
GENERAL STRIKES AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN BELGIUM

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April 1980

CRSO WORKING PAPER NO. 215

Copies available through:
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In their book, Strikes in France, 1830-1968, Charles Tilly and Edward Shorter argue that three patterns of strikes developed in Western industrial countries since the Second World War--a Northern European, a North American, and a French and Italian pattern.¹ Northern European strikes have been infrequent and relatively small, North American strikes moderately frequent and long, and French and Italian strikes very frequent, very short, and enormously large. Perhaps the most puzzling exception to Tilly and Shorter's model is Belgium. As the authors state, "Belgium, like Britain, is an ambiguous case for which we have no ready answer."²

I believe that Belgian strikes until the 1960's took an almost unique form. They were, at least partially, political strikes which were, however, rather unlike those of France and Italy. In their form Belgian strikes most resembled general strikes: very large, moderately long, and relatively infrequent. This distinctive strike form lasted only until the 1960's, when a peaceful labor relations system replaced it. To make this argument I will isolate the Belgian strike form, explain how this form grew out of the Belgian political situation, and show why this form changed.

ISOLATING THE BELGIAN STRIKE FORM

Tilly and Shorter use three indicators to describe the development of international strike patterns: strikes per 100,000 workers to measure the frequency of strikes, total workdays lost per striker to indicate the duration of strikes, and strikers per strike to show strike size. Table A gives examples of how Tilly and Shorter combine the three indicators to define a particular strike form. In Northern Europe (West Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia, strike frequency has dropped sharply in comparison to the pre-World War II period. Strike duration has also decreased, but Scandinavian strikes can still be relatively long once they do occur. Behind these changes lies the creation of social democratic systems where

government, business, and unions try to settle economic grievances without the unions resorting to work stoppages. In North America (the United States and Canada) strike frequently has dropped slightly but the length of strikes has decreased less than in other Western countries. North American "business unionism" has kept strikes as a normal part of the economy and thus relatively long and frequent. Yet because strikes deal with economic issues pertaining to the company or factory, they have remained small. By contrast with both of these situations, French and Italian strikes have become more frequent, very short, and enormously large since World War II. These characteristics, Tilly and Shorter argue, are those of the "political strike." French and Italian workers lack the social democratic state of Northern Europe and thus use the strike to get satisfaction for their demands. Yet French and Italian governments will often intervene rather than allow industrial disputes to take their course. Strikes in these two countries are demonstrations to pressure the government to act rather than real struggles between labor and management. Thus, combining the three measures of frequency, duration, and size can describe a particular form, and behind each form lies a distinctive political and economic situation.³

Yet the combination of Tilly and Shorter's three measures for Belgium defies neat categorization in one of the typical post-war patterns. Compare, for example, Belgium with the other countries in Table B. Belgium's strike frequency is very low, almost as low as those of Northern Europe. The size of strikes, however, is enormous, very nearly the same average size as French and Italian strikes. The duration of Belgian strikes falls between the two extremes, longer than the French and Italian, but roughly half that of both North American and Scandinavian strikes.

Tilly and Shorter suggest that Belgium represents some variation on the Northern European labor situation because Belgium has a low post-World War strike rate. Tilly and Shorter's figures for strike frequency, however, leave out the

years 1946-1949 which are included for most other countries in their model.⁴ In almost all industrial countries the years immediately after both World Wars witnessed enormous strike waves. As can be seen from Tables B and C, by including the post-World War I strike wave in the period 1901-1929, but omitting the post-World War II years from the 1950-1968 period, Tilly and Shorter exaggerate the drop in the Belgian strike rate. In their figures the rate drops from 6.4 to 2.6, whereas including 1946-1949 makes it drop only to 3.7. While not a large difference, it does make Belgium look less like the almost strike-free Northern European countries.

Breaking up the post-war period into smaller units provides a still more interesting clue towards isolating the Belgian strike form. Tilly and Shorter's argument is that the frequency of strikes dropped between the periods 1901-1929 and 1945-1968. As the first column in Table C illustrates, the significant drop in the frequency of Belgian strikes came only in the late 1950's. If one excludes the extraordinary strike wave of 1920-21, the average strike frequency was approximately 5.5 for the pre-World War II period. For 1950-1957, the average was still 4.2, after which it dropped abruptly to 1.59 for 1958-1968. It is only this later period since 1957, which makes the frequency of post-war Belgian strikes resemble that of Northern Europe.

The second indicator, strike size, shows an equally dramatic change from the 1950's to the 1960's. In 1950-1959, the average strike size was extremely large -- 1327 strikers. Between 1960-1969, however, the number of strikers dropped drastically to only 513 strikers. This is all the more striking in that it reverses not only the 60-year trend in Belgium but also the general trend in most Western countries toward ever-increasing size. As one can see from Table C, for strike size as for the frequency of strikes, Tilly and Shorter's post-war averages for Belgium combine two distinct periods.

The third measure, strike duration, also changed, though less dramatically,

from the 1950's to the 1960's. In the 1950's days lost per striker averaged 7.9 days; between 1960-1968 it rose to 10.6 days. This difference also suggests that a distinctive form of strike during the 1950's rather abruptly changed to another form in the 1960's.

It is this strike form prevalent during the 1950's which refused to fit into Tilly and Shorter's international model. The frequency of strikes fell between 4 and 5 per 100,000 workers, somewhat higher than in Northern Europe and much lower than in France and Italy. The size of strikes was enormous in the 1950's, as large or larger than the size of French and Italian strikes, perhaps even the largest average strike size in the world. The duration of Belgian strikes was roughly half as long as that in countries where strikes could be real labor--management struggles -- North America and Scandinavia -- yet three times as long as French and Italian political strikes. That the Belgian strike duration falls right between those of the other two patterns reinforces the impression of distinctiveness. How can this distinctive Belgian strike form be explained?

THE GENERAL STRIKE

I believe that the general strike can best explain Belgium's peculiar strike form. Belgian strikes through the 1950's included an unusual number of what could be called 'miniature' general strikes: unusually large strikes lasting long enough to threaten to do real economic damage, and as a result, occurring only occasionally, not frequently. In other words, where French and Italian workers might organize a whole series of one-day work stoppages, militant Belgian workers in the 1950's would engage in one large strike in a year. This would explain why the Belgian strike rate through the 1950's was relatively low while the size and duration were relatively large. The crucial relationship in defining a general strike, as opposed to the French and Italian political protest strikes, is that between large size and long duration. In fact, much of the Belgian strike activity was concentrated in a small number of strikes which, while not called

general strikes, had a similar form -- very large numbers of strikers and long duration. As shown on Table F, I in both the 1920's and the 1950's there was a definite correlation between strikes of long duration and strikes with large numbers of strikers. In the 1920's strikes lasting less than two weeks had approximately 280 strikers, while those lasting over two weeks had approximately 1200 strikers. In the 1950's strikes of less than a week averaged 825 strikers, those lasting a week and longer an astonishing 4538 strikers.

For those familiar with Belgian social history the importance of the general strike will come as no surprise. In the years before World War I, Belgian socialists were the acknowledged masters of the tactic. They launched three massive general strikes involving hundreds of thousands of workers in 1893, 1902, and 1913. Unlike most other Western labor movements, the Belgians continued to launch general strikes after the post-World War I period. Because of their size truly general strikes have not been included in the official Belgian and International Labour Office strike statistics. But by comparing these general strikes and strikes included in the official statistics, one can see the similarity in the form of the two kinds of strikes. Table D groups the general strikes and the largest of the officially recorded strikes.⁵ Coal miners, metal-workers, and dockers and the heavily-industrialized provinces of Hainaut, Liège, and Antwerp formed the basis of both types of strikes. Also both types of strike lasted long enough to be more than demonstrations of political protest. Just as one could argue that the general strikes continued the typical Belgian labor conflict on a grand scale, so one could equally maintain that the officially recorded strikes were general strikes on a smaller scale.

THE SOCIALISTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Why should the general strike form have been the peculiar tactic used by Belgian workers? I believe the special position of the Belgian Socialists can explain this. As shown in Table F, III the three provinces with the highest

percentage of Socialists unionists in the labor force -- Brabant, Hainaut, and Liège -- had the largest number of strikers per strike in the 1950's. East and West Flanders which had the highest percentages of Catholic unionists had the smallest number of strikers per strike. Furthermore the two most heavily Socialist provinces, Hainaut and Liege, had 70 percent of all strikers in the 1950's. (Table F, III) It was the Socialists who used the general strike form to pressure government and business, for despite Belgium's long history of industrialization, social democratic changes came more slowly in the twentieth century than in northern European countries. Because these changes came so slowly, the Socialists were pushed at times into exasperated militancy. Yet the very factors which slowed reforms also forced the Belgian Socialists to adopt peculiar tactics to demand reforms. Understanding both the pace of social reforms and the Socialists' special position can illuminate Belgium's distinctive general strike form.

As in many Western countries the depression brought the Socialist party back into government in Belgium.⁶ As might be expected, their Liberal and conservative Catholic coalition partners attempted to prevent radical reforms. In addition, Belgium during the mid-1930's faced the threat of anti-democratic parties -- the 'Rex' Fascists, and Flemish Nationalists on the right and the Communists on the left. The democratic parties -- Liberals, Catholics, and Socialists -- had to maintain a coalition to prevent one of the anti-democratic parties from attending any leverage. Naturally this limited the Socialists' ability to push reforms to help the workers. Furthermore, Socialist unions lost their funds when the Socialist Banque du Travail collapsed during the Depression. Only government intervention kept the Banque alive long enough to pay thousands of workers some of their savings. Collapse of the bank made the Socialists both less able to pressure their coalition partners for reforms and less capable of launching strikes. The Catholic metallurgists' union even attributed its increased

membership to workers leaving the Socialists because the latter could not strike against hostile employers.⁷

At the same time the Socialist party's own program in the mid-1930's concentrated on the so-called "Plan du Travail" formulated by Hendrik DeMan. DeMan's program of economic stimulus was in fact quite innovative, similar in some respects to Keynesian economics being discussed at the same time in Britain and the U.S. It did not, however, emphasize or implement reforms which would have been more immediately beneficial to workers -- collective bargaining, vacations, and increased insurance. Furthermore, the Socialists' concentration on the DeMan Plan resulted in part from the weakness of the Socialist unions as opposed to the Socialist party. Though the Socialist party was in most respects a moderate parliamentary party, the Socialists kept faithful to the Marxist concentration on acquiring political power as the primary goal. The immediate changes which might have stabilized industrial relations and thus limited strikes were less important. There was no coherent Socialist program asking for government intervention to secure, for example, collective bargaining in industries where it did not exist. The Socialist unions themselves were not in a position to formulate a more pragmatic program. There was no real central trade union federation. The commission Syndicale of the Socialist party, to which most Socialist unions belonged, was less centralized than the Catholic union federation and heavily influenced by the party leadership.

Like their counterparts in France and the United States, Belgian workers took matters into their own hands. From May to August, 1936, a massive wave of strikes swept the country. Over a half million workers -- non-Socialist as well as Socialist -- took part. The demands of most strikers were similar: the 40 hour week, regular vacations, union recognition, and collective bargaining. While the results varied between industries and regions, most workers gained improvements in their working conditions. Many employers still refused serious collective

bargaining.

The strike did create some momentum towards a more peaceful labor relations situation and towards an independent Socialist union program on labor-management issues. The Commission Syndicale was disbanded and the Confédération Générale du Travail Belge, (CGTB) a distinctly union federation, replaced it. The CGTB was much freer to create a program of immediate benefits for workers and more able to confront Belgian employers, most of whom were already organized in national federations. At a national labor conference, held partly as a result of the 1936 strikes, union and business leaders began debating centralized collective bargaining. Unfortunately, World War II cut off these fruitful beginnings.

Immediately after the war the government granted legal status to the joint management-labor commissions which had developed in certain industries and regions during the inter-war period. The initiative to create these commissions still depended on cooperation between unions and management, and the government was not obligated to impose the commissions' agreements on all businesses within an industry. Thus the commissions spread slowly and changed the labor relations situation only with some difficulty.⁸

At the same time, Belgian labor was too divided and preoccupied with other issues to push successfully for major changes. Ever since the post-World War I boom in Socialist union membership ended in 1921, Catholic unions had grown faster than the Socialist. After World War II, Catholic unions grew at an even faster rate as the more heavily Catholic Dutch-speaking areas began catching up industrially with French-speaking Wallonia. In addition, two bitter issues made effective collaboration between Catholic and Socialist unions difficult. Leopold III, accused by the Socialists of collaborating with the Nazis, attempted to return as king in the 1940's. A hotly-contested referendum almost split the country, pitting Catholics against Socialists. Members of the union

federations tended to line up with their respective political party. Only another massive general strike, largely led by Socialists, forced the king to renounce the throne. The mid-1950's saw a decisive showdown on the issue of equal state funding for religious and non-religious schools. Although Catholic unionists struggled against business and middle-class Catholic groups over economic issues, Catholic solidarity in support of religious education was also very strong. This solidarity manifested itself especially when the Socialists collaborated closely with bourgeois, anti-clerical Liberals against the Catholics. The educational issue, which had plagued Belgian politics for a century, was finally solved when the Liberals and Socialists agreed to state-funding without complete state control over religious education. Both the royal and educational issues divided workers more by religious or linguistic lines than class. Thus effective cooperation between the labor movements and concentration on economic issues were difficult.⁹

This background helps explain why the Socialist unions were not in a position to employ the short, massive strikes of French and Italian Communist unions. Especially since 1945 the Belgian Socialist unions have represented an increasingly smaller percentage of the organized labor force. A one-day political strike by the Socialists over an industry, province, or the whole country would not be effective with only a minority of workers involved. Instead, for a strike to be truly effective in influencing the government or business it would need to be long enough to cause or to threaten real economic damage. But just because large, long strikes can cause real economic harm and exhaust more of the strikers' resources, they cannot be organized frequently. The most effective tactic for a Socialist political strike would be a general strike -- relatively long, as large as possible, and used or threatened periodically, not frequently.

Catholic unions, by contrast, have almost always had open the avenue of influencing the government through their own political party. Between 1919 and 1963, the Catholic party participated in government during all but five years.

Especially since 1945, the Catholic unions have been the single most powerful element within the Catholic party. Putting pressure on the government in areas of economic and social policy could be substituted for political strikes. The Catholic unions argued that, "the FGTB [the Socialist union federation] utilizes the method of the political strike when the PSB [the Socialist party] is in opposition. Once the PSB enters into the government, one expects to see the end of the chapter of political strikes."¹⁰ While the Catholics were here referring specifically to political strikes such as the general strike over the royal question, I would argue that the same was true for the smaller strikes which had the same form as the general strikes.

One could argue that the dominant French and Italian Communist labor federations have been in a similar position as the Belgian Socialists because they have Catholic and Socialist unions competing with them. But none of the rival French and Italian union federations have had the political influence or the relative size of the Belgian Catholic unions. The French and Italian Communists' political strikes can claim to represent "the Workers" by their sheer size and frequency, whereas the Belgian Socialists' strikes had to make their impact by their economic threat. The degree of organization is the other important variable characterizing the Belgian labor movement. Almost all French and Italian unions are made up of small cores of militants and large groups of workers who are only loosely associated. Long strikes carry the risks of steadily declining participation. The best way to impress government and business with the unions' strength and keep them guessing about the exact degree of commitment to an issue among the workers is to have a short, large strike. In Belgium, Catholic and Socialist unions alike are large bureaucratic organizations with stable, dues-paying memberships and supporting auxiliary organizations. Belgium has been estimated to have the second highest unionization rate in the world, over 65 percent of the labor force.¹¹ Not only are huge, long strikes easier to organize,

but only a strike of some length will demonstrate the urgency of the workers' claims, not just their organizational strength.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE FORM

If divisions between unions, lack of collective bargaining, and the Socialists' political isolation created the general strike tactic, how did this situation change? Between 1958 and 1962, most of these basic problems were resolved. First, the 1958 agreement on funding religious education quickly removed a good deal of the ideological hostility between Catholics and Socialists. Second, the Catholic and Socialist labor federations and the employers federation made an historic agreement in May, 1960. The agreement's terms were very simple, the key one being that workers' wages and benefits must rise with increasing productivity. That the agreement was made at all and that it was negotiated by the rival labor federations and the national employers associations were more important than the agreement's terms. The May, 1960 agreement firmly established the pattern of labor-management negotiations which had begun with the 1938 National Labor Conference.

Shortly after this came the great general strike of December, 1960 to January, 1961. The Socialists' strike against the Liberal and Catholic government's austerity plan severely tested the rapprochement between the two union federations and between business and labor. Unaided by the Catholic unions, the Socialists were defeated. For the Socialists the failure of the strike demonstrated the need for a united labor front with the Catholics. At the same time the strike showed the Catholic unions and business the peril of attempting to ignore the Socialists. Without cooperation the threat of costly general strikes would continue. As a result of the strike, a Catholic-Socialist coalition government was formed in the spring of 1961. Only two shortlived governments of this type had been formed before in Belgian history, and yet since 1961 the Socialists have shared power almost continuously. Simultaneously the Catholic and Socialist

union federations began a definite policy of concerted action, "Le front commun." Only a common front could obtain national agreements with employers' and put effective pressure on the government regardless of the political parties in power.

The landmark 1960 agreement became the first in a series of national agreements between labor and employers' federations which have been made approximately every two to three years ever since. Undoubtedly the prosperous years of the 1960's along with the initial Common Market boom made a peaceful labor relations system easier to create. For a time in the 1960's unions even agreed to no-strike clauses in collective contracts. However it is the almost continuous participation of Socialists in government and the common union front that have made the national agreements possible. The peculiar consultative fashion of Belgian industrial relations allows business and labor to arrive at national agreements which entail increased government social expenditures and government action to give the industrial agreement the force of law. As Val Lorwin describes this system, labor and management, "have in effect presented checks drawn on the government for its signature, calling for legislation or regulation or budgetary action. With labor and management associations in agreement, the government has usually signed these checks."¹² What labor scholars have not noted, however, is that this system of cooperative labor negotiations emerged in its full form only in the 1960's.

Whereas the divided labor situation lasting through the 1950's had produced a distinctive general strike form, these changes around 1960 dramatically altered Belgian strike activity. As mentioned earlier, in both the 1920's and 1950's there was a correlation between strikes of long duration and strikes with large numbers of strikers. In the 1950's strikes of less than a week averaged 825 strikers, those lasting a week and longer averaged 4538 strikers. Between 1961-1965 this relationship was completely reversed. Strikes lasting a day or less averaged 1017 strikers, those lasting two to five days had only

approximately 450 strikers, and those of 11 to 20 days only 213 strikers. (See Table F, I).

The declines in the strike rate and the average size of strikes, noted on Table C, can now be seen as two sides of the same phenomenon. The peculiar strike form resembling the general strike disappeared in Belgium between the late 1950's and the early 1960's. Or to read Table F, I differently, there were two overlapping Belgian strike patterns until about 1960. One was made up of a relatively small number of large, long strikes, what I called the form of the general strike. This included strikes labeled "general" strikes and not included in the official statistics and many in the official statistics which had a similar form. The second pattern involved a larger number of much smaller, shorter strikes, more typical of industrialized countries. The 1960's saw the disappearance of the first form and a large, diminution of the second.

The change which occurred in Belgian strike activity appears directly related to the Socialists' relationship to the Catholic unions and the Socialists' new political position. As shown in Table F, II the four provinces with the highest numbers of Socialist union members -- Antwerp, Brabant, Hainaut, and Liege -- had by far the largest average strikes in the 1950's. The published strike data for the 1960's does not give strikers per strike but does include the provincial breakdown for total numbers of strikers. As seen in Table F, III the four Socialist provinces' share of strikers dropped between 1952-1958 and 1960-1966. The two most heavily Socialist provinces, Hainaut and Liège, had 70 percent of all strikers in 1952-1958 and only 49 percent in 1960-1966. The three provinces with the highest percentage of Catholic union members increased their share of strikers. This too indicates that the change from the 1950's to the 1960's involved not only a decline in the strike rate, but a decrease in the size of those strikes which occurred. That the decrease in size was especially concentrated in the Socialist areas points to the new relationship between Catholics and

industries, believe they have gained little from labor's political influence. While the bulk of union and Labour Party leaders remain committed to peaceful labor relations within a social democratic system, these workers have engaged in frequent, often unofficial strikes to protest their condition. A similar situation may lie behind the Belgian strikes of the 1970's. Once the mainstay of the country's industrial economy, the coal and metals industries of the southern provinces have fallen into almost permanent recession. Unemployed in some Walloon areas averages almost 16 percent, while the newer industries in Flanders have enjoyed a healthy level of prosperity since the second World War.

Yet even with two-thirds of the Walloon union members in Socialist unions, the Socialists are unlikely to resort to general strikes to protest their situation. Decades of lower birth rates have resulted in the Walloon provinces' population falling from almost 50 percent of the country's total to barely 30 percent. The Flemish Socialists, once a minority within their own party and union federation, now outnumber the Walloon Socialists by approximately 5 to 4. Furthermore, the old linguistic division has taken on a new intensity in the last 20 years. Belgium has moved towards a federal system with Flanders, Walloon, and Brussels as semi-autonomous regions. The two major traditional parties, Catholics and Socialists, have virtually divided into separate Dutch and French-speaking parties and more radical linguistic parties have grown in size. The linguistic or regional issue has become the context in which all other issues are dealt with -- or the excuse with which they are deferred. General strikes have become more difficult to organize and more unlikely to influence the government. While the Socialist party and union leaders are still officially committed to labor peace, their influence has been less valuable to the most militant workers. One result may be increasing protest strikes at the local level -- a situation similar to that of Britain.¹³

Ironically, the concentration on the linguistic or regional issue has probably

Socialists and the Socialists' new political position.

Just how decisively the 1960's changed Belgian strikes can be seen in recent statistics which at first glance refute the previous argument. As shown in the bottom of Table C, the Belgian strike rate shot dramatically upward after the 1960's. The frequency of strikes for 1970-1976 was 5.7, higher even than the rate for the 1950's and as high or higher than for any period before World War II. The trend during the 1970's in fact has been upward. The years 1975 and 1976 were the two most active strike years in Belgian history outside of the strike waves of 1906-1907 and the two post-World War periods. Since the entire labor situation of the 1970's is complicated by the periodic recessions and great inflation in most Western countries, it is difficult to explain these strikes. Nonetheless, other figures suggest that the rising frequency of Belgian strikes in the 1970's has not reversed the changes made around 1960.

First, while the frequency of strikes has gone back up, strike size, which declined in the 1960's, has actually continued to decline in the 1970's. (See Table C.) The figure for the 1970's, 383, is actually lower than that of the 1920's, 463. Another indicator which makes the increase in the frequency of strikes for the 1970's appear less startling is the striker rate, the number of strikers per 100,000 workers. As shown on Table E, the figure for the 1970's, 2,242, is only half that of the 1950's, 4,549.9, and slightly less than that of the 1920's, 2,575. Thus, the increasing frequency of strikes does not mean the return of the general strike form. Instead, there have been more frequent, but not unusually numerous, strikes of small size.

The decreasing size of strikes may provide an explanation for the rising strike rate. The only country in Tilly and Shorter's international comparison which experienced a similar decline through 1968 was Great Britain. As do other observers, Tilly and Shorter explain the smaller British strikes as local protest strikes. A minority of workers, caught in declining or economically depressed

left the union federations stronger and made the 'Front Commun' more effective. While the separate French and Dutch-speaking sub-parties have had difficulty even forming a cabinet at times, the labor federations have continued to grow in size and to be able to bargain with employers on a national level. As Van Lorwin has pointed out, "The increasing size, influence, and self-confidence of the two major labor confederations contrast with the decline in strength and public standing of the parties with which they have been associated."¹⁴ One could even argue that a kind of corporate situation has emerged. The labor federations are represented in the administration of government-subsidized welfare services as well as in the direction of economic policy and credit organizations. This "institutionalization" of the labor movement has made the unions one of the constituent elements of Belgian society and gives them a role in issues which seem far from their normal field of activity.¹⁵ With the political parties weakened by the linguistic issue, the unions' hold on the bureaucracy and their own organizational strength have allowed them to maintain the labor relations situation set up in the 1960's.

In conclusion, Belgium demonstrates the importance of social democratic labor relations for reducing strikes, but shows how long such a system could be delayed. Belgium arrived at a situation only in the 1960's that Northern Europe achieved in the 1930's and 1940's. As Tilly and Shorter argue, before 1968 France and Italy still had not reached a similar labor relations situation. Belgium also shows how decisive such a change could be. Even with a dramatic increase in the frequency of strikes in the 1970's, the most characteristic feature of previous Belgian strikes, the general strike form, has not returned.

Secondly, the Belgian strike pattern shows that analyzing a particular type of strike can help explain the political and economic situation of a society as a whole. Tilly and Shorter's method of grouping strike statistics seems a fruitful way to integrate strikes into the larger study of politics and economics.

Studying the causes of the distinctive Belgian strike form reveals the peculiar conflicts facing the Belgian labor movement: first, the conflicts between business and labor, and secondly, the conflicts within the labor movement itself -- that is, between Socialists and Catholics and between unions and political parties. Because conflicts and ideological differences between unions have not adequately studied, labor movements have often been portrayed as homogenous efforts on behalf of the working class. The form of Belgian strikes reveals that the conflicts between classes and those within the working class are both necessary for understanding the Belgian labor movement. Plural unionism, whether Catholic and Socialist, or Socialist and Communist, has not been studied thoroughly in enough countries to know how distinctive Belgium is. The case of Belgium does suggest that this phenomenon should be more thoroughly studied.

SOURCES FOR STRIKE STATISTICS

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FOOTNOTES

¹London, 1974. Chapter 12, "French strikes in international perspective" contains Tilly and Shorter's international discussion.

²Tilly and Shorter, p. 327

³Tilly and Shorter's labor force figures and those of this paper are taken from Bairoch, Paul, ed. La Population Active et sa Structure/The Working Population and Its Structure. (Brussels, 1973).

⁴It is not clear from Tilly and Shorter's text why data from these years was not available.

⁵The 1936 strike is the most problematic in the table. It could be labeled a strike wave or a general strike. The strike's early stages closely resembled previous general strikes: dockworkers, metals workers, and coalminers were the most militant and numerous, though disputes among public service and diamondworkers in Antwerp may have been the actual trigger. At some point, it could be argued, a general strike spilled over into a strike wave. Monica DeVriendt, De algemeene Werkstaking van 1936 (Limbourg, 1967) is one of the few discussions of the 1936 strike.

For information on Belgian general strikes before World War I see M. Liebman, "La pratique de la grève générale dans le parti ouvrier belge jusqu'à 1914" Le mouvement social, January-March, 1967, Wilfrid Crook, The General Strike (Chapel Hill, 1936), and Cyril Van Overbergh, La Grève Générale (Brussels, 1913). For the 1960-61 strike see Robert Gubbels, La grève: phénomène de civilisation (Brussels, 1962) and Valmy Feaux, Cinq semaines de lutte sociale (Brussels, 1962). For a useful review of Gubbels and Feaux, see Michelle Perrot, "Travaux belges sur les greves" Le mouvement social, Juillet-Sept., 1964.

⁶The Socialists shared power in 1919-1921 and briefly in 1925. The first government instituted the eight-hour day and increased the right to strike, but neither decisively reshaped labor relations.

⁷Centrale Chrétienne des Metallurgistes de Belgique, Rapport 1934-1935 (Ghent, 1936), p. 26-27.

⁸What may have kept Belgian workers from being anymore radical in the immediate post-war period was a general rise in wages. From being perhaps the lowest in industrial Europe, with the exception of Italy's, Belgian wages between 1945 and 1960 moved ahead of British and French, and became roughly equal with those of the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Germany.

⁹A discussion of these conflicts and perhaps the best short introduction to Belgian politics is found in Val Lorwin, "Belgium: Class, Religion, and Language in a Divided Society" in Robert Dahl, ed. Political Oppositions in Western Democracies (New Haven, 1966).

¹⁰"Les syndicats chrétiens, les partis politiques et la greve politique" Les dossiers de l'action sociale catholiques, No. 12, December, 1953. The article is the text of propositions approved at the XIVth Congress of the Christian labor federation, October, 1953.

¹¹Jean Neuville, "Le taux de syndicalisation en Belgique en 1971," Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques, Courrier Hebdomadaire, No. 607, (June, 1973), p. 3-6.

¹²Val Lorwin, "Labor Unions and Political Parties in Belgium" Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol. 28, no. 2, January, 1975, p. 257.

¹³For another attempt to interest Belgian strikes since 1968, see Michel Molitor, "Social Conflicts in Belgium" in Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, eds. The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968. Vol. I, (London, 1978).

¹⁴Lorwin, 1975, p. 253

¹⁵For discussions of the problems on institutionalization in Belgian unions, see Lorwin, 1975, and Molitor.

TABLE D

GENERAL STRIKES IN BELGIUM

Date	Demands	Industry(ies)	Strikes	Year's Total	Duration	Location	Est. Days Lost
1893	Universal Suffrage	general	200,000	?	7 days	general	1,200,000
1897	change of work rules	coal	18,945	35,958	24 days	Hainaut Liège	450,000
1899	wage increase	coal	42,842	57,931	43 days	Hainaut Liège	1,900,000
1901	end to wage cuts	dockworkers	15,000	43,814	19 days	Antwerp	285,000
1902	end to plural vote	general	250,000	260,500	7 days	general	+1,500,000
1905	wage increase	coal	51,789	75,672	47 days	Hainaut Liège	3,500,000
1910	wage increase	coal	13,700	26,289	35 days	Hainaut Liège	480,000
1911	change work rules	coal	23,000	55,316	+30 days	Liège	+800,000
1912	wage increase	coal	25,800	61,654	+30 days	Hainaut	+800,000
1913	end to plural vote	general	375,000	391,000	10 days	general	+3,500,000
1920	wages & solidarity	coal & metals	66,500	289,190	c.10 days	Namur & Liège	6,650,000
1923	wages	coal & iron	44,477	104,980	c.18 days	Hainaut Liège	1,890,000
1925	wages	metals	58,104	81,422	c.35 days	Namur & Liège	2,000,000
1932	wages & coll. barg.	coal, then general	140,000 to 166,000	160,000 to 190,000	30 days	Hainaut general	4,100,000
1936	wages, union recognition 40 hr. wk.	dockers, mining, general	520,000	560,000	20-30 days	Antwerp Hainaut general	11,300,000
1950	"royal question"	general	500,000	650,000	6 days	general	3,000,000
1957	end to wage restraints	metals	183,000	339,055	9-12 days	general	2,350,000
1957		construction	72,000	339,055	c.10 days	general	795,000
1959	protest	coal & general	76,176 140,000	123,473		Hainaut Liège	514,000 1,050,000
1960- 1961	protest "la Loi unique"	general	340,000	360,000	34 days	general	5,150,000

Sources: Cyril Van Overbergh, La Grève Generale (Brussels, 1913), Wilfrid Cook, The General Strike (Chapel Hill, 1936); Robert Gubbels, La grève: phenomene de civilisation (Brussels, 1962); Office du Travail, Revue du Travail.

TABLE C

Reconstruction of Belgian Strike
Statistics

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Size</u>
1896-1900	5.43		273.3
1901-1913	5.22		223.0
1920-1921	6.4 14.87		900 496.1
1922-1929	5.74		463.0
1927-1933		21.7	
1930-1939			564.8
1946('45)-1949	8.50	6.6	948.1
1946-1947	12.83		
1950-1957('59)	2.6 4.22	7.6 7.9	1100 1326.9
1958('60)-1968	1.59	10.6	513.2
1969	2.57		
1969-1976	5.3	10.2	383.9
1970-1976	5.7		

□ [= Tilly and Shorter's figures

Sources: Office du Travail, Statistique des Grèves, 1896-1910; Revue du Travail 1911-13, 1920-36, 1952-60; Institut National de Statistique, Bulletin, 1960-77; Annuaire Statistique de Belgique, 1926, 1938, 1950, 1967.

TABLE E

BELGIUM STRIKERS/100,000 WORKERS

	<u>Without General Strikes</u>		<u>With General Strikes</u>
1896-1900	1,440		
1901-1913	1,205	} 2,279	1901-1913 3,133
1920-1921	8,074		1901-1929 3,369
1922-1929	2,575		
1947-1948	10,633	} 7,619	
1949	1,591		
1950-1959	4,549	} 3,410	1947-1968 4,618
1960-1968	741		1950-1968 4,144
1969	722		
1970-1976	2,242		
<hr/>			
1950-1961	3,858		6,088

TABLE F

I. Size of Strikes (Strikers/Strike) by Duration

1922-1926		1955-1959			1961-1965		
<u>Duration</u>	<u>Strikers</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Strikers</u>	<u>No. of Strikes</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Strikers</u>	<u>No. of Strikes</u>
1	230	1/2-1	969	(176)	1/2-1	1017	(52)
2-5	350	2-5	675	(168)	2-5	450	(79)
6-10	244	6-10	4540	(48)	6-10	333	(26)
11-15	326	11-20	4536	(46)	11-20	213	(19)
16-20	1213						
+30	1190						

II. Strikers/Strike

1952-57

Antwerp	1163	
Brabant	*1373	
W. Flanders	604	
E. Flanders	497	
Hainaut	*1738	
Liège	*1332	
(Limburg	1588)	} low number of strikes
(Luxem.)	
(Namur)	

III. Percent of All Strikes by Province

	<u>1952-58</u>		<u>1960-66</u>	
Hainaut	35.7	} 70%	27.2	} 99%
Liege	34.2		22.0	
Antwerp	10.9	} 16%	7.0	} 11%
Brabant	5.2		4.0	
W. Flanders	2.5	} 12%	4.1	} 39%
E. Flanders	4.1		12.0	
Limburg	5.6		23.0	
Luxembourg	.5		--	
Namur	1.2		1.0	

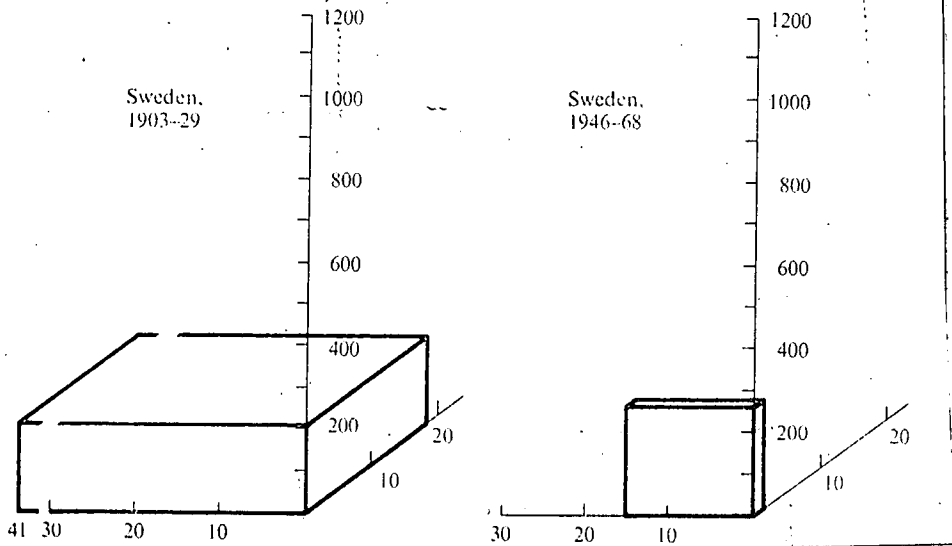
Mean = 1288

Source: See Table C

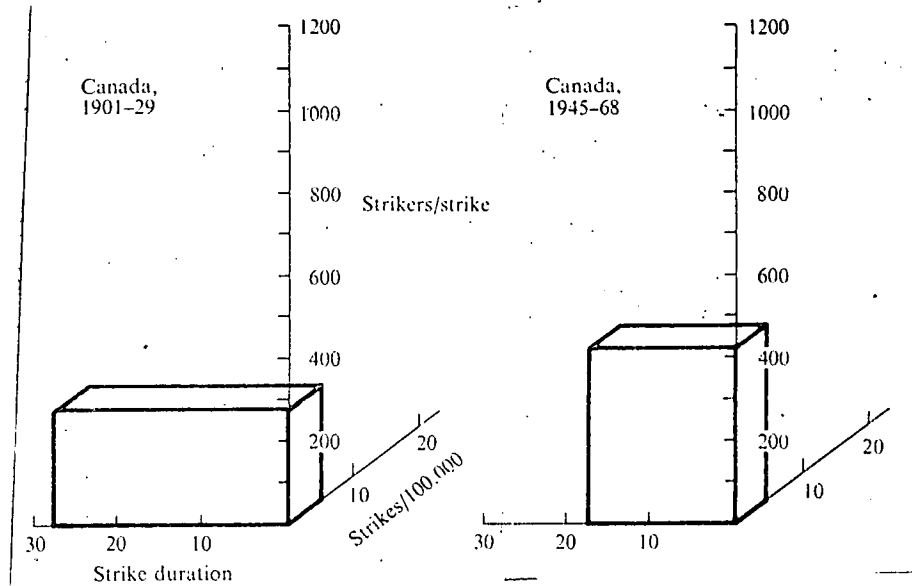
TABLE A

Examples of Post-war strike patterns. (from Tilly and Shorter, Strikes in France, 1830-1968. p. 319-323.)

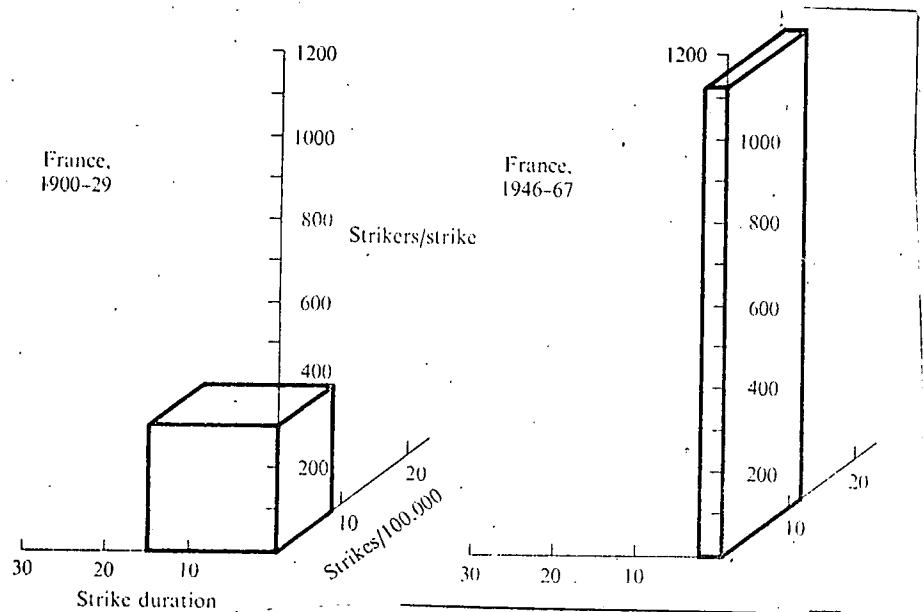
NORTHERN EUROPE: SWEDEN



NORTH AMERICA: CANADA



MEDITERRANEAN/WESTERN EUROPE: FRANCE



BELGIUM

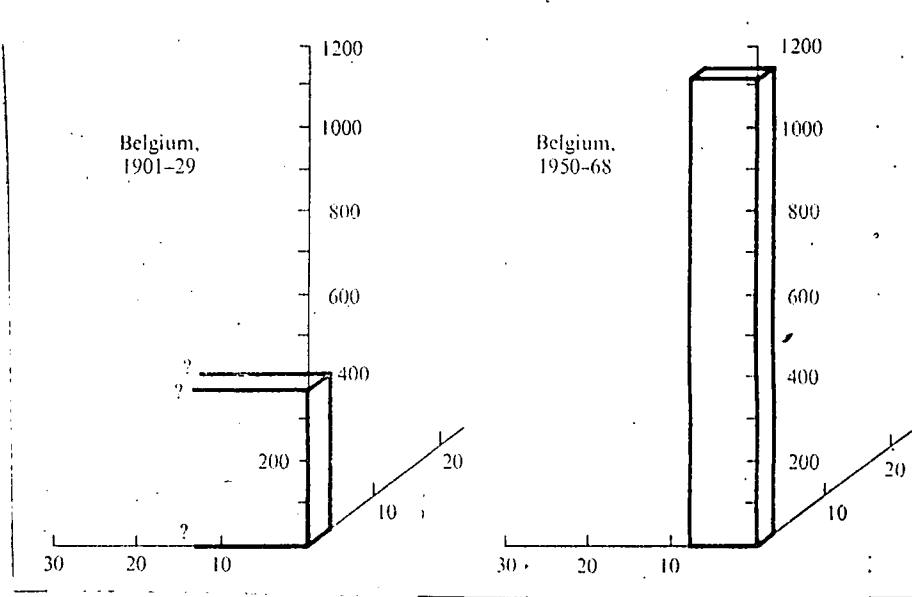


TABLE B

POST-WORLD WAR II STRIKE PATTERNS, 1945-68

Source: reconstructed from Table 12.1, p. 333, Tilly and Shorter, Strikes in France, 1830-1968. Data in Tilly and Shorter draw from International Labor Office Yearbook and Ross and Hartman, Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict (New York, 1960).

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Size</u>
Northern Europe			
Denmark	1.8	13.4	640
Finland	6.0	13.4	780
Germany	--	5.4	--
Netherlands	2.5	5.6	240
Norway	2.2	15.3	310
Sweden	1.3	13.5	260
North America			
Canada	5.2	17.3	420
U.S.A.	6.4	16.1	540
Mediterranean/W. Europe			
France	12.8	2.3	1130
Italy	18.1	3.3	1030
Apparent exceptions			
Belgium	2.6	7.6	1100
U.K.	9.9	3.4	400
Strikwerda's figures			
Belgium		<u>1927-33</u>	
1901-1929	6.4	21.7	371
1950-1968	2.7	8.5	1018
1945-1968	3.7	7.7	945