

THE INSIDER AS OUTSIDER: EMILE VANDERVELDE AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

par

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In January 1937, Emile Vandervelde resigned his position as Minister of Public Health and Vice President of the second Van Zeeland Cabinet. The first European socialist to have accepted a cabinet position while remaining a Socialist, Vandervelde personified the Second International tradition of moderate, negotiating insiders. Why then did he fight his last battle for the Spanish Republic outside of the government and against members of his own party?

Vandervelde had launched his campaign for assistance to the Spanish Republic shortly after his first visit to Spain in 1931. The annual congresses of the Parti Ouvrier Belge enthusiastically approved his earliest reports on conditions in Spain. In October 1934, the POB voted to send "Leur salut de fraternelle solidarité aux travailleurs espagnols dans leur lutte de défense pour le socialisme et les libertés démocratiques." (1). At each succeeding Socialist congress, Vandervelde reminded his fellow delegates that they were obligated to send more than "un simple geste de solidarité"; they had pledged to help the newest victims in "la lutte contre le fascisme" (2). From 1934 to 1936, Vandervelde served as the party's undisputed conscience in the Spanish struggle for democracy.

In October 1936, the POB passed a motion approving the Socialist International's condemnation of the Non-intervention pact. The Belgian government had joined the French initiative in August 1936, pledging to remain neutral and uninvolved in the Spanish conflict. After the meeting, Prime Minister Van Zeeland, wrote Vandervelde to express "les perplexités que j'éprouve à voir un membre du Gouvernement recommander une sympathie agissante pour un des par-

(1) *Compte rendu officiel du Congrès Annuel, Parti Ouvrier Belge*, October 27 and 28, 1934, p. 15.

(2) *Ibid*; and *Congrès Extraordinaire, Parti Ouvrier Belge*, February 21, 1935.

tis dans l'horrible guerre civile que déchire l'Espagne" (3). (his underlining). He reminded his vice president that the Belgian government had unanimously adopted a policy of neutrality toward Spain. "Il se conçoit difficilement qu'un membre du Gouvernement recommande à son propre parti une attitude différente," he explained, adding that the government could not rule effectively unless it was cohesive (4). The disagreements over Spain continued to divide the cabinet. Van Zeeland, encouraged by the Socialists Paul Henri Spaak and Henri De Man, embargoed arms shipments to Spain and outlawed the enrolling of volunteers for the International Brigades (5). Noting that all cabinet decisions were reported as unanimous, Vandervelde explained, "Ce que l'on n'a pas dit, c'est au prix de quelles difficultés, dans une atmosphère de tension croissante, cette unanimité fut obtenue (6).

The incident precipitating Vandervelde's resignation was the Belgian government's demand, negotiated by Spaak, that the Spanish Republic pay a million franc indemnity to the Belgians for the assassination of the Belgian diplomat, Baron Borchgrave. At the meeting of the cabinet on January 25, 1937, De Man and Spaak charged Vandervelde with meddling in foreign affairs through his contacts with the Spanish ambassador. Vandervelde, who alone opposed the government's handling of the Borchgrave affair, met with Van Zeeland. Shortly thereafter Vandervelde announced his resignation from the cabinet. The Conseil Général of the POB accepted the resignation.

In *Le Peuple*, the change of minister was duly noted. The headlines of the front page article highlighted Vandervelde's calls for continued party unity and his support for the government (7). There was no mention of Spain or of the cause of his resignation. This official silence on Spain was broken by the outraged calls for an explanation by *Combat* (8).

Perhaps the most controversial reporting of the resignation ap-

(3) INSTITUT EMILE VANDERVELDE, BRUSSELS. (IEVB) Van Zeeland to Vandervelde, Brussels, October 24, 1936, Vandervelde IV 620.

(4) Ibid. See also IEVB Van Zeeland to Vandervelde, November 17, 1936, Fonds Vandervelde 1173, II.

(5) On the differences between Vandervelde, De Man and Spaak see Emile VANDERVELDE, *Carnets*, Paris, 1966; Paul Henri SPAAK, *Combats inachevés*, Brussels, 1969; and HENRI DE MAN, *Herinneringen*, Antwerp, 1941.

(6) E. VANDERVELDE, *Carnets*, p. 41. See also IEVB, Van Zeeland to Vandervelde, January 26, 1937, Brussels, Vandervelde IV 709.

(7) *Le Peuple*, January 28, 1937.

(8) *Combat*, January 28, 1937.

peared in the journal of the Socialist Internationales, *Informations Internationales*. A lead article entitled "La Démission d'Emile Vandervelde" explained: "Ce dont il s'agit fondamentalement, c'est que pour Vandervelde la participation passagère du Parti au gouvernement ne peut en rien influencer sur ses positions principes, sur son indépendance et sur ses taches dans la lutte de classes, tandis qu'une partie des camarades du Parti, sous la direction de Spaak et d'Henri de Man voient en l'alliance des trois grands partis belges une suprême nécessité nationale et veulent subordonner l'action du Parti à celle du gouvernement" (9). De Man immediately and vehemently protested the allegation that he had abandoned socialist principles in the interest of national unity. Two weeks later, the editor, F. Adler, alluding to the uproar over the article, explained that he had not intended the article as congratulations for Vandervelde. He would have preferred that the resignation had not been necessary, he wrote. If Spaak and De Man had shared Vandervelde's commitment to the Party and its goals, he concluded, Vandervelde would not have been forced to give up his position in the government. The Bureau of the POB called an urgent meeting to discuss the article. In a letter to the *Informations*, they explained that contrary to the impression given in the February 4 article, all of the cabinet decisions concerning the Borchgrave affair had in fact been unanimous. Vandervelde had not dissented (10).

Except for a report on the February debate within the Conseil Général of the POB, *Le Peuple* maintained its silence (11). Meanwhile, the rest of the Belgian press was replete with interviews and stories of the rupture within the Belgian socialist movement (12). And Vandervelde was inundated by telegrams of sympathy for his difficult decision and congratulations for his courageous stand on behalf of the Spanish Republic. The one reproduced most often in Belgian journals came from Albert Einstein (13). His supporters, attacking Spaak and De Man, hailed Vandervelde as "le militant socialiste,

(9) *Informations International*, Vol XIV no 4, (February 4, 1937), INSTITUUT VOOR SOCIALE GESCHIEDENIS, AMSTERDAM (ISGA), DE MAN 452.

(10) March 5, 1937, ISGA, De Man 453; and IEVB De Block to Vandervelde, February 20, 1937, Vandervelde IV 715.

(11) *Le Peuple*, February 27, 1937.

(12) See I. SCAGA, De Man 454, for copies of the controversial interviews of De Man and Spaak with *l'Indépendance Belge*.

(13) Einstein to Vandervelde, January 23, 1937 cited by Adler in *Informations Internationales*, February 27, 1937; ISGA De Man 452. A dossier of telegrams is in IEVB Vandervelde IV 714.

plein d'esprit internationaliste et de fermeté courageuse" (14).

The question of Spain continued to divide the POB for the next two years, with Vandervelde becoming an increasingly outspoken opponent of the governmental policy of neutrality. At each POB Congress, Vandervelde drafted resolutions calling for Socialist aid to republican Spain while inside the government Spaak and De Man continued to support the government's foreign policy of non-intervention.

Vandervelde won his last victory in October 1937 when the Conseil Général of the POB supported his resolution to the Socialist International condemning the Non-intervention Pact and urging increased aid for the Spanish republicans (15). At the 1938 Congress, as the reporter on international affairs, his task was "de rapprocher, autant que possible, les points de vues" (16). That had been his habitual calling within the party. "Néanmoins, je me suis réservé d'exprimer, s'il en était besoin, des opinions personnelles", he added. In his subsequent discussion of "Politique intégralement belge", "Le P.O.B. et la Société des Nations", and "Socialisme National et Socialisme International", he reaffirmed his commitment to the internationalism of Locarno and the League of Nations, reminding the Socialist Minister of Foreign Affairs, Spaak, of the POB resolutions of October 1937 (17). Whatever the Belgian government might do, Vandervelde concluded, "nous sommes maîtres de notre politique et, il nous plaît de le constater, c'est l'honneur du Parti Ouvrier d'avoir été et de rester au premier rang des Sections de l'Internationale, dans l'Aide à l'Espagne et dans la lutte contre le Fascisme, pour la démocratie et la Paix" (18). In this last report, he maintained the style and rhetoric of the conciliator, while proclaiming his personal opposition to the Socialist Minister's policies.

The best place to begin to find an explanation for Vandervelde's decision to pursue his struggle for Spain outside the government and against members of his own party may be with his own arguments. He testified in article after article and speech after speech that the bombing of open cities in Spain outraged him. He could not remain silent and allow the democratic powers to hide behind the Non-intervention Pact while the arms, armies, and planes of fascist Germany and Italy crushed the Spanish Republic.

(14) IEVB X to Vandervelde, January 29, 1937, Vandervelde IV 706.

(15) IEVB, Vandervelde IV 688; and *Le Peuple*, June 2, 1937.

(16) E. VANDERVELDE, "Rapport sur la Politique Internationale", *Congrès Annuel, 1938, Parti Ouvrier Belge*.

(17) *Ibid.*

(18) *Ibid.*

Ever since Vandervelde joined the POB fifty years earlier, he had consistently intervened in POB congresses, the Chamber, and the press on the side of peoples who were being oppressed. Few causes had escaped his attention. Once before this concern had led Vandervelde to speak publicly in opposition to the majority of his party. In the first decade of the twentieth century, he supported Belgian annexation of the Congo, "in the interests of the native population", and against all the other Socialist leaders.

Spain typified the revolutionary struggle for liberty and democracy for which Vandervelde had fought throughout his life. The civil war in Spain was but an episode in the longer Spanish revolution, he explained, citing Marx (19). The new Spain of the popular front was battling to escape the oppression of the old regime of the high clergy, military professionals and the latifundia owners (20). The Spanish transition to socialism, an "évolution révolutionnaire", would be possible, he argued, only if the forces of reaction that were being reinforced by foreign fascists could be suppressed (21).

The socialists participating in their national governments would share a heavy responsibility if the Spanish democrats were defeated by the fascists, Vandervelde charged. If they remained silent, they would be helping to kill the revolution of the Spanish people. For four years, he appealed through every possible channel to his fellow socialists in England, France, and Belgium to renounce the Non-intervention Pact that closed the Spanish border to material aid from the democratic governments of Europe. The Spanish republicans needed to be able to buy their supplies. As he admonished Spaak in parliamentary debate, the renunciation of the Pact did not imply Belgian intervention, simply allowing freedom of trade (22). While the democratic governments enforced their embargoes, Italy and Germany cynically violated the Pact and supplied Franco with arms and ammunition (23). "Les accords de non-intervention sont aussi rigoureusement appliqués par les uns, qu'ils sont affrontément violés par les autres", he complained over and over again (24.)

(19) E. VANDERVELDE, "Karl Marx et la Révolution espagnole", *Depêche de Toulouse*, October 31, 1936.

(20) ISGA, Sozialistische Arbeiter Internationale 1299/14; Emile and Jeanne VANDERVELDE, *Ce que nous avons vu en Espagne*, Paris, 1938; and *Le Peuple*, January 24, 1938.

(21) E. VANDERVELDE, "L'évolution révolutionnaire", *Le Peuple*, February 13, 1938.

(22) *Annales Parlementaires, Chambre*, June 8, 1937.

(23) E. VANDERVELDE, *Ce que nous avons vu en Espagne*; and IEVB Vandervelde III K159.

(24) E. VANDERVELDE, "Au lendemain d'Almería", *Le Peuple*, June 6, 1937.

Vandervelde argued for four years with the Belgian supporters of neutrality and with French socialists such as Léon Blum who believed that "this endless chain of concessions and capitulations...is above all a question of saving peace" (25). The second World War had already begun, he answered them. As he reiterated after each new raid, Franco was bombing open villages, carrying out, "avec une férocité inexpiable, l'assassinat collectif des populations inoffensives et sans armes" (26). Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini had demonstrated their disrespect for civilized law (27). As long as Hitler refused to recognize international law, there could be no peace, he explained; it was only a deceptive illusion. The French and British leaders were making a grave mistake in trusting Hitler. They were losing critical time in their attempt to appease him. The democratic powers needed to look to each other for collective security against the forces of barbarism (28). They needed to act. Totalitarian dictatorships and democracies simply could not coexist peacefully, Vandervelde proclaimed.

For Vandervelde, the struggle being waged in Spain since the German and Italian intervention was essentially a battle between the forces of democracy and fascist tyranny. Spain in fact proved that fascism was not an isolated phenomenon (29). It was therefore imperative for those countries that "have so far remained free of the plague of fascism" to join together to oppose "the gangsters operating in Spain and elsewhere", he wrote (30). With the example of the racism of fascist Germany, he concluded, "Les peuples qui restent civilisés se trouvent devant un seul et formidable problème, d'une indéniable urgence et d'une terrible simplicité" (31). Ten years after it was all over, Léon Blum, looking back, mused that more clearly than any of his contemporaries, Vandervelde had understood the threat of Nazi Germany and had foreseen the coming of World War II (32).

(25) E. VANDERVELDE, "Will there be war in 1938?"; (Brussels, 1937).

(26) E. VANDERVELDE, "Intervention Italo-allemande en Espagne" *Dépêche de Toulouse*, March 28, 1938.

(27) IEVB, E. VANDERVELDE, Notes for a speech, Vandervelde V 733.

(28) E. VANDERVELDE, "La Réssurrection du Pacte à quatre et l'Internationale", *Le Peuple*, October 9, 1938; and VANDERVELDE, "En lisant l'Histoire de l'Europe", *Dépêche de Toulouse*, November 9, 1938.

(29) E. VANDERVELDE, "Les Atrocités de la guerre civile en Espagne", *Dépêche de Toulouse*, September 7, 1936.

(30) E. VANDERVELDE, "Will there be War in 1938?". See also IEVB Comte Sforza to Emile Vandervelde, May 28, Vandervelde V 1047.

(31) E. VANDERVELDE, "Malédiction sur le racisme", *Dépêche de Toulouse*, December 8, 1938.

(32) L. BLUM, *Hommage à Emile Vandervelde*, Paris, 1947.

Vandervelde saw fascism as a unique threat to modern civilization. He also understood the problem of Germany, Italy, and Spain in terms of the foreign policy of a small nation at "the crossroads of Europe". Vandervelde had negotiated Versailles and Locarno. These treaties carried with them certain obligations for mutual defense, he reminded the representatives to the Belgian Chamber (33). Throughout the twenties and thirties he also argued that the small democracies should lead the way in exercising moral judgement in international affairs. As the first victim of the First World War, Belgium had a special responsibility to prevent another war, he believed. The Belgian support of the Non-intervention Pact and the foreign policy of neutrality seemed to violate the spirit of these international agreements and Belgium's special obligation. Belgium had blindly followed its larger neighbor, France, into support of the Pact. The French Left had itself followed the English conservatives into the trap of isolationism, he charged (34). From a pragmatic point of view, he concluded that small nations such as Belgium needed strong international guarantees to protect them from the powerful. They needed an effective League of Nations and financial and political cooperation among European democracies (35).

Vandervelde clearly recognized that he was drawing on his ministerial experience from the First World War in these arguments. His opposition to neutrality and isolationism in 1936-38 certainly reflected the lessons of 1914 when Belgium had stood almost alone against the German onslaught. His calls for respect of the League of Nations and the European treaties echo his pleas to delegates of the pre-war Second International. Spain in 1936 seems to have become synonymous to him with Belgium of 1914; Vandervelde's cries of outrage against the bombing of Guernica sound very much like his pleas for aid to the devastated Louvain twenty two years earlier.

Vandervelde often acknowledged that he was speaking as one of the older generation. The theme of the passing of the old guard runs through Vandervelde's writing of the thirties. "De six ans plus jeune que la plupart de mes compagnons de l'Internationale d'avant guerre, je reste un des derniers", he lamented characteristically in one of the many memorials he wrote for his dying pre-war colleagues (36). Other political memoirs of the thirties also allude to the generational gulf isolating the deaf, aging Vandervelde from the dynamic new

(33) *Annales parlementaires, Chambre*, November 29, 1933 and December 21, 1933.

(34) IEVB, VANDERVELDE IV Dossier XI.

(35) IEVB, VANDERVELDE, Notes for a speech, Vandervelde IV 646.

(36) E. VANDERVELDE, *Dépêche de Toulouse*, November 15, 1937.

leaders — Spaak and De Man (37). Accounts sympathetic to Vandervelde portrayed the generational division as an ideological dispute between the internationalism of the veteran Vandervelde and the "national socialism" embraced by De Man and Spaak (38). De Man explained instead that the political issues of Spanish liberty and democracy so fervently championed by the elder statesman paled before the more significant economic questions threatening Belgium. And like the rest of the old guard Vandervelde was simply incapable of understanding the urgency of national economic reforms. De Man argued that Vandervelde's ideological rigidity, his tie to the class struggle for example, prevented him from understanding the new socialism (39).

These questions of politics versus economics, of internationalism versus nationalism, and of class struggle versus collaboration surfaced in the dispute between Vandervelde and De Man and Spaak over socialist participation in the Belgian government. In 1937, when Vandervelde resigned from the Van Zeeland government he issued a statement urging continued participation. However, in *La Depeche de Toulouse* of January 23, 1937, he began to question publicly the Socialists' participation in the Belgian government. After acknowledging the "compromis utiles" resulting from the cooperation of the Belgian Socialists with a conservative leader "raisonnable et de bonne foi", he asserted that the class struggle should not be forgotten. It had to continue "soit directement par des grèves, soit indirectement dans l'hémicycle parlementaire ou entre les quatre murs d'une salle de conseil" (40). A cooperative equilibrium between Socialists and Conservatives could not endure. The Socialists had to continue to struggle for reforms to aid the workers, reforms that would necessitate a budget increase and hence in the end be opposed by the other parties (41). In subsequent articles and talks, he further questioned the wisdom of participation in governments of national union. Yes, he always added, he had participated in coalition governments in the past, but that had always been during moments of national crisis. He had withdrawn when peace had been

(37) See for example: P. HYMANS, *Mémoires*, 2 volumes, Brussels, 1958; M.H. JASPSAR, *Souvenirs sans retouche*, Brussels, 1968.

(38) IEVB, La mutualité, les persévérants socialistes to Vandervelde, February 6, 1937, Vandervelde IV EV 762; and Ambassadeur d'Espagne to Vandervelde, Vandervelde II 1027.

(39) H. DE MAN, *Herinneringen*, Antwerp, 1941. The same theme was raised by Marc Ramplon in an article in *Combat*, February 6, 1937.

(40) E. VANDERVELDE, "En marge d'un livre de Max Adler", *Dépêche de Toulouse*, January 23, 1937.

(41) *Dépêche de Toulouse*, December 15, 1937.

restored (42). When first De Man and then Spaak tried to form governments of national union in 1938, Vandervelde voiced his strong opposition. What was needed was a democratic front to fight the fascists, he argued (43).

Governmental participation raised another issue in the struggle for the Spanish republic: cooperation with the Communists. Vandervelde's relations with the Third International had never been friendly. But now Russia alone had renounced the Non-Intervention Pact. Throughout Europe it was the Communists who were leading the movement to assist the Spanish Republicans (44). The Comintern asked the Socialists of the Second International to cooperate. Vandervelde responded in 1937 by recalling the differences between the Communists and the Socialists and urging the Communists to demonstrate their good faith with actions as well as words (45). The POB Bureau rejected the Communist proposal. Then in February 1938, Vandervelde wrote from Spain calling on his fellow Socialists to reevaluate their opposition to the Communists (46). Within Spain, he noted, the Socialists, Communists, and Anarchists were able to work together effectively in the International Brigades (47). In November 1938, disregarding Vandervelde's appeals not to "couper les ponts" the Party Congress categorically rejected future cooperation with the Communists and ordered the year old fusion between the

(42) *Annales Parlementaires, Chambre*, May 18, 1938; and *Dépêche de Toulouse*, December 15, 1937. We should remember that Vandervelde's own recent governmental forays had been difficult. He had attempted to head a government of democrats in June 1936, but it had failed to win support. In the constitution of the second Van Zeeland government, Van Zeeland had overlooked the anxious candidate for the ministry of foreign affairs, Vandervelde, for the inexperienced Spaak. Vandervelde had then been isolated within the Van Zeeland cabinet.

(43) E. VANDERVELDE, "La nuit de la conférence et ses lendemains", *Le Peuple*, May 15, 1938; IEVB, Vandervelde to De Block, October 1, 1937, Vandervelde V 805; and *Tribune*, November 19, 1937, Vandervelde IV Dossier XI; and *Le Peuple*, May 18, 1938.

(44) E. VANDERVELDE, "Quand donc les gouvernements amis de l'Espagne se décideront-ils à empêcher qu'on étrangle", *Le Peuple*, June 13, 1936; and E. VANDERVELDE, "Les Communistes et nous" *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, June 8, 1938.

(45) IEVB, Emile VANDERVELDE, "L'unité d'action et les trois internationales", July 23, 1937, Vandervelde III K 285; Parti Communiste de Belgique to Emile Vandervelde and De Brouckère, May 4, 1937, Vandervelde IV 687; and VANDERVELDE, "Ou va le Communisme" *Le Peuple*, March 7, 1937.

(46) *Le Peuple*, February 20, 1938.

(47) E. VANDERVELDE, "Les Internationaux en Espagne", *Dépêche de Toulouse*, February 28, 1938.

young Socialists and the young Communists broken (48).

Increasingly isolated from the new leaders and outside the mainstream of the POB, in the end Vandervelde turned his attention back to the Second International. He urged the leaders of the French and English Socialist parties to draw upon the lessons of the Socialists' failure of 1914 and not to allow themselves to be overwhelmed by events. Unlike 1914, the International should speak out and pressure the governments in which it was now represented to prevent another catastrophic war (49). "Ce n'est pas le moment pour la solidarité internationale d'être moins active", Vandervelde told his fellow Socialists. "C'est le moment pour elle, au contraire, de redoubler l'effort commun. Il va du salut de la Démocratie et de la Liberté" (50). Under Vandervelde's influence, the London Conference of March 10 and 11, 1937 denounced the Italian and German aggression that had turned the Spanish Civil War into a war of national liberation and protested against the Non-intervention Pact that prohibited the Spanish Republicans from procuring the materials necessary for their self-defense on the open market. Concluding that "la volonté de guerre des puissances fascistes devient toujours plus évidente", the International urged the national parties to redouble their assistance to the Spanish Republic (51). When the International met in Paris in June, it adopted the Spanish resolutions calling for the guarantee of the political and territorial independence of Spain, a return to free trade, and an International recommitment to solidarity with the Spanish. The Socialist trade unions then organized a week of propaganda for Spain. When Vandervelde looked back in the fall of 1938 he remembered proudly the assistance of the International to Spain. That at least partially counterbalanced the inaction of the governments (52).

The Spanish recognized Vandervelde's untiring crusade on their behalf. He was so different from the other socialists who verbally gave their support to the Spanish but then collaborated "à l'action asphyxiante du prolétariat et de toute la démocratie de notre pays", Indelacio Prieto wrote (53). At the invitation of the Spanish, Vander-

(48) R. DE BECKER, *La République*, November 7, 1938, IEVB, Vandervelde V 1099.

(49) Report of Vandervelde's speech in London, *Le Peuple*, March 13, 1937.

(50) IEVB, Vandervelde IV Dossier XI IV.

(51) IEVB, Résolution, Vandervelde IV Dossier XI; and Vandervelde V 733.

(52) E. VANDERVELDE, "Au secours de l'Espagne", *Dépêche de Toulouse*, March 10, 1938; and IEVB, Vandervelde V 733.

(53) *La Voix du Peuple*, February 1, 1937, quoting telegram to Prieto to Vandervelde, ISGA, De Man 452; See also IEVB, Vandervelde 1111, 1112, 1113 B, 1115 B, 1121, 1136 B, and 1145 B.

velde attended the opening of their parliament. He returned to Spain for a final visit in 1938 and characteristically telegraphed the Belgian government to express his outrage at the suffering of the besieged civilian populations and to ask the Belgians to join an international protest against the bombing of urban centers (54).

Shortly after he had resigned Vandervelde suggested, "Je suis un incorrigible. Je n'ai point 'la modération et la souplesse' qui conviennent à des hommes d'état" (55). At first glance, his assessment seems disingenuous. Vandervelde is usually remembered as the moderate who charted the course for the Belgian Socialist Party as a responsible government partner. But, considered again, Vandervelde may well have been correct. Although he had never been an extremist, he had consistently proclaimed his basic principles. A consummate tactician, he had reconciled German and French, orthodox and revisionist delegates during meetings of the pre-war Second International and made peace between Flemings and Walloons. He had been able to moderate disputes because his beliefs usually placed him right in the center, between the two opposing parties. He had never compromised his beliefs in the mediation. In this last struggle for Spain he continued fervently to propound the same "revolutionary reformism" that had guided his actions for forty-five years. What had changed was the POB. He was no longer in the middle of the mainstream. As he concluded, in an obvious reference to De Man and Spaak, "Je n'ai pas non plus, par sénilité cette plasticité cérébrale qui rend possible, aux générations nouvelles, des adaptations nouvelles, des adaptations singulièrement rapides au caprice des événements" (56). De Man remarked in his memoirs that Spain had forced Vandervelde to choose between being a Socialist and a minister (57). For Vandervelde the choice was not difficult. He had never modified his ideology. If a Socialist could not introduce reforms effectively within a government, then he should rejoin the opposition. In contrast Spaak wrote that his experience in the second Van Zeeland cabinet proved to him that he himself made a better homme d'état than a revolutionary (58).

For this last campaign, Vandervelde rejoined the opposition. He intervened in the Chamber, lobbied the Belgian Socialists and the

(54) *Las Noticias de Barcelona*, February 12, 1938, IEVB, Vandervelde IV 639.

(55) E. VANDERVELDE, "Que va faire M. Vandervelde...?", *Le Peuple*, February 7, 1937.

(56) *Ibid.*

(57) DE MAN, *Herinneringen*, Antwerp, 1941, p. 220.

(58) P.H. SPAAK, *Combats inachevés*, Brussels, 1969.

general democratic public through articles in *Le Peuple*, *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, and the *Manchester Guardian*, prefaces to books published by le Comité Juif d'aide à l'Espagne, correspondence with Belgian and French leaders, and innumerable speeches. He meticulously backed up these articles, lettres, and talks with details honed from his extensive files of newspaper clippings from all the Belgian newspapers and with material furnished by his friends in Spain (59). He wrote dramatic accounts of the bombing of Guernica and the refugees gathering in Santander. He reiterated the Basque pleas for bread, peace, and liberty. The London Committee on Non-intervention did not want to see the facts or hear the stories, he complained, calling for an independent Belgian inquiry (60). He persistently reminded his readers, his listeners, and his correspondents that as long as the governments of Belgium, England, and France remained deaf to the plight of the Spanish, the Germans would continue to escalate the war against helpless civilians just as they had in 1914 (61). Some of his correspondents replied, by the end many seemed to ignore him.

The Belgian government, and finally the Belgian party itself, rebuffed Vandervelde's moral and ideological appeals. *Le Peuple* shifted away from reports on the atrocities in Spain to lauding Spaak's campaign for international peace. In October 1938, in an article for *Le Peuple*, Vandervelde worried openly about his party's position. Would the POB Congress send delegates to the IOS and implicitly support the International's criticism of the Munich Pact's provisions on Spain? To do so would call into question the position of the Socialists in the Belgian cabinet. If no delegates were sent, however, the Belgians would risk isolation from the International socialist community (62). In October 1938 there were rumors that Vandervelde would resign the party presidency that he had held for decades over Spain (63).

Vandervelde lost his last battle with the recognition of what he called "la Junte insurrectionnelle de Burgos" (64). The debate before the 1938 POB Congress between De Man and Vandervelde in

(59) His clippings files are preserved in IEVB Vandervelde V 733.

(60) *Annales parlementaires, Chambre*, May 25, 1937 and June 2, 1938.

(61) Emile VANDERVELDE, "Au lendemain d'Almería..", June 6, 1937, in IEVB, Vandervelde III K66; E. VANDERVELDE, "Santander" in Vandervelde III K 313; and Emile VANDERVELDE, "Objet de l'interpellation", in Vandervelde V 733; *Annales parlementaires, Chambre*, May 25, 1937.

(62) *Le Peuple*, October 23, 1938.

(63) See *Le Peuple*, October 8, 1938, for example.

(64) Emile Vandervelde, "Le POB acquiescera-t-il à l'envoi d'un représentant à Burgos", IEVB Vandervelde III K 274.

Le Peuple was uncharacteristically open (65). The argument between Spaak and Vandervelde was no less tempestuous (66). Vandervelde persisted in reminding his fellow Belgian Socialists of the resolutions of the International, and of the Junta's bombing of open cities (67). It was not just a question of establishing commercial relations with Spain, but of recognizing Franco, he reiterated. Despite Vandervelde's impassioned appeal, at the Annual Congress the party voted confidence in Spaak and De Man. Vandervelde continued to lobby (68). During the first weeks of December, he joined in the debate over Spaak's campaign in the Senate to recognize Burgos (69).

Vandervelde died on December 27, 1938. His wife Jeanne wrote in January 1939 to the Spanish Socialists that with the votes of the Congress of the POB, "c'est comme si je perdais Vandervelde une seconde fois. Je vous l'atteste; jamais il n'eut accepté cela" (70). Without Vandervelde, the Belgian Socialists shifted unequivocally away from the political internationalism that had characterized their party since the founding of the Second International. It was now time for the economic nationalism of another generation.

(65) *Le Peuple*, November 1 and 3, 1938.

(66) J. WILLEQUET, *Paul Henri Spaak*, (Brussels, 1975).

(67) E. VANDERVELDE, "La question de Burgos", *Le Peuple*, May 22, 1938.

(68) E. VANDERVELDE, "Rafafchissons nos Mémoires", *Le Peuple*, November 20, 1938.

(69) *Le Peuple*, December 1 4, 6, 7, 8, and 11, 1938; and IEVB De Brouckère to Vandervelde, December 18, 1938, Vandervelde V 1213.

(70) Jeanne Emile Vandervelde to Parti Socialiste Espagnol, Archief en Museum van de Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging, Ghent; Carton de Wiart explained in his memoirs that Vandervelde's death allowed the Socialists to recognize Franco. Comte CARTON DE WIART, *Souvenirs politiques*, 2 volumes, Bruxelles 1981, p. 217.