

A black and white photograph showing a man in a suit on the left shaking hands with a man in a German military uniform on the right. The man in the suit is leaning forward and using a cane. The man in the uniform is standing upright. In the background, several other men in military uniforms are visible, some wearing caps with the German eagle emblem. The scene appears to be outdoors on a cobblestone street.

MAYORAL COLLABORATION
UNDER NAZI OCCUPATION
IN BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS
AND FRANCE, 1938-46

NICO WOUTERS



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To Liesbeth and our two beautiful children Elena and Hanne.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADN—L	Archives Départementales du Nord—Lille (<i>Departmental Archives of Nord in Lille</i>)
ADVN	Archief en Documentatiecentrum voor het Vlaams-nationalisme (<i>Archival and Documentation Centre for Flemish Nationalism</i>)
AGK	Auditoraat-Generaal van de Krijgsmacht (<i>Chief Military Prosecutor's Office</i>)
AMVC	Archief en Museum voor het Vlaamse Cultuurleven (<i>Archive and Museum for Flemish Culture</i>)
ARP	Algemene Rijkspolitie (<i>General State Police</i>)
CABR	Centraal Archief Bijzondere Rechtspleging (<i>Central Archives of Extraordinary Judiciary</i>)
CegeSoma	Centre for War and Contemporary Society (Brussels)
CFLN	Comité Français de Libération National (<i>French Committee of National Liberation</i>)
CR	Commissaire de la République (<i>Republican Commissioner</i>)
GD	Genadedossier (<i>Pardon File</i>)
HSSPF	Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer (<i>Commander of the SS and the Police</i>)
JPF	Judicial Penal File
MRP	Mouvement Républicain Populaire (<i>Popular Republican Movement</i>)
NA	National Archives (in The Hague)
NIOD	Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
NLVC	Nationale Landbouw- en Voedingscorporatie (<i>National Corporation for Agriculture and Food</i>)
NSB	Nationaal Socialistische Beweging (<i>National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands</i>)
NVD	Nederlandse Volksdienst (<i>Dutch People's Service</i>)

OFK	Oberfeldkommandantur (Provincial Office of the German Military Occupation Administration)
OT	Organisation Todt (Todt Organisation)
PA Luik	Provincie Archief Luik (Provincial Archives of Liège)
PA W-VL	Provincie Archief West-Vlaanderen (Provincial Archives of West-Flanders)
PAA	Provincie Archief Antwerpen (Provincial Archives of Antwerp)
PAH	Provincie Archief Hainaut (Provincial Archives of Hainaut)
PAL	Provincie Archief Limburg (Provincial Archives of Limburg)
RA—A	Rijksarchief Arlon (State Archives in Arlon)
RAB	Rijksarchief Brussel (State Archives in Brussels)
RABW	Rijksarchief Beveren-Waas (State Archives in Beveren-Waas)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service)
SDAP	Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij (Social-Democratic Worker's Party)
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (French Section of the International Labour Movement)
Sipo	Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police)
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Squadron)
UDCGT	Union Départementale Confédération Générale du Travail (Departmental Union of the National Labour Confederacy)
URD	Union Républicaine Démocratique (Republican Democratic Movement)
VNV	Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (Flemish National Union)
WA	Weerafdeling (<i>Defense Section</i>)

Introduction

On 5 August 1946, the city council of Roubaix gathered in what was supposed to be a routine session. It was almost two years after the liberation. Roubaix, the traditional capital of the linen industry in the French department of Nord, was now governed by a left-wing coalition of socialists and a small faction of communists. During this particular council session, however, bitter political conflict escalated. The communist alderman Eugène Doyen took the floor, and using violent rhetoric, accused the socialist mayor Victor Provo of being a Nazi collaborator.¹ Indeed, the mayor had been appointed by the collaborating Vichy administration in 1942 before being democratically elected in 1945. During the occupation—according to the communist alderman—the mayor had refused active support to the Resistance. Moreover, he had supposedly given lists of local Frenchmen to the Germans for forced labour deportation. Two hundred inhabitants were present during the council session, applauding or alternatively booing Doyen's speech. After this attack, mayor Provo responded publicly. He stressed that during the German occupation, he had always governed the city with the approval of the clandestine socialist movement. He had silently but actively supported the Resistance. He also mentioned that his predecessor, the socialist mayor Jean Lebas, had ordered him to follow this strategy. The latter was no longer there to confirm this; Lebas had died in German captivity. The political incident signalled the breakdown of the city coalition. A few weeks later, the mayor stripped the communist

aldermen of their powers. A report by the department of 12 August 1946 concluded that the majority of the city's inhabitants continued to support the mayor.

This incident is, of course, a typical case of political exploitation of the legacy of the Second World War. But more importantly it shows that even fairly soon after the liberation, direct knowledge and interpretations of what had really happened in towns and cities under Nazi occupation were already lost to opposing interpretations. Had mayor Provo actively supported people in hiding during the occupation or had he given lists of names to the Germans? Local people were no longer certain, even in 1946. The answer, incidentally, is that he most likely did both.

This complexity is connected to the essential position of a mayor. In liberal parliamentary democracies during the interwar years, the mayor (or burgomaster) was a nexus of local relations. He was a political and administrative leader who had to mediate between local interests and the state. He was also a community manager who had to build local consensus and involve stakeholders in decision-making.² As such, he was an anchor point of decentralized democratic organization after 1918.

What happened, then, when these democratic leaders were confronted with the realities of Nazi occupation?³ It seems clear that this would involve adaptation, careful mediation, strategic collaboration and ultimately some very difficult choices. The fact that 'feeling like a mayor in wartime' is still a frequently used proverb in the Netherlands today serves to testify to this. Behind the concepts of 'adaptation' and 'collaboration', however, lies a rich universe of local specificities under authoritarian rule.

A democratic mayor was determined almost by definition to offer 'good governance' at a grassroots level: to negotiate with local actors on an almost daily basis, to come up with practical solutions for everyday problems, to keep local administration running, to avoid social unrest, and to maintain his own individual legitimacy. Under Nazi occupation, all these aspects of good governance were even more essential for everyday survival. But perceptions about 'good governance' rapidly began to change. What was good governance in 1941 and what did it mean to whom? Adding to this ambiguity was the fact that in some countries, 'good governance' was also used by Nazi collaborationists as a legitimizing tool for their local takeover of power.⁴ Mayors offer an ideal group to break open the problems of elite accommodation under hostile occupation.

This book deals with occupied Belgium, the Netherlands and the north of France (Nord/Pas-de-Calais). There is ample literature for France about elite accommodation (in the context of state collaboration).

Probably the single most important study focusing on a specific professional group is Marc Olivier Baruch's monumental work on the French civil servants.⁵ There is, however, nothing remotely close to this for the Low Countries. Work on elite accommodation and collaboration exists, but remains fragmented.⁶

French WW II history has also consistently received major international attention, including seminal works in German and English, from Paxton's *Vichy France* (1972) to Jackson's *The Dark Years* (2001).⁷ In contrast, WW II studies on the Low Countries remain largely unknown to international scholars, and there are in fact still very few English works available. Size does not matter in this case. Both Belgium and the Netherlands are valuable case studies for understanding the occupation, all the more in an international comparison.

Belgium, France and the Netherlands were simultaneously invaded by Nazi Germany on 10 May 1940. Hitler's conquests in Western Europe were only of secondary importance when compared to the prize targets in the East. Mark Mazower goes as far as to call Hitler 'fundamentally uninterested' in the West: 'He was happy so long as Belgian and Danish industrial magnates and civil servants made sure their factories supplied the Reich (...)'.⁸ Even if it were correct to speak of 'fundamental uninterest', however, this certainly cannot be equated with 'lack of importance'. These countries were absolutely essential to the Third Reich's imperial ambitions. They needed to stabilize and defend Europe's Western borders, to produce industrial goods, to mobilize financial investment and skilled labour forces, and at a later stage even military support. Although these countries were never meant to become allies, some kind of settlement had to be found with their ruling elites. This involved shorter-term goals of cooperation. But it also involved their future positions in the new Germanic European order. Unlike the war of annihilation in Eastern Europe, the occupation of North-Western Europe was meant to prepare a societal *Gleichschaltung*. Some internal process of self-Nazification was supposed to take root. The Nazi occupying bureaucracies also increasingly struggled with being overstretched. All of this gave ruling elites margins of negotiation. France and the Low Countries exemplify this Western European occupation model of Nazi Germany characterized by ambivalent mutual dependency, accommodation and inevitable complicity of local elites.

Ever since it was put forward by the Dutch historian Ernst H. Kossmann and the Swiss historian Philippe Burrin, the concept of 'accommodation' of elites under occupation has had a negative ring to it.⁹ The subtext entails failure to resist and moral compromise. The Belgian and Dutch

equivalent is the ‘politics of the lesser evil’, a concept generated by ruling elites themselves. Quite clearly, it expresses the sentiment that Nazi occupation did not offer any good choices, only several degrees of bad ones. The popular association with moral failure seems strongly determined by present-day sensibilities and wisdom in hindsight. Elites’ choices under occupation were complex, to say the least. They were determined by legal constraints, sometimes by strict formal training (in the case of civil servants for example), by ideas on collective interests, uncertain longer-term expectations, issues of ambivalent political legitimacies, but also individual opportunism or fear.¹⁰ And all of these factors combined must be placed in a volatile development of rapidly changing occupation prospects, where the outlook in summer 1940 already differed greatly from that of the autumn later that same year.

First and foremost, this book is an in-depth study or radiology of occupation systems, that is, the complex set of interactions created between foreign rulers, ruling elites and local societies. An essential premise of this book is that any national system under the extreme strain of occupation and war will reveal some of its most fundamental characteristics. An interconnected premise is that the local angle (mayors, towns, villages) reveals these characteristics. Mayors’ responsibilities grew after May 1940. Because local democracies were a deeply rooted key feature of the three national systems before 1940, we can assume that the clash with an ‘imported’ authoritarian revolution becomes visible here. The comparative perspective is particularly useful: while national studies inevitably place ruling elites firmly in the administrative and political cultures of their respective countries, an international comparison on the other hand can critically assess such presumed national specificities. The image of the centralized and bureaucratic French state versus the weak and *laissez-faire* Belgian state might be considered somewhat of a cliché, yet the fact remains that these supposed differences are difficult to ‘test’. Their impact on local occupation realities is one way of doing just that.

Another question that forms part of this is about the classic dichotomy between individual agency and the structural impact of institutions and bureaucracies. In part, I will tackle this by investigating the differences between the national socialist mayors and their non-collaborationist colleagues. Mayors were prone to take individual choices in local micro-contexts. But they also operated within national contexts and rigid ideological networks. The personal legitimacy of mayors under occupation is essential here. This involves how they tried to provide good governance

to their populations (or create the perception of this), how they negotiated with the occupier and the central authorities, how they mediated between local and central interests, how they used legal arguments or arguments of personal authority, and in general how mayors explored the margins of perceived 'acceptable behaviour' during occupation. Properly to tackle the latter question, I will also include the evaluations of mayors' occupation records by courts and national authorities after the war.¹¹

The local angle is particularly apt to tackle a second major issue. The jump from the near total disappearance of European liberal parliamentary democracy at the end of the 1930s to its remarkable recovery only a few years later remains one of the single most essential issues of twentieth century European political history. It is often explained by invoking the strength of deeper historic cultures of democracy.¹² It remains, however, somewhat unclear how these shifts worked on the local, grassroots level.¹³ Oxford historian Martin Conway argues that in occupied Belgium the central state partially disappeared or disintegrated.¹⁴ The local level is thus assumed to have partially taken over the role of the central state. Certainly, the growing importance of the local level combined with lack of communication, lack of travel opportunities and the preoccupation with food, meant that the horizons of populaces narrowed to their direct village or city.¹⁵ As Conway writes with Dutch historian Peter Romijn: 'Its impact was (...) to restore a tangible sense of self-government to communities which felt empowered to negotiate their own relations with external authorities and to regulate their own internal affairs'.¹⁶ We can see this as well in the seminal study on daily life under occupation by Gildea, Wiewiorka and Warring. Hunger and rationing, forced labour and violence (collective reprisals) were the three elements that dominated local horizons. These were exactly the three domains where local governments played key roles. But how exactly did this process of 'destatification' work, and was it equally strong in France or the Netherlands? And how did the sudden return of the state (or the return of democracy) coincide with this (temporary?) growth of local powers? Tackling those issues, the last chapter focuses on the transition period from 1944 to 1946.

These are ambitious questions, and demand an ambitious approach to tackle them. This has meant implementing a hybrid approach, combining elements of micro-history with the study of top-down policies.

Top-down approaches to the local-central relation during occupation often have the problem that they fail to describe what happens below the surface. In his interesting model, the Dutch sociologist Cornelis J. Lammers,

for example, looks at the ‘level of collaboration’ (central or local) under Nazi occupation. He hypothesizes from this model that the ‘focal point of collaboration’ gradually trickled downwards from central government in 1940 to lower authorities in 1944.¹⁷ However, without concrete case studies, all of this remains rather abstract. It certainly tells us little about the internal mechanisms of that process or how it actually impacted social realities. Microhistory—more specifically the local case study of one city or town—would have been an appropriate and obvious way to do this.¹⁸ Decades after *Alltagsgeschichte* or bottom-up approaches came into vogue, this remains a favoured approach to study periods of war and occupation. This is also the case for daily life studies.¹⁹ The list of micro-level case studies of cities at war is vast, especially if we include those about WW I. Microhistories easily lend themselves to a synergetic approach, for example merging study of the economic climate with cultural histories of lived experiences. They often have the added advantage of automatically expanding the chronological timeframe beyond the strict years of war or occupation.²⁰ This explains the continued popularity of microhistory, which has incidentally also produced a wealth of local studies by semi-professional historians, often forgotten or neglected by academic scholars.

Despite this richness, microhistories by definition remain determined by the specificities of their one or two cases. Most studies still favour larger cities, for example, at the junction of urban history and war studies.²¹ This clearly determines the focal points, set of questions, and comparability of the outcome.²² The microhistory of a capital city will, of course, differ from that of a medium-sized city; and that of an industrialized region with a strong communist presence from that of an isolated rural region. The blurring of lines between battle- and home front within the Total War prism, often applied to larger cities, has different implications in rural villages.²³ Nevertheless, in many occupied countries the rural countryside and urban environments belonged to one occupational ‘eco-system’. The in-depth micro-history of one town cannot give us full insight into larger patterns or underlying trends. We must therefore attempt to transcend the most obvious urban–rural differences and look at the interchanges and interconnections of many local cases within a national system. This is what my book aims to do, detecting larger transversal patterns that cumulatively outline the nature of an occupation system.

This therefore means looking at more cases than one or two. It also means positioning mayors against national and intermediary (provincial and departmental) levels of government. How do their positions evolve? Where, when and how do conflicts arise (or not)? Can we determine

different categories of mayors? On a purely formal level, the last question is easy to answer. Some mayors had pre-war democratic mandates; others were appointed during the occupation. A significant portion of the latter group, at least in Belgium and the Netherlands, were Nazi collaborationists. The behaviour of these collaborationist mayors also forms a key element of my study, which therefore aims to fine-tune definitions of political and administrative collaboration in local practice.

The ambition of this hybrid approach is to combine the best of the two approaches: the richness of the local tied to an authentic transnational comparison. In order to retain the richness of concrete micro-cases, this book remains case-driven, using local examples that display enough depth and richness to unearth local realities. These are examples of the behaviour of individual mayors, the way local events developed or situations occurred, or the way specific characteristics of localities and local actors shaped the course of events. Several hundred such case-examples merged together create a sound transnational analytical framework.

The single most important condition to ensure the success of this approach was a rich set of empirical data. In my research, I have managed to overcome the classic obstacle for any international comparison: national differences in institutional organization of archives, and the qualitative differences of the type of information they hold. A flexible and diversified approach was necessary to gather national datasets that were comparably rich. The French situation was ideal, with the organization of the departmental archives creating a centralized set of diverse sources. In Belgium the type of sources I needed did not exist as a centralized body, and post-war judicial files of convicted collaborationist mayors were at the time still classified. I therefore needed to identify a plentiful supply of alternative sources, and found these in many smaller archives across the country. Some of the sources included individual post-war administrative purge dossiers, as well as so-called individual pardon (*grâce*) dossiers. The scattered and fragmented provincial archives were also useful here and offered some lucky finds, such as a coincidental discovery of the political cabinet file of the collaborationist provincial governor of West-Flanders, in an anonymous set of paper bundles in the basement of the Provincial Council Building in Bruges. For the Netherlands, the existence of many local studies as well as the research by Peter Romijn made yet another approach viable. For that country, I focused on several hundred individual post-war judicial and administrative purge dossiers. The judicial dossiers, in particular, generally contained more qualitative material (occupation correspondence, for example) than their Belgian counterparts.

To a certain extent, an unorthodox ‘speculative’ approach to source collation was unavoidable in the very earliest phase of the research, since I was not yet sure about the kind of material I would later encounter in other national situations. This was deeply empirical work: more than finding direct answers, this comparative data-collecting came down to a form of pattern-analysis that was only possible by reading many different archival sources, whose use was often not immediately clear. The indirect knowledge gained from ‘useless sources’ proved anything but. The French departmental bureaucracy, for example, produced a lot of administrative reports that despite some interesting numbers seem generic and frankly rather dull. However, only by reading hundreds of such reports and understanding their logic, and by cross-connecting them with other sources or literature, can one begin to detect patterns—*anomalies, gradual evolutions, changes in specific wording, conscious omissions, individual differences*—that hint at the realities behind the reports.

The structure, concrete topics and underlying narratives are partly the result of a slow and gradual ‘distillation process’ from the rich wealth of different archival sources. I could assume beforehand that certain topics, such as forced labour or food supply, were important. But how they would emerge in each of the three cases was difficult to assess without immersing myself in the archives. The persecution of the Jews is one example of a theme that is, of course, historically momentous, but in this book’s perspective gradually became secondary to the main topic. Yet another reality that was rendered visible was the behaviour of civil society actors under occupation: local associations, political networks and syndicates, but also the slowly emerging organized resistance networks. This book is not about these civil society actors under occupation. But at the least, the data make the outlines of this evolving civil society visible, in relation to mayors and official municipal administrations.

The questions and issues tackled in this book will always arise when indigenous local elites have to cooperate with a hostile occupier in the interest of the population. The Belgian WW I expert Sophie De Schaepdrijver has already indicated that an international and diachronic comparison of occupation situations in both World Wars will lead to more universal reflections on the recurring mechanisms of (military) occupations in general.²⁴ With the ambitious hybrid approach in this book, I set out to provide new insights into political and administrative collaboration under Nazi occupation, as well as reflect on occupation systems in general.

NOTES

1. 28 W 38451_5: Rapports des renseignements (...), ADN – L.
2. J. Garrard (ed.), *Heads of the Local State: International Perspectives on Mayoralty 1800–2000* (Ashgate 2007).
3. National studies about mayors for Belgium, the Netherlands and France respectively: N. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters 40–44. Lokaal bestuur en collaboratie in België* (Tielt 2004); P. Romijn, *Burgemeesters in Oorlogstijd. Besturen onder Duitse bezetting* (Amsterdam 2006); G. Le Béguec and D. Peschanski, *Les élites locales dans la tourmente: du Front populaire aux années cinquante* (Paris 2000); B. De Wever, H. Van Goethem and N. Wouters (eds.), *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939–1945)* (Ghent 2004).
4. N. Wouters, ‘New Order and good government: municipal administration in Belgium (1938–1946)’, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 13, nr. 4 (2004), 389–407.
5. M.-O. Baruch, *Servir l’Etat français. L’administration en France de 1940–1944* (Paris 1997).
6. Individual or biographical approaches (Peter Romijn, ‘Frederiks’ *Op de bres: een ambtelijke apologie*, *Jaarboek van het NIOD*, nr. 10 [Zutphen 1999]; E. Raskin, *Gerard Romsée: een ongewone man, een ongewoon leven* [Antwerp/Baarn 1995]); general synthesis work (M. Van den Wijngaert [ed.], *België tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [Antwerp 2004]; N. Wouters, *De Führerstaat: overheid en collaboratie in België (1940–1944)* [Tielt 2006]); works on post-war trials and/or specific sectors such as the industry (J. Meihuizen, *Noodzakelijk kwaad : de bestraffing van economische collaboratie in Nederland na de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [Amsterdam/Boom 2003]; D. Luyten, *Burgers boven elke verdenking ? Vervolgingen van economische collaboratie in België na de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [Brussels 1996]); or professional groups such as the police or gendarmerie (G. Meershoek, *Dienaren van het gezag: de Amsterdamse politie tijdens de bezetting* [Amsterdam 1999]; J. Campion, *Les gendarmes belges, français et néerlandais à la Sortie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* [Brussels 2011]).
7. R.O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York 1972); J. Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–1944* (Oxford 2001).
8. M. Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London 2008), 560.
9. E.H. Kossmann, *De Lage Landen 1780–1980: twee eeuwen Nederland en België. 2. 1914–1980* (Amsterdam/Brussels 1986); P. Burrin, *La France à l’heure allemande 1940–1944* (Paris 1995).
10. M.-O. Baruch (ed.), *Faire des choix ? Les fonctionnaires dans l’Europe des dictatures, 1933–1948* (Paris 2014).
11. Wouters, ‘New Order and good government’; M. Conway and P. Romijn (eds.), *The War for Legitimacy in Politics and Culture, 1936–1946* (Berg 2008).

12. A.S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London 1994); R. Gerwarth (ed.), *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914–1945* (Oxford 2007).
13. M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London 2008).
 Gildea, Wieviorka and Warring point to a 'reconfiguration of social structures'. R. Gildea, O. Wieviorka, A. Warring (eds.), *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini: Daily Life in Occupied Europe* (Oxford/New York 2006), 214.
14. When comparing the differences between the impact of war on eastern and western Europe, for example, Gildea, Wieviorka and Warring indicate 'the presence or absence of governmental or administrative structures' as one of their three primary variables. Gildea, Wieviorka and Warring (eds.), *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini*, 2.
15. M. Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947* (Oxford 2012), 51.
16. M. Conway and P. Romijn (eds.), 'Political legitimacy in mid-twentieth century Europe: an introduction?', in Conway and Romijn (eds.), *The War for Legitimacy*, 16.
17. C.J. Lammers, 'Levels of collaboration. A comparative study of German occupation regimes during the Second World War', *Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 31, nr. 1 (1995), 3–31.
18. P. Bronzwaer, *Maastricht en Luik bezet: een comparatief onderzoek naar de vijf aspecten van de Duitse bezetting van Maastricht en Luik tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Hilversum 2010).
19. Some examples: R. Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation 1940–1945* (London/Basingstoke/Oxford 2002); E.A. Johnson and K.-H. Reuband, *Everyday Life in Nazi Germany, an Oral History* (Cambridge 2005); S.L. Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France: Foreigners, Undesirables, and Strangers* (Cambridge 2009).
20. A. McElligott, *Contested City: Municipal Politics and the Rise of Nazism in Altona, 1917–1937* (Michigan 1998).
21. J. Winter and J.-L. Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919*, vol. I and vol. II (Cambridge 1997); A. Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation, 1940–1944* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn 2008).
22. J. Winter and J.-L. Robert, 'Conclusions: towards a social history of capital cities at war', in Winter and Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War*, II, 527–554; M. Funck and R. Chickering (eds.), *Endangered Cities: Military Power and Urban Societies in the Era of the World Wars* (Boston/Leiden 2004).
23. S. Goebel and D. Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Ashgate 2011).
24. S. De Schaepdrijver, 'Military occupations, 1914–1945', in R. Chickering, D. Showalter and H. van de Ven (eds.), *The Cambridge History of War* (Cambridge 2012), 236–256.

Local Democracies

MAYORS AND THEIR LOCAL STATES: AN INTRODUCTION

All of the three national constitutions (Belgium in 1830, the Netherlands in 1848 and France in 1884) created decentralized states with a high degree of local autonomy.¹ Most scholars agree that the Belgian state developed into an outspoken decentralized form, with a political and administrative culture of *laissez-faire*.² After the Belgian municipal law was adopted in 1836, local autonomy became a cornerstone of the Belgian system. Local autonomy referred to administrative autonomy and self-government, but to a more symbolical narrative of civil liberties as well.³ Traditions of local (or, better still, urban) liberties became an important supporting narrative for the Belgian state.

Belgium could be characterized as a low capacity state, which is to say that the Belgian state exercised negligible control in most public domains.⁴ To explain this, the American historian Carl J. Strikwerda points to the tension between nineteenth century political parties and the central state.⁵ Others point to pre-modern historical forces. These culminated in a constitution that built historic traditions of distrust against central power into its core.⁶

As a nation-state, the Netherlands was more centrally organized.⁷ One popular theory that has particular relevance for this book says that Belgian society was pervaded by a deep-rooted distrust of central governmental power, and this, in turn, led to a culture where there was a lower threshold for the evasion of certain central regulations. Conversely, Dutch collective

mentality was supposedly conditioned to display much greater obedience to central power and regulations. The Flemish historian Lode Wils argued that this Belgian attitude had been moulded by centuries of foreign occupation.⁸ The Dutch mentality, on the other hand, was founded in historic, socio-economic liberal traditions combined with an obedient strand of Protestant culture.

A variation on this theme points to the medieval urbanized culture in the Low Countries, where larger cities developed modern liberties. Belgium and the Netherlands had, since medieval times, been among the world's most densely urbanized regions. In 1850 the percentage of people living in the larger cities was 29.5 %, 20.5 % and 14.5 % in the Netherlands, Belgium and France respectively.⁹ This would continue to live on in the high degree of local autonomy in both nineteenth century states, but was much more evident in the southern (Belgian) part. If there was such a deeply rooted difference in political and administrative cultures of obedience to central authority it would perforce become visible during the German occupation of WW II.

The localist–centralist struggle was at the heart of the creation of the French Third Republic.¹⁰ The process of reversing the authoritarian centralist tendencies of the Second Empire proved difficult.¹¹ The debates took ten years. As in Belgium and the Netherlands, the French municipal legislation of 5 April 1884 implemented a fairly decentralized system. The French mayors (and their adjuncts) in all cities—including the larger ones—were elected from and by the municipal council.¹² As such, local autonomy was also a key part of French republican specificity.

A mayor's function would, of necessity, always be dual. The nomination procedure was therefore important. Was the mayor selected and appointed by the central state, or was he (indirectly) democratically elected by his local population?

In Belgium, the latter was the case. The mayor was clearly the defender of 'local interests' first and foremost. He presided over the municipal council and committee of aldermen, and was head of the local police. He had to be an elected member of the municipal council. An amendment of 1842 created the possibility for the King to appoint mayors outside the municipal council (this emergency clause would hardly ever be used until 1940–44). After local elections, the political majority proposed a candidate-mayor from within their ranks and following approval by the provincial governor (or district commissioner) the mayor was appointed by the King, via the minister of the Interior.

The Belgian mayor became a local notable who sometimes remained in office for decades. Through systematic entrenchment in provincial and national political mandates (in parliament for instance), mayors became an important political force within the Belgian system, certainly when the larger cities became forerunners in the development of specific urban socio-economic policies.

One author argues that the large number of independent municipalities and the significant political autonomy of mayors vis-à-vis national parties and the national state were the two main characteristics of French municipal administration by 1914.¹³ Both of these characteristics were equally applicable to Belgium, indeed perhaps even more so. As in Belgium, the French mayor was selected by the municipal council from among its own members, elected for a four-year term (in Belgium this was six years), was president of the municipal council and did not receive a salary. French municipal law did, however, stress that the mayor remained a representative of central authority first.¹⁴

Another Franco-Belgian similarity was the mayor's jurisdiction over the local municipal police force.¹⁵ In both countries, the mayor was head of the administrative police, concerned with the daily maintenance of order and preventive policing within municipal boundaries. They could issue local police decrees (under the supervision of the intermediary provincial/departmental level).

Despite these similarities, French local autonomy was weaker. It is telling that the French word for 'mayor' in Belgium was chosen to be *bourgmestre* and not *maire* (as in France). This was perhaps a deliberate way of indicating the greater degree of mayoral autonomy in the Belgian system. Belgian municipal law explicitly designated a committee (*collège*) consisting of the mayor and aldermen as the local 'government'. The French equivalents of Belgian aldermen, the *adjoints*, were 'mere' council members who did not govern specific domains. Belgian aldermen would gradually (certainly after 1918) absorb specific policy domains. The Belgian mayor presided over both the committee of aldermen and the council.

Belgian local autonomy was stronger in police matters as well. Whereas in Belgium the municipal council (theoretically) had to approve the mayor's local police decrees, in France this authority lay with the central state. French police commissioners were appointed by the state, while in Belgium this was the responsibility of the local government. In French cities with a population over 40,000, the central state even maintained its control over the local police.

A last crucial difference is to be found on the intermediate level. Much more than the relatively weak provincial administrations, the French regional authorities (the *départements*) represented strong instruments of central control. Here, the differences between the Belgian governor and the French prefect were essential. While both were civil servants, appointed by the state to represent central authority and to operate above party politics (despite every governor and prefect having a clear political profile), the Belgian governor had nowhere near the influence and powers yielded by the French prefect. The French Napoleonic ideal had been that of the ‘imperial’ prefect: a direct regional representative of the head of state.¹⁶ Indeed, this had been their role under the Second Empire. Despite the fact that under the Third Republic attempts were made to transform this role into that of a more ‘neutral’ civil servant and mediator, an authoritarian aura would continue to cling to the prefectural function.¹⁷ In practice, much depended on the individual personality of the prefect (and the size of municipality). Larger cities gradually developed a direct link with Paris.¹⁸

The Dutch system was radically different. The Dutch mayor was not a locally elected member of the municipal council, but rather a civil servant, selected and appointed by the central state for a six-year term (which in most cases was renewed until retirement). Dutch mayors received a wage, underwent administrative training and had to pass state exams. Although the mayor presided over the municipal council as well as its executive body (the committee of aldermen or *wethouders* in Dutch), he had no voting rights.

Therefore, it was clear that the Dutch mayor was first and foremost the representative of the central state. His position limited local autonomy, and this impacted his relationship with local populations. In Belgium and France, mayors represented local groups and interests. A Dutch mayor came from outside a local community, and indeed was supposed to take a neutral stance in local struggles.

The typical so-called ‘pillarized’ nature of society meant that every mayor did have a certain political colour. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century Dutch mayor was a ‘regent’ who preserved a distance between himself and the locality. Despite the attempt by a new generation of mayors in the 1920s to adopt a somewhat less distant style of government, the real ‘regency’ period of the Dutch mayoralty would only end after 1945. In 1930, 91 % of all mayors still came from the top two strata of society (which consisted of six levels).¹⁹ In that same year, 86 mayors were sons of former mayors, and 86 were members of the nobility.²⁰

Like his Belgian and French colleagues, the Dutch mayor was head of the local police and responsible for public order within his municipal jurisdiction. In municipalities of more than 5000 inhabitants, the municipal police had authority; in smaller communities, the state police (*rijkspolitie*) was responsible.²¹ The Dutch mayor had no accountability to the local municipal council in police matters. The further extension of central control over local police was a hot topic during the 1930s, and would come to the fore again after May 1940.

In the Netherlands, the provincial ‘commissar of the King’ (or Queen) (*Commissaris des Konings/Koningin*) had more similarities with the Belgian system than with the French prefectural system.²² As in Belgium, Dutch provincial government was rather weak between 1850 and 1940.²³ Central control was placed at the local level itself. Their most essential function in both countries, however, was their formal role in the appointment of mayors. While this role was purely bureaucratic in times of democratic normality, it would become critical during the German occupation.

In short, in Belgium, France and the Netherlands, local democracies displayed a high level of local autonomy and self-government, efficient forms of consensus-building and local mediation aimed at implementation of state policies. This system stressed increasing organized grassroots participation in decision-making, a (precarious) balance between mayors as both national politicians and local community leaders, and the role of local governments as both the symbolic and de facto carriers of civic liberties.

THE LOCAL BALANCE OF POWER DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

As a rule, the local balance of political power was more stable than the national one. This was certainly the case for the interwar Netherlands, where municipal elections in any case had no direct impact on the appointment of mayors. The most important gradual shift during this period was the rise of the Dutch socialist party. Although in 1939 the Dutch SDAP was still excluded from participation in national government, it had by then already gained a local foothold (mostly in the northern provinces of Friesland and Groningen). In 1901 the party gained councillors in Rotterdam, and in 1902 in Amsterdam. Whereas in 1917 there were only 10 socialist aldermen, by 1919 this had risen to 87 (in 73 towns or cities, including The Hague and Amsterdam).²⁴

Interwar developments in Belgium were more instable. The 1895 electoral reform (general multiple voting) had allowed for the socialist breakthrough in most of the larger Walloon cities.²⁵ In Flanders, the Catholic party maintained its dominant position while the liberal party held on to larger cities such as Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven and some communities around Brussels. The 1921 electoral reform (universal suffrage and proportional representation) caused further changes, and in many municipalities, absolute Catholic majorities were ruptured. The Socialist party broke through in Flanders as well (the party gained an average of 28 % of Flemish municipal councillors between 1921 and 1938). The liberal party was relegated to third place while the Catholic party (the Belgian Catholic Union) held on to an average of 40 % of Flemish council seats. In short, coalition governments became a necessity at the local level after 1921.

The most important pro-Nazi parties under occupation in Belgium and the Netherlands would be the *Nationaal Socialistische Beweging Nederland* (National Socialist Movement Netherlands, NSB), the *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National Union, VNV) and Rex.

The Dutch national socialists of the NSB would never have much success in local elections. They initially grew slowly in the more urbanized towns, but by 1939 the party hardly even participated in municipal elections.²⁶

The municipal election of 1938 was the last local election in Belgium before the war and occupation. For Flanders, the so-called 'Flemish Concentration' dominated these elections. These were coalitions between the VNV and the Catholic party, mostly in towns or cities where the Catholic majority was threatened.²⁷ Coalition lists were presented in around 100 Flemish cities and towns.²⁸ In many municipalities, this Flemish Concentration gained a majority.²⁹ After the 1938 elections, 81 % of Flemish mayors belonged to the Catholic party (as did about 68 % of all municipal councillors).³⁰ The liberal party claimed a mere 6 % of Flemish municipal councillors (but held onto the mayoralty in some important cities). In some of the largest cities, the Flemish Concentration was kept from power, most notably in Flanders' largest cities of Antwerp (where the well-known socialist Camille Huysmans remained mayor) and Ghent. So contrary to the NSB or Rex, the VNV had a significant presence in municipal government, thanks to the alliance with the Flemish Catholic party.

In francophone Belgium Rex was swept away in 1938. The party did not even attain 5 % of the overall vote, and this despite the fact that its numbers had been boosted by exceptional scores in a city like Liège, where Rex gained 15 % of the votes and six seats. In Charleroi and Tournai, Rex gained one seat out of 19 and 23 respectively.³¹ In Brussels, Rex

won four seats of 41. Significantly, the party was practically absent in the industrialized regions, which remained dominated by socialists (and communists). Rex only had seats in two out of 66 municipalities in the region around La Louvière, for instance. Significantly, the party could forge hardly any coalitions with the francophone wing of the Catholic party. The city of Ath was the most significant municipality where they succeeded in doing this (Rex joined a coalition with the Catholic and Liberal parties). There was, therefore, a marked difference with Flanders.

The situation in Nord/Pas-de-Calais resembled francophone Belgium. The socialist party came to the fore after 1892, when the first two socialist mayors were appointed in Caudry and Roubaix. After 1908, the socialists grew stronger in the smaller mining and metallurgic municipalities (around Valenciennes, for instance). From that point forth, *socialisme municipal* was implemented.³² This implied the development of strong regional–local networks of corporations, social organizations and unions with mayors acting as local nuclei of power.

Both *départements* basically consisted of large industrial islands in the middle of a rural sea (15 % of the active population worked in agriculture in 1936).³³ These industrial islands were located around the coal basins in Pas-de-Calais and the urban axis of Lill–Roubaix–Tourcoing in Nord. Coal mines were primarily located in Pas-de-Calais and the heavy production industries primarily around Lille and Valenciennes (in 1936, both represented 43 % of the working population).³⁴ The traditional textile industry around Arras had already begun its quick decline during the interwar years.

The last municipal elections before the war, in 1935, confirmed this picture. There were strong conservative centre-right bastions of power in the countryside in the west and south of Pas-de-Calais, while the centre-left *Parti Radical* remained strong in Arras, Valenciennes, Boulogne and the suburban areas around Avesnois and Cambrai. These elections also confirmed the strong socialist centres in the urban-industrial areas around Lille, Cambrai and the mining areas of Pas-de-Calais, with even pockets of strong communist presence in the mining area between Douai and Valenciennes. The socialist party became the biggest political party in Nord after 1935, with 614 representatives in the senate, followed by the *Union Républicaine Démocratique* (URD) at 468, and the left-wing republicans (*Républicains de Gauche*) with 445. The communists had 233 representatives.

During the national elections of 1936, the SFIO gained 13 seats and the communists six in Nord, out of a total of 24. The popular front officially had 20 (19, in practice) out of 24 members of parliament in Nord.

In the October 1937 regional elections for the *Conseil Général* (the departmental council) and the less important district councils, the SFIO won 33 seats (out of 68, amounting to an increase of 10 seats) in the Nord council and 10 in the Pas-de-Calais council (gaining 31 and 13 seats in the district councils of Nord and Pas-de-Calais respectively).

The conclusion, therefore, is that both *départements* remained true red regions.³⁵ With 27,000 members, the regional section of the SFIO of Nord was the biggest regional socialist section in France and with 13,000 members the Pas-de-Calais section shared second place with the *département* of Seine. The regional communist party had an estimated 20,000 members in January 1938. Mayors were essential nuclei in these socialist networks. After 1935, there were about 111 socialist mayors in Nord and 61 in Pas-de-Calais. One of the most influential was mayor Jean Lebas of Roubaix, who was also secretary of the socialist party section of Nord and president of the *Conseil Général* after 1937.

But right-wing parties also grew significantly. The *Parti Social Français*, for example, burgeoned to an estimated 50,000 members in both departments combined.³⁶ The socialist party's biggest threat, however, came from the extreme left. The communist party gained a considerable foothold in 1935 in the mining regions between Douai and Valenciennes, as well as in the metallurgic centre in the Samber region, the Lys region and around Lille. This led to bitter struggle, not least regarding control of the unions.

The apparent socialist dominance in both *départements* therefore becomes more nuanced when we examine the situation at the local level. While it is true that the socialists were able to participate in only 97 local coalitions (the communists were limited to 36)—a modest number when compared with the URD, the left-wing republicans and the *Radicaux Indépendants*, represented in 174, 149 and 123 coalition governments respectively—they exerted a relatively greater influence in larger cities. The majorities of the centre right parties were disproportionately restricted to smaller towns.³⁷

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE IMPACT OF WW I ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Belgium and France were partly occupied by the Germans during the First World War. In both occupied regions, contact with central authorities was cut off in 1914. Transport, mobility and communication were difficult or impossible. Life thus became limited to the local horizon, and local government became the only visible administration exerting a direct impact.

This occupation was the first practical trial run of the Hague Convention of 1907 (see below) for administrations under hostile occupation. Despite the lack of in-depth research, it is clear that mayors in both of the occupied territories had to deal with the establishment of hostage lists, forced labour policies, the deportation of inhabitants and German requisitioning. All these issues foreshadowed essential questions of WW II. Mayors had to make difficult decisions without any real backing from higher authorities.

The organization of local communities arguably regressed to earlier, pre-modern models.³⁸ As the role of municipal councils shrank, new networks and strong individuals came to the fore. These players derived power from local–regional networks, sometimes new (post-1914) ones tied to the specific challenges of occupation—especially social care and food supply. The mayor emerged as a key figure of mediation with the occupier.

After the Great War, mayors from both occupied countries became essential building blocks in the construction of patriotic memory and commemoration. In Belgium, mayors came to symbolize the spirit of national freedom, reinforcing pre-war narratives of local autonomy and urban liberty as a defining characteristic of the Belgian nation. This was also evident in the north of France, where, to this day, historiography and memories stress mayors' patriotic resistance during the occupation.³⁹

The significance of the political and socio-economic reform introduced after WW I was striking in all three states, even in a neutral country such as the Netherlands.⁴⁰ But in none of the three countries did WW I lead to any fundamental reform of municipal organization.

Autonomous socio-economic policies instituted by city governments certainly grew after 1918, reflected in the proliferation of a professional city bureaucracy. Confronted with the challenges of massive reconstruction after 1918, central states were in part forced to delegate powers to the local level and city governments.

In Belgium and (the north of) France, the mayor could develop more political independence. Mayors of larger cities wrested themselves from under the tutelage of prefects, who, after 1918, gradually became more of an adviser than a central watchdog.⁴¹ In smaller, rural communities the influence of the municipal council decreased in favour of the mayor. In both countries, mayors increasingly accumulated political mandates after 1918. In the north of France, several mayors of larger cities were elected to parliament (the mayors of Roubaix and Lille from 1919 until 1936, the mayor of Valenciennes from 1928 until 1940). One author writing on France argues that a local 'presidential regime' emerged around the mayor after 1918.⁴²

Regional differences aside, in Belgium and France a new generation of mayors came to the fore after 1918. This would impact the course of events during WW II.

Generally speaking, in 1940 mayors in Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais were of an advanced age. This was especially the case for mayors of larger cities (Jeff van de Meulebroeck of Brussels was 64; Camille Huysmans of Antwerp, 69; Louis Huart of Namur, 65). In Pas-de-Calais, over 50 % of the mayors were 60 or older, and 20 % were over 70.⁴³ In both countries this was the generation of mayors who had come into office in 1919. In the Netherlands, in contrast, in 1935 the government set the age of mandatory retirement for mayors at 65. As a consequence, many younger mayors were nominated between 1935 and 1940 in the Netherlands.

Centralizing tendencies were also strong after 1918, resulting not only from the experience of total war, but also from the fact that the first exploratory framework of the welfare state was being developed. This inevitably involved greater intrusion by the state into the (social) policies of city (or local) governments.⁴⁴ The emancipatory effect of WW I on local governments in Belgium and France, then, was to a certain extent ambiguous. Mayors in Belgium supported the central Belgian patriotic narrative after 1918, but at the same time further increased their autonomy vis-à-vis the central state.⁴⁵

WW I certainly further enhanced the position of the French and Belgian mayor as a strong political actor on a local as well as national level. It is much more difficult, however, to assess whether WW I led to a fundamental shift in the way local democracies worked at the level of decision-making as well as in their relationship with local populations. What was the impact of the regression on older forms of local societal organization? Was this regression temporary or did certain elements carry over into the post-1918 return to political-institutional normality?

A LOCAL NEW ORDER DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS?

Generally speaking, of our three countries, the Netherlands withstood the systemic crisis of the interwar years best.⁴⁶ The Dutch system absorbed various shocks fairly successfully during the 1920s and 1930s. The result of the 1918 national elections was in line with that of 1913, and there would be little fundamental change in this during the interwar years.⁴⁷ No anti-democratic party proved able to pose a real threat. The debate in the Netherlands was a technical-legalistic reformist one.⁴⁸

On a 'lower rung' on the scale of stability, we encounter Belgium. Here, social class struggle was more vivid than in the Netherlands. There were also stronger counter movements, most notably the communist movement in francophone Belgium and Flemish nationalism in Flanders. The May 1936 national elections were the key moment of political rupture in this regard. Léon Degrelle's new-order dissident Catholic party Rex gained 21 seats in parliament, and the Flemish nationalists doubled their seats to 16. Almost a quarter of parliamentary seats were held by parties that rejected the traditional Belgian parliamentary system.⁴⁹

The least stable system during the 1930s however, clearly was that of the French Third Republic. Here the long-running cyclical political struggles resurfaced with a vengeance. The French communist party and the radical unionist wing of the French socialist SFIO were powerful actors. The socialist electoral victory of 1932 instigated deep political struggle. France was also lacking a strong head of state able to transcend national cleavages. The Third Republic's president during the 1930s was the rather weak Albert Lebrun (who was re-elected in 1939). The cleavage between left and right peaked after 1936, with the Popular Front government led by the first socialist (and Jewish) government leader in France, Léon Blum, and in the international context of the Spanish civil war.⁵⁰ It was in this context that Edouard Daladier—in 1938 still the 'hero' of the so-called peace of Munich—became prime minister in May 1939.

Whatever the level of national crisis, the pressure put on local autonomy was a general (European) phenomenon. Despite the ambiguities of the New Order ideas, one of the generic aims was enhancing centralized authoritarianism. In that sense, 'order' always meant a strong central state. State control over private enterprise and the financial sector formed part of this, as did the idea that a state should represent a natural 'people's community'. These ideas also impacted local governments, as tendencies towards state centralization (merging of cities into larger entities, financial control over city budgets, political control over mayors, administrative control over the local police) became more pronounced.

The Nazi system had already shown the way.⁵¹ After 1933 the federal German structure was quickly centralized (under the cloak of the remaining Weimar constitution). German municipalities were merged into bigger towns and cities. Attempts were also made to neutralize local autonomy and subjugate local government to central state authority. The new Nazi municipal legislation of 1935 was a classic compromise between the traditional state bureaucracy and the Nazi movement.⁵² Several central and regional Nazi leaders favoured more local autonomy, hoping that

this would benefit a bottom-up *coup* by the movement.⁵³ The Prussian centralist bureaucratic vision had in fact gained the upper hand.⁵⁴ While the new legislation did indeed confirm the mayor as a local *Führer* with many individual powers, critical control over administration and local budgets was vested in the central authorities. In practice, the vague wording of this municipal law instigated an ongoing power struggle.⁵⁵

In the Netherlands the call for local reform was limited to the traditional, ongoing discussion about increased central control.⁵⁶ It was in Belgium that local government found itself more at the centre of discussion. One main point was the significant fragmentation. In 1830, Belgium comprised 2492 municipalities; by 1928, this had grown to 2676 municipalities. To put matters into perspective, after the amalgamations of the early 1930s, the Netherlands had only 1072 municipalities, despite a similar geographical area and a larger population.

France had the same problem as Belgium: in 1939 there were 2 million people living in 669 municipalities in Nord, and in Pas-de-Calais, 1.8 million people lived in 905 municipalities.⁵⁷ The urban regions in Nord and Pas-de-Calais counted 197 and 108 municipalities of over 2000 inhabitants, respectively. Conversely, these urban cores were surrounded by large rural areas where 50 % (Nord) and 80 % (Pas-de-Calais) of the municipalities were home to fewer than a thousand inhabitants.⁵⁸

This instigated the debate on ‘rationalized’ municipal mergers or unifications. In the Netherlands this led to large-scale amalgamations during the interwar years. The mayoralty system made it possible to appoint one mayor for several neighbouring municipalities (in 1910 there were 104 Dutch mayors who governed more than one municipality).⁵⁹

In Belgium and France municipal merger proved impossible. The principle of local autonomy was too strong.⁶⁰ What did emerge, however, were bottom-up, informal contacts between large core cities and their suburban municipalities. Informal structures like this would play an important role after May 1940.

A Study Centre for State Reform as well as a Royal Commissioner for Administrative Reform (appointed after the 1936 elections) were tasked with modernizing Belgian state organization.⁶¹ The central theme of the Centre’s final report was the weakening of parliamentary power to the advantage of the executive level. It also proposed municipal reforms: large-scale mergers of municipalities and the implementation of the ‘civil servant’ mayor system (which was essentially the Dutch system). Both propositions were bound to be rejected. Nonetheless, these initiatives

laid the groundwork for what would happen during the occupation. The Study Centre would be re-established during the summer of 1940.⁶²

France was another matter entirely. The Phoney War (*drôle de guerre*) between France and Germany from September 1939 permitted the Daladier government to take the final turn towards a more authoritarian way of governing. The regime implemented several measures which can in hindsight be interpreted as preparing the way for the collaborating Vichy regime: the strengthening of executive powers, a modest cult of personality around the head of state, a dominant political rhetoric of national renewal, a growing influence of young technocrats, an explicit alliance between regime and Church, a stress on traditional family values, an aggressive anti-communist stance and the rise of xenophobic and anti-Semitic elements in legislation.⁶³

Three laws enacted between July 1938 and March 1939 had broadened supervisory powers over local governments.⁶⁴ The true rupture came with two measures, both introduced on 26 September 1939. Referring to the non-aggression pact between the Soviet-Union and Germany (23 August 1939), Daladier outlawed the communist party and movement. Simultaneously, legislation regarding governmental decrees enhanced the powers of the central level over the political personnel of local governments for the duration of the war. In short, it gave the government (and prefects) full powers to suspend (and appoint) municipal councils and mayors. Both measures gave the government the wherewithal for a rapid purge of communists from public office and local governments. The Minister of the Interior, Albert Sarraut, ordered this purge on 7 October 1939. Five days later he stressed the need for a thorough approach, insisting that limitations of the 1884 municipal legislation were no longer relevant.⁶⁵ Local political personnel who were considered a threat to national security were to be replaced with centrally appointed 'special delegates'. This was the *de facto* end of local autonomy as per the republican model.

Nord and Pas-de-Calais provide good case examples.⁶⁶ The purging of communists began immediately.⁶⁷ All municipal governments where communists were part of the majority were suspended and replaced by special delegations (36 in Nord and 11 in Pas-de-Calais).⁶⁸ In other cities and towns, hundreds of communist councillors were suspended. The Socialist party took an active part, sometimes even physically ousting communists from town halls (as in the city of Calais on 29 October 1939).⁶⁹ The Socialist party also had a large hand in purging communists from unions, and filled in most of the vacancies created by the expulsions.⁷⁰ An 18 November 1939 decree gave the prefect significant powers to autho-

rise administrative arrests of those considered threats to national security. Special internment camps were set up in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. This decree, too, would prove useful to the Vichy regime.⁷¹

In Belgium and the Netherlands, repression of the communist movement also grew after September 1939. Local autonomy was also limited somewhat after mobilization. Nevertheless, French policy was clearly distinct. The Daladier government put republican, decentralized legislation aside. This would have a profound influence on the functioning of the Vichy regime after May 1940.

WHAT DO TO DURING AN ENEMY OCCUPATION?

The Convention of The Hague (on the Laws and Customs of War on Land) was the basic guiding text for situations of occupation. The Convention had been signed on 18 October 1907 by 44 countries, amongst which were Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Germany. The treaty basically described the rights and duties of an enemy occupier. An essential point was the occupier's obligation to guard public order in an occupied country.

When, during the 1930s, the prospect of war started to become more real, political debates arose about how best to prepare for a potential enemy occupation.

One might have expected Belgium to draw certain conclusions from the German occupation between 1914 and 1918. However, the parliamentary debates on the matter proved superficial. No analysis of events during those years was brought to bear. During the parliamentary debates in 1936, honorary procurator-general Servais stated that any preparatory legislation should be kept vague, and that a large margin for interpretation was essential. This resulted in the law 'on the duty of civil servants in wartime' (the so-called Bovesse legislation of 5 March 1935). This short but essential law stipulated that all Belgian civil servants and public officials must remain in their posts during an enemy occupation, and moreover were obliged to cooperate loyally with the enemy occupier. While France did not have dedicated legislation to this effect, the guiding principles were the same. The French ministry of the Interior, for example, would reiterate on 19 May 1940 that all French civil servants and public officials must remain in their posts in times of war and occupation. This was basically an implementation of The Hague Convention.

In Belgium, the essential points were brought together in an authoritative 'civil mobilization booklet' (17 March 1936). This small booklet collated

several basic texts, including the Hague Convention, and was distributed to all Belgian soldiers and public servants after September 1939. Again, the only real key point of the booklet was the obligation to remain in one's post and to cooperate with the occupier, as per the general interest of the country.

However, there was no definition of the exact nature of this 'loyal cooperation'. The only guideline was this:

But [civil servants] must abstain from executing their office if the occupying authority seeks to impose obligations that are incompatible with their duties of loyalty towards the Fatherland. In case of such an event they will seek council with their hierarchic superiors and they will act according to the written orders of these superiors.⁷²

This short paragraph was the only official guidance Belgian administrators had on how to deal with 'difficult' orders of an enemy occupier. This translated the essential conclusion from the German occupation of 1914–18. Resistance by government administrations and institutions to an enemy occupier was disadvantageous. An apparent 'warning from history' was the judicial strike by Belgian courts and the magistrates in 1917, when the occupiers had taken matters into their own, much more repressive hands. The simple lesson drawn by the Belgians, therefore, was that whatever the specific context, it was always better to keep Belgian matters and interests in Belgian hands. Belgians judged that providing detailed instructions for specific situations would not serve any useful purpose. This seemed a pragmatic approach.

In another sense, however, the Belgian political elite missed an enormous opportunity here. Many of the principal issues that would prove to be so difficult between 1940 and 1944 had already surfaced between 1914 and 1918. That first occupation had, in fact, been one of the first real tests for the Hague Convention. Yet Belgians did not examine that historical experience in order better to prepare their civil servants or administration for a similar situation in the future.

The Dutch lacked this historical experience, but they too created their version of a preparatory document.⁷³ Interestingly, they chose the opposite approach. Where the Belgian guidelines were consciously open, the Dutch stipulations of 1937 were detailed and formal. The only basic similarity was the obligation for Dutch public officials to remain in post and to cooperate loyally with the occupier (in explicit reference to the Hague Convention). The Dutch guidelines tried to outline a clear roadmap by

providing practical examples of what was not allowed, such as pledging loyalty to the occupier or acting as a guide for the enemy (article 17, for example, states: ‘persons who are requisitioned for this, are in reality faced with the choice between disgrace or death’).

At first glance, it might seem contradictory that the Dutch appeared to give more concrete examples about the dangers of collaborating with an occupier. As previously noted, however, the vagueness of the Belgian guidelines appeared to be a conscious choice by political leaders who, having lived through WW I, seemed to think it made little sense to list a top-down set of hypothetical situations and incidents. But we can perhaps also discern a difference in political-administrative culture here. The Dutch guidelines betray a strong belief in a formal-legalistic approach. In this regard it is also important to note that the guidelines were distributed only after the German invasion of May 1940⁷⁴: the Dutch seemed to believe that handing out a detailed list of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ at the beginning of an occupation was a workable approach.

Despite this fundamental difference in strategy, however, the philosophy of the pre-war instructions remained the same: loyal cooperation with an occupier was necessary in the interest of the population, but public officials must cease this cooperation if ever the disadvantages for the population outweighed the advantages. In all of the three countries, the Hague Convention offered the foundation.

None of the instructions touched on the most essential question, namely the exact relationship between the occupier’s legislation and authority and that of an occupied country. Reduced to its essentials this issue comes down to the following question: how should a civil servant—or a mayor, or a local policeman—react when an enemy occupier gives him an *illegal order*, meaning an order that contradicts the legislation of his own country or authorities? At first glance, the answer might seem simple: refuse to obey and/or ask your direct superior for guidance. But in practice the answer would never be so simple, for several reasons. One of these reasons was embedded within the Convention itself. The treaty text stated that an occupier had to respect the legislation of the occupied country, ‘*except when prevented from doing so*’. This was in fact a major loophole that rendered this entire paragraph (and large parts of the Convention with it) more or less useless.

Had this not become apparent during the occupation of Belgium in WW I? Indeed it had. After several concrete incidents between Belgian authorities and the German occupying forces (mostly with regard to the maintenance of public order), the Belgian *Cour de Cassation* had issued a

seminal decision on 20 May 1916. The highest Belgian court ruled that within the framework of the Convention, Belgian authorities under occupation had an obligation to execute German orders at all times, *even when these orders went against Belgian legislation*. The court based its argument on the fact that Belgium had integrated this international convention within a national law of 1910. As such, the court ruled that this treaty prescribed the overruling of national legislation by the German occupier. This was a remarkable decision, with far-reaching consequences. Belgian policemen, for example, had an obligation to carry out orders of the occupier, provided that they remained within the (vague) bounds of the Hague Convention.⁷⁵ German civil governor Moritz Ferdinand Freiherr von Bissing later qualified this decision. On 7 October 1916, he decreed that Belgian authorities were exempt from carrying out orders that held a ‘purely German political or military interest’. Although a significant grey area remained, this limitation was absolutely essential.

We can draw a rather important conclusion from all this. The practice of German occupation of Belgium during WW I created a ‘maximalist’ interpretation of the Hague Convention. Administrations of an occupied country had to execute any order of an occupier, except when it clearly concerned matters that belonged exclusively to the political or military interest of the occupier. It is remarkable that it appears that this issue was not further discussed during the interwar years in Belgium when preparations were made for a possible impending occupation. The Belgian and French acceptance of this during 1914–18 had created an important precedent. The Germans had not failed to notice this, and some who arrived after the invasion of May–June 1940 were acutely aware of this historical precedent. For them, the maximal interpretation of the Hague Convention was the norm when installing their occupation regimes.

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Adaptation (1940)

THE NEW OCCUPATION REGIMES OF 1940

Despite pre-war German preparation (May 1935 and September 1938), occupied Europe in 1941 was a patchwork of different types of occupation regimes.¹ Improvisation was ever-present; internal power struggles had ample room to develop.² However, occupation regimes in north and west Europe had in common a basic strategy of initially trying to achieve cooperation with indigenous elites. This had ideological reasons, but mainly pragmatic ones as well, notably the imperial ‘overstretch’ Germany was facing even in 1940.

After their surrender (14 May 1940) the Dutch were placed under a German *Zivilverwaltung*, or civic occupation regime. The country became a *Reichskommissariat*, which suggested future annexation to the greater German Reich.³ At the top of this system was *Reichskommissar* Arthur Seyss-Inquart, an Austrian National Socialist. The internal power struggle within the *Reich* was immediately visible in the Netherlands. Seyss-Inquart gave himself broad legislative competences in the Netherlands through a *Verordnung* of 29 May 1940. This was a maximalist approach to the Hague Convention, such that Dutch legislation was unambiguously and almost completely subordinated to German legislation.

In contrast, Hitler installed a *Militärverwaltung*, or military occupation regime, in Belgium.⁴ Hitler apparently felt it necessary to make some kind of gesture to the military. The unexpected presence in occupied Belgium of King Leopold III as a prisoner of war probably influenced his

decision. Uncertainty about how to tackle the Flemish–Walloon divide may also have been a factor.

Both types of occupation regimes in Brussels and Amsterdam were *Aufsichtsverwaltungen*, or ‘supervising administrations’. Theoretically they had to limit themselves to general framework legislation and to control over local policies and administration. A military occupation regime like the one in Belgium, however, had no political or ideological ‘mandate’. Its task was efficiently to exploit the economic potential of the occupied country. Order and stability were preconditions for this.

For the civil occupation regime in the Netherlands the primary objectives were political Nazification and *Gleichschaltung* of the occupied society.⁵ This meant that the SS initially lacked any formal position in occupied Belgium. Unlike in the Netherlands, there was no *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF). This was an important difference. The presence of a HSSPF gave Himmler direct leverage in the occupied territories, which explains the ongoing attempts by Himmler to install such a functionary in occupied Belgium. In May 1940, the SS had to establish a foothold in Belgium and fight its way from there. Nevertheless, it was immediately able to establish itself in occupied Belgium and open a *Dienststelle* of the *Sicherheitspolizei* and *Sicherheitsdienst* (Sipo-SD) in Brussels in July 1940. Although formally placed under the administrative authority of the *Militärverwaltung* (as of January 1941), these offices received orders directly from the Berlin *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. They operated semi-autonomously.⁶ Himmler regarded the Sipo-SD offices as a Trojan horse, to work towards the installation of a true *Zivilverwaltung*. He would succeed in this, but not until 13 July 1944, when the Allied forces were closing in.⁷ Thus, one can say that Belgium and the north of France were governed not by a ‘pure’ *Militärverwaltung* but by a hybrid civil–military system (certainly after 1942). A strict juxtaposition of the Dutch and Belgian/French occupation systems must therefore be nuanced.

The Belgian *Militärbefehlshaber* (military governor) Alexander von Falkenhausen was chosen to head the administration, although he was well known for this critical view of the Nazi regime.⁸ As military governor, he received orders directly from the *Generalquartiermeister* (supreme command of the German infantry forces, *Oberkommando des Heeres* or OKH).

The two northern French departments, Nord and Pas-de-Calais, received a remarkable statute. After the Franco-German Armistice (22 June 1940), the Germans divided their traditional arch-rival into seven

separate zones.⁹ In a surprising decision, Hitler opted to segregate the two northern French zones from France and add them to occupied Belgium; the resultant administrative entity would be under the authority of the Brussels *Militärverwaltung*. The two French departments became known as the so-called *zone rattachée*. This was probably a typical spur-of-the-moment decision on Hitler's part, and the construction would prove to exist more in theory than in actual practice. The German authorities in Brussels quickly realized that a uniform policy for both Belgium and the two French departments made little sense, given the completely different contexts.¹⁰

Five *Oberfeldkommandanturen* (OFKs) were installed (in Brussels, Charleroi, Ghent, Liège and the French Lille). On a lower level were ten *Feldkommandanturen* (FKs), thirty-three *Kreiskommandanturen* (KKs) and many local *Ortskommandanturen* (OKs). In some larger or important cities (including Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Ostend and Liège) special German city commissioners (*Stadtkommissare*) were added to German administration. In total, the German military occupation regime in Belgium had, in 1940, about 830 German administrators (including the French Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments). This number had risen to 1166 members in November 1941.¹¹ About 10,000 Germans were directly involved in the maintenance of public order and security. The initial German apparatus in the Netherlands was the most intrusive. Apart from the civilian staff and occupation forces (about 20,000 men), the Germans exercised direct control over the Dutch ministries and appointed a whole series of special agents (*Beauftragte, Kommissare, Referente*) who were basically watchdogs attached to Dutch officials.¹²

The OFK in Lille immediately had extensive administrative autonomy over occupied Nord/Pas-de-Calais. The regional German administration received full powers (*Ermächtigung*) from Brussels to issue decrees exclusively for their French zone.¹³ Both northern departments, placed in an artificial administrative 'alliance' with occupied Belgium, were in a markedly surreal political situation. The Germans closed the borders with both Belgium and the rest of France.¹⁴ The region became a closed enclave.

Communications with Brussels, Paris and Vichy were initially difficult. Vichy was not allowed to appoint a permanent representative in the region. Until after the summer of 1940, the Vichy authorities received only rare messages from the isolated region. The first official Vichy representative to perform an inspection in the region was the prefect Ingrand, on 6 December 1940.¹⁵ A week later, Pétain sacked Laval, the prime min-

ister of the Vichy government, and the Germans again restricted physical access to the region.

The German OFK in Lille almost immediately received a mandate of semi-autonomous administration in their zone. In concrete terms, this meant the German authorities in Lille evaluated the measures coming from different sources (Vichy, Brussels and even the *Militärverwaltung* in Paris) and then chose to approve, change or reject them. In a move that frustrated not only the Vichy regime but also the German *Militärverwaltung* in Paris, the OFK-Lille formally confirmed its semi-autonomy on 8 October 1940. The Paris occupation government tried hard to integrate these two industrialized regions.¹⁶ Gradually, the ‘detached’ north would slowly reintegrate itself with the rest of occupied France. The French Laval government would succeed in establishing the formal ‘administrative unity’ of France.¹⁷ This confirmed the reality on the ground. Policy and legislation gradually adapted to the rest of France. From the end of 1941, representatives of the northern prefects would attend the Paris conferences of French prefects.

International (English-language) literature presents the Belgian *Militärverwaltung* as a relatively moderate occupation regime.¹⁸ This is in many ways correct (although the situation grew worse as the occupation progressed). In June 1940, Belgian and German elites found each other in a fairly natural and pragmatic *modus vivendi*. The many similarities and parallels in the socio-political profile of these elites in Brussels certainly stimulated this. In May–June 1940 the *Militärverwaltung* spread a strategic and soothing message of reconstruction, stability and order (always with well-placed strategic references to the Hague Convention).

This initial mutual consensus would come under pressure very quickly in 1940. However, the guiding principles laid out in 1940 would remain in place until the end of the occupation. Prominent members of the *Militärverwaltung* were well aware of incidents that had occurred with the Belgian authorities between 1914 and 1918. More importantly, the *Militärverwaltung* was fully aware of its own precarious status. Von Falkenhausen did not wish to provoke major conflicts with Belgian elites (such as the Church or magistrature) that would give his opponents in Berlin the necessary ammunition to advocate the installation of a ‘true’ Nazi regime in Belgium. As such, a stable situation was the best precondition for the continued existence of the *Militärverwaltung*. Many in the Belgian establishment understood the *Militärverwaltung*’s predicament.

The Belgian situation was thus built on a foundation of strategic mutual interests.

The shortest duration of fighting during the war was in the Netherlands, with the Dutch government and head of state fleeing the country for England on 13 May 1940. In Belgium, a definitive rupture occurred between King Leopold III and the government on 25 May 1940.¹⁹ The Belgian king, already carrying a personal history of deep frustration with the pre-war democratic system, chose to remain in occupied Belgium as a prisoner of war. The government left Belgium and finally ended up in London, where it formed a government in exile.

After a short period of Dutch military rule (15–29 May 1940), the Germans looked to the highest-ranking civil servants to assume central power. These turned out to be the Dutch secretaries-general, the top civil servants attached to each ministerial department,²⁰ who, in ‘normal’ times, held no political responsibility.²¹ The Belgian situation started from a largely similar scenario. In an emergency session on 10 May 1940, the Belgian parliament approved a decree law stating that in a situation where contact with higher authority had been cut off, its powers and competences automatically transferred to the immediately subordinate authority. This essentially established a ‘cascade’ system and was intended to guarantee the continuity of administration in any circumstance. Thus, when the Belgian ministers left Brussels, their powers shifted to the Belgian secretaries-general.

France was another matter entirely. The longer fighting left enough time for internal political developments. New ministers were appointed in the Reynaud government, the most important of whom was 83-year-old marshal Philippe Pétain (appointed 16 May 1940). Republican President Lebrun asked him to form a new government, and, as new governmental leader, Pétain negotiated the Armistice (22 June 1940) with the Germans. The French parliament granted Pétain full powers (on 10 July 1940; of a total 932 members of parliament and senate, 569 supported the vote). With this mandate, Pétain suppressed the Third Republic and created the new authoritarian French state, giving himself broad legislative, executive and even partly judiciary powers.²² The French situation thus differed significantly from the ‘administrative regimes’ in occupied Belgium and the Netherlands. France still possessed a government that could—theoretically—exercise political sovereignty in a part of its own territory. The new French government (located in Vichy) theoretically retained three

important things: its colonies, its fleet and part of its territory. There was a political agreement that defined ‘state collaboration’.²³

WHO HOLDS CENTRAL CONTROL?

The summer of 1940 was a watershed historical moment. There was little doubt in anyone’s mind that the Germans had won the war. The prolonged political-administrative crises of the 1930s merged with this drastic rupture. Most elites felt that far-reaching changes were inevitable and/or advisable. In the context of Nazi occupation, this was a dangerous situation. Decisions taken during these crucial months would determine the rest of the occupation.

The situation in those first months of occupation was far from evident. The Germans initially seemed relatively reasonable, at any rate in Belgium. They appeared to follow a ‘legalistic’ scenario. Second, there were few alternatives for proactively pushing things forward. Occupied countries were immediately faced with enormous challenges, including food provision, refugees, reconstruction and economic recovery. Third, collaboration with the German occupying authority was imposed by national and international laws. There was no real viable plan B. Fourth, and finally, many within the occupied countries also considered the opportunities that the German occupation had created. Criticism of the pre-war democratic party systems resurfaced between June and September 1940. Ideas and frustrations that had been festering in the 1930s became pressing in the summer of 1940. To a certain extent, efforts for reform presented in 1940 can be regarded as (re-)vindication of those who had never really stomachached post-1918 mass democracy.

France was the only country with a full-fledged government and a sovereign political-ideological project.²⁴ The latter was the ‘National Revolution’, a generic amalgam of conservative, corporatist and right-wing Catholic ideas recycled from the 1920 and 1930s. Pétain was the only figure who could transcend the many intrinsic contradictions.²⁵ Obviously, the regime desired to explicitly distance itself from republican ideology.²⁶ Nevertheless, the regime was initially strongly sustained by former republican elites, especially within the administrations.

In Belgium and the Netherlands, governments were no longer present, parliaments and provincial councils had been ‘suspended’ (in the Netherlands the provincial council would remain in place for the moment), and political parties were forbidden. Despite the ‘administrative’ nature of

the regimes, vindictive sentiments were dominant as well. As in France, the shock of defeat encouraged rejection of the pre-1940 system. In the Netherlands, an aspiration to undo the fragmentation of pre-war Dutch society emerged. This was embodied in the figure of Hendrik Colijn—five-times prime minister during the interwar years and author of the June 1940 pamphlet ‘On the border of two worlds’ (*‘Op de grens van twee werelden’*) and a short-lived but remarkably successful occupation organization, the Dutch Union (*Nederlandse Unie*).

Prevalent in Belgium, on the other hand, was dissatisfaction with Belgium’s administrative organization, shared by Belgian elites and German occupiers alike. Between June and September 1940, many political initiatives were launched from leading Belgian circles, often around the King. The formation of a new authoritarian government led by King Leopold III (who could then become the Belgian Philippe Pétain) seemed an ideal scenario. Indeed, France, with its (semi-)sovereign Vichy government, was seen by many leading Belgians as an example to follow.²⁷

In both Belgium and the Netherlands, these aspirations were blocked or rejected outright by the Germans, who simply saw no advantages in facilitating grand ‘domestic’ projects. Technocratic, administrative regimes with legislative powers were considered much more useful (and controllable) instruments for German plans. As such, by the end of 1940, it was clear that in Belgium and the Netherlands the momentum for grand local political reform had ebbed.

The essential question in both countries therefore concerned the nature of these peculiar ‘administrative regimes’, and the extent of their powers. Could such regimes hold the power to issue new legislation? For the Germans the answer was affirmative. In the Netherlands, Seyss-Inquart resolved the matter decisively. On 21 June 1940 he decreed that the secretaries-general held full legislative powers with regard to the competences of their respective ministerial domains. Most Dutch secretaries-general accepted these powers without hesitation, although attitudes varied according to individuals and the specific domain of policy. Nevertheless, a general attitude prevailed, in which the Dutch secretaries-general welcomed these expanded legislative powers. In June 1940, they appeared to welcome the era of ‘powerful’ administration free of time-consuming parliamentary debates or the influence of political parties.²⁸

Things proceeded more slowly and with more difficulty in Belgium. Much to the Germans’ surprise and dismay, the Belgian secretaries-general did not especially consider themselves to be ‘a Belgian government’.²⁹ The

regime of the secretaries-general was perceived to be a temporary authority, even by the secretaries-general themselves. They also had to deal with the presence of the King and the economic-financial Galopin committee (a shadow ministry of finances and/or economic affairs). Only when the Germans pressed the point did the Belgian secretaries-general move forward, albeit first by actively seeking legislative backing and support. Belgian top legal specialists (including the Committee of the Legislative Council) provided the necessary judicial legitimation, which basically rested upon a 'maximal' interpretation of the 10 May 1940 Law. A 'Protocol' of 12 June 1940 sealed this arrangement. Henceforth, German decrees would be executed as Belgian legislation (if they conformed with the Hague Convention) and the secretaries-general would be allowed to issue decrees with the power and status of laws, within certain conditions.³⁰

The Belgian secretaries-general would gradually gain confidence. Although the committee lacked any legal foundation, it would issue decrees and become a *de facto* ministerial council or government. When three secretaries-general were sacked during the summer of 1940 under German pressure (two cases involved the merger of ministerial departments; the third involved a replacement), the committee adopted a more proactive attitude. Victor Leemans, tied to the collaborationist Flemish National Union, was appointed secretary-general of Economic Affairs. He was an outspoken supporter of the committee being an 'authoritarian government'. Under his influence, even the prudent Jean Vossen, of Internal Affairs, noted on 29 August 1940 that the committee should present itself as a 'dictatorial government'.

It is clear that in the Netherlands a more confident technocratic tendency came to the fore in 1940. What accounts for the Belgo-Dutch differences? The perceived transitional status of the secretaries-general was important, of course, but there were more deep-seated causes. In Belgium, these civil servants were first and foremost products of political nominations. Unlike their Dutch (or French) counterparts, they were not moulded through any uniform process of professional education or training. The occupation brought them onto fundamentally uncharted terrain. The idea of developing policy autonomously, without backing from their political supervisors, was alien to them. We should not be blind to certain technocratic tendencies that also gradually emerged within Belgian administrations (see below). But it was much less outspoken than in the Netherlands. But we can also hypothesize that naivety caused by a lack of historical experience played a role here. In Belgium, the occupation of WW I remained a vivid part of an active collective memory in the ruling elites. It was clear from

the outset that there was strong awareness about the potential dangers of German occupation. The Netherlands lacked this historical framework and perhaps a realistic expectation of the dangers of proactive cooperation.³¹

But in France too, the regime struggled with the outline of collaboration. The concept of *collaborer* or *Zusammenarbeiten* (in the Armistice) implied near-totally subjugated cooperation. The maximal interpretation of the Hague Convention prescribed that German legislation and measures would supersede national legislation.³² Marquet, the French minister of the Interior, stated on 7 August 1940 that the Germans held full legislative and executive powers in the occupied zones, but that French legislation remained important in certain ‘French matters’. The Vichy government hoped that some logical division of competences would develop. In each of the three countries, the Germans would install a system of ‘previous authorization’, such that local legislation had to be approved by the German authorities before publication. Most of the important Vichy laws had to be presented to the Germans for approval. Apparently, this came as a surprise to the regime.³³ German control over local legislation was thus almost total. The prefects of Nord and Pas-de-Calais would, from the beginning of 1941, present all of their decrees and measures to the OFK in Lille in advance.³⁴

Therefore, the basic question and principle at stake remained in all three countries: how to create a ‘division of powers and competences’ and draw a line between German and ‘domestic’, national interests. This was a battle for autonomy and control of the occupied authorities over their own administrations.

TRANSITION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERMEDIARY LEVEL

Dutch administration withstood the transition virtually intact, with no mass exodus of refugees. Most civil servants and authority figures remained in place. A certain Dutch political culture of obedience probably played a role in this, yet more ordinary reasons were also important, such as the short duration of fighting and the fact that all escape routes to the south were blocked. The absence of a collective WW I trauma doubtless played a major part as well. The return to administrative normality was virtually immediate in the Netherlands, and the several weeks that passed before the appointment of Seyss-Inquart afforded the Dutch administration time to adapt.

Things proceeded quite differently in Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais. The German invasion provoked a mass exodus of two million

Belgians. Although Belgian civil servants and authority figures were legally bound to stay, many followed the example of the local population and fled. In doing so they were violating Belgian law. The same happened in Nord/Pas-de-Calais, from which hundreds of thousands people fled in May 1940. Of the 402,000 inhabitants of the urban region of Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing, an estimated 297,000 people fled to the south.³⁵ As in Belgium, collective memory of the German invasion in 1914 played a significant role. Despite the prefect's order (of 19 May 1940) to remain at their posts, many (local) administrators took flight, including the mayors of several larger cities.³⁶

This occurred alongside the communication ruptures between the departmental and central authorities. Inevitably, the departmental authorities had to assume the role of central government.

The respective tenures of the two prefects would immediately go in different directions. Rochard, the prefect of Pas-de-Calais, was absent when the Germans arrived (he would return to Arras on 26 May 1940). This was a poor start. Rochard was also a known freemason. He was sacked, under German pressure, in August 1940, officially because he was 'too old'. Fernand Carles, the prefect of Nord, on the other hand, was present when the Germans entered Lille.³⁷ Carles was practically the first representative of the French government that the Germans found still at his post. That was a good start. From the outset he seemed to have developed a good working relationship with the German authorities. On the French side, the minister Marquet confirmed his confidence in Carles, on 12 July 1940. This was not unimportant, since the first official contact between prefect Carles and a Vichy representative would not take place until 3 September. Prefect Carles and his administration would prove to be of vital importance. He would remain in place for the entire occupation, along with his direct subordinate Darrouy (who was initially secretary-general, the top civil servant, and was later appointed prefect). In contrast, prefectural authority would remain unstable in Pas-de-Calais. Rochard's replacement, Bussière, was appointed to a different position after twenty-one months in office. Three different prefects would follow in rapid succession (after eleven, eight and six months respectively). Similar instability in the prefectural office would emerge in other leading administrative positions.

This was essential. The prefects quickly came to the fore as key players.³⁸ This occurred even during the transition itself. Vichy minister Marquet had instructed the prefects, on 16 July 1940 'to take every decision necessary, with the sole purpose of maintaining public order in every domain'.³⁹

The Vichy regime would almost automatically regress to the traditional ideas of the nineteenth century imperial prefect. The government would bind them to the new regime, with expansion of competences, increased wages, restoration of the office's prestige (via new ritual signs of recognition) and minimizing the influence and impact of other power brokers such as local governments and employers' organizations. The law of 23 December 1940 declared the prefects as the 'sole representatives of the state'. The abolition of parliament, implementation of municipal reforms (which had begun under Daladier in 1939), and the suspensions of departmental councils (*conseils généraux*)⁴⁰ now allowed for a great deal of legislative power to flow to the prefect and his administration. The message of the Ministry of the Interior (7 August 1940) was clear: 'Yesterday, you turned to central authority for the slightest problem ... Now ... you will have to take your own initiatives. You were executive officials, tomorrow you will be men of action. You were civil servants, but you will be leaders. (...) want you to be *obsessed* by the restoration of order.'⁴¹

They basically compensated for the forced territorial division of the French state. The *zone rattachée* with its near-total isolation in 1940 offers a perfect example. The first meeting Prefect Carles held with a government representative (General de la Laurencie) was on 3 September 1940 in Paris. Here, Carles received the 'full powers' to issue emergency measures. Prefect Carles and his colleague(s) of Pas-de-Calais would later use these to 'officialize' certain German decrees (in regard to punishment of crimes in the domains of food supply or employment of the unemployed).⁴²

The continuity of Dutch provincial administration and the strong French departmental authority were key differences from Belgium. Here, the German *Militärverwaltung* immediately sacked eight of the nine provincial governors. Only Houtart, the governor of Brabant, was deemed acceptable by the Germans. The official reason was that the governors had abandoned their posts in May 1940. Indeed, seven of the provincial governors had left their administrative capitals. However, provincial governors were allowed to leave their posts, for, unlike mayors, during wartime they were supposed to follow the government.⁴³ Sacking eight out of nine governors was thus a fundamental breach of Belgian administrative autonomy. It was, however, accepted by the Belgian authorities without much protest. Perhaps the importance of the measure was not fully recognized. Likewise, it may evidence the lack of perceived importance regarding the provincial level. Three of the eight new Belgian governors appointed in August 1940 were from collaborationist parties. Michiel Bulckaert (VNV provincial deputy)

became governor of West Flanders, Gerard Romsée (VNV member of parliament) became governor of Limburg,⁴⁴ and Antoine Leroy, a Rexist engineer, became governor of Hainaut.⁴⁵ The Germans had steered towards these nominations. Secretary-general Vossen of Internal Affairs had made no objections, because (as he claimed after the occupation) at that time he still assumed that the VNV and Rex would remain 'loyal to the country'.⁴⁶ The five other new governors—Jan Grauls in Antwerp; Georges Doyen in Liège; Georges Devos in Namur; Jozef De Vos in East Flanders; and Baron René Greindl in Luxemburg—were not members of either party. They were either civil servants or district commissioners. Nevertheless, in 1940 they clearly supported some kind of authoritarian new order.

This played an often overlooked but crucial role. Pre-war directives had stated that mayors and local governments were to look to their direct higher authorities for guidance. These were provincial governors and administrations. The Belgian intermediary level was thus immediately decapitated.

The Dutch situation was different. Here, provincial commissioners played an important role during the first weeks and afterwards. The provincial commissioners were in direct contact with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and could transfer authority to the important mayors, with whom they maintained close contact. The provincial commissioner of Zuid-Holland had already in September 1939 begun to organize regular meetings with the mayors of his province's larger cities. These meetings continued during May and June 1940 (and afterward). The Utrecht provincial commissioner, Lodewijk Bosch van Rosenthal, immediately organized meetings between the most important mayors and leading figures of his province. He even discussed the nature of future cooperation with the Germans.⁴⁷ These kind of meetings existed to some extent in each Dutch province. German orders and measures would be discussed and collective standpoints could be adopted.⁴⁸ These meetings would develop into a structural thing. In reaction to the German occupation, therefore, more direct ways of organizing administrative contact were developed in the Netherlands.

These pre-war provincial commissioners would also remain in place for a fairly long time.⁴⁹ The first NSB provincial commissioner would be Albert J. Backer (in Noord-Holland, at the start of 1941). This affected local governments. Local political-administrative continuity was remarkable. As In 't Veld, an historian and, in May 1940, the mayor of Zaandam, noted after the war: 'it gave the bourgeoisie a reassuring feeling, to see that the well-known, trusted people stayed in control'.⁵⁰ This 'smooth'

Dutch transition meant that a strong, unified and professional Dutch front of civil servants and administrators was present to confront the German occupier and defend Dutch interests.

LOCAL TRANSITIONS: BETWEEN PURGES AND NORMALIZATION

Even during the transition, local administrations were confronted with severe problems: the return of refugees, material destruction of houses and infrastructure, food provision, administrative disintegration and economic recovery. In France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, local governments were generally able to cope with this, in large part because, despite the political rupture of May 1940, administrative systems had remained in place (which seems a fairly normal scenario during sudden political transitions like regime changes or occupations).⁵¹ Certainly in Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais, local governments had to play the role of independent cells in a decapitated body.

The Germans established direct local lines of communication with city and municipal governments and administrations. Most, if not all, local governments and mayors wished to resume ‘normal’ public life as soon as possible.⁵² The Germans asked for the same things. Practical agreements had to be made concerning reparation of infrastructure, traffic control, protection of the lines of communication, organization of food and gas supplies, restarting local businesses, control of prices, appointment of administrators, and regulation of everyday public order.⁵³ In the beginning, this was especially relevant in the areas of public order and the exchange of information with the occupier. Local appeals to remain calm and abstain from resistance in May 1940 quickly became local police measures geared towards confiscation of all local firearms, removal of military blockades and mines, and safeguarding German communication lines and military storage facilities.⁵⁴ A local ‘convergence’ of material interests soon emerged. Distinctions between German and indigenous interests became difficult for local administrators and police to discern on an everyday level.

This also happened on the national level. It was, after all, in line with the Hague Convention. But the everyday nature of local government posed a particular danger. An essential question that arose was whether a local governmental level was capable of establishing limits in its cooperation with the occupier, without the backing of a central government?

A pressing undertaking after the immediate post-transition was to fill missing posts. In Belgium, about one third of all Belgian mayors fled in May 1940.⁵⁵ The highest rate of such flight occurred in the central province of Brabant. With entire municipal councils being absent, normal legal succession procedures were sometimes impossible to execute. In several provinces temporary emergency measures were taken, including temporary appointments of mayors outside the council, provincial commissars, and war committees. The latter were also formed in Nord/Pas-de-Calais to replace the many absent local governments. These local measures were later retroactively ‘confirmed’ and approved by the higher authority.

With the French *zone rattachée* sealed off, many of the civil servants who had fled could not return. The Vichy laws of 16 July and 23 July 1940 declared that those who had fled in May 1940 were enemies of the state and that their citizenship could be withdrawn.⁵⁶ A special court, established 30 July 1940, would judge the most important responsible parties in the *debâcle* of May 1940.⁵⁷ The flight of civil servants in May 1940 became a first angle to purge representatives of the republican regime. In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, however, this political-ideological aspect was present only on a rather marginal, secondary level. Administrative normalization was the foremost priority.

Unlike in Belgium, an extensive administrative inquiry was not necessary in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. Since September 1939, the prefect had held all necessary powers. He could suspend and appoint local political and administrative personnel without much inquiry or motivation. The prefects quickly took administrative normalization in hand. Matters proceeded more quickly in Nord/Pas-de-Calais than in Belgium. Municipal government was automatically suspended in municipalities with ad hoc war committees.⁵⁸ On 20 June 1940, prefect Carles suspended, in one measure, all administrators who had fled.⁵⁹ He also gradually replaced war committees with new ‘special delegations’ of centrally appointed replacement ‘municipal councils’. But even here, disintegration of local governments lasted for months. On 22 August 1940, Prefect Carles officially confirmed temporary but extended replacement of 64 municipal councils in Nord by ad hoc war committees. During this first phase new appointments would be especially prevalent in the police services, particularly with the appointments of many new local police commissioners.⁶⁰

In Belgium on 13 July 1940 the secretaries-general installed a special committee of inquiry to investigate civil servants (on 18 July 1940 for mayors and aldermen). The Belgian sanctioning procedures were generally

mild. The committees often accepted rather meek arguments—for example, references to sick relatives and to the ‘general confusion’ during the invasion—from officials for having abandoned their posts. In May 1940, 1170 mayors appeared before a Belgian inquiry committee investigating such flights.⁶¹ Of these, 80 were ‘relieved of office’ by the Belgian authorities⁶²; the others, as well as civil servants in general, received small sanctions (usually a short suspension) or—as in most cases—no sanction at all. There were no significant differences in sanction policy between Flanders and Wallonia.⁶³

In Belgium (as well in the north of France) large parts of the populations seemed to have supported these sanctioning measures.⁶⁴ However, the strategic wisdom of this was questionable. Subjecting Belgian personnel to sanction procedures that could last for months was fairly dangerous in an occupation context. After the liberation, Vossen of the Interior would indeed be questioned about these measures. However, these 1940 procedures should not be interpreted in view of the subsequent purges of 1941. Belgian authorities were aware of the dangers but had little choice. For many authority figures it seemed unlikely they would ever return. Belgium’s central administration lacked the necessary legal powers to intervene directly. There were few other options to normalize local governments.

The Belgians regarded these procedures as purely internal. The Germans, however, saw things differently. The *Militärverwaltung* created an important instrument for itself with the *Verordnung* of 18 July 1940 concerning ‘the execution of public offices’ (*Ausübung öffentlicher Tätigkeit*). They could now withdraw the ‘permission’ (*Genehmigung*) to execute public office from any Belgian authority figure. Again, this was a fundamental breach of Belgian administrative autonomy. The question was how the Germans would use their right of veto.

Initially, the Germans in Belgium opted for continuity. In 1940, the Germans limited their political purge to a small number of specific, individual cases. Nonetheless, the German authorities monitored Belgian procedures carefully. Clearly, mayors and public officials who had fled had thereby rendered themselves politically suspicious in the eyes of the occupying power. German authorities maintained complete lists of these public officials. As late as 1943 the Germans would still use a mayor’s flight in May 1940 as justification for sacking him. This also happened in the north of France, such as in October 1941 in Dunkirk.⁶⁵ In Belgian municipalities and cities with high incidences of flight by public officials in May 1940, the German tendency to interfere would remain higher in 1941–43.

Time was a factor against local authorities, in Belgium and in the north of France. Formal problems included that in order to approve municipal budgets, municipal councils required official majorities.⁶⁶ In short, the longer this abnormal state of affairs lasted, the more likely it became that there would be German intervention.⁶⁷ Quick ‘normalization’ of local government was thus needed.

The Belgian secretary-general Vossen did not have power to sack and appoint mayors. He could therefore not create any final ‘normalization’. The new mayors who had replaced absent mayors all remained legally *ad interim* and therefore temporary. Secretary-general Vossen issued a decree on 13 November 1940 stating that all public officials who had not returned to their posts before 1 October 1940 were automatically ‘relieved of their mandate’.⁶⁸ This created the legal means to appoint more permanent mayors. This was a questionable measure from a legal viewpoint. At the moment it was perceived as necessary to block German and collaborationist interferences. The direct cause for Vossen’s decree was the situation in Antwerp, whose socialist mayor Camille Huysmans had fled in May 1940.⁶⁹ The subsequent temporary mayorship had been handed to the Catholic alderman Leo Delwaide, but the Germans pushed for a permanent solution for this important port city.⁷⁰ The city of Ghent faced the same situation. Here, the VNV threatened to obstruct proceedings via trying to impose their own candidate mayor. The Germans in turn issued a *Verordnung* on 19 December 1940 by which all absent Belgian officials automatically received German interdiction. Vossen’s decree would more or less signal the gradual end of this first post-invasion phase.⁷¹

The authoritarian French ‘prefectoral approach’ went quicker. War Committees were initially immediately replaced by ‘special delegations’ in Nord/Pas-de-Calais.⁷² This measure allowed for a gradual replacement of these special delegations (or war committees that had been formed in May–June 1940) by former municipal councils. In Pas-de-Calais this was finished in January 1941; in Nord the process lasted a few months longer.⁷³

All in all, despite the significant political disintegration in May 1940, continuity in local governments turned out to be relatively high in Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais.

SOCIALIST ACCOMMODATION IN THE NORTH OF FRANCE

After September 1939, the socialist party had been able to take over many positions in local governments in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. However, the party suffered a heavy blow when many of its leading figures took flight in

May 1940. The socialist mayors of Lille, Lens, Anzin and Roubaix fled, as did most of the socialist leadership of the different unions. The official ban of the northern SFIO during the summer of 1940 thus seemed to confirm the reality of an imploded party. Ironically, the communist party would momentarily gain from this, exploiting this socialist flight for its underground propaganda, diffusing the view that socialists had abandoned their people and responsibilities (which was strikingly similar to the propaganda by the collaborationist Rex and the VNV in Belgium).⁷⁴

The SFIO quickly sought to establish itself. The local party network had been damaged but was by no means destroyed. It maintained strong local footholds. Naturally, this entailed accommodation and collaboration with the regime and the occupying power.

French historians Dejonghe and Le Maner explain the socialist parties' attitude during the summer of 1940 as having been a *double jeu*. Both historians argue that the SFIO's strategy was a deliberate ploy to prepare for underground resistance. Both historians make a rather strict distinction between the attitudes of the leftist and of the right-wing elites (political parties, the church, business elites) in 1940. Such distinction, however, seems anachronistic if not even irrelevant in the 1940 context. A large part of the SFIO in Nord/Pas-de-Calais opted for political-administrative collaboration in June 1940. On 10 July 1940, all eight socialist members of parliament from Nord/Pas-de-Calais voted in favour of Pétain's full powers. In 1941 the socialist syndicate leaders would still openly support Vichy's corporatist reform (the *Charte de Travail*) and take leading positions in the new institutions. Local administrators followed an active 'policy of presence'. The SFIO's virulent anti-communism was akin to that of the Vichy regime's and they enacted the regime's persecution policies certainly until 1941.

An individual example is Jean-Baptiste Lebas, the socialist frontman and mayor of Roubaix. Lebas had fled in May 1940 and was not able to return to Roubaix until after the summer. Despite his attempts to retake his old position, the local war committee (installed in June 1940) refused him access to the municipal house. Lebas and other socialists who were pushed aside after May 1940 created a small clandestine paper (*L'homme libre*). In 1941–42, this would gradually be integrated into the emerging organized underground resistance. After the occupation, Lebas became the symbol of early (that is, immediate) socialist resistance. This necessitated forgetting Lebas' attempts to retake his mayorship in September 1940. Other leading socialist mayors followed the same trajectory.⁷⁵ They fled in May 1940, were shunted aside after the summer of 1940 and in

large part because of this, were involved in what would later become the underground resistance. The SFIO's generational and ideological schism (which included the fact that younger socialists tended towards resistance) would become dominant only later, after mid-1941.⁷⁶

Dejonghe and Le Maner emphasize the immediate climate of strong anti-German (and consequently anti-Pétain) feelings in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. An attitude of 'proto-resistance' was supposedly tied to collective remembrance on WW I. Besides the fact that 'public opinion' is a problematic concept, this assessment of the general climate in Nord/Pas-de-Calais is not supported by the evidence.⁷⁷ The north of France followed the same general patterns of shock and adaptation. From early on, 'anglophile sentiments' were just as easily detectable in other occupied French regions and in Belgium.⁷⁸ The general feelings of insecurity about the future of both regions had an ambiguous effect on people's attitudes. Prefect Carles labelled the mental climate in his region in 1940 *incohérent*: contradictory, confusing and quickly shifting.⁷⁹ It seems the socialist party in Nord/Pas-de-Calais adopted an attitude that was in-line with local elites elsewhere. Generally speaking, a large segment of the 'People's Front' elite had already 'crossed the bridge' towards Vichy in 1940 and vice versa.⁸⁰

Therefore, in 1940, the important industrial urban centres of the north remained in the hands of the republican People's Front administrators. This implied a pragmatic ideological flexibility of the prefectural power.⁸¹ To their Vichy superiors, the prefects had solid arguments for supporting this pragmatic policy. These were: maintaining social order in these labour class regions, the former SFIO's anti-communism, the loyal attitude of the former SFIO establishment to the regime and the fact that the local administrative status quo was the safest way to avoid direct German interferences. In 1940 (and 1941), the German OFK supported this prefectural pragmatism. Like their formal superiors in Brussels, the German authority in Lille clearly prioritized stability, public order and economic exploitation.

NOTES

1. H. Umbreit, 'Les pouvoirs allemands en France et en Belgique', in E. Dejonghe (ed.), *L'occupation en France et en Belgique*, 5–60; W. Benz, 'Typologie der Herrschaftsformen in den Gebieten unter deutschem Einfluß', in W. Benz, J. H. Houwink Ten Cate and G. Ottot (eds.), *Die Bürokratie der Okkupation. Strukturen der Herrschaft und Verwaltung im besetzten Europa. Nationalsozialistische Besatzungspolitik in Europa 1939–1945* (Berlin 1998), 11–27.

2. Umbreit, 'Les pouvoirs allemands', 54.
3. L. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 13 vols. ('s-Gravenhage 1969–1988); L. Kwiet, *Reichskommissariat Niederlande. Versuch und Scheitern nationalsozialistischer Neuordnung* (Stuttgart 1968).
4. A. De Jonghe, *Hitler en het politieke lot van België (1940–1944). De vestiging van een Zivilverwaltung in België en Noord-Frankrijk*, Vol. I (Antwerp/Utrecht 1972); Jose Gotovitch and Francis Balace, 'Militärverwaltung', in F. Balace (ed.), *Jours de guerre. Jours de chagrin I* (Brussels 1991), 81–102.
5. W. Warmbrunn, *The Dutch under German Occupation 1940–1945* (London 1963).
6. This was strengthened after the nomination of SS-*Brigadeführer* Richard Junclaus as Himmler's direct representative in Belgium for so-called *Volkstumsfragen* (political, ethnic and racial questions).
7. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 9.
8. De Jonghe, *Hitler en het politieke lot*, 67.
9. The two largest and most important zones were the occupied zone under the Paris *Militärverwaltung* and the so-called 'free zone' in the south, under the new French government.
10. In the first two months, most German decrees had a general character, and applied to both territories (Nord/Pas-de-Calais and Belgium). From August 1940, increasing numbers of German decrees were issued specifically for Belgium.
11. De Jonghe, *Hitler en het politieke lot*, 92.
12. Lammers, 'Levels of collaboration', 26.
13. *Verkündungsblatt des Oberfeldkommandanten für die Departements Nord und Pas-de-Calais*.
14. Dejonghe (ed.), *L'occupation en France et en Belgique*.
15. E. Dejonghe, 'Les caractères particuliers du régime d'occupation du Nord-Pas-de-Calais (1940–1942)', in *colloque Églises et chrétiens pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale 5 et 6 novembre 1977* (Lille 1977).
16. On 23 November 1940, the OFK in Lille reconfirmed that it could always adapt or annul Vichy-legislation in the *Zone Rattachée*, even if such legislation had already been implemented. R. Bargeton, 'La fonction', 148.
17. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 84–86.
18. Warmbrunn, *The Dutch*; W. Warmbrunn, *The German Occupation of Belgium 1940–1944* (New York 1993).
19. H. Van Goethem and J. Velaers, *Leopold III. De koning, het land, de oorlog* (Tielt 1994).
20. H. Blom, 'Nederland onder Duitse bezetting 10 mei 1940 – 5 mei 1945', in J.C. Boogman et. al. (eds.), *Geschiedenis van het moderne Nederland. Politieke, economische en sociale ontwikkelingen* (Houten 1988), 481–516.
21. Van Bolhuis et. al. (eds.), *Onderdrukking en verzet*, 399.

22. J.- Cointet, *Histoire de Vichy* (Paris 1995); M. O. Baruch, *Le régime de Vichy* (Paris 1996).
23. D. Peschanski, 'Exclusion, persécution, répression', in J.-P. Azéma and F. Bédarida (eds.), *Le régime de Vichy*, 209–234, quotation at 212.
24. Lammers, '*Levels of collaboration*'.
25. Burrin, 'Vichy', 329.
26. J.-M. Guillon, 'La philosophie politique de la Révolution nationale', in Azéma and Bédarida (eds.), *Le régime de Vichy*, 167–184.
27. D. Luyten, 'Het centrum Lippens: een Belgische Nieuwe Orde in een nazistisch Europa?', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, nr. 71 (1993), 875–912.
28. G. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie. Nederland tijdens de oorlogsjaren 1940–1945* (Haarlem 1991), 115.
29. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 6.
30. The legislative decrees had to be 'necessary', 'in the general interest of the country' and within the ministerial domain of competence. Also, these decrees could not be of a political nature (for example, changing the constitutional framework of the Belgian state).
31. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*.
32. B. Rochet, *L'administration belge pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale: refuge et berceau de modernisation?* (Unpublished Report CegeSoma Brussels 2002), 100.
33. R. Thalmann, *La mise au pas. Idéologie et stratégie sécuritaire dans la France occupée* (Paris 1991), 44.
34. Bargeton, 'La fonction', 148.
35. C.L. Détréz and A. Chatelle, *Tragédies en Flandres (Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing) 1939–1944* (Lille 1953).
36. Le Maner, 'Les municipalités'.
37. Carles to the minister of the Interior, d. 6 July 1940. Bargeton et. al., *Rapports*, 49–50.
38. Jackson, *France*, 155.
39. 'Prendre toutes les décisions nécessaires avec le seul souci du maintien de l'ordre public dans tous les domaines'. Bargeton, 'La fonction', 144–145.
40. The laws of 12–27 October 1940, 7 February 1941 and 9 March 1941
41. Bargeton et. al., *Rapports*, 49–50.
42. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 94.
43. 'Note sur la situation (...)', nr. 129, Archief Jean Vossen, Microfilm 74, CegeSoma.
44. Gerard Romsée (1901–1976) had been a member of parliament before the war and was one of the leading Flemish nationalist politicians of the province of Limburg. Raskin, *Gerard Romsée*.
45. Antoine Leroy was a mining engineer and senator for Rex. After a short stint as mayor in May–June 1940 he became governor of Hainaut on 17 August 1940 (until 1944).

46. Statement by Jean François Vossen n.d., Microfilm nr. 78 nr. 45: JPF (Judicial Penal File) Wildiers, *Archieven Frans Wildiers*, CegeSoma.
47. G. Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet. Jhr. Mr. Dr. L.H.N. Bosch ridder van Rosenthal* (Kampen 1999).
48. Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet*, 93.
49. The first provincial commissioner to be replaced was J. W. Quarles van Ufford, of Zeeland, in September 1940. Three of the remaining ten commissioners were replaced in February–March 1941 (Bosch van Rosenthal, of Utrecht; W.G.A. van Sonsbeeck, of Limburg and Röell, of Noord-Holland). De Jong, *Het koninkrijk Deel 4: eerste helft*, 147–149.
50. J. In 't Veld was mayor of Zaandam at the time of the German invasion. After the war, he wrote one of the first historical overviews of Dutch local government under occupation. J. In 't Veld, 'De gemeenten', in J. Van Bolhuis, C.D.J. Brandt, H.M. Van Randwijk and B.C. Slotemaker (eds.), *Onderdrukking en Verzet: Nederland in oorlogstijd*, Vol. I. (Nijmegen, n.d.), 435–455.
51. I. De Haan, 'Machtsovergangen en overgangsrecht. Recente literatuur over transitionele politiek en rechtvaardigheid', in M. de Keizer et al. (eds.), *Onrecht. Oorlog en rechtvaardigheid in de twintigste eeuw* (Zutphen 2001).
52. P. Struye, *L'évolution du sentiment public en Belgique sous l'occupation allemande* (Brussels 1945).
53. In a large city like Namur, for instance: 'Ville de Namur(...)', AA 108, CegeSoma. See also: 'Circulaires reçues du commissariat d'arrondissement Soignies (...)', CegeSoma Microfilm nr. 2 A.
54. *Kommandantur d'Arlon, K 126 'Résistance'*, RA Arlon.
55. W.C.M. Meyers, 'Burgemeesters, schepenen en gemeentelijke administraties', in *België in de Tweede Wereldoorlog dl. 9. Het minste kwaad* (Kapellen 1990), 84–90.
56. 'relative à la procédure de déchéance de la qualité de Français' (16 July 1940) and 'relative à la déchéance de la nationalité à l'égard des Français ayant quitté la France' (23 July 1940).
57. These parties included De Gaulle, who received the death penalty, on 2 August 1940.
58. *I W nr 429, map: 'suspensions, mutations'*, ADN – L.
59. Carles to the Ministry of Interior d. 25 July 1940, in Bargeton et. al., *Rapports*, 56.
60. *I W nr 429: 'nominations'*, ADN – L.
61. *Archives Jean Vossen, Microfilm 74, 'nr. 123: disciplinaire acties'*, CegeSoma.
62. *Archives Jean Vossen, Microfilm 74, nr. 131: nota van pleidooi*, CegeSoma.
63. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 75–78.
64. *Nr. 14 W 36249: Nominations, (...)*, ADN – L.
65. Sub-prefect Dunkirk to prefect Carles dd. 31 October 1941, *I W nr. 2274*, ADN – L.

66. Cabinet. Réorganisation des corps municipaux'; 14 W 36254 nr. 1: 'instructions, (...), ADN – L.
67. Le Maner, 'Town councils'.
68. Le Maner, 'Town councils', 73–75.
69. Huysmans, being a member of parliament, had been allowed to do so.
70. D. Martin, 'Un bourgmestre entre accommodation et refus', in *Jours de chagrin* (Brussels 1992), 91–101.
71. Nevertheless, as late as early 1941 some municipal personnel were still being investigated. *Provinciearchief Brabant 1940–1944: nr 40*, RAB.
72. The prefect to the OFK-Lille d. 3 December 1940, OFK-Lille to the prefect d. 27 December 1940, *Map: 'Marché Noir', 1 W nr. 863*, ADN – L.
73. Le Maner, 'Les municipalités'.
74. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 275–280.
75. Such as A. Laurenet and A. Van Wolput from Nord and A. Pantigny, Just Evrard, Emilienne Moreau and Octave Legrand in Pas-de-Calais.
76. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 279–293.
77. P. Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris 1990).
78. Y. Durand, 'Les pouvoirs indigènes en France et en Belgique' in Dejonghe (ed.), *L'occupation en France et en Belgique*, 41–50.
79. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 238.
80. Burrin, 'Vichy', 327.
81. Le Maner, 'Les municipalités', 242.

Infiltration (1940–41)

NEW ORDER REFORM: DIFFERENT NATIONAL PRIORITIES IN 1940

The general pattern in the three countries in 1940 was one of adaptation and cooperation. Nevertheless, the transition of May 1940 came from different starting points. New Order reforms quickly took different national directions.

In the Netherlands, the political nature of the occupation regime became explicit immediately. The German *Generalkommissar für das Sicherheitswesen und Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* Hans Albinn Rauter had extensive powers over police matters. He was backed by Himmler and also had some authority in dealing with Seyss-Inquart. Rauter's overall goal was to reform the Dutch police along the lines of the German model.¹ Unlike Belgium and France, the Netherlands had in Rauter a person with both the vision and the powers to do this.

The fragmentation of the five major police institutions over three different ministerial departments posed an initial problem.² The most important police bodies were the municipal police (Ministry of Interior)³ and the state police (the *marechaussée*; the Dutch counterpart of the Belgian and French *gendarmérie*) under the Ministry of Justice.⁴ During the 1930s, debate on the reform of police organization had already led to a power struggle between the ministries of Justice and the Interior. Dutch contenders for power of the 1930s still had their positions in 1940. This

was something which the German occupying power could exploit. The Dutch Justice ministry saw the occupation as an opportunity to complete the evolution that had begun with the 1935 Central Police Decree (*Rijkspolitiebepsluit*, which had enhanced the powers of the five Procurators General over the municipal police).⁵ Rauter was glad to give the Justice Ministry the opportunity. Thus Dutch police reform started early and would reach deep.

As early as July 1940 the Dutch *marechaussée* was transferred to the new directorate-general of police (led by a former chief magistrate, A. Brants, under the Justice ministry). After the summer of 1940, this was followed by successive waves of centralizing reform.⁶ The personnel policy of the Dutch police came under the control of the German *Generalkommissar für das Sicherheitswesen*. Rauter introduced a loyalty pledge for Dutch policemen, which only a small minority refused to give. In September three of the five Procurators General (including Van Genechten, in The Hague) were replaced by members of the NSB.⁷

Rauter was initially supported by the ministry of Justice and the leadership of the Dutch police. But by the second half of 1940, Dutch objections had begun to emerge. On 1 February 1941 further radical reform was blocked by the Dutch commanders. Clearly, however, Dutch police reform had begun at near-breakneck speed in 1940. As the police historian Cyrille Fijnaut has noted: ‘In seven months Rauter had accomplished something that certain groups had been trying to do in vain for most of a century.’⁸ SS control of Dutch police was now a fact.

This was in stark contrast to Belgium and the north of France. Here, the main German priorities centred around economic reform (and, to a lesser extent, political control over local government). Belgian police reform would not be tackled until much later in the occupation, by which time the dangerous momentum of 1940 had long since passed.

The Belgians regarded the ‘restart’ of economic life in June 1940 with a significant degree of sensitivity. Fears of forced labour and deportations (memories of 1914–18 were still very much alive) permeated the central Belgian authority. Restarting the Belgian economy was considered the safest means of preventing the deportation of Belgian workers. For the German military government too, the economic exploitation of Belgian industry was the main priority. Economic reform in Belgium was thus urgent and unavoidable. What Rauter did with the Dutch police, the Brussels *Militärverwaltung* did with Belgian economic organization. Under German pressure, the functions of the ministerial department of Economic Affairs were broadened in July 1940. Where the personnel

purges in the Netherlands were early and widespread in the domain of Justice, in Belgium the ministry of Economic Affairs was the first department to come under the control of an open supporter of the New Order.

On 14 August 1940, Victor Leemans was appointed secretary-general for Economic Affairs. Although not a member of the VNV, before the occupation Leemans had been leader of the *Arbeidsorde* (Labour Order), a trade union organization affiliated to the party. He was a staunch defender of German National Socialist ideas about labour organization,⁹ and in 1940, he defended reforms based on the German model and integration of Belgium into the wider Germanic economic sphere. He quickly appointed members of the VNV and like-minded technocrats to his administration, so that his department became essentially the Belgian executive office for the German *Gruppe Wirtschaft* (in close consultation with Belgian employers). In September 1940, Leemans established the Central Offices, which, like the German *Warenstellen*, comprised one office for each essential economic raw material. In February 1941, he established the Company Groups (a unified umbrella organization for employers) for each major private sector. The new institutions took over many powers formerly exercised by government ministries. This was the blueprint for a completely new corporatist organization of the Belgian economic system.¹⁰

In the north of France, the same economic priority determined the process of reform. The OFK-Lille followed the policy of its superiors in Brussels. They established *Warenstellen* to cooperate closely with their Belgian counterparts. Vichy and the Paris *Militärverwaltung* had little say in the matter.¹¹ From the outset, economic ties were organized between Nord/Pas-de-Calais and Belgium which lasted throughout the occupation. Thus, by the end of 1940, the *zone rattachée* belonged to the political-administrative system of France but to the economic sphere of Belgium.

A secondary Belgian-French priority was stronger control over local government. Here, the Belgian and French situations diverged. In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the driving force for these reforms was the French authorities themselves. The Vichy law of 2 November 1940 added four new services to prefectural responsibilities.¹² On 17 December a fifth service ('Occupation Problems') was added in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. A direct cause for this, incidentally, was the fact that German inquiries about Jews were placing excessive demands on the work previously done by the departmental authorities.¹³

More importantly, municipal legislation was reformed. A new municipal law was issued in two parts, on 14 and 16 September 1940. The first section expanded the grounds for dismissing democratically elected offi-

cials. The second imposed controls on their nomination.¹⁴ Democratic elections were ‘suspended’. Mayors and municipal councillors were henceforth appointed by the prefect (although the position of mayor would remain unpaid).¹⁵ The authority and practical significance of municipal councils were sharply reduced after the summer of 1940. The same could be said of the new so-called regional ‘Administrative Commissions’.¹⁶ The municipal legislation of November 1940 was intended to be temporary but remained unchanged throughout the occupation. It was first and foremost a procedural law, and much would depend on its practical implementation.

In January 1941, the German OFK in Lille authorized the implementation of this municipal legislation in the *zone rattachée*. Every nomination had to receive advance German approval. The legislation came into force on 1 February 1941, not much later than in the other occupied zones.¹⁷ Prefect Carles had opposed the new municipal legislation. He feared it would invite German interference.¹⁸ Indeed, the struggle with the Germans for the control of (political) local personnel would now increase.

LOCAL FÜHRERS?

As noted, there was no systematic purge of local political personnel in Belgium, France or the Netherlands in 1940. Administrative continuity was the key concept. But the Germans immediately increased control. ‘Political trustworthiness’ in public officials and civil servants quickly became essential. Control over nominations of mayors would turn out to be one of the most important (and continuing) areas of dispute between the occupation regime and local authorities.

Belgium, with its local and regional administrative disintegration and weak central authority, was in a poor starting position. The previously mentioned German decree of 18 July 1940 on ‘exercise of public offices’ exploited this weakness. It was implemented only in Belgium, not in the French *zone rattachée*. The decree was simple and short, but far-reaching. It required every Belgian public official to have (or receive) official German permission (*Genehmigung*) to remain in office. Moreover, individual ‘permission’ could be revoked at any time. It gave the Germans total control over the entire Belgian civil service. It was a fundamental breach of Belgian administrative autonomy. Given the complete absence of protest when the decree was published, it seems that the Belgians did not appreciate this at the time.¹⁹

On paper, the German intervention system in northern France appeared to be stronger than in Belgium. From 1 September 1940 the OFK-Lille required all major French appointments and measures to be submitted for approval two weeks in advance. This was even stricter than in its sister administration in Paris.²⁰ Both northern prefects protested, but to no effect.²¹ However, French departmental and prefectural authorities in the north proved able to protect their administrative autonomy more successfully than their counterparts in Belgium. In practice, they maintained their control over appointments in 1940–42 and kept financial control over local government.²²

In the Netherlands the framework was likewise markedly intrusive. With a decree of 20 August 1940 the *Reichskommissar* gave himself authority to appoint all higher-ranking Dutch public officials. The Dutch secretaries-general kept their responsibilities for the lower administrative levels (including mayors). However, every Dutch public official was now required to obtain a German *Sichtvermerk*, similar to the *Genehmigung* in Belgium.²³ Unlike in Belgium, Dutch civil servants were obliged to take an oath of loyalty to the occupier (by the decree of 17 September 1940).²⁴ On paper, direct German control over appointments was even more marked in the Netherlands than in Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais. In all three countries, the Germans established formidable instruments of personnel control. The question was how they would be enforced in practice.

The mayoralties were essential. Municipal councils, the last remnants of local democracy, continued to exist in 1940–41 (they were still needed for formal functions, including the passing of municipal/city budgets in 1940). In practice, they quickly ceased to be relevant.

This was most evident in Belgium, where there were many smaller municipalities and councils. The Germans basically ignored Belgian municipal councils—and the committees of aldermen—from the outset. They regarded the mayor as the only responsible representative. Local powers naturally shifted towards the mayors. When the Belgian secretary-general in February 1941 decided that mayors could issue ‘exceptional’ local decrees during emergencies without consulting the municipal council, it was simply a confirmation of the post-May 1940 reality. In this way, the German leader principle (*Führerprinzip*) was immediately introduced into everyday local administration and government in Belgium.

The OFK in Lille did exactly the same in the north of France. Municipal councils and *adjoints* were ignored in correspondence, orders and measures. As in Belgium, the mayor was treated as the sole responsible representative.

This meant, among other things, that a mayor could be held personally liable when orders were not carried out. Threats that the mayor would be taken into custody or taken hostage became an almost standard piece of rhetoric at the end of German letters to local administrations.²⁵

The Netherlands had a different, much stronger initial position. From a legal-administrative point of view the Dutch mayoral system was very similar to the German. There would be no fundamental discussion about reforming Dutch local government. That is not to say that the Germans chose not to intervene directly in individual cases. One of the earliest interventions was the Germans' sacking of the mayor of Zwolle (A. Van Walsum) in 1940, on the grounds that he had refused to submit a list of Jewish stores and pubs. The second important dismissal of a mayor came after the patriotic demonstrations on Carnation Day (29 June 1940). Mayor De Monchy of The Hague was sacked on 1 July. He had previously made patriotic public speeches. Mayor Van de Weyer of Bunnik was the first mayor in the province of Utrecht to be sacked by the Germans (in September 1940), apparently because of intelligence from a pre-war contact the Germans had in the city.²⁶ However, these direct German dismissals of Dutch mayors were exceptions. They were probably intended to serve as warnings.

Initially things were more problematic in the north of France. The outspoken political profiles of many mayors, their generally higher ages and the high degrees of local autonomy were realities which the Germans could not easily accept. However, for the prefects, control over French (local) administration was the primary concern. Indeed, strong prefectural authority effectively blocked fundamental German local reforms and purges. There would be no purge of freemasons from the local governments of either northern department, for example. Vichy's anti-freemason law of 18 August 1940 (as well as subsequent related legislation) would not be implemented in Nord and Pas-de-Calais.²⁷ On 21 September 1940, the OFK-Lille issued a report with a plea for fundamental reform of local government and the introduction of a centrally appointed and paid 'civil servant' mayor.²⁸ The prefects, backed by the government, blocked this. In 1940–41 the French prefects in the north had strong influence with the Germans.

Belgium is an entirely different case. The experts of the German *Militärverwaltung* were familiar with the country's local administrative organization. On their arrival they already regarded Belgian local government organization as a major problem. Direct German intervention in the work of mayors was therefore most marked in Belgium. The Germans

sometimes opted simply to bypass local legislation and intervene directly. One strategy was the appointment of so-called ‘commissar-mayors’. These mayors were appointed by the Germans and not by the proper Belgian authority. When OFK-Lille attempted this in its zone, it immediately met with French prefectural resistance. On 13 October 1940, for example, the German *Standortkommandantur* of Loos (Pas-de-Calais), on his own authority and independently of the French prefect, appointed a commissar-mayor. Shortly afterwards this happened again, in the municipality of Hersin-Coupigny. The prefect of Pas-de-Calais reacted strongly. He refused to accept either mayor and immediately appointed a legal ‘counter-mayor’ in each municipality. After this episode, the German OFK-Lille refrained, for the immediate future, from direct interventions of this sort.

This illustrates a significant difference from Belgium, where several Belgian commissar-mayors were directly appointed by the Germans in 1940 without much Belgian protest.²⁹ Especially in Flanders, these kinds of German measures passed without notable objection from provincial governors. In the important East-Flemish city of Aalst the Germans, without any clear direct cause, asked for the dismissal of Mayor Nichels in August 1940.³⁰ The mayor refused to accept ‘voluntary’ discharge and stayed in office. In September, the Germans placed him under a professional ban, but he again chose to stay in office. On 3 October, the Germans forced their way into a committee meeting of the mayor and aldermen, and formally forbade the mayor to carry out his functions. Several VNV members were appointed as aldermen. The next day the mayor was summoned to the *Ortskommandantur*, where, after being threatened, he finally decided to accept voluntary discharge. The local VNV had clearly staged this scenario (one of the new VNV aldermen acted as interpreter at the meeting). Remarkably, the provincial governor accepted these actions without protest: ‘as far as permission for council meetings or the acceptance of certain council members is concerned, all the orders of the occupying authority are to be followed’.³¹

The Germans had little understanding of, or patience with, Belgium’s decentralized legal framework. That the country’s central authority could not sack and appoint mayors was something the Germans found difficult to accept. The fact that Belgian administrative bans on mayors (even removing a mayor from office) had no impact whatsoever on a mayor’s (democratically elected) position in the municipal council was incomprehensible to the Germans. This continued to lead to confusing, and some-

times surreal, correspondence between Belgian and German authorities until the first half of 1941.

A major difference with France was that many within the Belgian establishment shared this German dissatisfaction with local governments. Whereas prefect Carles did everything in his power to shield and protect his local administrations from German interference, the Belgian authorities (and certainly the New Order provincial governors) in fact actively provoked German dissatisfaction with local governments. Pre-war arguments re-emerged during the summer of 1940. Two central projects that the pre-war Lippens Study Centre had developed in 1937 were once again put to the secretaries-general. The first concerned the establishment of a centrally appointed ‘civil servant’ mayor. The second involved the large-scale merger of municipalities. Secretary-general Vossen of the Interior had been a strong supporter in 1937 of both proposals, and remained so in 1940.³²

The matter of elderly mayors was a major issue in 1940 in Belgium. It seemed to symbolize the dysfunctionality of local government. Political-ideological considerations became intertwined with this. Younger people were more ready to confront the challenges of the ‘new times’. At least until mid-October 1940, Vossen went along with this kind of thinking.³³ Most of the provincial governors supported reform and purging of the mayoralities. Only Governor Houtart of Brabant—the only pre-war governor kept in office—opposed this. The VNV’s Gerard Romsée, governor of Limburg, distinguished himself here in actively lobbying (October 1940–January 1941) for one broad measure to dismiss every older mayor.³⁴ The governor of West Flanders, the VNV’s Bulckaert, did likewise. The importance of the replacement of eight provincial governors in June 1940 now became clear. This pressure on mayors would open up a window of opportunity for the VNV in Flanders.

DISAPPOINTED COLLABORATIONISTS

In the north of France, there was no strong collaborationist party in the French sense of the word (meaning a pro-German National Socialist party). During the transition, people who came forward to fill gaps in local governments were from the traditional political parties and networks. There simply was no question here of a fascist *coup d'état* in 1940. In Belgium and the Netherlands, there were many smaller collaborationist groups. However, only three parties really matter here.

In the Netherlands, the important party was the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB).³⁵ This party had enjoyed some initial success among the urban middle class and lower bourgeoisie with about 55,000 members in 1936 and about 8 % of the vote during provincial elections that year.³⁶ The Dutch ruling elites had reacted repressively. The ‘public office ban’ (*ambtenarenverbod*) prohibited public officials from membership of the NSB. The so-called *Mandement* of 1936 prohibited Catholics from voting for the party. In October 1936, members of the Reformed churches were forbidden to become party members. The party was labelled fundamentally ‘un-Dutch’. Its explicit reference to the German NSDAP made it a fairly easy target. The party was successfully ostracized and its share of the vote fell to 3.89 % in the parliamentary elections of April 1939.

In francophone Belgium, the essential party was Rex. Founded from radical Catholic youth movements, Rex from the outset depended on the charisma of one man, its leader Léon Degrelle. After electoral success in the 1936 elections, Rex had been successfully contained by the traditional elites. They achieved this not through official governmental bans, but rather by more informal ostracizing mechanisms.³⁷ In 1939, Rex was left with only four seats in parliament. It had become politically marginalized and insignificant, and its members were outcasts. Rex and the NSB differed considerably in political profile, but their societal positions in 1939 were similar.

The Flemish National Union (VNV) in Flanders was another matter. As a nationalist—and initially Catholic conservative—party, it had been grafted onto one of the main structural cleavages in Belgian society, the Flemish-Belgian divide. Although the VNV would quickly move in a fascist direction, the party was able to reach a position that was much closer to the heart of power than its southern and northern counterparts. The crucial factor was the attitude of the ruling elites, more particularly the Flemish wing of the Catholic party. There was no big push to ostracize the VNV in Flanders. Quite the contrary: the abovementioned ‘Flemish Concentration’ aimed to politically unite both parties. The biggest repercussion could be seen at the local level. The Flemish Catholic Party pulled the VNV to the centre of power. This shaped the VNV’s political identity, its self-image and its political legitimacy. The VNV and its members internalized their own propaganda. Similarly but conversely, for parties like Rex and the NSB, the level of isolation was such that they were forced to internalize the self-image of a hated revolutionary minority. VNV members—

to a certain extent, at least—truly believed in their mission to represent the Flemish people as a whole.

Differences aside, these three parties welcomed the German occupation in 1940 as a liberation. They expected a revolution in their favour. However, they confronted an unpleasant surprise in 1940 when they realized that they would not automatically receive German support.

This was a huge disappointment, certainly in the Netherlands. The Dutch NSB was modelled on the German NSDAP. The occupation regime was a political one. But even in this instance, full German support was initially not an option. On 21 May 1940, De Marchant et d'Ansembourg, one of the heads of the (Dutch) Limburg NSB, demanded mass appointment of party members to public office, but by June the *Reichskommissar* had firmly checked these ambitions. Most initiatives from within the NSB were ignored or blocked. This problem was certainly felt at the local level. Local NSB sections and members assumed that the time had come for them to take over local power. When they realized that this would not happen, they were at a loss. On 28 May 1940, for example, the local NSB leader Gerhard Klomp (later NSB mayor of Terneuzen and Veenendaal) protested to the mayor of Rhenen at the arrest of NSB members after 10 May 1940.³⁸ Klomp demanded an interview with the mayor to discuss his assumption of power. The mayor simply refused to meet him. On 31 May 1940 Klomp wrote, somewhat despairingly, to his party superior to ask what he should now do. For the moment, the party had no real answers for him.

Once the NSB realized German support was not forthcoming they tried to prove their value. Party leader Mussert started by offering his total support to the occupation regime (22 June 1940) and Hitler (4 September 1940). But the party found out that ideological arguments did not sway the Germans. Even the political *Zivilverwaltung* opted for the self-Nazification of Dutch society through traditional networks. The NSB would grow from 50,000 to 70,000 members in 1941, less than 1 % of the population. The Germans simply had no use for this marginalized group.

The invasion had started a strong bottom-up dynamic. Local party sections spontaneously began campaigning against their local governments. The NSB had hardly any convincing ammunition to attack Dutch town governments. There had been no post abandonment in the Netherlands and the Dutch mayors were a professional body of civil servants. Rigid nomination procedures, including state exams, kept the mayoralty closed. The NSB campaign was built primarily on political arguments. The party emphasized the anti-German, anti-National Socialist sentiments of local

Dutch governments and mayors. They clumsily merged ideological arguments with claims to be acting in the general interest. In 1940 a local NSB leader of Winterswijk wrote to the Germans about the mayor of Aalten: ‘with the removal of this person not only will the interests of the NSB be served but those of the entire population of Aalten as well’.³⁹ When the post-war court asked NSB member Alphons Bouwman why in 1940 he had called the mayor of Ottersum an ‘opponent of National Socialism’ and ‘a saboteur’, Bouwman stated in his defence: ‘because I had the opinion that a proper sewer system in the area was (...) an important public interest’.⁴⁰

This campaign often led to results only several years later. Typical is the example of NSB member Arie van de Graaff from Etten, who in December 1940 bribed a town official to provide damaging information about the mayor. In early 1941 he filed an official complaint to the central food inspection. In August 1941 he filed a new complaint with the (NSB) procurator-general about alleged corruption. On 3 December 1942 he filed a complaint with the German *Feldgendarmarie*.⁴¹ It was not until 31 August 1943, in a completely new occupation context, that Van de Graaff became the town’s mayor. Several ambitious party members also tried to run for office in different municipalities in 1940–41.⁴² Essentially, the NSB simply could not profit from the 1940 situation.

In Belgium however, local disintegration had created opportunities. Where local political leaders had fled, local members of the VNV (and, to a lesser extent, Rex) could in May 1940 take over town halls. Moreover, protracted disciplinary proceedings locked many local governments into situations of prolonged instability. Also, the VNV was well organized at the local level and the party came strongly to the fore in May–June 1940. But even here, this was not enough. Gradually, local situations were normalized. The normal legal rules of succession were followed. Even the so-called *Flamenpolitik* of the *Militärverwaltung* in Belgium—the policy ordered by Hitler to favour the Flemish people in order to gain their support and divide Belgium—afforded few substantial benefits to the VNV on a local level.⁴³

Only in a minority of Flemish cities and towns did specific events in May 1940 have lasting influence on occupation government. In the town of Eeklo, for example, the Germans appointed in May 1940 the only present (Catholic) councillor, Arthur Zandycke, as commissar-mayor.⁴⁴ Zandycke remained in office through the entire occupation and developed close collaboration with the Germans. In Hasselt, the provincial capital of Limburg, VNV members formed an improvised steering committee and took over local government after the flight of the Catholic college in May

1940. This committee gained German support.⁴⁵ This improvised coup would last throughout the occupation, and in April 1941 VNV member Jef Deumens was appointed mayor. But these were the exceptions of 1940.

In Flanders, it remains a popular myth of the defence argument that the road to a *coup d'état* of the VNV was based on a decision taken by the central party leadership and then imposed on an ill-informed rank and file. The implication is that the majority of the VNV membership was not fascist but misled. The local reality in Flanders shows the opposite picture. The real driving force lay at the local level. In fact, central leadership in 1940 was quickly confronted with local party unrest when ambitions were not fully met.⁴⁶ One of the leading VNV members, Hendrik Elias (who would become party leader in 1942), was confronted by frustrated rank and file members during a party meeting in Ghent in early June 1940.⁴⁷ On 9 October 1940, the party leaders explained to all members: 'From the large number of letters we receive (...) it appears that not only the masses, but also many of our own people, including some of the best, seem to think that the leadership of the VNV in Brussels makes all the nominations, issues the decrees and controls the administration (...). The VNV is not in charge, nor does it have the power. The leadership of the VNV is doing everything to take power and in the meantime gradually to penetrate the fortress (...). In this seizure of power, our comrades have to be aware of the enormous difficulties of time and circumstances.' The frustration is well documented in internal party correspondence. Local members considered a takeover of power to be reparation for past wrongs done to Flanders. This reveals that by the end of the 1930s, the Flemish VNV had been permeated by a totalitarian logic. The transition to National Socialism and collaboration with the Germans in 1940 was not a break with the past but a smooth evolution.

Rex faced more serious problems. The absence (and even uncertainty about the fate) of Rex leader Degrelle, who had been deported by the Belgian authorities in May 1940, left the party without direction until the end of July. More importantly, it became clear that after 1938 the party had imploded and by 1940 was essentially dead. Rex was hardly present in many towns and cities where local government had severely weakened after May. In Charleroi, former Rexist senator Jean Teughels, who had left the party in 1938, had held a seat in the city council since 1939 as an 'independent'.⁴⁸ After the flight of the city government in May 1940, it took some time before Teughels and Rex found each other again. Not until 11 April 1941 did Teughels, once again a member of Rex, become mayor. The same scenario played out in the city of Verviers. The party could only score

occasional chance successes, as in Jemappes where a formerly obscure civil servant (Jean Brasseur) was co-opted onto an improvised local committee, only then joined Rex and became mayor on 2 April 1942.⁴⁹

Rex had a long way to go before it could begin thinking seriously about any takeover of power.⁵⁰ It began to work feverishly towards reconstructing itself. Dormant local sections were revived. A recruitment campaign was launched. In particular, people with higher education were recruited. Initially this worked only in the province of Hainaut, where Rex scored its first major (but isolated) victory: the appointment of a Rex provincial governor in August 1940. The situation in the province of Namur was more typical. Here, the party did not even hold local membership lists. The provincial party leader Jean Georges needed exactly seven months simply to obtain answers from the local sections and to collect an overview of the province's sixty-seven local sections.⁵¹ A typical example was Mariembourg. Maurice Pirard, the regional Rex secretary, was arrested in May 1940 by Belgian state security and deported to France. When he returned, he had to build a local Rex section. He began sending personal complaints about the mayor of Mariembourg to his party leadership and the Germans. These complaints were ignored until 1942.⁵²

The central problem facing these parties was, of course, lack of German support. Even in cities where Rex had been relatively strong before the war, the party could not break into local government. In Nivelles, for example, Rex had gained almost 10 % of the votes in 1938. It had maintained a fairly strong local section. Yet, despite the flight of the Nivelles council in May 1940, the actions of the local Rex section were ignored by the Germans.⁵³ Another significant example was La Roche in Wallonia. This was the locality where Rex had scored its best electoral results in the 1936 elections. Degrelles' mother lived in the town. It had hosted the 1936 party congress. However, La Roche mayor Jean Orban de Xivry had survived May 1940 well and was only 56 years old in 1941. Rex made several attempts to destabilize the mayor, filing several formal complaints against him with the Belgian judiciary.⁵⁴ This went on and finally resulted in the appointment of one more Rex alderman.

In August 1942, there were still 40 temporary mayors and 108 temporary aldermen in office in Hainaut.⁵⁵ They should, in theory, have been easy targets for a collaborationist party. That even in mid-1942 these positions remained closed to Rex was a revealing fact, given that Hainaut had been Rex's strongest province before the war.

Rex was particularly weak in the industrial regions of Wallonia. Stability in these regions was essential to the Germans. Therefore in all the larger cities, including Liège and Namur, pre-war mayors remained firmly in place. The Brussels *Militärverwaltung* thus followed the same strategy as the OFK in Lille, namely, maintaining the traditional and sometimes leftist governmental elite in these industrialized regions for the sake of social peace and order.

Rex could not successfully exploit the weak spots in Belgian local authorities, and the NSB failed to find them in the Netherlands. As with Rex, organizational coherence and capacity was one of the major differences between the NSB and the Flemish VNV. Like Rex, the NSB deflected its energy onto almost perpetual party reform after June 1940.⁵⁶

From the summer of 1940 Rex, VNV and NSB also tried to employ a classic fascist tactic: provoking incidents of street violence in an attempt to weaken local government. Rex leader Degrelle even reported this to secretary-general Vossen on 2 October 1940 (because the sanctioning procedures against post-deserters were proceeding too slowly).⁵⁷ Several weeks later, city councils in the Brussels area and around several large Walloon cities were disrupted by Rexist militias. Violence against Jewish shops in these areas (and in Antwerp, at the hands of the small Flemish section, *Rex-Vlaanderen*) increased as well. VNV sections adopted similar tactics during and after the summer of 1940, often aimed against mayors. In Mechelen, VNV council member Camiel Baeck used the council session of 29 August 1940 to stage a public attack on the members of the city government who had fled in May 1940. The local VNV party had been mobilized. Socialist council member Bouchery understood the message and avoided attending the city council from then on. Baeck later became the city's mayor. Similar events occurred in the municipal council session of Vilvorde (near Brussels) of 6 September 1940.⁵⁸ In the East Flanders town of Lokeren, the young VNV alderman Stan De Bruyn carried out a raid in September 1940 on the town hall, targeting civil servants who had fled in May 1940 but who remained in office. One civil servant was forcibly removed from the hall and several others subsequently accepted voluntary discharge. A year later, De Bruyn became mayor of the town.⁵⁹

The NSB used this strategy even more strongly. The paramilitary *Weerafdeling* (WA) was re-established in June 1940, clearly for such purposes. The WA systematically provoked unrest, so as to de-legitimize local governments in the eyes of the Germans.⁶⁰ The NSB also systemati-

cally provoked incidents around patriotic days in 1940, to indicate to the Germans that mayors allowed patriotic protests.⁶¹

This fascistic dynamic served to highlight the parties' impotence in gaining any real power. The Germans allowed such actions but largely ignored them. By October 1940, it was clear that these parties were not making any significant progress. It appeared that no fundamental political overhaul would happen. The pre-war administrative organization seemed to reinforce itself. The secretaries-general in both countries had consolidated their positions. Internal party reform as well as operations to expand party membership during the summer of 1940 (such as the 'people's movement' of the VNV), had not succeeded in unblocking the situation.

In each party, expectations had been fuelled by years of pre-war frustrations. This made the disappointment all the greater when political momentum seemed lost after May 1940. After the summer, the morale and motivation of the average Rexist was so low that the party leadership had begun to fear that the party would disintegrate before it could be rebuilt.⁶² This presented these parties with a fundamental problem. Party leaders on the one hand had to keep the revolutionary dynamic alive. On the other hand, they had to temper the unrealistic expectations of the party's membership base. Only one of the three parties treated above would deal with this challenge in a remarkably successful way.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL FASCIST TACTICS

In September 1940, VNV party secretary Paul Lambrichts noted the essential problem. Pre-war politicians and civil servants had a much stronger grasp on the Belgian administrative legal framework and networks, and the VNV had little leverage with which to break into the system.⁶³ Nevertheless, the VNV would eventually succeed where other similar collaborationist parties in Europe would fail: namely, in receiving German support and achieving a significant takeover of power early in the occupation.

From September 1940, the party leadership tried to organize a grassroots campaign against local governments. Secret central party instructions (24 October 1940) said: 'We strongly recommend our district leaders to bring all these corrupt situations to the attention of the *Ortskommandanturen* and to gather support there for your proposals. You can tackle the most important individuals first (...). With only a few exceptions, all the current mayors are party creatures who are still fully entrenched in the old system, and work and think in this spirit. They are—probably in not a single

case—true examples of and for a National Socialist time.’⁶⁴ Party control ‘objectified’ the nature of the local campaign. Quickly, non-ideological arguments were used to attack local governments and mayors. A recurring argument certainly remained the issue of desertion of posts in May 1940. Increasingly more essential however, was the faltering food supply.

Even during the summer of 1940 it had become clear that the Belgian food supply was failing. There were several causes for this, but the hastily installed centralized system was one of them. This new system collided with the traditional Belgian free market system and with local attitudes. Belgian local governments were caught in the resultant political cross-fire. In the eyes of the German authorities, Belgian local governments had confirmed their political disloyalty and dysfunctional administration by failing to implement central policy. The VNV immediately recognized an opportunity. From September 1940, the failing food supply became the central argument in the hundreds of VNV letters and reports. These reports went straight to the Germans.⁶⁵ A VNV coup was now presented as a necessary measure for ensuring the food supply in the general interest. Analysis of over 750 individual nomination and sanction files of all mayors in the provinces of Antwerp, East and West Flanders and Limburg shows the effectiveness of the contact between the VNV and the Germans. They quickly bypassed the Belgian system. In 1940–41 in Flanders, the Germans could generally combine a professional ban on a mayor with a concrete ‘proposal’ for his VNV replacement in one and the same message to the Belgian authorities, without any regular Belgian administrative inquiry needing to take place. The Belgian administration quickly lost all control over this parallel procedure.

Rex drew a similar conclusion around the same time. In the party’s internal journal *Puissance et Ordre* (Power and Order) the leadership wrote (25 October 1940): ‘there is no other solution than to feed the [German authorities] with all the necessary arguments to enlighten their judgment and to allow them to force the Belgian authorities to put the interest of the country before their own party interests’.⁶⁶ The Namur provincial chief Jean Georges directed his local sections thus: ‘For the mayors, for instance, you should not worry about whether or not they left their posts in May, nor whether they were reinstated or not. The only thing that matters is their policy. This was and still is detrimental for Belgium....and here you have the only true criterion. And there you have the basis on which your report should be built.’⁶⁷ This strategic shift was already evident on the national holiday of 21 July 1940 and the holidays of 11 and 15 November 1940.

In many municipalities, Rex did not use political arguments to attack local governments which had gone on ‘strike’ during those days, but instead argued that these administrations had failed their constituencies by ceasing to provide local services.⁶⁸ From September 1940 onwards Rex would also focus on the failing food supply as a main campaign element.

At the beginning of July 1940 the Dutch NSB also tried to centralize local reports about opponents at the behest of *Generalkommissar* F. Schmidt.⁶⁹ The party’s so-called Central Intelligence Service (*Centrale Inlichtingen Dienst* or CID) was transformed and the spontaneous local campaign was centralized.⁷⁰ The party district leader and his provincial representatives provided information about unreliable mayors to the provincial commissar (provided he was a member of the NSB), the central party secretariat and the German *Beauftragte* in the province. However, the NSB hardly had any ammunition to use against mayors. Their reports remained primarily political. For example, the damaging reports made by Willen Ten Hoopen (NSB Circle Leader and mayor of Ruurlo in June 1943) during 1940 and 1941 about at least five mayors were generally entirely political in nature. The report (April 1941) about Mayor Van Luttern of Lochem only noted that he ‘takes a firm stand against National Socialist foundations. He has particularly a fanatical hatred of the NSB. He is a staunch supporter of England and is unreliable.’⁷¹ Another similar example concerned the province of North Holland, where the NSB regional leader Simon Plekker (who in 1942 would become mayor of Haarlem) sent the German *Beauftragte* Seidel on 24 September 1940 similar lists of mayors.⁷²

Much of the energy of the NSB was aimed internally at simply finding and mobilizing party members of suitable profile and education for certain public offices.⁷³ Only from the first months of 1941 did meetings take place between German representatives and regional/provincial NSB leaders to discuss mayoral vacancies. F. Müller came to the fore as a central figure. He would later become NSB mayor of Rotterdam and then evolve into the leader of the corps of NSB mayors (through the regional circles of NSB mayors⁷⁴) and a ‘shadow’ secretary-general of the Ministry of the Interior. This was all in the future, however.

The Flemish VNV gained a head start in 1940 compared to most other European collaborationist movements. The party had some specific strengths. First, it boasted several individuals who were qualified to take on important political positions in 1940. The most important were: Victor Leemans (secretary-general of Economic Affairs), Hendrik Elias (mayor

of Ghent), Gerard Romsée (governor of Limburg), Michiel Bulckaert (governor of West Flanders), Paul Beeckman (National Commissioner for Prices and Wages) and newcomers Piet Meuwissen (head of the National Corporation for Agriculture and Food, NLVC) and Frits-Jan Hendriks (head of the National Labour Office).⁷⁵ Second, the party had a reliable, well-organized network of local and regional sections. Third, the VNV could strategically turn Belgian weaknesses to its own advantage. It could convince the German occupation regime that it was in Germany's interest to offer structural support to the party. The VNV was able to present itself as a credible administrative alternative at a time when their fellow collaborationist parties were still considered marginal political adventurers. This way, the party itself fundamentally influenced German strategic policy in 1940.

TOWARDS THE LOCAL *FÜHRERPRINZIP*

The context of cooperation changed after the summer of 1940. In the Netherlands and the north of France, the move towards a new occupation phase was signalled in 1941 by the violent ruptures of the February Strike and the mining strikes in May.

The Dutch February Strike of 1941 started with social unrest in working-class districts in Amsterdam and quickly spread to other cities, later being brutally put down by the Germans.⁷⁶ The mining regions in the north of France had already been plagued by strikes since January 1941. In April–May that year, larger strikes broke out and metal workers joined the miners.⁷⁷ On 27 May 1941 the textile industry joined the strikes and, in many places, women participated in ‘bread marches’.⁷⁸ As in the Netherlands, these strikes were quickly and brutally quelled by the Germans. Reprisals were taken and hundreds of key figures were arrested. A month later, this would seamlessly merge with the large-scale arrests of communists after 22 June 1941. The next large mining strike took place in October 1943. In both countries, brutal German repression signalled the end of the first major phase of the occupation and the beginning of a new one.

In Belgium, the change proceeded more quietly. Belgo-German tensions had begun to grow from October 1940 onwards. The secretaries-general had begun to prevaricate in certain discussions. One of the key problems remained the appointments of mayors. On 25 and 31 October 1940 the Germans presented specific demands: more powers for the provincial level, a penal procedure within administrations for breaches in food

regulations, and introduction of the system of a civil-servant mayor.⁷⁹ The latter was of major importance in the Belgian context. The Belgian Legislative Council formally forbade the reform. In response, secretary-general Vossen—who had openly supported the system of civil-servant mayors since 1937—now also reversed his stance. Basically, he fell back on a more minimal interpretation of the Hague Convention after the summer of 1940. Vossen again placed the pre-war Belgian constitutional order centre stage and refused to implement the German demand. This was simply the tip of the iceberg of a changed context. The Belgian secretaries-general had flirted with dictatorial powers during the summer of 1940, but by October had once more adopted a more prudent attitude.⁸⁰

It was in this context that the collaborationist VNV increased its pressure.⁸¹ The mayoralty of Ghent—the second largest city of Flanders and a major industrial centre—became an important test case. For months, Vossen refused to sign the nomination of Hendrik Elias, a leading member of the VNV but not an elected member of the Ghent city council. The Germans pushed ahead and nominated Elias as ‘commissar-mayor’ at the end of December.⁸²

The Brussels *Militärverwaltung* encountered mounting pressures from Berlin. In January–March 1941 they decided to break the stalemate by sacking all resisting secretaries-general. This was not a violent break but a fundamental one nonetheless.⁸³ The departments of Justice and the Interior were the essential battle grounds. The VNV initially lobbied the Germans to have Gerard Romsée, their Limburg provincial governor, appointed as the head of the Justice Department. But this proposal met with strong opposition from the committee of secretaries-general as well as the Belgian magistrature.⁸⁴ The Germans decided to compromise and pushed Romsée to the Interior, where he was appointed on 4 April 1941. The French-speaking Gaston Schuind was appointed as head of the Justice Department. Schuind was not a member of any collaborationist party and had a conventional civil service record. It was a clear sign that the Germans did not want to risk conflict with the Belgian magistrature over the appointment of a Flemish collaborationist to the Justice Department.

The focal point of collaboration reform was thus moved to the Interior ministry.⁸⁵ From now on, the VNV controlled local governments, the police and the gendarmerie. Hendrik Borginon, one of the more prescient VNV heads at the time, already recognized that the VNV had missed an enormous opportunity by losing the Justice Department. He wrote to the VNV leader De Clercq to say that power over the nominations of mayors

would be ‘more of a disadvantage’ for their party. This would prove to be a very far-sighted statement.⁸⁶

In the Netherlands, the composition of the committee of secretaries-general would change more gradually. By the end of November 1940 the first member of the NSB joined the committee (Tobie Goedewaagen, for Information and Arts). In March 1941, secretary-general Jan C. Tenkink of the Justice Department was replaced by Jaap Schrieke, a member of the more radical wing of the NSB.

There now emerged a revealing ‘reverse mirror’ image between Belgium and the Netherlands. In Belgium, collaborationist parties failed to get control of the Justice Department, which remained in the hands of a ‘neutral’ civil servant, but were able to take over the Department of the Interior. In the Netherlands the situation was the other way around. While the Justice Department came into collaborationist hands, the Department of the Interior remained (for almost the entire occupation) in the hands of Karel J. Frederiks, a pre-war Dutch civil servant. This was a consequence of the difference between a *Zivil-* and *Militärverwaltung*. Rauter did not shrink from conflict with the Dutch magistrature and judiciary, and in fact, replaced all the Dutch Procurators General with NSB members in 1941.

But the Dutch change was signalled in a more violent way. The brutally repressed strikes of February 1941 directly impacted on local governments. The Amsterdam city government and the head of police were dismissed and replaced, as were the mayor and police commissioner of Zaandam and the mayor of Haarlem. The Dutch strikes of February 1941 signalled tighter German control of city governments. With the decree of 1 March 1941, the *Reichskommissar* could now easily replace Dutch mayors with a ‘governmental commissioner’.⁸⁷ This measure was immediately implemented in three large cities: Amsterdam, Hilversum and Zaandam, followed a few days later in Haarlem (where NSB member S.L.A. Plekker was appointed) and on 17 May 1941 in Maassluis. These governmental commissioners came directly under the authority of the central Department of the Interior.⁸⁸

The Germans now abandoned the idea of natural social self-Nazification. Gradually they began supporting the NSB, for instance in filling vacant mayoral positions.⁸⁹ The new Amsterdam mayor (or rather governmental commissioner) was Edward John Voûte, a municipal councillor of Bergen. He had not been a member of the NSB before the occupation, but had developed contacts with Rost van Tonningen from June 1940 onwards.⁹⁰ Van Tonningen had a large hand in Voûte’s appointment as mayor of

Amsterdam in March 1941.⁹¹ This was another similarity between the NSB and Rex. In both parties, new members who had been invisible before the occupation and joined the party only after May 1940 could rapidly attain important positions.

There was violent repression of strikes in the French *zone rattachée* as well, but here the immediate impact on local governments was less direct. It is questionable whether ‘rupture’ is the right term here. French historians Dejonghe and Le Maner consider the strikes to have been a major turning point.⁹² The German OFK in Lille was supposedly on the verge of what they both label a massive ‘Nazification’ of local governments (‘Nazification’ is a somewhat misleading concept for the north of France). Indeed, a new French municipal legislature had been approved and Darlan had just carried out a political audit of French local governments (including those in Nord/Pas-de-Calais). This audit could be interpreted as a prelude to a massive purge operation.

It is possible that the mine strikes convinced the Germans to annul these plans. However there was no break in local government. Reaction to these strikes confirmed the existing policy. The basic conditions did not change in 1941: efficient economic exploitation on the part of the Germans and administrative autonomy over political personnel for the French.⁹³ A French municipal legislature had been in power in both departments since 1 February 1941 and already on 25 February 1941 Darlan himself had issued an explicit instruction to maintain ‘stability’ in the personnel composition of local governments (specifically the mayors). The purges had to be limited to people who openly attacked the regime.⁹⁴ The real break signalled by the mine strikes in Nord/Pas-de-Calais would not be in local government but in French police reform.

In contrast, the German reorganization of the Belgian committee of secretaries-general signalled the beginning of the fundamental reform of local government. In half a year, the local *Führerprinzip* would be implemented. The Germans initiated an administrative revolution with one concise measure: the so-called ‘age decree’ of 7 March 1941. All persons who held public offices of any kind were forced to relinquish all functions at the age of sixty. This German ‘decree’ was issued only for Belgium, not for the *zone rattachée*. The reason for this is clear: in France (and the Netherlands) the Germans had no need for this sort of shock measure.

It was a massive blow to Belgian administration. With this one measure, 980 mayors, 1883 aldermen and 492 municipal secretaries now had to be dismissed in the next few months.⁹⁵ In the end, 1250 Belgian mayors

would be effectively discharged (over half of them in 1941) during the occupation in compliance with this change alone. This revolutionary measure had not been discussed beforehand with the Belgian administration, and it remains in question whether the Germans actually fully realized the great impact it would have. It provoked strong complaints from the Belgian authorities, including the committee of secretaries-general, who on 12 March 1941 judged the German measure ‘illegal’. The German occupiers ignored these complaints.

This decree led to a total blockage in Belgian local government because of legal problems of appointment.⁹⁶ However, these were quickly resolved by Gerard Romsée, the new VNV secretary-general of the Interior. In a few months’ time he would implement the reform the Germans had been demanding since October 1940. With his decree of 16 April 1941 Romsée implemented a measure enabling the Department of the Interior to dismiss mayors (later also aldermen) by means of a legally valid ‘removal from office’ decision that made a replacement appointment possible. He ‘normalized’ the appointments of mayors who were not members of the municipal council. He introduced financial compensation for mayors (27 August 1941). In June 1941 liberalized the legal restrictions on registration for the lists of qualified voters. The formal framework of Belgian municipal legislation was hollowed out. Romsée deliberately used ambiguous legal terms.⁹⁷ The combination of these different measures meant de facto implementation of a system of centrally appointed civil servant mayors in Belgium.

Subsequent measures followed in rapid succession. Municipal councils were suspended in all three countries (‘temporarily prevented from meeting’). In Belgium, this happened with a German measure from 11 April 1941. Romsée quickly followed with a Belgian countermeasure and transferred the powers of municipal councils to committees of the mayor and aldermen. In the Netherlands, meetings of municipal councils were prohibited at about the same time. The German decree of 11–12 August 1941 suspended the provincial legislative and executive bodies (as in Belgium, this was formally a ‘temporary’ measure) and their powers were transferred to provincial commissioners.⁹⁸ The same happened with the municipal councils and the committees of aldermen, with the powers of these suspended local bodies being transferred to the mayors. In the north of France, council meetings were never formally suspended by a general measure; rather, they were simply hardly ever called. A municipal council meeting was an exceptional event but was never considered a serious

problem. The *Kreiskommandantur* in Cambrai, for instance, asked the sub-prefect on 18 May 1942 to send him the agenda of the city's council meeting, explaining that 'I simply want to be kept informed.'⁹⁹

In Belgium, there was hardly any protest (either from the general population or from the political authorities) against this suspension.¹⁰⁰ In the Netherlands, however, the measure met with wide objections and even some civil disturbances.¹⁰¹ Dutch (local) administrators considered it a fundamental infringement of Dutch autonomy. The Limburg NSB provincial commissioner De Marchant d'Ansembourg even considered it necessary to demand an oath of obedience to this specific measure, after which about 45 mayors submitted their resignations.¹⁰² Indeed, Dutch historiography still equates this one decree with the implementation of the local *Führerprinzip*.

The Belgo-Dutch differences had several reasons. First, the Belgian population and administration had other priorities. A German report (about the city and region of Bastogne) from this period, for instance, noted that neither the population nor the local administration had visibly reacted to any notable extent against the German age decree for public servants, but had objected strongly to the simultaneous restrictions in food regulations.¹⁰³ On the other hand, Belgium had just undergone the major administrative change of the age decree. Until that point, the framework of Dutch municipal administration had been mostly maintained. In Belgium, the abolition of the municipal councils simply confirmed a reality. There is also the national difference to consider. In the Netherlands, the councils' role as guardians of local interests and local democracy was more important.

Whatever the differences, March–April 1941 signalled the start of a completely new phase for local governments under occupation in all three countries.

NOTES

1. C. Fijnaut, *Opdat de macht een toevlucht zij? Een historische studie van het politieapparaat als een politieke instelling* (Arnhem/Antwerp 1979), 272.
2. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*, 137.
3. In May 1940, the Dutch municipal police counted ca. 11,000 men (in 1941 this would rise to 14,000). The corps was responsible in all municipalities of 5000 inhabitants or more.

4. In the large cities, the municipal police were led by a (chief) commissioner nominated by the central government.
5. Romijn, 'Lokale Verwaltung'.
6. Rauter created the function of inspector-general of police and integrated the field police (*rijksveldwacht*) with the *marechaussée* (which was then 4000 men strong). New squadrons were created, as well as new intelligence services within the new directorate-general and the chief-magistrate of Amsterdam. Fijnaut, *Opdat de macht*, 270–279.
7. Romijn, 'Lokale Verwaltung', 26.
8. Fijnaut, *Opdat de macht*, 280.
9. D. Luyten, 'Leemans, Victor L.', in *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 1812–1813.
10. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*.
11. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*.
12. 'General Administration and Police', 'Finances', 'Youth, Family and Public Health', 'Socio-Economic Affairs'.
13. Bargeton, 'La fonction', 145–146.
14. This applied only to municipalities that exceeded 2000 inhabitants; republican legislation was temporarily maintained for smaller municipalities.
15. Municipal councillors and mayors for cities with respectively less than 50,000 and 10,000 inhabitants; mayors of the larger cities were appointed by the ministry of Interior.
16. Established in Nord on 10 January 1941 and in Pas-de-Calais on 28 January 1941. Mazey and Wright, *Les préfets*, 273; R. Bargeton, 'La fonction', 169.
17. Durand, 'Les pouvoirs', 43.
18. Durand, 'Les pouvoirs', 45.
19. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 66.
20. The *Militärverwaltung* in Paris initially limited itself to control over the top-ranking nominations; this was broadened only by the end of 1940 (for instance, to mayors from cities larger than 10,000 inhabitants).
21. Administrative and financial control was exercised by the 'département de surveillance de l'administration et de l'Etat français' with the OFK-Lille. Le Maner, 'Town councils'.
22. Le Maner, 'Les municipalités'.
23. P. Romijn, 'Die Nazifizierung der lokalen Verwaltung in den besetzten Niederlanden als Instrument bürokratischer Kontrolle', in Benz et al. (eds.), *Die Bürokratie der Okkupation*, 93–120.
24. Van Bolhuis et al. (eds.), *Onderdrukking en Verzet*, 443–414.
25. Le Maner, 'Town councils'.
26. Van Roon, *Een commissaris in het verzet*, 92.
27. In Nord, a total of 60 people would be removed from office on official grounds of membership in freemasonry. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 250 ff.

28. Le Maner, 'Town councils'.
29. 2/9964/16: *Gemeenten. Politiek personeel*. (...), RABW.
30. Testimony Nichols d. 15 October 1940, nr. 2/9870/1 'Aanklachten wegens collaboratie (...) Gemeenten A-G 1944–1946', RABW.
31. 2/9964/17: *Postverlating* (...), RABW.
32. Declaration for the defence of Vossen n.d., *Archief Jean Vossen*, nr. 226–229 (...), CegeSoma; 'Nota in zake: burgemeester', n.d., *Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur West-Vlaanderen*, PA W-VA.
33. Letter d. 30 September 1940 to the provincial governors. 2/9964/16: *Gemeenten*. (...), RABW.
34. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 80–83.
35. R. te Slaa and E. Klijn, *De NSB: ontstaan en opkomst van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, 1931–1935* (Amsterdam 2009).
36. Von der Dunk, *In de schaduw van de depressie*.
37. E. Gerard, *De katholieke partij in crisis. Partijpolitiek leven in België 1918–1940* (Leuven 1985).
38. *JPF Gerhardus Hendrik Klomp*, CABR, NA.
39. *JPF Willem Pieter Cornelis Bos*, CABR, NA.
40. *JPF Alphons Bouwman*, CABR, NA.
41. *JPF Arie van de Graaff*, CABR, NA.
42. *JPF nr. 17.141 Paul Johan Marie Coenen*, CABR, NA.
43. Gotovitch and Balace, *Militärverwaltung*, 100.
44. *GD nr. 72.439, Arthur Van Zandycke*, RAB.
45. *Burgemeesters: Hasselt — Jozef Bollen*, PA L.
46. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 85–94.
47. De Wever, *Greep*, 35.
48. Colignon, 'Le nouvel ordre communal', 76.
49. *GD nr. 72.698, Jean Brasseur*, RA.
50. V. Reynvoet, *La vie quotidienne à Auvélais sous l'occupation allemande (1940–1944)* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Liège University 1994); Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 95–101.
51. Report by Georges d. 23 October 1940, Map: 'Prise de pouvoir. (...)', *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK.
52. He became mayor of Mariembourg in July 1942. *GD nr. 85. 178, Maurice Pirard*, RAB.
A similar example was Frans Garin, Rex-mayor of Givry in May 1942. *GD nr. 77.580, Frans Garin*, RAB.
53. N. Derleyn, *Nivelles sous l'occupation Allemande 1940–1944*, 2 vols. (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Liège University 1992).
54. J.-M. Bodelet, *Le Rexisme dans la province de Luxembourg (1940–1944)* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Université de Liège 1996).
55. Verzeichnis über die nicht endgültig besetzten Stellen d. 1 August 1942, *Ongëinventariseerde bundel postverlating*, PAH.

56. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk 6–A*, 363.
57. *Archives Jean Vossen, Microfilm 74, nr. 134*: ‘nota van pleidooi’, CegeSoma.
58. *Departement Inhoud: Bestuurspolitiek, Nr. 118*: ‘nota (...)’, *Archieven VNV, AA 156*, CegeSoma.
59. *Processen-verbaal 1940 nr. 24477*, Police Archives City of Lokeren.
60. *JPF Marius Frans L. H. Welters, CABR, NA*.
61. *JPF Simon L.A. Plekker, CABR, NA*. See, for example, the town of Tilburg: A. De Beer, *Zo maar een stad. Tilburg 1940–1945* (Tilburg 1994).
62. Map: ‘Prise de pouvoir. (...)’, *JPF Jean Georges, AGK*.
63. Bundel: ‘Werkverschaffing’, *JPF Theo Brouns, AGK*.
64. Mededeeling nr. 35 aan de arrondissementsleiders. Onderwerp: ‘burgemeestersbenoemingen’, d. 24 October 1940, in *JPF Groot-Brussel, AGK*.
65. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 112–126.
66. ‘Puissance et ordre. (...)’, d. 25 October 1940, in *JPF Groot-Brussel. Grauls en consoorten. Brunet, File III, AGK*.
67. Jean Georges to Léon Lambert, district leader Vresse-sur-Semois d. 15 October 1940, Map: ‘Prise de pouvoir (...)’, *JPF Jean Georges, AGK*.
68. C. Dubois, *Attitudes, manifestations et actes de résistance à Bruxelles en 1940–1942* (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles) 19.
69. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*, 229; De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk deel 6–A*, 377.
70. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*, 382.
71. *JPF nr. 58226, Willem Ten Hoopen, CABR, NA*.
72. *JPF Simon Lambertus A. Plekker, CABR, NA*.
73. *JPF nr. 49245, Louis Leon Auguste Sille, CABR, NA*. See also: Romijn, *Die Nazifizierung*, 104.
74. *JPF Harmen Westra, CABR, NA*.
75. De Wever, *Greep*, 425–430.
76. E. Van Diggele, *E.J. Voûte. Burgemeester van Amsterdam in oorlogstijd* (Unpublished Doctorate Thesis, History, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden 1993).
77. L. Taylor, *Between Resistance and Collaboration: Popular Protest in Northern France, 1940–1945* (Chippenham/Eastborne 2002).
78. Taylor, *Between Resistance and Collaboration*, 74–76.
79. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 66.
80. This attitude was most explicit in the departments of Finances, the Interior and Justice. M. Van Den Wijngaert, ‘La politique du moindre mal. La politique du Comité des Secrétaires Généraux en Belgique sous l’occupation allemande 1940–1944’, in Dejonghe (ed.), *L’occupation en France et en Belgique*, 63–73.
81. Meeting report n.d., *Archief Jean Vossen, nr. 255, Microfilm 74*, CegeSoma. The Germans also issued a decree (19 December 1940) which submitted every absent Belgian public official to automatic professional interdiction.

82. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 115.
83. The secretary-general of Justice, Ernst de Bunswyck (a strict legalist), was removed in January 1941; Vossen (and his replacement, Henri Adam) of the Interior resigned in February 1941; and in March 1941 the secretaries-general Delmer (Public Works), Castiau (Transport) and De Jonghe (Colonies) were discharged.
84. E. Verhoeyen, *België bezet, 1940–1944: een synthese* (Brussels 1993), 47 ff.
85. The number of civil servants in this department doubled in 1940.
86. *'Het proces Borginon'*, D 9052, ADVN.
87. Van Bolhuis et al. (eds.), *Onderdrukking en Verzet*, 440.
88. From 5 July 1941, the Germans could sanction Dutch civil servants (including mayors). In Belgium and the north of France, administrative control over mayors would formally always remain with the indigenous administrative authority.
89. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*, 70.
90. *JPF, Edward John Voûte*, CABR, NA.
91. Van Diggele, *E.J. Voûte*.
92. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*.
93. Le Maner, 'Les municipalités', 242.
94. Subfile: 'cabinet. Réorganisation des corps municipaux', 14 W 36254 nr. 1: *instructions*, (...), ADN – L.
95. Verhoeyen, *België bezet*, 5.
96. Hundreds of mayors, aldermen and top administrators were suddenly required by Belgian law to be 'prevented from executing their legal mandate'. Since there was no vacancy of these functions according to Belgian law, this automatically implied that Belgian authorities could not appoint replacements.
97. For example, Romsée continued to prefer 'voluntary discharges' on the parts of mayors themselves, as in this way he was kept off the record.
98. Van Bolhuis et al. (eds.), *Onderdrukking en Verzet*, 456.
99. *I W nr. 863*, ADN – L.
100. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 137.
101. Van Bolhuis et al. (eds.), *Onderdrukking en Verzet*, 449.
102. Derksen and Van der Sande (eds.), *De burgemeester*, 26–27.
103. OK-Bastogne to the Feldkommandantur Aarlen, 'La Kommandantur d'Arlon', nr. K 126: 'résistance', Rijksarchief Arlon.

The Limits of Nazification

THE PREFECTORAL SYSTEM AND CONTINUITY IN NORD/ PAS-DE-CALAIS

The mine strikes of May 1941 in Nord and Pas-de-Calais signalled a new occupation phase. However, in terms of French local government, the dominant trend remained continuity. Even after May 1941, there was no Nazification of local governments to speak of.

The Germans made almost no attempt to investigate possible breaches of their regulations, certainly in the conduct of small towns. As a rule, the German OFK in Lille accepted the decisions made by the French departments.¹ On 7 August 1941, it even ruled that both prefects could nominate *adjoints* and municipal councillors without notifying them.² When the Cambrai *Kreiskommandantur* sent questionnaires to all mayors of the district in June 1941, the departmental authorities immediately protested that this infringed French administrative autonomy and contravened the Hague Convention.³

Until 1943, the German OFK in Lille only intervened when there was a serious threat to security (for example after the attack on a German soldier on 28 September 1941 in Marcq-en-Barœul, when the mayor was arrested and held for two days).⁴ Direct German interventions in the mayoral functions were only provoked by incidents of that sort. One of those exceptional examples was the German ban on the 65-year-old mayor Muliez of Bondues on 16 April 1941, after repeated acts of sabotage in his village.

And even here, prefect Carles refused to appoint the replacement nominated by the occupier. Instead, he installed his own special delegates. Both prefects thus kept a level of control over the mayoralty and autonomy which was out of the question in occupied Belgium or the Netherlands.

Yves Le Maner writes that most of the replacements in local government occurred during the second half of 1941, after which matters became more stable again.⁵ This is generally confirmed by figures I found for 197 municipalities in Nord, where the November 1940 legislation was implemented in 1941.⁶

In January 1942 (for Nord), special delegations were still present in six larger cities (ones with more than 10,000 inhabitants),⁷ in 23 smaller towns (2000–10,000 inhabitants) and in 18 smaller villages (under 2000 inhabitants). Several months later (April 1942), a departmental report recorded that all war committees and special delegations had been replaced by mayors (Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

New mayors were primarily appointed in the districts of Avesnes, Valenciennes (and Cambrai). The high number in Valenciennes can be partly explained by the high number of purged communists in September 1939. During the entire occupation, 91 mayors (out of 160) for mid-size towns (2000–10,000 inhabitants) were kept in place. In Pas-de-Calais, 82 out of 112 mayors (73 %) were kept in place for these mid-size towns. When implementing the new municipal legislation in the district of Béthune, the subprefect proposed the reappointment of 41 out of 50 mayors.

This confirms the picture of continuity. The proportion proves to be even higher when one takes into account that many of the 1940–41

Table 4.1 Heads of municipalities (Nord, January 1942)

<i>District</i>	<i>Mayors</i>	<i>Adjoints acting as temp. mayors</i>	<i>Munic. Councillors acting as mayors</i>	<i>Presidents War Committees</i>	<i>Presidents Spec. Delegations</i>
Avesnes	98	20	28	3	3
Cambrai	80	15	17	5	4
Douai	52	7	–	–	7
Lille	110	9	–	1	6
Valenciennes	77	–	?	4	
Dunkirk	110	5	2	–	1

14 W 36254 nr. 4: 'instructions (...)', ADN – L

Table 4.2 Mayors kept in post (May 1940–April 1942) in municipalities affected by the November 1940 legislation (>2000 inhabitants)

<i>District</i>	<i>Municipalities with less than 5000*/10,000 inhabitants</i>	<i>Municipalities with more than 5000*/10,000 inhabitants</i>
Avesnes	10 mayors out of 24	2 mayors (<i>unknown total number</i>)
Cambrai*	7 mayors out of 15	3 mayors out of 4
Douai	16 mayors out of 21	3 mayors (<i>unknown total number</i>)
Lille*	20 mayors out of 29	19 mayors out of 28
Valenciennes	14 mayors out of 32	3 mayors out of 5
Dunkirk	18 mayors out of 19	5 mayors out of 6

Districts with an asterisk “*” were calculated with the criterion of 5,000 inhabitants. The number in the first column shows the number of mayors that remained the same since May 1940, the second column shows the number of municipalities. The indication ‘15 on 20’ therefore means that since May 1940, five new mayors were appointed in this particular district.

‘temporary’ special delegations were composed of traditional local elites.⁸ When mayor Beauvillain of Caudry was arrested by the Germans in July 1942, for example, it was a typical routine measure to nominate a deputy mayor.⁹

Let’s take the town of Maresches as an example. Its mayor, Henri Carlier, was suspended in May 1940 for deserting his post. The German *Kreiskommandantur* of Avesnes resisted his reappointment and the prefect nominated a special delegation, headed by the father of the former mayor. It would take the Germans over a year to admit that this solution had been unsuccessful. In August 1942 the prefect simply reinstated the original pre-war mayor.¹⁰

The important textile city of Tourcoing offers another good example. Deputy mayor Salembien had replaced the mayor after the latter’s abandonment of his post in May 1940. Salembien quickly came into conflict with the departmental administrators, who found him too ‘localist’ on food supply decisions, putting the interests of his city over regional needs and ignoring central regulations.¹¹ The Germans repeatedly complained about this as well. However, prefect Carles repeatedly delayed a dismissal of the mayor as what he called ‘an extreme measure’. Only when implementing the new municipal legislation in 1941 did Carles come up with a strong new candidate: Léon Marescaux, a man who was deeply embedded in local political and economic life. Marescaux had been *adjoint* in the city council since 1925 (for the PR), and was a former president of the local chamber of commerce, a former member of the *Conseil d’homologation du textile* and a member of the board of directors of the city’s savings banks.

His candidacy was supported by the city's key socio-economic organizations, and he was appointed mayor on 27 November 1941. This example shows the prefects could be prudent and safeguard strong local consensus, at any rate in the larger cities.

Social and political stability determined prefectural policies in dealing with the mayors. In April 1942, for example, Carles wrote to the *Feldkommandantur* that he wished to dismiss the mayor of Wattrelos but feared local repercussions. He feared that other members of the local authority would also leave after the mayor's dismissal. That a dismissal would cause local unrest and that successors were scarce was the argument most often used by prefects to counter German interference.¹²

This led to some remarkable episodes. Mayor Senechal of the town of Ostricourt was sentenced in 1942 by the Germans to six months in prison. When he was released on 20 December 1942, the French authorities saw no obstacle to his immediate reinstatement as mayor. This would have been unthinkable in Belgium or the Netherlands. It took the Germans several weeks to notice this situation and to voice their protest. The prefect only grudgingly appointed a replacement.¹³

All of this resulted therefore in the gradual reinstatement of Third Republic mayors and other elites in 1941–43. Prefects in both cases could block a politically inspired purge policy for mayors and *adjoints* (that is, until the winter of 1942–43). Dismissals for 'disciplinary' reasons were minimal (for both *départements* 16 mayors in 1941, 16 in 1942, 13 in 1943 and 7 in 1944).¹⁴

The great majority of administrative sanction procedures was related to food supply policy.¹⁵ It took just one remark by the Germans that several municipalities in Pas-de-Calais had provided false information on milk supplies, for example, for prefect Daugy to immediately suspend all the local governments concerned.¹⁶ But even here, prefects remained cautious. As in Belgium, food supply was the area of greatest conflict between central/regional administrations and local governments. The prefects tried to mediate and effect compromise. In August 1942, for example, the sub-prefect of Avesnes ordered the departmental inspection administrations 'to be so kind as to consider the mayors and municipal administrations as potential partners in the implementation of their task and not as suspects. (...) Central authority cannot alienate itself from the support of municipal magistrates who were compromised by small and perhaps pardonable mistakes made by temporary and inexperienced civil servants.'¹⁷ Subprefects often restrained excessively harsh investigations by regional inspectors.¹⁸

Good local governance was therefore essential to the French prefects and the Germans. When the advantage of a mayor's presence outweighed his mistakes, the prefects protected him. When for example an investigation revealed irregularities in mayor Jean Paresys' policy (in the village of Bierne), prefect Carles formally forbade the administration to send the file to the chief public prosecutor (2 August 1942), declaring that the mayor concerned was a good administrator. The sanction process was halted without any action being taken.¹⁹ A similar example was the mayor of the village of Crochte, where Carles personally halted the investigation on 21 September 1942.

The prefects had good reason for this. After the summer of 1940, the number of complaints from local inhabitants against their mayors (or local governments in general) about food supply exploded. Many local inhabitants felt disadvantaged and tried to use the departmental authorities to defend their interests. The prefects of Nord and Pas-de-Calais were well aware of the potential danger of a witch-hunt climate, in which all sorts of (pre-war) criticisms could be made against a mayor. This was, incidentally, what happened in Belgium (mainly in Flanders), where the collaborationist VNV provoked a climate of this sort.

Prefects prudently preserved a difficult balance, particularly when politics were involved. When the German authorities complained about a socialist mayor—which they fairly frequently did—both prefects responded that a mayor should not be punished for 'old' or 'past' political affiliations, and vigorously defended socialist mayors.²⁰ Whenever a (socialist) mayor offered his resignation, prefect Carles sometimes personally tried to persuade him to stay in office. In this regard, as we will see, there are many similarities between Carles and the Dutch secretary-general Frederiks. For both, the preservation of 'their' local governments and mayors became a goal in itself.

Several factors explain this. One essential difference from Belgium or the Netherlands, was of course simply the lack of any major alternatives. There was no strong collaborationist party campaigning to infiltrate local governments. The regional representatives of the ministry of Information (led by the *délégué régional d'information*) in Nord and Pas-de-Calais were completely blocked by both departmental authorities in 1942 and 1943. Another factor is that personnel stability itself became an instrument for the ultimate goal, the principle of French administrative autonomy (for which a relationship of confidence between the prefects and the OFK in Lille was the necessary condition). To allow too much German interference, would inevitably signal the gradual disintegration of French autonomy.

The creation of the central state police also deserves mentioning here. This also partly explains the continued German tolerance of socialist mayors after May 1941. New centralized police reform reduced the mayor's influence on the police, and thus the 'danger' he could pose. Such, in any case, was the argument used by prefects. One clear illustration of this, was when the Germans demanded the dismissal of several mayors in the urban region around Lille on 15 April 1942. They explicitly said they wanted to 'free little by little all municipal administrations of mayors with an extreme red colour'. Prefect Carles argued against this that 'red' mayors no longer posed any danger because their influence on police commissioners had been reduced.²¹

The prefects and the former socialist party worked together in a strategy of mutual benefit. Socialist mayors remained in power in most of the industrial areas until 1943. The Vichy government leader Laval would later follow this northern policy, supporting the reinstatement of Third Republic elites. On 22 June 1942 Laval ordered the prefects to exercise moderation in their sanctioning of mayors.²² Laval came to the same pragmatic and self-evident conclusion that the northern prefects had already seen in 1940: namely, that local government under the strain of occupation needed the administrative expertise and local socio-political legitimacy of existing elites.

Nevertheless, German and Vichy acceptance of the situation in the north was with clear unease. The prefects persisted in the message that the socialist (or centre-left) mayors were reliable and supported the 'spirit' of the National Revolution. The prefects communicated an absolute minimum of political information on new mayors (a standard phrase used in reports, for example, was 'current political attitude: correct, supportive of the Marshal's policies').²³ This was obviously a smokescreen and the Germans must have had at least some understanding of this. Nevertheless, the German OFK in Lille accepted this situation for almost two and a half years, largely because it worked and because there was little alternative.

THE BUREAUCRATIC ILLUSION HOLDS AFTER 1943 (NORD/PAS-DE-CALAIS)

This situation was a precarious one and it was bound to come under pressure. On 15 September 1942, Pétain himself received a delegation of mayors from the *zone rattachée*, led by mayor Tillie of Saint-Omer. At the exact same time, German dissatisfaction with left-wing mayors in Nord and Pas-de-Calais had reached breaking point.²⁴ The OFK in Lille demanded the

collective dismissal of the remaining socialist mayors of major towns (Lille, Calais, Dunkirk and Boulogne-sur-Mer). Prefect Carles was able to restrict the outcome to the dismissal of the mayor of Boulogne. But the writing was on the wall.

Under increased German pressure, prefects took a stricter stance.²⁵ Prefectoral control of mayors became tighter.²⁶ More severe departmental sanctions were introduced for food supply issues which remained the primary criterion for judging local governments and mayors.²⁷ After the winter of 1942–43 forced labour (see below) became another essential domain. Now, ‘good government’ became also implementation of forced labour policies. Mayors who resisted now risked dismissal by the prefects. In Nord in July 1943 there were three cases of mayors who had resisted police operations in their localities against younger men in hiding. In August 1943 the prefect, irritated by the sluggish pace of the investigation, intervened directly and removed all three mayors (on the grounds of ‘a very clear hostility towards measures taken by the Government concerning forced labour’).²⁸

Even now, departmental authorities remained cautious about political instrumentalization. In August 1943 there was a formal complaint from the first *adjoint* of the town of Gondcourt against his mayor Henri Couvelard. The *adjoint* also accused the mayor of having ‘communist sympathies’. In January 1944, the department cleared the mayor of all charges.²⁹ There was no German intervention in this investigation.

This continued French autonomy applied even in more serious cases. In February 1944, for example, both the municipal secretary and a candidate-mayor were murdered in the village of Erquinghem-Lys. One might well expect such extreme events to happen in the political context of occupation. But in fact, the root causes of these local murders appear to have been individual hostilities and pre-war local village politics.³⁰ Even in the context of occupation, the departmental investigation disentangled local complexities and elucidated these murders.

Nevertheless, there was a visible shift after the winter of 1942–43. Both departments gradually started appointing more right-wing mayors, more openly Pétainist figures with a more technocratic profile, and without any clear pre-war political (socialist or left-wing) affiliation. This trend was evident during the first half of 1943, also in the urban industrialized areas traditionally dominated by socialists.³¹

But even then, it remained a gradual policy and not a thorough purge. Politically motivated dismissals of mayors remained the exception, espe-

cially in smaller towns and villages.³² The case of mayor François of the rural village of Le Quesnoy, suspended in September 1943 for the illegal slaughter of a cow, can be considered a typical example. Even in 1943, the prefects still commonly used the phrase ‘the mayor is an anglophile but a good administrator’ without any German reaction. Ideological arguments were only used to strengthen a case when administrative problems occurred.³³

In October 1943, a well-informed government observer wrote a report on the larger towns and cities in Nord and Pas-de-Calais. He described the majority of mayors as ‘wise’, ‘moderate’ and ‘prudent’. He also stressed the good relationship between prefects and the mayoralty: ‘many of them voluntarily distance themselves from what they still call ‘politics’ (...). But all of them implement, without question, the instructions and orders they receive from the prefect, even when they know these orders seem to go against particular interests of inhabitants or are strongly opposed to their personal convictions.’³⁴ The observer was far less positive about the mayors of smaller (rural) villages, whom he described as led ‘by a desire not to be compromised in the eyes of their subjects, who are hostile to the government’.³⁵

Vichy pressure increased. In particular, the regional governmental representatives of the ministry of information (*délégués régionaux*) attempted to intervene. But both northern prefects and particularly prefect Carles successfully closed the door on them. A highly revealing investigation occurred when regional Vichy representatives formally accused the mayor (and municipal secretary) of Sin-le-Noble in July 1943 of hostility to the government. The subprefect of Douai informed Carles that the mayor was an excellent administrator and concluded: ‘without a doubt, he is not a hundred per cent loyal, but in general he struck me as someone who understands the difficulties of the Government, even if he has a certain level of distrust of the policy of collaboration’.³⁶ The subprefect stressed that distrust of the government was widespread in his district. On the question whether this local authority supported the Vichy government, the subprefect answered in a stroke of bureaucratic inspiration: ‘One cannot confirm this, nor confirm the opposite.’³⁷ Prefect Carles then wrote an amicable letter to the Vichy representative (4 July 1943), assuring him that he would continue to monitor the mayor. The latter remained in office until the end of the occupation without further problems.

Complaints by Vichy representatives against mayors increased during and after the winter of 1942–43. They all revealed the weak position of Vichy representatives in Nord and Pas-de-Calais. When the Vichy

regional representative wanted to replace the president of the war committee of Maubeuges (December 1942), the prefect repeatedly (but always amicably) made it clear that the Vichy candidate-mayor was unacceptable because he belonged 'to the collaborationist group' (*au groupe 'Collaboration'*).³⁸ When the Vichy representatives proposed a candidate-mayor for a town in Cambrai, the subprefect wrote to Carles (12 May 1943): 'the contradiction between the hostility towards [the Vichy candidate] and the trust in [the *adjoint* mayor] appears somewhat curious when one knows both of these men well'.³⁹ In this particular case, the collaborationist *Rassemblement National Populaire* movement also proposed its own candidate mayor. The latter was completely ignored by the prefect. On a Vichy-candidate mayor in the town of Malo-les-Bains the subprefect of Douai wrote (23 February 1943): 'without a doubt, this man is a fierce supporter of the government's policy but I doubt whether his nomination will be well received by the population'.⁴⁰

The prefects trusted the mayors more than the Vichy representatives. On 25 February 1943, a Vichy representative complained that mayor Cattelot of St-Rémy-Chaussée had called him 'an agent of the Gestapo'.⁴¹ The prefect found out that this Vichy representative had been defeated by the mayor in the 1935 elections and ignored the complaint. When the Vichy representatives complained about illegal textiles in the mayor's possession, the prefect literally copied the mayor's defence into his own letter to the Vichy representatives.⁴²

Mayors who openly supported the Vichy regime remained exceptions. They simply created too much tension in their communities. Mayor Tual of the town of Wignehies offers one such striking example. He was the local president of the collaborationist *Mouvement Franciste* and was appointed with the support of the regional *Délégué* of the ministry of information. On 19 August 1943, mayor Tual was the victim of an assassination attempt which he narrowly survived. The municipality was responsible for covering all the costs of the incident (the mayor's medical costs, for example). However, the local financial administration flatly refused to pay, on the grounds that 'the attack on Dr Tual was a political assassination aimed not at the mayor of Wignehies but at Dr Tual, leader of a political party (Francisme)'.⁴³ The local administration went so far as to imply that the mayor himself had provoked the attempt by his strict stance on forced labour. The prefect did not accept this, but it shows the local hostility.

A mayor's local legitimacy remained the primary concern. The vast majority of individual intelligence files on mayors and municipal coun-

cillors described their political attitude as ‘correct’ or ‘in favour of the government’. Although the term ‘unfavourable’ (*défavorable*) increased in 1944, it remained for a small minority.⁴⁴ The majority—according to these files—were either ‘in favour of the government’, or (somewhat less positive) ‘with a correct and loyal attitude’. In the rare case where the prefect could not write even this, he simply wrote: ‘political attitude: none’.⁴⁵ Despite increasing pressure in 1943 and 1944, prefectural control was maintained. The condition was the illusion of a de-politicisation of mayors. The situation had arrived at a mutually sustained bureaucratic illusion intended to placate external (higher) powers and safeguard stability.

LOCAL NAZIFICATION IN BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

The Belgian and Dutch national contexts were very different from the prefectural model in the north of France.

The Dutch secretary-general of the Interior Karel J. Frederiks was member of the pre-war administrative elite. He followed the same strategy as both northern French prefects. He wanted to maintain his control over the mayoralty and preserve continuity. He tried to keep administrative sanction procedures against mayors at a strict minimum. As a result, few mayors were sanctioned (or sacked) during the occupation by the ministry of the Interior. Frederiks, however, had less autonomy to begin with. German interventions were much stronger than in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. It was the German *Generalkommissar* who took the formal decision to dismiss or appoint Dutch mayors.⁴⁶ Although Dutch actors were obviously involved, it was the German *Beauftragte* who proposed a candidate to the *Abteilung für niederländische Personalangelegenheiten*.⁴⁷ In the Netherlands, the Germans could use the existing system. Many mayors, having reached the end of their six-year term, were not reappointed. When mayor A. Van de Sande Bakhuijzen of the important city of Leiden was dismissed (March 1941) on the orders of the *Generalkommissar*, the latter said that this dismissal should be treated ‘as if we let him go because he had reached the age limit’.⁴⁸ Frederiks therefore worked in a difficult context. Contrary to Belgium or France, Dutch mayors could fall out of service automatically.

The Belgian ministry of the Interior was headed by Gerard Romsée, a VNV collaborationist, after March 1941. When he took over the ministry of the interior in Belgium, Rex and the VNV considered this the beginning of their coup.⁴⁹ For the VNV, this would effectively prove the case. Close lines of communication between VNV governors, German adminis-

trations and local VNV sections enabled a quick influx of VNV candidates into public offices, notably mayors. Local political personnel were put under systematic pressure by the ministry to offer voluntary resignation. Often, the resignation document and the appointment of a new (VNV-) mayor were signed on the same day. The Germans had total control over this through their individual 'authorization'. It often happened that only one candidate had this authorization. The ministry of the interior was reduced to a mere 'appointment machine'. The selection process had already taken place on the local and intermediary level.

The provincial governors played an important role. They had to formally forward the names of candidate-mayors to the ministry. We see that regional differences can be linked to the figure of the governor. The Antwerp governor Jan Grauls was relatively moderate and (sometimes successfully) dared to oppose certain collaborationist candidates.⁵⁰ He was often bypassed by local VNV sections, however. The VNV governors of Limburg and West-Flanders were more in tune with the VNV appointment policy. In East-Flanders, the relatively moderate governor would be replaced in 1943 by a VNV member.

The biggest regional difference was between Flanders and francophone Belgium. While Romsée's appointment was welcomed by VNV governors in Flanders, most Walloon governors reacted with open hostility (with the exception of the one Rexist governor, Leroy of Hainaut). The four francophone governors blocked (or at least delayed) Romsée's appointments. Governor Doyen of Liège, for example, voiced protests to Romsée (and the Germans) over several important local appointments in 1941.⁵¹ This was clearest in the province of Brabant. This, as we saw, was the only Belgian province where the pre-war governor (Houtart) was still in office by 1942. Despite repeated demands by Romsée and the Germans, Governor Houtart stubbornly refused to appoint mayors who were not elected members of the municipal council. Between 1 April 1941 and 25 September 1942 (he resigned shortly after) governor Houtart appointed 120 mayors, of whom 61 were candidates selected by Houtart himself. 22 other candidates were 'acceptable' to him, while 37 (about 30 %) were appointed against his will.⁵² Immediately after Houtart's resignation, the district commissioner of Nivel as well as two provincial deputies would be replaced by a Rexist and two VNV members respectively. When governors Doyen of Liège and Devos of Namur were also dismissed around the end of March 1942, they were succeeded by the Rexist Georges Petit and

Emmanuel de Croy respectively. This signalled the slow advance of Rex in local governments.⁵³

In the province of Luxemburg, Rex had been virtually nonexistent before the war. Under occupation, the Catholic governor René Greindl opposed the party's candidacies. Arlon offers a good example of this struggle. When Arlon's city government crumbled in March 1941 as a result of the German age decree (mayor Paul Reuter was 75 years old in 1940), Greindl made a desperate attempt to convince members of the traditional elite to take over city government.⁵⁴ The local section of the collaborationist *Deutsche Sprachverein* proposed Lucien Eichhorn, one of their young members, who was supported by Rex (the latter had no local foothold themselves). This ambitious young journalist was appointed mayor of Arlon on 1 November 1941. This was a major defeat for Greindl.⁵⁵ He did succeed in further delaying Rexist appointments, but was dismissed in the second half of 1943 (officially because of his opposition to the forced labour policy).⁵⁶ Several months afterwards, the four pending Rexist provincial *députés* were appointed. Around the winter of 1943–44, Rex had gained the majority in the provincial executive committee in three Walloon provinces (Hainaut, Liège and Luxemburg).⁵⁷

The Dutch provincial 'Commissioners of the Provinces' played a similar role.⁵⁸ As in Belgium, they were gradually replaced with collaborationists. In January 1941, Albert Backer (a provincial civil servant who only had joined the NSB after May 1940) became Provincial Commissioner of Noord-Holland.⁵⁹ Two other replacements came in February 1941 with the appointments of NSB district leader F.E. Müller as provincial commissioner of Utrecht (soon afterwards he was appointed mayor of Rotterdam) and Eugène De Marchant et d'Ansembourg of Limburg. At the beginning of August 1941, NSB member Egon Lodewijk von Bönninghausen was appointed commissioner of Overijssel (he would join the Dutch eastern front volunteers in May 1943).⁶⁰

As in Belgium, they had a big influence on local appointments, especially mayors. The big difference was obviously that the collaborationists never formally controlled the ministry of the Interior. The NSB constantly tried to replace Frederiks, but never succeeded in doing so.⁶¹ This created a structural line of conflict and a problem for the party. Unlike in Belgium (but similarly to Nord and Pas-de-Calais), the old, traditional local elites had a central point of contact and reference on a central level, bypassing the NSB Provincial Commissioners.⁶² The centrally led network of

traditional Dutch mayors and civil servants therefore, although gradually crumbling, remained in place until the end.

Another Belgo-Dutch difference was the political context in which appointment procedures took place. In the Netherlands, the political aspect was explicit in all NSB appointments. For example, when NSB Provincial Commissioner of Noord-Holland proposed Marinus J. Van Leeuwen as mayor for the town of Naarden to secretary-general Frederiks, the Commissioner explicitly listed Van Leeuwen's political positions within the NSB. He further wrote that this NSB mayor would treat all local political opponents 'fairly'.⁶³ The NSB Provincial Commissioner of Limburg even referred to pre-war elections when defending a local NSB nomination with Frederiks: 'I find it desirable that besides the countless "democratic" mayors there should also be some national socialist mayors appointed in a province where since 1935 over 12 % of the people have been national socialist voters.'⁶⁴ All of this was very different in Belgium, where VNV secretary general Romsée was extremely careful to ban any political dimensions from nomination procedures of mayors (and public officials in general). Romsée prudently preserved the illusion of strictly neutral, non-political appointments. This had no concrete impact during the occupation, but it would have a fundamental influence on post-war trials and memories.

In general terms, the infiltration into local governments effected by Rex and the NSB started later, went at a slower pace and would never be as significant as that of the VNV in Flanders. In a total of 1172 Flemish municipalities, 430 new mayors and 553 new aldermen were appointed between 1 January and 22 November 1941, and of these 232 mayors and 283 aldermen were members of the VNV. At the beginning of 1943, the number had risen to 478 VNV mayors and 712 VNV aldermen.⁶⁵ After April 1941, Romsée appointed new mayors in 61 % of the Flemish municipalities and in 31.2 % of the francophone municipalities.⁶⁶ The majority of these mayors were not part of the municipal council: 70 % in Flanders and 46.8 % in francophone Belgium. The province of Brabant is not included in these numbers (new mayors were appointed there in 51.4 % of the municipalities after April 1941, 72.6 % of whom came from outside the municipal council). In Flanders, the regional patterns are more or less similar. Some 11 % of the mayors were dismissed by a single German *Amtsverbot*, 36 % left office by implementation of the German age decree and 12 % took voluntary discharge.⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, the focal point of the VNV seizure of power lay in the larger cities.⁶⁸ In smaller, rural municipalities it was harder to find a suitable collaborationist-candidate. Smaller villages were too unimportant to spend time and resources on. Concrete plans were developed during the occupation to merge small rural villages (or at least to put them under the authority of one mayor). Although this system was never implemented, it helps explain why many small villages were left alone by the VNV or the Germans.

The local coup of both Rex and the NSB would never really make up for the delays of 1940–41. By the end of 1943, one out of eight francophone municipalities were controlled by a Rex mayor.⁶⁹ This included the largest urban conglomerations, so that they controlled a proportionally larger number of people.⁷⁰ The number of Rexist mayors, however, would only rise minimally after December 1943. Their control of rural areas was very uneven. Overall, a report by Reeder from March 1944 mentioned a total of 174 Rex aldermen and 206 Rex mayors in Belgium.⁷¹ The differences in the regional spread of Rexist mayors were very marked, between the provinces of Luxemburg-Namur and Hainaut for example. The latter province had an almost ‘Flemish profile’. In stark contrast, we can hardly speak of a significant collaborationist local infiltration in the province of Luxemburg. The provincial factor was essential here. Hainaut was the only francophone province where Rex was able to install a governor in 1940.

Concerning the Netherlands, historian Peter Romijn could not detect systematic regional patterns in the purges of mayors.⁷² According to a German report, only 21 Dutch mayors were dismissed by the Germans before June 1941 and only 27 new mayors had been appointed by the Dutch ministry of the Interior. Romijn doubts these numbers however, because at least 12 NSB mayors had been appointed by June 1941.⁷³ The number of NSB mayors quickly grew after August that year. By October, 28 NSB mayors had been appointed.⁷⁴ Between June 1941 and May 1943, 222 new Dutch mayors were appointed, for the most part members of the NSB.⁷⁵ De Jong cites the number of 152 newly appointed mayors by June 1942, 76 of whom were NSB members.⁷⁶ The latter number had risen to 161 by December 1942.⁷⁷ De Jong mentions a rise to 227 NSB-mayors by October 1943 and 275 by July 1944, which covered about 55 % of the Dutch population. According to De Jong, 77 new mayors were appointed throughout the occupation who did *not* belong to the NSB (the majority of them during the first year of occupation).

Compulsory German dismissals were the most common reasons for the removal of Dutch mayors during the occupation. The non-renewal of a six-year

term came second. Only 40 (11.4 %) of the 351 mayoral mandates that came to an end during the occupation were not renewed. In other words, the large majority of these end-of-term mayors were kept in office. Between June 1941 and June 1942 the average number of dismissals of mayors would be five per month, with a peak around June 1942 (when a large number of mayors were replaced in the strategically important coastal cities).⁷⁸ Only after mid-1942 did investigations of individual mayors systematically lead to a dismissal.

There are no clear patterns in the motives for forced dismissals. The only common feature is that complaints against them originated in specific local incidents and that these were used to support hostile political judgements. Therefore, the substantive causes for a German *Amtsverbot* often seemed trivial. Mayor J. van Doorninck of Oudewater at the end of 1941 forbade a public film screening by the NSDAP, which led to the mayor's immediate dismissal by the Germans.⁷⁹ Mayor H. Van Rijckevorsel of the town of St. Oedenrode received a German *Amtsverbot* for calling his newborn daughter 'Juliana'.⁸⁰ NSB-provoked unrest was also often the direct cause. So in the Netherlands we are looking at sudden dismissals, often provoked by trivial but symbolically important incidents.

THE PRACTICAL LIMITS OF A TOTALITARIAN PROGRAMME (BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS)

The Flemish VNV created a professional framework for its seizure of power. The party created a Commission (later Department) for Administrative Politics and in August 1941 began publishing the journal 'Administrative News' (*Bestuurlijke Tijdingen* or *Bestuurstijdingen*). The Commission was intended to act as a connection between the party and the personal secretariat of secretary-general Romsée. On 21 December 1941 this Commission organized an ambitious conference in Brussels, where all VNV-members in public office were brought together. The result of this conference was the booklet *Greep naar de Macht* (Seizure of Power), the one essential document containing the VNV's vision of its coup. On 26 February 1942, VNV-leader Staf De Clercq held a general meeting to instruct all important party members in public office.⁸¹ On 14 June 1942, the party organized a national conference with 800 VNV-mayors and aldermen supposedly present.⁸² All of this appears to confirm the VNV's dynamism and organizational capacity in 1941–42.

Rex in francophone Belgium and the NSB in the Netherlands continued to struggle with a weak internal organizational structure, a dearth of

able and loyal candidates for public office, and weak control over the provincial level.⁸³ The German age decree in Belgium, Romsée's appointment to the Interior and (a couple of months later) Rex-leader Degrelles' departure to the Eastern Front (August 1941) led to internal reorganization. In March–April 1941 Rex created the pompously titled Political Service of the General Staff of the Leader of Rex (*Service Politique de l'État-Major du chef de Rex*), and in December, this Political Service set up 'regional networks' (*Cadres Politiques*; party members appointed to public office). These Cadres would only exist in practice in the largest cities.⁸⁴

The appointment of journalist José Streel as head of the new Political Service was a turning point. Streel had not even been a member of Rex before the occupation. Greatly inspired by Maurras, this intellectual presented a marked difference from Degrelle both in style and in ideas. Streel wanted to give Rex a broader legitimacy. This meant softening pro-Nazi attitudes and establishing ties with the right wing of the Catholic movement.⁸⁵ With Degrelle away fighting the Bolshevik threat in the East, Streel had his hands free for the moment (1941–42). The Political Service began to build systematic connections with Romsée's personal secretariat and streamline nomination procedures.

Rex was also able to publish its own administrative journal, but only in September 1943 (Administrative and Political News or *Informations Administratives et politiques*). This journal was markedly less administrative or legalistic than its Flemish counterpart, regularly publishing articles on Nazi racial theory for example. Nevertheless, the essential underlying vision in both collaborationist Journals was that members in public office had to stay within the Belgian legal framework for as long as the war lasted. The message to mayors was that once the war was over, the true National Socialist revolution would begin.

The Dutch NSB in 1941 also tried to implement internal party reform as a means of getting a grip on the situation. The party's so-called 'Secretariat of State' (*Secretarie van Staat*) after March 1941 began to gather reports systematically on local political personnel, especially mayors.⁸⁶ Every aspiring member with a party number below 100,000 was asked to send in a personal CV.⁸⁷ Like VNV and Rex, the NSB created a coordinating section of 'Administrative Affairs' in direct contact with the German *Abteilung Niederländische Personalangelegenheiten*.⁸⁸

After 1942, Rex in particular got stuck in a sort of perpetual, almost compulsive process of reform, which gained renewed momentum after Degrelle's proposal on 17 January 1943 to put Rex on the radical SS track, causing the entire 'civic' wing of Rex (including Streel) to leave the

party.⁸⁹ By that time the coup by Rex had reached cruising speed, largely because in the final stage of the occupation Degrelle had finally obtained German support, while on the Belgian side the personal secretariat of Romsée was desperately seeking candidate-mayors to fill the growing number of vacancies by mid-1943.⁹⁰ In the end, the Political Service of Rex would end up as an irrational machine, working for unimportant local appointments as the allies were closing in.⁹¹

The real problem was the qualities of their local party members. On this front, the NSB and Rex fell short. We have no complete in depth social overview of membership, but the VNV had a local 'secondary elite' in 1940, waiting in the shadows to replace the traditional one. Rex and the NSB had no credible local figureheads in 1940. And the necessary influx of members with a correct profile happened only very gradually.⁹² In this regard, the German age decree in Belgium came too early for Rex, as regional leaders were quick to realize. The Rex district leader of southern Dinant wrote on 31 July 1941: 'I am beginning to wonder whether the entire question of forced retirement at the age of 60 has not been one big disappointment, because frankly nothing is moving.'⁹³ A party recruiting campaign aimed at people with higher levels of education did not amount to much. At the local level Rex remained a patchwork organization of opportunists, careerists, adventurers or radicals whose pre-war position had often been marginal or invisible. The search for party members capable of holding public office permanently absorbed a great deal of energy.

Here again, the Dutch NSB is highly similar. In his seminal WW II history, De Jong confirms: 'When the first groups of NSB members had to be appointed as mayors, it immediately became clear that the NSB encountered the greatest difficulties in finding able candidates.'⁹⁴ An extra obstacle was the high professional standard of the Dutch mayoralty. In order to offer a credible alternative the NSB was forced to organize its own internal education programme for candidate-mayors. NSB members who passed received a certificate, and were obliged to serve some time as interns in a municipal administration, preferably under an NSB-mayor.⁹⁵ Of the first class of 120 party members who followed this internal mayoral course, an astounding number of 96 failed their exams.⁹⁶ These administrative 'crash courses' would have mainly counterproductive effects, because they quickly became one of the main ways in which popular Dutch opinion stereotyped NSB members' supposed lack of intellectual skills. Another element of this popular stereotyping was the accusation of opportunism. One should keep in mind that, unlike those in Belgium and France, Dutch

mayors received a salary. Indeed, many NSB-candidates cited financial reasons as one of their main reasons for becoming candidate-mayors.

This image of incompetence was inescapably close to reality. The context was such that candidates were propelled to positions for which they would never have qualified in normal times. NSB-member Paul Coenen was a typical example. In December 1940 he proposed his candidacy as mayor of Rhenen, for which he followed the party's 'mayoral course'. He failed his exams in June 1941 but held on to the ambition and advanced successive candidacies for the towns of Holten (October 1941) and Haaksbergen (December 1941), unsuccessfully lobbying the German *Beauftragte* in Groningen for support. In April 1942 Coenen worked as an intern in the town of Oldenzaal and in May 1942 his name was put forward as a candidate mayor in the town of Denekamp.⁹⁷ The NSB mayor of Oldenzaal advised Coenen to moderate his ambition to a small rural village, because agricultural matters were basically the only area in which he had any knowledge. Coenen continued to lobby. He was finally appointed in July 1943 as mayor of the small rural community of Olst. This was a typical example of a collaborationist without the ability—as his own party leadership realized—to lead a larger town successfully.

An internal evaluation report from 1942 for example concluded that party member Willem Ten Hoopen was not qualified for any managerial task or leading position, was not a good public speaker, had few skills as a farmer (his profession); that although he was a convinced National Socialist his personal conduct was questionable, he was financially dependent on his family and had twice already been ousted from the movement. Despite this quite devastating report, Ten Hoopen was still appointed mayor of the (albeit very small) rural village of Ruurlo (June 1943).⁹⁸ Again, there are many similar examples.

However, the field of political fantasy and rhetoric was where these parties excelled. The position of mayor was the main priority target for these three parties. The theory was that a town mayor had the position, power and symbolic capital to spearhead a process of local Nazification. This process would therefore start with the town hall.⁹⁹ The VNV even produced a detailed road-map for such a gradual Nazification of local (and regional/national) administrations, with priorities and milestones.¹⁰⁰ This remained merely theory. When in the middle of 1942 the VNV wanted to start large-scale infiltration of the social and police services in Flanders, it quickly became clear the party simply had no more people to provide. It had been depleted by mid 1942.

Indeed, the Nazification of town halls remained a mere aspiration in many respects. As a general rule in both countries, collaborationist mayors (or provincial governors/commissioners) hardly purged the regular administrations. The local police in Belgium, for example, remained largely free of collaborationist infiltration. Rex failed to take over city police in the greater urban areas.¹⁰¹ The best indication of this in Belgium was the status quo in the ranks of top local civil servants, notably the municipal secretaries and treasurers.¹⁰² Only the most radical collaborationist mayors initiated political purges. This was more common in the Netherlands.

There are two main reasons why, as a rule, administrative continuity was maintained by these parties. First, they simply did not have nearly enough qualified members to take over many governing and administrative bodies. Second, collaborationist mayors needed the expertise and legitimacy of city administrators to keep local government and public services going, certainly in the larger towns and cities.

This meant that in many localities some kind of *modus vivendi* had to be found between a collaborationist local government and its municipal administration. The end result was always a mix of individual and contextual factors, and would make an ideal topic for local micro-case studies. Central policy in Belgium reacted by considerably enlarging the sanctioning powers of mayors over their municipal personnel. On the local level however, VNV, Rex and NSB governors and mayors (of larger towns and cities) responded to this situation by creating so-called 'personal secretariats'. These were political cells filled with selected reliable party members, paid out of municipal finances and strictly separated from the regular administrations. They handled all politically sensitive matters and kept them outside official city administration.¹⁰³ This was a widespread phenomenon, used by practically all Belgian and Dutch provincial governors/commissioners and large-town mayors.

When the VNV-journal *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen* outlined the ideal of a total national socialist merger between civil servants and the political movement, local reality was therefore different.¹⁰⁴ This clash between political theory and local reality created all kinds of interesting conflicts.

One problem facing all three parties, was to maintain political control over party members in office. Different attempts were made. In May 1942, VNV-members holding public office had to participate in an eight-day political camp. The focal point was political control: 'Our comrades within the command posts of the Belgian state machinery should not try to become obedient Belgian civil servants. They are no good to us this

way! They have to strive diligently and untiringly to become (...) good national socialist civil servants, meaning civil servants who want to use the administration to implement (...) national socialist ideas. (...)'.¹⁰⁵ Another method was internal sanction procedures.¹⁰⁶ While documentary evidence is scarce, in looking at three files of NSB mayors who had to appear before their party's sanction committee, we see that internal (personal) party conflicts as well as misconduct in the private sphere were the essential elements.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, none of these three sanction procedures dealt at all with the administrative conduct of these mayors.

Initially, the Flemish VNV was moderately successful in controlling their mayors, thanks mainly to the deeper ties that existed between members and their party.¹⁰⁸ Rex found this much more difficult. Many members had only joined after May 1940. There was a real danger that these people would renounce the party once they had achieved their appointment.¹⁰⁹ Examples of this abound, including the housepainter Lucien Renonnet who joined Rex in 1941 to become mayor of Lierneux, an old ambition of his. He was appointed mayor on 31 December 1942, after which he immediately distanced himself from Rex and tried to govern the town as a 'normal' mayor (and, according to post-war witness accounts, succeeded in making quite a good job of it).¹¹⁰ These kinds of cases were typical of Rex.¹¹¹

The principle tactic was to 'encapsulate' these members. The NSB organized their mayors in networks (called 'circles') led regionally by an important local mayor and nationally by the Rotterdam NSB mayor.¹¹² Rex tried the same thing in 1942 with the so-called *Cadres Politiques*.¹¹³ This tactic of local 'encapsulation' ultimately increased the sectarian isolation of these party members, and therefore their radicalization.

Problems of political control were most explicit in the Netherlands. Here, several problems converged. First, the NSB was confronted with the situation that at the time of their nomination (which generally occurred at a later stage than for many VNV mayors), party members already had a violent past in the paramilitary WA or had developed personal contacts with the German Sipo-SD. Figures like these were later hard to control as mayors. One good example is Jan Boll, who became mayor of Zaltbommel at the beginning of 1942. He immediately turned out to be an uncontrollable element. He tried to take control over the police in neighbouring towns and personally persecuted black marketeers, assuming charge of house searches in other towns. Non-NSB mayor Hobo of Zuilichem complained about this behaviour on 12 August 1942, and Mayor Boll admitted on 25 August that he had acted as an 'officer of justice' in neigh-

bouring towns: 'Because, due to my national socialist conviction, I want to use all the power that was given to me (...) to eradicate this villainous black market'.¹¹⁴ It proved impossible to explain to him the normal legal framework in which a mayor had to operate. The mayor was finally reprimanded on 26 January 1944 by Secretary-General Frederiks. In this meeting with Frederiks, the NSB mayor revealingly defended himself by declaring that it was difficult for a 'newcomer' immediately to possess full knowledge of all legal restrictions. Again, there are many other similar Dutch examples of this.¹¹⁵

Second, because a Dutch NSB mayor often came from outside a local community and thus the local party section, an 'external' mayor had often thwarted the mayoralty ambitions of the local party leader, and the relationship between the local party leader and the NSB mayor was frequently tense. The Limburg NSB provincial commissioner De Marchant et d'Ansembourg spoke to a group of NSB mayors in August 1941: 'As far as I am concerned, the ideal relationship between the mayor and the local leader of the party is like that of the older, somewhat more moderate brother and the younger and somewhat more fierce one, in which despite the contradictory opinions or attitudes the mutual bond of the importance of the community creates an atmosphere of trust.'¹¹⁶ Reality was more truthfully described by NSB member Michel Boutz, who wrote to his party superiors on 20 November 1942 (which was before his own appointment as mayor of Born) that 'there is an enormous amount of nagging about our comrade mayors, and especially from our own people'.¹¹⁷ Underlying these personal conflicts were key issues of local strategy, in which moderate mayors were played off against radical local party-leaders.¹¹⁸ Central party leadership mostly supported mayors over local group leaders.

All in all, the NSB wasted a lot of energy on internal local conflicts.¹¹⁹ On 4 July 1942, the Department of Administrative Affairs distributed a circular specifically devoted to this problem. Countless local incidents remained however, as evidenced by Mayor Welters's letter to the NSB provincial commissioner in February 1944 complaining that 'one is mentally murdered by one's own comrades and one has more trouble dealing with the 1 % of comrades than with the 18,000 political opponents in the town'.¹²⁰

But this problem was endemic to all collaborationist parties. The VNV also had its fair share of 'uncontrollable' mayors or public officials. An essential problem was that VNV mayors developed individual con-

tacts with local German authorities and used them to attain a degree of ‘immunity’, not only against higher administrative authority but against party officials as well. In some of these cases there were abuses of power that were also damaging to the VNV. But their own party leadership was unable to control them because of their German connections.¹²¹

All in all, after the triumphant expectations of 1940 these collaborationist parties were quickly confronted with the harsh realities of local occupation government. By 1943, totalitarian theory clashed with reality for all three parties. Nazification had reached its limits.

When VNV-leader De Clercq died in October 1942 (of natural causes) the mayor of Greater Ghent Hendrik Elias took over. He inherited a party in crisis.¹²² In a remarkably open report, VNV district commissioner Bockaert of Ghent-Eeklo had this to write to the German authorities: ‘[The majority of the VNV] wonders whether they can justify their party membership much longer to their own people. (...) These members now consider the Germanic empire under German rule no longer an aim they can strive for but as an imperialistic danger.’¹²³ The party now became the victim of the very success that it had partly (but actively) created in 1940–41. In July 1943, twelve mayors in the province of West-Flanders collectively offered their resignations to governor Bulckaert and party leader Elias.¹²⁴ VNV Mayor De Vogelaere of Broechem (4 October 1943) offered his resignation, writing: ‘I have been extremely stressed for almost all this time (...). And my hypersensitive character has of course stimulated this. And I have to mention here that incidentally I came to Broechem in 1939 to enjoy a necessary, calm rest.’¹²⁵

For Rex and the NSB, a paradoxical situation now emerged. Both parties gradually received the German support they had been so desperately seeking since May 1940. It came at a time, however, when the German cause—and collaborationism with it—had become a much less attractive career path. Obviously, this was precisely the reason that, in 1943, the Germans had to fall back on the most extreme of the collaborationist parties.

By the second half of 1942, there were already signs in Wallonia that there was a significant lack of candidates for positions in local governments.¹²⁶ As early as June 1942, governor Greindl wrote that he could only find collaborationists for these local positions.¹²⁷ In Hainaut, between May 1943 and June 1944 an average of 70 mayoral posts would remain vacant. In December 1943, 258 posts of aldermen were vacant in this province alone.¹²⁸ In 1943–44, collaborationist parties began a desperate

struggle to keep the machine of the coup going. The mobilization of every single available party member was essential.¹²⁹ From mid 1943, when the political Department of Rex came under the control of Louis Collard, the appointment machinery approached its maximum strength.¹³⁰ Collard organized a frantic, almost hysterical search for Rexist candidates for all kinds of vacant public offices.¹³¹ One of the bigger successes in 1943 was the appointment of Rexist Jacques Dewez as governor of Luxemburg. It is illustrative of the parties' lack of internal organization that regional Rexist circle leaders (of Virton and Neufchâteau) were informed of this nomination by reading about it in the Rexist journal. Much to the dismay of these regional leaders, they had never even heard of Dewez before.

An enormous amount of energy was put into keeping the party artificially mobilized. At a national meeting in October 1943, about 300 Rexist mayors and aldermen were present.¹³² On 28 October 1943, Rex's Political Department began reconnecting with people from the old pre-war lists of members to see whether these people were still interested in standing as candidates.¹³³ The essential problem was now revealed. By the time the party finally received full German support, it was too late. Many recognized collaborationism for the sinking ship it was. Local sections stopped responding to letters. The situation became worse still in 1944. On 26 February 1944, the francophone private secretariat of Romsée had to come to the conclusion in an internal memorandum that no new Rex candidates were being proposed.¹³⁴ A German *Verordnung* of 23 May 1944 stipulated that no Belgian civil servant or public official could resign without explicit German permission. Collaborationist mayors were now completely stuck in the positions into which they had put themselves.

In 1943–44, Rex's Political Department became completely alienated from reality. Conway calls the attempts to appoint Rexist mayors an 'irrational obsession': 'Even when the allied forces were advancing towards Belgium in the summer of 1944, they kept plotting schemes to take over insignificant positions.'¹³⁵ Even in the extreme context of 1944 and increasing political violence (see below), the political department kept producing somewhat bizarre 'good government' propaganda: '[good governance] is a matter of personal pride, it is a matter of pride in the Movement, it is quite simply a duty to the population who will judge us more on our mistakes than our strengths and who will, in the end, bear the costs of the measures we were short-sighted enough to implement. (...) Municipal government should be a wise supporter, it should keep its family character, there are problems that the municipality cannot resolve through administrative

means but for which the mayor can offer support; we must return to this traditional approach without forgetting the principles of equality and justice that have to guide all our actions.¹³⁶ I provide this extensive quotation simply to illustrate the gap between Rexist rhetoric and reality by 1943.

In 1943 Romsée and his secretariat at the ministry of the Interior began seeking out and contacting members of the ‘old’ pre-war Belgian establishment in order to fill specific positions, including, apparently, even some members of the Belgian military.¹³⁷ On 8 September 1943, Romsée and the collaborationist governors (secretly) decided to adopt the policy of maintaining the ‘old’ pre-war local leaders in their positions, or trying to attract these people anew.¹³⁸ It may be that Romsée was strategically ‘covering his tracks’ here and preparing for a possible post-German era. But this reversion to the pre-war elite is certainly also testimony to the defeat of the collaborationist parties’ totalitarian programme. The radical VNV governor Bulckaert proposed to only nominate mayors from within the municipal council (and thus the old pre-war political majorities). This was a complete volte-face after his radical lobbying for total a purge in 1940. Internally, the top collaborationist administrators had to admit defeat. Romsée was forced to dismantle the system he himself had set up in 1941.

NOTES

1. Dossier ‘dispositions générales (...)’, *I W nr. 991*, ADN – L; *I W nr. 470*, File: ‘remplacement (...)’, ADN – L.
2. *I W nr. 470*, ‘réorganisation communale’, ADN – L.
3. Bargeton, ‘La fonction’, 152.
4. *I W nr. 470*, File: ‘remplacement(...)’, ADN – L.
5. Le Maner, ‘Les municipalités’.
6. Report 26 September 1941, *14 W 36254 nr. 4*: ‘instructions, (...)’, ADN – L. Odonne, ‘Les autorités municipales du Nord-Pas-de-Calais au Journal Officiel (September 1939 - août 1944)’, *Revue du Nord*, vol. 76, nr. 306 (1994), 564–644.
7. Namely: Anzin, Denain, Doai, Dunkirk, Halluin, CegeSomain.
8. *Nr. 14 W 36252*: ‘nominations, (...) Douai’, ADN – L.
9. *Nr. 14 W 36250*: ‘nominations, (...) Cambrai’, ADN – L.
10. *Nr. 14 W 36249*: *Nominations (...)* ADN – L.
11. *Dossier Tourcoing, Nominations (...)* Nr. 14 W 36248, ADN – L.
12. *I W nr. 863*, ADN – L.
13. *Nominations (...)* Nr. 14 W 36247, ADN – L.
14. Le Maner, ‘Town councils’.

15. Amongst others: Rapports—Commissair Principal (...), *14 W nr. 36247–36249*, ADN – L.
16. Map: ‘Marché Noir’, *1 W nr. 863*, ADN – L.
17. *Nr. 14 W 36249: Nominations (...)*, ADN – L.
18. On 20 April 1943 the subprefect of Avesnes intervened in the case of the mayor of the village of Sains-du-Nord, for example. *14 W nr. 36249: Nominations (...)*, ADN – L.
19. *Nr. 14 W 36252: ‘nominations, (...) arr. Douai’*, ADN – L.
20. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 268.
21. *1 W nr. 863*, ADN – L.
22. Jackson, *France*, 214.
23. ‘attitude politique (...)’, *1 W nr. 863*, ADN – L.
24. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 267–269.
25. E. Dejonghe, ‘Les délégués de la propagande dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais (1942–1944)’, *Revue du Nord*, vol. 73, nr. 289 (1991), 87–101.
Dejonghe, ‘Les délégués de la propagande dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais’.
26. The case dossier on the mayor of the village of Haucourt (338 inhabitants). *Nr. 14 W 36250: ‘Nominations (...)*, ADN – L.
27. Bargeton, ‘*La fonction*’, 153; Le Maner, ‘Town councils’, 112.
28. *Nr. 14 W 36250: ‘Nominations (...)*, ADN – L.
29. Investigation procedure in Gondécourt 1943–1944, *nr. 14 W 36245: ‘Nominations(...)*, ADN – L.
30. *Nr. 14 W 36244: ‘Nominations (...)*, ADN – L.
31. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 269.
32. Correspondence September–December 1943 Bondues, (...), *14 W 36243*, ADN – L.
When the local government of the small rural village of Tilloy-les-Marchiennes was replaced in the second half of 1943 by a special delegation for ‘hostility towards the government’, we can only assume this local government had explicitly opposed central regulations or had voiced their political hostility too openly. *Nr. 14 W 36251: ‘nominations, (...) Arr. Douai’*, ADN – L.
33. In February 1943, mayor Lecomte (Wattrelos) was called by a police report “an old socialist” surrounded by anglophiles. *Nr. 14 W 36248, ‘Nominations (...)*, ADN – L.
34. 505 U 511/2: ‘*Rapport commiss. (...)*,’ d. 27 October 1943, ADN – L.
35. I505 U 511/2: ‘*Rapport commiss. (...)*,’ d. 27 October 1943, ADN – L..
36. *Nr. 14 W 36251: ‘Nominations, (...) arr. Douai’*, ADN – L.
37. Letter of 1 July 1943 from the Sub-prefect to the prefect, *Nr. 14 W 36251: ‘Nominations, décès, (...) Arrondissement Douai’*, ADN – L.
38. *Nr. 14 W 36249: Nominations, (...)*, ADN – L.

39. *Nr. 14 W 36250: 'Nominations, (...) arr. Cambrai'*, ADN – L.
40. *Nr. 14 W 36252: 'Nominations, décès, démissions, attitude politique des municipalités, incidents entre municipalités et collaborateurs: Arrondissement Douai'*, ADN – L.
41. *I W nr. 2501: 'Hostilité du maire de St-Rémy-Chaussée (...)'*. ADN – L.
42. *Nr. 14 W 36250: 'Nominations, (...) arr. Cambrai'*, ADN – L.
43. *I W nr. 2663: attentat (...)*, ADN – L.
44. *14 W 36254 nr. 2: 'instructions, (...)'*, ADN – L.
45. File: 'Monsieur le secrétaire-générale du cabinet', *14 W 36254 nr. 1: 'instructions, (...)'*, ADN – L.
46. Romijn, 'Die Nazifizierung'.
47. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk deel 6—A*, 410.
48. Dossier A. Van de Sande Bakhuijzen, *BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
49. Bundel 'Briefwisseling', *JPF Theo Brouns*, AGK.
50. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 192.
51. AA 953, *Archieven G. Doyen*, CegeSoma; Doyen aan Romsée d. 14 October 1941, *BenoemingsDossier Flémalle*, PA Luik; Doyen aan Ortskommandantur Huy d. 2 September 1941, Doyen aan Romsée d. 2 September 1941, OK-Huy aan Doyen d. 13 September 1941, AA 953, *Archieven G. Doyen*, CegeSoma.
52. Nr. 12 'Memorandum: 'Mon action pendant l'occupation' avec brouillon et notes', *Archieven Baron Albert Houtart, Microfilm 79*, CegeSoma.
53. Doyen, by the way, resigned himself, in protest against Romsée's appointment policy of mayors.
54. J.-M. Triffaux, *Arlon 1939–1945. De la mobilisation à la répression* (Arlon 1994).
55. Letter of Greindl to Romsée d. 18 May 1942, *JPF Albert Thiry*, AGL.
56. Romsée to Greindl d. 19 May 1942, Greindl to Romsée d. 5 June 1942, *Archieven René Greindl*, CegeSoma.
57. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 143; *JPF Henri Ledoux*, AGK. See also: J.L. Roba and J. Leotard, *La région de Walcourt-Beaumont pendant la seconde Guerre Mondiale*, 3 vols., Tome II (Walcourt 1983).
58. Kienhuis, *Provinciaal beleid in bezettingstijd*.
59. *Nr. 64108 I en II, Albert Johan Backer*, CABR, NA.
60. Kienhuis, *Provinciaal beleid in bezettingstijd*, 53 ff.; *Nr. 74914, Eugène Hubertus Joseph Maria De Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
61. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk Deel 4: eerste helft*, 145.
62. *Nr. 74914, Eugène Hubertus Joseph Maria De Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
63. *Dossier Marinus Johannes van Leeuwen*, *BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.

64. *Dossier Henricus Bouchoms*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.
65. Meyers, *Burgemeesters*, 92–93.
66. Rapport J. Lahaye André, Veiligheid van den Staat, d. 14 October 1946, 8912 97/283 AC 164—*Dossier Gerard Romsée*, ADVN.
67. P. Romijn, P. Gunst and P. Dostert, ‘Les pays du Benelux’, in Le Béguec and Peschanski (eds.), *Les élites locales*, 385–404.
68. In the province of Luxemburg only 81 municipalities changed mayors. J.-M. Bodelet, *Le Rexisme*.
69. Out of a total of ca. 1520 francophone municipalities.
70. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 208.
71. The same report listed also 20 reexists in what we could call the top civil servants on the national Belgian level: one secretary-general (De Meyer), three directors-general, four directors, two commissioners-general and ten other undefined top ranking civil servants. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 202.
72. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 327.
73. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 335.
74. Romijn, ‘Die Nazifizierung’.
75. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 337.
76. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk deel 6 – A*, 411.
77. Hirschfeld, on the other hand, cites 130 NSB mayors in January 1943 or 14 % of Dutch municipalities, covering a disproportionate 39 % of the Dutch population, however. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting*, 230.
78. Romijn, ‘Die Nazifizierung’.
79. *J.M. Van Doorninck*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.
80. Princess Juliana, daughter of the exiled Queen Wilhelmina, was the first heir to the Dutch throne. *H.L.J.M. Van Rijckevorsel*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.
81. Staf De Clercq to Hendriks, d. 18 February 1942, *JPF F.J. Hendriks*, AGK.
82. De Wever, *Greep*, 439.
83. ‘Présentation de candidats (...)’, *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK; Georges to the district leaders d. 27 March 1941, *Map: Prise de pouvoir. (...)*, *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK.
84. ‘Activités des Cadres Politiques’, *Informations Administratives et politiques*, vol. 2, nr. 2, February 1944.
85. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 112–115.
86. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk deel 6 – A*, 382.
87. Nr. 49245, *Louis Leon Auguste Sille*, CABR, NA.
88. Romijn, ‘Die Nazifizierung’, 104.
89. Streel was replaced by Louis Collard. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 355–356.
90. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 105–107.

91. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 360–365.
92. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*.
93. ‘sous-farde 1. 118 bis, Rex’, *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK.
94. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk deel 6—A*, 410.
95. This certificate was purely a internal party document and therefore, legally speaking, not a necessary condition for any kind of appointment, and in fact it would later be gradually more and more ignored by the party itself. Harry Bouwens d. 5 November 1941, *Nr. 52699*, *Willem Hansen*, CABR, NA.
96. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk deel 6—A*, 410.
97. *Nr. 17.141 Paul Johan Marie Coenen*, CABR, NA.
98. *JPF Willem Ten Hoopen*, CABR, NA.
99. Report Commission for Administrative Policy d. 27 September 1941, *JPF Achiel Verstraete*, AGK.
100. *Epuratiedossiers, nr. 028/15, Prosper Verckens van Denderwindeke*, RABW; ‘Griffier Van Bockrijck aan de kerkfabrieken d. 11 April 1942’, *Bundel Nr. 308: ‘Bundels (...)’*, PAA.
101. In fact, in all large Belgian cities the city police encountered enormous difficulties in filling their vacant positions from 1941 onwards. By the end of 1943, there were 750 vacancies with the city policy in Greater Charleroi, 400 vacancies in Greater Liège and 180 for Greater La Louvière. Activiteiten van het Cadres Politiques, *Informations Administratives et politiques*, nr. 2, October 1943.
102. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 203.
103. Wildiers testimony d. 20 February 1945, *Nr. 37 Vervallenverklaring als provincieraadslid*, *Archieven Frans Wildiers, Microfilm nr. 78*, CegeSoma.
104. *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, vol. 2, June–July 1942, 167.
105. ‘De openbare ambtenaar in onze Beweging’, *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, vol. 3, April 1943, 149.
106. *GD nr. 82.847, Dedullen*, RAA.
107. Mayor J. Eekhof of Denekamp, mayor Klinkenberg of Putte and mayor Van Leer of Leerdam.
108. *JPF Hendrik Elias bundel 1 fol. 97*, AGK; District leaders to the regional leaders d. 19 May 1942, *Departement Inhoud: Bestuurspolitiek, File nr. 100–2, Archieven VNV, AA 156*, CegeSoma.
109. ‘sous-farde 1. 118 bis, Rex’, *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK; *Nr. 178: Circulaire 48, Archieven Rex, AA 166*, CegeSoma; *Nr. 179: Circulaire 51, Archieven Rex, AA 166*, CegeSoma; *Nr. 181: Circulaire 58, Archieven Rex, AA 166*, CegeSoma.
110. *GD nr. 71.109, Lucien Rensonnet*, RAA; Letter from the Département Politique to André Renauld d. 8 September 1941, *Nr. 226: ‘Nominations’*, *AA 166*, CegeSoma.

111. Nr. 226: 'Nominations', AA 166, CegeSoma.
112. *Administrative Purge File F. Müller*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, NA.
113. Which would only be implemented in the larger, industrial cities. Introduction by Léon Brunet, *Informations Administratives et politiques*, nr. 2, October 1943. In December 1943, Rex had 13 of these urban Cadres Politiques (at least on paper). Nivelles, Wavre, Thuin, Chimay, Mariembourg, Bièvre, Liège, Huy, Namur, Soignies, Tournai, Mons and Ath. 'Activités des Cadres Politiques', *Informations Administratives et politiques*, nr. 4, December 1943.
114. Letter from mayor Boll to the provincial commissioner Gelderland d. 5 August 1942, *Dossier Jan Boll*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2019, NA.
115. *JPF Marius Frans L. H. Welters*, CABR, NA; *JPF Frederik Jan Overbeek*, CABR, NA; *JPF Paul J.M. Coenen*, CABR, NA.
116. Speech August 1941, *JPF Eugène H.J.M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
117. *JPF Michel Guillaume Boutz*, CABR, NA.
118. A typical example was the complaint raised by the local NSB group leader of Bloemendaal to his regional leader at the end of 1942 about the 'political passiveness' of NSB mayor Zigeler. *JPF Jan Willem Zigeler*, CABR, NA.
119. It occupied much of the attention of NSB circle leader Van de Graaff, for instance (who was also mayor of Steenbergem). *JPF Arie Van de Graaff*, CABR, NA.
120. Letter from Welters d. 4 February 1944, *JPF Marius Frans L. H. Welters*, CABR, NA.
121. Testimony of a lower officer of the gendarmerie d. 12 April 1948, *GD nr. 83.727, Clement Ronsmans*, RAA; letter to governor Wildiers d. 17 February 1943, in *Dossiers burgemeesters, Hemiksem, File nr. 26: 'A. Cauwenberghs 1944'*, PAA; Report to the governor concerning mayor Baeck d. 2 February 1943; letter from the Kreiskommandantur to the governor d. 9 August 1943 and letter from the governor to the Kreiskommandantur d. 19 August 1943, in *Dossiers burgemeesters, Mechelen, File nr. 35: Onderzoek Baeck 1943*, PAA; *Benoeemings- en tuchtdossiers Burgemeesters, Putte, File nr. 26: Klacht tegen Borré, bevoorradings*, PAA; *Dossiers burgemeesters, Heist-op-den-Berg, File nr. 23: benoeming Hendrik Corten burgemeester-commissaris 1943*, PAA; *JPF Hendrik Corten*, AGK.
122. De Wever, *Greep*, 594.
123. Report from Bockaert to the Kreiskommandantur Eeklo d. 19 February 1944, *JPF Amaat Bockaert*, AGK.
124. De Wever, *Greep*, 541.

125. Letter from De Vogelaere to governor Wildiers d. 4 October 1943, *Dossiers burgemeesters, Broechem File nr. 22: ontslag Vital de Vogelaere 1944*, PAA.
126. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 365. This was most clearly felt in Hainaut and Verviers. See: two separate letters from the district commissioners from Verviers and Huy to governor Petit, both d. 1 September 1942, *Archieven Bouman, AA nr. 1314 Bouman, Dossier nr. 310, Georges Petit, CegeSoma*.
127. Romsée to Greindl d. 19 May 1942, Greindl to Romsée d. 5 June 1942, *Archieven René Greindl*, CegeSoma.
128. *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Henegouwen 1940–1944*, PAH.
129. ‘Présentation de candidats (...)’, JPF Jean Georges, AGK.
130. Staff in the department would multiply by ten under Collard’s control, reaching sixty members. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 214.
131. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 145 and 201. Letter by Boulanger, n.d. JPF Albert Thiry, AGK.
132. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*.
133. *Archieven van ‘La Kommandantur d’Arlon’, K. 66: ‘Rex’, RAA*.
134. *GD nr. 81.356 François Boulanger*, RAA.
135. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 207.
136. ‘La gestion d’une commune’, *Informations Administratives et politiques*, vol. 2, nr. 2, February 1944.
137. Testimony Lambert de Magnée, oud-arrondissementscommissaris Hasselt d. 11 June 1945, *D 8914 – ADVN 97/283 AC 164 Gerard Romsée, File II A. Gerard Romsée: ‘Gouverneur. (...)’, ADVN; Nr. 8912 97/283 AC 164, Dossier Gerard Romsée, File I: Algemeen, ADVN; D 8914 – ADVN 97/283 AC 164 Gerard Romsée, File I: Gerard Romsée I. Dossier Borginon, ADVN*.
138. Report of a meeting d. 8 September 1943, *8912 97/283 AC 164 – Gerard Romsée, File: ‘Gerard Romsée. Getuigenverklaringen’, ADVN*.

The Limits of Good Governance

THE CHANGING POSITIONS OF MAYORS: POLICE REFORM

When talking about good governance for local populations under foreign occupation, safety and food are probably the two most important issues. Traditionally, mayors had a huge role to play here, both because of their formal and informal powers. However, under occupation their roles and powers shifted within the national system. Centralizing reform relocated powers from local to central and from pre-war institutions to new ones. When comparing the abilities of mayors to offer good governance, we need to assess their places within these national systems under reform.

First, with regard to maintenance of order and police. It is clear that in all three countries, the various German police forces were not numerous enough to police the entire territory.¹ Centralizing the indigenous police's command structures, and trying to do something about their political unreliability, were two priorities for the Germans in all three countries. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of police reform showed large national differences.

In the Netherlands, police reform was a priority in 1940. Reform in April and May 1941 transferred command of the local police to commanders of the German *Ordnungspolizei*.² In 1941 in many larger cities local police commanders were replaced by members of the collaborationist NSB.³ This happened in the capital city of Amsterdam after May 1941. New intelligence services were created, often manned by members of the

NSB. Rauter created new political police-schools. The culmination was the fundamental *Polizeiorganisationsverordnung* (issued 14 December 1942, implemented 1 March 1943).⁴ This grand reform package centralized all police powers from the ministries of Justice and the Interior to the Directorate-General of Police. This was turned into a semi-autonomous body of government. Secretary-general Schrieke of the Justice department became the new director-general. NSB-member Leo Broersen became his second-in-command (Chief of Staff of police). This reform had many direct implications: the powers of the police were enlarged (house searches, internment, use of force and so on) and police powers of the five chief magistrates were transferred to five police-chiefs (all of them members of the NSB) who would quickly become so-called ‘police-presidents’ (present in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Groningen, Arnhem and Eindhoven, later also The Hague, Utrecht and Haarlem).

In both northern French departments, police reform took more time. It was the French Vichy regime itself that would launch its own grand police reform after April 1941 (under the third Vichy-government led by admiral François Darlan).⁵ Centralizing reform was not unlike those in the Netherlands, with a new central directorate of national security under the ministry of the Interior and newly created police prefects.⁶ The chain of command of the municipal police was changed,⁷ while the fundamental law of 23 April 1941 created a true French state police. Even more crucial was the establishment of new ‘police regions’ (or zones) with the law of 19 April 1941. This also created the function of the regional prefect. These new regional prefects had full powers to command the state police and they responded directly to the national secretary-general of Police. They became a sort of ‘super-prefect’ in matters relating to police and public order. They could easily suspend public officials for reasons of public security.⁸ These Vichy reforms were implemented in the two northern departments as well. They constituted the single most radical reform after the economic reforms of 1940. This police reform stood in contrast with the continued status quo within local governments. It came as no surprise that prefect Carles of Nord was appointed as the new regional prefect for both departments (on 9 September 1941).⁹

There are other Dutch-French similarities. In all Dutch towns of over 10,000 inhabitants, local police was placed directly under the authority of the newly created secretary-general of Police. In smaller localities (130 towns with less than 5000 inhabitants) the local police (*marechaussée*) continued to function but the Dutch mayor was reduced to a so-called

‘administrator of police’ (*politiegezagdrager*), a previously nonexistent term which reduced the mayor’s powers to purely administrative formalities. In France, new mobile and special units were created, the latter aimed at one specific group of opponents and placed directly under the Interior ministry.¹⁰

One can compare the function and powers of the French regional prefect with those of the Dutch police-presidents in larger cities. However, the Dutch police presidents had more extensive powers and, perhaps more importantly, they were all members of the collaborationist NSB.

A final French-Dutch similarity is that German SS-structures gained control over the French police. This was after German military police services were integrated into the Sipo-SD (March 1942), which took control over the French civil services in occupied France (causing the dismissal of *Militärbefehlshaber* Otto van Stülpnagel). In May 1942, Karl Oberg was appointed as the *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF) in occupied France.¹¹ This was an important turning point. Now, the French system should be seen as a ‘hybrid’ occupation system, combining elements of a military and a civil system.¹² This moved the French system much closer to the Dutch one. Similarities increased after 1942, most notably with the infiltration of radical collaborationists into the police.

In both countries, police reform would continue after this. In France, there was further centralizing reform in 1942, infiltration of pro-Nazi collaborationist groups in 1943 and a reduction of powers for the regional prefects in 1944.¹³ In the Netherlands, the next logical step—the integration of the police forces within SS-structures—failed to happen. After the national strike of May 1943, Dutch resistance to further Nazi reform grew and the momentum was lost.

It is clear that French-Dutch situations showed similar trends. Under both national police reforms, mayors had lost most of their police powers by 1942. This was especially the case in the larger towns and cities. In terms of the position of mayors within a larger complex system there are, however, specific national characteristics I would like to point out.

For Nord/Pas-de-Calais, this is the ambiguous attitude of the Germans towards police reform. The German OFK in Lille delayed this process because it distrusted the French police. Under German pressure, police numbers were even cut in 1941 and plans for administrative internments were postponed.¹⁴ The German authorities also delayed the full implementation of state police reform, which was not put into effect in Nord and Pas-de-Calais (specifically for the urban conglomerate of Lille–

Roubaix–Tourcoing) until 3 March 1942.¹⁵ Only from this moment on, did regional prefect Carles take direct control and command over the police forces in these cities.¹⁶ French mayors were therefore caught in a situation of ambiguous reform, which became a main focal point of tension, reducing the pressure on mayors and local governments.

An entirely different form of ambiguity was present in the Netherlands. Initially, Nazification was concentrated on the centralized police reform and the judiciary. However, the May 1943 strike marked the beginning of a shift: the Nazification of the mayoralty. Internal resistance within the Dutch police corps rose, as did (in proportion) German distrust of regular Dutch police forces.¹⁷ Belatedly, the Netherlands in this respect now took on elements of the Belgian scenario. The ambiguity lay in the fact that NSB mayors in this second stage of the occupation acted as a counterweight to centralized police reform. They had often been unhappy with Dutch/German police reform from the beginning. A provincial meeting of NSB-mayors in Noord-Brabant, for example, expressed concern about the purely administrative role of mayors in police matters. The NSB voiced explicit mistrust of the Dutch police. They preferred Nazi reform of local governments.¹⁸ The initial focus was thus partly reversed in the second half of the occupation. In this regard, then, the Netherlands became a combination of Belgian and French elements. Conflicts between NSB mayors and the police became more frequent. In the town of Zaandam, for example, the new police commissioner—a member of the resistance—successfully blocked interference by the NSB-mayor Vitters simply by stressing the latter’s limited, administrative powers in police matters.¹⁹ When NSB-mayor Kronenburg of Oeffelt wanted to open specific investigations, the police simply answered that he had no right to issue these orders.²⁰ So paradoxically, Nazi police-reform in the Netherlands had the unintended effect of giving the police enough formal powers to bypass the direct influence of collaborationist NSB mayors after May 1943.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE BELGIAN URBAN CONGLOMERATIONS

The exception here was Belgium. Police reform started from April 1941, after Romsée’s appointment to the Interior. He would gradually implement reform of the local police and the (formerly military) gendarmerie. However, this was not nearly as far-reaching as reform in the other two countries. Romsée could only start his reform of the local municipal police

as late as March 1942, transferring the responsibility for police recruitment and appointment from local governments to the ministry. He also created police schools (the first ever in Belgium).²¹ Probably his most important reform was that of a central office, the General State Police (*Algemene Rijkspolitie* or *Police Générale du Royaume*, hereafter ARP). Romsée appointed as head of the ARP Emiel Van Coppenolle, a former army colonel and a staunch supporter of an authoritarian new order in Belgium.²² In 1942, Van Coppenolle would also become national chief of staff of the Belgian *gendarmérie*.

However, the ARP remained a paper organization, and infiltration of collaborationists in the Belgian local police and *gendarmérie* remained minimal throughout the occupation.²³ Unlike in France and the Netherlands, a unified and centralized state police was not created. Continuity was even more marked on the level of the Justice ministry. In the Netherlands and France large parts of police powers would be transferred from both the ministries of Justice and the Interior. The Belgian Justice department, however, remained fairly stable and was never subject to such reform. A focal point of power also remained next to the ministry, with the top ranking Belgian magistrates: also a continuation of the pre-war situation.²⁴ This shows the difference between a military and a civic (political) occupation regime.

The larger cities in Belgium are one example of how legitimizing good governance rhetoric clashed with reality. They also show how the Germans tried to implement some form of urban state police in Belgium.

Ideas to merge towns into larger urban entities had always failed to materialize in Belgium. They returned with a vengeance during the summer of 1940. In response to the many acute problems facing local governments after May 1940, deliberations between the largest cities and their neighbouring suburban towns were launched (or in the case of the 19 Brussels municipalities, continued). These deliberations were born of pure administrative necessity. The Germans encouraged them. From the start, the Germans called the mayors of cities such as Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Charleroi ‘chief mayors’ (literally *Oberbürgermeister* or sometimes *Führungsbürgermeister*), which implied that the mayor’s authority extended over his city’s neighbouring municipalities, whose mayors were ignored. The experience of WW I was clearly discernible here. In 1914–18, cities had been merged and secretary-general Vossen (Interior) testified after the war: ‘[The Germans] were very well informed on what had happened in Belgium in this domain before 1940’.²⁵ The idea of ‘greater urban

conglomerations' was in the minds of German occupation authorities even when they arrived in Belgium.²⁶

The Germans would quickly connect the issue of local government reform with local police reform. The local bottom-up trend in 1940 included talks between the various local police commissioners. The Belgians themselves saw the rational advantages of this. Secretary-general Vossen defended more formal police deliberation structures in August 1940,²⁷ and the Antwerp provincial governor went even further when he proposed a 'merger of police corps' in September 1940.²⁸ The latter was an imprudent statement. Walter Delius, the German *Stadtkommissar* in Antwerp, quickly pushed for a radical merger of the city of Antwerp with its suburban neighbouring towns. Delius was the former mayor of the German Wesermünde, where he had led an urban fusion operation. It was telling that Delius' proposal was defended on the local (Antwerp) level, notably by the Catholic Antwerp mayor Leo Delwaide.

Greater Antwerp (*Groot Antwerpen*) was created on 15 September 1941. It entailed the annexation of seven neighbouring municipalities by the city of Antwerp, creating a city of 527,850 inhabitants. Although initially the administration as well as police organization remained decentralized, the political leadership was clearly centralized under one (new) city government. Remarkably, this political reshuffling was not used to create a majority of collaborationists in city government. Although members of collaborationist parties could infiltrate, the majority in the city government remained in the hands of 'traditional' party-politicians (four Catholics, two socialists and one liberal against four members of the VNV and one Rexist) with mayor Delwaide remaining in post.²⁹ Again, this illustrates the pragmatic moderation of the German occupation government, which placed social stability in this important port city above any kind of political revolution. It should also be said that this traditional city elite wholeheartedly supported the German-instigated merger, thereby giving this illegal reform the aura of legality and widespread acceptance.

The merger was illegal since, according to the constitution, a municipality was a 'political entity' and the secretaries-general did not have the legal powers to abrogate it. However, secretary-general Romsée would extend the important Antwerp precedent of September 1941 to all other large cities in Belgium. Typically, he used strictly neutral technocratic arguments (rational efficiency, good governance) to legitimize the reform.

However, it was clear that these reforms played directly into German plans. The German *Stadtkommissar* in Brussels, Otto Hahn (the pre-war

city secretary of the German city of Essen) had even published a German article on 28 August 1940 in which he explicitly revealed the true German agenda by connecting Brussels urban unification with police reform: 'The Brussels police should be turned into a state police, even when we cannot advance further on the municipal issue.'³⁰ This could hardly be clearer.

Under the authority of Romsée, VNV member Hendrik Borginon was charged with organizing the unification of a series of urban conglomerates. The first to follow the Antwerp precedent was the unification of Greater Ghent.³¹ This was no coincidence, since this had been one of the earliest cities to be taken over by a VNV mayor. Greater Ghent was created in May 1942, annexing eleven municipalities, containing 254,400 inhabitants and presided over by a VNV-dominated city government. Greater La Louvière followed in June 1942 (sixteen municipalities and a total of 104,800 inhabitants), with a Rexist majority under Rexist mayor Gorain. Greater Charleroi was created in July 1942, a gigantic operation involving 31 municipalities and bringing together over 340,000 inhabitants. Greater Charleroi was controlled by a Rexist majority, led by Rexist mayor Jean Teughels.³²

The culmination came with the creation of the capital city of Greater Brussels on 27 September 1942. This merged the 19 Brussels municipalities into one city. The equilibrium in the composition of the city government showed strategic prudence. Romsée and Borginon wanted to avoid the perception of a VNV- and Rexist-dominated city government, and had put a lot of effort into finding councillors who in theory represented all of the pre-war political parties, thereby creating a government that on paper perfectly respected political as well as linguistic (Dutch-francophone) equality. In practice, this was an illusion. All of the members of the new capital city government were open sympathizers with the authoritarian new order and cooperation with the occupier, which meant that the Interior ministry eventually produced a selection of unknown figures, most of whom had been on the political margins before 1940. The new mayor of Brussels was Jan Grauls, a Flemish nationalist who had never been a member of the VNV (and had been appointed provincial governor of Antwerp during the summer of 1940). He was a consensus figure: a fairly able administrator with no formal political affiliation, moderate and rather colourless.

Greater Brussels provoked—for the first time—widespread protest from Belgian authorities against urban unification. Romsée isolated himself within the committee of secretary-generals.³³ It was the direct cause

for the resignation of Houtart, the last of the pre-war provincial governors.³⁴ The legal Brussels mayor Van De Meulebroeck, who was dismissed because of the unification, ordered the distribution of leaflets all over Brussels. He called the unification ‘illegal’ and ended with a famous sentence: ‘I am and will remain the legal mayor of Brussels.’

These protests signalled the end of urban unifications. Although Greater Bruges (under VNV mayor Jozef Devroe)³⁵ and Greater Liège were created soon after Greater Brussels (causing the dismissal of Joseph Bologne, socialist mayor of Liège),³⁶ the many other planned unifications of (smaller) cities in Belgium were halted.³⁷

On 11 December 1942, the Brussels Court of Appeal judged that the constituent decree of Greater Antwerp was illegal (a view confirmed by the national Court of Cassation in February 1943). The unified cities created before December 1942 were not ‘reversed’; they simply continued to exist until the end of the occupation. This included Greater Antwerp, whose Catholic Mayor would in February 1944 be replaced by a member of the VNV.

How should we assess the impact of these fundamental changes? The urban mergers were always legitimized in terms of necessary good governance. In reality, they advanced and reinforced the political coup of both the VNV and Rex. In one motion, several towns at once could be placed under the control of a collaborationist local government. The struggling Rex would benefit especially from this.³⁸

The real importance of the urban unifications lay in the domain of police reform. This had been the essential underlying German agenda.³⁹ These large urban entities were an indirect way of obtaining what the Germans had failed to achieve through direct reform, namely the creation of a state police.

Did they achieve this? The answer is ambiguous. A form of stronger central control over the city police was indeed implemented in Greater Brussels and—to a lesser extent—Greater Antwerp. In Brussels, mayor Grauls had to cede many legal police powers to the ministry of the Interior (and, to a lesser extent, also to more radical collaborationist aldermen). To speak in French terms, Greater Brussels resembled the ‘statification’ that happened through the regional prefects’ authority over a unified police in larger urban conglomerations. In Dutch terms, the position of Brussels mayor Grauls after 1942 could be considered what was called a ‘police administrator’ (*politiegezagdrager*), comparable to that of Dutch mayors of smaller towns.

However, in most greater-city conglomerations, the political takeover of local government did not automatically imply direct control over city

administration or police. In none of these cities was administration or police organization completely centralized. In most unified cities after 1942, a system of decentralized districts was kept in place, in what was meant to be a transition to a future central city structure, but in practice perpetuated the former municipal division.⁴⁰ This meant that real political control remained weak and, more importantly, that certain members of the abolished town governments could maintain their influence over their former city administrations.⁴¹ In the unified Walloon conglomerates, Rexist city governments tried to purge city administrations and the local police, but usually failed to do so (in Greater La Louvière, a Rexist was appointed as central police commissioner).⁴²

The final analysis, then, is nuanced. The creation of the greater urban conglomeration can certainly be considered an important first step towards a kind of centralized state police in Belgium, but in practice only Greater-Brussels came close to this reality during the occupation.

REFORM IN FOOD POLICY

In Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais, food supply was arguably the single most important and problematic policy domain after May 1940. Belgium and occupied France became highly dependent on Germany from the outset. This was far less the case for the Netherlands. The Dutch population (generally speaking) enjoyed more favourable material living conditions until the winter of 1942–43.⁴³

In Belgium and Nord and Pas-de-Calais, problematic systems of rationing and control, the black market, smuggling and clandestine networks caused tensions between local governments and central policies. The centralized prefectural system could cope relatively well with these problems. It was the Belgian case where a completely new system implemented in 1940 shows an interesting example of failed centralism.

In 1940, the highest ranking Belgian responsible was the secretary-general of Food Supply and Agriculture Emiel De Winter. This civil engineer kept his difficult position throughout the entire occupation. In May 1940, he inherited enormous problems and few policy powers to implement solutions. Food production, distribution and price regulation were determined by the free market and local liberties. He responded in 1940 by creating the National Corporation for Agriculture and Food Supply (the *Nationale Landbouw- en Voedingscorporatie* or NLVC). This new corporatist organization was tasked with directing the food production and distribution markets. It enjoyed extensive powers and quickly installed a

centrally organized system. As in France, production plans and quotas were imposed on farmers, while a rationing system by foodstamps was intended to guarantee strict control over local distribution. For Belgium, this was a revolution. Almost overnight, a centralized system replaced the deeply ingrained tradition of local free market autonomy.

Theoretically, local governments (municipal food supply administrations) became local branches of the NLVC. However, the introduction of a completely new organization so alien to Belgian localist culture quickly created a confusing tangle of regulations and instructions. By 1942, local governments could simply no longer keep up with new directions and orders (or, at the very least, they used this argument to evade regulations). The obvious tension between the central and the local levels became immediately manifest. At a regional meeting of mayors in Sint-Niklaas (province of East Flanders) on 8 October 1940, for instance, the main topic of discussion was near universal opposition and outright resistance of local farmers to the new system and the lack of solutions mayors were offering for this. A German representative at that meeting stated that if the Belgian system were to fail, the German repressive system and military courts would take matters into their own hands.⁴⁴ As early as 1941, there were persistent conflicts between the central inspection services, the municipal administrations and mayors, the provinces and their inspection authorities, the National Corporation for Agriculture and Food Supply, and even between the gendarmerie on the one hand and local governments, the local police and the rural guard on the other.⁴⁵

Belgian mayors were immediately caught in the middle. In true *Führerprinzip*-tradition, they were held personally responsible by the German authorities for the success or failure of local food policy organization. But also at the Belgian ministries of the Interior and Food Supply, the supposed resistance by mayors became a recurring point of frustration in 1940.⁴⁶ On 12 December, sanction measures against local governments were intensified: the first in a long line. By January 1941, food supply was officially considered in crisis.⁴⁷ The secretaries-general primarily blamed mayors but also the local police; the Germans and the secretaries-general considered that the latter insufficiently reported on food supply violations.⁴⁸

However, in reality the central NLVC, designed as the solution, became a large part of the problem itself. Piet Meuwissen, closely affiliated with the collaborationist VNV, was appointed national NLVC-leader. The national corporation was quickly infiltrated by collaborationists, down to the regional offices. This rapidly de-legitimized the organization's policies with local communities. It gave the aura of collaborationism to food

supply organization in Belgium. In contrast, it made opposition and evasion of central food regulations all the more accepted. Food inspectors—a completely new phenomenon in Belgium—came to be among the most hated groups in rural areas during the occupation.⁴⁹

By the end of 1941 it was clear that the new central corporation had failed to take off. There were two main reasons: firstly a weak and rushed central organization, and secondly a complete lack of local legitimacy or support. We can speculate that for the Germans, the decision to appoint a member of VNV at the department of the Interior was determined above all by the problem of getting local governments in line to implement central food supply regulation. Romsée himself seemed to realize this. His most important measure in this regard was the creation of the administrative judiciary in February 1941. This reform endowed mayors, governors and services of the Interior with judicial powers of sanction primarily for violations of food regulations. Romsée's entire policy was based on stricter controls and more severe repression. He quickly collided with reality. Conflicts emerged with most provincial governors, especially (and remarkably) those who were members of his own party. VNV-governor Bulckaert of West-Flanders was probably the most open and harsh critic of Romsée and De Winter's food policies. This collaborationist governor openly declared that he would not follow certain central policies, as they would be detrimental to the particular interests of his own region.⁵⁰

Matters went from bad to worse in Belgium after the implementation of forced labour in October 1942. The explosion in the numbers of men in hiding gave a boost to the black market. This basically signalled the end of the streamlined central organization the Germans and certain Belgian authorities had envisaged in 1940.⁵¹ New repressive measures at the central level failed to compensate for the fact that local governments and police services increasingly no longer supported central measures. In August 1943, secretary-general De Winter reported extensive fraud systems organized by local governments. Local and individual food-interests openly took priority over the 'national interest'.⁵² Local governments were increasingly ignoring or falsifying central production quotas. The above-mentioned VNV governor Bulckaert openly wrote to the ministry of Food Supply that he would continue to protect these fraudulent systems. The ministry threatened that if that was the case, 'before long it would be obliged to shut down bread supply to the population'.⁵³ I would speculate that provincial authorities' protection (or turning a blind eye) of these fraudulent local systems happened in all provinces to a certain extent, but Bulckaert was the only governor with the bravado to put this on paper.

The situation reached total crisis when instances of physical violence increased. In 1943, several Flemish municipal police corps sometimes openly refused to guard foodstamps or related documents because of the danger involved. In 1943, Flemish provincial governments had to admit that the police was not equipped (with weapons and in manpower) to guarantee successful guard duties.⁵⁴ From 1944 onwards, provincial and local governments sometimes openly gave up on acting against successful holdups and thefts.⁵⁵

In short, the revolutionary system installed in 1940 quickly collided with Belgian local reality. All known data suggest that the black market in food had grown to enormous proportions even in 1941 (although it is hard to obtain exact numbers, for obvious reasons). The failure of the central food organization served as a motor for the general crisis of legitimacy of central Belgian authorities.

Romsée dogmatically kept pointing to local obstruction (mayors, local police) as the main reason for the failure of the new system.⁵⁶ He remained faithful to his own mission statement of 30 July 1941: ‘when the food supply services in a certain municipality are not working satisfactorily (...), then this is caused by the fact that that mayor does not understand his duties (...). When a measure is taken, the mayor must make sure it is implemented. He gives the order. If he encounters any resistance, he must intervene immediately. If he does not, he is negligent in his duties and must be replaced.’⁵⁷ This was the local *Führerprinzip* in all its simple practicality. Romsée failed to recognize that he would not change deeply rooted local traditions overnight, by means of circular letters sent from his Brussels office. In everyday reality, the new order therefore meant control of everyone by everyone and overall inefficiency.

I aim to indicate several things. First, that there were at least two main sides to good governance and legitimacy under occupation. On the one hand, there was the informal, local legitimacy of mayors. A local community expected efficient mediation and negotiation. Food supply regulations were really a good testing ground for this. This is illustrated by some post-war assessments. The Catholic mayor Simon of the village Harzé (Liège) received a two-month suspension from the provincial administrative hierarchy after the war, not because he was a political collaborationist but because he had been ‘too strict’ in implementing food regulations.⁵⁸ In francophone Belgium, mayors would also be arrested by the resistance for exactly the same reason after the liberation.⁵⁹ The balance between efficient mediation, efficient policy implementation and acceptable behaviour was precarious indeed. Maintaining political legitimacy necessitated

diplomacy, strategic insight, courage and a certain base of local support. Good government during the occupation meant different things. For the occupier, it meant efficient control (and repression); for the local population it meant protection against that same control and repression.

But second, legitimacy was also determined by fundamentally changing frameworks. The legal powers of mayors quickly changed. This happened within a larger national system of changing authorities, new occupation institutions and new regulations. Their pre-war relations with the central level changed. As a result, the possibilities of providing good governance to their local populations shifted as well. Good governance was also connected to intensified struggle of legitimacy between the central and the local level: the capacities of central powers to extract obedience from mayors, and inversely of mayors to detach themselves from the occupier.

I have already mentioned the ‘focal point’ of collaboration in my introduction, referring to the theoretical model of the Dutch sociologist Lammers. The general trends I outlined above indicated ambiguous results after (failed) centralized reform in two essential fields: public order and food supply. This already shows that a focal point of collaboration is not a vertical phenomenon, something that gradually trickles down from central to local. It shifted horizontally as well, between new collaborationist institutions: the Interior department, the Justice department, and the department of Agriculture. The focal point of collaboration is therefore defined by the location in a state system the occupiers came to depend upon most to implement certain policies. This depended on the policy domain and the specific moment in time. But it was also defined by perception and legitimacy: where local populations perceived collaboration to be the greatest and the most severe. The practical implementations of this are clearest in repressive policies. Chapter 6 will therefore be a further comparative assessment of the national differences in focal points of collaboration and the position of mayors in their larger systems.

GOOD GOVERNANCE BY COLLABORATIONISTS IN BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

Intuitively, good governance by Nazi collaborationists seems like a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, it was the basis for an entire seizure of power in the Belgium and the Netherlands. In the first country, it even formed the basis for a post-war apologetic myth. How collaborationists defined and used good governance, how they tried to put it into practice,

and how they responded to the problems and contradictions can shed some new light on local Nazi collaborationism.

I have already indicated how after the summer of 1940, the main collaborationist parties in Belgium became aware of the usability of ‘good governance’. In December 1940, the radical Rexist provincial leader of Namur wrote that his party had to transform itself from ‘subversive’ party to a trustworthy ‘party of governance’.⁶⁰ The general and obvious idea was that ‘good governance’ by local national socialist administrators was the best form of political propaganda. Collaborationist mayors had to prove the superiority of the national socialist system in practice. Even as late as 1943, Léon Brunet (a key Rexist figure) wrote: ‘On the internal front we naturally need to take positions of command, but certainly also to win hearts and minds. It is here that we will need to gain that which the leader has called the revolution of the soul, and it will be done by presenting ourselves to the people with a dignified and always measured attitude, by the quality of our innovations and our reforms, most notably in the social domain. (...)’.⁶¹ Indeed, the idea of ‘social justice’ came to the fore here. For the VNV, ‘social justice’ primarily concerned an efficient food supply.⁶² For Rex, the term was more often applied to policies in urban areas. The Rexist propaganda campaign from 1941 onwards was increasingly aimed at the working class. Rex began labelling their aims as a ‘social revolution’.⁶³ Central party directives in 1943 literally called the Rex revolution ‘a socialist revolution’ (*une révolution socialiste*).⁶⁴ The municipal services for food supply were those in which Rex and the VNV explicitly sought to nominate party members because, apparently, they saw potential for propaganda potential in this.⁶⁵ Ideologically, the idea of local good governance corresponded to the 1930s ideas of these parties as sole embodiments of the ‘people’s community’ (*Volksgemeinschaft*).⁶⁶

There was a huge contradiction in this. Theoretically, good governance would win you grassroots legitimacy. But without grassroots legitimacy to begin with, was it even possible to provide good governance? The Namur Rexist leader mentioned above seems to sense this in a letter of early 1941: ‘The masses don’t always follow the leader, but the leader should always follow the masses. It is truly dangerous to put people into leadership positions who clearly do not have any good will among the masses.’⁶⁷ VNV Mayor Armand Smet of Grembergen was confronted with a ‘bread riot’ by local women in April 1941, when they wore tricolour Belgian ribbons and demanded a better food supply. Instead of talking to these women and listening to their concerns, the mayor immediately called in the German

Feldgendarmrie, who arrested the women (five of them were interned for six weeks).⁶⁸ Collaborationist mayors were inherently unable to pacify local unrest. The essential democratic tools of local good governance—mediation, debate, participation, consensus-building—were out of their reach, and this weakness and insecurity about their own moral and political authority had to be compensated for by the application of German power (see below).

However, collaborationist parties did have one major advantage. They had influence with the occupier. That might be used to obtain certain material advantages for the local population. And to a certain extent, this did happen, as is clearly evidenced in the personal archives of a few collaborationist mayors or provincial governors.⁶⁹ They mediated with the German occupier in many hundreds of individual cases, gaining reductions in sanctions or punishments for relatives, more food rations, exemptions from forced labour or from certain mandatory duties, and so on. Secretary-General Romsée also received several hundred similar requests. VNV governor Bulckaert of West-Flanders provided guidelines in 1941. His private secretary wrote on 7 November 1942 to the VNV mayor of Leffinge: ‘Confidentially, I think I must tell you that a mayor would be wrong to steer towards a 100 % implementation of the legislation. (...) It would probably be best to speak secretly to the inspection services about this in order to diminish your own responsibility (...)’.⁷⁰ It is notable that the amount of help provided to local inhabitants by collaborationist mayors increased significantly in the last year of the occupation. As we shall see later, some collaborationists who had been radical and repressive in 1941 tried explicitly and openly to help inhabitants in 1944. They could sometimes achieve real practical results in response to the requests of certain inhabitants.

But these marginal, individual successes had no significant propaganda value for collaborationist parties. There were several reasons for this.

Firstly, none of these parties had ever had any real administrative, social or economic programme. The VNV had a vaguely corporatist programme of socio-economic reform. But even its takeover of the re-established pre-war Study Center for Administrative Sciences never amounted to practical results.⁷¹ Rex didn’t even have the beginnings of a programme. The party also lacked competent administrative specialists. Rex focused on the simpler elements of national socialism, such as the implementation of the ‘leaders principle’ in all official bodies.

Secondly, the main obstacle was the war itself. The everyday problems facing populations were intrinsically linked to the situation of occupation, as were German policies and tactics. As long as this context endured, the

collaborationist parties' ideas on how a future state and society should look simply had no practical use.

Thirdly, there was these collaborationist mayors' own ambivalence towards regulations and legality. These parties considered the legal framework as a remnant of the old order.⁷² Party interests and ideology overruled legal restrictions. VNV leader Elias was clear in his circular of 10 September 1943 to all members in public office: 'you are ordered to maintain public order by any means necessary, and as concerns those in conflict with current Belgian legality, (...) it is obvious that, in this regard, you will provide the German authorities with any help required without bothering about any formal objections respecting legality'.⁷³ In this regard, the VNV also tried to diminish central/provincial control on local VNV governments.⁷⁴ This was a contradiction. On the one hand, VNV and Rex mayors called on inhabitants strictly to follow rules and central regulations. On the other, it was only too clear that these parties themselves rejected this. Also, many collaborationist mayors ignored central regulations when it came to their personal interests. There were many examples of mayors, certainly in the VNV, simply staying in office after administrative inquiries had clearly indicated problems.⁷⁵ The classic tension between local and central interests also had an impact. Even Belgian collaborationist mayors (or governors) sometimes ignored central (German) regulations to support local interests.⁷⁶

And finally, there was obviously the political aspect. At the time of his appointment, VNV mayor Van der Hallen of Lier wrote to his inhabitants: 'My fellow citizens need to have the conviction that I will govern the city as a fully fledged Flemish National Socialist, which means that as a mayor I do not belong to any political party and will thus govern completely without any prejudice.'⁷⁷ Collaborationist mayors were serious in their communication about this. They tried to present themselves as standing 'above' former party politics.

The reality was the exact opposite. As a new governmental elite, collaborationist mayors became important party members. They explicitly advertised their political affiliations, through uniforms and badges, the organization of political meetings, the organization of marches and mourning ceremonies for fallen comrades on official occasions, allowing paramilitary exercises in municipal buildings, changing street names and replacing official 'national' portraits (that is, of the monarchy) with portraits of collaborationists in town halls.⁷⁸ Recruitment for the eastern front was very apparent from 1942 onwards in collaborationist town halls,

particularly in Belgium, where it was ordered by the provincial government and some German *Kommandanturen*.⁷⁹ Remarkably, Rex mayors were much more prudent in this regard. This was probably due to the immensely hostile local contexts in which Rex officials operated. Rexist party leadership even seemed to advise against too blatant a political display.⁸⁰ In any case, higher Belgian administrative authority did not protest against this politicization of town halls.⁸¹

In the Dutch administrative tradition, mayors' inauguration ceremonies had significant formal and symbolic weight. NSB mayors considered them important in confirming their position. These moments often became focal points of tension. The local monograph about the small town of Lochem describes the inaugural ceremony of NSB mayor F. Van Elten. It makes clear how total the isolation of the NSB mayor was and how strongly the national socialist symbolism of this ceremony confirmed this.⁸² Despite Belgium having no tradition of such formal inauguration ceremonies, the custom was introduced by collaborationist mayors (notably in Flanders). In Belgium they had no formal status and were exclusively political events. From 1942 onwards, these inaugural ceremonies were used to boost morale and tackle growing pessimism amongst party members. In September 1942 the VNV leadership ordered local VNV governments systematically to organize grand events for collaborationist militias, in order to keep optimism alive.⁸³ Rex did the opposite. In contrast with the conspicuous VNV ceremonies, Rexist inauguration ceremonies of mayors were private, relatively 'hidden', and purely for internal use (such as the inaugural ceremony of Jean Teughels as mayor of Charleroi).⁸⁴

On the odd occasion, even voices from within the Dutch NSB tried to mitigate overt political triumphalism. This was most notable with the *Nederlandse Volksdienst* (Dutch People Service or NVD) and Winterhulp, the two main pillars of a social-economic collaborationist policy. In monthly reports by NSB mayors in 1943–44, it is sometimes mentioned that they consciously kept the NVD and Winterhulp out of any NSB affiliation for strategic reasons. The NSB mayor of Grevenbicht wrote to his party on 21 May 1943 that he preferred to appoint a non-party member as local NVD to achieve local support.⁸⁵

More lucid party members certainly had some awareness of the damaging effects of openly provocative political behaviour. There are some examples of the local NSB negotiating with non-NSB mayors to draw them into the party and use their legitimacy.⁸⁶ NSB provincial commis-

sioners sometimes gathered non-NSB mayors and tried to force them to take oaths of loyalty (mostly unsuccessfully).⁸⁷

After the liberation, most collaborationist mayors would argue that these kinds of 'symbolic' political activities (meetings, propaganda, speeches, marches, posters, and so on) had hardly any real impact in smaller villages and towns, and had to be considered as nothing more than social activities for the local party. However, this political symbolism had a real impact insofar as it provoked tension and later often violence. And underlying this symbolic confirmation lay the very real implementation of a national socialist local policy.

The strategy was rather clumsy. Obviously, the real propagandist value for collaborationist parties was nil. Mayors and their parties did not gain lasting legitimacy through local government. They merely succeeded in turning themselves into the focal points of political tension. Indeed, it was exactly this excessive politicization of local government in 1941–43 that provoked countless incidents and conflicts. It is remarkable to see how sensitive collaborationist mayors were to anything they considered as questioning their individual legitimacy. A majority of NSB and Rexist mayors were involved in (sometimes small) incidents during the occupation that often started when members of the local population challenged their authority. In such situations, many tended to invoke German support. Significant mechanisms of tension also arose around collective punishments (or guard duties) imposed after political incidents, such as the city of Antwerp having to pay 100,000 Belgian francs and to organize forced guard duties after an arson incident in the local VNV headquarters in Hoboken on 27 June 1942.⁸⁸ Hundreds of examples show that this was an escalating spiral of mutual reaction.

Many similar incidents could be related. An increase in such incidents is evident by the end of 1942. There were also minor incidents: from painting slogans and smashing windows of houses, to damaging cars, and minor verbal and physical aggression against collaborationists. Local opposition—from purely symbolic actions to political violence and assassination attempts—became more frequent and open. There are no reliable numbers for Belgium and the Netherlands for these kinds of trivial incidents. Often they were not necessarily reported. But looking at my diverse and broad archival data, it is clear that small local occurrences of opposition or dissidence against collaborationist mayors had taken on enormous proportions by the end of 1942. In local incidents of conflict like these, it was often clear that personal scores were being settled in a political context.

The result was that these parties succeeded in de-legitimizing governmental and administrative authority itself. In 1942–44, simply the act of accepting a certain position—certainly as a mayor—was considered a political statement. Everyone still in office by 1944 was, by definition, suspect. A letter from the Antwerp governor Wildiers (6 November 1943) to Romsée was telling. Following an emergency meeting with the provincial police and judicial leaders, he wrote about rising criminality: ‘In this regard, I have to point to the eagerness with which the press excessively elaborates these terrorist incidents to the population. These press articles necessarily have to have a strong impact on the imagination of younger people (...). In my view, it would be advisable that certain events are either kept completely quiet, or otherwise are presented in such a way that they cannot be seductive to the public or younger people in particular.’⁸⁹ These parties injected their own lack of legitimacy in public authority.

This was particularly evident in the field where good governance seemed relatively self-evident: food supply. In Belgium, the Germans really expected results here early on. A German *Hauptmann* for example, brought a clear message to the regional VNV-mayors in Bruges on 26 July 1941, saying that the ‘new order’ mayors had to prove their worth primarily through repression of the black market.⁹⁰

In the north of France and Belgium, the organization of guard duties had already become a problem by 1941, certainly in the area of food supply (crops and fields, food supplies, foodstamps, and so on). The local police, understaffed and inadequately equipped, was unable to absorb these tasks. Central policies (such as the use of mobile gendarmerie units) failed to solve the problems.⁹¹ Forced requisitioning of the male population for guard duties quickly proved problematic as well. Forced local guard duties quickly became a favourite German sanction measure, often imposed in reprisal for violence against local collaborationists. It goes without saying that members of collaborationist parties were exempt from these German sanctions.⁹²

However, when rural criminality (food thefts, for example) became a major problem, this created a window of opportunity for collaborationist mayors. It was a real and acute problem for the agricultural sector. Already in 1940 farmers themselves demanded a more repressive answer from the (local) authorities. Several local initiatives to organize rural guards emerged in Flanders and Wallonia.⁹³ The system of so-called rural auxiliary police was frequently used in 1941 in the provinces of Namur and

Luxemburg. So, by 1941, local bottom-up initiatives had already created embryonic organizational structures.

Secretary-general Romsée and the central NLVC-corporation, however, chose to ignore this local potential, responding to the problem instead by creating the Rural Guard (24 June 1941).⁹⁴ Farmers could volunteer for this body, whose core duties were simply the guarding of fields and crops. Members were unpaid and were not considered as civil servants and or police employees (they could not, for example, issue official police reports). Institutionally, the Rural Guard was part of the NLVC. Operational command was in the hands of the mayor.⁹⁵ Only two months after its creation Romsée (and his colleague De Winter) upset matters by making Rural Guard membership mandatory. This effectively meant that mayors could forcibly requisition local inhabitants.

Right from the start the VNV would de-legitimize the entire project by putting political agendas first. From the outset, the NLVC, secretary-general Romsée and the VNV saw the Rural Guard as a tool to gain an ideological grip on rural populations.⁹⁶ Both the NLVC and the VNV showed little subtlety.⁹⁷ The first draft of officers for the Rural Guard came for the most part from the former (dissolved) fascist organization Verdinaso. The organization immediately prioritized a series of cultural (political) activities.⁹⁸ This immediately signalled the failure of the Rural Guard. Initially, the Rural Guard had some success. A 1942 report stated that the Rural Guard was operational in 1095 of 1156 Flemish communities (94.5 %) and in 1024 of the 1477 Walloon municipalities (69 %).⁹⁹ Although this says nothing about everyday reality, in 1942 several 10,000 men were effectively integrated in the Rural Guard all over Belgium. After 1942, the presence of collaborationists in the command structures grew.¹⁰⁰ Gradually, the Rural Guard became simply a fascist militia in the rural areas. Practical cooperation with the local police and the gendarmerie remained notoriously difficult, often leading to local conflicts.¹⁰¹ Disintegration would come very quickly in 1943, especially in Wallonia.¹⁰² By 1944 the Rural Guard barely existed as a national organization any more.¹⁰³

The failure of the Rural Guard illustrates the inability to put the common interest over ideology, and the inability to provide good governance, notably by the VNV in Belgium. The largest target group—the rural population—was alienated from the outset. One farmer from the small town of Aalter summarized this well after the war: ‘The rural guard was a good thing, but we did not want to sign up in order to avoid being accused afterwards of having collaborated with some political organization.’¹⁰⁴

Politics was an obvious obstacle for the basic legitimacy needed to provide acceptable good governance. In April 1944, certain VNV mayors wanted to deploy the VNV militia *Dietsche Militie-Zwarte* Brigade systematically in rescue and salvage operations after allied aerial bombardments.¹⁰⁵ It was thought this had propagandistic potential. On 8 May 1944, the VNV district leader of Brussels (Ghysels) wrote that this was completely counterproductive. The appearance of uniformed members of the VNV after allied bombings incited such heavy hostility from the local populations that the rescue operations themselves came under threat.¹⁰⁶

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY OF THE VNV

This clash between political theory and local reality tells us a lot about the relationship between a self-proclaimed revolutionary minority and a larger population.

On 1 September 1941, in a letter to leader De Clercq, a leading VNV official wrote: 'more than ever, the masses are hostile towards us. The distance between the Flemish people and the VNV is growing day by day, has already become insurmountable.' The (non-VNV) governor of East-Flanders De Vos came to the same conclusion on 16 February 1942. With regard to local VNV nominations he wrote: 'This policy will, in the end, come back to haunt the party itself.'¹⁰⁷

By 1943, not even the staunchest believer in National Socialist rhetoric could any longer deny that the majority of the Flemish population was hostile towards the VNV. For Rex and the NSB, total societal isolation and hostility were nothing new. It was simply a continuation of their pre-war situation. Conway stresses Rex's extreme form of 'elitism': 'Every attempt at popular support had to be avoided. (...) The revolution was to be imposed at bayonet point upon an uncomprehending nation.'¹⁰⁸ Rex somewhat embraced this role in 1940. The Rexist press wrote: 'The history of the world is made by minorities, always when these minorities embody the will and the decisions of the majority.'¹⁰⁹ And with regard to the 'social revolution': 'the masses are unable to find a solution for the problems that concern us'.¹¹⁰ In internal correspondence the topic of the troubled relationship with the population was, for the most part, avoided completely. The NSB found itself in an almost identical situation. They too, almost relished in their role of hated, isolated minority.

This was a marked difference from the political culture of the VNV and its mayors. As a party deeply rooted in traditional Flemish nationalism, the ideological concept of the ‘connection to the people’ was strongly internalized by party members. Furthermore, the party had not been completely marginalized politically in the second half of the 1930s. Unlike many NSB or Rex mayors, most VNV mayors came from their local community. They felt connected to it. To a certain extent, the party took its mission as ‘good administrators’ seriously. They started to believe and internalize their own propaganda.

Their isolated position was, therefore, not simply a practical problem but a more fundamental one. The VNV had to resolve the basic contradiction that the enemies of the VNV in fact comprised the majority of the Flemish people. Here, the party faced a crisis of identity that went straight to the heart of its self-image.¹¹¹

An interesting indication of the doubts and frustration this evoked amongst party members in public office was the ‘question segment’ in the administrative journal *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*. Although obviously censored, this segment as a source gives a rare insight into the thoughts of collaborationist mayors under occupation. By 1941, many internal VNV reports and letters from mayors were already trying to find an answer to the problem of the lack of local support. The ‘impossible’ position of the VNV mayor quickly became a central topic. VNV district commissioner Rathé wrote in 1942: ‘The position of mayor certainly is no honorary position; it truly has become a nuisance.’¹¹² The VNV journal *Bestuurstijdingen* had already noted this in August 1941: ‘Apparently, our mayors should know every law or decree by heart, because for even the slightest shortcoming with regard to some decision or other, they are indicted by whichever party that happens to be disinterested in the correct implementation of decisions.’¹¹³ This self-pity and self-victimization quickly became a recurring theme. It continued to appear in speeches during the national VNV staff day on 6 June 1943. Several speakers stressed that the population always ‘held the mayor responsible and especially the mayor of the so-called “New Order”’.¹¹⁴

Indeed, here was born the embittered self-image of the party as martyrs. Even in 1941, party propaganda stated that: ‘We know that a lot of people translate their patriotism into a negative and indifferent attitude towards every measure from public authority. Even to the extent that they are inclined to do the exact opposite of what they are asked to do, just like little children, who are sometimes ordered to do the opposite in order

to get them to do the right thing. This erroneous attitude has grown here into a true psychosis, to such an extent that one labels the ease in which legislation is evaded as a civic virtue.¹¹⁵ The ideological translation was that the Flemish people within the artificial Belgian context had been unable to develop a natural civic connection with national state authority.

When actual violence against collaborationist mayors came into play, the problem became acute. Anger against the Flemish people rose: ‘there are people in this country who mark every civil servant who does his duty as a traitor, and every saboteur as a hero. (...) Certain people support authority in peace time and reject it in times of war.’¹¹⁶ The editorial staff of *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen* wrote: ‘It is, however, for this population, even the Anglophile part of it, a stroke of luck, an unappreciated but great stroke of luck, that, despite scorn and death threats, hundreds of mayors and aldermen are striving to keep the scourge of anarchy, fratricide and famine at bay.’¹¹⁷ VNV district commissioner Rathé voiced his anger in an August 1943 article: ‘It is quite simply a fact, and we are currently experiencing this everywhere in wartime with the strict food rationing, that the Belgian CANNOT submit to an established state authority. Every time a little piece of legislation appears, the Belgian will immediately search for the loophole to escape possible implementation for his particular case.’¹¹⁸

The Flemish people themselves became the enemy. In an article from the Limburg VNV journal *De Toekomst* (The Future) it was written: ‘In this way, our bravest comrades put their lives at stake to protect the safety, peace and the material possessions of the population. At the same time however, part of that same population shows itself in spirit or in action an accomplice to the cowardly crimes of bandits and terrorists, who are trying to kill our comrades and the population.’¹¹⁹ By the end of 1942, the VNV wallowed in self-pity. VNV mayor Paul Van Asse of Sint-Amands mockingly said in a speech: ‘As you know all too well, you are “public enemy” number 1 [*sic*]. You may adopt this title as a mark of honour, it is indeed the best proof of your loyal service to the people’s community and your unflinching confidence in the resurrection of the blind, misled masses.’¹²⁰

Already in 1942, the party was quickly losing its patience with ‘the people’ or ‘the masses’. More and more, the Flemish people were condemned in internal party speeches and correspondence.¹²¹ On the national staff day in June 1943, it was said that the Flemish people needed to be re-educated through punishment: ‘In authoritarian states this is done by: schools, labour service, military service, propaganda. In Belgium, we primarily have repression! (...) It is up to all of you to show (...) that you have the moral

courage to forget yourself and serve your community; that you have the courage to fight fraud in all its forms with radical decisiveness. This is a form of obedience, to which our opponent has to look with respect.¹²²

In order to maintain their own contradictory political situation, the VNV necessarily had to come to the conclusion that it wasn't the party that had failed; it was the Flemish people. This further stimulated a repressive attitude against all opposition. This image of self-sacrifice and martyrdom was already very much present in 1944. This self-image of martyrdom and self-victimization would remain an essential characteristic of Flemish nationalism to mobilize mass support during the 1950s and 1960s. In Belgian historiography, these characteristics are mostly explained as a consequence of the position of Flanders vis-à-vis Belgium. I would like to argue that it has not yet been sufficiently recognized that this self-victimization found its roots in the confrontation the party had with its own people during the occupation.

THE CASE OF MAYOR PAUL DEHOVE OF LILLE

For Nord and Pas-de-Calais, there are relatively few comparative reference cases of collaborationist mayors. The most prominent example of in both departments was mayor Paul Dehove of Lille, the capital city of Nord. To complement the Belgian-Dutch part above, and conclude this chapter, I will elaborate on this individual case.

Paul Gustave Dehove (born 7 December 1889) had been a municipal councillor and *adjoint* of Lille since 1935. He was a prominent but otherwise unremarkable member of the SFIO-section in Nord. His story diverges from May 1940 onwards. When most socialist municipal councillors (including socialist mayor Charles Saint-Venant) fled after 10 May 1940, Dehove remained in Lille. He was appointed temporary mayor in June 1940. Post-war witnesses labelled him as an able administrator during the first four weeks of his mayoralty, focusing on food supply and transport. Most post-war witnesses identified a radical change coinciding with the arrival of the German *Stadtkommissar* Dr Dengel in Lille (July 1940). The consensus was that under the dual influence of Dr Dengel and prefect Carles, Dehove rapidly (and radically) veered towards the National Revolution. He made a clear ideological turn in July 1940. The numerous direct post-war witnesses describe Dehove as a good administrator with weak social skills. The question as to whether frustrations about his pre-war position played a role remains open. The majority of witnesses argued

that his choice was motivated above all by personal rather than political concerns. Some witnesses claimed that he aspired to a ministerial post in the government. The majority of witnesses stress his ambition, personal pride and strong admiration for *Stadtkommissar* Dengel and prefect Carles. Dehove's occupation correspondence adopts a consistently pompous and theatrical style, run through with mystical references to personal service and self-sacrifice for 'the eternal France'. Deferential admiration for Dr Dengel and Carles is indeed visible.

Whatever the motivation, the following step was the rupture with the (clandestine) socialist party. On 20 September 1940, Dehove informed some representatives of the former SFIO that he would abstain from any party activities in light of the German ban on the party. Four days later the police commissioner of Lille—probably on the command of mayor Dehove—wrote a circular letter to all former SFIO mayors of the region informing them that political meetings were forbidden. Exactly one day after this letter, former mayor Saint-Venant returned to Lille, where matters escalated. On 2 and 3 October 1940 the former SFIO distributed 350 leaflets via municipal personnel and the local police directed against mayor Dehove.¹²³ These leaflets proclaimed mayor Saint-Venant as the only legal and legitimate mayor of Lille. The Germans promptly arrested Saint-Venant (8 October 1940) and deported him outside the *zone rattachée*. In an extraordinary emergency council session that same night, prefect Carles and mayor Dehove explained why Saint-Venant had been arrested.

This context was clearly detrimental to Dehove's own legitimacy. Dehove was considered the main architect of Saint-Venant's arrest. It confirmed the final breach with his former party.

Dehove was officially appointed temporary mayor on 16 July 1941,¹²⁴ and it took until June 1943 for the ministry of the Interior to confirm him as mayor with full powers. On this occasion, Dehove wrote to the population of Lille: 'Every Frenchman, in the position that the higher authority assigns to him, has to accept the task he is given and has to serve, without any consideration of his own convenience, his own preferences or personal interests, with only the salvation of our country in mind.'¹²⁵

Lille's new municipal council was installed on 22 May 1942, and the new *adjoints* were appointed in January 1943.¹²⁶ Most of them were newcomers and convinced *Maréchalistes*. Such men had proven hard to find, even in a city as large as Lille.¹²⁷ On 7 July 1942, the new city government sent a unanimous vote of confidence to Pétain and the government, using a strong New Order rhetoric.¹²⁸

Dehove remained a convinced *Maréchaliste* or even *Vichyste* to the end. He consistently invoked allied bombardments in propaganda. He was present at all key political events in the region.¹²⁹ In January 1944, Dehove received the *Francisque*, a high Vichy-decoration which he wore in office. When minister Henriot was killed by the resistance on 28 June 1944, Dehove demanded official displays of mourning, which caused a severe conflict with his city government.¹³⁰ Dehove figured prominently at the mourning event for Henriot at the end of June 1944, a gathering guarded by the French *Milice* and with a large German presence.¹³¹ At the very end, on 22 and 26 August 1944, Dehove wrote two ‘final letters’ to prefect Carles.¹³² In both letters, Dehove primarily argued that he had tried to ‘do good in difficult times’ and governed outside politics for the common good. Those were the two standard arguments used by collaboration mayors in Belgium and the Netherlands as well.

Indeed, there are more evident similarities with Belgian and Dutch collaborationist mayors. Dehove was something of an isolated zealot, using political-ideological symbolism to confirm his power and legitimacy and arguably also to compensate for his insecurities about his position. Indeed, analysing most post-war testimonies, it is clear that a majority of Dehove’s conflicts with city personnel and government arose from symbolic political issues (the motion of support for Pétain, his public stance against the allies, and so on). His apparent lack of strategic insight and social skills further enlarged the gap. When, for example, city personnel organized a collection for the families of the so-called ‘Ascq tragedy’,¹³³ Dehove personally vetoed the initiative. Perhaps he felt that it communicated an anti-German message. Given the emotional weight of this tragedy, Dehove must have thereby destroyed any local legitimacy he had left.

To evaluate his administration is not an easy question to answer unambiguously. Dehove invested a lot of time in public communication and propaganda. He explicitly integrated the city’s policies (especially social policy) with the defence of the National Revolution. As with many collaborationist mayors in larger cities, however, his direct influence on administration was limited.

His direct influence as mayor was probably strongest on forced labour policy. Dehove was strongly hostile to those who evaded forced labour. He made a priority of repressive policy on the matter.¹³⁴ This became concrete, for example, when the city had to send lists of its personnel eligible for forced labour. Mayor Dehove ensured that these lists were delivered, and personally indicated names that might have been missed.

The mayor strongly resisted the city administration's permissive tendencies towards those in hiding, sending repeated instructions to city personnel to detect and list names. Needless to say, he vehemently opposed attempts to provide such people with illegal foodstamps. The latter did occur, and were hidden from the mayor by city personnel. In June 1943, Dehove suspended payment of food rationing to members of city personnel in hiding. Dehove did not often intervene, on the other hand, in police matters or the repression of the underground resistance. He deliberately left this to the city police and departmental authorities. After the liberation there were few or no complaints brought against him for repression of the resistance.

Dehove was one of those ambitious figures who had lain low before 1940 and who saw a window of opportunity in June 1940. Once all bridges were burned in September 1940, there was nowhere left to go but forward. His direct influence as a mayor on the city administration was mixed. Personally he followed local STO policy, but had little legitimacy or influence on administrative city personnel, or even the police. There are, therefore, striking similarities with the attitude and governance of certain Belgian and Dutch collaborationist mayors

NOTES

1. J.-L. Charles in P. Dasnoy, *Rapporten van de Geheime Feldpolizei 1940–1944* (Antwerp/Utrecht 1974).
2. Fijnaut, *Opdat de macht*, 284.
3. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*, 138–139.
4. Meershoek, *Dienaren van het gezag. De Amsterdamse politie tijdens de bezetting* (Amsterdam 1999).
5. J. Delarue, 'La Police', in J. Azéma and Bédarida (eds.), *Le régime de Vichy*, 302–311.
6. The *Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale* or *D. G. de la Police*, established in July 1941 and placed under the authority of state secretary Pierre Pucheu of the Interior. M. Rajsfus, *La police de Vichy. Les forces de l'ordre Françaises au service de la Gestapo 1940/1944* (Paris 1995).
7. Municipal police were placed under the command of the national *Sécurité Publique*.
8. In cases of strong public unrest, the regional prefect took direct command over all three police sections of the state police, including therefore the Judicial Police (*Police Judiciaire*) and the Intelligence Police (*Police de Renseignements*). 'Legislation, correspondance (...)', 1941: *I W nr. 2030*, ADN – L.

9. His second in command became his cabinet-secretary general Darrouy, who at that time had already been in his loyal service for twelve years.
10. For example, the *Service de Police Anticommuniste* or SPAC, the *Police aux Questions Juives* or PQJ and the *Service des Sociétés Secrètes* or SSS.
11. Peschanski, *Vichy. Contrôle et exclusion*, 75.
12. N. In 't Veld, 'Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer und Volkstumspolitik: ein Vergleich zwischen Belgien und den Niederlanden', in Benz et al. (eds.), *Die Bürokratie*, 121–138, (quotation at 123).
13. After the allied invasion of 6 June 1944, the regular French police forces turned against the regime. J. Azéma, *De Munich à la Libération, 1938–1944* (Paris 1979).
14. J.-M. Berlière, *Les policiers français sous l'occupation. D'après les archives inédites de l'épuration*, (Paris 2001).
15. Peschanski, *Vichy. Contrôle et exclusion*, 64.
16. Even after the implementation of the so-called *déconcentration* (March 1942), the regional prefecture maintained its near total autonomy in daily command and personnel matters. Pierre Barral, *Idéal et pratique du régionalisme dans le régime de Vichy, Revue française de science politique*, vol. 24, nr. 5 (1974), 911–939.
17. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 7—A*, 613–615.
18. Report meeting 17 December 1942, *JPF Jacques Daems*, CABR, NA.
19. *JPF Hendrik Vitters*, CABR, NA.
20. *JPF Johannes J.L. Kronenburg*, CABR, NA.
21. R. Van Doorslaer, 'De Belgische politie en magistratuur en het probleem van de ordehandhaving (1940–1945)', in L. van Outrive, Y. Cartuyvels and P. Paul, *Sire, ik ben ongerust. Geschiedenis van de Belgische politie 1794–1991* (Leuven 1992), 129–152 (reference at 131).
22. R. Boijen, 'Coppennolle, Adriaan E. Van', in *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 793–794; C. Fransen, *Politiewerk in bezettingstijd. Emiel Van Coppennolle—korpcommandant van de rijkswacht tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Ghent University 2001).
23. In 1943, about 20.5 % of the lower gendarmerie corps (1500 of a total of 7300 men) were newly appointed since 1940, but a marginal minority of them were members of a collaborationist party.
24. Fourteen regional public prosecutors and 28 % of all Belgian court judges were replaced during the occupation, but almost all of them were 'normal' successions. J.N.M.E. Michielsen, *The 'Nazification' and 'Denazification' of the courts in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. the Belgian, Luxembourg and Netherlands courts and their reactions to occupation measures and measures from their governments from exile* (Maastricht 2004), 39–44.

25. *D 8914-ADV N 97/283 AC 164 Gerard Romsée, SubFile: 'Gerard Romsée: pers', ADVN.*
26. Testimonies of city personnel d. 9 December 1945, *Archieven 'Groot-Gent', nr. AA 114*, CegeSoma; Getuigenis kabinetschef van de burgemeester, Van Glabbeke, d. 15 December 1944, '*JPF Groot-Brussel. Persoonlijke bundel Joannes Grauls*', AGK.
27. *Kabinetsarchief Antwerpen—Bundel: 'Groot-Antwerpen. Vorming 1940-1942'. File: 'Groot-Antwerpen', PAA.*
28. *Kabinetsarchief Antwerpen—Bundel: 'Groot-Antwerpen. Vorming 1940-1942'. File: 'Groot-Antwerpen', PAA.*
29. *Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur Antwerpen—Bundel: '1944. Epuratie algemeenheden. Onderrichtingen', PAA; JPF Hendrik Borginon, bundel Groot-Antwerpen, AGK.*
30. Quotations from 'Eene grootstad in het bezette gebied', vertaling in *JPF 'Groot-Brussel. Grauls en consoorten. Bundel Grauls. File II A. Bundel 7/1/49'*, AGK.
31. *Archieven 'Groot-Gent', nr. AA 114*, CegeSoma.
32. J.-L. Delaet, *Le pays de Charleroi de l'occupation à la libération 1940-1944* (Charleroi 1994).
33. *8912 97/283 AC 164—Archieven Gerard Romsée. File: 'Gerard Romsée. Getuigenverklaringen, ADVN.*
34. Houtart to Romsée d. 16 July 1942. *JPF 'Groot-Brussel. Grauls en consoorten. Grauls. File II A. Bundel 7/1/49'*, AGK.
35. D. Van den Abeele, 'Burgemeesters en schepenen in de Brugse agglomeratie tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog', *Brugs Ommeland*, vol. 41, nr. 3 (September 1941), 131-144.
36. *Benoemingsdossiers burgemeesters: Joseph Bologne, PA - Luik.*
37. Getuigenis Gerard Romsée, d. 15 June 1945, *Fonds Frans Van Der Elst, Dossier Gerard Romsée, File III en IV: 'Groot-Agglomeraties', ADVN.*
38. The party would only attain ca. 12.5 % of all francophone mayors, but these mayors would govern almost 70 % of the population in francophone Belgium. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 143.
39. *GD Guillaume Chanteux nr. 71.118, RAB; Ondervraging Eggert Reeder d. 12 March 1947, 8912 97/283 AC 164—Archieven Gerard Romsée. File: 'Gerard Romsée. Getuigenverklaringen', ADVN.*
40. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 300-303.
41. Testimonies of Brussels city personnel and aldermen, d. 5 January 1945, *JPF, 'Groot-Brussel. Persoonlijke bundel Joannes Grauls. Arrest van 3 mei 1949'*, AGK.
42. *GD nr. 83.004, Charles Fresson, RAB. M. Conway, Collaboratie in België, 211.*

43. B. G. J. De Graaff, 'Collaboratie en verzet: een vergelijkend perspectief', in J. B. Jonker et al. (eds.), *Vijftig jaar na de inval. Geschiedschrijving en Tweede Wereldoorlog*, ('s-Gravenhage 1990), 95–10.
44. Verslag vergadering burgemeesters arrondissement Sint-Niklaas d. 11 October 1940, *Doos: 'Vergaderingen burgemeesters arrondissement Sint-Niklaas 1940–1944'*, Stadsarchief Lokeren.
45. *File nr. 306: 'Officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen (...)'*, PAL; *Benoemings- en tuchtdossiers Burgemeesters, Willebroek, File nr. 27: 'Klacht (...) 1943'*, PAA.
46. *Microfilm 27: 'Circulaires (...) Soignies'*, CegeSoma; *Nr. 304–305: 'Officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen voor het publiek tijdens de oorlog 1940–1945'*, PAL; Bodelet, *Le Rexisme*, 74.
47. General circular letter Adam d. 28 January 1941, *Losse stukken. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
48. References in Governor Romsée to mayors burgemeesters d. 21 March 1941, *Nr. 304–305: 'Officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen (...)'*, PAL; Police Commissioner to the mayor of Hoboken d. 5 April 1941, *Losse stukken, Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA; *Feldkommandantur 681 Hasselt aan de gouverneur d. 30 August 1941, File nr. 320: 'Officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen (...)'*, PAL; Grauls to the mayors d. 21 July 1941, *Bundel: 'Politie 1941–1942'. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA.
49. Circular letter d. 21 July 1942 Lysens to mayors, *File nr. 320: 'Officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen (...) 1940–1944'*, PAL.
50. Bulckaert to the *Feldkommandantur Brugge* d. 10 July 1941 and 19 June 1942, *Kabinetsarchief Bulckert*, PA WVL; Meeting 11 November 1942, Bulckaert to Romsée d. 3 December 1942, *File: Landbouw, bevoorrading; 'Beschouwingen (...), File: 'Bevoorrading. Weermacht, controle' in Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
51. Bulckaert to mayors d. 17 July 1943, in *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL; *Kabinetsarchief gouverneur 1940–1944, File: 'Bewaking Koolzaadoogst. Omzendbrief 12 juli 1943'*, PAA.
52. *File nr. 313: 'Officiële publicaties. (...)'*, PAL.
53. Romsée to governors and mayors d. 23 March 1943 and De Winter to governors d. 18 October 1943, *Losse stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL; *File nr. 313: officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen (...) 1943–1944*, PA-WVL.
54. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 435.
55. *2/10.231/5 Gemeenten personeel Politiek mandatarissen Tucht (...)A-Z 1940–1944*, RAB.
56. Romsée to the governors d. 12 May 1941, *Losse stukken. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-V.

57. Romsée to the governors d. 30 July 1941, *File: rechtspraak: algemene zaken. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1044*, PA W-V.
58. *Benoemingsdossiers*, Doos 15, *Gemeente Harzé*, PA Liège.
59. *Epuratiedossiers Schriek*, nr. 371: *burgemeester Jos Beyens*, PAA.
60. Letter from Jean Georges to Vincent December 1940, *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK.
61. *JPF Groot-Brussel. Grauls en consoorten. Brunet, File III*, AGK.
62. Article by Alfred Van der Hallen in *Stadsnieuws* d. 31 July 1943; *JPF Alfred Van der Hallen*, AGK; ‘Het actieprogramma voor de eerste wintermaanden in de verschillende afdelingen van de beweging’, *Dienst*, vol. 5, nr. 10, October 1942.
63. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 66–67.
64. *Nr. 155: ‘ordres aux militants de base pour le mois d’octobre 1943’*, *Archieven Rex*, AA 166, CegeSoma.
65. Circular Letter nr. 31 from Georges to the party district leaders, *Archieven Rex*, AA 166, CegeSoma.
66. ‘Mededeling nr. 35 aan de arrondissementsleiders(...)’, d. 24 October 1940, onder meer in *JPF s Groot-Brussel*, AGK.
67. ‘118bis. Fonde de pouvoirs du chef de region. 9 aril 1941 à mai 1941’, *JPF Jean Georges*, AGK.
68. *GD nr. 69.903: Armand Smet*, RAB.
69. The most important are the archives of governors Wildiers (Antwerp) and Bulckaert (West-Flanders). For others, only partial fragments are preserved.
70. Letter from the head of the political secretariat of governor Bulckaert to the mayor of Leffinge d. 7 November 1942, *File: ‘Vertrouwelijk: Leffinge’, Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
71. Report by the ‘Centrale Dienst Documentatie Auditoraat-generaal’, d. 15 June 1945, on the ‘Tijdschrift voor Administratie’, *JPF Gerard Romsée*, AGK.
72. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 150–158, 357–359, 470–474, 477–478.
73. Quoted in Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 473.
74. A. Rathé, ‘Gemeentebestuur. Burgerlijke verantwoordelijkheid der gemeentebesturen, der ambtenaren’, *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, April 1942.
75. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 257–260.
76. *Benoemings- en tuchtdossiers Burgemeesters, Hoogstraten, File nr. 22: Protest (...)*, PAA.
77. D P. De Zaeger, *Lier en de Nieuwe Orde : de politieke evolutie in Lier tussen 1938 en 1947* (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, KU Leuven 1994), 65.
78. This seemed to have been a central order of the VNV-leadership: *Epuratiedossiers nr. 2/10045/4, burgemeester Hubert Verschraegen, Kruibeke*, RA B-W.

79. *File Nr. 308: 'Bundels (...) 1939-1942'*, PAL; *Map: 'Allerlei stukken met opening van enkwest'*. *Losse stukken kabinetsarchief gouverneur 1940-1944*, PAA.
80. *Informations Administratives et politiques*, nr. 3, November 1943.
81. I could only find one example, in which provincial governor Houtart protested against the collaborationist mayor of Sint-Kwintens-Lennik, who had exaggerated by completely covering the town hall with collaborationist flags. *Archives Baron Albert Houtart, Microfilm 79, Nr. 16. 'suspension et mise en disponibilité 1945'*, CegeSoma.
82. H. J. Ten Broeke et. al., *Lochem in oorlogstijd 1940-1945. Met wat er voorafging...en wat er kwam* (Zutphen n.d).
83. Central VNV-leadership to Jozef Lysens d. 30 September 1942, *JPF Jozef Lysens*, AGK.
84. Report 14 March 1945, *Epuratiedossier Hector Jassogne*, PAA.
85. *JPF Jean Henri Schreurs*, CABR, NA.
86. *JPF Harm Hölke*, CABR, NA.
87. *Dossier B. Meindersma, BZ-ABB 1879-1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
88. *Bundel: 'Ordemaatregelen 1942-1943, met bomaanslag op Mortsel'*, PAA.
89. Letter from governor Wildiers to Romsée d. 6 November 1943, *Bundel: 'Bestrijding Banditisme'*, *Kabinetsarchief gouverneur 1940-1944*, PAA.
90. Departement Inhoud: Bestuurspolitiek, Nr. 50: Bestuurskringen VNV, *Archieven VNV, AA 156*, CegeSoma.
91. Gouverneur Lysens aan de arrondissementscommissarissen d. 13 September 1941, *Nr. 265: 'Algemeen Politie. (...) 1941-1944'*, PAL; *Nr. 265: 'Algemeen Politie. Toegang (...) 1941-1944'*, PAL.
92. Interview with Jacques Wijnants van G. Doyen in 1972, *AA 953, Archieven G. Doyen*, CegeSoma.
93. Ondervraging Gerard Romsée d. 17 June 1946, *JPF Adriaan Van Coppenolle*, AGK; *Nr. 265: 'Algemeen politie. (...)1941-1942'*, PAL; *Bundel: 'Ordemaatregelen 1940-1941'. Submap: 'Ordemaatregelen, (...)'*, PAA.
94. S. Lefever, *De Boerenwacht in de Vlaamse Provincies (1940-1944)*, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, KU Leuven 1974); *Mappen: Boerenwacht. JPF Adriaan Van Coppenolle*, AGK.
95. Romsée aan de burgemeesters d. 27 June 1941, *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief West-Vlaanderen gouverneur Bulckaert 1940-1944*, PA W-VL.
96. Nazi term referring to the 'forced coordination' of all bodies in society under one totalitarian framework.
97. A. Rathé, 'Boerenwacht', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, vol. 3, November-December 1943.
98. Lefever, *De Boerenwacht*, 93-100.

99. 'Enkele beschouwingen over de werking van de Boerenwacht' n.d., *JPF Adriaan Van Coppenolle*, AGK.
100. Correspondentie Rex met de NLVC en arrondissementscommissarissen 1943, *JPF Van Coppenolle*, AGK; *Archives de la Kommandantur d'Arlon*, Doos K. 66: 'Rex', RAA.
101. *Bijlagen aan het vertoog (...) 1941. Verslagen der arrondissementscommissarissen, Gent, 1942*, RABW. (cited: 49 *Pak nr. 127: Veldwachters-rubriek 56 1942, Re C., Nr. 817: 'Verslagen van veldbrigadiers, 4^{de} kwartaal 1941, en eerste kwartaal 1942*, PA W-VL.
102. Report of the chief of the police services of the NLVC d. 6 July 1943, *JPF Adriaan Van Coppenolle*, AGK.
103. *File: 'Boerenwacht', Archief arrondissementscommissariaat Roeselare-Tielt*, PA W-VL. See also correspondence in *Nr. 1357: 'rijkswacht maandverslag mei 1944'*, PA W-VL. For German wild requisitioning-actions of rural populations, see: *Fonds Frans van der Elst, Dossier Jan Van Hoof, XV 204 D 8881*, ADVN.
104. 'De Boerenwacht was iets goeds, maar wij wilden niet ondertekenen om achteraf niet beschuldigd te worden van medewerking met een of ander organisme.' S. Lefever, *De Boerenwacht in de Vlaamse Provincies (1940-1944)*.
105. 'Hulpverlening bij luchtbombardementen. De taak der partij en van haar formaties', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, vol. 4, April 1944, 77.
106. Ghysels to mayor Grauls d. 8 May 1944, *JPF Groot-Brussel: Dossiers Jan Grauls*, AGK.
107. De Vos to Romsée d. 16 February 1942, *D 8914-97/283 AC 164 Gerard Romsée, SubsubFile 'Iib. I.K. XIII. Benoemingen van burgemeesters en schepenen'*, ADVN.
108. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 157.
109. 'Notre conception du monde: le peuple', *Informations Administratives et politiques*, nr. 3, November 1943.
110. 'Pour la révolution sociale', *Informations Administratives et politiques*, nr. 4, December 1943.
111. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 346-348.
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113. B. Vermeulen, 'Onze bevoorrading', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, nr. 1, August 1941, 21.
114. 'Algemeene beschouwingen en richtlijnen. Hoed af voor onze burgemeesters', *Leiding*, vol. 6, nr. 8, August 1943.
115. M. De Bisschop, 'Passieve luchtbescherming', d. 20 July 1941, *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, nr. 1, August 1941, 18.

116. Dr. D., 'Hoofdbesturen. Samenordering der openbare besturen. Samenwerking. Onze positieve houding', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, February 1943.
117. 'Administratieve woekerbestrijding', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, June 1943.
118. A. Rathé, Politiegezag en openbare opinie, *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, jg.3, August 1943.
119. Article in *De Toekomst*, 1943: 'Lid der Vlaamsche Wachtbrigade op de tram te Linen doodelijk getroffen. Bij het verhinderen van een overval op den postwagen.'
120. Speech n.d., *Epuratiedossiers burgemeesters, nr. 192, Paul Van Asse, Sint-Amands*, PAA.
121. Wouters, *Oorlogsborgemeesters*, 337 ff.
122. 'Administratieve woekerbestrijding', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, June 1943.
123. Epuratiedossier Paul Dehove, in *28 W 38407 I: 'épuration (...)'*, ADN – L.
124. *1 W nr. 2224: 'Dehove Paul, maire de Lille, discours 6 juillet 1940, (...)'*, ADN – L.
125. Letter to the population from Dehove, June 1943, Purge File Paul Dehove, *28 W 38407 I: 'épuration dans l'administration préfectorale'*, ADN – L.
126. File 'Lille': *Nr. 14 W 36246: 'Nominations (...)'*, ADN – L.
127. When evaluating four of these new municipal councillors the prefect could even write nothing more convincing than the rather weak: 'seems to support the policies of the current government'.
128. File 'Lille': *Nr. 14 W 36246: 'Nominations (...)'*, ADN – L.
129. Such as the public speech of the minister of propaganda Philippe Henriot in October 1942, the opening of the exhibition of the Flemish Union for France (*Vlaamsch Verbond voor Frankrijk*) and most importantly, the two most striking new order events in the north of France of the entire occupation (the opening of the anti-Bolshevist exhibition from the beginning of July 1942 and a conference given by Henriot in Lille at the end of January 1944). Purge File Paul Dehove, in *28 W 38407 I: 'épuration (...)'*, ADN – L.
130. Rapport commissaire principal Lille, File: 'Lille', in *Nr. 14 W 36246: 'Nominations (...)'*, ADN – L.
131. Epuratiedossier Paul Dehove, in *28 W 38407 I: 'épuration (...)'*, ADN – L.
132. *Nr. 14 W 36246: 'Nominations (...)'*, ADN – L.
133. The Ascq tragedy was a massacre in the small village of Ascq (near Lille) caused by the SS-Division Adolf Hitler. It was one of the biggest traumas during the occupation in the north of France.
134. Purge File Paul Dehove, in *28 W 38407 I: 'épuration (...)'*, ADN – L.

Systems of Repression

SYSTEMS OF LOCAL INTELLIGENCE: AN INTRODUCTION

As foreign occupiers the Germans needed reliable sources of information in 1940. City administrations were crucial. They had access to the public and municipal registers, the registers of foreigners and local police archives. The Germans asked local governments for a broad range of information in 1940: complete lists and production figures of companies, information about foreigners, names of streets and police organizations, lists of people in possession of firearms, and so on. Massive amounts of administrative, police and judicial information flowed from (local) administrations to the German services. This was an unavoidable aspect of administering an occupied country within the framework of the Hague Convention. Some problems became immediately clear. There was the issue of information about communist movements, for instance, but also that pertaining to foreign inhabitants (such as the British) and even Jews. It is difficult to discover whether local governments were aware of potential problems early on.¹

This provides a useful way to analyse local systems of repression. The basic question is simple: how did indigenous authorities manage information about inhabitants? What kind of information could be given to an occupier without endangering one's own inhabitants? Was a police commissioner, a mayor or a judicial magistrate acting legitimately in falsifying information in his own records? The problem is applicable to all policy domains: food supply, labour policy, public order, administrative

appointments, Jewish persecutions and the repression of the underground resistance. It is also about the criminal aspects of ‘collaboration’. All of the three countries had articles in their penal code on ‘betrayal’ or denunciation of inhabitants to the enemy. When did a ‘normal’ administrative report to the Germans become criminal betrayal of citizens? It tackles the issue of the autonomy of the national administration. Could certain offices control (or hide) their internal workings from the Germans? And it tackles the issue of focal points of collaboration. Where did the Germans get their information and how did it get to them?

MAYORS IN THE FRENCH PREFECTORAL SYSTEM

In the (north of) France, the traditional culture of a centralized bureaucracy theoretically created an ideal framework for large flows of data.² This is evident in 1940 in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. There were inspection rounds (conducted together with German officers) from June 1940 onwards, and mass surveys in all French administrations. Sub-prefects collected information from all smaller villages and towns and drew up summary reports for the Germans.³ The scope of the information provided by the French was impressive: information on the economy, the social situation, food supply, public order, the identification of numerous important pressure groups, the police services, and so on.⁴ The prefect forwarded detailed reports to the Germans about postal traffic, customs inspections and a large amount of socio-economic information, right down to single companies. A political evaluation of individual officials was part of this. In late 1940, tens of thousands of individual files were created. Interestingly, most local officials left the ‘political affiliation’ field on their forms blank.⁵ The regional departmental authorities filled in this political information themselves (giving former party affiliations), together with a political assessment.

The Vichy regime further enhanced centralized control with its reform of police and intelligence services, which trickled down to the regional level.⁶ However, the departmental administrations of Nord and Pas-de-Calais also carefully guarded French autonomy. They were able to retain some independence in the processes of information policy. In 1941 and 1942, for example, sensitive political and personal information about civil servants was, as far as I could discover, not sent to the Germans but locked within the French ‘system’. These reports stopped at the prefectural level.⁷

There were also a number of minor incidents in which we can see where the lines of French autonomy were drawn. One example is the negotiation

following an order by the *Kreiskommandantur* of Douai on 12 April 1941 requiring local governments of the district to send detailed information reports to the German administration. Prefect Carles immediately protested that this was outside the 'normal framework of French-German relations'.⁸ In this case, Carles's objection stemmed from the bypassing of the departmental level. The sub-prefect of Douai proposed that the German question on 'the political colour' of mayors and adjoints should be filled in by the departmental authorities, which they then did.⁹ A similar incident occurred when, on 18 May 1941, the *Kreiskommandantur* of Cambrai asked for copies of the minutes of all municipal council meetings (as well as the agendas of these meetings). Again, the sub-prefect and prefect Carles decided in August 1941 that they would transfer reports and agendas only of important council meetings. In practice German questions like these often led to stronger departmental control.

Within this system in Nord/Pas-de-Calais, local governments remained important sources of information. Mayors continued to send in regular reports about the local state of affairs and public opinion to the prefects. These often concerned political affairs. The (sub)prefects wrote summary reports from these local reports for the Germans. Systematic reports of this sort were non-existent in Belgium, and very limited in the Netherlands. Certainly in 1941–42, these reports by French mayors were often (deliberately) vague and general, peppered with statements such as 'the population remains uneasy about the food supply' or 'the communists are inactive'.¹⁰ Mayors also regularly had to give political advice with regard to 'questionable' people prominent in the area.¹¹ From mid 1942 onwards, in both departments, mayors in rural areas with a right-wing profile for the most part provided negative political evaluations in answer to these questions. Up-to-date address information in the municipal registers remained essential for the Germans. During their 1941 search for those possessing illegal firearms, for instance, the Germans first visited town halls to cross-check their list of weapon-owners with municipal registers.¹² When the *Feldgendarmarie* found that their address information (to issue fines, for example) was incorrect, mayors had to provide correct addresses.¹³ Mayors also had to immediately report any 'unusual events' or disturbances (such as resistance activities). This was considered a key task of local governments.¹⁴ Local governments had to inform the *Kreiskommandantur* (preferably by telephone) as soon as any such incident occurred.¹⁵ Obviously, the German system of collective reprisals worked counterproductively and led lower-level authorities to cover up incidents.

The focal point of the information system for the Germans, however, was soon found to lie with the French police structure. This was already noticeable in 1940. The police information sent to the Germans went much further than mere statistics. Indeed, police information had taken on a clearly political character by June 1940. Furthermore, reports by the French police also dealt with broad social issues such as socio-economic organization.¹⁶ Social unrest and all other forms of local opposition were monitored and reported by the police (and employers' organizations).¹⁷ When mayors covered up local protest, detailed French police reports kept the Germans informed.¹⁸

Monthly reports by the city police commissioners also dealt with the political attitudes of local governments, as well as underground communism and its collaborationist groups.¹⁹ When, for instance, an anonymous complaint arrived at the prefecture (at the end of 1941) about the municipal council of the town of Marcq-en-Baroeul, the local police commissioner filed a report in which he assessed every council member from both an administrative and a political point of view. The commissioner concluded that the council was not in favour of Pétain, but that this was not causing any administrative difficulties.²⁰ Both prefects based their reports to the Germans in 1940–42 almost exclusively on police documents.²¹

In general, police commissioners—rather than mayors—responded to the prefects' more sensitive questions. This seems logical when purely police actions are concerned, but more noteworthy when it came to political assessments. In Belgium it would have been unthinkable for a police commissioner to file a report on the political stance of his local government. This increased in 1943. In 1944, elaborate information was gathered by the police intelligence on the attitudes and opinions of French civil servants, teachers, postal personnel, local administrators and the like.

French police in Nord and Pas-de-Calais appear to have seen this political framework as completely natural. They demonstrated a proactive manner of political thinking 'towards the regime'.²² The commissioners of the *Service Régional des Renseignements Généraux* never failed to use the 'public opinion' section in their monthly reports to suggest more efficient ways of communicating government policies or adapting strategies.²³

From 1941 onwards, certain French police services sent monthly reports directly to the German Sipo-SD. Such reports often dealt with 'public opinion'.²⁴ Individual information (names and whereabouts) was not taboo. The weekly reports to the Sipo-SD also mentioned the names of the arrested communists. During the strike in a factory in La Madeleine

(Lille) on 5 September 1942 the *commissaire central* of the regional *Service de Renseignements* provided the Sipo-SD with the personal case files of 36 workers involved, including a political assessment.²⁵

There were individual variations (the *commissaire spécial* of Valenciennes was the most active in seeking out information, the reports of the *commissaire spécial* of Douai the least detailed). The Germans themselves quickly fell back on the police commissioners (municipal police, or the *Service de Renseignements*) for reliable information.²⁶ This means there were systematic flows of information from French police to the Sipo-SD well before the appointment of Karl Oberg as HSSPF and the subsequent Oberg–Bousquet agreement. The only thing that changed after Oberg’s appointment in September 1942 was that these reports became more detailed.²⁷ Henceforth, the names of all arrested or apprehended Frenchmen would be included in all reports.

It is difficult to say whether the authors consciously falsified information. The overall impression given, however, is one of detailed completeness: exhaustive accounts of all ‘special incidents’, all arrests/apprehensions, all judgements by French courts, and (in the case of Lille) reports of the meetings of the mayors’ association of the North and East (*Association des Maires du Nord et de l’Est*).²⁸

The question of whether it was legal, opportune or legitimate to hand over information about French citizens to the Germans was never an explicit point of discussion among top ranking officials in the region. The only real, essential issue was the question of French administrative autonomy on a central (departmental) level. These could not allow the Germans to establish separate agreements, for example with local governments.

To summarize, important French characteristics were: the openly political nature of the intelligence work carried out by the (local) French police; the fact that mayors were only a secondary (and diminishing) source of information for the Germans; the actual bureaucratic scale and level of detail of the information; and, lastly, the formal central (departmental) control. The centralized bureaucratic system seemed highly efficient. However, its bureaucratic vastness gradually became a screen to hide the reality. By the end of 1941, (sub-)prefects and departmental administrations had started using empty standard phrases like ‘nothing has changed since the previous report’, or even to leave certain sections in their reports blank. By the end of 1941, it became manifest that the sheer amount of information made it relatively easy to omit or hide things. The centralization of bureaucracy could therefore work both ways.

One practical implementation is the issue of forced labour. In 1942, during the labour-requisitions of the *Organisation Todt* (OT), the German–French agreement was that the Germans would give the number of workers, and the French would select the names.²⁹ By prefectoral order of 16 October 1942, mayors had to send in lists of men within certain social categories. The labour offices (*Offices du Travail*) made the final individual selections.³⁰ Most mayors in Nord/Pas-de-Calais appear to have sent in these lists.³¹ Open protests were very rare.³² In January 1943, the practical agreement was made that the Germans would trace people who fled during labour service, while the French would trace those who failed to report.

Despite these clear-cut agreements, forced labour caused severe problems for mayors. There were anti-German incidents when 800 French workers departed for the OT from Lille railway station on 11 December 1942.³³ On 19 December, labourers attacked the mayor of Fourmies when he arrived to see them off. The police commissioner explained: ‘This incident took place because the 28 labourers assigned to leave for Germany thought that the mayor of Fourmies was responsible for their selection.’³⁴

Things came to a head with the introduction of Forced Labour (STO) in France on 16 February 1943. There was huge protest and young men went into hiding *en masse*. Overall, the prefects and state police implemented STO policy rigorously, and in close cooperation with the German authorities. On 2 and 3 March 1943, for example, the French police arrested 285 people, 78 of whom were administratively interned and transported to Lille.³⁵ Labour evaders were sought out by the French police and interned in special camps for deportation under the STO-regulations,³⁶ under administrative orders from prefect Carles. Some of these orders were based on information that Carles received directly from the German OFK in Lille. On 10 September 1943, he issued such an administrative arrest order for 385 people who had refused to report after being requisitioned.³⁷ In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the French police succeeded in finding about half of the young men who had gone into hiding during the months following February 1943. De Jonghe and Le Maner, however, note a change after the summer of 1943. Changing war perspectives and the hostility of the French population undermined the enthusiasm of the police.³⁸

Local governments played only a minor part in this French chain of information. Their lists passed through police offices first and were often amended.³⁹ In the ‘year class action’ of 1919–1922 (August 1943), the

lists of mayors had to be 'regulated' (*régularisés*) by the police services.⁴⁰ The French police and gendarmerie indicated who was 'irregular' (*irréguliers*) and therefore must be sought out.⁴¹ In the district of Avesnes the standard working method was that the police (or gendarmerie) first visited the town hall to ask for all current information regarding the *irréguliers*, then visited the individual's family, last known address and the local food supply office. In other districts, the gendarmerie often did not even check with the town hall.⁴² The French state police in Nord/Pas-de-Calais continued to search for and apprehend people in hiding well into 1944.⁴³ On 14 July 1943, a policeman in Fournies killed a young labour evader who was fleeing.⁴⁴ Although the police authorities did not endorse the killing, the policeman was not sanctioned. On 27 February 1944, in the village of Conde-sur-Escaut, a young man who had been shot by the police was buried. The victim was the son of a well-respected local family, and many attended the funeral; the police regretted the incident, but in his report the local commissioner wrote that the 'sane part of the population' realized that the victim had brought this upon himself by provoking authority.⁴⁵ This was a recurring attitude in police reports.

So the focal point of the more delicate aspects lay with the police and the departments.⁴⁶ This is not to say local governments and mayors had no role to play. Although the Labour Offices managed the production of the essential individual labour cards, inhabitants had to obtain their cards (as well as their passports and food stamps) from their municipal administrations. Local governments could therefore detect 'illegal' or 'irregular' people. De Jonghe and Le Maner write that in general, northern mayors collectively obstructed this task, and even falsified labour cards *en masse*.⁴⁷ This may well be true, but it is very hard to substantiate. These falsifications by nature left no paper trail. It therefore remains a hypothesis. It was certainly true that mayors were in the front line for complaints and hostility.⁴⁸ Even well before the introduction of STO, the subprefect of Cambrai wrote about the 'great reluctance' of most mayors to implement any type of forced labour.⁴⁹

When French support in the north for STO was eroding, the prefect tried to mobilize local governments. He ordered mayors to provide new general lists of men (11 November 1943).⁵⁰ Cooperation was weak. The Germans took over, and in November 1943 the OFK in Lille ordered every community to deliver two people per 1000 inhabitants, or incur fines. The German police began organizing their own raids. The German OFK also tried to requisition essential municipal personnel (and even

policemen) in cities like Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing for forced labour duties.⁵¹ City governments had little choice but to cooperate.⁵² Although this initiated the final split between German and French (police) services, cooperation was formally maintained in 1944. The standard task for the French services in 1944 was assisting the German authorities in guarding apprehended people.⁵³ This led to protests from the prefects and police authorities in June 1944, not on matters of principle but on the practical grounds of lack of manpower.⁵⁴ After the so-called fourth ‘Sauckel-action’⁵⁵ in January 1944 (in which the target number of labourers for both departments was set at 50,000), French and German police services still organized joint actions. On 3 February 1944 prefect Carles confirmed to the Germans that French state police would cooperate fully.⁵⁶

All the while, large amounts of information continued to pass between French and German officials. Between May and July 1944, the prefect himself transferred lists of arrested criminals, smugglers, black marketeers and the like to the German authorities for forced labour in Germany.⁵⁷ German orders to the departmental authorities to help in the tracing and apprehension of specific men in hiding were carried out until the last days of the occupation.⁵⁸

The essential point is that northern French mayors could hide behind the police/gendarmerie and the prefects. Prefect Carles seemed to have consciously allowed this. He never tried actively to involve the mayors. In a meeting with the Germans on 3 February 1944, the Germans demanded that the mayors provide detailed lists of three persons they could spare per 1000 inhabitants in their communities. Carles flatly refused. He told the Germans ‘it is in practice impossible to impose this responsibility, in this particular form, on mayors’.⁵⁹ The Germans accepted, and the mayors did not receive this order. Several months later (30 March 1944) the OFK-Lille tried again demanding fresh year class actions. This operation apparently also went no further than the prefect’s office. Carles seems to have remained conscious of the need for local legitimacy of mayors.

‘PASSIVE COLLABORATION’: BELGIAN CENTRAL WEAKNESS

Unlike France, Belgium lacked a pre-war culture of centralized bureaucratic organization. The German invasion did not help things. Intermediary provincial authority was immediately ‘decapitated’. Top-ranking civil servants (beginning with the secretaries-general) were ill-prepared to take a central bureaucracy into their hands.⁶⁰ The distance between the ‘weak’ top civil

servants and the stronger political mayors was outspoken from the outset. Extending central control from Brussels over these mayors did not come naturally to the Belgian system.

Adding to the Belgian problem was the extensive (and early) infiltration of collaborationists into key positions.⁶¹ Lower authorities and police forces were confronted with a politically contaminated system. By the end of 1940, direct hierarchical superiors were now often Nazi collaborationists. Also, central powers now openly collided. Secretaries-general Romsée and De Winter (Interior and Food Supply respectively) developed stricter attitudes than Schuind, their colleague in the Ministry of Justice. This increasingly led to contradictory instructions to local governments.⁶²

The Belgian judicial magistrature could have acted as a counterweight if it had been less concerned with defending its own particular interests. In 1940, magistrates had supported broad legislative powers for the Belgian secretaries-general, and further encouraged a maximal interpretation of the Hague Convention.⁶³ In 1940 they supported the repression of communism, and condoned illegal policies (the creation of the greater urban conglomerations, the persecution of the Jews). However, throughout 1942 they gradually adapted. Now, the courts and magistrates began ruling against certain reforms, reversing their support in 1940. This was a huge problem for local governments. Once implemented, it was impossible to reverse these reforms. Moreover, clarity about the legal limits of collaboration had been eroded.⁶⁴ A clear example was on the issue of 'illegal arrests'—arrests ordered by the Germans but without any proper basis in Belgian law. Here, the Belgian magistrates made a volte-face in October–November 1942, shifting from silent acceptance to strict veto. This was basically a shift from a maximalist to a minimalist interpretation of the the Hague Convention.

So in Belgium, top-level authorities remained unable to impose clear central agreements at the local level, although this was exactly what they were supposed to do according to pre-war Belgian instructions.

One element of this was a preference for oral agreements. Just one example is the oral agreement which Schuind (of Justice) made with the *Militärverwaltung* in October 1942, stipulating that the German police would not act against crimes not committed against the Germans. Schuind interpreted the agreement as a German commitment, which was not how the Germans saw it.⁶⁵ Why was such a crucial point not set down on paper? Oral agreements on the central level, basically meant that local governments were supposed to take individual responsibility. After the war

for example, the Namur provincial governor De Croy testified: 'In the province of Namur, oral instructions were given to all local governments to keep on distributing food stamps to people in hiding.'⁶⁶ However, this same governor on 20 April 1943 explicitly forbade this practice in a circular letter.⁶⁷ Mayors, therefore, were forced to provide this clandestine help without any central backing.

Another typical Belgian element was the creation of a body of bureaucratic jargon pertaining to concepts that did not exist. There was the concept of 'passive collaboration' for example. This seemed to originate with Belgian reactions to German anti-Jewish legislation (October 1940, see below). These measures were unconstitutional. Nevertheless, the Belgian Standing Committee of the Council of Legislation wrote on 21 November 1940: 'those who execute an occupation measure under duress are in fact its victims, and not participating in it'.⁶⁸ Concepts such as 'enforced acceptance of a measure' would be used in many permutations after October 1942 (with the introduction of forced labour). One example: when the Germans demanded Belgian non-ferrometals, the committee of secretary-generals concluded that the measure was contrary to Belgian law and the Hague Convention. Despite this, they decided to cooperate (October 1941). They argued that this German demand constituted a *de facto* act of force which could not be refused. Obviously, this was a slippery slope, certainly when it became official central policy. German *Militärverwaltungschef* Eggert Reeder and secretary-general De Winter of Food and Agriculture agreed in 1943 that Belgian civil servants or public officials with 'problems of conscience' about following German orders should consider themselves to be 'requisitioned'.⁶⁹ On 23 May 1943, Reeder wrote that Belgian administrations or officials 'requisitioned' by German authorities must always execute orders, and that such a 'requisitioning' overruled all legal or other objections (even the Hague Convention).

When confronted with illegal German orders, higher Belgian authorities from 1943 onwards simply said that mayors and police forces should regard themselves as 'requisitioned'. This constituted 'undergoing' a measure, which constituted 'indirect' or 'passive' cooperation. Juridically, this did not mean anything. But it seemed to imply local governments could cooperate and be somehow absolved of any responsibility or blame. Collaborationist provincial governors also imposed this interpretation.⁷⁰ By 1943, this had become a basic underlying directive by Belgian central authorities.

This, then, was the context in which local flows of information were organized. In the domain of food supply, official reports from the police and gendarmerie regarding offences were sent en masse to the German authorities.⁷¹ As a rule, these documents contained all the names and addresses of the Belgian inhabitants involved. The flow of information was never centrally regulated. Early on, the Germans intervened directly with local governments. The district commissioner of Soignies, for example, asked his mayors on 28 September 1940 to send in lists of farmers who had been guilty of the ‘greatest failure’ in meeting the production quota.⁷² This order was explicitly given on behalf of the *Kreiskommandantur*. The Antwerp provincial governor Grauls was told on 3 July 1941 by the Antwerp *Feldkommandantur* that his German administration had a right to remove any ‘food supply’ case they wished from the Belgian courts ‘in order to shorten the proceedings’.⁷³ On 21 February 1942, the *Feldkommandantur* in Hasselt ordered all mayors to send all official police reports about black market crimes directly to them, accompanied by the list of names of all farmers who failed to meet the quota.⁷⁴ This *Feldkommandantur* wrote on 30 March 1942: ‘the addresses of these farmers need to be precise and accurate because we plan their arrest’.⁷⁵ The great majority of Limburg mayors obeyed the order.

In August 1942, the Germans installed ‘special courts’ under the *Kommandanturen* for offences against food regulations.⁷⁶ The German *Militärverwaltung* complained in June 1942 about the unwillingness of mayors to release the names of certain farmers. VNV governor Lysens of Limburg reprimanded the mayors (15 July 1942): ‘Using the lists given by the *Feldkommandantur*, the mayors must identify the farmers who have delivered less than 85 % of their mandatory quota.’⁷⁷ Shortly afterwards, farmers identified by (some) local governments were indeed arrested by the *Feldgendarmerie*. In principle, the Belgian ministry of Agriculture and Food supply forbade Belgian administrators to give lists of ‘refractory farmers’ to the Germans.⁷⁸ However, in practice it largely ignored the problem.

In July 1943 the ministry officially informed the province of West-Flanders that Belgian administrations were now suddenly allowed to submit these lists to the German services.⁷⁹ The Ghent *Oberfeldkommandantur* had given an oral promise that these farmers would not be punished by the German courts. This was enough insurance for the ministry. Lists with names were delivered. It goes without saying that the German authorities did carry out arrests afterwards. When the authorities in the province of

West-Flanders became aware of this, the responsible civil servant wrote to the VNV governor (August 1943): ‘in these circumstances it is obviously impossible for me to continue to deliver the remaining lists (...)’.⁸⁰ The German police simply proceeded by seizing the existing lists from the provincial offices. The final report made by a provincial civil servant (28 August 1943) summarizes: ‘Our instructions (...) were not violated, because no list of names was delivered with the explicit intent of arrest. Besides, the Germans did not make any arrests in the true sense of the word [sic].’⁸¹

Even after the creation of the Belgian administrative judiciary, the Germans continued regularly to claim jurisdiction in the more serious cases (thefts of food or of food tickets, for instance) for themselves. At the local level sending names of farmers, smugglers and so on was practically unavoidable in 1943–44.⁸² The central and provincial authorities had by then lost track of information flows to the Germans.⁸³

Even more than in food supply, the problem was the most acute in the domain of forced labour.⁸⁴ As in both other countries, initial voluntary labour programmes gradually evolved towards forced labour. In Belgium, the National Labour Office (*Rijksarbeidsambt*) was created in April 1941.⁸⁵ In November 1940, Frits-Jan Hendriks—a member of the VNV—was appointed head of this organization. This new corporatist organization would extract itself from the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Forced labour in Belgium was implemented on 6 March 1942. Labourers would remain in Belgium (or the north of France). The secretaries-general (as well as the magistrates) judged that this German measure was acceptable within the framework of the Hague Convention. They ignored the increasingly repressive German policy.⁸⁶ In occupied Belgium, the German *Werbestelle* took more active control of Belgian employment policy.

The category of ‘asocial element’ now appeared in administrative language. The Germans started in 1942 by asking the Belgian National Labour Office for the lists of economically unproductive people, and continued (certainly after March 1942) by turning increasingly to local governments and local police. The category of ‘asocial element’ was not rooted in any Belgian legislation. It was an ideological concept that could include a wide variety of individuals: people without a (useful) profession, but also smugglers, ordinary criminals and political opponents.⁸⁷

In April 1942, there was a direct German order to mayors to deliver these kinds of lists in Hasselt and Antwerp.⁸⁸ In September 1942 it was

applied in Ghent.⁸⁹ There is a well-documented incident in the district of Turnhout, where the Germans summoned all the mayors in March 1942 and gave them the order to deliver lists of ‘unruly elements’.⁹⁰ About ten mayors from the district claimed their town had no such ‘elements’. Fifteen mayors gave a few names only after repeated German orders. All the other mayors gave longer lists. In total, 681 names were delivered in April 1942. Only 161 of this group turned out to be actually unemployed.⁹¹

Non-collaborationist mayors clearly had personal misgivings about obeying these German orders. What happened after March 1942, was that most Catholic mayors (in Flanders at least) obeyed but generally gave only a small handful of names and often only after repeated German questions.⁹² This obedience was probably also the case in francophone Belgium. The city government of Mons, for example, gave a long list of asocial elements to the Germans in July 1942.⁹³ And in September, the socialist mayor of Liège, Joseph Bologne, furnished an extensive list of women, older men and merchants to the *Oberfeldkommandantur*.⁹⁴ All in all, compliance was general. Explicit protests came only from certain Brussels municipalities as well as from provincial governor Albert Houtart of Brabant. He pointed to the principle of ‘professional confidentiality’ of mayors with regard to their inhabitants, but he was the only one within the Belgian administration to do so.⁹⁵

When the Germans implemented forced labour in Germany for Belgium on 6 October 1942, the context changed dramatically. Belgian authorities voiced strong objections. Secretary-General Verwilghen of Labour and Social Security stepped down in protest. Forced labour in Germany caused broad social opposition. Thousands of young men went into hiding. This created massive problems for local authorities over question of information and control. The Germans now fully imposed local direct rule. Immediately (October 1942), Belgian local police forces were confronted with massive German orders to search and apprehend ‘dodgers’.⁹⁶

From a top-down, formal perspective one might get the impression Belgian central authority adopted a clear stance. The committee of secretaries-general and the magistrates unambiguously prohibited any kind of cooperation with forced labour in Germany. Even the collaborationist VNV secretary-general Romsée did this (on 27 November 1942).

Local realities, however, were very different. It seems that local cooperation of Belgian police forces was strong in the early phase. In November 1942, the Belgian *gendarmérie* apprehended Belgians all over the country on the direct orders of the *Werbestellen* or *Feldgendarmérie*. The Mechelen

gendarmerie, for instance, apprehended 154 people on 11 November 1942. The brigades of East- and West-Flanders (and probably of other provinces as well) were frequently used by the Germans for these missions in 1942 and 1943. During the first months of 1943 the German police organized frequent nightly arrest operations in the province of Brabant. In each case the Germans forced local governments and the police to cooperate.⁹⁷ At the end of 1942 and in early 1943, hundreds of letters reached national authorities. Should the local police enforce German labour requisitioning? Should local administrations withdraw food cards and identity papers from inhabitants who refused German calls and went into hiding? Should street names be made clearer so that the German police could more efficiently find addresses? Should lists of municipal personnel be delivered to the Germans? Should 'illegal' Belgians in hiding be tracked down, pointed out to the Germans or apprehended?

Central Belgian authorities now gave up their control over the collaborationist Belgian National Labour Office. This Office positioned itself as an intermediary between local governments and the German *Werbestellen*.⁹⁸ It ignored the orders of its supervising ministry. The demands for lists of the so-called 'asocial elements' after October 1942 increasingly came from the Belgian Labour Offices.⁹⁹

And so ambiguity became official Belgian policy. Cooperation with forced labour in Germany was formally forbidden, but cooperation with forced labour in Belgium remained obligatory.¹⁰⁰ It was evident that this set the door wide open for local problems. When asking for lists of names, the Germans soon simply stopped mentioning 'forced labour in Germany' or even 'forced labour' altogether. To further add to the confusion, Romsée of the Interior quickly undermined his own instructions.¹⁰¹ On 29 January 1943 he wrote to all Belgian mayors that they had interpreted his ban 'too strictly'.¹⁰² 'Indirect cooperation'—there we have the concept again—was still necessary. In practice this meant that local governments and the police had to execute search and control measures such as handing over documents, providing lists of names to Germans, and even identifying houses and hiding places for the German police.¹⁰³

In September 1943 secretary-general Romsée promised his colleagues to issue clearer instructions for mayors. On 8 September 1943 he nonetheless told the governors he would *not* do this. He thought this was the responsibility of the Justice department.¹⁰⁴ In a meeting of 27 October 1943, he told the governors that identifying the hiding places of labour dodgers was forbidden. But he stressed that he would not put that down on

paper. Mayors and the police had to be referred to the magistrates.¹⁰⁵ But the latter also distanced themselves from responsibility. They proclaimed that they did not have to make any statements with regard to German orders when these orders were clearly outside their legal jurisdiction.

The situation that emerged in 1943 was quite surreal. With regard to several (precise) questions about transferring official police reports to the Germans, the Ghent procurator-general wrote in 1943: '[the magistrature] is obviously not competent to give instructions to the gendarmerie or police with regard to the demands of the occupier to provide police reports dealing with breaches of German decrees'.¹⁰⁶ And on the other hand, Romsée of the Interior wrote on 16 September 1943: '[only the procurator-general] seems to have the capacity to establish a set of rules for the police services. (...) The entire issue of the arrests essentially belongs to those at the head of the public prosecutor's offices.'¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, there were some attempts at control from the Justice department. The Brussels procurator-general on 28 June 1941 clearly forbade handing over names of Belgian communists to German authorities.¹⁰⁸ In a typical reaction, the Germans ordered cooperation from local governments and police forces.¹⁰⁹ This now actually did lead to negotiations. The result was the seminal instruction (by circular) of *Militärbefehlshaber* Von Falkenhausen on 24 July 1941. This brief letter remained the standard reference on the issue of 'illegal' German orders. It essentially decreed that while, as a rule, Belgian authorities must obey any direct German order, they could nonetheless cite personal conscientious objections in specific, exceptional cases.¹¹⁰ But even here, central authority did not back local governments up. The secretaries-general and the chief magistrates claimed that refusal of a German order based on objections of conscience was always an individual choice.

The only more or less consensual agreement was that Belgian authorities did not have to cooperate to measures 'primarily in the military or political interest of the occupier'. This was put on paper in February 1942 (the direct cause was the December 1941 advice of the Belgian council of legislation, with a prohibition to Belgian police forces against arresting allied pilots).¹¹¹ It is essential to point out that this basic guideline was taken directly from the occupation of Belgium during WW I.

But the local situation simply remained that nobody gave clear answers to the practical, everyday questions of mayors or local police commissioners. After October 1942, the Belgian magistrature again reverted to a more legalistic stance and a minimal interpretation of the cooperation under the Hague Convention. This basically meant they repeatedly

rejected German and collaborationist positions on ‘illegal’ German orders. In a circular of 26 May 1943 Reeder wrote that Belgian authorities *always* had to implement German orders. The Brussels procurator-general immediately took the opposite view (in a circular of 31 May 1943).¹¹²

Finally, on 8 October 1943, the newly appointed secretary-general of Justice Robert De Foy succeeded in sealing a national ‘judicial agreement’ with Eggert Reeder. It confirmed the basic separation between Belgian and German interests and endorsed Belgian (judicial) autonomy. The Germans would withdraw from general Belgian judicial investigations and court cases.

Theoretically, this had wide-ranging consequences for local intelligence and information management. We can see this in the area of the local so-called ‘special incidents’. Normally, local governments and the police had to report these incidents (such as resistance activities) immediately to the Germans, first by telephone and then with a special form containing all information on the suspects.¹¹³ The Belgian magistrates used the 1943 national agreement to cancel this practice. They issued a circular with instructions that all documents must henceforth be sent to the Germans ‘without any information about the suspect and without any information whatsoever that could lead to the tracking of the perpetrator’.¹¹⁴ However, the Germans—again—largely ignored the agreement. Belgian authorities lacked the will or power to implement it. VNV secretary-general Romsée of the Interior never supported it (and simply did not convey it to local governments and the police).¹¹⁵ But even the magistrates communicated poorly about it. Remarkably, Belgian provincial and local governments were not informed about the circular for months.¹¹⁶ Only when persistent questions continued to flood in did secretary-general De Foy convey it (this was as late as 22 January 1944). And it was not until April 1944 that the procurators-general informed the provincial governors that no intelligence about the identity of Belgian ‘criminals’ must be given to the Germans. The procurators-general stated that German demands to mayors about the identities of perpetrators should be considered ‘silently withdrawn’.¹¹⁷

The *Militärverwaltung* cancelled this Belgian agreement in April 1944.¹¹⁸ Just as Belgian authorities were finally (reluctantly) communicating the agreement, the information became obsolete. Now, any semblance of central control was gone. In reality, this did nothing more than confirm local reality. The Belgian police did not actively engage in investigative or repressive activities, while Belgian courts became lenient or even passive

towards political crimes in 1944.¹¹⁹ But Belgian police and gendarmerie forces did identify political crimes and file official reports, including, for instance, resistance actions against German or collaborationist men and equipment.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: LOCAL AMBIGUITY IN BELGIUM

The provincial governors were caught between the weak central authorities and the local level. At first, collaborationist governors tried to prescribe broad cooperation to forced labour.¹²⁰ On 2 March 1943, VNV governor Wildiers of Antwerp ordered his mayors to send the lists of all ‘unruly elements’ to the National Labour Office (many non-collaborationist mayors now complied).¹²¹ Without any clear central instructions they, too, simply tried to interpret policy. VNV governor Bulckaert of West-Flanders wrote to his mayors on 27 February 1943 that pointing out houses of people in hiding was mandatory but that mayors and the police could never use ‘direct force’.¹²² He clearly tried to define ‘indirect’ cooperation, inspired by Romsée’s verbal instructions. The Antwerp VNV governor tried to do the same (in a letter to mayors on 5 February 1943): ‘Direct cooperation means that you engage in administrative acts, not that you passively submit to a measure or a requisitioning by the occupying authority. Administrations can only provide access to the lists of their personnel when there is an official request from the Feldkommandantur and the latter sends its own personnel to copy the information from these lists.’¹²³ This meant that Germans could look into municipal registries themselves, but that help by Belgian civil servants during such consultation was forbidden.¹²⁴

The Antwerp VNV governor had the misfortune of also serving as temporary governor of Brabant in 1943, just when the problems associated with German local orders reached their height. Confronted with the question of whether the local police could point out or identify people to the German police, Wildiers gave the following response, which I quote at length because it so well illustrates the situation: ‘The fact that a Belgian policeman is asked to provide intelligence does not presuppose that said policeman knows anything about the assignment of those people. It is none of his business. When elements of the military authorities or the Feldgendarmerie on assignment ask him such a question, he must consider them as if they were ordinary people, in whose service he is, and who are not obliged to give their reasons for approaching him. It is not

to be feared that this could be collaboration with forced labour because the assignment of the *Feldgendarmerie* is not even an issue here and the policeman in question is not required to know the assignment. Members of the police should themselves be perfectly capable of judging when the situation is one of passive submission or active cooperation with a given order.¹²⁵ This was a miracle solution indeed. When one considers the German police as the ‘ordinary public’, many issues of collaboration under occupation would automatically disappear.

Wildiers would even turn this statement into a general circular (7 May 1943).¹²⁶ VNV governor Bulckaert, however, by then had pulled his head out of the sand: ‘the nature of the information requested by the *Kreiskommandantur* raises the suspicion that this is connected with (...) forced labour in Germany. If this suspicion is proved true, mayors must not hand over (...) the said information to *Kreiskommandantur Kortrijk*’.¹²⁷

All in all, governors were also just trying to find a position. After the order from the Antwerp *Feldkommandantur* (July 1943) to submit certain lists containing personal information, VNV governor Wildiers, for example, suddenly decided to follow the strict guideline of the Antwerp regional procurator.¹²⁸ The Antwerp governor himself shifted position several times in 1943 and 1944.¹²⁹

Because of the lack of central agreements, some larger cities reached specific local agreements with lower German *Kommandanturen*, often on crucial issues about the principles and limits of collaboration in the fields of policing, forced labour and persecution of Jews. One example was the ‘Keim-agreement’ in Liège, on the national issue of judicial autonomy.¹³⁰ Another example on food supply issues, was the Antwerp provincial agreement (June 1941) that all official reports on relatively minor infractions (infractions against the mandatory closing hour, failure to black-out lights, contravening dancing bans, transgressing certain city limits, and so on) had to be sent immediately to the German *Feldkommandanturen*, while official police reports about more serious cases were to be sent first to the Antwerp public prosecutor, who would then send ‘relevant files’ to the German military courts.¹³¹

This situation basically continued for the rest of the occupation. Contradictory orders were issued. Local questions and protest letters by mayors went unanswered.¹³² The gendarmerie commander of Bruges had to wait for over a year in 1942 for an answer to his question on how to respond to German orders to arrest people in hiding (an answer that when

it finally came, settled nothing).¹³³ Several gendarmerie commanders made lists of definite questions for the procurators-general (mid-1943) to which only meaningless answers came.¹³⁴ A gendarmerie commander wrote very poignantly to the Ghent procurator-general: ‘in the very near future, I will be obliged to inform my men that the higher Belgian authority leaves the questions that we ask about the instructions of the “Civil Mobilisation Booklet” (...) unanswered’.¹³⁵ In May 1943, the mayor of Ruiselede (West-Flanders) asked whether the police could be sanctioned if prisoners they were guarding for the Germans escaped. Neither Governor Bulckaert nor the magistrates responded. The mayor concluded as follows in July 1943: ‘If it takes so much time to get an answer to such a question, we have to conclude that there won’t be any time left to actually implement your advice.’¹³⁶

The procurators-general, especially Rémy from Ghent, thought that policemen had to ‘sense’ for themselves whether a German order was illegal or not. Rémy wrote to the chief of the West-Flanders gendarmerie (13 March 1944): ‘it is up the local gendarmerie to deduce the consequences of the framework-instructions of the judiciary (...) and to take its own responsibility’.¹³⁷ This is an astonishing instruction coming from one of the country’s top-ranking legal authorities in a situation of enemy occupation. The regional public prosecutor of Oudenaarde flatly refused to put instructions on paper regarding the arrests of grounded allied pilots by the Belgian police. He had a remarkable way of arguing this: ‘I would like to stress that it is not out of fear of taking responsibility myself that I give you this answer, because I know all too well what I would personally do in such a case; however, as I see it, the borders between the different powers of administrative and judicial authorities (...) need to be strictly respected’.¹³⁸ But in 1944, local orders were sometimes issued at gunpoint. Mayor Leo Simons of St-Lenaerts was frank (19 March 1943): ‘So the mayor faces an inescapable dilemma: a prison sentence now, or the death penalty later.’¹³⁹

The result was obvious. Local cooperation remained high. While most (non-collaborationist) mayors had refused to give sensitive information to the Germans until 1942, many gradually gave up under pressure in 1943.¹⁴⁰ All sorts of lists and names were transferred to the Germans: names of ‘unruly’ or ‘asocial’ elements, people mentioned in official police reports, lists of farmers and their output. Lists of city personnel were also transferred. Where mayors Delwaide of Greater Antwerp and Grauls of Greater Brussels had refused to hand over lists of city personnel in 1943,¹⁴¹ information on municipal personnel was handed over *en masse* to

the Germans after April 1943. The reason for this concession was simple: local governments hoped to obtain exemptions for their personnel.

However, local governments—mayors or administrative personnel—at the same time tried to sabotage measures at a grassroots level after 1942. There were ways of doing this: falsifying information, delaying certain responses (a typical example was the mayor of Gruitrode who, in May 1943, waited for a few hours before reporting the crash of an English plane so that the pilots had ample time to escape¹⁴²), not reporting incidents or warning inhabitants ahead of German actions.¹⁴³ Exact statistics are impossible to create. But falsifying or hiding municipal records certainly became much more frequent. This seems to have been a more widespread phenomenon in Wallonia and the Netherlands than in Flanders (which is logical, considering the smaller number of collaborationist mayors there).¹⁴⁴ In 1944 this was certainly a problem for the Germans in Belgium and the Netherlands. Unlike in Wallonia, apparently, the Germans and the NSB made serious attempts to copy or safeguard these municipal registers, often by taking them to one central location.

In any case, by the end of 1943, local authority letters that asked probing questions had diminished. Mayors and police commissioners had by that time realized the futility of writing to their superiors. Mayors retreated to their own local islands, solving their own problems in a situation of legal fluidity and lack of central leadership.

PRINCIPLED CHOICES IN THE NETHERLANDS

One Dutch focal point of new order reform was the Justice department. A centrally approved broad flow of bureaucratic information to the Germans was initially not questioned. In December 1940, HSSPF Rauter insisted on better cooperation by the lower branches of the Dutch *Marechausée* with the German repression of ‘sabotage’. As a result, through a circular of January 1941 the Dutch secretary-general of Justice ordered the *Marechausée* to inform the Sipo immediately about any ‘illegal’ local activities. He also ordered them to provide all key information such as the names of suspects. Secretary-general Frederiks of the Interior issued a similar circular to Dutch mayors in the same month,¹⁴⁵ reiterating that every act of ‘sabotage’ was punishable under Dutch law, and that mayors and local police were required to provide all information that could lead to the arrest of perpetrators. This was presented as being laid down in the Hague Convention.

There was also a similarity with the Belgian situation, notably the fact that Dutch mayors increasingly had to operate within a politically 'contaminated' system, infiltrated by collaborationists on a higher level. A marked difference from Belgium in this domain was the continued existence of formal non-NSB connections between the local and central levels. When provincial authorities became too infiltrated by NSB-members, the other mayors organized their own parallel networks. Mayors of cities such as Utrecht (mayor Ter Pelkwijk), Haarlem (mayor De Vos) and Groningen (mayor Cort van der Linden) debated amongst themselves and arrived at common positions. In 1941–42, secretary-general Frederiks used these horizontal structures as a way of exerting influence, communicating orders and guidelines.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Dutch mayors increasingly found themselves in a similar blurring of lines around information management. One illustration is the case of Dutch mayor Leemhorst of Hoorn (who was dismissed in June 1942 because of his 'anti-national socialist' attitude). Despite being judged by the Dutch post-war purge committee in 1945 as having been 'penetrated by the spirit of resistance', he nevertheless encountered difficulties after the liberation for one particular incident. When he was ordered in March 1942 to establish a 'cable guard', he had given the Sipo-SD a complete list of all male inhabitants between the ages of 18 and 45 years (amounting to over 2000 names). As it turned out, the Sipo had at that time given the same instruction (demand for a list of males) to eight neighbouring towns, but always with slightly different parameters (some mayors had to give names without profession or age, some an exhaustive list of males, some only a small group, and so on). Mayor Leemhorst had provided the complete information on addresses and professional situations. This, the post-war purge committee judged, had been a mistake. The mayor testified in 1945: 'I never thought about it, and also nobody said anything to me about it, while ten men were working on that list, that I would be sending valuable information to the Germans.'¹⁴⁷ If this is really true, then this mayor apparently was not conscious of the problem of information management in 1942. The example indicates at least that as in Belgium, local variation existed in the Netherlands as well.

The so-called 'special events', already mentioned, are useful to apply to the Netherlands as well. Take (amongst others) the case of mayor Diepenhorst of Giessen-Nieuwekerk. He was not an NSB member. In 1942, he twice informed the Germans of a 'special event', namely the location of crashed allied pilots. The latter were then immediately

arrested. When questioned about this after the war, the mayor declared that everyone had known where the allied pilots were. The post-war purge committee supported this view, concluding ‘that in these circumstances notification of the Germans (...) was necessary, so the committee cannot put any blame on the mayor for doing this’.¹⁴⁸ There are many similar examples for Belgium and France as well.

Dutch Mayors and local governments were under similar direct German pressure, certainly after 1942. In 1942, Mayor Krol of the small Dutch town of Vriezenveen, for instance, received a German request to send in names of locals who were ‘a threat to public order’. The mayor, who was not an NSB-member, passed on two names.¹⁴⁹ While it cannot be denied that this was a situation where one two inhabitants were put at risk, perhaps the mayor felt he could not refuse outright and therefore had to give ‘some’ answer. Such questions were also typical for German rule in Belgium.

As an overall comparison with Belgium, the perception of ‘normality’ about (repressive) centralized food supply organization and even forced labour in the Netherlands was stronger than in Belgium. In both cases, this was partly caused by the existence of pre-war traditions. A centralized food rationing system had already been created in 1939. The connection with pre-war normality was stronger. Generally speaking, a more repressive attitude to ‘useless’ people seemed to have been more widely accepted under Dutch mayors as well, although this is obviously hard to express in hard numbers and admittedly remains a hypothesis. Another relevant factor adding to this, perhaps, was that the Dutch lacked any collective memories of deportations of labourers to Germany resulting from WW I experiences. I would hypothesize that in the Netherlands, opposition to forced labour as a general policy field was less outspoken for a longer time than in Belgium.

Having said that, Dutch mayors did express the same unease as their Belgian colleagues fairly early on. In 1941–42 discussions emerged about acceptable conduct, when non-NSB mayors complied with German demands to provide the addresses of Dutch nationals who had breached their labour contract.¹⁵⁰ Another parallel with Belgium is that higher Dutch officials could also get confused about what was allowed or not. The NSB mayor Willem Pot of Muntandam, for instance, gave the German authorities a list of black-marketeers in 1942. After the liberation, Pot defended himself by saying that handing over lists of fraudsters and black-marketeers had been part of the routine responsibilities of any Dutch

mayor or Dutch public official in 1942. This led him to claim that the fact the Germans would go on to arrest these people in 1944 had ‘nothing to do with politics’.¹⁵¹ As in Belgium, the year-class actions in early 1943 caused non-NSB mayors to protest. Many now refused to hand in lists. As in Belgium, German officials began relying more strongly on the regional Dutch labour office branches (*Gewestelijke Arbeidsbureaus*).¹⁵²

While in Belgium the turning point was October 1942 (forced labour), in the Netherlands the number of people in hiding rose dramatically after the May strike of 1943. Local governments were now confronted with a growing clandestine society they had to help support or control. The Germans began organizing larger raids and implemented the so-called second distribution card (*de tweede distributiestamkaart*) on 4 December 1943. This new document was clearly a repressive German device to seek people out and create watertight control, and was recognized as such.¹⁵³ This measure in particular caused enormous conflict in Dutch local governments. Reaction to this specific measure would be a recurring topic in post-war purges of mayors.¹⁵⁴ Separate, autonomous Dutch distribution offices had the greatest responsibility for daily implementation, but local governments played an essential part in the administrative effects of this document. Principled protest by Dutch mayors now became strong. As in Belgium, obstruction from local government gradually increased. The organized Dutch underground resistance focused on this as well. When in early 1943 mayors were forced to nominate 10 % of their municipal personnel for forced labour duty, the historian De Jong writes that many mayors openly refused to do so. In some cases, even NSB mayors resisted.¹⁵⁵ So by now, the parallels with Belgium were increasing. A difference with Belgium was that the abovementioned ‘comments on the guidelines’ (*commentaar op de aanwijzigingen*), issued by the Dutch government-in-exile, now forbade cooperation in forced labour in Germany.

Successive German measures regarding forced labour made the principled choice for or against cooperation with the underground resistance hard to avoid. Another important German measure was the decree on redundant companies (15 March 1943), which sought to free up a large number of Dutch workers for forced labour in Germany. Resulting from that measure, Dutch mayors and local governments had to check and control the lists of names. On the reaction of non-NSB mayors to this measure, De Jong writes: ‘not only was resistance more or less general, it was also very effective’.¹⁵⁶ While I agree that opposition against this measure

was great, locally based sources are perhaps too weak to support so categorical a statement.

The main point here is that by 1942, Belgium and the Netherlands were mostly similar in this regard. Local governments and mayors could not hide behind central powers, or behind clear agreements. Increasingly, they had to take their own decisions and responsibilities when confronted with direct German orders that bypassed central authorities.

THE PERSONAL FACTOR: CARLES (FRANCE), FREDERIKS (NETHERLANDS), ROMSÉE (BELGIUM)

I have paid attention to systemic differences but the personal aspect is essential as well: the impact of (key) individuals within these systems. It is difficult to assess the exact impact of one (top-ranking) individual. The nature of the bureaucratic archival sources tends to make individual impact invisible. It is also interesting to note in this regard that collaborationist public officials (including mayors) destroyed much of the essential evidence, especially in Belgium.¹⁵⁷

I will integrate this individual aspect by comparing three central and parallel individuals. These three individuals have already figured prominently in previous chapters: Fernand Carles (the regional prefect of Nord/Pas-de-Calais), Gerard Romsée and Karel Johannes Frederiks (both secretaries-general of the respective national Departments of the Interior) in Belgium and the Netherlands. They managed similar policy domains and faced the same problems. Their individual views and instructions had direct and far-reaching influence at the local level.

Let's start with the French case. In 1916, after brief military service in French Africa, Fernand Carles (b. 1886) began a long administrative career as sub-prefect of several French departments.¹⁵⁸ From 1928 he served for six years as prefect in Algeria. In 1933 he was appointed prefect of La Moselle in France, and on 21 March 1936 he became prefect of Nord. According to French history, Carles's experience as a civil servant and diplomat played an essential role in negotiating a settlement between employers' organizations and the unions and thus in the containment of large social unrest during the general strikes of 1938.

Not much is said about his ideological profile before 1940. In any case, he exemplified that group of prefects who would wholeheartedly support

Pétain after June 1940. In French historiography, he is mostly listed in the group of prefects labelled as *zélés de la Révolution nationale*.¹⁵⁹

Noteworthy was the strong confidence Carles inspired in the Germans (OFK-Lille) as well as amongst Vichyites. Despite the fact that by September 1942 certain circles in Vichy apparently suspected him of playing the role of double agent and secretly supporting the allied cause, he nonetheless maintained a strong position throughout the occupation.¹⁶⁰ It seems clear that Carles himself must have also had some doubts about his position, for by the end of September 1941, for instance, he seemed to have been on the verge of offering his resignation. We can assume that Vichy's anti-Jewish policy mustn't have been easy for him, given that his wife was Jewish. In sharp contrast with this, he was a staunch supporter of radical French anti-communist repression.

The Dutch secretary-general Karel Johannes Frederiks (b. 1881) had many similarities with Carles. Like the northern French prefect, Frederiks was a patriotic civil servant, moulded in large part by a national political-administrative career before 1940. After his law studies, Frederiks had become a civil servant with the Department of Agriculture, Commerce and Trade. At the age of 40, he transferred to the Department of the Interior and in 1931 he became the department's highest-ranking civil servant. In May 1940, Frederiks seemed to adopt a proactive attitude. He strongly supported collaboration and new order reform, in accordance with his particular interpretation of national interests. He would remain in his post until close to the end of the occupation. In this role, he was one of the main supporters of the policy of the lesser evil. He absolutely wanted to keep the Dutch administrative system in 'good' Dutch hands.¹⁶¹

Carles and Frederiks shared similar basic principles. They were both national civil servants who were perfectly in sync with the context of 1940. During the summer of that year, they embodied the policy of accommodation and political-administrative cooperation, motivated by a strong sense of patriotic duty, an understanding of the urgency and necessities of the situation, but also by an ideologically motivated interpretation of the 'national interest'. This translated into a policy of compromise and cooperation with the German occupier. Both of them wanted to block German intervention in the national administrative system, and to defend autonomy over their own domestic administration and affairs. Both strove for a stable status quo for local political personnel. They were both imbued with a strong sense of national or civic duty, which made them stay in their posts until the very end. Although Frederiks fled his post and went into

hiding on 4 September 1944 (fearing assassination for being a collaboratorist), afterwards he kept in contact with his ministry and several mayors through his private secretariat (although his active, direct influence was over). He then immediately began writing the defensive testimony about his policy that he published in 1945.¹⁶² Carles committed suicide in 1945, during his imprisonment while awaiting trial.

One essential similarity was that they were unable to evolve, to adapt over time. For personal or ideological reasons, they lacked the flexibility to change or withdraw from the framework of cooperation which they themselves had partially established in 1940. Frederiks, for instance, lost a great deal of credit after the May strikes of 1943. The so-called ‘comments on the guidelines’ (*commentaar op de aanwijzigingen*) clearly rejected his overly lenient policy of cooperation. Nevertheless, Frederiks continued to openly reject any kind of clandestine ‘resistance’ by Dutch public officials. Through their continued presence and influence, both men embodied the system’s refusal to agree on a policy of resistance. They both became tangled up in a system that, in the end, was far removed from the initial goals of 1940. Both are similar examples of the complete identification that top civil servants can have with a certain state system and the tunnel vision that can accompany this.

The image of prefect Carles in French historiography is highly nuanced. The dominant picture that is revealed is that of the competent and loyal administrator, blinded by a dogmatic sense of patriotic duty that doomed him to follow the regime to the bitter end.¹⁶³ This is the image of a man conditioned by his professional education and an overall predisposition to obedience. For him, it was simply psychologically impossible to distance himself from what he considered legal French authority.

Interestingly, Dutch historiography about Frederiks is much more negative. Responsibility for this view lies with ‘national historian’ Loe de Jong. His ‘judgement’ of Frederiks was hostile. De Jong stresses the admiration Frederiks held for the historic figure of Napoleon and attributes to him almost pathological delusions of grandeur.¹⁶⁴ De Jong places much causal explanation on Frederiks’ personal psychology, most notably his misplaced sense of historical self-importance. De Jong’s vision has had a weighty impact on historiography. While Romijn’s analysis of Frederiks offers a more varied vision,¹⁶⁵ the picture of the somewhat naïve technocrat on a mission who welcomed having freedom to develop policy without parliamentary control in 1940, and was so fiercely opposed to the collaborationist NSB that he was blind to his own compromises, nevertheless remains a dominant one.

The Belgian secretary-general Gerard Romsée was not a civil servant before the war, but rather the faction leader of the VNV in the Belgian parliament. He was the most important representative of the more moderate wing of this party and as such immediately came to the fore in 1940. As we have seen, he was appointed as governor of Limburg and secretary-general in August 1940 and March 1941 respectively. He quickly reformed local government, as well as (to a lesser extent) the police and gendarmerie. In particular, his appointment policy was clearly political. His reforms worked towards stronger centralization, systematically taking away powers from the provinces and the local level (certainly with regard to the police in the larger cities). Another characteristic was his persistent attempts to infringe on the jurisdictions of his colleagues at the Ministry of Justice to stimulate collaborationism.¹⁶⁶ He also facilitated the integration of collaborationist paramilitary militias in police forces.

He was, however, at the same time a prudent and strategic political collaborationist. One of Romsée's essential characteristics was that he dogmatically maintained formal neutrality in everything he said or did. First, he formally distanced himself from his party after his appointment as governor. When he was appointed as secretary-general, he took an oath of loyalty to Belgium and reconfirmed his 'neutral' profile.¹⁶⁷ He always maintained this strictly neutral character in all of his letters. All political letters with collaborationist parties or Germans were systematically removed.¹⁶⁸ He also made strategic use of the *Führerprinzip*. First, he delegated large chunks of policy and autonomous management to certain subordinates.¹⁶⁹ After the liberation, he could claim that he had known nothing about the 'political' affiliations or policies of these subordinates and could therefore not be held personally accountable. He used exactly the same argument with the collaborationist mayors he appointed.

The fact that Romsée's personality was closed and introspective worked in his favour. Certainly after November 1942, Romsée hardly communicated and would refuse to put explicit instructions in writing. He was one of the main propagators of oral agreements. Strategically, this was a smart thing to do. After the liberation it was difficult to find written instructions or letters in which he had incriminated himself. Therefore, the Belgian local diversity and ambiguity was certainly also strengthened by the personality of this collaborationist at the head of the Interior department. In the following sections, we will continue to consider the impact of these key figures by delving deeper into some essential policy areas.

THE ISSUE OF ILLEGAL ARRESTS: JEWISH PERSECUTION

The persecution of the Jews is an obvious key topic to assess the place of local governments and mayors within a larger repressive system.

On the eve of WW II, about 65,000–75,000 Jews lived in Belgium.¹⁷⁰ The large majority of these were immigrants who did not hold Belgian citizenship. By the end of 1940, only 6.6 % of the registered Jewish population held Belgian citizenship. This was in sharp contrast with France and the Netherlands. According to Patrick Weil, of an estimated total of 330,000 Jews in France, 58 % held French citizenship.¹⁷¹ In the Netherlands, 80 % of the Jewish populations were Dutch citizens.

The Belgian secretaries-general refused to implement anti-Jewish decrees themselves, mainly on the grounds that it would be unconstitutional.¹⁷² The German military government in Brussels accepted this without much resistance, and issued its own German decrees, starting with two simultaneous decrees of 28 October 1940.¹⁷³ Ultimately, the German authorities would issue a total of 18 anti-Jewish decrees in Belgium, which followed the standard pattern of exclusion, registration, isolation and physical marking as the final stages before deportation. On 25 November 1941, the Association of Jews in Belgium (AJB) was created, with mandatory membership. One of the last German decrees was the imposition of the yellow Jewish Star (27 May 1942).

In October 1940, the Brussels military government nevertheless pressed for Belgian cooperation in local implementation. Instead of simply referring to the argument of non-constitutionality (which the Germans had already accepted), the secretaries-general sought backup from Belgium's top legal experts. What is remarkable is that neither the leading Belgian jurists nor the secretaries-general referred to the Hague Convention (which forbade such forms of persecution). They could have done so; unlike the Dutch *Zivilverwaltung*, anti-Jewish policy was not a priority for the Brussels military government in 1940. Without a doubt, this was a conscious omission. Jews were sacrificed by the Belgian authorities in the name of the general *modus vivendi*. The large majority of Jews in Belgium were non-Belgian citizens. Only when anti-Jewish policy became more severe were there Belgian protests (early 1942).¹⁷⁴ However, this mostly concerned the small minority of Jews with Belgian nationality.

As far as the French *zone rattachée* was concerned, only 4000 Jews lived in both departments before 1940, half of whom were in the urban region around Lille (La Madeleine and Marcq-en-Baroeul).¹⁷⁵ This small number

was further reduced after the exodus of May–June 1940, although in 1942, both departments together still counted 690 registered Jewish companies.

The legal framework in Nord/Pas-de-Calais was a sort of hybrid Belgian-French construction. The initiative was launched by the French government. The Jewish statute was installed by a Vichy-law of 3 October 1940.¹⁷⁶ Official anti-Jewish policy in the north would start with the German decree of 18 November 1940. It was basically a synthesis of the two first German anti-Jewish decrees issued in Belgium several weeks before (28 October).¹⁷⁷ One month later, a French law would establish the French equivalent of the Jewish register. Subsequent German measures issued by the OFK in Lille would closely follow the same repressive pattern laid out by the Brussels (and also Paris) military governments. In March 1941, a branch of the Vichy-created ‘Commissariat for Jewish Affairs’ was established in Lille.

On a local level, the creation of the Jewish registers was essential. Every Belgian municipality had to create such a registry and make public calls for all Jews (initially from the age of 15 upwards) to present themselves at the town hall for registration (before 30 November 1940 at the latest). In Belgium, this happened mostly in urban areas. By the end of 1940, about 52.9 % of all registered Jews in Belgium lived in the Antwerp conglomeration (38.33 % by the end of 1941), 40 % in the Brussels conglomeration (50.9 % by the end of 1941), 3 % in the Liège conglomeration and 4 % were dispersed over the rest of the country.¹⁷⁸ The second census of Jews was held in July 1941. For this, municipal governments had to add the mark *Jood-Juif* on identity papers, and send their Jewish registers to the Brussels Sipo-SD. The third census-operation of March 1942 was mainly carried out by the recently created AJB.

Deportations started in June 1942, first under the formal cloak of forced labour. Once the deportation phase began in earnest, the Sipo-SD took over from the German military government. The first convoy from the *SS-Sammellager* Kazerne Dossin (Mechelen, near Antwerp) left on 4 August 1942. During the summer of 1942, a handful of larger raids were organized. On 25 September 1942, Eggert Reeder notified the German *Kommandanturen* that the deportation of all Jews from the territory had begun, under the coordination of the Sipo-SD. In the same communication, he ordered that in principle Belgian police forces should not be involved.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, more than in the Netherlands or France, the true motor of anti-Jewish repression, and especially arrests, would be German rather than Belgian bodies.

This municipal Jewish register in Belgium and the north of France was a practical application of the question on local information management. The basic question remained the same: how indigenous authorities handled private information about individual Belgian citizens or foreign people within their borders which could lead to persecution by the enemy.

In the north of France, this issue did not lead to any fundamental questions from mayors or any discussions of principle. Anti-Jewish policy was legalized and legitimized by the French state authorities. While protests within the Belgian system by top-ranking civil servants against the persecution would increase in 1941, there were virtually none in the north of France. On the local level, the lack of protest was in line with information management in other repressive domains, where there was virtually no principled protest or open dissent.

But in Belgium, the local level complied as well. Belgian local governments had to provide a register, but Jews themselves would actively register. It was here that concepts about 'passive' or 'indirect' forms of cooperation (see above) originated. In reality, the registration of Jews necessitated an active administrative process by Belgian administrations. City personnel and the local police had to verify the information provided by the Jews in their civic records or through semi-continuous control measures. In the city of Antwerp, for example, a city civil servant complained to the governor about the large workload for city personnel and the police created by Jewish registration.¹⁸⁰ Registers were actively kept up to date in 1940–41.¹⁸¹ As far as the source material allows us to say, the administrative upkeep of these registers in 1941–42 was an active work for municipal personnel and the local police.¹⁸²

The fact that local governments maintained these registers made the information available to the Germans. The collaborationist commissar-mayor of Ghent (Elias) wrote in a note of 25 February 1941 that the information in the Jewish registers was 'open to everyone'.¹⁸³ The removal of Jews from Belgian public offices (circular letter 22 February 1941) initiated a new round of information gathering and transfer to the Germans.¹⁸⁴ During 1941–42, there were also repeated specific German requests for information from local authorities.¹⁸⁵ Sometimes seemingly trivial questions helped to maintain a permanent system of control. Gradually, this process became less essential, because the Sipo-SD found other means of access to this information. With the third census in 1942, immediately before the start of the actual deportations, the role of Belgian municipal governments in registering Jews was more or less over. Nevertheless, the

municipal Jewish registers remained a reference point of information for the Germans up until 1943.¹⁸⁶ Belgian mayors and policemen in general hardly protested against the upkeep of these registries. This was in sharp contrast to the many protests after 1942 related to information management in other domains.

After the summer of 1942, the persecution of the Jews entered a new phase in all three countries. When deportations began, Jews went into hiding and the true hunt could begin. Deportation rates and mortality rates differ fundamentally in these three countries, namely 40 % in Belgium, 25 % in France and 75 % in the Netherlands.¹⁸⁷ Clearly, given these figures, the Netherlands was able to arrest and deport its Jewish inhabitants much more efficiently than Belgium or France. In their impressive comparative study, Dutch historians Griffioen and Zeller map a set of different causes, but all in all the main cause lay with the Germans.¹⁸⁸ The Dutch *Zivilverwaltung* had the political will to make Jewish persecution a real priority from the very beginning. The hybrid German structure in Belgium (military government versus Sipo-SD) also hindered centralized efficiency.¹⁸⁹ These systemic differences created different contexts for local governments to operate in. In the Netherlands, the occupier took direct control over police and to a lesser extent local governments to execute its policy.¹⁹⁰

The relatively poor German preparation in Belgium revealed its impact after the summer of 1942. Once Jews went into hiding, the Sipo-SD in Belgium turned out to have only one way of working, namely larger raids. Raids were an unreliable tactic with counterproductive effects, since they encouraged more Jews to go into hiding.¹⁹¹ And in Belgium, massive opposition to forced labour after October 1942 impacted on the hunt for the Jews. After October 1942, there was widespread awareness of the problem of 'illegal arrests'. In a maximalist interpretation of the Hague Convention, the Brussels procurator-general had decreed in November 1940 that the Brussels police were permitted to follow German orders to apprehend Belgians (in this case, those who failed to follow regulations on the blacking-out of lights).¹⁹² Until October 1942, the Belgian police arrested or apprehended Belgians on the direct order of the Germans on a regular basis. After October 1942, this shifted. By the end of 1942 the Belgian magistrates essentially said that arrests within the sphere of Belgian interests (violations of food supply regulations, for instance) were allowed,¹⁹³ but that execution of German orders with a military or political German interest was strictly forbidden. This culminated in the statement by the three procurators-general on 24 March 1943 that the Belgian

courts would no longer prosecute political, patriotic crimes.¹⁹⁴ This was a return to the pre-war Belgian constitutional framework. All of a sudden, potential penal consequences for after liberation came (back) into play.

Greater Antwerp offers the most striking local example of this shift. Until 1942 the Antwerp city police acted on German orders, carrying out patrols and inspections, providing various police reports and apprehending people. One noteworthy event was the expulsion of hundreds of foreigners (mostly Jews) from the Antwerp area to the province of Limburg.¹⁹⁵

On 15 August 1942, the city police carried out the order of the Sipo-SD to close down a city quarter and assist with the arrest of Jews. More than a thousand Jews were arrested (and deported). This was the first such anti-Jewish action in Belgium. It is likely that the Antwerp city police were taken by surprise and ill-prepared to offer resistance. All relevant higher authorities were informed of the situation during the following days. Neither mayor Delwaide, nor chief commissioner of police De Potter, nor the Antwerp public prosecutor Edouard Baers reacted to what had happened.

A second, similar action of 26 August 1942 was aborted, but after strong threats from the Germans the city police of Antwerp arrested 1243 Jews on the night of 28–29 August 1942 (the German order had been to arrest a thousand Jews). Unlike the raid on 15 August, in this case the city police acted alone (there were no German police personnel present). The threats made by the Germans to arrest and deport police personnel undoubtedly had a part in this diligence, which is a unique event in the history of the Belgian occupation.

It is remarkable that even after this event, none of the higher authorities responsible thought it necessary to react. The event passed without any comment from the higher authorities. A third mass arrest of Jews in Antwerp in cooperation with the city police took place on 11–12 September 1942. Again, nobody in charge (at the city, province or central level) made any comment.¹⁹⁶

What happened here in Antwerp was the most extreme local consequence of maximalist police cooperation in Belgium. German orders could not be refused and were in fact legal under the Hague Convention. In one sense, this was the final result of lack of clear central (or intermediate) Belgian authority.

Meanwhile, the Antwerp police also implemented German orders for the apprehension of Belgians who evaded forced labour in Belgium. The German *Feldkommandantur* reconfirmed the order to search, apprehend

and guard labour-dodgers on 31 August 1942. The Antwerp police did this without any hesitation. In September 1942, arrested Belgian labour-dodgers from all over the province were gathered in a hall in Greater Antwerp, held by the Antwerp city police and subsequently handed over to the Germans. The mayor, the chief commissioner and the Antwerp chief public prosecutor were fully informed but did not react.¹⁹⁷ This was, in effect, business as usual.

Things drastically changed after the implementation of forced labour for Belgium in Germany. Suddenly, alarm bells started to sound throughout the entire system. Mayors and police commissioners all over Belgium demanded clear instructions and central backing. In Greater Antwerp, things came to a head on 16 November 1942. The Antwerp public prosecutor wrote to the chief of police that he had found out that forced labour dodgers holding Belgian nationality were being apprehended and interned by the city police. The Antwerp magistrate wanted to ‘remind’ the commissioner that this was punishable under the Belgian penal code. This letter took the chief commissioner completely by surprise. In a panic, he immediately replied that his police had in fact been apprehending people throughout the occupation. The Antwerp public prosecutor immediately responded on 18 November 1942: ‘Every apprehension, (...) every arrest or any other measure through which someone’s liberty is taken away outside the framework of Belgian legislation is an extra-judicial arrest (...) and as such punishable by the articles of the Belgian penal code’.¹⁹⁸ Now, for the first time, the mayor reacted as well, writing that he had always thought these kinds of arrests were illegal and had repeatedly said so (which was clearly not the case).¹⁹⁹ Panic ensued amongst the officers of the Antwerp city police. They had been arresting foreigners, Jews and Belgians between 1940 and 1942 without any order to the contrary from their superiors. On 23 November 1942, a crisis meeting was organized (without the mayor) with the German *Feldkommandantur*.²⁰⁰ The result was that the Germans accepted the viewpoint of the Antwerp public prosecutor. From now on, the Antwerp police were absolved from executing German orders for arrests and/or apprehensions for forced labour. Not a word was said about the thousands of Jews arrested earlier.

Belgian regional executive authorities (such as the chief magistrates) had chosen to relegate the Belgian constitutional framework and penal legislation to the background in 1940. After October 1942, the magistrates found it opportune to reintroduce it, though this shift came too late for the Jews of Antwerp.

The Antwerp hierarchy quickly closed ranks. The chief magistrate complimented the commissioner on his conduct until then, and the commissioner answered on 24 November 1942 that he didn't need compliments because he had only been 'following orders'.²⁰¹ The magistrate received a letter from Mayor Delwaide that very same day. It was a strategic letter, conveying the message that he had deliberately kept silent on the entire matter as it was outside his sphere of responsibility. Remarkably, Delwaide explicitly referred to the anti-Jewish action of 28 August 1942, but ignored that of 15 August. About the events of 28 August he wrote: 'These arrests were carried out without my knowledge. If I had been aware of them, I would have objected, because it is clear that the Belgian police are not allowed to execute orders in such cases.'²⁰² With this letter Delwaide probably wanted to cover his tracks and forestall any future penal action against him.

The difference from Brussels was significant. The so-called Conference of the 19 mayors had already collectively refused to distribute the yellow 'Jewish star' in early June 1942. Temporary mayor Coelst had then told the Brussels OFK that it could not demand cooperation in the persecution of Jews: 'A large number of them are Belgians, and we cannot allow ourselves to be associated with a regulation that presents such a direct threat to the dignity of each man, whoever he may be.'²⁰³ This was a clear refusal. The Brussels OFK accepted it and decided to carry out the distribution itself.

In July 1942, the OFK ordered the Brussels police to help with an anti-Jewish raid. The request was also refused after the intervention of the Brussels mayors, and again, the Germans accepted the refusal.²⁰⁴

The differences between Antwerp and Brussels are very interesting. The Brussels authorities refused its cooperation at the last moment before large raids. To explain this Antwerp–Brussels difference we need to look at a combination of three reasons: a political-ideological one, a systemic one and a contextual one. Concerning the first, the Brussels mayors were clearly more driven by a patriotic Belgian framework. Delwaide, the Catholic mayor of Greater Antwerp, was politically inclined towards the new order. This did not necessarily mean, however, that the Brussels mayors were more staunch defenders of democratic human rights, or even that certain of them were necessarily less anti-Semitic than some of the Antwerp leaders.²⁰⁵ Second, comparing Brussels with Antwerp means comparing two different organizational systems. While the Antwerp organization was unified and centralized, the Brussels organization was still in the situation of pre-war decentralization. The political authority over the

conglomeration was fragmented between 19 separate mayors, who arrived at collective stances in their 'Conference'. This collective system was at that time unique for any city government in Belgium. It empowered mayors by reducing the local isolation so typical of the Belgian system. At the very least, it avoided rushed decisions. Things had to be discussed. It was also easier to evade individual responsibility since each mayor could hide behind another. Also, we should not forget the perspectives of the mayors at that moment. In January 1942, the decision had been taken to unify the 19 Brussels municipalities, effectively meaning the dismissal of all these mayors. This pushed the Brussels mayors into a more obstructive attitude towards German orders. Simply put, the Brussels mayors were on their way out and were searching for strategic topics to give symbolic weight to their exit. In fact, the shift by the Brussels authorities was in line with the general tactic of mayors (and public officials) under occupation, namely strategically adapting their position and carefully choosing topics that would lend communicative weight to their change of direction. I therefore consider the position of the Brussels mayors in the domain of the persecution of the Jews a strategic one, only intelligible in the context of that specific moment. In any case, the Antwerp–Brussels difference in itself exemplifies local diversity.

In the north of France, the first large anti-Jewish raid in the north was organized in the night of 11–12 September 1942. Unlike individual local raids in Belgium, this was a coordinated action in all major cities with Jewish residents.²⁰⁶ Like what had happened earlier in Antwerp, this action was a joint Franco-German action. The French police shut down city quarters, while the German police carried out the actual arrests. The day after, over 500 arrested Jews left for the transit camp in Mechelen (Belgium), from where they were deported to the East. This was the single most important anti-Jewish action in the region. On 27 September 1942 the resistance paper *La Voix du Nord* wrote: 'The help given to the Germans by the 103 agents of the Pétain police has proved once again that the latter is nothing more than an instrument in the hands of the Gestapo. The arrest of the policeman who let one Jew escape clearly proves its subjugation.'²⁰⁷ This underground journal pointed to prefect Carles and mayor Dehove as the main figures responsible.

However, things were perhaps more nuanced. After the war, the head of the city food supply service in Lille would testify that many Jews had been warned before the raid and had gone into hiding, supported by a clandestine committee. According to this municipal civil servant, not only

was mayor Dehove aware of the existence of this committee, he had also silently approved of the fact that Jews in hiding received clandestine food stamps.²⁰⁸ This points to a situation not unlike that in Belgium, where even some collaborationist mayors were reluctant actively to support German anti-Jewish repression.

As in Belgium, this large raid marked the beginning of the phase when remaining Jews went into hiding. On 14 September 1942, the Antwerp *Feldkommandantur* wrote that local governments must ensure that Jews did not go into hiding with Belgian citizens.²⁰⁹ The role of local governments and mayors therefore remained one of (active) control and information management, that is, facilitators of apprehensions. In theory, the role of mayors became more essential. Now they had to detect Jews who had slipped through the initial registration system.

As far as I can see, however, Belgian mayors and local governments hardly played a role during this stage. The issue rarely surfaces in the sources and available literature, related to local government. After September 1942, the Belgian system and Belgian collaborationists played only a secondary role, at least in direct arrests and apprehensions.²¹⁰ From now on, the arrest of Jews was primarily carried out by German forces and their henchmen.

In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the Germans took over as well. The situation of 1943–44 was mainly one of individual arrests by German forces, sometimes with help from the French state police or (later) the *Milice*. This was probably also a deliberate tactic. Prefect Carles had pointed to the negative impact the larger raid in Lille had had on public opinion. The Germans would once again return to the use of a collective raid, on 27 October 1943 (again around Lille). This, however, remained a smaller operation. Historians De Jonghe and Le Maner write that Jewish persecution disappeared from the public eye. It was considered an exclusively German issue. Regular French services had other priorities after the winter of 1942–43.²¹¹

Nevertheless, the question remains how the Germans received their information to identify and detect Jews in hiding. In theory, collaborationist mayors could play an essential role. This was especially the case in rural areas, where Jewish people often attempted to hide. On 12 January 1944, for example, three Jews were arrested by the German Sipo-SD. But the information leading to the arrest came directly from Rex mayor Jean Brasseur.²¹² VNV mayor Clement Ronsmans of the village of Leefdaal

likewise played an active role in warning the Sipo-SD of a Jewish family hiding in his village, leading to their arrest.²¹³ Numerous other actions ‘facilitated’ arrests by the Germans, as when in the village of Erembodegem the local police and gendarmerie found hidden Jews in 1943 and handed them over.²¹⁴ So although from now on the physical act of apprehending Jews was for the most part directly carried out by German forces, local governments could easily work as the intelligence branch of the German forces, in the same way as in many other areas.

The near total absence of archival sources during the occupation period, as well as in post-war purge files, indicates that (collaborationist) mayors were rarely engaged in actively repressing (searching and detecting) Jews in 1943–44. The topic of arresting Jews rarely surfaced in post-war purge cases against mayors. When it arose, the issue of this persecution was often an argument for the defence of the collaborationist mayor in question. During the administrative purge investigation on mayor De Greve of the village of Sleidinge, for example, a prominent witness testified that the mayor had always denied the presence of Jews in his community when questioned by German authorities, although he had allegedly been very well aware that some Jews were hidden there.²¹⁵ Protection of Jewish people also provided arguments for more important officials or mayors, such as mayor Jan Grauls of Greater Brussels.²¹⁶ Post-war purge files on mayors often turned on such testimonies that were difficult to verify, though they remained small details that were not investigated further.²¹⁷

The large number of collaborationist Belgian mayors appears *not* to have had any significant impact on Belgian deportation rates of Jews. This is also a hypothesis based on simple numerical logic. Given collaborationists’ efficient transfer of local information about opposition and resistance members, the arrest numbers in Belgium should have been much higher after the summer of 1942 if the tight network of local collaborationists had fully supported this German repression. We can safely conclude that this did not happen. The gradual process of strategically distancing themselves from the Germans had now begun. One might also argue that Belgian collaborationists had perhaps never espoused a truly national socialist anti-Jewish frame of mind. But arguably the essential cause was simply that by the time active repression (search and transfer of information) became relevant, collaborationist mayors had little incentive to support this policy any more. By now they wanted to detect armed opponents and resistance-members, not Jews.

MECHANISMS OF POLITICAL REPRESSION UNDER NAZI MAYORS

The active and repressive management of information against opponents would turn out to be the key distinguishing characteristic of collaborationist mayors. The act of giving information about local citizens to the Germans would be the largest domain of direct collaboration to the German repression machine. Individual behaviour of mayors greatly differed, but there were several underlying mechanisms.

A first factor of influence was the lack of administrative strength and political legitimacy of collaborationist mayors, and the insecurity that came with it. Good governance was key to the collaborationists' legitimation. But they lacked the tools to achieve this. The only practical tool they had was repression, or the threat of it. The mission statement of VNV mayor Van Sintjan of Boechout near Antwerp (appointed on 20 May 1941) was a typical example. His policy priority was food supply in the 'general interest of the people'. When presenting the way he would achieve this, the only concrete point he could mention was 'hard and merciless' repression of inhabitants who broke regulations.²¹⁸

German power became a practical tool of administration. Most collaborationist mayors frequently used German power as a threat in order to force inhabitants to obey them. Rexist mayors Max Jadoul of Moha and Adolphe De Paepe of Maulde made this threat the main theme of their appointment speeches before the administration and population (June and August 1942, respectively).²¹⁹ Many mayors put it into practice. VNV mayor Marcel Hillewaere simply called in German help every time a measure needed implementation, such as when someone refused to accompany requisitioned cattle to deliver food or to execute a mandatory task.²²⁰ One NSB mayor, J. Mertens of Oosterhout, summarized the mindset in August 1944: 'Can't we put this case to the fore with the SD or the Feldgendarmarie? (...) It is difficult for my police to act efficiently in this matter. The SD can create fear much more effectively.'²²¹

This, of course, also showed they had a clear understanding of their own lack of power and legitimacy. In the case of VNV mayor Albert Dessers of Borgloon, the military prosecutor in the post-war trial concluded that reporting opponents to the German occupier had become an 'official mindset' for the mayor. The military prosecutor remarked that this had been manifested most clearly at moments when the mayor had felt his personal authority was being threatened.²²²

Dutch NSB mayors present the most obvious examples. They easily and quickly fell back on German support whenever they felt their authority was under threat. As early as 1940 NSB members wanted to use the Germans to 'scare' opponents, or to 'teach opponents a lesson'.²²³ This was a Catch 22. Using German power was an obvious sign of incompetence.

The second factor logically flowed from the first. In 1940 and 1941, providing the Germans with information about opponents and inhabitants was still mainly a matter of control. When tensions and unrest grew in 1942, control quickly evolved into a spiral of active repression and violence. Gradually, controlling inhabitants became a form of self-protection. In this context, small and relatively trivial incidents had the tendency to escalate. I have hundreds of local case examples of this sort. Just one typical example was the incident that occurred in the village of Merbesle-Château, when the windows of Rex mayor Léon Staquet's house were smashed. For the mayor, the logical reaction was to give the Germans the names of seven local inhabitants whom he had labelled as the main anti-Rexists and Anglophiles for immediate arrest (amongst whom were the local preacher and justice of peace).²²⁴

This was arguably stronger (and occurred earlier) in the Netherlands and Wallonia as compared to Flanders. Fear of the home population was great. Danger was everywhere. NSB mayor Alphons Bouwman thought he saw the same man in the vicinity of his house repeatedly and wrote: 'Would it not be possible to safely lock away these kinds of persons, so they are no longer a threat to us national socialists?'²²⁵ When the German authorities freed a suspect handed over by a collaborationist mayor, the latter could also complain of fear for his safety.²²⁶ This climate of permanent threat created an atmosphere of paranoia. Policing of local societies gradually became total. Weapon owners (such as people with hunting licenses) were proactively listed and screened by collaborationist mayors.²²⁷ By the end of 1942, collaborationist parties were increasingly called upon by their own party leadership to observe all kinds of suspect behaviour and inform the Germans immediately about suspicious-looking people.²²⁸

Repressive action was therefore often provoked by a specific local incident, after which NSB mayors took on individual opponents they had had in their sights for some time.²²⁹ After the destruction of his kitchen garden in August 1942, NSB mayor Stevens of Boxmeer pleaded with the regional police president Eindhoven: 'Might we consider the possibility of creating a civil guard, meaning we could use prominent citizens to stand guard and hold them responsible for certain acts of sabotage?'²³⁰ Fear for

personal safety seemed to be as much a cause as ideological radicalism, although the latter clearly created a detachment from everyday local reality and provided no rational grounds for mitigation.²³¹

A third factor was that, by 1942, collaborationist mayors had become essential parts of parallel shadow structures. They were encapsulated in these structures and could not easily extract themselves.

In Belgium, the degree of political information management clearly increased after Romsée's appointment in March 1941.²³² The Belgian National Labour Office headed by VNV member Hendriks also expected cooperation from collaborationist mayors.²³³ But perhaps the most important were local party sections. By 1942, collaborationist parties had become sectarian movements within a hostile society. Members had a radicalizing influence on each other. The VNV and Rex set up networks of 'trusties': local 'spies' for the Germans.²³⁴ Local party members gave information to 'their' mayor and expected consequent action. Collaborationist mayors represented a repository for all manner of complaints and information on opponents. Many found it difficult to resist this pressure from below.²³⁵

This stimulated the mistrust felt even for those administrations or services where collaborationists' infiltration was inconsequential. In Belgium, these were mainly the courts and the police forces. One practical example was the district governor of Nivelles (later provincial governor of Luxemburg), Jacques Dewez, who complained to the Germans about the regional public prosecutor because he felt the courts were too lenient in fraud and black market cases.²³⁶ On 19 January 1943, the VNV periodical *Volk en Staat* explicitly called VNV mayors to stop reporting politically inspired 'crimes' to the Belgian police forces or judiciary, 'because you run the risk that if you report it to the Belgian justice system, your information will be transferred to the perpetrators of the crime'.²³⁷

This factor operated in the Netherlands as well. The NSB mayor of Sittard wrote in his monthly report of 1944: 'assignments of a political nature or investigations relating to the NSB or NSDAP cannot be implemented because of unreliability [of the police]'.²³⁸ The procurator-general of Haarlem answered the mayor of Boxmeer in April 1943 that he could do nothing about threats to the mayor, because these threats were simply 'highly common'.²³⁹ Therefore, in 1942 and afterwards, Germans and local collaborationists alike mainly fell back on collaborationist mayors.²⁴⁰

THE OPPORTUNITY OF FORCED LABOUR FOR POLITICAL REPRESSION

Forced labour created an enormous window of opportunity for collaborationist mayors. Although some moderate collaborationist mayors (certainly in Belgium) were not happy with this German measure—for they feared further tension and also felt the impact on the local workforce²⁴¹—forced labour in Germany was simply a useful instrument to remove a wide range of local opponents. As early as March 1942, it was clear that these mayors welcomed the opportunity to make lists of ‘undesirable elements’ that would actually be used. In April 1942, VNV governor Lysens of Limburg announced a universal campaign to fight ‘asocial elements’.²⁴² In local reality, the difference between collaborationist and non-collaborationist mayors was immediately apparent. The number of names provided by the former was much higher, the political profile of the people on the lists was clear, and routine administrative lines of communication were cheerfully ignored. Lists of unwanted (anti-social) people went straight to the Germans.²⁴³ Collaborationist mayors often added supplementary comments alongside the names on the lists, making connections with resistance activities or urging the Germans to apprehend these men without delay.²⁴⁴ In Belgium, this increased after October 1942. In many towns and cities under a VNV mayor, administrative services were now centralized in order to increase personal control by the mayor over information.²⁴⁵

In every locality lists of names were distilled from different sources: local party sections, local police, food inspection agents and collaborationist individuals. Because of this, all kinds of people came together on the lists of those destined for forced labour in Germany: people in hiding, criminals, those without gainful employment, political opponents and resistance fighters.²⁴⁶

This repressive use of labour policy could lead to confusion within the collaborationist National Labour Office itself. When VNV mayor Verbeeck attempted to have all local ‘criminals’ deported by simply compiling a (long) list of all names appearing in the local police reports for various and sundry reasons,²⁴⁷ a confused civil servant of the National Labour Office replied that he couldn’t deport all these people because ‘It is not within my immediate jurisdiction.’²⁴⁸

This was at its most unambiguous in francophone Belgium. Rex mayors began systematically sending in lists of local communists early on, expecting

them to be apprehended and deported.²⁴⁹ Such radical Rexist mayors as Edouard Boulard of Ollignies reported so many people that the Germans had a large pool of local names.²⁵⁰

Formal, open conflicts between NSB mayors and municipal personnel were typical of the Dutch system and the single most important flashpoint was forced labour. Indeed, the implementation of forced labour measures (at least lists of municipal personnel and the second distribution card) figured in practically all complaints and indictments during post-war court cases against former NSB mayors.

The search and apprehension of people evading their German work agreement had already been a source of explicit opposition within the Dutch police force in 1941.²⁵¹ Here, the NSB tried to prove their worth to the Germans. Municipal employees of the town of Stedum testified after the war that their relationship with NSB mayor Brontsema had been reasonably good until the listing order discussed above came in,²⁵² when it deteriorated. And indeed, it was over this issue that the municipal secretary was arrested, later to die in captivity; he became a local martyr after the occupation.²⁵³

One clear issue was the selection of municipal personnel for forced labour. The Section of Administrative Affairs of the NSB wrote in May 1942 that NSB-mayors had to actively support this.²⁵⁴ The NSB leadership (and prominent mayors such as Müller from Rotterdam) now wrote parallel instructions next to the official ones of the department of the Interior.²⁵⁵ In February 1943, the party ordered their mayors to send in the lists of the year classes of 1925–1926. This ignited conflicts in many municipalities to such an extent that certain NSB mayors brought in local party members to take over the selection work in the municipal public record office.²⁵⁶ A central party instruction of 8 June 1943 ordered that NSB mayors should make final selections of eligible men themselves and that this had to be kept secret.²⁵⁷ A similar crucial point of conflict was the abovementioned second distribution card.

The actual results of these conflicts varied. Some NSB mayors, such as mayor Overbeek of Hardenberg, did not acquiesce in any type of resistance and responded harshly.²⁵⁸ NSB mayor Michel Boutz of Born simply sacked his municipal secretary on 16 March 1944 because he had refused to cooperate.²⁵⁹ NSB mayor Willem ten Hoopen of Ruurlo called in the German SD to investigate the ‘frauds’ among his own municipal personnel, leading to several arrests.²⁶⁰

More moderate NSB mayors, too, were unable to stand out against the orders personally to select local men for forced labour. Several tried to escape personal responsibility by ordering subordinate civil servants to establish lists.²⁶¹ In some cases, lists of names were leaked to the people affected so that they could go into hiding. This was often done by municipal personnel, but sometimes a collaborationist mayor had (tacitly) given his approval. NSB mayor Daems of the city of Roosendaal, for example, formally sent the list of local civil servants eligible for forced labour. However, he gave the listed men ample opportunity to go into hiding. Afterwards, he did not act when the Regional Labour Office remained passive in searching for these men. The post-war court judged on 19 September 1947 that in this particular situation, this NSB mayor had shown exactly the same attitude as the ‘majority of national civil servants’.²⁶²

NSB mayors had put themselves in a difficult situation. It was almost impossible for them openly to resist forced labour measures. A collaborationist mayor like Willem Hansen of the city of Vlaardingen, for example, was very strict, sacking any of his municipal personnel who refused to cooperate with forced labour measures. However, this same mayor appears to have been tolerant to people in hiding and even to resistance members.²⁶³ Forced labour was the one domain in which he had to appear loyal to the party and the collaboration policy. The same went for NSB mayor Hendrik Sieling of the city of Appingedam, who was assessed positively after the war as a moderate collaborationist. The one major exception was his creation of lists for forced labour.²⁶⁴

Political peer pressure might also help explain this. NSB mayor Zigeler of Bloemendaal passed on various types of lists (for forced labour) and supported police searches. He was clearly under pressure from his more radical local party section.²⁶⁵ NSB mayors had to send periodical reports and were expected always to report ‘something’. Personal contacts were a factor.²⁶⁶ NSB-mayor Westra testified after the war on this issue: ‘In this, I relied too much on certain right hand men and had too much confidence in their reports (...). My position was a very difficult one. I was solely responsible, without a municipal council and for months without aldermen, in an organization where almost everyone distrusted me as an NSB mayor and closely followed my every move.’²⁶⁷ Political peer pressure also seems to explain the paradoxical behaviour of NSB mayor Theodoor van Dierendonck from Ede. On the one hand he passed on many names of local people for forced labour. On the other he tried (pragmatically) to protect his municipal personnel.²⁶⁸ After the war, most witnesses stressed

that the mayor suffered from severe pressure from the local party section (and had tried to distance himself from the party in 1944).

Nevertheless, as in Belgium, radical collaborationist mayors welcomed forced labour as an ideal instrument to get rid of local opponents.²⁶⁹ After August 1943, the term ‘asocial element’ was also used in the Netherlands. Even methods of sowing deliberate confusion by higher authorities were similar to events in Belgium. The collaborationist police president of Eindhoven, for example, ordered mayors to send in lists of asocial elements (mid-July 1943) to help with the harvest. In reality people on these lists were arrested and deported.²⁷⁰

As in Belgium, people who ended up on Dutch lists of unwanted or anti-social elements in 1943 had been those (often municipal personnel) who had resisted in 1941–42, or had some kind of personal conflict with a collaborationist mayor.²⁷¹ As in Belgium, regional labour offices had to reply to NSB mayors that the people they had put on lists had regular Dutch contracts that formally exempted them from forced labour in Germany.²⁷² NSB mayor Van Ravenswaaij of the city of Utrecht wrote several letters in 1943 and 1944 to the regional labour office, trying to designate specific individual cases. On 10 May 1944, he had identified a 19-year old man who was doing kitchen-chores somewhere: ‘Might this be a case of interest to you?’ The regional labour office answered that he was not. The young man had a mental handicap, and moreover his formal labour situation was perfectly in order. This example might seem trivial. In fact it reveals that a mayor of an important city like Utrecht—in the crisis situation of May 1944—apparently had the time and felt the need personally to notify the labour office about an unknown young man working in a kitchen. This and numerous other examples show that local NSB-members were by now not concerned with efficient labour policy. Detecting and removing unwanted individuals was the main goal.

It is interesting to note that after 1943 the presence of an NSB mayor had little significant impact on the overall local effects of forced labour policies. NSB mayor Marius van Lokhorst of the city of Nijmegen, for example, provided elaborate lists of men for forced labour on several occasions. However, few of these men were actually deported. Regional Labour Offices were increasingly reluctant to use these NSB selections. Administrative resistance or sabotage of this system was often successful in neutralizing the NSB’s influence. An efficient local system of supporting people in hiding, as well as resistance from the police and the regional Labour Offices, were much more significant factors.²⁷³

‘TO REMOVE DISAGREEABLE ELEMENTS’: THE FIGHT AGAINST LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETIES

These local police states went beyond issues of self-protection or personal frustration. The essential significance was the struggle against former (pre-war), competing regional-local elites and their networks. What we see here is a totalitarian process at work at a grassroots level: a new (local) political elite trying to oust or even destroy an old, established one.

Targeting local notables—as hostages for example—became a pattern in Belgium and the Netherlands almost immediately. Taking hostages was explicitly prohibited by the Hague Convention (article 50).²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Germans immediately used this tactic in all three countries, basically from the beginning: political prisoners (at a later stage, for execution), human shields (to prevent resistance attacks), replacement hostages (family members of wanted persons) and reprisal hostages (often local people of influence, apprehended after local incidents).²⁷⁵

Collaborationist parties played a major role in this. In francophone Belgium, the lists of communists that Rex delivered around June 1941 would be used to determine hostage policy throughout the rest of the occupation.²⁷⁶ In the first half of 1942, the VNV began establishing ‘preventive’ lists of dangerous people who had to be ‘neutralized’ when the time was right.²⁷⁷ On 27 March and 29 May 1942 respectively, the Limburg and Antwerp VNV provincial leaders wrote that in order to protect local party members, the party had systematically to start establishing lists of names of all important local opponents. The Catholic youth movement leaders were mentioned as a priority target. The provincial leaders explicitly laid it down that ‘These opponents must be neutralized at the right time’,²⁷⁸ and the Antwerp party secretary reinforced this principle, saying that the party ‘need[ed] to get the ringleaders and dangerous crooks; for instance, we need not report people who listen to the British radio or talk about it, whereas you should report a mayor or a judge who perhaps outwardly remains silent, but in fact sabotages everything’.²⁷⁹ The VNV began systematically setting up lists of the local Flemish elite in March-April 1942. This elite was, for the most part, Catholic. Overall, there are hundreds of instances of collaborationist mayors putting members of the local elite on hostage lists.²⁸⁰

In the Netherlands, hostage policy only came to the forefront later, but the pattern was the same.²⁸¹ A typical example was Hendrik Vitters, NSB mayor of Zaandam from July 1942. After a fire in a German depot, the

Amsterdam Sipo-SD ordered him to provide a hostage list.²⁸² Together with the local NSB section, mayor Vitters established a list with the names of 30 opponents and notables. The NSB mayor delivered the list to the local police inspector (who immediately ‘leaked’ the list to the people mentioned on it). There is, incidentally, no clear pattern showing whether Dutch collaborationist mayors who came from the local community itself were more or less inclined to report local dignitaries and to fight local civil society networks. The hostage list of mayor Pieter Dekker (Oude Tonge and later also of Harlingen) in April–May 1942 contained members of the municipal administration who had shortly before refused to cooperate, a local priest and an alderman (*wethouder*).²⁸³ This caused such protest that hostage executions would only be reintroduced during the summer of 1944.

The Dutch situation clearly shows that the totalitarian dynamic created a reserve pool of potential hostages for future reprisals aimed at local powerbrokers.²⁸⁴ A regional NSB leader (Klaas Pit) made a link after the war between the local party files of 1935 and the hostage lists in 1944: ‘In preparation for an eventual takeover of power by the NSB in the Netherlands, a certain number of people—who in case of certain events could serve as hostages—had to be known.’²⁸⁵ The future NSB mayor of Hardenberg ordered the local circle leaders in January 1942 to compile lists of local powerful people who were known opponents of the SD, as long as they did not include doctors or civil servants, who were apparently considered indispensable.²⁸⁶ NSB mayor Cornelis van Ravenswaaij of Utrecht wrote in April 1942 that he had received the list of local dignitaries ‘who through their esteem in the community could, in case of unrest, be of great influence’.²⁸⁷ Mayor Thomaes of Boxtel wrote on 29 March 1942 about three local dignitaries: ‘This triumvirate forms the core of opposition in Boxel and surrounding areas.’²⁸⁸ NSB mayor Harm Höltke of Gorinchem collected a list of names of the richest local opponents, with the aim of collecting fines in case of German reprisals.²⁸⁹ NSB mayor Willem Bos of Winterswijk defended his local hostage policy after the war as a legitimate instrument of law enforcement.²⁹⁰ Many NSB mayors listed municipal personnel who had refused to cooperate with the NVD or *Winterhulp*, either as hostages or for forced labour.²⁹¹ In 1942, NSB mayor Edward Sandberg of Kampen gave the Germans the names of specific personal opponents who were causing unrest and would do better to ‘disappear in the general interest’.²⁹² NSB mayor Antoon Van Campen illustrates that the use of German force was specifically aimed at important local opponents (in his case, a priest and a doctor) who consistently

questioned the mayor's authority.²⁹³ NSB mayor Van Campen put a municipal council member on his personal 'black list' after the latter had refused to become member of the NVD. This list also contained black market farmers.²⁹⁴ Although difficult to prove (judicially) in post-war trials, the links between German reprisals and these NSB-created lists are often clear.

Complete arbitrariness was the result. A municipal councillor of the Dutch village of Dinteloord testified after the war that the blacklist of NSB mayor Van Campen contained political opponents, municipal personnel who had refused to carry out orders, local notables who had refused to cooperate with the NVD and farmers who sold produce on the black market.²⁹⁵ NSB party leadership made several failed attempts in 1942 and 1943 to centralize these bottom-up flows of local information.²⁹⁶ In a remarkable letter to the national WA commander (as early as 19 July 1941), provincial commissioner (and NSB member) De Marchant et d'Ansembourg wrote that he thought things were getting a bit out of hand: '[The WA] is becoming some kind of tale-teller on our people to the German authorities, which will certainly not help to win the love of our own. [I think that incidents] should be dealt with by ourselves, or by the Dutch police as appropriate, and that we should make use of the German occupation authorities only in the most extreme cases.'²⁹⁷ He himself would later actively participate in this reporting of Dutch opponents to the Germans, illustrating that collaborationism created uncontrollable dynamics.

I found just one rare early example in the Netherlands of a discussion of principle on the issue of explicit hostage taking. When NSB mayor Fontein Strootman of the village of Eersel wrote a letter to the Sipo-SD on 28 October 1942 listing several names of potential local hostages, the provincial commissar called the mayor to his office: 'Hostage taking is a measure of the occupying power; it is up to them to determine when hostage taking takes place, and a mayor should not use such a measure to remove elements who are disagreeable to him from his community.'²⁹⁸

To 'remove disagreeable elements' from the local community, however, was not easy. The coup of VNV, Rex and NSB was far from complete. Most pre-war local and provincial administrations were (at least partly) kept in place. Old ties and networks endured. At a local level, these networks were deeply rooted. They consisted not only of associations of all kinds, local party divisions, and socio-economic interest groups, but also of youth organizations, cultural and sports organizations (that were mostly connected to a political body). Following the sudden transition to German occupation these networks were forcibly pushed into the

background. They did not, however, disappear. They remained present, initially mostly dormant. In Belgium, local-regional Catholic civil society persisted, sometimes semi-clandestinely, sometimes openly.

Either way, its influence on local societies remained, despite such influence being perhaps cautiously exercised in 1940–41, when the German new order still had the wind in its sails. Certainly after October 1942, however, these dormant networks began to re-emerge. Pre-war local powerbrokers—or even new ones—began tentatively to creep again to the foreground in 1943. These old and new powerbrokers represented small pockets of legitimacy for local populations, immune to the collaborationist elite. They presented a major threat to local collaborationist authorities—particularly the mayors.

One pocket of competing legitimacy remained the local pre-war political elite, and many pre-war mayors. These often continued to have significant local influence after their dismissal in Belgium and the Netherlands. Indeed, reports of continued and blatant contact between dismissed mayors and the local administration—despite the presence of a new collaborationist mayor—recur frequently. Such was the case for mayor De Winter of Rumst, who found out that his predecessor, former mayor Fonteyn, was still openly organizing various meetings (with farmers, for instance, in order to give them instructions). Mayor De Winter filed several complaints (primarily with the VNV governor), but to no avail.²⁹⁹ All Limburg VNV mayors gathered under the direction of VNV governor Lysens as early as May 1942 to discuss the problem of local (Catholic) notables setting local populations against the collaborationist mayor. An internal Rex report directed to the Sipo-SD (December 1943) came to the conclusion that the old pre-war (Catholic) elite still dominated the political power networks in the province of Luxembourg. The report said that the old pre-war provincial executive committee (*bestendige deputatie*) still held clandestine meetings and gave instructions to the provincial administrations.

Schools also provided one such battleground for local conflicts of legitimacies (certainly in Flanders). Many VNV mayors crossed swords with local teachers who used their classrooms to voice anti-German and anti-collaborationist views.³⁰⁰

The local clergy was another of the important pockets of competing legitimacy and semi-clandestine opposition. Certainly in Belgium, churches were one of the last bastions of dissidence. Church attendance rose during the occupation, and in many cases local clergymen used their weekly sermons to openly criticize German or collaborationist policies. From 1942

onwards, the topic of such critiques often concerned the eastern front. In Wallonia in particular, there were frequent conflicts between Rex mayors and local preachers. Conflicts between the local clergy and collaborationist mayors were also frequent in the Netherlands.³⁰¹ In Flanders, many VNV mayors chose to avoid direct confrontation with the local clergy.

Personal confrontation was a delicate matter because these local dignitaries often commanded so much legitimacy that their arrest could provoke local opposition. The most obvious course of action remained the filing of complaints and submission of reports. On 20 May 1942, VNV mayor Vrijdaghs of the town of Sint-Truiden sent a report to his governor regarding the local priest who was stirring up the Catholic youth movements and openly preaching against the VNV. The mayor said that he himself could do nothing, as it would completely undermine his own position. For him, the Germans alone had the power to intervene. He wrote '[The Germans] should assume their responsibility. I hope that now, finally, there will be a thorough intervention. You are welcome to forward my letter to the German Verwaltung.'³⁰²

Remarkably, however, the Germans did not silence such openly dissident voices, especially in Belgium. Belgian collaborationist mayors appeared to have few legal means to put a stop to this, despite the system of presumed authorization by the German local *Ortskommandantur*.³⁰³ Just one example: in the village of Broechem (in 1941) and later the village of Oelegem (in 1943), both VNV mayors were openly criticized in satirical puppet shows. The two outraged VNV mayors each did everything they could to prohibit these public plays. They were reprimanded by the Antwerp *Feldkommandantur*, the provincial governor and secretary-general Romsée. According to municipal law, a Belgian mayor could only prohibit public theatre when public order was threatened, which, it was determined, was not the case here. Thus, even in German-occupied Belgium and despite the high degree of collaborationist control, local satirical puppet shows could openly voice a certain level of criticism without any sanction.

The Germans in Belgium had no intention of engaging in a needless confrontation with certain local networks and populations, and were by no means keen to take overt action against priests or pre-war mayors. Overall, only when German interests were directly threatened did the Germans actually intervene in a repressive way. For example, it was only when VNV mayor Gerard De Coninck of Wijtschate presented the gatherings of the local Catholic Labour Youth as those of a political proto-resistance group

that this youth movement was immediately suppressed and its leader (the local priest) arrested.³⁰⁴

There are some examples of Dutch NSB mayors taking action against the former local mayor, but apparently not as systematically as in Belgium.³⁰⁵ Mayors had a different position in local societies. When NSB mayors made demands these were modest: usually a request for removal of a former mayor from the local area.³⁰⁶ Anti-communist action hardly appears at all in post-war court investigations against NSB mayors, for the obvious reason of the lack of a communist presence in most localities. It was more common for NSB mayors to use incidental conversations or haphazard fragments of information to instigate (escalating) German repression.³⁰⁷ When confronted with small pieces of evidence (such as leaflets) pointing towards the resistance in 1943–44, many NSB mayors apparently chose to be better safe than sorry, giving elaborate lists of people potentially involved in resistance networks to the German Sipo-SD.³⁰⁸ The repression of local opposition by NSB mayors therefore had the same characteristics, it was simply more incidental and individual.

HOSTAGES, COMMUNISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF LOCAL COOPERATION IN NORD/PAS-DE-CALAIS

In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, hostage-taking was an accepted instrument of policy from the outset. In 1940, the arrest of local dignitaries for short periods of time, as reprisal, was commonplace.³⁰⁹ Unlike in Belgium or the Netherlands, an official (French) administration was set up. Quickly, administrative regulations prescribed the numbers and social categories of hostages per town (students, merchants, free enterprises, and so on). French regional, local and police authorities had no qualms about actively participating.

Both departmental archives contain official lists of hostages by municipality.³¹⁰ For an average village these comprised about six names. For a somewhat larger town such as Marcq-en-Baroeul the list enumerated 19 potential hostages. And in a marked difference with Belgium and the Netherlands, the French police actually arrested hostages, for example four students arrested at Tourcoing on 8 December 1940, to serve as hostages after German phone lines were cut.³¹¹

Even in 1940, the monthly reports of the regional authorities, listing people apprehended by prefectural administrative order of arrest, were

used to compile German hostage lists.³¹² In correspondence between the French regional authorities and the police from 1940 to 1942, there is often talk of ‘lists of undesirable elements’ (*listes des indésirables*). This category was used to create a long list of local hostages.³¹³ In 1940, mayors were acceptable as hostages but policemen were not. When the mayor of St.-Pol put the local police commissioner at the top of the hostage list in July 1940, the regional authorities judged that the mayor had gone too far: ‘Police commissioners are no local dignitaries, nor political men. They are magistrates who belong to the ministry of the Interior, appointed and sent to localities to lead the police there and not for anything else.’³¹⁴ Mayors in both departments, however, remained prime ‘hostage material’ in 1940. A typical example was the mayor of Wattignies-Templemars, arrested with five other local dignitaries in September 1940 after German windows had been smashed and telephone cables cut.³¹⁵ Typically, such an internment would last for several days or weeks. All of this did not provoke debates on principles in 1940–41, but after 1940 taking mayors hostage would significantly decrease.

Things became more serious when hostage policies became interconnected with political violence after June 1941.

Communists had, of course, been registered before 1940. Shortly after June that year information about individual communists was assembled by town and village by the French *Sûreté Nationale*.³¹⁶ In June 1940, the list of all communist municipal councillors elected in 1935 was passed on to the OFK-Lille.³¹⁷ From June 1940, the clandestine communist movement continued to organize protest action in factories and industrial areas.³¹⁸ Initially, however, the actual repression of communism in Nord/Pas-de-Calais was moderate. The number of communists arrested by the gendarmerie that appear in the reports of prefect Carles (Nord) from June to October 1940 can even be said to be remarkably low (fourteen).³¹⁹ In almost all of these cases, arrests were of communists who had clandestinely distributed pamphlets. This included files of judicial procedures and court convictions. Whereas in 1940 and the first half of 1941 80 % of them concerned ordinary (non-political) common law crimes (mainly theft), the number of political condemnations began to increase and from 1943 onwards, a clear majority of the cases sent to the Germans concerned communists.³²⁰ After June 1941, the Germans had a large database of names and addresses of all major communists in the region.³²¹ These formed the basis for a reserve pool of hostages.³²²

The Communists played a major part in the miners' strikes of May and June 1941. On 4 May a violent attack was made on a German in Lambersart. The French *Sûreté Nationale* conducted their own investigation and sent all their results and information to the *Geheime Feldpolizei*.³²³ The role of the mayor in all of this was minimal; he forbade public demonstrations in his locality and for the rest simply had to carry out German reprisal measures for the town. The real turning point was, conspicuously, 22 June 1941. After this date there were a greater number of overt communist activities and a rise in violent incidents.³²⁴ The hot spots were Lens, Douai and Valenciennes. On 24 July, the Brussels *Militärbefehlshaber* Von Falkenhausen himself delivered the order to the OFK-Lille to engage in radical repression.

This elicited a strong reaction from the collaborationist prefectural system. For the French police and the gendarmerie in Nord/Pas-de-Calais, a culture of anti-communist repression was already deeply rooted.³²⁵ Vichy simply reinforced this and augmented the legal instruments available. In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, regional prefect Carles played an essential role. From the very beginning, he considered the unambiguous repression of communism necessary. In this respect, his personal radicalization process went hand in hand with that of the regime.³²⁶ On 17 January 1941, he wrote to the ministry of the Interior saying that he wished to organize large scale arrests of communists, but that he was hampered by the absence of internment camps in the region.³²⁷ He would go on to play a major role in the establishment of such camps, with the first one opening on 9 September 1941 in Doullens (used mainly for the detention of communists).

On 30 July 1941, the first German death penalty was issued against a communist worker who had committed sabotage (he was, incidentally, Belgian). During the night of 24–25 August 1941, two German soldiers were killed in a communist resistance attack in Marquette-les-Lille, and the following night, two German officers were killed in the course of a similar attack in the centre of Lille. The French authorities in the region cooperated closely with the Germans in the resulting retaliation. In cooperation with the *Geheime Feldpolizei*, the city police and auxiliary guards in Lille locked down a city quarter on 31 August 1941 to conduct large-scale house searches and street inspections (they made no arrests).³²⁸

On 7 September, two French gendarmes of Somain caught two communists in possession of incriminating material, arresting one of them. That night, a member of the same brigade was shot, and the brigade consequently organized house searches and arrested ten communists.³²⁹ The

OFK-Lille issued letters complimenting this French action. In fact, the Germans wanted to give the brigade a financial reward, but prefect Carles intervened by pointing out this was against regulations.³³⁰

As of 5 September 1941, the systematic German execution of communist hostages and members of the resistance began.³³¹ Initially the Brussels *Militärbefehlshaber* Von Falkenhausen held short of meeting Hitler's execution 'quota' (outlined in his instructions on 16 September 1941), and in Belgium, Von Falkenhausen even stalled the execution of hostages for a while. After numerous acts of sabotage were committed in Liège and Vilvorde, however, five Belgian resistance fighters were executed at the end of December 1941.³³² The selection of hostages and ultimate decision to execute them were the responsibility of Von Falkenhausen personally, but the gathering of intelligence obviously remained decentralized and local.³³³

On 23 September 1941, regional prefect Carles wrote an important police circular. All communist leaders had to be arrested and every change of address of every registered communist had to be communicated to the regional administration.³³⁴ Carles wrote to the ministry of the Interior on 9 October 1941 to say that his police forces would 'redouble' their efforts to identify all non-registered communists.³³⁵ In November 1941 a section of the anti-communist police was established in the region (as well as shortly thereafter a special section of the judicial police). Using the instrument of administrative arrests (issued by the prefects), the French police now apprehended hundreds of communists, sometimes on a German 'suggestion', sometimes 'preventively', and sometimes in reprisal.³³⁶

By 1942, local control, policing and repression effectively had become key priorities of the regime (and of collaboration).³³⁷ After an attack on two German soldiers in Lens (Pas-de-Calais) on 11 April 1942, the OFK-Lille ordered yet again that all communist leaders in the entire region were to be arrested and that all French police services 'had to place themselves at the disposal of the *Geheime Feldpolizei* through the *Kreiskommandantur*'.³³⁸

In local practice, French and German investigations of resistance networks often seemed to start separately, until either the Germans or French decided to take action. Then, mutual cooperation or exchange of information/prisoners was often the result.³³⁹ A raid on 14 February 1944 in Bailleul gives one example of how daily practice evolved. In the early morning, the German police requisitioned 200 French policemen for a major action. All roads were blocked and houses were systematically searched, leading to the arrest of 60 people. The French state police

took active part in the search and arrests, while local auxiliary policemen pointed out houses. The French reports of this raid gave no indication of any protest or objections whatsoever.³⁴⁰ These were standard Franco-German police actions in 1944.

So local hostage and reprisal policies were openly political in nature and part of the normal local French–German cooperation. Despite the Hague Convention, real debates did not take place in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. When German–French tensions arose when the Paris police cooperated with German operations on 28 August 1941, the debates were more about the principle of protection of French autonomy than the protection of French citizens. The semblance of formal autonomy remained important to the French authorities in this domain as well. After the August 1941 incident, the director-general of the municipal police (Meyer) issued the general order that the French police, in principle, had to execute German orders. This was contradicted, however, by a French decree of 25 October 1941, and the French–German police agreement of 16 April 1942, as well as the new agreement of 4 August 1942 (between the HSSPF and Bousquet), tried to distinguish between French and German interests and jurisdictions.³⁴¹ On 25 October 1941 Pucheu decreed to the prefects that arresting communists as hostages on the orders of the Germans was prohibited.

Therefore, although the same basic questions as in Belgium and the Netherlands were raised, questions surrounding conscientious objections or legal problems regarding the arrest of French citizens who might then be delivered to the Germans were not at stake here.³⁴² A logical consequence was that the Germans would sometimes arrest and execute French communists who were apprehended (or, at least, reported) by the French authorities.

This exchange of information did not work both ways; the French regional authorities, for instance, only learned in April 1942 that the Germans had dismantled an important communist group in October 1941.³⁴³ On 22 October 1941 the minister of the Interior ordered that the procurators-general were to deliver the monthly lists of all arrested communists to the Germans, something that—according to my findings—had already been happening in the northern region since 1940.

Nevertheless, there were certain incidents that made the limits of French cooperation visible. In August–September 1941, the personal secretariat of prefect Carles reported 20 names of important communists to the Sipo-SD. Several of these men were later executed as hostages. The initial German question had made no mention of execution.

The head of Carles's personal secretariat consequently reflected that 'In this case, the good faith of the *commissaire aux renseignements généraux* in Lille had been exploited and we were entirely taken by surprise'.³⁴⁴ It seems that the explicit provision of names for execution presented something of a problem for the personal secretariat of the prefect, surprisingly since this was the unavoidable consequence of the bureaucratic system in place.

The following example also sheds light on practices. In the middle of September 1941, the *Kreiskommandantur* of Avesnes ordered the French sub-prefect to arrest thirteen communists in the town of Pont-sur-Sambre.³⁴⁵ Both the sub-prefect and the *police spéciale* checked the German intelligence. They concluded that these thirteen individuals were innocent, as none of them was a registered communist (only three of them had been communists before the war). The French authorities assumed the German information was wrong, and put the German order on hold. In a meeting at the *Kreiskommandantur*, the mistake was traced back to the police commissioner of Aulnoye, who had sent two reports: one to the Germans with the names of thirteen 'dangerous communists', and one to the French authorities without any names. The police commissioner defended himself before his French superiors by saying that 'It was never my intention to propose the arrest or internment of these individuals. I simply obeyed the orders of the occupying authority by giving more specific information about them.'³⁴⁶ The departmental authority judged that the police commissioner had made a serious mistake in giving priority to French over German authority. It is possible, of course, that this local police commissioner wanted to neutralize his personal opponents. This highlights several things. First, the lack of influence exercised by the mayor (who played no part in the entire matter). Second, the fact that within the interconnected French-German anti-communist repression, the French regional authorities tried to exert some kind of autonomous control over German orders issued to French services.

I was able to find one rare question about the issue of principle. In June 1942 the *Commissaire central aux Renseignements* asked prefect Carles for clear regulations with regard to information exchange with the Germans. This was an exceptional, even unique demand. The commissioner said that the Germans were constantly asking for information about all kinds of French citizens, including high ranking policemen and civil servants, and that he had problems continuing with this due to 'questions of conscience'.³⁴⁷ I can only hypothesize that the real reason the commissioner

was feeling reluctant just then, was that higher ranking French officials were now being mentioned on these lists. The prefect's office simply responded that these German requests for information could not be refused. There would never be any central (regional) restriction from the prefect's office with regard to information flows to the Germans.

I was only able to find one example in which the regional prefect actually tried to limit French police cooperation in German repression. On 1 December 1943, Carles forbade the police of Avesnes to transport certain French prisoners. These prisoners had committed acts exclusively directed against the German military. In Carles' view it was up to the Germans themselves to transport them.³⁴⁸ Here, therefore, the regional prefect referred to the basic formal principle of Franco-German division of powers. This, however, was a rare exception. Normally, French cooperation was near total as long as the normal chain of command was observed.

The absolute priority of maintaining autonomy, led to radicalization in practice. On the local level, the police in Nord/Pas-de-Calais did many things that in Belgium and the Netherlands would be considered to have dubious legal grounding. Arbitrary house searches, for instance, were common in 1942–44, as was apprehending people on direct German orders.³⁴⁹ Indeed, French autonomy was a charade. Daily reality showed an indiscriminate overlap between French and German police repression. This was normality and included common crimes. A typical example was that of the northern French gendarmerie who apprehended several smugglers in Armentières on 25 December 1942. After receiving a severe beating, the smugglers were simply handed over to the German police.

Franco-German anti-communist (or terrorist) police actions often remained separate, but clearly mutual coordination was near total in 1944.³⁵⁰ Under Darnand, as the French *Milice* gradually took control of law enforcement, any formal agreements differentiating between French and German repression became irrelevant.³⁵¹ When violence escalated in 1944, the dynamic of local police collaboration was impossible to control. By then, prefectural authorities had lost even the supervision of German reprisal actions. Many French reports could hardly keep up with German arrests.³⁵²

What was the role of mayors and local government in repression and hostage policies? Generally speaking, local governments played a minimal, purely executive role in hostage information-gathering and policy. As a rule, most mayors were also excluded from the repression of the (armed) resistance.³⁵³ Local governments were mostly used to provide supplementary information at best. Practical examples show that French

police forces and regional authorities revised any information coming from local governments with regard to political repression or hostages. The *commissaire central* of Roubaix, for example, informed the prefect on 23 September 1941 that the municipal secretary of Roubaix—further to a verbal instruction of the mayor—had submitted an updated list of registered communists (with the explicit intention of arresting hostages). The commissioner suggested double-checking the information before sending the list to the German OFK. In a 29 October 1941 meeting between the *Kreiskommandantur* and the sub-prefect of Cambrai the French authorities were ordered to hand over the complete lists of all communists, Gaullists and all other generally anti-German inhabitants for 120 towns and villages. The German *Kreiskommandantur* explicitly said that the *Police Spéciale* was solely responsible and local governments were not to be involved.³⁵⁴

Interestingly, local governments seemed to have been prohibited from nominating potential hostages. They were, however, allowed to organize the random selection of hostages (*tirage de sort*). On 24 January 1941, for example, the mayor of Houplin had to defend himself before the prefect because he had personally nominated specific hostages instead of letting fate decide. At the same time, contrasting examples can also be found, mostly involving registered communists. At the beginning of September 1941, the *commissaire spéciale* of Lille (on the order of the OFK) asked the mayor of Lesquin to provide the names of 20 local communists to be arrested as hostages. The mayor answered that the eight best-known local communists had already recently been arrested, so that the local ‘supply’ of names was insufficient. In the end, the mayor delivered eight names and the *commissaire spéciale* collected the other twelve.³⁵⁵ This type of ‘joint effort’ occurred regularly.

Even by 1941, arresting communists had become so common that mayors and local governments could hardly follow what was happening. It was simply standard German policy to arrest registered communists after every local incident. When, on 20 September 1942, an explosion occurred on the railway track between Roubaix and Croix, the first thing the German *Feldgendarmarie* did was to immediately arrest a handful of registered communists from the nearest village. The following day, 40 people were arrested from several neighbouring villages, all of whom had appeared on lists of ‘political opponents’.³⁵⁶ In the end, the arrests of communists—and, increasingly, ‘Gaullists’—in reprisal had become so common that local and regional reports contained such standard phrases as:

‘[person X] was a former communist and his arrest was probably carried out because of this specific reason’.³⁵⁷ The mayor of Mons-en-Baroeul informed the prefect on 1 September 1941 that he had no information at all on the German arrest of two inhabitants of his community: ‘In my opinion, these two arrests have to be linked to the repression of communist activities carried out by the Germans after some recent incidents. I have every reason to believe that both persons have to be considered as hostages.’³⁵⁸

The most important role of French mayors was, in fact, mediation. A mayor would lobby the Germans for individual releases.³⁵⁹ Mayors mostly used objective, economic arguments for this (for example, shortages of local labour and of farmers).³⁶⁰ In larger cities, specific civil servants were assigned to handle hostage files, and the city of Lille even had a special *Service des otages* that occupied itself mainly with mediating for release.³⁶¹

A mayor’s legitimacy in Nord/Pas-de-Calais was therefore probably less affected by local hostage-taking than in Belgium or the Netherlands. In fact, the system in place could help to *increase* a mayor’s legitimacy. A good example was the mayor of Quincy. He informed the prefect on 11 November 1940 that he had been forced to select ten hostages after the cutting of German telephone cables. He had consequently selected ten names and posted the list in public places. However, he also informed the prefect he had put his own name as the first on the list. This was obviously a strategic move to strengthen personal legitimacy. Even the Germans realized they would only strengthen the mayor’s position by pursuing this tactic. They decided to cancel the arrest of hostages, and order the establishment of a permanent local guard duty. Several weeks later, however, the town received a collective fine of 100,000 francs, and the mayor personally was fined 10,000 francs. Again, the mayor returned to his former tactic, publicly offering himself as a hostage.³⁶² The tactic had proved its worth. In another example, the mayor of Lewarde was ordered by the German police to name four hostages on 8 November 1941. The hostages did not have to be communists, but had to be ‘hostile to Germany’. Again, this particular mayor refused and offered himself as hostage. After mediation by the sub-prefect of Douai, the Germans opted for the standard approach, arresting four local registered communists. The incident was then dropped.³⁶³ Mayors in Nord/Pas-de-Calais could detach themselves from this policy, at least in public perception. Local hostage policies gave mayors mainly an opportunity to mediate for releases. Further, they offered good opportunities for mayors to strategically side explicitly

with their people, both against the Germans as well as—in a later phase—against their own regional authorities and police forces.

NOTES

1. Initially, formal protests were scarce, some exceptions aside.
2. D. Peschanski, 'Encadrer ou contrôler. Information et propagande sous Vichy', in L. Gervereau and D. Peschanski (eds.), *La propagande sous Vichy* (Paris 1990) 10–31.
3. Reports of the sub-prefecture of Cambrai and Avesnes, 1941–1942, *I W nr. 770*, ADN – L.
4. *I W nr. 1589*, ADN – L.
5. *I W nr. 730*, ADN – L.
6. Peschanski, *Vichy. Contrôle et exclusion*, 50, 74–76.
7. *Rapporten van overheidsinstellingen aan prefect Carles 1941–1942*, *I W nr. 1589*, ADN – L. *Rapporten van de prefect van Pas-de-Calais aan Binnenlandse Zaken 1941–1942*, *I W nr. 1589*, ADN – L.
8. Bargeton, 'La fonction', 151.
9. *I W nr. 470*, 'réorganisation communale', ADN – L.
10. Monthly reports of Roubaix and Seclin, 1941–1942 *I W nr. 770*, ADN – L.
11. *I W nr. 410*, ADN – L.
12. *I W nr. 145*: 'amendes infligées (...)’ and 'Arrestations (...)’, ADN – L.
13. *I W nr. 145*, ADN – L.
14. *I W nr. 199*: 'mesures (...)’, ADN – L.
15. See an example in Armentières: *I W nr. 199*: 'mesures (...)’, ADN – L.; *I W nr. 559*: 'ordonnance allemande (...)’, ADN – L.
16. *I W nr. 398*, ADN – L and *I W nr. 408*, ADN – L.
17. *I W nr. 1951*: 'Toussaint et 11 novembre 1943. (...)’, ADN – L.
18. *I W nr. 1457*: 'circulaires préfectorales 1944’, ADN – L.
19. *I W nr. 770*, ADN – L.
20. Incidentally, I did not find any negative intelligence provided by a police commissioner that led to the discharge of a mayor before the end of 1941. Complaint on the municipality of Marcq-en-Baroeul, 'Nominations, (...)’, *4 W 36247*, ADN – L.
21. *Correspondentie en Rapporten kabinet Carles 1941*, *I W nr. 1354*, ADN – L. *Politioenele rapporten 1944*, *I W nr. 1589*, ADN – L.
22. *Rapporten van politioenele diensten 1942*, *I W nr. 1587*, ADN – L.
23. *Rapporten van politioenele diensten 1942*, *I W nr. 1587*, ADN – L.
24. *I W nr. 1581*, ADN – L.
25. *I W nr. 1090*: 'Police. (...)’, ADN – L.

26. *I W nr. 1015: 'Résistance: arrestations, mesures de représailles,...'*, ADN – L.
27. *'Rapport du commissaire spécial de Lille à la Sipo-SD', I W nr. 517*, ADN – L.
28. *'Rapport du commissaire spécial de Lille à la Sipo-SD', I W nr. 517*, ADN – L.
29. Meetings of 19 and 23 October 1942. *505 U 512/4: 'Mesures (...)'*, ADN – L.
30. *15 W nr. 36649: 'application (...)'*, ADN – L.
31. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 264.
32. OFK-Lille to prefect 24 November 1942, *File: 'Marché Noir' in I W nr. 863: 'Administration (...)'*, ADN – L.
33. *I W nr. 2661: 'Réquisition (...)'*, ADN – L.
34. *I W nr. 2661: 'Réquisition (...)'*, ADN – L.
35. *505 U 512/4: 'Mesures (...)'*, ADN – L.
36. *I W nr. 769: 'Service (...)'*, ADN – L.
37. *I W nr. 1396: 'STO: réfractaires (...)'*, ADN – L.
38. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 262.
39. *I W nr. 1202: 'STO (...)'*, ADN – L.
40. Circular letter Carles 21 August 1943 . *I W nr. 769: 'Service (...)'*, ADN – L.
41. With a letter of 3 November 1943. *I W nr. 769: 'Service (...)'*, ADN – L.
42. *I W nr. 1397 and nr. 1398: 'STO (...)'*, ADN – L.
43. *I W nr. 769: 'STO (...)'*, ADN – L.
44. *I W nr. 2002: 'affaires (...)'*, ADN – L.
45. Police report d. 2 March 1944. *I W nr. 1517: 'Nord-Pas-de-Calais (...)'*, ADN – L.
46. *I W nr. 1202: 'STO, Organisation TODT (...)'*, ADN – L.
47. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 262.
48. *Nr. 14 W 36251: 'Nominations (...) Douai'*, ADN – L.
49. Subprefect Cambrai to prefect d. 10 February 1943. *Nr. 14 W 36250: 'Nominations(...) Cambrai'*, ADN – L.
50. *505 U 512/4: 'Mesures (...)'*, ADN – L.
51. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 265.
52. *I W nr. 1422: 'Organisation Todt (...)'*, ADN – L.
53. *I W nr. 1202: 'STO (...)'*, ADN – L.
54. *I W nr. 251: 'surveillance (...)'*, ADN – L.
55. After Fritz Sauckel's appointment as *Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz* on 31 March 1942.
56. *I W nr. 724: 'affaires (...)'*, ADN – L.
57. *I W nr. 1202: 'STO, organisation TODT (...)'*, ADN – L.

58. *I W nr. 982: 'correspondance (...)',* ADN – L.
59. *I W nr. 724: 'affaires (...)',* ADN – L.
60. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*, 231–232.
61. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*, 222–223.
62. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 416.
63. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*, 235.
64. Perhaps this corporatist, protectionist attitude was typical for the French magistrature as well. However, in the French prefectoral system in Nord and Pas-de-Calais, the magistrates' direct influence or impact over a mayor's everyday functioning was much smaller.
65. Verhoeyen, *België bezet*, 74.
66. De Croy d. 17 November 1948, *Archieven Frans Wildiers, nr. 42: 'De Zaak Wildiers'*, CegeSoma.
67. *KK. des Kreises Philippeville, nr. AA 92*, CegeSoma.
68. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 131.
69. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 261.
70. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 402; Letter of governor Greindl to the district commissioners d. 26 March 1943, *Fonds: Archieven Greindl*, CegeSoma.
71. Grauls d. 18 October 1940 to Luitenant-kolonel Leclair of the *gendarmérie*, *Losse stukken: Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA.
72. *Microfilm 27: 'Circulaires (...)',* CegeSoma.
73. 'Richtlinien für die Wucherbekämpfung im Bereich der *Feldkommandantur* 520', d. 3 July 1941, *JPF Groot-Brussel. Bundel: Jan Grauls*, AGK
74. *Nr. 312 201.24: 'Officiële publicaties. Onderrichtingen (...)',* PAL.
75. *File nr. 320: 'Officiële publicaties (...) 1940–1944'*, PAL.
76. Report of the *Feldkommandantur* 681 Hasselt, d. 6 March 1942, *File nr. 320: 'Officiële publicaties(...)',* PAL. Grauls to the mayors d. 25 August 1942, *JPF Groot-Brussel, Bundel: Jan Grauls*, AGK.
77. *Nr. 304–305: 'Officiële publicatie. Onderrichtingen (...)',* PAL.
78. *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
79. Based on a bundle of correspondence in a dossier without any indication, in *Kabinetsarchief Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
80. Letter from Keldermans (Chief Provincial Inspection Service) to the governor, July 1943, *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
81. Report by Keldermans, 28 August 1943, *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
82. *Benoemingsdossiers burgemeesters: Ignace del Fosse et d'Espierres, gemeente Spiere*, PA W-VL.

83. Grauls to the *Feldkommandantur* d. 10 July 1941, *JPF Groot-Brussel. Bundel: Jan Grauls*.
84. U. Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers* (Cambridge 1997).
85. J. Culot, 'Het gebruik van Belgische arbeidskrachten en het probleem van de werkweigeraars', in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, vol. 1 (1970), 33–66.
86. One example was the suppression by the Germans of the financial support (by Belgian social services) given to certain categories of unemployed or useless labourers.
87. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*, 144.
88. *JPF gouverneur Jozef Lysens*, AGK.
89. Arrondissementscommissariaat Roeselare-Tielt 1940–1948, File: 'Lijst van gemeenteraadsleden (...)’ and *JPF Alfred van der Hallen*, AGK.
90. Testimony employee of the National Office of Labour d. 2 May 1945, *Epuratiedossiers nr. 120: Van Hoeck A.*, PAA.
91. Section Leader Afdelingsleider Labour Office Turnhout d. 25 September 1942, *Epuratiedossiers nr. 120: Van Hoeck A.*, PAA.
92. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 387–390.
93. Some interesting facts in this regard in a case study for the town of Tielt. K. Ravyts and P. Struye, *Het Tielte 1940–1945* (Tielt 1995) 195.
94. *Burgemeester Bolgone*, PA – Luik.
95. *Archief Baron Albert Houtart, Microfilm 79, nr. 4*, CegeSoma.
96. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*, 145–147.
97. 'Nota Romsée', *Archieven Frans Wildiers: nr. 34: 'Verplichte tewerkstelling'*, CegeSoma.
98. *GD nr. 72.698, Jean Brasseur, GD nr. 81.087, Jérôme Vuylsteke, GD nr. 82.514, Jozef Craessaerts, RAB; Epuratiedossiers burgemeesters nr.422, dhr. Zaman, Kalmthout*, PAA.
99. In the district of Kortrijk, for instance, the regional National Labour Office issued such a demand in October 1942 (only 18 of the 52 mayors in the district answered 'positively' by sending in names). *Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Bulckaert; losse stukken*, PA W-VL.
100. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*.
101. Report of the meeting of governors d. 17 June 1943, *Bundel: 'Tewerkstelling (...)'. Map: 'arbeiders (...)'*, PAA.
102. *JPF gouverneur Jozef Lysens*, AGK.
103. *Omzendbrieven—Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-VL.
104. Report d. 8 January 1943, *Fonds Frans Wildiers: W 686 B, map 33*, AMVC.
105. *Oorlog re C rubriek 79—1944, Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte (...)'*, PA W-VL.
106. *Parket-Generaal Gent. Nr. 153: corres (...)*, RA-BW.

107. Romsée to the ministry of Justice d. 16 September 1943, *Parket-Generaal Gent*, nr. 85: briefwisseling (...), RABW. The Justice department dogmatically stuck with its position. Secretary-general Schuind d. 1 February 1943, Antwerp procurator Le Paige to the police d. 18 March 1943 and again d. 6 October 1943. *Purge Files nr. 120: Turnhout, Van Hoeck A.*, PAA; *Fonds Frans Wildiers: W 686 B, map 33*, AMVC.
108. *Ordemaatregelen 1940–1941, File: 'S.E.E. opeisingsbevelen'. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA; Verhoeyen. *België bezet*, 69.
109. *Ordemaatregelen 1940–1941, File: 'S.E.E. opeisingsbevelen'. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA; Verhoeyen. *België bezet*, 63.
110. *Ordemaatregelen 1940–1941, File: 'S.E.E. opeisingsbevelen'. Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA; Verhoeyen. *België bezet*, 70.
111. Advice of the Permanent Council of Legislation February 1942.
112. *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Bulckaert 1940–1944*, RAB; *Fonds Frans Van der Elst, Dossiers Gerard Romsée: nr. 8912 97/283 AC 164 File: 'Gerard Romsée. Getuigenverklaringen'*, ADVN.
113. Von Harbou to Romsée d. 3 July 1943, *File nr. 306: 'Officiële publicaties, (...) 1941–1944'*, PAL; *Bundel: 'Ordemaatregelen 1942–1943, met bomaanslag op Mortsel'*, PAA.
114. Procurator Antwerp to Wildiers d. 13 July 1944, *File: 'samenwerking der rijkswacht van districthoofdplaatsen tot 23.6.1944'*, PAA.
115. Romsée to the governors d. 12 February 1944, *Titelloze map, Bundel: Ordemaatregelen 1944*, PAA.
116. Timmermans to Wildiers d. 17 March 1944, *Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Antwerpen 1940–1944*, PAA.
117. *File: 'samenwerking der rijkswacht (...) 23.6.1944'*, PAA.
118. Remarkably, the agreement would be reinstated by the new *Zivilverwaltung* on 11 August 1944.
119. *Losse stukken: Kabinetsarchief gouverneur 1940–1944*, PA W-VL; *Nr. 45: 'Feiten waarbij Duitse onderhoorigen gemoeid zijn. (...)'*, PAB. See also the many *gendarmérie* reports in *Archives de la Kommandantur d'Arlon*, RAA.
120. Such as the Antwerp governor Wildiers in 1942–43, for instance. *Bundel: 'Bezetting (...)'. Map: 'Afleveren van rantsoenzegels aan jongelingen te Boom en Niel'*, PAA.
121. *Purge Files nr. 265: Hulshout, burgemeester Celen*, PAA; *nr. 268: Eindhout, burgemeester Dassen*; *nr. 217: Westerlo: Prins de Merode*; *nr. 218: Vorselaar, Baron L. De Borrekens*, PAA.
122. *Omzendbrieven—Losse Stukken: Kabinetsarchief Bulckaert 1940–1944*, PA W-V.
123. Circular by Wildiers d. 5 February 1943, *'Tewerkstelling 1940–1944. Arbeidsonderrichtingen'*. *File: 'arbeiders in het buitenland: rantsoenzegels'*, PAA.

124. Grauls d. 9 February 1943, *JPF Groot-Brussel: Brunet*, AGK.
125. Letters from the district commissioner of Mechelen to Wildiers d. 1 March 1943, report local police Mariakerke 10 March 1943, *Archieven Frans Wildiers, nr. 34: 'Verplichte Tewerkstelling'*, CegeSoma; Letter from Wildiers to the district commissioner Mechelen d. 3 March 1943, *Archieven Frans Wildiers, nr. 34: 'Verplichte Tewerkstelling'*, CegeSoma.
126. *Bundel: 1940–1944: 'Bezetting 1940–1944. Arbeidsverordeningen. Algemene onderrichtingen'*, PAA.
127. *Oorlog re C rubriek 79–1944, Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte arbeidsdienst in Duitsland. (...)'*, PA W-VL
128. *Kabinetsarchief gouverneur 1940–1944: '1940–1944 (...)': Titelloze map*, PAA; letter from Wildiers to the municipal governments d. 4 September 1943, *Archieven Frans Wildiers, nr. 34: 'Verplichte Tewerkstelling'*, CegeSoma.
129. As far as I could find, the Luxemburg governor was the only Belgian authority who would, in October 1943, issue an unambiguous, strict prohibition to his mayors and policemen on the issue of pointing out houses and identifying or finding people in hiding for the Germans. *'Archives de la Kommandantur d'Arlon', Doos K. 84: meldingen Kommandantur*, RA-A.
130. The police and gendarmerie would limit themselves strictly to establishing the facts of a crime, offering no further assistance to the ongoing German investigation. This regional agreement was laid down below the radar of the ministry of Justice. Van Doorslaer, *De Belgische politie*.
131. In this particular Antwerp agreement, official reports dealing with infractions against food regulations no longer had to be sent to the Germans (unless German individuals were involved). *Kriegsverwaltungsrat Beckmann* to the Antwerp prosecutor d. 6 August 1941, *Losse stukken: Kabinetsarchief Gouverneur 1940–1944*, PAA.
132. *Map: 'Maatregelen getroffen in de provincie Brabant'*, PA; Kabinetsnota 26 October 1943, in *Oorlog re C rubriek 79–1944, Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte arbeidsdienst (...)'*, PA W-VL; Amongst others: Wildiers aan de OFK-Brussel d. 24 September 1943, *Archieven Frans Wildiers, nr. 34: 'Verplichte Tewerkstelling'*, CegeSoma.
133. Archief Parket-Generaal Gent, nr. 85: briefwisseling i.v.m. verhoudingen Belgische politiediensten en bezetter 1943–1944, RABW.
134. Parket-Generaal Gent. Nr. 154: briefwisseling over onderrichting VF 24 July 1941 (...), RABW.
135. Commandant Territoriale Rijkswachtgroep West-Vlaanderen d. 15 December 1942. Parket-Generaal Gent. Nr. 153: corres (...), RABW.
136. *Oorlog re C rubriek 79–1944, Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte (...)'*, PA W-VL.

137. Oorlog re C rubriek 79—1944, *Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte (...)'*, PA W-VL.
138. Letter 27 November 1942, Oorlog re C rubriek 79—1944, *Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte (...)'*, PA W-VL.
139. *Fonds Frans Wildiers: W 686 B, map 33*, AMVC.
140. See, for example, the published memoirs of a rural local policeman. D. Decuyper, *Dorp zonder grenzen. 1940–1945. Epicentrum Geluwe* (Geluwe, 1985), quotations from 300.
141. *Bundel: 'Bezetting—Tewerkstelling, Arbeidsverordeningen: Briefwisseling'*, PAA; *'Arbeidsonderrichtingen'*, Map: *'opsporing werkweigeraars. Tussenkomst gemeentebestuur'*, PAA; Testimony d. 8 March 1946, *'JPF Groot-Brussel: Brunet'*, AGK.
142. Circular *Feldkommandantur*, Hasselt to the governor d. 29 May 1943, *File nr. 318: 'Officiële (...) 1943'*, PAL.
143. *File nr. 313: 'Officiële (...)'*, PAL.
144. *Circulaires reçues du commissariat d'arrondissement Soignies(...)*, *Microfilm 27*, CegeSoma.
145. Hirschfeld, *Bezetting en collaboratie*, 124.
146. Romijn, *'Frederiks' Op de bres*.
147. In the end, the mayor received no sanction and was reappointed in 1945. *Dossier H.C. Leemhorst van Hoorn, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
148. *Dossier J.G. Diepenhorst van Giessen-Nieuwekerk, Peursum en Schelluinen, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
149. *Dossier J. Krol van Vriezenveen, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
150. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk 7—A*, 618.
151. *JPFWillem Pot, CABR*, NA.
152. *JPFWillem Pot, CABR*, NA, 576.
153. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 6*, 751.
154. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 6*, 625–645.
155. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 7 – A*, 576, 611.
156. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 7 – A*, 595.
157. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*.
158. Bargeton et al., *Rapports, Tome I*, 9–18.
159. Mazey and Wright, *Les préfets*, 282. In a political questionnaire carried out on 15 January 1941 (and again on 1 March 1942), Carles himself defined his political profile as: 'Political antecedents: republican; current orientation: completely devoted to the new regime' (clearly a standard answer).
160. Bargeton et al., *Rapports*, 43–48.
161. *Rapport Commissie Rutgers d. 6 September 1946*, Archief Ministerie van Algemene Oorlogvoering, Kabinet van de Minister-President, Nationaal Archief Den Haag, Doos 134.

162. Romijn, 'Frederiks' *Op de bres*.
163. Bargeton et al., *Rapports*, 42.
164. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk Deel 4: eerste helft*, 142–144.
165. Derksen and Van de Sande, *De burgemeester*, 42 ff.
166. He sometimes gave direct orders to magistrates, or put forth proposals that were not within his purview (projects such as the establishment of special internment camps, or the concept of administrative arrests).
167. De Wever, *Greep*, 429.
168. Wouters, *De Führerstaat*.
169. This was the case, for instance, with his personal secretariat (nominations), the General National Police (*Algemene Rijkspolitie*), the Inspection Service (*Dienst voor Toezicht*) under Tilman and several newly created corporatist organizations.
170. L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad: Een geschiedenis van Antwerpen en zijn joodse bevolking (1880–1944)* (Tielt 2000), 10, 201–202, 547.
171. P. Weil, 'The Return of Jews in the Nationality or in the Territory of France', in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to their Countries of Origin after WW II*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 58–71, here 58.
172. The Belgian constitution forbade discrimination based on race or religion. R. Van Doorslaer, E. Debruyne, F. Seberechts and N. Wouters, *Gewillig België. Overheid en Jodenvervolgging tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam/Antwerp 2007); I. Meinen, *La Shoah en Belgique* (Waterloo 2012).
173. The first defined the word 'Jew', implemented certain prohibitions and also created the Jewish register. The second decree placed a prohibition on certain (public) functions.
174. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*.
175. A colony of Polish Jews lived in the region around Lens as well before 1940. Their number was difficult to determine. D. Delmaire and Y.-M. Hilaire, 'Chrétiens et juifs dans le Nord-Pas-de-Calais pendant la seconde guerre mondiale', *Revue du Nord*, nr. 237 (1978); D. Delmaire, 'La communauté juive en Zone interdite', *Revue du Nord* (1987).
176. But similar to the Belgian *Kommandanturen*, the German authorities in Nord and Pas-de-Calais had not waited for such legislation to gather information on the Jews. Already in August and September 1940, the local *Kommandanturen* of Lille, Douai and Valenciennes had asked city governments for lists of Jews.
177. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 253.
178. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen*, 547.

179. For example, report of a meeting of the Arlon *Feldkommandantur* with the *Kreiskommandanturen* and the *Feldgendarmarie* d. 26 September 1941, *Archives Kommandantur d'Arlon*, RA-A.
180. Subdoos V: 'Ordemaatregelen (...)', nr. 2080–2257, PAA.
181. *Map: A1447–A1474. (...)*, in *Doos: 'Ordemaatregelen bezetting. (...)'—IV, nr. 2080–2257*, PAA.
182. Van Doorslaer et al., *Gewillig België*.
183. *JPF Hendrik Elias, Bundel I, folio 185, 'stukken van onderzoek'*, AGK.
184. Circular letter Jean Vossen, d. 22 February 1941, *Doos: 'Ordemaatregelen (...)' IV, nr. 2080–2257*, PAA.
185. For example, the question of the district commissioner of Dinant (July 1941) to the mayors to fill in reports on Jewish enterprises, the question of the *Feldkommandantur Arlon* to mayors for the possession of pigeons by Jews. *AA 111: Omzendbrieven arrondissementscommissariaat Dinant, CegeSoma; Archives Kommandantur d'Arlon, Doos K 106: correspondentie tussen Kommandanturen*, RA-A.
186. *Microfilm 27, 'Circulaires (...)'*, CegeSoma; *Bundel 133, Politie: rubriek 65 1942, Re C, Nr. 1095: De Panne (...)*, PA W-VL.
187. P. Griffioen and R. Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België 1940–1945: overeenkomsten, verschillen, oorzaken* (Amsterdam/Boom, 2011).
188. Griffioen and Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland*, 655.
189. *Griffioen and Zeller, Jodenvervolging in Nederland*, 686.
190. Griffioen and Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland*, 686.
191. Griffioen and Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland*, 32.
192. B. Majerus, *Occupations et logiques policières: la police bruxelloise en 1914–1918 et 1940–1945* (Brussels 2007).
193. Correspondence September 1943, Parket-Generaal Gent, 'nr. 85: briefwisseling (...)', Rijksarchief Beveren-Waas.
194. Verhoeyen, *België bezet 1940–1944*, 73.
195. *File: 'A1628-A1640. Ordemaatregelen – (...) II–4'* in *Doos: 'Ordemaatregelen (...)'—IV, nr. 2080–2257*, PAA.
196. Van Doorslaer et al., *Gewillig België*, 568–581.
197. Van Goethem, 'La convention', 39.
198. Brief nr. 56121 A, from procurator Baers to De Potter, 18.11.1942, Parket Antwerpen 2002, D12, RAB-W.
199. Archief Politiemuseum Oudaan, Delwaide to De Potter, 20.11.1942.
200. Archief Politiemuseum Oudaan, Verslag: '23 November 1942'.
201. Archief Politiemuseum Oudaan, De Potter to procurator Baers, 24.11.1942.
202. Delwaide to Baers, 24.11.1942, Parket Antwerpen 2002, 2D 85, RAB-W.

203. Meeting between Coelst and the OFK-Brussels, d. 5/6 June 1942. *Nr. 41: (...)*, *Archieven gouverneur Baron Albert Houtart*, CegeSoma.
204. *Nr. 33, Ordonnances sur les Juifs*, *Archieven gouverneur Baron Albert Houtart*, CegeSoma.
205. Mayor Coelst of the city of Brussels in particular was known to have made several anti-Jewish remarks before 1940. On this particular event he wrote in his wartime diary: 'Frankly, I have no particular love for the Israëlites as a community.' *Mémoires de guerre de Jules Coelst (...)* *Mai 1940–September 1942*, AB2421, CegeSoma.
206. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 254–255.
207. *505 U 512/4: 'Mesures de police (...)*', ADN – L.
208. Epuratiedossier Paul Dehove, in *28 W 38407 I: 'épuratio (...)'*, ADN – L.
209. Subdoos V: 'Ordemaatregelen—bezetting—Joden en vreemdelingen 1940–1944—IV. 1971–2075'. Pak I: 'A1971-A2075 Orrdemaatregelen (...) V'. in *Doos, 'Ordemaatregelen bezetting. Joden en vreemdelingen 1940–1944'*—IV, *nr. 2080–2257*, PAA.
210. In fact, the total number of Jews directly arrested by Belgian authorities probably lies at around one fifth (18 %) of the total deportation number. Griffioen and Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland*, 534.
211. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 255.
212. *GD nr. 72.698*, *Jean Brasseur*, RAB.
213. *GD nr. 83.727*, *Clement Ronsmans*, RAB. See also: *GD 60.580*, *Hendrik Hoebrechts*, RAB; *GD nr. 57.596*, *Raymond Courtoy*, RAB.
214. *2/10.028/17 Purge File Frans van Audenhove, Erembodegem*, RABW.
215. *2/10850/21, Purge File, Sleidinge. Dossier betreffende H. De Greve(...)*, RABW.
216. *Archieven Jan Grauls*, *nr. AA 698*, CegeSoma; *JPF Groot-Brussel: Jan Grauls*, AGK.
217. *GD nr. 51.525*, *René Spaas*, RAB. *Epuratiedossiers nr. 93*, *Scheurweghs, gemeente Schilde*, PAA.
218. *Gemeentebestuur. Omzendschrijven nr. 1*, Boechout d. 20 May 1941.
219. *GD nr. 80.770*, *Maximilien Jadoul*, RA; *GD nr. 54.113*, *Adolphe De Paepe*, RAB.
220. *GD nr. 77.139*, *Marcel Hillewaere*, RAB.
221. Letter of Stevens d. 9 August 1944, *JPF J. A. J. M. Mertens*, CABR, NAA; *JPF Eugène H. J. M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
222. *GD nr. 80.185*, *Albert Dessers*, RAB.
223. *JPF Harm Höltke*, CABR, NA.
224. *GD nr. 80.639*, *Léon Staquet*, RAB.
225. *JPF Alphons Bouwman*, CABR, NA.
226. *JPF Addo Hovinga*, CABR, NA.

227. *JPF Arie van de Graaff*, CABR, NA.
228. Theo Brouns to Paul Lambrichts d. 9 September 1940, *Bundel: 'Werkverschaffing'*, *JPF Theo Brouns*, AGK.
229. See the active and persistent repression of several individual resistance members by NSB-mayors Van Campen, Van de Graaff and Ten Hoopen. *JPF Adriaan Van Campen*, CABR; *JPF Arie Van de Graaff*, CABR; *JPF Willem Ten Hoopen*, CABR, NA.
230. Stevens, d. 14 August 1942. *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
231. *Frederik D. G. Klinkenberg*, CABR, NA.
232. *JPF Joseph Lysens*, AGK.
233. Secretary-general Bisquet of Labour to the mayor of Schoten, d. 18 December 1942, 'Bezetting 1940–1944. Arbeidsverordeningne, algemene onderrichtingen', PAA.
234. *GD nr. 7677, Jeroom Ampe*, RAB.
235. *JPF Johannes L.J. Kronenburg*, CABR, NA.
236. Report to the chief military prosecutor n.d., *GD nr. 62.118, Jacques Dewez*, RAB.
237. Article 19 January 1943, *Volk en Staat*.
238. *Report community Sittart, May 1944*, JPF, E. H. J. M. De Marchant et d'Ansembourg, CABR, NA.
239. *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
240. *Getuigenis Metsers n.d.*, D8874, *Stukken Piet Wyndaele XIX*, 276–278, ADVN; *GD nr. 78.692, Florent Leyn*, RAB; Letter by mayor Prosper Verckens of Denderwindeke d. 2 June 1943, 2/10.028/15, *Prosper Verckens, Denderwindeke*, RAB.
241. Mayor Albert Cornet d. 19 April 1943, *JPF Adriaan Van Coppennolle*, AGK.
242. *JPF gouverneur Jozef Lysens*, AGK.
243. Testimony Armand Tilman n.d. *GD nr. 83.727, Clement Ronsmans*, RAB; Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 440–446.
244. *GD nr. 73.577: Jeroom Ampe*, RAB; *GD nr. 69.204: Emiel van de Pol*, RAB; *GD nr. 69.903: Armand Smet*, RAB; *GD nr. 74.706: Paul van Haelst*, RAB; *Epuratiedossiers nr. 2/10.044/12 Jozef de Pilleceyn, gemeente Eksaarde*, RAB
245. *JPF Jozef Lysens*, AGK; 'Voedselvoorziening. Het oprichten van gemeenschappelijke ravitailleringsdiensten voor kleine gemeenten', *Bestuurlijke Tijdingen*, vol. 3, September–October 1943.
246. The list of local anti-Rexists sent in by Rex mayor Robert Lefebvre of Lamain, for example, contained names of people in hiding as well as information about acts of sabotage on the local railway. *GD nr. 67.889, Robert Lefebvre*, RAB.
247. *Burgemeesters nr. 395, Burgemeester Verbeeck*, PAA.

248. *Purge File burgemeesters nr. 395, Burgemeester Verbeek*, PAA.
249. *Map: 'Prise de pouvoir. Propagande. Abonnements au Pays Réel. Discipline. Cours de dirigeant politique. Style Pévenasse. Rapports avec les autres partis et autorité occupante'*, JPF Jean Georges, AGK.
250. *GD nr. 53.681, Edoaurd Boulard*, RAB.
251. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk 7 – A*, 616.
252. *JPF Klaas Hendrik Brontsema*, CABR, NA.
253. P. Beukema, *Stedum onder het Hakenkruis. Stedum, Garsthuizen, Westeremden. Fragmenten uit de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Bedum 1991).
254. Section of Administrative Affairs 12 May 1942, in *JPF Frederik D. G. Klinkenberg*, CABR, NA.
255. *JPF Frederik Ernst Müller*, CABR, NA.
256. *JPF Harmen Westra*, CABR, NA.
257. Circular letter 8 June 1943, in *JPF Frederik Jan Overbeek*, CABR, NA. Post-war testimony by Wittekamp, NSB circle-leader (*kringleider*) of Nijmegen, in *JPF Johannes J.L. Kronenburg*, CABR, NA.
258. *JPF Jan Overbeek*, CABR, NA.
259. *JPF Michel Guillaume Boutz*, CABR, NA.
260. *JPF Willem Ten Hoopen*, CABR, NA.
261. *JPF Jan Brouwer*, CABR; *JPF Harmen Westra*, CABR, NA.
262. *JPF Jacques Daems*, CABR, NA.
263. *JPF Willem Hansen*, CABR, NA.
264. *JPF Hendrikus Sieling*, CABR, NA.
265. *JPF Jan Willem Zigeler*, CABR, NA.
266. *JPF Petrus Jansen*, CABR, NA.
267. *JPF Harmen Westra*, CABR, NA.
268. *JPF Theodorus van Dierendonck*, CABR, NA.
269. Report meeting of mayors in Noord-Brabant d 19 November 1942. *JPF René Desiré Bernard Marie Ghislain Thomaes*, CABR, NA; Report meeting March 1943, mayors of the Beverwijk region. *JPF J. Van Grunsven*, CABR, NA. *JPF Mattheus Broere*, CABR, NA.
270. Testimony d. 6 May 1947 afdelingscommandant Marechausée Boxmeer, *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
271. *JPF Johan Rösener Manz*, CABR, NA.
272. *JPF Adriaan Van Campen*, CABR, NA.
273. A.B.M. Beijer, *Gemeentelijk beleid in bezettingstijd. Nijmegen 1940–1944* (Nijmegen 1982), 100–125.
274. J.A. François, *Grondlijnen van het volkenrecht* (Zwolle 1967).
275. J. Konings, *De terechtstelling van gijzelaars tijdens de Duitse bezetting van België onder het bestuur van de Militärbefehlshaber Von Falkenhausen (1940–1944)* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, KU Leuven, 1982).

276. One clear example was the village of Solre-sur-Sambre, where five people were arrested as hostages (two of whom would later die in Germany). All of these had been reported to be communists by the Rex mayor around June 1941. *GD nr. 79.947, Robert Tholbecq, RAB.*
277. After rather questionable legal advice by his secretariat, VNV provincial governor Bulckaert issued a circular to his mayors regarding hostages that 'the mayor can provide the list of all men but he is not allowed to appoint individuals himself'. Report by the political secretariat of governor Bulckaert d. 6 January 1943, *Kabinetsarchiefgouverneur 1940-1944: losse stukken, PA W-VL.*
278. *Nr. 1: Proces, File nr. 10: Nota (...), and nr. 20: repressie in AC 314, Theo Brouns—D 571-572, F 20, ADVN.*
279. *Dossier Gerard Romsée, 8912 97/283 AC 164. File: 'Gerard Romsée'. Getuigenverklaringen, Fonds Frans van der Elst, ADVN.*
280. See, amongst others, the hostage lists made by Rex-mayor Arthur Bothy of Beez, VNV-mayor Van Goethem of Burcht, Maurice Denis, alderman of Greater Brussels, VNV mayor Willemeyns of Herentals, VNV mayor Sylveer Derveaux of Moeskroen, Rex mayor René Dutoit of Pommeroeul, Rex mayor Jean Brasseur of Jemappes, Rex mayor Hubert Leroy of Binche. *GD nr. 82.882, Arthur Bothy, RAB; Purge Files Mayors nr. 35, A. Van Goethem, Burcht, PAA; GD nr. 80.190, Maurice Denis, RAB; Purge Files Mayors nr. 361, Rombouts, gemeente Herentals, PAA; GD nr. 78.131, Sylveer Derveaux, RAB; GD nr. 63.137, René Dutoit, RAB; GD nr. 72.698, Jean Brasseur, RA; GD nr. 81.163, Hubert Leroy, RA.*
281. The first serious incident was the execution of eight hostages in 1942. De Jong, 'Gevangenen en gedeporteerden', in *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden deel 8.*
282. *JPF Hendrik Vitters, CABR, NA.*
283. *JPF Pieter Johannes Elisa Dekker, CABR, NA.*
284. *JPF Barteld Jakob van Ham, JPF CABR; NA; JPF Marinus Stevens, CABR; JPF Frederik J. Overbeek, CABR; JPF Johan Rösener Manz, CABR; JPF Adriaan Van Campen, CABR; JPF Harmen Adriaan Maas, CABR, NA; JPF Hendrik Vitters, CABR, NA.*
285. *JPF Paul J. M. Coenen, CABR, NA.*
286. *JPF Frederik Jan Overbeek, CABR, NA.*
287. *JPF Cornelis van Ravenswaaij, CABR, NA.*
288. *JPF René Desiré Bernard Marie Ghislain Thomaes, CABR, NA.*
289. *JPF Harm Höltkke, CABR, NA.*
290. *JPF Willem Bos, CABR, NA.*
291. *JPF Jan Willem Zigeler, CABR, NA.*
292. *JPF Edward Floris Sandberg, CABR, NA.*
293. *JPF Claudius Antonius Prinsen van Campen, CABR, NA.*
294. *JPF Claudius Antonius Prinsen van Campen, CABR, NA.*

295. *JPF Adriaan Van Campen*, CABR, NA.
296. Instructions to local party sections like this were issued in 1942 and 1943. *JPF Simon L.A. Plekker*, CABR, NA; *JPF Eugène H. J. M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
297. *JPF Eugène H. J. M. De Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
298. Report of meeting d. 4 November 1942. *Epuratiedossier Fontein Strootman*, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Afdeling Binnenlands Bestuur 1879–1950, NA.
299. *Epuratiedossiers burgemeesters nr. 164: Gemeente Rumst, burgemeester De Winter*, PAA.
300. *File nr. 323: 'Omzendbrieven van de ministeries en afdelingen van het provinciebestuur en de Feldkommandantur 1940–1942'*, PAL.
301. *JPF Paul Johan Marie Coenen*, CABR, NA; *JPF René Desiré Bernard Marie Ghislain Thomaes*, CABR, NA.
302. *Nr. 1: Proces, Kaft nr. 10: Nota i.v.m. terrorisme en houding politie en gerecht in Limburg 1943–1944, en nr. 20: repressie in AC 314, Theo Brouns—D 571–572, F 20*, ADVN.
303. Letter from Dr. Schröder to the mayors of district Sint-Niklaas, d. 30 August 1940, *Inkomende briefwisseling 1940*, City Archives Lokeren.
304. *GD nr. 54.870, Gerardus De Coninck*, RAB; *Nr. 1: Proces, File nr. 10: Nota i.v.m. terrorisme en houding politie en gerecht in Limburg 1943–1944, en nr. 20: repressie in AC 314, Theo Brouns—D 571–572, F 20*, ADVN.
305. *JPF Johan A. Teseveld*, CABR, NA.
306. *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
307. *JPF Mattheus Broere*, CABR, NA; *JPF Willem Bos*, CABR, NA.
308. *JPF Harmanus Hondius*, CABR; *JPF Addo Hovinga*, CABR; *Srafidossier Arie van de Graaff*, CABR.
309. J.-M. Fossier, *Zone interdite. Nord-Pas-de-Calais mai 1940–1945* (Paris 1977).
310. *I W nr. 143: 'arrestations (...)'*, ADN – L.
311. *I W nr. 1840: 'Arrestations (...)'*, ADN – L.
312. *I W nr. 1760*, ADN – L.
313. *I W nr. 143: 'arrestations (...)'*, ADN – L.
314. *I W nr. 1557: 'commissariats (...)'*, ADN – L.
315. *I W nr. 1840: 'Arrestations par les Allemands (...)'*, ADN – L.
316. *I W nr. 417: 'conseillers (...)'*, ADN – L.
317. *Nr. 505 U 511/22: 'documentations (...)'*, ADN – L.
318. E. Dejonghe, 'Les communistes dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais de juin 1940 à la veille de la grève des mineurs', *Revue du Nord*, VII/IX (1986), 685–719.
319. *I W nr. 1353–1354: 'rapports (...)...1940–1942'*, ADN – L.

320. *Registres (...)*, *I W nr. 4675* in *I W nr. 143: 'arrestations (...)*', ADN – L.
321. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 298.
322. *I W nr. 1015: 'Résistance (...)*', ADN – L.
323. *I W nr. 1015: 'Résistance (...)*', ADN – L.
324. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 296–297. J. Azéma, A. Prost and J. Rioux (eds.), *Le Parti communiste français des années sombres, 1938–1941* (Paris 1986).
325. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 301.
326. *I W nr. 1533: 'Instructions (...)*', ADN – L.
327. *505 U 511/25: 'Internements administratifs (...)*', ADN – L.
328. Map: 'Lille', in *I W nr. 1015: 'Résistance (...)*', ADN – L.
329. *I W nr. 1540: 'mutations (...)*', ADN – L.
330. He did, however, ask the Germans for alternate compensation: the release of a member of the Gendarmerie who had been arrested as a hostage.
331. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 298.
332. Konings, *De terechtstelling*, 17.
333. Konings, *De terechtstelling*, 27.
334. *Nr. 505 U 511/5: 'note (...)*', ADN – L.
335. *505 U 511/25: 'Internements (...)*', ADN – L.
336. *505 U 511/4: 'Internements (...)*', ADN – L.
337. Jackson, *France*, 216; D. Peschanski, 'Exclusion, persécution, répression', in Azéma and Bédarida (eds.), *Le régime de Vichy*, 209–234.
338. *505 U 511/21: 'relations (...)*', ADN – L.
339. *I W nr. 726: 'rapports de police (...)*', ADN – L.
340. *I W nr. 724: 'affaires traitées par l'OFK (...)*', ADN – L.
341. Fijnaut, *Opdat de macht*, 263.
342. *I W nr. 1533: 'instructions (...)*', ADN – L.
343. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 301.
344. *I W nr. 1540: 'mutations (...)* *Collaboration entre polices (...)*', ADN – L.
345. *I W nr. 2002: 'affaires de police (...)*', ADN – L.
346. *I W nr. 2002: 'affaires de police diverses: arrestations de 13 communistes (...)*', ADN – L.
347. *I W nr. 1540: 'mutations (...)*', ADN – L.
348. *I W nr. 299: 'arrestations (...), 1942–43'*, ADN – L.
349. Peschanski, *Vichy. Contrôle et exclusion*, 42–45.
350. *505 U 512/4: 'Mesures(...)*', ADN – L.
351. By decree of 20 January 1944, military courts could offer quick convictions of communists immediately after their arrest, and give death penalties that would be executed immediately. *I W nr. 48: 'fonctionnaires (...)*', ADN – L.

352. *1 W nr. 724: Affaires traitées (...)*, ADN – L.
353. *1 W nr. 1533: 'instructions (...)',* ADN – L.
354. *Nr. 505 U 511/22: 'documentations (...)',* ADN – L.
355. *1 W nr. 143: 'arrestations (...)',* ADN – L.
356. *505 U 512/4: 'Mesures (...)',* ADN – L.
357. *1 W nr. 143: 'arrestations par les allemands: motifs d'ordre politique, notices sur les personnes suspectes, otages, arrestations...',* ADN – L.
358. *1 W nr. 143: 'arrestations (...)',* ADN – L.
359. *1 W nr. 1015: 'Résistance. (...)',* ADN – L; *1 W nr. 9: 'arrestations (...) 1941-1943',* ADN – L.
360. *1 W nr. 143: 'arrestations (...)',* ADN – L.
361. *1 W nr. 146: 'Otages (...)s',* ADN – L. Lille was somewhat of a special case, because on 7 July 1940 43 hostages were taken, most of whom were still in custody in October 1940. *505 U 511/10: 'Note de parlementaires (...) (...)',* ADN – L.
362. *1 W nr. 145: 'Amendes infligées (...)',* ADN – L.
363. *1 W nr. 143: 'Arrestations (...)',* ADN – L.

Disintegration

THE HOUSE OF CARDS COLLAPSES

When the international war perspective changed, German strategic pragmatism turned into outright repressive exploitation.

In the Netherlands, the brutally repressed May strikes of 1943 marked the beginning of this final phase. After these strikes the Dutch committee of secretaries-general would hardly meet in full again. Although its core remained unchanged in 1943, two members of the NSB were appointed to the committee. Seven of the eleven provincial commissioners were already members of the NSB. The strikes of May 1943 made choices stark: a mayor still in office after May 1943 by definition found himself in a suspect position.¹

In France, the German occupation of the ‘free zone’ in November 1942 is a clear turning point. This signalled the end of any legitimate independent French national project. The Vichy regime would gradually crumble under internal power struggles and fascist radicalization.² The final push towards total state centralization was made. Radical collaborationists such as the *Milice Nationale* leader Joseph Darnand were appointed in key state positions. The collaborationist takeover of government became total in 1944, with Philippe Henriot appointed minister of Information and Propaganda and Marcel Déat (leader of the *Rassemblement National Populaire*) appointed minister of Labour and Employment (March 1944).

The characteristics of disintegrating systems identified by Dutch sociologist Lammers became clearly visible in all three countries.³ Central powers

lost their grip. There was a ‘weakening of bureaucratic discipline’, and a ‘growing tendency (...) to evade or counteract directives’. Public authorities gradually moved towards silent or open opposition. In the Netherlands, the so-called ‘comments on the guidelines’ (*commentaar op de aanwijzigingen*) were distributed among mayors. This was an addendum to the pre-war guidelines.⁴ This document should be understood as the Dutch national political establishment trying to reintroduce the pre-war constitutional order.⁵ In Dutch culture such a government-approved set of orders was important and its (political and psychological) impact great. It sent a clear message that opposition or even resistance was allowed and in fact needed. It is revealing that an official document was necessary to announce this. Moreover, it hinted at a post-war assessment.⁶ An important consequence of this was that secretary-general Frederiks’ legitimacy (or what was left of it by that time) was badly undermined. His policy was now officially condemned as being too lenient. The taboo on resistance previously prevalent in Dutch (local) governments or the police was broken.

The existing horizontal structures created by city mayors and used by Frederiks gradually began to lose importance. So-called ‘discharges for principled reasons’ by mayors became more frequent. The latter had been a feature of the Dutch system even in 1941. Mayors would use a strategically chosen issue to offer their resignation, taking this in turn as a public platform to voice their general political opinions.⁷ This method of covering one’s own strategic position as well as trying to influence the position of others was a typical example of the self-conscious Dutch mayor.

More fundamentally characteristic of the Netherlands was the phased liberation and elongated occupation. Most of the country (the northern part) remained occupied for over half a year longer than Belgium and France. It still had to live through the ordeal of the hunger winter of 1944–45. In October 1944, the southern parts of the country were finally liberated. Disintegration of the NSB was general after this, although the party continued its collaboration to the very end. About 80 NSB mayors who had fled from the liberated south would retake positions in the occupied north. Disintegration of political and public life was sometimes near total, with additional factors like the national railway strike, arbitrary mass German requisitioning and the hunger winter exacerbating escalating repression. While many non-collaborationist mayors went into hiding, the permanent crisis management for local governments became even more extreme than during the summer of 1944.

But also the prefectoral system in Nord/Pas-de-Calais felt its central power crumble in 1943. It reacted typically by more and further centralizing reform.⁸ In the beginning of 1943, both departmental *commissions*

administratives (for Nord and for Pas-de-Calais) were replaced by new structures (so-called Departmental Councils or *Conseils Départementaux*). The Nord council was presided over by the Vichyst mayor Dehove of Lille.⁹ Both new councils consisted primarily of mayors.¹⁰ It was an attempt by the regime to find renewed connection with representative local legitimacy. These new bodies had no real impact at all.

It is impossible to measure the regime's legitimacy in 1943–44 reliably. French historians Le Maner and Dejonghe call the period *la longue attente* (the long wait).¹¹ This is indeed the essence: local governments (and local populations) went into a 'transitory' mode. A report of the *Service de Renseignement* (August 1943) on the socialist local government (led by socialist mayor Florent Willems) of the town of Lesquin provides a concrete and perhaps revealing example. Until 1942, this particular local government had been plagued by continuous bickering and conflict between a pro- and an anti-Vichy faction. However, the report by the French authorities noted that in 1943 the international context had resolved this conflict: 'emotions seemed to have calmed down, and rather to have taken on a "wait-and-see" position [*attentisme*]'.¹² This local government had decided that it would stop investing in open short-term political struggle, and instead prepare for a new (post-occupation) context.

Even more than before, most northern mayors now strenuously avoided any political association with the regime. When, for example, the Vichy state-secretary of Information and Propaganda Henriot paid a visit to Lille and gave a speech at the town hall, the majority of invited mayors stayed away with excuses such as health reasons, transport problems or other personal reasons.¹³ Politically, mayors withdrew from the system. This was part of the loss of direct influence and control on local governments.¹⁴

In Belgium, this process happened earlier. I have indicated that Belgian local authorities were more vocal about their dissatisfaction. Belgian mayors, local police-leaders and governors were sounding the alarm bell about disintegrating public authority as early as 1941. Probably the most remarkable example is a collective letter of all nine provincial governors to Romsée on 16 October 1941: 'More and more, the legitimacy of civil public authorities is diminishing. (...) Soon we will reach the point where their actions will have little impact.'¹⁵ The governors demanded an immediate rise in food supply, which clearly did not happen. Two years later, Romsée and his colleague De Winter tried to launch an interesting initiative: they wanted to use 'influential personalities' to convince the population to follow central regulations on food supply. Clearly, both secretaries-general

hoped to transfer the legitimacy of local personalities to state authority. It was telling that secretary-general Plisnier (Finances) found this a useless idea.¹⁶ He accused Romsée of being personally responsible for this total loss of legitimacy because of his policy of appointing collaborationist mayors.

As in the Netherlands, the number of mayoral resignations increased, in contrast with the number of new candidate-mayors. Similarly to occupied Belgium, the French government and the German OFK in Lille issued measures that fixed mayors in their positions as early as October 1942. Local political personnel were only allowed to resign after approval by the OFK in Lille. A political mandate in local governments (and public offices in general) was legally described as a national duty, turning resignation into a political act of desertion. The German authority in Lille wrote that resignation 'should be considered as an act of opposition against the occupying army (...)'.¹⁷ As in Belgium, sanctioning measures (judicial and administrative) were further increased in 1944. Central authorities had to resort to threats and repression to uphold the framework of their own public administration.

German demands on local governments became more extreme, to the extent of ignoring the interests of local populations or any claims of legitimacy local governments were still trying to maintain. By 1943, local governments had lost the means to provide normal let alone good governance. In all three countries, local government budgets as well as available administrative personnel could no longer cope with the exploitative demands. In the reports of the meetings of the Regional Association of the Municipalities in Nord and Pas-de-Calais¹⁸ in 1943 and 1944 it is clear that medium-sized or smaller towns and villages at least were struggling to provide even the most basic forms of public services.

Two measures that exemplified this were the year class actions (regarding forced labour) in 1943 and 1944 and the German orders for military constructions in all three countries.

The successive German year class actions meant that all men of a certain age group (born between 1920 and 1924, for example) were called for forced labour in Germany, including previously exempt groups such as farmers or (local) government personnel. Local food supply administrations, which had seen an obvious increase in personnel after 1940, were hit particularly hard.¹⁹ This led to chaos in local food supply organization.²⁰ Increasingly, the Germans arbitrarily arrested municipal personnel for deportation,²¹ and made no exception for collaborationist (provincial or local) governments. In 1944, official food supply organization was failing in most major cities in Belgium. German policy in Nord/Pas-de-Calais

and the Netherlands was, overall, similar in 1944, showing the failure of any kind of legitimate German longer-term administration and/or project of cooperation with local elites.

The military constructions measures show the same. With an allied invasion looming, the Germans frantically began constructing military defence works (anti-tank ditches, wooden poles against enemy parachutists) all over the Netherlands, Belgium and Nord/Pas-de-Calais. These orders started mainly from December 1943 onwards. Local governments had to provide the labour force (by requisitioning the male population) and even the material and finances. Clearly, these works were purely in the military interest of the occupier and as such, in opposition to the Hague Convention (article 52) as well as the three national penal legislations.

In the Netherlands and Belgium, the Germans did not negotiate this policy on the central level but issued orders directly to mayors. Typically, higher Belgian authorities issued contradictory orders.²² In Belgium, the majority of war mayors in office after March 1944 cooperated to some extent in these military constructions. In 1944 the Germans were not planning on compromising on this issue and for mayors, there was little margin to negotiate or manoeuvre.²³

The same German orders were issued in the Netherlands. Most NSB mayors vigorously supported the measures, although some tried to soften the practical implementation.²⁴ For non-NSB Dutch mayors this was the final straw. Several mayors resigned (and subsequently even went into hiding).²⁵ Perhaps because resistance to these orders was presented in more formal and open ways in the Netherlands, German pressure here was extreme, with severe threats and arrests of mayors.²⁶ Some mayors bowed to these threats (and the perspective of a replacement by an NSB-member) and followed orders reluctantly.²⁷ Provincial NSB commissioners now played an active role to mobilize mayors: to provide dubious interpretations of the Hague Convention, to hide the true intent of the German measure or to negotiate a settlement whereby mayors would not have to recruit the workers personally.²⁸ The Dutch context therefore now took on the basic characteristics of the Belgian system: negotiations and ambiguous arrangements moved down to a lower, local level (secretary-general Frederiks seemed mostly absent from these discussions).

On 16 August 1944, the Dutch government in exile issued a clear ban on cooperation in German military works. This was important for post-war purges; a mayor who had actively implemented these German orders after 16 August 1944 was liable for purge sanctions. In reality, this did not

effect much change in German pressure and the dilemmas involved. Many patriotic mayors, some well connected with the resistance, continued to implement these works after 16 August 1944.²⁹ After the war, Dutch authorities would take German pressure into account.³⁰

However, although orders were formally obeyed, the actual impact of the works was minimal. Dutch Mayor S. De Jong of Bolsward, for example, strictly implemented these German orders, and had several discussions with the underground resistance (both parties even exchanged letters on the issue). The mayor's main argument was that this should not be taken too seriously, because 'the allied forces (...) will never be stopped by such small diggings'.³¹ Many Belgian, Dutch and probably French mayors probably came to the exact same conclusion during these months. Formally obeying an order was difficult to avoid, but it was perfectly feasible to make sure the actual effects of these constructions were minimal.

In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, these German orders did not incite any real protest from French authorities.³² The sub-prefects acted as go-betweens, conveying German orders to the mayors. The only protests from French mayors in the north were linked to more practical issues (when German demands were too excessive). Unlike in Belgium, the intermediary level (sub-prefects) also supported these orders. On the surface, the French system therefore appeared to preserve itself; however, reality below the surface was different. An October 1943 report by a Vichy representative painted an extremely negative picture of public order in the region, stating that 99 % [*sic*] of the population was anti-German and pitted against the government. The report continued to describe the mine-regions as a powder-keg waiting only for a spark. This report was implicitly projecting the scenario of an allied invasion, in which case the entire region was expected to turn violently against the regime.³³ The report stated in so many words that 'the maintenance of public order is nothing more than fiction, the smallest general change would suffice to make this dormant lack of power visible'.

In a subsequent November 1943 meeting with prefect Carles, the German OFK in Lille more or less confirmed the report and demanded full cooperation with the German effort to assure public order.³⁴ Prefect Carles seemed to agree. In a meeting several days later, with one of his closest confidants, Carles voiced his real concern. He had simply lost trust in his own French police services. Carles detected 'pre-revolutionary tendencies' within the police, and he feared that if the allies were to land on the European continent, three quarters of the state police in Nord/Pas-de-Calais would turn against the German forces: 'The prefect shows

his great concern in particular for the fact the police is armed, because he takes collaboration with the Germans very seriously and his own work is now sabotaged this way by his police.'³⁵ On this occasion, a remarkably open Carles testified that he recognized the disintegration of state power.

Months later, at the very end, the French chief of intelligence (*commissaire principal de renseignements*) informed the prefect of Nord on 24 August 1944 that the last efforts to gather information had been largely ignored (by private businesses, local governments, and workers themselves). But he seemed to accept the system's disintegration: 'These results were to be expected, in light of the current mental state of the population, increasingly hostile towards any measure of control, which is assumed always to come from the occupying authority.'³⁶ This amounted to an official confirmation by the prefectural system itself that it had broken down at some time during the summer of 1944.

LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETIES REVIVED

In 1940, an attempt was made to destroy and/or replace pre-war socio-political structures down to the local level (political parties, trade unions and so on). However, in all three countries the tight networks of these structures remained in place on the local level. This was in part an unavoidable consequence of the decision to maintain the overall pre-existing framework of local governments. Mayors remained local nuclei of (supra-)local elite networks, however dormant these became in 1940. The strategic politics of presence of mayors automatically implied that many political and socio-economic networks remained in place. This was partially an explicit goal, for example, of French socialist mayors vis-à-vis their (clandestine) communist competitors. Obviously, this social fabric took heavy blows between 1940 and 1942, since the occupiers' goal was to eradicate (or transform beyond recognition) each occupied country's civil society. This process became acute in Belgium and the Netherlands, where collaborationist local governments tried to become a bridgehead for the Nazification of local societies. But the authoritarian prefectural system in Nord and Pas-de-Calais came down to the same thing. De-politicizing local governments clearly implied deconstructing the political potential of pre-war local networks.

In early 1943, the situation had drastically changed compared to 1940. With the prospect of a future liberation the strategic rational of many mayors and local networks changed. Actively (re-)gaining or increasing political legitimacy in preparation for a post-war order gradually became the

priority. In 1943–44, local governments gradually entered a transitional phase towards a post-liberation order. Full national state disintegration was not a problem, but rather a stimulating prerequisite. Local dormant networks were reactivated and transformed. Local communities proved resilient to material hardship and German repression.³⁷ Evasion of German orders or national regulations became general: ‘many of the more isolated rural areas had largely slipped beyond effective German or Belgian state control during the final year of the occupation, creating an uncertain and fluid environment in which various resistance groups, notables, and local officials co-operated and competed with each other’.³⁸

Conway argues that this was particularly strong in Belgium, but specificities aside, I would argue that there were in fact no significant differences between the north of France and the Netherlands. The emergence of a resilient, transformed social fabric of a local civil society is the main characteristic in all three cases.

A major issue was the distinction between the underground resistance versus ‘official’ local government. Pre-war local structures were clandestine by definition. Local resistance groups were created on pre-existing social structures (youth organizations, sport clubs, cultural organizations and so on). Because most of them belonged to one of the pre-war political pillars, they unavoidably became part of a fight for political legitimacy when the liberation approached. The partial overlap with the underground resistance created obvious tensions with the formal structures of ‘official’ local governments and mayors; this became an essential part of mayors’ own repositioning in 1943–44. The two most clear case-examples are the socialist mayors in Nord/Pas-de-Calais and the Catholic mayors in Flanders.³⁹ As such, each locality became a battleground for a struggle for legitimacy.

COMPETITION FOR LEGITIMACY IN FRANCE

In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the underground resistance was reorganized and centralized in 1943. Departmental Coordination Committees (*Comité Départemental de Coordination* or CDL) were set up, to prepare for liberation and the post-war transition. Communist networks were integrated as well,⁴⁰ creating true shadow structures to local and regional administrations. What should happen with local governments at the time of liberation became a discussion moot point within these resistance committees.⁴¹ The communist representation wanted a near total purge of local governments: ‘Communist pressure intensified during the first months of 1944,

with the distribution of impressive black lists on which figured, side by side, policemen, mining-engineers, Polish interpreters and socialist mayors...'.⁴² After the liberation, a member of the communist resistance wrote that even in 1940, the communist fight had been more against the French regime than against the Germans ('we are not at war, we are conducting politics').⁴³ In Nord and Pas-de-Calais, this internal French political struggle was primarily directed against the socialist political-administrative elite and their 'betrayal' in 1940. Socialist and moderate-right (Christian Democratic) resistance representatives recognized the dangers. The preliminary consensus was that the socialist party would maintain the larger cities like Lille (for which a future transitional mayor had already been appointed) while the communists would be able to choose mayors in the mining regions. However, it was arguably clear to everyone that this fragile consensus was premature. The struggle for power continued and would only begin in earnest once the liberation arrived.

After June 1940, the northern Communists tried to maintain positions on the ground through clandestine action. French historians Dejonghe and Le Maner write: 'Indeed, the communist party had become without question the most powerful political force in Nord-Pas-de-Calais by the end of 1943. Reintegrated in the national community by the martyrdom of its resistance-members, it adopted the image of courage and youth. Its social basis grew and diversified (...) and from now on contained an important part of the intellectual middle classes'.⁴⁴

However, those parts of the socialist party (or other republican parties for that matter) who chose to maintain local government strove for exactly the same goals. Each side used its own strategic advantages. In this way, the underground resistance's actions were a direct continuation of the internal pre-war political struggle.⁴⁵ A clear example was communist propaganda in the region around 11 November 1943. It mainly attacked socialist mayors and town halls. A local resistance group in the town of Halluin, for example, called on the population to gather at the town hall on 11 November, to oppose local government because it had given local coal supplies exclusively to the wealthy elite.⁴⁶ The abovementioned communist member of the resistance wrote in his post-war book: 'Socialist mayors are installed in the seats of ousted communists. But communists are present in the reopened factories, and the words of protest that run through the household queues are inspired by communists'.⁴⁷ This phrase is part of post-war communist propaganda, but the prism of competition for legitimacy is essential in order to understand this.

The socialist mayors exemplified this increasingly schizophrenic situation. When the ‘politics of presence’ which had perhaps seemed logical in 1940 became harder and harder to justify, this would lead to a schism within the socialist movement as well. This was partly a generational issue. The faction which had chosen to remain in power in local governments in 1940 was—in general terms—certainly of a somewhat older generation. When the underground resistance gradually became stronger in 1941–42, a younger socialist generation was more attracted by this option. Again, a strict juxtaposition is too simplistic, yet we can say in a general sense that after 1942 the socialist movement was torn between an ‘administrative branch’ of people in local governments and public offices that supported the regime on the one hand, and the underground resistance fighting it on the other.

Now, suspicions and increasing unease about a socialist *double jeu* became more explicit at departmental level. However, without clear or explicit demonstrations of disobedience, how was the prefect supposed to assess this? On 5 February 1943, the commissar of the Intelligence Service wrote an interesting report on his meeting with socialist mayor Victor Provo, who apparently had given very frank answers to commissar’s questions. At the time of the interview, Provo had just returned from a meeting in Paris with representatives of the former socialist party (SFIO). Mayor Provo openly admitted he still supported the pre-war ‘socialist ideology’. However, the commissar wrote that ‘there is not one of his administrative acts in which one could blame him for obstructing the politics of the French head of state and his government’.⁴⁸

It is characteristic of the northern prefectural system that, after 1942, mayors rarely voiced open protest around issues of principle. This stands in contrast with Belgium and the Netherlands. French mayors appeared to withdraw within the French system itself. They distanced themselves from the regime and its escalating repression, instead focusing on the interests of their local communities. They remained silent on their inner opinions.

The mayor of Cambrai ventured a rare cry of protest on 19 October 1943, after German authorities had arrested hundreds of local men three days earlier. The mayor bluntly said that in these conditions, French local governments could no longer preserve their basic function. He threatened to offer the city government’s collective resignation. The mayor explicitly attacked the prefect and the Vichy government.⁴⁹ This was truly a rare exception. It was interesting that prefect Carles’ answer was placatory and understanding, basically saying the mayor was right but that all French

officials had to accept the *fait accompli* of occupation: ‘Your task may be difficult, but the task of the government and of myself is not less so.’⁵⁰ Another rare similar example was when mayor Victor Bournonville of the rural village of Bellaing outright refused in November 1943 to propose male inhabitants to guard German military trains, writing: ‘I refuse to take this responsibility, and I will not assign anyone to take on this guard duty. I will not take charge of this. If the Sub-Prefect wishes to assign them, let him do so, but again, I will assign no one.’⁵¹ These seemed exceptional, emotional cries of protest.

The concrete cases of Jean Lebas and Victor Provo—both of the city of Roubaix—illustrate the other side. Roubaix was a traditional centre for the region’s linen industry and it had been a socialist bastion since 1912. Mayor Jean Lebas was one of the most powerful socialists in both departments.⁵² He was appointed mayor in 1912 and, therefore, had been mayor during the German occupation of WWI. Lebas left the city in May 1940, whether or not on the orders of his party. After the war, Lebas would become one of the most important symbols of the socialist resistance during WW II in the region, and as such the main figurehead of socialist memory construction. However, in May–June 1940 many blamed him for his ‘flight’. After his (relatively fast) return, Lebas started a (press-) campaign to justify his flight. City government had been replaced in June 1940 by a temporary war committee (mostly consisting of local notables). During the summer of 1940, Lebas and the other ousted councillors and *adjoints*, began campaigning to retake power. French (or German) authorities hesitated to intervene, but after the summer prefect Carles discharged Lebas. For Lebas, the next step was then to establish the clandestine paper *L’Homme Libre*, which would later develop into one of the most important resistance-papers in Nord/Pas-de-Calais. However, a large proportion of the pre-war city councillors were readmitted to local government in 1940–41, and Lebas remained in close contact with these men and the network they represented. The Roubaix government remained a problem-case for the new regime. In May 1941, ex-mayor Lebas was arrested by the Germans. In August 1941 socialist *adjoint* Dr Guislain was appointed (temporary) mayor until December 1941, when a new socialist mayor (Alphonse Verbeurgt) was appointed. Both men would be arrested by the Germans in the first half of 1942. But even after all this trouble, prefect Carles yet again appointed a socialist mayor: Victor Provo. Provo was not an elected member of the city council, but a *protégé* of Lebas and the coming man within the northern SFIO. Apparently, Carles himself had

even contacted the clandestine SFIO with the message that this was their last chance: the next mayor for Roubaix would not be a socialist. Provo therefore accepted the mayorship of Roubaix with the formal approval of the clandestine SFIO, thereby serving both the interests of his own clandestine party and those of the Vichy-regime (and the Germans).

Mayor Provo's position was obviously delicate. However, he seems to have been strategic enough to ensure success. Historian Florin writes in his monograph on Roubaix: '[Victor Provo] succeeded in sparing Vichy and the prefecture, thanks to his image of a "national" and moderate socialist; he also tried to avoid any confrontation (...) with the German authorities who were nevertheless installed at the very heart of City Hall'.⁵³ Provo stayed outside the resistance itself, but remained in permanent and close contact with it. I will briefly skip to the post-war period for this case: Provo succeeded in constructing enough occupation-period legitimacy with his own party, the local population, and resistance and post-war authorities. At the moment of liberation, the local population appears to have greeted his public liberation speech with great enthusiasm. The liberation committee of Roubaix, which contained resistance representatives, subsequently continued to support mayor Provo.⁵⁴ In 1945, the socialists went to the elections with Provo ranking fourth place on their list (Jean Lebas had died in Germany and supported the list posthumously). The socialist party would gain an overwhelming 29 out of 36 seats in the city council in 1945. Provo was elected mayor with a large majority. To quote Florin: 'a man appointed by Vichy and constrained to govern the city for two years together with a rightwing faction was therefore able to make a clean break in 1945 with a recent past'.⁵⁵

Roubaix is admittedly somewhat of an exceptional case. But it offers a very clear picture of the complex social-political realities in larger cities and towns, and the importance of the individual personality of one figure. In Roubaix, the socialist strategy clearly did work (although, as my opening anecdote showed, Provo's wartime track record would come back to haunt him later).

Because the continuity of pre-war (republican) structures and mayors was greater than in Belgium or the Netherlands, the gradual rapprochement between the official town hall and clandestine civil society was arguably easier overall in the north of France than in both other countries. The erosion of local government powers, implemented by the regime in 1940–42, now became an advantage. In a situation of civil war, it was not a disadvantage to have a minor position of power. To a certain extent, this civil war was fought above and beyond town halls and mayors. Indeed, mayors

and local governments could focus on mediation and damage control. Mayors were able to hide behind Vichy institutions, police services and departmental administrations. This was in sharp contrast with Dutch and Belgian mayors, who now increasingly found themselves in the political and administrative frontline.

COMPETITION FOR LEGITIMACY IN FLANDERS

In Flanders, the best comparison is the position of local Catholic civil society. The essential tension was indeed focused on the relationship between the Flemish Catholic pillar and the collaborationist Flemish nationalists of the VNV. In many towns and cities, both parties had joined forces in the municipal elections of 1938. The local coup launched by the VNV in 1940 was therefore largely aimed against their former political allies.

In 1940, many Catholic mayors in Flanders went a long way in voicing support of the 'new order' and hence cooperation. A small minority would make the step towards active collaboration, even joining the VNV. In these cases, post-war evaluation would be relatively easy.⁵⁶ For the majority of Catholic mayors, however, the politics of presence was more ambiguous. Only rarely did the VNV take all seats in a local government (the college of mayor and aldermen). This means that in most cases, Catholic aldermen stayed in office with a VNV majority. Relations with their former political allies are difficult to assess: I found several examples of members of a local Catholic civil society elite who sent congratulation telegrams when a collaborationist VNV mayor was appointed in 1940–42; also a sign of strategic politics of presence which is difficult to interpret.

The appointment of VNV mayor Gerard Seys of the village of Beverenbijn-Roeselare in 1940 happened with explicit support from the local Catholic elite.⁵⁷ The pre-war Catholic mayor himself proposed this VNV-candidacy and the Catholic municipal majority supported it. During his mayorship, Seys protected the local Catholic elite and parts of the population. In exchange for his protection, Seys in turn received local support after the occupation. During the post-war judicial investigation, an impressive series of positive witness statements from the local Catholic elite was assembled.⁵⁸ One final and remarkable example is the case of VNV mayor Joris Hardy of 's-Herenelderen, who was a radical collaborationist. Immediately after the liberation, the municipal council took the startling decision to appoint this collaborationist war mayor as the municipal secretary, and this—as the council argued—'on the explicit wish of the population'.⁵⁹ This decision

was annulled by central Belgian authority (later, the mayor would receive a four year prison sentence). During the subsequent judicial and administrative investigation, it appeared that the VNV mayor had protected the pre-war Catholic mayor from being arrested as a hostage by the Germans.⁶⁰ The decision to appoint the collaborationist mayor soon after the liberation seemed the result of a mutual deal. This particular deal was exceptional, but the pattern of political continuities under occupation between these 1938 allies was, I argue, the general pattern.

True, the initial success of the local VNV coup meant that many Catholic mayors (and aldermen) disappeared from town halls. However, in the majority of cases they did not disappear from their localities altogether. Catholic notables remained present in the immediate background. Local sections of *Winterhulp* (Winter Aid) seemed important instruments for Catholic mayors or aldermen to continue playing a leading role, which often implied direct cooperation with a local VNV government. This was a factor specific to Flanders. In the Netherlands or Wallonia, Winter Aid was perceived much more as a purely collaborationist body.

The VNV's choice to collaborate so radically in 1940 ultimately turned out to be an enormous advantage for the Flemish Catholic party. The VNV became the visible face of local collaboration with the enemy. In the meantime, the framework of local Catholic civil society largely remained in place, even with direct connections in the town hall. The fact that Catholic mayors were ousted from Flemish town halls in 1940–41 created the possibility of repositioning themselves against the occupier. They could develop sometimes highly efficient methods of informal mediation, which helps to explain their post-war electoral success (see Chapter 6).

‘NOT AN OUNCE OF ILLEGALITY IN HIM’: DUTCH MAYORS AND THE RESISTANCE

The official Dutch term for the resistance—also after the war, incidentally—was ‘the illegality’. It is a revealing term. Supporting a clandestine movement was not something that came naturally to Dutch mayors. After the May strikes of 1943 and the ‘Commentary on the Directions’ (see above), the consequences of forced labour made it next to impossible for Dutch mayors to ignore the growing ‘illegality’.

The Dutch local resistance usually made a careful, personal assessment of a mayor to assess whether he would cooperate or not. A mayor's reaction to a question for cooperation was determined by his personality, position,

future perspectives and local contexts. Old age may have been a determining factor as well, since older mayors were sometimes less inclined to make the mental leap to accept 'illegal work'. The 66-year-old mayor A. Jonker of the village of Dokkum, for example, openly communicated to his community in 1944 that he did not disapprove of the organized resistance as such, but wanted to maintain a strict distance: 'I said that I did not want to be involved in illegal work, I feared that this would make things just too difficult for me.'⁶¹

Another example illustrating this was mayor W. Bins, who had been mayor of Weesperkarspel since 1931. One resistance action changed his local position. In 1944, the resistance destroyed a railway line near his community. As a mayor, Bins saw this as a threat to food supply and did everything possible to repair the damage of the attack. After the liberation, the resistance filed complaints against Bins, much to his outrage: '[I] was forced to listen to a young man of 26 years who labels me as "hopelessly weak", while he (...) knows hardly anything about me'.⁶² In another letter of 1945 he wrote: 'Sincerely, my love for Monarchy and Fatherland is no less than that of any man, especially not of a member of the resistance, but I am simply not someone who organizes armed robberies or places explosives on railway tracks. I tried, as a mayor and man of honour, to serve my community and thereby my fatherland.'⁶³ There was partly a generation conflict at work here.

There were a (small) number of Dutch mayors who rejected the resistance outright, not out of any collaborationist stance but on principle. A personal friend of mayor J. Van Kuyk of Veenendaal testified after the liberation: 'The idea of the illegality was simply alien to him. For example, he failed to understand why the robbery of the distribution office was necessary.'⁶⁴ Another witness said: 'He did not have an ounce of illegality in him.'⁶⁵ When a friend in the resistance informed the mayor that the resistance would arrest him after the liberation, this came as a great surprise and shock to the mayor.

However, the majority of Dutch mayors still in power at this time had a more ambiguous attitude towards the resistance. A standard conflict was that between mayor and municipal personnel. Mayor P. Colijn of the city of Alphen-aan-de-Rijn is a good example to illustrate this. His first conflicts with his personnel were over the classic issues: forced labour and cooperation in German military constructions.⁶⁶ Matters came to a head when the resistance destroyed the municipal registry. The mayor wanted to repair the documents, which his personnel refused. A member of city

personnel testified after the war: ‘[His] attitude was wrong’.⁶⁷ The mayor however, continued to defend his position: ‘[I do not admire] their attitude, (...) because finally none of them had to anything to fear from their refusal (...)’.⁶⁸

I will conclude here with a post-war assessment by mayor Colijn: ‘From the very beginning I thought: tinker away all you want, but the less I know about it officially, the better it seems to me, also for you. In no sense was this a sign of lack of sympathy for the illegality, but, once you are outside, it is better to stay outside.’⁶⁹ These extensive quotes illustrate fundamentally opposed visions on the role of a mayor in wartime.

CONSENSUS IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

In an extensive series of student research papers on rural communities in Wallonia under occupation, the idea of the ‘absence of occupation’ is sometimes expressed. On the small village of Beauchevin, for example: ‘The village was not really occupied, although some Germans resided in the village.’⁷⁰ Another researcher in this series wrote: ‘There was nothing we could call a real German occupation in the villages I studied.’⁷¹ And on the village of Court-Saint-Étienne a researcher wrote: ‘There was no occupation in Court in the real sense of the word.’⁷²

Circumstances could indeed be highly different in smaller and rural villages: fewer (or no) German occupying forces, less acute problems of food supply, fewer strategic (military or political) targets for the resistance and more geographical possibilities for going into hiding. Also, Rex could hardly penetrate the Walloon countryside. In the Netherlands such contexts were more rare by the way, since pre-war fusion operations had abolished the smallest municipal entities.

In small and isolated towns and villages, pre-war mechanisms of (informal) mediation were easier to perpetuate. Let us take the example of the small village of Havré (Hainaut), where mayor Louis Schattens remained in power for the entire occupation. Post-war evaluation was overall positive: ‘[The mayor] respected and implemented German orders, at the same time helping his inhabitants where possible’.⁷³ He was re-elected as mayor in 1946. This particular mayor even contracted an apparent marriage of convenience with the local Rex section. When mayor Schattens was briefly arrested by the Germans after 11 November 1943, a Rex alderman went to negotiate with the Germans in Mons to release the mayor. Similarly, in the village of Baulers (near Nivelles, ca. 1000 inhabitants), the

pre-war mayor Ramaix remained in power throughout the occupation; he spoke German fluently and maintained a good working relationship with the German *Ortskommandantur*. However, this did not prevent him from supporting his population and preserving local legitimacy. This mayor did not encounter problems after the occupation.

A more extreme and striking example was the village of Rebecq-Rognon (near Nivelles), where Rexist mayor De Frey was killed by the resistance only a week after his appointment in 1943. After this assassination, the former liberal mayor Jules De Ridder simply returned and continued to govern the community until the liberation. Other local Rexistists had clearly understood the message, and made no further attempt to take over the small municipality.⁷⁴

In the minority of smaller rural villages where they were actually present, Rexist mayors appear to have been fairly pragmatic. This seems logical: they were isolated in hostile communities in the later stages of the occupation. The small village of Loupoigne (province of Brabant) is a typical example. With hardly any German presence and no real traumatic events during the occupation, it had had a Rexist mayor (Ricard) who was positively viewed after the occupation by the local population. As one witness said: 'He would never have harmed anyone.'⁷⁵ Rexist mayor Jules Jacquet of the Brabant community Virginal-Samme (ca. 2000 inhabitants) was described positively even by local members of the resistance.⁷⁶ One researcher in the above-mentioned series of local case studies concludes about Rexist mayor Louis Hap of the village of La Hulpe: 'The mayor, although a member of Rex, was not a real collaborationist.'⁷⁷ On the Rex mayor Ruelle of the tiny village of Lasne-Chapelle-Saint-Lambert (450 inhabitants), post-war witnesses said: 'he helped the inhabitants' and 'Mr Ruelle was really a nice man'.⁷⁸ On witness stated of Rex mayor Collard of Cérroux-Mousty: 'He never did any real harm to the population. He was more stupid than evil.'⁷⁹ On Rex-mayor Dacosse of Jodoigne the researcher concludes: 'This person did not pose any problems for the local community: he was not an informer',⁸⁰ while another researcher concludes on Rex mayor Robert Dusart of Ittre: 'He was happy to lead the community without ever going against the interests of the population.'⁸¹ A local notable member of the village of Ham-sur-Sambre even said about Rex burgomaster Emile Godefroid: 'Mr. Godefroid tried to administrate the community in a better way than the old mayor. [He was] a public official who was well aware of his responsibilities'.⁸² This type of moderate Rexist mayor was even sometimes to be found in larger towns.⁸³ In all of these

cases, Rexist mayors had protected members of the community, and overall had implemented German orders flexibly or even purely pro forma.⁸⁴

Radical paramilitary violence in certain (urban) regions, then, was only one side of Rex. The fact that Rex had many ‘latecomers’ (members who only joined the party after the German invasion) also worked both ways. While some of these individuals were uncontrollable radicals, more often than not they turned out to be opportunists and careerists. One example was Emile Renson, a labourer who joined Rex in 1941 to annul his contract as a voluntary labourer in Germany and who was subsequently appointed mayor of Grand-Hallet in 1942. Apparently, his mayorship between 1942 and 1944 went by unnoticed.⁸⁵ Another example is Maurice Houyet, who was unemployed and looking for work before and after 1940. Still unemployed, he joined Rex around 1942 and then became mayor of the village of Gerpinnes.⁸⁶ After the war, the population could apparently clearly recognize opportunism, and take this into account.

There are many similar examples for Flanders as well. The only post-war complaint the local population could raise against VNV mayor F. Bertels of Oostmalle was that he had replaced the ‘legal’ pre-war mayor.⁸⁷ And for VNV mayor Drijbooms of Noorderwijk the post-war investigators concluded (in the administrative purge procedure): ‘As far as Drijbooms is concerned, the only thing for which the local population reproaches him is that he was a member of the VNV.’⁸⁸ A post-war investigative report by the gendarmerie concluded on VNV mayor Piet Driessens of Lint: ‘His attitude during the occupation was correct (...). In general, Driessens was held in good esteem by the local population.’⁸⁹

POST-WAR INSURANCES

From 1943 onwards, Belgium and the Netherlands saw an increase in resignations of public officials and mayors. A resignation now became a strategic decision, with which a mayor intended to send a message. In the Netherlands this was rather explicit and formal. Mayor G. Bos of Heiloo, for example, had initially tried to integrate himself in the NSB, but changed his position around May 1942. He communicated this openly and in writing. In February 1943, the mayor joined a group of 12 Roman Catholic mayors who formally announced their intention to ‘revise’ their policy of cooperation with the occupier. Immediately afterwards, the mayor was sacked and went into hiding.⁹⁰ There are several examples of mayors who initially seemed to embrace the new order, but changed their minds. They

then used a public resignation to bury their earlier mistake.⁹¹ In some cases, one might suspect that certain incidents were consciously provoked by a mayor to reclaim legitimacy by resignation. One might, for example, hypothesize that this was what the Catholic mayor Delwaide of Greater-Antwerp did, when he resigned in early 1944.

Collaborationist mayors had little to gain from such a resignation. Their bridges were burned. Their most successful tactic was pragmatic flexibility on key issues (notably protecting people in hiding). Indeed, most collaborationist mayors who were positively evaluated after the liberation had combined political radicalism with flexibility towards people in hiding.⁹² When, for example, NSB member Jan Brouwer became mayor of Weesp, he neutralized the information given to him by the local party section on people in hiding. The mayor was also aware of a local 'clandestine committee' which supported people in hiding, and even some resistance members.⁹³ However, even this mayor would still try to remove individual opponents. Perhaps the best-known Dutch example is the Amsterdam mayor Voûte, who according to witnesses changed his policy position in 1943 and began investing in 'good works'.⁹⁴ Collaborationist mayors were in fact ideally placed to do so. All collaborationist war mayors were able to gather positive witness statements in their post-war trials, referring to actions that they had taken in the final stages of the occupation.

This made all good governance by collaborationists ambiguous.⁹⁵ VNV mayor Jef Olaerts of the city of Genk, for example, seemed to have helped several local inhabitants, but most of these actions in fact occurred during the last six months of the occupation.⁹⁶ Often, the people he helped (by protecting them from German measures, for example) were prominent members of the local community (some important farmers, a gendarmerie commander, one prominent member of the resistance). I have the distinct impression that this mayor made sure there were always 'paper trails' of these actions, personally writing letters to the figures concerned describing what he had done. And indeed, after the occupation these actions painted a fairly positive picture of Olaerts' mayorship.

A municipal civil servant testified after the war on the protection offered by the NSB mayor of Onstwedde: 'If the assignment for delivering men for the Organisation Todt had come in 1943, the mayor would in my opinion have taken a different position than now in the autumn of 1944.'⁹⁷ Some mayors were rather clumsy. NSB mayor Coenen of Olst ostentatiously joined several members of municipal personnel to listen to the clandestine broadcasts of *Radio Oranje* in 1944, giving the message to the municipal

secretary that he ‘was not as national socialist as was presumed’.⁹⁸ In the final months of the occupation, he evacuated people in need, according to the same secretary, in order to ‘create confusion’ about his true intentions. Immediately after the end of the war, Coenen wrote a letter to the municipal personnel to ‘sincerely thank them for the fine cooperation’. This also gave him the opportunity to inform his former personnel that he had almost been arrested by the Germans, because he had been found alongside the resistance where he was planning to join the allied forces to fight against Japan.⁹⁹ A Dutch purge report of 23 May 1945 concluded that this particular NSB mayor had been ‘very helpful’ in 1945 to the population ‘like most NSB officials during the last phase incidentally’.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the Dutch context of total societal disruption in the final stages of the occupation offered many opportunities for mediation and protection. Local examples abound during these very last months, with NSB-mayors helping refugees,¹⁰¹ personally organizing local food-supply initiatives during the hunger winter,¹⁰² setting up emergency hospitals and so on.¹⁰³

A typical case was that of mayor Frederik Klinkenberg of Putten who had excelled in radical repression between 1941 and 1944.¹⁰⁴ After September 1944 he fled Putten in the liberated south, to become mayor of Borculo in the occupied north. Here, he could start with a clean slate. He openly denounced the NSB, supported the local resistance, sabotaged German orders and helped the population get through the harsh final months. It goes without saying that after the war, the defence tried to maximize the impact of the final months and brush away the repression of the first years.

NSB alderman Herman Hondius of the city of Nijmegen is a very good example. His positive role after the 22 February 1944 bombardments of the city helped to create a lot of personal legitimacy, creating a connection with parts of the city administrative personnel. He became a threat to the ruling NSB mayor, and was transferred as (acting) mayor of the city of Tilburg.¹⁰⁵ There, he managed to use his professional skills as an engineer to help maintain power supply in the region during the hardest months of the winter of 1944–45. He also actively helped to organize food supply.¹⁰⁶ He distanced himself from the NSB and cooperated with the city elite. During the final weeks of the occupation, he asked to be brought in contact with the resistance in order to prepare a peaceful transition of power with them (something the personnel refused to do). Remarkably, the post-war public prosecutor in his court case would remain critical, arguing that all of this did not minimize his political role.¹⁰⁷

NSB mayor Hendrik Vitters (Zaandam) is another case of a radical collaborationist who mediated in the final stages. Even members of the resistance would support him after the liberation for his behaviour in February 1945.¹⁰⁸ Most post-war witnesses would explicitly make the distinction between his first years as mayor and his behaviour in 1944–45.

In those Dutch cases where collaborationist mayors had changed course in 1943–44, the social-professional local environment often played an essential part. Sometimes religious personal advisors, former political friends or other members of the local elite could gradually bring collaborationist mayors back to reality. In the Netherlands, some mayors fell back on some kind of local ‘committee’ or ‘council of wise men’. Such committees were often connected to the ‘illegality’ (the resistance). In Flanders, this overall trend was dominant. VNV mayor Octaaf Govaert of Komen, for example, had a fairly radical political profile in 1940–41 (he was amongst other things a member of the Flemish SS). But as mayor in 1941, he avoided major incidents with the population.¹⁰⁹ The local village priest advised him in December 1942 to change his tactics, and to support young people in hiding in the village. Apparently, the priest explicitly argued that these actions would help Govaert after the war. The mayor did begin to support young men in hiding, and this turned out to be an advantage during his post-war trial. Collaborationist mayors who were still connected to individuals outside their party-network could pick up these signals much more effectively. Rapprochement with local elites was always essential. In the case of VNV mayor Albert Dessers of the town of Borgloon, for example, the consensus among post-war witnesses was indeed that the mayor had implemented a drastic change of strategy in 1943 by reopening communication with his administrative environment and local inhabitants.¹¹⁰ But in the extreme final stages such rapprochement happened in the Netherlands as well. Examples such as that of NSB mayor Van Grunsven of Beverwijk who created a so-called ‘Aid Action for Beverwijk’ (20 February 1945), appointing members of the local elite and the city personnel (including previous political opponents), were not uncommon.¹¹¹

More exceptional were collaborationist mayors who began cooperating with the underground resistance. This was a small minority of cases, but there are nevertheless several examples of NSB and Rex mayors doing this in the final stage. Rexist mayor Eugène Cambier of Braine-le-Château, for example, actively tried to set up a cooperation with local resistance groups in 1943 (the latter remained distrustful).¹¹² During the summer of 1944 he tried to create his own resistance organization. Another similar

example from Rex was Marcel Stavelot, who was a member of the paramilitary *Formations de Combat* before he was appointed mayor of Nîmes in 1942. As such, he avoided major conflicts with the population and in 1943 began to offer his support to local/regional resistance groups.¹¹³ Several NSB mayors communicated to the local underground resistance that they knew who they were, but would let them be.¹¹⁴ After a successful local robbery of a distribution office, NSB mayor Overbeek communicated to the head of the resistance: 'I will cover you 100 %.' Another resistance member testified after the war about this mayor: '(he) silently allowed the disappearance of identity cards, in the interests of the people involved'.¹¹⁵ NSB-mayor Willem Hansen (since June 1943 mayor of Vlaardingen) also helped the underground resistance on several occasions and, for example, warned its members that their covers had been blown in September 1944.¹¹⁶

A remarkable example is that of NSB mayor Van Scheltinga of the city of Wassenaar. He was able to come closer to the underground resistance by the end of 1944.¹¹⁷ The commander of the local resistance group (the *Ordedienst* or OD) even proposed a pragmatic cooperation agreement with a letter to the mayor, dated 4 December 1944. The resistance-commander wanted to offer his help in maintaining public order in the city, but he wanted guarantees from the Germans that they would appreciate these efforts: 'If they want to see us only as spies and saboteurs and treat us accordingly, they would make a great and regrettable mistake. (...) If they leave the current administrative apparatus intact, and support it where possible, we will keep order and peace around here, despite all difficulties.'¹¹⁸ One day later, the mayor accepted the offer, in turn confirming this in writing: 'your honest attempts to cooperate with me as mayor (...) have made me decide to offer you my support, because every positive attitude on behalf of our own people is applauded by me, as mayor and in particular as a national socialist (...)'.¹¹⁹ Remarkably, the mayor afterwards effectively negotiated a cooperation with the Germans and this resistance group, to preserve local public order and everyday administration. After the war, a resistance member had the following to say on this (rather exceptional) cooperation: 'We could cooperate with Austrian members of the *Feldgendarmarie*, because of which German plunderers could be apprehended and neutralized. (...) I could write a book on this miraculous cooperation of the NSB mayor of Wassenaar, who knew my family before there was any talk of a man called Mussert [the NSB leader, author's note]'.¹²⁰ Miraculous indeed, but the local embedding of this mayor seemed a necessary condition for this type of 'reconciliation' at the very end.

Good governance in 1940–42 served a propagandistic goal, while after 1943 it served the purpose of personal insurance for after the liberation. But it always contained a strategic dimension. The behaviour of collaborationist mayors during the last six months of the occupation was contradictory, to say the least. Processes of radicalization and persecution of the underground resistance went hand in hand with (strategic) moderation. This would make post-war evaluation extremely difficult.

ORGANIZED CIVIL WAR

In 1944, the central leadership of both the VNV and Rex issued concrete orders for a total military mobilization of their rank and file, to fight on the side of the Germans against the coming allied forces. The mayors of both parties were assigned essential coordinating roles.¹²¹ Coordinating meetings were held and the VNV distributed lists of opponents.¹²² Rex did the same, calculating that they would have 3580 German-trained men available.¹²³ We can see exactly the same developments in the Netherlands, where NSB mayors had to play the same role in ‘evacuation offices’: operation centres to organize the evacuation of party members and their families to Germany while engaging in all-out war against opponents.¹²⁴ In both countries, however, these large schemes were never implemented. The speed of the allied advance and the lack of local collaborationists’ motivation led to their failure. However, local realities in cities and towns were highly diverse.

In 1943, politically motivated violence increased, as did all forms of ‘ordinary’ criminality.¹²⁵ Even in the second half of 1943 police reports in Pas-de-Calais describe large raids of French policemen on resistance hideouts, large firefights and attacks by armed resistance fighters on French police offices to liberate imprisoned comrades.¹²⁶ The paramilitary *Milice Nationale Française* infiltrated the regular police system (which was 30,000 men strong in early 1943).¹²⁷ A small division of the *Milice* was founded in Nord/Pas-de-Calais in March 1944.¹²⁸ The number of *Milice* members remained very low, and the militia was primarily deployed during the summer of 1944.¹²⁹ But once this door was opened, political contamination emerged. The joint venture of the Germans and the *Milice* dropped all semblance of legality to engage in a war against the underground resistance. Legal French power quickly lost control.¹³⁰ The symbolic rupture in Nord/Pas-de-Calais was the Ascq tragedy, where members of the SS-division Adolf Hitler killed 68 inhabitants on 1 April

1944, in an escalated reprisal action. Nothing could have made the gap between French and German power more evident. The prefects of Nord/Pas-de-Calais demanded an internal German investigation. But the event did not influence the collaboration policy, which was maintained until the end. After June 1944, things escalated further,¹³¹ with sabotages, armed attacks and firefights difficult to count.¹³²

Local police forces began to crack. There were reports of members of the gendarmerie surrendering their arms to the resistance.¹³³ On 16 August 1944, two members of the gendarmerie were convicted (by a French court) to a 15-year prison sentence for allowing the escape of a resistance member.¹³⁴ Prefect Carles' attitude to the incident was interesting. On 4 July 1944 he indicated that two communists apprehended by the French on German orders must be released, because the legal basis for their arrest was not correct. According to Carles, the prison guards were liable for indictment in this situation, and he was unsure whether to issue an administrative remand order or release both men.¹³⁵ Even in a situation of total escalation, the prefect dogmatically upheld certain legal principles. To lose oneself in legal details was perhaps the only remaining escape from civil war.

Collaborationist public officials continuously attempted to promote themselves as the embodiment of (legal) order, at the same time presenting politically motivated actions as 'terrorism'. As Brussels VNV alderman Lode Claes wrote after the murder of Rex-mayor Teughels: 'However one looks at this case, this is not about new order or old order, but rather about order in general, and this is in everyone's interest, it is a national interest.'¹³⁶ He fooled no one. A gradual reign of terror was installed and paramilitary militias, inherently part of pro-Nazi collaborationist movements, added to further escalation. VNV and Rex saw these militias as an embryonic new police force and increasingly used them as reliable guards or auxiliary police.¹³⁷ In all occupied territories, the Germans began taking specific protection measures for militia-members and gradually integrating them into German structures. The obvious consequence was that these militias gained a *de facto* immunity and leeway for abuse of power.¹³⁸ In both Belgium and the Netherlands, these militias actively provoked violence themselves, with the regular police and the population. These militias became the physical contradiction of their parties 'legal' governmental strategy. When violence against collaborationists and their families increased, collaborationist parties felt distrust towards the traditional legal system (certainly in Belgium, where political infiltration in the judiciary and police was very weak). Paramilitary militias became necessary tools

for protection: a buffer between collaborationists and population. Party leaderships were put under pressure to protect members and their families. Any semblance of legality was henceforth left behind. VNV leader Hendrik Elias wrote to ‘his’ mayors (10 September 1943): ‘You hereby receive the order to maintain public order with all means, if necessary also those that could contradict current Belgian legality, and to protect life and possessions amongst comrades. It goes without saying that in these cases you will provide all help to the German authorities without bothering about formalistic objections concerning legality.’¹³⁹

In Belgium, assassinations of collaborationists increased after June 1941. On 17 September 1941, a member of Rex was killed in Doornik. Shortly afterwards, two Germans were killed.¹⁴⁰ The first ‘official’ VNV victim of a political assassination was mayor Pieter Cardinaels of Oplabbeek. Things escalated in 1942 with 67 individual assassination attempts (60 of them in the second half of that year), primarily in Wallonia and Brussels.¹⁴¹ Tensions rose after the murder of Rex-mayor Jean Demaret of Ransart (June 1942); in July and August 1942, Rexist militias killed several civilians. In Wallonia, the point of no return was reached after the murder of Rex-mayor Jean Teughels of Greater-Charleroi (19 November 1942). In a report dated February 1944, Eggert Reeder made mention of 50 more serious attacks on Rexist in the short period between December 1943 and January 1944.¹⁴² In Flanders, escalation came later (starting around May 1943) and would remain more localized in specific regions (isolated regions in the province of Limburg and around the city of Leuven).

Collaborationist mayors were primary—very visible—targets. After a threat campaign by the Walloon underground resistance at the end of 1943 for example, 15 Rex-mayors resigned in the region around the Borinage.¹⁴³ Overall, one collaborationist mayor was killed in the province of Antwerp, two in West-Flanders, five in Brabant, five in Limburg, six in Liège and twelve in Hainaut.¹⁴⁴ The purest forms of escalation took place in the urban industrialized regions in Wallonia, where socio-economic tensions were greatest. The focal point of the Rex local coup was also here. In Autumn 1943, Rex-leader Victor Matthys founded the *Formations B*, an armed guard-militia, while Rex’s intelligence service was transformed into a paramilitary strike force.¹⁴⁵ Permanently guarding of Rex mayors by militia-members had become a standard procedure by 1944.¹⁴⁶

This thoroughgoing militarization of the Rexist movement obviously had a great impact on mayors. Many even had to join these militias and

received German training.¹⁴⁷ Particularly in Greater La Louvière and Greater Charleroi the intermingling of the Rex city administrations and the militias was strong early on.¹⁴⁸ Rex alderman Henri Merlot Charleroi became head of a local Rexist militia (the *Police Merlot*) while in Greater La Louvière, the notorious militia *Bande Duquesne* closely cooperated with the city administration (in particular Rex alderman Félix Fourmois who controlled the city's public registry).¹⁴⁹ The Rexist mayor and aldermen of Mons tried to assign 85,000 francs in the city budget to support the intelligence service of Rex.¹⁵⁰ As governor of Brabant, Rexist Gillès De Pélichy ordered the Brussels city government to allow Rexist intelligence services free access to the public records office.¹⁵¹ In Greater Liège, a provincial deputy (Gaston Chavanne) cooperated directly with the local militia, with the support of Rex mayor Albert Dargent.¹⁵² Fuelled by intelligence provided by local administrations, these national socialist militias were ready to bring the fight to the resistance.

The most striking situation occurred in Greater Charleroi, where two successive Rexist mayors were killed by the resistance (the abovementioned Jean Teughels in November 1942, and his successor Oswald Englebin who was killed together with his wife and son on 17 August 1943).¹⁵³ In the subsequent reprisal actions (17–18 August 1943) by the Charleroi militias, 27 citizens died. The tragedy in the village of Courcelles (near the site of mayor Englebin's murder) became an especially iconic reference point in collective memory (the militias killed 19 inhabitants). After the murder of a Namur leader and his wife (30 January 1944), Rexists killed the former provincial governor François Bovesse on 1 February 1944. Rex was essentially caught up in a process of local civil war.

The same mechanisms emerged in Flanders to a much lesser extent.¹⁵⁴ In contrast with francophone Belgium, the Flemish VNV adopted a more controllable approach by using a perfectly legal device—local 'auxiliary police' who were temporary policemen paid by the city to perform specific tasks—to create a *de facto* political militia.¹⁵⁵ These political policemen were armed and often received German training. This was a local process, not controlled by the central level. However, for the most part, these local auxiliary police did their guard duties but never actively implemented repressive actions. This 'legal' approach is—next to socio-economic conditions—perhaps a partial explanation for why things remained more controlled in Flanders. After 6 June 1944 the Germans tried to mobilize these political auxiliary forces, without any success. Instead a controlled disbanding of these militias ensued, in part led by VNV mayors.¹⁵⁶

This was the general Flemish situation. However, exceptional escalations did happen in Flanders as well. In certain rural regions of the province of Limburg, VNV militias carried out reprisals against resistance attacks, supported by the German Sipo-SD.¹⁵⁷ In July 1944 alone, three VNV-mayors in the province were assassinated.¹⁵⁸ In general it is difficult to determine the exact role of VNV mayors. Some mayors actively cooperated in arresting members of the resistance (VNV mayor L. Moons of Koersel¹⁵⁹ or VNV mayor Mathieu Soors, whose brother had been killed in 1943 by the resistance¹⁶⁰), while at least one Limburg VNV mayor offered clear resistance to these militia actions.¹⁶¹ The majority of the Limburg VNV mayors, however, appear to have tried to make themselves invisible when militias operated in their communities.

In contrast to Limburg, things remained relatively stable in and around the urban regions of Antwerp or Ghent, or, for that matter, the rural areas of West-Flanders. This is usually explained by structural factors, such as the closed social nature of Limburg society, the availability of large areas in which to hide and—most importantly—the proximity of the Liège communist resistance.¹⁶² However, all these factors also applied in certain other Flemish regions where things remained stable. Also, institutions of local government or (pre-war) social fabrics of local communities were not significantly weaker in Limburg than elsewhere. Belgian resistance expert Fabrice Maerten refers more to personal/individual factors: ‘these differences owed much to particular circumstances, and often depended on the role played by particular individuals in giving an impulse to local resistance campaigns’.¹⁶³

The importance of local circumstances was confirmed by a 2001 microstudy of certain Limburg villages. It showed that the resistance members who incited the regional processes of escalation in general originated from the villages themselves (and were not francophone communists from Liège). The presence of radical individuals within small local communities and the existence of (pre-war) personal feuds seemed the most significant factors.¹⁶⁴ The general conclusion therefore seems to be that the persistence of local governments and pre-war social fabrics did succeed in maintaining stability in many regions, but had an essential Achilles’ heel. A favourable climate for violent escalation basically existed everywhere. But in most cases, including West-Flanders, the necessary spark to ignite its full potential was never set alight.

In the Netherlands, the overlap between NSB-mayors and paramilitary militias had always been strong.¹⁶⁵ The most important Dutch militia was

the *Landwacht*,¹⁶⁶ a group increasingly used for repressive actions alongside the Germans. The call to deploy militias (especially the *Landwacht*) came mostly from the local level and from NSB mayors.¹⁶⁷ In several localities, a *Landwacht* militia was effectively placed under the authority of an NSB mayor, sometimes as a personal bodyguard.¹⁶⁸ Immediately, however, the focal point of activities was aimed at active repression. The most important policy domain stimulating this was forced labour. A report of regional NSB mayors easily summarized the situation: ‘[Workers] who do not respond must be apprehended, but the police cannot be trusted’.¹⁶⁹ Apprehending work-dodgers quickly became the core business of locally deployed *Landwacht* militias in 1944.

When a regional police president remarked that certain *Landwacht* actions—especially searching private houses—in the towns of Laren and Blaricum in early 1944 were not legal, the commanding officer simply responded that he was acting under the authority of the NSB mayor who was the highest police authority figure for both localities.¹⁷⁰ NSB mayors used the *Landwacht* to implement reprisals, to seek out members of the resistance and to assemble labourers for German military works; in other words, all the tasks the regular Dutch police did not do.¹⁷¹ A mayor’s local knowledge combined with a militia’s armed force was potentially lethal. One militia member testified after the war about an NSB mayor: ‘One followed him and he gave directions until he said at a certain moment: “let’s take a look here as well”, and usually we found someone. As I said, he usually had excellent information.’¹⁷²

However, the same collaborationist mayors who had called in these militias (and the Germans), were confronted with the unwanted consequences of what they had asked for. Previously moderate NSB mayors now suddenly became involved in radical repression.¹⁷³ In early August 1944, for example, the *Landwacht* came to the village of Oeffelt. First, they had a meeting with NSB mayor Kronenburg, after which they organized a raid and arrested seven inhabitants. After the war, the mayor claimed he had never asked them to come and had been unable to stop them.¹⁷⁴ Such a claim was simply impossible to assess.

There are many examples of NSB mayors who tried to mitigate consequences or openly protested.¹⁷⁵ NSB mayor Van Grunsven of the town Beverwijk first asked for reinforcements after the assassination of the local party leader in April 1944. But when a detachment of collaborationist police participated in the arrest of 480 young men during a large raid, this clearly exceeded his expectations. He actively mediated for the release

of these men, only to receive the answer of Rauter himself that the assassination of the party leader was not the issue here: this was simply a standard reprisal action meant to set a clear example to other localities.¹⁷⁶ For collaborationist mayors who still had strong connections to local social networks, such actions were unacceptable. One such NSB mayor protested in September 1943 after local violent actions of the paramilitary WA: 'Public opinion constructs the opinion that higher authority does not dare to resist the WA.'¹⁷⁷ In March 1944, NSB mayor Van de Graaff forbade actions by a *Landwacht* group, writing to the party-leadership: 'I foresee clashes and will do nothing to prevent them. (...) As mayor, I hold no control over them and I will certainly not spend any municipal budget on them.'¹⁷⁸ The latter point was a sensitive one. Indeed, many *Landwacht* units tried to support their activities via local city budgets, which did not sit well with most NSB mayors.¹⁷⁹

Now, seemingly for the first time, certain NSB mayors were confronted with the true consequences of their choices. NSB mayor Bruynis of the village of Elst seemed genuinely surprised when confronted with the lack of respect for the legality of the *Landwacht*.¹⁸⁰ NSB mayor Jan Brouwer (of Weesp) had a more personal reaction of utter shock after witnessing the death of a local farmer at the hands of a German Sipo-SD in 1944.¹⁸¹ Even a radical NSB mayor such as Sandberg felt that certain impassable lines had been crossed when the Germans shot an opponent's son and raped his wife. The mayor mediated for the immediate release of this man and went to his house to offer his personal apologies. As the victim testified after the war: 'but for the rest, he seemed convinced that despite everything he had tried to seek the good for the city and citizens of Kampen'.¹⁸² A lot of collaborationist mayors now found out they had not signed up for this. Nevertheless, their direct responsibility in the efficient deployment of these militias was significant, whether they intended it or not.

LOCAL CONTINGENCY AND INDIVIDUAL RADICALISM

As a group, collaborationist mayors are highly heterogeneous. For every one who carried through moderation after 1943, there was another who seemed to embrace the possibilities presented by the state of near anarchy, welcoming civil war as a personal liberation of sorts.¹⁸³

But on the level of individual psychology, there were a wide variety of responses. Certain collaborationist mayors reacted poorly to extreme stress. The amount and nature of information passed by Rex mayor Edouard

Boulard to the Germans in 1943–44 reveal someone in a state of permanent severe paranoia.¹⁸⁴ When Rex mayor Jean Brasseur of Jemappes was informed that there were armed resistance fighters residing in his locality, in a panic he called both the *Feldgendarmarie* and the *Gardes Wallonnes*.¹⁸⁵ When at the end of 1943 two armed men were seen walking through the village, he again immediately telephoned the *Feldgendarmarie*, who reassured him that these were two German undercover agents. In 1944, this particular mayor would also actively cooperate in German anti-resistance actions. The fact that VNV mayor Gerard Smaers (of Meerhout) engaged militias in the fight against the resistance was probably at least partly explained by the fact that he had taken up the post of mayor because his predecessor had been assassinated.¹⁸⁶

Moderate collaborationists who had previously avoided problems sometimes now broke under the pressure. Rex mayor Frans Garin (of Givry), for example, had avoided incidents until he contacted the German police when his inhabitants organized a church service for a crashed allied pilot, and again when crops were being stolen from the fields (17 people were arrested by the Germans in July 1943).¹⁸⁷ In September 1943 he became the victim of physical aggression. He immediately resigned and signed a contract as a voluntary labourer in Germany. VNV mayor Léon van Oeteren avoided conflict for years, but after the murder of his VNV alderman he contacted the Germans who arrested four people (three of them died in captivity). From that point on, he always carried a firearm when in the town hall, and his house was permanently guarded by militia-members.¹⁸⁸ Rexist governor Jacques Dewez of Luxemburg testified after the war that in the last phase he had been acutely afraid for his safety and as a result issued far-reaching orders to repress the underground resistance. The governor threatened people and Rexist militias never left his side during the final months of the occupation. After the war, he gave a simple (yet probably truthful) general assessment: ‘There was some slight ambition involved (...) while during the final months fear drove me to unreasonable acts’.¹⁸⁹

Personal radicalism now also shone through. Some individual case examples will highlight the impact of specific personality types. A first example is that of Hendrik Corten (VNV), who became the commissar-mayor (meaning: directly appointed by the Germans) of the town of Heist-op-den-Berg (near Antwerp). From the very beginning, this man seemed to have some kind of despotism and anger towards his local community. Immediately before his appointment, he wrote to the regional public prosecutor that he would

let 'the Gestapo' round up all his local adversaries.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, as mayor he participated in nightly actions with the Flemish SS and several party members (30 April 1942–3 May 1942) to arrest local inhabitants. It is telling that he decided to leave in order to fight on the Eastern Front in 1942, leaving his wife and children behind in the community. On his departure in November 1942, he wrote a letter to the former pre-war mayor holding him personally responsible for the safety of his family, threatening him should the local community act against his wife or children. His aggressive hostility towards the community clearly shines through in his letters to his family in 1942–43.¹⁹¹ When he fled from the community in September 1944, he attached a small farewell letter to the local community (in rhymes, no less), warning the inhabitants that he would soon return to settle scores. On 5 December 1944 he wrote to a Flemish SS officer: 'I hope to be mayor in Heist again in 1945, and pity on the men of the old order who will dare to look at us the wrong way: our patience is at an end!'¹⁹²

Stan De Bruyn, the VNV mayor of the small town of Lokeren, had already shown his tendency to seek confrontation as alderman in 1938.¹⁹³ As a mayor during the occupation, he actively participated in the repression of the resistance with the Germans, gathering information, organizing investigations, participating in nightly round-ups in his and other municipalities.¹⁹⁴ Tens of people were arrested, several of whom died in German captivity. After the war, on 5 June 1948, the former mayor declared: 'I only intervened in cases where public order had to be maintained.'¹⁹⁵ In this case perhaps age played a role: De Bruyn was barely in his early twenties when he became mayor.

NSB mayor Theo Lamers of Lichtenvoorde actively participated in German raids against Jews (in different localities), sometimes considering these raids as a small trip where he took his wife. One key witness (a former mayor) testified after the war: 'My impression of Lamers is that he is a brutal and clever man. He is not bothered by a conscience and will walk over dead bodies to achieve his goals. But when he senses no disadvantages, he is a fine man.'¹⁹⁶ The overall description is one of a charming and communicative man, but without any true capacity for human empathy.

In sharp contrast with the Netherlands, post-war judicial trials in Belgium integrated psychological analyses in their investigations only very rarely (psychiatric reports, for example, were hardly ever used). A highly unusual case was Arthur Surin, the mayor of the town of Dour (October 1941) who actively tracked down resistance members, and violently arrested several people.¹⁹⁷ Exceptionally, the post-war judicial

investigation not only integrated psychiatric reports in its procedures but gave them a lot of weight. Surin had been a radical Rexist, but more essential was that he was ‘a weak man, unstable, restless, a sensitive and highly suggestible personality’.¹⁹⁸ Another psychiatric report concluded: ‘With his sentimental character, he is oversensitive to his problems, to his own imagined deceptions, a dreamer, an introvert, timid, doubtful, undecided, weak, he is unable to have his own will to take decisions or to resist.’¹⁹⁹ In his post-war penal file, the military prosecutor wrote that this had been the ideal personality type to end up, come 1940, in the most radical national socialist factions of collaborationism.

Clearly national socialism attracted certainly personality types that were not really suited to mayoral office, certainly not when an appointment happened almost overnight. The fact that Rex and the NSB attracted many new (opportunistic) members after 1940 could work both ways: either these people withdrew from the movement, or they turned out to be uncontrollable elements. An example of the latter was Rexist mayor of Jamagne (Edmond Leclercq), who—after a year working as a voluntary labourer in Germany—apparently rather impulsively decided to join Rex. Afterwards, he had joined the Walloon Legion and executed paid guard duties for the Germans. Only then—rather suddenly—was he appointed as mayor. He then also became a regular informer for the German *Geheime Feldpolizei*.²⁰⁰ This man was not really suitable for mayoral office. He arrested many local inhabitants and got involved in several firefights with the resistance. He himself testified during his trial, not really in his own defence: ‘I tried to create around me an atmosphere of terror.’²⁰¹ Another example was Gérard Donnet, who only joined Rex in 1941, and then became mayor of his hometown of Boussu. He immediately pursued actions to arrest local inhabitants, to the extent that in 1942 the German police urged him to act more moderately.²⁰² Such loose cannons, appointed mayor out of nowhere, were not uncommon in Rex.

What certain national socialist collaborationists now seemed to have was precisely a detachment from reality, an inability to project realistic perspectives into the near future and to take a step back. Characteristically, these persons also maintained their belief in German victory, making a true effort to deny reality as it unfolded around them. NSB mayor Overbeek of Hardenberg communicated on 8 March 1945 that Germany would win the war and that all apprehended hostages must let go of their ‘unpleasant’ [*sic*] attitude towards the Germans.²⁰³ NSB-mayor Feer of Blaricum wrote on 7 September 1944: ‘I came here (...) full of ideals and all kinds

of plans on behalf of the population and municipalities. (...) I would have loved to continue and complete my task here. Probably there is something better hidden in the future: behind the (current) clouds the sun will probably shine again!²⁰⁴ On 5 May 1945, this same mayor would distribute the announcement in his town that all rumours that Germany had capitulated were false, and that anyone who carried arms on the street would be executed on sight.²⁰⁵ Certain mayors still tried to reason with the same population they were taking hostage. NSB mayor Daems argued that apprehending people in hiding for forced labour was not unpleasant work, because the population was always grateful to NSB mayors when they were released.²⁰⁶

Individual psychology and a detachment from reality is perhaps also the only way to understand extremely contradictory behaviour. Some collaborationist mayors seemed difficult to fit into any logical categorization. NSB mayor Klinkenberg of Putten, for example, radically repressed opponents and Jews, yet protected certain others. Many key witnesses testified that he had never been driven by political convictions but only by lust for power. In the end, the court investigators failed to come up with any satisfactory answers: ‘On the question of how he came to all of this, the suspect cannot offer any decent answer’.²⁰⁷ NSB mayor Simon Plekker of the city of Haarlem combined radical repression with a certain sensitivity towards the persecution of the Jews. As a city civil servant testifies: ‘On several occasions he visited children’s homes and I was present when he talked to a Jewish child. He asked me: “where are its parents”, to which I replied: “gone”. He murmured: “Poor thing” and remained silent for the rest.’²⁰⁸ Later, the mayor would protect certain Jews. Another city civil servant concluded in his post-war testimony: ‘Plekker is typically someone who lives by his emotions. There was no system in his attitude, I admit that.’

NOTES

1. J.C.H. Blom, ‘Exploitatie en nazificatie. De Nederlandse samenleving onder nationaal-socialistisch bestuur 1940–1945’, in H. Flap and W. Arts (eds.), *De organisatie van de bezetting* (Amsterdam 1997), 17–29.
2. Jackson, *France*, 213.
3. Lammers, ‘Levels of collaboration’, 24.
4. These comments were written by several high-ranking Dutch public officials and officially approved by the Dutch government in London. L.H.N. Bosch Van Rosenthal, ‘De Aanwijzingen’, in Van Bolhuis et al. (eds.), *Onderdrukking en Verzet*, 385–397.

5. It explicitly condemned cooperation with German Forced Labour policy, for example.
6. In 'T Veld, 'De gemeenten'.
7. *Dossier F. Van Boxtel, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
8. *I W nr. 48: 'fonctionnaires (...)', ADN – L.*
9. Prefect Carles opened the first session on 17 May 1943. *I W nr. 577: 'Conseil Départemental du Nord: séances mai-décembre 1943', ADN – L.*
10. Such as mayors Blavet of Avesnes, Verlet of Dunkirk, Leriche of Ribécourt-la-Tour, Meurillon of Comines and Verriez of Brunémont. *I W nr. 577: 'Conseil (...)', ADN – L.*
11. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 234–279.
12. *Commissaire du Service de Reinseignement Générale aan préfet Carles d. 7 August 1943, Nominations, décès (...), 14 W 36246, ADN – L.*
13. *I W nr. 589: 'Voyages officiels....', ADN – L.*
14. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 279–294.
15. Quoted in Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 223.
16. Van den Wijngaert, *Het beleid*, 263.
17. OFK-Lille op 24 November 1942 aan de préfet, *File: 'Marché Noir' in I W nr. 863: 'Administration (...)', ADN – L.*
18. *The Association Régionale des Communaux du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais.*
19. *Bundel: Bezetting 1940–1944. Arbeidsverordeningen 1921–1922. Onderrichtingen, PAA.*
20. 'Nota aan den heer gouverneur d. 28 September 1943', *Bundel: Bezetting 1940–1944. Arbeidsverordeningen 1921–1922. Onderrichtingen, PAA, Map: 'nota's over bedienden van het provinciebestuur en der provinciale directie', 'Note pour Monsieur le Gouverneur' d. 29 September 1943, Bundel: Bezetting 1940–1944. Arbeidsverordeningen 1921–1922. Onderrichtingen, PAA.*
21. *Oorlog re C rubriek 79 – 1944, Bundel 59, File nr. 1704: 'Verplichte (...)', PA W-VL; Bundel: Bezetting 1940–1944. Arbeidsverordeningen 1921–1922. Onderrichtingen, Map: 'nota's over bedienden (...)', PAA; AA 48, nr. 83: BZ—repressie, CegeSoma.*
22. *Fonds Frans Vander Elst, 8912 97/283 AC 164, Gerard Romsée. File: 'Gerard Romsée. Getuigenverklaringen', ADVN; GD nr. 62.118, Jacques Dewez, RAB; Bodelet, Le Rexisme, 96–98.*
23. *Kreiskommandantur Roeselare d. 15 July 1944, verslag, Kabinetsarchief Bulckaert 1940–1944. Losse stukken, PA W-VL.*
24. *JPF Frederik Ernst Müller, CABR; JPF Harm Höltke, CABR; Zuiveringsdossier F. Müller, JPF Paul Coenen, CABR; Srafdoossier Arie van de Graaff, CABR; JPF Antonius Weustink, CABR; JPF Hendrik*

- Vitters, CABR; JPF Gerhardus Hendrik Klomp, CABR; JPF Marius Frans L. H. Welters, CABR; JPF Theodorus Ch. Van Dierendonck, CABR, NA.
25. JPF Albert Backer, CABR, NA.
 26. JPF Albert Backer, CABR; JPF Adriaan Van Campen, CABR, NA.
 27. *Zuiveringsdossier R.A. Cleveringa*, and *Zuiveringsdossier J. Ermerins*, CABR, NA..
 28. JPF Albert Backer, CABR, NA; JPF Albert Backer, CABR; JPF Cornelis Izak van der Weele, CABR, NA; JPF Eugène H.J.M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg, CABR, NA; JPF Marius Frans L. H. Welters, CABR, NA; *Zuiveringsdossier W. Brokx*.
 29. Some mayors got into trouble during their purge investigation because they had continued to cooperate with these German military constructions after 16 August 1944: Mayor E. Cleveringa (since 1932 mayor of the village of 't Zandt), mayor H. Ter Cock (since 1918 mayor of Wijde wormer), mayor L. Honcoop of the village of Hattem, mayor J. Ten Holte of Dalen. *Zuiveringsdossier E.E. Cleveringa*; *Zuiveringsdossier H. Ter Cock*.
 30. *Zuiveringsdossier H.F.M.E. Graaf van Limburg Stirum*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, NA.
 31. *Epuratiedossier S.W. De Jong*, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, NA.
 32. *I W nr. 85: 'affaires allemandes. Janvier - août 1944'*, ADN – L.
 33. 505 U 511/2: 'rapport de Georges Bernard (...)', d. 27 October 1943, ADN – L.
 34. *Nr. 505 U 511/5: 'note (...)'*, ADN – L.
 35. Report of Meeting d. 17 November 1943. *Nr. 505 U 511/5: 'note (...)'*, ADN – L.
 36. *I W nr. 85: 'affaires (...)'*, ADN – L.
 37. Something which Conway stresses for Belgium when he talks about the 'collective structures of Belgian society [that] provided a barrier to the hierarchical structures of control (...)'. Conway, *The Sorrows*, 54 (see also 53).
 38. Conway, *The Sorrows*, 289.
 39. J. Sainclivier, 'Les notables face à la lutte armée', in *La résistance et les Français: lutte armée et maquis. Colloque international organisé par l'Université de Franche-comté*, June 1995, onuitgegeven acta, 1995.
 40. Generally speaking, the clandestine socialist party had a stronger control over this coordination committee in Nord than the communists, while in Pas-de-Calais it was the other way around. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 325–326.
 41. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 325.
 42. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 326.

43. A. Pierrard, 'L'action du PCF dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais durant la guerre 1939–1945', *Mémor*, nr. 19–20 (1994), 155–176.
44. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 325.
45. J.-M. Guillon and P. Laborie (eds.), *Mémoire et Histoire: la résistance (Toulouse 1995)*; A. Caudron, 'Démocrates Chrétiens de la région du Nord dans la Résistance', *Revue du Nord*, vol. LX, nr. 23 (1978), 589–628.
46. *I W nr. 1951: 'Toussaint (...)'*, ADN – L.
47. Pierrard, 'L'action'.
48. *Nr. 14 W 36247: 'Nominations (...)'*, ADN – L.
49. *Nr. 14 W 3650: 'Nominations (...)'*, ADN – L.
50. Letter of prefect Carles d. 26 October 1943.
51. *Nr. 14 W 36253: 'nomination (...) Valenciennes'*, ADN – L.
52. J.-P. Florin, 'Pouvoir municipal et occupation à Roubaix', in Dejonghe (ed.), *L'occupation en France*, 269–318.
53. Florin, 'Pouvoir municipal et occupation à Roubaix', 301.
54. Florin, 'Pouvoir municipal et occupation à Roubaix', 304.
55. Florin, 'Pouvoir municipal et occupation à Roubaix', 307.
56. *Epuratiedossier nr. 128, Van Dun van Ravels*, PAA. *Benoemingsdossiers Ernest Coene, gemeente Moen*, PA W-VL.
57. *GD nr. 76.776, Gerard Seys*, RABW.
58. *GD Gerard Seys, nr. 76.776*, RABW.
59. '(...) de uitdrukkelijke wensch van de bevolking'.
60. *GD nr. 56.727, Joris Hardy*, RABW.
61. *Zuiveringsdossier A. Jonker, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
62. Testimony of mayor Bins, d. 21 November 1945, *Zuiveringsdossier WJAC. Bins, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
63. Testimony of mayor Bins, d. 21 November 1945, *Zuiveringsdossier WJAC. Bins, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
64. *Zuiveringsdossier J.J.C. Van Kuyk, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
65. *I Zuiveringsdossier J.J.C. Van Kuyk, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
66. *Zuiveringsdossier A. Colijn, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
67. *Zuiveringsdossier A. Colijn, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
68. Defensive written testimony by mayor Colijn, November 1944, *Zuiveringsdossier A. Colijn, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
69. In this particular case, the purge commission would evaluate negatively and gave the mayor unwanted (but honourable) discharge in 1946. *Epuratiedossieres A. Colijn, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57*, NA.
70. J. Van Overbeke, 'Beauchevain et Tourinne-la-Grosse', in J. Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d'histoire contemporaine consacrés à la vie quotidienne pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Brabant wallon, Hainaut et Namurois*

- (1984–1998) (Unpublished Seminar Papers, Université Catholique de Louvain 1984–1998).
71. S. Lambert de Rouvroit, ‘Cortil-Noirmont et Gentinnes’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 72. C. Loir, ‘Court-Sain-Étienne’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 73. B. De Walque, ‘Havré’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 74. V. Guilluy, ‘Rebecq-Rognon’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 75. V. Deneubourg, ‘Loupoigne’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 76. A. Carlé, ‘Virginal-Samme’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 77. C. Kornis, ‘La Hulpe’, Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 78. S. Lannoy, ‘Lasne-Chapelle-Saint-Lambert’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 79. O. De Borchgrave, ‘Céroux-Mousty’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 80. F. Snappe, ‘Jodoigne dans la Guerre’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 81. T. Capitani, ‘Ittre et Haut-Ittre’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 82. I. Gheysens, ‘Ham-sur-Sambre’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 83. Like Rex-mayor Hazart of Waterloo. A.- Meeus, ‘Waterloo’, in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.
 84. Similar individual examples include Rexist mayors Antoine Gaspar of Bonlez, Zéphin Denys van de gemeente of Ligny. *GD nr. 63.254, Antoine Gaspar*, RAB; *GD nr. 53.989, Zéphin Denys*, RAB.
 85. *GD nr. 50.145, Emile Renson*, RAB.
 86. *GD nr. 59.203, Maurice Houyet*, RAB.
 87. *Epuratiedossiers nr. 66, F. Bertels, Oostmalle*, PAA.
 88. *Epuratiedossiers nr. 348, Jozef-August Drijbooms, gemeente Noorderwijk*, PAA.
 Also: VNV-mayor Van den Brande of the village of Oevel. *Epuratiedossier nr. 84: Van den Brande van Oevel*, PAA.
 89. Report, d. 7 April 1946. *Benoeemingsdossiers Lint—File 16: (...) 1943*, PAA.
 90. *Zuiveringsdossier G. C. Bos*, NA.
 91. The cases of mayor Reymer of Roermond and mayor C. van de Clooster baron Sloet tot Everlo (of Castricum), for example. *Zuiveringsdossier*

- C.A.F.H.W.B. van de Clooster Baron Sloet tot Everlo; Dossier J. Reymer, NA.
92. For example: JPF J. Kattenbusch, CABR; JPF Samuel D.J. Westendorff, NA; JPF Hendrik Spijkerman, CABR; JPF René Desiré Bernard Marie Ghislain Thomaes, CABR; JPFs Anthonie van Leyenhorst, CABR, NA.
 93. JPF Jan Brouwer, CABR, NA.
 94. JPF Edward John Voûte, CABR, NA.
 95. Getuigenis Antwerpen d. 7 May 1945, *Losse stukken Kabinetsarchief Wildiers*, PAA.
 96. *GD nr. 69.754*, Jef Olaerts, RAB.
 97. JPF A.D.A.R. Franseman, CABR, NA.
 98. JPF Paul Coenen, CABR, NA.
 99. JPF Jan Sassen, CABR, NA.
 100. *Zuiveringsdossier J.G. Diepenhorst, BZ – ABB 1879–1950*, NA.
 101. JPF Theodorus Ch. Van Dierendonck, CABR, NA.
 102. JPF Rijk de Vries, CABR, NA.
 103. JPF Samuel D.J. Westendorff, CABR, NA.
 104. Frederik D. G. Klinkenberg, CABR, NA.
 105. Beijer, *Gemeentelijk beleid*.
 106. JPF Harmanus Hondius, CABR, NA.
 107. JPF Harmanus Hondius, CABR, NA.
 108. JPF Hendrik Vitters, CABR, NA.
 109. *GD nr. 62.154*, Octavus Govaert, RAB.
 110. *GD nr. 80.185*, Albert Dessers, RAB. Exactly the same conclusion was reached after the liberation on Rex-mayor Adolphe De Paepe. *GD nr. 54.113*, Adolf De Paepe, RAB.
 111. JPF J. Van Grunsven, CABR, NA.
 112. S. Descamps, 'Braine-le-Château et Wauthier', in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d'histoire contemporaine*.
 113. *GD nr. 50.370*, Marcel Stavelot, RAB.
 114. Three cases are NSB-mayors Jan Sasse, Oldenbanning van De Wijk and mayor Overbeek. JPF Jan Sassen, CABR; JPF Eis Zwindermans Oldenbanning, CABR, NA.
 115. 'ik dek U voor 100 %'; '(hij) liet oogluikend toe, dat persoonsbwijsen in het belang van betrokkenen werden gwijsigd'. JPF Jan Overbeek, CABR, NA.
 116. JPF Willem Hansen, CABR, NA.
 117. JPF Daniel De Blocq van Scheltinga, CABR, NA.
 118. Letter of the local resistance commander (Ordedienst) d. 4 December 1944, JPF Daniel De Blocq van Scheltinga, CABR, NA.
 119. Letter of Mayor van Scheltinga d. 5 December 1944, JPF Daniel De Blocq van Scheltinga, CABR, NA.
 120. Post-war testimony of a member of the local resistance, n.d., JPF Daniel De Blocq van Scheltinga, CABR, NA.

121. Document nr. 160: proces-verbaal d. 26 March 1945, in (*JB 65*)—nr. *AA 1418, Documents (...)*, CegeSoma. See also: JPF ‘Groot-Brussel, Brunet en co’, AGK.
122. A.M. 62, ‘betreft: Invasie’, d. 14 June 1944, getekend: J. Drijvers, *JPF Adriaan Van Coppenolle*, AGK.
123. *Kreiskommandantur* aan Albert Josef en gouverneur Jean Georges d. 13 July 1944, *Notiz über (...)* *File: nr. 121 bis. (...)*, *JPF gouverneur Jean Georges*, AGK; *GD nr. 85.774, Jean Martin*, RAB.
124. *JPF Albert Backer* and *JPF Willem Bos*, CABR; *JPF Paul Johan Marie Coenen*, CABR, NA.
125. For Belgium, see Antoon Vrints, ‘Patronen van Polarsiatie: homicide in België tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog’, in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, vol. 15 (2005) 177–204.
126. *I W nr. 1529: ‘Pas-de-Calais (...)*’, ADN – L.
127. J.-P. Azéma, ‘La Milice’, *Revue d’Histoire du Vingtième Siècle*, nr. 28 (1990), 83–105.
128. *I W nr. 157: ‘police (...)*’, ADN – L; *I W nr. 1533: ‘instructions (...)*’, ADN – L.
129. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 248.
130. *I W nr. 982: ‘correspondance (...)*’, ADN – L.
131. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 332–378.
132. *Map: ‘Résistance’, I W nr. 724: ‘affaires (...)*’, ADN – L.
133. *I W nr. 982: ‘correspondance (...)*’, ADN – L.
134. *I W nr. 724: ‘affaires (...)*’, ADN – L.
135. *I W nr. 982: ‘correspondance (...)*’, ADN – L.
136. Press article d. 26 November 1942, *JPF Groot-Brussel VIII. 1949. L.7. 56—Bundel: Ludovicus Claes*, AGK.
137. *Archief Boumans, JB 63, AA 1314–1522*, CegeSoma.
138. *File nr. 305: ‘Officiële (...)*’, PAL; *Bundel: ‘Politie 1940–1944’. Submap: ‘Politie en rijkswacht. (...)*’, PAA.
139. *File nr. 31—(...)* *Archieven Frans Wildiers*, CegeSoma.
140. De Jonghe, *De strijd Himmler-Reeder deel 2*, 88–90.
141. J. Schoenmaekers, ‘Een gevaarlijke tijd’: *Groot-Bilzen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Een bijdrage tot de analyse van het verzet in Limburg* (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Ghent University 2001).
142. Schoenmaekers, ‘Een gevaarlijke tijd’, 235.
143. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 236.
144. Report of Belgian State Security d. 14 October 1946, *8912 97/283 AC 164—Dossier Gerard Romsée*, ADVN.
145. Conway, *Collaboratie in België*, 229.
146. *GD nr. 84.534, H.-J. Van Single*, RA.
147. *GD nr. 81.639, Alexandre Want*, RAB; *GD nr. 85.774, Jean Martin*, RAB; Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 326, 334, 509.

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149. *GD Félix Fourmois*, nr. 71.803, RAB.
150. *GD nr. 83.905, François Boveroulle*, RAB.
151. *AA 48, nr. 83 (...)*, CegeSoma; *JPD Groot-Brussel 7/L/49. Carton 55—Bundel Adrien Gillès De Péligny*, AGK.
152. E. De Bruyne, *La Sipo-SD à Liège 1940–1944* (Housse 1998).
153. J.-L. Delaet, *Le pays de Charleroi de l'occupation à la libération 1940–1944* (Charleroi 1994).
154. Vrints, 'Patronen van Polarsiatie'.
155. Getuigenis 15 May 1945, *JPF Theo Brouns*, AGK.
156. Titelloze map, Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Antwerpen 1940–1944, PAA; Bundel reserve-hulppolitie, *JPF Theo Brouns*, AGK.
157. *JPF Theo Brouns, File: 'Brouns. 1945 L. 412. 62'*, AGK; Document nr. 184, V. d. 21 April 1945, *Nr. AA 1418: Documents de l'Auditorat-Général, map Nr. 101*, CegeSoma.
158. Lode Rochus of Diepenbeek (2 July 1944), Gerard Lismont of Groot-Gelmen (9 July 1944), Antoon Ariën of Tessenderlo (18 July 1944). J. Bouveroux, *Terreur in oorlogstijd. Het Limburgse drama* (Antwerp/Amsterdam 1984), 135 ff.
159. Report gendarmerie Leopoldsburg d. 17 April 1945, *JPF Theo Brouns*, AGK.
160. *GD nr. 85.371, Mathieu Soors*, RAB.
161. *GD nr. 81.311, Henri Hanssen*, RAB. Schoenmaekers, 'Een gevaarlijke tijd', 231.
162. E. Raskin, 'Limburg', in R. De Schryver and B. De Wever et al. (eds.), *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging, 1894–1909*.
163. Quoted by Conway, *The Sorrows*, 50.
164. Schoenmaekers, 'Een gevaarlijke tijd'.
165. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 10 A – I*, 56.
166. The *Landwacht* were formed in early 1944 with the intention to become a politically reliable auxiliary police to the NSB and the Germans. Formally subjugated to German police structures, they consisted of 1,250 fulltime and 9,000 reserve members (at the peak of September 1944). De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 10 B – II*, 288–289.
167. *JPF J. Kattenbusch*, CABR; *JPF Eugène H.J.M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
168. *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
169. Report regional meeting NSB-mayors Eindhoven, November 1944, *JPF Addo Hovinga*, CABR, NA. Reports of the regional meetings NSB-mayors Groningen (1944); Post-war testimonies Vorrink (Groningen):

- head of the private secretariat of NSB-mayor Tammens. *JPF Willem Pot*, CABR, NA. An individual case example: *JPF Addo Hovinga*, CABR, NA.
170. *JPF Adriaan Willem Feer*, CABR, NA.
 171. *JPF Paul Coenen*, CABR; *JPF Barthold Arnold van der Sluys*, CABR; *JPF Edward Floris Sandberg*, CABR; *JPF Jan Hendrik Hermans*; *JPF Tjeerd van der Weide*, CABR, NA.
 172. *JPF Klaas Hendrik Brontsema*, CABR, NA.
 173. *JPF N.W. Bruynis*, CABR, NA.
 174. *JPF Johannes J.L. Kronenburg*, CABR, NA.
 175. See other individual cases, in *JPF Julius Vogels*, CABR, NA. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk deel 10 B – II*, 290.
 176. *JPF J. Van Grunsven*, CABR, NA.
 177. Report d. 17 Oct. 1945, *JPF E.Z. Oldenbanning*, CABR, NA.
 178. *JPF Arie Van de Graaff*, CABR, NA.
 179. Circular mayor Müller d 7 August 1944, *JPF Eugène H.J.M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg*, CABR, NA.
 180. *JPF N.W. Bruynis*, CABR, NA.
 181. *JPF Jan Brouwer*, CABR, NA.
 182. *JPF Edward Floris Sandberg*, CABR, NA.
 183. Case-examples: VNV-mayor Sylveer Derveaux of Moeskroen (*GD nr. 78.131*, *Sylveer Derveaux*, RAB); VNV-mayor André Vandenberghe of Oudenaarde (*GD nr. 86.525*, *André Vandenberghe*, RAB); the VNV-mayor Eisden Paul Lambrichts (*GD nr. 84.291*, *Paul Lambrichts*, RAB); Rex-mayor Edoaurd Boulard of Ollignies (*GD nr. 53.681*, *Edouard Boulard*, RAB).
GD nr. 53.681, *Edouard Boulard*, RAB.
 184. *GD nr. 5781*, *Edoaurd Boulard*, RAB.
 185. *GD nr. 72.698*, *Jean Brasseur*, RAB.
 186. *GD nr. 78.781*, *Gerardus Smaers*, RAB.
 187. *GD nr. 77.580*, *Frans Garin*, RAB.
 188. *GD nr. 57.529*, *Léon van Oeteren*, RAB.
 189. *GD nr. 62.118*, *Jacques Dewez*, RAB.
 190. *JPF Hendrik Corten*, AGK.
 191. *JPF Hendrik Corten*, AGK.
 192. *JPF Hendrik Corten*, AGK.
 193. Interview with Stan de Bruyn by the author, 24 May 2000.
 194. *GD nr. 85.965*, *Stan de Bruyn*, RAB.
 195. Testimony by Stan De Bruyn d. 8 July 1947, *Fonds Frans van der Elst*, D 8907 *Stanislas De Bruyn*, ADVN.
 196. Testimony by former mayor Bos of Winterswijk. *JPF Theodorus Anthonie Lamers*, CABR, NA.
 197. *GD nr. 83.887*, *Arthur Surin*, RAB.

198. Psychiatric Report n.d., *GD nr. 83.887, Arthur Surin*, RAB.
199. Psychiatric Report n.d., *GD nr. 83.887, Arthur Surin*, RAB.
200. *GD nr. 83.328, Edmond Leclercq*, RAB.
201. Post-war testimony, *GD nr. 83.328, Edmond Leclercq*, RAB.
202. *GD nr. 72.682, Gérard Donnet*, RAB.
203. *JPF, F.J. Overbeek*, CABR, NA.
204. *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
205. *JPF Adriaan Willem Feer*, CABR, NA.
206. Regional meeting NSB-mayors Roosendaal, d. 10 November 1944, *JPF Jacques Daems*, CABR, NA.
207. *Frederik D. G. Klinkenberg*, CABR, NA.
208. *JPF Simon L.A. Plekker*, CABR, NA.

Transition and Memory

RESTORATION AND PURGES

On a national level, all three countries opted for a legal ‘clean slate’ after the liberation.

In France, the legality of the Vichy regime itself was annulled, meaning its tenure and decisions were, in a strictly legal sense, considered never to have taken place. A decree by the CFLN (21 April 1944) created the framework for a return to republican legality (a return to the pre-3 September 1939 situation). This enabled the Fourth Republic to make a direct political and legal connection with its democratic predecessor.

Belgium did more or less the same: the decree-law of 5 May 1944 annulled all occupation decisions by the secretary-generals (including all appointments and discharges). Politically and legally, Belgium simply returned to the situation before 16 May 1940. The Dutch *rechtsherstel* (restoration of law) was similar again, bringing the Netherlands back to the political-legal situation before German invasion.¹ But administrative stability and political legitimacy could not be repaired with one top-down stroke. It also had to happen on the local level.

In the immediate post-liberation weeks, many wartime mayors remained in post (ca. 60 % overall in both the Netherlands and Belgium).² Absentees in local governments were replaced following ‘normal’ (pre-war) rules of succession. Local governments were faced with acute challenges in the wake of liberation, but the issue of political legitimacy overshadowed all

others.³ National legal restoration caused local governments to return overnight to the situation at the last pre-war elections. For obvious reasons, this did not tally with what had happened in the meantime. Therefore, an evaluation and a purge were unavoidable.

In our three national cases, the post-war purges were many-faceted and extended processes, and included both administrative sanctions and judicial penal procedures. Though highly complex, the judicial facet was also the most unambiguous, evolving within the strict frameworks of national penal legislation and the various courts involved. Administrative purges were much more ambiguous, both in terms of legal basis and political agenda. State purges of public services and administration served two essential purposes: first to restore the legitimacy of state authority with the general population, and second to restore the state's confidence in its own body of civil servants.⁴ The underlying logic of the administrative purges therefore differed fundamentally from judicial court cases. The (classic) dilemma that a severe purge would hamper the continuity of public administration was felt particularly keenly in France. Different forms of pragmatic mitigation were quickly implemented in all three countries.

PURGES IN NORD/PAS-DE-CALAIS

New prefects for Nord and Pas-de-Calais had been appointed at the beginning of 1944. On 1 September 1944, Jean Michel Cabouat took over the office of prefect of Pas-de-Calais in Arras. He suspended his predecessor and most of his entourage (and also imposed house arrest on the pro-Vichy bishop Dutoit). Roger Verlomme (who had been clandestinely in the region since 14 July 1944) took over as the new prefect of Nord on 2 September 1944, also suspending his predecessor and his entourage. The very same day, similar to what happened in other liberated cities, a *Comité Départemental de Libération* (CDL) was installed in Lille, consisting mostly of members of the (former) resistance.⁵

However, the essential figures that emerged in this precarious transition were the newly created Republican Commissars (*Commissaires de la République* or CR). It was their job to manage the transition and guide the return to republican normality.⁶ Shortly after the liberation, Frans-Louis Closon arrived as the CR for both northern departments. He immediately took on a lot of power, not always to the liking of the newly installed prefects.⁷ Closon quickly limited the power of the organized resistance in the local liberation committees (CDLs). He reinstated certain leading

civil servants and created an Administrative Purge Committee.⁸ A rapid restoration of administrative stability was the priority and Closon had the powers to implement this.⁹ Certainly, there were local examples where resistance-dominated CDL's ousted legal local governments and assumed power, but they were very rare.¹⁰ The former resistance was pulled on board but this was mainly a means for central authority to control them. Indeed, although the new republic theoretically restored local liberties, the central state took a strong hold on administrative normalization.¹¹ After he took over the powers to appoint local 'delegations' from the CDLs in September 1944, Closon quickly stabilized the more problematic local governments.¹² Almost immediately, both prefects were flooded by complaints from local liberation committees demanding more resistance members in local governments (delegations)¹³ (Table 8.1).

Administrative normalization was implemented relatively fast. Symbolically, De Gaulle himself visited the liberated departments between 30 September and 2 October 1944, giving a public speech in his native city of Lille on 1 October.

On 9 May 1944, the CFLN had announced that all 'local representatives' of the regime would have to be purged.¹⁴ Yet it was unclear what this would mean in practice.

The purges of local political personnel in both French departments differed fundamentally from both the Belgian and Dutch scenarios. In France, one basic decree (27 August 1944) outlined the framework for the administrative purges (investigative procedures and sanction measures for civil servants). The prefectural corps, judicial magistrates and the police would be particularly affected by this; 60 % of French prefects were replaced after the liberation.¹⁵

Table 8.1 Municipalities governed by a centrally appointed 'delegation' (in Nord, at the end of October 1944)

<i>District</i>	<i>Small towns (< 2000 inhabitants)</i>	<i>Larger towns (> 2000 inhabitants)</i>
Avesnes	60 (of a total of 156)	21 (of a total of 27)
Cambrai	51 (of a total of 120)	18 (of a total of 18)
Douai	43 (of a total of 66)	19 (of a total of 24)
Dunkirk	15 (of a total of 121)	14 (of a total of 29)
Lille	72 (of a total of 130)	56 (of a total of 62)
Valenciennes	41 (of a total of 82)	32 (of a total of 38)

In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the purge numbers were overall among the lowest of the country. Indeed, purges hardly affected the French mayoralty. It was also a short process. Contrary to Belgium and the Netherlands, there were no extensive purge investigations on each individual mayor. *Commissaire* Closon played an essential role here as well. His powers and those of both prefects were extensive enough to allow quick and autonomous decisions. The CDLs were quickly reduced to mere advisory boards. The majority of administrative investigations into local political personnel were over by January–February 1945.¹⁶

The general line followed by *Commissaire* Closon was that mayors appointed under the occupation should in principle be maintained, as long as they offered ‘sufficient guarantees’ in terms of national safety. Only mayors who explicitly (*manifestement*) lacked sufficient legitimacy with the population needed to be replaced, preferably by the mayor/*adjoint* in office before 3 September 1939 and preferably while respecting the pre-war political balance.¹⁷ In Nord, 271 mayors were discharged or suspended and replaced (40 %), while in Pas-de-Calais the figure was 300 (36 %). Most of these were in larger cities (continuity was overall very high among rural mayors). This also indicates that the gradual trend towards the appointment of more right-wing mayors in Nord/Pas-de-Calais after 1943 had been a primarily sub-urban phenomenon.

To give a general picture, about 4155 civil servants were sanctioned in some way in Nord and Pas-de-Calais.¹⁸ According to a report on Nord (November 1945), the prefect had ordered 1256 administrative arrests since the liberation, 1092 administrative internments and 215 cases of house arrest. For Nord, 2070 files (mostly individual cases) were transferred to the courts.¹⁹ As far as the civil servants in lower administrations (such as municipal governments) were concerned, there had been 84 sanction-investigations by November 1945 (of which 22 had resulted in discharge).²⁰ Police commissioners in particular were purged (practically in all larger cities in both departments).²¹ In Nord, 91 members of the local police and 98 members of the state police were subjected to a court case.²² A list of names of ‘collaborationists’ in Nord contains 190 names (mainly members of political movements; no mayors or other public officials are on this list).²³ Six secretaries-general (four in Nord) and 17 sub-prefects (10 in Nord) were replaced.²⁴

These numbers are low compared to national French averages. French historian Rouquet posits an inversely proportional relationship between local trades union organization and the level of purges, which (as he

admits) remains an hypothesis. In the same vein, he also assumes the same correlation between the presence of resistance networks and collaboration (and therefore purges). Rouquet therefore explains the low numbers of administrative purges in Nord and Pas-de-Calais by the strong network of local trades unions and the strong presence of the organized resistance, which arguably played an important role.²⁵

France saw many legal innovations for prosecution of pro-Nazi collaboration and war crimes.²⁶ New special courts were created to judge Vichy-collaborationists per category (from leading figures to the so-called ‘smaller fish’). The creation of so-called *indignité nationale* (literally ‘national unworthiness’, or divestment of citizenship and subject rights, created by the decree of 26 August 1944) was also an essential legal innovation, and a far-reaching one at that.

In the whole of France, 124,751 cases were brought before the lower two courts (dealing with ‘ordinary’ local collaborationists; the highest court dealt with top-ranking collaborationists and leaders of the Vichy regime). In the end, 49,723 people were sentenced for *indignité nationale*, 39,266 received prison sentences, 2853 received the death penalty (1303 of which were *not* carried out) and 3910 received the death sentence *in absentia*.²⁷ Novick writes that few French mayors, *adjoints* and municipal councillors were struck off by administrative or judicial purges, without however giving hard facts.²⁸

As stated, judicial sentences in the north of France were among the lowest in the country. In both departments, about 6800 people were sentenced based on the purge legislation (including 4000 prison sentences, 43 death penalties and 62 life-sentences). Historians De Jonghe and Le Maner talk of a ‘moderate purge’ in both northern departments (*une épuration modérée*).²⁹

Hardly any local political personnel were brought to court for collaboration-related charges, with only individual and exceptional cases such as mayor Dehove of Lille. One report on Nord lists seven mayors who were arrested by republican authorities after the liberation,³⁰ while the police informed the department of the arrest of four mayors.³¹ In sharp contrast to Belgium, the administrative procedures against mayors did not wait for legal procedures to reach a verdict. The administrative and judicial segments were both more clearly separated in the north of France.

This leaves the question of if and how a political evaluation of mayors (in terms of ‘national loyalty’) was made in the first months after liberation. One interesting case was that of mayor Charles Wamberghé of the town of Lynde

(district of Dunkirk). Immediately after the liberation, several complaints accused the mayor of being a Vichyist ‘collaborationist’. The Dunkirk sub-prefect reached a final evaluation remarkably quickly (compared to Belgium or the Netherlands). Already on 12 October 1944, the subprefect wrote that the mayor had indeed been a convinced supporter of Pétain and the policy of collaboration. However: ‘It does not appear that M. Wamberghe has done any propaganda work; his contact with the Germans was courteous, but nothing more’.³² There was, however, a concrete complaint against this mayor as well: the fact that he had advised younger people to go to work to Germany. The final conclusion of the subprefect was: ‘if based on his ideas we can consider Charles Wamberghe as having been a well-informed supporter of close Franco-German cooperation, it would seem that he has never put this conviction to the fore publicly or supported it with real actions’.³³ Remarkably, this supporter of Vichy stayed in office as mayor unhindered—until the 1945 local elections, that is.³⁴

I did identify some court cases against mayors that help to shed light on the judicial approach. The mayor of Ochtezele en Noordpeene was accused of having denounced local inhabitants (‘patriots’) to the Germans, for having refused compulsory guard duty. The mayor was cleared of all charges after the briefest of investigations: ‘One cannot reproach the mayor of this community with having warned the Germans that these five men from Ochtezele had refused to submit to given orders (...)’.³⁵ A similar example was former mayor Marcel Sinnaeve of Leffrinckoucke, who was accused of close economic collaboration with the Germans. A quick police investigation concluded that these were fictional complaints and that the mayor was simply ‘highly unpopular’ in the community.³⁶ Mayor Ammeux of the town of Esquelbeck was accused of having used stolen French military material for his own gain in 1940. The judicial investigation was closed without consequence in December 1944 (again, with opposition from the local liberation committee).³⁷ These cases mainly seem to show that prefectural power in Nord/Pas-de-Calais could block attempts to use the purges to get rid of unpopular mayors.

Administrative investigations that led to the removal of mayors had to involve more serious charges, for example about active political behaviour. Rather late, on 21 February 1945, the prefect of Nord prescribed that mayors who had also been Vichy *délégués* must—in principle—be relieved of their mandate (unless there were mitigating circumstances). One such example was mayor Loeuil of Quérénaing.³⁸ Although there were no further complaints against the mayor, this mayor had been politically too

visible under Vichy and the prefect himself advised his removal. Another case was the president of the local 'special delegation' and later mayor of Tressin, Pierre Brabant. He had also been a local *délégué à l'information*. Brabant argued unconvincingly that he had always considered this as a 'neutral' position, and received the support of members of the local elite and local resistance representatives. In this particular case, the investigation concluded that no reproach could be made against mayor Brabant because he had effectively 'misjudged' the function of local information delegate.³⁹ It was therefore possible after the liberation for individuals with enough local legitimacy to rise above certain political Vichy positions.

Judicial investigations were opened against mayors who were arrested after the liberation. One rare example involved the small town mayor of Carnin who had delivered two French colonial soldiers to the Germans (in June 1940) and also warned the Germans of a crashed allied plane (in March 1944), leading to the arrest of two pilots.⁴⁰ A judicial investigation was also opened against war mayor Piat of the town of Lannoy on the charge of explicit anti-Gaullism. Interestingly, there was also a complaint brought against him that he had 'not [done] enough' to support local men evading forced labour. This complaint was immediately rejected by the court, which argued that the mayor had also done nothing explicitly harmful to these people.⁴¹ Another mayor who was removed through a judicial procedure following complaints by the local liberation committee was mayor Wilmot of Marcoing. The concrete complaints were that the mayor had stopped a transport convoy meant for French POWs in Germany, and removed public patriotic signs on 14 July 1944.⁴² One other rare example was mayor Rémi Outerleys of Rubrouck, who was arrested for delivering an allied pilot to the Germans (in August 1942).⁴³

A collective court investigation was opened against the municipal council of Faches-Thumesnil (and mayor Degryse in particular) for purely political reasons. The mayor and his council, appointed during the occupation, were accused by the local liberation committee of having been generally pro-Vichy. After a brief judicial investigation the mayor, the municipal secretary and several municipal councillors were removed from office.⁴⁴ All these mayors received the lightest of sentences. The severest was removal from office.

Compared to Dutch or Belgian cases, these were, overall, minor cases with hardly any fundamental charges, confirming that there was no purge, in the true sense of the word, of the French mayoralty in Nord/Pas-de-Calais.

The only true judicial case against a mayor in Nord/Pas-de-Calais was the trial of Paul Dehove of Lille. The two most important accusations during his post-war trial were his replacement of the legal socialist mayor and his support for forced labour policy.⁴⁵ The political-ideological aspect dominated the case. There was a deep investigation into all Dehove's political statements, contacts and meetings. Some witnesses testified in favour of Dehove's 'good governance' (which offers an interesting comparison with Belgium, see below). But all administrative acts and policies were unambiguously interpreted by the court as political-ideological support for the collaborationist regime.

One other rare example of a comparable socialist-turned-Pétainist mayor was the court case against mayor Augustin Boutte, who was sentenced to two years in prison by the Court of Justice in Bétune on 13 March 1945 (still soon after the occupation, and in time for the elections).⁴⁶ This case is interesting because socialist-communist competition was at the heart of it. The mayor was charged (and convicted) chiefly for his role in the German arrest and deportation of a young communist resistance member. The evidence brought before the court for the mayor's direct involvement in collaboration, however, left doubts. After the mayor's prosecution, the SFIO section of Pas-de-Calais would in fact support his court appeal, explicitly arguing that the conviction had been based on politically motivated communist testimonies. The court upheld the former mayor's request for a reduced sentence. However, such cases of the communist resistance attempting to purge a socialist mayor through court proceedings were extremely rare (in fact, this was the only one I could identify in which this was unambiguously the case).

Even more important than the Dehove case, was that brought against prefect Fernand Carles. He had embodied Vichyism and/or Pétainism in the region. As such, his post-war court case was the main trial of political-administrative collaboration in both departments.⁴⁷ The concrete charges brought against him were, successively: appointing Vichyist mayors and civil servants, establishing lists of hostages, active cooperation in German repression of Communism, active participation in the persecution of the Jews, repression of the underground resistance and clandestine press, his contacts with the fascist *Milice Française*, offering financial rewards for denunciation, his close personal contacts with the Germans (and presence at pro-German events), active execution of forced labour policy, and his police and prison system reform (including the creation of an internment camp).⁴⁸

His appointments of the mayors of Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing were explicitly mentioned in the indictment. This, then, was truly a court case of collaboration in the Belgian or Dutch sense of the word, and indeed, the arguments used by Carles' defence lawyers—about the prefect's supposed 'good governance' in the 'general interest' under difficult circumstances, and his protection of certain individuals—displayed many internal similarities with trials of collaborationist mayors and administrators in those countries (see below). However, the trial and investigation were never brought to full closure as Carles committed suicide on 23 April 1945 while in prison, prematurely aborting the most important trial of a collaborative administrator in the north of France. Besides the personal tragedy, this is also unfortunate from a historic point of view. A court verdict on this landmark case of collaboration under occupation in this region would have provided an important precedent for French case-law. As already stated, a nuanced picture emerges from assessment of Fernand Carles by leading historians of the north of France, depicting Carles as a misled idealist blinded by his patriotism or nationalism and stressing his qualities as a 'good administrator'.

The attempted return to the administrative situation as at 2 September 1939 meant that many communists were reappointed to their former local government positions. This caused obvious tensions in many localities.⁴⁹ Former resistance members were now forced to cooperate with local governments appointed under the Vichy regime. This was hardly a stable foundation for local government. It was probably one of the reasons why restored French republican authority opted for early municipal elections in May 1945 which aimed to restore democratic legitimacy to local governments as quickly as possible.⁵⁰

More importantly still, the strategy was clearly to use this 'electoral' approach as a shortcut solution to the many unresolved issues of compromised local governments. Just one example of this, was the case of mayor Notteghem of Bruilles-St-Amand. Although charged with denunciations, the court had decided not to sentence him. In April 1945, however, the republican commissar wrote that it was best to suspend this mayor as the court case against him had weakened his legitimacy and authority. The prefect argued against this that the mayor should remain in office since he had not been found guilty. It is likely that the prospect of the upcoming local elections, and the idea that a 'democratic judgement' of this man by his own population would soon follow in any case, were the grounds for this moderate attitude. In short, it was left to local parties to decide

whether to reinstate certain wartime administrators on their lists, while it was up to local populaces to voice their (dis-)approval of such candidates. This ‘purge through elections’-approach was as democratically bottom-up as it was pragmatic.

But even though the time between the liberation and the local elections was brief, it still left time for local tensions to surface. One such example of a contested mayor was Léon Delsart, who had been mayor (for the URD) of the town of Nomain since 1922 (and a member of parliament between 1932 and 1936).⁵¹ He was arrested immediately after the liberation by the resistance. Several concrete complaints were brought against him. The brief police investigation concluded that the real problems were connected less to the war and occupation than to personal conflicts between the mayor and other local powerbrokers, notably the resistance. The Douai police report of 29 September 1944 concluded that the mayor was an authoritarian man by nature, who could not tolerate other opinions. In April 1945, just before the elections, the court case was closed without consequence. The mayor was released (officially for health reasons), much to the dismay of the local liberation committee.⁵² However, the mayor was by now old and would no longer participate in the elections. Obviously this meant that the potential problem of his reinstatement would not in fact arise in practice. Another relevant example was the court investigation of mayor Ambroise Chatelain (and his first *adjoint*) of the town of Divion. Most of the complaints brought against both men concerned administrative facts going back to the 1930s, with no political or Vichy-related accusations. The investigators therefore concluded that no charges of collaboration could be brought against either defendant.⁵³

Both prefects therefore mainly sought to create the most stable conditions possible for the local electoral campaigns. When, for example, the Douai court of justice ordered the arrest of mayor Lebette of the town of Cantin in the beginning of April 1945 (for several denunciations in 1942), the subprefect voiced his protest, arguing that it was ‘not opportune’ to arrest a mayor so soon before the elections.⁵⁴

It was unavoidable from the outset that the occupation would still cast a long shadow over the 1945 local elections. The electoral campaign between the socialists and communists was particularly sharp. Communists tried to make the most of their ‘resistance capital’ for the elections. Therefore, they strategically opted to stand on ‘open’ lists, not specifically labelled as communists but going under the name of the Patriotic and Republic Antifascist Union (*Union Patriotique et Républicaine Antifasciste*). Overall, former members of the resistance dominated many local electoral lists.⁵⁵

The overall outcome of the first round was therefore not unexpected. The communist-dominated *Union Patriotique et Républicaine Antifasciste* won in the urban industrialized regions with large labour populations, to the detriment of the socialists (the restored SFIO). The MRP held its strong pre-war position in the medium-sized cities. However, in the second round of the elections the SFIO was able to gain a stronger foothold in certain more rural towns and cities. So although they lost control of certain important cities (Valenciennes, Bruay, Noeux and Lens) to the communists, they were able to compensate for this somewhat elsewhere.

Indeed, in many localities the socialists now learned that their occupation strategies did not always translate into electoral support after the occupation. One remarkable example was the dismissal by the socialist war mayor Jules Houcke of Nieppe, after he had gained a (slight) absolute majority in the elections. Despite this victory the result was a severe loss compared to the pre-war results. He considered this as ‘a certain degree of ingratitude’.⁵⁶ The mayor thought he deserved more support based on this wartime track record. As he himself put it: ‘This fight against the invader, nobody could have done this with more heart and more sincerity than me. But to fight against Frenchmen, that I find impossible. Politics begin, where courage ends.’⁵⁷ As Le Maner concludes: ‘This way, the socialists seemed to pay a heavy price for the politics of presence conducted by their local notables.’⁵⁸

But overall, the results of the 1945 municipal elections were nuanced. They were far from catastrophic for the socialists. In fact, the loss in 1945 would be partly reversed in subsequent elections. As the socialists learned in 1945 that local populations had not always viewed their politics of presence under occupation positively, the communists would subsequently learn that administrating communities held different challenges than the underground fight against an enemy occupier.

While the communists would quickly become plagued by internal conflict, the socialist party in both departments carried out a strict internal purge. They worked on formulating one homogeneous political message, based on the image of the ‘martyr-mayors’ who had consciously compromised—sacrificed—themselves by taking up position between the occupier and population in the most difficult situation imaginable. The May 1945 elections came too early for this. Only two years later, however, the situation had changed. In the 1947 municipal elections, the socialists were able to make up for their immediate post-war losses and overall, the 1947 results were in general terms a return to the pre-1940 situation.⁵⁹ In Pas-de-Calais, the socialists gained 63 mayors, while the communists

lost 15. The MRP and the new party *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* regained many of the positions in the traditional pre-war bastions of the centre-right.

The conclusion is, therefore, that the occupation did not have any durable impact on the local balance of political power. However, there was a rupture in terms of personnel, with a generational switch after the liberation. In Pas-de-Calais, only 28 % of pre-war mayors remained in post as mayor after the 1945 elections and this number seemed more or less the same in Nord. While before 1940 53 % of mayors in both departments had been older than 60, this was reduced to 30 % in 1945. And while only 4 % of all mayors had been younger than 40, this increased to 12.5 % in 1945.⁶⁰ The discontinuity after the occupation, then, was caused in part by a younger generation of mayors taking over power from the post-1918 generation.

On the one hand, this democratic approach (stabilization through local elections) was therefore successful. This, however, does not take into account wounds caused by wartime experiences, which lay dormant in many local communities. The elections did not 'solve' these issues. A typical example was the village of Arneke, where war mayor Louis Permandt had been filtered out through the normal French process, meaning he had been suspended after the liberation and had not been re-elected in the municipal elections of May 1945. Nevertheless, the former mayor's continued presence in the community continued to cause tensions to the point where the mayor received physical threats during the summer of 1945. Former resistance members who were elected to the municipal council in May 1945 understood these tensions. In fact, they resented the fact that the war mayor had simply been 'removed' without any purge sanction against him.⁶¹ Although the higher authorities had considered the concrete complaints against the mayor not serious enough,⁶² the legacy of the occupation continued to breed dissatisfaction in local communities. I would hypothesize that many people in a similar position to former war mayor Permandt eventually decided simply to remove themselves, perhaps to another town to start again.

Finally, I want to remark that collective memory development in the longer term was primarily structured around national and regional frameworks. There is an extensive literature on the development of Vichy-related memory.⁶³ Suffice to say here, that individual cases of war mayors were obviously used in local/regional political campaigns, but the issue of war mayors as such was not cultivated as a dominant, separately distinguishable issue within French myth and memory construction. This is an interesting point of comparison with the Belgian and Dutch cases.

THE BELGIAN AND DUTCH PURGES OF MAYORS

Belgium and the Netherlands had to deal with the considerable infiltration of Nazi collaborationists in local governments. While the Belgian government had already destroyed all occupation-appointments (5 May 1944), the subsequent decree-law of 8 May 1944 prescribed the purging of ‘unreliable’ political and administrative public officials.⁶⁴ After the liberation, purge commissions would be created per public sector or administration. In the Netherlands, Dutch civil authorities had to wait until the liberation of the entire territory to take over the direction of the purges (of the military authorities in the liberated south of the country).⁶⁵ The Central Committee of the Purges of Government Personnel⁶⁶ was established in April 1945.⁶⁷ Dutch purge decrees were finalized as late as April and May 1945.⁶⁸ They were the result of political negotiations, which continued even during the purges themselves. The most important decree (F 132, August 1945) provided a description and therefore criteria to evaluate the concept of ‘political disloyalty’ (*politieke ontrouw*).⁶⁹ It also provided the set of administrative sanctions, the most severe of which was discharge with loss of all pension rights.

This purge decree was primarily set up with collaborationist members of the NSB in mind. A striking difference with Belgium was that appointments of mayors under wartime were not automatically ‘annulled’ (in legal terms) after the liberation. Therefore appointments of collaborationist NSB mayors were considered legal, which implied that they needed to be purged individually. In Belgium, the 1938 elections were the norm. Only mayors with a ‘legal’ mandate—by necessity elected municipal councillors—had to be purged. The essential concrete effect of this was that many VNV mayors yet hardly any Rex mayors surfaced in the administrative purge. The fact that Rex had been wiped out in the 1938 elections therefore fundamentally influenced the nature of the post-war purge in francophone Belgium. By mid-1946, administrative purge investigations had started against 1947 municipal councillors, 329 aldermen and 468 mayors (among those mayors there were therefore many members of the collaborationist VNV, but hardly any Rexists). At the beginning of 1947, 1364 municipal councillors and 118 mayors had been removed from office because of their wartime conduct.⁷⁰

Besides the abovementioned decree aimed at purging pro-Nazi collaborationists, the Dutch also created another more ambiguous purge decree (F 221) for public officials. This decree comprised ‘mistakes of

a not particularly severe nature, but where there is a lack of confidence with superiors, colleagues, subordinates or the general public, because of which continuation should be considered as not desirable'.⁷¹ This decree was aimed at the much more ambiguous, difficult group of 'patriotic' public officials who might have made mistakes under occupation. Belgian and Dutch purge legislation would be further changed and adapted even during the phase of policy implementation itself, creating delays and inconsistencies.⁷²

In January 1946, 345 Dutch mayors had been discharged, the majority of whom were members of the former NSB. At that time, investigations were still pending on 153 mayors. By April 1946, a total of 418 mayors had been discharged and this rose to 509 by the end of 1947 out of a total of 905 cases investigated based on the purge legislation.⁷³ Besides discharges, many other sanctions were given as well.⁷⁴ In the end, 74 non-collaborationist mayors (meaning not members of the NSB) received some kind of sanction in the Dutch purges.⁷⁵ The Dutch state purge model was therefore radically different from the French one. It also took a lot longer. In April 1946, when in France the first post-war local elections had already taken place over a year before, the Dutch still had 210 ongoing investigations against mayors.

Unlike in France (or Belgium for that matter), the Dutch state could not count on local elections to restore democratic legitimacy to a new generation of mayors because of their civil servant statute. The state itself had to evaluate and—if necessary—replace its civil servant mayors. This offered more possibilities for top-down control: to purge behind closed doors without too much interference from local factors. The Dutch state also had the potential advantage of being able to fall back on a pre-existing framework for sanctioning mayors.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, even in the Netherlands it turned out to be impossible to detach the purges of mayors from political and other local power struggles.⁷⁷

The Dutch central purge commission made use of a questionnaire, which was basically a checklist for mayors (the Belgian provincial government used the same approach, but not as systematically). This created a uniform approach but offered no final evaluations for individual cases. As the purge commission responsible for the (difficult) case of mayor F. Ter Wisscha van Scheltinga wrote: '[Our Commission] was not there to judge that the wrong public officials had been in power, but rather people who, in the midst of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, committed mistakes or acts that were considered mistakes by some'.⁷⁸

Part of this delicate assessment was generational. Several mayors who had made mistakes were older mayors who, after a lifelong patriotic duty to Dutch society, had been confronted with German occupation right at the end of their career. A typical example of such a case was mayor S. Baron Van Fridagh. This older mayor had actively cooperated with the Germans on several initiatives, inciting conflict with his municipal personnel and population. A post-war report of the central purge commission described him as ‘an aristocrat of the old school’.⁷⁹ The exact qualities that had made people of this generation ideal mayors after 1914 had perhaps pushed them towards ‘mistakes’ under occupation.⁸⁰

Overall, Dutch purge authorities showed clemency towards these mayors.⁸¹ The peculiar civil servant status of mayors in the Netherlands was a large advantage here. It gave the state more flexibility. The Purge Commission did not necessarily have to rely on sanctions to remove mayors. The solution of ‘honourable discharge by own request’, for example, came in useful. It was not a formal sanction, and provided an elegant way of removing certain de-legitimized patriotic mayors. In the case of the abovementioned mayor Baron Van Fridagh, the responsible provincial Commissioner of the Queen wrote: ‘I am of the opinion that to mayors, like Baron Van Fridagh, who executed their office for 24 years without any real complaints made against them, but who failed in certain instances during the years of occupation, honourable discharge cannot be withheld, at least when (...) the mayor assumed that he was serving the Dutch case in good faith and to the best of his knowledge’.⁸² Honourable discharge was also used to remove mayors who had reached the end of their career in any case.⁸³

During the investigation of mayor J. Diepenhorst (since 1938 mayor of Oud Beyerland), the Purge Commission itself seemed split over how to assess the mayor’s order to guard the city public records office against an attack by the resistance. Certain members evaluated this order as unpatriotic while others argued the exact opposite, blaming the resistance for planning an attack on a Dutch town hall.⁸⁴ This case illustrates that members of the Purge Commission had to assess ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as they went along. In this particular case, there was also a strong local political struggle playing out in the background. In the end, the mayor decided to offer his resignation himself. He did not receive any further sanction.

It was therefore obvious that political struggle—and pressure from the local resistance—impacted Dutch purge procedures as well. The Dutch Central Purge Commission even ascribed great importance to the local legitimacy of a mayor. Certain Dutch mayors had made severe mistakes

but succeeded in holding on to their local legitimacy. Overall, such mayors were evaluated positively and reappointed without too many problems. A good example was B. Van Slobbe, since 1936 mayor of the southern Dutch town of Breda, who had made several rather serious ‘mistakes’ (concrete actions of cooperation with the Germans). Remarkably, these were hardly investigated or taken into account. This can only be explained by the mayor’s national network and strong legitimacy and popularity with the local population. He was reappointed in May 1946 and received honourable discharge in November 1947.⁸⁵

The dubious role played by secretary-general Frederiks of the Interior was sometimes also accepted as a defensive argument.⁸⁶ In the case of mayor Bruineman of the town of Druten, the Commission summarized things well in its final report. It stated that the all too human tendency to avoid immediate dangers had not been counterbalanced by the necessary central authority: ‘The mayors were ultimately, so it seems to the commission, left to their own devices.’⁸⁷ This particular analysis would have seemed more suitable in Belgium, but Belgian purge investigations would never take this particular element into account after the war.

The only ‘errors’ considered truly inexcusable were political ones. Closeness to, let alone membership of a collaborationist movement almost always led to sanctions or dishonourable discharge.⁸⁸ The same applied to mayors who had maintained overly close contacts with the German occupier.⁸⁹

Finally, purge procedures were in exceptional cases also used to remove certain unwanted mayors. One mayor received honourable discharge for presumed homosexuality.⁹⁰ And even when the Purge Commission had to admit that there was only doubt about a mayor’s attitude, the exit route of honourable discharge was an elegant solution.⁹¹ An example of a mayor removed because of lack of local legitimacy was mayor G. De Kerff, who was appointed mayor of Sas-van-Gent in 1935. The Central Purge Commission seemed initially to advise positively towards reappointment, but was then confronted with a local population who wanted the mayor removed (not necessarily for facts related to the occupation). The provincial Commissioner of the Queen advised pragmatic use of the existing window of opportunity to give this mayor an honourable discharge.⁹² For Dutch local communities, this transition was a unique opportunity for local populations to express their opinion on their mayor. In exceptional cases, local dissatisfaction did indeed lead to mayors being removed (with an honourable discharge or reappointment in another community).⁹³

Belgium combined French and Dutch elements. As in the Netherlands, there was a large-scale operation of individual purge investigations against mayors. However, while in the Netherlands the initiative was necessarily located at the central state level, the Belgian initiative lay at the local level. Belgian higher authority needed concrete local complaints to launch investigations. If a local consensus existed around a war mayor, and no one had any complaints, the state did not move on its own. This was an integral part of restored democratic local autonomy. Part of this was, similar to France, the perspective of future local elections which could take care of unwanted mayors.

Belgium was probably also the most problematic case of the three. It lacked the central capacity to stabilize local governments and purge top down, as well as the right stable context for early local elections. The Belgian government therefore opted for a longer transition period. The first post-war municipal elections took place on 24 November 1946. This meant that the transitional phase between liberation and local elections had taken nearly two years. The strategy was clearly to give local/provincial governments the time to normalize and stabilize, creating the conditions for a normal electoral process (and a 'normal' electoral result).⁹⁴ It was feared the communists would benefit more than others from early elections immediately after the occupation. The Belgian and French government therefore opted for two opposite strategies. Both of these had their own defensible logic, but in my opinion the Belgian approach proved eventually to have more disadvantages, certainly in the longer term. The long transition period gave ample time to neutralize the resistance as a political force and to create a certain stable groundwork for elections. However, it would on the other hand give local conflicts two years to fester and develop before municipal elections finally decided democratic legitimacy. Political and personnel conflicts had ample time to deepen and become durably embedded in local societies.

An administrative investigation procedure was started only when there was a clear reason or cause. If such an administrative (or judicial) investigation started, the mayor in question was 'suspended by disciplinary measure' and replaced by a member of the same party.⁹⁵ This suspension was formally not a sanction (the Dutch had the exact same type of measure).⁹⁶ Public perception, however, could often not make that distinction. This was one of the many concrete problems with the long transition period of two years. In practice, Belgian administrative authorities often waited for a parallel judicial investigation (and contrary to Nord/

Pas-de-Calais, there often was one) to reach its verdict before making a final administrative decision. This meant that a suspension could last a very long time. This was unpleasant for those involved, both personally and politically. Politics and administrative purges quickly became intertwined here. Political pressure was sometimes put on administrative (and judicial) authorities to come to a rapid (positive) decision. The best-known example of this was the case of the Catholic mayor Delwaide of Antwerp, whose party leadership wanted to have his administrative and judicial investigation closed before the elections.

The long period of local transition made politicization of the purges unavoidable: something which was more explicit in Belgium than in the Netherlands to begin with. Indeed, the politicization of administrative purges of local government was unavoidably steeped in local politics. In hindsight, it is remarkable that, on a central level, there was never any explicit consideration of the explosive political situation in Flanders on the local level, or the effect this could have on the longer term. The half-hearted attempt of the Belgian ministry of the Interior in April 1945 to explain the strict distinction between the ‘unworthiness’ of a civil servant or public official in the administrative sense on the one hand, and political mistakes or crimes on the other, was a lost cause.⁹⁷

Flanders was a problem. The electoral result of 1938—and the structural political intertwinement it had created between the local Catholic elite and the Flemish nationalists—was supposed to have founded the local power balance until November 1946. This was obviously a problem. Immediately after the liberation, in hundreds of Flemish towns, the socialist, liberal and (where present) communist opposition attacked Catholic majorities. This instigated a political campaign that would last for two years and in which collaboration under occupation remained a central issue. The main challenge for the local Catholic party⁹⁸ was how to maintain its local position of power (over 75 % of Flemish mayors were members of the Catholic party). The main challenge was to legitimize their 1938 cooperation with the VNV as well making their own politics of presence during the occupation acceptable. They had everything to lose, while the opposition could only advance in Flanders.

A Catholic mayor’s political alliance with the collaborationist VNV was, for obvious reasons, a frequent complaint submitted by the socialist, liberal and communist oppositions. The factor of the former resistance also played its part.⁹⁹ As in both other countries, the local resistance tried to present themselves as legitimate local powerbrokers. Real political incidents

such as the takeover of local government after the liberation often lasted only for a few short days (although in some exceptional cases in francophone Belgium such a conflict could drag on for months). Contrary to France, the Belgian resistance did not receive any formal role in the purges of local governments.¹⁰⁰ Their informal influence on local politics and purges, however, remained strong.

Intermediary provincial governments (the governors) played an important, often underestimated role in the local purges. Certainly in Flanders, governors were aware of the danger of political instrumentalization. The governor of East Flanders warned the minister of this as early as 13 November 1944.¹⁰¹ Contrary to the myths of anti-Flemish purges that would later be developed within the Flemish movement, Belgian authorities tried to distinguish and remove purely political and personal factors from purge investigations. Complaints against mayors that were related to a mayor's Flemish nationalist conviction were treated carefully (and often moderately). The governor of East Flanders even wrote in 1945: '[We feel] that having formed a concentration list with the VNV before the war and having formed a majority in the municipal council together with this party cannot be considered enough cause to remove someone from the municipal council if no other complaints can be held against them'.¹⁰² Provincial authorities, then, seemed conscious of the danger of political abuse of the purges.

This led to a relatively moderate purge where Catholic mayors were concerned. Contrary to francophone Belgium or the Netherlands, having played an active role in the social aid organization *Winterhulp*, for example, was not considered a problem for Catholic local notables. This did not mean that petty local politics and individual personal feuds did not interfere at all during the long two-year transition period, which was partly used to get rid of 'unwanted' mayors. Stabilization was the real priority, which meant that de-legitimized mayors were replaced by stronger figures. The fluid transition period created a window of opportunity to get rid of unwanted mayors in Belgium as well, but more for higher authority.¹⁰³ In some smaller villages in Belgium, this meant appointing someone from outside the municipal council (a local notable) or replacing an old mayor with a younger man. This way, municipal legislation was somewhat 'stretched out' by higher Belgian authority.¹⁰⁴ For obvious reasons, this led to frustration and incomprehension with those mayors who were 'temporarily' suspended in 1944–45 and then never returned after the 1946 elections.

In the shorter term, the long two-year transitional phase seemed to attain its intended goals. Although many local campaigns were still overshadowed by occupation experiences, and many new lists (communists) and new candidates came to the fore, the overall electoral result of 1946 showed continuity with the 1938 results. In Flanders, the renewed Catholic party gained about 70 % of municipal councillor seats and 75 % of all mayors. Although the socialists and communists gained more power in cities of over 10,000 inhabitants, the pre-war Catholic dominance in local Flemish local government was confirmed.¹⁰⁵ In francophone Belgium, continuity was slightly less patent. In most larger cities, the communist party gained power to the disadvantage of the socialist party (although, as in the north of France, much of this communist gain would again be lost in the next local elections). Similarly to the north of France, the real rupture happened on the personnel level, certainly concerning mayors. In West Flanders, 64 % of mayors were new. This number seems applicable to Flanders as a whole, and to a lesser extent also to francophone Belgium. Regional differences aside, a new generation of mayors clearly came to the fore in 1946, replacing the post-1918 generation.

The assessment of Belgian non-collaborationist mayors was framed in the broader assessment of the policy of the lesser evil: administrative collaboration by the pre-war, patriotic elite. The special purge committees listed mistakes for all Belgian secretaries-general. But overall, the general line presented by these investigative commissions was that the policy of the lesser evil was not punishable by article 118bis (was not, in legal terms, part of 'political collaboration').¹⁰⁶ This was not a surprising conclusion, and is in fact similar to the pragmatic attitudes adopted in France and the Netherlands when confronted with economic or political-administrative cooperation by members of their elite with the German occupier. A high level of elite continuity was a general (Western) European feature after 1945. This general policy trickled down to the local level and the purges of 'patriotic' Belgian mayors.

Two central Belgian examples are the socialist mayor Joseph Bologne of Liège and the Catholic mayor Leo Delwaide of Antwerp. As mayor, Bologne had transferred lists of communists and so-called 'a-social' elements (in 1941 and 1942) to the Germans. The facts were proven, but the mayor could not be indicted (let alone convicted) because he had acted without any malicious intent against the fatherland and the national state. More interesting is mayor Delwaide, who was charged with political collaboration in 1945. He had offered support for several German measures,

had not protested when the Antwerp police rounded up thousands of Jews during the summer of 1942, and had prompted and led the creation of the first unified urban agglomeration. In strict legal terms, the latter element was a textbook example of ‘changing the institutional organization of the country’ (part of the legal article on political collaboration). Indeed, all other (collaborationist) mayors of these urban agglomerations were convicted for exactly this. The judicial investigation against Delwaide, however, was closed without consequence, again because Delwaide had acted without any malicious intent. Delwaide would later become the Antwerp alderman responsible for the harbour, and an influential member of the Belgian parliament. These (and many other) cases made it clear that there was no such thing as ‘administrative collaboration’ in legal terms: there was only anti-Belgian collaboration with the enemy.¹⁰⁷

The same vision was applied to certain illegal institutional reforms under occupation. The best examples in Belgium were the greater urban agglomerations and the administrative judiciary. Concerning the latter, even in the case of Rex governor Leroy of Hainout a substitute military prosecutor wrote in 1946 in a legal note that the Rexist governor had acted ‘in good faith’ (*ter goeder trouw*) when cooperating in this system. His assessment was revealing: ‘The creation of this administrative judiciary was the work of Belgian civil servants who, indeed with a certain negligence towards our public law, were in general moved by the urgent demands of feeding the population (...)’.¹⁰⁸ What the substitute magistrate was basically saying here, was: we recognize that this was an illegal reform in the strict legal sense, but we retroactively approve because there were higher interests under occupation and we have no real other alternatives than to condone this now.

This approach aimed at elite continuity was a frequent mechanism in post-1945 purges. But it was rather outspoken in the Belgian case. The specific circumstances of the Belgian occupation had created enormous potential for a domino effect. Unlike in France, where the Vichy leadership could be ‘detached’ from the ordinary citizenship, or the Netherlands where the same could be done with NSB members in control of the judiciary or the police, many crucial repressive administrations had remained in the hands of the Belgian elite. All the more problematic, then, that Belgian pre-war instructions had been so explicit about the responsibility of top ranking civil servants. In reality, the exact opposite of the system proposed in pre-war instructions had happened. This created the problem after 1945 that lower public officials (primarily mayors) who were accused

of certain acts of collaboration pointed their finger upwards, towards top-level officials. Such an ‘upwards domino effect’ was not an acceptable perspective in 1945.

As was the case with Dutch mayors, it was basically the Belgian state itself that stood on trial here. Civil servants and public officials had been left in 1940 with the assignment to take care of Belgian interests in 1940, but had then been left to their own devices. The government in exile in London had never given any clear new instruction as the occupation went along, while the head of state—after first supporting the new order in 1940—remained passive and silent throughout the occupation. Could the Belgian state hold these public officials and magistrates legally accountable for individual mistakes? Clearly, exceptions notwithstanding, the overall response to this question was negative.

TRIAL NARRATIVES: EVIL NAZIS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Besides the administrative purges, the other main component of what we would today call post-war ‘transitional justice’ was the judicial part: the court investigations and trials of pro-Nazi collaborationists and war criminals. In Belgium and the Netherlands, this was the most dominant and visible part of the purges.

In Belgium, judicial experiences after 1918 strongly determined the approach after 1944. As in 1918, military courts were made responsible for the prosecution of pro-German collaboration. The most important penal articles used after 1944 also originated in WW I. However, the scope and context of collaboration in WW II was very different. Much would depend on interpretation and concrete implementation of the ‘old’ penal legislation in court cases.¹⁰⁹ The three most important Belgian penal articles were ‘political collaboration’ (article 118bis), economic collaboration (article 115) and military collaboration (article 113). Denunciation (article 121bis) formed a fourth important legal basis for indictments.

When talking about ‘repression’ with regard to WW II, most other European countries refer to war crimes committed by Germans and their collaborationists. Not so in Belgium. In this country, ‘repression’ refers to the post-war (judicial) judgement of collaboration and war crimes by the Belgian state. In part, this is caused by Flemish nationalist mythology, cultivating the image of ‘anti-Flemish repression’ by the Belgian state. In any case, the terminology is highly revealing and something of a Belgian equivalent to the Dutch calling the underground resistance ‘the illegality’.

The Dutch had no recent experience with this sort of judicial operation. This partly explains why they had fewer qualms about retroactive legislation than the Belgians. Four decree-laws of December 1943 created the legal basis for 'special', extraordinary judicial courts (*bijzondere rechtspleging*) to deal with acts of pro-Nazi collaboration.¹¹⁰ Of these new decree-laws, the most important was the Decree of Extraordinary Penal Legislation (*Besluit Buitengewone Rechtspleging*).¹¹¹ This essential decree described what constituted political and military collaboration in Belgium, as well as denunciation. A subsequent large judicial innovation came with the so-called Tribunals (for which the decree was signed as late as September 1944). They evolved into judicial courts intended to judge large numbers of 'small' collaborationists: the ordinary members of the NSB, pro-German sympathizers, those who had gained small benefits or against whom there was no concrete complaint besides political affiliation. These tribunals were placed mostly outside normal judicial procedures, legislation and magistrates.

In Belgium, over 53,000 people received a prison sentence for some form of collaboration with the Germans.¹¹² Some 24,000 people were condemned based on 118bis (political collaboration), 10,000 of whom were indicted exclusively for these charges (meaning that 14,000 people were condemned for political collaboration in combination with other charges).¹¹³ In the Netherlands, about 50,000 people received prison sentences. Unlike in the north of France, this included a fair number of collaborationist mayors.

Political collaboration was the most important basis for indictments of collaborationist war mayors in Belgium, although it was often combined with other charges: denunciation, military collaboration (carrying arms or uniforms), or other penal facts such as theft, maltreatment or economic collaboration.¹¹⁴ In the Netherlands, most NSB mayors were indicted before the political Tribunals. Some mayors of larger cities, however (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht) were brought before the Extraordinary Courts.¹¹⁵

In Belgium there were no typical cases, nor were there standard reference punishments for collaborationist mayors. A verdict could range anywhere from the death penalty (mayor Leo Vindevogel of Ronse was actually executed after receiving the death penalty) to being freed without any legal charges (although a loss of civil and political rights was difficult to avoid for these mayors). Collaborationist mayors with few charges except having been members of Rex or the VNV were not convicted. The judicial investigation against VNV mayor Drijbooms of Noorderwijk, for

example, was closed without further consequence. This high variety in sentencing was unavoidable, given the differences in each individual case. A normal sentence for a Belgian collaborationist mayor of a mid-sized town, with no severe incidents during the occupation, was a prison sentence of two years (in the first instance).

Legal specificities aside, there were many similarities between the general legal content of Belgo-Dutch prosecutions of collaborationist mayors. But first, I would like to point out two striking differences as well.

The structural use of psychiatric analysis in Dutch court cases was a major difference with Belgium. When combined with reliable witness testimonies, such analyses give highly interesting insights into evaluations at that time, yet also present dangers for the writing of history.¹¹⁶ There is a danger of reducing systemic factors to personal pathologies based on largely obsolete evaluations. Also, the danger exists of following the arguments of the defence lawyers, who consciously cultivated the image of ‘abnormal’ personalities. Psychiatric reports were primarily used to support the creation of enough mitigating circumstances. To explain NSB mayor Feer’s active participation in the persecution of the Jews, for example, the defence primarily tried to use the argument of his ‘extremely anxious personality’.¹¹⁷ In his plea for the defence of NSB mayor Tesebeld, one lawyer explained: ‘the suspect [is] as naive as a child who can do dangerous things without fully realising the dangers for others, who is only aware of his good intentions and sees everyone who works against him as an obstacle. In this ideological euphoria the suspect can be dangerous, especially when there are no other people around to intervene (...). However, it is striking to see how the suspect reacts in a situation from person to person (...). Then he becomes a human being (...).’¹¹⁸ The legal defence of NSB mayor Thomaes, trying to minimize certain acts against opponents under the occupation by stressing their abnormality, stated: ‘I really had to laugh when I read the content of certain letters written by the defendant, because they were so ridiculous. One can really ask whether this man can be called normal. (...) However much he praised himself, he wasn’t such a bad person.’¹¹⁹

Although I did encounter several of these psychiatric reports in cases against Rexist public officials (never for VNV public officials), this medical approach rarely arose in Belgium, primarily because there was no similar legal tradition in the Belgian judicial system. It makes the difference with Belgium clearer, certainly concerning the construction of memory after the trials. NSB mayors were pathologized, ostracizing these men from the

spectrum of normal political Dutch traditions. This in sharp contrast with Flanders, where the choices of VNV mayors would be interpreted mainly along the traditional fault lines within Belgian politics and society.

A second Belgo-Dutch difference was the fact that Dutch court cases against NSB mayors had access to much more hard evidence. In particular, the VNV had systematically destroyed ‘political’ documents, meaning Belgian investigators had to scrape fragments of evidence together to build their case. Also, in the same vein, there were several NSB-mayors who were much more open about their national-socialist conviction, even continuing to defend this ideology after the liberation in court. NSB mayor Kattenbusch declared before his prosecutors: ‘I still consider National Socialism as the ideal system. (...) Nothing was ever asked of me which went against my conscience, and I therefore never had any conflicts of conscience with any occupation measure. Even the measures against the Jews, in which I personally never had to participate directly, did not go against my own beliefs and in any case were no reason for me to distance myself from the Germans or the National Socialist movement.’¹²⁰ No Flemish VNV mayor would ever have been so naive as to make this statement in his own court case.

It was quite unusual for a Belgian collaborationist to testify as former NSB mayor Feer did during his trial when talking about the many arrests he had ordered or implemented: ‘I know that my style is sometimes rather radical, but today I would still write the same about a man like [X], who is a danger to society. I never considered while writing this letter that I would jeopardize this man’s life and safety.’¹²¹ When NSB mayor Weustink had to defend himself in the case of the arrest of several important local key figures, he did not declare that he was ‘forced’ or unwillingly involved; on the contrary, he acted as if this had been normal policy, adding: ‘I never once thought for a moment to warn these people.’¹²² NSB mayor Dekker declared on his active repression of individual opponents: ‘You have to understand this in light of that context. I was a National Socialist. Everyone who fought against National Socialism fought against me. That was also how I interpreted this particular case. (...) I cannot add anything more about this incident.’¹²³ NSB mayor Hovinga testified on his active participation in certain arrests: ‘I simply wanted to find out how things went about during arrests.’ When confronted with the enormous hostility of witnesses who testified about his collaboration with the Sipo-SD, he declared: ‘I never noticed that inhabitants did not like me.’¹²⁴ On a letter in which NSB mayor Sandberg had given the names of people hiding Jews,

he testified: ‘This letter speaks for itself. I cannot offer any explanation. I am aware that what I ask in that letter is not very charitable of me.’¹²⁵ It was not uncommon for NSB mayors to try and openly defend their occupation policies in domains such as forced labour or public order, thereby also giving valuable information and admitting to personal involvement.

While several former NSB mayors still defended National Socialism in 1946, former VNV mayors systematically distanced themselves from the Germans and National Socialism, referring to Flemish nationalism as their sole ideological basis as well as their choice for collaboration. The general Belgian pattern was also to dogmatically deny everything, until the moment when strong (written) evidence surfaced. Many NSB mayors had very weak defensive positions because the weight of written evidence was so overwhelming. In short, Dutch courts seemed to have an easier task. Belgian courts had to create legal truth in a context which had already been politicized decades before, based on the most fundamental and antagonistic cleavage in Belgian politics.

But there were many basic similarities as well. The specific context—an avalanche of individual cases, understaffed courts and a difficult societal and political context—made a certain pragmatic approach inevitable. Also, an equivalent of ‘administrative collaboration’—politically inspired administrative support to the Germans by public officials or civil servants—did not exist as a separate penal category in either country. This implied that the governance of these mayors became part of their political collaboration, their supposed betrayal of the Dutch or Belgian state.

Court investigations were not concerned with creating any kind of historical truth, or doing justice to any form of truthful collective memory development. They worked within the confines of a strict legal framework. In legal terms, investigations tried to gather concrete building blocks to turn charges into convictions. This meant firstly that certain facts needed to fit into the general description or intent the legislator had made available through the penal articles. This meant concentrating on visible and unambiguously political acts (such as political memberships, carrying uniforms, presence at certain political events, Nazi-jargon used in letters or press articles). Such unambiguously political acts were the most usable in court. A second concern was focusing on crimes that could be corroborated with enough hard evidence.

All of this meant that the investigation often focused on certain acts which were not necessarily the most important from a historical point of view. To put it simplistically but clearly: to have worn a uniform or

carried a flag on certain occasions was often judicially more usable than repressive acts against Jewish people. Overall, administrative functions (such as mayor) were minimized, downplayed or pushed into the background. This was very clear with mayors who had also been part of paramilitary militias, for example, where acts which fell under the mayorship were sometimes even not mentioned at all (let alone really investigated or evaluated). The confusion over collaborationist public officials was very real, which is made clear by the example of a note during the court investigation on Rexist provincial deputy Albert Thiry. Here, a court investigator wrote in a preparatory note: 'That he accepted the function of provincial *député* during the occupation should in itself not be considered as a legal infraction.' The responsible military magistrate put a large question mark next to this sentence, expressing his disagreement or own confusion.¹²⁶

From a judicial point of view, all of this was hardly a problem. By putting specific facts together, a pattern of behaviour was composed which had to prove a certain (criminal, political) intent behind someone's overall behaviour. An example of the intended conclusion was in the case of Rexist district commissioner Ledoux: 'In his activities as a district commissioner, Ledoux too often acted as a Rexist more than as a civil servant who only pays attention to the common good.'¹²⁷ And again, all that really mattered from the prosecutor's point of view was that charges and indictments could be turned into strong verdicts and clear convictions.

The real problem did not lie at the judicial level. There was a hidden problem in the underlying trial narrative that was being created here. By narrowing the judicial focus this way, prosecutors in both countries left a wide terrain open for the defence. When accused of political crimes, it was precisely their administrative positions that mayors and their defence called upon to counteract these charges.

Piet Wyndaele, one of Flanders' most important defence lawyers for collaboration cases, wrote in a legal note: 'We did not consider administrative cooperation as collaboration with the enemy.'¹²⁸ This summed things up nicely. A standard reference example was the court case against Piet Basteleurs, VNV mayor of Liedekerke. While the military prosecutors focused primarily on purely political party-related facts, the defence focused on the mayorship.¹²⁹ The defence accepted that the mayor had engaged in some political activity, but concluded: 'his governance was nonetheless correct, from an administrative point of view'.¹³⁰ His initial prison sentence of five years was reduced to three years on appeal.¹³¹ VNV district commissioner Paul De Baenst was confronted during his trial with

letters in which he had written of ‘100 % living for the national-socialist principles’ and the importance of the ‘search for Germanic living space’.¹³² His defence simply argued that all such letters were purely ‘private correspondence’, and that what really mattered was his good governance as mayor in the field of food supply.

VNV administrators systematically detached their administrative collaboration from of the political, ‘criminal’ domain. Essentially, ‘good governance’ became the single most important defensive argument during trials of collaborationist mayors (and public officials in general). This meant that even during the trials themselves, collaborationist mayors were already developing a rhetoric and narrative of martyrdom. The statement for the defence of Rex mayor Oscar Sohy of Nalinnnes read: ‘Sohy, incidentally, wanted to create respect for the rules with the farmers, with the intention only of ensuring food supply in the country, but because of this he made himself highly unpopular and this made him the target of an assassination attempt.’¹³³

An interesting parallel example are the cases of Rotterdam NSB mayor Müller and Antwerp VNV mayor Timmermans. Both had been convinced national-socialists, and both had governed the most important port-cities in their respective countries during the occupation. Despite the differences in legal context, the defensive strategies in both court-cases were remarkably similar. Their obvious and explicit national-socialist support had to be compensated for by good governance, which in both cases meant primarily the protection of Rotterdam and Antwerp harbour interests. Both ‘national ports’ held great economic interest for their recovering countries in 1945. And, as the defence argued, it was partly thanks to these national-socialist mayors that both harbours had survived the occupation. In both cases, the defence tried to use good governance to minimize, or even outright deny, all political implications. In the case of Timmermans, this was even supported by important elite witnesses such as socialist mayor Camille Huysmans. This profoundly anti-Nazi mayor could not be suspected of any sympathies for Flemish nationalist collaboration. Nevertheless, Huysmans also testified before the court, evaluating Timmermans’s mayorship positively and concluding: ‘In short, from a political point of view I abide by my strict position. (...) From an administrative point of view I am of the opinion that, remarkably enough, a rather different person also lay in Timmermans, one who ensured the continuity of municipal policy, which he had already known before the war as a member of the city council.’¹³⁴ Even someone with the political insight of

Huysmans could not explain the apparent contradiction between the evil Nazi and the good mayor. He could only conclude that ‘another person’ must have resided in Timmermans-the-mayor.

In the Netherlands, the defence of former Rotterdam mayor Müller did exactly the same thing during his court trial, pleading: ‘The Müller of 1941 and 1942 was in his political expressions and acts a totally different person than the mayor of Rotterdam of 1944 and 1945.’¹³⁵ Even with the trial of VNV party leader Hendrik Elias—a major figure in the Flemish nationalist collaboration overall—his mayorship of Greater Ghent was used (partly successfully) as a mitigating circumstance.¹³⁶ The apparent contradiction returned again and again in court cases in Belgium and the Netherlands. In the case of NSB mayor Westendorff, the prosecutor wondered: ‘How [is] it possible (...) that this defendant was able to combine such reprehensible and grave acts with a good execution of the office of mayor’.¹³⁷ And indeed, this was one of those examples where in the end the court saw ‘in the way in which the defendant executed his office as mayor a circumstance (...) which should have its influence on the judgement of the acts which are considered proven; acts which, how severe and despicable they might be, appear in a more positive light because of the mayorship’.¹³⁸ In short, certainly in Belgium it could work out as a great advantage after the war for a political collaborationist also to have served as a mayor.

The same scenario played out for all prominent collaborationists who had taken over public offices during the occupation. The act of protecting people in hiding in 1943–44, for example, was a factor in the large majority of court cases against VNV and Rex mayors. But the organization of food-supply was also a central argument (certainly with VNV defendants). Other explicit examples where these arguments did impact the verdict (or rather subsequent pardon-measures) were the cases of Rex mayors Marcel Stavelot of Nismes,¹³⁹ Marcel Bataille of Gaurain-Ramecroix¹⁴⁰ and Maurice Pirard of Mariembourg. In the latter case, the pardon measure spoke of ‘mitigating circumstances resulting from the services he rendered for his fellow citizens’.¹⁴¹ One final Belgian example was the case of Rex mayor Armand Godfroid of Rhisnes, whose food distribution to the local population as well as protective measures towards people in hiding caused his initial sentence of 20 years to be reduced to ten.¹⁴² On the protective behaviour of NSB mayor Swaalf, the court judged in its verdict: ‘The tribunal has great appreciation for this.’¹⁴³ Courts often mentioned such protective measures for inhabitants in their final verdict as a mitigating circumstance.¹⁴⁴ A good Dutch example was Johan Koert, who had been

NSB mayor of the village of Wolphaartsdijk. A representative selection of post-war testimonies by important members of the local community included the judgements that he was a 'jovial fellow', 'never did anything mean', 'I never kept my mouth shut in front of him and I never encountered any problems', 'he was a good man, his only mistake was he joined the NSB', 'he was not too bad a fellow', 'he was a real man of the people' and so on.¹⁴⁵ Especially his mediation to release arrested men who evaded forced labour was greatly appreciated by the community. All of these opinions contrasted sharply with the written correspondence gathered as evidence. In October 1941 Koert wrote 'of course Hitler cannot free our people, before he has absolute certainty that this damned democracy is over and done with for ever', and on opponents he wrote 'luckily more and more of these villains are being punished and sabotaging civil servants replaced by National Socialists: that is the only way to make the eyes of the people open one day'; on the German repression of May 1943, meanwhile, he wrote that 'by powerful intervention of the Germans, all was over quickly. (...) People are unwilling or unable to understand that (...) a total effort is necessary to liberate Europe'.¹⁴⁶

It was a common phenomenon for (parts of) local communities to support their Nazi mayor after the war. There are numerous examples of groups within local communities setting up petitions to decrease the sentence or even free 'their' local collaborationist mayor. This was the case in Belgium as well as the Netherlands. When mayor Willem Hansen of Vlaardingen was sentenced to four years in the first instance, this led to members of the local community, including two members of the local resistance, offering positive statements in order to get his sentence reduced.¹⁴⁷ In many court cases against Rexist, VNV or NSB mayors, local inhabitants came to testify about the good nature of the defendant. A concluding report based on the many positive statements on NSB mayor Vogels stated: 'He was a social and likeable fellow who had time to talk to everyone and tried to help wherever he could.'¹⁴⁸ This seemed to be the essence of the local testimonies about him. Nevertheless, the mayor was sentenced to a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence (he was released in March 1948).¹⁴⁹ The convictions of NSB mayors Weustink and Vitters even occasioned protest movements from within their respective communities, because some people thought the punishments on these collaborationist mayors too severe.¹⁵⁰

This can be explained in several ways. Parts of local communities had perhaps bonded with 'their' mayor. They wanted him removed from office, of course, but when confronted with the possibility of a heavy prison sentence years after the facts, many communities seemed to back down. On

the other hand, there were often political and ideological factors at work as well. Often there were local notables giving positive testimonies in support of the defendant. In doing this, they often contradicted proven evidence. In many cases in both countries, positive defensive testimonies came from members of the local clergy, or chaplains in the prison institutions where collaborationists were held.¹⁵¹ This was often linked to a message of reconciliation, more concretely of reintegration and re-education, such as a chaplain of the prison camp that held former NSB mayor Boutz stressing that this man was young, felt a lot of regret, had a young family and wanted to start a new life far away from any political field.¹⁵²

But another main reason was certainly also lack of insight: into the true extent of a mayor's collaboration, the true political nature of the mayorship and the true legal background of the investigation. Years after the liberation, it became apparent that the visible 'good governance' was what (parts of) a local community remembered the most. This was a fairly frequent phenomenon. Rex mayor Albert Cornet of the town of Ortho is just one example of many. He had a radical and active political profile, but the main thing the local community seemed to put to the fore during his pardon procedure years after the liberation was that his organization of local 'agricultural policy' had been good.¹⁵³ Another typical example was Rex mayor Richard René of the small village Pâturages. Within his Rexist circle, he had always showed himself to be a convinced national-socialist. In his small community, however, he had become popular with his distribution of free soup and the occasional local village party.¹⁵⁴ It was perhaps no small wonder, then, that a large part of the small community thought highly of him after the liberation (in particular appreciating his soup).

A more high-profile name from the Netherlands in this context was Amsterdam mayor Voûte. Even during his trial, the prosecutors were aware that the defendant had a certain level of popularity with parts of Amsterdam public opinion. One responsible magistrate recognized what I argued above, writing in a note during the trial: 'This is partly due to ignorance of the true facts.'¹⁵⁵ The magistrate further wrote that the acts of 'good governance' had by nature been visible to the public, while cooperation in repression had mostly remained hidden. In the case of Rex mayor Henri Van Single of Ottignies, the courts came to the same explicit conclusion.¹⁵⁶ This mayor had been involved in several denunciations and had maintained close contact with the German security services. However, as the prosecutor remarked, all of this had happened in the dark, hidden from the local community. Indeed, in the case of Amsterdam mayor Voûte the court warned of the creation of a positive public perception of his mayorship. They wrote

that ‘the statement that during the occupation he fulfilled some kind of divine mission for the interests of Amsterdam should be rejected as utterly profane, but also as completely in contradiction with the facts’.¹⁵⁷ This was an essential insight. Most local communities did not have full or even reliable knowledge of the true role a collaborationist mayor had played during the occupation. A trial was not always the best instrument to create such adequate insight for local societies. In Belgium (Flanders) specifically, this would give rise to many myths, which would last for decades.

In more radical cases, acts of ‘good governance’ had no impact on the final verdict, especially in the Netherlands. NSB mayor Broere of the town of Enkhuizen, for example, had a radical national-socialist profile on the one hand, but had also done some good deeds. In particular, he had relieved the situation of his community during the winter famine of 1944–45, and in March 1945 he had accepted to take 120 babies who needed shelter into the town.¹⁵⁸ As far as I can see, these positive facts were not taken into account in the final verdict. The Dutch courts had little difficulty bypassing potential contradictory elements. The criminality of the political element was mostly clear and this political framework dominated judicial evaluation.

The fundamental problem lay with Belgian courts dealing with Flemish collaborationist mayors. During the course of developing case law, a strict distinction would emerge between the public function (good governance) and the political function. Simply put: the fact that the mayorship of collaborationists formed an integral part of their political collaboration, and in fact was at the very heart of Nazification and repression of local communities, was neutralized as a legitimate interpretative framework.

This becomes clear when contrasting Belgian (Flemish) court cases with their Dutch counterparts. In the case of NSB mayor Westra, the Dutch prosecutor gave a clear statement: ‘the true value for the enemy of such governmental officials, was not in certain behaviour they engaged in within their usurped position, but in the fact that they held this function. (...) These acts primarily came down to a strong party policy, namely Nazifying municipal government. Not direct cooperation with German warfare as such, therefore, but the realization of a situation which was an intrinsic part of the political goals of the enemy in the Netherlands.’¹⁵⁹ This is a strong awareness on the part of the judicial authorities about the political nature of these civil servants’ functions. Belgian courts failed sufficiently to create this awareness. I could find only one very rare explicit court analysis of this problem in Belgium, in the trial of VNV mayor Jan

van Hoof of Asse. Here, the chief military magistrate himself resisted the mechanism of using ‘good governance’ in the defence. His analysis was sharp and clear: ‘What the enemy had in mind was taking over public offices and appointing its trustees, on whose servitude and zeal it could count. (...) That the mayor then erected a new graveyard, set up a new gym hall or opened a musical school, how does this compensate when placed against his national duties?’¹⁶⁰ Such reasoning by the military prosecutors in Belgium was, however, a rare exception.

Dutch courts had fewer problems in piercing through the ‘good governance’ defence. One magistrate stated in the case of NSB mayor Van de Graaff: ‘A lot of NSB mayors tried to make themselves popular by attempting to mediate with the Germans for their inhabitants.’¹⁶¹ The court went even further in the case of NSB mayor Herman Hondius, saying this mayor’s good governance had made him ‘a very dangerous propagandist for national socialism (...), certainly much more dangerous than a whole army of blind followers and small opportunistic NSB members’.¹⁶²

I found the same soberingly direct analysis in the defence strategy of NSB mayor Van Ravenswaaij. The defence was standard, claiming that all Nazi expressions had been a smokescreen, and that his real intentions were made clear by his good governance as mayor. The court totally rejected this, saying that all good acts of governance had been motivated by ‘rational calculation, connected to the changing war perspective. [He has] protected inhabitants of his community, probably under the influence of the opportunistic mindset so characteristic of him’.¹⁶³

In exactly the same vein, Dutch courts or witnesses had no problems in simply saying that it was logical that NSB mayors had often delivered ‘good governance’. In the case of NSB mayor Mertens (the town of Oers), the court followed the municipal secretary who stated that the mayor was a true national-socialist at heart, but had simply been pragmatic: ‘He did not want to spoil things for himself, he wanted to remain in position as mayor.’¹⁶⁴ A prime witness stated during the trial of former Amsterdam mayor Voûte: ‘It goes without saying that Voûte also did some good things, he was after all appointed to do good things for the citizenry.’¹⁶⁵

This sobering yet essential reasoning was mostly absent from the cases of Belgian collaborationist mayors. Elements of lack of evidence, the less outspoken national-socialist profile of the VNV, or different legal contexts played a role in explaining the difference. The most important reason, however, I would argue, lay with the political and societal context of these judicial procedures in Belgium.

TRIAL NARRATIVES ABOUT DENUNCIATION

The renowned Belgian sociologist and transitional justice specialist Luc Huyse wrote: ‘It is a big leap from political collaboration to denunciation. Both crimes differ fundamentally on many points.’¹⁶⁶ From a post-war and strictly legal point of view, this is correct. But when we analyse government under occupation, the lines between both crimes blur completely. As we saw, managing intelligence in relation to the occupier was one of the key points to assess the political and administrative collaboration of war mayors. As such, the crime of denunciation was intrinsically tied to the crime of political collaboration.

Each of the three countries possessed legal penal articles to deal with the crime of denunciation. In Belgium, this was article 121bis: ‘submitting people to persecution or repression by the enemy’. The content of this was highly similar in the Netherlands. The abovementioned decree of Extraordinary Penal Legislation contained a similar paragraph (‘consciously submitting people to detection, duress and limitations of liberties or any other punishment or measure by and from the enemy’).¹⁶⁷

This was, indeed, an extremely difficult point in court cases against collaborationist mayors or other public officials, for several reasons. Chapter 4 made it clear that information management was an essential aspect of the policy of the lesser evil. Most ‘traditional’ Belgian administrations, police services and so on had sent massive amounts of information to the Germans starting in 1940. The best example was the information from Belgian magistrates’ offices about the Belgian communist movement, transferred to the Germans in 1940. And the specific Belgian context had only made this more complex. Because of the lack of clear central guidelines and agreements, most local governments had simply followed their own rules. This was a problem during court cases, in the sense that many defence lawyers for collaborationist officials used exactly this lack of clarity and this widespread phenomenon as an argument. The former Antwerp VNV governor Frans Wildiers, for example, strategically testified during his trial: ‘[It] is clear that both the magistrature as well as most official institutions (magistrate offices, the governor, district commissioners, local governments, gendarmerie, police) regularly during the war provided intelligence to the occupier and transferred lists of Belgian civilians who because of this could get into trouble with the Germans. This was unavoidable in the circumstances at that time (...)’.¹⁶⁸ In strict factual terms, the former VNV governor was completely right.

This, then, was an essential problem for courts dealing with cases of political collaborationists. On the one hand, it was clear that a VNV mayor such as Joseph Vermeyleen of the city of Haacht had systematically transferred police reports to the Germans, leading to the persecution of local inhabitants.¹⁶⁹ However, as it quickly turned out, many non-collaborationist figures had done exactly the same thing.¹⁷⁰ A critical, in-depth look at the problem of intelligence management would therefore imply assessing the Belgian policy of the lesser evil. And we have already seen, this was a taboo area for post-war courts.

As a general topic, anti-Jewish persecution rarely came into post-war investigations against Belgian public officials. Although Belgian military courts realized the unique nature of anti-Jewish persecution, judicial logic prevented in-depth exploration of these crimes.¹⁷¹ There were, however, some moments when interesting judicial decisions were taken. The post-war evaluation of the registration of the Jews offers an interesting example, also because it concerns information management. As an administrative operation, the registration of the Jews had been the largest task Belgian local governments and police forces had executed in this domain, yet it remained absent from the collective court investigations of mayors and aldermen of the greater-urban agglomerations.¹⁷²

However, the question did instigate an investigation of principle. On 1 March 1945, the Belgian chief military prosecutor ordered a national investigation on the issue of the Jewish registration. Independent from this order, the same question also surfaced in the court investigation against the former district commissioner of Nivelles. The main reason for this was that during the course of this investigation documents relating to the registration of the Jews surfaced. The responsible military prosecutor in Nivelles asked the chief military prosecutor a pertinent question on 16 November 1945: 'Should the transfer of lists with Jews by the district commissioner (...) be considered as criminal denunciation or as an administrative act that any Belgian civil servant was allowed to undertake?'¹⁷³ This was a rare example of a military prosecutor reducing the question to its bare essentials. However, it seemed difficult to come up with an answer. In all large cities (and several smaller ones), documents related to the registration of Jews were being brought together. Especially in Antwerp, the investigators did intensive research. In Liège, the judicial police simply questioned one representative of the Belgian organization 'Help to Israeli Victims of War' (*Hulp aan de Israëlieten Slachtoffers van de Oorlog*), mainly because they argued that this post-war organization held all the relative archival

documents. But it took the chief military prosecutor more than two years after his initial order to give a clear answer. The answer came on 18 June 1947, after many reminders sent by the Nivelles military prosecutor. First, the chief prosecutor stated the fact that apparently no indictments and prosecutions had taken place for these acts anywhere in Belgium. Second, he ordered the following instruction: if Belgian civil servants had not transferred information from these registries 'in a particularly malevolent way, there seems no reason to use these facts for indictments'.¹⁷⁴ However, he did advise using these facts to strengthen the indictment based on the general crime of political collaboration. This decision banned the Jewish registration from most judicial investigations. This example also illustrates how difficult it was for post-war military courts to arrive at judicial policy and jurisprudence, certainly in administrative processes such as the Jewish registration.

Another point of difficulty was to isolate the individual element within the larger system. During court cases, everyone pointed the finger at someone else making responsibility for denunciations a moot point. VNV mayor Brughmans of Korbeek-Lo testified during his trial that every mayor had had to deliver a specific administrative form with all the production numbers of local farmers, implying the Germans had always known which farmer to punish if they wanted to.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, VNV mayor Ronsmans of Leefdaal defended himself by saying the Germans had always known about certain infractions by local populations, from many different Belgian sources.¹⁷⁶ From what I argued before, I have to conclude that this was probably to a large extent a factual truth. The underlying question bypassing the strictly judicial one was how to determine an individual's responsibility within a complex bureaucratic system of information flows.

The deliberate construction of parallel political lines of contacts outside regular public administration made this even more complex. Collaborationist mayors reported things to their party-leadership, and after the liberation claimed they were surprised to hear that this information had reached the Germans. Of course, many mayors used this argument to deny any responsibility in denunciation charges.¹⁷⁷ A typical Dutch example of this was NSB mayor Müller of Rotterdam. During his trial, he claimed that he had never wanted his many reports with incriminating personal information about opponents to reach the Germans.¹⁷⁸ NSB mayor Stevens testified on such lists: 'I did not do this because I hoped measures would be taken against these people or their family members; I only did this because I was obligated to do so.'¹⁷⁹ Another good case example was

the court case against NSB mayor Van Ravenswaaij of the city of Utrecht. During this court investigation, former NSB Rotterdam mayor Müller denied the party leadership's responsibility for the procedure of hostage lists: 'There was never any obligation for mayors of Dutch municipalities to establish such a list. Mayors who did this did so on their own responsibility.'¹⁸⁰ The head of the Utrecht Sipo-SD, however, testified: 'It is also known to me that the leadership of the NSB in the Netherlands, cooperated to create these lists.'¹⁸¹ In this concrete local case, although one local clerk had actually typed out the Utrecht hostage lists, it was clear that both the mayor and the city police had been heavily involved in the selection.¹⁸²

A typical Flemish example was the case of VNV mayor Alfred Van der Hallen of the town of Lier. During the occupation, many lists of opponents were set up in and around the town hall; of resistance members, unreliable members of the police, local opponents in general. Several people were involved in this process: a member of the mobile *gendarmérie*, the direct VNV right hand of Van der Hallen, apparently a member of the resistance and several others. After the liberation, many pointed their fingers at the mayor as the central spider in the web.¹⁸³ But the latter—obviously—simply denied any knowledge of such lists. And indeed, as in most cases, individual responsibility in these denunciation charges was effectively impossible to prove legally. In such a legal context of trials, it was unavoidable that defendants started pointing fingers at others as soon as they realized that clear evidence was lacking.

This was certainly the case for collaborationists in higher public offices, who often denied knowledge on the actions of subordinates. During his trial, NSB provincial commissioner Backer denied any knowledge of the close contacts between his personal secretary and the German SD. He also denied any responsibility for the actions of all individual NSB mayors who had been appointed on his advice.¹⁸⁴ This was exactly the same for Gerard Romsée (the former Belgian VNV secretary-general of the Interior), who during his trial claimed that he had been unaware of the fact that members of his personal secretariat were members of Rex. He also denied any responsibility for the actions of the hundreds of collaborationist mayors he had appointed.

Another added complexity related to this political aspect had to do with the interpretation of individual intentions. When a Rex or VNV mayor had complained to higher Belgian authority about the dysfunctions of certain policemen, civil servants, or about the lack of obedience of farmers or other inhabitants, was this always a political act with a malicious intent

(and therefore, perhaps, legally denunciation)? Was there always a clear line between a normal administrative act of a mayor complaining about personnel on the one hand and an act of political repression on the other? When confronted with such complaints, most collaborationist officials simply declared that such reports had been part of their official duties and, as such, had served the general interest of the population.¹⁸⁵

The answer to such problems was: patterns. Several pieces brought together could create a clear (however incomplete) picture of a general intent. But in Belgium, the frequent lack of written evidence was a problem for this. Hard written evidence was always essential to build a legal case based on denunciation charges (article 121bis). Moreover, this written evidence had to establish a direct connection between the transfer of information and a certain repressive action. The latter legal condition was the same in the Dutch judicial system, so the same legal problem was also present in many Dutch cases.¹⁸⁶ This direct link was not easy to prove. NSB mayor Theodoor Lamers of Lichtenvoorde made the somewhat incredible claim that his ‘interventions with the SD in Arnhem were exclusively administrative in nature or aimed at the defence of the interest of Dutch citizens’.¹⁸⁷ He denied any involvement in the arrest of a member of the local clergy, whose anti-German sermons had been seized on the orders of the mayor. And indeed, although the picture the mayor painted of his relationship with the German SD was not particularly credible, a direct connection between the arrest of this clergyman and any specific actions of the mayor could not be substantiated. This was highly common in the majority of cases.

After the war, German raids and the repression of 1944 (and 1945) were the iconic *lieux de mémoire* in local memories. In many localities, these were often traumatic experiences where local people had been deported, never to return. Victims and their descendants demanded clarity and justice after the liberation. However, this often proved difficult.

It proved near impossible to determine individual responsibilities of local collaborationists (or the mayor). The preparation of these actions proved impossible to reconstruct after the war, mainly because of a total lack of (written) sources. Did collaborationist mayors encourage or provoke these German actions, were they actively involved in their preparation or coordination? It turned out to be extremely difficult for the investigators to find clear written documents that spelled out exactly who had played what role in these actions. Written documents were either destroyed at the liberation, or had never existed in the first place. Of necessity, the courts had

to fall back on oral witness testimonies.¹⁸⁸ But several years after 1944, it proved a nightmare to disentangle facts from fiction based on nothing but (often indirect) oral testimonies which contradicted each other. Legally speaking, it was impossible to determine who had done what, in one specific night in the first half of 1944, without any written documents.¹⁸⁹

A typical example was VNV mayor Louis Rochus, who participated in four separate German actions in his locality, during which one member of the resistance was shot.¹⁹⁰ In the course of the post-war judicial investigation, it was judged that he had been forced to be present by the Germans, but his role had remained passive. Just one other example of the post-war difficulties in assessing individual responsibilities was the case of Gerard De Paep, who amongst other things had been VNV governor of East Flanders under occupation. He had always steered clear of any direct individual participation, but during one nightly raid in his home town he apparently could not avoid it. After the war, there were only contradictory oral witnesses to assess De Paep's personal role in this particular German raid.¹⁹¹ Dutch courts would encounter the exact same problems when trying to disentangle and judge the paramilitary violence in 1944. In many cases, NSB mayors rejected any individual responsibility, saying militias had acted autonomously.¹⁹² In Belgium, these events in particular had taken place in complete secrecy, and hardly any evidence existed on the role of collaborationist mayors in the repressive raids of 1944.

Only in the rarest of cases were post-war courts able to arrive at a clear connection between initiatives of a collaborationist mayor and German actions. It was rather exceptional, for instance, that post-war courts could assess that certain German raids against the underground resistance in the community of Ichtegem were at least partly caused by information provided by the VNV mayor (Maurice Dekeyser).¹⁹³ One notorious example was the case of VNV mayor Piet Gommers of Hoogstraten, where on 1 May 1944 the German police apprehended dozens of resistance members and other local inhabitants, several of whom would later perish. After the war, an in-depth judicial investigation concluded that the mayor was guilty of the charges brought against him in this regard, because he had provided the necessary information which had steered this action.¹⁹⁴ But again, this conclusion was an exception. In most cases the exact nature and responsibilities of German raids in local communities in 1944 remain unresolved to this day.

Dutch courts tackled the same problem.¹⁹⁵ But they were helped by the fact there was much more written evidence. This often made denying any responsibility harder, and often led to rather absurd defensive statements

by NSB defendants. On a list of 55 people listed as ‘the most dangerous’, NSB mayor Van de Graaff testified: ‘I declare not to know what this list is about or what purpose it served or to whom it was transferred. I do know it was not a list of hostages.’¹⁹⁶ NSB mayor Westra said of several denunciation letters: ‘I do not remember this, but it says “Westra”, so I can assume this is mine, but there are things in here that cannot possibly be true (...). Either I signed it without really reading it or this is not entirely correct.’ When the court asked him, ‘so you claim that you wrote utter nonsense’, Westra responded: ‘That might be possible. In that kind of war context with all that misery, one can sign something which one has not truly read.’¹⁹⁷ NSB mayor Harm Höltké said on his list of opponents: ‘The composition of this list was simply a preparatory measure from me. I don’t remember what the direct cause for this preparatory measure was. (...) I think it was not of such great importance, making this list’.¹⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Dutch courts were obviously also confronted with the same problems: disentangling individual responsibility and determining connections between the transfer of information and repression.¹⁹⁹ In the Netherlands as well, contacts with the Germans had taken place orally, in secret. NSB mayor Paul Coenen of Olsen, for example, probably painted a reliable picture of everyday reality when he described frequent casual conversations as well as many formal meetings with party members and German agents, where information about opponents was freely exchanged: ‘I do not want to deny that this way, names were passed on to the SD.’²⁰⁰ A typical local case that clearly demonstrates the problems was the case of the small town of Gorinchem (Zuid-Holland). Its NSB mayor (Harm Höltké) had in April 1944 established a list of ‘dangerous elements’ who must be detained in case of military operations. This list was updated and expanded in September 1944 by the collaborationist town government. On 26 September and 3 October 1944, over 100 inhabitants were arrested by the German SS. About 40 of them would ultimately perish in German captivity. Obviously, this represented a huge trauma for the small town, and the victims and their descendants demanded justice during the court case against the NSB mayor. However, as was often the case, it proved impossible to determine the individual responsibility of the mayor in the creation (and transfer to the Germans) of the final list of September 1944. The mayor could not be indicted for this. Needless to say, the descendants were not happy with this legal verdict. In a letter to the responsible district attorney on 3 August 1949, the descendants still expressed ‘major dissatisfaction’ with the way this had been handled.²⁰¹

And even when there was written evidence, another defensive argument came to the fore: that the consequences of the transfer of certain information had not been clear at that time. This was also a way of trivializing authorities' contacts with the Germans. NSB provincial commissioner De Marchant et d'Ansembourg declared on this topic during the investigation: 'We did not pay much attention to these things and they were more often used as a means to renew the contacts with the Germans and to create an atmosphere of confidence.'²⁰² NSB mayor Overbeek declared: 'In hindsight, it seems incomprehensible to me that I could have written such things. This letter bothers me the most of all the evidence in my case file. As I consider it now, this letter seems petty and inferior. (...) I never considered the idea that the letters I wrote and sent might be dangerous'.²⁰³

NSB mayor Kronenburg of Groesbeek even tried to present his support for forced labour as maintenance of public order. He had given names of people 'because I considered these individuals as dangerous for the peace and safety of the Dutch population (...). With giving these lists to the Germans, I never had the intention to expose these people to arrest or persecution by the Germans. I also never considered the fact that the employment of these persons both here and in Germany would strengthen the German war-potential'.²⁰⁴

Some members of the NSB also tried to hide behind national-socialist jargon. NSB mayor Willem Bos declared: 'from this, I might explain the often bombastic and arrogant tone of different letters and perhaps also my attitude, because national-socialism at that time began to excel in these characteristics. This is no excuse, but an explanation.'²⁰⁵ The radical NSB mayor René Thomaes of Boxtel stated during his court case: 'I was just repeating what I heard at that time; it was not my intention to make my judgements public. (...) One has to try and imagine the situations and mentalities of the occupation years. (...) I never considered that these acts might do something wrong to anybody (...) and I just considered them party-activities (...). In hindsight, I never understood national-socialism, otherwise I never would have joined it'.²⁰⁶

In general, denunciation was extremely difficult to prove before a court. In the end in Belgium, 32,845 judicial investigations were opened with denunciation as the only charge. Of these, only 4101 actually led to a conviction. About 3800 people were convicted for political collaboration in combination with denunciation.²⁰⁷ Only a small minority of collaborationist officials were convicted for denunciation. Because charges of denunciation were often impossible to prove, in most court

cases against collaborationist mayors these acts were used legally to reinforce the indictment of political collaboration. This was clear in Belgium, for example, with the widespread phenomenon of the lists of a-social elements. Having transferred such lists was hardly ever considered as denunciation. But when it concerned a collaborationist mayor it was simply further proof of a political attitude.²⁰⁸ Again, these legal difficulties did not do justice to the reality of occupation. The trial narratives that emerged reduced this essential aspect of political-administrative collaboration under occupation to a secondary element at best.

EPILOGUE: MAYORS IN WARTIME AND MEMORY

After WW I—as modern tropes of collective memories emerged—mayors under occupation became part of new patriotic memory regimes. The myth of the heroic mayor as the father and protector of his community was highly useful material to repair the damaged emblem of occupied states. Thus, local mayors became symbols of national unity.

After WW II, matters were more complicated. In France, national politics of memory overrode local memories, certainly in the sense that mayors did not become separately distinguishable characteristic of this memory development.²⁰⁹ This was different from the Netherlands and Belgium, where war mayors can be identified as distinct elements of collective memories related to post-war national identities.

In the Netherlands, this was most explicitly connected with the role played by the traditional establishment of mayors under occupation.²¹⁰ Therefore, post-war narrative construction related to the dilemmas faced in purge procedures rather than trials of collaborationist NSB mayors. The latter were convicted as political criminals and labelled as wrongdoers, causing their subsequent ostracization. Again, we can point to the similarities with Rex and its mayors.

This narrative was created even during these purge investigations. The delicate evaluation and the defensive arguments crystallized in the dilemma over Dutch mayors. One explicit example was the purge investigation of mayor Van der Sluis of the town of Goor. This patriotic mayor had made some severe mistakes.²¹¹ The mayor himself wrote long defensive notes on these issues: ‘I therefore had the choice: to bring several people to the police station myself, or refuse (...). I had to choose between two conflicts of conscience. There was no escape. I was between two fires. In the end, I chose the first option. Another man would perhaps have

chosen the second option. But he should not think that in in doing so he placed himself on a higher level.²¹² He concluded himself: ‘Did I fail ? (...) I would, by the way, love to see the man who served for four years as a mayor under German occupation without ever failing. When the inner predisposition is not right, failure is the rule. But should then the exception weigh so heavily that the entire man is cast aside?’²¹³ The answer of the Purge Commission and Dutch society in a more general sense to this question was negative. Mayor Van der Sluis was reappointed.²¹⁴

Memory construction in Flanders was another matter entirely. Here, a comprehensive and even defensive attitude towards the collaboration of the VNV became dominant.²¹⁵ The role played by the collaborationist parties’ mayors under occupation formed an essential part of this. The creation of this Flemish nationalist memory with regard to collaboration is often located after 1950.²¹⁶ The so-called Royal Question which came to a head in 1950–51 brought the country to the brink of civil war and confirmed the fundamental fault lines that had defined Belgian politics and society for many decades. One of these fault lines was the Flemish–Walloon cleavage. Indeed, Flemish nationalism would return with a vengeance after 1951 as a strong political force in Belgium.

I argue that the narrative building blocks of this Flemish nationalist memory were created immediately after the liberation, and in fact most strongly crystallized in Flemish local memories of the purges and trials of collaborationist mayors. All the basic elements that would recur in memory construction for decades to come had already explicitly surfaced between September 1944 and November 1946, both in administrative purges and court cases.

The long transitional gap between liberation and municipal elections was an essential condition for this construction. It pushed Flemish local Catholic parties in a majority of localities towards an aggressive defensive strategy, retroactively legitimating the 1938 local coalitions with the Flemish nationalists. This already foreshadowed the national attitude of the national Christian Democratic party (CVP) after 1951 towards the legacy of Flemish nationalist collaboration. Pragmatic *realpolitik* and ideological convictions went hand in hand, as they had during the Catholic–nationalist cooperation in 1938.

The parallel judicial procedures against collaborationist mayors would further reinforce this trend. Basically, the VNV was able successfully to transfer its occupation propaganda onto the post-war judicial investigations. The same arguments that had served as legitimation for a totalitarian

coup in 1941 could serve for the purpose of the legal defence of these mayors and other collaborationist public officials. The rhetorical continuity was remarkable.

Probably the best illustration is the court case against Gerard Romsée, Interior secretary-general and foremost Nazi collaborationist to hold public office in Belgium. The most important legal councillor for his defence during his trial was Frans Van der Elst. This lawyer would also defend VNV leader Hendrik Elias and later guard Elias' archive, publishing an apologetic defence of his collaboration. Moreover, Van der Elst would be co-founder and first chairman of the *Volksumie*, the first large Flemish nationalist party to emerge after the war. As a lawyer for Romsée's defence, he could simply use the same arguments used by VNV propaganda in 1941. Romsée's entire policy, he argued during the court trial, had to be understood in the perspective of safeguarding food supply. From this perspective, the illegal appointment of many hundreds of collaborationist Rexist and VNV mayors had been necessary 'because it (...) it would have been impossible to guarantee an efficient municipal policy if [Romsée] had not replaced the mayors (...) and left this to the blind game of the municipal law (...)'.²¹⁷

The defensive rhetoric used by Van der Elst during the Romsée trial was almost literally taken over by the memory construction of the Flemish nationalists and a large part of the Catholic party. Already at the beginning of 1947, the influential Flemish journal *De Rommelpot* wrote on the conviction of Romsée: 'His crime: taking seriously the maintenance of order, food supply, and everything he was obligated (...) to safeguard'.²¹⁸ An impressive production of Flemish nationalist historiography would later successfully cultivate this image.²¹⁹ Collaborationist VNV public officials—notably mayors—were victimized and martyred. The narrative said that the VNV had taken over positions in the mayoralty to help and protect the Flemish people in a difficult time, and because others refused to take this responsibility. For this sacrifice, it argued, VNV mayors were unjustly punished after the war in an anti-Flemish repression by the Belgian state and judiciary. Hendrik Elias, leader of the VNV after 1942 and himself a historian, played an important role in this as well, becoming one of the most important historians of the Flemish movement of the 1960s and 1970s. When writing the history of VNV mayors under occupation, he could recycle his own party propaganda from 1941 to 42 when he wrote in an unpublished manuscript in 1959: 'When tackling this subject, I have to stress the extraordinary services this collaboration has rendered to the

country and the population (...). (...) One [will] also realise that the population—without a doubt unwilling from the end of 1943 onwards—has been protected and to a large extent even saved by the VNV and its politics'.²²⁰ To put matters into due perspective, these words were written not by a marginal and exiled provocateur like former Rex-leader Degrelle, but a well-respected historian whose views fundamentally influenced Flemish (Catholic and Flemish-nationalist) opinion. Elias received the prize of the Flemish provinces for his historical work in 1969. Several years later, he played a pivotal role in the editing of the influential *Encyclopedia of the Flemish Movement* (1973–75), strongly influencing the articles on items such as the VNV, collaboration and post-war trials ('repression'). This underlying narrative was, generally speaking, also reinforced when local historical works began to appear during the 1970s and 1980s.²²¹

Collective memory in Flanders evolved and shifted after 1989.²²² Although the apologetic perception has come under increasing pressure from these recent developments, it remains common locally. The tenacity of these myths and memories surrounding VNV mayors in particular was pointed out by an oral history research project conducted between 2000 and 2004. The large majority of the 200 Flemish people interviewed voiced positive opinions when asked about their mayor, without being able to ground this opinion in any hard facts. Significantly, there was clearly a unifying framework, pushing individual opinions into one stereotyped narrative: that the collaborationist mayors had been victims who had tried to protect the population but had been misled by the Germans and unjustly convicted after the war.

In this sense, local memories also help to clarify typically fragmented Belgian war memories, and more specifically the opposite ways in which collective WW II memories evolved between the Dutch-speaking Flanders and the French-speaking Wallonia. In francophone Belgium, the mayorship of Rexists was completely obscured by the political and military collaboration of the movement. Public perception of Rex was strongly determined by the filter of the actions of Rexist militias and criminal excesses of violence.²²³ However, the building blocks for a potential positive memory development regarding Rex mayors were in fact there in Wallonia as much as in Flanders, if not more so. The basic political and administrative behaviour of Rexist mayors did not differ from VNV-mayors. Clearly, francophone Belgium lacked the fertile ground for this specific memory construction. A more nuanced view of Rex mayors remains difficult to this day. One remarkable trend in the large (abovementioned) series of

micro-studies of smaller francophone communities²²⁴ is the apparent surprise felt by many of the student-researchers when the perceptions they had mapped through the use of oral history often proved to be nuanced, or even fairly positive. ‘Why so many contradictions?’²²⁵ was even the title given to the case-study of the town of Malèves.²²⁶ Apparently, the history students researching these cases had expected an unambiguously negative story more in line with the collective perceptions and memories they had grown up with. When confronted with a reality that was much more nuanced—a community being fairly positive about a convicted Rex mayor—some found this simply impossible to explain.

So clearly, the constructions of the VNV mayor as victimized martyr and the Rex mayor as fascist criminal both still need some revision in public perception. To this day, there remains great uncertainty in many local communities about the exact role played by the collaborationist mayor who governed the city or village under Nazi occupation. Unlike in the Netherlands, the Belgian archives of post-war trials remain for the largest part closed to the general public. During the trials, the wider public could read only the most superficial arguments, and the outcome, in newspaper coverage. In subsequent decades, in-depth information remained closed off. Even today, creating greater public access to these crucial archives would be a key step towards encouraging more nuanced and accurate views of the role played by certain mayors under Nazi occupation.

NOTES

1. The Royal Decree of 5 September 1944 restored the positions of all pre-war administrators.
2. There were, however, large regional differences, in the province of West-Vlaanderen, for example, 66 % of all mayors returned immediately. De Wever and Gunst, ‘Van Kamerleden en Burgemeesters’.
3. L. Huyse and K. Hoflack (eds.), *De democratie heruitgevonden. Oud en nieuw in politiek België. 1944–1950* (Leuven 1995).
4. P. Romijn, ‘Ambitions and dilemmas of local authorities in the German-occupied Netherlands, 1940–1945’, in De Wever et.al. (eds.), *Local Government*, 33–67.
5. C. Senechal, *Le comité de libération du Nord* (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Université de Lille 1980).
6. C.-L. Foulon, *Le Pouvoir en province à la libération. Les commissaires de la république (1943–1946)* (Paris 1975); O. Rudelle, ‘Reviving the republican tradition: the transition from fascism to democracy in France’, in

- S.U. Larsen (ed.), *Modern Europe after Fascism 1934–1980* (New York 1998), 2 vol, 1281–1315.
7. F.L. Closon, *Commissaire de la République du Général de Gaulle, Lille, septembre 1944—Mars 1946* (Paris 1980).
 8. *Commission d'Épuration Administrative*. The subcommittee for departmental and municipal administrations was led by Jules Leclercq, a member of the liberation committee; 28 W 38398–6: 'épuration (...)'; ADN – L.
 9. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 363 ff.
 10. One example was the small village of Premesques (1400 inhabitants). The prefect resolved the situation by appointing a special delegation in January 1945. 33 W 38806 – 1: (...), ADN – L.
 11. M.O. Baruch, 'Changing things so everything stays the same: The Impossible "épuration" of French Society, 1945–2000', in N. Wouters (ed.), *Transitional Justice and Memory in Europe (1945–2013)* (Antwerp/Cambridge 2014), 63–94.
 12. A *délégation municipale* (including members of a local liberation committee) or a *délégation spéciale* (including members directly appointed by the prefect). 15 W 36562: 'réorganisations (...)'; ADN – L.
 13. 33 W 38804–17: *Comité* (...), ADN – L. See also: Y. Le Maner, 'Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais', in P. Buton and J.-M. Guillon (eds.), *Les pouvoirs en France à la libération* (Paris 1994); A. Trogneux, 'Amiens au lendemain de la Libération d'après la presse locale (1944–1945)', *Revue du Nord*, vol. 78, nr. 315 (1996), 367–382.
 14. Bargeton et al. (eds.), *Rapports*.
 15. M. Cointet-Labrousse, 'Between summary justice and the reconstruction of legality by decree: the theory and practice of French purge policy 1943–1953', in S.U. Larsen (ed.), *Modern Europe after Fascism 1934–1980* (New York 1998), 2 vol.
 16. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 4, 365.
 17. 27 W 38376–4: *commissaire* (...) *Map: 1 F 13*, ADN – L.
 18. This included administrative sanctions such as temporary suspension, transfer to another administration or lower position, to discharge. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 368–370.
 19. That is, 33 in the Avesnes district, 318 in Valenciennes, 252 in Cambrai, 118 in Douai, 83 in Dunkirk and 1266 in Lille.
 20. Eight cases were pending, 23 people were relieved of their mandate/discharged, 22 people were acquitted, fourteen people were 'restored' in their original pre-war function, eight people were transferred, five people had simply maintained their current position, five were put on retirement, four were declared 'incompetent', two suspended and, finally, one reprimanded.

21. 33W 38802: *Comité (...)*, ADN – L.
22. Departmental Report d. 4 December 1945. 27 W 38321 (...)', ADN – L.
23. 30 W 38574 – 1-2, '*épuration (...)*', ADN – L.
24. Bargeton, 'La fonction'.
25. F. Rouquet, *L'Épuration dans l'administration française. Agents de l'état et collaboration ordinaire* (Paris 1993).
26. The most important ones: the purge decree of 26 June 1944, the decree of 26 August 1944 (adapted with the decree of 26 December 1944, concerning *indignité nationale* and the 26 December 1944 decree on rehabilitation. Baruch, 'Changing things'.
27. Cointet-Labrousse, 'Between summary justice'.
28. P. Novick, H. Ternois and J.-P. Rioux, *L'épuration française 1944–1949* (Paris 1985). Rouquet, also, does not give us much hard data on these groups. Rouquet, *L'Épuration*.
29. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 369.
30. Mayors Delsart of Nomain, Longelin of Fenain, Degorre of CegeSomain, Dehove of Lille, Robert Motte of Fourmies, Aimable Toulouse of Mazingarbe and Benjamin Cambier of Pont-à-Vendin. 28 W 38407-2: *listes (...)*, ADN – L.
31. Paul Dehove of Lille, Henri Dal of Anneullin, Couvelard of Gondécourt and Cloque of Carnin. The report also mentioned the suspension of mayor Marescaux of the city of Tourcoing and the discharge of mayors Jules Sauvage of Bauvin and Fleury of Haubourdin. Police report of 'general intelligence', d. 6 January 1945. 28 W 38398-6: '*épuration (...)*', ADN – L.
32. Report by the subprefect of Dunkirk, d. 12 October 1944 42 W 39356, ADN – L.
33. Report by the subprefect of Dunkirk, d. 12 October 1944 42 W 39356, ADN – L.
34. 42 W 39356, ADN – L.
35. Inspector of police Dunkirk to the subprefect, d. 26 February 1945, 33 W 38804-17: *Comité (...)*, ADN – L.
36. 42 W 39356: (...), ADN – L.
37. 33W 38802 – 17: *Comité (...)*, ADN – L.
38. 33W 38810 – 12: *Epuration (...)*, ADN – L.
39. Police Commissioner Lille d. 4 April 1945 to prefect, 42 W 39357: *modifications (...)*, ADN – L.
40. 30 W 38574 – 1-2, '*épuration*', ADN – L.
41. 42 W 39356: *Rapport (...)*, ADN – L.
42. 42 W 39356: *Réorganisations (...)*, ADN – L.
43. 42 W 39356: *Réorganisations (...)*, ADN – L.

44. 33W 38802 – 5: *Comité (...)*, ADN – L.
45. Especially his active role in the forced requisitioning of city personnel—selecting people and suspending salaries—held great weight in the case. 28 W 38407–1: *Épuration (...)*, ADN – L.
46. 27 W 38321 – 1 (...), ADN – L.
47. Bargeton et al. (eds.), *Rapports*, 15–50.
48. Bargeton et al. (eds.), *Rapports*, 18.
49. 42 W 39357: *modifications (...)*, ADN – L.
50. D. Peschanski, ‘Introduction’, in Béguec and Peschanski, *Les élites locale*, 15–33.
51. 28 W 38407–2: *listes (...)*, ADN – L.
52. 33 W 38804–17: *Comité (...)*, ADN – L.
53. 27 W 38321 – 2 (...), ADN – L.
54. Subprefect of Douai to the Court of Justice d. 11 April 1945. 42 W 39355 – 1 (...), ADN – L.
55. Dejonghe and Le Maner, *Le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, 376–377.
56. 42 W 39356: *réorganisations (...)*, ADN – L.
57. 42 W 39356: *réorganisations (...)*, ADN – L.
58. Le Maner, ‘Le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais’, 351–359.
59. Le Maner, *Éléments pour une histoire*.
60. Le Maner, ‘Le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais’, 356.
61. Report National Police, d. 18 September 1945. 28 W 38398–6 *Épuration (...)*, ADN – L.
62. The concrete complaints against him were his overactive organization of mandatory guarding of railway tracks, too much support for forced labour and several symbolical expressions of support for the Vichy-regime.
63. E. Conan and H. Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris 1994).
64. Overall, the administrative purge of Belgian state personnel would lead to 10,600 individual sanctions (1300 suspensions and 7300 discharges). Huyse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 31–32 and 36; Wouters, *De Führerstaat*, 182–187.
65. P. Romijn, ‘Restoration of confidence. The purge of local government in The Netherlands as a problem of post-war reconstruction’, in I. Deak, J. Gross and T. Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath* (New York 2000), 173–183.
66. *Centraal Orgaan op de zuivering van het Overheidspersoneel*.
67. J.H.J. Van Den Heuvel and D.M. Ligtermoet, *Burgemeesters tussen wanorde en wederopbouw. Het naoorlogse herstel van het openbaar bestuur in de provincie Zeeland* (Middelburg 1987), 157.
68. P. Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig. De afrekening met de ‘foute’ Nederlanders* (Amsterdam 2002).

69. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 634–635.
70. Huysse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 33.
71. Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 145.
72. For example, the notion of ‘honourable discharge’ was added to the list of possible sanctions. The reforms of minister Beel in April–May 1945 would create more mutual alignment between pre-existing administrative sanction legislation for mayors.
73. Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 140–142.
74. Some numbers for the province of Utrecht: 15 mayors of a total of 50 were investigated within the purge legislation, five mayors received a written reprimand (which was not made public), three mayors received an honourable discharge, and five mayors received a dishonourable (or rather, a ‘normal’) discharge.
 Report of the provincial ‘Commissioner of the Queen’ d. 15 November 1945, *Dossier J.J.C. van Kuyk, gemeente Veenendaal, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
75. Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 151.
76. For the ministry of the Interior, the Central Body for the Purge of Government Personnel (*Centraal Orgaan op de Zuivering van het Overheidspersoneel*) was created. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 635.
77. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 637–640.
78. *Dossier F.J. Ter Wisscha van Scheltinga, gemeente Wijchen, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
79. *Dossier S.G.L.T. Baron van Fridagh, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
80. *Dossier C.M.J. Dony, gemeente Huissen, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
81. Romijn, ‘Restoration of confidence’, 181.
82. *Dossier S.G.L.T. Baron van Fridagh, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*. Another similar example was the 67-year-old mayor A. Jonker from the town of Dokkum. *Dossier A. Jonker, gemeente Dokkum, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
83. For example: *Dossier G.J.M. De Kerff, gemeente Sas van Gent, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
84. *Dossier J.C. Diepenhorst, gemeente Oud Beyerland, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
85. *Dossier B.W.Th. Van Slobbe, gemeente Breda, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*.
86. Mayor W. van der Meulen of Terheyden, for example: *Dossier W.A.J. van der Meulen, gemeente Terheyden en Teteringen, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA*. Another case where Frederiks’ dubious role was used as a defensive argumentation was J. Bruineman of Druten. *Dossier*

- J.A.M. Bruineman, gemeente Druten, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
87. *Dossier J.A.M. Bruineman, gemeente Druten, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 88. *Dossier J.A.J. Van Heereveld, gemeenten Nieuw-Vossemeer, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 89. *Dossier Van der Ley, gemeenten Termunten, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 90. *Dossier C.A.F. Kalhorn, gemeente Rheden, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 91. *Dossier V.R. Los, gemeente Houten, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 92. *Dossier G.J.M. De Kerff, gemeente Sas van Gent, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 93. *Dossier S. Hoogenboom, gemeenten Naaldwijk, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA; Dossier A. Van der Sluis, gemeente Rolde, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
 94. Circular Letter nr. 277, d. 1 September 1944 van minister August De Schrijver, *Kabinetsarchief gouverneur Henegouwen 1940–1944, Losse stukken, PA – Henegouwen.*
 95. *2/10.231/7: Gemeenten, politiek personeel, tucht, epuratie, Dossier Deinze, RABW.*
 96. An order to cease activities, (*‘een bevel tot staking’*).
 97. Ministry of Interior Affairs to Chief Military Magistrate d. 10 April 1945, *Dossier Grandes Agglomérations Généralités, nr. 651/44, AGK.*
 98. The new Christian Democratic Peoples’ Party (*Christen Democratische Volkspartij* or CVP), created in 1945.
 99. E. Laureys, *Het bevrijde België. feiten, opinies en voorstellingen: rapport de projet, 1943–1945* (Unpublished Report, CegeSoma: Brussels 1998).
 100. This was initially slightly different in the Netherlands, primarily because of the elongated liberation. In the liberated south, under military rule, the former resistance could still play an important role in the (ad hoc) purges. This changed after May 1945, when central civil authority took over from military rule, and neutralized the direct formal involvement of the resistance on the administrative purge procedures.
 101. *Dossier nr. 2/9870/2—Maldegem: ‘Aanklachten (...)– 1944–1946’, RABW.*
 102. *2/10.037/8. Gemeenten. (...). Burgemeester Jozef van Risseghem, Deinze, RABW.*
 103. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 574–575.
 104. The Belgian state also attempted to bring purge operations under central control with several measures (the decree-law of 7 May 1945, for

- example, created the possibility to bring purge investigations under central control). Huysse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 33.
105. De Wever and Gunst, *Van Kamerleden en Burgemeesters*.
 106. Only secretary-general Schuind of the Justice ministry was (in the first instance) sentenced (on 30 October 1947) to five years in prison based on political collaboration. Arrest Hof d. 30 October 1947, *JPF Gaston Schuind*, AGK.
 107. F. Dumon, 'La collaboration politique et administrative', *Revue de Droit Pénal et de Criminologie*, vol. 27 (1946–1947), 856–875.
 108. 'Rapport sur instruction à charge du gouverneur Leroy' d. 6 February 1946, *JPF Antoine Leroy*, AGK.
 109. Huysse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 195.
 110. Four legal decrees formed the basis for this: extraordinary penal legislation, the special courts, the extraordinary jurisprudence and the special pardons.
 111. Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 42.
 112. J. Gilissen, 'Etude statistique de la répression de l'incivismisme', *Revue de Droit Pénal et de Criminologie* (1951), 50.
 113. Gilissen, 'Etude statistique de la répression de l'incivismisme', 197.
 114. This was penal article 118bis: 'Serving the politics and plans of the enemy, participating to the reform by the enemy of the legal institutions, weakening the loyalty of citizens with regard to the King and the state and supporting propaganda against the resistance'. Huysse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 193.
 115. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 661.
 116. Von der Dunk (ed.), *In de schaduw*, 11.
 117. *JPF Adriaan Willem Feer*, CABR, NA.
 118. *JPF Johan A. Tesebeld*, CABR, NA.
 119. *JPF René D.B.M.G. Thomaes*, CABR, NA.
 120. *JPF J. Kattenbusch*, CABR, NA.
 121. *JPF Adriaan Willem Feer*, CABR, NA.
 122. *JPF Antonius Weustink*, CABR, NA.
 123. *JPF Pieter Dekker*, CABR, NA.
 124. *JPF Addo Hovinga*, CABR, NA.
 125. *JPF Edward Floris Sandberg*, CABR, NA.
 126. Report in *GD nr. 77.826*, *Albert Thiry*, RAB.
 127. Exposé des Faits' d. 2 June 1948, *JPF Henri Ledoux*, AGK.
 128. *XIX, 276–278, D8874, Archieven Piet Wyndaele*, ADVN.
 129. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 583–592.
 130. *GD Petrus Basteleurs, nr. 62.776*, RAB.
 131. *GD Petrus Basteleurs, nr. 62.776*, RAB.
 132. *GD nr. 53.968, Paul De Baenst*, RAB.

133. *GD nr. 71.261, Oscar Sobhy, RAB.*
134. Timmermans was convicted for his prominent political role, initially sentenced to the death penalty, reduced to a life sentence, reduced to 16 years in prison. *GD nr. 85.304, Jan Timmermans, RAB.*
135. *JPF Frederik Ernst Müller, CABR, NA.*
136. *GD nr. 85.684, Hendrik Elias, RAB.*
137. Court Report, *Strafdossier Samuel D.J. Westendorff, CABR, NA.*
138. *JPF Samuel D.J. Westendorff, CABR, NA.*
139. *GD nr. 50.370, Marcel Stavelot, RAB.*
140. *GD nr. 55.276, Marcel Bataille, RAB.*
141. *GD nr. 85.178, Maurice Pirard, RAB.*
142. *GD nr. 12.355, Armand Godfroid, RAB.*
143. Final Court Report, *JPF Carolus Ludovicus Swaalf, CABR, NA.*
144. Such as in the case of NSB-mayor Bruynis, who was sentenced to 6.5 years of forced labour duty. *JPF N.W. Bruynis, CABR, NA.*
145. *JPF Johannes Koert, CABR, NA.*
146. *JPF Johannes Koert, CABR, NA.*
147. *JPF Willem Hansen, CABR, NA.*
148. *JPF Julius Franciscus Vogels, CABR, NA.*
149. *JPF Julius Franciscus Vogels, CABR, NA.*
150. *JPF Antonius Weustink, CABR, NA; JPF Hendrik Vitters, CABR, NA.*
151. *JPF Rijk de Vries, CABR, NA.*
152. *JPF Michel Guillaume Boutz, CABR, NA.*
153. *GD nr. 82.645, Albert Cornet, RAB.*
154. *GD nr. 17.119, Richard René, RAB.*
155. Report Procureur-Fiscaal n.d., *Strafdossier Edward John Voûte, CABR, NA.*
156. P. Jacquet and L. Herman, 'Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve', in Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d'histoire contemporaine.*
157. *JPF Edward John Voûte, CABR, NA.*
158. *JPF Mattheus Broere, CABR, NA.*
159. *JPF Harmen Westra, CABR, NA.*
160. *GD nr. 78.927, Jean van Hoof, RAB.*
161. *JPF Arie van de Graaff, CABR, NA.*
162. *JPF Harmanus Hondius, CABR, NA.*
163. *JPF Cornelis van Ravenswaaij, CABR, NA.*
164. *JPF J.A.J.M. Mertens, CABR, NA.*
165. *JPF Edward John Voûte, CABR, NA.*
166. Huuse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt Verleden*, 203.
167. Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 43. *JPF Albert Backer, CABR, NA.*
168. 'Omstandigheden waarin de lijsten van smokkelaars aan het Arbeidsambt werden overgemaakt', *Archieven Frans Wildiers, nr. 34: 'Verplichte Tewerkstelling'*, CegeSoma.
169. *GD nr. 71.317: Joseph Vermeylen, RAB.*

170. Such as Catholic mayor Verbeeck of Bouwel, for example. Gouverneur Richard Declerck aan BZ, 15 October 1946, *EpuratieDossiers: Verbeeck van Bouwel*, PAA.
171. Also, there was real fear that such an in-depth investigation could potentially have a domino-effect, posing questions of principle about the legal responsibility of the highest Belgian authorities.
172. For a full elaboration, see Van Doorslaer et al., *Gewillig België*, 881–889.
173. Van Doorslaer et al., *Gewillig België*, 888.
174. Letter of the Chief Military Prosecutor to the military prosecutor of Nivelles, d. 18 June 1947, AA 1882. Z/121 problème des interventions des administrations communales à l'égard des juifs pendant l'occupation allemande, CegeSoma.
175. *GD nr. 70.608, A. Brughmans*, RAB.
176. *GD nr. 83.727, Clement Ronsmans*, RAB.
177. *JPFJohan M.W. Rösener Manz*, CABR, NA; *JPFWillem Pot*, CABR, NA.
178. *JPF Albert J. Backer*, CABR, NA.
179. *JPF Marinus Stevens*, CABR, NA.
180. Post-war testimony by Müller, n.d., *JPF Cornelis van Ravenswaaij*, CABR, NA.
181. Post-war testimony Head of the SD Utrecht, n.d. *JPF Cornelis van Ravenswaaij*, CABR, NA.
182. *JPF Cornelis van Ravenswaaij*, CABR, NA.
183. Getuigenis Frans Maes d. 29 June 1945, *JPF Alfred Van der Hallen*, AGK.
184. *JPF Albert J. Backer*, CABR, NA.
185. *GD nr. 57.596, Raymond Courtoy*.
186. One good example was the court case against NSB-mayor Timmer, whose letters about a member of the resistance in the end could not be directly connected to this man's execution in December 1944. *JPF Ido Gerardus Timmer*, CAB, NA.
187. *JPF Theodorus Anthonis Lamers*, CABR, NA.
188. In the case of Rex-mayor Marc Stordeur of Villers-le-Gambon, the prosecutor said he was 'without a doubt' responsible for denouncing people, but that sufficient hard evidence was lacking. *GD nr. 61.461, Marc Stordeur*, RAB.
189. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 605–602.
190. *GD nr. 79.885, Louis Rochus*, RA.
191. It took the military courts several successive arrests to finally decide De Paep was not guilty on the charges brought before him related to this raid. *Penal File Gerard De Paep*, AGK.
192. *JPF J.C. Koert*, CABR, NA.
193. *GD nr. 79.353, Dekeyser Maurice*, RAB.
194. *GD nr. 85.109, Gommers Piet*, RAB.

195. *JPF Cornelis Izak van der Weele, CABR, NA.*
196. *JPF Arie van de Graaff, CABR, NA.*
197. *JPF Harmen Westra, CABR, NA.*
198. *JPF Harm Höltnke, CABR, NA.*
199. An example of such a difficult case was NSB-mayor Barteld of Ham. *JPF Barteld Jakob van Ham, JPF CABR, NA.*
200. *JPF Paul Johan Marie Coenen, CABR, NA.*
201. *JPF, H.Höltnke, CABR, NA.*
202. *JPF Eugène H.J.M. de Marchant et d'Ansembourg, CABR, NA.*
203. *JPFs Anthonie van Leyenhorst, CABR, NA.*
204. *JPF Johannes J.L. Kronenburg, CABR, NA.*
205. *JPF Willem Bos, CABR, NA.*
206. *JPF René D.B.M.G. Thomaes, CABR, NA.*
207. Huyse and Dhondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 203.
208. In the court case against governor De Vos of East-Flanders the military prosecutor even came to the principal conclusion that the transfer of these 'lists with a-social elements' was legally speaking not denunciation, but an element of political collaboration (art. 118bis). First Substitute Military Prosecutor Ghent to the Chief Military Prosecutor, d. 15 December 1945, *JPF Jozef De Vos*, AGK.
209. Baruch, 'Changing things'.
210. Romijn, *Burgemeesters*, 634–644.
211. Amongst others, the transport of a Jewish woman and the arrest of several people.
212. Personal Written Testimony, n.d., *Purge File A. Van der Sluis, gemeente Rolde, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
213. Personal Written Testimony, n.d., *Purge File A. Van der Sluis, gemeente Rolde, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
214. Although he himself would resign soon afterwards. *Dossier W. van der Sluis, gemeente Goor, BZ – ABB 1879–1950, nr. 2.04.57, NA.*
215. R. Van Doorslaer, 'Gebruikt verleden. De politieke nalatenschap van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België, 1945–2000', in G. Deneckere and B. De Wever (eds.), *Geschiedenis maken. Liber amicorum Herman Balthazar* (Ghent 2003), 227–266.
216. J. Velaers and H. Van Goethem, 'Koningskwestie', in *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 1745–1748.
217. Vragenlijst Emiel De Winter, *File: 'Gerard Romsée' (...) 8913 ADVN 97/283 AC 164, ADVN.*
218. *De Rommelpot*, d. 14 February 1947, vol. 2, nr. 7.
219. J. Tollebeek, 'Historiografie', in R. De Schryver and B. De Wever et al. (eds.), *NEVB*, 117–171.
220. D 94/122, Archieven Hendrik Elias. 'Gedenkschriften en beschouwingen', *onuitgegeven manuscript* d. 24 February 1959, 146, ADVN.

221. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 609–620.
222. S. Wouters and D. Luyten, ‘A consensus of differences. Transitional justice and Belgium’s divided war memories (1945–2012)’, in Wouters (ed.), *Transitional Justice and Memory*, 95–132.
223. Wouters, *Oorlogsburgemeesters*, 525.
224. Lory (ed.), *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*,
225. ‘*Pourquoi tant de divergences?*’
226. J. Jourdain, ‘Malèves’, in Lory, *Séminaires d’histoire contemporaine*.

Conclusion

LOCAL STATES

The Belgian occupation system was clearly low-level from the outset. The main characteristics of such a system were a weak national and intermediary authority, an unsuccessful attempt at corporatism which caused a fragmentation of central power and a high level of pro-Nazi infiltration in local government (the mayoralty). There was a weak capacity of top-ranking Belgian civil servants to take individual and autonomous responsibility when political backing had evaporated in 1940. This was revealed as one of the deep-rooted characteristics of Belgian administrative culture among civil servants. The problems of imposing central policies became explicit early on (food supply organization in 1940, for example). Specific local Belgo-German agreements prevailed. Large cities became islands in themselves. A systemic lack of clarity about the legality of orders—but, even more importantly, the legitimacy of national public authority—was endemic. In this context, the Germans could implement a system of direct (local) rule early on.

In contrast to this stood the prefectoral model in the north of France. This prefectoral system succeeded in preserving strong French autonomy vis-à-vis the Germans, tight bureaucratic control over subservient governments, the semblance of political legality and legitimacy, a successful centralized police reform and a strong status quo in republican

mayors. The northern prefects provided counterweight to ideology and measured success purely by administrative results (food supply) and the local legitimacy of a mayor. This was a pragmatic and strategic policy. De-politicizing local government was part of the smokescreen created to keep the Germans outside the administration. However, this had strong political-ideological implications as well. The result was a process to destroy local autonomy and democratic self-government.

The Dutch situation was somewhere in between. The smooth local transition of May 1940 as well as the status of mayors as civil servants created stronger tools to perpetuate central hierarchical control. Another essential point was the success (from the German point of view) of Dutch police reform. Although the collaborationist NSB gradually infiltrated the Dutch mayoralty, by the end of 1942 the focal point of collaboration lay above and outside local government, with the Justice department and the police forces.

In Belgium, the focal point of collaboration lay in the interior ministry. The formal powers and responsibilities of mayors grew exponentially (although to a lesser extent, this was also the case for the Netherlands). In the north of France, mayors' powers diminished and were hollowed out in 1940–42. In many policy domains, mayors were pushed to the margins by the weight of the authoritarian prefectural system.

It is very tempting to explain these differences in occupation systems as the logical result of pre-war national political cultures. Indeed, the emblematic Belgian weak-capacity state and the French central bureaucratic state became clearly visible under occupation at the local level. Their basic characteristics were accentuated to extremes in the context of the occupation in 1940 and 1941. However, these systemic differences in the occupations were not necessarily unavoidable in 1940. To a large extent, these differences resulted from specificities that occurred during the first months of occupation. In Belgium, the large number of mayors who abandoned their post, the presence of the King, combined with the hesitance of the national secretaries-general and the successful local campaign of the collaborationist VNV, were unforeseen and even unexpected occurrences. The autonomous, isolated position of Nord/Pas-de-Calais was also an essential factor that came as a complete surprise in June 1940. The role of the individual should not be underestimated either. The prefectural system in Nord and Pas-de-Calais was shaped as much by the individual figure of Fernand Carles as by French administrative tradition and culture. The Dutch hybrid model was as much defined by the unique juxtaposition between the Dutch technocrat Frederiks and the collaborationist NSB mayors as by the specific status of the Dutch mayoralty. And the role of

the highly strategic and prudent collaborationist Romsée confirmed all the inherent weaknesses of central Belgian administrative culture. Underlying national political cultures, then, stimulated certain developments but did not cause them. I would argue that the specific dynamics of each national occupation itself were more important.

What was the local impact of these general systemic differences? Did the top-level prefectural model in the north of France offer the Germans more exploitation efficiency? I would say yes, in the first two years. During these first two years, the prefectural system in Nord/Pas-de-Calais could make good use of its bureaucratic organization and the political legitimacy injected into the system. Hostage policies, communist repression, excessive police violence and large-scale administrative internments were contested by elites in Belgium and the Netherlands, whereas they were normal (legal and legitimate) parts of the system in Nord and Pas-de-Calais. The organization of food supply and economic reorganization, as well as local control and certainly anti-communist repression, were significantly better organized down to the local level.

After the winter of 1942–43, however, the picture blurs. Despite all the fundamental systemic differences, disintegration of central authority hit all three countries equally hard. National authorities lost all legitimacy and control of mayors and subservient governments. Mass evasion of national policies became part of everyday life (after forced labour implementations). German occupying forces moved towards a locally implemented reign of terror. Germans and collaborationists created parallel shadow structures (which happened even in the north of France in 1944 with the *Milice*). An important conclusion is that neither one of these different systems was better equipped as such to do anything significant about the problem.

After the winter of 1942–43, the similarities between what happened on the local level in the three countries far outweighed the differences of national systems. Mayors focused on becoming local fathers to their communities. Mayors and local administrations were now able to detach themselves from the system: both in a political-symbolic way and in real policy terms. No amount of bureaucratic control could prevent this. On the contrary, the fact that French mayors had been reduced to minor administrators in 1940–41 now turned against the regime itself. Mayors used the French system to hide themselves. With regard to hostage policies, for instance, French mayors had more leverage with which to distance themselves, to mediate and even to build local legitimacy. Similarly, Dutch police reform turned against the Germans when some local police officers were able to fend off interference from collaborationist mayors.

The French prefectoral system was a closed system. Bottom-up protests, signals, warnings, questions and so on from mayors were very rare. The prefectoral and police authorities maintained a central framework of cooperation. The protests of the prefect were usually about the principle of French autonomy vis-à-vis German power. Viewed from outside and on the surface, this prefectoral system seemed to run smoothly. But in reality, it became hollowed out from the inside. The silent ‘wait-and-see’ attitude of French mayors, as opposed to the explosion of individual protests from Belgian (and increasingly Dutch) ones, was more a sign of the kind of reactions these systems allowed or even provoked than of any significant differences in local realities. Under the dome of the system, French local governments were helping put in place the parallel structures from below. The mutually upheld bureaucratic illusion between the prefectoral powers and the mayors was maintained until the end. It was not radically different from the illusion of collaboration upheld by Dutch and Belgian Nazi mayors in the last stage.

I would argue that the biggest difference was now visible in the Netherlands. Here, ‘Belgian characteristics’ now also emerged fully: a downwards shift of the level of collaboration, direct German rule, confusion about legality and a lack of support from higher authority. For several pre-war Dutch mayors still in place in 1943, the idea that resistance under the radar of national authority might be a legitimate third way between resignation or cooperation was difficult to accept. This was the civil servant statute at work, as well as the continuing ambiguous impact of Frederiks, the head of the interior department.

In all three countries, local governments and mayors showed their truly remarkable capacity to sustain local administrations at the height of societal disintegration and terror. Even in the final stage of occupation, social structures of solidarity were kept together. The most extreme example was the Netherlands during and after the hunger winter of 1944–45. Despite the violence and terror, the disintegration of state authority and the extreme material hardships, the local level kept functioning remarkably well. Arguably, the social fabric of local democracies emerged all the stronger from this ordeal. I would argue that a large part of this resilience came from the rapprochement between clandestine social networks and official local governments. This was arguably easier in the north of France, where local governments and mayors were structurally less involved in the political and repressive policies of the regime. But even collaborationist mayors were caught up in this transitional trend towards post-war local arrangements, although

this did not stop them from continuing political collaboration (and the repression that went with it) until the very end.

Local governments and mayors also showed their capacity to grind policies to a halt when they decided it was in their (local) interest to do so. Most local governments in all three countries, for example, did execute the German year class actions (forced labour) and the German military constructions in 1943–44. But they were able to do so with little efficiency, little significant output or any durable impact.

The exact impact for communities remains ambiguous. To me, the ‘transfer of information’ to the occupiers is a prime criterion to measure various essential things: the individual choices administrators could make, the impact of pro-German collaboration within a system and the extent of national control over local governments. Was the tightly structured French prefectural model more efficient from a repressive point of view than the Belgian situation of weak central power and large infiltration of collaborationist mayors? Did the ‘hybrid’ Dutch situation combine the ‘best’ of the French and Belgian system in terms of repressive efficiency (as the persecution of the Jews seems to suggest)? Frankly, matters cannot be put this clearly. The centralized bureaucratic control in France could lead to efficient repression but it could also make mayors invisible within a larger system. The Belgian situation seemed to create more loopholes for evading scrutiny, but it could also make evasion of central orders impossible when local German terror was used. Therefore, stronger centralization did not automatically lead to stronger control. In fact, the concept of ‘central state control’ cannot be regarded as a single variable that goes either up or down. The level of central control that an occupier or regime was able to impose depended on the specific command and the context in which it was received. The most unambiguous conclusion one can draw from these complex systems of information management points towards the essential importance of individual choices. Outcomes always depended on the way those responsible for government chose to respond in any given situation.

Therefore, despite the significant national systemic differences in these three countries, I would argue that under the surface the similarities prevailed. Local governments emerged as local states in all three national systems: semi-autonomous cells within the state bodies that carved out their own paths and directions once the first cracks of administrative and political disintegration became visible in either central system.

A DEMOCRATIC AWAKENING?

One could argue that the systems described above were simply the sum of all the personal choices made every day by local elites. In 1940, national and local elites decided to bury liberal democracy for good. Local politics of presence were strategic, opportunistic and largely unavoidable. But in 1940, local elites and mayors actively supported the construction of a new system of local government, over the heads of local populations. The consequences were very clear to mayors. They played vital parts in setting up local police states, in which information about disobedience, dissidence or even resistance within local communities was detected, registered and transferred to the occupiers. In 1940–41, there was no mayoral counter-movement in either country against the construction of a centralized authoritarian system.

The image of an authoritarian system where the margins for manoeuvre were close to non-existent does not hold water when one looks at the local level. Unsurprisingly, big decisions by top-level elites had the most impact. However, low-level decisions by mayors impacted communities on an everyday level. Choices to hide or falsify public registries, to turn a blind eye to people in hiding, to support clandestine networks or even resistance activities, to slow down the concrete execution of German orders, to transfer dangerous information (or not), to mediate for local food supply interests, to negotiate with the Germans in individual cases, to maintain distance or close contact with German authorities, to warn local people about upcoming reprisals and so on were made on a day-to-day basis.

When a major international shift arrived after the winter of 1942–43, it was clearly visible in the way in which attitudes of local elites changed. Local elites, even collaborationist ones, went into a transitional mode towards a post-war settlement. It is in this sense that the gradual rapprochement between mayors and a revitalized civil society after 1943 must be understood.

In 1943, local civil society came back with a vengeance. This re-emergent civil society was a mixture of old and new: pre-war political, socio-economic and religious elites, but also resistance networks. Their relation to official local governments was ambiguous. The clearest cases are the Flemish Catholics and the French socialists. Many Catholic local notables and networks were ideally placed to act as local mediators, without being seen as part of the collaborationist system. When many VNV mayors moderated their policy after 1943, local marriages of convenience sometimes emerged between collaborationist Flemish nationalists and parts of local Catholic society. Likewise, socialist mayors who had remained in position in Nord/Pas-de-Calais became essential points of connection between the

underground resistance and the semi-legal party network that had always persisted. These complex social processes that unfolded in hundreds of towns, villages and cities were the results of individual choices. The level of success was determined by social relations between different protagonists and elite groups: between socialist mayors and communist resisters, between older Dutch mayors and their younger municipal staff, between local Catholic elites in Belgium and collaborationist movements and their mayors.

Of course, there was a lot of strategic opportunism involved once local elites went into this transitional mode. This was clearly a raw power struggle between political competitors in the midst of everyday survival. However, the choice of mayors to allow re-emerging civil society networks to act more openly again was a conscious choice made for renewed forms of local democracy. When pre-war legal frameworks became important again, it was because elites once again needed them to be. Can we call this collective mental shift a democratic *réveil*—a reawakening of democratic norms and values from the same local elites who had collectively buried liberal democracy only two years before? I argue that we can.

The way the occupation had escalated clearly underscored the value of a certain type of local community pacification and consensus-building among local elite groups. The centralized, top-down and authoritarian system—in which the role and function of mayor was not about mediating consensus but about violently implementing national rules—was quite explicitly shown to lead to catastrophe. These were experiences that each and every local community and groups of local elites lived through. These local experiences were nothing less than a cathartic process. What happened in 1943–44 also proved that this system of local democracy was so deeply rooted in communities that it would not be dismantled again. As such, strategic and opportunistic as elites may have been, the turn to post-war transition in 1943–44 reconfirmed strengthened convictions about local democracy and the central role mayors were supposed to play in its system.

THE ROLE OF NAZI COLLABORATIONISTS

Regional and sectoral differences aside, the Dutch and Belgian systems both encountered a significant infiltration of indigenous Nazi collaborationists. In 1940, these parties completely embraced German Nazi goals. The movement towards a totalitarian seizure of power was a bottom-up movement. It was spurred on by local party sections who finally saw a

chance to take over town halls. By 1943–44, collaborationists seemed to have been successful. Their grip on (parts of) the system seemed fairly strong: local governments, new order corporations (in Belgium), the magistrature and state police (in the Netherlands). In Belgium, the role played by the collaborationist Gerard Romsée—who took control of the Interior Department in early 1941—was particularly important.

However, even in the so-called weak-capacity Belgian state, the real grip of these collaborationists on the system was, overall, weak. The quality and number of their members and their organizational capacities remained feeble. The organization of a coup became a goal in itself, creating an irrational drain of energy. The attempt at centralized corporatism failed completely. Even in Flanders, the attempted coup was fragmented. Top-level collaborationists (new order corporations, provincial governors/commissars, magistrates or someone like Romsée) had little power outside their most direct sphere of influence. This was as much a problem of a working administration as a lack of legitimacy. They failed to control local societies and subservient administrations. Large parts of the system remained in the hands of pre-war elites and civil servants. In many localities, collaborationist mayors were isolated figures. Collaborationist mayors were overall much too clumsy in their explicit display of national socialist tropes and their politicization of everyday governance. This excluded them from access to any kind of personal legitimacy.

Collaborationist mayors and top-level collaborationists ended up creating small political islands around themselves: private secretariats with reliable party members. This almost sectarian inwards turn towards the small group of reliable peers was further proof of their failure to get a grip on regular structures. Collaborationist parties gradually started disintegrating in 1943. In 1944, the majority of collaborationist mayors went into a transitional mode as well, trying to find more suitable alternative positions as compared to the triumphant aggressive stance of 1940.

However, for many of the local communities governed by these Nazi collaborationists, their role was far from negligible. There was one domain where collaborationist mayors did have a significant impact: information for repression. In 1943, the single most important use collaborationist mayors had for the Germans was that they were ideally positioned antennae to pick up information. Systematically gathering information about opponents had been an essential part of the attempted coup. Monitoring local societies and potentially dangerous citizens became part of a machine that created its own fuel. The mere presence of collaborationist mayors

provoked hostility and incidents, making opponents visible. This system of repressive information management was also the clearest expression of the ongoing struggle to neutralize the local networks (and, in essence, an entire local civil society) that continued to represent the greatest obstacle to the collaborationists' coup. This way, local police states emerged. In 1943, this information transfer to the Germans became necessary self-protection for collaborationist mayors. By 1944, collaborationist mayors created parallel shadow structures of policing that often led to local escalations when the Germans decided to intervene.

The role of most collaborationist mayors became highly ambiguous in 1943 and 1944. A large majority strategically moderated their positions, by mediating for certain individuals, trying to protect certain useful members of the local elite, turning a blind eye to people in hiding, or even making some kind of agreement with clandestine networks. This was, simply, a matter of personal insurance for the times ahead. On the other hand, the parallel repressive machine had by now become unstoppable, certainly once collaborationist parties militarized and paramilitary groups were called in. Many collaborationist mayors were applying the accelerator and the brake at the same time, often leading to contradictory behaviour. However, many of the protective and mediating actions were often public and visible, while mayors' role in repressive actions—preparing German raids in 1944 for example—remained hidden. This would make post-war evaluation difficult.

LOCAL PURGES AND MEMORY DEVELOPMENT

Local transition from liberation to the first post-war municipal elections showed significant differences between the countries discussed here. Again, Belgium and France are opposite cases. Local transition in Nord/Pas-de-Calais was tightly organized from the top down. Central power was able to push towards relative normalization of local governments early on. The organized resistance was mostly neutralized by strategically making it part of this system. The lack of infiltration of local governments by pro-Nazi collaborationists was also essential. This allowed the transition to advance quickly, and in a certain sense to skip the step of a real political purge. The French wasted no time in organizing local municipal elections. These elections were explicitly meant to close down the period of French civil war and to reclaim republican democratic legitimacy. This was probably an ideal and advisable scenario in several ways. Certainly, it closed

the door to continued struggle and competition. It renewed local elites (mayors specifically) and provided them with an indisputable democratic legitimacy. The jump from near total civil war in certain regions to (relative) stability in 1945 is a truly remarkable step. This can only be explained by the groundwork that had already been laid in 1943–44. On the local level, the reconnection between mayors (socialist ones for example), the underground resistance and civil society networks in general had been well prepared beforehand. New prefectural authorities were also appointed in 1944. The process of local normalization could hit the ground running, the day after the last German left the region.

The Belgians, in contrast, took more than two years to move from liberation to the first post-war local elections. The Belgian state simply lacked the powers to implement controlled normalization. Also in contrast to the French, the Belgians had made no real preparations for this. Moreover, Nazi infiltration in local governments had been too strong and deep. In Flanders, this infiltration was even connected to the pre-war alliances the Flemish Catholic party had made in 1938. In this context, it was hard to make early municipal elections a reality. The long transitional jump did, however, succeed in creating stability. Post-war municipal elections resulted in a partial replacement of mayors, but an overall continuity in terms of political power balances.

In Belgium and the Netherlands, a process of judicial and administrative purges of mayors was necessary. In both states, the administrative purges of mayors were pragmatically used to restore the state's confidence in its own civil servants and to restore public confidence in national states. As such, there was little room for too much critical self-reflection.

In the judicial trials of Nazi collaborationist mayors, the issue of information management and legal denunciation was a particularly interesting test case. On the one hand, it could be used to deconstruct the anatomy of authoritarian systems. Determining (individual) responsibilities in the elaborate system of hostage lists was one example. Both in Belgium and the Netherlands, courts were unable to offer any systematic answers to this specific problem.

The issue was also ideal to problematize the policy of the lesser evil. Having been a good administrator and bureaucrat before the war could suddenly bring one to handing over citizens to the enemy under occupation. Again, Belgian and Dutch courts never came to grips with this issue. It would have necessitated a clear interpretive framework for the behaviour of patriotic civil servants and public officials.

In these judicial trials, indictments proved fairly easy to turn into convictions for ‘political collaboration’ as it was defined in Belgium and the Netherlands. However, by necessity these procedures were pragmatic and reductionist. This created a problem in court cases against Flemish nationalist mayors. This problem was not judicial but societal and political. Courts allowed the so-called ‘good governance’ elements of Nazi mayors to become detached from their political and ideological roles. This created trial narratives that impacted longer-term memory development. The visible good governance would quickly overshadow the political aspects and the hidden collaboration these mayors had provided for German repression. I would suggest that the legal battle surrounding VNV mayors between September 1944 and November 1946 constitutes the earliest, first essential cornerstone of post-war Flemish nationalist politics of memory. In Flanders, VNV mayors could easily cultivate and expand their rhetoric of martyrdom and victimhood. The roots of fragmented Belgian war memories were therefore already planted in these post-war trials.

Local transitional processes created dominant narratives and frameworks of interpretation which would influence collective memories on a national level for decades to come. It was perhaps inevitable in this context that historically essential topics—the persecution of the Jews comes to mind—were often neglected by purge investigations. But this neglect, and the lack of a separate enduring trial narrative, closed the door to public awareness about these facts afterwards. In the Netherlands, the narrative of the proverbial ‘mayor in wartime’ originated in purge procedures. It later became the symbol for being the victim of an impossibly difficult situation. This reductionist and patriotic narrative steered away from any deeper conclusions that Dutch society might have drawn about its political and administrative culture. Another example is the Belgian trials, where collaborationist Flemish nationalists could simply recycle the propaganda they had already used under the occupation. According to their defensive arguments, Flemish nationalist mayors had maintained food supply (good governance) for their populations but were then martyred in an anti-Flemish Belgian ‘repression’ after the war. This enduring narrative would dominate Flemish public opinion for decades.

Administrative authorities and judicial courts responded to their own goals and internal logic. There was no paradigm—legal or otherwise—to assess administrative collaboration by pre-war patriotic elites accurately. Nor was there any political or societal will to do so in 1945. In neither country was there any attempt to create an overall process of ‘coming to

terms' as we would understand this today in a transitional justice framework. This meant that on a local level, most traumatic wounds were not resolved at all. On the contrary, they were buried within communities only to resurface perhaps decades later.

FINAL THOUGHTS: THE RESCUE OF THE DEMOCRATIC STATE?

The German occupation in 1940 hit these three states and the fabric of their societies very hard. But it hit them in the late stages of an advanced process of state formation. National system differences were significant. Pre-war political cultures became accentuated under occupation. Yet the enduring resilience of local democracies proved to be the stronger similarity.

At the height of German repression in 1944, when national authorities all but evaporated, renewed local democracies emerged. This re-emergence should not be understood as a regression to older pre-modern forms of local community management. In fact, I want to argue that theories about *ancien régime* regressions—which are applicable to central/eastern Europe during WW II and to occupied Belgium or northern France during WW I—were no longer relevant for these countries in 1944. The key to success was the connection between official local government and local civil society. Technocratic municipal civil servants, mayors of pre-war parties and (paradoxically) even pro-German collaborationist mayors kept local governments going. Local institutional democracy offered the backbone to renewed local civil networks. The social transformative power of these networks could only be this strong and enduring because it was supported by local states. In this sense, 1944–45 was a cathartic process in which these states needed the full impact of hostile occupation to confirm their democratic maturity. Opportunistic as the choices of local elites may have been in 1943 and 1944, this also represented their interiorization of basic democratic norms.

Destatification was countered when local democracies turned out to be small states. As such the state never really disappeared; its institutional and administrative fabric remained in place, firmly supported by local governments. This also helps explain why—despite all the national differences in the road to post-war stabilization and democratic reconstruction—the overall trend in these three countries is a uniform one. Local states were the prerequisite for regaining national democratic legitimacy relatively quickly, and thereby also for the longer-term task of restoring damaged nationhoods.

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