dictatorship against the will of the people. Rather than giving birth to democracy as in eighteenth-century France, the Bolsheviks employed force to repress liberty. The Bolsheviks argued that the ends they envisioned justified their means. No goal could justify the oppression of popular sovereignty, Vandervelde replied. Furthermore, Vandervelde concluded, the Bolsheviks' terror seemed to have no limits.

Lenin's assertion not only that the Russian Revolution was a Marxist revolution but also that the Russian Bolsheviks were the sole legitimate heirs of the Marxist tradition disturbed Vandervelde. Lenin's claims were particularly threatening to Vandervelde because of developments in Western Europe. The movement of Western Socialists into national governments allowed the Communists to question the commitment of their leftist comrades to Marxist revolution. Vandervelde angrily rebutted the increasingly common portrayal of the Third International, established by the Russians in 1919, as revolutionary and the Second International as reformist. Vandervelde had always asserted that reforms *were* revolutionary. When members of his own Brussels Federation condemned the Belgian Socialists for their politics of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, arguing for a return to the prewar declarations of class struggle, they quoted the Russians. "Show me a Socialist that is worthy of the name who is not a revolutionary," he challenged the delegates to a Belgian party congress in 1920.³¹

The violence and force of the Russian Revolution that so appealed to some disillusioned Socialists in the West troubled Vandervelde. Their willingness to turn to violence did not bestow on the Bolsheviks the privilege of calling themselves the only true revolutionaries, he argued. They had resorted to force to impose their revolution on Russia because the social and economic conditions had not been ripe for a socialist revolution, Vandervelde charged, echoing Karl Kautsky's attack on Lenin

29. Ibid. See also "Emile Vandervelde rentre à Bruxelles," *Le Peuple* 10 October 1920.

30. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1920*, p. 18.

31. Ibid.; and Emile Vandervelde, "Contre le Bolchevisme," *Le Flambeau* 31 January 1921, pp. 87–99.

in his 1918 *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Western Socialists who knew how to wait patiently and build institutions gradually would prove the only successful revolutionaries in the end, he prophesied.

Vandervelde especially resented the Western Socialists, such as the Frenchman Marcel Cachin, who had championed the Zimmerwald and Stockholm pacifist initiatives during the war and now bowed to a belligerent Moscow. Vandervelde reminded the Socialists that in 1871 Marx had railed against the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin's divisive presence in the First International. Vandervelde called on the same language to denounce a second generation of revolutionary Russians who shattered the unity of the international Socialist movement and threatened to demoralize the working class.³²

Vandervelde's first direct confrontation with the Soviet regime occurred in 1922, after Lenin had ordered the arrest and conviction of the members of the Central Committee of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries. The trials of Lenin's most outspoken critics on the left were to be a political affair, "noisy, educative," and accompanied by plenty of "tumult" in the press.³³ Lenin hoped thereby to dissuade their followers from further sedition.

The Socialist Revolutionaries appealed to the Socialist Internationals for help. Austrian Socialist Friedrich Adler of the Vienna Union, the so-called Second and a Half International, protested against the repression of political opposition in the Soviet Union. However, because the Vienna Union still clung to the hope of reuniting the Socialist and Communist Internationals, Adler refrained from explicit criticism of Lenin's actions. The Labour and Socialist International, formerly the Second International, on the other hand, vociferously condemned the upcoming trials of Lenin's Socialist opposition.

All three Internationals were scheduled to convene in Berlin on 5 April 1922 to negotiate a common program of action. The trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries dominated the hostile discussions. Speaking for the executive committee of the Labour and Socialist International, Vandervelde and Ramsay MacDonald demanded that the Communists stop undermining Socialist trade unions by their cell-building tactics, that the Russians withdraw occupying troops from Georgia, and that the Comintern entrust the investigation of the Socialist Revolutionaries to a committee composed of representatives from the three Internationals. The Vienna Union handed the representatives of the Third International a milder set of conditions. Refusing to accept the demands, Polish member of the

32. Emile Vandervelde, "Les 21 conditions de Moscou," in *Réalisations Socialistes*.

33. Lenin cited in Marc Jansen, *A Show Trial under Lenin: The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Moscow 1922* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), p. 27.

German Communist Party Karl Radek, on behalf of the Third International, bitterly denounced Vandervelde and his Socialist allies. Thanks to the mediation of the Vienna Union, the Internationals did manage to arrive at a compromise of sorts. Radek agreed to allow Vandervelde to represent the Socialist Revolutionaries at the trial. He added in an aside that he would have preferred to welcome Vandervelde to Moscow as one of the accused.³⁴ The Communists also acquiesced to demands that the trials be public, that representatives of all three Internationals be allowed to attend and take notes, and that no death penalties be imposed. The substantial accommodations that Radek and the Russian Nikolai Bukharin offered the Labour and Socialist International reportedly angered Lenin, but he agreed to honor the Berlin Agreement. The Internationals never met again.

For the second time in his life, in May 1922, Vandervelde journeyed abroad to plead the case of political prisoners. The procedural irregularities in the Congo of which he had complained in 1909 paled in comparison with the harassment that plagued him in Moscow. Vandervelde and his Belgian colleague Arthur Wauters met the representatives of the Vienna Union, Kurt Rosenfeld and Theodor Liebknecht, in Berlin to travel to Moscow on 24 May. The willingness of the brother of the martyred Karl Liebknecht to serve as a member of the defense for the Socialist Revolutionaries stunned German Communists.

Once inside Russia, hostile demonstrators attacked the defense team's train as it pulled into each station. A bullet shattered the window of Rosenfeld's compartment. Gone were the days when a small group of Belgians huddled beneath the flag on the Petrograd platform. In Moscow, a crowd of thousands chanting "Down with the traitors to the working class!" broke through police cordons. Vandervelde was singled out. Demonstrators jeered, "It is a pity, friends, that we cannot hang him."³⁵

Despite restrictions on their travels and the constant presence of an escort, Vandervelde managed to observe Soviet society from the window of his car as he traveled back and forth between the courtroom and his lodgings on the Vorontsovo Estate, twelve kilometers from the center of Moscow. Less had changed than he would have expected since his visit in 1917, he acknowledged.³⁶ Large houses had been divided into tiny apartments, indicating a change in the social structure. Officially, the bourgeoisie had been eliminated, but Vandervelde noted he still encountered men who lived and thought just like the Russian bourgeoisie of old. The hierarchy had not disappeared, it had just been transformed,

34. Jansen, *Show Trial*, p. 38.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

36. Emile Vandervelde and Arthur Wauters, *Le Procès des Socialistes révolutionnaires à Moscou* (Brussels: Librairie du Peuple, 1922).

he concluded. Meanwhile order reigned in the streets and music poured forth from the conservatories.

In the factories, technicians directed manual laborers who worked. Lenin had transformed the economic system. In 1917 Vandervelde had observed that the few factories that existed had slowed to a halt with all of the coffee breaks and the endless political discussions taking place within their walls. Workers were now subject to a military discipline imposed from the top. Vandervelde did, however, acknowledge the Western blockade and the ongoing civil war as partially responsible for the drastic reorganization he had observed.

As could be expected, Vandervelde no longer championed the soviets as representative popular assemblies. He asked to leave the meeting of the Moscow Soviet within half an hour of arriving; he was bored by the dull proceedings, he reported.³⁷

The Western defenders prepared for the trial in daily meetings with the first group of twenty-two imprisoned Socialist Revolutionaries at the Lefortovo prison. Like their Bolshevik accusers, the Socialist Revolutionaries intended to use the trial to make a political statement: to attack the Bolsheviks and to call world attention to their plight. Even before the trial opened, the Western defenders realized the hopelessness of their situation. The formal accusation was not delivered to the defendants and their lawyers until 31 May, leaving the legal defense little time before the start of the trial to study the volumes of evidence amassed against the Socialist Revolutionaries. Ten Russian lawyers filled out the prisoners' defense team.

The trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries opened on 8 June 1922 in the Pillar Hall of the House of the Trade Unions, the former ballroom of the Nobles Club, in the center of Moscow. According to historian Marc Jansen, "everything in the hall was very informal. People smoked and wore their everyday working clothes, with the exception of Vandervelde who appeared in a morning coat."³⁸ It did not take the Bolsheviks long to seize upon Vandervelde's behavior and appearance as a symbol of the bourgeois character of patriotic Western Socialism. The international attention focused on the trial convinced Lenin to broaden his attack on his political enemies to include an indictment of Western Socialism in general. Communists from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France, England, and Bulgaria, coordinated by the Frenchman Boris Souvarine, came to Moscow to testify at the trial.

The court assembled to hear testimony six days a week, sitting from

37. Emile Vandervelde, *Avant le procès de Moscou, Notes au jour le jour* (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1922).

38. Jansen, *Show Trial*, p. 62.

noon until five and again from seven until midnight. Issues that the Western defenders assumed to have been settled by the Berlin Agreement between the three Internationals were openly challenged by the president of the tribunal and the prosecutors. The defense was denied access to the stenographic records of the trial and not allowed to take notes themselves. On one occasion, when the partially deaf Vandervelde continued to speak through the president of the court Grigorii Piatakov's attempt to interrupt him, the court threatened to throw the Belgian lawyer out of the courtroom for insubordination.³⁹

Vandervelde had not come to Moscow expecting to win the release of the prisoners. He had, however, hoped that the presence of representatives of the two Socialist Internationals would dissuade the Bolsheviks from condemning the defendants to death. But even that began to seem increasingly unlikely as the press clamored for the heads of the Socialist Revolutionaries. Crowds inside and outside the courtroom taunted the Western Socialists. The handful of Western Communists who participated in the trial insisted on addressing Vandervelde as "His royal Minister." In his testimony, Bukharin referred persistently to the Second International as the "yellow International."

Discouraged by the proceedings, a "parody of justice," the Western defenders met with the Socialist Revolutionaries on 14 June to reconsider their defense.⁴⁰ Together, they drew up a statement listing each of the court's many violations of points guaranteed by the Berlin Agreement. They cited the assertion by Bukharin, one of the signers of the Berlin Agreement, that the agreement had been rendered invalid by the canceling of all future meetings of the three Internationals. Two of the prosecutors also indicated that they did not consider the court bound by the agreement. No stenographic record had yet been offered to the defense despite their repeated requests, and only four defenders from the West had been permitted in the court.⁴¹ In response, the tribunal granted them the right to stenographic records but refused to address the more general issues covered by the Berlin Agreement.

"If the Berlin Agreement is not binding, what more can we do here?" Rosenfeld asked Vandervelde.⁴² The tribunal had already flagrantly violated the agreement, so why should they expect it to honor its promise not to impose the death penalty? Vandervelde agreed. Rather than sanctioning by their presence the seemingly inevitable tragedy, Vandervelde, Wauters, Rosenfeld, and Liebknecht resolved to take their

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

41. Vandervelde and Wauters, *Le Procès*, pp. 133–4.

42. Rosenfeld cited in *ibid.*, p. 96.

case back to Brussels and Berlin where they might have more effect. It took a twenty-four-hour hunger strike to secure their exit visas from the Soviet authorities. As the four defenders waved farewell to the twenty-two defendants who remained imprisoned in their cells, the Socialist Revolutionaries serenaded them with a chorus of "The Internationale."

Vandervelde took up the cause of the Socialist Revolutionaries as soon as he returned to Belgium. He called on the international proletariat to protest on behalf of the heroic struggle of the Russian Socialists, many of whom were still engaged in hunger strikes.⁴³ He reiterated yet more forcefully his attacks on the Bolshevik dictatorship.

In Moscow the departure of the Western delegation occasioned massive demonstrations on 20 June. Banners proclaimed "Death to the traitors of the revolution!" and "Death to the social democrats." Cardboard representations of Vandervelde, arms and legs jerked in feverish motion by puppeteers' strings, were paraded aloft. Provincial demonstrations featured caricatures of Vandervelde arm in arm with the Belgian king and the Russian czar, accompanied by the slogan "Down with Royalist Socialism."⁴⁴

The guilty verdict handed down by the court on 8 August 1922 did not surprise Vandervelde. Although they would eventually be released and sent into exile, twelve of the Socialist Revolutionaries were sentenced to death. With their verdict, the Bolsheviks convicted not only the defendants, Vandervelde suggested, but all political opposition in the Soviet Union. In 1917 the Socialist Revolutionaries had commanded two-thirds of the popular vote. The Bolshevik minority that had seized control of the government in October had used the trial to suppress the representatives of that majority.

This second encounter with revolutionary Russia forced Vandervelde to reformulate his earlier analogies between the Russian and French revolutionaries. After witnessing the results of Lenin's aggressive centralism, Vandervelde had lost all of his illusions about the dawning of the next revolutionary age. Vandervelde now compared the Socialist Revolutionaries to the moderate Girondins of 1792 who had been tried and guillotined by the dominant Jacobin minority. The Socialist Revolutionaries, like the Girondins, had fallen victim to the violence of the Russian version of the French Reign of Terror. Vandervelde did not consider the implications of his new analogy. He was comparing the Socialist Revolutionaries to the moderates of the French revolution who had upheld the values of property and individualism against the egalitarian dreams and revolutionary dictatorship of the French Jacobins, traditional

43. Emile Vandervelde, Rus/SRP/8, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England.

44. Jansen, *Show Trial*, pp. 144-5.

revolutionary heroes of the Socialists. As in his defense of the natives in the Congo a decade earlier, Vandervelde's humanitarian impulses dictated his wholehearted defense of the victims of oppression and persecution. He wanted to rescue the Socialist Revolutionaries from the Russian version of the guillotine by mobilizing world opinion, that was all.

The French Communist Jacques Sadoul picked up Vandervelde's analogy and used it to criticize the Western Socialists. Proud to be a Jacobin, Sadoul denounced the easily frightened Belgian lawyer as a Girondin, a reforming representative of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁵

The trial further scarred relations between the two Internationals. Most Western Communists actively supported the verdict. Clara Zetkin had argued within Communist circles in Moscow against the death penalty, but after the trial she exonerated the Russians in her pamphlet "Wir Klagen an! Ein Beitrag zum Prozess der Sozial-revolutionare." On the other side, the response was immediate and loud. Socialists and leftist intellectuals, including Maxim Gorky, Anatole France, Romain Rolland, H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Alphonse Aulard, Marie Curie, Eugene Debs, Albert Einstein, Charles Gide, Bertrand Russell, Georges Sorel, and Sidney Webb, petitioned the Russian government to free the political prisoners.

The 1922 trial must have been especially difficult for Vandervelde, who bore the brunt of the Bolsheviks' attacks against opportunistic Socialist counterrevolutionaries who were said to have "tried to stab the first revolution in the back."⁴⁶ In his physical presence and his outspoken views, he made an obvious target. Articles in the Communist press viciously parodied not only his role at the trial but also his participation in the Belgian Ministry of National Defense and his 1917 trip to the Russian front.⁴⁷

The trial forced Vandervelde to recognize the gulf that threatened permanently to divide the International. He had come to accept the presence of Communist parties everywhere but in Belgium. Although they did not seem to be gaining new recruits, it seemed unlikely that the Communists would disappear either.⁴⁸ But the Bolshevik persecution of Socialists within Russia and the expansionist threats of the "Moscow autocracy" in Europe made any accord between the former members of the Second International impossible.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Vandervelde continued to call for an end to the Western

45. Jacques Sadoul, *Les SR et Vandervelde* (Paris: Humanité, 1922), Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

46. Jansen, *Show Trial*, p. 45.

47. See, for example, H. Valetsky, "Vandervelde et l'Union soviétique," *L'Humanité* 27 December 1934.

48. Emile Vandervelde, *Etudes marxistes* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1930), p. 210.

49. Emile Vandervelde, "Les 21 conditions de Moscou," p. 195; and Vandervelde and Wauters, *Le Procès*, p. 92.

economic blockade of the Soviet Union. It only increased the xenophobia of the Russian masses and furnished the Bolsheviks with further excuses for terror, he explained.⁵⁰ Vandervelde also pressured the Belgian government to recognize Soviet Russia.⁵¹

The Russian Revolution Revisited: Stalinism

Vandervelde agonized over the Russian Revolution for the rest of his life. "For men schooled in the doctrine of Marx, it is a strange and painful thing to see realized . . . a sort of gigantic caricature of Marxism," he lamented.⁵² He could accept neither their revolutionary methods – the violence and terror that had been integral parts of Lenin's revolution – nor the end to which that violence led, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Something in Russia itself had distorted the Marxist tradition there, he finally decided.

Part of his explanation of the unique course followed by the Russian Revolution resided in the extreme economic underdevelopment of Russian society at the time of the revolution. The Russians had barely embarked on the first steps of industrialization in 1917. Therefore, they had sought their revolutionary justification only in Marx and Engels's 1848 pamphlet the *Communist Manifesto*. After all, he suggested, Russia in 1917 bore some resemblance to Germany before the 1848 revolution. According to Vandervelde, the Bolsheviks neglected all that Marx and Engels wrote after 1848.

Twentieth-century Europe, on the other hand, had long since industrialized. Communists who insisted that the French or British should blindly follow the revolutionary path defined by the Russians ignored the evidence of historical development, Vandervelde argued. Western societies could not reverse seventy-five years of economic evolution. Nor should Western Socialists forget the later works of Marx and Engels.

Vandervelde's democratic socialism based itself on these "revisions." "Is it surprising in these circumstances that Socialism today is no longer, nor can it be, what it was in the time of the *Manifesto* and that revisionism, begun in fact by Marx himself, has continued to carry on his work?"

50. Vandervelde often wondered aloud why the Russians who needed outside economic support should so willingly alienate all of their potential allies in the West. Emile Vandervelde, "Une Politique de gribouille, Les Minorités bolchevistes contre la classe ouvrière," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 13 March 1928.

51. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 22 March 1927, p. 1035; and Emile Vandervelde, "Le Bilan de la politique économique russe," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 27 June 1924.

52. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Chaos russe," in *Journalisme socialiste* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1930), p. 52.

Vandervelde asked rhetorically.⁵³ Vandervelde went further to suggest that Marx and Engels's own revisions of their 1848 manifestoes foreshadowed social democratic theory.⁵⁴

In 1848, Marx had analyzed all social struggles as class struggles, Vandervelde acknowledged. There were two classes then, the capitalists and the proletariat. In 1917, Lenin attempted to force his preindustrial, agrarian society into that rigid model. But in Marx's later writings, Vandervelde pointed out, Marx had made subtle distinctions within the social classes. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx had discussed the particular problems of the peasantry and acknowledged the existence of intellectual workers. He had described three, not two, classes in the third volume of *Capital*. Since the death of Marx and Engels, class distinctions had further blurred, so that capitalism now oppressed all classes, not just the proletariat, according to Vandervelde.

The Bolsheviks consciously distorted Marx when they relied on his texts taken in isolation to justify their minority rule, Vandervelde argued. Marx had referred to the dictatorship of the proletariat, but according to Vandervelde, he defined a collective dictatorship, not rule by an elite minority. Vandervelde cited Engels's introduction to *The Paris Commune* and letters by Rosa Luxemburg just before her death as his evidence.⁵⁵

After Stalin seized total control of the Soviet Union, Vandervelde gave up any attempt to analyze the Russian Revolution within the Western revolutionary tradition. The comparisons between the French and Russian Revolutions that had dominated his earlier writings completely disappeared.

Vandervelde looked to Russian traditions themselves to explain the revolution throughout the 1930s. Russia had clearly struck out on its own revolutionary path through its own unique wilderness. Subjected to centuries of absolutist rule, the Russian people had toppled the czar in 1917, "only to fall again under the domination of a bureaucracy and a police that seem in fact little different from those of old."⁵⁶ Stalin's centralization of power followed the czarist tradition. In 1922 Vandervelde had charged the Bolsheviks with aborting the democratic revolution. Stalin's regime convinced Vandervelde that the Russian Revolution had been fated to meet an authoritarian end. Bolshevism became a symptom, rather than a cause, of the Russian failure in his later analyses. The centuries

53. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Marxisme a-t-il fait faillite?* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1928), p. 30.

54. Emile Vandervelde, "Sur la lutte de classes," *L'Avenir Social* July 1929, p. 387.

55. Emile Vandervelde, "La Dictature prolétarienne," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 7 February 1929.

56. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Cinéma soviétique," *L'Avenir Social* February 1930.

of poverty and authoritarian rule had doomed the Soviet experiment right from the beginning in Russia.

In 1930 Vandervelde returned to Russia for what would be his final visit. As a member of a delegation of Western Socialists, he was invited to attend the plenary meeting of the Moscow Soviet, but he declined.⁵⁷ Although he reported that he was treated courteously by the Russians, he returned from Moscow saddened by his new understanding of Stalin's powers.⁵⁸

Based on his visits to factories, he concluded that Stalin had finally managed to bring about an industrial revolution in Russia. This rapid industrialization had demanded stunning sacrifices from the Russian people, Vandervelde noted, echoing the scores of other Western critics from all political points of view.⁵⁹ Vandervelde added that he would be one of the first to rejoice if the Soviets did accomplish their economic miracle. Then, either the workers would finally realize a higher standard of living or they would revolt against their dictatorial regime.⁶⁰

Vandervelde still did not believe that it was possible to stage a socialist revolution in an economically backward society. Lenin and Stalin had established a "dictatorial, bureaucratic, hyperstatist socialism in a country where capitalism existed only in an embryonic state," he asserted.⁶¹ In fact, he argued, their socialist society "has nothing in common with the democratic socialism that Marx and Engels had always conceived."⁶² According to Vandervelde, Marx had denied the possibility of creating a socialist regime in a country where the proletariat barely existed and peasants and artisans dominated.⁶³

By the middle of the 1930s, Vandervelde was comparing Stalin's use of terror with that of his fascist contemporaries. The judicial procedures meted out by the two political extremes differed very little, he explained.⁶⁴ In an article entitled "La Seconde Terreur en URSS," he despaired that

57. Labour and Socialist International 9/24, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

58. Vandervelde to Stampfer, 1930, Kleine Korrespondenz, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

59. Emile Vandervelde, "Notes sur l'industrie soviétique," *La Vie Ouvrière* March 1931, pp. 49–53; Emile Vandervelde, "Où en est la révolution russe?" *Le Flambeau* May 1934; and Emile Vandervelde, "Deux Témoignages de grands capitalistes sur l'effort constructif de la révolution russe," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 2 September 1934.

60. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Chômage, la crise mondiale, et l'URSS," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 14 August 1932; and Emile Vandervelde, "Notes sur l'industrie soviétique," p. 53.

61. Emile Vandervelde, *L'Alternative capitalisme d'état ou socialisme démocratique* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1933), p. 206.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

63. Emile Vandervelde, *Réalisations socialistes*, p. 166–7.

64. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, *Etudes marxistes*, p. 145–54; and Emile Vandervelde, F. Adler, R. Abramovitch, and Léon Blum, *Le Procès de Moscou et l'Internationale ouvrière socialiste* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1932).

terrorist acts were taking place in Russia under the cover of a flag “that is the same color as our own.”⁶⁵

And yet, through it all, even at the height of Stalin’s terror, Vandervelde never completely forgot the joy and hope he had experienced in Russia in the spring of 1917. He could not change his own course that radically, nor could he write off a cause as hopeless, no matter how dramatic the momentum of events. In rare moments at the end of his life he even suggested that the Russian Revolution might someday succeed in achieving its goals. Perhaps the feverish Russian industrialization would allow the Russians to achieve their revolution backward, he once speculated.⁶⁶ Maybe they would succeed in instituting political changes first, and then transforming the economic base of their society after all.

Vandervelde called in the 1930s for a normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and the Western powers, especially the United States. He acknowledged the growing distance separating the Soviet regime from Western Socialism but explained that further isolation would serve only the forces of extremism. He appealed for an end to the boycott and for formal recognition of the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ The Soviet leadership later wrote to thank him for his role in establishing normal diplomatic relations with the nations of the West.⁶⁸

65. Emile Vandervelde, “La Seconde Terreur en URSS,” *Le Peuple* 9 February 1930; and Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale 1299/8, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

66. Emile Vandervelde, “L’Expérience stalinienne,” *L’Avenir Social* 1932.

67. Emile Vandervelde, “La Vanité des tentatives de boycottage de l’URSS,” *L’Avenir Social* 1931; Emile Vandervelde, “Pour la Révolution russe quand même,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 13 February 1932; and Emile Vandervelde, “L’Intégration de l’URSS dans l’économie cosmopolite,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 19 November 1933.

68. Telegram Potemkin, 12 July 1935, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

The Revolution from Within: Governmental Participation

The First World War changed forever the Belgian Socialists' relationship to their government. The king's invitation to the Belgian Workers' Party to share in the reconstruction of a democratic Belgium dramatically altered the terms of the decades-old Socialist debate over ministerial participation. The cohesion of the wartime cabinet and the meetings at Lophem opened possibilities for governmental coalitions that would have been unimaginable in Belgium before 1918.

Vandervelde presented the case for ministerial participation in starkly simple terms at the first postwar Socialist congress in 1918. "We must participate in the national reconstruction, because if it is done without us, it will be done against us," he reasoned.¹ The Conseil général had already met and the vast majority of the Belgian Socialist leaders shared Vandervelde's assessment. They exuded confidence as they dictated the terms of their participation in the first government of national union. Immediately, the government would have to institute universal manhood suffrage at the age of twenty-one. It could then proceed to annul the onerous article 310 of the penal code that limited workers' rights to organize. The satisfaction of these two demands would constitute a veritable revolution, Vandervelde proclaimed to the assembled delegates.

On 14 November 1918, Vandervelde announced to a crowd gathered in front of the Maison du Peuple that at last the king had indeed committed the government to universal manhood suffrage. After three and a half decades of struggle in the Parliament and in the streets, the Socialists had finally conquered their primary objective. Belgium had completed its evolution toward democracy, Vandervelde declared. Hendrik de Man, who was no friend either of Vandervelde or reformism, later suggested that Vandervelde alone truly understood the full implications of the achievement of universal manhood suffrage for Belgian Socialism.²

1. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1918*, p. 8.

2. Hendrik de Man, *Après coup* (Brussels: Editions de la Toison d'Or, 1940), p. 180.

Vandervelde believed that the era of the general strike and violent class confrontation could be put to rest as the Socialists turned confidently to Parliament and the government to enact reform. In 1918, that was a cause for rejoicing in Belgium.

The Belgian Socialists were not alone. The balance of political power had shifted throughout Europe. French, British and German Socialists all were confronted with radically new possibilities for ministerial participation and the sharing of governmental power.

Historian Geoff Eley asks whether the burst of reformism in the 1920s resulted from “a coherent socialist political strategy” or from the confluence of working-class militancy and governmental instability.³ Vandervelde never paused to wonder why so many Socialists throughout Europe proceeded with so little hesitation along the path toward social democracy. It seemed to Vandervelde that the Socialists, who had once divided over questions of ministerial participation, had arrived at a “sort of doctrinal amalgam.”⁴ They all accepted the need to work from within to build the revolution. The French, who had shared Jaurès’s nationalist infatuation with the French Revolution and the possibilities of reform, had come under the influence of the more orthodox Guesdists, according to Vandervelde. The British Socialists, previously inspired by MacDonald’s fraternal Christianity and hardly recognizable as Marxists, had gone over to the Independent Labour Party. The Germans meanwhile seemed to be abandoning their rigorous concern with theory and were willing to experiment with governmental reform.

The leaders of the European Socialist parties continued to correspond regularly, sharing each other’s triumphs in parliamentary elections and learning from their governmental defeats. However, without the regular debates of the Second International congresses, the Socialist leaders did not often pause to compare their divergent strategies. After the schism between Socialists and Communists at the French party congress at Tours in 1920, the French Socialist Party based its rejection of governmental responsibility on the prewar experience of Millerand. The Germans struggled in equal isolation. And the Belgians forged ahead within their government.

Of all the Socialist parties, the Belgians had always been the most single-minded in their pursuit of universal manhood suffrage. For decades suffrage had glittered in the distance as the key that promised to unlock the peaceful path to socialism. Before the war, the elaborate Belgian system

3. Geoff Eley, “Reviewing the Socialist Tradition,” in Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks, eds, *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 32.

4. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme en Europe depuis dix ans. Les Intellectuels et le Parti ouvrier belge* (Brussels: Editions Conseil Général du Parti ouvrier belge, 1926).

of plural suffrage, with its multiple votes for heads of households, had denied the Socialists the hope of winning the parliamentary majority. In effect, that allowed the Socialists vigorously to proclaim that their reformist strategy was revolutionary. As Vandervelde ardently asserted, reformist demands were revolutionary when they produced skirmishes in the streets as well as negotiations in the corridors of parliament.

When the king finally handed the Socialists the key to the path of democratic socialism in 1918, they set out resolutely. Vandervelde's wartime experience had led him and many other Belgian Socialist leaders of his generation to expect that with governmental responsibility would come the power to effect a socialist revolution from within. Now that they had won universal manhood suffrage, they devoted themselves enthusiastically to governmental participation. In marked contrast, the French Socialists, who had debated continued participation in a wartime cabinet that seemed to ignore them, chose after the war to remain steadfastly in the opposition.

Vandervelde realized that the Belgian Socialists would have to look beyond nineteenth-century treatises to find guidance for their evolving strategy. He proclaimed that in the tradition of Marx himself they would now have to revise their revisionism to fit the dramatically changed conditions of postwar Europe.

In *Le Socialisme contre l'état*, considered by many political theorists to be Vandervelde's most important contribution to socialist theory, Vandervelde defined his vision of the postrevolutionary state.⁵ He warned against the assumption that seemed to underlie the strategy of many reformists that they could gradually appropriate for themselves the powers exercised by the bourgeois state. Only a socialist revolution could create a socialist state, he argued.

During the transition, the collectivist ideal of "to each according to his work" would continue to apply until conditions were ripe to institute the communist ideal of "to each according to his needs," Vandervelde explained. Everyone would work and the principal means of production would belong to all. Although he now called himself a socialist rather than a collectivist, Vandervelde continued to distinguish between property earned by one's own labor, which would be preserved under socialism, and property that resulted from the work of others.

Vandervelde explained that the government of the socialist state would do more than that of the bourgeois state. In *Le Socialisme contre l'état*, Vandervelde sketched a postrevolutionary political state that would oversee the government of men while an administrative state would organize and centralize industrial production. Capitalist governments had attempted to

5. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Socialisme contre l'état* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1918).

rule people, but they had expected industries to govern themselves. In contrast, Vandervelde suggested that socialism would also effectively administer things – that is, the economy – as well. Socialist organization would replace capitalist anarchy. On the other hand, he warned against a self-perpetuating managerial class. All the citizens would serve as officeholders in the political state, at the same time that they enjoyed their true liberty as property holders in the collective regime. He warned against perpetuating the managerial class.⁶

Vandervelde recognized that his vision could not be achieved by simply appending additional reformist goals to the 1894 Charter of Quaregnon, which had guided the Belgian Workers' Party for a quarter century. He cautioned his fellow Socialists against limiting their vision to short-term reforms such as the eight-hour day and workers' pensions that could be realized by building alliances with the other progressive forces in Parliament. Socialism was not to be built by piling reforms one upon another. "To reconcile the contingencies of daily action with the permanence of the socialist idea and, as Jaurès said, to understand the real in order to achieve the ideal," the Socialists needed to remember their revolutionary vision.⁷

Vandervelde mingled citations of Jaurès and Kautsky to support this middle road between reform and revolution. When asked after the war if he was still a Marxist, he responded, "I am a Marxist, more or less – not completely – just as Jaurès was, and as Marx would have been had he survived."⁸ He continued: "I am a Marxist in the sense that I accept Marx as the best condenser of nineteenth-century socialist thought. I find his guiding influence in the programs of all the Socialist and Labor parties of the world. He had the merit of being the first to connect socialist doctrine to the workers' movement."⁹ As Vandervelde pictured Marx, he was the first Marxist revisionist.

Unlike the British Fabians and other reformists, Vandervelde still portrayed himself as an ideological descendant of Marx. Even during the 1920s when Vandervelde, accustomed by his wartime governmental experience to acting quickly, molded democratic socialism to meet the contingencies of the moment, he returned to cite Marx.

Whether the Belgian Socialists moved closer to a socialist revolution in the 1920s as they learned to participate in coalition governments with Liberals and Catholics is a question that Vandervelde did not publicly consider until the end of the decade. Then he acknowledged the obstacles

6. Vandervelde's concerns would be echoed seventy years later as Communist regimes crumbled throughout Eastern Europe.

7. Vandervelde cited in Robert Abs, *Emile Vandervelde* (Brussels: Labor, 1973), p. 301.

8. Emile Vandervelde, *Etudes marxistes*, 2d ed. (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1930), p. 166.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

that had blocked the democratic socialist path he had defined. But by the time that Vandervelde decided to redirect the course, Socialists throughout Europe were too entangled in governmental responsibilities to follow him.

Reform from Within

One of the most orthodox of the Belgian opponents of ministerialism before the war, Vandervelde's friend Louis de Broeckère opened the 1919 Socialist congress with a resolution "affirming the political capability of the working class."¹⁰ For the first time, the authors of the Belgian Workers' Party platform not only dreamed of but expected to realize a reduction in the web of indirect taxes and the introduction of progressive taxes on revenues and inheritance. They outlined an extensive program of social legislation that included the eight-hour day, a revision of the work code, measures for reducing unemployment, and the establishment of pensions. They demanded the limitation of military service to six months. From their position inside the government, they expected to draft and introduce the measures that would improve the lives of Belgian workers. Hendrik de Man was abroad, so only Joseph Jacquemotte, a future leader of the Belgian Communist Party, rose to challenge the almost unanimous consensus at the congress. He accused Belgian Socialists of protecting the realm of the bourgeoisie.

Belgian Socialists thus embarked on a two-and-a-half-year experiment in governmental participation. According to Belgian historian Frans Van Kalken, "The party maneuvered very skillfully" in the tripartite cabinet.¹¹ Three Socialists – Vandervelde, Eduard Anseele, and Joseph Wauters – had accepted positions in the first postwar government. In their excitement, they all, including Vandervelde, forgot Vandervelde's warnings about shortsighted reformism.

The Socialists had great hopes for the parliamentary elections of 1919, the first under universal manhood suffrage. Their hopes were fulfilled. They won seventy seats in the Chamber that year, thus becoming the second strongest party and emerging as a serious challenger to the Catholics, who retained only seventy-three seats. In the governmental reorganization that followed, the Catholics ceded one of their cabinet positions to the Socialists. Jules Destrée was named minister of arts and science.

The 1919 election brought an end to half a century of Catholic control

10. L. de Broeckère, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1919*, p. 39. See also A. J. Wauters, in Leo Collard, ed., *Les Faits du parti, 1885-1960* (Brussels: Institut Emile Vandervelde, 1960-61), p. 91.

11. Frans Van Kalken, *Entre deux guerres* (Brussels: Office de Publication, 1944), p. 80.

of the Belgian Chamber. The thirty-four Liberal seats, when added to the Socialists' seventy, denied the Catholics the governing majority they had enjoyed since the middle of the nineteenth century. Henceforth, almost every question introduced for parliamentary debate divided the Chamber. Other European parliaments were similarly deadlocked between the wars. But in Belgium more than elsewhere, the even balance of the parties brought governments down almost as quickly as they could be formed. Because of the size of its constituency, the vast political experience of its aging leaders, and its ability to unite in support of compromise, the Belgian Workers' Party was called to participate in eleven of the seventeen governing coalitions between the wars.

Serving as justice minister from 1918 until 1921, Vandervelde introduced a number of significant reforms into legislation. He was especially effective in revamping the criminal justice system to accord with his view of criminals. They were not subnormal delinquents, but people who were suffering from an illness and in need of treatment he explained. He therefore mandated improvements in prison conditions, opening a sanatorium for the treatment of inmates suffering from tuberculosis and establishing a central employment office. To substantiate his views, Vandervelde dispatched researchers from his "anthropological service" to study the mentality of prisoners in a quest to better understand the causes of their criminal behavior. He created a school of criminology to educate the future magistrates who would hand down sentences.¹²

The comprehensive, far-reaching nature of Vandervelde's reforms of the penal system was typical of the conscientious statesman's pragmatic attention to detail, sociological approach, and revolutionary vision. Vandervelde also introduced legislation to protect the victims of discrimination and oppression. New laws limited rent increases and prohibited evictions, for example. During his tenure as justice minister, he introduced legislation to defend the rights of handicapped children in particular and minors in general. He also established schools for social service. One of the projects closest to his heart, the *Loi Vandervelde*, or Vandervelde Law, discouraged the consumption of alcohol, especially among workers. Vandervelde also broke down the century-old barriers that had prevented women from practicing law in Belgium.

According to his contemporaries, Vandervelde effectively mobilized the bureaucratic resources at his command to gain support for his reforms within the government and to assure their passage in Parliament. He even

12. For Vandervelde's assessment of his reforms, see Emile Vandervelde, *Réalizations socialistes, Notre action d'après-guerre* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1923).



Figure 13 The Council of Ministers at Henry Carton de Wiart's residence in Boderghem-Saint Martin, 1921. Institut Emile Vandervelde

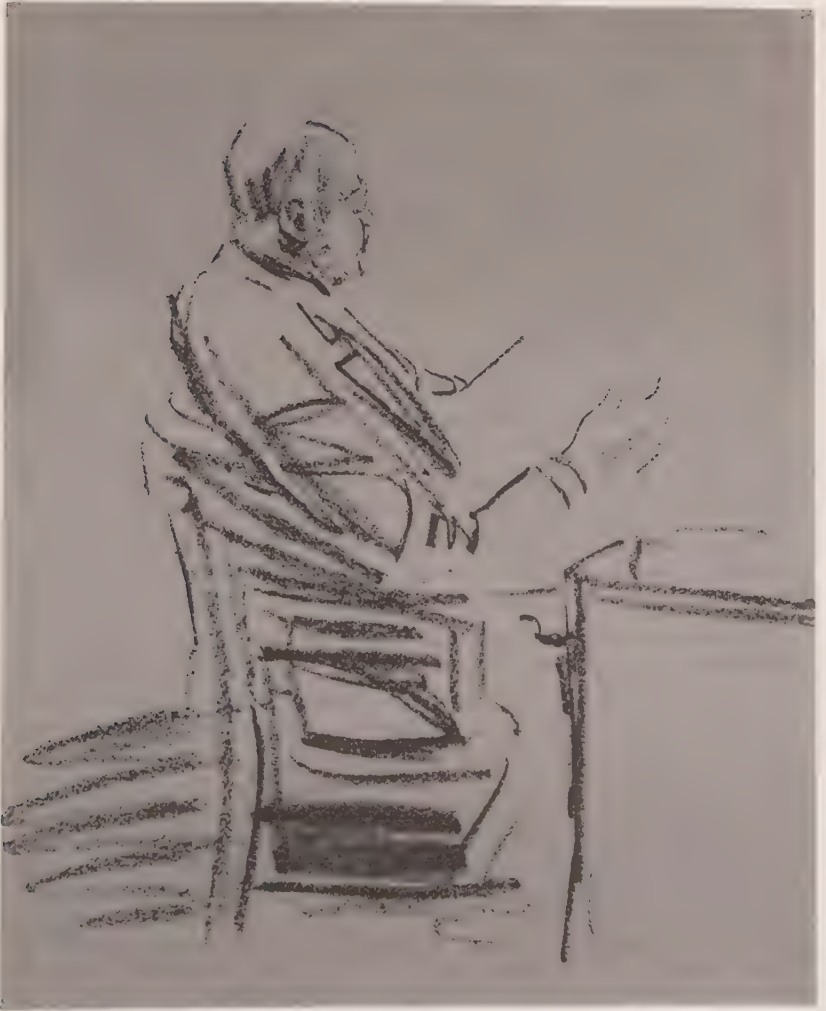


Figure 14 Emile Vandervelde, seated. By Jean Maillard, from *Emile Vandervelde vu par Jean Maillard* (Paris: L'Eglantine, 1932)

took up residence temporarily in his book-lined office at the ministry.¹³ As always, an inexhaustible supply of clippings and statistics documented all of his initiatives. Although his ministerial responsibilities forced him to neglect the books and journals that accumulated in his study overlooking the Parc Léopold, he prided himself on the realization of his theories of revolutionary reform. At meetings of the party Bureau, he enumerated his many successes and defended the government from charges of moving too slowly.¹⁴

The Socialists' first year of successes gave rise to an increasingly intractable conservative opposition. Party leaders were unable to form the coalitions within the government required to support the reforms that they continued to propose. That caused a number of party members to urge the Socialists to withdraw from the government and rejoin the opposition. Nevertheless, the majority of delegates to the April 1920 party congress voted to remain in the government for the time being. But they threatened resignations from the government unless at least part of the Socialist program was voted into law.

Each new debate in Parliament revealed the profound differences that increasingly divided the three Belgian parties. It became more difficult to mobilize a parliamentary majority in support of any significant legislation. Dissension reigned within the political parties as well. On the question of granting amnesty to Flemish activists who were accused of wartime collaboration, for example, Vandervelde and Huysmans lined up on opposite sides of the issue.¹⁵ For the Socialists, such public disagreements brought up the troubling question of the right of parliamentary deputies to act independently of resolutions passed by the Conseil général.¹⁶

One especially divisive question was women's suffrage. Ever since the nineteenth century, Belgian Socialists had proclaimed their support in principle for women's suffrage. In practice they had steadfastly refused to act. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Vandervelde had angrily challenged his friends who contended that women were not sufficiently

13. Carton de Wiart recalled his wonder at the "richesse de la documentation" accumulated by Vandervelde. "Tout un jeu de fiches, classées suivant un système bibliographique decimal alors à la mode, permettait de passer en revue les ouvrages," he observed. Comte Carton de Wiart, *Souvenirs politiques*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Renaissance du Livre, 1981), p. 31.

14. See, for example, Bureau, 23 September 1919, "Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij," Microfiche 67, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

15. Bureau, 14 January 1920, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Socialiste Arbeidersbeweging, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent; and *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 25 January 1921, p. 387.

16. Conseil général, 8 January 1921, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

educated to be entrusted with the vote. He had reminded his fellow Socialists that similar arguments had been used to exclude the workers in the nineteenth century. He had insisted that the Socialists take up the cause of women. But just as consistently, together with his first wife, Lalla, a leader of the Socialist women's group, he had also bowed to arguments regularly advanced within the party that the inclusion of a demand for women's suffrage would jeopardize the all-important struggle for universal manhood suffrage.¹⁷

The achievement of universal manhood suffrage after the war changed the terms of the debate for Vandervelde. He now quite openly chided his fellow Socialists, as well as the Liberals, for their failure to extend equal rights to women. The Catholics, on the other hand, supported women's suffrage in the expectation of gaining a substantial majority of new votes. And it was this fear that riveted the left to their opposition to extending the vote to women.

Vandervelde later testified that the arguments against women's suffrage offered by fellow Socialists truly saddened him. Ever the humanitarian, Vandervelde continued vigorously to champion women's rights. "If in the current capitalist regime workers are oppressed, women are doubly oppressed, as women and as workers," he argued again and again.¹⁸ How could his fellow Socialists refuse to recognize the plight of women and not grant them the vote? How, he asked, could the Belgians ignore the tide that had swept the rest of Europe after the war? Vandervelde's strident address brought more hostile jeers than applause from the Liberal and Socialist benches of the Chamber. Never one to give up, Vandervelde became ever more outspoken in his defense of women's rights in the ensuing years.¹⁹

Governmental crises increased in intensity and frequency. No one expected the second Delacroix cabinet formed in December 1919 to survive. The final blow came in August 1920 when the unions in Antwerp refused to transfer munitions, manufactured in France and destined for use against the Red Army, to Polish ships. When the Socialists lined up behind the unions, the Liberals vehemently challenged their foreign policy commitments. Two Liberal ministers, Paul Hymans and Paul Emile Janson, submitted their resignations to the king in protest. The government fell.

The king asked Henry Carton de Wiart to put together a third national union government. Carton de Wiart approached Vandervelde privately.

17. As late as March 1919, Vandervelde agreed to submit to the unspoken pact of the three parties and not push for universal suffrage for women.

18. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 26 February 1920, p. 421.

19. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Les Femmes belges et le travail," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 19 June 1935.

“The amicable relations that I had established with Emile Vandervelde, that our life during the war had fortified, allowed me to speak very freely with him,” the Catholic minister explained.²⁰ But Vandervelde insisted on opening the discussions to include other Socialist leaders. The Socialists subsequently debated the question of governmental participation in conflicting editorials in *Le Peuple* and at meetings of the party Bureau and the Conseil général. Jacquemotte, in particular, challenged Vandervelde’s support of participation, alleging that the Socialist ministers had betrayed the interests of the working class.²¹ Two days of discussion over governmental participation dominated the extraordinary congress of 1920.²² In his discussions with Carton de Wiart, Vandervelde steadfastly supported the decisions of the congress. Carton de Wiart chided him to remember his well-deserved reputation as a statesman. He reminded Vandervelde that during the war Catholic ministers had charged that as an “internationalist” Vandervelde could not patriotically serve his country, but Carton de Wiart had risen to defend him.²³ They did finally reach an accord which was approved by the Conseil général. According to the new prime minister, “Vandervelde had prepared the scenario in advance.”²⁴

The Carton de Wiart cabinet began as a precariously balanced coalition of three resentful parties. It charged itself only with completing the revision of the Constitution and mediating parliamentary disputes. In fact, it took very little to upset the fragile agreement on which the government had been established. For their part, the Socialist ministers seemed constantly poised on the verge of resignation. They raised the possibility of rejoining the opposition whenever the government voted down a Socialist program.

The Socialists left the government in December 1921. The immediate cause was “l’affaire du fusil brisé,” or “broken-gun affair.” Albert Devèze, the Liberal minister of national defense, demanded the resignation of veteran Socialist Eduard Anseele, serving as minister of public works. He had been observed participating in an allegedly pacifist rally at La Louvière, an action deemed inappropriate for a government minister. If Anseele did not resign, then Devèze would. The prime minister supported Devèze and demanded that Anseele step down. The Socialist ministers took advantage of the opportunity to rejoin the opposition. As Vandervelde explained in an editorial in *Le Peuple*, the issue went beyond whether

20. Carton de Wiart, *Souvenirs politiques*, pp. 50–1.

21. Jacquemotte and Vandervelde, Conseil général, 18 February 1920, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 72, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

22. Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, *Congrès extraordinaire 1920*, pp. 78–80.

23. Carton de Wiart, *Souvenirs politiques*, p. 53.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Anseele should have been standing next to a man waving a flag portraying a soldier trampling a gun.²⁵ The Catholics and Liberals had clearly demonstrated their intention to oppose the enactment of further social reforms. The government steadfastly refused to reduce military service to six months as it pursued an ever more dangerous course of confrontation in foreign policy.²⁶ Specifically, the Belgian government threatened to occupy the Ruhr if the Germans did not pay their reparations. The Socialists realized that they could accomplish little more within such a government.

As he resigned, Vandervelde responded to criticism from the right as well as the left. Editorials in the Catholic and Liberal press sneered that the Socialists had not achieved socialism during their three years of participation. Vandervelde reminded his critics that, in fact, the Socialists had enacted almost their entire program of reforms. The revolution had begun, he explained. When younger members of the party charged that the older Socialists, too long inside the government, had lost their taste for combat, Vandervelde asked why the second largest party in the Belgian Parliament should return to the strategy it had pursued in 1886. "The attitudes of a major party on the verge of taking power do not resemble those of a sect just being born," he asserted. "The powerful calm of a river as it approaches the sea does not have the same rhythm as a thin waterfall descending the mountains."²⁷

"The Struggle against Reaction:"²⁸ Constructive Opposition

From his new vantage point as leader of the opposition, Vandervelde avidly defended the three-year experiment in governmental participation. He reminded the Socialists that they had achieved most of their short-term goals. Universal manhood suffrage had been enacted; the Loi Vandervelde limiting the sale of alcohol had been passed; progressive taxes had been levied on inheritance and revenues; workers' pensions were in place; unions now disbursed strike benefits; tenants were protected from capricious landlords; military service had at least been reduced to ten months; the eight-hour day was now the law, although it had not been widely enforced; and article 310 of the penal code limiting labor organizing

25. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Lock-Out d'Anseele," *Le Peuple* 6 November 1921.

26. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 20 October 1921, p. 2696; and Emile Vandervelde, *Le Parti ouvrier belge* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1925), p. 98.

27. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire du Parti ouvrier belge, 1885–1935; vers la souveraineté du travail* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1936), p. 327.

28. Emile Vandervelde cited in Vanden Berghe, *Emile Vandervelde: Sa doctrine, son action* (Paris: Vermaut, 1928), p. 151.

had been suspended. Before they could progress further along the path to socialism, Vandervelde predicted that they would have to endure a “difficult fight, a period of rude tests.”²⁹

That period of “rude tests” began almost immediately. The Socialists suffered a demoralizing electoral defeat in November 1921. This first major setback since the party had won access to the Parliament in 1894 caused a number of Socialists, especially those on the left, to question their postwar strategy. The gap between theory and practice troubled them. Universal suffrage did not seem to be leading to socialism. Perhaps they had taken the wrong path. Vandervelde acknowledged the mood of the majority of delegates to the party congress that year: “It would have been a moral impossibility for the Workers’ Party to collaborate with the bourgeois parties in the government,” he explained, in obvious contradiction with his earlier pronouncements.³⁰ Delegates to the December congress reminded Vandervelde and the other party leaders who had served in postwar governments that the party had only approved participation until “the Belgian house,” destroyed by the war, was rebuilt.³¹ Now that the process of reconstruction was under way, it was time for the Socialists to return to the opposition.

However, few party leaders were ready to rule out the possibility of future governmental participation. In a revealing defense of the Socialists’ original decision to join the government, the Bureau later explained, “Basically, [our participation in the government] was consistent with the traditional tactics of our party, which have always consisted of taking advantage of circumstances, of choosing the right time to bestow successive improvements on the working class, thereby leading them step by step toward a better future.”³² Party leaders openly acknowledged the pragmatic opportunism that guided their reformist strategy.

Free of the daily demands of a ministerial schedule, Vandervelde published a justification of the Belgian Socialists’ participation in four postwar governments titled *Faut-il changer notre programme? Avant-projet de révision*.³³ Despite his experiences with the obstructionist tactics of the Liberals and Catholics in the second Delacroix ministry, overall Vandervelde’s participation in the Belgian government had done little to

29. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1921*, p. 11.

30. Vandervelde cited in Carl-Henrik Höjer, *Le Régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Botryckeri Ab, 1946), p. 125.

31. Jules Lekeu, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1918*, p. 29.

32. Rapport au XXXIII^e congrès as cited by B.-S. Chlepner, *Cent ans d’histoire sociale en Belgique* (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1936), p. 366.

33. Emile Vandervelde, *Faut-il changer notre programme? Avant-projet de révision* (Brussels: L’Eglantine, 1923).

shake his faith in democratic socialism.

Vandervelde sketched the evolution of Belgian society since 1913 that had created such an ideal site for the first European Socialist experiment in sharing political responsibility and governmental power. The war had altered the fundamental structure of European society, opening the door to governmental participation for the Socialists. As Socialists shared governmental responsibilities, they realized significant reforms. Although the vote had yet to be extended to women and the power of the Senate and the king still blocked the institution of direct democracy, Vandervelde claimed that the foundations for a democratic government that would evolve toward socialism had been established. Neither Vandervelde nor his critics paused to compare the reformism of his *Avant-projet de révision* with his 1918 denunciation of reformism.

Vandervelde produced a parallel strategy of gradual reforms for achieving socialism in the workplace. He heralded the gradually expanding worker control of the production process, which, he explained, mirrored the Socialists' gains in the political system. In the brief burst of prosperity immediately following the war, working conditions in the most industrialized sections of Western Europe had improved slightly. Socialists and union leaders had effectively wrested concessions from European capitalists. With the economic downturn of 1920–21, employers had tried to renege on their agreements, resulting in an "ever widening gap between what the workers demand and what employers are willing or even able to concede."³⁴ If Vandervelde, the attentive reader of *Capital*, recognized this classic description of revolutionary conditions, he chose to overlook it.

Vandervelde believed that reforms in the structure of industrial control would ultimately allow the workers to defend their postwar gains. Within most of the former Allied countries, workers had gained representation on most industrial boards. They had a role in decision making, Vandervelde proclaimed. In an even more dramatic development, the principal industries in Austria and Germany had been placed under the control of national councils. Throughout Europe, Socialists "had demanded that workers control enterprises."³⁵ As a consequence, Vandervelde explained, European workers could see "vast perspectives opening before them."³⁶ These changes foreshadowed "the radical transformation of the regime of property and production," that is, socialism.³⁷

Despite his generally optimistic forecasts, Vandervelde cautioned his

34. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

readers about the threats to democracy that had appeared since the war.³⁸ In particular, he pointed to the Bolsheviks. Before her death, Rosa Luxemburg had predicted that without general elections or freedom of thought, public institutions would atrophy. That was exactly what had happened in Russia, Vandervelde argued.³⁹ The Bolsheviks' dictatorship of the proletariat could no longer be excused as a temporary expedient; it had clearly been institutionalized as state terror. And it threatened to spread beyond Russian borders.

Vandervelde also warned his readers of the equally dangerous threat posed by the right. Before the war many Socialists had prophesied that war would lead to revolution. Counterrevolution now loomed as a more likely result, he predicted. Periods of political and economic crisis were not the time to strike out boldly in search of the new world.

At party congresses and in meetings of the Conseil général, Vandervelde was called to account for the Belgian Workers' Party's deviation from a prewar strategy that had at least seemed to be revolutionary. He argued that even though Belgian Socialists had willingly accepted positions within the government, and although they might do so again in the future, they had not abandoned the revolution. "Our objective for tomorrow, or for the day after tomorrow, is not to participate in power, but to take power," he asserted.⁴⁰ As he had before the war, he maintained that reforms were revolutionary. In a variation on his earlier theme, he suggested that the reforms they had won since the war put the Socialists that much closer to the day when they would rise to conquer new positions in the government. Then, the Socialists would establish a new economic order based on the cooperative federation of all workers.

In December 1921, the Catholics and Liberals negotiated a new coalition government. Vandervelde boasted confidently that the bourgeois parties "for better or worse might be able to govern without them [the Socialists], but they could not govern against them."⁴¹ The new prime minister, Georges Theunis, affirmed his commitment to preserve the reform legislation enacted by the previous government. But the Catholics and Liberals increasingly allowed regulations to lapse without enforcement. "Socialist opposition was certainly too strong for them to think of abrogating the social legislation," Vandervelde reflected ten years later. "But they were able to sabotage the laws, to nibble away at them."⁴²

38. Emile Vandervelde, "Que reste-t-il des démocraties en Europe?" *Le Peuple* 23 July 1923.

39. Vandervelde, *Faut-il changer?* pp. 103–4.

40. Emile Vandervelde, "La Réaction," *Le Peuple* 22 April 1923.

41. Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire*, p. 76.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

As the economic crisis deepened, lockouts and strikes spread throughout Belgium. Public employees in particular made use of their newly won right to protest. They initiated deliberate slowdowns in crucial service sectors. Telephone and railroad services were interrupted at peak periods. Socialists eagerly defended the strikers in Parliament and in the streets. Vandervelde had mused in the midst of his first term as minister: "It is easier to be a Socialist in the opposition than in the government."⁴³ That proved to be true as Socialists vigorously demanded the enforcement of social legislation enacted between 1918 and 1921. Renewed contact with the workers invigorated the leaders.

But even in the opposition, issues raised in parliamentary debate that did not fit easily into the category of class conflict posed new difficulties for Socialist leaders. Vandervelde resolutely denounced the Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in parliamentary debates. He headed a special party commission that prepared a detailed report on the implementation of a six-month military draft, following the lines suggested twenty years earlier by Jean Jaurès. At the same time, however, the prominent Socialist from Charleroi Jules Destrée publicly supported the stationing of Belgian troops in the Ruhr. When it came to a vote in the Chamber, the other two leaders of the Socialist delegation, Joseph Wauters and Eduard Anseele, abstained to avoid taking a position.

These same foreign policy questions also divided the ruling parties within the governmental coalition. Entangled with disputes over linguistic issues, they brought down the Theunis government in the winter of 1924. Vandervelde's arguments for forgiving German debt and his protests against the king's proposal for lengthening military service from ten to fourteen months had won support among Flemish Catholics in Parliament. When the king turned to a conservative Catholic, Baron Maurice Houtart, to constitute a new Catholic-Liberal government, Belgian Socialists bitterly protested their exclusion from Houtart's negotiations. Although they did not really want to participate in the government again, they objected that, by not consulting them, the king was failing to recognize the Socialists' political maturity.

In the subsequent parliamentary campaign, the Socialists vowed to replace the weak and divided bourgeois coalition with a united, forceful government of workers. Socialist candidates proclaimed throughout the provinces, that once elected, a Socialist parliamentary majority would guide the ever growing working class to class consciousness. Socialist ministers would then proceed to collectivize and socialize the means of production. The path to socialism seemed clear, at least in campaign

43. Emile Vandervelde cited in Abs, *Emile Vandervelde*.

rhetoric.

Vandervelde reaffirmed the identity of the Belgian Socialists as the workers' party. But his definition of the proletariat in 1924 was broader than any Marx had envisioned in *Capital*, and he recognized that. The war and the economic reorganization that followed had caused new groups, such as the intellectuals, to identify with the proletariat. In a series of articles in *Le Peuple* in 1924–25, Vandervelde proposed strategies for winning the support of these new workers, the former intermediate classes.⁴⁴ He suggested, for example, that Socialists appeal directly to tenants, a natural Socialist constituency. The Socialists had but to remind them of the reforms instituted under Vandervelde's ministry. For the time being, Vandervelde assumed that voting behavior and class interests were one and the same.

As leaders of the opposition, the Socialists waged an enthusiastic campaign. They won ten additional seats in the parliamentary elections of April 1925, a significant gain. Most important, these wins gave Belgian Socialists potential control of a majority of votes in the Parliament if they could count on the support of some of the smaller parties. Vandervelde trumpeted the victory to his French neighbors. The French and British Socialists had had a standing wager over which party would first secure a parliamentary majority. Vandervelde proudly claimed that triumph for Belgium.⁴⁵ The Socialists now held 79 of the 187 seats in the Chamber. In addition, they were guaranteed the support of the two Communists, four Christian Democrats, and six Frontists from Flanders, who would vote with them on all but linguistic questions.

Following their impressive electoral success, the Socialists announced their desire to rejoin the government. The king called Vandervelde to the Royal Palace. With little dissent, the Conseil général supported Vandervelde in his deliberations with the “democratic elements” of the other parties to form a government based on the Belgian Workers' Party platform. According to political scientist Carl-Henrik Hojer, “The decision of the POB [to form a government] was one of the most important events of the interwar period in Belgium because it officially challenged the political tradition of the country and because it appeared to have a

44. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, “Le Gouvernement de demain,” *Le Peuple* 23 March 1924; Emile Vandervelde, “Les Fonctionnaires et la lutte des classes,” *Le Peuple* 13 April 1924; and Emile Vandervelde, “Le Marxiste et l'étudiant,” *Le Peuple* 22 March 1925.

45. Emile Vandervelde, “Une Majorité travailliste au Parlement belge,” in *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 13 April 1925.

possibility of success.”⁴⁶ The Socialists challenged political custom by negotiating with individual Catholics and Liberals whom they hoped to recruit for their cabinet.

All of the Liberals rebuffed Vandervelde’s advances. Among the most avid proponents of a strong military, they resolutely refused to join a coalition headed by the Socialists. The Catholics too refused to negotiate individually with the Socialists. Finally, Vandervelde was forced to concede defeat. The first Socialist attempt to form a government in Belgium had failed. The elderly Catholic mediator Charles de Broqueville tried next, but he failed too, as each of the three parties clung to its programs and refused to compromise. After a vote of no confidence in a government subsequently formed by the Catholic Aloys Van de Vyvere, the Liberals tried to build their own coalition.

In June 1925 after Belgium had gone eight weeks without a government, Vandervelde agreed in principle to participate in a Catholic-Socialist coalition. Although the Socialists readily parceled out their ministerial assignments, disagreements within the increasingly fragmented Catholic Party doomed that government as well. Weeks later, the two parties finally reached an agreement based on further Socialist concessions. The Conseil général approved it with a bare majority. During the debate, Destrée and de Man protested Vandervelde’s failure to abide by the firm resolution adopted at the last party congress. The Belgian Socialists had declared their refusal to participate in any government that was not headed by a Socialist. Destrée and de Man warned that participation in a Catholic-led government during a severe economic crisis would involve the Socialists in a massacre of the workers.

French Socialist leader Léon Blum was wrestling with a similar dilemma: whether to participate in a governmental coalition with the Radicals.⁴⁷ While the orthodox wing of the French party opposed all participation as class collaboration, reformists in France argued for the acceptance of responsibility. In the middle, in the French tradition of Jean Jaurès, Léon Blum remained committed to a revolutionary vision in the longterm, while he fought to realize reforms in the present. Blum did not oppose participation in principle, but he cautioned his reformist friends of the dangers of becoming identified with the progressive bourgeois

46. Höjer, *Le régime parlementaire*, p. 148. Debates over governmental formation dominated the meetings of the Conseil général throughout the spring. See the minutes for the meetings of 14 April 1925, 19 May 1925, 27 May 1925, 2 June 1925, 5 June 1925, 7 June 1925, 15 June 1925, and 17 June 1925, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en Ladelijke Raad*, Microfiches 94–96, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

47. See Joel Colton, *Léon Blum, Humanist in Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), pp. 59–74.

parties.

The French Socialists defined their goal in the 1920s as the “conquest of power,” that is a revolutionary transformation of society. Under capitalism, Blum defined the possible “exercise of power,” that is the acceptance of ministerial responsibility in a coalition government in which the Socialists were the controlling partner. The French Socialists adamantly refused to participate in the coalition governments that were headed by the Radicals.

Vandervelde reminded his fellow Socialists of the French determination to remain in the opposition. He also pointed out that Ramsay MacDonald’s minority Socialist government had been crushed decisively in Britain. Could the Belgians expect to fare better, given the strength of conservative forces in Belgium, he asked.

A new Belgian government of six Catholics, one technician, and five Socialists finally coalesced and presented its program to the Parliament on 23 June. A number of leading Catholics rose to question Vandervelde’s nomination as minister of foreign affairs. They were disgruntled that they had not been consulted. The Christian Democratic wing of the party alone had negotiated the agreement with the Socialists. The Liberals also vowed to oppose the government.

Keeping the Ship Afloat: 1925 to 1927

The Pouillet-Vandervelde cabinet encountered fierce opposition from the very beginning. “In the course of my reign and during the time that I observed Leopold II’s reign, I never saw a cabinet that had to struggle against greater difficulties,” King Albert later recalled.⁴⁸ “The workers’ government,” as Vandervelde called it, negotiated sensitive treaties and attempted to cure the economic crisis within Belgium without support from the traditionally powerful political forces in Belgium.

Catholics and Liberals alike challenged Vandervelde’s competence to serve as minister of foreign affairs. The former president of the Second International would not protect their national interests, they charged. If he remained true to his socialist principles, he would not fortify national frontiers or encourage exports while limiting imports, they reasoned. In fact, experience would prove Vandervelde’s foreign policy to differ little from that of his Liberal predecessor, Paul Hymans. But his pacifist rhetoric and his apparent willingness to rely on international organizations rather than strengthening the Belgian military frightened them. Those fears

48. King Albert cited in Guy Vanthemsche, “De Val van de Regering Pouillet-Vandervelde, een samenzwering des bankiers,” *Revue Belge d’Histoire Contemporaine/Belgische Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 1–2 (1978): 178.

colored the Belgian opposition's general perception of the Pouillet-Vandervelde government.

The conservative opposition in Belgium could do little to influence Vandervelde's international pronouncements, but this group of industrialists and financiers was a force to be reckoned with in economic planning. Burdened with an escalating national debt and monetary inflation, the Pouillet-Vandervelde government set economic reform as its most pressing task. Finance minister Albert-Edouard Janssen, a Christian Democrat, presented a project for stabilizing the franc to the government in November 1925. Janssen planned to make good the state's debt to the national bank by way of an amortization plan and an external loan of \$150 million. The ministers were optimistic. The Dawes Plan had assured the regulation of reparations, and the American agreement on war debts promised at last to open the American capital market for European loans. The Belgian financial community was less enthusiastic. That winter, negotiations with New York bankers over the loan, which had seemed to be proceeding smoothly, suddenly collapsed. As a result, the government could not enforce its monetary ceiling of Fr 107 to the pound, setting off wild currency speculation. On 15 March, Black Monday, the pound rose to Fr 122 in an hour of trading, causing a public panic. As the value of the franc continued to plunge, the widely respected Belgian economist Emile Francqui urged the government to abandon its plan. Janssen, however, refused to give up on the loan-repayment project, in which the government had invested so much hope.

A number of Socialists publicly accused New York bankers of purposely fueling the crisis. As a member of the government, Vandervelde was more reserved. Later, however, he clearly assigned responsibility. "The converging offensives of [the government's] political adversaries, of certain bankers, and that mob of speculators who should be known as the shipwreckers of the franc" had sabotaged the Pouillet-Vandervelde recovery plan, he charged.⁴⁹ Rumors spread by Belgian bankers and industrialists had frightened off foreign investors. According to the Socialists, the conservatives had plotted to bring down "the workers' government" so they could implement their own economic programs.⁵⁰

The Pouillet-Vandervelde government fell in May 1926. Shortly thereafter, Marcel Henri Jaspar, leader of the conservative Catholics, agreed to head a tripartite government to pull the country out of its economic crisis. On behalf of the Socialists, Vandervelde promised Francqui, who would clearly assume control of the new government, "We

49. Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire*, p. 81.

50. On the question of conservative sabotage of the Pouillet-Vandervelde recovery plan, see Vanthemse, "De Val van de Regering," pp. 165-214.

are ready to give a hand to any government, providing it can prove itself able to reestablish the financial condition of the country.”⁵¹ He wrote Friedrich Adler, comparing the French Socialists’ decision to reenter the opposition to the Belgian Socialist resolution to remain within the government and save the franc. Both governments had been threatened by conservative reaction, but the strength of the Belgian Socialists compelled them to continue their struggle from within while the French had been able to withdraw more easily to the opposition, he explained.⁵² Socialists – Anseele, Wauters, Huysmans, and Vandervelde – served until October 1927.

The Catholics’ role in bringing down the Pouillet-Vandervelde coalition had caused the Socialists to hesitate before agreeing to enter a new government. Vandervelde explained that his doubts about cooperating with the “shipwreckers” had been dispelled in a meeting with the representatives of Socialist unions and cooperatives. Assembled in a small room of the Maison du Peuple “adorned with revolutionary effigies,” they had pleaded anxiously with Vandervelde to rescue “their franc.”⁵³ Charged with that responsibility, Vandervelde mobilized leading Socialists to support the new government. He appealed to them to remember how they had come to the defense of their nation in 1914. The Belgian nation was at war again, he concluded. The Conseil général had then approved the participation of four Socialist ministers in the government.

The fall of the first “workers’ government” and the success of the Jaspar-Francqui cabinet, however, forced the Socialists to reconsider their faith in universal suffrage and the democratic process. Bankers and industrialists had easily toppled the government they opposed and replaced it with one of their own. Despite the Socialists’ control of Parliament, capitalists had effectively dictated economic policy to the government.

In 1925, when the Socialists won control of the parliamentary majority, according to historian M. Pierson, they “had thought they were strong enough to try to govern the bourgeois state against the will of capitalism.”⁵⁴ They had been proved wrong. Four years earlier, Vandervelde had prophesied that capital would no longer be able to govern against the workers. The reverse had also proven to be true. The first workers’ government had survived a short eleven months. It was replaced by yet another Catholic-led coalition.

51. Emile Vandervelde cited in Liane Ranieri, *Emile Francqui ou l’intelligence créatrice* (Paris: Editions Duculot, 1985), p. 211.

52. Vandervelde to Adler, 7 January 1927, *Sozialistische Arbeiter International* 1296/1 and 2, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

53. Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire*, p. 85.

54. M. A. Pierson, *Histoire du socialisme en Belgique* (Brussels: Institut Emile Vandervelde, 1953), p. 188.

Francqui moved quickly and forcefully to consolidate the floating foreign debt.⁵⁵ In July 1927 Parliament voted “extraordinary powers” to the government to implement Francqui’s emergency measures. Vandervelde supported the vote, comparing the Belgian governmental crisis to wartime. Without saying so publicly, the Socialists agreed to entrust the economic recovery to the financiers guided by Francqui, the man who had organized Belgian relief during the war.

Vandervelde adroitly overlooked the inherent irony of the Socialists’ commitment to rescuing the capitalist economy. At the party congress of 1926, he admitted that it was only after much reflection that Socialist leaders had agreed to cooperate with their former enemies to save the franc in 1925, “to keep the ship afloat.”⁵⁶ More typically, he dismissed the contradictions in the Socialist strategy by arguing pragmatically that if the economy collapsed, the disaster would drown the workers as well as the industrialists. “We wanted, at all costs, to save the franc, the franc that belonged to everyone,” he explained.⁵⁷

Vandervelde occasionally hinted at a more orthodox Marxist analysis of the economic crisis. But the books and articles that he wrote in the mid-1920s lacked the rigor that had distinguished his earliest economic analyses. He now shifted effortlessly and seemingly unconsciously between orthodox pronouncements that capitalist crises would lead to war and statistically detailed reports on trade set within the narrow context defined by Francqui’s policies. After the economic crash of 1929, Vandervelde examined the results of “American-style neocapitalism.”⁵⁸ Over the next few years, the ability of Belgian capitalists to weather the crash reconfirmed his increasingly pragmatic, atheoretical reformism.

Belgian historian Jan Dhondt has suggested that, although the economic crises of the interwar decade pushed the Christian Democrats toward the left, they shoved the Belgian Socialists definitively to the right, further away from revolution and toward reform.⁵⁹ In the midst of the transition, both parties drifted somewhat aimlessly. The Socialists, in particular, lingered in a malaise from which they seemed to lack the will to extricate themselves.

At the extraordinary congress of the party held in December 1926, Vandervelde acknowledged the failure of the coalition government to act

55. For a description of the economic measures, see F. Baudhuin, *Histoire économique de la Belgique, 1914–1939* (Brussels: E. Bruylant, 1946).

56. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1926*.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Emile Vandervelde, *L’Alternative: Capitalisme d’état ou socialisme démocratique* (Paris: L’Eglantine, 1933), p. 52.

59. Jan Dhondt, “De Evolutie van de Partijen tussen de twee Wereldoorlogen,” *Res Publica* 4 (1962): 379.

on any of the Socialists' reforms.⁶⁰ A number of delegates responded to his call for patience by demanding that the Socialists leave the government. The Socialists had sacrificed too much already, they declared. When Vandervelde returned to the podium, he addressed the concerns of the next generation of Belgian Socialists, who feared that continued participation in the tripartite government would destroy the party. He recognized "the young people who are listening and impatiently awaiting the moment when at last they can rise to denounce my opportunism, my moderation, and my spirit of pragmatic concessions."⁶¹ But he refused to leave the cabinet before the nation had completed its economic convalescence.⁶²

However, soon thereafter Vandervelde again took up his campaign to reduce military service to six months. Catholic and Liberal leaders as well as the public reacted hostilely, as he knew they would.⁶³ It had never been a popular cause among Belgians, who anxiously sought to build up their military and fortify their frontiers.

On 8 October 1927 Vandervelde was invited to speak at Tribomont-les-Verviers to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Prévoyance sociale*. His speech resonated far beyond its immediate audience. "The truce is over," Vandervelde announced to his Socialist audience. "We must now dedicate ourselves to the realization of our ideal."⁶⁴ The Socialists in the government committed themselves to fight to secure fixed leases for farmers, insurance for employees, and six-month military service for all. Vandervelde pledged that Belgian Socialists would strive mightily for disarmament and world peace.

Catholic and Liberal ministers responded immediately and angrily to press accounts of the Tribomont-les-Verviers speech. Vandervelde appeared to have delivered an ultimatum to the government, bringing back memories of the days following the war when Socialists had effectively dictated national policy. Marcel Henri Jaspar denounced the presumption of his foreign minister.⁶⁵ The Socialists stood firm and refused to retract Vandervelde's demand for the reduction of military service to six months. When Jaspar asked the Socialists to resign from the government, they complied. The Catholics and Liberals then re-formed their coalition and

60. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 24 November 1926, Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 102, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

61. Emile Vandervelde, Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, *Congrès extraordinaire 1926*, p. 16.

62. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Problème de la participation en Belgique," *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* 15 December 1926 to 15 February 1927, pp. 19–24.

63. F. Barbey, *La Belgique d'Albert I et Léopold III* (Paris: Perrin, 1950), p. 146.

64. Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire*, p. 90.

65. Henri Jaspar to Vandervelde, 10 October 1927, Jaspar 10, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

the Socialists returned to the opposition.

At the annual congress in 1928, Vandervelde proudly noted that it was his demand for reducing military service that had caused the government to fall. "It is the class struggle rising back up to the surface," he proclaimed. "Once again we see the struggle between the possessing classes and Labor."⁶⁶ The young Paul Henri Spaak went further than the veteran minister. Fifteen years of Socialist cooperation with the bourgeoisie had definitively ceased, Spaak declared with relief. Socialists had finally recognized that socialism would not be realized by building reform upon reform. Vandervelde had not anticipated that his impatient young listeners of the previous year would challenge him so soon. At that time, the failure of the strategy of governmental participation seemed obvious to the vast majority of Belgian Socialists. And yet, no one from either generation came forward to propose an alternate strategy.

Vandervelde recognized in a 1928 article in the *Revue de Paris* that there was "nothing more paradoxical at first glance, than the persistence of what appears to be a system of class collaboration in one of the countries in which the struggle of classes has always been and remains the most intense."⁶⁷ Indeed, Belgian Socialists had participated in more governments of national union than any other Socialist party in Europe. They had also been the very last to abandon the experiment. He cautioned his readers against dismissing the Belgians as extreme revisionists who had slipped unconsciously into reformism. He reminded them of the gravity of the economic crisis faced by the Belgian government after the war and the utter devastation of the German-occupied territory. Stronger and more united than other European Socialist parties, the Belgian Workers' Party had naturally been expected to aid in the recovery. Their strength also precluded remaining in the opposition. An obvious partner in the governing alliances that rose and fell with such frequency in Belgium, the Belgian Socialists were no more inherently reformist than their neighbors, Vandervelde argued. They were more successful at the polls and hence controlled a larger number of parliamentary seats. That brought greater governmental responsibility.

Vandervelde acknowledged that, after 1921, the Socialist ministers had appeared to subordinate the class struggle to national concerns, resigning themselves to accept the persistence of the capitalist system. But as he argued in another 1926 article, which echoed the theories of his friend the German Socialist Karl Kautsky, industrial development that increased the

66. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1928*, p. 25.

67. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Socialistes belges et la participation au gouvernement," *La Revue de Paris* April 1928.

size and maturity of the proletariat had pushed the working class forward politically. "The war gave a definitive push to the persistent tendencies [of economic development] and opened the way for a Socialist victory."⁶⁸ The Socialists obviously could not return to their prewar strategy. Although their faith in governmental participation had been shaken, they remained almost unanimously committed to following the parliamentary road to Socialism. Having won universal manhood suffrage, they looked to the results of the next election rather than to rebellion.⁶⁹ Whether in the government or in the opposition, in 1928 as in 1891, the Socialists' goal remained the same, Vandervelde declared.

An Unsure Opposition

In the 1930s the economic crisis deepened, threatening the Socialist unions and cooperatives as well as Belgian industry and finance. At the same time, linguistic questions that cut across class lines urgently demanded resolution. The war that had facilitated the integration of the working class into Belgian society had simultaneously exacerbated regional tensions. By 1929, Belgium had begun to come apart at its linguistic seams.⁷⁰

A lifelong resident of Brussels, Vandervelde was caught in the very center of the linguistic quarrel, which he never really understood. Vandervelde seemed to hope that it would just go away. In the nineteenth century when Vandervelde represented Charleroi in Parliament, he defended Flemish demands for linguistic equality. His Walloon constituents had little sympathy for his message.

Vandervelde spoke out in Parliament at the end of the nineteenth century to advocate linguistic legislation that would recognize Flemish as well as French as official languages in Belgium. Until the war, Vandervelde's

68. Emile Vandervelde and Paul Henri Spaak, *Le Socialisme en Europe depuis dix ans. Les Intellectuels et le Parti ouvrier belge* (Brussels: Editions Conseil Général du Parti Ouvrier Belge, 1926), p. 281.

69. The discussion of universal suffrage was framed by Friedrich Engels in his introduction to Karl Marx's *Class Struggles in France*. For a contemporary discussion of the debate in a British context, see Barry Hindress, *Parliamentary Democracy and Socialist Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

70. The literature on the linguistic question in Belgium is vast. See, among others, Alexander B. Murphy, *The Regional Dynamics of Language Differentiation in Belgium: A Study in Cultural-Political Geography* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988); Arend Lijphart, ed., *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium: The Dynamics of a Culturally Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Val Lorwin, "Belgium: Religion, Class, and Language in National Politics," in *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, ed. Robert A. Dahl (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Hendrik Elias, *Vijftientig Jaar Vlaamse Beweging, 1914-1939* 4 vols. (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1969); Aristide Zolberg, "The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium, 1830-1914," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1974): 179-235.

response to Flemish demands almost mirrored his arguments in defense of native rights in the Congo, the cause closest to his heart at the time. He sought protection for Flemish as the disappearing language of an underprivileged people. All the while, he acknowledged the natural predominance of French as an international language.⁷¹ Vandervelde's ability to see both sides in the increasingly intense and bitter struggle was unique and not altogether appreciated by either of the two opposing factions. Unique as well was his desire to distance himself from the linguistic debates, which threatened the unity of the Belgian nation.

Vandervelde justified his mildly pro-Flemish position in the Marxist terms of class struggle. He chided the Walloon Socialists from the more industrialized south who, like "the bourgeoisie, despise the language of workers, peasants, and domestics."⁷² Most of his fellow Belgian Socialists tried to ignore the linguistic question, which seemed a distraction from the class struggle. Questions such as the 1911 debate over the use of French at the state university in Ghent only temporarily troubled party unity. Vandervelde supported Camille Huysmans's proposal for the establishment of a Flemish university. But ever the compromiser, he proclaimed his understanding of the Walloon opposition to expelling French speakers who were already teaching and studying at Ghent.⁷³

The war finally compelled Vandervelde to recognize the urgency of what his compatriots had come to call the Flemish question. When he visited the trenches, his inability or unwillingness to stumble in his inadequate Flemish isolated him from many of the working-class soldiers.⁷⁴ The legitimacy of the Flemish demands to be judged, administered, and educated in their own language seemed to cry out for his attention by the end of the war. He had heard Woodrow Wilson proclaim the right of all peoples to self-determination.

At Lophem in 1918, King Albert intervened to pledge the establishment of a Flemish university. The nationwide debate over Ghent opened in 1922. In editorials in *Le Peuple*, Vandervelde now called for the expulsion of French speakers from the university at Ghent. He explained his change of position during the subsequent parliamentary debate. The Flemish

71. Emile Vandervelde, "La Question des nationalités en Belgique," *Documents du Progrès* March-April 1911, pp. 272-8.

72. Emile Vandervelde, *Journal de Charleroi* 18 March 1898, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 460, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

73. Emile Vandervelde, "Contre la néerlandisation de l'Université de Gand," *Bulletin de l'Association Flamande pour la Vulgarisation de la Langue Française* 1911, p. 3.

74. See Emile Vandervelde, "La Question des langues, 1916," in Emile Vandervelde, *Dans la mêlée* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1919). Camille Huysmans suggested that Vandervelde was too proud of his ability to charm speakers in his native language to attempt to fumble in the Dutch that he did, in fact, know. Camille Huysmans, "Toen Vandervelde in de Kamer verscheen," *Socialistische Standpunten* 5-6 (1963): 388.

question needed to be understood within the context of the postwar awakening of nationalities, he suggested. He carried his defense of a Flemish university at Ghent to his weekly editorials in the French Socialist daily *La Dépêche de Toulouse*.⁷⁵ His arguments that the Flemish were entitled to their full democratic rights won little support from his fellow Socialists in either France or Wallonia.⁷⁶

In the midst of the debate, one of the most respected and strident Walloon Socialists, Jules Destrée, published his controversial treatise on the linguistic question, *Wallons et Flamands*. The former minister of arts and science challenged the legitimacy of Flemish claims for equality. The symbol of Flanders, the Flemish lion, “a noble animal, possesses a virtuosity that we have never been able to equal, and so he obtains what he wants,” Destrée charged.⁷⁷ The government, in its desire for “peace at any price” had yielded to all the Flemish demands, forcing the Walloons to defend their unique French culture from the onslaught. Vandervelde agreed to review Destrée’s book in *Le Peuple*. With his characteristic moderation, he recognized the “good faith” of its author while suggesting that he did not agree with its arguments.⁷⁸ After all, when Destrée ridiculed the Brussels compromisers at the center of the conflict, he was clearly pointing at Vandervelde.⁷⁹

Linguistic questions continued to smolder. In 1929 Vandervelde helped to negotiate the so-called Belgian Socialists’ Compromise, which at least momentarily subdued debate within the party. This agreement between Jules Destrée and Camille Huysmans committed Belgian Socialists to support for a territorial solution to the linguistic question.⁸⁰ In effect, the agreement had been reached by leaving the most divisive questions unasked.

75. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, “Le Compromis des Belges,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 18 April 1929; Emile Vandervelde, “La Culture française est-elle menacée en pays flamand?” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 3 December 1929; and Emile Vandervelde, “Un Livre flamand d’expression flamande,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 22 April 1932.

76. See Mieke Claeys Van Haegendoren, “De politieke houding van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij en vooral de Vlaamse Socialisten tegenover de Vlaamse beweging 1919–29,” *Politica* 14 (October 1964): 303; Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 25 October 1922, p. 1856; and Jaspar 53, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

77. Jules Destrée, *Wallons et Flamands* (Paris: Plon, 1923), p. 126.

78. Emile Vandervelde, “Wallons et Flamands,” *Le Peuple* 30 December 1923.

79. As a member of the Belgium Workers’ Party’s Commission linguistique, Vandervelde persisted as the voice of compromise, always insisting on resolving differences between his Flemish and Walloon friends. Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 87, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

80. Frans Van Kalken, however, suggests that “judged to be too conciliatory, the compromise was soon put aside, and then forgotten.” Van Kalken, *Entre deux guerres*, p. 57.

As in other debates over questions that were not directly related to the class struggle, the Belgian Socialists retreated quickly to a pragmatic compromise. Until 1930, they attempted to leave the question open for a personal decision on the part of each deputy. Flemish Socialists simply went one way while the Walloons went another. The few attempts made by isolated Socialists to define a theoretical perspective for the Belgian Workers' Party on the regional dispute, the rare efforts to tie Flemish demands to the class struggle, remained falteringly vague.⁸¹

In meetings of the Conseil général in the 1930s when the language issue threatened to intensify, Vandervelde rose to silence the controversy.⁸² He rarely took sides, except occasionally to defend the Flemish from attack. He recoiled from Walloon threats to hold separate regional congresses. For him, the linguistic issue had become an irritation that loomed beyond his understanding. In December 1931, when Louis de Brouckère resigned from the leadership in protest against the separatist politics of regional leaders, Vandervelde tendered his resignation as well. He admitted that he was less bothered by theoretical disputes than de Brouckère, but he acknowledged his deep fear that linguistic politics would divide the Belgian Workers' Party.⁸³ He ultimately withdrew his resignation. Over the next few years, he occasionally granted limited concessions to the regional movements, but he continued resolutely to defend the unity of the Belgian nation and the party.

Vandervelde also loyally continued to support the Belgian king, a rather odd gesture for a Socialist, Vandervelde acknowledged. The war had brought them together. And just as it had left Vandervelde believing that Belgium was more than the "artificial result of diplomatic maneuvers," so too had it imbued the avowed republican with a deep personal commitment to Albert I. If Albert and Elizabeth had not been king and queen, Vandervelde suggested, the three citizens would have become good friends. After the war, their meetings were more formal than they had been at Sainte Adresse, but Vandervelde still traveled to the Royal Palace. When

81. See Jan Craeybeckx, "Arbeidersbeweging en Vlaamsgezindheid voor de Eerste Wereldoorlog," *Verhandelingen van de Vlaamse Académie voor Wetenschappen Letteren en schone Kunsten van België* 40, 3 (1978).

82. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 16 December 1930, Microfiche 117, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent; and Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 15 July 1931, Microfiche 121, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

83. Bureau, 2 December 1931, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 124, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent; and Emile Vandervelde, "Le Parti ouvrier et la question des langues," *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1998/79, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

the king died in a tragic mountain-climbing accident in May 1934, Vandervelde joined the country in mourning, sending his condolences to Queen Elizabeth. His republican principles, however, forced Vandervelde to decline de Broqueville's request that he serve on the committee to honor King Albert.⁸⁴

Vandervelde summarized the period that stretched from November 1927, when the Socialists left the Jaspar government, until the elections of November 1932 as "a molting season."⁸⁵ The Socialist strategy of government participation and reform from within had come under intense scrutiny. The questioning sharpened when the Socialists suffered substantial losses in the elections of 1929, just as the British Labour Party nearly doubled its parliamentary representation. Vandervelde conceded openly that the glaring failure of the Poulet-Vandervelde government had demoralized the Belgian Workers' Party.⁸⁶ In a rare return to biological metaphor, Vandervelde explained that the party needed to shed its reformist skin before it could proceed to its next stage. At the same time that MacDonald was forming his second Labour government across the Channel, Vandervelde called on his fellow Socialists to embrace a "revolutionary politics" once again. By revolution, he quickly explained, he did not "mean a return to violence, but an attack against the very principle of the capitalist regime."⁸⁷ Capitalism would not evolve gradually into socialism, he now recognized; there would be a struggle.⁸⁸

Vandervelde's new rhetoric echoed the politics of confrontation that he had all but abandoned during the war. It would be too simple, however, to conclude that Vandervelde had renounced participation to return to a prewar strategy of extraparliamentary opposition. His perspective on the path to socialism had substantially evolved since the war, having clearly been influenced both by the experience of the war and by his participation in the government during the 1920s.

The Socialists' opposition in Parliament became more strident as they reasserted their class identity. In parliamentary addresses on the economic crisis Vandervelde cited Marx's theories on surplus value. He reminded the Liberals and Catholics of the Socialist vision: "Our historic task is to assist in the birth, to be midwives to a new world, a world where capitalist property no longer belongs to a few men, but to the entire community,

84. "Emile Vandervelde nous dit," *Le Peuple* 19 February 1934.

85. Vandervelde to de Broqueville, 2 June 1934, de Broqueville 207, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels.

86. Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire*, p. 92.

87. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Elections belges du 26 mai," *L'Avenir Social* May-June 1929, pp. 262-5.

88. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1929*, p. 6.

where profit is not the only stimulus to production, where production will be used to satisfy the needs of all and will not be under the control and direction of a financial oligarchy, but under the control and direction of the workers themselves.”⁸⁹ Vandervelde refused to vote for the railroad budget, for example, because, as he announced, Socialists could not condone government projects that “threaten the integrity of our collective domain.”⁹⁰ Vandervelde compared the Socialists’ struggle to trench warfare. He cautioned his fellow Socialists against the expectation of rapid and decisive gains in the coming years. The battle would be a long and difficult one, he predicted.⁹¹

Throughout the economic crisis, Vandervelde pledged his support to Belgium’s democratic system and most especially to the Parliament. This was not part of the skin he would shed. He believed in democracy; it would be the cornerstone of his socialism. He repeatedly affirmed that, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, universal suffrage guaranteed government “of the people and by the people,” at least, Vandervelde added, “for one of the two sexes.”⁹²

But whereas the Parliament was a democratically elected institution, Vandervelde condemned the Belgian governments of Catholics and Liberals as plutocratic. He contrasted them with English and French governments that were becoming more hospitable to Socialist participation. In 1932 Vandervelde voted against granting extraordinary powers to the Belgian government. Such an abrogation of parliamentary control would further jeopardize workers’ rights and imperil the fragile Belgian democracy, he warned in a reversal of his 1927 position.

The economic dilemmas and linguistic debates of the late 1920s and early 1930s took their toll on party unity. That unity began to unravel along generational lines. According to one commentator, only “the moral authority of de Brouckère and the agility of Emile Vandervelde” kept the Belgian Workers’ Party from fragmenting.⁹³

As economic conditions worsened and governments fell, Vandervelde fended off demands that Socialists reconsider the question of participation. Vandervelde objected strongly to joining the government again. The Socialists’ place was in the opposition.⁹⁴ His friend Ramsay MacDonald

89. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 18 November 1931.

90. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 5 December 1929, p. 89.

91. Emile Vandervelde, “Le Premier Mai international,” *Le Peuple* 1 May 1930, p. 2.

92. Emile Vandervelde, “Le Régime parlementaire et ses difficultés,” *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres* (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1933–35), p. 122.

93. Bohy cited in *Les Fastes du Parti*, ed. Leo Collard (Brussels: Institut Emile Vandervelde, 1960–61), p. 127.

94. Emile Vandervelde, “Battons-nous d’abord,” *Le Peuple* 2 July 1933.

had ended up betraying the Labour Party in the 1930s with his governmental participation, he reminded the Belgian advocates of coalition building. “It is not the time for compromises, transactions, or collaboration, but for the intransigent affirmation of Socialist principles,” he argued.⁹⁵ Socialists needed to consolidate their position on the outside of the government. Through patient and forceful opposition, they would build up a base from which to conquer power after the crisis.

Vandervelde warned that any attempt to stage a violent revolution would fail, provoking the forces of reaction. However, he also acknowledged that Belgian Socialists could not hope to realize their goals by reforming capitalism or assuming power from within.⁹⁶

The deepening of the economic crisis reminded Vandervelde of Marx’s earliest prophesies. An older, more experienced Vandervelde now envisioned barricades dividing workers from capitalists, and Socialists from the government. After a decade of governmental participation, he called on workers to build the world of tomorrow, not to rescue the world of today.

95. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 21 August 1932, cited in A. Pletinckx, “Le Parti ouvrier belge dans la première phase de la crise économique,” *Revue Belge d’Histoire Contemporaine/Belgische Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 7 (1976): 273–327; 8 (1977): 237–89.

96. Emile Vandervelde, “Le Tripartisme et nous,” *Le Peuple* 14 February 1932.

Internationalism: A Dream Not Revived

Socialists throughout Europe set to work reconstructing their devastated nations after the First World War. They deferred the greater challenge hovering beyond their borders. The war had severed the bonds of comradeship that once joined the European Socialists. These international ties would be difficult to repair. When they had voted war credits and supported their governments on opposing sides of the trenches, the former Socialist comrades generated antagonisms that the Treaty of Versailles did little to assuage. The consolidation of Bolshevik control in Russia after the 1917 revolution exacerbated the rivalry that had developed between Socialists and Communists over Marx's heritage.

European Marxists tried to come together after the war to debate and negotiate compromises, but their attempts were futile. They could no longer paper over the fissures that divided them. Moreover, a new generation of Socialists and Communists was coming of age and gradually replacing the leaders of the Second International. They focused their attention inward: the Communists on the consolidation of their national revolution and the Socialists on the achievement of domestic reforms.

After the war, the ranks of Socialist parties swelled throughout Europe as voters lent their support to their electoral platforms. Socialist leaders moved into the forefront of parliamentary politics. Subsequently invited to join and then to form national cabinets, they wielded governmental power to an extent never envisioned before the war by even the most ardent advocates of ministerial participation. At the same time, attempts to rebuild the International faltered.

Vandervelde pondered the cause of the disintegration of the European Socialist movement after the war. He suggested that the crushing Allied defeat of Germany and the widespread famine and despair in Russia and Central Europe had divided the workers of Europe into two worlds so disparate that they could no longer envision a common Socialist future. The proletariat in Britain won stunning victories at the ballot box and wrested substantial reforms from employers through the union movement, thus giving rise to dreams of further democratic reform. Meanwhile, Vandervelde explained, the Russians repudiated both parliamentary

politics and syndicalism. The Belgian Socialist leader also looked to the divisive resolution of the war itself as the cause of international discord.

Vandervelde initially agreed with the observations of Ramsay MacDonald: "Never has Socialism been stronger within each individual country, but never has the International been so weak," he wrote to the British Labour leader.¹ At the time neither man recognized the irony of their exchange. After all, it was Vandervelde who led the European Socialists into their national cabinets in the first days of the war while at the same time presiding over the International. MacDonald would assume command of the first Labour government in Britain, only to abandon socialism several years later. MacDonald's actions caused Vandervelde, in contrast to the leaders of the British Labour Party, to question unconditional governmental participation.

At the end of the first interwar decade, Vandervelde mused that MacDonald had always been more of a Fabian concerned with British reforms than a Marxist. His British contemporary would be remembered as one in a long string of British ministers, Vandervelde suggested, but not as a Socialist comrade.² Vandervelde hoped to carve out a different historical record for himself. He consciously differentiated his own path as a Socialist committed to internationalism from that followed at the turn of the decade by MacDonald.

Vandervelde partially withdrew from the International in the years immediately following the First World War. Its activity and its potential, even during the period when he presided over the Socialist movement, seemed to pale in comparison with the vigorous comradeship and hopes of the prewar International. He tried to lay the foundations for a lasting European peace through the official diplomatic channels now open to him as a member of the Belgian government. Like most Socialists after the war, Vandervelde's perspective was focused more nationally than it had been before.

The Labour and Socialist International

As the war was ending, leaders of the Socialist parties and labor unions from the Allied countries convened an international conference to meet alongside the Versailles peace conference. Vandervelde, Arthur Henderson of Britain, and Albert Thomas of France issued the invitations. But, as had happened so often during the war, travel limitations thwarted their plans.

1. Emile Vandervelde to Ramsay MacDonald, 31 January 1920, I 195, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

2. Emile Vandervelde, "La Mort de Ramsay MacDonald," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 22 October 1931.

This time it was French premier Georges Clemenceau who refused to grant visas to the German and Austrian Socialists. The organizers did not give up. They moved their gathering to Bern. Following the wartime pattern, however, once logistical issues were settled, disagreements within the Socialist movement surfaced. Belgian Socialists voted overwhelmingly to boycott the congress. They refused to sit at a conference table until after the German Socialists had admitted that they shared responsibility for unleashing the war.

Belgian party discipline prevented Vandervelde, as a Belgian Socialist, from attending the Bern conference. He therefore resigned as president of the Bureau of the International, explaining that he could not lead a movement if he was unable to attend its meetings. After holding on to the presidency through the conflicts of the war, it was ironic, but also prophetic, that the decision of the Belgian Socialists themselves on the eve of the Versailles peace conference forced his resignation. "An internationalist in heart and soul, I had dreamed of being one of those who would play a large part in the reconstruction, now more pressing than ever, of the International," Vandervelde confided.³ That would not come to pass. Instead, Vandervelde traveled to Versailles to represent the Belgian government at the official peace conference.

Ninety-seven Socialists gathered in Bern in February 1919 – a dramatic contrast to the 896 Socialist delegates who had celebrated Socialist unity nine years earlier at the congress of the Second International in Copenhagen. The Americans joined the Belgian boycott; they too spurned the unrepentant Germans. At the other extreme, the Socialist parties of Italy, Switzerland, Serbia, and Rumania refused to join the Allied Socialists who had supported their governments during the war. Also absent, the Russians were organizing their own Third International. The French Socialist delegation came to the conference divided between an opposition faction led by Marcel Cachin, Jean Longuet, and L. O. Frossard, who had opposed Socialist participation in the wartime cabinet, and the so-called majority represented by Pierre Renaudel and Albert Thomas. The German party divided into two delegations as well. The minority was represented by former German Social Democratic Party leaders, including Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, Hugo Haase, and Kurt Eisner. The leaders of the majority Socialists, who had supported the war, stayed home. Friedrich Adler, Victor Adler's son, alone came from Austria. In fact, of all the delegations, only the British appeared at Bern with a unified leadership.⁴

3. Emile Vandervelde cited in Pierre Renaudel, *L'Internationale à Berne* (Paris: Grasset, 1919), p. 11.

4. For a further discussion of the 1919 Socialist conference, see Maria Sokolova, *Les Congrès de l'Internationale socialiste entre les deux guerres mondiales* (Paris: Imprimerie Meyer-Ruelle, 1953).

Karl Hjalmar Branting of Sweden presided over the wrangling assembly. The debate stalled over the two divisive questions at the core of the splintering of the movement: Should the German Socialists be forced to sign a statement of war guilt? And, How stridently should the Socialists decry the absence of democracy in Russia? Without really resolving these issues, the delegates to the Bern congress agreed to endorse Wilson's fourteen-point peace plan as a beacon of hope for Europe's future. The German Socialist-turned-Communist Clara Zetkin bitterly composed her obituary for international Socialism. "The old International is dead and lies in shame. They could no longer revive it," she grieved. "In Bern, they demonstrated more confidence in Wilson than in Marx."⁵

Ramsay MacDonald and Jean Longuet subsequently suggested that the Second International acknowledge its own death. The European Socialists could then begin to build an organization from new foundations. Vandervelde disagreed. The Second International still meant too much to him to be abandoned. He compared the conflicts that splintered the Second International after the war to the nineteenth-century struggle between Marx and Bakunin. Their rivalry had destroyed the First International. However, Vandervelde's analogy with the First International did not extend to the logical conclusion that the Socialists abandon their dispute-ridden organization and start afresh. Instead, in 1919 he reminded his fellow Socialists that Marx had ultimately triumphed and the anarchists had been banished. The Russians could leave the International a second time and Socialism would again thrive, he predicted. He pledged himself, therefore, to strengthening the remnants that survived of the Second International after the war and the Russian Revolution.

The Second International revived itself under a new name, the Labour and Socialist International. The body's organizational structure changed little. Ultimate authority still resided in the congresses of the International, which were scheduled to meet regularly every three years. An executive committee, elected by the congresses, governed the Labour and Socialist International in the interim. A nine-member Bureau and a secretariat administered the International and published a bulletin.

After their experience in the Second International, Socialist leaders did not conclude that more power should be vested in a central authority. In fact, the Labour and Socialist International exercised less disciplinary power over the national parties than had the Second International before the war. The national parties were even more autonomous than they had been. In contrast to the Second International, lively debates over questions of theory and practice at the congresses of the Labour and Socialist

5. Clara Zetkin cited in E. Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier* (Paris: A. Colin, 1946-63), vol. 2, p. 289.

International were infrequent; crucial decisions were left to the national parties. More than ever, it was the informal contacts between the leaders of the national parties that linked the international Socialist community together, not a formal organization.

By the time the Belgian Socialists consented to rejoin the reorganized International, they had clearly relinquished their leadership role. Their repeated refusal to accept the Germans back into the International after the war, like their steadfast support of the Allied governments during the war, moved the Belgian party out of the center of the European Socialist movement. That troubled Vandervelde, as it did the other two Belgians who had served the International during the war, Louis de Brouckère and Camille Huysmans. In opposition to the party majority, the three appealed to Belgian Socialists to accept their international responsibilities.

"I recognize two faults in myself," Vandervelde admitted to the Belgian party congress in 1919. "The first is to have remained an intractable internationalist and [the second] to have pushed conciliation to its extreme limit at the heart of the party."⁶ Between the wars, it proved difficult to pursue international commitments while negotiating compromises within the party. The nationalism of the majority of Belgian Socialists placed the party on the right wing of the now decidedly reformist International. During the 1920s, Vandervelde chose the path of compromise.

Before the war, Lenin and Jaurès had come together in the Belgian capital to debate at meetings of the Bureau, Vandervelde reminisced. Moreover, Belgium had served for centuries as a sanctuary for political refugees, including Karl Marx. That time had passed. Vandervelde acknowledged the reasoning behind the Bureau's decision to move its headquarters from Brussels to the offices of the Labour Party in London. The British had won impressive political and economic victories since the war, substantiating their claim to be the most advanced proletariat, he explained.⁷ According to Karl Kautsky, the move away from the Continent was symbolic as well as geographic. European Socialism would no longer be guided by theorists, but instead by British pragmatists who had no pretensions to understanding Marxism.⁸ The acceptance of British leadership recognized the definitive shift toward democratic, parliamentary politics and the rejection of revolution, Kautsky concluded.

The first congress of the Labour and Socialist International was convened in Lucerne in August 1919. The Socialist delegates pledged "to abolish the capitalist organization of society . . . through the conquest of

6. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1919*, p. 56.

7. *Le Peuple* 5 August 1920.

8. K. Kautsky, *Vergangenheit und zukunft der Internationale* (Vienna: 1920), pp. 81–5, as cited in Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 38.

political power and the socialization of the means of production and exchange.”⁹ With equally ambiguous rhetoric, they agreed to wage a revolutionary struggle for world peace.¹⁰ As the leaders of European Socialism settled into a reformist practice at home, they vented their revolutionary slogans in resolutions of the International. Maria Sokolova, a historian and critic of the Labour and Socialist International, has condemned its debates and manifestoes as mere rhetoric. “The more that European socialism between 1914 and 1923 demonstrated a tendency to become nationalized and reformist, the more its leaders cloaked this practice in a revolutionary terminology,” she charges.¹¹

Criticism of the leadership of the Labour and Socialist International came from both the left and the right. The unrelenting denunciations of Bolshevism alienated the few Socialists on the left who attended the congresses of the Labour and Socialist International. The Brussels Federation of the Belgian Workers’ Party condemned the Labour and Socialist International for its preoccupation with reforming rather than overthrowing the capitalist system. Furthermore, the Brussels Federation charged, the Socialists had entrusted their internationalism to capitalist institutions such as the League of Nations, “which in a word, is totally devoid of any character of revolutionary class struggle.”¹² On the other side, many Socialists from the Allied countries continued to object to any attempt at reconciliation with the German Socialists who had been the first to vote war credits. Allegedly, their leaders had condoned the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

Individual Socialists from both the left and the right condemned the International Socialist Action Committee on which Longuet, Renaudel, Henderson, MacDonald, Bruning, and Huysmans sat for failing to intervene in international crises.¹³ Marcel Cachin and P. J. Troelstra, both formerly involved with the Stockholm Congress, attacked the newly constituted executive committee of the International for being irresolute. Vandervelde replied with a variation on the theme of his earlier response to MacDonald. “The indolence has deeper causes. Never has Socialism been so strong; never has Socialist action been so weak,” he explained.¹⁴ The International suffered, he acknowledged because most Socialist leaders were involved in their own governments. The leadership of the European Socialist movement had shifted solidly into the reformist camp.

The International reconvened at the end of July 1920 in Geneva. Splits

9. *Projet de statuts de l’Internationale*, I 525, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

10. I 248, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

11. Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 74.

12. *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1920*, pp. 12–13.

13. See I 51 and I 525, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

14. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 6 August 1919.

within a number of national delegations had forced a six-month postponement of the congress. Delegates from seventeen national sections attended, ten of them representing factions of their parties.¹⁵ Congress participants responded to the violence of the upheaval surrounding them by charting a peaceful path to socialism. They plotted the realization of socialism from within the European democracies through political reform.¹⁶ Resolutions also heralded the gradual socialization of industry throughout Europe. Finally, while affirming its support for international organizations, the Geneva congress denounced provisions of the Treaty of Versailles that the Socialists argued contributed to imperialism. Attending for the first time since the war, the Belgian delegation introduced a strongly worded resolution charging Germany with responsibility for the war.

The executives of the Labour and Socialist International, the Third International, and the Vienna Union, the so-called Second and a Half International, agreed to meet in Berlin in 1922 to discuss a common strategy before the scheduled summit of European leaders. Friedrich Adler of the Vienna Union presided over the conference. He appealed to Socialists and Communists to unite in their common struggle against capitalism.¹⁷ Although they were not quite ready to admit that unity was no longer feasible, as historian G. D. H. Cole suggests, neither the leaders of the Second nor those of the Third International really wanted to come back together again.¹⁸ Vandervelde certainly believed that the differences between Socialists and Communists were beyond resolution. Rather than negotiating compromises as he had before the war, he reminded his friends that the leaders of the Third International had called him and his colleagues "social patriots" and attacked the Second International as the "yellow International." Berlin marked the last attempt of the three Internationals to converge.

The leaders of the Labour and Socialist International and the Second and a Half International subsequently reunited, but only in opposition to the Third International. They addressed the invitation to their next congress to all European Socialists "who recognize the suppression of the capitalist

15. Lewis Lorwin, *The International Labor Movement* (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 209.

16. For records of the Geneva congress, see Labour and Socialist International 1011/8, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England. Vandervelde's notes are preserved in I 324, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

17. Labour and Socialist International 22/5, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

18. G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought: The Second International* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956-58), vol. 4, part 3, p. 682. See also Labour and Socialist International 30, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam; Emile Vandervelde, "La Conférence générale des partis socialistes," *Réalisations socialistes, Notre action d'après-guerre* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1923), p. 227.

system as their goal and class struggle as the means of emancipating the working class.”¹⁹ They reminded Socialists of their obligation to each other to agree to remain united as they warned that reactionary forces seemed to be coalescing in pockets around Europe.

The Labour and Socialist International firmly reestablished itself at the Hamburg congress in 1923. Otto Bauer of Austria presented the report of the International’s Commission on International Reaction. Rather than proposing specific actions to be undertaken in each of the four centers of counterrevolution that he described, Bauer called for Socialists to break down the wall of silence and keep each other informed of threatening developments.

Vandervelde returned to the International, joining British Socialist Sidney Webb, the Austro-German leader Rudolf Hilferding, and French Socialist Léon Blum on the commission that issued a report titled “The Imperialist Peace and the Tasks of the Working Class.” In a debate over the repercussions of the Versailles treaty, Léon Blum attacked the imperialist pretensions of its authors, while Vandervelde defended his role at Versailles. The commission’s final resolution, adopted by the congress, defined capitalism as the root of war in the modern world.

Since the war, the rhetoric of the individual Socialist parties had evolved to reflect their increasingly reformist practice. In contrast, as demonstrated by its invitation to the Hamburg congress, the International continued to derive its vocabulary from prewar Marxist orthodoxy. That pleased Vandervelde, who guided his party into governmental participation at the same time that he rallied them to commit themselves to active support of the International. In his address to the “veterans of the International” at the congress, he proclaimed his regret that Marx and Engels had not lived to see the eight-hour day enacted, May first celebrated as a holiday, and the fourth generation of European Socialists meeting at Hamburg.²⁰ The achievement of these victories did not strike him as incompatible with the revolutionary goals set half a century earlier by Marx and Engels. He recalled Schopenhauer’s famous affirmation “It often only takes a few months for a paradox to become a commonplace.”²¹ Vandervelde unself-consciously defined middle-of-the-road compromises that attempted to reconcile the irreconcilable. In the 1920s even more than before the war, he defined democratic socialism by making the paradox of revolutionary reformism seem commonplace.

When Vandervelde looked back, he remembered the Second Inter-

19. Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 62.

20. Emile Vandervelde, “Aux vétérans de l’Internationale,” *Le Peuple* 20 May 1923.

21. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 17 November 1925, p. 15.

national as a world of comrades. Most of his friends had long since disappeared. Jaurès, Haase, and Luxemburg had all been assassinated. By 1931, all of the French leaders from the Second International would be dead. In fact, Vandervelde noted that only ten of the seventy leaders photographed at a Bureau meeting in 1914 survived the first decade of the interwar period.

Except for Friedrich Adler, the new secretary of the Bureau with whom he corresponded regularly, the new friendships that Vandervelde formed with the next generation of Socialist leaders, such as Arthur Henderson or Léon Blum, did not compensate for the loss of the old friends with whom he had traveled and debated.²² Significantly, his ties with the men with whom he had served in the Belgian wartime cabinet, the men who now ruled Belgium, were closer.

The Diplomat between the Wars

When French and Belgian forces moved into the Ruhr Valley to exact the German payment of war reparations, Vandervelde appealed to the League of Nations to arbitrate the economic dispute. He called on the former Allies to be conciliatory. If the debt question was not resolved, he feared that the war that had already slipped from the military to the economic battlefield would revert to an armed struggle.

Within Belgium, Vandervelde urged his fellow Socialists to disassociate themselves from the government's politics of retribution. At a meeting of the party Bureau, he protested the Belgian policy toward Germany and requested permission from the party to resign from the government.²³ The majority of Belgian Socialists sitting on the Bureau refused to condone such a gesture. In the subsequent cabinet discussion of the Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, Vandervelde alone voted against the government. Jules Destrée supported the military occupation, while Eduard Anseele and Joseph Wauters abstained. At the next meeting of the Conseil général, delegates from Wallonia challenged the few Socialists, most of whom were Flemish, who questioned the government's foreign policy alignment with France. They angrily denounced them as "pro-German." Vandervelde in turn questioned France's intransigent position. He urged his fellow Belgians not to follow uncritically their large neighbor to the west, reminding them that the economic and political chaos caused by such a

22. Some of the interwar correspondence between Adler and Vandervelde is preserved in Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale 1292 and 1293, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

23. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 26 April 1921, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad, Microfiche 78, Archief en Museum van de Socialiste Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

policy would inevitably spill from Germany across the Belgian borders.²⁴ Belgians had a vested interest in fostering peace in Germany. Impassioned at party meetings, Vandervelde muffled his arguments, however, in public. Despite his earlier request to the Bureau, he claimed that he did not want to cause the government to collapse prematurely. More likely, he had chosen to compromise rather than to press his international concerns against a resolute majority within the party. So de Brouckère stood alone as an outspoken critic of Belgium's policy toward Germany.

Belgian Socialists' concentration on domestic politics to the exclusion of questions of war and counterrevolution beyond their borders mirrors the mood of other European Socialists after the war. Without a left that had long since departed for the Communist International, these Socialists settled comfortably into their belief that social reform legislated within democracies would not only improve the lives of workers, but would create a world in which nations could live at peace. Dictatorships alone caused war, they argued, looking over their shoulders at the Bolsheviks as well as the fascists. It followed, therefore, that the threat of war could be lessened by working within nation-states to mitigate the conditions that contributed to the propagation of authoritarian rule.

When commissions of the Labour and Socialist International met to consider their response to the various interwar crises, they were ever mindful of the different positions of the Socialist parties. They wrote resolutions and the executive committee issued protest manifestoes, but the International did not come together to act as a unified organization.²⁵ The days were long past when the leaders might have assembled an extraordinary congress or even an emergency meeting of the Bureau. A vigorous debate over calling a general strike in the event of war would have seemed ludicrously out of place in the Labour and Socialist International. The war had shattered illusions as well as comradeship.

Instead, Socialist leaders throughout Europe chose to act individually on a national level, for example, to discuss reparations and the Ruhr occupation with the leaders of their own governments.²⁶ Most of the Socialist leaders now sat in national cabinets where they expected to wield considerable influence. And even in countries where they remained outside of their governments, Socialist leaders had an important voice in the deliberations of their parliaments. Of symbolic, if not practical,

24. Vandervelde to Adler, 21 November 1923, Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale 1292, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

25. See, for example, the Lille Resolution, February 1923, Labour and Socialist International 14/10/1, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England.

26. Executive Committee of the Labor and Socialist International, 16 February 1924, Labour and Socialist International 24/16/1, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England.

significance, the formation of national cabinets and parliamentary elections caused the postponement of several scheduled meetings of the Bureau. In international affairs, as in domestic politics, most of the Socialist leaders were actually reformers. They accepted the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and war reparations as the given parameters within which they had to work.

Vandervelde also searched beyond the reconstructed International for a means to resolve the recurrent crises that troubled Europe. Even more than before the war, Vandervelde relied on his firsthand observations and personal diplomacy. For example, when conflicts in the Balkans threatened to escalate in 1924, Vandervelde traveled to the region. On his thirty-seven-day trip through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, he gave twenty speeches in banquet rooms, train stations, and Socialist meeting halls. He denounced the treaties of Saint-Germain, Trianon, Neuilly, and Sèvres, which he explained, had aggravated tensions in the region. He lauded the pledge taken by delegates to the recent meeting of Bulgarian, Rumanian, and Yugoslavian Socialists to protect the freedom of national minorities. Finally, he called publicly for an expansion in the scope of the League of Nations' intervention in the refugee crisis.²⁷ Upon his return from Central Europe, he urged Socialists actively to defend minority rights in reports that he presented to the executive committee of the Labour and Socialist International.²⁸

Throughout the 1920s, Vandervelde persistently addressed the Belgian Parliament in support of disarmament. When Prime Minister Marcel Henri Jaspar accused him of monotonously echoing the same refrain at every session, Vandervelde retorted, "I always repeat the same thing because, unfortunately, nothing ever changes."²⁹ And yet, at the same time, Vandervelde listed security as one of the most important concerns of any Belgian leader, whether Catholic, Liberal, or Socialist. He had voted for the government's military budget in 1920, openly acknowledging that no political party in Belgium could risk opposing national defense after the war. The Belgian Socialists repeatedly cited Wilson's principle of national sovereignty to justify their continued support for the Belgian army. At the same time, most members of the Socialist delegation to Parliament also staked out positions for the limitation of armaments and the reduction of military service. Vandervelde referred back to Jaurès's 1910 treatise on national defense to resolve the contradictions in the Socialists' position.

In 1925 Vandervelde secured for himself the position of minister of

27. Emile Vandervelde, "Retour des Balkans," *Le Peuple* 1 October 1924.

28. Comité exécutif de l'Internationale ouvrière et socialiste, September 1924, I 351 D, Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp.

29. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 20 November 1923, p. 353.

foreign affairs in the short-lived Pouillet-Vandervelde cabinet. The opening of official access to diplomatic channels tantalized Vandervelde with expectations of resolving international disputes peacefully. Although Vandervelde never even alluded to the conflict between his new portfolio and his Socialist principles, the responsibilities of his new diplomatic position could be reconciled only with the most reformist conception of Socialism. The balance struck between revolution and reform shifted decidedly in the latter direction when Vandervelde formally entered the diplomatic circles in which treaties were negotiated. But again, he never acknowledged the shift.

Vandervelde's Catholic partners in the cabinet complained from the very first that his previous experience as president of the Socialist International would undermine his ability to represent forcefully Belgium's interests abroad. They thought his Socialist internationalism would cause him to rebel against working within diplomatic channels. They need not have been concerned. Vandervelde formally entered diplomatic circles believing that conflicts could be resolved by treaties negotiated among government officials with popular mandates. Although he was often excluded from private negotiating sessions because he represented a small country, Vandervelde refused to be disillusioned. He remained one of the staunchest supporters of the diplomacy of the 1920s.

The first problems arose when, as minister of foreign affairs, Vandervelde was held accountable to his government for the pronouncements that he made abroad. He continued to travel widely in 1925–26 as had become his custom, frequently addressing Socialist gatherings. That occasionally piqued the Catholic cabinet ministers, who rebuked him for presuming to step out of his official role when he addressed particular audiences. For example, Charles de Broqueville criticized Vandervelde for lecturing on Marxism in Paris at a meeting chaired by Léon Blum. Vandervelde simply replied, "You will just have to take me as I am."³⁰ Paul Hymans then took up the questioning of his Socialist colleague, asking what would happen if Vandervelde were to address a group in Britain chaired by the Labour leader who was currently serving as prime minister. Vandervelde laughed and said that that would not pose a problem. "MacDonald does not understand anything about Marxism."³¹ His nonchalance covered a dilemma that had plagued him during the war as well. Vandervelde's Socialist internationalism did not always fit within the official protocol required of a government minister.

This time, however, Vandervelde chose quietly to resign from the

30. Emile Vandervelde cited in Paul Hymans, *Mémoires de Paul Hymans*, ed. Frans Van Kalken (Brussels: Editions de l'Institut Solvay, 1958), vol. 2, p. 798.

31. *Ibid.*

Bureau of the Labour and Socialist International. De Brouckère replaced him as Belgium's representative. During the war, in contrast, he had insisted on continuing as president of the International while he served as a cabinet minister. Perhaps the potential for conflict with his new diplomatic responsibilities was greater than it had been when he served as minister of procurement. His experiences in the government after 1916 may have convinced him of the difficulty of reconciling the two roles. But more likely, his position in the reconstituted International mattered less to him in 1926 than had the presidency of the Second International in 1916.

Vandervelde brought to diplomacy the skills that had been nurtured in his youth in the circles of the progressive Brussels bourgeoisie, skills that he had honed over the years at the center of the Second International and that had served him so well during the war. Instead of picnicking with Friedrich Engels on the shores of a Swiss lake or touring art museums with Jean Jaurès, now he breakfasted with German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann and had lunch with Czechoslovakian diplomat Eduard Benes in Geneva hotels. The same relative informality prevailed. "By chance, this morning I met Chancellor Luther. We had a very long conversation as we walked the length of the Lake," Vandervelde reported to Prime Minister Poulet.³² During the stroll, the German diplomat had justified to Vandervelde Germany's demand for membership in the League of Nations, while Vandervelde explained the problems that would ensue should Germany pull out of the negotiations before an accord was reached.

The "new diplomacy" of the interwar period entrusted negotiating to political leaders representing their governments. Either simultaneously with meetings of the League of Nations or separately in various European cities and resorts, foreign ministers negotiated international security arrangements. Important decisions were prepared in advance through extensive correspondence, but final details were worked out in conference chambers or more often hotel rooms.

The negotiations between Germany and the Western powers at Locarno in October–November 1925 introduced Vandervelde to the intimate negotiating circle of Aristide Briand, Austen Chamberlain, and Gustav Stresemann. Like them, he brought to these hotel-room diplomatic sessions his experience as a parliamentary spokesman adept at forging compromises. The diplomats discussed and agreed to the entry of Germany into the League of Nations, the withdrawal of Allied troops from Cologne, and disarmament.

The presence of Benito Mussolini at Locarno posed a dilemma for Vandervelde. He refused to meet with the Socialist-turned-fascist.

32. Vandervelde to Poulet, Geneva, 13 March 1926, Archives Emile Vandervelde III F 83, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.



Figure 15 With Aristide Briand at Locarno, 1925. Institut Emile Vandervelde

Vandervelde's well-documented and searching inquiry into the application of sanctions imposed by the League of Nations had already offended the very correct Chamberlain. The British diplomat was incensed when Vandervelde rebuffed the Italian leader.

After the completion of negotiations, Vandervelde appealed for Belgian support for the Locarno Treaty that he argued would guarantee the security of Belgium at the crossroads of Europe. For the first time, according to Vandervelde, the national interests of individual countries coincided with the interests of the European community.³³ The major powers in Europe had all agreed to submit their disputes to international arbitration. Contented, Vandervelde envisioned extensive League of Nations intervention in trouble spots such as the Balkans. The League would mediate crises between countries before disputants could resort to armed aggression, he reported to the Belgian Parliament, adding, "Peace is the goal that we pursue . . . Europe will be peaceful, or it will not continue to exist."³⁴ France, Germany, and Belgium, in full view of the world, had pledged not to go to war again, he concluded. He mused that the Locarno treaty might even be the first step toward the creation of a United States of Europe.³⁵

Vandervelde also urged leaders of the International to support the Locarno diplomatic initiative.³⁶ He protested vehemently against Socialists who wanted to disregard all treaties as worthless scraps of paper. He did not agree that the Locarno treaty could be dismissed as just another security pact between capitalist nations. It represented Europe's best chance to avoid another war, he argued.

For the next four years, the "Locarnites" met often, usually during sessions of the League of Nations, to discuss disarmament, seats on the league, and security interests.³⁷ Sometimes Vandervelde was summoned to join the "Geneva tea parties," but more frequently, Briand, Stresemann, and Chamberlain, representing the "Big Three," conferred privately in their hotel rooms. Vandervelde objected to the secrecy of these discussions.³⁸ As an elder and experienced statesman who functioned easily in the

33. Emile Vandervelde, "Ce qu'on a fait à Locarno," *L'Avenir Social* 31 December 1925, pp. 426–35.

34. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 15 February 1927, p. 700.

35. Emile Vandervelde, "M. Briand et l'Union fédérale européenne," *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1299/37, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

36. Vandervelde to MacDonald, 19 November 1925, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 28, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

37. Austen Chamberlain cited in Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West, 1925–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 69.

38. Vandervelde to Jaspard, Geneva, 10 December 1926, Archives Emile Vandervelde V 1055, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

informal realm of public affairs negotiated in private surroundings, he was acutely sensitive to the rebuff. He protested against the Big Three's neglect of the interests of the small powers.

On those occasions when he was invited to join the "Locarno cabal," Vandervelde reported back daily to the Belgian government. The contacts that he had forged with Belgian leaders during the war opened channels so that he could confide to Catholic leaders of the cabinet.³⁹ His sensitivity to the personalities of the other diplomats as well as his understanding of opposing national interests allowed him to negotiate compromises with the "cabal."⁴⁰ His letters suggest his earnest commitment to resolving conflicts. In the midst of the debate over Germany's right to membership in the League of Nations, the seasoned Belgian diplomat Baron Eugene Beyens flattered Vandervelde: "I am persuaded on all counts that our country's cause could not have a more eloquent advocate than yourself. With your indisputable authority, you are perfectly suited to the conciliatory role reserved for Belgian representatives."⁴¹ It was Vandervelde who broke the impasse over German membership in the league by suggesting that Poland be granted a temporary seat on the council, a proposal with something for everyone. He brought that technique with him from his days as president of the Second International.

Vandervelde availed himself of the authority of his diplomatic position to restrain nationalist ambitions wherever possible. He strongly opposed any moves toward territorial annexations. Especially concerned with developments in the Balkans and Austria, Vandervelde reported to Jaspas: "I see certain dangers increasing. I am already considering ways to ward them off. It was with this thought in mind that I do not want to let my friends in Western Europe remain ignorant of what could happen in Central Europe."⁴² He also sought to break down protectionist restrictions on free trade. Small nations, he argued, depended on their exports to survive.⁴³ Most significantly, he worked to increase the sphere of activity of the

39. Vandervelde even reported to Van Cauwelaert when trying to win support for the treaty he had negotiated with the Netherlands that he thought he could convince the Vatican to put pressure on Catholics in Belgium. Vandervelde to Van Cauwelaert, 30 October 1926, Van Cauwelaert Archives, Frans Van Cauwelaert Archief, Archief en Museum voor Vlaams Cultuur en Leven, Antwerp.

40. See Pouillet 158³, Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels. On the meetings of the "cabal," see Gordon A. Craig, "The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austen Chamberlain," in *The Diplomats*, ed. Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

41. Baron Eugene Beyens to Vandervelde, 28 February 1926, Emile Vandervelde 1012 B, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

42. Vandervelde to Jaspas, 16 June 1927, Archives Emile Vandervelde III F 79, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

43. Emile Vandervelde, "La Conférence économique," *Revue Economique Internationale* April 1927, pp. 18–35.

League of Nations. De Brouckère was appointed to represent Belgium at the League.⁴⁴ Contrary to the fears of Catholic leaders, Vandervelde staunchly defended Belgium's interests when he negotiated compromises over borders and tariffs.

International Socialism and Fascism

Despite Locarno and the subsequent agreements negotiated among the European statesmen, the forces of reaction continued to intensify and endangered the fragile peace within Europe. The threat of international hostilities increasingly preoccupied the Bureau and congresses of the Labour and Socialist International as well as the diplomats. With the exception of the Labour Party, the Socialists proclaimed their support for most of the treaties negotiated in the 1920s. But they also struggled to come up with their own strategies for combating counterrevolution rather than working solely through official diplomatic channels. That was true for Vandervelde as well, especially after the Belgian Socialists left the government in 1926.

For a decade after the war, Vandervelde continued to comfort himself by dividing the continent into two halves in his own mind. Initially, he dismissed German fascism as a passing phenomenon, a new form of Boulangism that had stormed into Berlin and that would vanish again just as quickly. West of Germany, he professed to be more concerned with the spread of American neocapitalism than of fascism.⁴⁵ There, the proletariat enjoyed the rights they had gradually wrested from the bourgeoisie. Ever since the war, workers in France, Britain, and Belgium had confidently pursued the class struggle through the ballot box and union negotiations.⁴⁶ It was elsewhere that the dictators found conditions ripe for their coups.

Vandervelde took renewed solace from Engels's prediction that the days of street battles had passed. The state's monopoly on heavy artillery in advanced capitalist states had suggested to Engels that Socialists should no longer risk mounting the revolutionary barricades. He predicted that universal suffrage would serve the workers as a more effective revolutionary weapon. That pronouncement by Marx's brother-in-arms had supported Vandervelde at the turn of the century when the Belgians channeled the workers' strikes into the struggle to win universal manhood suffrage. It reassured him again in the 1920s when counterrevolutionary

44. When the Socialists reentered the opposition, they were incensed that Jaspas asked for de Brouckère's resignation. That became a topic of discussion of the International.

45. Emile Vandervelde, *Etudes marxistes*, 2d ed. (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1930), p. 190; and "Discours de Vandervelde" (1928), *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 53/8, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

46. Vandervelde, *Etudes marxistes*, p. 147.

violence threatened to spread through Europe. Vandervelde refused to believe that a small group of terrorists, whether Bolsheviks or fascists, could successfully launch a coup against any democratic government that enjoyed a true popular mandate. It followed from this conviction that the best defense against fascism in Germany, as in the rest of Western Europe, was to strengthen democratic forces.

The Labour and Socialist International assembled in Marseilles in August 1925. Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria had all succumbed to authoritarian regimes since the last congress, but the Socialists had won impressive victories elsewhere. Four hundred twenty-two delegates representing every European country except Switzerland attended this second congress of the Labour and Socialist International.

A number of commissions met before the assembly of the congress to prepare reports for general debate. The first commission was assigned the task of drafting a resolution on guaranteeing peace in Europe. Within the commission, Rudolf Hilferding of Germany opened the discussion by lauding the newly created League of Nations as a true community of nations. It had laid the foundation for establishing the rule of international as opposed to national sovereignty, he explained. Other Socialists condemned the League of Nations as a capitalist tool that had proven totally ineffective in checking national aggression. The debate over treaties negotiated by the various foreign ministers grew more heated. While most of the delegates applauded the signing of the 1924 Geneva Accords, which seemed to originate in the ideas of Jean Jaurès himself, they condemned the Locarno Pact as a limited regional agreement that excluded Russia. It seemed to them to be just another in a series of collective security agreements negotiated between capitalist nations. Finally, British Labour Party delegate Noel Buxton, enervated by the controversy, proposed that the International leave the questions of the pact and the League open, allowing each national party to formulate its own approach to European diplomacy. Léon Blum rose to his feet to challenge Buxton. The International could not continue to leave such important international questions unresolved, he argued. He pointed in despair to the discord that had already resulted from the lack of central decision making. The Labour Party had voted against the Locarno Pact in London while the Socialists decided to ratify it in Berlin and Paris, thus rendering the International totally ineffective. In the end, the congress negotiated an acceptably broad resolution that was approved by a majority of the delegates.

When the Labour and Socialist International assembled for its third congress in Brussels in 1928, the leaders reveled in the new power the Socialist parties exercised within many national governments. With satisfaction, Vandervelde compared the Socialist parties in 1928 with the

feeble factions and movements that had dispatched their leaders to the Brussels congresses of the First and Second Internationals in 1868 and 1891. Since the war, he boasted, the Socialist parties had grown so powerful, they had been compelled to accept governmental responsibility in democracies throughout Europe.

After a lengthy discussion of the resolutions presented by the commission on colonialism, the Brussels congress returned to the question of strategies for preserving European peace. Dutch Socialist J. W. Albarda summarized the prevailing assumptions of the International: "The best means of diminishing the dangers of war and protecting international peace is to increase the influence of the Socialist proletariats on their governments' politics."⁴⁷ Socialists would continue to struggle to strengthen the forces of democracy within their borders. The International did not seriously consider direct intervention in diplomatic affairs.

After the Brussels congress, Vandervelde acknowledged the tame character of the meetings of the Labour and Socialist International as compared with the congresses of the prewar International that he remembered: "We are far from the time, when in Paris or in Amsterdam, burning questions almost spontaneously engaged us in passionate debates."⁴⁸ That erstwhile passion was missing from the debates of the 1920s. Resolutions passed by the congresses documented at length the evolution of capitalist agriculture, described colonial expansion in detail, and listed specific national violations of international agreements. But only in the vaguest of terms did they call for action by the International. It is therefore not surprising that in his articles and speeches on foreign affairs in the late 1920s, Vandervelde focused on diplomatic ventures between the German and French governments or negotiations within the League of Nations, but rarely mentioned the International.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Vandervelde accepted the presidency of the International again in 1929. The renowned master of compromise worked closely with Friedrich Adler, secretary of the Bureau and former head of the Vienna Union. Vandervelde called the attention of the members of the Bureau to the significance of the alliance between the two men who had led rival Socialist movements after the war. "We have always worked together in full and complete agreement," he announced.⁵⁰ Rather than ideological disagreements, it seemed to be Vandervelde's barely legible handwriting

47. Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 100.

48. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Manifeste de l'Internationale," *L'Avenir Social* August 1928, p. 451.

49. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Perspectives prochaines," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 7 January 1929.

50. Vandervelde, Bureau de l'Internationale ouvrière et socialiste, 21 August 1933, New Archives, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

that posed the greatest obstacle to effective collaboration.⁵¹

Through the bulletin of the International and extensive correspondence, Adler and Vandervelde alerted French and British Socialists to threatening developments in Poland, Italy, Austria, and Germany. They entreated Western Socialists to pressure their governments to intervene in an effort to ameliorate economic conditions and defuse the crises in Central and southern Europe. They relied on relationships developed within the new generation of Socialists leaders, such as the contact that Léon Blum maintained with Hugh Dalton in England. Vandervelde's relations with governmental leaders with whom he had been negotiating since 1914 gave him insight into their positions. This knowledge – for example, of Edouard Herriot's personal views on Poland – allowed him to suggest effective tactics to the Socialists sitting in cabinets so they could influence subsequent official negotiations. Even Adler's and Vandervelde's suspicions about what had been said by the wives in the diplomatic corps to Lady Snowden informed the pragmatic strategy of the Socialists.⁵²

The leaders of the International celebrated each time a Socialist attained a position of influence within his respective government. These Socialists exchanged suggestions for convincing the leaders of "the bourgeois parties" to intervene in the Balkans, for example. "In reality, whether we are talking of disarmament, the end of military occupations, or the right of self-determination, the solutions of tomorrow will depend in large part on the sum of influence that the social democratic parties in different countries have on their own governments," Vandervelde explained in 1928.⁵³ The new diplomacy that empowered political leaders backed by popular mandates to negotiate over what had previously been the private affairs of kings seemed to hold exceptional promise to the Socialists.⁵⁴

There was another side, however. When Vandervelde pleaded with the British Socialists to follow the lead of the French on naval disarmament, they reminded him of their governmental responsibilities. "We are the government; our French comrades are in the opposition," the Scottish

51. Adler's secretary complained, "C'est à peu près impossible pour une personne qui n'est ni française ni belge à lire votre écriture. Adler et moi et les deux jeunes dames qui font les travaux du Bureau ont passé trois heures dans de vaines tentatives à lire votre dernier chef-d'oeuvre. Même Adler commence à perdre ses cheveux." Secretariat to Vandervelde, 25 November 1923, *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1292, *Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis*, Amsterdam. Such complaints recurred periodically. I certainly sympathize with them.

52. Adler to Vandervelde, "Confidentielle," 19 June 1930, *New Archives*, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

53. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Parti Ouvrier aux Intellectuels*. (Brussels: Imprimerie Cooperative Lucifer, 1928), p. 24.

54. Emile Vandervelde, "Un Ouvrier, ministre des affaires étrangères," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 17 August 1929.

Labour leader W. Gillies argued. According to Gillies, because the French had chosen to remain in the opposition, they could afford to make such bold pronouncements. "The French manifesto requires less courage because French Socialists do not need to consider if they are embarrassing the Government."⁵⁵ Gillies, like Vandervelde, clearly assumed that by entering their governments, the Belgians and the British had chosen the high road, the more challenging course. Neither paused to consider why their governmental responsibilities conflicted even with the hesitant internationalism of the Bureau's resolutions. Few Socialist leaders acknowledged that it was their national reformist strategies that constrained the ability of the Labour and Socialist International to act.

Vandervelde recognized that Socialist foreign ministers sometimes had to struggle "to reconcile legitimate national aspirations with the general interests of Europe and the world."⁵⁶ But he firmly believed that the two could be reconciled. He was convinced that as Socialists these diplomats were uniquely placed to understand which national aspirations were legitimate and to see them from a global perspective.

In 1925 Rudolf Hilferding had clearly juxtaposed the capitalist ideal of a Europe that gave free rein to "the absolute sovereignty of isolated nations" to the Socialists' vision of "the sovereignty of all nations collectively."⁵⁷ The line distinguishing these two positions became increasingly fuzzy as the Socialists assumed more power within their governments and as conflicts between European nations threatened to spread. International institutions such as the League of Nations and diplomatic agreements such as the Locarno Pact fell between Hilferding's two conceptions. Some Socialists condemned both as the reassertion of national interests while others, including Vandervelde, saw in them the recognition of international sovereignty.

As the diplomats negotiated and the Socialists corresponded, tensions in Central Europe escalated and fascism continued to spread. Vandervelde argued that fascism would stop at the borders of the democracies of Western Europe. Europe still remained divided into two halves in his mind. On one side the people enjoyed liberty, he still argued, while on the other they were increasingly subjected to dictatorships, some fascist, others Communist. Most members of the International shared this view.

The stunning success of the Austrian fascists within the former stronghold of European Socialism shook Vandervelde out of his relative

55. Gillies to Adler, 4 April 1930, New Archives, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels. The issue of a Socialist conference on naval disarmament to be held at the same time as the official Naval conference in London generated reams of correspondence.

56. Vandervelde, "Le Parti ouvrier aux intellectuels," p. 24.

57. Hilferding cited in Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 84.

complacency.⁵⁸ He traveled to Vienna to see for himself the wreckage of Austrian social democracy. When he returned, he intervened in diplomatic and Socialist circles in Paris and London to convince them of the urgency of the crisis. He maintained continual contact with his Austrian friends, especially Friedrich Adler, to learn of daily developments.⁵⁹ The time had come, Vandervelde declared, for Socialists to align themselves with democratic forces and to act resolutely.⁶⁰ The International could no longer safely assume that sovereign nations existed in relative isolation from one another during periods of peace.

Vandervelde complained, however, that neither the Bureau of the Labour and Socialist International nor the congresses could act because of the growing dissension within Socialist ranks at the national level. The splits within the German Social Democratic Party had paralyzed their ability to organize an effective resistance to the fascists. In Britain, MacDonald's defection from the Labour Party had resulted in a malaise that sapped British energy. Factions were developing in France and Belgium as well.⁶¹

All the while, Adler continued to direct confidential correspondence on conditions within Austria and Germany to Vandervelde. Vandervelde in turn sent bulletins to Socialists in France and Britain. But that was not enough. In frustration, Adler observed to Vandervelde in the fall of 1929 that the official meetings of the Bureau and its administrative committees were so infrequent that the International was unable to respond effectively to international developments.⁶² It is unlikely that many other Socialist leaders shared Adler's impatience with the irresolution of the Labour and Socialist International. Vandervelde was almost alone in believing that the International could act as an independent body at the same time that Socialists participated within national governments.

At the 1931 Vienna congress of the Labour and Socialist International,

58. Emile Vandervelde, "L'Internationale et les socialistes d'Autriche," *Le Peuple* 10 November 1929; Emile Vandervelde, "L'Internationale et les socialistes d'Autriche," *Informations Internationales* 41 (1929), *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1298/56, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam; and Emile Vandervelde, *Livre noir de la dictature autrichienne* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1934).

59. Correspondence between Vandervelde and Friedrich Adler from 1929 is preserved in the New Archives at the Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels. Recently discovered, the letters had not yet been inventoried when I used them.

60. Emile Vandervelde, "L'Internationale et les socialistes d'Autriche," *Le Peuple* 10 November 1929.

61. Vandervelde to Van Roosbroeck, 25 August 1929, *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1298/38, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

62. Adler to Vandervelde, 29 August 1929, *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1298/41, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam; and Vandervelde to Adler, 2 September 1929, *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale* 1298/49, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

Austrian Socialist Otto Bauer demolished the last remnants of the comforting illusion that Europe could be divided into democratic and dictator-prone regions. "Since the congress of Brussels, fascism has erupted in industrialized countries where there are no illiterate people," he asserted. No line separated Germany from its western neighbors. "At this moment all our thoughts must be dominated by the fact that in the very heart of Central Europe, in that large country that is Germany, fascism represents a very serious danger."⁶³ The Socialists had to come to terms with that threat. Léon Blum, who followed Bauer to the podium, supported the Austrian's call for mobilizing international economic assistance for Germany to alleviate that country's distress. After some discussion of the economic roots of fascism and the Treaty of Versailles, the congress resolved that everyone shared a responsibility to prevent the collapse of the German economy and to reinforce democracy. They had moved a long way from the crisis theory of the nineteenth century. The collapse of capitalism could lead to counterrevolution as easily as to revolution, the speakers reminded the assembly. Specific resolutions on international credit and the adjustment of war debts supported their appeal to European governments to undertake "a constructive international economic program of action."⁶⁴ Only the British Labour Party and the Polish Bund, who opposed any collaboration with the democratic bourgeoisie and were outraged by the International's call for financial assistance to Germany, opposed Bauer's resolution.

After the discussion of Central Europe, Louis de Brouckère presented his commission's report on disarmament to the Vienna congress. He began by repeating the assertion that wars were rooted in capitalism, adding his corollary that the best means to prevent war was to disarm. Specifically, his resolution called for gradual, partial disarmament of the European powers.

Vandervelde closed the Vienna congress by reminding the Socialist delegates of their international obligations. But he returned to his refrain: Vigilant Socialists within their governments would prevail to preserve the peace. If war did break out despite diplomatic efforts to prevent it, then the Socialists in the International would stand united in their opposition to military aggression.⁶⁵ "Whatever happens, this union will be maintained," he predicted in a prophecy unfounded in reality. "Whatever happens, we will all fight together for the interests of the working class and our common ideal."⁶⁶ His was the last speech ever made at a congress

63. Otto Bauer cited in Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 111.

64. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Résolutions du congrès socialiste international de Vienne," *L'Avenir Social* 1931, p. 344.

65. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Congrès de Vienne," *L'Avenir Social* 1931, pp. 325-7.

66. Vandervelde cited in Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 123.

of the Labour and Socialist International.

The Bureau continued to meet in urgent sessions. In June 1932 Vandervelde alerted delegates that they were poised at the edge of “the most serious moment that democracy and socialism have known since the war.”⁶⁷ The growth of fascism imperiled the peace that reigned so precariously in Europe. At a meeting of an enlarged Bureau in Zurich in September 1932, Vandervelde described the terrifying developments in Germany. Explaining that the readers of the French-language press did not have access to the details of recent events in Germany, he suggested sending an urgent communiqué to the other members of the International.⁶⁸ Without the knowledge of the meager efforts of Western governments to reinforce democratic elements in nations facing mounting fascist threats, they would not apply pressure in their capitals.

In February 1933, Bauer pleaded with his fellow Socialists to force their governments to help check the rearmament of Germany. Alexandre Braecke answered that the French Socialists would do all that they could to influence their government, although he reminded fellow Bureau members of the swing to the right in the recent elections that had reduced the Socialists’ voice in the French government. For the Labour Party, Gillies suggested that the British actually preferred that Germany rearm publicly rather than clandestinely. He did not see any need for action by the Socialists either individually or collectively.⁶⁹ The Socialists, it seems, had adopted the colors of the governments in which they served like chameleons, rather than steering them on a new course as Vandervelde had so confidently predicted.

Vandervelde presided over a meeting of European Socialists in Paris in August 1933. Adler mounted the platform to narrate in some detail Hitler’s rapid rise to power in Germany. He concluded his somber report by sketching a path leading beyond the crisis to the establishment of socialism. Vandervelde then returned to the podium to report, not as the president of the International, but as the head of the majority faction of the Belgian Workers’ Party. He sadly described the calls for violence and the defeatism that resonated among Belgian Socialists. Otto Bauer, Vandervelde’s successor within the Labour and Socialist International as the forger of compromise and the author of significant resolutions, echoed Vandervelde’s despair. “The debates have demonstrated profound differences of opinion, not only between different parties, but even within

67. Emile Vandervelde, “La Situation mondiale, Rapport sur la conférence de Zurich fait au Conseil générale du Parti ouvrier belge le 22 juin 1932” (Brussels: L’Eglantine, 1932).

68. Bureau, 27 September 1932, Zurich, Labour and Socialist International 4/9, Labour Party Archives, London.

69. “Compte rendu de la séance du Bureau de l’International ouvrier socialiste, 18 et 19 février 1933,” Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

the parties," Bauer observed.⁷⁰ The delegates were unable to resolve one of the most significant issues facing the congress, that of forming a united front with European Communists to oppose the fascists.

The final resolution of the Paris meeting appealed to the Socialists to struggle against fascism and to come to the aid of its victims. Should war threaten, the Socialists would establish their independence of action from their governments and maintain their relations with each other. In effect, they were to return to their prewar strategy.

Individual Socialist leaders from Britain, France, Austria, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands worried collectively about the arrests of Socialists in fascist countries. In their correspondence, they urged each other to speak out publicly, to continue to travel, and to write.

"On the Other Shore"

Vandervelde had come to realize that the younger generation of Socialists had political careers that overshadowed their participation in the Labour and Socialist International. Vandervelde dedicated his 1928 address to the Brussels congress of the International to the surviving veterans of the Second International. "There are not many of us who are still living and participating in the new International," Vandervelde mused. "Sometimes I find myself wondering if we have not already crossed over to the other shore as well."⁷¹ More and more persistently in the last decade of his life, Vandervelde evoked the Socialist comradeship that had disappeared in the First World War. He had not found a niche within the Labour and Socialist International. But neither was he ready to abdicate his leadership role to the younger generation and retire. He offered instead "to serve as the bridge between the two shores."⁷² In Brussels in 1928 he promised to bring together the world of the men who had known Marx with that of the new Socialist leaders.

With the help of his second wife, the Argentinean-born doctor Jeanne Beeckman, whom he had married in Paris in 1927, Vandervelde continued to entertain the leaders of the Labour and Socialist International.⁷³ They gathered at the Vanderveldes', as one invitation read, in keeping with "the

70. Otto Bauer cited in Sokolova, *Les Congrès*, p. 131.

71. Emile Vandervelde, Labour and Socialist International, Proceedings, *Brussels Congress, 5-11 August 1928*, Archives Emile Vandervelde VI 16, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Vandervelde and Beeckman were married in the eighth arrondissement of Paris on 30 October 1927. She was born Jeanne Augusta Félicie Beeckman in Buenos Aires, 8 December 1891. It was her second marriage. Death declaration in Papiers Personnels, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

customary system of a cold supper from 7:30 to 11:00.”⁷⁴ He also maintained his active correspondence with Socialist leaders throughout the world. Throughout the 1930s, his wife, Jeanne, enthusiastically served as Vandervelde’s secretary, passionately responding to each request for information and thanking the myriad of correspondents for sharing their brochures and manuscripts with “le Patron.” They sent New Year’s cards to one another; the Vanderveldes’ card to the Kautskys featured their two Siamese cats and their terrier, “nos bêtes.”

Vandervelde himself had written to Kautsky in 1926 to acknowledge that, of all the cards he had received on his sixtieth birthday, “none of them touched me more than the expression of sentiments from a man such as yourself, one of the last and most illustrious survivors of the generation that knew Marx and Engels. All that I have been able to do that was worthwhile over the last forty years in the intellectual sphere, I owe above all to those who were my masters.”⁷⁵ When Vandervelde, in turn, wrote to congratulate Kautsky on his eightieth birthday in 1934, he reminisced that before the war they had been divided by the labels of revisionist and orthodox Marxists. Theory no longer separated them now, he suggested.⁷⁶

Writing Kautsky’s obituary for *Le Peuple* in 1938, Vandervelde asked his readers, “Do our friends of the coming generations realize what it has been like for an old man like me to watch his companions from past struggles die one by one over the last twenty-five years?”⁷⁷ He corresponded with and visited French and British Socialist leaders in the twenty years between the wars, but only his friendships with the Germans Bernstein and Kautsky dated from the formative period of the Second International.

In 1932 Vandervelde observed: “The prewar International was distinguished by having men in the foreground in every country who in a certain way incarnated the Socialist and workers’ movement. Their lives were interwoven with the collective life of the party of which they were the very soul.” The older generation, “Jaurès and Guesde in France, Bebel and Liebknecht in Germany, Keir Hardie, Brantig, Troelstra, Victor Adler, Axelrod, Turati! We have seen them disappear one after another,” he lamented.⁷⁸ Ten years younger than most of the other leaders of the Second

74. Jeanne Emile to Adler, 1 April 1935, *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale*, 1303/6, *Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis*, Amsterdam.

75. Vandervelde to Kautsky, 29 January 1926, Kautsky 368, *Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis*, Amsterdam.

76. Correspondence between Kautsky and Vandervelde is in Kautsky D^{xxii}, Kautsky 361, Kautsky 367, and Kautsky 368, *Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis*, Amsterdam.

77. Emile Vandervelde, “Karl Kautsky, Le Grand Théoricien socialiste est mort à Amsterdam,” *Le Peuple* 16 October 1938.

78. Emile Vandervelde, “Flippo Turati,” *L’Avenir Social* 1932, p. 221.

International, Vandervelde watched all of his comrades except for the Belgians – Bertrand, Huysmans, and de Brouckère – die.⁷⁹

So Vandervelde continued to travel, now frequently venturing beyond crisis-ridden Europe. He journeyed to Argentina to try to reunite the Argentinean Socialists in 1929. His most memorable trip was to China in 1930 by way of Moscow and Siberia. He was received in Kharbine, Moukden, Beijing, Canton, and Shanghai with great festivity as the president of the International. Although he protested that he had been invited by the National Chinese Committee for Scientific Research as a university professor, not as a political leader, he was obviously enchanted by the reception. As usual, he met political leaders, poets, teachers, peasants, and merchants throughout China. He gave public lectures to students at the National University in Tsing Hua, asked about the effects on Chinese cities of increased automobile use, visited temples, and surveyed working conditions in silk-production centers. He seems to have recovered his youthful zest while traveling abroad. Upon his return, he published a number of articles expounding his comparative theories of revolution and modernization.⁸⁰

The Palestinian question particularly interested Vandervelde during the last decade of his life. In Israel he saw the germs of the socialism of which he had always dreamed. He was impressed by the Israeli people's internationalism and commitment to assist the oppressed, as well as by their sense of justice and their pride in all they had accomplished.⁸¹ He marveled at the idealism of the Israeli leaders, comparing them to Thyl Ulenspiegel, the legendary Flemish hero who stood up to giants to fight for justice. In part, as Baron Edmond de Rothschild explained, Vandervelde adopted the cause of Israel just as he had always been drawn to victims of oppression throughout his career. But more than that, he also seems to have found in Zionism the comradeship that had once flourished in the Socialist movement.

In 1933 Vandervelde returned to Austria. He hoped that an international presence at the Socialists' congress would forestall further repression. He

79. Emile Vandervelde, "La Mort de Ramsay MacDonald," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 22 October 1931.

80. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Les Rouges et les jaunes," *L'Avenir Social* 1930; Emile Vandervelde, *Ce qui s'est passé en Chine depuis mon premier voyage en Extrême Orient* (Brussels: Hayez, 1932); Emile Vandervelde, "Impressions de voyage en Chine," *Bulletin de l'Académie Nationale de Peiping* 1, no. 4 (1930); Emile Vandervelde, "Le Kuomintang," *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles* 36, no. 2 (December 1930–January 1931); and Emile Vandervelde, *A travers la révolution chinoise, soviète et kuomintang* (Paris: Alcan, 1931). The extensive documentation for his trip is preserved in the Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

81. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Pays d'Israel, Un Marxiste en Palestine* (Paris: Rieder, 1929).



Figure 16 Gathering at the Pagoda of Kompong-Thom in Cambodia, 1930. Institut Emile Vandervelde

traveled to Madrid in April 1933 to assess the threat to the Spanish republic, sending detailed reports back to Adler on the need for immediate action and sketching projects for land reform.⁸² When Sylvia Pankhurst appealed to him as a friend in 1937 to speak in London in defense of Ethiopia's right to a seat on the League of Nations, he answered that he would try to rearrange his speaking trip to France to allow him to honor her request. In addition to his personal observations, his interest in events throughout the world was fed by a clipping service that supplied him regularly with articles not only from the European press but from Asia and the Americas as well.⁸³ He relayed this information to *Le Peuple*.

Vandervelde grieved that the escalating armaments race had again escaped control in Europe. While diplomats met at conference tables and talked of peace, they prepared all the while for war, he lamented. Vandervelde never renounced his service in the foreign ministry, but appealed ceaselessly for disarmament through every forum available in the 1930s. The rearmament of Germany especially troubled him. In contrast to his pre-1914 optimism, he now predicted that, if a second European war started, it would inevitably end in a terrible massacre. Wars had changed since the time when Marx and Engels could confidently prophesy that they would lead to revolution, he warned. The fascist presence had turned Europe upside down.

However, in a spirit reminiscent of the manifestoes issued by the Second International before the First World War, Vandervelde still proclaimed resolutely to Socialist gatherings, "You have placed war outside the realm of what is legal. The workers are resolved, whatever it costs, to place it outside the realm of what is possible."⁸⁴ He cited passages from Luxemburg's *Junius Pamphlet* and recalled Victor Adler's dreams for a united Austria-Hungary as well as Jan Masaryk's roadside proclamations from Russia in 1917. After a decade of negotiating treaties as a member of the Belgian government, Vandervelde returned to his fond memories of comradeship in the Second International. At least in his mind, that comradeship still stood as a barrier against war and a path to Socialism.

82. Vandervelde to Adler, 3 April 1933, Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale 1302/11, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

83. Some of those clippings are preserved at the Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

84. Emile Vandervelde, "La Situation mondiale," Rapport sur la Conférence de Zurich fait au Conseil général du Parti ouvrier belge, 22 June 1932, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

The Insider as Outsider: Socialist Nationalism and the Spanish Civil War

Vandervelde left Belgium to travel to Spain in 1931, preoccupied by the stagnation of governmental politics in Belgium and the growing threat of fascism throughout Europe. He returned rejuvenated, proclaiming that he had just witnessed “democracy’s greatest victory since the World War.”¹ The Spanish republicans had overthrown the authoritarian old regime. And on its century-old ruins, they were building a vibrant democracy from the bottom up. Five years later, as Spanish forces coalesced to defend their still fragile republic against the combined assault of Spanish, Italian, and German fascists, the aging Vandervelde tenaciously championed their democratic cause. For one last time, Vandervelde adopted the struggle of an oppressed people as his own.

Belgian Socialists were in no mood to listen to Vandervelde’s plea for international intervention on the side of the besieged Spanish republic. The Belgians were absorbed in their own domestic economic crisis. The democratic socialist path along which Vandervelde had steadily guided the Socialists in Belgium for four decades had led to what he decried as “le socialisme national.” The next generation of Belgian Socialist leaders – Paul Henri Spaak and Hendrik de Man – committed the Belgian Workers’ Party to full governmental participation. Alarmed by their domestic focus, Vandervelde defiantly returned to the internationalism that he had practiced before the First World War.

The older generation of Belgian Socialists – Vandervelde, de Brouckère, and Huysmans – were not yet ready to retire. Nor were they prepared to abandon the Socialist strategies they had developed before 1914, in the decades before universal manhood suffrage and the war.² Paul Henri Spaak, the first of the younger generation to challenge the aging leaders,

1. Emile Vandervelde, “Lettre de Madrid,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 5 May 1931. See also his series of articles in *Le Peuple* in May 1931 and “Au courant de la plume, Le Président Macia,” *L’Avenir Social* 1931.

2. For a comprehensive analysis of the generational struggle see Mieke Claeys Van Haegendoren, *25 Jaar Belgisch Socialisme* (Antwerp: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1967), p. 54.

acknowledged that he had once looked up to Vandervelde. But that had been a long time ago. Vandervelde had grown old while Socialism stagnated in its pursuit of day-to-day politics, Spaak observed.

The other leader who would rise to challenge the older generation, Hendrik de Man, shared Spaak's frustration with the inertia of the parliamentary politics pursued by the Belgian Socialists. De Man had joined de Brouckère in 1910 to condemn Belgian Socialist reformism in articles published in the German journal *Neue Zeit*. In 1912 the twenty-five-year-old de Man again had challenged Vandervelde from the left.³ Shortly after the war and the Russian Revolution, de Man left Belgium. Following a lengthy visit to the United States, he chose to move to Germany to pursue his theoretical inquiries. Throughout the 1920s, de Man cast himself as an outsider.

Vandervelde claimed to understand the impatience of the next generation. They were ready to assume command of the party, eager to push aside the generation that had led the European Socialist movement through the war and the Russian Revolution.⁴ However, as Vandervelde looked around Europe, he observed that no one in the next generation measured up to the stature of his elders – Jean Jaurès of France, Auguste Bebel of Germany, Victor Adler of Austria, P. J. Troelstra of the Netherlands, Hjalmar Branting of Sweden, or Filippo Turati of Italy. Some of the younger Socialists excelled as theorists, as parliamentary spokesmen, or as organizers, but only a few, such as Léon Blum or Otto Bauer, even made a pretense of being both men of action and theorists.

The generational conflict was more acute in Belgium than in any other European Socialist party. In part, that was because the two generations of Belgian Socialists were forced to share power for so long. The older generation of Belgian Socialists – Vandervelde and Huysmans – had been promoted to the executive committee of the International in 1900. They had been a decade younger than most of the French and German leaders of the Second International. Long after most of the French and German leaders had died, the Belgians remained active, both within the International and within the Belgian Workers' Party. It may also have been the extraordinary character of the younger group of Belgian Socialists that led to intergenerational conflict. The combination of Spaak's dynamism and de Man's theoretical intensity presented a formidable challenge to a generation accustomed to followers. The inclusive Belgian party had absorbed its younger renegades rather than excluding them.

3. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Rapport de de Man," *Le Peuple* 7 April 1912.

4. Emile Vandervelde, "La Cure de rajeunissement du socialisme," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 17 February 1935.

Sinking in the quagmire of economic crisis and seemingly futile opposition politics, Belgian Socialists assembled for their annual congress in 1931 in the Brussels Maison du Peuple. They met beneath a stage dominated by the flower-bedecked busts of Karl Marx and Emile Vandervelde. Congress participants enthusiastically, but without discussion, endorsed Vandervelde's sympathetic rhetoric on behalf of the new Spanish republic. In October 1934 Belgian Socialists again followed Vandervelde's lead and voted to convey "their greetings of fraternal solidarity to the Spanish workers in the struggle for the defense of Socialism and of democratic liberties."⁵ At subsequent congresses, Vandervelde pushed his fellow Socialists to send more than "a simple gesture of solidarity." He called on them to intervene to help the Spanish victims of "the struggle against fascism."⁶ From 1934 to 1936, together with Louis de Brouckère and a few friends, Vandervelde continued to prod the party, serving as its international conscience.

But by 1936 the shifting of generational leadership was already at work within the party. Spaak and de Man had convinced the majority of Belgian Socialists to support their nationalist strategy and abandon the archaic internationalism of the old guard. Vandervelde's Marxist rhetoric seemed increasingly dated to a generation that had come of age after the "heroic period" of the general strike and the pre-1914 international comradeship of the International. Vandervelde struggled against the party's attempts to relegate him to a figurehead position.

Barely tolerated within the Belgian party, de Brouckère and Vandervelde sought support for their Spanish commitment from the International. Within the ranks of the Labour and Socialist International, the two Belgians rallied European Socialists to proclaim their solidarity with the ever more beleaguered republicans in Spain.⁷ The International, now stripped of even the limited powers it had commanded before the war, was forced to rely on its national constituencies to carry through its resolutions. And its persistent cajolery threatened the Socialists who were now sitting in governments throughout Europe. They intended to pursue their own policy of nonintervention in the Spanish war, independent of the dictates of the International. Ultimately, the clash between the Socialists in their governments and the Labour and Socialist International revealed one of the paradoxes of Vandervelde's democratic socialist strategy. Real commitment to the Spanish revolution seemed to jeopardize governmental participation. Vandervelde resolved the contradiction for himself by

5. *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1934*, p. 15.

6. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1935*.

7. Emile Vandervelde, *Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale 1299/14*, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

returning to the opposition and recommitting himself to the international class struggle.

The Party of the Working Class and the Plan

In July 1932, miners in the economically ravaged Borinage went out on strike despite Socialist attempts to maintain calm in the face of steadily deteriorating conditions. In a region beset with rising unemployment and falling wages, the strike spread rapidly from one industry to another. Vandervelde compared the hopelessness and violence of the strike to the primitive struggles depicted by Emile Zola in *Germinal*.⁸ The Socialist youth movement – the Young Guard – joined the Communists on the side of the striking workers. They hoped to see a revolutionary general strike burst forth from the seething discontent. On 9 July the Bureau and the Conseil général, with quite the opposite intention, also proclaimed their solidarity with the strikers. Together with the Commission syndicale socialiste, they organized a joint action committee in an attempt to break the paralysis that afflicted the party and to woo back the desperate workers.

Shortly thereafter, an accord was negotiated by the government, the Socialists, the employers, and the unions. The Socialists called the striking workers back to work. Miners in the major coal basins of Limburg and the Hainaut, demanding higher wages, refused to give up their strike and continued to demand a raise in their wages.⁹

The Socialists' role in trying to end the strike provoked new controversy in the floundering party. Vandervelde proclaimed that the strike had proven that when the workers "stood up and showed their teeth," their demands could be achieved.¹⁰ Parliament hailed the return of order to the region and pledged to attend to the workers' plight. But although the workers eventually returned to work, they still talked of a general strike in the Borinage. A rising chorus of voices dismissed party leadership as inactive, and worse yet, part of the governing structure of Belgium.

Nevertheless, the party congress of December 1932 reaffirmed the Socialist strategy of "constructive opposition." Vandervelde energetically defended this position between government participation and the general strike. He cited his experience in the 1925–26 Catholic-controlled government to argue that the Socialists would gain little by agreeing to share power with the Catholics during an economic crisis. Warning against moving to the other extreme, he argued that encouraging the workers to engage in a violent general strike would not cause the capitalist system to

8. Emile Vandervelde, "Les Grèves au pays noir," *L'Avenir social* 1932.

9. For Vandervelde's perspective on the strike, see *ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, p. 455.

come crumbling down with Socialism rising spontaneously from the ashes. He cited Kautsky's admonition from Germany against launching a general strike when thousands of workers were unemployed and both fascists and armed troops were poised to exploit any hint of violence.

Paul Henri Spaak attacked the party's resolution to defend parliamentary democracy and its appeal to workers to maintain their exceptional "sangfroid." It was further proof of the lethargic inertia of the Socialist leaders mired in the daily routine of parliamentary politics, he charged. In his new journal, *L'Action Socialiste*, Spaak challenged the "superreformism" of the older generation. He called for revolution.

Spaak also used his position on the joint action committee, which had been set up during the strike, to attack the Socialist leaders who controlled the Bureau. Even after the resolution of the strike, the joint action committee had continued to meet. Its jurisdiction awkwardly overlapped the traditional institutions of party governance. Vandervelde reported to the Conseil général on the criticism emanating from that committee. When Spaak charged that the aging party leadership had renounced direct action, members of the Bureau fumed. They threatened to impose disciplinary sanctions and to shut down the joint action committee. Vandervelde intervened to protect Spaak from expulsion.¹¹

The debate over strategy was silenced temporarily by the Conseil général's voting of a secret resolution condemning the general strike and a public resolution lauding the miners' peaceful petition drive.¹² Spaak still refused to submit to the decisions of the party Bureau or to allow party censorship of his journal. He asserted his independent voice in Parliament as well, often voting against party positions.¹³

In the meantime, it was Vandervelde the mediator who invited more dissent into the party. He encouraged de Man to return from Germany in 1933 to serve as director of the Belgian Socialists' Bureau for Social Research. From there, de Man's reputation as an ambitious and innovative theorist propelled him to the vice presidency of the party.

Vandervelde was certainly aware that de Man would neither quietly accept the guidance of the older generation nor work within the parameters of that generation's strategy. In 1928 Vandervelde had reviewed de Man's *Au-delà du marxisme*. He traced de Man's intellectual journey from the

11. Jef Rens, *Rencontres avec le siècle* (Paris: Gembloux, Duculot, 1987), p. 30.

12. Conseil général, 25 July 1933, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 139, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

13. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général élargi, 8 November 1933, Algemene Verslagboeken van de Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 142, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

avid Marxism of his youth to his repudiation of Marxist orthodoxy.¹⁴ Vandervelde analyzed at length how de Man's affinity with Bergsonian irrationalism had led him to reject Marxist materialism and to detach himself from all workers' organizations. He decried the younger generation's eagerness to discard Marx's sociology as archaic rather than working to adapt it.¹⁵

But the Socialist leaders, including Vandervelde, recognized that they desperately needed an economic program. As soon as he returned to Belgium, de Man began to formulate a Socialist response to the government's economic policy of deflation. Other than their economic program, the "Plan du salut public," which had fallen flat in Parliament in 1931, and Vandervelde's periodic rhetorical rallying cry to class struggle, the Socialists had nothing with which to challenge the prevailing theories of the liberal economists.¹⁶

De Man presented a sketch of his own Plan to the Bureau in the fall of 1933. The reaction among party leaders was hesitant. In part, many of them had already begun to fear de Man's political ambitions. Above all, they doubted that the middle classes could be rallied to support his economic program. The true base of the party was the working class, Vandervelde asserted.¹⁷ De Brouckère asked how de Man could presume to cooperate with capitalists and to initiate reform on a national level from within the capitalist structure. In contrast, de Man found a strong base of support among union leaders, because his Plan promised to ease rising unemployment.

At the extraordinary congress of December 1933, Belgian Socialists adopted de Man's economic program, "Plan du Travail" or "Plan van de Arbeid" as their party platform, probably without realizing the full implications of their action. Vandervelde himself called it "a rejuvenation cure" and proclaimed his continuing respect for de Man.¹⁸ The deepening unemployment crisis and the lack of other alternatives had convinced party leaders and the directors of the Socialist press to lend their support to de

14. Emile Vandervelde, "Au-delà du marxisme?" *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 5 February 1928.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

16. Vandervelde proclaimed, for example, "Notre tâche historique, ce n'est point d'aider le capitalisme à se donner du bois de rallonge . . . Il ne s'agit plus pour nous de partager ou d'assumer le pouvoir, mais de le conquérir, et de haute lutte." Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 14 February 1932, cited in A. Pletinckx, "Le Parti ouvrier belge dans la première phase de la crise économique," *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 8 (1976): 248.

17. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 27 October 1933, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 141, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

18. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Cinquantenaire du Parti ouvrier belge, 1885-1935; vers la souveraineté du travail* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1936), p. 103.

Man's energetic initiative.

"The object of the plan is the economic and political transformation of the country," de Man asserted boldly in the introduction to his Plan.¹⁹ The government would revitalize the Belgian economy. A nationalized sector of the credit and financial institutions and monopoly industries would be created that would coexist alongside a private sector of smaller enterprises. Under centralized direction, this national economy would function efficiently, promoting the general interest by way of internal markets and by absorbing unemployment. De Man also proposed a restructuring of the parliamentary regime to lay the foundations for this more efficient government. The Plan would end the party's stagnant reformism, closing the gap between socialist theory and practice, he concluded.

Although de Man's strategy of class collaboration would seem to have little in common with Spaak's calls for revolution and a general strike, the two men forged a pragmatic partnership around the Plan to challenge the established leaders of the party. De Man turned to Spaak because he knew that the popular Spaak could rally wide support within their generation and in the Brussels Federation. De Man himself had never cultivated contacts beyond his intellectual circles. For his part, Spaak stood in awe of de Man's intellectual abilities and followed his new initiative willingly. So the unlikely pair came together.

After the December congress, de Man directed party leaders to instruct Socialists in Parliament to lobby for his Plan. Vandervelde admonished him not to play schoolmaster to the Belgian Socialists. At the same time, Spaak continued to snipe at party leaders in the journal he edited, *L'Action Socialiste*. After Spaak viciously attacked the unions as reformist for failing to launch a general strike, party and union leaders chastised him. He adamantly refused to submit to party discipline, storming out of a 7 February 1934 meeting of the Bureau.²⁰

In October 1934 de Man called for a dramatic reorganization of the Belgian Workers' Party. He urged Bureau members to step down to allow new leaders to be elected. Such a move would bring Spaak from his troublemaking perch outside the party into the responsible inner circle, he explained. Gust Balthazar responded with exasperation that the party already had enough trouble without a major reorganization.²¹ De Brouckère

19. Hendrik de Man, "Plan du travail," *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire 1933*, p. 151.

20. Bureau, 7 February 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 146, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

21. Bureau, 25 October 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 161, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

went further, resigning from the party to protest de Man's speech. De Man and Vandervelde openly confronted each other at a meeting of the Bureau, proof of the growing intergenerational hostility.²² An article in *L'Action Socialiste* suggesting that the deaf Vandervelde, surrounded by his massive auditory devices, was too old to lead set off the exchange.

In November Vandervelde urged the Belgian Socialists to decide finally whether to support de Man's Plan fully or to repudiate it. They could no longer simply give it their halfhearted support.²³ The following month he announced that he was not certain that he could support the Plan. He objected specifically to its corporativism, which he said hearkened back to medieval economic organizations rather than Marxist socialism. De Man's highly publicized meeting with French "neosocialists," who joined him in proclaiming the death of socialism and the birth of planism, had enraged the veteran Socialist.²⁴ If supporting de Man's Plan meant renouncing internationalism and the class struggle, then, Vandervelde angrily concluded, his choice, and he hoped that of the party, was obvious.²⁵ Finally, Vandervelde threatened to resign from the Bureau if the party chose "planism" over Marxism.

Belgian Socialists debated throughout the fall, but they confined their struggle to the relative privacy of the Bureau. All the while, Vandervelde led the Socialists' attack in Parliament on the deflationary policies of the "bankers' government" and lent his support to the Plan.

Then, in the midst of the winter of 1934, the government announced its intention to reduce the salaries and pensions of public employees. Cries of outrage from the Socialist benches greeted this solution to the economic crisis. Outside of Parliament, Socialist militants demanded a general strike. At first Vandervelde shared de Man's concern at their inflammatory rhetoric.²⁶ But as support for a strike intensified, de Man was left alone with his fears. The rest of the party leaders, including Vandervelde, resolved to work with the militants in planning a twenty-four-hour strike. De Man's complaints that a general strike would alienate the middle class,

22. Bureau, 8 November 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 161, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

23. Emile Vandervelde, *Conseil général*, 9 November 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 162, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

24. On planism in France, see Georges Lefranc, "Le Courant planiste dans le mouvement ouvrier français de 1933 à 1936," *Mouvement Social* 54 (January–March 1966).

25. Bureau, 12 December 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 166, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

26. *Commission syndicale et Bureau*, 26 December 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 166, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

thus shattering his hopes for implementing his Plan, were ignored. Vandervelde hoped that a well-controlled strike would bring the rank and file back to a reactivated Belgian Workers' Party. With references to the prewar strikes for universal manhood suffrage, Vandervelde appealed to party and union leaders to come together to organize a forceful, peaceful strike.

At the same time, Catholic and Liberal leaders approached Vandervelde to discuss the formation of a government of national union to deal with the intensifying economic chaos. Vandervelde refused. He informed the king, as well as the Bureau, that the Socialists had nothing to gain from participating in a government controlled by bankers who were determined to devalue the franc and increase the misery of the workers. Vandervelde proposed instead that the parties join together on a national labor committee to address the problems of labor and unemployment.²⁷ Although Spaak denounced the idea of a labor committee as a typical ploy of Vandervelde-inspired reformism, the majority of the party agreed somewhat reluctantly to try it.²⁸ Nine Socialists, eight Catholics, and four Liberals were named to the committee, over which Vandervelde's long-time friend Emile Francqui presided.

The Socialists continued all the while to organize their strike to protest against the government's economic program. When the government denied them permission to demonstrate, Vandervelde appealed to Parliament for protection of their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Neither his impassioned speech nor the direct appeal by a Socialist delegation to the prime minister reversed the government's decision.

The Bureau and the unions met frantically, caught between an unyielding government and restless workers. At one meeting of the Conseil général, a long-time party member stood up to denounce the cowardly deception practiced by party leaders who refused to act.²⁹ If the leaders would accept the risks and lead decisively, then, he pledged, the workers would follow. The party met together with the unions at an extraordinary congress to condemn the government's decisions as the first stage of fascism. But as soon as the discussion turned to the question of whether to stay within the bounds of legality or strike and risk violence, debate stalled. In the end, the Socialists voted to protest the government's action by withdrawing their members from the newly founded National Labor

27. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 27 January 1935.

28. Bureau, 7 February 1935, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 171, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

29. Plumet, Conseil général, 16 February 1935, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 187, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

Committee. Several parliamentary delegates, including Spaak, decided to go further and to resign their seats, thus forcing partial parliamentary elections. In a private resolution, the Socialists vowed to call a general strike of twenty-four hours if all else failed – a tactic older leaders remembered well from an earlier period. But this time they kept the threat to themselves, rendering it almost harmless.

Back on the Inside

The Theunis government fell in the middle of March 1935. The dire economic conditions caused leaders of all three parties to hesitate rather than accept responsibility for forming a new government. Consequently, Leopold III, who had ascended the throne after the death of his father, took the unusual step of dispatching Theunis to survey the major parties on their views of the crisis. He asked the Socialists specifically whether they would enter a government that did not support the Plan.

The Belgian Workers' Party had just pledged at its congress not to participate in any government unless the Plan du travail was incorporated into that government's program. But de Man was growing impatient with Vandervelde's arguments against governmental participation. If he could only establish himself on the inside, then he believed that he would be able to convince the majority of the government to adopt his Plan. Vandervelde countered that a government was more likely to act when it was threatened by a large working class about to revolt in the streets than when it was being politely prodded by a few Socialists sitting in the government.³⁰ He remembered too well that in 1925–26, as a minority, the Socialists had been unable to act and were forced to share in the blame for the economic crisis.

Theunis bypassed Vandervelde and approached the younger leaders of the party, asking them to join the government. De Man and Spaak expressed their eagerness, even if it meant abandoning the Plan. In March 1935 Vandervelde acknowledged that he had become "the least participationist" of any of the members of the Bureau and the most skeptical about coalition governments.³¹

The king chose Paul Van Zeeland, the vice-governor of the Belgian National Bank and a political outsider, as prime minister. A friend of de Man's, Van Zeeland had been discussing details of the Plan with the younger generation of Socialists. At a contentious meeting of the Bureau

30. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 14 November 1934, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 163, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

31. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 20 March 1935, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 173, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

lasting until midnight, Spaak reported smugly that Van Zeeland intended to assemble “a young government.”³² To Arthur Gailly’s suggestion that the Socialists propose Vandervelde for minister of foreign affairs, Spaak objected that, not only was he too old, but his past role in the International would impede negotiations with many European heads of state. Spaak prevailed. Vandervelde reluctantly agreed to accept Van Zeeland’s offer of the vice presidency of the cabinet. He would serve as a minister without portfolio, just as he had during the first years of the war. Five Socialists – Eugène Soudan, Louis Delattre, de Man, Spaak, and Vandervelde – joined four Liberals and six Catholics in the first Van Zeeland government. Spaak had refused to accept the relatively unimportant ministry of post, telephone, and telegraph and was named minister of transport.

The formation of the new cabinet signaled a changing of the guard, especially within the Socialist party. At the party congress of 30 and 31 March 1935, the Socialists agreed to support the government’s program, but warned that they would accept little responsibility for its failure. Van Zeeland pledged “to bring about the economic renovation of this country.”³³

The decision to participate in the tripartite government was called into question seven months later at a meeting of the Conseil général. The Van Zeeland government clearly had no intention of implementing the Plan du travail, but, more disturbing, it also seemed unable to alleviate the suffering of the workers. Finally, after much discussion, the Conseil général resolved that the Socialists could remain in the government, but only if Van Zeeland agreed to accelerate the programs to lend assistance to the workers before the onset of the next winter.

In his report to the December 1935 congress assessing the Socialists’ first year in the government, Arthur Wauters proclaimed the Van Zeeland cabinet the first real step on the path toward socialism. Vandervelde echoed Wauters. Unemployment had been reduced, farmers were complaining less, and the forty-hour week was about to be implemented, he observed. Moreover, he had finally achieved his own personal goal: Belgian recognition of the Soviet Union. The Van Zeeland government was not a Socialist government, Vandervelde concluded, but it did give the working class a forum for defending its interests.³⁴

Socialist voters apparently agreed. In the next elections, in May 1936,

32. Paul-Henri Spaak, Bureau, 24 March 1935, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 174, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

33. Paul Van Zeeland cited in Carl Höjer, *Le Régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Botryckeri Ab, 1946), p. 239.

34. Emile Vandervelde, “Un Grand Discours de Vandervelde sur la politique du gouvernement,” Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

the Socialists held on to seventy seats, overtaking the Catholics who dropped to sixty-three seats. But what stunned the Belgian political leaders was the election of sixteen Flemish nationalists, nine Communists, and twenty-one Rexists, followers of Léon Degrelle on the extreme right. The extremists had gained seats in Parliament primarily at the expense of the Catholics and Liberals.

Following custom, the king directed Van Zeeland to discuss the formation of a new government with Vandervelde, the head of the largest party in Parliament. Leopold knew that Catholics and Liberals alike would refuse to accept a Socialist, especially Vandervelde, to head a coalition government. It seems in fact that almost everyone except Vandervelde himself understood the futility of his effort to build a coalition. He took his mission quite seriously. Ignoring the counsel of Catholic and Liberal friends, including Marcel Henri Jaspar and Paul Hymans, Vandervelde pressed on with his discussions.³⁵ He presented his optimistic version of his negotiations to the king on 5 June.³⁶

Finally, even Vandervelde was forced to concede defeat. The Socialists agreed to participate in a second Van Zeeland government. Vandervelde announced that while he had had reservations about joining Van Zeeland's government in 1935, the Socialists now, as the largest party, had no choice but to "accept their responsibilities."³⁷ Better to work with a Catholic they knew than risk the threat posed by the Rexists.

Had Vandervelde known what was to come, he probably would have been less sanguine. The discussions over the composition of the new government were arduous. Van Zeeland offered the Socialists five seats; they demanded six. Each party refused to accept the candidates proposed by the other parties. Van Zeeland would not give Vandervelde foreign affairs, the post he still coveted. And Vandervelde refused to sit again as a minister without portfolio. He compared his role in the first Van Zeeland cabinet to that of a mother-in-law paid to sit still.³⁸

Although Vandervelde assumed that Van Zeeland would consult an official delegation from the Belgian Workers' Party in his negotiations, the new prime minister instead quietly summoned only de Man and Spaak

35. Paul Hymans, *Mémoires de Paul Hymans*, ed. Frans Van Kalken and John Bartier, 2 vols. (Brussels: Editions de l'Institut Solvay, 1958), pp. 764–7; and Marcel Henri Jaspar, *Souvenirs sans retouche* (Paris: Fayard, 1968), pp. 194–6.

36. Vandervelde's notes are preserved in Archives Emile Vandervelde V 1098, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

37. Emile Vandervelde, 27 May 1936, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 210, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

38. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 29 May 1936, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 240, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

to confer. Spaak then reported the results of their privileged conversations to the Conseil général. Van Zeeland once again refused to give foreign affairs to the past and future president of the Second International, Spaak asserted with obvious pleasure. Vandervelde could not be placed at the head of justice either, because the next justice minister would have to proceed against those Socialists connected with the 1934 failure of the Banque Belge du Travail. What were they to do with Vandervelde? he asked. Spaak's portrayal of Vandervelde as a doddering crank who refused to step aside infuriated Vandervelde's friends.³⁹ They berated Spaak for accepting the ministry of foreign affairs, which rightfully belonged to the party president. Not only did Spaak have no experience in foreign affairs, but he followed the government's, rather than the Socialists', foreign policy positions. Referring to the "allusions made to the advanced age of our old friend," one delegate complained about Spaak's handling of this "sentimental question." How, he asked, could the party so mistreat "our flag bearer . . . the man who embodies all of our past and all of our future"?⁴⁰ Although the delegate intended his remarks as praise for Vandervelde, they indicated how much Vandervelde's position in the party had changed. Most party members had already dismissed Vandervelde as a figurehead. As an inert bust positioned on the stage next to Marx, he could be looked up to and remembered, but his ideas were no longer to be seriously considered.

Finally, after Belgium had gone three weeks without a government, the Socialists joined the Catholics and the Liberals in a second Van Zeeland cabinet. Spaak became minister of foreign affairs, de Man accepted finance – a crucial position for implementing his Plan – Delattre stayed at labor, and Herman Bouchery took over the ministry of post, telephone, and telegraph. Vandervelde was offended by Van Zeeland's offer to bestow special honors on him if he would agree to remain outside the government. So Van Zeeland created a new post just for him, the ministry of public health, and Vandervelde agreed to continue to play the good mother-in-law.⁴¹ Camille Huysmans assumed the presidency of the Chamber. That pleased Vandervelde.

Vandervelde moved into his new ministerial office determined to enact

39. Paul Henri Spaak, Conseil général élargi, 11 June 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 244, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

40. J. Merlot, Conseil général, 11 June 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 247, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

41. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 13 June 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 249, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

reforms in public health just as he had as minister of justice fifteen years earlier. He undertook a very active program, establishing medical services for state employees, fighting for substantial budgets to be devoted to the protection of children, launching a campaign against tuberculosis, setting up a national committee on nutrition, dispensing information on public health, reforming hospitals and nursing education, introducing physical education in the schools, and, of course, leading the battle against alcoholism.⁴² Above all, he intended to introduce class analysis into the understanding of public health, he explained.⁴³

Several days after the elections, Antwerp dock workers went out on strike. A fascist attack on two Antwerp Socialists, one of whom was an officer of the dock workers' union, precipitated the twenty-four-hour strike protesting the government's failure to intervene against the fascists. As negotiations for a new government were proceeding, the strike spread. The Antwerp dock workers, who had not benefitted from the partial economic recovery engineered by the first Van Zeeland government, went back out on strike to secure a forty-hour week, an increase in their minimum wage, legal protection of labor's right to organize, and six days' annual paid vacation. Catholic and Socialist union leaders, who had appealed in vain to the dock workers not to strike, were meeting in Geneva at the time. They resolved together that, should the Communist-inspired strike spread further, they would support it and take the demands of the striking workers to the government.⁴⁴ The docks of Antwerp, one of the largest harbors in the world, shut down completely.

The strike spread south to the Borinage and Liège where miners, in imitation of recent French tactics, occupied their workplace. Meanwhile, the wave of strikes in France had been resolved by the historic Matignon agreements. Socialist and Catholic labor leaders hurriedly convened in Brussels to put together their list of demands to present to the government. The mining federations proclaimed a general strike. The strike continued to spread, heading back north to Ghent and Brussels where the textile, transport, metallurgical, and office workers walked off their jobs. Without leadership from either the Catholic or Socialist unions, strikes broke out spontaneously throughout Liège and the Borinage. At the urgent meetings of the party Bureau and the Commission syndicale, Vandervelde waffled, caught between defending what he argued were the very legitimate

42. The file on Vandervelde's activity at the ministry of public health is in the Archives Emile Vandervelde V 811, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

43. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Les Inégalités physiques de classe et la santé publique," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 28 June 1936.

44. See Carl Strikwerda, "The Belgian Working Class and the Crisis of the 1930's," in Helmut Gruber and Wolfgang Maderthaner, eds., *Die Krise der europäischen sozialdemokratie in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1987).

demands of the strikers and wanting to prevent violence.⁴⁵

Catholic and Socialist labor leaders, who met with Van Zeeland, convinced the prime minister to convoke a national labor conference to consider their demands. On 23 June the employers capitulated in large part to the strikers' demands. By mid-July, most of the five hundred thousand striking workers had returned to work.

No doubt with a sigh of relief, Vandervelde applauded the success of the strike, which had involved all sectors of Belgian industry in a struggle for a common set of demands.⁴⁶ For the first time, he declared, the Commission syndicale socialiste, with over six hundred thousand members, and the Confédération des travailleurs chrétiens, with its three thousand workers, had marched together. He celebrated that unity of action and proclaimed his vision of a popular front in Belgium's future.

Vandervelde attended cabinet meetings throughout the summer of 1936, sitting as an unusually quiet skeptic. In speeches to groups of workers and the Young Guard, he openly acknowledged the difficulties of serving as a government minister and president of the party during a period of labor unrest sparked by genuine misery. But the ever-present danger of fascism required a continued Socialist presence in the government, he concluded.

The Nonintervention Pact

The threat of the Rexists within Belgium worried Vandervelde. The aggression of the fascists beyond Belgian borders alarmed him. In the summer of 1934 Vandervelde had traveled through Germany to Czechoslovakia to represent the Labour and Socialist International at the Workers' Olympiad. Upon his return he contrasted the mournful scenes he had witnessed from his train as he passed through Nazi Germany with the animation and gaiety of Czechoslovakia, a virtual island of liberty in Central Europe.⁴⁷ With mounting urgency, he warned Belgian Socialists that in "a nation such as ours, at the crossroads of nations, it will be impossible to remain uninvolved in the struggles that continue to build" between democracy and fascism.⁴⁸ Then in March 1936, in flagrant violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler moved into the Rhineland.

45. Bureau, 16 June 1936, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 214, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeiders Beweging, Ghent.

46. Emile Vandervelde, "La Grève générale en Belgique," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 6 July 1936.

47. Emile Vandervelde, "The Workers' Olympiad," *International Information* 21 July 1934, Labour and Socialist International 18/3/12, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.

48. Emile Vandervelde, "La Rentrée parlementaire," Dossier, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

Years later, Léon Blum remembered Vandervelde as one of the first European leaders to understand the threat of fascism and to foresee the inevitability of a second world war.⁴⁹ The spread of fascism necessitated international commitment, Vandervelde argued. The Belgians could not hide within a shell consisting of national boundaries.

The younger generation of Belgian Socialists did not share Vandervelde's concern for events beyond Belgium's borders. Committed to the implementation of the Plan within Belgium, de Man contrasted "the reality of everyday national politics" – which to him meant the implementation of the Plan within Belgium – with the "overblown fiction of the International that exists only on holidays and at congresses."⁵⁰

In the summer of 1936, Spaak and Van Zeeland followed the lead of the French and British governments and signed the Nonintervention Pact, a nonbinding agreement by which the signatory powers pledged to stay out of the conflict in Spain.⁵¹ They agreed not to lend material assistance to the Spanish, expecting the Italians and Germans to remain equally uninvolved in the civil war being fought on Spanish soil.

At the 24 June meeting of the Conseil général, Arthur Wauters challenged this new policy toward Spain. He criticized Spaak for his part in the London negotiations that had produced the Nonintervention Pact. Without prior discussions in Parliament, Spaak had announced the new, "realistic" foreign policy of Belgian neutrality in a speech to foreign journalists. Wauters asked how a Socialist in the very center of Europe could advocate such an inward-looking program of noninvolvement. How could an internationalist declare, "I am neutral. I will bury my head in the sand so that I can see no danger, and then they will leave me alone"?⁵² Spaak turned to taunt Vandervelde for fueling the outcry in *Le Peuple* against the pact, but Vandervelde refused to join in the debate. He worried that a public statement of his anger would jeopardize his position within the government.

The International denounced the Nonintervention Pact, which closed Spanish borders to material assistance from the European democracies. The fascist powers callously disregarded its terms and lent their full

49. Léon Blum, *Hommage de Léon Blum à Emile Vandervelde* (Paris, 1947).

50. Hendrik de Man, *Herinneringen* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1941), p. 151.

51. See Christine Denuit-Somerhausen, "La Belgique au Comité de Non-intervention en Espagne," *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/Belgische Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 18, no. 1–2 (1987): 15–38.

52. Wauters, Conseil général, 24 June 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 250, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent. On the Spanish civil war and the Belgian Socialists, see J. Gotovitch, "La Belgique et la guerre civile en Espagne," *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 14, no. 3–4 (1983): 497–532.

assistance to the Spanish generals, the International argued. A delegation was dispatched to Spain to build the case for Socialist intervention on the side of the republicans. As the governments signed the Nonintervention Pact, the International issued resolution after resolution proclaiming the duty of the international proletariat to support the Spanish revolution. At meetings of the Conseil général, a leader of the Belgian Socialist women and prominent militant, Isabella Blume, and Vandervelde continued to call the attention of the Belgians to these resolutions.

By the end of August 1936, all the major European powers had agreed to abide by the pact. Thereafter, despite the mounting barrage of evidence of German and Italian violations, the French, the British, and the Belgians continued to abide by its terms.

Belgian Socialist Henri Rolin wrote to Vandervelde at the beginning of September assessing Léon Blum's pioneering role in supporting the Nonintervention Pact as "heavy with responsibility."⁵³ Just weeks after Blum had assumed power as the first Socialist prime minister of France, Spanish prime minister José Giral had appealed to the French Popular Front for military assistance and arms shipments to help suppress the coup of the Spanish generals. Although Blum at first acquiesced, pressure from the British government and from the Radicals within his own government forced him to relent during the first week of August and support the pact.⁵⁴ Despite definitive proof of Italian intervention on the side of the generals, the majority of the French cabinet urged the prime minister to secure an international agreement isolating the Spanish war. Blum listened, fearing that a split within his cabinet would immobilize it and jeopardize this first experiment in Socialist rule.

The former Italian ambassador to France, Count Carlo Sforza, unsuccessfully prodded Blum to renounce the Nonintervention Pact and intervene. Sforza wrote in frustration to Vandervelde that the large nations were shrinking inward in the face of danger, so it was up to the small nations of Europe to act as their conscience.⁵⁵ Vandervelde agreed. He reminded his audiences, readers, and correspondents during the summer of 1936 that an unchecked escalation of aggression, not unlike what was

53. Henri Rolin to Vandervelde, 11 September 1936, Archives Emile Vandervelde III/F/63, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

54. For more information on Blum's decision, see Joel Colton, *Léon Blum, Humanist in Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966); Jean Lacouture, *Léon Blum* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); Dante A. Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Helmut Gruber, *Léon Blum, French Socialism, and the Popular Front: A Case of Internal Contradictions* (Cornell, N.Y.: Western Studies Program, 1986); and Arthur H. Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of Washington, D.C., 1960).

55. Comte Sforza to Vandervelde, 28 May, Archives Emile Vandervelde V 1047, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.



Figure 17 At the International with Léon Blum in Paris, 1933. Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging

happening in Spain had led them all into war in 1914.⁵⁶ As the first victim of the last war, Belgium had a special responsibility to prevent another war, he argued. That meant intervening to protect the Spanish republic from the fascist aggressors. The Nonintervention Pact seemed a grievous violation of the series of international agreements that he had negotiated over the last decade. At the heart of Europe, Belgium could never be neutral, Vandervelde asserted.

In September Spaak lashed out at the criticism from within his own party of his foreign policy. He complained especially about *Le Peuple's* columns depicting the agony of Spanish children alongside descriptions of the Nonintervention Pact.⁵⁷ Spaak adamantly defended the government's policy toward Spain. De Man joined in, blaming the editors of *Le Peuple* for sowing dissension within the ranks of the Belgian Socialists. Vandervelde guarded his silence, explaining that he was suffering from a crisis of conscience.

Vandervelde pledged to remain within the government as long as Van

56. Emile Vandervelde, notes for a speech, Archives Emile Vandervelde V 733, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

57. Paul Henri Spaak, Meeting of the Direction syndicale and the Bureau, 10 September 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 220, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

Zeeland did not ask him to abandon his principles and as long as he could continue to speak out for the Spanish. According to Vandervelde, he did challenge the government's policy from within. Spaak, however, later claimed that Vandervelde never even hinted at his disapproval of Belgian foreign policy during cabinet sessions. Meanwhile, in public meetings Vandervelde fervently defended the Spanish republic, but he never directly attacked Belgian government policy.

Through the summer and early fall, Vandervelde tried to avoid public confrontations with the government as it developed a foreign policy. In response to governmental initiatives on defense, he promised Van Zeeland that, while he would not block them, he also would not support them. The Parliament could serve as the final judge. At a cabinet session over which he presided, King Leopold defined what he called a foreign policy of "independence" in some detail. Vandervelde, by now almost completely deaf and attached to a cumbersome amplification device, signaled his intention to speak as soon as the king finished. But when Vandervelde stood up, attached to a myriad of cords, he lurched forward, falling to his knees in front of the king. According to Jaspar, the scene resembled a Marx brothers' comedy.⁵⁸ De Man laughed so hard at the spectacle that he began to cry. Once Vandervelde had regained his composure, and before many of the other ministers had recovered theirs, Jaspar recalled, Vandervelde rose to deliver an elegant analysis of the king's speech, which Jaspar applauded for breaking "conventions."⁵⁹ He moved that the speech be published. The Socialist ministers, including Vandervelde, also tentatively promised the king their support in his attempt to reinforce Belgium's defense.

Discussion of Belgian foreign policy dominated the October 1936 congress of the Belgian Socialists. In presenting the official report on Spain, Vandervelde reminded his colleagues that the International had proclaimed the necessity for Socialists "to demonstrate an active sympathy for all those who struggle in other countries for the cause of democracy and liberty."⁶⁰ Henri Rolin then asked the Socialist ministers whether they were showing an "active sympathy" for the Spanish.⁶¹ What had they done, he asked, besides send sweaters while the fascists armed the rebels fighting to defeat the Spanish republic? Vandervelde replied tactfully that that was a question for the government. He added, however, that perhaps it was

58. Jaspar, *Souvenirs sans retouche*, p. 226.

59. See also Emile Vandervelde, *Carnets, 1934-1938* (Paris: Editions Internationales, 1966), p. 36.

60. Vandervelde, *Carnets*, p. 39.

61. Henri Rolin, Congress, October 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau and van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 435, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

time for a Socialist congress to give some direction to that government.⁶² The party, to Vandervelde's great satisfaction, then voted to commend the International's condemnation of the Nonintervention Pact. Spaak responded that he felt like a prisoner not only of his enemies but of his own party.⁶³

After the congress, Prime Minister Van Zeeland wrote Vandervelde to express "the perplexity that I am experiencing in seeing a member of the government recommending an *active* sympathy for one of the parties struggling in the horrible civil war that is tearing Spain apart. The government unanimously adopted the politics of neutrality, as you know. I have difficulty understanding how a member of the government could recommend a different attitude to his own party."⁶⁴ Vandervelde had never before so openly challenged government policy.

Encouraged by Spaak, Van Zeeland embargoed arms shipments to Spain and outlawed the recruitment of volunteers for the International Brigades. Noting that all cabinet decisions on Spain were reported as unanimous, Vandervelde explained, "What goes unmentioned is the price at which this unanimity was achieved in an atmosphere of growing tension."⁶⁵ Vandervelde had sparred constantly with Van Zeeland as well as Spaak and de Man.

At a meeting of the Conseil général in December 1936, Vandervelde confessed that, although he wanted to remain within the government to accomplish his program in public health, he could not keep quiet when the issue of Spain came up.⁶⁶ His position within the government was becoming increasingly intolerable, he admitted. Even his decision to escort the heroine of the Spanish war, La Pasionaria, to the suburb of Heysel appeared to the public and the government alike as a challenge to Van Zeeland and Spaak's policy of neutrality, which Vandervelde clearly deplored.

Vandervelde's encouragement of the International's effort to recruit Belgian volunteers for the International Brigades enraged Van Zeeland, who invited Vandervelde to justify his defiance of government policy. Vandervelde answered that he had been forced to compromise over and

62. Ibid.

63. Paul Henri Spaak, Congress, October 1936, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 437, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

64. Paul Van Zeeland to Vandervelde, 24 October 1936, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 469, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

65. Vandervelde, *Carnets*, p. 41. See also Paul Van Zeeland to Vandervelde, 26 January 1937, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 709, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

66. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 14 December 1936, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 257, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

over again on military matters, but that he could not give in on what was for him a compelling question of conscience. He asked the Conseil général for permission to resign from the government. “Ever since Blum with tears in his eyes had consented to the politics of noninvolvement, I have literally been poisoned,” he explained.⁶⁷ How, he asked, could he continue as president of a Socialist party that belonged to the International and serve in a government that forbade the recruitment of volunteers for Spain? The Conseil refused, convincing Vandervelde to remain in his position and sending a compromise resolution written by Spaak to the government.

The debate over volunteers for the International Brigades reopened a difficult issue for the Socialists – alliances with the Communists. In February 1933 the Socialists had appealed to the Communists to work together and were rebuffed. A year and a half later, the Communists approached the Socialists to discuss a common front. On behalf of the Labour and Socialist International, Adler and Vandervelde accepted the invitation. The discussions between the two Internationals were so successful that other members of the Bureau responded with alarm, informing Vandervelde and Adler that they had overstepped their instructions to open a dialogue.⁶⁸ Many Socialist leaders, especially the Dutch, Scandinavian, and British delegates to the International, worried about the implications for the national parties of a common front between Socialists and Communists dictated by the Internationals. Within France, perhaps a popular front could work, but the conditions for such an alliance did not exist everywhere, they contended.⁶⁹

After the outbreak of the Spanish war, de Brouckère met again, though somewhat more hesitantly, with Cachin and Thorez of the French Communist Party to discuss the Spanish situation.⁷⁰ Within Belgium, those

67. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 14 December 1936, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 257, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

68. Correspondence and reports, marked “Strictly private,” in Labour and Socialist International 18/2/66 and 18/2/67, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England. Executive committee, 13–15 November 1934, Labour and Socialist International 18/2/31, Labour Party Archives, Manchester; and *Informations Internationales* 13 October 1934, Labour and Socialist International 18/1/2, Labour Party Archives, Manchester; Labour and Socialist International 18/1/21–49, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England.

69. In French papers, Vandervelde tried to explain the Belgian reluctance to join a common front and the need for the Communists to support their actions with words. In *Le Peuple* he took the opposite tack and called on the Belgians to recognize that there was more at stake than just supporting the government and keeping it from falling. Archives Emile Vandervelde K III 285, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; and Bureau and Comité syndical, 6 July 1937, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 268, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

70. 28 October 1936, Labour and Socialist International 18/5/12, Labour Party Archives, Manchester, England.

Socialists who supported the International's commitment to republican Spain began to cooperate with the Belgian Communists, their obvious allies after the Soviet refusal to sign the Nonintervention Pact.⁷¹ Spaak and de Man denounced the Young Guard for its collaboration with the Young Communists. But at the same time, to Spaak's greater alarm, the older leaders, including Vandervelde, signed joint petitions and appeared together with the Communists at rallies for Spain.⁷²

At the cabinet meeting on 25 January 1937, building tension over Spain finally came to a head. Vandervelde condemned the Belgian government's demand, presented by Spaak, that the Spanish republic pay a million-franc indemnity to the Belgians for the assassination of the Belgian diplomat stationed in Spain, Baron Borchgrave. De Man and Spaak accused Vandervelde of meddling in foreign affairs by meeting independently with the Spanish ambassador and of supplying articles critical of the government to *Le Peuple*. Vandervelde, who had always wanted to be foreign minister, was in effect defining his own foreign policy for Belgium following the dictates of the International, according to Spaak. Before the exchange between the three Socialists could be brought under control, de Man and Spaak also attacked Vandervelde's wife, Jeanne, who was employed by Vandervelde's ministry, as the source of his strong convictions.

Vandervelde subsequently answered Van Zeeland's summons to discuss the incidents. The prime minister reminded Vandervelde of all the times that he had stood alone in opposing a government decision.⁷³ Van Zeeland suggested that the spirit of collaboration that was required of a strong and effective governing team had been single-handedly destroyed by Vandervelde. Vandervelde agreed to leave the cabinet. This time, the Conseil général of the party accepted his resignation from the government.

The Socialist feud at the center of the cabinet inevitably spread to the party Bureau.⁷⁴ Spaak and Vandervelde had decided in advance not to divulge details of their dispute, but eventually they were revealed. Vandervelde insisted that he had resigned from the government over Spain. He was protesting Spaak's plan to sever relations with republican forces

71. Parti communiste de Belgique to Vandervelde and de Brouckère, 4 May 1937, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 687, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; and Bureau, 28 May 1937, Archives Emile Vandervelde V 781, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

72. Bureau, 22 January 1937, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 261, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

73. Van Zeeland to Vandervelde, 26 January 1937, Catalogue, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV, pp. 12–14, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

74. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 27 January 1937, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 262, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

in that country. Spaak said that the dispute over Spain was only a cover. He argued instead that Vandervelde had finally recognized that he was disrupting the government. De Man went further to charge that no political principles were involved in the Socialists' dispute – the disagreements in question were strictly personal. As the debate grew more heated, Vandervelde tried to shift the arena of discussion from the Bureau, where he realized his support was waning, to the Conseil général as a whole. Spaak prevented him from doing so, fearing that opening the debate over Spain in the Conseil would provoke a ministerial crisis and bring down the government. The aging Vandervelde now quarreled over issues on which he would have sought to compromise as a younger man. His friends noted the change in his temperament.

Vandervelde's resignation opened a discussion of Socialist policy toward Spain. Vandervelde was inundated by telegrams and letters of support.⁷⁵ Vilifying Spaak and de Man, they hailed Vandervelde as "the Socialist militant, full of internationalist spirit and courageous resolution."⁷⁶ Standing up for the forces of democracy in Spain, Vandervelde had single-handedly challenged the attempts to turn Belgian Socialism inward, they suggested. In response, one member of the Bureau complained that Vandervelde had become the flag bearer behind whom all those who opposed the politics of the government, including the Communists, rallied.⁷⁷

In contrast to the rest of the Belgian press, which fanned the flames of an unprecedented division within Belgian Socialist ranks, *Le Peuple* tried to play down the controversy. The change of minister was duly noted and that was all. The headlines of the front-page article announcing Vandervelde's resignation highlighted his calls for continued party unity and his support for the government.⁷⁸ There was no mention of Spain or of the cause of his resignation.

Not surprisingly, the controversy reverberated in Socialist circles beyond Belgium. In his article in the French Socialist paper *Le Populaire* entitled "Difficulties in the Belgian Workers' Party: The Real Causes of Vandervelde's Resignation," Louis Lévy contrasted Vandervelde's internationalism with the insular foreign policies of Van Zeeland, Spaak,

75. The dossier of telegrams is preserved in Vandervelde IV 714, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels. See also Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 622–625, 706–708, and 726, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

76. "X" to Vandervelde, 29 January 1937, Vandervelde IV 706, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

77. Jauniaux, 8 February 1937, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 263, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

78. *Le Peuple* 28 January 1937.

and de Man.⁷⁹ Lévy distinguished the policy of a Van Zeeland government that went so far as to jail volunteers for the International Brigades from Blum's more moderate attempt to abide by the terms of the Nonintervention Pact. In his own column in *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, Vandervelde, too, contrasted his internationalism with the "concentration nationale" of the Belgian government.⁸⁰

The reporting of the resignation in the International's official newsletter, *Information Internationales*, followed the same line. Friedrich Adler, the newsletter's editor and Vandervelde's colleague from the executive committee of the International, explained that Vandervelde had been forced to resign because he refused to abandon his Socialist principles merely to suit the demands of governmental participation. "Some of his party comrades, under the direction of Spaak and of Hendrik de Man, on the other hand, saw the alliance of the three Belgian parties [Socialists, Catholics, and Liberals] as a supreme national necessity and wanted to subordinate party action to that of the government," Adler concluded.⁸¹ Two weeks later, Adler acknowledged the uproar over the International's intervention in the Belgian dispute. He would have preferred that the resignation had not been necessary, he explained. Had Spaak and de Man shared Vandervelde's real commitment to Socialist principles, he suggested, Vandervelde would not have been forced to make such a decision. That explanation further infuriated Spaak and de Man, who called the Bureau to meet in urgent session to formulate a response. In their letter published in the March issue of the *Informations Internationales*, the Socialist ministers reminded Adler that all of the cabinet decisions concerning the Borchgrave affair had been unanimous.⁸² Again, they suggested, it was an internal Belgian affair, a personal dispute among Belgian Socialists.

But the controversy would not go away. De Brouckère as president of the International protested the inactive Bureau in an article in *Le Peuple*, an act that set off another storm of controversy.⁸³ At the 10 February

79. Louis Lévy, "Les Difficultés du Parti ouvrier belge: Les Causes réelles du départ de Vandervelde," *Le Populaire*, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 740, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

80. Emile Vandervelde, "Pourquoi je suis sorti du gouvernement Van Zeeland," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 1 February 1937.

81. *Information Internationales* 14, no. 4 (4 February 1937), de Man 452, Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

82. 5 March 1937, de Man 453, Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam; and De Block to Vandervelde, 20 February 1937, Vandervelde IV 715, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

83. Bureau, 5 February 1937, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 263, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

meeting of the Conseil général, Arthur Gailly warned that the dispute threatened to pull apart the party. "Rarely, or perhaps never, has the party known such grave hours as those we see today," he observed.⁸⁴

Vandervelde presented a detailed report on his resignation to the Conseil général. It was no secret that he had always been treated as the black sheep of the Van Zeeland government, Vandervelde began. Economic and social questions had been decided for the government in a small committee to which he was not privy. Vandervelde reiterated his declaration that he had resigned on 25 January, his seventy-first birthday, over Spain. But he also reminded the Conseil général that de Man had been calling for the rejuvenation of party leadership and the retirement of "an elderly man [who] no longer has the physical and intellectual force that a leader needs to lead."⁸⁵ When the Belgian Socialists had invited him back to serve as party president, he had been personally rejuvenated, Vandervelde countered. He did not consider himself old. The meeting closed with a vote of confidence in Vandervelde, asking him to continue as president of the party and once again accepting his resignation from the cabinet.

In an article in *Le Peuple*, "What Will Mr. Vandervelde Do Now?" Vandervelde assured his readers that he had only resigned from the government; he did not intend to retire from public life.⁸⁶ He would continue to fight for Socialism as he had for fifty years, he asserted. "I am an incorrigible. I have none of the 'moderation or flexibility' that is required of a statesman," he explained. "Perhaps as a result of senility, I also have none of the cerebral plasticity that seems to allow the new generations to adapt so quickly in response to the caprice of events."⁸⁷ Vandervelde had often mused that the young Socialists who had been on his left before the war had jumped over his centrist position in the 1920s. Ten years later they challenged him from the right. De Man was a particularly good example of that trend. He had abandoned the rigid orthodox Marxism of his youth to accuse Vandervelde in the 1930s of clinging to an outdated Marxism. Vandervelde noted that other Socialists had moved even further to the right, proclaiming fascist visions of national

84. Arthur Gailly, Conseil général, 10 February 1937, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 277, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

85. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 10 February 1937, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 277, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

86. Emile Vandervelde, "Que va faire Monsieur Vandervelde?" *Le Peuple* 7 February 1937.

87. *Ibid.*

rehabilitation.⁸⁸

In his memoirs, de Man observed that the Spanish civil war had forced Vandervelde to choose between being a Socialist and serving as a minister.⁸⁹ Twenty years earlier, when Vandervelde first joined the king's cabinet, he had assumed that the two were quite compatible. He defined the Belgian path of democratic socialism based on that assumption and justified it in a series of almost theoretical treatises. He remained in the Belgian government after the signing of the Versailles peace accord, even helping to stabilize the Belgian franc or, in his words, to keep the ship of Belgian capitalism afloat. It never occurred to Vandervelde, even in his wartime arguments with Huysmans, that he was not promoting international Socialism while serving as a Belgian minister. But two things happened in the 1930s to modify his view. Vandervelde had become more critical of national union governments based on the disillusionment of his 1925–26 experience and the subsequent paralysis of the Belgian Socialists. At the same time, de Man and Spaak had emerged to justify governmental participation almost as an end in itself. In Vandervelde's eyes they had abandoned the class struggle and internationalism just to keep the governmental coalition intact. Spaak later reminisced that his experience in the second Van Zeeland cabinet proved to him that he made a better statesman than he did a revolutionary.⁹⁰ He too had made a choice.

In the last decade of his life, Vandervelde proudly proclaimed himself "an incorrigible." If serving in the government meant abandoning Marxism, then he would return with contentment to an older tradition of protest. He would continue to speak out. Even if they stood as the last two Marxists in the Belgian Workers' Party, Vandervelde and de Brouckère would remind the Belgian Socialists of their international obligations.

In the midst of the controversy over his resignation, Vandervelde announced defiantly to the Bureau, "I will take up my responsibilities to pursue the politics of internationalism."⁹¹ Over the objections of de Man, the party Bureau agreed to send Vandervelde, Balthazar, and Huysmans to represent the Belgian Socialists at the Socialist International Conference on Spain scheduled to meet in London on 10 and 11 March 1937.

In London Vandervelde called on the International to demonstrate "the

88. Emile Vandervelde, "Quand le citoyen Benito Mussolini venait me faire la contradiction," *Le Peuple* 30 January 1938; and Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès extraordinaire*, 1933, p. 41.

89. De Man, *Herinneringen*, p. 220.

90. Paul Henri Spaak, *Combats inachevés* (Brussels: Fayard, 1969).

91. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 9 February 1937, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 264, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

courage to speak firmly and clearly . . . to declare that the politics of nonintervention has been an abominable dupery.”⁹² The majority of the delegates concurred with his assessment of the growing danger posed by fascist aggression and the need for international solidarity. They issued a stinging denunciation of the Nonintervention Pact. The congress also resolved to continue to pressure the national parties to heed the pleas of the Spanish republicans and renounce the pact.⁹³ Finally, they decided to organize a week of propaganda for Spain in the summer of 1937.⁹⁴ Even that relatively innocuous action alarmed Socialists in governing circles throughout Europe.

Vandervelde now devoted almost his full attention to Spain. Together with Louis de Brouckère and Camille Huysmans, he addressed gatherings ranging from university audiences to open-air assemblies at the Palais des Sports in Schaerbeek. He appealed through every possible channel to his fellow Socialists in Britain, France, and Belgium to renounce the Nonintervention Pact, which he charged, “is as rigorously applied by the one side as it is violated with impunity by the other.”⁹⁵ While the democratic governments enforced their embargoes, Italy and Germany cynically violated the pact and supplied Franco with arms and ammunition. Vandervelde castigated Spaak in parliamentary addresses.⁹⁶

The bombing of open cities in Spain especially outraged Vandervelde. After each new raid, he called the attention of Belgian audiences and readers to Franco’s attacks on civilian targets. With the assistance of German junkers he was carrying out “the collective assassination of innocent and unarmed populations with an inexplicable ferocity.”⁹⁷ The aerial attack on Guernica on market day, 26 April 1937, inspired Vandervelde to send an impassioned plea to Blum. “How long will the scandal [of nonintervention] be allowed to continue?” he asked. “Do I need to tell you, my dear friend, who as a prime minister have remained fully committed to your socialist principles, with what agonizing impatience the workers continue to ask [when the Socialists will intervene]? Must I remind you once more that we are looking to you to lead the democratic

92. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 13 March 1937.

93. *Ibid.*

94. On the activities of the Labour and Socialist International concerning Spain for the summer and fall of 1937, see Labour and Socialist International 4/16, 4/17, and 4/19, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.

95. Emile Vandervelde, “Au lendemain d’Almería. Ce que nous pouvons et ce que nous devons faire pour l’Espagne,” *Le Peuple* 6 June 1937.

96. *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 8 June 1937.

97. Emile Vandervelde, “Intervention italo-allemande en Espagne,” *Dépêche de Toulouse* 28 March 1938.

governments out of this quagmire?"⁹⁸ Vandervelde addressed the Belgian Parliament once again to cry out against the burning of the ancient Basque town and the machine-gunning of its civilian population.⁹⁹ Evoking the conditions endured by refugee populations fleeing the bombardment of Santander, he denounced "the democratic powers, small and large, [that] remain deaf to the heartrending appeals of the people in agony, to the most frightful of catastrophes."¹⁰⁰

Vandervelde questioned the proponents of neutrality, who continued to believe that "this endless chain of concessions and capitulations . . . is above all a question of saving peace."¹⁰¹ The Second World War had already begun, he answered them. As long as Hitler and Mussolini refused to abide by international law, there could be no peace, he explained; what passed for peace was only a deceptive illusion. How many more examples of aggression would the French, British, and Belgian governments require before they understood that totalitarian dictatorships and democracies could not coexist peacefully within Europe? Vandervelde asked. The time had come to act, Vandervelde proclaimed.¹⁰² The Socialists could not hide within their national borders forever.

In June 1937 the Labour and Socialist International convened an urgent meeting in Paris to discuss the war in Spain with the International Federation of Trade Unions. Chaired by de Brouckère, the two Internationals adopted the series of resolutions forwarded from Spain appealing for an international guarantee of the political and territorial independence of that country and a return to free trade so that Spain could obtain the arms it needed to defend its republic. The Internationals pledged to renew their efforts to convince the national governments to seek intervention by the League of Nations in the war in Spain. They reiterated their solidarity with the Spanish people.¹⁰³

Vandervelde defended the International's resolutions on Spain against increasing skepticism within the Belgian Bureau. He met their questions with all the passion of "a man who for twelve months has consecrated all

98. Emile Vandervelde, "En pensant à l'Espagne. Lettre ouverte à Léon Blum," *Le Peuple* 1 May 1937. On reactions to the destruction of Guernica, see Hubert Rutledge Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

99. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 25 May 1937, p. 1521.

100. Emile Vandervelde, "Santander," typed manuscript, Archives Emile Vandervelde III K313, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

101. Emile Vandervelde, "Will There Be War in 1938?" (Brussels, 1937), typed manuscript, Labour and Socialist International XVI, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.

102. Emile Vandervelde, "Espagne! Espagne!" *Dépêche de Toulouse* 18 February 1937.

103. *Information Internationales*, 28 June 1937, Labour and Socialist International 20/1/28, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.

of his moments of reflection and meditation to the large drama that is being played out over there and in which are engaged not only the liberties of Spain, but also those of Europe and the world.”¹⁰⁴ Spaak in turn denounced the International and Belgium’s representatives to it. He questioned the efficacy of the League of Nations as well. Every discussion of the International brought new charges from Bureau members against de Brouckère and Vandervelde for failing to defend the Belgian government at meetings of the executive committee of the International. Isabella Blume, who supported Vandervelde and de Brouckère, reminded the Belgian Socialists that they had never sent a woman as part of their delegation to the International all the while that women were playing a leading role in the defense of liberty in Spain.

Despite protests from Socialists sitting as ministers in their governments, *Information internationales* continued to print reports of the International delegates’ visits to Spain. The publication documented the slaughter of innocent women and children in Madrid by German aerial bombardment and noted ironically that all the while “Comrade Blum and Mr. Eden congratulate each other on the great advantages of their policy.”¹⁰⁵ *Le Peuple* also featured articles on Spain contributed by Socialist activists Isabella Blume, Jean Delvigne, and Louis de Brouckère as well as Vandervelde. The Spanish were no longer fighting a civil war, they all argued; Spain was under siege from fascist forces.

In *La Dépêche de Toulouse* Vandervelde contrasted the courage and resolution of the International with the timidity of the French and Belgian governments.¹⁰⁶ He realized that the International’s condemnation of the Nonintervention Pact troubled the Socialist ministers in Paris and Brussels. Spaak too alluded to the irreconcilability of the perspectives of the two groups of Socialists. No Socialist party with members sitting in a cabinet – not the French, the British, the Swedish, the Norwegians, or the Czechs – could possibly follow the reckless lead of the International, he concluded.

Vandervelde won his last victory within the Belgian Workers’ Party in October 1937 when the Conseil général supported his resolution to the Socialist International condemning the Nonintervention Pact and urging increased aid for the Spanish republicans. Council members confirmed the resolution of the October 1936 congress and announced their support for the resolutions of the International. “At the present time, all of the

104. Emile Vandervelde, Conseil général, 13 July 1937, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 283, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

105. Jean Delvigne, *Information Internationales*, 29 December 1936, Labour and Socialist International 20/1/18, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.

106. Emile Vandervelde, “Au secours de l’Espagne,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 10 March 1938.

governments who claim to be democratic have a moral obligation which they can no longer avoid of assuring the victorious defense of Spain against an aggression that has been solemnly attested to by almost all the member states of the League of Nations, including Belgium," they declared.¹⁰⁷ After that, Spaak prevailed.

The Incurable Outsider

The second Van Zeeland government fell in the fall of 1937. Because the Socialists controlled the largest number of seats in Parliament, the king turned again to Vandervelde to initiate negotiations for a new coalition government. Vandervelde declined. The time had come to build a popular front of workers, he replied, looking to the French and the Spanish. He appealed to the Socialists to return to the opposition to build their support among Catholic and Socialist workers in rural as well as urban areas.

De Man immediately signaled his willingness to undertake negotiations on behalf of the Belgian Socialists. Disregarding Belgian political precedent, he bypassed the parties and appealed directly to individual politicians. The Catholics' alarm at de Man's tactic caused the king to intervene and forbid further raiding of the Catholic party. At the same time, irritated by de Man's recent attacks on their opposition to his plan, the Liberals as a block also refused to negotiate. Even within his own party, de Man met opposition. Vandervelde and Huysmans mustered a significant protest against de Man's negotiations.¹⁰⁸

The king ignored Spaak and asked Paul Emile Janson, a Liberal from the older generation, to build a cabinet from the remnants of the second Van Zeeland government. Vandervelde responded to the announcement of its formation by reiterating his call for a return to the true Socialist strategy of class struggle.¹⁰⁹

La Libre Belgique suggested facetiously that the Socialists were using the generational differences within the party to solve their perennial dilemma. They could now appeal to bourgeois voters and secure their place within the government while simultaneously strengthening their identity as the party of the proletariat. The moderate politicians Spaak and de Man had risen to prominence in the public arena, while "the big shots" de

107. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1937*, p. 5.

108. Vandervelde to De Block, 1 October 1937, Archives Emile Vandervelde V 805, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels. See also discussions in the Bureau, 23 September 1937, 27 October 1937, 30 October 1937, and 3 November 1937, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 270 and 274, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

109. Emile Vandervelde, *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 15 December 1937.

Brouckère and Vandervelde roamed behind the scenes rallying the workers with their inflammatory rhetoric and their pure Marxist doctrine.¹¹⁰

Articles in the Belgian press and political memoirs written in the 1930s alluded frequently to the generational gulf isolating the deaf, aging Vandervelde from the dynamic new leaders Spaak and de Man. But the Socialist party was not the only one that had come apart along generational lines. Vandervelde belonged to a generation of Belgian leaders who had attended the same universities before the turn of the century, sat over the years together in Parliament, and then served side by side in the wartime cabinet in exile. Throughout the 1920s, these Catholic, Liberal, and Socialist political leaders continued to dine together and to advise King Albert informally. They shared an enduring mutual respect. From the war they had learned to work together, but also, according to Vandervelde, they had come to understand the necessity of commitment to the cause of European democracy. For Vandervelde, Spain symbolized that cause.

The war seemed to have defined the unique outlook of the next generation as well. De Man told a party congress in 1938 that it was the war that had irreparably divided the generations. "Those men who were too old or who were not yet born," he reflected, did not understand the real horrors of war. "We would never be able to forget that sentiment of having been sent to our death by men who were incapable of organizing the peace."¹¹¹ Vandervelde personified for de Man a whole generation that had failed to prevent the First World War and that seemed quite willing to start a second. In his compelling explanation of the rift between Socialist generations, de Man forgot that de Brouckère had also volunteered to fight on the Yser.¹¹² Nevertheless, in the name of all the other veterans who had survived the last European war, de Man vowed never again to allow another such human massacre.

De Man recognized that the war also defined the gap that separated him from the next generation, which had been too young to fight in 1914. The Young Guard did not share his revulsion at violence. Experience had not made them pacifists; in fact, they aggressively repudiated his middle generation's foreign policy. They applauded Vandervelde's cranky courage when he resigned from the government and invited the idealistic internationalist to rally their gatherings in the name of the Spanish

110. *La Libre Belgique* 19 January 1938, Archives Emile Vandervelde V 1099, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

111. Hendrik de Man, Congress, 6 November 1938, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 455, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent. See also Peter Dodge, *Beyond Marxism: The Faith and Works of Hendrik de Man* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), pp. 38–41.

112. Guy Galand, *Louis de Brouckère* (Brussels: Editions Labor, n.d.).

revolutionaries. Vandervelde eagerly championed the impetuous younger generation as other Bureau members tried to discipline them for their alliances with the Communists and their outspoken resolutions on Spain. Vandervelde proudly preached tolerance for the young to de Man and Spaak.

In her analysis of the conflict between generations, Mieke Claeys Van Haegendoren concludes that “the Spanish question was actually only the occasion for a crisis that in reality was caused by fundamental differences over domestic policy, and even more, by disagreements over the future of Socialism itself.”¹¹³ Embedded within the arguments over Spain were issues of Socialist strategy – governmental participation or constructive opposition – and of theory – the class struggle or alliances with the middle class as well as nationalism or internationalism. Vandervelde, de Brouckère, de Man, Spaak, and all the other Belgian Socialists involved in these debates over Spain realized that they were in fact struggling over the definition of the future path of Belgian Socialism.

Of all the European Socialist parties, “the Belgian Workers’ Party has always been the most inclined to improvise according to the circumstances, to tell itself that all roads lead to Rome,” Vandervelde admitted. But, he added, “there is still, as strong as iron, this conviction that the class struggle is the ineluctable consequence of the antagonisms resulting from the private appropriation of monopoly capital.”¹¹⁴ Neither de Man nor Spaak would have agreed. According to de Man, the struggle for Spanish liberty and democracy so fervently championed by the elder statesman and his youngest followers paled before the more significant economic problems threatening Belgium itself. In interviews with various Belgian newspapers, de Man openly dismissed Vandervelde’s revolutionary international Socialism as an outmoded strategy appropriate in 1848 but not in 1938. The class struggle was irrelevant in the new Europe, he argued.¹¹⁵

It may well be that de Man’s socialist nationalism, which Vandervelde now compared to fascism, had shocked Vandervelde into returning to Marx.¹¹⁶ Although references to Marx had all but disappeared from Vandervelde’s writing in the 1920s, once again he returned to his definition of revolutionary reformism. I am “a revolutionary when it comes to goals, but a reformist when it comes to means,” he proclaimed.¹¹⁷ He continued to adapt Marx, he acknowledged, but after forty years he was still “the

113. Claeys Van Haegendoren, *25 Jaar Belgische Socialisme*, p. 376.

114. Emile Vandervelde, “La Lutte des classes est-elle un fait ou un moyen?” *Le Peuple* 23 January 1938.

115. See Marcel Brélaz, *Henri de Man, Une Autre Idée du socialisme* (Geneva: Editions des Antipodes, 1985).

116. Vandervelde, *Carnets*, p. 66.

117. Emile Vandervelde, “Où va le monde?” *La Revue Belge* 15 April 1938.

same socialist that I was in the time when we were the young ones. I have the good conscience to know that 'le Patron' of 1936 thinks no differently on essential questions than did the young Marxist of 1894 who in the middle of the electoral campaign proclaimed collectivism and cried 'Vive la Commune!'"¹¹⁸ This anchor was important to Vandervelde in the face of the challenge from de Man and Spaak.

The two Socialist strategies could not coexist within the party; they were based on fundamentally opposed theoretical foundations. Vandervelde had initially conceded that "useful compromises" could be made with a reasonable conservative leader, but, he concluded, in the end Socialism would only be achieved through class struggle.¹¹⁹ Although Socialists might need to participate in coalition governments during moments of national emergency, he cautioned that they needed to be prepared to withdraw when the crisis was resolved. The bourgeoisie obviously did not intend to help the party construct Socialism.

On the other side, de Man and Spaak attacked those Belgian Socialists who discussed the formation of a popular front with the Communists. De Man expected his plan to be implemented from within the government with the cooperation of the middle class as well as the workers. He needed a centralized, effective government to pull the Belgian economy out of its morass. Even parliamentary procedures impeded the efficient implementation of his plan. De Man's denigration of Parliament in turn troubled Vandervelde, an ardent proponent of parliamentary democracy.¹²⁰

By the beginning of 1938 it had become clear that de Man and Spaak had gained significant support within the Belgian Workers' Party. Even *Le Peuple* seemed to be shifting.¹²¹ Rather than reporting on the atrocities in Spain, most columns featured discussions of Spaak's commitment to preserve peace in Europe. As the spokesman for the minority as well as president, Vandervelde often found himself in an awkward position within the party. When questions of Spain or the government's budget came to a vote in the Bureau, Vandervelde usually tried to absent himself, often by traveling to meetings of the International. On other days, he wondered out loud whether he should step out for a cup of coffee when questions were presented for a vote. As president of the party, he could not continue to

118. Emile Vandervelde, "Le Déclenchement!" Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels.

119. Emile Vandervelde, "En marge d'un livre de Max Adler," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 23 January 1937.

120. See an article by Marc Ramplon, "Au secours du pouvoir," in *Combat* 6 February 1937, p. 37. Ramplon denounced the Socialist leadership for its lack of realism, pointing out that Vandervelde, who had remained so loyal to his doctrines, blocked real action. He called for hard, authoritarian measures in the opposition to fascism.

121. See Jan Craeybeckx, "De Spaanse burgeroorlog in de socialistische syndicale pers: een steekproef," in *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 18, no. 1-2 (1987): 357-92.

oppose the majority, but he was unwilling to vote against his conscience.¹²² In his absence, de Man and Spaak professed that they were tired of Vandervelde's "conscience." It continually asserted itself, disrupting party decisions. At a meeting of the Conseil général, "les petits militants" from Wallonia protested Vandervelde and de Brouckère's habit of visiting their cities, "like pilgrims on Sundays," to hold meetings in public with the Communists.¹²³ They were disrupting party unity.

In the midst of the party debates, Vandervelde left for Spain, together with his wife, Jeanne. He had done the same thing three decades earlier when he journeyed to the Congo to avoid voting against the party in Parliament. To Vandervelde, Spain symbolized the revolutionary struggle for democracy that he had championed throughout his life.¹²⁴ The Socialists participating in their national governments would share a heavy burden of responsibility if the Spanish democrats were defeated by the fascists, Vandervelde charged. By remaining silent, they would be helping to asphyxiate the revolution of the Spanish people.

On the eve of his departure for Spain, Vandervelde submitted an article to *Le Peuple*, titled "Revolutionary Evolution," in which he reiterated his commitment to Marxist revolution. If the Spanish republic triumphed, it would demonstrate an important shift toward democracy and socialism, he asserted.¹²⁵ But, the Spanish needed reinforcement to help them to withstand the onslaught of foreign tyranny. He reminded European Socialists of Marx's buoyant optimism and called on them to come to the aid of the Spanish people's revolutionary struggle against fascism. Vandervelde vowed to keep his faith in revolutionary reform. No matter what the Belgian Socialists chose to do, he pledged that he would not abandon the Spanish people.

Vandervelde recorded his impressions of his trip to Spain in his last book, *Ce que nous avons vu en Espagne*, and in open letters to *Le Peuple* and *La Dépêche de Toulouse*.¹²⁶ He chronicled his visits with Jeanne to the International Brigades where the true spirit of internationalism flourished. He rejoiced. Revolutions rarely succeeded over night, he observed; the course of the Spanish revolution had not been smooth. But despite the intervention of the fascists, he predicted that the republicans

122. Emile Vandervelde, Bureau, 4 April 1938, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 296, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

123. Ibid.

124. Emile Vandervelde, "Karl Marx et la révolution espagnole," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 31 October 1936.

125. Emile Vandervelde, "L'Evolution révolutionnaire," *Le Peuple* 13 February 1938.

126. Emile Vandervelde, *Ce que nous avons vu en Espagne* (Paris: Le Comité international de coordination et d'information pour l'aide à l'Espagne républicaine, 1938).



Figure 18 Emile and Jeanne Vandervelde in republican trenches near Madrid, 1938. Institut Emile Vandervelde

would prevail.¹²⁷ Vandervelde was incapable of believing that the forces of good would not triumph over evil.

Vandervelde returned to Belgium full of hope. The left was cooperating within the International Brigades, he noted optimistically. There, Socialists, Communists, and anarchists were able to work together effectively – a novel contrast with the division that continued to fester even within the Socialist party in Belgium. For Vandervelde, who had always worked to promote unity, that contrast was significant.

Not surprisingly, Vandervelde reacted to de Man's resignation from the government in February and to the apparent failure of his plan with the satisfaction of a fulfilled prophet. The whole government then fell in May 1938. This time the king entrusted Spaak with the negotiations. Spaak was determined to build a tripartite government strong enough to act decisively and bring an end to the instability of the last years. Spaak did not pause to consult the party while he negotiated. Like de Man, he chose ministers who could govern independently of their parties. But unlike de Man, he got away with it. The Socialist press lauded his success.

Vandervelde desperately appealed to the Conseil général to protest that body's exclusion from the ministerial selection process and to call a congress to discuss the breach in party discipline.¹²⁸ Spaak was burying the class struggle under his politics of "socialist nationalism" and that spelled suicide for the Socialists, he argued. Despite his failing health, Vandervelde even rose in Parliament to denounce Spaak's "superparty" as an abrogation of Belgium's tradition of parliamentary democracy.¹²⁹ Never before had Vandervelde so publicly attacked another Socialist.

Vandervelde was also determined to challenge Spaak at the October 1938 Congress. At planning sessions for the congress, while organizers tried to discuss scheduling details, Vandervelde proposed resolutions reaffirming the class struggle as the founding principle of the Socialist Party. He also called for the congress to recognize the sovereignty of the International.¹³⁰ De Man responded by urging the Belgian Workers' Party

127. Emile Vandervelde, *Les Noticias de Barcelone*, 12 February 1938, Archives Emile Vandervelde IV 639, Institut Emile Vandervelde.

128. Conseil général, 4 May 1938, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiches 315–320, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

129. Emile Vandervelde, *Annales parlementaires, Chambre des députés, Compte rendu analytique*, 18 May 1938, p. 1647.

130. Conseil général, 22 June 1938, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 318, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

to disregard altogether the resolutions of the International.¹³¹ Once again there were rumors that Vandervelde would resign the party presidency unless the congress supported his position on Spain.

In 1938, the Belgian Socialist debate over Spain centered on the government's policy toward what Vandervelde denounced as "the insurrectional junta of Burgos," led by Francisco Franco. At first, in March 1938, Spaak promised not to dispatch a Belgian commercial representative to Franco's government in Burgos. But under pressure from the Catholics as well as Belgian industrialists, Spaak announced his intention to send the delegate to Burgos after all. Outraged that a Belgian Socialist would help to establish the dictator who was crushing the Spanish republic, Vandervelde angrily protested Spaak's decision.¹³² During the summer of 1938, Socialists who had previously remained uninvolved in the debate were drawn into the controversy over Burgos.

Despite the charged atmosphere and his minority position, Vandervelde was asked and agreed to serve as reporter on international affairs at the 1938 congress. He recognized his obligation "to bring together, if possible, the different points of view." That had been his habitual calling within the party. "Nevertheless," he added, echoing speeches he had made on the Congo: "I reserve the right to express my personal opinions if that becomes necessary."¹³³ That is what he had done in the 1907 Congo debate as well. Vandervelde reaffirmed the Belgian Socialists' commitment to the internationalism of Locarno and the League of Nations, pointedly reminding Spaak of the Belgian Socialists' resolutions of October 1937 and the International's position. How, he asked again, could Spaak recognize the junta that had bombed open cities, killing and wounding scores of innocent Spanish people?

Then Spaak took the podium. In what one of Spaak's biographers has called the most brilliant speech of his political career, Spaak convinced the congress that Burgos did not really pose a question of Socialist honor. Rather, he argued, the Socialists were voting whether to provoke a ministerial crisis that would bring down the Socialist government or to support Spaak's program.¹³⁴ The annual congress responded to the debate by voting confidence in the Socialist ministers.

In Vandervelde's very conspicuous absence from Bureau meetings after

131. Bureau, 10 October 1938, *Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij*, Microfiche 301, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

132. See, for example, Emile Vandervelde, "Le POB acquiescera-t-il à l'envoi d'un représentant à Burgos?" Archives Emile Vandervelde III K 274, Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels; and Emile Vandervelde, "La Question de Burgos," *Le Peuple* 22 May 1938.

133. Emile Vandervelde, *Compte rendu, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès annuel 1938*.

134. J. Willequet, *Paul Henri Spaak* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1975), p. 65.

the congress, discussion turned to the problem posed by President Vandervelde as the outspoken leader of the antigovernment minority. Spaak complained of the frustration he endured as prime minister of a party whose president openly attacked his policies. A number of Bureau members reported that they had heard new rumors that Vandervelde intended to resign. Most of them expressed again their impatience with Vandervelde's persistent threats to resign. "Le Patron' has reached the age when he likes this sort of demonstration," Wauters acknowledged.¹³⁵ But no one from the Bureau would volunteer to seek him out, either to invite him to return or to reprimand him. Meanwhile, de Man, who had unsuccessfully challenged Spaak at the congress over the government's conservative economic policy, stormed out of the Bureau meeting. He would need to be appeased as well.

Vandervelde continued to wage his attack on government policy in the Socialist press. His exchange with de Man in *Le Peuple* amounted to a veritable duel.¹³⁶ Vandervelde appealed to Belgian Socialists to break away from the politics of governmental portfolios. He asked whether the congress would send a delegation to represent the Belgian Socialists at the International. To do so would implicitly support the International's condemnation of the Munich Pact, which the Socialists in the Belgian government had recently approved. If no delegates were sent, however, the Belgians would cement their isolation from the International Socialist community.¹³⁷

When the Belgian Socialists assembled for yet another congress on 5 December to resolve the differences over Spain, Vandervelde confided his despair. "I am worried, anguished, and surprised by certain political directions that I see among us," he acknowledged. "We have already given in. We gave in again yesterday in the Senate. Do not give in on what I hold dearest to my heart," he pleaded.¹³⁸

Vandervelde died suddenly on 27 December 1938. In his last article for *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, published on 24 December, Vandervelde asked to be remembered as one of the few who still had hope for the future.¹³⁹ He asked to be remembered for remaining faithful to his Socialist

135. Wauters, Bureau 14 November 1938, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 304, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

136. *Le Peuple* 1 and 3 November 1938.

137. Emile Vandervelde, *Le Peuple* 23 October 1938.

138. Emile Vandervelde, Parti ouvrier belge, Congrès, 5 December 1938, Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau an van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij, Microfiche 467, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

139. Emile Vandervelde, "Une Autre Société des Nations," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 24 December 1938.

The Democratic Socialism of Emile Vandervelde

ideals to the very end. With his last struggle for Spain, he did that.

After Vandervelde's death, the Belgian Socialists shifted unequivocally away from the political internationalism that had characterized their party since the founding of the Second International. Vandervelde's wife, Jeanne, wrote to the Spanish Socialists that when the Belgian Socialists voted in January to recognize the regime in Burgos, "it was as if I lost Vandervelde a second time. I swear to you, he never would have accepted that."¹⁴⁰ Hendrik de Man succeeded Vandervelde as president of the Belgian Workers' Party.

140. Jeanne Emile Vandervelde to Parti socialiste espagnol, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent.

Conclusion

Reform could be revolutionary, Emile Vandervelde explained. Reforms made the final achievement of socialism possible; they prepared the way for the revolution. With increasing confidence as he led the Socialists along the path toward social democracy, Vandervelde asserted that they were transforming capitalism from within and laying the foundations for socialism. He therefore condemned with increasing vehemence the violence espoused by revolutionaries on his left. Unlike the reformists, however, Vandervelde never assumed that socialism would be constructed simply by piling one reform on top of another.

Vandervelde, in fact, ignored the revolution-reform debate that still preoccupies most historians of European Socialism. From his position in the middle, the debate seemed senseless. Vandervelde defined revolution as the replacement of an existing social order with a completely new one.¹ Therefore, Socialism was by definition a revolutionary doctrine, no matter how reformist the strategy advocated by its leaders. “We are at one and the same time reformists and revolutionaries,” Vandervelde declared as he mapped out his democratic socialist strategy at the center of the European Socialist movement.²

Vandervelde’s socialism was “a grand, humane conception of life that would be realized by the emancipation of labor,” his friend Louis de Brouckère explained.³ He did not allow most ideological differences, which he dismissed as mere questions of strategy, to separate him from comrades who shared his dedication to this broadly conceived socialist ideal. In essence, comradeship, not a particular doctrine, defined European Socialism for Vandervelde.

That conception of his mission at least partially explains Vandervelde’s search for compromise at the center of both the Belgian Workers’ Party and the Second International. It also accounts for his bitter repudiation of Lenin and Bukharin in the 1920s and of Spaak and de Man in the 1930s.

1. Emile Vandervelde, *L’Alternative capitalisme d’état ou socialisme démocratique* (Brussels: L’Eglantine, 1933), p. 37.

2. Emile Vandervelde, “Les 21 conditions de Moscou,” *Réalisations socialistes, Notre action d’après-guerre* (Brussels: L’Eglantine, 1923).

3. Louis de Brouckère cited in Robert Abs, *Emile Vandervelde* (Brussels: Labor, 1973).



Figure 19 Emile Vandervelde with Louis de Brouckère, 1936. Institut Emile Vandervelde

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He could not dismiss their ideologies as mere strategical differences. He could not bring these Socialists on his left and his right into the fold. In addition, as Vandervelde aged, he became less tolerant of ideological differences and was clearly less willing to play the role of mediator among Socialists.

Throughout his life, Vandervelde sought companionship in the bourgeois circles that had nurtured him as well as among the Socialist leaders. When the war decimated the intimacy of Socialist comradeship, Vandervelde found solace in the company of other government leaders, mostly Belgians, who shared his education and culture. That willingness to fraternize with members of the bourgeoisie opened him to occasional criticism from workers in the party. He countered, whenever such attacks arose, that the fact that he owned a large house constructed around a monumental personal library made him no less a Socialist. It did, however, distinguish his socialism and that of the other European Socialist leaders raised in the midst of the European bourgeoisie from the socialism of the proletariat.

The Socialist strategy that Vandervelde defined between reform and revolution was predicated on his unshakable optimism. The humanitarian conviction that oppression had to be eliminated without creating any additional suffering was the very foundation of Vandervelde's commitment to socialism. Jean Jaurès, drawing upon the French revolutionary tradition, shared that commitment. Only if socialism were achieved democratically would the revolution generate a decisive and humane social transformation. The strategies and goals of democratic socialism and social democracy were entwined.

Over time, as Vandervelde responded to colonialism, war, and revolution, his strategy evolved, edging closer to reformism and away from revolution. He acknowledged that evolution of his views, but not the moderation of his goals that necessarily accompanied it. Unlike reformists in France, Germany, and, above all, Britain, Vandervelde argued that he remained a committed Marxist.

When he embarked on the democratic socialist path, Vandervelde cited lengthy passages from Friedrich Engels to justify the Belgian campaign for universal manhood suffrage. The time had come to move beyond bayonets to the ballot box, he argued. The Paris Commune had proven the vulnerability of the traditional revolutionary tactics of the barricades. The election of the Belgian Socialists to Parliament in 1894, coupled with the defeat of the 1905 Russian revolution, confirmed Vandervelde's faith in legislation and his fear of violence. The Belgian Workers' Party flourished at the geographic center of the Second International during this "heroic period." In Vandervelde's words, the Belgian Socialists conciliated "the ritual formulas of revolutionary intransigence and a legal, reformist

practice.”⁴

The First World War propelled the European Socialists, and most especially the Belgian Workers' Party, along the path toward social democracy.⁵ Vandervelde triumphantly proclaimed after the Belgians had achieved universal manhood suffrage that “the socialist conquest of power by legal means no longer appears to be chimerical.”⁶ Even in 1930, as Socialists throughout Europe floundered between governmental participation and uncertain opposition, Vandervelde confidently asserted that the socialist revolution was near at hand.⁷

Vandervelde continued throughout his long career to look to Marx's dialectic as an explanation of historical change and as a guide to the socialist revolution. He read and frequently cited *Capital*. But it should be noted that Vandervelde had assimilated Marx without Hegel. His Marxism was influenced, rather, by the biological determinism of Charles Darwin. Often, Vandervelde would link the two great thinkers in his explanations of historical progress.

Vandervelde adapted Marx's dialectic. He recognized the significance of class struggle as the driving force of history. But class struggle did not necessarily imply class warfare, according to Vandervelde. He explained that the evolution of ideas and material conditions were inextricably intertwined, but he rejected the rigidly materialist interpretations that dismissed philosophy as the mere reflection of economic determinants.

Vandervelde was especially critical of those Marxists who had adopted the *Communist Manifesto* as a sort of catechism. Marx had revised his own theories, he reminded them. In particular, the revolutionary fervor that inspired Marx's pamphleteering in 1848 had all but disappeared by the time Marx contributed his sober analysis of the Paris Commune. Why then, Vandervelde asked, should Marxists fifty years later slavishly reiterate strategies that had been developed in the middle of the nineteenth century? Marxism, Vandervelde explained, should “always be going beyond itself, forever adapting itself to the extreme variety of societal conditions, to the ongoing transformation of systems of production, and to the profound changes in political and social institutions that have in part been the work of the workers.”⁸ In the 1930s, Vandervelde heralded the rediscovery of the works of the young Marx, which revealed yet another, more humane,

4. Vandervelde, *L'Alternative*, pp. 219–20.

5. Here, however, I would not agree with Belgian historian Marcel Liebman, who considers the war as a great divide that marked the end of pragmatic centrist socialism in Belgium.

6. Emile Vandervelde, *Faut-il changer notre programme?* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1923), p. 111.

7. Emile Vandervelde, “Une Révolution sociale,” *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 4 April 1930.

8. Emile Vandervelde, *Les Doctrines sociales actuelles* (Brussels: Lamertin, 1930).

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revolutionary thinker.⁹

Vandervelde's theories were undeniably eclectic. His studies of Darwin's evolutionary theory first led him to Marx's dialectic; thereafter his voracious appetite for new historical, social, artistic, and economic analyses shaped his adaptation of democratic socialism to the European society that seemed to be changing so rapidly and dramatically around him.

The range of Vandervelde's reading was encyclopedic. Most frequently, he quoted passages from Marx and Engels as well as Kautsky, Jaurès, and Bernstein. But citations in his columns, articles, and public addresses also regularly included idiosyncratic English Socialists such as William Morris and Sidney Webb, historians such as George Trevelyan and Jules Michelet, sociologists such as Vilfredo Pareto, and novelists such as Honoré de Balzac and Emile Zola. According to one reviewer, hard-pressed to categorize Vandervelde's work, "Wherever there was life, he was eager to experience it. Daily newspapers and thick tomes, conversations and lectures, voyages and statistics" all informed his thought.¹⁰ According to Jef Rens, a young Socialist during the 1930s, Vandervelde "read a great deal and read rapidly, always seeming to feel the need to share with the workers, whether through speeches or in articles, what had impressed him or what he thought would be useful for them or would enrich them."¹¹

In his preface to Jean Maillard's collection of sketches of Vandervelde, Belgian writer Auguste Vermeylen tried to explain Vandervelde's complexity. "Not only in his dynamic personality, in his constant orientation to action, but in the suppleness with which he perceives the finest movements of life, in his humor, his fine perception of nuances, in the spiritual independence that prevents him from ever taking shelter behind a system," Vandervelde differed from other scholars as well as political leaders.¹² He devised an ever evolving practice, not a system.

Vandervelde's own secretary, Auguste DeWinne, suggested rather enigmatically that Vandervelde's was a "Marxism à la belge. Far from rigid, it took account of the reality and practice of his time."¹³ "Of all the statesmen living in Europe, Emile Vandervelde is the one who best knows how to unite in his spirit loyalty to his ideal and the realistic preoccupation imposed by life," Italian diplomat Count Carlo Sforza observed. "He never forgets what he wants, but as a Belgian, he does not go building castles in

9. Emile Vandervelde, "La Jeunesse de Karl Marx," *La Dépêche de Toulouse* 31 July 1934.

10. A. Rossi, "L'Alternative," *Monde* 3 June 1933.

11. Jef Rens, *Rencontres avec le siècle* (Paris: Gembloux, Duculot, 1987), p. 30.

12. Auguste Vermeylen, Preface, *Emile Vandervelde vu par Jean Maillard* (Paris: L'Eglantine, 1932).

13. Auguste DeWinne, in Louis de Brouckère et al., *Emile Vandervelde, L'Homme et son oeuvre* (Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1928), p. 122.

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the air.”¹⁴ At the very center of the European Socialist movement, Vandervelde the pragmatist never abandoned his conviction that European society was moving inexorably toward the socialist revolution. He was a man of action who understood theory or, in the words of Swedish political scientist Carl Höjer, who “knew how to bring together the resolution of fundamental doctrines and a great flexibility in practice.”¹⁵ In short, Vandervelde struggled to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable.

Vandervelde never acknowledged the tension between Marx’s revolutionary ideals and the reality of the pragmatic strategy of the democratic socialists. Even at the end of his life as he reconsidered the path along which he had guided European Socialism for almost half a century, Vandervelde never saw the ultimate contradictions in a democratic socialism that sought to realize its lofty ideal through a strategy of compromise.

For fifty years, as the Socialists had proceeded by degrees toward social democracy, the promise of reforms that could be achieved from within the existing system had grown. The closer the Socialists came to the revolution, the less necessary that revolution appeared. The democratic socialists had therefore inevitably moved further away from revolution at each critical juncture along the course they charted. The riddle posed by this “revolutionary reformism” is all the more compelling today.

14. Carlo Sforza, *Les Bâtisseurs de l'Europe moderne* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1931), p. 265.

15. Carl Höjer, *Le Régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Botryckeri Ab, 1946), p. 51.

Chronology

- 1866 Birth of Emile Vandervelde in Brussels
- 1881 Matriculation, Université libre de Bruxelles
- 1885 Graduation with a degree in law
- 1886 Participation in first demonstration of workers
- 1887 Return to the Université libre de Bruxelles
- 1887 Organization of the Cercle des étudiants et anciens étudiants socialistes by Vandervelde and Louis de Brouckère
- 1889 Second International Paris congress
- 1890 Demonstration for universal manhood suffrage in Brussels
- 1890 Application of King Leopold to Belgian parliament for a loan to subsidize colonial expenditures
- 1891 Vandervelde's first article in *Le Peuple*
- 1891 Second International Brussels congress
- 1891 Publication of *Enquêtes sur les Associations professionnelles d'artisans et d'ouvriers en Belgique*
- 1893 General strike for universal manhood suffrage in Belgium
- 1894 Election of twenty-eight Socialists, including Vandervelde, to Belgian parliament
- 1894 Charter of Quaregnon
- 1895 Reporting of atrocities in Congo
- 1896 Second International London congress
- 1897 Publication of *L'Evolution régressive en biologie et sociologie*
- 1897 Publication of *La Question agraire*
- 1898 Publication of *Parasitisme organique et parasitisme social*
- 1900 Second International Paris congress
- 1900 Election of Vandervelde as president of the International Socialist Bureau of the Second International
- 1901 Marriage of Emile Vandervelde and Lalla Speyer
- 1901 Publication of *Le Collectivisme et l'évolution industrielle*
- 1901 Publication of *L'Exode rural et le retour aux champs*
- 1902 General strike for universal manhood suffrage in Belgium
- 1904 Second International Amsterdam congress
- 1905 Election of Camille Huysmans to replace Victor Serwy as secretary of the International Socialist Bureau

Chronology

- 1905 Corroboration of British charges by Leopold's own Congo commission
- 1906 Publication of Félicien Cattier's *Etude sur la situation de l'Etat independant du Congo*
- 1906 Parliamentary discussion of annexation of the Congo
- 1907 Second International Stuttgart congress
- 1908 Vandervelde's first voyage to the Congo
- 1908 Belgian parliamentary vote to annex the Congo
- 1909 Publication of *Les Derniers Jours de l'état du Congo*
- 1910 Second International Copenhagen congress
- 1911 Publication of *La Belgique et le Congo*
- 1912 Second International Basle congress
- 1913 General strike for universal manhood suffrage in Belgium
- 1914 Final meeting of International Socialist Bureau
- 1914 Declaration of war: Vandervelde joins government as a minister of state
- 1914 Move of International Socialist Bureau from Brussels to the Hague under the direction of Camille Huysmans
- 1915 Meeting of Socialists from Allied nations in London
- 1916 Naming of Vandervelde to cabinet as minister of procurement
- 1917 Vandervelde first trip to Russia
- 1917 Stockholm congress
- 1917 Publication of *Trois Aspects de la Révolution russe*
- 1918 Establishment of universal manhood suffrage in Belgium
- 1918 Publication of *Le Socialisme contre l'état*
- 1918 Naming of Vandervelde as minister of justice in Delacroix cabinet
- 1919 Election of seventy Socialists to Belgian parliament
- 1919 Versailles peace conference
- 1919 Socialist congress Bern
- 1919 Formation of Labour and Socialist International, Vienna Union, and Third International
- 1919 Labour and Socialist International Lucerne congress
- 1920 Labour and Socialist International Geneva congress
- 1921 Resignation of Belgian Socialists from tri-partite government
- 1922 Meeting of three Internationals in Berlin
- 1922 Defense of Socialist Revolutionaries in Moscow
- 1923 Labour and Socialist International Hamburg congress
- 1923 Publication of *Faut-il changer notre programme? Avant-projet de révision*
- 1925 Naming of Vandervelde as minister of foreign affairs in Pouillet-Vandervelde government
- 1925 Treaty of Locarno
- 1925 Labour and Socialist International Marseilles congress

Chronology

- 1926 Fall of Pouillet-Vandervelde government
- 1926 Naming of Vandervelde as minister of foreign affairs in Jaspard government
- 1926 Resignation of Vandervelde from International Socialist Bureau
- 1927 Marriage of Emile Vandervelde and Jeanne Beeckman in Paris
- 1927 Speech at Tribomont-les-Verviers
- 1927 Resignation of Socialists from Jaspard government
- 1928 Publication of *Le Marxisme a-t-il fait faillite?*
- 1928 Labour and Socialist International Brussels congress
- 1929 Election of Vandervelde as president of Labour and Socialist International
- 1929 Vandervelde's trip to Palestine
- 1930 Return to Russia in Socialist delegation
- 1931 Labour and Socialist International Vienna congress
- 1931 Voyage to China
- 1932 Miners' strike in the Borinage
- 1933 Labour and Socialist International Paris meeting
- 1933 De Man's Plan du Travail/Plan van de Arbeid
- 1933 Publication of *L'Alternative: Capitalisme d'état ou socialisme démocratique*
- 1935 Naming of Vandervelde as minister without portfolio in Van Zeeland cabinet
- 1936 Naming of Vandervelde as first minister of public health in second Van Zeeland cabinet; Henri Spaak as minister of foreign affairs
- 1936 Antwerp dock workers' strike
- 1936 Nonintervention Pact
- 1937 Resignation of Vandervelde from Van Zeeland government
- 1938 Vandervelde's trip to Spain
- 1938 Publication of *Ce que nous avons vu en Espagne*
- 1938 Formation of Spaak government
- 1938 Debate over Burgos in Belgian Workers' Party
- 1938 Death of Emile Vandervelde

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Institut Emile Vandervelde, Brussels

Most of Vandervelde's published works are available at the Institut. Some of Vandervelde's correspondence, notes for his speeches, photographs, newspaper accounts of his activities, and extensive miscellaneous documentation, including his files of newspaper clippings, are in the Institut's archives. In addition to the five original collections, there are two sets of new archives, one inventoried in 1984 and the other – a set of recently discovered boxes – awaiting inventory. All of the archives will be reclassified and catalogued in 1994–95. The typed manuscript of Vandervelde's secretary, Jules Messine, "Emile Vandervelde, Sa Vie et son oeuvre," is at the Institut.

The published records of the Belgian Workers' Party are available at the Institut as is a collection of monographs on Belgian Socialism.

Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent

The record books of the Belgian Workers' Party for the period 1898 to 1939 are preserved at the Archief and will soon be available on 468 microfiche cards. Lost since the Second World War, the "Algemene Verslagboeken van het Bureau en van de Landelijke Raad van de Belgische Werkliedenpartij" were discovered in a Brussels attic in 1991. They are an invaluable source for the debates of the International Socialist Bureau, the Conseil général, and the congresses of the Belgian Workers' Party. Also of interest for work on Vandervelde are the archives on Spain and the Banque Belge du Travail.

Special Archives, Central Archives, Moscow

Papers from a number of Belgian Socialists are to be found in these recently opened archives in Moscow. Unfortunately, the bundles of Vandervelde's correspondence were removed by the KGB and are reported missing from this invaluable collection.

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Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam

In this vast collection of the correspondence and official documentation of the Second International, I used the following series extensively: Hendrik de Man, Jules Guesde, Karl Kautsky, Kleine Korrespondenz Adler, Labour and Socialist International, Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale, Bureau socialiste international, and Deuxième Internationale. There is one small dossier on Vandervelde at the Instituut.

Camille Huysmans Archief, Antwerp

Shortly before his death, former secretary of the Second International Camille Huysmans invited French historian Georges Haupt to work with him on the archives of the Second International, which he had preserved in Antwerp. Georges Haupt wrote of this collection, "Taken together, the acts emanating from the executive committee and the Secretariat of the BSI, reveal a precise picture of the daily activity [of the Bureau] . . . These documents restore the interior face of Socialism, which has escaped our investigation."

The Huysmans archive's documentation of every phase of activity of the Second International, but especially of its executive committee, fills in the gaps left by the more formal sources in the archives in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, the collection is not inventoried. I am very grateful to Wim Geldolf of the Archief, Denise De Weerd of the Albertine Library, and Herman Balthazar, Governor of the Province of West Flanders, for granting me permission to work for several summers in the archives, as well as to the assistants who allowed me to call up each folio in the entire collection. The "I," "F" and "D" series will be especially useful to scholars of European Socialism.

Labour Party Archives, Manchester

Most of the records of the interwar Labour and Socialist International are preserved at the Labour Party Archives. The documentation on the International is extensive.

Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels

Of particular interest are the collections of papers for the ministries of Marcel Henri Jaspar, Henry Carton de Wiart, Jules Destrée, Jules Renkin, Prosper Poullet, and Charles de Broqueville. In the microfilm collection of the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique are the Papiers Morel,

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a collection that contains the correspondence between E. D. Morel and the Vanderveldes.

Katholiek Documentatie-en Onderzoekscentrum, Leuven

In addition to other sources documenting the other side of Vandervelde's frequent debates with Catholic political leaders, KADOC has a collection of brochures on the debate over the annexation of the Congo, and in particular the activity of missionaries.

Archives Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels

Vandervelde's career at the Université nouvelle is documented in his professorial dossier in the Brussels university archives.

Frans van Cauwelaert Archief, Antwerp

Located on the upper floor of the Archief en Museum voor Vlaams Cultuur en Leven, the van Cauwelaert Archief has some of Vandervelde and Frans van Cauwelaert's correspondence.

Archief en Museum voor Vlaams Cultuur en Leven, Antwerp

Some of Vandervelde's correspondence is preserved in the general collection.

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Interview

Elisabeth Hucklingbroich, granddaughter of the brother of Lalla Vandervelde, Brussels. I am grateful to Miss Hucklingbroich for sharing her memories of the Vandervelde household with me.

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