

lives in a climate which is sufficiently healthy to permit the rearing of white children, but insufficiently stimulating to create an enterprising and energetic race. The Creole looks to take life easily. He is not going to "hustle around" and learn new methods. Even when the absentee owner, mentally stimulated by residence in England, spends tens of thousands on new machinery, the man on the spot will not trouble to exert himself to get the best results out of this costly plant. His blood—corrupted by the climate—forbids exertion. Moreover, like all unenterprising persons, he resists enterprise on the part of others. The new Department of Agriculture in the West Indies, maintained and controlled by the Imperial Government, is by no means popular with the planters. It tries to teach them more than they want to know. The attempt made by Mr. Chamberlain to open up the Hinterland of British Guiana was blocked by the Colonial legislature. The sugar planters who dominate that body prefer to confine the colony to the fringe of land along the sea coast. The opening up of the interior might deprive them of their cheap labour.

It is this absence of enterprise that is killing the West India sugar industry, not Continental bounties. As a matter of fact most of the sugar produced in the West Indies goes to the United States where it is protected against bounty-fed sugar by the American countervailing duties. That portion at any rate of the West Indian sugar industry will not be benefited by the abolition of bounties, for it will lose its present protection against German and Austrian sugar in the American market. In any case, however, this trade with the United States is precarious, because it is at the mercy of the sugar trust. Even now the sale of low class "Muscovado" sugar to the States does not appear to pay so well as the sale of high class Demerara to the United Kingdom.

What the future will bring, it is impossible to predict, except negatively. The abolition of bounties will make but a slight difference in the selling price of sugar, because the industry is now so well established throughout the world that the withdrawal of the bounties will not greatly diminish production. The difference in price will certainly not be equal to the increased profit that the West Indian planters could now obtain by a more intelligent management of their business, but the intelligent management will certainly not be forthcoming from the present generation of planters.

HAROLD COX

THE GENERAL STRIKE IN BELGIUM, APRIL, 1902

It is impossible to give an adequate account from an economic point of view of the general strike which took place last April in Belgium without setting forth the political situation through which it was brought about. Nor are the effects of it on the course of industry, on

wages and on trade in general, of any consequence as compared with its political importance. So much is this the case, that the *Revue du Travail*, issued by the Belgian Labour Department, which publishes monthly statistics of strikes, refused to look upon this great labour movement as a strike properly so called, describing it as a "chômage (cessation of work, 'play') volontaire, étranger à tout désaccord entre les ouvriers et leurs patrons respectifs." The estimate is accurate, and is not dictated by administrative indolence, nor by the party spirit of opposed politics. But it is no less true that this colossal demonstration, whatever we may call it, interfered powerfully for some days with the functioning of certain essential organs of the national economy, and may be reckoned among the active methods of the Belgian trade-unions. To this extent it is of interest to the economist.

Agitation in Belgium for the extension of the franchise may be said to have begun twenty years ago, when, under the Frère-Orban ministry, the Radicals demanded a revision of the Constitution.

When, however, in 1893, a revision had been agreed to by the Catholic ministry headed by M. Beernaert, the movement received a check which seemed likely to last many years at least. The system of basing the electorate on the census was then replaced by the system now in force. The parliamentary votes rose in number from about 120,000 to over a million. Every Belgian citizen who had attained the age of twenty-five, and had resided for one year in the same commune, had the right to vote. This seemed nothing short of "manhood suffrage." But, with the object of "mitigating" or "organising" it, a supplementary vote was granted to any man, not under thirty-five years of age, having legitimate offspring and paying direct taxation of not less than five francs to the state, or to any man who either owned real estate to the value of 2,000 francs, or was a bond-holder in Belgian Government stock drawing an annual dividend of not less than 100 francs. And to any man who had had a complete course of secondary education, or was exercising a public function or profession requiring the qualification of secondary education, *two* supplementary votes were allotted.

There was thus a franchise of single, dual, and triple votes.

The result, of course, was that the greater part of the middle classes had two and three votes per head, while most of the working men had but one. Very many of them, nevertheless, received two votes, and still more among the peasantry, a fact which gave rise among the opposition to the saying, "vote plural, vote *rural*."

That the working classes benefited by this system of franchise, as compared with that which it superseded, is evident from the parliamentary election of 1894, following the revision of the Constitution, when some thirty representatives of the Labour party obtained a seat in the House.

These new members lost no time in denouncing the electoral machine as unjustly favouring the middle classes, whose supplementary votes

outbid and annihilated those of the masses. They demanded manhood suffrage "pure and simple," that is to say, a vote for every citizen over twenty-one years of age.

For a long time none but Socialists had demanded this fresh electoral reform. But when, in consequence of the introduction of proportional representation (1899) the Liberal party came in, it joined the Socialists in demanding, if not the abolition of the plural vote, at least certain modifications in the conditions under which the supplementary votes were conferred. It had, in fact, become evident that, if the effect of the plural vote was to limit manhood suffrage, it mainly benefited the Catholic party and agricultural classes. Besides, it was alleged that frauds and false allotment of supplementary votes were sufficiently numerous to vitiate the system entirely. From that time the Liberal party made common cause with the Labour party in demanding a fresh revision of the Constitution.

It should be stated that a revision is practically only possible when the different parties agree to it. Parliament can, it is true, decide that a revision of the Constitution is desirable. This suffices legally for a dissolution of both Chambers. But the new Parliament may only discuss the motion if two-thirds of each Chamber are present. And no resolution introducing a change is carried unless the majority be at least two-thirds.

Now the opposition, consisting of Socialists and Liberals, was in a minority of about twenty. Hence it was necessary to win over a considerable portion of the Government majority.

This it was hoped to achieve through energetic pressure on public opinion. The Liberals counted on working this through pacific and legal methods, but the Socialists had recourse to street agitation. Two precedents encouraged them therein. In 1893, when Parliament could not agree on the revision of the Constitution, a solution—that, namely, of the plural vote—was unquestionably precipitated by vehement manifestations at Brussels and a strike in the collieries of the Hainaut district. In 1899, similar agitation, in which, moreover, some of the bourgeois took part, brought on the fall of the Vandenpeereboom Catholic Ministry.

This time, however, it was clear that the Government meant to resist with every resource it could command. In Parliament precautions were taken for paralysing obstruction. In the country many *classes de miliciens*, men, that is, who had discharged their year of military service, were mobilised, and troops were concentrated so as to be ready to protect the capital and manufacturing localities.

From the beginning of April meetings and manifestations in favour of the reform bill grew more violent in character, and in the second week of the month riots took place at Brussels and in the province Hainaut. Bands of youths, disowned for that matter by the Labour party, came into collision with the police and gendarmerie, windows were smashed, pistol-shots were fired, officials were wounded. The

National Guard—the militia of the bourgeoisie—was mobilised on special service lasting at Brussels for nearly a fortnight.

It was only after that week of outbreaks, which, for that matter, were at once suppressed, and which had no other practical result except undermining the confidence of the Liberal middle class, that the Council of the Labour party decided to give the word for a general strike.

Such a crisis had been for months "in the air." It was known that, at the critical moment, the Labour party would use it against the middle classes and the Government. And that moment was supposed to have arrived when the Chamber was about to consider the motion of revision. On the 14th April, two days before the date fixed for the Parliamentary debate, the Brussels Federation of the Labour party issued a manifesto calling on the working "classes to reply to the sanguinary and odious brutalities of the police and gendarmes by having recourse, calm in their strength, to their sole remaining legal weapon—a General Strike."

The appeal was heard. With a unanimity which amazed not only their opponents, but even the Labour chiefs themselves, the working classes obeyed the signal. From the morrow 150,000 to 200,000 working men were on strike; in three days, 300,000 to 350,000. If the Belgian working classes engaged in trades and industry be estimated at 700,000, it will be seen that the strike, if not absolutely general, deserved fairly well to be so called. Never had so formidable a rising of the working classes been seen.

What were the constituent elements? Unfortunately, we have no sound statistics to draw upon. But we can form approximate estimates. The miners were the first to come out, and the last to stay out. They were certainly the kernel and chief support of the movement. Out of 130,000 Belgian miners, some 120,000 decided to "play." In certain collieries hardly enough workmen were left to keep the wells in good order. Next to the miners came the metal-workers of the great foundries of the Hainaut and of Liège. Their calling is closely bound up with the collieries. Their opinions and their aims they have in common with the colliers. There were probably 50,000 or 60,000 of them on strike at the height of the agitation. All the workshops of the great John Cockerill Society at Seraing were closed, an event hitherto unprecedented. Then came the quarrymen, among whom the Socialists have a numerous following, and lastly only, textile workers—in wool at Verviers and in cotton and linen at Ghent. It should be noted that the Socialist workers of Ghent did not go on strike till the Thursday or Friday. I do not know if this was due to the slow-moving deliberate Flemish intelligence as contrasted with the heedless impulsiveness of the Walloon. But I am inclined to believe the more probable reason to be that, at Ghent, the powerful co-operative societies of the Labour party have to compete with the equally prosperous co-operative societies supported by the clerical party, and that ther the

trade unions (*syndicats ouvrier*s) are richer and better organized than elsewhere. It needed no long reflection to understand that the strike threatened to ruin these institutions.

Side by side with these groups of workers belonging to large-scale industries there stood only a small minority of tradesmen. In the towns trade went on almost as usual. No bakers, butchers, or carriers were noted among the strikers.

Thus it is not true, as has been fancied abroad, and as certain French theories about the general strike would have it, that we were confronted by a vast intimidation of the middle classes by the labouring classes. There was no instantaneous suspension of all the functions of social life. But there was a cessation of some of the most important. Coal and iron are the staple products of Belgium. Hence, throughout whole districts there reigned a deathly stillness in place of the humming of the hive which was the usual sign of activity and of life.

From a business point of view, the strike broke out at a very unfavourable moment for these two leading industries. The stock of coal was getting very low. And a recuperative movement in metal-working had just set in after the worst period of crisis that had been known for years. "Consumption"—to quote *La Revue du Travail*—"has been radically checked, and the recovery which seemed to be taking shape in the metal industries has received through the strike a blow that has reacted heavily on the coal market. On the one hand, the colliers of the Mons valley have now to struggle against the sharp foreign competition which has found its opportunity in the strike of the coal-mines—a longer affair than that of the foundries. It has been noted that, even in our own ports there have been large deliveries of English, French, and German coals, and that several consumers, to secure their supplies, have been forced to enter into contracts binding for a relatively considerable time."

In some branches of industry, where the crisis is still felt, employers have not looked upon the strike as a misfortune. It is true that they have not been careful to retain their full staff on their books, and have even, in some cases, taken the initiative in a lock-out, glad to practise economy for some days in their employ and in the general expenses of a scarcely remunerative rate of production. This is said to have been the case at Ghent, where the textile industry is undergoing a period of depression.

Some employers, again, judge it opportune not to resist the voluntary play of their workmen, lest they should expose themselves not only to the animosity of their own employees, but also to annoyance, or possibly violence, at the hands of the operatives of other establishments.

Finally, there were a few who, through their political sympathies, gave leave of absence to their staff. The journal of the Labour party, *Le Peuple*, asserts that some did not even allow their men to lose by ceasing work.

None among employers held that the movement was directly aimed against their interests. It may even be said, as a general fact, that in large establishments the men took the trouble to go to their directors to explain the purely political character of their secession.

Being, as it was, a strike among the larger industries and, to a less extent, among urban working men, it did not affect either home-workers, or artisans properly so-called, or country labourers. Hence, too, it follows, as has been noticed by M. Van Overbergh in his interesting study entitled *La Grève générale Belge d'Avril, 1902* (Bruxelles : Schepens), that Wallonia plays the leading part in it. For the large industries are, as is well known, located in Wallonia, i.e. in Le Hainaut, and in the Liège country.

As it only completely stopped certain branches of industry, the strike could only succeed if it were long in duration. Coal, iron, stones, even textiles are unquestionably articles of primary necessity. But in a modern nation, waited on by trade, wholesale and retail, and maintaining its lines of communication and transport, life does not depend, altogether and absolutely, on these industries as it does on those which deal with food. To use the language of M. Böhm-Bawerk, the arrested production consisted, for the most part, of goods of a "remote order." It followed that several weeks were required before the general strike could make itself felt by the public as sufficiently appalling to compel the Government to give way.

But it could not hold out, and that for two reasons. The one was psychological. Of the 300,000 strikers, there was certainly a third who went on strike because others did so, and without enthusiasm. Their heart was not in it, and they would certainly ask nothing better than to be allowed to return to their work.

The second reason was want of money. The strike had been taking shape a long time in idea, through speech and print, but it had not been guaranteed by the purse. The Belgian trade unions are weak and poor. In a remarkable work on the subject by M. L. Varlez, published in the *Mémoires du Musée Social de Paris*, and entitled "Quelques pages d'histoire syndicale, 1902," he reckons the number of working men who are unionists and affiliated to the central organisation or Labour Party as 90,000. But their subscriptions are very small, only 65 of the 146 trade unions under observation in 1900 requiring of their members over one franc per month! In other words, the union funds were incompetent to assist a strike in any way whatever. There were, it is true, the co-operative societies, and they furnished considerable subsidies. But they depend for their very credit and reputation on the system of cash down. It would have been suicidal for them to have supplied funds proportionate to the needs of thousands of strikers. The journal *Le Peuple* opened a fund to which Liberal bourgeois contributed. The Social Democrat party in Germany sent £500 (10,000 marks). In eight days, however, this subscription list amounted to only £2,000. This would not avail much among 300,000

men, with a probable total of 1,000,000 to 1,200,000 mouths to feed.

From Friday, April 18th, the very day on which the Chamber rejected the motion to discuss the revision of the Constitution by eighty-four votes of the Right to sixty-four of the Left, it became evident that the strike could not be maintained. By the next day secessions had begun everywhere. The central committee of the Labour party, to avoid checkmate, published an instruction to working men to return to work. They thus had the satisfaction of seeing their orders promptly carried out, for on Monday, the day following, work was everywhere recommenced. The Hainaut miners alone showed a sulky and grudging temper by keeping up the strike eight or ten days longer.

From the political point of view the general strike was a grievous mistake. It estranged the Liberal middle classes from the Labour party, after they had made common cause to get the reform of the plural vote. And it brought consternation to many minds, even among the ranks of those who had hitherto voted Socialist. This is why, in the parliamentary election of the 25th May following, there was a falling off in the number of Socialist votes.

Notwithstanding, there seems a disposition to repeat the experiment, and the order has gone forth among Socialist trade unions to prepare for the next general strike.

It is doubtful, however, if a fresh appeal by the central committee of the Labour party would have the prestige of the first. It was shown rather too clearly that so far from dictating to circumstances they were its slave.

However that may be, the episode must react on the organisation of the Belgian trade unions. It has coincided with the existing tendency toward a grouping according to trade, an increase of subscriptions, the formation of workable strike-funds, payment of permanent secretaries, in a word, toward the best possible practical constitution of the unions. They have now thrust upon them an object that is purely political and revolutionary. It is to be feared that this will not work altogether for the good of their members.

ERNEST MAHAIM,
*Correspondent of the British Economic
Association for Belgium.*

THE Scandinavian universities have only a moderate number of professorships in political economy. In Christiania there are two professors, one of whom also lectures on constitutional law, Copenhagen has two or three, and the two old Swedish Universities in Upsala and Lund altogether three. The latest appointment is that of *K. Wicksell* in Lund (not without considerable opposition on account of certain radical views which he has publicly professed). In Sweden, however, an im-