

LEAGUE OF NATIONS
COMMITTEE ON INTELLECTUAL CO-OPERATION

ENQUIRY
INTO THE
CONDITIONS OF INTELLECTUAL WORK

Second Series

INTELLECTUAL LIFE

in the

VARIOUS COUNTRIES

BELGIUM

NOTES INTENDED TO SERVE AS A CONTRIBUTION TO A
GENERAL STATISTICAL SURVEY OF POPULAR EDUCATION

By Julien LUCHAIRE

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Inspector-General of Public Education in France,
Expert on the Committee for Intellectual Co-operation.

IN COURSE OF PUBLICATION

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NOTE

The object of the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation in publishing this series of pamphlets is to call attention to the problems of organisation and intellectual assistance to which each subject gives rise. The Committee does not propose to treat these subjects exhaustively, but desires rather to bring them to the notice of the public and to provide an opportunity for further suggestions.

NOTES INTENDED TO SERVE AS A CONTRIBUTION TO A GENERAL STATISTICAL SURVEY OF POPULAR EDUCATION

By JULIEN LUCHAIRE

Belgium is rightly included among those European countries whose official statistics supply exceptionally abundant material for a general statistical survey of intellectual life. In addition, the study of social phenomena is held in high esteem in that country, and consequently copious and valuable information on the question under discussion may be obtained from several institutions, e.g., the Central Statistical Commission (rue de Louvain, Brussels) and the *Palais Mondial* in Brussels, at which a Belgian bibliography on a large scale has been prepared. To judge from the friendly manner in which the enquiries which we made have invariably been received, our undertaking is regarded with favour and is arousing a great deal of interest; and it seems reasonably certain that Belgium will be one of the first countries for which we shall be able to prepare a satisfactory conspectus of intellectual life. The limited area of the country and the variety and importance of its intellectual activities make it an excellent field for investigation.

Our present contribution does not claim to be anything but a bare outline; even with the available material we could have produced a more satisfactory survey if we had bestowed on this particular enquiry some of the time which we thought it better this year to devote to a number of countries and a great variety of subjects.

Part 2 of the *Annuaire statistique de la Belgique et du Congo belge*, published by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Health (Vol. XLV, 1914, and Vol. XLVI, 1915-1919), is entitled: "Political, Intellectual and Moral Data". (The first part is described as Territory and Population and the third part as Agricultural, Industrial and Commercial Data.) The second part is subdivided into Elections, Education, Literature and the Fine Arts, Savings Bank, Associations, Welfare, Co-operation, Justice, Medicine, Army and Finance. The table of contents for the chapter on Education gives references to other headings under which data on special forms of education (industrial, agricultural and military) are supplied. The general title of the second part can scarcely be described as altogether appropriate in view of the variety of the subject-matter which it contains, but the two chapters on Education and Literature and Art, together with their annexes, to which reference is made in the table of contents, contain practically everything necessary for our purpose. The chapter on Literature and Art has the merit of giving in compendious form information concerning periodicals and art exhibitions which is rarely found in statistical returns. It is unfortunate that certain data given in the 1914 Yearbook have been omitted in the editions from 1915 to 1919, e.g., the classification of the population according to their educational level at various ages; education of soldiers serving under the colours; education of discharged soldiers; courses for the illiterate; regimental schools; evening courses and special courses; number of pupils and results of examinations held in connection with the courses for the illiterate during the year, separate returns being made for the Flemish and the Walloon candidates; the educational standard of apprentices in workshops; classification of inhabitants according to profession or occupation; distribution of the two national languages.

Mention should also be made of a most useful memorandum summarising the whole work of education in Belgium, published in 1921 by M. Jules Destrée, Minister for Science and Art. This memorandum, which is called "L'aide à qui veut s'instruire" (a publication issued by the Ministry for Science and Art), has also been consulted.

General elementary education may be regarded as in the main the result of the combined influence of elementary instruction, the reading of children's books, popular literature and newspapers, and theatrical and cinematograph performances.

In Belgium, elementary education is given in the infant schools (*écoles gardiennes*) and elementary and adult schools. Compulsory education was introduced in Belgium by the law

dated May 19th, 1914; but attendance at infant and adult schools is not compulsory. A comparison between the number of pupils attending elementary schools before and after 1914, however, shows that, by the time attendance was made compulsory by law, voluntary attendance at elementary schools was already the almost universal rule. The great effort which raised school attendance in Belgium to a high level was made between 1880 and 1910. Returns taken from the tables on that subject in the *Annuaire statistique* are as follows: number of pupils at elementary schools (commercial, "adopted", private, and in receipt of grants) in 1881: 340,118; in 1890: 616,041; in 1900: 793,915; and in 1910: 929,347. During the same period, the population increased from 5,585,846 to 7,423,784. A comparison between these figures will show how much progress has been made. The example of Belgium shows that a country, without resorting to stringent measures, can in thirty years' time pass from an average to a high standard of elementary education; down to 1880, only one person in 16 was entered on the rolls of an elementary school, while by 1910, the proportion was nearly 1 in 7. We therefore think it would be a matter of special interest to the Committee to ascertain the causes which brought about *so rapid and satisfactory an increase in the attendance at the elementary schools in that country.*

The present law lays down that every Belgian child must attend school regularly for eight years, reckoning from the year in which it reaches the age of six, that is to say, until the age of fourteen. A note kindly forwarded to us by the Belgian Ministry of Science and Art states that "the number of children evading this provision and receiving no education is almost negligible, but it is impossible to give accurate figures". It thus appears highly probable that the Belgian Government has no means of ascertaining the number of children who receive no school education. In all likelihood, too, it has no means of finding out how many children are not receiving adequate instruction. But countries in which a very high proportion of the children are enrolled on the school registers are confronted with two serious problems: first, that of regularity of attendance, and secondly—in this case the factors are more difficult to determine—that of the actual results of the teaching, for irregular attendance is not the only cause of an inadequate standard of general education in such countries. A high standard of attendance is, of course, a favourable sign. But it would be particularly desirable that a nation which has done a great deal for the development of education should draw up and publish statistics showing the actual value and extent of the results obtained. The Belgian Ministry of the Interior has not yet published the decennial statistics of illiterates which should have appeared in 1920. But even when they are published, we shall possess no more definite information than we do for all, or practically all, other countries, for we shall know neither the inadequacy of the results, obtained in the schools nor the value of the teaching.

As is the case also in other countries, Belgian statistics do not give figures showing successes and failures in the final examination at the elementary schools, nor do they give figures showing the average value of the tests in this examination year by year. However, the Ministry of Science and Art, which has replied with the utmost readiness to the numerous questions we asked it, informs us that, out of the 14,688 pupils who presented themselves for examination in 1922 at the close of the elementary school course, 10,922 obtained either a third- or fourth-class certificate, and the ministerial note adds: "It should be stated that entrance for this examination is optional and that many schools send in no candidates." Indeed, if all the scholars were entered regularly at the conclusion of their eight years of study, the number of candidates, reckoned on the present elementary-school attendance, would be 120,000, *i.e.*, ten times the figure given above. It is therefore evident that in Belgium the examination test is not an adequate means for estimating the real value, or even the general results, of elementary education. This statement assuredly does not apply to Belgium alone, and the observations which we have just made are far from being intended as a criticism on the administration of that country; we merely wish to take this opportunity of requesting the Committee to consider *whether it would not be desirable to establish a standard to assess the value of elementary education which might be adopted by all nations, which would enable individual countries to compare their progress with that made in other countries and which would thus lead to improvement all round.*

On January 1st, 1921, there were 8,087 schools in Belgium with 25,737 classes, 966,457 pupils and a teaching staff of 26,856. To these figures should be added those of the elementary schools which are entirely free and are not subject to the provisions of the Education Act. The Administration possesses no recent official information on these institutions; but in 1910 the establishments inspected by the secular and regular clergy were attended by about 50,000 pupils, and

those in which no inspection whatever takes place by about 8,000. In addition, there are elementary classes in the intermediate schools, with about 20,000 pupils (20,957 on December 31st, 1919). In Belgium, out of a population of just under eight million, more than a million pupils are accordingly receiving elementary education, and on an average there is one teacher for about 35 pupils. In 1881, the number of pupils was 340,118 (public elementary schools), with 8,328 masters and mistresses, *i.e.*, about one teacher to 40 pupils. Considerable progress has thus been made not only in actual numbers, but also in regard to the quality of the teaching, at any rate as far as recognition of the importance of the principle of small classes and more individual attention is concerned.

But progress is dependent on yet another condition—the efficiency of the teacher. In this matter, Belgian official statistics only give one item of information—the proportion of pupils enrolled in the normal schools to certificated teachers leaving these schools. In 1920, the proportion of those obtaining certificates to enrolled students was about 1 in 7; in 1919 it was about 1 in 4. These figures should be accepted with reserve, especially as there is reason to believe that—as was the case almost everywhere else—the standard of examination was lowered considerably after the War. Here again we have no criterion by which to appraise the true value of the examinations.

A third condition is the possession of adequate material equipment and an abundant supply of first-rate educational apparatus. In Belgium, the cost of providing for all the material requirements of elementary education is borne by the communes in the case of the communal schools, and by the committees or governing bodies in the case of “adopted” schools (unless the commune assumes the responsibility for them) and also of private schools and schools receiving grants. (An “adopted” school is a private school which signs a contract with the commune and accepts its control in return for certain advantages; the staffs of the “adopted” schools and of the free schools in receipt of grants are paid for by the State in the same way as the staff of the communal schools strictly so called.) Although not legally bound to do so, the State defrays part of the cost of building and equipping the communal schools, and each year Parliament places funds for the purpose at the disposal of the Science and Art Department. The contribution made by the State is generally fixed at a third of the total expenditure on the work. The provinces also give grants (often equivalent to a sixth of the expenditure). We have been unable to collect the data required for ascertaining the amount which Belgium expends yearly on the material side of elementary education. The budget of the Department necessarily only gives incomplete information on the subject; the statistics of expenditure in the Communes and Provinces under the new Education Law cannot be prepared for 1921 until the accounts for that year have been finally passed, and it would also be necessary for us to possess the main figures in the budgets of the private schools.

On the other hand, there is no difficulty in ascertaining the amount spent by the State on teachers' salaries and, the general costs of administration. They are as follows :

1923 budget : costs of administration and inspection, and miscellaneous	4,859,050 francs
Salaries and allowances of staff in elementary schools.	209,983,000 »
Salaries and allowances of staff in normal schools.	10,210,000 »

But the above constitutes only a part of the sums devoted by Belgium to elementary education; and, as we have seen, it is no easy matter to give even a rough estimate of this expenditure.

We venture to point out here the great value, in making trustworthy estimates, of the above items of expenditure in all the various countries, as they furnish a criterion of the interest shown by individual nations in this work, which forms the basis of all intellectual development. It is to be feared that the figures so often given, *i.e.*, the percentage of the total expenditure of the State which is devoted to public education, are wholly insufficient, as they do not take into account all the other sources from which the schools obtain revenue. *The Committee may perhaps consider that it would be desirable to draw up, if need be with the help of specialists in elementary education, a tabular statement to show the full extent of the financial effort made by each nation towards the development of elementary instruction, together with the principal technical improvements effected each year.* Everything which has no direct bearing on the object in view should be eli-

minated; elementary education is a subject of constant solicitude in all advanced countries and the mere record of the vast number of detailed regulations, experiments and discussions to which it gives rise fills whole volumes every year. Here, as elsewhere, an enquiry carried out under the auspices of the Committee should avoid excessive detail and should aim at ascertaining measures of practical utility and the factors which make for progress. Such an enquiry would be of advantage to all. Naturally the Committee makes no claim whatsoever to interfere in the organisation of elementary or secondary education in the various countries, but it will doubtless be conceded that it has the right in the general interest to stimulate a friendly international rivalry by publishing from time to time the most striking results of its enquiry. A stimulus of this nature is given by international congresses of specialists; but its influence is confined to these limited circles. I venture to think that clear and concise publications issued by the Committee would reach a wider public, and would attract universal attention to the progress already made and the work which has yet to be done.

The subject of elementary education in Belgium calls for a few further remarks. There were 3,381 infant schools (known in Belgium as "*écoles gardiennes*") on January 1st, 1921, with 5,432 classes, a roll of 178,504 pupils, and a teaching staff of 5,466, *i.e.*, one mistress to about 32 pupils. The attendance at the infant schools is about one-fifth of that at the elementary schools. The numbers attending these schools fell from 282,708 in 1913 to 205,418 in 1919, and there was a further decrease in the following year. This was due to the decline in the birth-rate during the War; the Belgian Administration hopes that next year will mark the beginning of a recovery. This is all the more desirable in view of the remarkable increase in the attendance at the infant schools during the twenty years after 1880, in the course of which it increased fivefold. The Belgian State has nothing to do with the opening and management of these schools; it merely makes grants and pays and inspects the staff.

The numbers in the adult schools have also decreased, but obviously for other reasons. They rose from 76,918 in 1881 to 240,019 in 1910, but fell again to 159,677 in 1913; they increased to 174,044 in 1919, with a subsequent decrease to 136,733 on January 1st, 1921. At our request, the Belgian Administration was good enough to furnish the following explanation: "Various causes have brought about a decrease in attendance at the courses for adults. The law obliges children to attend school for eight years; they consequently get a better education, and as a result the courses for adults, and even the continuation classes, are no longer required to the same extent as formerly. The pupils are better prepared at the elementary schools; they can attend the vocational or commercial courses which are to be found almost everywhere. The adult courses, therefore, should be reorganised. The Council for the Improvement of Elementary Education is dealing with this question. The present economic situation also accounts for the decrease in attendance at the adult schools. In certain districts the younger generation, attracted by higher wages, leave their homes for the industrial centres or for foreign countries."

These data give results which are to a certain extent contradictory. On the one hand, a higher standard in elementary-school education is paving the way for a corresponding rise in the level of adult education; on the other hand, many young persons are now less eager to complete their general education. The Committee will recognise that this is a subject of particular interest. The training of the masses for trades and professions will always find support and encouragement amongst the representatives of the great economic interests; but that is not the case with general education. Thus there is reason to believe that, as regards popular education, once the question of the elementary schools has been settled, the education of adults will become the great problem for advanced nations.

The Committee will therefore, no doubt, desire information as to the result of the forthcoming discussions of the Council for the Improvement of Elementary Education in Belgium. It may even desire to *open a more general enquiry into the present position of popular adult education among the principal nations*, or at least to instruct the investigators it may appoint to devote special attention to this subject.

It may be asked whether in Belgium, as in other countries, the obstacles to the growth of the adult school movement do not lie to some extent in the ever-increasing facilities of various kinds for completing their general education which are offered to working men in other directions. In dealing with intellectual life and all the manifold activities of the human intelligence, we should always consider all the possible ways in which these activities can find an outlet and not confine our attention to the time-honoured forms, and especially to those under the supervision

of the authorities. The solution of the problem of the general education of adults in the working classes is, evidently, not to be found in the adult schools alone.

Popular libraries also play a part. However, in Belgium, the returns regarding "communal public libraries and popular libraries established under the auspices of the public administration" give hardly any idea of their importance from the point of view of popular education. We shall have to deal more fully with this matter. In 1919 there were 1,102 libraries of this kind in Belgium; 770 of the 2,638 communes in the kingdom possessed a library. 125,486 readers used these libraries during that year, and 209,648 persons borrowed books. (The population of Belgium for the year in question was 7,577,027.) One hundred and one communes with from 5,000 to 25,000 inhabitants and four communes with over 25,000 inhabitants possessed no library. Confining ourselves to these figures alone, and without comparing them with similar data in other countries, we may assume that a movement like that of the communal and popular public libraries, which does not touch one-twentieth of the population, exerts a very slight influence on the development of general education among the working classes. This inference, however, requires to be verified.

Statistics of books bought by the same classes of the population would be instructive, but we have not been able to obtain any figures on the subject.

The reading of newspapers, as we pointed out earlier, is another element in general popular education, but here again there are practically no official statistics. The data referring to the Belgian periodical press disappeared during the German occupation; the table published in the *Statistical Yearbook* for the years previous to 1912 and also for 1919 was prepared from information supplied by the Postal Administration; even the publication of these statistics in greater detail would very probably give no further information concerning the circulation of the various newspapers or their character. This table shows that, in consequence of the War, the number of daily papers (which was 94 in 1911) had fallen to 73 by 1919; but the War had much more disastrous effects on periodicals other than daily newspapers, which decreased from 2,133 in 1911 to 613 in 1919. It may be inferred that such a wholesale disappearance of periodicals appreciably decreases, throughout the whole country, the opportunities for reading and consequently the means of instruction. That is the utmost we can say at the present stage of our investigations.

Moreover, we are aware that research in this field will be a difficult matter. *Satisfactory statistics concerning the daily and periodical press which would enable us to estimate the part it plays in the intellectual training of the public have not, we believe, been compiled in any country; this again would be a useful subject of enquiry for the Committee.* However, if the Belgian or any other State Administration were willing to undertake an investigation of this kind as an experiment, we should, no doubt, find material for most interesting observations touching directly upon the activities of the Committee. It is obvious that, at all stages of intellectual life, the daily press will furnish a vast collection of ideas and subjects for thought; and that, for the intellectual development of the masses and even of persons with some pretensions to culture, this daily acquisition of knowledge supplements, and is assimilated with, the knowledge acquired at school and from books. It is therefore not a negligible factor.

Our enquiries into the influence exercised by the theatre and the cinematograph are still in progress and we shall give the results later.

A sketch of the conditions under which intellectual life among the working classes in Belgium is developing would not be complete unless information was given regarding the work of all societies and institutions which concern themselves in any way with popular education. There are a large number of these institutions in Belgium. In the matter of elementary education, the Law of September 5th, 1919, setting up the National Society for the Promotion of Child Welfare (*L'Œuvre nationale de l'enfance*) was, no doubt, intended by the State to complete fittingly the work begun by private initiative.

Amongst other useful institutions with this object in view, the Social Service Schools (*Écoles de service social*) may be mentioned; these were organised by a Royal Decree dated October 15th, 1920, instituting a "Council for Social Service Schools" attached to the Ministry of Justice. This Council drew up the programme of a course of study for a diploma as social helper in various branches, for instance: "appointments in child welfare institutions, posts as director or assistant in educational institutions or child-welfare organisation, and as supervisor of public libraries". The curriculum of the Central Social Service School at Brussels includes the study of the prin-

cipal laws on public education, teaching institutions, a course of psychology, a course of pedagogy, the study of books for use in schools and continuation schools, suggestions on the choice of a profession, art in the home, and methods applied in statistics and documentation. The programme of study for public librarians is worthy of reproduction :

Construction, equipment, financial direction and administration of libraries and kindred institutions.

Special libraries. Libraries for children and young persons. The book from the technical point of view; purchase of books. The book as an intellectual work. Choice of books. Bibliography : classification of books and periodicals according to subject matter; catalogues; works of reference and official documents. The history of literature. How to ensure the success of a library; present-day problems; co-operation with educational institutions; the children's story hour. How to educate readers and counteract frivolous and pernicious reading.

Visits to libraries, publishing houses, bookbinding establishments, public sale-rooms, reading-rooms, printing works and studios for photo-engraving.

Courses of practical training in public libraries, the International Institute of Bibliography, children's libraries and the Royal Library; the art library and libraries connected with social institutions.

Introductory courses on educational methods, popular lectures on social subjects, etc., have also been provided.

Finally, in this country, where the cleavage between the political parties is very marked and where political feeling tends to colour the whole daily life of the adherents of these parties, it will be necessary to study the intellectual activities of certain popular Catholic institutions and of socialist institutions such as the "*Maison du peuple*" at Ghent.

A question as complex and elusive as the general culture of a nation cannot be dealt with until all the above-mentioned data are available. A skilful selection of purely relevant data would, we repeat, do much to curtail the time required for such research. Similar investigations carried out in other countries will help to reveal the best methods of setting to work and will save time. For further information on this point readers are referred to our report, *Notes on the Methods of compiling Statistics of Intellectual Life*.

Simultaneously with the present report, we are finishing a sequel to it, entitled *General Education of the Middle Classes in Belgium*. It is already possible to show the connection between the two by reminding readers that M. Jules Destrée, Minister for Science and Art in 1921, whose work contributed largely to the development of the intellectual life of Belgium, introduced a law on October 15th of that year for the education of children of outstanding ability (*Loi relative aux mieux doués*). This law established a system of selection of the best pupils from elementary schools for further teaching in secondary and higher schools. It is a practical application of a principle which is often repeated during discussions on public education in all countries, but rarely carried into effect—that every human being with first-rate abilities, no matter to what class he or she may belong, should be given the best possible education, and that it is the duty of the community to remove obstacles due to poverty. The advance which this law makes on the system of scholarships in force in other countries is brought out in Article 26, which states that, in fixing the grant, account may be taken of income which might have been earned during the period of study; it is, in fact, recognised that scholarships which merely meet the cost of education do not compensate for all the expenditure actually incurred by the families of the students as a result of the prolonged period of study, and do not always lead to the selection of the best-qualified candidates.

We are strongly in favour of the Belgian system of a special law, formally instituting special funds administered by provincial and communal bodies, and of selection committees composed of prominent local citizens. It is essential that the reward for ability should be bestowed in such a manner as to make the strongest appeal to the popular imagination.

Here again is a subject which for several reasons is of particular interest to the Committee. It may perhaps desire to place on its agenda the problem of how to recruit the best intellects from among the masses.

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