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'The Troublesome Word of Crisis': Discourse on the Agricultural Crisis of the 1930s in the Belgian Parliament

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Abstract: The concept of a 'crisis' was omnipresent in the period of economic depression in the 1930s. What is more, the agricultural crisis was part of a never previously experienced despair in Europe and the whole of the Western world. Historians have extensively researched the crisis in agriculture, however, without reflecting on the consequences of the use of the concept and the discourse related to it. In this article – inspired by refreshing historical research on parliamentary practices – I investigate the language and figures of speech used in the Belgian Parliament to frame the agricultural question in a particular way. The case of Belgium is unique because farmers' associations were well represented in parliament, in spite of the declining importance of agriculture in the active population and national economy. Since 1840 onwards, Belgian governments had embraced free trade and pursued an economic policy with little or no trade obstructions, dictated by the interests of the export industry. The depression of the 1930s urged a re-evaluation of the relationship between the state and the economy, which extended to agriculture. The Belgian free trade tradition – already exceptionally abandoned during and immediately after the Great War to cope with food scarcity – seemed to crumble during the interwar period as farmers' associations asked for protectionist measures from 1929 onwards. This article contributes to our understanding of this paradigm shift from free trade towards agricultural protectionism. Furthermore, it gives an insight into the complexity of the interest groups campaigning for agricultural protectionism and using specific metaphors and discourse to influence politics.

Introduction

March 1930. Henri Brutsaert, Catholic MP and representative of the Belgian Farmers' League confronts the minister of agriculture, asserting: 'I know, … that the word "crisis" doesn't please you. You're more pleased if we talk about "an unpleasant period", like some kind of thunderstorm that darkens the sky only temporarily and will clear up tomorrow, instead of that troublesome and little comforting word "crisis".'[1] As this quote suggests, the existence of an agricultural crisis – often referred to as a crisis over the global overproduction of agricultural goods[2] – was not self-obvious. An economic situation needed to be understood and recognised as a crisis first.[3] The concept of a crisis was a frame many politicians used to describe what was going on in the agricultural sector at the time. Philosopher Donald Schön uses 'metaphor' as a synonym for 'frame' and describes

it as a specific perspective, the way we look at a particular situation. When a problem is set within a certain frame, it has immediate implications for the proposed policy solutions, seen as an obvious consequence of the framed problem.[4] So, metaphors are more than just linguistic figures of speech. George Lakoff argues in his famous *Metaphors We Live By* how they form the ways in which we think and act.[5] I will focus on the choice, adoption or rejection of crisis metaphors with regard to agriculture in Belgian political discourse during the 1930s via an analysis of parliamentary speech. How did MPs – from various political fractions, defending various socio-economic groups – use figures of speech to strengthen change or oppose the perception of agricultural problems? And in what sense were these metaphors part of a strategy to change agricultural policy?

The article focuses particularly on debates regarding the problems caused by the so-called agricultural crisis for those who experienced its consequences, in the first place the farmers, but also the food processing industry, merchants, retailers and consumers.[6] The primary source material consists of the minutes of parliamentary meetings. Since the introduction of the single vote system for men in 1919, the Belgian Chamber of Representatives developed into an arena for discussion regarding the interests of all societal groups and it will therefore receive more attention than the second chamber of Belgian Parliament, the Senate.[7] MPs were not only members of a political party, but often attached to civil society organisations, like trade unions, merchant movements or farmers' associations. The minutes of parliamentary meetings contain several voices that took part in the debates, whereas other state sources (for example, minutes of the Council of Ministers) do not. Furthermore, the minutes of parliamentary debates offer a whole range of opinions from various MPs, in contrast to the press – periodicals and newspapers were segregated along party lines – which took the 'official' party stance. During the 1930s, Belgium was ruled by coalition governments. As a consequence, politics became more and more a question of searching for a compromise. Until March 1935, several Catholic-Liberal coalitions followed each other into government. From 1935 onwards, governments of national unity – formed by the Catholic, Liberal and Socialist Party – were installed into power. Between June 1931 and September 1939, Belgium had nine different governments, which evoked a general feeling of failure over the parliamentary and democratic regime. As a consequence, new political parties, such as the Communist Party, the far-right *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National Union) and the authoritarian REX, gained popularity.[8]

A brief search on the full text search engine of www.plenum.be – a database of historical minutes of the Chamber of Representatives – identifies a peak in the use of the concepts '*landbouwcrisis*' and '*crise agricole*' at the beginning of the 1930s.[9] Between 1919 and 1940 the concepts were used 357 times, reaching a peak in 1930 and 1931 with a frequency of 121 and 140 times respectively. This article aims at unravelling this crisis discourse and the viewpoints that were voiced in parliament via close reading of the minutes of the parliamentary debates. Before an adequate analysis of the crisis-concept can be made, it is important to understand the core of the heated parliamentary debate over agricultural policy during the 1930s, namely the clash between traditional 'free traders' and adherents of agricultural protectionism. The first part of this article will examine this conflict. In the second part I will deconstruct the meanings of the

crisis-concept. Third, I will return to the 'start' of the crisis: from what point were the plummeting agricultural prices seen as the start of an agricultural crisis, was there a discussion about the existence or severity of the crisis, and who was blamed for it? The fourth part goes deeper into the vocabulary used by the 'Catholic farmers' group': it framed the crisis in military terms, as an attack by foreign countries, with an 'obvious' solution being protectionism. The fifth and last part discusses the metaphor of 'illness', first used by the Socialist Party to convince parliament that structural changes in agricultural policy were necessary.

1. A polarised debate

What is the relevance of studying the discourse on Belgian agricultural policy during the interwar period? As a very densely populated, industrial export country, agriculture was only of secondary importance, which makes Belgium at first sight a marginal case. The share of farmers in its active population dropped between 1910 and 1937 from nearly 25 to 16 per cent.[10] In absolute figures, the number of Belgian farmers declined by a third between 1900 and 1947, whereas it fell by one fifth in Great Britain and even rose in the Netherlands.[11] The share of agriculture in the Belgian national economy declined from 12.5 per cent in 1929 to 9.7 per cent in 1937, in contrast to 18 per cent in France and 20.5 per cent in Germany. Not surprisingly, in the 1930s Belgium remained a marked net importer of food that was in a position to profit from lowering food prices.[12] Nevertheless, Belgium was an exporter of a number of specialised, high-value commodities, such as horticultural products (for example, strawberries, grapes, chicory) and eggs.[13]

The Belgian case is interesting because it reveals precisely how the level of organised political discourse impacted upon the issue. In particular, whereas the farmers had become smaller in number, they still remained firmly represented within parliament. Most of their defenders had close ties with the established farmers' associations, which were organised politically as well. The oldest, largest and most influential was the Catholic and *de facto* Flemish *Boerenbond* (Belgian Farmers' League, hereafter *Boerenbond*), which formed an alliance with the small Walloon *Alliance Agricole Belge* (hereafter AAB). The *Boerenbond* was, along with the Christian Labour Union, the Christian Union of Middle Men and the Federation of Catholic and Conservative Associations, one of the four branches of the Catholic Party.[14] The *Fédération Nationale des Unions Professionelles Agricoles* (hereafter UPA), with an increasing membership in Wallonia, claimed to be neutral, but was on good terms with Liberal and also Catholic politicians.[15] The political action of the farmers' associations increased during the 1930s. In 1937, for instance, the *Boerenbond* created a Central Political Committee to 'coordinate the political representation of the farmers within parliament and in provincial councils' and to guarantee uniform action of all politicians connected to the *Boerenbond*.[16]

At the beginning of the crisis, the MPs who spoke in the name of the farmers' associations – many were lawyers, a few agronomists or veterinarians[17] – represented themselves increasingly as one group, with the same political goals. For them, the shrinking rural community had an important symbolic and electoral importance. They presented the agricultural producer as the feeder of the nation and as morally superior,

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being hard workers, loyal Christians and peaceful citizens.[18] This mental construction of the ideal farmer was widespread across Europe, serving even within Belgium as an instrument for supporting a farmer-friendly agricultural policy.[19]

Not all MPs who defended agriculture were connected to a farmers' association. Some were experts (being farmers themselves, agronomists or veterinary doctors); others had close ties with the rural world as descendants of a farming family or as inhabitants of a rural region, while a few had interests in the food processing industry. Interestingly, they were not only members of the Catholic and the Liberal Party, but also of the Socialist and of the Flemish-nationalist Party. However, it was the so-called 'Catholic farmer group' – Catholic MPs with a special interest in agricultural and rural matters – that was the principal and most vocal advocate of the farmers, along with the very diligent Socialist MP Joseph Chalmet. However, as the crisis dragged on, more and more voices from other parties were heard, including spokesmen for the Catholic and Socialist labour unions.

Second, the demands of this heterogeneous 'farmer group' were very controversial. As the economist Jo Swinnen has demonstrated, the opposition against agricultural protectionism in the 1930s was at its strongest in highly industrialised countries, such as the UK and Belgium. Federico adds that protectionism was a luxury good: only countries with a relatively small agricultural sector could afford it.[20] Nevertheless, the Belgian farmers' associations vociferously demanded protection, via restrictions on the import of agricultural produce and food. But, given the context, how did they frame their argument? Their claim inevitably clashed with the arguments of those who feared high food prices, especially against the backdrop of the coinciding industrial crisis and declining consumer purchasing power.[21] Therefore, when grain prices dropped over the course of 1929, the Belgian government stuck to its free trade tradition. It did so, in the first place, to prevent social unrest and in the second place because it opted for a deflationist policy with low wages and prices to support the troubled export-oriented industry. Instead of protecting agriculture, the state took some protectionist measures in favour of certain industrial branches, like the coal-mining industry.[22] While some agricultural export countries such as France, Italy, the Netherlands and Denmark, but also agricultural importers such as Germany and Great Britain, introduced forms of agricultural protection from 1929 or 1930 onwards, Belgium hesitated. The country did eventually follow a very modest degree of protectionism for agriculture, as confirmed by the study of tariff levels by Heinrich Liepmann, Jo Swinnen and Giovanni Federico. However, compared to other European countries, only Britain reveals a similarly low degree of agricultural protectionism.[23]

Finally, the 1930s are interesting because the economic depression raised new questions, including in Belgium, about the relationship between state and economy, and about the relevance of state interference and regulation. From the food crisis of the 1840s onwards, Belgian governments have embraced the free trade ideal and have pursued an agro-food policy with little or no trade obstructions.[24] The agricultural crisis of overproduction of the later nineteenth century was answered by hardly noticeable duties on a few products, leaving Belgium with almost an open food market until the First World War, which was also the case for Denmark, the Netherlands and Britain.

Only in exceptional situations, such as the food shortages during and immediately after the First World War, were import, export and prices closely regulated and controlled.[25] Shortly after the war, when Belgium still had to cope with food scarcity, and in the middle of the 1920s when prices for cattle, meat or dairy were on the rise, temporary restrictive export measures by the government immediately met with opposition from the *Boerenbond,* which sang the praises of free trade in favour of its own members.[26]

The free trade dogma, indeed, continued to circulate. For many – in Britain, in the Netherlands and in Belgium also – free trade was more than just an economic theory. Free trade was closely connected to ideas on morality, social justice, democracy, peace, wealth and national identity. In these non-self-sufficient countries, *laisser passer* was seen as the only 'right' political choice by various political parties. However, its widespread support gradually vanished after the First World War.[27] The crisis of the 1930s accelerated this paradigm shift, because free trade seemed to aggravate the economic situation instead of offering a remedy. Discourse analysis proves to be a fruitful tool to gain insight into the mental leap from free trade towards agricultural protectionism.

2. The crisis metaphor

The agricultural policy was often debated in the Belgian Parliament during the 1930s. Discussions became more intense as more parties and politicians wanted to have their say on the subject. As Amalia Ribi Forclaz noted, the worldwide economic depression deeply influenced the international perception of agricultural problems, such as under employment, low wages and poor standards of living in many rural areas.[28] On a national level, the use of the word 'crisis' in parliament made a similar 'reframing' of the agricultural question possible.

Currently, parliamentary practices in the past are the subject of innovative research.[29] Parliamentary discourse is analysed as a way of speech, bound to certain rules, culturally and historically dependent. Interactions in parliaments were (and still are) structured by existing and evolving identities and power relations. MPs accordingly present themselves as belonging to a party, a region, a profession, a social class, a generation, and combinations of identifying markers.[30] The Belgian Chamber of Representatives has been described as an arena, a place of *lutte parlementaire*, especially since the arrival of the Socialist Party in 1894. Belgian parliamentary culture appeared to be more emotional and dramatic than the 'businesslike' practices in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries.[31] Belgian MPs used, as historians have recently demonstrated, parliamentary speech in identity-making processes along the linguistic, socio-economic and ideological fault lines in the country.[32]

The crisis metaphor was omnipresent during the Great Depression. In *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, Mark Mazower opens his chapter on the 'Crisis of Capitalism' with a quote from novelist Sholem Asch (1936): 'it was as if someone had picked up the world and shaken it into utter confusion'. Asch describes the general feeling in the 1930s as a never-before experienced despair, in Europe and the whole Western world.[33] However, the word 'crisis' was already frequently used before 1929. After the First World War, for instance, Winston Churchill spoke about a World Crisis: the war

had brutally destroyed the illusion of progress and civilisation and the glory of the nation state.[34] Nevertheless, the notion of crisis was not commonplace until the 1930s when multiple, if not all dimensions of societal life seemed to be hit. The crash of the American stock exchange announced only the beginning of a seemingly endless succession of crises. Not just the economy, but also 'old' certainties – including political systems, moral values and established elites – seemed to crumble.[35] Philosophers, moralists, social scientists and historians proclaimed a crisis of Western civilisation and wondered whether it was this crisis that would sow the seeds of fascism and yet another war.[36]

In Belgium, the troublesome economic situation extended itself from the currency, through banking, industry, agriculture and trade, to massive unemployment. From 1931 to 1935, the Belgian economy seemed at a dead end.[37] For Belgian agriculture, the consequences of the crisis were rather limited compared to its surrounding countries. As Jan Blomme estimated, the average real income of farmers declined 22 per cent between 1929 and 1934, and stagnated afterwards. Belgian agriculture seemed less vulnerable than its surrounding countries, because – with the exception of eggs – no important export markets were lost. The collapse of grain prices of 1929 resulted in a significant cost reduction for cattle farming, the activity with the largest share in Belgian agricultural output at the time. Furthermore, the domestic demand for high-quality food products could be maintained because the Belgian export industry was able to uphold its competitiveness compared to other European countries. According to Blomme, these circumstances can help to explain the relatively moderate impact of the agricultural crisis in Belgium. Nevertheless, during the 1930s the average yearly income of farmers dropped way under the income of the employed industrial workers. This gap probably strengthened the experience of poor economic times in agriculture.[38]

Many historians have easily adopted the crisis-labels that were in use in the 1930s, without really questioning their appearance, meaning and consequences. 'Crisis is one of the most loosely used words in the vocabulary of social analysis', states historian Harry Ritter.[39] The contemporary omnipresence of the crisis-notion is of course meaningful in itself and illustrative of the crisis atmosphere of the time. However, it is revealing to unravel the deeper meanings that the concept 'crisis' entailed, and more precisely in this article with regard to Belgian agriculture.

For French and Dutch dictionaries of the 1920s, the word crisis had, first and foremost, a limited, mainly political and economic meaning, *een handelscrisis* (trade crisis), *une crise financière* and *une crise ministérielle*. Based on this definition, the occurrence of an agricultural crisis seemed logical. The dictionaries referred also to 'crisis' as the most severe phase of an illness. Both in French and Dutch, 'crisis' was secondly seen as a decisive moment, a turning point – *un moment décisif, een keerpunt*.[40] In the parliamentary discussions, the agricultural crisis was portrayed as an exceptional event, opposed to 'normal circumstances' and 'normal times' that could cause a fundamental change in agriculture. Most MPs used the word turning point, in itself a metaphor in the negative sense: the crisis threatened the income, the profession, the lifestyle and even the existence of a whole socio-economic group.[41] Third, the use of the word 'crisis' was frequently connected to a specific time period – *un moment, een oogenblik* – and thus implied temporality. Even though the exact end was unknown, it would certainly end one day.[42] It

is relevant to note that there was no significant difference between the use of the concept *crisis*, the Dutch word; or *crise,* French one.

The fourth layer of meaning was the 'scientification' of the concept. In the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* of 1937, 'crisis' received a purely economic definition, including the previously mentioned elements of temporality and exceptionality. Crisis was scientifically defined as 'a grave and sudden disturbance upsetting the complex equilibrium between the supply and the demands of goods, services and capital'. One important consequence of this 'scientification' was the perception of the solution: since a crisis can be analysed scientifically, science should be able to find a solution. Another important consequence was that the science-based notion of crisis transformed it into a legitimate tool in politics.[43] In parliament, MPs could henceforth use the crisis concept as a valid weapon in their plea in favour of the agriculture sector. In the following section I argue how these aspects of meaning were intensely used in parliamentary debate during the agricultural crisis.

3. (Dis)claiming the crisis

Scholarly literature predominantly mentions the year 1929 as the start of the agricultural depression, when prices for arable products fell dramatically, due to overproduction in the world market. However, they also confirm that the symptoms of over abundance were already evident earlier in the 1920s. Between 1924 and 1929, wheat output rose by 17 per cent, whereas consumption only by 11 per cent.[44] If we look at the Belgian statistics, there were signs of a downward trend of prices of wheat and sugar beet from 1926 onwards. For wheat, prices declined because of technological innovation and a better fertilisation of the land, which made grain cultivation more productive, especially in the US and Canada. Furthermore, 1927 was a year with extraordinarily good yields for Belgian arable farmers, which contributed to the decline in prices. The prices of animal products and horticultural products only started to decrease over the course of 1930.[45]

In the late 1920s, MPs did not immediately label the falling prices as a crisis. In January 1928, when the Agricultural Commission of the Senate submitted its report on the Ministry of Agriculture's budget, there was no mention of an agricultural crisis, nor a wheat crisis. Instead, the report advanced the prospect of partial self-sufficiency for food and the necessity to increase agricultural yields.[46] Jan Van den Eynde – a Catholic MP, a farmers' son, veterinarian and linked to the *Boerenbond* – was the first to address the crisis, in March 1928. In his account of the debates in the Commission of Agriculture of the Chamber, he mentioned *les symptomes d'une crise agricole*. The commission, with agricultural experts of all parties, was aware that the prices of cattle, pigs, potatoes, and grain had decreased since 1927. Simultaneously, the commission knew production had become more expensive for farmers because of price increases for fertilisers, sowing seeds, fodder, and leases.[47] Because of this, the commission saw the falling prices and rising production costs as the immediate causes of a critical agricultural situation. The agricultural sector itself – with its 'hard-working', 'diligent' farmers – was considered as the victim of external circumstances and certainly not to blame for any carelessness.[48]

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In December 1928, the crisis was mentioned again by a Socialist MP, Arthur Wauters. He mentioned the fall of the sugar beet prices: 'We pass through yet another severe crisis.'[49] Wauters had no direct link with agriculture, but he was familiar with sugar beet farmers. His village, Waremme in the Hesbaye, was located in the agricultural district with the largest sugar beet acreage in Belgium, 12 per cent of the total acreage of sugar beet.[50] The Socialist Party had a special interest in the sugar beet question: sugar beet growers were entirely dependent on their buyers, the sugar industry. Conflicting interests between the growers and the factories fitted nicely into the Socialist discourse of class struggle. The sugar beet question also alerted other MPs of various political parties, who despite having no immediate link with agriculture, had originated from sugar beet areas, since this cultivation was particularly local.[51]

Curiously, the MPs representing farmers' associations were remarkably silent in the sugar beet debate. One explanation is the location of sugar beet cultivation, mainly the Walloon region, in which the most powerful farmers' union, *Boerenbond*, was only indirectly commercially active.[52] Second, in terms of nominal value, the sugar beet cultivation (and arable production in general) was only of secondary importance for the Belgian agricultural economy. According to some MPs with links to farmers' associations, the agricultural sector was not going through a period of crisis at all. Some MPs downsized or even ignored the signs of a downward economic trend over the course of 1929. A Catholic MP, with ties to the AAB, emphasised that the 'so-called beet crisis' was no priority, given the improving standard of living in farming families. According to this MP, 'it is a fault to practise ostrich politics, to close one's eyes to the light, but it is another to exaggerate the extent of the evil. As a whole, agriculture is performing satisfactorily'.[53] Pierre Beckers, a Catholic MP and delegate of the *Boerenbond*, argued that there was no danger of sugar beet cultivation perishing and that no specific measures were needed.[54] The farmers' unions did not put the sugar beet problem in the frame of crisis.

But the language of the *Boerenbond* changed in January 1930. Gilbert Mullie, Catholic senator and member of the high council of the *Boerenbond*, declared: 'Until recently, for a lot of people of various backgrounds, agriculture seemed prosperous. This good fortune was more apparent than real. … Today, this illusion is impossible. Belgian agriculture, as a whole, has without doubt entered the era of crisis.'[55]

From this moment onwards, the denial of an agricultural crisis was heavily criticised by all MPs defending the agricultural interest. It is remarkable how Catholic politicians not only blamed members of other political parties, but also each other for the little recognition that the agricultural crisis had met until then. A Catholic MP pointed to the Minister of Agriculture Henri Baels and accused him, although a member of his own party, of minimalising the damage in the agricultural milieu.[56] Another Catholic MP, Senator Georges Limage, who was a farmer himself, was blamed for keeping silent about the worsening agricultural incomes.[57] Why did it take so long for them to acknowledge the crisis? Perhaps Baels – as minister of agriculture since 1926 – did not want to delegitimise his own policy? Nevertheless, a bitter tone overshadowed the report of the Commission of Agriculture of the Chamber on the budget for 1930. By January of that year, there was a cross-party consensus among the farmers' representatives that

the agricultural crisis needed to be taken seriously. Figures of cost and sale prices were frequently mentioned to give the crisis concept a scientific basis. Finally, the Belgian agricultural crisis was understood as a profound negative economic watershed with the prospect of 'a dejected and worrisome future'.[58]

4. A foreign attack

The statement of *Boerenbond* member Mullie symbolised an about-turn in the position of the farmers' associations towards protectionism. The sudden switch was inspired by export favouring and other protectionist measures by foreign governments. It was the protectionist legislation of France, which included import duties on wheat in May 1929 and the obligation for millers to use 97 per cent of French wheat in December 1929, which provoked the first demands of the *Boerenbond* and UPA to protect the Belgian farmers against 'French grain dumping'.[59] This is remarkable, since Belgium had relied on massive imports of bread grain since the 1880s and that after the First World War the degree of self-sufficiency for bread cereals had sunk to just under 25 per cent.[60] However, it was not the grain imports as such, but the export-favouring measures of foreign powers that had triggered the renewal of the free trade-discussion in Belgium.

Immediately after the French protectionist measures of December 1929, the discourse of MPs from the farmers' associations had all of a sudden depicted trade in agricultural goods as an economic war, *une guerre pernicieuse* in which the 'hard-working Belgian farmers' had been 'attacked' and then forced to defend themselves.[61] The use of the word *attack* as a metaphor for the foreign protectionist measures had serious consequences for the proposed solutions: since 'abnormal, fake and artificial competition' disrupted normal economic life, the answer was to be found in a comparable protectionist policy, a fight with 'equal weapons'. For certain MPs within the agricultural milieu, the depressing agricultural situation was a consequence of 'an attack, artificially used against us by our neighbours'.[62] Embedded in a military rhetoric, the MPs representing the farmers' associations positioned themselves not as vanguards but as mere defenders of the agricultural cause. As a consequence, the solutions they formulated were to be understood as responses to the *others'* policy.[63] The others were the wrongdoers. The Belgian government only had to react and protect its farmers against the enemy.

The MPs representing the three most powerful farmers' associations – *Boerenbond*, UPA and AAB – soon formed a united front based on pro-protectionism. They called for import duties, especially on wheat, meat, butter and horticultural produce, and the obligation to use Belgian crops in the Belgian food processing industry and for consumption in public institutions. Their claims led to heated debates between the advocates of free trade (MPs of the Socialist, Liberal and some of the Catholic Party representing industrialists, labour unions and merchants) and the adherents of agricultural protectionism (a minority of mainly Catholic MPs, some Liberals tied to farmers' associations and a few Flemish nationalists). Joseph Chalmet, a bricklayer, unionist and farmer's son, was the only Socialist who occasionally supported the protectionist camp, although his party fiercely rejected agricultural protectionism. He was in favour of some limited, temporary protectionist measures. Protectionism was also

supported in the Netherlands by a cross-party 'Green Front'. In this Dutch front, several civil servants of the Ministry of Agriculture were also involved. For Belgium, there is no evidence of a front between MPs and civil servants.[64]

Interestingly, the Belgian 'protectionist front' – well aware that parliament consisted of a majority of 'free traders' – never called itself 'protectionist': protectionism was considered a dirty word, a word to avoid. Hence, an alternative vocabulary had to be found. A Liberal MP, linked to the UPA, offered a convenient way out when he declared: 'agriculture doesn't ask for protection, but justice'.[65] The rhetoric of justice, together with military metaphors, indeed became the ground on which the Belgian protectionists built their plea for political intervention: because small countries had the right to demand fair treatment from larger countries.[66] In the Netherlands also, farmers' interest groups turned to the argument of justice to strengthen their position: because farmers had the right to make a living.[67] In Belgium, a Liberal MP linked to the UPA and a Catholic MP representing the *Boerenbond* both questioned the minister of agriculture about his political answer to the French policy. Other MPs with connections to the farmers' unions also adopted this discourse of justice to convince the Chamber: no *protectionist* duties, but *compensation* duties on wheat were demanded.[68] In this instance, they conveniently used a double argument: on the one hand, there should be compensation to neutralise state support that foreign farmers and food industries received from their governments, while on the other, equal treatment of the Belgian industry that already benefited from relatively high import duties. The industrial custom duties had been adapted to the currency devaluation of 1925, the modest agricultural duties had not. The defenders of farmers' interests thus called for equal treatment, as a 'fair income justifying their labour'.[69]

Subsequently, key elements from the definition of 'crisis' – temporality, exceptionality and turning point – were brought forward, one after the other, to introduce agricultural protectionism in the dominant frame of free trade. The protectionists, in the first place, pointed to the temporality of the wretched situation within agriculture: no structural, but only provisional protection measures were needed. Second, they emphasised the peculiarity of the situation: in normal times, so they stressed, they would be adherents of free trade, but the exceptionally high duties and export-stimulating measures of others justified their protective demands. Third, they considered the crisis as a turning point with regards to the role of the state in the market economy: state interventionism was seen as inevitable in order to overcome the crisis. They agreed that the farmer should in the first place save himself – 'via his intellect, his work, his courage and his perseverance' – but for now help from the state was needed: 'only temporarily and of a defensive nature, so it won't provoke laziness'.[70] Disregarding their demand for public aid during the agricultural depression of the 1880s–90s, they claimed to be asking for state help for the first time.[71] Paradoxically, they asked for state intervention with the goal of helping farming families do without in the future. In other words, they envisaged a return to free trade. The dogma of the Farmers' League in the long run remained: 'the remedy of the crisis doesn't lie in the hands of a government'.[72]

This ambiguity with regard to state interference was mirrored in the attitude towards international negotiations to stop protectionism. The large majority of Belgian politicians

were adherents of 'toll peace' and the Belgian government aimed at promoting free trade across Europe. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul Hymans from the Liberal Party, played a pioneering role at the International Economic Conferences of Geneva (1927 and 1930), as well as during the negotiations that led to the Treaties of Oslo (1930) and Ouchy (1932).[73] The MPs linked to the farmers' associations were not hostile to these custom truce initiatives; on the contrary, they defended the initiatives, had high hopes for a solution on the supranational level and asked themselves whether the League of Nations should not speak out against the dumping practices of large countries.[74] Nevertheless, the 'farmers' group' found itself once more in an ambiguous position. It adhered to toll peace – 'because we have interest in a prosperous Europe' – but repeated that the exceptional situation required temporary measures of protection. The end justified the means.[75] When MP Van den Eynde of the *Boerenbond* elaborated on what he considered as an ideal trade policy in the given circumstances – a combination of a defensive national agricultural economy and the European spirit of the Treaty of Oslo – a roar of applause rose from the Catholic seats in the Chamber of Representatives.[76] Free trade was still the best formula: it stimulated initiative and the activity of the 'diligent Belgian farmers'. However, as Sandront of the UPA stated in March 1930, 'free trade has become a Utopia and is only possible if it exists everywhere'.[77]

The defensive language of the farmers' associations was soon integrated into the rhetoric of the government itself. In January 1930, the Catholic Minister of Agriculture Henri Baels introduced a special import and transit licence for wheat and wheat flour.[78] He spoke of how 'we should arm ourselves as well, because we have arms at our disposal'.[79] In legislative texts, a similar discourse was used regarding the 'extraordinary and abnormal circumstances caused by measures taken by foreign governments … which hamper the normal action of competition in the Belgian market'.[80] The minister also appealed to the parole of justice. Moreover, to legitimise his policy, he drew on the 12th article of the Convention of Geneva of 1927, which stipulated that every participating nation had *the right* to take measures, in case of extraordinary and abnormal circumstances, in order to *protect* the vital economic and financial interests of the country. He stated that 'Our agriculture isn't dreaming about raising custom barriers, but she protests against the abnormal, fake and artificial competition.'[81] Baels spoke a clearly offensive language – 'we will have the right to react and we will do it with determination'– but his actual policy was very moderate.[82] Did he use the discourse of the protectionist group to pour oil on troubled waters?

Interestingly, it was not the *Boerenbond* but six Walloon Catholic MPs – one of them linked to the UPA, two to the AAB, two aligned to the conservative wing and one a Christian Democrat – who forwarded the first bill to raise import duties in December 1929. Their proposal was to raise import duties on oats, a feed crop for horses.[83] The Senate, however, rejected the bill by two votes, whereas twelve senators abstained. Of the abstainers, nine were Catholic, thereby blocking the bill of their own party. Their motive for either abstaining or rejecting seemed to be twofold: on the one side, they genuinely feared higher costs for small farmers who bought their oats on the market, whereas in principle they asserted that Belgium was 'a free-trader in its firm belief' and should therefore stay so.[84] But rejection was just a matter of time. In March 1931, Belgium

introduced an import duty on oats, as it had done in 1895 for the protection of oats for draught horses, still systematically used in agriculture and for urban transport, could apparently persuade many.[85] Other protectionist measures followed. The import duties on meat, cattle, butter, as well as bananas, lemons, margarine, wine and beer, were raised by legislation in March 1932.[86] In April 1932, an elaborate system of import duties and import quotas was introduced, which aimed at protecting some agricultural products against foreign competition. For wheat, the main ingredient for bread, import duties were limited to a minimum. Henceforth, wheat farmers would receive state subsidies instead. Framing the agricultural crisis via the metaphor of attack made the defence of Belgian agriculture an evident solution. However, another crisis metaphor was used simultaneously.

5. A disease

> Van Dievoet has persuaded us of the importance of the crisis. But he made us believe that the agricultural crisis is the result of a protectionist fury of other countries, while in reality it is nothing more than a new disease. And the proposed remedy ignores the general state of the patient.[87]

This quote, by the Socialist Jules Mathieu dating from December 1932, unmasked the rhetoric of the farmers' group. Protectionism is not a cause, but a consequence of a structural agricultural problem, according to Mathieu.[88] The Socialist Party set the problem in a different perspective: agriculture was an ill body and the policy should be adapted accordingly. The disease-metaphor was a subtler one, less visible in language than the militaristic metaphor. However, it made a huge difference to how the crisis and its treatment were perceived: not merely ad hoc protection duties were needed, but a profound cure via a fundamental conversion. The disease-metaphor turned the crisis into a failure of the existing system. Hence, the diagnosis of 'disease' can be derived indirectly from proposals for major changes in policy.

In March 1932, the Socialist Chalmet introduced two bills in the Chamber of Representatives to implement structural changes in the land lease legislation of 1929: the establishment of a lease commission for disputes between landlord and tenant, an unlimited lease term (to assure the tenant's security) and the right for tenants to demand lower leases.[89] His initiative was not applauded at all. Another Socialist proposal to create an agricultural crisis fund to finance tenants in need, received similar negative criticism. For the Catholic farmers' group – representing the interests of large landowners, small farmers, tenants and, to a lesser extent, the rapidly shrinking group of land labourers – the so-called tenant question was a tricky subject. The *Boerenbond* introduced another bill later that year to change the lease legislation, issuing a *temporary* reduction of the leases in times of an *extraordinary* fall in prices.[90] The *Boerenbond* once more advanced the topos that farmers wanted no pity, 'the farmer wants to work, produce and sell'. Furthermore, there was no time for structural changes, according to one of its spokesmen. Eventually, no new land lease legislation, but only the temporary reduction of lease prices came into being in the middle of August 1933.[91]

Socialist MPs introduced the metaphor of illness while the 'protectionist front' continued to talk in belligerent terms. But the increase of import duties, from April 1932 onwards, seemed to please the protectionists to some extent and they adapted their discourse accordingly. Militant protectionism and even the use of the crisis-concept faded away in the parliamentary debates.[92] The battle was fought also because the successive Catholic-Liberal governments did not alter the obtained protectionist legislation, except at moments when prices of certain foodstuffs rose in an extraordinary way. Protectionism, henceforth, became a standard trope with which the advocates of protective measures started or ended their speeches in parliament: 'We should protect our agriculture.' Occasionally, new measures were demanded when prices of previously less affected output plummeted, for example, for horticulture in 1934 and for butter in 1936. But Socialist and some Liberal MPs considered the reinforcement of agricultural protectionism more and more as a path to worsening the 'illness' instead of curing it. The following quote of a *Boerenbond* MP in 1934 clearly shows how the two standpoints – and the solutions that were derived from each – conflicted: 'There are still people opposed to us [Socialist and Liberal MPs] who think that the crisis continues because of the [protectionist] measures introduced in favour of the agricultural sector.'[93]

The metaphor of illness for its part provoked a discourse of disillusion. By 1935, as the crisis dragged on, the tone in parliament became embittered. The overall feeling was that the policy of agricultural protection – as worked out by the Catholic-Liberal governments – had failed, both in terms of measures and their implementation. Wheat subsidies, for instance, were distributed with serious delays, sometimes of more than one year. More important, for the 'protectionist front' most import duties were too low.[94] Even the Catholic farmers' group – in 1934 still praising the agricultural minister to the skies[95] – was disillusioned: 'Our farmers and market gardeners work and slog as slaves: they're becoming tired of your often incomprehensible attitude.'[96] The previously 'diligent, hard-working, law-abiding farmers' were tired and 'had almost lost their patience'.[97] As MP Robert de Kerchove d'Exaerde, representing the *Boerenbond*, stated: 'There is a huge discontent, which lingers as a smouldering fire, and might erupt one day.'[98]

Here, a fundamental break with the traditional farmers' topos comes to the fore. From 1934 onwards, MPs linked with farmers' associations talked about a multitude of farmers who opposed governmental policy or even their own farmers' unions. Previously, the agrarian population had been seen as the guardian of social order, in contrast to the unpredictable and easily stirred up labouring class. However, around 1934, farmers were tired of the ceaseless crisis. This bitterness was visible in the outbreak of successive strikes of potato growers and dairy farmers from 1936 onwards, discontented as they were with the loss-making prices. Their demand was not protectionism, so they said, but simply remunerative prices. The size of these mostly local or regional events should not be overestimated, but nevertheless they did lead to the establishment of a dissident farmers' association in Flanders with the significant name *Boerenfront* (Farmers' Front).[99]

In the meantime, the crisis resulted in many victims, first of all among farmers who saw their savings and income dramatically shrink. Second, the farmers' associations were affected: they lost members, were confronted by competing associations and their

cooperatives (for example, for the purchase of fertilisers and fodder) suffered severe financial losses. For the 'almighty' *Boerenbond*, the damage was considerable. Its savings and lending bank was put into liquidation at the end of 1934 and the association faced the hard job of regaining the trust of the farmers.[100] The second part of the 1930s is often considered as a period of economic recovery, but for farmers' incomes it was rather a period of stagnation. Agricultural and food prices did indeed slightly increase, but costs did so as well and output volumes levelled.[101] To curb the rising prices of meat and butter, the government decided to temporarily abolish and ease some protectionist measures on animal products in the winters of 1934 and 1935, to the great dissatisfaction of farmers and farmers' associations.[102] On top of that, the general feeling of political instability should be mentioned. Belgian governments succeeded each other at a rapid pace, and so also did the ministers of agriculture, which only reinforced the MPs' judgement of an inconsistent agricultural policy. Additional budget cuts at the expense of agriculture and the transfer of responsibility for agricultural education to the Department of Education left the farmers once more disappointed.[103]

As the crisis dragged on, the realisation grew that agriculture was not going through a temporary critical period that could be bridged via ad hoc protection. On the contrary, MPs of the 'farmer's group' began to speak of 'a big agricultural problem'[104] and 'a structural problem'.[105] The metaphor of sickness, first only used by the Socialist opposition, spread into the discourse of various political parties. Although the defenders of agricultural interests had made pleas for the 'modernisation' of agriculture from the early 1920s onwards (more agronomic research, more agricultural education, more fertilisation, better breeds, higher quality standards for dairy, etc.), they did so now with an ever-increasing urgency. Modernisation had become as important as protectionism and in 1937 the Agricultural Commission of the Chamber asked for a policy according to a well-thought out plan, 'with orientating rules and a rational program'.[106] The protectionist duties remained part of the demands formulated by the commission. However, it also urged for a more constructive agenda that should contain important points of action: the reduction of production, sales promotion (via a higher quality, the activation of domestic consumption and the extension of export), the improvement of sanitation for cattle, and also of drainage plants and land.[107]

With the need for protectionism fading in the middle of the 1930s, new concerns came to the fore. Instead of an almost exclusive focus on threats from *outside* of Belgium, MPs became concerned about not 'paralysing' or 'sterilising' agriculture from *within*.[108] The MPs of the farmers' associations denounced the budgetary cutbacks for rural infrastructure and cattle improvement, for agricultural research and education, and for their own functioning.[109] Second, they demanded a reorganisation of the department itself. Many, from right across the various political parties, complained about the slowness and inefficiency of the Department of Agriculture. It did not meet the desired standard. It should pursue an anticipative policy, such as the search for new markets. *Boerenbond* member Jan Van den Eynde – but also Louis Sandront of the AAB and the Liberal René Lefebvre of the UPA – wanted an expansion of the economic services provided by the ministry, in order to deal quickly and rationally with the general economic problems.[110] The Flemish nationalist Jeroom Leuridan compared the department to

an abandoned family member, because agriculture had been put together with other activities between 1932 and early 1935 and again in 1938.[111] By the end of the 1930s, it was the internal problems within the agricultural sector that had become the central issue in parliamentary debate.

Conclusion

This article sheds a new light on the political tensions, the complexities of the debates, and the shifting answers to the agricultural crisis of the 1930s. The label 'crisis' was introduced in January 1930, soon after the introduction of protectionist measures by other countries. This is a revealing fact: the plummeting grain and sugar beet prices of the late 1920s were seen as the sign of a possible crisis, but the import duties of other nations was the point at which its existence needed to be acknowledged in order to trigger the demand for action from the government. MPs of the Belgian farmers' association labelled the crisis as an *attack* by foreign powers. This metaphor helped them to introduce protectionism as a valid solution. Reacting to *the others* became the password for legitimising a protectionist policy in a parliament in which free trade had been the dominating economic dogma since the middle of the nineteenth century. The farmers' unions cleverly used a we-versus-them rhetoric. Belgian farmers had been *attacked* and it was therefore their *right* to defend themselves. A militarist discourse, combined with the arguments of justice and of temporality characterised the parliamentary pleadings for protectionism. This was, as far as we know now, also the case in the Netherlands and it is likely that this rhetoric was equally used in other national contexts. Further research could reveal whether it was a 'European' or wider phenomenon.

The Socialist Party 'unmasked' how the farmers' associations had framed the crisis in a way to steer the government in the direction of a protectionist policy. The party denounced the attack-metaphor and replaced it with the metaphor of illness. Curing with structural measures – instead of temporal protectionism – became the best option. After 1934, when the 'old' institutions – the Department of Agriculture and the main farmers' associations – were exposed to much criticism, the illness metaphor gained political importance. The protectionist measures were already in place, but had proved insufficient, which opened the way for a new discourse about the *internal* problems within the agricultural sector. The tensions between free traders and protectionists did not disappear, but instead faded into the background. In contrast, political speech pointed henceforth at the structural problems within agriculture and at the urgent need for fundamental change.

Furthermore, the analysis of the parliamentary debates reveals how dominant the farmers' associations were in the way the crisis was framed. The attack-metaphor penetrated the governmental rhetoric and legislative texts. The 'protectionist front' of *Boerenbond*, AAB and UPA presented itself as one militant group with a common goal, which can explain the omnipresence of its rhetoric and its protectionist success. Even though the metaphor of *illness* gradually increased in importance, it never replaced the farmers' unions' discourse of *attack*. There was a good reason for that: the tendency for self-analysis with regards to the disease-metaphor, would inevitably mean self-criticism,

since the farmers' unions and the Catholic Ministry of Agriculture had formed the backbone of the structures by which the agricultural sector was organised.

Finally, the analysis uncovers the different views regarding the role the state should play in the economy. MPs of the protectionist front, using the attack-metaphor, frequently referred to the temporality of protectionism, although they still, so they said, aimed at free trade. The disease-metaphor opened new avenues for structural state intervention and economic planning. However, in this respect, Belgium did so later than its neighbouring countries.[112]

How did the metaphorical use of language evolve in later political debates? It is difficult to estimate the long-term impact of a particular discourse. However, the belligerent rhetoric about protectionist measures of the 1930s seemed to be 'recycled' in the 1950s by the farmers' associations during parliamentary debates and in the negotiations that led to the establishment of the EEC. There was no 'crisis' at that time, but again the fear of 'dishonest' competition from abroad still resonated. State-led export improving measures were again labelled as 'unnatural' and 'artificial'. And again, the exceptionality of the situation led to the 'special' treatment of the agricultural sector in the Treaty of Rome in 1957.[113]

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NOTES

1. Minutes of Parliamentary meetings of the Chamber of Representatives (MPC), 4th March 1930, Brutsaert, p. 811: 'ik weet … dat dit woord u ook niet bevalt. Gij hoort liever in plaats van dat onbehagelijk en weinig verkwikkelijk woord "crisis", spreken van een moeilijk tijdperk, van zoo een soort ongeweerte dat de hemel tijdelijk verduistert en morgen zal opklaren.'
2. But contradicted by G. Federico, 'Not guilty? Agriculture in the 1920s and the Great Depression', *Journal of Economic History*, 65 (2005), 971–3; G. Federico, *Feeding the World: An Economic History of Agriculture, 1800–2000* (Princeton, 2005), p. 192.
3. For instance with regard to the food crisis of the 1840s: M. Van Dijck, *De wetenschap van de wetgever: De klassieke politieke economie en het Belgische landbouwbeleid, 1830–1884* (Leuven, 2008), p. 20.
4. D. Schön, 'Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-setting in Social Policy', in A. Ortony, ed., *Methaphor and Thought* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 137, 148, 150–1.
5. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 3–4.
6. Other much debated issues during this period, such as social legislation for farmers and farm labourers and land lease legislation will not be addressed in depth in this article.
7. N. Matheve, *Tentakels van de macht: elite en elitenetwerken in en rond de Belgische tussenoorlogse regeringen 1918–1940* (Heule, 2017), p. 79.

8. E. Gerard, 'De binnenlandse politiek', in M. Van den Wijngaert, E. Buyst, E. Gerard, D. Luyten and L. Vandeweyer, *België, een land in crisis, 1913–1950* (Antwerp, 2006), pp. 89–96.
9. See <www.plenum.be>. Despite the errors in the search – the OCR isn't flawless for old, printed documents – the search engine can be used to identify some trends. I searched for the concepts '*crise agricole*' and '*landbouwcrisis*' ('agricultural crisis' in French and Dutch). Synonyms were not taken into account in this brief search.
10. J. Blomme, *The Economic Development of Belgian Agriculture 1880–1980: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis* (Leuven, 1993), pp. 277–82.
11. J. Bieleman, *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in Nederland, 1500–1950: Veranderingen en verscheidenheid* (Boom, 1992), p. 211.
12. In 1933, the Belgian negative trade balance for agricultural products fluctuated around 35 per cent. In terms of consumption, at that time the country had to import around c. 65 per cent of its needs from arable farming (for bread grain it was even 77 per cent), 13 per cent of its needs from horticulture and 4 per cent from livestock farming. Blomme, *Economic Development*, pp. 277–82; H. J. Puhle, 'Lords and Peasants in the Kaiserreich', in R. G. Möller, ed., *Peasants in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History* (Boston, 1986), p. 83.
13. Blomme, *Economic Development*, p. 260; Y. Segers and L. Van Molle, *Leven van het land: Boeren in België, 1750–2000* (Leuven, 2004), pp. 55–6.
14. L. Van Molle, *Katholieken en landbouw, landbouwpolitiek in België 1884 tot 1914* (Leuven, 1989), pp. 245–51; L. Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen: de Belgische Boerenbond 1890–1990* (Leuven, 1990), p. 366; T. E. Mommens, 'Politics under Influence? The Case of Belgian Agriculture during the Green Pool Negotiations', in R. Griffiths and B. Girvin, eds, *The Green Pool and the Origins of the Common Agricultural Policy* (London, 1995), pp. 182–5.
15. Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen*, pp. 163, 208, 366; Mommens, 'Politics under Influence?', pp. 182–5.
16. Documentation and Research Center on Religion, Culture and Society (KADOC), Belgische Boerenbond, Centraal Comité voor Land- en Tuinbouwbelangen van de Boerenbond (CCLT), 994, Eerste Jaarverslag Centraal Politiek Comité van Boeren en Tuinders (CPC), 1938.
17. Between 1929 and 1939 the number of MPs in the Chamber involved in agricultural discussions varied from 27 to 30 MPs out of a total of 187 (until 1936) and 202 MPs (from 1936 onwards). Based on my own calculations. P. Van Molle, *Het Belgisch Parlement. 1894–1972* (Antwerp, 1972); K. Desmecht, 'Reacties op de landbouwcrisis van 1929–1935: Geschiedenis van het Belgische landbouwprotectionisme' (unpublished Master's thesis, Leuven, 1987), pp. 57–8.
18. Van Molle, *Katholieken en landbouw*, pp. 47–80.
19. L. Bluche and K. K. Patel, 'Der Europäer als Bauer: Das Motiv der baürlichen Familienbetriebs in Westeuropa nach 1945', in L. Bluche, V. Lipphardt and K. K. Patel, eds, *Der Europäer – ein Konstrukt: Wisssensbestände, Diskurse, Praktiken* (Göttingen, 2009), pp. 138–40.
20. J. Swinnen, 'The growth of agricultural protection in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries', *The World Economy*, 32 (2009), 2524–5; Federico, *Feeding the World*, pp. 215–16.
21. Swinnen, 'The growth', 1501, 1511; G. Vanthemsche, 'De economische actie van de Belgische staat tijdens de crisis van de jaren 1930', in H. Van der Wee and J. Blomme, eds, *The Economic Development of Belgium since 1870* (Cheltenham, 1997), pp. 340–1.
22. Swinnen, 'The growth', 1501, 1511; Vanthemsche, 'De economische actie', pp. 340–1.
23. G. Federico, 'Natura non Fecit Saltus: the 1930s as the Discontinuity in the History of European Agriculture', in P. Brassley, L. Van Molle and Y. Segers, eds, *War, Food and*

Agriculture (New York, 2012), p. 27; Swinnen, 'The growth', 1513. For the figures of Liepmann, see M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe* (New York, 1964), p. 121.
24. Van Dijck, *De wetenschap*, pp. 397, 399–403; Van Molle, *Katholieken en landbouw*, pp. 352–3.
25. Swinnen, 'The growth', 1513.
26. Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen*, p. 233.
27. F. Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 2–7; P. De Rooy, *A Tiny Spot on the Earth: the Political Culture of the Netherlands in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 197–9; Van Dijck, *De wetenschap*, pp. 401–02.
28. A. Ribi Forclaz, 'A new target for international social reform: the International Labour Organization and working and living conditions in the inter-war years', *Contemporary European History*, 20 (2011), 321–3.
29. See, for example, H. te Velde, *Sprekende politiek: Redenaars en hun publiek in de parlementaire gouden eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2015); M. Beyen and H. Te Velde, 'Passion and Reason: Modern Parliaments in the Low Countries', in P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie and K. Palonen, eds, *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparitive History of a European Concept* (New York, 2016), pp. 81–96; Josephine Hoegaerts launched a new research project on the sound of parliamentary speech; see *Vocal Articulations of Parliamentary Identity and Empire* (ERC starting grant), 1918–2023.
30. C. Ilie, 'Identity Co-construction in Parliamentary Discourse Practices', in C. Ilie, ed., *European Parliaments under Scrutiny: Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 60–6.
31. Beyen and Te Velde, 'Passion and Reason', pp. 84–5.
32. Ibid., pp. 81–96; M. Beyen, 'Linguistic Syncretism as a Marker of Ethnic Purity? Jeroom Leuridan on Language Developments among Flemish Soldiers during the First World War', in J. Walker, ed., *Languages and the First World War: Communicating in a Transnational War* (London, 2016), pp. 226–37; K. Lauwers, '"Vous n'êtes pas un collègue flamand?": Identiteitsvorming tijdens de Belgische Kamerdebatten over "talen in bestuurszaken" in 1932', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis (BTNG)*, 1 (2014), 10–43; J. Deferme, 'Van burgerlijke afstandelijkheid naar volkse betrokkenheid: De politieke cultuur van enkele socialistische mijnwerkers in het Belgische parlement, 1894–1914', *Brood en Rozen*, 9 (2004), 11–29.
33. M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London, 1999), pp. 106–17.
34. H. Ritter, *The Dictionary of Concepts in History: Reference Sources for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (New York, 1986), p. 82.
35. M. Beyen, 'Een representatiecrisis: Politieke en culturele breuklijnen in Vlaanderen tijdens de "lange jaren dertig"', in J. Lensen, L. Stynen and Y. T'Sjoen, eds, *De stekelige jaren: Literatuur en politiek in Vlaanderen, 1929–1944* (Leuven, 2014), p. 14.
36. R. Starn, 'Historians and crisis', *Past and Present*, 52 (1971), 11–12.
37. E. Gerard, *De schaduw van het Interbellum: België van euforie tot crisis 1918–1939* (Tielt, 2017), pp. 12, 166–89, 197–200.
38. Blomme, *Economic Development*, pp. 272–5.
39. Ritter, *The Dictionary*, p. 79.
40. *Van Dale, Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, 6th edn (Leiden, 1924), reference 'crisis'; *Larousse classique illustré* (Paris, 1925), reference 'crise'.
41. MPC, 21st January 1930, Chalmet, p. 305; Housiaux, pp. 1107–08.
42. *Van Dale*, reference 'crisis'; *Larousse*, reference 'crise'.
43. Starn, 'Historians and crisis', 10–11.
44. Federico, 'Natura', pp. 21–2; Federico, *Feeding the World*, p. 194; P. Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929–1939* (New York, 2000), p. 80.
45. Blomme, *Economic Development*, pp. 209–10.

46. Report of the Agricultural Commission of the Senate (ACS), Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1928, 10th January 1928, p. 3.
47. Report of the Agricultural Commission of the Chamber of Representatives (ACC), Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1928, 29th March 1928, p. 5; Blomme, *Economic Development*, p. 209.
48. MPC, 4th March 1930, p. 815.
49. MPC, 19th December 1928, Wauters, p. 337.
50. *Landbouw, Algemeene telling van 31 december 1929: Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken* (Brussels, 1937), pp. 14–15, 74–5, 104–05.
51. In March 1929 four MPs of the conservative wing of the Catholic Party (some linked to the UPA), one MP of the Catholic Party of the *Belgian Boerenbond*, three Socialists, one Liberal and one MP of the Front Party addressed the sugar beet question. They all originated from a sugar beet region.
52. Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen*, p. 210.
53. MPC, 20th March 1929, Merget, p. 1173: 'Mais, si c'est une faute de pratiquer une politique d'autruche, de fermer les yeux à la lumière, c'en est une autre d'exagérer l'étendue du mal. Envisagée dans son ensemble, l'agriculture enregistre des résultats satisfaisants.'
54. MPC, 20th March 1929, Beckers, p. 1185.
55. Report of the ACS, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1930, 15th January 1930, Mullie, p. 2: 'Voor tal van personen in de meest verschillende middens, leek de landbouw tot deze laatste tijden bijzonder voorspoedig. Deze voorspoed was meer schijn dan werkelijkheid. … thans is deze illusie niet meer mogelijk. De Belgische landbouw, in zijn geheel beschouwd, is beslist en zonder twijfel in het crisistijdperk getreden.'
56. MPC, 21st March 1930, Housiaux, pp. 1107–08.
57. MPC, 27th March 1930, Chalmet, pp. 1166–7.
58. Report of the ACS, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1930, 15th January 1930, p. 2.
59. MPC, 21st January 1930, Maenhaut, Masson, p. 300; A. Chatriot and E. Lynch, 'Introduction', in A. Chatriot, E. Leblanc, E. Lynch, eds, *Organiser les marchés agricoles: Le temps des fondateurs* (Paris, 2012), p. 22; Tracy, *Agriculture*, p. 177.
60. Blomme, *Economic Development*, pp. 209–15, 282.
61. MPC, 10th April 1930, Merget, pp. 1393–4.
62. MPC, 10th April 1930, Merget, p. 1394: ' … pour répondre à l'attaque qui nous est faite artificiellement par nos voisins.'
63. MPC, 21st January 1930, Baels, pp. 300–01.
64. P. De Rooy, *Ons stipje op de wereldkaart: de politieke cultuur van Nederland in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2014), p. 209.
65. MPC, 21st January 1930, Masson, p. 302.
66. MPC, 21st January 1930, de Liedekerke, p. 305.
67. De Rooy, *Ons stipje*, p. 209.
68. MPC, 21st January 1930, pp. 300–06; MPC, 2nd April 1930, Van den Eynde, pp. 1239–40; MPC, 21st March 1930, de Kerchove d'Exaerde, p. 1106.
69. MPC, 10th March 1931, Desmedt, p. 943; MPC, 3rd July 1931, de Kerchove d'Exaerde, p. 2046.
70. Ibid.
71. Report of the ACS, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1932, 11th February 1932, pp. 4–5; Report of the ACS, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1933, 15th March 1933, p. 7.
72. MPC, 2nd December 1931, Van Dievoet, p. 180: 'Le remède à la crise n'est pas entre les mains d'un gouvernement.'
73. F. Van Kalken and J. Bartier, eds, *Paul Hymans: Memoires* (Brussels, 1958), pp. 608–09, 616, 646–9.

74. MPC, 21st January 1930, de Liedekerke, p. 305; MPC, 2nd April 1930, Van den Eynde, pp. 1239–40.
75. Report of the ACC, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1930, 29th March 1928, Van den Eynde, p. 17.
76. MPC, 26th November 1931, Van den Eynde, p. 124.
77. MPC, 21st March 1930, Sandront, pp. 1108–12.
78. Royal Decree of 20th January 1930, *Licences d'importation: froment et farine*; MPC, 21st January 1930, Baels, p. 300.
79. MPC, 21st January 1930, Baels, p. 300: 'Nous devons nous armer à notre tour, car nous avons des armes à notre disposition.'
80. Law of 20th June 1930: Import, Export and Transit of Goods*:* 'Lorsque dans des circonstances extraordinaires et anormales, les intérêts vitaux du pays sont en péril … . en ce qui concerne les marchandises qui, par suite de mesures prises à l'étranger par les pouvoirs publics, bénéficient, à l'exportation, d'avantages tels que l'action normale de la concurrence sur le marché belge s'en trouve essentiellement vicée.'
81. Ibid.: 'Notre agriculture ne songe pas à élever des barrières douanières. Mais elle proteste contre la concurrence anormale, factice, artificielle.'
82. MPC, 21st January 1930, Baels, p. 300.
83. Report of the ACC, Bill on the adjustment of the table of the Law of 8th May 1924 concerning import duties, 18th December 1929. With much criticism of Socialist MPs: MPC, 10th April 1930, Colleaux, Periquet, Mathieu, Bologne, pp. 1392–3, 1394–5.
84. Among the abstainers, there were several senators of the Christian Labour Movement. Also an independent senator – not linked to any party – but representing the UPA abstained. Minutes of Parliamentary Meetings of the Senate, 16th April 1930, Tschjoffen, p. 913.
85. Law of 12th March 1931: Import Duties on Oats, Oatmeal and Oat Groats.
86. Law of 18th March 1932: Adjustment of Custom Duties, Excise Duties and Consumer Duties.
87. MPC, 2nd December 1931, Mathieu, p. 183: 'M. Van Dievoet nous a convaincu de la réalité de la crise. Mais il a tenté de faire croire que cette crise résultait de la furie protectionniste des autres pays. A la vérité, ce n'est qu'une nouvelle maladie; le remède proposé ignore l'état général du malade.'
88. MPC, 2nd December 1931, Mathieu, p. 183.
89. Bill of 3rd March 1932, Revision of the Civil Code: Tenancy and the Creation of Tenant Commissions, introduced by Chalmet; Bill of 18th March 1932, Revision of Leases, introduced by Mathieu, Brunet, Chalmet, de Rasquinet, Gelders, Doms.
90. Bill of 2nd June 1932: Temporary Arrangement of the Troubles in Tenancy because of Abnormal Price Reductions, introduced by de Liedekerke; Bill of 5th July 1932: Temporary Reduction of Some Leases, introduced by Van Dievoet.
91. MPC, 3rd December 1931, de Kerchove d'Exaerde, p. 208.
92. MPC, 15th March 1938, Pierlot, p. 1031.
93. MPC, 15th February 1934, Van den Eynde, p. 1031. 'Tegenover ons staan ook menschen die meenen dat de crisis, dat de moeilijkheden blijven voorduren ten gevolge van de maatregelen die getroffen werden ten voordeele van den landbouw.'
94. MPC, 20th February 1935, Blavier, p. 475.
95. MPC, 15th February 1934, Van den Eynde, p. 1033, De Vleeschauwer, p. 1044.
96. MPC, 20th February 1935, Maes, p. 504.
97. MPC, 20th February 1935, Van den Eynde, p. 509, De Vleeschauwer, p. 511, De Vleeschauwer, Maes, Van den Eynde en Blavier, p. 512.
98. MPC, 20th March 1938, de Kerchove d'Exaerde, p. 1214. 'Er heerscht een groote mistevredenheid, die als een smeulend vuurtje voortloopt, en tot een uitbarsting kan komen.'

99. T. E. Mommens, 'Politieke, institutionele en economische componenten in de ontwikkeling van de Belgische zuivelsector tijdens het Interbellum' (unpublished Master's thesis, Leuven, 1985), pp. 93–122.
100. Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen*, p. 271.
101. Blomme, *Economic Development*, pp. 269–70.
102. G. Kwanten, *August-Edmond de Schryver, 1898–1991: politieke biografie van een gentleman-staatsman* (Leuven, 2001), p. 152; Vanthemsche, 'De economische actie', pp. 344–5;Minutes of the Council of Ministers, 12th April 1935, De Schryver, p. 386.
103. Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen*, p. 239.
104. MPC, 16th July 1936, De Backer, p. 328.
105. MPC, 2nd June 1937, Pierlot, p. 1629.
106. Report of the ACC, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1937, 7th November 1936, Van den Eynde, p. 1.
107. Ibid.
108. Report of the ACC, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1934, 1st February 1934, Merget, p. 12.
109. Report of the ACS, Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of 1934, 1st January 1934, p. 1.
110. MPC, 12th April 1935, Van den Eynde, p. 980, Sandront, p. 994; MPC, 29th March 1938, Lefebvre, p. 1884.
111. From July 1932 to January 1935 (with an interruption in the course of 1934), there was namely one Department for Agriculture and for the 'Middle Class' of self-employed craftsmen and retailers. From May 1938 to January 1939 there was a combined Ministry of Economics, Middle Class and Agriculture. See P. Bourgeois, C. Devolder, C. Devolder and M. Guinand, *Het Ministerie van Landbouw (1884–1990), vol. 1: Organisatiestructuur van de centrale administratie en adviesorganen* (Brussels, 1994), pp. 89, 97; MPC, 12th April 1935, Leuridan, p. 992.
112. De Rooy, *Ons stipje*, p. 210; K. K. Patel, 'The paradox of planning: German agricultural policy in a European perspective, 1920s to 1970s', *Past & Present*, 212 (2011), pp. 241, 247; A. Chatriot, *la politique du blé*: *crises et regulation d'un marché dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 2016).
113. Bluche and Patel, 'Der Europäer', pp. 140–1.