

PhD RESEARCH

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The Implementation of Contemporary Trade-Union Movements and of new Social Relations in Belgium (1910-1937) - [Original Title : *La mise en place du syndicalisme contemporain et des relations sociales nouvelles en Belgique (1910-1937)*]

Université libre de Bruxelles, 2013. Supervisor : Serge Jaumain.

The inter-war period is crucial to the establishment of contemporary trade-unionism in Belgium. Indeed, the period presents a rise in mass membership and the establishment of a new industrial relations network, predicated on employer and state recognition of trade unions as acknowledged partners in contract negotiations. Unions were also offered an official role at a national level in unemployment benefit distribution, and underwent substantial organisational changes within the movement itself (centralisation, concentration and rationalisation). This study will attempt to show how and according to which models the various components of the trade-union movement participated in these changes. It will show the role trade unions acquired over the period and how the changes affected the trade-union movement. This overall approach will lead us, in the first part, to reconsider the specific influence of the First World War on particular developments in the world of the trade unions, on industrial relations in general and on Belgian social policy during the years 1919-1921.

The second part offers an analysis of the processes which, during the years 1918-1920, governed the establishment of new industrial relations systems in Belgium, and the trade-union "boom" of the immediate

post-war period. The role played by different components of the trade-union world in these development is evaluated against the background of a troubled social, political and economic immediate post-war landscape. The third part of this thesis is devoted to a study of the consequences of these developments on trade-union doctrine, action and organisational structure during the 1920s and 1930s. The main focus is on conflicts, contradictions and tensions provoked within the Socialist trade-union movement, far more significant numerically than its Catholic, Liberal or neutral counterparts. The purpose is to determine the extent to which such internal tensions and conflicts may have affected the construction of a Socialist trade-union movement.