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licentiate thesis for obtaining a master in History
year 2002-2003
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**The emigration policy of the Belgian government from Belgium to
the U.S. through the port of Antwerp 1842-1914**

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Foreword

After finishing high school I moved to the U.S. as a Rotary exchange student. I stayed in Pagosa Springs, a small mountain town in southwestern Colorado. I quickly learned how mobile Americans are. In spite of being a small town, I met people from all over the country, from Iowa to Louisiana, Hawaii to Alaska. That most of the people I met still knew their origins surprised me the most. People always told me with a certain pride: “I am 1/8th German, 1/4th Swedish, 1/16th Polish, etc. Would the people I met have inherited the mobility of their forefathers? However to my surprise I never met any American with Belgian ‘roots’ in Pagosa. Three years later I learned that I was at the wrong place to meet Americans with Belgians ‘roots’. I travelled through the U.S. and Canada and stayed for a while in Windsor with a Belgian family who had immigrated there fifty years ago. They introduced me to the Belgian community of the area. I learned about the ‘Gazette van Detroit’, joined the Belgians club of Windsor for their annual pick-nick, and got fascinated by people’s stories about crossing the Atlantic during the first half of the 20th century. However these clubs will not exist for much longer. Meanwhile, the second generation feels more Canadian than Belgian. My interest for emigration history comes from this experience. Originally I wanted to write my licentiate’s thesis about Belgians who emigrated to the U.S. and Canada, but this seemed to be a bit too ambitious. I had to limit my research to the Belgian emigration to the U.S.

With this I also want to express my gratitude to some people who collaborated during my research. First of all I want to thank my promoter, Professor Eric Vanhaute. He was always available to answer my questions. Every time I walked into his office with some doubts and questions about the project, I walked out with a good portion of self-confidence and motivation. I also want to thank the personnel of the archives of the ministry of Foreign affairs, the Albertina library, and the Center for American studies.

Furthermore I want to thank Jeroen Storme, Dieter Van de Putte and Frederick Derck who corrected the original Dutch version of this study. Moreover I want to thank Gunther Vanneste for sharing his flat with me while I was doing my archive research in Brussels. A very special thanks goes out to Vaughn Curd for editing the English version¹. I also want to thank my friends and family for all their support. Finally I want to thank my parents for allowing me to make my own choices in life and for always supporting me to materialize them.

This is the only page he didn’t get to edit and this is probably quite noticeable.

Introduction

Definition of the central question

The emigration movement to the United States constitutes one of the most remarkable events of the 19th century. Between 1820 and the First World War the movement numbered about 30,000,000 people. Most emigrants came from Europe. Germany, Ireland and England provided the bulk of these emigrants between 1820 and 1880². The part played by Belgians in this movement remained very limited. However during the 1840's most of the social-economic and political factors were present to trigger such movement in Belgium. The king Leopold I was an outspoken supporter of emigration. He sought a way to increase his power and his territory. During the 1840's the king hoped to found a colony somewhere overseas. Leopold I could count on the assistance of the liberal politicians who shared his desire to expand the territory based on economic motives. They hoped to open new markets through the colonisation of new territories. The liberal politicians also wanted to stimulate emigration because they considered emigrants as valuable go-betweens to promote the Belgian products abroad. For the first time since the foundation of Belgium in 1830, a homogeneous liberal government under the leadership of Charles Rogier took power in 1847. This liberal politician tried to implement an active emigration policy. In Belgium the 1840's are automatically associated with the major rural crisis which struck the Flemish countryside. The young nation went through a very difficult period in the social-economic field. Flanders did not seem to be able to recover from the slump causing a constant increase of indigents. The belief that the overpopulation of Flanders constituted the cause for the structural crisis spread. At this time Belgium already had a very high population density compared to other countries. More and more people started to support the idea of conducting an active demographic policy. Emigration was regarded as the ideal outlet for the surplus of population. Moreover Antwerp being a flourishing emigration port offered the ideal gateway to start this movement. The Belgians had to and would follow the example set by the German emigrants who had started to emigrate via Antwerp after the blockade on the Westerschelde was lifted in 1839 and settle successfully in the United States. The U.S. represented the 'Promised Land' to many where cheap and fertile lands were abundant, where the wages were four to five times higher than in Belgium and where hardly any restrictions on immigration existed.

² M. BENNET, American immigration policies: A history, Public Affairs Press, Washington, 1963, pp. 14-15.

In spite of all these positive factors a large scale emigration movement failed to occur. Only towards the end of the century would an increasing amount of Belgians cross the Atlantic. Even then the total Belgian emigration to the United States remained very limited compared to other countries. No more than 29,000 Belgians settled in the United States in the 19th century. This is very little in comparison to other countries like the 40,000 emigrants from Luxemburg, the 94,000 from the Netherlands, the 115,000 from Switzerland, the 153,000 from Denmark, the 582,000 from Sweden and the 2,500,000 from Germany³. Only after 1900 until the First World War the emigration movement picked up a little when approximately 50,000 Belgians moved to the U.S⁴. This non-event leaves us with the intriguing question: “*Why didn't the Belgian emigrate?*” It took long before the question was subjected to a thorough study. Claude Fohlen rightly pointed to the lack of research concerning the Belgian emigration movement to the United States⁵. After 1967 the topic got broached by different people following the international investigation tendencies. They studied mainly the demographical and social-economic aspects of the Belgian emigration. The research of Schepens, Kurgan-Van Hentenryk, Stengers, Vandepitte and Verrijken have analysed the magnitude, development and causes for the emigration movement and the origin and destination of the emigrants (Schepens, 1973; Kurgan-Van Hentenryk, 1976; Stengers, 1978; Verrijken, 1982; Vandepitte, 1988). Jean Stengers in particular studied why the emigration why the Belgian overseas emigration remained so low. Stengers claimed that the internal migration and the border emigration to France were the main reasons for the non-event. He also blamed the lack of organisation regarding overseas emigration by the state and charity institutions. Moreover the Belgian in general was too attached to his country to emigrate⁶. What attracts the attention regarding the studies about Belgian emigration is the distressing lack of comparative studies. Poland for instance always had an important border emigration to Germany and nevertheless after 1880 an important emigration movement to the United States came about⁷. A comparative study with the Polish emigration movement could throw light on new aspects. Also a comparative study with Germany which in the field of emigration served as the best example to follow for many Belgian supporters of emigration until the First World War remains open for investigation. Only Annabelle Nuytens has

³ J. Stengers, Emigration et immigration en Belgique au XVIII et XIX siècle, Bruxelles, Académie Royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 1978, p 53.

⁴ K. SMETS, Belgians in the United States: a guide to information sources, 1990, 77-79.

⁵ C. FOHLEN, La América anglosajona de 1815 a nuestros días, Barcelona, Editorial Laboro, 1967, p. 77.

⁶ J. STENGERS, op cit., pp 45 –60.

⁷ W. THOMAS and F. ZANYECKIE, The polish peasant, Chicago University press, 1919, 2346p.

compared the Irish emigration movement to the Belgian one. She describes how a crisis triggered a true exodus in Ireland while a similar crisis in Belgium failed to spark emigration. The findings of Nuytens regarding this non-event point to a lack of organisation in Belgium. In Ireland mostly religious institutions took care of the emigrants leaving the country and guided them to their new home, while in Belgium the Church kept away because it disapproved of the movement⁸. However the Belgian Church provided the United States with many missionaries to spread the catholic faith. A special ‘American College’ was even founded in Belgium with the specifically purpose of instructing missionaries how to serve in North-America⁹. A thorough study regarding the influence of the Belgian Church on the Belgian emigration movement still needs to be made.

This licentiate’s thesis written under the guidance of Eric Vanhaute, professor at the University of Gent a close look was taken at the influence of the Belgian government on Belgian emigration before the First World War. In what way did the Belgian government contribute to the organisation of the Belgian emigration? Linda Maesens researched the interference of the government concerning the emigration to Latin-America through Antwerp (Maesens; 1978)¹⁰. She mainly studied Royal decrees and laws passed by the government to organize the emigration movement through Antwerp. The policy of the Belgian government regarding the Belgian emigration movement was barely discussed in this thesis. Only Luc Schepens described briefly the attitude of the Belgian government towards the Belgian emigration movement before 1914¹¹. This thesis will go more deeply into the interference of the Belgian government with the Belgian emigration. The most important point for the Belgian emigration policy came in 1856 when Charles Vilain XIII, minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, laid down the non-intervention policy towards emigration. The government would not intervene into the Belgian emigration, not encouraging it nor slowing it down. Government responsibility for emigration was limited to protecting and informing emigrants. This constituted the official standpoint of the government until the First World War. That such an important issue as emigration policy remained unchanged for nearly seventy years is remarkable. Especially considering the fact that many Europeans emigrated during that time and most of them chose the United States as a final destination. This research

⁸ A. NYUTENS, Ierland: 19^e eeuwse exodus naar Noord-Amerika – vergelijkende studie met België, Leuven, K.U.L., (onuitgegeven licentiaatsverhandeling), 1995, p. 224.

⁹ P. SABBE en L. BUYSE, Belgians in America, Uitgeverij lannoo, Tielt, 1960, pp. 133-135

¹⁰ L. MAESENS, Regeringsbemoeing in de organisatie van de emigratie via Antwerpen naar Latijns-Amerika 1843-1913, RUG, Gent, 1978, p.146.

tries to give an answer to a number of questions: What led the government to chose the non-intervention policy? The existing literature mainly puts forward the failure of the colony in Santo Thomas de Guatemala. Is this true? What were the repercussions of this decision on Belgian emigration to the United States? The government officially upheld the non-intervention policy, but did it ever decide to act otherwise off the record? Would the government therefore ever exercise any influence on the emigration movement again? Has the emigration policy ever been questioned? What were the opinions of the different political ideologies towards emigration? What influence did the American immigration policy have on Belgian emigration?

Emigration is inextricably bound to immigration. Nevertheless in the existing literature Belgian emigration is often viewed from a one-sided standpoint. The research mainly focused on events taking place in Belgium which may have influenced the emigration without taking into account events which influenced the immigration in the country the emigrants move to. Based on the correspondence between the Belgian consuls in the U.S. with the Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs the events taking place in the United States which weighed on the Belgian emigration policy and emigration movement will be discussed. Moreover the investigation proves that the Belgian emigration movement was determined by the emigration flow of other European countries via Antwerp to the United States. On the other hand the research demonstrates that some events regarding Belgian emigration influenced the American immigration policy.

This study also points out that although the non-intervention policy was officially followed from 1856 till 1913, unofficially the government did not always follow this policy. Many decision of the government which not directly deal with emigration had an important influence on the movement. Sometimes these decisions had a stimulating effect while others slowed the movement down. The different Belgian governments were aware of the effect of their decisions. In particular the way the government dealt with its responsibility to inform and protect Belgian emigrants, influenced the emigration across the Atlantic. During the period of the non-intervention policy the position of the government was repeatedly questioned. In particular during the crisis of the 1880's that issue was debated about. However the main characteristic of this research regarding the governmental decision making towards the Belgian emigration to the United States is that the Belgian emigration policy would be determined by the commercial interests of the port of Antwerp.

¹¹ L. SCHEPENS, Van vlaskutser tot Franschman: Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de West-Vlaamse

Source and method

Many scientific studies regarding the Belgian emigration to the United States analyse the movement based upon the interpretation of figures. These studies prove the difficulty of interpreting figures which are at the hand (Stengers, 1978; Schepens, 1973; Kurgan-Van Hentenryk, 1976; and Verrijken, 1982). However the figures are not of a substantial importance for this research. The study is concerned predominantly with trying to show how the government outlined its emigration policy and how it implemented it. Considering the fact that the official guideline on emigration did not change from 1856 on, the research did not centre itself on the official governmental publications ‘Receuils Consulaires’ and ‘Annales Parlementaires’¹². The research is based upon the correspondence of the minister of Foreign Affairs with the different consuls and officials in the United States and the different Belgian authorities which were involved, in order to create an image of the decision making and the unofficial point of view regarding the emigration policy. The archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs are divided into a ‘Diplomatic Archive’ and an ‘African Archive’. The ‘Diplomatic Archive’ is once again split up into political files and economic files. It is regrettable that the inventory of the archive was not accessible to the investigators. One is dependent of the archivist who, after taking note of the topic of your research decides which files may be interesting for the investigation. This is far from being an academic method. Fortunately Lebllicq-De Champ published a book which among other sources discloses the files concerning Belgian-American history lying in the archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs¹³. It allows one to decide for himself which files are important for Belgian-American research. However it must be pointed out that files concerning the port of Antwerp which are relevant to the Belgian emigration to the United States are not all included in the book. Files were often classified randomly. Some times the description of a file can be misleading about what the file contains. In the General State Archives some files of minor importance for this study, mainly of the State Security concerning emigration, can be found. This archive was useful for the chapter concerning the subsidized emigration of beggars, convicts and ex-

plattelandsbevolking in de 19e eeuw, Brugge, West-Vlaams Studiebureau, 1973, p. 247.

¹² translated: ‘Consular Bundle’ and ‘Parliamentary Annals’

¹³ F. LEBLICQ- DE CHAMP, Guide de sources de l’histoire et des relations belgo-américaine conservées en Belgique 1776-1914, Brussel, Commission of educational exchange between USA, Belgium and Luxemburg, 1977, 183p.

convicts. For the same reasons the Provincial State Archive and the City Archive of Antwerp proved to be very relevant.

All the Belgian publications regarding emigration produced before the First Word War have also been analysed to illustrate contemporary ideas about emigration. These ideas have been compared with the emigration policy of the government. The archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs also include many pamphlets from different organisations which were intended to stimulate emigration. The way the government dealt with the propaganda also revealed interesting insights. Finally many previous investigations about the Belgian emigration to the United States have been of great use. Especially the studies of Balace, Schepens, Boumans and Spelkens (Schepens, 1973; Spelkens, 1976; Balace, 1967 and Boumans, 1965). Unfortunately there are two important studies that I haven't been able to localise: "*Propaganda en voorlichting met betrekking tot de Belgische overzeese emigratie*" and "*Belgische uitwijking en landbouwkolonisatie naar de Verenigde Staten en Texas 1840-1880*"¹⁴. These two licentiate's thesis of Vera Van Coillie and Gudrun Van Branden which were written under the guidance of professor Everaert, are no longer present at the University of Gent. Attempts to contact professor Everaert about a possible location for these theses have remained unanswered.

Delineation of the time frame 1842-1914

During the 1830's the emigration movement from Germany, known as 'Auswanderung' originated. Together with Ireland and England, Germany would provide most of the immigrants entering the United States. This period from 1820 till 1880 is known in the United States as the 'Free Period' regarding emigration. During that time span no federal laws restricting immigration were imposed¹⁵.

The German emigrants embarked at Hamburg and Bremen. Through these two German ports the emigrants joined the 'New world'. It didn't take long before some Germans found their way to the port of Antwerp and began to use it as a gateway to the United States. In 1842 a well organised movement began. This attracted the attention of the Belgian government because of the commercial interests it entailed. The protection of the commercial interests of the port of Antwerp, in which the transport of emigrants was becoming more and

¹⁴ translated: Propaganda and information concerning the Belgian emigration to the United States. and The Belgian emigration and agricultural colonisation to the United States and Texas between 1840-1880.

¹⁵ M. BENNET, op.cit., p. 14.

more important, largely determined the Belgian emigration policy. Another factor which arose the attention of the government for emigration, took place at the same moment. In 1842 the consequences of the crisis in the Belgian flax industry became alarming. Shortly after crops failed and epidemics started to break out which disrupted the Flanders area. These events lead to important debates on how to resolve the structural crisis. The high population density of Flanders was seen as the basic problem for the structural crisis. Emigration was increasingly regarded as the ideal outlet for the surplus population. The commercial interest of Antwerp and the active emigration policy implemented as an outlet for the crisis would play an important role in the Belgian emigration policy. Therefore 1842 has been chosen as symbolic year to delineate the beginning of the investigated period.

The year 1914 used to delineate the end of the investigated period is more evident. The First World War marks the end of whole era. During and after the war the emigration from Belgium and the immigration into the United States underwent major changes. From the start of the conflict the Belgian government tried to discourage emigration to keep as many compatriots as possible within the borders for the future reconstruction of the country. The government realized that overseas emigration left few prospects for an eventual return to the country¹⁶.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part goes from 1842 till 1883 and the second from 1883 till 1913. In both parts a crisis initiates major discussions regarding emigration. The overpopulation of Belgium is put forward in both periods as main reason for growing poverty. These two periods also largely coincide with the two main immigration periods into the United States. During the first period, the so called 'Free Period', the Americans mainly tried to lure farmers to populate the uncultivated lands. In Belgium the politics were mainly dominated by the liberal wing between 1842 and 1883. During this time span the emigration movement increased during the 1840's and 1850's but decreased during the following two decades. The second period coincides with the second industrial revolution which caused an industrial crisis in Belgium in the 1880's. This crisis heralds the start of the second period. From this moment on, more and more labourers crossed the Atlantic. This period coincides with the so called 'Restrictive Period' of immigration in the United States. The restriction policy was especially true for the older northern and eastern states. The southern states still had to deal with an economic decline after their loss in the Civil War. The

¹⁶ P. TALLIER, "Belgische vluchtelingen in het buitenland" in: A. MORELLI (red.), Belgische emigranten, Berchem, Epo, 1999, pp. 21-43.

abolition of slavery had disrupted the traditional plantation system in the south. This region tried to attract emigrants to fill the gap in the labour force created by the abolition. In the meantime the politics in Belgium looked very different compared with the previous period. Discord in the liberal party gave way to the dominance of the catholic party. We also see the rise of the socialist party. Finally during the 1870's the Red Star Line was founded. This shipping company made the port of Antwerp flourish again.

Part I: Belgian emigration to the United States: 1842-1883

Chapter I: The causes for the active emigration policy to the U.S.A. by the Belgian government

1.1) The rise of German emigration through the port of Antwerp

Between 1820 and 1880 approximately 3,052,000 Germans emigrated to the United States¹⁷. During this period the Germans made up the largest group of immigrants entering the U.S. Initially this emigration flow went through the German ports of Bremen and Hamburg. It didn't take long before Germans of the eastern and southern parts of Germany found their way to the Belgian port of Antwerp. Not only was it a faster way, it was also a cheaper way to get to their destination. The businessmen in Antwerp were aware of the important profits that transportation of emigrants offered. Until the start of the emigration flow ships were leaving Antwerp for the U.S.A. with cheap shipments that yielded only small profits. The prospect of replacing this cargo with emigrants promised to enlarge the profit margins significantly.

The governor of Antwerp, pointed out to the Belgian government that this commerce could produce a lot of advantages for the Belgian economy¹⁸. The port of Antwerp reopened in 1838. When Belgium gained its independency in 1831 the Netherlands refused to recognize it and blocked the access of the port to the North Sea. In 1838 William of Orange was forced to accept the treat of 'Twenty-four Articles' and finally signed it in 1839. The treaty implied the Dutch recognition of Belgium as a nation and allowed the Belgian authorities to free up the access from Antwerp, through the Westerschelde to the North Sea. This put an end to 250

¹⁷ M. BENNET, American immigration policies: A history, Public Affairs Press, Washington, 1963, p. 14.

¹⁸ E. SPELKENS, "Belgian migration to the United States and other overseas countries at the beginning of the 20th century" in: Emigration through Antwerp into the new world, Centre for American studies, 1976, p. 57-58.

years of constant barriers against the port¹⁹. Immediate actions were taken by the local and national authorities to revive the commerce through Antwerp. The Belgian government picked up on the advice of the governor about the prospect of profits resulting from the transport of emigrants. The minister of the Interior, Bartholomeus de Theux, realized that new laws should be put in place to regulate this traffic. He ordered Désiré Behr to travel to Bremen, one of the biggest emigration ports of the time, to investigate what measures were taken there²⁰. Behr reported about the way emigrant transport was organized in Bremen and confirmed that high profits were made with this traffic²¹.

Based on this report the governor of Antwerp together with the Chamber of Commerce of Antwerp drafted a proposal for a bill. It included the matters that urgently needed to be regulated: the food supply for the trip, the inspection of the ships and health standards. The government however never passed the bill²².

In the meantime the German emigration flow through Antwerp increased. Part of the reason for this was the establishment of a regular shipping line between Antwerp and New York in 1840 financed with grants from the Belgian parliament²³. In 1841 a total of 3792 emigrants travelled from Antwerp to the “New World”. The following year the number of emigrants rose to 4240²⁴. The same year the governor of Antwerp urged J.B. Nothomb, the minister of Foreign Affairs to pass the bill. On March 14th the bill got passed and signed by the King. This set the base for the regulation of emigration through Antwerp²⁵.

From this moment on the government, in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce of Antwerp worked hard, to lure mainly German emigrants to Antwerp. In 1842 the navigation board of the port urged the completion of the railroad that connected Antwerp with

¹⁹ From 1400-1550 the port of Antwerp flourished and became one of the most important European ports. From 1550 onwards the port underwent a decline because of the unrest in the region due to the Reformation and Contra reformation. This led to an uprising, violently put down by Philips II. It led to a break up of the United Provinces in an independent northern part and a southern part under Spanish rule. As a result of this the port of Antwerp saw its access to the North Sea blocked from 1585 till 1815. Under Dutch rule the blockade weakened but got implemented again from 1830 till 1839 because of the refusal of the Dutch king to recognize Belgium's independency. With the signing of the ‘Twenty-four Articles’ all restrictions on the port of Antwerp were lifted.

²⁰ E. SPELKENS, *op cit.*, p. 57-58.

²¹ Note from Behr to the Department of Foreign Affairs, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

²² E. SPELKENS, *op cit.*, p. 58.

²³ A. VERTHE, 150 jaar Vlamingen in Detroit, Tielt, Lannoo en Vlamingen in de wereld, 1983, p.26

²⁴ Tables concerning the immigration movement to Belgium and emigration flow from Belgium 1841-1884, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commision du travail 1886.

²⁵ E. SPELKENS, *op cit.*, p. 62.

Cologne²⁶. The Department of Foreign Affairs ordered the Belgian consuls in Germany to bring the bill to the knowledge of the German population. This was done to promote Antwerp as an emigration port. The Belgian Consul in Frankfurt, J. Mulhens was ordered to set up a huge promotion campaign²⁷. In May and June 1844 he published big pamphlets in local newspapers several times. These pamphlets advertised the advantages the port of Antwerp offered. Similar campaigns were also set up by the consuls of Cologne, Nuremberg, Kassel and Leipzig. The government also negotiated with the railroad companies to obtain discounts for emigrants. In 1843 the director of the railroad company conceded the free transport of the entire luggage carried by Germans who crossed Belgium on their way to America²⁸. In 1846 a discount of 30% on train ticket was given²⁹.

The keen competition with the other emigration ports Bremen, Hamburg, Le Havre and Rotterdam made this necessary. Often the German press published articles about abuse occurring in the Belgian port. Some accusations were based on truth while others were totally fabricated. The articles were designed to discredit Antwerp. The German authorities and businessmen hoped to convince Germans to use their own national ports Bremen and Hamburg. Belgian consuls in Germany were ordered to combat these allegations in the press when such smear campaigns arose.

To prevent abuse that might harm the reputation of the port the government named Thielens in 1846 as emigration inspector. Thielens gave up his position as secretary of the cabinet of the governor in Antwerp to be able to fulfil his new assignment³⁰. He served thirty years as emigration inspector. His task consisted of protecting the emigrants and handling their complaints. His office in Antwerp served also as an information centre. Antwerp was the first emigration port to have someone appointed by the government to protect emigrants³¹. The German emigration flow, the so called “*Auswanderung*”, through Antwerp made the Belgian government aware of emigration. The commercial advantages attached to it were of a great importance. This explains why the government would use all its means to protect this

²⁶ Letter from the governor of Antwerp to the MFA. 22/6/1842, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 273, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1817-1850.

²⁷ Letter from the DFA to Mulhens 18/4/1844, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

²⁸ Letter from the director of the railroad company to DFA 9/12/1843, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

²⁹ Letter from the DFA to the governor of Antwerp 25/6/1846, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

³⁰ J. EVERAERT, "Landverhuizers op doortocht: Antwerpen en de transatlantische emigratie" in: JALON Rita (red.), *Landverhuizers: Antwerpen als centrum van komen en gaan*, Antwerpen, Uitgeverij Pandora, 2002, p.10.

³¹ L. MAESENS, Regeringsbemoeing in de organisatie van de emigratie via Antwerpen naar Latijns-Amerika 1843-1913, RUG, Gent, 1978, p. 64.

trade. The *Auswanderung* would also serve as an example, to encouraging Belgians to emigrate and form colonies during the big economic crisis midway through the 19th century. The assignment given to baron Auguste Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz to explore the possibilities that the U.S.A. offered proves this. The crisis would cause the Belgian government to use a pro-active emigration policy.

1.2) The big rural crisis 1845-1855

The crisis broke out in different sectors and took different shapes. It affected the Flemish rural area particularly strongly. The crisis started in the flax industry and spread out to different sectors. The main causes for the crisis were the spread of the mechanical cotton industry and the lowering of French customs duties on flax products in 1836. Because of this Belgium lost the French market to England where cheaper linen was produced due to the mechanization³². The Belgian flax industry collapsed at the beginning of the 1840s. Many hundreds of thousands of the rural population, mainly from East- and West Flanders lost an important part of their income. Many families didn't earn enough to survive which caused a significant increase in the number of inhabitants that required support from the local authorities.

The crisis was not limited to the flax industry. In 1844 the agricultural sector was struck. The harsh winter of 1844-1845 ruined most of the wheat and rape crops. A lot of farmers decided to switch over to the cultivation of potatoes. The same year the potato crop was hit by a mold, *phytophthora infestans*, that affected the potato plant. Almost the entire harvest was destroyed. The potato plague continued till 1850. In 1846 the rye crop was also struck with a disease that spread and affected other crops. This caused a food shortage³³.

It didn't take long before epidemics started spreading among the weakened population. In 1846 a typhoid epidemic broke out and dragged on for a few years. Two years later cholera broke out in Antwerp and spread to other cities. The disease struck the hardest in the provinces of East-Flanders, Liege and Hainault. It caused the death of approximately 23,000 Belgians³⁴.

Along with the increasing poverty, the crime rate rose. Many smaller crimes were committed with the intention of being incarcerated in prisons or in poorhouses. It was an act

³² L. SCHEPENS, Van vlaamsche tot Franschman: Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de West-Vlaamse plattelandsbevolking in de 19e eeuw, Brugge, West-Vlaams Studiebureau, 1973, p. 21.

³³ D. MUSSCHOOT, We gaan naar Amerika: Vlaamse landsverhuizers naar de nieuwe wereld 1850-1930, Tielt, Uitgeverij Lannoo, 2002, p. 11-14.

of desperation to get their hands on food. Others joined beggar gangs. Together they roamed the country and stole to survive.

1.3) Emigration as a solution for the crisis

1.3.1) The report of baron Auguste Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz

To investigate the commercial advantages some countries presented, the authorities financed exploration missions. In 1842 the State ordered mister Deconinck to travel to the United States to examine the possibilities the country offered for commerce. He travelled through the country for six months from April till October³⁵. Two years later a similar mission was trusted to baron Auguste Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz, secretary of missions in Washington, but now the emphasis was put on the possibilities the country offered for emigration. Goblet, Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, made this clear in a letter addressed to the baron:

“I have the honour of charging you with a journey of which the purpose is to investigate the matter of emigration to the United States, and to examine at the same time the opportunities and means the country offers for Belgian trade³⁶.”

The baron received five essential questions that needed to be answered. (1) What advantages does the American government offer to attract emigrants? (2) How are the colonists doing that settle in the country and what are their moral and material condition? (3) Where did they settle? Why? What is the influence on the trade relations between the country of emigration and immigration? Do the emigrants still have ties with their home country? What are the consequences for commerce? (4) What is the best place for Belgian emigrants to

³⁴ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 22.

³⁵ A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Missions et explorations, nr. 2013, 1838-1895.

³⁶ Letter from the M.F.A. to Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz 15/4/1844, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

settle for their own good and for the good of the trade relations between Belgium and the United States? (5) In what way does the Belgian government need to intervene in Belgium and in America? Could the government in collaboration with the American government, regulate the emigration to protect the emigrants and to make this movement as efficient as possible.

During the summer of 1845 the baron delivered a 195 page report to J.A.Goblet³⁷. His work had a big impact on people's expectations about what possibilities the U.S.A. offered to immigrants. Forty years later the baron's report would still be used as a reference for new publications. Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz concluded that emigration for the emigrant himself could be profitable, but didn't expect emigration to enhance trade between the two countries much. Big German and English populations had already settled in America. They were important enough to influence the American government that controlled the trade. Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz predicted that the Belgian population in the U.S.A. would never reach significant enough numbers to rival with the Germans and the English.

The well-being of the emigrants in the northwest area proved the potential the country held. The region prospered due to a favourable climate, a fertile soil, the existing waterways that facilitated the trade and the home-industry³⁸. The government also contributed to the prosperity. The law for naturalisation allowed immigrants to obtain American nationality after five years. Thanks to naturalization they acquired political rights which enhanced their social status. On top of that the American government put big lots of land at the disposal of its inhabitants through public sale every year. Those were sold at very low rates. Every American or immigrant could acquire a piece of land³⁹. One didn't need as much capital in the United States as in Belgium, however if you remained without capital, you would keep on living in miserable conditions according to the baron.

Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz described five different ways that immigrants used to organise their community. The first way, "*the commune*", based on the traditional European model, didn't fit in well with the American way of life according to him. A second way of organizing a community consisted of buying land from corporations of stockholders. This implied that immigrants would be exposed to the risk of becoming victims of speculation. A third possibility was to join a religious or a philanthropical association. These lured

³⁷ A.VANDERSTRAETEN-PONTHOZ , Rapport sur un voyage d'exploration dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique du Nord, 1845, 195p.

³⁸ A.VANDERSTRAETEN-PONTHOZ , op cit., pp. 9-11.

³⁹ A.VANDERSTRAETEN-PONTHOZ , op cit., pp. 24-27.

immigrants by offering benefits such as schools, churches, mills, etc. On the other hand immigrants were confronted with the disadvantage of being tied to certain rules. These were put together depending on the purposes of the association. Other immigrants opted for, or ended up in isolated territories separated from fellow compatriots. These individuals or families tried to manage on their own. Most of them tried to get a job in the bigger cities first until they saved enough money to enable them to buy land. Immigrants that belonged to this category originated mainly from, Aalst (Belgium), Luxemburg, the Lorraine region, Franche-comté, Elzas and Switzerland⁴⁰. The baron met them across the whole country. They bought farms amidst Americans who exploited them. This occurred most frequently when they first arrived when their grasp of English was still poor. They were charged more every time they bought something. Finally the baron mentioned a way of settling which was in accordance with the American social structures and way of life. He named it '*agglomeration*'. This national system grew out of the huge stream of immigrants that took things into their own hands and acted intuitively. The '*agglomeration*' ensured the immigrant freedom and opened up the best chances for succeeding in the venture.

The baron favoured this system of organizing the community. The agglomerations that only enclosed one nationality functioned better than mixed ones. If compatriots wished to emigrate, the baron estimated that their chances of succeeding were much higher when they left their home country in group. Such groups did not have to fear settling in an '*agglomeration*' far away from the Atlantic coast. On the contrary it seemed that their opportunities to form a healthy and wealthy community increased the greater the distance from the Atlantic shores. The construction of railroads favoured the cultivation of vacant land in the interior of the U.S.A. This caused an increase of the total national production and opened up new markets. The baron predicted that those new markets would arise in the new frontier cities that were booming at that time⁴¹. That is where the immigration stream directed itself.

According to the judgement of Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz, immigrants who managed to acquire a wealthy position in the United States would not have a significant influence on Belgian-American trade. Nor did he expect Belgian industry to benefit from it. Immigrants

⁴⁰ In the AMBZ. nr. 2020 I, I found some letters dating back from 1834 concerning about sixty, rather wealthy families coming from the province of Luxemburg that decided to move to the U.S.A. because of the uncertain economical and political climate.

⁴¹ Those are Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Cincinnati, Saint-Louis and Buffalo.

didn't consume much. The demand for products from their home country was negligible. Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz only saw one way for emigration to stimulate trade with the home country. If a business class developed among the Belgian group of emigrants and acquired a place in the American high society. These people would then be able to use their influence to stimulate the Belgian emigration towards the interior of the United States. The baron never expected the Belgian emigration to be significant enough for Belgians to be able to climb up to these higher positions. On top of this the American protectionist policy hampered trade relations with the home country. Therefore he concluded that trade relations would be limited to the coastal areas.

Quite a few predictions made by VanderStraeten-Ponthoz, came true. This proves that he had a very clear point of view on the whole situation. He insinuated that since America tried to close its markets to European products, emigrants constituted the ideal and most profitable cargo for shipping companies. They became and were seen as pure merchandise. He predicted that the growing competition between shipping companies to lure emigrants, would make the fare for crossing the Atlantic drop significantly. He pointed out that agents who worked for shipping companies used all means to palm off tickets on anyone who could afford it without taking into consideration the fate of the buyers. They received a commission on every ticket they sold. To sell as many tickets possible was their only motive. The baron urged the government to establish or support societies that would protect the emigrants from such agents in Belgium. On the other hand he predicted that the immigration stream into the U.S.A. would soon increase to enormous proportions if the American government did not take measures to limit it.

History proved the baron right on most of his predictions. The prices for the trip to the New World dropped considerably. His advice regarding the establishment of associations protecting the emigrants at the port of departure was followed by the government in 1846 when Thielens, former assistant of the governor of Antwerp was assigned as inspector of the emigration board. The immigration stream into the U.S.A. increased as the baron predicted but measures to limit it were only taken forty years later.

Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz did not indicate about how the government should intervene. He concluded that the United States offered better opportunities for the poor than Belgium. Only hard working men could cherish the hope that their children might be spared from the miserable life that they had known. Europe on the contrary offered only the prospects of falling even lower. He warned that Belgium needed to take into account that a time would

come when a part of its population would want to move. Therefore the country needed to find means to take advantage of this emigration stream which it wouldn't be able to prevent. As stated before the baron was very sceptical about the advantages for industry that emigration to U.S.A. offered. He believed that Brazil held better opportunities. The emigration movement would follow the main trade routes. Vanderstaeten-Ponthoz predicted that soon Brazil would replace the northwest of the United States as major attraction pole for the emigration flow from Europe to the America's.

This report is a very accurate reflection of the situation as it presented itself at that time. His judgement on the events and his views on what would come to pass were extremely precise. He only misjudged the shift of the emigration stream from the U.S.A. to Brazil. The emigration movement would take on such proportions that indeed a part of it did chose South-America to build new lives, but the majority still decided to try their luck in the United States.

1.3.2) The fight against the crisis

The measures taken to push back the crisis were not very successful. During the joint catholic-liberal government led by Van de Weyer (July 1845- March 1846) and the first homogeneous catholic government presided by de Theux (March 1846 – August 1847) the aid was focused on employment and help in goods. In August 1847 the liberal wing led by prime minister Charles Rogier took power and formed a homogeneous liberal government⁴². The quick fall of the previous governments and the different ideologies represented by them illustrates the insecurity and instability that reigned throughout the crisis. The liberal rule would last till 1852. During this period the government worked on long term solutions. This brought back some of the much needed stability.

In December 1847 a special credit of 500.000fr. was voted to drive back the crisis⁴³. The money was predominantly spent on traditional aid such as road and waterway construction, workshops, the stimulation of new industries and the use of new tools and techniques, assistance for the needy, and measures to fight epidemics. In addition that Rogier tried to stimulate export⁴⁴. He lowered the toll on coal, but this only opened up only limited opportunities. The prime minister entered into many pacts of friendship and trade to promote the export. He also encouraged the foundation of “houses of commerce” abroad. During his

⁴² L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p 61.

⁴³ At that time 5 francs was the equivalent of 1 dollar.

⁴⁴ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 73.

term of office Rogier enlarged the budget for scholarships for study abroad. All this fitted in his policy of enhancing trade relations with foreign countries.

Within the contemporary liberal ideologies the foundation of colonies was viewed as an important way of stimulating the economy. At first colonies were seen as an economic necessity, opening up new markets for the Belgian industry on one hand and as a political necessity enabling the country to strengthen its position as a new nation on the other hand. The king, seeking to increase his power, advocated the idea of establishing colonies. From the late thirties onwards, many propositions for erecting colonies in the most diverse regions of the planet reached the king and the government. As the crisis lingered during the 1840's founding colonies also became a demographical necessity. Everyone realised that the collapse of the textile industry was not the only reason for the critical situation in Flanders. Among intellectuals and politicians the conviction grew that Belgium's high population density had caused the crisis. In that realm of thought colonies presented a credible solution to the overpopulation and the poverty that had struck Flanders.

According to Rogier's opening speech of 1847 the Minister preferred internal migration. He warned that every attempt at external emigration should be taken with the greatest care. At that time the government was involved in an important colonization attempt in Santo Thomas de Guatemala. By the end of 1847 after big financial and human losses the government decided to withdraw its support from this project⁴⁵. Soon after his opening speech, Rogier became aware of the necessity of external emigration. The following letter of 1848 to the governors of the different provinces in Belgium proves this. In this letter he points out the direct link between the high population density and the number of needy per province. In the provinces with the highest population density, Brabant and West-Flanders, there was a ratio of 1 : 4.86 and 1 : 3.87 who depended on charity support. The province of Luxemburg which had the lowest population density had a ratio of 1 : 70. Rogier concluded the following:

"The figures point out in a astonishing way the need to move a part of the abundant population of Flanders. This movement can take place through internal as external colonisation.

The government believes that external emigration can be attempted as a tryout under the direction and the guarantee of the public authorities. Where this external colonisation needs to be directed? There where we found the most similarities to the Belgian climate⁴⁶."

⁴⁵ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ Letter from Rogier to the provincial governors , A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

The pressure on the government to undertake something against the growing poverty increased while the crisis continued. The size of the colony was estimated at 500 families. The installation costs, the costs for the transport and the land would be claimed back from the emigrants later on. The eventual colony should be accompanied by a couple of priests and a Belgian state agent. The local councils and charity institutions should provide the money to support the colony. The national authorities planned to pitch in but considered their role to be more as a coordinative and logistic one. This plan had a lot of similarities with the one set up by de Theux.

On the 17th of August the provincial council of West-Flanders gathered to discuss the crisis. The topic of emigration, brought to their attention by Rogier was discussed:

“The emigration to foreign countries has become a necessity considering recent measures related to trade traffic failed to materialize. This emigration needs to happen in form of a colony depending on the home country. In this case the State should consider putting a considerable amount of money at the disposal of the colony or at least give moral support to any private initiative. Before the State makes any decision on the matter a thorough exploration of the possible destinations should be carried out⁴⁷. ”

On the 23rd of March 1849 Rogier presented a new bill. As in December 1847 he tried to obtain a special credit to fight the crisis. This time he hoped to receive 1,000,000fr. Part of it would be used to help labourers and create new employment. Another part would be spent on initiatives to stimulate the national industry. Some money would go to agriculture, while yet another part would be used to better the hygiene conditions and for the construction of rural roads. With this money he hoped to fund measures against cholera. Furthermore some money would go to the encouragement of artistic and literary productions. Finally some money from that budget would go to stimulating emigration to foreign countries⁴⁸.

The bill received fierce opposition from some members of parliament. The book of the clergyman Hansen “*Des questions relatives à l'émigration aux Etats-unis d'Amerique du Nord: situation de Belgique en 1849 et moyens d'améliorer*” illustrates what the points of discussion were⁴⁹. The main theme of the book consists of the problem of the high population density. Most people considered the population density to be a cause for the crisis. The author

⁴⁷ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 72.

⁴⁸ CHAMBRE DE REPRÉSENTANT, Compte rendu de l'emploi du crédit extraordinaire de 1.000 000 ouvert au département de l'intérieur par la loi du 21/6/1849 séance du 5/2/1852, Buxelles, Imprimerie Deltombe, 1852, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁹ P. HANSEN, *Des questions relatives à l'émigration aux Etats-unis d'Amerique du Nord: situation de Belgique en 1849 et moyens d'améliorer*, Mons, Imprimerie de Piéront, 1849, 167p.

also pointed out to the weak trade position of Belgium. Between 1832 and 1847 imports exceeded export. According to Hansen the country was too populated, didn't have enough raw materials, didn't produce large amounts of products destined for export and had to deal with a huge food supply shortage. This situation needed to be changed urgently. Either the trade would need a major boast or part of the population would need to emigrate.

Opinions were divided as to what was the appropriate solution for the problem. One group believed that if the farmers improved the cultivation of their land, not only would the food shortage disappear but a surplus of production could even be produced. Two interventions would be sufficient to obtain this higher productivity. First new techniques to improve cultivation needed to be applied everywhere. Secondly all the heath lands needed to be cultivated. The second group doubted that these measures would be sufficient to provide the whole population with food. Unless, as Hansen stated cynically, a fierce epidemic broke out and killed one third of the population. This group of people thought that the population increased faster than production. They predicted that the food shortage would increase. They considered the emigration of a big part of the population to be an absolute necessity⁵⁰.

The Belgian priest summed up 31 ways to increase productivity and fight poverty⁵¹. He believed that these efforts would improve the situation, but doubted that they could be realized within ten years. He gave five reasons for this. First he pointed out that it was always easier to do evil than to do good. Secondly some measures required the cooperation of different social classes which Hansen deemed impossible. The third obstacle was the need to replace long term projects with short term projects. Besides Hansen stated that among a large part of the population an aversion existed towards any innovation. Finally he blamed the translation of the book '*Adventures of Eulenspiegel*' for having spread immoral values. Because of all those reasons Hansen considered the emigration of part of the population to be the only solution. His preference for the final destination went to the United States, mainly because of the resemblance large parts of the country had with Belgium climate wise. Was the U.S.A. Belgium's only hope then?

France offered few promising opportunities as an outlet for the Belgian commerce. It didn't look like the customs levy on foreign imports was going to be lifted in France. This limited the possibilities for establishing strong trade relations between the emigrants and their

⁵⁰ P. HANSEN, op cit., pp. 4-32.

⁵¹ P. HANSEN, op cit., pp. 33-67.

home country⁵². The biggest problem Belgium had to deal with remained the shortage of land. In the United States billions of hectares of land were awaiting to be cultivated. The opponents of taking advantage of this opportunity based their arguments mainly on the failure of the colony in Santo Thomas de Guatemala. This failure was mainly caused by: the hesitation of the administration of the colony whether to organise the settlement as an agricultural colony or as a trading company; the poor choice of the colonists; the many colonists who committed a breach of contract; the interference of king Leopold I in the appointment of the administration; the presence of Belgian militaries and the mutual distrust with the Guatemalan authorities. In 1845 and 1846 the death 211 out of 871 colonists in eighteen months scared off many Belgians for emigration⁵³. This event had a huge impact on public opinion towards emigration. Hansen deplored the fact that this unfortunate incident undeservedly put many Belgians off emigration. Hansen stated that the attempt was doomed to fail. He deplored the unfortunate choice of site for the colony. The climate too different from the Belgian climate. Besides he blamed the government for having taken a too hesitant position towards the colony.

The opponents of emigration feared that it would export capital and therefore weaken the economy. Hansen pointed out that the German emigration proved the contrary. The emigrants send more money to the home country than they exported when leaving Germany. The capital import proved to have a positive influence on the German economy. Once the emigrants owned land, they immediately attracted fellow countrymen. This emigration movement enhanced the trade relations between both countries, according to Hansen. Sceptics of emigration also claimed that it didn't offer a solution to the overpopulation. Hansen refuted this argument by quoting the figures of the German and Irish emigration. These undisputedly showed that thanks to the migration movements the population decreased considerably, in spite of different attempts by the German authorities to slow it down. If the Belgian government could control this movement, the success of it would be guaranteed, according to Hansen.

The last chapter of his book contains a summary of the correspondence he maintained with count Bocarmé. The count had lived in the United States since 1835. All sorts of practical questions were discussed in this part. In particular it explained how the emigration

⁵² The French revolution en 1848 created a period of political instability in Europe. Many feared the revolution might spread.

⁵³ E. STOLS, “Latijns-Amerika, vurigheid, utopieën en luchtspiegelingen”, in: MORELLI Anne (red.), *Belgische emigranten*, Berchem, 1999, p. 234.

could unfold and where it needed to be directed to⁵⁴. The government could drastically limit the costs of this movement. It could put its boats at the disposal of the emigrants. The government also needed to abolish all the costs it imposed on people who sold all their belongings such as register-, mortgage- and stamp costs. The authorities needed to take the position of a private enterprise. Furthermore, the government had to raise funds for emigration and administer them. An official agent should be appointed to inspect, buy and divide the lands. This task could be attributed to a priest. Each group of one hundred families needed the company and direction of a priest. His presence would have an important positive influence on the successful outcome of the colony, according to Hansen.

The Belgian priest seemed convinced that an emigration flow similar to that in Ireland and Germany was about to start in Belgium. He estimated that in the near future a million Belgians would pursue a better future in the United States of America. Therefore he proposed the teaching of English in schools. Knowledge of the language was imperative in the U.S. and had proved to be an important language for commerce over all. Once the colony reached a certain size, it would form an ideal outlet for Belgian products.

Hansen pointed out that Belgium numbered many public and private charity institutions. He stated that the money they spent on valid people would produce better results when used to pay for their transport to the U.S. Furthermore many people locked up in prisons ended up there after committing small crimes to get their hands on food. Some did so deliberately to be incarcerated. The cost of their maintenance added up. Hansen stated that by letting them emigrate of their own free will or even forcing them to do so, the government would save a lot of money. He concluded that in order to save Belgium both efforts to raise the total national production and to encourage emigration had to be made.

Hansen's book shows that the topic of emigration provoked many controversies. Not all supporters of emigration held such strong convictions as the clergyman. Some of his peculiar statements can be attributed to his religiousness like his swipe at Tijl Uilenspiegel⁵⁵. In spite of this his work remains representative for the arguments both supporters and opponents used to defend their point of view on emigration. He discussed all aspects and debatable subjects on the matter. All these discussion concerning the matter delayed the approval of the special credit of 1,000,000fr. Rogier had applied for. Finally on the 21st of

⁵⁴ P. HANSEN, *op cit.*, pp. 97-135.

⁵⁵ Tijl Uilenspiegel is one of the most famous characters in Belgian folkloric literature.

July the bill passed. In the end 90,157fr. would be spent on the encouragement of emigration⁵⁶.

1.4) Conclusion

The German emigration flow through Antwerp contributed to arousing the interest of the Belgian government in emigration. The German movement would always be used as a point of reference. The success of German colonies in the United States convinced many people in Belgium to follow in their footsteps.

The failure to found a successful colony in Santo Thomas de Guatemala, put many Belgians off getting involved with emigration. It didn't mean however, as insinuated in many books, that the government gave up on the idea of erecting other colonies elsewhere. The biggest lesson they learned from the failure, was that the next attempt should be undertaken in a region that presented more similarities with the Belgian climate. The report baron Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz set up indicated that the climate in the U.S. proved to be more appropriate. The choice of the government in picking the U.S. as location for the founding of new colonies was no coincidence.

In the end the persistent crisis triggered the policy of active emigration to the U.S. held by the Belgian government. The duration of the crisis made it clear that the problem could not only be attributed to the collapse of the flax industry. The conviction grew among politicians and intellectuals that overpopulation predominantly caused this crisis. Everyone was aware of the need for an urgent solution to the growing poverty that had struck the Flemish rural area. Encouraging part of the population to emigrate should alleviate the misery people lived in at that time. This conviction would lead to the foundation of two colonies funded by the government and the subsidized emigration of beggars, convicts and ex-convicts to the United States. Charles Rogier (1800-1885) undoubtedly played an important role. This liberal politician possessed an enormous interest in all that took place abroad⁵⁷. His appointment in August 1847 as leader of the government contributed to the Belgian active emigration policy. This will be made clear in the following chapters.

⁵⁶ CHAMBRE DE REPRÉSENTANTS, Compte rendu de l'emploi du crédit extraordinaire de 1.000 000 ouvert au département de l'intérieur par la loi du 21/6/1849 séance du 5/2/1852, Buxelles, Imprimerie Deltombe, 1852, pp. 2-4.

⁵⁷ HOUTHAEVE Robert, P.J. De Smet de grote zwartrok: missionaris en vredesstichter, Moorslede, Houthaeve, 2001, p. 359.

Chapter II: The agricultural colonies Sainte-Marie and Kansas

2.1) The initiative taken by the government de Theux-Malou

2.1.1) The content of the project

In 1844 the interest in establishing a colony in the United States increased. During the Nothomb government, baron Vanderstraten-Ponthoz was given the mission to explore the possibilities the U.S. offered for fellow countrymen. During the summer of 1847 plans started to become concrete. Through this project the government wanted to relieve a proportion of its poor inhabitants. De Theux, the minister of the Interior estimated the number of families needed for projects at 500 to 1,000. In the long term 3,500 to 4,000 families could possibly join the colony. The cost to sending 1,000 families was estimated at 500,000fr. which brought the total cost to 2,000,000fr. De Theux hoped that the success of the colony would encourage local councils, charity institutions and private initiatives to follow its example and undertake similar initiatives. A project involving one hundred families should be undertaken first⁵⁸.

2.1.2) The search for the appropriate location

The most important discussion point concerned the choice of site. In April 1847 Dirckx left his town Eeklo along with some other families of that region to found an agricultural colony in the United States. He had lost his job and hoped to build a new, better life overseas. He wrote the government to receive some information on the different regions in the U.S.A. before leaving. Based on the report of Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz he decided to head to Wisconsin. The minister of Foreign Affairs, Deschamps, gave the colonists a letter of recommendation. Deschamps wrote to Napoléon Beaulieu, the agent in Washington, to welcome Dirckx' followers upon their arrival. In exchange Dirckx promised to write a yearly report on his experiences⁵⁹. In the end Dirckx settled in the state of Missouri near where the Missouri flows into the Mississippi, seven kilometres from Jefferson City.

⁵⁸ Letter from Rogier to D'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 18/9/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁵⁹ Letter from Deschamps to Beaulieu 16/4/1847, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

Minister Bartholomeus de Theux de Meylandt had an outspoken preference for trying an attempt in that region. His older brother, Theodore, worked as a missionary in the area. As oldest son, Theodore would have inherited the title of count from his father. However he chose to be a missionary and passed the title on to his brother Bartholomeus⁶⁰. Theodore de Theux de Meylandt arrived in 1816 in the United States. He studied for eight years at the university of Maryland, before moving to Florissant near Saint-Louis in 1825⁶¹. The letters he wrote home must have had an influence on Bartholomeus preference to set up a colony in that region. His brother passed away on the 28th of February 1846. It is plausible to think that the minister wanted to found a colony in that region to honour his brother.

De Theux asked the opinion of the emigration-inspector Thielens on the best location for setting up a colony. Thielens had a preference for an independent region. He pointed out that the decision on the matter was not his responsibility but the responsibility of the Belgian legation in Washington⁶². Napoléon Beaulieu head of that legation supported the idea of expatriating a part of the excess population which created the imbalance between population and food supply. The choice of site was of the utmost importance. According to his vision, the chosen country needed to offer possibilities which Belgium did not possess. Moreover the country had to produce advantages for Belgian commerce and industry. The United States welcomed immigrants but did not promote immigration, said Beaulieu. The American authorities left the immigrants to fend for themselves. The emigration needed to take place in big groups if it was to produce profit for Belgian commerce and industry. Only big emigration groups like the German and English groups could gain enough power to influence national politics. The Belgian immigrant population in the United States would never reach sufficient proportions to allow it to rival those two groups. According to Beaulieu, only South-American States, like Peru offered the opportunity of building profitable trade relations⁶³.

De Theux realized that the Belgian emigrants would never be able to influence the national politics of the U.S.A. His project however did not aim at achieving this. He just wanted to lower the population figures in Belgium by directing the emigration to regions where food supplies were abundant. It was a once off project with the hope that success would inspire local authorities, charity institutions and private initiatives to follow its example. De Theux did not predict that the emigration would be significant enough to

⁶⁰ <http://users.skynet.be/pater.de.smet/index.htmlpj-3/pagina130.htm>

⁶¹ [www.usersskynet.be/pater.de.smet/pagina 11.](http://users.skynet.be/pater.de.smet/pagina11.htm)

⁶² L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 100.

⁶³ Letter from Beaulieu to de Theux 22/6/1847, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

influence, in whatever country it may be, the national politics or to obtain advantages for Belgian commerce. Stimulating commerce and industry did not form part of the responsibilities of the ministry of the Interior. He doubted the belief that Peru would offer more advantages than the U.S.A. Previous attempts in the neighbouring country Brazil proved that the climate was not suitable⁶⁴. De Theux brought his project for a site in Missouri to the attention of Beaulieu. He based it on the Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz's report. The minister asked Beaulieu to verify the correctness of the information. He also had to see if he could get any support for the project from the American government⁶⁵. A week later the minister of Foreign Affairs, let de Theux know that the project got postponed. At that time the authorities could not take the responsibility nor finance a project of that size. De Theux understood Deschamps' decision. Nevertheless he ordered Beaulieu to carry on with his mission. On the 12th of August Deschamps sent this request to Beaulieu. That same day the government fell. Under the government Rogier government these plans would take a different shape. They would however result in the foundation of two colonies supported by the State: Sainte-Marie and Kansas.

2.2) Sainte-Marie

2.2.1) The realization of the project under Rogier

In June 1848 Rogier started to develop the project. He urged Beaulieu to send the information on which they had been waiting for nearly a year. The next month Beulieu sent his report. It was based on testimonies of other people. The agent in Washington did not receive permission to go on site to investigate. He gave three possibilities⁶⁶.

The first option consisted of founding a new colony in Missouri. He considered it essential that for a project of that size some competent people would go to Missouri to chose a good site. The choice had to be made before winter. That gave the colonists time to build houses. It was preferable to initially send a small batch of colonists beforehand to prepare the land. Upon their arrival colonists should be provided with chicken, cattle and food supply.

⁶⁴ This is a reference to an attempt made by Charles Van Lede to found a settlement there. The colony of Itajahy wasn't very successful.

⁶⁵ Letter from de Theux to Beaulieu 2/8/1847, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

⁶⁶ Letter from Beaulieu to D'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 15/7/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

This had to allow them to get through the first year. He estimated the installation cost per family to be around 2,000fr. The colony should be composed by hardworking young men. These adapted quickly to the new environment. With good guidance these emigrants could hope to live a decent life. Only after a few years would the colony start to produce profits. According to Beaulieu these profits would only be considerable if they used modern mechanised agricultural tools and techniques.

The second possibility Beaulieu gave, was in West-Virginia. This state proved that not only in the ‘west’ cheap land could be found. The land appeared to be ideal for cattle breeding. The region was the biggest meat supplier of the country. It offered better opportunities than the isolated parcels available in the ‘Far West’. The opportunities in the Far West were limited to economic self sufficiency. In West Virginia on the other hand, an export economy could be established.

Finally the third possibility, which Beaulieu preferred, consisted of negotiating with the ‘American Association for the Colonisation of Sainte-Marie’. A month earlier he had introduced a representative of the association, mister Belcke, to Rogier.

Indeed a month earlier mister Belcke, professor of the University of Maryland had visited Rogier in Belgium. He came to Belgium in the name of the association to convince the government to send its emigrants to Sainte-Marie. The association had started a flourishing colony in Elk County, Pennsylvania. In only a couple of years the settlement had grown 2600 inhabitants. The colony had two churches, three schools, mills and iron mines nearby. The price of an acre of land varied from 4 to 20 dollars depending on the distance from the city. Belcke offered 10,000 to 50,000 acres of their best land at the very low price of 2 dollars an acre. The association committed itself to providing the colony with churches, schools, and priests. If the government bought at least 10,000 acres and paid 4 dollars per unit, Belcke would take care of the transportation of the colonists from New York to Sainte-Marie. Belcke proposed undertaking a test first. As such the construction of hundred log cabins, a church and a school would be necessary. He advised letting the colonists arrive in small groups. The new ones could then be put to work upon their arrival by the early settlers⁶⁷.

The pressure to accept this proposal increased. King Leopold I wrote to Constant d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne, minister of Foreign affairs about it. He proposed that the ‘Association for exportation and colonisation’ which was being formed, would handle the

⁶⁷ Letter from Rogier to D’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 19/7/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

issue. In cooperation with charity institutions the association could transport poor families to Pennsylvania. First the minister wanted an attempt on a small scale⁶⁸. About the same period a lot of requests from Belgians reached the ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs asking for their transport to the U.S.A to be paid.

Rogier asked Beaulieu to write a report on the chances of success. The minister of the Interior asked his colleague in Foreign Affairs to investigate the possibility of using the boats of the State for the transportation. In this way costs could be limited to food supply. To d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne's dismay the boats could not be used. His point of view towards the initiative becomes clear through the following letter to Rogier:

"Those who consider emigration as an efficient means of bringing an end to the fight against pauperism are wrong. I do not argue the fact that emigration could produce some good results, but emigration under the auspices of the government implies very high spending. The cost of only sending a couple of hundred families is already so considerable that if the government decides to walk that path, it could better do it on a large scale.

The colony has to be able to receive an unlimited number of emigrants and could at the same time serve as a place for deportation. By implementing this system we could turn around the general, current crisis which would be very desirable considering the moral and economical situation and it would offer some compensations for the sacrifices made by the State. Public opinion shares the point of view about emigration and it would be very difficult for the government not to try anything"⁶⁹."

This letter also shows that the pressure to do something about the overpopulation problem was increasing. Public opinion also seemed to be in favour of action. D'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne wanted a project on a much bigger scale. The colony should be able to receive an unlimited amount of the poor population. He attached some conditions to the project of Belcke. An official should be sent to Sainte-Marie check on the fertility of the lands. The colonists should possess a lot of courage and zest for work. For the minister it was more important to send out as many poor families as possible rather than to focus on possible profits the colony could produce.

2.2.2) The provisional agreement and the expeditions from Victor De Ham and Auguste Moxhet

⁶⁸ Letter from Leopold I to D'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 24/7/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁶⁹ Letter from d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Rogier 2/8/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

In deliberation with d'Hoffschildt de Resteigne, Rogier decided to send an 'investigation commission' led by Auguste Moxhet, consul-general in New York. Victor De Ham made the trip across the Atlantic to accompany him⁷⁰. Victor De Ham was head of office for Flanders at the ministry of the Interior. Already under the de Theux government he had taken charge of all matters concerning emigration. For example in May 1847 he received the mission to investigate all the things that went wrong at the port of Antwerp. At that time a smear company against the port raged in Germany. The reason for the smear campaign consisted of the selling of false tickets for the inland transportation in the United States⁷¹.

In the meantime Rogier already signed a provisional contract with Belcke. By doing so the Belgian government became the owner of 10,000 acres of land in Pennsylvania. The contract included a clause stipulating that the sale only went through if the fertility of the lands and the good health conditions of the colony were confirmed by the official state agents⁷². The budget estimate for the tryout amounted to 40,000 dollars or 213,230fr. One fifth would be spent on preparation, the exploration of the territory, and the transport of the first group of emigrants. At the arrival of the colonists another 8,000 dollars would be put at their disposal. This money covered the food supply and the installation cost. The rest would be used in 1851 for the sending of a new batch of emigrants.

The reports of Moxhet and De Ham reached the ministry of Interior in November. The reports did not correspond. Moxhet gave a negative opinion. He doubted the fertility of the lands and estimated the chances of success to be low. He proposed that attention be focused on Santo Thomas de Guatemala. Moxhet joined Beaulieu in the conviction that emigration attempts should be directed to Central and South-America. As stated above, this opinion was supported by political and commercial interests.

A number of people shared this opinion in Belgium. Some responses to the letter from Rogier to the provincial governors about the possibility of emigration to foreign countries as a solution for the growing poverty and overpopulation in Flanders, illustrate this. In West-Flanders the provincial council assigned a special commission to investigate the proposal. Charles van Lede was the spokesman of the commission. In 1841 the 'Bruges Commerce Society' charged Van Lede with the task of establishing a branch in Rio de Janeiro. On his

⁷⁰ Letter from Rogier to d'Hoffschildt de Resteigne 14/8/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁷¹ Letter from de Theux to the governor of Antwerp, 27/5/47, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 273, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1817-1850.

⁷² A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2030, Notes du Baron Lambermont sur les tentatives belges d'émigration et de colonisation p. 32.

initiative the project developed into the establishment of a colony. A hundred Belgian emigrants populated the colony of Itajahy. His attempt failed⁷³. However this didn't seem to discourage him. As spokesman of the special commission, he pronounced the commission to be in favour of emigration abroad. However they advised against the proposition of Rogier directing emigration to the U.S.A. The commission considered the United States to be a big competitor of Europe. They manufactured similar industrial products as in Europe and stood on the verge of passing European trade and navigation. According to the commission the emigration would never produce any advantages for the national industry and commerce. In the end the provincial council did not follow their advice. The majority voted in favour of erecting a colony in the U.S.A. of which the State carried the full costs⁷⁴.

In contrast, Victor De Ham on the contrary reacted enthusiastically to his trip overseas. He even wrote a book about it: "*Recommendations to the Belgian emigrant*". The book is a true plea to emigrate to the U.S.A. He gave three reasons why North-America offered better opportunities than South-America. On top of the list stood the climate which showed many similarities to the Belgian climate. Second came the low price of fertile land. Third, the American government guaranteed freedom of religion.

He gave an overview of all the possibilities each state offered. His preference went to the area between the 37th and 45th degree of latitude. He considered it more appropriate to settle in the older states closer to the Atlantic. In the west you took the risk of getting isolated. Of course a lot of attention also went to Sainte-Marie. He used it as typical example of the advantages a catholic colony offered. The states with the best opportunities were Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana.

De Ham also made a profile of which people could expect a better future there and how to go about things. The farmers who possessed 2,000fr. to 3,000fr., had a good chance of establishing a prosperous farm. He advised them to leave with the whole family to enable them work the land together. Every diligent worker could build some wealth if he possessed of the money to pay for his crossing and the transport to the interior. De Ham alluded to the many requests of people to the ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs to pay for their transport:

“The labourers and craftsman without means, that persistently apply to the parliament and the government for the money to pay for the transport to the United States, ignore the inevitable disappointments that await them. People without the means to pay for

⁷³ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 85.

⁷⁴ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 99.

the ticket to travel to the interior end up right away in misery if it is in New Orleans or New York, because of the overpopulation of those cities⁷⁵. ”

De Ham however did not want to put off anyone from crossing the Atlantic. Later he incited people to emigrate:

“So all of you, dedicated workers, that the nation no longer nourishes, you whose biggest wish is to own some good land with the opportunity to enlarge it bit by bit in the future of each of your children, hard working cultivators, careful and thrifty. All of you who for the happiness of owning land do not fear a few years of hard labour, COME WITHOUT FEAR. The Americans appreciate courageous people. Imitate the Germans who with their work, their thriftiness and perseverance manage to overcome all the obstacles⁷⁶. ”

De Ham also advised the emigrants how to emigrate. He advised against isolated emigration because it brought misery. It was best to look up fellow countrymen who had already lived there a couple of years. According to De Ham, the best way to emigrate was in ‘agglomerations’ of 50 to 100 people who left with a common aim. Together the obstacles were not too difficult to overcome. It also permitted to sharing of costs for the construction of a church and the maintenance of a priest and a teacher. De Ham considered early autumn to be the best period for leaving Belgium. It provided the time to build a house and cultivate a bit of land before the winter. The land should be bought from the state according to the township system. The ‘township’ represented a unit put forward by the land registry. It measured 36 square miles and was divided into 36 units. This square mile was divided once again into 640 parcels of one acre. The government sold townships in one block or per acre. The average price per acre at that time amounted to 1 dollar. The land also could be bought on credit⁷⁷.

De Ham clearly based his book on the report of Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz. The way he describes each state and the possibilities they offer coincide in the main. He emphasizes the advantages obtained by taking up American citizenship the same way that the baron had. The best period for leaving coincides as well. He uses the same arguments to defend this belief. In particular his advice to emigrate by forming ‘agglomerations’ proves the influence of baron Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz. He also seemed to be aware of the report Beaulieu handed to Rogier when he praises West-Virginia for its cattle breeding.

⁷⁵ V. DE HAM, Conseils à l'émigrant Belge, Bruxelles, Imprimerie de G. Stapelaux, 1849, p. 39.

⁷⁶ V. DE HAM, op cit., p. 41.

⁷⁷ A. DE SMET, "Agriculteurs belges aux Etats-Unis" in: Journal de la société central de l'agriculture de Belgique, Brussel, 105e jaargang, nr. 6, deel I, 1957-1958, p 7.

Because of the contradictory reports of Moxhet and De Ham Rogier decided to call upon the advice of the ‘Advisory committee for the interests of Flanders’ presided over by de Mérode. The committee turned down the project⁷⁸. It forced Rogier to dissolve the agreement he had with Belcke. This happened on the 27th of July 1849. This should have meant the end of the project but the blind confidence of De Ham in the success of the project and the determination of Rogier to try something out decided otherwise.

2.2.3) The agreement between De Ham and Rogier

The day after Rogier dissolved his contract with Belcke, he signed a new one with De Ham. This proves that the minister of the Interior absolutely wanted to undertake an attempt. Given the lack of support from different sides, Rogier and De Ham decided to take initiative on their own. They neglected all the advice against the project. The contract signed by both gentlemen clearly illustrates their intentions:

“Mister Charles Rogier, Minister of the Interior, wishes to encourage an emigration and colonisation attempt of Flemish paupers to Pennsylvania, United States of North America. And Mister Victor De Ham head of office for Flanders at the Ministry of the Interior living in Uccle, is being determined to dedicate himself to the accomplishment of an enterprise of that kind, his special knowledge, his personal services and those of his family⁷⁹.”

The contract proves De Ham’s great dedication to the project. He had the following obligations towards the government: first he committed himself to move there with his family. Secondly he promised to welcome during the following three years groups of fifty Flemish people, divided into families of four to five which contained at least one adult. The emigrants had to be healthy, possess a certificate of good morals, and couldn’t have any correctional or criminal convictions to his name. If the emigrants carried out their obligations for three years they became free. If successful the colony would receive fifty new, poor colonists sent by the State or the local councils during the next five years. De Ham took care of the transportation from New York or Philadelphia to Sainte-Marie. He had to provide each family with 25 acres of land, materials for the construction of a log cabin, furniture, farming tools, a cow, a pig, sowing seed and food till the first harvest. The emigrants had to pay back these expenses later on. De Ham needed to advise the emigrants and make the relations with the local people

⁷⁸ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 101.

⁷⁹ Contract signed by Rogier and De Ham 28/7/1849, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

easier. He had to build a church when possible. The task of looking for a priest from the order of the redemptorists who spoke Flemish was also his. He had to be able to support the clergyman. The priest in turn would take care of the moral well-being of the settlers. By signing the contract De Ham gave up his job at the Ministry of the Interior.

Rogier had a few obligations on his side as well. He had to pay for the crossing of the Atlantic and the food supply for the trip. On top of that he put a sum of 70,000fr. at the disposal of De Ham. De Ham would receive the first instalment of 15,000fr. within a fortnight of signing the contract. A second instalment for the same amount would be handed over at departure. A third instalment would be paid when the ministry of Foreign Affairs received a letter from the local authorities of Sainte-Marie, confirming their arrival. Another 10,000 would be given in January 1850. During the summer of 1850 the government would investigate the situation. If the result proved to be satisfying than another instalment of 15,000fr would be put at De Ham's disposal. The sum of 45,000fr needed to be paid back on the long term. The other 25,000fr. had to cover the transport and served as incentive premium. The 4,000 acres of land and everything upon it served as guarantee. Rogier financed this project with the extraordinary credit of 1,000,000fr. that was approved on the 21st of June 1849.

2.2.4) The founding of New Flanders by De Ham

On September 7th 1849 De Ham boarded the ship 'Lorena' in Antwerp with his family and 59 other Belgians. All the emigrants originated from the province of West-Flanders. Thirty nine came from the town Wakken (four families, two couples and six bachelors), nine from Meulebeke (one family), another five from Waregem (one family), three more from Plassendale (bachelors), and a couple from Ingelmunster. The group included twenty three kids⁸⁰.

The expedition had a difficult start. The boat was forced back to Plymouth after three weeks due to bad weather⁸¹. The crossing took 103 days. The Lorena only reached New York on the 19th of December. After the exhausting trip everyone still seemed to be in reasonably

⁸⁰ List added to: CHAMBRE DE REPRÉSENTANTS, Compte rendu de l'emploi du crédit extraordinaire de 1.000 000 ouvert au département de l'intérieur par la loi du 21/6/1849 séance du 5/2/1852, Buxelles, Imprimerie Deltombe, 1852, 41p.

⁸¹ Letter to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 1/10/1849, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

good health. This was due to doctor Reis who accompanied the group on their trip inland as well⁸².

In the meantime, Mange consul of Philadelphia mailed a new report about Pennsylvania to Rogier. It reached the Minister right before the ‘Lorena’ arrived in New York. It numbered eight pages and included a couple of maps. The consul informed Rogier of the possibility of buying two pieces of land in the north of Pennsylvania. They were the best the country had to offer, according to Mange. The lands not only appeared to be very fertile but also very rich in minerals. One territory measured 64,000 acres while the second one counted 5,300 acres. This region did not only offer agricultural opportunities, it also offered industrial ones. Mange pleased Rogier with his report. However the Minister pointed out that with their involvement in the project of Sainte-Marie and the contract he was about to sign for a similar project in Missouri he preferred to wait upon the results.

De Ham promised to send a report every three months⁸³. In his report of July 1850 he wrote that they had settled eight kilometres from the village Sainte-Marie⁸⁴. His area was called New Flanders. De Ham named his settlement Leopoldsburg. His report makes it clear that he encountered difficulties. Preparing the woodland for cultivation took longer than expected. After six months only 50 acres were being cultivated. He mainly grew potatoes on it. Meanwhile he provided all the families with a house, furniture and farm tools. This same week he scheduled to buy a herd of cattle. He also had arranged the food supply till the first harvest.

In his report De Ham hinted that he often had trouble controlling the colonists. He once left the colony for a couple of days. Upon his return he found most colonists to be drunk. One of them, a certain Oesselaere, had threatened his wife and daughter during his absence. He wanted to burn their house down. De Ham banished this individual from the colony. He mentioned that the presence of a Flemish priest would do the settlement a lot of good. The health conditions of the colony were very satisfying, “*health ruled*”. The biggest problem that confronted De Ham becomes clear in the following quotation:

“The families Van Peteghem and Baert, respectively consisting of seven and four members, the bachelors Verheust, Van den Broecke and the brothers Ghyselen, have lent their ear to the suggestions of some American landowners in the vicinity and successively left New Flanders in spite of the contracts that tie them to the colony. At

⁸² Letter from d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Rogier 24/12/1849, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁸³ Report of Mange for d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 11/12/1849, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁸⁴ In the archives unfortunately only the second report of June has been preserved.

their hiring these speculators promised them a house all prepared, fifty acres of land, food supplies and high salaries. (...) beggar habits, after which all work is difficult⁸⁵.

Many speculators possessed land in the United States. At that time a lot of similar organisations like the ‘American Association for the Colonisation of Sainte-Marie’ existed. The propositions of Mange illustrate this. The biggest task consisted of selling or populating the lands. Once the lands were cultivated a lot of profit could be raised from it. Fierce competition to lure immigrants to their territory broke out. This explains the sending of agents like Belcke to Europe in order to direct emigrants before they departed to their lands. The quote above proves that this practice did not offer any guarantees. A lot of associations lured emigrants from other colonies with attractive propositions. In the end the biggest cost consisted in the transport of the settlers to the territories. When exempted from that expense the landowners could offer attractive propositions.

Two years after the visit from Belcke to Belgium the ‘American Association for the Colonisation of Sainte-Marie’ published a book about the colony directed to Belgian emigrants: “*To the Belgian emigrants. Colony of Saint-Marie, Elk County in the state of Pennsylvania*⁸⁶”. The book was written by Cartuyvels, the director of the colony. He owned the colony together with Benzinger and Eschbach. This book clarifies why the ‘American Association for the Colonisation of Sainte-Marie’ addressed the Belgian government. Mister Cartuyvels appeared to be a Belgian priest who had been residing in the United States for eleven years. In the book he posed as a true patriot that wanted to bring some solace to the growing poverty in Belgium. He wanted to warn the emigrants of the dangers of emigration to the ‘New World’ but foremost to point out the advantages it may produce. Like many other authors on the subject the priest advised against the emigration of isolated families. The chances for these families to settle near a big city where they could practise their religion and speak their language were very slim. According to Cartuyvels that constituted the biggest danger: “*The danger of losing his faith is greater in America where industry and labour produce nice profits*”. He described the best way of emigrating as follows:

“The free and complete practice of their religion, proper education for their children, an honourable existence, peaceful and independent in the midst of people who speak their language and finally the assurance and free administration of their property must be sought.

⁸⁵ Report from De Ham to D’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne, 16/7/1850, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁸⁶ J.-L. CARTUYVELS, Aux émigrants belges. Colonie de Sainte-Marie canton d’Elk dans l’état de Pennsylvanie, Saint-Trond, Vannest Pluymers, 1850, 32p.

Men with an honourable character, religious and distinguished by their social position, founded the colony of Sainte-Marie five years ago. To this effect they bought 80,000 acres of land⁸⁷.”

After this quote Cartuyvels wrote a whole chapter in which he praises the quality of the land. He also reported on how the colony looked at that time. The settlement already numbered 3,000 inhabitants. It included four villages each with a church. Sainte-Marie was at the centre and inhabited by Germans. Four kilometres south of Sainte-Marie was Kersey, an Irish settlement. The forth settlement, New Brussels, destined to be populated exclusively by Belgians lay four kilometres east of Sainte Mary. Finally Cartuyvels mentioned Leopoldsburg, New Flanders under the direction of De Ham located eight kilometres north of Sainte-Marie. The size of the colony was 80,000 acres half of which had already been sold. Cartuyvels, Eschbach and Benzinger still owned the other half. A group of rich people from Munster and the Belgian government bought most of the remaining lands. Cartuyvels claimed he owned the best land of the country. With his book he hoped to encourage wealthy Belgian businessmen to follow the example that had been set by those from Munster and lure Belgian emigrants to the colony. To encourage wealthy Belgian businessmen to buy land he wrote the following:

“To make emigration easier we sell our lands at 25fr. to 40fr. per hectare. We have sold a part to wealthy landowners of Munster and the Belgian government. I want draw attention to those interested in this new way to prosperity⁸⁸,”

To lure future emigrants he wrote:

“It’s best to arrive with enough money to buy land and food for the first year. Emigrants have a good opportunity. Mister Cartuyvels will be in Belgium. He will be able to give all the information needed⁸⁹,”

Cartuyvels added a few articles from local newspapers to his book. In one of the articles the Belgian King and government are praised for their support of the colony:

“The Belgian government, at the request of the king Leopold I, the most philanthropical and most popular monarch of Europe has directed to Sainte-Marie, a certain number of poor families that he transported to America at his own expense. He gave each one 25 acres of land.

Honour to the only government, to the only monarch that have not forgotten their solemn duties towards their people⁹⁰.”

⁸⁷ J-L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p 5.

⁸⁸ J-L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p 7.

⁸⁹ J-L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p 7

⁹⁰ "An example for the monarchs", Public Ledger, Philadelphia, 8/4/1850, in: J-L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p. 11

Finally he included some letters from inhabitants of Leopoldsburg in his book. Here follows a short illustrative fragment:

“From the start mister De Ham has been taking care of us, which he hasn’t stopped doing, also when something needs to be done for him one would say that that his commands are requests and the colonists obey him in the blink of an eye⁹¹.

This testimony did not coincide at all with the report sent by De Ham in July. De Ham admitted to having problems controlling the settlers. It’s clear that Cartuyvels book was pure propaganda. He wanted to describe Sainte-Marie as the most ideal destination for Belgian emigrants.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs wanted to know how the situation really was. d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne ordered Bosch to investigate the situation in New Flanders. In 1849 the State appointed him as ‘chargé d’affaires’ in Washington. The government created this new function. d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne describes his responsibilities in a letter to Moxhet, the consul-general in New York:

“The commerce between Belgium and the United States is amenable to a great extension. The government considers it its duty to make sure that nothing could harm the commercial relations but to use all the means at hand to help the development of commerce and navigation between the two countries.

The consuls need to make sure that the shipping companies and the Belgian tradesmen dispose of all the infrastructure possible. This new function has been created, Mister Moxhet, so that your task as consul-general in New York does not become too big. We foresee a major expansion in commerce. Mister Bosch will have to act as a go-between in case of conflict between both governments. His mission primarily concerns matters of commercial interest⁹². ”

Bosch also had to follow up on the project in Sainte-Marie. Based on his report the government would decide whether to give a fourth instalment of 15,000fr. to De Ham or not. The report took a long time before reaching the ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rogier decided not to wait for it. On getting De Ham’s report he chose to take immediate measures together with d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne. They paid for the crossing of eleven passengers on board of the ship ‘Denise’. The final destination of these emigrants was Sainte-Marie. They had to replace the fourteen colonists that had deserted the settlement⁹³. Bosch travelled in August 1850 to Sainte-Marie. In December his account of the situation had still not arrived at the Ministry. Rogier ran out of patience. He looked for means to penalize Bosch. In the meantime

⁹¹ Letter from Charles Wintaer 1/4/1850 in: J-L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p. 31.

⁹² Letter from d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Moxhet 26/10/1849, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4094, dl. II, Expédition Bosch 1849-1852.

rumours reached the home country insinuating that De Ham had got himself into a very difficult situation. He needed money urgently but the absence of Bosch's report impeded the payment of 15,000fr. Rogier decided to pay him an unconditional advance of 5,000fr. d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne entrusted this mission to Moxhet⁹⁴.

The long awaited report finally arrived on March 1851⁹⁵. It contained some complaints of settlers against De Ham. Bosch attributed this to the low morality of some colonists. He stressed the importance of only sending subjects with good moral values⁹⁶. Rogier concluded that his testimony proved that the colony showed promise and satisfying results. He allowed Moxhet to hand over the rest of the sum due to De Ham. He received another 4,000fr⁹⁷. This indicates that Rogier had paid a second advance of 6,000fr. shortly after the first one.

2.2.5) New Flanders desertion

The contract between Rogier and De Ham planned the sending of a second batch of fifty emigrants. Partly because of the tardiness with which Bosch had delivered his report. Eleven more were sent based on De Ham's report to replace the ones lured away by land speculators. Some documents show that plans to convey new emigrants existed in 1851. The local authorities of Antwerp formed a network paying for the crossing of unwanted inhabitants confined in beggar workhouses to the United States (see chapter three). Normally the local councils paid for the cost. When the origin of a person could not be traced back to a certain community, the Department of Justice took charge of them. As stated above Rogier committed himself to the sending of 50 emigrants to Sainte-Marie. To save money arrangements were made between the Department of Justice and Rogier to send these beggar emigrants to Pennsylvania. The following fragment from the Minister of Justice Tesch to the governor of Antwerp T. Teichmann illustrate this:

⁹³Letter from Rogier to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne, s.d., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

⁹⁴Letter from Rogier to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne, 29/12/1850, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850)..

⁹⁵ Letter from d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Rogier ?/3/1851, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850)

⁹⁶The report has not been preserved. The information stated above comes from the correspondence between d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne and Rogier about it.

⁹⁷Letter from Rogier to De Ham 3/4/1851, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

“The eight healthy persons confined at the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraeten who applied for emigration to the United States of America, could only be directed to Sainte-Marie next spring⁹⁸. ”

In the end the eight would be sent earlier without the intention of settling in Saint-Marie.

In May 1851 De Ham wrote to Tesch⁹⁹. De Ham heard about the initiative that expatriated people confined in beggar workhouses. He confirmed the opportunities for them to start a new and better life in the ‘New World’. He estimated the chances for a better life to be higher when accompanied by someone:

“They lack indeed a guide and a supporter who can find a job for them. I could put them to work where I live, as Belgian labourers and foremost upright, honest and hard working farmers. At this moment I could use four farmers.

If your department could send me four adults of young age, with decent morality and used to rural work and if they could pay for the cost of transport to the colony of New Flanders, I commit myself to paying their salaries of 3 dollars a month or 16fr. with food and housing on top of that and raise this salary bit by bit.

If they behave in a satisfying way during a period of four years I will help them to obtain the means to establish themselves on their own¹⁰⁰.

De Ham estimated the cost of+ the crossing at 150fr. The transport inland required an additional 60fr. He proposed entrusting the 60fr. to the consul. His son would welcome them upon their arrival and guide them to the settlement.

This letter illustrates the desperate position De Ham found himself in. All the funds received from the government had been spent. In his report De Ham already urged Rogier to award him more funds. He needed these as compensation for different damages he had suffered. He could no longer pay for the transport from New York to Sainte-Marie for new emigrants. Unfortunately the money from the special credit put aside for emigration was used up. Neither Rogier or d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne was disposed of a budget that allowed them to pump more money into the colony. Probably for these reasons the sending of new colonists didn’t go through. De Ham desperately urged Rogier to send him new workers. He would immediately be able to put them to work. This proves that a big part of the settlers had already left Leopoldsburg to try their luck somewhere else.

The governor of Antwerp declined De Ham’s request:

⁹⁸ Letter from Tesch aan Teichmann 10/1/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

⁹⁹ Until May 1851 I did not find any new letters from De Ham. His report of June 1850 is the only one that has been preserved in the archives.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from De Ham to Tesch 19/5/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

“Upright, honest and hard working labourers who could be recommended by the governor? I believe that these essential characteristics, which are needed for the well-being of the establishment he leads, can not be found among people incarcerated in beggar workhouses and that it would be dangerous for the future of his enterprise to recruit settlers from among them. Far from being able to count on their permanent assistance, Mister De Ham would be exposed to the depreciation of his own colonists who followed him to Pennsylvania of which the antecedents do not give reason to believe that they would associate with their new work companions without disgust. Furthermore financial considerations oppose the execution of De Ham’s idea¹⁰¹. ”

From the information given before it is doubtful that the beggars would arouse disgust among the inhabitants of Sainte-Marie, because most of them had already left by then. The high cost for the transport to the interior constituted an extra stumbling block for the governor. Whether some beggar emigrants joined De Ham in Pennsylvania in the end remains unclear. The council of Ypres paid 210fr. for Louis Rubrecht who had the intention of settling in Sainte-Marie. This included the ticket for the transport to the interior. The sum would be handed over to the emigrant from the captain of the ship upon their arrival in New York. Whether mister Rubrecht finally joined the colony or not remains unknown. This case seems to be an exception to the rule¹⁰².

In August 1851 Bosch wrote a new report on the situation in Sainte-Marie. This document is unfortunately fairly damaged. and nearly unreadable. He confirmed the fear that De Ham found himself in major trouble. The document contains letters from mister Broeckhoff and Belfonte¹⁰³. They stressed the financial difficulties which De Ham found himself in. However they praised the leader of the colony:

“Mister De Ham has done in very little time much more than we could have expected from him with the sparse means that have been allocated to him¹⁰⁴. ”

In 1856 a parliament member, Brixthe reported in a session of the House of Representatives about a trip he made to the settlement. He testified that upon his arrival on the site, the colony only numbered eight members. The land appeared to be in a very bad shape¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Teichmann to Tesch 24/5/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

¹⁰² District of Ieper to Teichmann 30/7/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁰³ The names could be spelled differently.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Bosch to d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 15/8/1851, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹⁰⁵ Annales parlementaires, Chambre de représentants 1855-1856, séance du 7/4/1856, pp. 1054-1060.

Rogier admitted he never expected such unfavourable results from the colony. Bosch described the situation as a catastrophe. Rogier concluded that urgent measures should be taken to save their investment. Moxhet had to investigate the matter¹⁰⁶.

2.2.6) The financial deficit

The contract between De Ham and Rogier included a clause to safeguard the investment of the government in case of failure. The 4000 acres of land constituted a guarantee. It soon became obvious that the guarantee did not have any legal base. The act of warrantee did not provide the required forms of authenticity¹⁰⁷. The landowners from the ‘American Association for the Colonisation of Sainte-Marie’ kept the rights to the lands until they received the full payment for the 4000 acres. This never occurred.

Moxhet estimated the sum necessary to save the colony to be 1200 to 1500 dollars¹⁰⁸. D’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne informed the consul general that his department could not possibly pump more money in the settlement. With a contract signed by De Ham and the ‘American Association for the Colonisation of Sainte-Marie’ on the 4th of April 1850, De Ham put a mortgage on all his possessions. By doing so he also put a mortgage on the advances made by the government. Moxhet received the difficult mission of saving the investment of the government. The case dragged on for a while. With a letter from the 1st of January 1853 De Ham let the government know that the colony now only existed on paper. Moxhet informed the government that same year that it didn’t have any legal proof to claim the 4,000 acres. He warned the government that De Ham was about to lose the lands and with this his chances for a better future in the U.S.A. The lands would soon be worth a lot of money. He blamed the bad choice of colonists for the failure of the colony. De Ham was not at fault and therefore deserved continued support from the government¹⁰⁹. However no money was allocated for the purchase of the lands. On the contrary Henri De Brouckère, minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, asked Moxhet how the government could claim the money back from De Ham. Moxhet confirmed what everyone feared. De Ham possessed of no means

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Rogier to d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne ?/9/1851, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹⁰⁷ Letter from d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Rogier 25/03/1850, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹⁰⁸ One dollar was worth 5.15fr. at that time which means that between 6180fr. and 7725fr. was needed.

whatsoever to pay the government back. He advised the government to take over the mortgage De Ham had put on New Flanders¹¹⁰. At the end of 1853 a spark of hope was ignited that some money could be reclaimed. Plans were drawn up to erect a railroad near New Flanders. That would considerably augment the price of the land. Unfortunately a year later an economic crisis struck the United States. The projects for constructing the railroad was shelved. The value of the land decreased as a result. De Ham paid 1.25 dollar per acre. Now the price had dropped to 0.87 dollars. De Ham was forced to move to Pittsburgh. There his wife and daughter taught to make ends meet. Only his son who owned a sawmill in the area remained in Pennsylvania. The other colonists went their own way. According to De Ham many gave up farming to start working in factories. The colony leader was left with a debt of 6,000 dollars. The consul again asked to give up the rights that the Belgian authorities had on the land. De Ham found an opportunity to sell the land at 2 dollars an acre. It would allow him to pay his debts and still have 1500 dollars left. De Ham promised to give half of the profit to the government. However this wouldn't be possible unless the government cancelled the mortgage it had on the land¹¹¹. In the meantime De Brouckère had given the assignment to the Ministry of Finance to investigate the matter. The commission gave a positive advice give up the mortgage. If they did not do this the land of De Ham could be taken in possession by the 'American Association for the Colonisation of Saint-Marie'. It was the last chance to ever retrieve a part of the invested money. De Brouckère followed the advice of the Ministry of Finance. Still the affair ended on a false note. As stated above, De Ham never paid off all the land. He first needed to raise the funds to buy the rest of the lands. Only than he could sell all his lands. He never gathered the needed funds. The 'American Association for the Colonisation of Saint-Marie' would most probably repossess the territory. The consul of Philadelphia, Mange also sent a letter from Mister Garner. Garner lived in the vicinity and analysed the situation as follows:

"The reason for the failure is nothing less than bad administration from the beginning till the end. I appreciate Mister De Ham a lot as a person, but he didn't have the capabilities to run such a colony. Many others who arrived at Sainte-Marie did not possess of financial aid and many of the colonists were generally poor. Now many of them have built up a prosperous situation for themselves. The biggest mistake was to

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Moxhet to De Brouckère 15/2/1853, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹¹⁰ Letters from Moxhet to De Brouckère 27/4/1853 en 19/5/1853, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹¹¹ Letter from the consul of New York, Mali, to de Brouckère 26/10/1854, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

come in the middle of winter without making any preparations. Because of that the whole first year was lost¹¹². ”

It remains indistinct what exactly happened to the lands. Between 1856 and 1864 the ministry of Foreign Affairs send a yearly letter to Mali, consul of New York, to clarify what became of the 4,000 acres. Only in 1864 after 8 requests did Mali report to the ministry. De Ham had lost all the lands. He lived in Pittsburgh where he earned a living by teaching. De Ham still had very little means. Mali promised to keep an eye on him. If he ever built any wealth again, than the government planned to claim a part of the money back¹¹³.

2.2.7) Cartuyvels and his New Brussels

As director of the colony of Sainte Marie, Cartuyvels designed his own project. According to his book he founded New Brussels, located four kilometres east of Sainte-Marie. He reserved part to be populated exclusively by Belgians. It was probably a small scale project. Only very few sources of his colony remain. The book announced the arrival of the priest in Belgium in 1850. He probably turned back along with ten colonists. The report from the House of Representatives on the expenses of the special credit of 1,000,000fr. included three supplements. The third one is a list with ten names whit the quote “*subsidized to Saint-Marie from Limburg*” written next to it. Two originated from Grossum, another two from Tongeren and six from Sint-Truiden¹¹⁴. Cartuyvels himself originated from Sint-Truiden¹¹⁵. This leads to the assumption that the people on the list emigrated to New Brussels together with Cartuyvels. Two years later the priest returned to his home country. He came to collect samples of Belgian products from his native region. These were destined for a small business he founded in Sainte-Marie. The ministry of Foreign Affairs awarded him 400fr. for his business in the hope of encouraging to trade relations between Belgium and the United States¹¹⁶. In 1856 Cartuyvels had already left Sainte-Marie. The following fragment out of the report of Poncelet, consul of Chicago proves this:

¹¹² Letter from Mange to Vilain XIII, 25/6/1855, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹¹³ Letter from Mali to Rogier, 27/9/1864, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹¹⁴ List added to: CHAMBRE DE REPRESANTANTS, Compte rendu de l'emploi du crédit extraordinaire de 1.000 000 ouvert au département de l'intérieur par la loi du 21/6/1849 séance du 5/2/1852, Bruxelles, Imprimerie Deltombe, 1852, 41p.

¹¹⁵ Sint-Truiden and the two towns Grossum and Tongeren are situated in the province of Limburg.

¹¹⁶ Letter from De Brouckère to Cartuyvels 21/12/1852, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl III, Emigration 1851-1854.

“Mister Reverend Cartuyvels, founder of the colony of Sainte-Marie, Pennsylvania who has already lived for four months in the prairies of Illinois where he runs the missions Menteno, Petites Iles, Kankakee and Erable, and he regretted not having known this region earlier, because he would have refrained from establishing a colony in the forests of Pennsylvania where after six or seven years of work the emigrant still found himself in a position of suffering and poverty nearly as great as when he arrived and that during that time he worked like a ‘nigger’ to cultivate a few acres of land. This honourable priest who for over sixteen years has travelled through the eastern, southern and northern states says that he has never encountered such fertile lands and so easy to cultivate, nor a region where the colonist could in little time and without much capital get rich so fast as in the prairies of Saint-Louis. Sainte-Marie which celebrated its tenth anniversary only numbers 2,000 inhabitants, mainly poor¹¹⁷. ”

For this testimony we can conclude that Cartuyvels’ attempt to erect a colony failed. He would however remain a strong supporter of emigration. In 1887 he published another article in which the topic of emigration is once again at the centre of discussion. This is discussed in the second part.

2.3) Kansas

2.3.1) The settlement of Dirckx

As mentioned above, Dirckx left Eeklo in 1847 along with some people of the region to start an agricultural colony in the United States. A letter from Dirckx to D’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne indicates that the colony succeeded. Dirckx talked with many superlatives about Missouri:

“The resources of our new home country are truly inexhaustible. It is not without reason that they call this state of Missouri, ‘The Garden of the West’. In the vicinity of the banks of the rivers are without exaggeration the most fertile lands of the globe.

The healthy climate has to this point left me and my travelling companions with invariably good health, even during the hardest work and during the least favourable seasons of the year.

I let you conclude, sir Minister, if this region wouldn’t suit for the too numerous and poor countrymen that the insufficient and stagnating Belgian industry will force to expatriate like us¹¹⁸. ”

Dirckx claimed that a couple of farms in his colony could already serve as model farms for new emigrants that would come in the future. All kinds of European crops could be

¹¹⁷ A. PONCELET , Rapport adresse au Ministère des affaires étrangères, Bruxelles, Imprimerie Deltombe, 1856, p 17.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Dirckx to d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 29/5/1849, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

cultivated in the area. The productivity of the land appeared to be much higher than in Belgium. Dirckx didn't only reflect on the advantages Missouri offered for farming. He extensively discussed the industrial opportunities as well. He saw the possibility of building a profitable textile industry. The many cotton factories in the country made cotton products very cheap. Therefore no linen was fabricated in the area. Linen was imported from Ireland and sold at high prices. According to Dirckx Belgian weavers would be able to earn a lot of money in Missouri. The development of the tobacco industry would also open up good prospects. The quality of Belgian tobacco exceeded that made in West-Virginia by far. The hemp industry would also flourish. In his report Dirckx appeals the state and his countrymen to erect Belgian factories and depots of all sorts:

"Your excellency will judge how important and how easy it would be to establish workshops, factories, and manufactories of all kinds here on water and steam like crystal glassworks, nail factories etc., considering the inexhaustible richness of our coal-, iron-, copper-, magnesium-, tin mines, etc. as well as the ease of access to appropriate construction materials of all kinds and to transport through steamboats which travel our rivers daily.

Our colony would certainly be suitable for poor but industrious factory workers and other from Liege, Namur from that region who would find here all the raw materials that they could wish for.

As far as the commercial relations are concerned, Belgium the mother country could establish with her daughter, our new home country,..., the acquisition of huge territories that Our United States have just done west of Missouri, foremost the invaluable Gold Region in California, of 1000 miles of extent, will soon bring about Houses of Commerce to maintain a regular trade with their compatriot's.

Concerning the chances of emigration, if the government persists to be willing to tryout, under its direction and guarantee, ..., our region is suitable for it more than any other¹¹⁹.

Dirckx's picture of Missouri contains all the elements which were sought for the founding of a colony. It seems to pick upon the ideas and the needs that lived among the Belgian people. The quest for an ideal location that in the end led to Sainte-Marie, shows what was sought after. The supporters of emigration were divided in two groups. One group attached a lot of importance to the commercial advantages the emigration could produce. The other group stressed the importance of fighting against pauperism and the overpopulation. The picture Dirckx drew of Missouri must have been appealing for both of these groups.

The people, who attached greater importance to economical values, wanted an independent colony. A part of this group started to realize that the cost of protecting such independent colony could not be overlooked. In the meantime in 1848 some people

discovered gold in Sutter's Mill California. The California Gold Rush broke out in 1849. Around the globe people spread stories of gold nuggets were for the taking there. It caused a true 'El Dorado' fever¹²⁰. The Gold Rush increased the stream of people going inland, going west. Mexico had ceded California to the United States in 1848. This opened many promising prospects for the American trade. These opportunities also received a lot of attention in Dirckx's letter. His letter clearly didn't escape the attention of the Belgian government. A part of the special credit of 1,000,000fr was used for establishing a house of commerce in San Francisco. Dirckx also pointed out the industrial possibilities Missouri offered. He did this in a very concrete way. In previous reports and publications the authors only discussed the matter vaguely. The linen industry in particular got a lot of attention. This industry had been struck the hardest by the crisis which had disrupted rural Flanders. At that time intellectuals desperately sought for alternatives and solutions. Dirckx' point of view on the opportunities in Missouri surely aroused the interest of people working on trade relations, industry and emigration.

The group who gave priority to emigration itself, found in Dirckx' letter many attractive aspects of erecting a colony in Missouri. Again Dirckx stressed the favourable climate. After the bad experience of Santo Thomas de Guatemala, the climate was a deciding factor in the choice of the location. In Santo Thomas de Guatemala 211 out of 871 colonists died in eighteen months. Many of the survivors decided to return to the home country.¹²¹. The deaths were attributed to diseases caused by the hot and humid climate. Therefore a lot of people looked for regions that showed similarities with the Belgian climate. This would guarantee a healthy environment. Dirckx also indicated the successes that German emigrants had achieved with their colonies. The German emigration movement served as big example for Belgium. It remained a strong argument in favour of emigration. De Ham had already used this argument in his work by literally pointing out the affinity Belgians have with the German race (see before)¹²². This was used to show that Belgians had the same chances of succeeding as the successful Germans who settled in the United States. Finally Dirckx used lots of superlatives to describe the fertility of the land. Fertile lands were abundant in America while Belgium had a huge shortage with depletion as a consequence. Moreover in Belgium

¹¹⁹ Letter from Dirckx to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 29/5/1849, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹²⁰ R. HOUTHAEVE, P.J. De Smet de grote zwartrok: missionaris en vredesstichter, Moorslede, Houthaeve, 2001, p. 218.

¹²¹ L. SCHEPENS, op cit., p. 89.

¹²² V. DE HAM, op cit., p. 39.

one agricultural crisis followed another. Dirckx described Missouri as a second home country where the poor could build a better future. This second home country would also bring about important commercial advantages. Such opportunities could not remain without unexplored.

2.3.2) Maguis, Guinotte and Cie

De Theux had an outspoken preference for founding a colony in Missouri. However Rogier listened to Bosch's advice and chose Saint-Marie for his trest. A few years later Maguis and Guinotte dug up de Theux's plans to found a colony in Missouri.

Maguis worked as an engineer of roads and waterways. Guinotte was the secretary of the 'Brussels Forestry Society'. Both decided to found an agricultural colony where Dirckx had settled in Jefferson County. The initiative received support from the government. On the 28th of January Rogier signed an agreement with Maguis and Guinotte. He accorded a grant of 300fr. per adult and 150fr. per child emigrant younger than twelve. Maguis and Guinotte committed themselves to settling with fifty emigrants in Kansas, Missouri. The colonists were tied to the association for four years. Maguis and Guinotte guaranteed them a salary of 25 cents or higher per day. They also had to provide the settlers with housing and a food supply during that period. They also paid for the transport from Antwerp to Kansas. After four years the emigrants would receive 2.5 acres of land, the materials for building a house, furniture, farm tools, sowing seed and food supply until the first harvest. The settlers would refund these expenses afterwards. Guinotte and Maguis had to establish good relations with the local population. Both gentlemen needed to provide the means for the emigrants to fulfil their religious duties. The government promised to hand over 10,000fr. fifteen days before their departure from Antwerp. The consul would give them another 5,000fr. upon their arrival in New Orleans. Guinotte and Maguis promised to send a report on their experiences every six months¹²³.

2.3.3) The foundation of Kansas

In May, under the supervision of Thielens the group boarded the ship 'George Steven' in Antwerp. Rogier had summoned Thielens to be personally present at their departure. He had to check the ship and the food supplies. Thielens made a report about the embarkation:

“Mister Thielens remarked that the colonists have been selected with very good care. They all have a sturdy stature, conform to the strict age conditions and are all in excellent health. There are only eleven women and eight adolescents between 15 and 20 years. Maguis and Guinotte are very strict. They have sent back an emigrant to his village who arrived drunk in Antwerp. This example has a good influence on the colonists¹²⁴.”

Rogier also charged different consuls in the U.S.A. with checking if the promises made by Maguis and Guinotte were kept. Hunt, the consul of Saint-Louis, let the Minister know that the colonists reached Kansas on the 10th of June. Shortly after some colonists came knocking on his door to complain about mistreatment by Maguis and Guinotte. Hunt didn’t take them too seriously¹²⁵. D’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne considered these complaints to be normal. According to him dissatisfaction always arises at the start of such enterprises. He attributed it to the problems some people had adapting to their new environment. Many had created an idealistic picture of their new life in the U.S. before their departure. As such disillusionment and disappointment on arrival was inevitable. In order not to neglect anything the Belgian minister of Foreign affairs had asked, Hunt to visit the colony. Hunt however had to make sure he did not bring discredit to Maguis and Guinotte with his visit.

A month and half after their arrival at the end of July a more serious problem surfaced. A cholera epidemic broke out. In 1849 and 1850 the region was ravaged by different epidemics. The Gold Rush triggered these. Saint-Louis, the most important city of Missouri, boomed with the discovery of Sutter’s Mill. It constituted the most eastern gateway for gold seekers. The traffic of steamboats to Saint-Louis increased rapidly. The increasing traffic allowed the epidemics to spread quickly. The year 1849 is known as the unfortunate year in the United States¹²⁶. A year later the colony of Maguis and Guinotte was not spared from this misfortune.

After the news that a cholera-epidemic had broken out in the settlement further correspondence with the colony seem to disappear. The only letters concerning the matter left in the archives date back from 1867 and 1869. These discuss the ways to claim the 15,000fr. back. These letters indicate that the association of Maguis and Guinotte existed till 1865. In the meantime Maguis had returned to Brussels. By doing so he had lost all his rights to the

¹²³ Agreement signed by the Ministre of the Interior and M.M. Guinotte, Maguis and Cie 28/1/1850, Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

¹²⁴ Letter from d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Rogier 6/8/1850, Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 273, dl. II, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

¹²⁵ Letter from Hunt to d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 3/7/1850, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

land. No colonists remained populating the land, but Guinotte still lived in the U.S. His brother had joined him. Guinotte still owned the land. The estimated value of the land amounted to 20,000fr. However the letters stipulated that it would be very hard for Belgian authorities to find means of forcing Guinotte to sell the land and refund his debt of 15.000fr. There is no evidence to indicate this ever happened.

2.4) Conclusion

The government invested money in two projects founding agricultural colonies in the United States. By doing it hoped to inspire private initiatives to follow its example. However both attempts ended up failing. Afterwards the government did not take similar initiatives anymore.

The earlier attempt in Santo Thomas de Guatemala did not put the authorities off undertaking new initiatives. In many publications this failure has been put forward as the main reason for the non-intervention policy concerning emigration pronounced by Charles Vilain XIII in 1856¹²⁷. This chapter proves this assumption to be wrong. In 1847 the government had already decided to stop all the direct aid it granted to the colony. Only later were plans to establish colonies in the United States drawn up. The experience of Santo Thomas de Guatemala contributed to the decision to direct new attempts to the United States. In a time span of eighteen months 211 colonists died in Santo Thomas because of tropical diseases. Everyone blamed the climate for this misfortune¹²⁸. To avoid this problem the general opinion was that future attempts should be made in areas which showed similarities with the Belgian climate. Many parts of the U.S. seemed to meet these criteria. During this period many people also shared the opinion that emigration offered the solution for the ongoing crisis. As Rogier formulated it himself: “*In 1848 and 1849 when we were looking at all means to help Flanders, the opinions joined to point out emigration as one of the most efficient solutions*¹²⁹.” The main concern of the government was to get rid of part of the poor population. Some of supporters of emigration still preferred the erecting of colonies in independent or small nations for political and economical reasons. Therefore they obstructed

¹²⁶ R. HOUTHAEVE, op cit., pp. 212-215.

¹²⁷ J. Stengers, Emigration et immigration en Belgique au XVIII et XIX siècle, Bruxelles, Académie Royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 1978, p 56.

¹²⁸ L. Schepens, op cit., p. 88.

¹²⁹ Annales parlementaires, Chambre, 1855-1856, séance de 7/4/1856, p. 1045.

the choice of U.S. as final destination. Nevertheless the political and economical motives for establishing a colony had to give way for demographical motives.

It has to be pointed out however that the colonies of Sainte-Marie and Kansas were of much smaller scale than Santo Thomas de Guatemala. Sainte-Marie only represented a small project compared to Santo Thomas. Nevertheless in the long term it aimed to stimulate an important emigration movement. That the undertaking failed to reach its objectives in the end can be blamed on different factors. The late arrival on site, the bad choice of colonists, the poor quality of the lands and the inapt direction of De Ham seems to have influenced the outcome. However the main reason for the failure seems to be the departure of many colonists, lured away by attractive propositions from American landowners. The breach of contract of these emigrants produced the downfall of De Ham's settlement. Because he was unable to claim any money back from them he was unable to return the money he had borrowed from the government. The failure in Kansas can mainly be attributed to the cholera epidemic. The epidemic was an indirect consequence of the Gold Rush triggered in 1849. These two misfortunes made the authorities reluctant to carry out similar attempts.

Chapter III: Belgium helps his beggars, ex-convicts and convicts to emigrate

In 1965 R. Boumans wrote an article titled: "*An unknown aspect of the Belgian emigration to America: the subsidized emigration of beggars and ex-convicts 1850-1856.*" Forty years later this aspect of Belgian emigration still remains largely unknown to the public. Since the excellent publication of Boumans no further investigation on the subject has been carried out. This chapter is based on Boumans' work although quite a number of new aspects will also come to light.

3.1) The elaboration of the network

3.1.1) Beggar workhouses or beggar colonies

The beggar workhouses were part of the public charity institutions. The first workhouse was erected in Bruges in 1805. Forty years later others could also be found in Mons, Rekkem, Hoogstraeten and Ter Kameren¹³⁰. There were two ways to end up in such

¹³⁰ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 54.

institutions. After being convicted for begging or vagrancy by a magistrate the convict remained in custody for a couple of days. Upon their release the governor decided if they needed to be placed in a beggar workhouse or not. The governor based his judgement on the means the beggar possessed. If he judged the beggar's means to be insufficient for supporting himself, the governor sent him to a beggar colony. The period of confinement could vary from a couple of months to a couple of years. A second way of ending up in one of these institutions consisted in voluntary confinement. This method was regularly abused. In 1848 the authorities voted in very strict laws which complicated this way of getting in beggar workhouses a lot a lot¹³¹. The law came at the request of the community councils and the government as well. The cost of the stay was paid for by the local authorities. When it was unclear to which town an individual belonged, the State covered his expenses. The Department of Justice took care of this. During the crisis years the number of beggars incarcerated in beggar workhouses increased considerably. The institutions hosted not only beggars but also children, the elderly and insane people. They lived packed in small rooms in unhygienic conditions. The detainees had to work ten hours a day. The shortage of food made some people so desperate that they committed smaller crimes on purpose in order to be locked up in such institutions. The increasing numbers of beggars caused by the crisis in Flanders' rural area could not be contained. Many vagabonds and beggars headed to the cities. There they joined and formed gangs. The city of Brussels for instance had to send thousands of beggars back to their villages in 1846 and 1847. In 1848 Bruges closed its gates to vagabonds¹³². The pressure to solve this problem increased, but nothing seemed to help until 1850 when a procedure was set up to send detainees in beggar workhouses to the United States.

3.1.2) The increasing pressure on the government to get rid of the ‘unwanted part’ of the population

From 1846 on the ministry of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs were overwhelmed by requests from people wanting their transport overseas to be paid. This problem in a letter to the governor of Brussels was raised. The governor also received similar requests. He

¹³¹ R. BOUMANS, Een onbekend aspect van de Belgische emigratie naar Amerika: De gesubsidieerde emigratie van bedelaars en oud-gevangenen 1850-1856, in: Expansion Belge 1831-1865, Ministerie van Nationale Onderwijs, Brussel, 1965, p. 479.

¹³² D. MUSSCHOOT, op cit., p. 17 en 42.

discussed the transport of two craftsmen from Gent paid for by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry granted 300fr. to send both gentlemen to New York. The governor proposed to do this on a larger scale in order to keep down the expenses. He considered it to be the ideal outlet for the growing number of paupers in Belgium¹³³. Deschamps took this proposition into consideration. He asked the consul in London to investigate how England organized emigration¹³⁴. An organization had just been founded in the English capital to stimulate emigration. However, a week later the government collapsed which closed the matter.

A letter from de Haussy, Minister of Justice, from 1847 shows another practice that was in use at the time. Boumans stated that Antwerp had taken the initiative of sending beggars and ex-convicts abroad. The following fragment of a letter from de Haussy to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne proves that similar practises had been executed by the State before:

“Jean Pierret has been sentenced to two years imprisonment for fraud, but through the Royal Decree of September 15th 1849 he obtained a pardon on the condition he embarks within the first three days of his release if he does not leave the Belgian soil he will be detained again.

He came back to Belgium on September 7th and has filed a request for the government to embark on a ship owned by the state going to Brazil¹³⁵.”

The number of people who were forced to leave Belgium this way before 1850, remains unknown. The investigated documents in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Archives only revealed this isolated case. It's hard to know if this was a test or a frequently used practice. It does indicate however that the idea of getting rid of a proportion of the unwanted paupers by deporting them was already wide spread. This practice was not limited to beggars and ex-convicts as the title of Boumans' article indicates. Prisoners also received the opportunity to escape from their punishment if they were prepared to emigrate.

The subsidized crossing of the two craftsmen from Gent was not an exception. The ministry of Foreign Affairs possessed a budget to pay for the crossing of businessmen and industrialists. During the crisis the requests to pay for the crossing increased. Besides demands from businessmen and industrialists a lot of regular emigrants applied for free transport. The requests arriving at the ministry of the Interior were always referred to Foreign

¹³³ Letter from the governor of Brabant to Deschamps 5/8/1848, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

¹³⁴ Letter from Deschamps to the consul of London, 7/8/1847, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. I, Emigration 1834-1848.

Affairs. D'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne repeatedly made it clear that the places on the ships subsidized by the state could only be taken by industrialists and businessmen¹³⁶.

3.1.3) The network founded in Antwerp

In 1850 The mayor of Antwerp decided to pay for the transport to the United States of people who were perceived to be a burden on society. His first experiment involved a certain Leemans. He appeared twice before a judge in a short period of time: the first time for abuse of confidence and the second time for vagrancy. He accepted the proposal of the council to emigrate to the United States. A month and half later he boarded a ship heading to New York. The city of Antwerp paid for his transport with the budget for the maintenance of detainees in beggar workhouses¹³⁷.

The governor of Antwerp, T.Teichmann, was very enthusiastic about the initiative. He would be, together with Jean-François Thielens, the driving force behind the network that would develop. Since 1846 Thielens had worked as emigration-inspector in Antwerp. Before that he worked for the governor as cabinet's secretary. Thielens and Teichmann knew each other quite well. While the city of Antwerp continued to send beggars overseas, Teichmann tried to implement the system in the entire province. He informed the community councils of Lier, Mechelen and Turnhout of the initiative taken in Antwerp. He also wrote to the director of the beggar workhouse in Hoogstraeten. Teichmann asked the director to convince local community councils of encouraging their detainees in Hoogstraeten to emigrate. The cost of the crossing only amounted to 140fr. Mechelen quickly responded and handed over a list of thirteen people confined in Hoogstraeten who they wanted to encourage to emigrate. The governor of Antwerp handed the list over to the director of the beggar workhouse in Hoogstraeten. Seven of the detainees decided to take advantage of the offer. Two of the others were no longer in Hoogstraeten and the other four could not be convinced. A little later Lier agreed to also pay for the transport of some detainees¹³⁸. Turnhout initially informed

¹³⁵ Letter from de Haussy to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 28/4/1849, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. II, Emigration 1849-1850.

¹³⁶ Letter from Rogier to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 18/4/1850, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. II, Emigration 1849-1850.

¹³⁷ R. BOUMANS, op cit., p. 480.

¹³⁸ Letters: 16/7/1850 from Teichmann to Lier, Mechelen, Tunhout and the director of the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraten, 9/8/1850 the council of Mechelen to Teichmann, 10/8/1850 Teichmann to the director of the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraten, 16/8/1850 the director of the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraten to Teichmann, 2/9/1850 the council of Turnhout to Teichmann, 3/9/1850 the council of Lier to Teichmann, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

Teichmann that they didn't have any volunteers to be shipped to the United States. The governor of Antwerp kept on insisting with a new letter:

"By sending detainees of beggar workhouses, the community gets rid of miserable individuals who inevitably would have spread the begging to their families, the community offers them a new chance for a better future and to get new morals in a country where the salary is much higher and where the immigrant escapes from the shame of his past and the influence of his disruptive companions. The crossing, food included, costs on average between 160fr. and 180fr. per adult, which is only a bit more than the price of confinement for one year. This sum also includes the expenses for the equipment and some pocket money to get through the first days of their stay in the United States. The emigration inspector Thielens has already sent you a brochure. He keeps an eye on the embarkation of the beggars.

Only moments after their liberation beggars get convicted again to be sent once more to the beggar workhouse which they consider to be a permanent shelter. In case of interest the communities can get directly in touch with mister Thielens¹³⁹."

This letter represents a strong argument for sending beggars to the United States. It gave the local authorities the opportunity to do away with inhabitants who used beggar workhouses as a permanent residence and this with a once time expense of 160fr. to 180fr. which corresponded with the cost of maintenance for a year at the beggar workhouse. It also gave the beggar the possibility of beginning a new life. In the first letter of July 7th 1850 Teichmann emphasized the advantages expatriation procured for the communities without really taking into account the well-being of the emigrants. The brochure mentioned in the letter, probably included the opportunities the United States offered to immigrants. The correspondence between the governor and the councils shows that some councils were concerned with the well-being of the beggars. The council of Mechelen for instance, had some concerns with the project. First they pointed to an article that said the U.S. would take measures to restrict the immigration stream¹⁴⁰. They feared that the beggars would be refused access to the country. The council also inquired as to what measures were taken to prevent the emigrants falling back into poverty: "*Are there special organizations to receive them? Does the government help them with the transport to the interior and does it help them to find work*¹⁴¹?" It seemed to be necessary to also show the councils that the beggars also benefited from the operation. Thielens composed a brochure to reassure the local authorities. The emigration-inspector published a book about the emigration to the U.S. that same year, "*Manual and Advice for emigrants*". That Thielens only sent a brochure and not the whole

¹³⁹ Letter from Teichmann to the administration of Turnhout, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁴⁰ The proposals for restrictive measures came from the 'Know Nothing Party' (see below).

book is no surprise. It would have missed its purpose, because in it we can read the following: “*lazybones, drunks and beggars are extremely hated and despised*¹⁴². ” Also the rise in price of the transport from 140fr. to 160fr. to 180fr. has to be interpreted in that context. The increase had to cover the extra cost of enhancing the well-being of the emigrant. The letter made clear that the beggar received some luggage and pocket money. The luggage consisted of: “*a shirt, two pairs of socks, two handkerchief, a pair of pants, a pair of shoes, a hat, a cardigan, a towel, a suitcase, a brush, a comb, smoking tobacco and pipes, chewing tobacco, Dutch gin, white soap, cooking materials, straw mattress, pillow, blanket and 15fr. pocket money*¹⁴³”. These matters were arranged by Thielens. This letter also proves the far-reaching collaboration between Teichmann and Thielens. The persuasiveness of Thielens appears to have worked, because shortly after the council of Turnhout reported that two candidates wanted to take advantage of the offer¹⁴⁴.

Not all the communities were concerned with the well-being of the emigrants though. The governor needed to point out to the council of Welle that the candidates had to volunteer for it¹⁴⁵. The council of Ekeren also wanted to send women across the Atlantic. The governor refused:

“The living conditions for emigrants in the United States are far from being as easy for women as for men. Men mostly find work in public works which give them the means to survive. The women would not be able to find work there.

... considering this humanity orders us to not expose them to a compromising future by expatriating them. I therefore cannot consent¹⁴⁶. ”

Teichmann planned to expand his network. On the 30th of October he informed Charles de Brouckere, mayor of Brussels, about his project. On December 4th he wrote another letter to all the councils of his province of stressing the advantages on the scheme. He increased the pressure on the local authorities by pointing out the cheap price for the crossing

¹⁴¹ Letter from the local council of Mechelen to Teichmann, 23/9/1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁴² J.F. THIELENS, Wegwijzer en raedgeber der landverhuizers, Antwerpen, Drukkerij Conart, 1850, p 15.

¹⁴³ Contract signed by emigrants in Antwerpen 27/12/1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from the administration of Turnhout to Teichmann, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Teichmann to the council of Welle(?) 4/11/1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Teichmann to the council of Ekeren 21/10/1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

at that time and saying it soon would increase¹⁴⁷. This play worked, since many councils replied to his letter to send beggars at the “*current price*”.

3.1.4) The expansion of the network on national level

The occasion to involve the government in the network began with the request of seven detainees in Hoogstraeten to emigrate. These were paid for by the Department of Justice. Tesch had just replaced de Haussy on the 12th of August as Minister of Justice. He asked for advice as Rogier was informed by Teichmann about how the network functioned¹⁴⁸. Teichmann did not only want to send detainees from beggar workhouses. He believed that anyone who received public assistance should be eligible for emigration. He defended his ideas with Rogier when the family Block of Antwerp applied for a grant¹⁴⁹. The minister of the Interior let Teichmann know that all the credits allocated for stimulating of emigration had been spent. He suggested letting the charity institutions cover the costs. The matter dragged on. Teichmann kept insisting on getting the seven detainees sent to America. In the end Tesch decided to pay for the crossing of the detainees. Finally on the 27th of February, eight beggars subsidized by the Department of Justice crossed the Atlantic to the “New World”¹⁵⁰. At first Tesch and Rogier decided to direct these emigrants to Sainte-Marie. The government had an agreement of sending 50 new emigrants to Sainte-Marie. By sending these emigrants they could save themselves some money. But since Bosch’s report on the situation of the colony had not yet reached Rogier, the emigrants only travelled to New York¹⁵¹.

The long deliberation was due to the fact that both Rogier and Tesch were aware that if this practice would become known to the public it could provoke difficulties with the American authorities. The immigration of paupers had been prohibited since 1831. Tesch explicitly asked Teichmann to keep their past as ex-detainees in beggar workhouses secret. He defended this by saying that it could jeopardize their future in the United States, but it is

¹⁴⁷ Letters from Teichmann to the governor of Brussels 31/10/1850 en aan aal Antwerpse gemeenten 4/12/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁴⁸ A.R.A., T O22: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de bienfaisance et des prisons: nr. 85, Correspondance 1850-1852, nr. 14512.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Teichmann to Rogier 5/9/1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 273, dl. II, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1817-1850.

¹⁵⁰ A.R.A., T O22: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de bienfaisance et des prisons: nr. 85, Correspondance 1850-1852, nr. 14512.

¹⁵¹ Letter of Tesch to Teichmann, 10/1/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

clear that the government also had interests in secrecy¹⁵². As stated above, the council of Mechelen had already inquired about the measures restricting immigration into the United States. The proposals for these measures came from the ‘Know Nothing Party’. In 1838 the anti-catholic movement in the U.S. led to the foundation of the ‘Native American Movement’. This movement also opposed the big immigration flow that entered their country. They increased the pressure on the American authorities to refuse the right of access to the U.S.A. for vagabonds and paupers. The Native American Movement was responsible for a couple of bloody insurrections. As a result the movement dissolved. It reorganised in 1850 and became known to the public as the ‘Know Nothings’. It thanked its name to the secret nature of its actions. This movement had quite a lot of supporters. It was centred in New York City. Officially the party called itself ‘The American Party’ and also ‘The Order of the Star Spangled Banner’. The party slowly but surely won local elections with their anti-foreigner ideology. The party peaked in 1855-1857 when it obtained some influence in the 34th American Congress¹⁵³. After 1857 it started fading away. This movement was responsible for the renewing of the laws to prohibit the immigration of indigents in 1851.

Despite the risk the Belgian government decided to follow through with the transportation of beggars. In March 1851 Tesch approved two new requests. However he did insist that the beggar, convict or ex-convict did not leave a woman or children behind¹⁵⁴. Rogier ensured that the provinces of East- and West-Flanders which had the highest poverty rates, were included in the network¹⁵⁵. By the end of 1851 Tesch had briefed all the governors¹⁵⁶. Everything happened with the greatest care. The danger of being caught had to be avoided at all costs. This care had already illustrated with the refusal of De Ham’s request to send beggars to Sainte-Marie. Teichmann opposed the idea, not only because he believed the beggars did not fit the profile of the people De Ham was looking for (see above), but also for the following reason:

“In case of conflict the immigration of our beggars to the United States could draw the attention of the American government and endanger future transportations, while beggars at the moment go by totally unnoticed and ignored.

¹⁵² Letter from Teichmann to the director of the beggar workhouse in Hoogstraten 13/1/1851, S. A., Modern archief: Maatschappelijke instellingen, nr. 145/3, Emigranten 1850-1855.

¹⁵³ M. BENNET, *op cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Teichmann to the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraeten 19/3/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁵⁵ A.R.A., T O22: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de bienfaisance et des prisons: nr. 85, Correspondance 1850-1852, nr. 14512.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Teichmann to the provincial governors 25/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

The beggars prefer to look freely for work in the big cities where the salaries are much higher. This system contributes perfectly to the immediate assimilating of our beggars, while the system of De Ham would cause their agglomeration in one and only location, which seems to me, considering the past of those individuals, to be a situation to be avoided at all costs, not only for the peace within the colony itself, but also to not compromise the continuation of our shipments¹⁵⁷. ”

In another letter to the provincial governors he stressed the importance of keeping beggars pasts secret:

“For each one of them we’ll have to provide a special certificate indicating their age, place of birth, civil status, profession, etc., but without mentioning their confinement in the beggar workhouse¹⁵⁸. ”

Teichmann absolutely wanted to avoid the system being discovered by the American authorities. The governor feared that the concentration of these individuals on one site would draw the attention of the authorities. He tried hard to spread the beggars as much as possible upon their arrival. Before their departure however he tried to gather as many volunteers as possible to keep down the prices of transport. Thielens and Teichmann were prepared to send big groups as is shown in the following letter:

“If in the interval new requests for exportation happen to be approved,..., it would not be of any inconvenience to direct a larger number of passengers than indicated on the list to Antwerp. M. Inspector of the Service for Emigrants disposes of an unlimited number of places for the price mentioned above. The extra expeditions will go on every eight days till the closure of navigation in winter¹⁵⁹. ”

Thielens took care of the practical side of the matter. He tried to keep the costs as low as possible. He asked Rogier to coordinate everything a bit better. At that time the emigrants left in small numbers. This periodical emigration was subject to price fluctuations. According to Thielens these fluctuations could be avoided if the beggars left in group. This also offered the possibility of buying materials and food supplies in bigger quantities and thus at a cheaper price. He also hoped to fix the price for the crossing:

“I am quite certain of reaching an agreement with one of the best houses at the market square for a fixed price all year around if I can assure him of providing a reasonable and constant number of passengers¹⁶⁰. ”

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Teichmann to Tesch 24/5/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Teichmann to the provincial governors 25/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 140.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Thielens to Rogier 5/4/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

The letter of Teichmlann to the provincial governors of the 25th of October quoted earlier proves that Thielens came to an agreement with this ‘respectable house on the market square’. Thielens alluded to the shipping company of Adolphe Strauss. The total cost for the crossing between 1850 and 1856 amounted between 170fr. to 180fr. New York was the most popular destination. Every once in a while beggars were also shipped to New Orleans, which normally cost more but Thielens managed to obtain the same price as for New York. Strauss and his sons are undoubtedly the most discussed ship owners of the city. Their name pops up in all shady business going on in Antwerp. Thielens and Strauss would build a strong collaboration. This collaboration lasted nearly thirty years until Thielens gave up his position as emigration-inspector. This indicates that the emigration-inspector had a conflict of interest as he was supposed to inform and protect the emigrants. This collaboration will become clear in this and following chapters.

The project was well received in all provinces. The provinces of Brabant and Liege took immediate advantage of the offer by sending detainees confined in the beggar workhouses of Ter Kameren and Rekhem. The movement started slower in West- and East Flanders. The governor of West-Flanders was a prominent supporter, but complained about the lack of funds:

“We deplore the fact that our legislation does not permit exporting these beggars against their will. The people who fill up these institutions are rarely attached to their country. There are already many indigents who have applied for it, but the poorest and smallest communities can not always afford the transport cost. The provincial council decided to free up 3,000fr. to 6,000fr. of the budget of 13,500fr. allocated for communities and charity institutions who take measures in the interest of educate children with good morals of indigents through work and for the erection of shelters for the elderly and orphans¹⁶¹. ”

The local authorities in West-Flanders found themselves in a disastrous financial situation. The governor tried to get financial support from the government. He defended his demand by pointing out that the government also benefited from each beggar sent to the U.S. He proposed dividing the cost between the local, provincial and national authorities. Rogier however did not accept his proposal.

In the meantime positive news about the first group sent to the U.S., reached Belgium. A group of seventeen had been put to work upon their arrival by the “Panama Railroad

¹⁶¹ Letter from the governor of West-Flanders to Thielens and Rogier 16/9/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. II, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851.

Association". These immigrants would be earning 25dollars to 30dollars a month¹⁶². Those were phenomenally high salaries compared to Belgium. For instance a sailor hired in Antwerp earned 5dollars to 6dollars a month. The figures must have appealed to the imagination of a lot of people. The information came from the emigrants themselves and from a special agent in New York. The year before Thielens had already pointed out the necessity of having a special agent at the port of arrival to direct the emigrants. This agent needed to provide the emigrants with useful information and help them to find jobs. D'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne however claimed he did not possess of enough money to cover the expense of 600fr. a year for the agent¹⁶³. Thielens decided to look for one himself. By the summer of 1851 he had found someone in New York to take this responsibility. It was a businessman from Antwerp who welcomed the emigrants upon arrival. Thielens always warned the agent in advance of the departure of the beggars. The agent then welcomed them and tried to put them to work somewhere¹⁶⁴. This agent was the son of a businessman, mister Kiehn, who provided Thielens with the materials and the food supply for the emigrants. The agent in New York did not receive a salary. According to Thielens Kiehn worked for free because it served the interests of his father¹⁶⁵. The Kiehn family appears to be related to of Adolphe Strauss. This indicates that Kiehn did not only serve the interests of his father (see below). The great efforts Thielens made for the network and the fact that he entrusted the organisation exclusively to a select group of people, indicate that he had some personal interest in the matter.

3.1.5) The expansion of the network to prisoners and ex- convicts

In 1851 the network grew to include prisoners and ex-convicts. The 'Committee for After-care and Resettlement of freed Prisoners' tried to reintegrate released prisoners into society. An important part of this process was finding work for them. In 1850 the committee started to put some to work as sailors on boats leaving from Antwerp¹⁶⁶. It was a small step from this to shipping them like the beggars to the United States. From the beginning of 1851

¹⁶² Letter from Teichmann to the governor of East Flanders 10/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁶³ Letter from Teichmann to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 18/4/1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from Teichmann to Rogier 4/8/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850

¹⁶⁵ This information comes from a letter of 19/5/1852 from Thielens to Mr. Barling who offered his services to observe this task in New York. P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

¹⁶⁶ R. BOUMANS, op cit., p. 488.

an intense correspondence between different committees, Tesch, Rogier, Thielens and Teichmann arose. Rogier's reply to one of Thielens' letters it becomes clear that the Minister of the Interior fully supported the project:

"The matter concerning the emigration of beggars has not been lost sight of. Your note has been communicated to the governors of both Flanders and Limburg. However a big obstacle to the complete realisation of your project is that the Ministry at the moment lacks the funds to encourage local councils. Nevertheless the plan to demand a special credit for this matter has not been forgotten.

Mister Ducpétiaux has been informed about the project and showed a lot of interest in it. It would be good to keep him informed¹⁶⁷."

There is no evidence that any such special credit for enhancing the network ever existed within the budget of the Ministry of the Interior. Rogier did however send letters to provincial and local authorities to stimulate this kind of emigration. He did the same for the emigration of ex-convicts. Mister Ducpétiaux, mentioned in the letter above, worked as general-inspector for the Belgian prisons. Rogier put Thielens in contact with Ducpétiaux to further his plans for absorbing up prisoners and ex-convicts into the network. At that time Thielens was setting up a test to send a prisoner to the U.S. in collaboration with the 'Committee for After-care and Resettlement of freed Prisoners' of Antwerp and the governor.

The individual chosen for the test was a certain Gilbert, who since the age of thirteen had served a twenty year sentence at the prison of Hemiksem. His liberation was scheduled for the summer of 1852. With a letter the prison's administrative commission asked to pardon the rest of his punishment in order to enable his expatriation to the United States. The commission defended their request as follows:

"...he partially knows different trades and if he found himself separated and far from his former cellmates he could find a decent way of living. He has an extremely decisive character and is not deprived of intelligence. We have been dealing with this individual for a long time now and his impending release raises apprehension in us for him and for society because of the numerous connections he has made in prison, he will undoubtedly fall back into vice. By granting him a pardon the government would do the individual and society a big favour¹⁶⁸."

On September 10th he was let off his punishment by royal decree on the condition that he left the country. A month later Gilbert boarded a ship heading to New York. The Department of Justice paid part of the ticket since his so called '*masse de réserve*' which was the money the prisoner still had to his name was not sufficient. Tesch was pleased with the

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Rogier aan Thielens 14/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. II, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851.

initiative and authorised other prisons to follow this example¹⁶⁹. The commission of the prison of Antwerp received permission to free F.Leponne and J.Buyle on the condition they be expatriated to the United States. Their ‘masse de reserve’ covered their expenses. According to the commission there were other requests but the subjects could not cover their expenses but hoped the Department of Justice could intervene¹⁷⁰. Some could count on their families to pay for the crossing. T. Van Hooydonck imprisoned in Gent had his ticket paid for by his sisters¹⁷¹. The Department of Justice proved to be reluctant of contributing financially to the project. In the end an agreement was made between all parties in. The local resettlement organizations, local social security and local councils committed themselves to paying for the crossing of convicts who had served out their sentences. The costs for prisoners who obtained a pardon on the condition that they immigrate to the United States were covered by the ‘masse de reserve’ of the prisoner which was topped up by a subsidy of the Department of Justice if necessary¹⁷².

Thielens followed Rogier’s advice and contacted Ducpétiaux, general-inspector of Belgian prisons. The following fragment of this correspondence illustrates the growing collaboration of high level officials on the matter:

“My agent in New York has just informed me that it will be easy for the young men you want to undertake a tryout, especially if they are accompanied by a person of confidence who has the means to house and feed them for the first couple of days, and who if needed can provide them with some tools for work, without which a labourer encounters many difficulties getting work in American workshops. The former convict Gilbert pardoned on the condition he emigrates to the United States has written me saying he wouldn’t for anything in the world want to come back to Europe. He went to Albany and Nova Scotia along with forty other Belgians who come from our beggar workhouses. He earns 4fr. a day and reckons that he will be paid twice as much when the bad season is over¹⁷³. ”

The good news about Gilbert must have been encouraging. In particular the high salaries in America must have appealed to many prisoners’ imaginations and convinced both beggars as prisoners to emigrate.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from the administration of the prison of Hemiksem to Tesch 20/8/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Tesch to Teichmann 3/11/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from the commission of the prison of Antwerpen to Tesch 12/3/1852, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁷¹ Letter from the warden of the prison of Gent to Teichmann, 2/9/1854., P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁷² R. BOUMANS, *op cit.*, p. 489.

¹⁷³ Letter from Thielens to Ducpétiaux 23/2/1852, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

The local resettlement organizations used the network set up for detainees from beggar workhouses. On the other hand Teichmann, Thielens and Tesch took over the system to put detainees from beggar workhouses to work as sailors on boats leaving from Antwerp. The price for a simple crossing with luggage amounted to 170fr. to 180fr. The cost of providing a beggar with the necessary materials to work as a sailor amounted to only 110fr. Furthermore sailors started earning money as soon as they got started¹⁷⁴.

3.1.6) The first problems

Not everything ran smoothly. The city of Antwerp complained that some people let themselves be incarcerated in beggar houses on purpose in order to get their transport to the U.S. paid for by the city. The mayor proposed locking up these people for at least two years. In this way he hoped to discourage the practice but the budget of the city did not allow it. He felt powerless against this new trend. The mayor then suggested making their stay at such institutions less comfortable and make them work harder. According to the director of the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraeten there existed only one solution to the problem. He suggested implementing emigration on a larger scale. This emigration would have to concentrate on two sorts of individuals:

“I would favour: 1) the emigration of those accompanied by their family who by their behaviour and past have shown good will and zest for work, but who by unfortunate circumstances find themselves in a miserable situation. 2) the kind of vagabonds who seem to be lost and destined to spend their lives in beggar workhouses or prisons. That way society will not have to expect any more scandals from them¹⁷⁵. ”

Another problem Thielens and Teichmann had to deal with was the return of some beggars to Belgium. The local councils who found these individuals roaming back in their community againstarted to doubt the efficiency of the system. The city of Antwerp for instance had paid for the crossing of two individuals called De Vleeschouwer and Thoen. Two years later the city received notice that both had come back to Europe. They had got stuck in London trying to return to their home country and had asked to be repatriated. The council of Antwerp decided not to intervene. Before his departure De Vleeschouwer had been described as follows: “*a bad subject, incorrigible, and with an obvious immorality, that has*

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Teichmann to Rogier and Tesch, 9/6/1852, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from the director of the beggar workhouse of Hoogstraten to Teichmann 6/10/1851, S. A., Modern archief: Maatschappelijke instellingen, nr. 145/3, Emigranten 1850-1855.

been condemned three times for theft." The community council feared that both men would constitute a burden to society again¹⁷⁶. In the city archives of Antwerp some documents can be found with a short description of the beggars who were sent to the U.S. The qualities required to qualify for a free ticket to the United States can best be illustrated with the description of Vincken and Wauters' character: "*incorrigible drunks and vagabonds, bad subjects on all fronts*"¹⁷⁷. Thielens constantly reassured the local councils. He pointed out that an immediate return was impossible considering that the return ticket cost about 500fr. He estimated that a mere 2% ever made it back to Belgium.

Another incident nearly caused the downfall of the network. Brussels had united a rather large group of candidates. It numbered fifty beggars. Forty five of them were single men or widowers without children. The group also included three women. Two had already been married, but had been divorced for a long time now. The final two candidates were not specified. Everyone in the group had been arrested twice or more. Only five of them still had a living parent¹⁷⁸. Normally Teichmann and Tesch advised against the emigration of women for so called 'humanitarian reasons'. This matter has been discussed before in the request from the local council of Ekeren (see above). Less than a year later Kiehn Thielens' the agent in New York, had no objections to the emigration of women. They could find work as easily as men¹⁷⁹. One thing becomes very clear with the description of this group. The government and local councils hardly showed any concern for the well-being of the emigrants¹⁸⁰. This form of emigration existed with the sole purpose of allowing the local and national authorities to get rid of individuals who had been living at their expense for a long time. The main criteria for getting the approval appeared to be the assurance that the individuals didn't leave

¹⁷⁶ Letter from the mayor of Antwerp to Teichmann 20/6/1853, S. A., Modern archief: Maatschappelijke instellingen, nr. 145/3, Emigranten 1850-1855.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 158.

¹⁷⁸ Session of the council of Brussel, 28/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850.

¹⁷⁹ Session of the community council of Brussels, 28/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1850. With a letter from 4/8/1854 the Department of Justice informed about the possibilities in the United States for an 18-year old intelligent female orphan who was incarcerated in a beggar workhouse. Thielens answered quite strangely that the emigration of women had always been advised against. He added that his agent in New York never had any job offers for women. This is totally in contradiction with other letters which are in the same archive. Four months earlier he personally arranged the crossing of a certain Catherine Stuyck. She had been sentenced to two months imprisonment. Thielens arranged for her crossing when she got out. Even after his negative reply to the Department of Justice of 8/8/1854 women emigrated through him like Virginie Debot from the beggar workhouse of Mons 22/8/1854. Thielens probably suddenly advised against the emigration of women to the Department of Justice because he feared they might start to become a burden for the consulate.

¹⁸⁰ The council of Mechelen has to be mentioned as an exception on the rule here. The following fragment of a letter about the refusal of some requests proves this: "*We rather pay their expenses than knowing them unhappy in the United States of America.*"

anyone behind who they were responsible for and who could therefore be at risk of becoming dependent on public support. This explains the explicit mention that the group did not leave any children, women and only five elderly parents behind who might depend on welfare provided by the local or national authorities.

Kiehn did not appear to be prepared for the arrival of such big groups in New York. Many of them found their way to consul Mali to complain and ask for money. The consul considered it unacceptable that beggars be dumped without any means in the United States. He spent 225fr. to pay for their transport to the interior to avoid any scandal. In a long letter to d'Hoffschildt de Resteigne he pointed out that emigrations of this kind could harm the good relations the country held with United States¹⁸¹. This letter convinced d'Hoffschildt de Resteigne in consultation with Rogier to suspend any future transportation of beggars, convicts and ex-convicts. Thielens and Teichmann did everything to make both ministers reconsider decision. The governor admitted that the group of seventy two who had reached New York with the 'Atlantis' was too numerous. It wasn't his intention to concentrate so many beggars on one ship. He stated that this incident occurred because of little coincidences and that it would never happen again. According to Kiehn the group of beggars did not deserve the attention and compassion Mali had given them. He pointed out the German emigration which brought large groups of poor people in much worse conditions and thus with smaller chances of succeeding to the U.S. So far this had never caused a conflict between Germany and the U.S. Thielens also refuted the complaint of Mali. The beggars had not been dumped without means. He promised however to take the necessary measures to ensure any discomfort for the consul in New York would be avoided. Thielens described the beggars as 'born profiteers'. He proposed some measures to prevent the emigrants from staying in New York. The existence of the consulate of New York should be kept secret for them. In the future their pocket money would only be handed out on their arrival at their final destination. That way they prevented it from being wasted on liquor abuses. The beggars should, following the example of the German emigration movement, head directly to the interior. In the interior many employers only paid half of the wages to the labourers. The other half was paid when the contract was finished. This measure prevented them from deserting or wasting it on alcohol. In the meantime Thielens had made arrangements for the beggars whose emigration had been suspended by a letter from d'Hoffschildt de Resteigne of December 12th 1851, to shipping them upon the 'Uncas' to New Orleans on the 15th of

January. With this transport the new measures could be put to the test¹⁸². On the 25th of January d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne allowed Teichmann and en Thielens to proceed with their initiative.

In what way all these measures were implemented remains unclear. The price for the crossing however remained between 170fr. to 180fr. until 1856. The measure to take care of the transport of the emigrants to the interior was rarely applied to beggars. However Thielens used it for prisoners and ex-convicts for whom he charged an extra 20fr. to 25fr. The amount of prisoners and ex-convicts per ship remained very limited. It wasn't easy to find ship owners and captains who would allow passengers of this kind on their ships. Most captains only agreed to transport beggars and ex-convicts on the condition that the transport to the interior for the passengers had been arranged beforehand. At this time the city of New York increased the fines imposed on captains found guilty of transporting paupers and convicts. More and more captains refused to transport this kind of passenger anymore. To bypass this difficulty and also to keep expenses down Thielens withheld their past. This also explains the increasing concentration of these emigrants on each ship. In the end this would lead to a diplomatic conflict between the United States and Belgium.

3.1.7) The 'Rochambeau' case

The district secretary of Liege, Fléchet, sent a circular letter concerning the imminent departure of some prisoners from Vilvoorde and some detainees from beggar workhouses to the United States. This letter fell into the wrong hands, namely those of the Americans¹⁸³. As mentioned above, the 'Know Nothing Party' gained influence at the beginning of the 1850's. This movement was characterized by its anti-catholic and anti-immigration ideology. The letter leaked to the American press where it triggered a huge controversy¹⁸⁴. The emigration through Antwerp was discredited for some time in the American press. According to Mange, consul in Philadelphia this resulted from an Irish Protestant campaign against the Catholics¹⁸⁵. De Brouckère, who in 1852 substituted d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne as minister of Foreign

¹⁸¹ Letter from d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Teichmann 13/12/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

¹⁸² Letter from Teichmann to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 31/12/1851, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. III, Emigration 1841-1854.

¹⁸³ R. BOUMANS, op cit., p. 492.

¹⁸⁴ Letter from de Brouckère to Piercot concerning articles published in the 'New York tribune' 5/10/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. III, Emigration 1851-1854.

Affairs, asked for an explanation for Fléchet's letter to the minister of the Interior, G. Piercot. The minister who totally supported the network explained the whole system. The circular of Fléchet contained details about the functioning of the network in the hope of convincing mayors in the province of Liege to encourage beggars, ex-convicts and prisoners to emigrate to the United States. The minister of the Interior believed that the incident would not affect Belgian-American relations. Germany and England had been exporting their poor and beggars who constituted an expense for their community¹⁸⁶. Rogier send a letter to the provincial governors cautioning them to be more discreet so as not to endanger the useful practice:

“The government, with the purpose of helping the councils, advised the emigration to the United States of paupers confined in beggar workhouses. ... This practice however should be undertaken with the greatest discretion. Make sure that no publicity at all is given to it. ... This publicity could compromise the administration and arouse the suspicions of the American government who does not approve of the arrival on its territory of individuals of the category concerning this matter.

...periodicals mentioning the departure of detainees and sums voted by community councils for this are very detrimental.

...M. Governor I'll ask you to confidentially communicate the content of this letter to the authorities it may concern¹⁸⁷.

Because of the press campaign in the U.S. the American consul in Antwerp started to control the emigration through the port more strictly. In late autumn 1854, the 'Rochambeau' left Antwerp for New York. The ship contained 160 Belgian passengers. The American consul suspected the presence of ex-convicts on board, but he could not prove it. He sent a letter to the governors of Antwerp and Liege to protest against the embarkation of some passengers. The governors justified the emigration of these passengers by comparing them to German emigrants. They claimed that the Belgian emigrants did not differ from the Germans who crossed the Atlantic. The Belgian officials described them as “*robust, single men in good health without deformation*”. Besides they possessed over more and better materials than the Germans and their transport to the interior had been arranged beforehand. This kind of Belgian emigrant had never caused any trouble in the past. The governors saw no reason why that would change now¹⁸⁸. Teichmann would regret this miscalculation later. The American consul warned the New York authorities of his suspicion. At the arrival of the Rochambeau,

¹⁸⁵ Letter from Mange to H.de Brouckère 8/9/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁸⁶ Letter from the G.Piercot to H.de Brouckère 30/11/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. III, Emigration 1851-1854.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from the G. Piercot to the governors 30/11/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. III, Emigration 1851-1854.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from the governor of Liege to the American consul in Antwerp, 30/11/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. III, Emigration 1851-1854.

twelve Belgians were arrested based on the law to fight the import of foreign convicts. The Belgian authorities were fiercely criticized in the American press. The Belgian ‘chargé d’affaires’ in Washington had the following advice for de Brouckère:

“...the Belgian circular letter concerning the shipment to America of ex-convicts and of which the translation has been published in all the newspapers of the Union, has caused precautionary measures to be taken against Belgium.

...by intervening prematurely you would create the impression that the Belgian authorities indeed are responsible for transporting these individuals. On the contrary its best to leave all initiative to the local authorities of Antwerp and to make it known that the government has nothing to do with it.

I have the honour, sir Minister of bringing your attention the necessity of keeping all measures taken to direct individuals whom we want to remove from our country to the United States as secret as possible ..., it wouldn’t be safe to chose New York in the future as port of disembarkation¹⁸⁹. ”

The chargé in Washington based his advice on the position the English government had taken during a similar incident. The Belgian authorities followed his advice to the letter. It didn’t take long before the American authorities threatened Belgium with sanctions:

“Evidence has been furnished that at least twelve persons alleged to be convicts have been shipped not only with the full knowledge and consent of the Belgian authorities but with their active agency and cooperation. These men were arrested and jailed upon their arrival in New York. ... We expect that steps will be at once taken to prevent the recurrence of this situation in the future, if not to punish the parties who have taken part in this. ... Furthermore draw your attention to the shipping of paupers. We have evidence that the Belgian government encourages the local authorities that these should be sent to the U.S. at the public expense. ...

This practise is highly objectionable. It must be admitted to be incompatible with fair dealing and good neighbourship which should be observed between one nation to another. We urge that his Excellency will prevent the shipping of this class of people from Belgium to the United States¹⁹⁰. ”

To prove the accusations the American legation quoted an article published in the ‘Independence Belge’ of October 15th 1854 which denounced the whole network. In addition some quotes from the report of the community council were included. During this session a budget of 4,000fr. had been approved for sending detainees in beggar workhouses to the United States.

De Brouckère wasn’t pleased with the complaint and asked for explanations from Piercot. He defended himself by claiming the American press exaggerated the incident. The minister of the Interior pushed all responsibility onto the local authorities and denied any

¹⁸⁹ Letter from the chargé d’affaires in Washington to de Brouckère 23/12/1854, Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. III, Emigration 1851-1854.

shipment of ex-convicts: “*The Belgian Government has never favoured the emigration of ex-convicts, only of indigents living at the expenses of the communities.*” Piercot claimed that his involvement limited itself to pointing out the possibility to the local authorities. Besides Teichmann had informed him that the arrested subjects in New York were all ex-detainees of beggar workhouses. They did not match what was considered to be an ex-convict in America¹⁹¹. The Department of Justice from its side stressed the financial advantages to de Brouckère. The minister was not satisfied with the answer. He brought the fact that the letter of Fléchet mentioned the transport of prisoners incarcerated at the prison of Vilvoorde to the attention of Piercot. He waited for conformation that passengers of that kind had not boarded the ‘Rochambeau’. He insisted that future shipments of that sort were not to go ahead. According to de Broeckère the incident had already wrecked an emigration project in Brazil¹⁹². After another thorough investigation Teichmann confirmed that no passengers of that kind had embarked on the Rochambeau. Eight of the twelve arrested came from beggar workhouses, another three were unknown to him and only one had ever been convicted for theft. Once again the involvement of the government was denied:

“The royal Government is absolutely unaware of any transport of emigrants to the United States. ... The local councils take care of the emigration of people who can not find means of existence in Belgium... Although the government is completely ignorant to the sending of emigrants, it did not believe it had to abstain from giving the official order to the police of the port of embarkation to only hand out the right of passage to honest people who never had to deal with repressive justice¹⁹³.”

Meanwhile in the U.S. the case grew to such proportions that it reached the Senate. On the 23rd of January the Senate made some resolutions concerning beggars and ex-convicts arriving in New York. The ‘Emigration Commission’ in New York investigated the origin of immigrants who found themselves in American charity institutions. The list of passengers and the list of inhabitants of charity institutions were put side by side. Of this comparison it appeared that most of the immigrants depending on the welfare system of American society were Belgians and Germans who came directly from Antwerp or indirectly via London or Liverpool. The commission admitted that the arrest of the twelve Belgians was done based purely on the suspicions of the consul in Antwerp and without solid proof. They concluded

¹⁹⁰ Letter from the american Legation in Brussels to de Brouckère 15/1/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹¹ Letter from Piercot to de Brouckère 19/1/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹² Letter from de Brouckère to Piercot, 20/1/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

that a law needed to be passed to force shipping companies to ship home all passengers who had the right of passage into the country refused¹⁹⁴.

Mange the consul of Philadelphia, was concerned about the faith of the Belgian prisoners. He sent to de Brouckère some articles published in the American press which protested against the arrest. According to these articles the preliminary investigation had shown that the detainees were not criminals. These articles urged the authorities of New York city to release them. One article contained a quote from Mange who put the responsibility for the occurrence on Gall's shoulders, the American consul in Antwerp¹⁹⁵. De Brouckère pointed out to Mange that he crossed the line with his quotes in the newspaper. The case was the responsibility of Mali the consul of New York. Mali tried to pressure the American authorities to release the twelve. On February 12th Mali let de Brouckère know that he had obtained their release. The Emigration Commission would spend 20 dollars to secure their transport to the interior¹⁹⁶. Later the Emigration Commission asked Mali to let the Belgian authorities know that in comparison to other European ports, many disreputable people emigrated through Antwerp. Furthermore the commission knew some people made it their business to arrange the emigration of such individuals. The commission warned that from now on every ship coming from Antwerp would be subjected to a thorough control¹⁹⁷. The release of the prisoners was postponed a few times. The mayor of New York feared creating a precedent which would complicate the refusal of entrance to beggars and ex-convicts in the future¹⁹⁸.

Just when the prisoners were about to be released a new scandal broke out. Another ten Belgians were arrested upon their arrival in New York for the same reasons. They reached the American city on board the 'Henry Read'. They were released from beggar workhouses but again had been convicted in the past. The incident received a lot of attention in the American newspapers. The mayor reconsidered his decision to send the twelve passengers

¹⁹³ Letter from Piercot to de Brouckère 20/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹⁴ Letter from Vice-president Crabtree to the Emigration Commission 1/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹⁵ Letter from Mange to de Brouckère 3/2/1855 including the translation of articles from the The New York Herald, 27/1/1855 and an article from the Courrier des Etats-Unis: Organe des populations Franco-Américaine 28/1/1855. A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Mali to de Brouckère 12/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹⁷ Letter from the Emigration Commission to Mali 15/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

¹⁹⁸ Letter from the mayor of New York to ? 26/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

from the Rochambeau to the interior. He demanded that the Belgian authorities pay for their repatriation. Mali and the chargé in Washington, Solvyns, refused to do so. The Belgian consulate and the New York mayor could come to an agreement. The matter was transferred to the court of law. Roosevelt, judge of the Supreme Court of New York, pronounced himself in favour of the Belgian emigrants. The decisive factor that influenced his decision, was his interpretation of the beggar workhouses as an institution. He interpreted them neither as penitentiary institutions nor as institutions of public welfare but as social workplaces. Therefore individuals who came out of beggar workhouses could not be considered paupers or ex-convicts. Finally on the 24th of February the twelve passengers of the Rochambeau were released on the basis of ‘habeas corpus’¹⁹⁹. What became of the ten passengers of the Henry Read was not mentioned. They probably were released at the same time as the others following Roosevelt’s verdict. The captain of the ‘Henry Read’ likely had to pay a heavy fine for bringing these passengers.

3.2) The collapse of the network

3.2.1) Restrictive measures

Under the pressure of the American authorities the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assured the American authorities that in the future the maritime police of Antwerp would refuse to let ex-convicts on board ships. De Brouckère ordered Teichmann to see to it that the emigration supported by the authorities would not cause any new incidents like that caused by the Rochambeau²⁰⁰.

Mali had a conversation with the immigration inspector of New-York. He reported it to de Brouckere. This clarifies what exactly triggered the whole ‘Rochambeau’ case. The inspector told Mali that for a couple of years the boats coming from Antwerp had caused more problems than ships coming from other ports. He accused Antwerp from serving as a centre of rotation for the shipment of the lowest class of emigrants coming from Belgium, as well as Germany and Switzerland. According to the inspector of the New York ‘Immigration Board’ it was the ship owner Strauss that stood at the head of the network. The inspector suspected Strauss of being specialised in the emigration of subjects whom the communities

¹⁹⁹ R. BOUWMANS, *op cit.*, p. 493 en 494.

²⁰⁰ Letter of Piercot to de Brouckère 26/2/1855, 26/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

and the government wanted to get rid of. Word was he earned 15 dollars for each emigrant of that class who he shipped to the U.S.A. The commotion around Fléchet's letter and subsequently the Rochembeau case allowed them to impose higher fines for the importation of paupers and convicts. This had immediate consequences. The company 'Porth Smith and Company' which managed a line between Antwerp and New York was one of the first victims. Two boats transporting emigrants to New York had had to deal with serious complications. These caused an extra expense that absorbed all the profits of that shipment. 'Porth Smith and Company' ordered their captains to tighten their control during the embarkation of the emigrants. On top of that the 'Immigration Board' considered implementing a special tax for all ships coming from Antwerp. The board demanded guarantees from the ships that their passengers would not cause any expenses for the American government. Mali pointed out that these measures could endanger the competitive position of Antwerp as an emigration port. They could also force the boats to make a detour through the east because the goods loaded in Antwerp would no longer be sufficient to make the trip profitable. This could affect the whole trade going through Antwerp. Also the project of the government to subsidize a transatlantic service on steam would come under review. Mali stressed the importance of upholding the good reputation of the port²⁰¹.

The cooperation between Thielens and Strauss has been mentioned before. In 1850 Thielens published a guide for the emigrants in both national languages. A second edition of the book was printed in 1856: "*Advice to the Belgian emigrant going to the United States of North America.*" Strauss' shipping company distributed this second edition for free. It included a recommendation certificate for Strauss shipping company authenticated by Thielens²⁰². On the 2nd of January Thielens offered Strauss a contract guaranteeing him a monopoly on all emigrant transport paid for by the government²⁰³. This contract gave an official character to a practice that had been going on for years. In 1851 Thielens had already mentioned the collaboration with a shipping company with which he could get a fixed price (see above). An incomplete list of this class of emigrants from 1853 composed by the

²⁰¹ Letter from Mali to de Bouckère 12/3/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²⁰² J. EVERAERT, "Landverhuizers op doortocht: Antwerpen en de transatlantische migratie (1843-1914)" in: JALON R. (red.), *Landverhuizers: Antwerpen als kruispunt van komen en gaan*, Gent, Snoeck-Ducaju en zoon, 2002, p.11.

²⁰³ Contract between Strauss and Thielens 2/1/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

maritime police also mentions as well the name of the shipping company that transported them. With a few exceptions they all left with Strauss²⁰⁴.

As former secretary of cabinet of the governor of Antwerp, emigration-inspector, secretary of the ‘Navigation Commission’ and cousin of the chief captain of the port, Thielens had a big impact on the emigration policy. Although he originally was appointed to ensure the well-being of emigrants going through Antwerp, he had his say in all decisions concerning emigration. The network built for the emigration of beggars, prisoners and ex-convicts, proves he also had connections with a lot of prominent people in Antwerp.

The first chapter of this study discussed the efforts made by local and national authorities to lure a part of the German emigration movement to Antwerp. The competition with Bremen and Hamburg remained fierce. Between 1843 and 1855 many smear campaigns against Antwerp ran in Germany²⁰⁵. The biggest abuses during this time were the selling of false tickets for the transport to the interior of the United States and the withholding of food supplies by captains. Some captains then sold what was left of the food supplies upon their arrival in New York. Most of the complaints were addressed to Strauss. The ship owner had a bad reputation in the U.S. and in Germany. From 1850 on there are many traces which indicate efforts by the authorities to lure the Swiss emigration movement to Antwerp. The general-consul in Bern, M. De Gremus de Sturler received the mission to direct the Swiss emigration flow to Antwerp. The Swiss government apparently also stimulated the emigration of indigents. The volume of the movement was estimated at 6,000 to 7,500 annually. De Sturler looked for ways to make the voyage to Antwerp as cheap as possible²⁰⁶. To what extent de Sturler succeeded in luring the Swiss emigrants to Antwerp remains an open question. According to the New York Emigration Commission however it seems that he managed to direct at least part of the movement to Antwerp.

Strauss benefited the most for all the efforts of the government to lure foreign emigrants to the national port and to send countrymen overseas. His close collaboration with Thielens indicates that the emigration-inspector also enriched himself with the whole operation. Teichmann also strived with a lot of dedication to keep the network running. In what way Teichmann benefited financially from the network is less obvious. However he

²⁰⁴ List of the beggar emigrants from 1850-1856, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

²⁰⁵ P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 273, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1817-1850, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

²⁰⁶ Letter from Vilain XIII to Teichmann 5/9/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

always defended Thielens and Strauss when their integrity was questioned. All three moved heaven and earth to save the network.

In the meantime Charles Vilain XIII replaced de Brouckère as minister of Foreign Affairs on the 30th of March 1855. It was the first time in eight years that a catholic politician exercised this function. As seen in chapter one the Catholics were less favourable to emigration than the liberals. He immediately received a letter from Mali. The consul did not let the opportunity to influence the new minister go by. Mali showed comprehension for the government policy concerning the emigration of beggars and ex-convicts, but stated that the advantages of this policy no longer outweighed the disadvantages. He emphasized once again that the activities of Strauss in particular created bad blood in the United States²⁰⁷. The previous government had already followed Mali's advice and ordered Teichmann to suspend the shipment of beggars, ex-convicts and pardoned prisoners. Vilain XIII asked Teichmann to give him more information on this kind of emigration. Teichmann answered quickly assuring Vilain XIII that strict controls stopping the emigration of beggars, convicts and ex-convicts had been implemented. The governor claimed that these measures also applied to the German and Swiss emigrants. He let the minister know that it wasn't easy to stop a system that had been adopted by the other provinces as well. In his letter to Vilain XIII he denied all involvement of the government. Teichmann also pointed out that it was hard to control the foreign emigrants. He had no influence on agents who sold tickets across the border. They received a commission on each ticket they sold. These agents tried to sell as many tickets as possible without taking into account the situation or the well-being of the buyer. Teichmann suggested insisting the Germans have a certain amount of money in their possession before granting them access to Belgium on their way to the 'New World'. The authorities had already tried to implement this measure ten years earlier without success. At the time the Belgian authorities had tried to prevent German emigrants falling at the expense of the Antwerp and national authorities with this measure. However it caused a serious decrease in the number of emigrants leaving through Antwerp. The measure triggered a big wave of protest from the shipping companies at that time. Therefore it was never implemented. However the measure had been implemented with success by France during that period. This made Teichmann believe that the same could be done in Belgium. In the meantime Gall, the American consul in Antwerp, required that all emigrant candidate for the U.S. should pass through his office. The emigrants had to pay him 1fr. and solemnly swear that they were not

paupers or a convicts. Teichmann did not believe that Gall received an official mandate to do so. However he suggested waiting to see what results this measure produced before requiring a certain sum of pocket money from German emigrants. The governor also refuted the accusations that Antwerp served as a centre of rotation for the shipment of the lowest class of emigrants coming from Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. If a larger number of emigrants of that class emigrated through Antwerp, it was purely coincidental. Teichmann pointed to the fact that Liverpool, the biggest emigration port for Irish emigrants undoubtedly transported many emigrants of that kind. Furthermore he stated that the accusations against Strauss were totally unfounded. Strauss had never specialized in the transport of a certain class of emigrants. He worked just as all the other shipping companies did. Teichmann reassured the minister that to avoid future problems he had come to an agreement with all the shipping companies of the city to no longer ship German beggars, at least not to New York. He also strongly opposed the fear of the consul Mali that the conflict endangered the project establishing a steamship line between Antwerp and New York. The price for a ticket on these ships cost much more than sailing ships. As such it attracted a totally different category of emigrant²⁰⁸. This testimony of Teichmann on the precarious situation of the network does not mean however that he gave up on it.

3.2.2) The search for alternatives: Brazil and Canada

The conflict around the twelve passengers of the ‘Rochambeau’ immediately had an impact on the network. Because of the international attention the matter received, Rogier decided to suspend all new shipments. In the meantime the number of detainees volunteering to emigrate, kept on increasing. Teichmann urged Rogier to decide on when the shipments to the U.S. could be resumed as quickly as possible. As Rogier’s answer remained unforthcoming Thielens started to look for alternatives. He suggested sending the emigrants to the “*English possessions in Canada*”. He remarked that the authorities there did not control the immigrants. The next boat for Canada left Antwerp on the 5th of April. Thielens asked

²⁰⁷ Letter from Mali to Vilain XIII 31/3/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²⁰⁸ Letter from Teichmann to Vilain XIII 3/4/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

Teichmann if he could make the preparations for it²⁰⁹. Rogier approved the resumption of the shipments, just before the news of the new scandal concerning the ‘Henry Read’, reached Belgium. The ten beggars who would be arrested upon arrival in New York had left Antwerp on the 18th of January just before Rogier suspended any new shipments²¹⁰. Teichmann had already written to the local authorities and the other provincial governors to prepare new volunteers. Thielens advised against continuing to ship them to New York because of the strict controls. He opted for other American ports and Canadian ones as well. According to Thielens, considering the fact that ships to these destinations sailed less frequently, every space needed to be filled. Therefore he asked the provincial governors to react quickly to this opportunity²¹¹. Two days after Teichmann sent out these letters, de Brouckère received the news about the Henry Read. He suspended all voyages again. However pressure increased on Teichmann from local authorities and different businessmen in Antwerp to keep on going with the shipments of beggars, ex-convicts and convicts. Teichmann supported the idea of directing the beggars to Canada. A week after de Brouckère’s suspension Teichmann asked him to. The same day the minister of Foreign Affairs received a letter from the Department of Justice pointing out that the number of requests for getting expatriated had increased considerably. Teichmann tried to find out if the conflict concerning the circular letter of Fléchet had been settled. De Brouckère concluded that it was too early to decide whether or not new expeditions to the U.S. could be undertaken. He would approve a test to Canada only if he received the necessary guarantees that no conflict would result from it²¹².

Meanwhile de Brouckère had the consuls investigate what the government policy on the emigration of beggars was like in Germany, Ireland, England and France. The consul of Berlin informed de Brouckère that the German authorities had shipped ex-convicts and ‘dangerous individuals’ to the U.S. until 1851²¹³. That year a conflict arose between the port of Bremen and the American authorities concerning the matter. From that moment on the German authorities refrained from sending that kind of emigrant to the United States. According to the consul no network existed in Germany to encourage poor beggars to

²⁰⁹ Letter from Teichmann to Rogier, 20/2/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²¹⁰ List of beggar emigrants from 1850-1856, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

²¹¹ Letter from Teichmann to the provincial governors 5/3/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856

²¹² Letters from Rogier to Faider and de Brouckère 13/3/1855 and reply of de Brouckère 16/3/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²¹³ This conflict explains why during that same year the laws on immigration of paupers and convicts were renewed under impulse of the Know Nothing Party.

emigrate. Only the Grand Duchy of Saksen sent beggars overseas without accompaniment, but so far this had not led to any conflict²¹⁴. In 1851 the state of Bremen agreed to spend 150,000fr. on the stimulation of the emigration movement. The emigration had to relieve the area of the important population growth²¹⁵. The consul of Dublin informed De Brouckère that no special measures were taken by the authorities concerning the emigration. However a large number of emigrants were transported at the expense of the ‘Union’. The English boats often experienced problems with the Emigration Commission of New York. The people the consul had spoken to, blamed it on the fact that most of the members of that commission were former captains of American boats. They tried to favour American ships as much as they could²¹⁶. The consul of London informed de Brouckère that the English government only sent beggars to its own colonies²¹⁷. The big English, Irish and German communities already established in the U.S. facilitated the integration process of beggars with these nationalities. This meant that Belgian beggars without these communities to help them adjust caused more trouble than other beggars. In addition the Irish and English spoke the same language as the Americans. This formed another barrier for Belgian beggars. Finally the consul in Le Havre reported on the French situation. Some beggars did get support from their community to emigrate. This however did not necessarily come from the community council. It could just as well come from a member of the community. This sort of emigration had caused problems at times. These problems were due to the high impoverished state of these beggars when they arrived in the ‘New World’. Some ships had been heavily fined for this²¹⁸.

Due to the change government change of 30th of March any decision was postponed. In the beginning of April Nothomb, the new Minister of Justice picked up on the matter. New demands of beggars for expatriation kept on increasing. He asked Teichmann what opportunities Canada offered as the U.S. continued to produce problems²¹⁹. The governor answered that the laws passed to keep beggars out only applied in the state of New York. All shipping companies except one, refused to transport beggars on their ships. That exception

²¹⁴ Letters from the consul in Berlijn to Vilain XIII 4 and 5/4/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²¹⁵ Letter from ? to Teichmann 5/8/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 273, dl. I, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1817-1850.

²¹⁶ Letter from the consul in Dublin to Vilain XIII 13/4/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²¹⁷ Letter from the consul in London to Vilain XIII 19/4/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²¹⁸ Letter from the consul in Le Havre to Vilain XIII 15/5/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²¹⁹ Letter from Nothomb to Teichmann 6/4/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

was no other than the company owned by Adolphe Strauss the man who Teichmann had stressed did not specialise in the shipping of beggars, ex-convicts and convicts. Teichmann believed that the network could remain and defended his opinion as follows:

“The laws do not apply to the ports of New Orleans and Charleston where we shouldn’t encounter the same problems. ...whatever may be, it seems preferable to me to direct indigent emigrants to Canada or to Brazil. The immigration in these places is less abundant than in New York, which makes it easier for the beggars to become engaged at their arrival in public works, construction and agriculture. ... However it must be pointed out that boats sail less frequently to these regions... Every occasion will have to be taken advantage of to the fullest. The next embarkation for Quebec will go through on the 20th of May²²⁰.”

Vilain XIIIII feared that the emigrants would use Canada gain access to the U.S. over land and cause more trouble that way²²¹. Teichmann tried to reassure Vilain XIIIII. He considered Canada to be a very good alternative to New York which had become overcrowded and too expensive to live in. Moreover it absolutely had to be avoided that more Belgians fell at the expenses of New York authorities. Canada offered better opportunities for starting a new life. Furthermore it gave the emigrants the opportunity to move on to Wisconsin. Teichmann didn’t expect any trouble to originate from expatriating them to Canada. In 1853 a Belgian colony had settled there and according to reports it was very successful (see chapter IV). Teichmann assured Vialin XIII that only within the state limits of New York could this kind of emigrants bring about conflict. To give an idea of what the situation in Canada was like, the governor translated an article from the ‘Deutsche Auswanderung Zeitung’, published in Bremen and written by Jim, agent in Canada:

“...479 proletarians and beggars, who had emigrated at the expenses of their communities, did not have to pay for their transport to the interior. They obtained free transport from the Canadian government 600 miles into the interior. ...274 among them looked weak, sick not to be recommended for labour, but thanks to the generous character of the Canadians, I found jobs for them which will probably get them out of their misery.

...this summer 2,539 Germans enjoyed free transport to the interior, which implies a saving of 5,340 dollars... In Canada you can find abundant land and work for anyone who wants it²²².”

The governor was convinced that strong, young, single men would easily find work in Canada. Finally he also made mention of a boat that left for Brazil that same month. Brazil

²²⁰ Letter from Teichmann to Nothomb 9/4/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

²²¹ Letter from Vilain XIIIII to Teichmann 12/4/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

offered extremely good conditions for colonists. Teichmann had already booked twenty places on that ship. After hearing Teichmann out, Vilain XIII gave his permission to attempt a test in both Canada and Brazil.

As quoted above the emigration to Canada gave the possibility of proceeding to the United States. The Minister of Justice inquired about the practical aspects of the operation. “*Is there an agent to welcome, direct, inform and put the emigrants to work on arrival or is it better that they move on to Wisconsin? Could we eventually entrust the matter to the German agent? What is the price of getting from the port of disembarkation to the final destination in Canada or the United States? Have there been Belgians who emigrated to Canada? How are they doing*²²³?” Teichmann admitted not having a contact in Canada. However Quebec housed a governmental agency which directed immigrants upon their arrival. The governor believed that emigration to Canada was suitable for single men but not so suitable for whole families although Germans often emigrated that way. Single men had better chances of being placed somewhere right away than whole families. The ticket to Wisconsin cost 50fr. The captain could hand this money over upon arrival in Canada. His answer to Nothomb’s last question was promising:

“In 1852 an indigent family left for Canada after a collection done by a priest in the community of Grez Doiceau yield enough for their crossing. The news about their experiences over there had an immediate impact causing the departure of 120 Walloon families, at the end of the year the colony numbered 500 families and this figure keeps on increasing²²⁴. ”

This fragment is an account of the colonists who established themselves in Wisconsin, not in Canada. This indicates that in Canada was considered more as a transit place to finally send Belgian beggars to the U.S. without arousing the suspicion of the American authorities.

The traffic between Belgium and Canada, and Belgium and Brazil was however limited. The line was only open for four months a year. The first boat to Rio Grande, ‘Aurora’, left Antwerp on the 24th of April with fourteen beggar emigrants on board. The ‘Richard Aslop’ left Antwerp for Canada on the 7th June with seven Belgian beggars. As usual the transport had been arranged by Strauss. The price remained 180fr. In the meantime

²²² Letter from Teichmann to Vilain XIII 14/4/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

²²³ Letter from Nothomb to Teichmann 8/5/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

²²⁴ Letter from Teichmann to Nothomb 12/5/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. I, Emigratie 1850-1855.

Strauss was still sending some indirectly to New York via Liverpool²²⁵. However many communities weren't sure if they still wanted to pay for the crossing. Since the 'Rochambeau' case and its aftermath many communities feared that their beggars would be sent back. Teichmann had to reassure the local authorities and send out many letters to stimulate emigration yet again. The network seemed to get into its stride again. The governor of Limburg responded enthusiastically to Teichmann's appeal. He promised to send as many beggars as possible to keep down the costs. As requested this would take place with the greatest discretion²²⁶.

Regardless of the controversy the United States still remained a destination for beggars. This is made apparent in a letter from Teichmann to the council of Elsene. He let the council know to budget at least 20fr. on top of the 185fr. to ensure the transport to the interior of the United States²²⁷.

The ships coming from Antwerp were still subjected to strict controls upon their arrival in New York. In the 'Weekly Herald' two articles appeared on the eighth and the 9th of May announcing the arrival of the 'Leopold', a ship coming from Antwerp loaded with paupers. Surprisingly the shipping company responsible for the ship was not Strauss, but Stecker and Stock. The company denied all the accusations. It asserted that not a single pauper had boarded the Leopold in Antwerp. It claimed that the articles were part of a smear campaign in New York against Antwerp. Stecker and Stock asked Mali to intervene²²⁸. The consul informed Stecker and Stock that the newspaper based it's story on information from the American consul in Antwerp, Gall. The consul claimed to know from a reliable source that the ship had many German paupers on board. Stecker and Stock defended themselves by saying that strict orders had been given to their agents in Germany to no longer sell tickets to paupers. They asked for clarification on what Gall's reliable source was²²⁹. Teichmann questioned Gall's integrity to Vilain XIII. The governor said he had received many complaints of different captains claiming everything was done to put Antwerp in the wrong. The captains addressed their complaints mainly towards Gall:

²²⁵ List of beggar emigrants 1850-1856, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

²²⁶ Letter from the governor of Limburg to Teichmann 5/5/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

²²⁷ Letter from Teichmann to the community council of Elsene, 9/7/1855, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Bedelaarsgestichten, nr. 78, dl. II, Emigratie 1850-1855.

²²⁸ Letter from Stecker en Stock to Mali 22/5//1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²²⁹ Letter from Stecker en Stock to Teichmann 23/5/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

“The people openly say at the stock market that Gall came to Belgium for one reason only: to ‘make money’, an expression that he, himself had used. Many American captains have asked the American government for his dismissal²³⁰. ”

The governor pointed out that Gall never produced any proofs to support this accusation. The maritime police confirmed that Gall came to Belgium with the sole purpose of enriching himself. The measure requiring a solemn oath claiming not to be paupers or ex-convicts at the cost of 1fr. per emigrant Gall implemented after the scandal of the Rochambeau confirms this assumption. Teichmann asked Vilain XIII to file an official complaint in Washington. An investigation by the Emigration Commission decided in favour of Stecker and Stock and the passengers of the Leopold²³¹.

3.2.3) New difficulties

The sending of beggars to Brazil encountered immediate protest from the consul in Rio. According to the consul their behaviour harmed the reputation of the other Belgian emigrants. They represented a constant source of trouble. The consul asked Nothomb to renounce to shipping beggars overseas²³². The tight cooperation between Thielens and Strauss started to arouse the government’s suspicions. This followed a complaint coming from Cologne against the emigration-inspector. It concerned Thielens’ recommendation of traveling with Strauss’s company. In Cologne a pamphlet had been distributed in which Thielens highly recommended Strauss²³³. Thielens was called to order by Vilain XIII for this propaganda. Vilain XIII also sent the American consuls a copy of Thielens’ book “*Advice for the Belgian emigrant going to the United States*”. He wanted their opinion on it. If some chapters did not match the reality they would have to be changed. Moreover the complaints against Strauss from the U.S. and Germany persisted. Mali pointed out the danger of Thielens being associated with Strauss. As much for Thielens as for the administration he represented, the association implied that they shared responsibility for the complaints²³⁴. Furthermore

²³⁰ Letter from Teichmann to Vilain XIII 24/5/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²³¹ Letter from Mali to Vilain XIII 5/6/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²³² Letters from the consul in Rio to Vilain XIII 21/6/1855 en 1/8/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²³³ Letter from the consul of Cologne to Vilain XIII 4/2/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²³⁴ Letters from Vilain XIII to Teichmann 26/2/1856, aan Consuls 27/2/1856 en van Mali aan de Vilain XIII 13/3/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

there was a string of incidents that annoyed Vilain XIII, namely a variety of complaints from ex-detainees of beggar workhouse in Vlissingen²³⁵. Five emigrants testified to having boarded a ship in Antwerp. Their respective communities had transferred 180fr. to Thielen for their crossing. Once on board of the ship, the captain had forced them to work. The captain had also confiscated their food supply. The five individuals decided to disembark in Vlissingen to protest. The consul of Vlissingen suspected Strauss had withheld the money. These facts would later be confirmed by the captain²³⁶. A month later another incident took place. This time three beggars had become stranded in Vlissingen. Due to bad wind the ‘Lady Seymour’ had anchored in Vlissingen for a while. It had to stay there until the winds became more favourable. The three beggars had no money or food as means for sustaining life. As a result they turned to the consul of Vlissingen. The consul asked permission to Vilain XIII to do support them²³⁷. Teichmann once more intervened to defend Strauss. He informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs that their pocket money was entrusted to the captain. He received the order to only hand it over to them upon their arrival in the U.S. The governor explained that this measure had been taken to prevent the beggars wasting it on alcoholic beverages during the trip²³⁸.

On the 7th of April long debates had been held in the House of Representatives concerning what emigration policy the government should follow. These discussions led to the famous statement of Vilain XIII:

“I believe I need to declare that the system used by the government is to leave emigration to regulate itself, neither to push nor to limit it. ...This is thus the standpoint of the government: the complete and entire liberty²³⁹.”

This guideline would stand until the First World War. However this official standpoint remained vague. It kept the possibility of intervening in the emigration movement open according to the needs of the country (see below). This is illustrated by a letter of Vilain XIII ten days later concerning the shipment of beggar emigrants. At the request of Teichmann Vilain XIII explained the consequences of his new emigration policy on the shipments of unwanted subjects:

²³⁵ Vlissingen is a Dutch port just about where the Westerschelde connects Antwerp with the North Sea.

²³⁶ Letters from consul in Vlissingen to Vilain XIII 27/2/1856 en 8/3/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²³⁷ Letter from consul in Vlissingen to Vilain XIII 15/4/1856 en 8/3/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²³⁸ Letter from Teichmann to Vilain XIII 21/4/1856, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

²³⁹ Annales Parlementaires, Chambre de représentants séance du 7/4/1856, pp. 1040-1048.

“The government formally prohibits the embarkation of emigrants, coming from beggar workhouses, ‘pauper’ and ‘convicts’ as they are called in the U.S. in Antwerp on ships navigating to the United States. This measure does not apply to emigrants who travel to Canada²⁴⁰. ”

The last names on the list composed by the maritime policy filled out by the maritime police are those of the three beggars who became stranded in Vlissingen. This does not necessarily mean that no more shipments went through afterwards. It proves however that the government wanted to disassociate itself from the practice. There are no traces of evidence in the archives to indicate that more shipments to the U.S. took place in the first couple of years after Villain’s XIII decision. However it is plausible that the movement directed itself to Canada. It would be strange that after all the efforts made by Thielens, Strauss and Teichmann to maintain the system that they would give up on it so easily. Especially when Vilain XIII explicitly stated that he did not have any objections to do send them to Canada. A thorough investigation of the files concerning Canada at the ministry of Foreign Affairs could possibly clarify this. In any case Strauss remained very active in Antwerp. He would be responsible for restarting of the practice of sending beggar emigrants to the U.S. in the 1860’s (see below). Boumans executed a thorough investigation on the emigration of beggars, prisoners and ex-convicts whom emigrated this way between 1850-1856. He estimated their number between 720 and 745 based on the lists annotated by the maritime police²⁴¹. As was stated earlier these lists were probably incomplete. The actual number is undoubtedly higher.

3.3) Conclusion

The decision of the city of Antwerp to send detainees in beggar workhouses to the United States by paying for their crossing was quickly followed by other communities of the province. The cost for the emigration was more or less the equivalent of one year’s stay at the workhouse. This offered the ideal answer to the increasing number of beggars who weighed heavily on the budget of the local and national authorities. The beggar workhouses were mainly populated by individuals whose chances of ever being productive members of the society again were very slim. The following fragment translated from an article out of the ‘Journal of Brussels’ which criticized the beggar workhouses as an institution illustrates the characteristics of the detainees:

²⁴⁰ Letter from Vilain XIII to Teichmann 17/4/1856, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

“The beggar colonies are the subject of important discussions. They represent a high cost for the communities but produce very poor results. Only a small minority can be put back on the right track after their release. The vast majority that end up there are ex-prisoners who have very few prospects to work to enable them to cover the costs of living. They are out to corrupt their environment, involve others in their criminal activities and cause disorder in these institutions. The institutions carry the great risk of confining healthy, even young people, and leaving them to a fate without worthy occupation²⁴².”

It is no surprise that most of the communities wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to remove these individuals. This is why the network spread quickly. The initiators of the system justified its use with humanitarian pretexts. To justify the system the initiators fenced with humanitarian pretexts. The emigration would open opportunities, a new life that the home country no longer offered. However the biggest concern of most of the communities was how to get rid of as many of these ‘unwanted individuals’ as fast and as cheaply as possible without caring about their well-being.

The collaboration between Strauss, Teichmann and Thielens also facilitated the quick spread of the network. That Strauss enriched himself through the network is indisputable. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that Thielens also benefited financially from the network. His tight collaboration with Strauss, the most discussed shipping owner of the city who seemed to have a hand in all the shady deals happening in the port, seems to indicate this. Finally the governor Teichmann put a lot of energy into setting up and defending the network when its use was questioned. He always defended Strauss and Thielens when a complaint was filed against them. In all probability Teichmann also had more than just carrying out his tasks as governor as motive for expanding and maintaining the network. The activities of the American consul Gall proved that emigrants were an easy target for exploitation. The ministries of the Interior and Justice encouraged the existence of the system. Rogier, the Minister of Interior helped Teichmann to convince and encourage authorities to send beggars to the United States. The Department of Justice even contributed financially by paying for the crossing of beggars and prisoners who had obtained pardons on the condition that they are expatriated to the U.S. The absorption of prisoners and ex-convicts into the network came about because of the ‘Committee for After-care and Resettlement of freed Prisoners’. The

²⁴¹ R. BOUMANS, op cit. , 1965, pp. 500-504.

²⁴² Translation of an article from Le Journal de Bruxelles, 12/4/1855, based on a report of the director if the beggar workhouse of Mons, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

prisoners and ex-convicts quickly integrated the network and this practice never ran into any objections from Belgian authorities until it got discovered by the American authorities.

For five years this kind of emigration continued without many problems. The diplomatic conflict around the ‘Rochambeau’ changed this however. The conflict had different causes. These can be found both in Belgium and in the U.S. At that time in the United States the support for the ‘Know Nothing Party’ with their anti-catholic and anti-immigrant ideology, was growing.. This movement pressured the American authorities into putting more restrictions on the immigration flow. Fléchet’s carelessness and subsequent failure to keep the network silent allowed it to be leaked to the American press where it triggered discussions that even reached the Senate. As a result the controls on boats coming from Antwerp became stricter. The American ‘Emigration Commission’ uncovered what they believed to be an international network for the emigration of paupers and convicts. Antwerp functioned as a centre of rotation for the shipment of the lowest class of emigrants coming from Belgium, but also Germany and Switzerland. When Gall warned the commission of the presence of ex-convicts on board of the Rochambeau, the commission took the opportunity to use the existence of the network to bring charges against the Belgian authorities. The diplomatic conflict that continued for a couple of months caused part of the movement to partly be diverted to Brazil and Canada. Strauss however seemed to persevere with sending some beggars to the United States.

As a result of the government change of March 1850 a catholic politician became of minister of Foreign Affairs. He implemented a new emigration policy that kept the government from intervening directly in the emigration movement. The shipment of beggars, prisoners and ex-convicts to the United States was formally forbidden. The ban was implemented because the authorities feared that a new conflict might harm Belgian’s commercial interests. However Vilain XIII left the door open to continuing the practice if the beggars and ex-convicts directed to Canada. Whether this took place or not remains unknown. That this policy did not entail the end of this kind of emigration to the United States will become clear in the following chapters.

Chapter IV: The new emigration policy of Vilain XIII

This chapter gives an overview of the transition to the new emigration policy pronounced by Vilain XIII. First a short history of the emigration movement to Wisconsin

will be given. This is necessary to put the parliamentary debates concerning emigration that to be discussed here, in the right context. On the basis of these parliamentary debates will be explained on what arguments Vilain XIII's guidelines were based. The impact of this new policy will be verified to the government's attitude towards different associations which wanted to stimulate the emigration to the United States.

4.1) The Belgian colony in Wisconsin

4.1.1) The origin and evolution of the colony

There is already quite a bit of literature about the Belgian emigration to Wisconsin. Therefore only a rough sketch of how the emigration came about will be given here. This emigration movement together with the colony of Sainte-Marie would be the main subjects of discussion during the debates that lead to the non-intervention policy.

The majority of emigrants who moved to Wisconsin came from the east part of Walloon-Brabant and the north of the province of Namur. This region was largely populated by day labourers who typically owned a small house with a small piece of land each. Because of the population growth, more and more day labourers were forced to rent houses. Therefore the demand for lodging increased as did the rent prices. This went on until the low wages of the labourers could no longer cover their living costs. The number of who needed to rely on public support to make ends meet increased. The prospects for the future looked very bleak. Therefore some decided to try their luck in the 'New World'. Their example would soon be followed²⁴³.

The first ten families left in 1852. They had been encouraged by their reverend who organized a collection for their departure in the community Grez Doiceau. The first families arrived in Wisconsin in May. Since they didn't speak any English they looked to settle in a French-speaking area. In Green Bay they found quite a few French-speaking Canadians. They finally settled in the north-eastern part of the state near Green Bay on the advice of Daems a Belgian priest. He is considered to be the founding father of the 'Belgian Settlement' near Green Bay. The clergyman had already resided in the area as a missionary for a couple of years. He was delighted to see Belgians and welcomed some fifty countrymen with open arms. Daems helped the emigrants to find a good location to settle themselves. On his

recommendation they bought land from the federal government and not from land speculators. The price of federal lands generally cost around 1.25 dollar per acre²⁴⁴. The Belgians in Wisconsin managed to buy their land for only 0.50 dollar per acre. Moreover they only had to pay for the land five years after they started cultivating it. The settlers needed to work hard to develop the lands for cultivation. The possession of land which in Belgium had been very hard to come by made everything worthwhile for them. They wrote with pride to their friends and relatives back home about their big parcels of land. That news hit like a bomb on the home front. It motivated many families to follow in their footsteps. The next year a new group joined the colony. Upon their arrival a small cholera epidemic broke out which claimed a couple of victims. This emigration movement did not go unnoticed by the eyes of the Antwerp shipping companies. In 1855 and 1856 they set up a whole propaganda campaign to stimulate the emigration movement²⁴⁵.

One of the ship owners who actively campaigned for the emigration was no other than Adolphe Strauss. He did this once again in collaboration with Thielens. The family of Thielens possessed some real estate in the towns of Grez-Doiceau and Sainte-Marie-Geest. Thielens still had some relatives living in the town Geldenaken in the same region. According to the research of Marie-Rose Thielemans Thielens' book; "*Guide and Advice to the emigrant*", probably triggered the emigration movement to Wisconsin. In his information brochure the emigration inspector drew a very promising image of Wisconsin. In other reports like those of Vanderstaeten-Ponthoz and De Ham, the authors advised against this state because of its harsh winters and hot summers²⁴⁶.

The shipping companies sent their agents to recruit emigrants. These agents got a commission on every ticket sold. One of these agents was named Steyckmans. In 1855 he left Belgium for Wisconsin. A few months later the 'American Association for Property and Land' sent him back to lure emigrants. Streyckmans quickly convinced 250 people to emigrate. He earned five francs per emigrant. The association paid for the costs of transport to the U.S. Strauss took care of all the practical aspects for the crossing²⁴⁷. The agents used all means to sell as many tickets as possible. After the church when most villagers were gathered

²⁴³ M.R. Thielemans, "De Waalse emigratie naar Wisconsin", in: MORELLI Anne (red.), Belgische emigranten, Berchem, Epo, 1999, p. 126-127.

²⁴⁴ One acre is the equivalent of 40 are.

²⁴⁵ A. De Smet, Agriculteurs belges aux Etats-Unis in: Journal de la société central de l'agriculture de Belgique, 105e jaargang, nr. 6, deel I, 1957-1958, p. 14-15.

²⁴⁶ M.R. Thielemans, op cit., p. 131.

²⁴⁷ De Smet A., op cit., p. 17.

together they read fragments of false and real letters of Belgians in the U.S. who praised Wisconsin. The cheap lands particularly appealed to the imagination of the listeners.

Estimates concerning the correct magnitude of the emigration to Wisconsin between 1853-1857 vary from 7,500, according to De Smet and 10,000 according to Thielemans. The settlement in the vicinity of Green Bay numbered approximately 800 inhabitants in 1857. The movement caused a big drop in land prices and an increase of the wages in Walloon-Brabant and Namur. Not everyone was pleased with this development. The Brussels bourgeoisie, owners of most of the land in that area filed a request asking parliament to intervene and stop the movement. The government decided to distribute pamphlets including fragments of the report of Poncelet, consul in Chicago. The consul visited the colony in 1855. Around 1857 the movement began to slow down. The colony in Wisconsin started to flourish that same year thanks to the perseverance and hard work of the colonists. A year later the pioneers of the settlement had already obtained American citizenship and thus the right to vote. After the outbreak of the Civil War, the colony started to stagnate²⁴⁸.

4.1.2) The standpoint of the government towards the colony

In 1854 Mali asked De Brouckère to send him some information on the Walloon emigration movement. He saw them arriving in New York and travelling to the interior but never heard any news on their situation. He mentioned that no one ever came knocking on his door for some information. The consul only ever received Flemish emigrants who got themselves in trouble at his consulate. In his letter he praised the Walloon emigrants while on the other hand he drew a very bad picture of Flemish emigrants:

“Most of the Flemish emigrants have a deplorable lack of energy, ... , lacking the courage to overcome the difficulties of their position. Homesickness gets the better of them, they abandon their work to go back home where misery awaits them.

Where as the Walloons who are disposed of a more pronounced character, overcome most of the inconveniences, they have a larger reserve of makeshifts they are great workers, robust and healthy²⁴⁹.”

To illustrate the profile of the Walloon emigrant he gave the example of fifty emigrants from Liege who had asked his advice. They had a recommendation letter of a priest from Herve on them. An entrepreneur had promised the consul that he would provide work all

²⁴⁸ M.R. Thielemans, op cit., p. 136.

²⁴⁹ Letter from Mali to Piercot, 9/1/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl III, Emigration 1851-1854.

emigrants who came knocking on his door. Mali sent the group to him. The businessman was very pleased with his Walloon workers. Mali deplored the fact that the home country lost such good men. The consul considered it appropriate to take more measures to put Flemish immigrants to work in the United States. They preferred begging to working. Moreover Mali protested again against the dumping of beggars by the Belgian communities. He mentioned a group of Belgian invalids who recently arrived in New York. They had returned from Panama where the climate was unfit for Belgians.

Mali's letter is a plea against the Belgian emigration to the U.S. According to him the Flemish emigrants always ended up in the lowest class of society. The group of invalids he mentioned were probably part of the first group of emigrants coming from beggar workhouses who were put to work by Kiehn (see 3.1.4). In contrast the Walloon emigrants were very successful. Mali considered their departure from Belgium as a loss for the home country. He found it deplorable that Belgium lost such good citizens.

In 1855 Poncelet, consul in Chicago toured around Iowa, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. He wrote a 43 page long report about his journey. His report wasn't being positive about the situation his countrymen lived in within the United States:

"I believe it was my duty to dedicate a lot of attention on everything that concerned agriculture and the localities the emigrants should choose from, because before my departure from Belgium I witnessed a big crowd leaving, on the sole indications of small brochures which misled those poor people and which were based on the false and lying letters written by compatriots living in America, who hope to lure fellow countrymen in order to increase the value of their lands, to create the opportunity to sell them, or paid for by the landlord to lure as many emigrants as possible to the region. Furthermore the emigrants have to stay together as much as possible. It is beneficial for them to stay in group because in the long term they will be able to choose mayors, judges and police officers of their choice. Moreover this will produce more advantages for the commerce and industry of the home country; it is therefore that the German emigrants stick close together²⁵⁰."

According to Poncelet the colonists in Wisconsin lived in miserable conditions. He stated that the emigrants had been lured there with lies and deceit. However the consul did not oppose emigration. The move overseas still signified an improvement in their situation:

"All these emigrants have preserved the good morals and customs of our country and live better than they did in Belgium. To give only one example: in all the decent farms they offer you choice wine, absinthe, beer, cognac and in abundance, all these

²⁵⁰ A. PONCELET, Rapport adressé au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Bruxelles, Imprimerie Deltombe, 1856, p. 2.

beverages were so to speak unknown to them in Belgium, here they are luxury items and very expensive²⁵¹.”

However the consul considered it necessary to organise the emigration movement differently. The movement had to follow the German example by staying in group. If the emigrants stuck together, than the home country could extract far more advantages from the emigration. Poncelet did not disapprove of emigration but wanted to redirect it. Thielemans discovered that this advice was based on personal interests. Poncelet managed a large domain in the state of Illinois for some rich Belgian families. Poncelet wanted to reorient the movement towards Illinois²⁵². His report drew a very favourable picture of the prairies in that state. This had already been alluded to when the colony of Cartuyvels was discussed. The Belgian priest said: “*he has never seen such fertile land, so easy to cultivate, nor a location where the colonist could get rich so fast in a short period and without much capital like in the prairies of Saint-Louis*²⁵³.” In 1850 the American authorities voted the ‘Land Grand Act’. By doing so the state of Illinois obtained the rights to construct the railroad to the West. Along with the right to build the railroad the state obtained the rights of all lands within six miles of the railroad. Therefore the state decided to found the ‘Illinois Central Railroad Company’ which took care of the construction of the railroad and the sale of the land²⁵⁴. This explains why the state numbered many speculators.

The government decided to publish parts of Poncelet’s report in Belgian and German newspapers. It also spread official notices containing fragments of the report in the provinces of Namur and Brabant to inform perspective emigrant. It also looked into the possibility, suggested by Mali and Poncelet, of appointing an agent in New York who would guid the emigrants upon their arrival. However the government judged this to be too expensive²⁵⁵.

That same year, 1856, Roussel published a book about the emigration movement: “*Guide for the Walloon emigrant*”. He also warned of the false promises of the agents. However his advice on the best location to emigrate differed completely from Poncelet. The author recommended the states of Michigan and Wisconsin. In these states one could still buy fertile land which were in the hands of the federal government. He advised against the unhealthy prairies of Illinois and Indiana. These states were overcrowded with speculators,

²⁵¹ A. PONCELET, *op cit.*, p. 3.

²⁵² M.R. Thielemans, *op cit.*, p. 135.

²⁵³ A. PONCELET, *op cit.*, p. 17.

²⁵⁴ D. MUSSCHOOT, *op cit.*, p. 24.

²⁵⁵ Letters from De Brouckère to Rogier of 12 and 26/1/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

according to Roussel²⁵⁶. This testimony seems to confirm Thielemans' suspicion that Poncelet's report had been written with his own personal interests in mind. The consul had drawn a negative picture of Wisconsin in the hope of directing the Belgians to Illinois. Roussel's publication on the contrary appears to have been written without personal interest but with the sole intention of providing for the well-being of the Walloon emigrants. He advised the emigrants to direct themselves to the notary to arrange the practical side of their journey. The notary could indicate a shipping company to them, preferably a Belgian one. He warned the emigrants to be careful not to pay too much for their ticket and to watch out for crooks in Antwerp. Roussel personally made sure that Belgian emigrants received the same advantages from the railroad company as the Germans did. This meant a rebate of 30% on the train ticket and the free transport of their luggage²⁵⁷. Upon their arrival in New York he advised them to stay at 'Castle Garden'. The American authorities guaranteed cheap food and lodging there. Moreover the emigrants could get valuable information on the country. From there the free transport to the train station was arranged for them. Roussel counselled the emigrants to look up fellow countrymen who had lived there for while and could guide them²⁵⁸.

In the meantime the parliament received contradictory letters requesting both to encourage as to discourage the emigration movement to Wisconsin. These led to the important debate about emigration on the 7th of April 1856. A letter from de Decker to Vilain XIII right before the discussions started about the emigration flow to Wisconsin. He claimed that Wisconsin did not appear to be a suitable location. De Decker based his opinion on what he read in the 'Receuils Consulaires'²⁵⁹. He stressed again the negative report of Poncelet concerning the desperate situation of the settlers near Green Bay. The publication of brochures and official notices to warn the candidates against abuse were received with certain distrust according to the provincial governor of Namur. The local population believed that the government wanted to stop the movement. However de Decker pointed out that the government just wanted to protect the more isolated population in that region from fabulous tales with the publication of these official notices. Therefore Vilain XIII proposed to appoint a special agent in Antwerp to inform these people before their departure. Thielens together

²⁵⁶ E. ROUSSEL, Guide de l'émigrant Wallon, Imprimerie Van Mol et Van Looy, Anvers, 1856, p. 6.

²⁵⁷ E. ROUSSEL, op cit., p11.

²⁵⁸ E. ROUSSEL, op cit., p30.

²⁵⁹ The Receuils Consulaires are books published by the government containing reports from the Belgian consuls all around the globe.

with a member of the provincial council could temporarily assume that responsibility²⁶⁰. Thielens interest in the emigration stream to Wisconsin, as stated earlier, makes it hard to believe he would advise against the perspective emigrants moving to that area.

After the parliamentary debate the government decided not to intervene in the emigration movement:

“...The intervention of the government in this case could only have a moralizing character.

...to inform the population with all the means at hand, like the publication of the consul Poncelet²⁶¹.”

The reasons behind this decision were clarified by Poncelet himself. His request to get permission to intervene in the disastrous situation of the Belgian emigrants in Green Bay was rejected. He reacted to this as follows:

“The Belgian government has decided not to intervene actively at the moment in this emigration movement and above all not to compromise the sound economic situation of the port of Antwerp and of the principal emigration companies. The government is satisfied with advising emigrants in their venture by publishing some ‘Receuils Consulaires’, brochures and sometimes even spreading official notices in communities to warn the population against illegal and deceptive recruiting²⁶².”

Poncelet was aware of the intentions of the government concerning emigration. The active emigration policy had to make way for the interests of the port of Antwerp and this would remain so until the First World War.

4.2) The parliamentary debates concerning emigration

4.2.1) The session of February 5th 1852: the evaluation of the special credit of 1,000,000fr.

In the first chapter we saw how Rogier insisted on getting approval to obtain his special credit of 1,000,000fr. to fight the crisis. The second chapter described how the portion dedicated to emigration got spent. When the network of beggar emigrants came about Rogier had no funds left to support the network. However he promised Teichmann he would try to

²⁶⁰ Letter from de Decker to Vilain XIII 5/4/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²⁶¹ Letter from de Decker to the provincial governor of Namur 28/4/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

²⁶² J. Ducat, A. Defenet e.a., From Grez-Doiceau to Wisconsin: contribution à l'étude de l'émigration Wallonne vers les Etats-Unis d'Amérique aux XIXe siècle, Biesme-Mitime, Brussel, 1986, p. 45.

obtain approval for a new credit²⁶³. The parliamentary debate of the 5th of February shows this was a vain hope.

The central question of the debates focused on the effect the different projects funded with this credit had on helping the working-class population by creating more jobs. The report on this debate indicates that 90,157fr. of the budget went to stimulating poor families to emigrate to the U.S. However the report pointed out that many of these families did not belong to the working-class. The final conclusion on this spending expenditure sounded like this:

“In the important matter that constitutes emigration there are two interests to take into account: that of the nation and that of the individuals who are encouraged to leave their home country. First it would be appropriate of this government to make known if it consents on entering this path (n.a.: of encouraging emigration). Should this practice be approved than measures designed to give guarantees to the emigrants should be taken. In the meantime the Government will kindly refrain from using public funds to stimulate transatlantic emigration. ...Let us conclude with this final observation: What influence did the expense of 90,157fr. have on fighting social unrests by creating new jobs? And it is however for that purpose that the funds had been put at the disposal of the administration²⁶⁴.”

Specific laws concerning the interference of the government in the Belgian emigration movement had not been passed before 1914. All the emigration laws up to 1914 related to the protection of emigrants in general. The laws intended to make Antwerp competitive and attractive as an emigration port for emigrants from Germany, Switzerland and later on eastern European countries. This fragment shows the importance of the failure of Sainte-Marie and Kansas. Nearly all the other projects financed with the special credit received a negative evaluation. A similar credit did not get granted afterwards. Both failures also meant the end of governmental attempts to establish an agricultural colony in the U.S.

4.2.2 Session of the 9th of May 1854: debate on the budget of the Ministry of Justice

The debate mostly dealt with the part that charity and welfare institutions demanded in the budget of the Department of Justice. These institutions claimed the biggest part of the budget. The question raised once again was if the country wouldn't be better off by stimulating the beggars and the poor to emigrate to the United States. The growing emigration

²⁶³ Letter from Rogier to Thielens 14/6/1851, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 274, dl. II, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851.

²⁶⁴ Chambre de représentants, séance du 5/2/1852, Compte rendu de l'emploi du crédit extraordinaire de 1 000 000 ouvert au département de l'intérieur par la loi du 21/6/1849, Bruxelles, p. 8.

movement to Wisconsin triggered the discussion. The Member of Parliament Delvaux pointed out that a lot of communities were still weighed down by the expenses created by beggars. He suggested that the government in collaboration with provincial and local authorities guided this emigration movement to the United States. Delvaux stated that only sparse means were necessary to relieve the huge burden caused by the beggars. As an example he gave the Irish emigration movement to Australia organized by the English government. The letters from Belgians about their situation in the U.S. testified to the possibility of building a better future there. Delvaux considered the former colonisation projects to be too big and ambitious. They wanted to bring solace to the poor community and also produce advantages for Belgian trade and industry. The combination of the two had proved to be impossible. The parliamentarian was convinced that it would be sufficient to pay for the crossing of a proportion of the "*by misery doomed population*". Their letters would convince others to follow their example. Delvaux concluded as follows: "*If the government would set this example, I believe that the movement soon could be that important that the government would have to moderate it rather than stimulate it.*"

His colleague Van der Donckt did not consider this a solution. Belgium needed its healthy people to stay within its borders, while no other country liked to see our beggars and invalids arriving. The parliamentarian de Haerne supported Delvaux. According to de Haerne the movement only opened good prospects if the emigrant himself and the country they left behind could benefit from it. The high cost for settling in and the lack of religious and associative organisation had caused the failure of previous attempts. De Haerne also mentioned the Irish emigration movement. The Irish organized themselves through 'association and subscription'. What exactly this implied, de Haerne did not explain. As a consequence of this approach however the family ties remained very important. After a certain period of time the Irish emigrants started sending money to family they had left behind. This had a very positive influence on the Irish economy. De Haerne preferred the United States to France as a destination because the U.S. offered better opportunities. He requested more information on the emigration movement set up by the province of Antwerp. He had met De Ham in 1851 on his first return trip to Belgium. De Ham's biggest problem was to prevent the colonists of forsaking their moral and religious values from back home. The key to success according to de Haerne consisted of 'organisation and association'. The parliamentarian Osy on the contrary believed that the duty of the government should be limited to providing information. He also met De Ham during his visit to Belgium to obtain

new subsidies. Osy opposed this request. He also criticised the how the communities got rid of inhabitants depending on welfare by sending them to the United States. Osy urged an investigation to find out if these ‘poor souls’ had not ended up in a similar state of poverty in the U.S. These people embarked on our ships under strict supervision with handcuffs on. This had a very bad influence on the German emigrants. According to Osy it harmed the reputation of the port of Antwerp. The government would be best not getting involved in the practice of encouraging emigration. The parliamentarian believed that the charity institutions themselves should take the initiative to erect associations to encourage emigration. Member of parliament Rodenbach shared Osy’s opinion on many points. He stated that the Senate had to carefully consider its options before intervening again in projects which encouraged emigration. He pointed out that previous attempts had not produced satisfying results. Of the 70,000fr. the government invested in Sainte-Marie it hadn’t received one frank back. Moreover, according to Rodenbach some of the inhabitants of Sainte-Marie seemed very unhappy. Only people who left with a sufficient amount of capital could prosper in the United States. Rodenbach supported the proposition of Coomans of stimulating the internal emigration; however the possibility for future emigration attempts should remain. Delvaux opposed Rodenbach’s argument that emigrants needed a certain amount of capital at their departure. Delvaux stated that the most important factor was a good moral and religious guidance. Member of parliament de Mérode pointed out that the U.S. still had a lot of cheap land available²⁶⁵. He couldn’t see why the government wouldn’t take advantage of this. Belgium’s position on the North sea offered a lot of strategic advantage for emigration. Moreover, according to de Mérode the English language shared a lot of similarities with Flemish which made it easy for Flemish emigrants to pick up the language. Faider, the minister of Justice, suggested that Belgium should follow the German example. It would be better to let the emigration movement evolve spontaneously and be financed by private funds. Another parliamentarian, Brixthe, reported on his 1851 trip to Sainte-Marie. He had only seen eight Flemish emigrants in the colony and the lands were in very bad condition. Most colonists left the settlement to build a new future elsewhere else. In the meantime the colony had been totally abandoned, even by De Ham. He had moved to Cincinnati with his family. The lands had probably already been repossessed and occupied by others. Member of parliament Loos explained how the system of expatriating beggars worked. He believed that government intervention was called for. In general however he believed that the government would be better kept out of

²⁶⁵ De Mérode got in the beginning of the 1840’s appointed by Leopold I to establish a special committee. This

matters concerning emigration. It was better to leave these matters to charity and speculation. Still according to Loos, like the German emigration, the success of the emigrants in the U.S. would lure family and friends. Rogier finally added that perhaps the first emigrants would better be accompanied by officials. These could provide suitable guidance. That should be sufficient to trigger the emigration movement. The involvement of the government would stop there. Emigrants always lured others, according to Rogier²⁶⁶.

Out of the summary of this debate in the House of Representatives a few things catch the eye. The failure of Sainte-Marie constituted an important topic in the debates. It was put forward by the opponents of new emigration attempts as the main reasons not to intervene in emigration. Most of the members of parliament agreed that such initiatives as establishing colonies abroad should be left, like they were in Germany, to the initiative of private enterprises and charity institutions. However not all members were convinced that the parliament should no longer take actively part in the emigration movement. De Mérode, de Haerne and Delvaux urged their peers to follow the English example concerning the encouragement it gave to the Irish emigration towards Australia. The form of emigration the parliamentarians tolerated the most was the expatriation of detainees from beggar workhouses. Osy however questioned the humanity of the operation and pointed out that it marred the reputation of our national port. Over all a vast majority considered an emigration movement to be desirable. However, because of the failure in Saint-Marie the active role of the government in emigration was questioned.

4.2.3) The session of April 7th 1856: debate concerning the governmental emigration policy

The immediate cause for the debate came from the growing number of families leaving the provinces of Brabant and Namur to settle in Wisconsin. The parliamentarian De Ruddere opened the debate. He doubted that emigration helped fighting the poverty in Belgium. He observed that most of the emigrants did not come from the lower classes, but left with a considerable amount of capital. The House of Representatives received a number of requests to implement measures to prevent the emigration. Rodenbach was opposed to any government intervention of this kind. The people needed to have the freedom to decide for themselves. According to Rodenbach, the responsibility of the government should be limited

committee had to analyse all the proposals to found a colony somewhere.

to providing information and protecting the emigrants from being exploited. Moreover the emigration movement to Wisconsin wasn't bad. A decrease in the population of these areas would lower the rent prices. The ones left behind would have less trouble finding affordable places to live. Member of Parliament Julliot went even further. He stated that the emigrants went to the United States what Belgium lacked, namely land. The more people that left, the more people would be able to provide for themselves. Julliot believed that the government had to encourage the movement rather than to limit it. Osy picked up on the statements of Julliot. He stated that the government should not intervene into emigration. Van der Donckt immediately supported him: "*total freedom should be given to Belgian emigrants who intend to emigrate.*" The only matter in which the government should intervene was in the prevention of exploitation of these venturesome countrymen. Unlike Rodenbach, Van der Donckt did not believe that the country contained too many inhabitants. He considered every departure of a capable healthy man to be a loss for the country. Still according to Van der Donckt the poor and the invalids who lived at the expenses of the community preferred to stay here in any case. Every country, especially countries with high population densities, had a class of poor inhabitants. According to Van der Donckt this was inevitable. Vilain XIII the Minister of Foreign Affairs during this debate stated the following on the subject:

"I believe I need to declare that the policy used by the government is to leave the entire liberty, not to push or limit it. Recently an association formed with the sole purpose of stimulating emigration asked permission to establish itself as a public limited company. I clearly refused so that Belgians who have the intent to emigrate, can't think that the government gives its protection to the association. ...This is thus the standpoint of the government: to leave the emigration movement freely develop without interfering²⁶⁷."

De Mérode contested Van der Donckt's statement that Belgium would not become overpopulated. He considered emigration to be the ideal outlet for the surplus inhabitants. Moreover it opened up opportunities for commerce. He had the following advice for the minister of Foreign Affairs and the minister of the Interior:

"...to not remain too indifferent towards the question of emigration, to get involved with it and always look to help patriots who wish to move to other countries."

De Haerne warned of the abuse of land speculators. The failure of Sainte-Marie was partly due to them. Before the attempt, Rogier had asked the parliamentarian to investigate the possibilities Sainte-Marie offered. De Haerne refused because he believed that every attempt

²⁶⁶ Annales parlementaires, Chambre de représentants, séance du 9/5/1854, Bruxelles, pp. 1652-1660.

should be based upon a strong bond of solidarity. The colony missed this essential union. Still according to de Haerne the bond among the colonists needed to be created before their departure. The group needed civil and religious rules and laws to live by before leaving the Belgian soil. Moreover a similar lifestyle as the one led in the home country needed to be possible in the new country. De Haerne pointed out that the successful German and Irish emigration was based upon religious principals and this strengthened the social ties. The Belgian emigration movement totally lacked religious principals. De Haerne considered this to be the main reason for the many complaints about the fellow countrymen overseas. If enriching themselves remained the sole motivating factor for emigration, it would be doomed to fail. De Ham, who had returned to Belgium, told De Haerne that because of the lack of a priest the colonists started to disperse. The parliamentarian concluded that under no circumstances should emigration be hindered. The authorities needed to encourage it by giving it moral support. Julliot built on De Haerne's ideas. An association should guide the movement which would be to the advantage of those who left and also to the advantage of those who stayed behind. The government could appoint an agent that would lead this organisation. It would guarantee a fairer and better organised emigration movement. Again Rodenbach noted that the government needed to abstain from any intervention. After hearing Rodenbach out, Julliot withdrew his proposition. Rogier closed the debate. He discussed the previous failures of establishing colonies. The communities had sent their worst subjects and as a result the projects failed. Moreover at that time when the colonies were established the government lacked the money and the proper experience for such projects²⁶⁸.

For the first time in the debates concerning emigration the suggestion to slow the movement down comes up. It is obvious that an important majority opposed this. The opponents of limiting emigration were divided into two groups. One group wanted the government to encourage emigration. A more moderate group suggested that the government did not intervene in any way. Eventually this moderate group got the upper hand. Its guideline would be followed by the government until the First World War. The debate however shows that opinions concerning the topic were divided. Therefore it is of no surprise that the position of the government towards emigration would be questioned at times. Officially the guideline remained prevalent until the First World War, but that does not mean that the government no longer exercised any influence on the movement. However the government would never again give financial help to the establishment of any colonies in the U.S. De Haerne blamed the lack

²⁶⁷ Annales Parlementaires, Chambre de représentants séance du 7/4/1856, pp. 1040-1048.

of organisation and more importantly the lack of guidance for the previous failures. He suggested that the German and Irish emigration movements succeeded because of the religious and moral support they received and were based upon. The Belgian church would remain against emigration until the First World War. The main reason for this was undoubtedly the loss of faith of a lot of immigrants in America. The colonists in Sainte-Marie and Kansas had not been accompanied by a Belgian priest. However Belgian missionaries were very active in America. Apparently the Belgian church did not feel the need to take care of the moral well-being of Belgian emigrants in the U.S. The role of the church as an institution and the role of the missionaries and their influence on the emigration would form a very interesting subject for investigation. A comparative study with the German and Irish situation would enable to evaluate the emigration movement better. It would in particular shed more light on the lack of organisation of catholic charity institutions regarding emigration, one of the reasons why the big emigration movement failed occur in Belgium²⁶⁹.

4.3) Public Limited Companies

In the last debate Vilain XIII mentioned an association which wanted to stimulate emigration. This association called “*Le Phare: first public limited company to favour the agglomeration of Belgian emigrants in the United States*”. However Vilain XIII refused to let the association organize itself as public limited company. The following part analyse the developments of the association and the attitude the government had had towards similar past requests.

4.3.1) Le Phare

The foundation of the association dates back to 1854. Before being rejected by Vilain XIII the association had already filed a request with De Brouckère. The correspondence between the ministry of Foreign Affairs and ministry of the Interior gives an image of how was viewed by the association by the national authorities. The association claimed to be a philanthropical organisation. According to its representatives its main concern was the well-being of the lower classes of the Belgian population. The association promised to provide a

²⁶⁸ Annales Parlementaires, Chambre de représentants séance du 7/4/1856, pp. 1040-1048.

²⁶⁹ A. Nuytens, , Ierland: 19^e eeuwse exodus naar Noord-Amerika – vergelijkende studie met België, Leuven, K.U.L., (onuitgegeven licentiaatsverhandeling), 1995, p. 74.

better future the poor. This would also help to solve the problem of Belgium's overpopulation.

The minister of the Interior advised De Brouckère not to give in on the request to obtain the permission to organize itself as a public limited company. The minister stated that the government should approach such delicate matters with the greatest care. He was convinced that the intentions of the association were far from being only humanitarian. The emigration needed to be beneficial for the emigrant but also for the nation. This emigration could only benefit these individuals, if they were healthy and hard working men. The sick, elderly and others hit by misfortune lost the support they received from public welfare if they emigrated. Moreover nothing had yet proved that emigration actually resolved overpopulation. The minister did not believe that such enterprise served the interests of the State. The only advantage the state got out of emigration was no longer having to support a part of the indigent, non-productive population. The country also lost good, hard working labourers through these projects and it saw considerable capital being invested abroad. De Brouckère started to consider emigration more as a burden than a boost for the Belgian economy. Commerce was only stimulated by emigration if some tradesmen came back to the home country but that hardly ever happened²⁷⁰.

Two years later the association adapted their statutes a little bit. Because of the change of government they decided to again try again to obtain the statutes of a public limited company. They put forward the increasing poverty, for which no one seemed to be able to find a solution to, as an important motivating factor for their association. The association attributed the structural poverty to the failure to recognize it's the real cause, namely overpopulation. The association believed that there was enough work in Belgium but not enough rewarding work. The salaries needed to rise. Therefore the work force needed to decrease. To increase demand emigration offered the ideal solution for this problem. The representatives of the association did not want to enter the theoretical discussion on whether if emigration decreased the population or not. They just gave the Irish example which to them seemed to be convincing enough. In 1849 Ireland contained 8 million inhabitants of which 620,000 relied on public support. Six years later, thanks to emigration that figure fell back to 106,000. Belgium had only attempted a few tryouts on a small scale. In 1849 the country numbered four million people of which 900,000 relied on some sort of support. According to

²⁷⁰ Letter from the Piercot to de Brouckère 6/3/1854, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banques, nr. 3844, Le Phare 1854-1856.

the association this number increased to 1,500.000 in 1855. The Irish indigent population succeeded in building a better life in the United States, so why would it be any different for Belgians. Moreover the combination of emigration and agglomeration guaranteed benefits for Belgian commerce. The association stressed the fact that it did not intend to stimulate emigration but only to guide it. ‘Le Phare’ aimed to protect the emigrants from the dreadful speculators from southern states, what the association described as the ‘white slave trade’. The representatives claimed they would have a positive influence on the emigration movement out of Walloon Brabant. According to them, thousands of inhabitants from that region were preparing to leave. The association hoped to gather a couple of thousand settlers in their agglomeration. The representatives of ‘Le Phare’ guaranteed a decrease of the poverty and a decrease in wages in Walloon-Brabant. Once this occurred the emigration flow would stop by itself because it would have lost its meaning. The representatives asked for Royal approval of the drawn up statutes. If this was impossible they wanted to know what needed to be adapted²⁷¹.

The representatives of ‘Le Phare’ presented a couple of strong arguments for their case. They seemed to be well aware of the problems the government had to deal with concerning emigration. The government still hadn’t found a lasting solution for the persistent pauperism. The number of individuals depending on welfare kept on growing. The representatives also picked up on the controversy around the emigration to Wisconsin. They also refuted the criticism on the association that led to the previous disapproval. Ireland served as example to prove the advantages of this emigration. The debate of the 7th of April had already indicated that the Irish emigration movement was increasingly seen as the standard for the supporters of emigration. However all the efforts of the association were in vain. They did not succeed in convincing Vilain XIII. The Minister of Foreign Affairs doubted the intentions of the association. Besides participation in this movement implied an important moral responsibility he did not want to incur.

4.3.2) The position of the government towards similar associations

After discussing the rejection of ‘Le Phare’ the question rises in what way the government changed its policy towards such initiatives. In the past other associations had applied to get the statutes as a public limited company approved. One of the first requests

²⁷¹ Letter from Le Phare to Vilain XIII 8/11/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et

came from the ‘Public Limited Company for the Colonisation of Texas’ who at that time worked as a silent partnership. H.Castro led this association. This person had owned property in Texas since 1842. He founded Catsroville and populated his land with a couple of thousand German colonists to cultivate the land²⁷². He ran his operation mainly through the port of Antwerp. Castro was working on a new project involving 2000 colonists on twenty different ships. He deplored the fact that the ‘Company for the Colonisation of Guatemala’ was not able to gather enough capital to take part in his project. According to Castro the company missed an opportunity to win back part of the losses it had already made²⁷³. Because of the difficulties the government had to deal with regarding the colonisation attempt in Guatemala, Nothomb refused to approve the statutes. He believed that all associations who aimed to stimulate the emigration created too many responsibilities for the government. Besides the minister of Foreign Affairs Goblet considered that the statutes of public limited company weren’t necessary to execute the planned operations²⁷⁴.

Six years later a similar request was filed by the ‘Belgian-American railroad company from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and Society for Emigration’. The association planned to construct a railroad between Savannah and Fort Gaines with an eventual extension to the Mississippi. It also intended to buy 150,000 acres of land alongside the railroad in Georgia. Finally it also committed itself to gathering emigrants to populate these lands. It would take care of the transport of the emigrants as well. The association enjoyed the trust of the chargé in Washington, Beyard. A provisional approval of the statutes would already allow them to acquire a large part of the needed capital. However the government was reluctant to give its approval. The uncertain character of the enterprise aroused the suspicion of the government. The association did not own the lands nor did it receive concession of the lands by the American authorities. The same was true for the rights of building and exploiting the railroad. The government believed that the sole purpose of the association was to sell their land. Again the failure of Santo Thomas de Guatemala came to order: “we see certain dangers and inconveniences analogous with these of Santo Thomas de Guatemala²⁷⁵”. In case the

Banques, nr. 3844, Le Phare 1854-1856.

²⁷² H. CASTRO, Castroville: colonie fondée par Henry Castro 1/9/1844 sur la rivière Meding, Antwerpen, J.E. Buschmann, 1845, p. 26.

²⁷³ Letters from Castro to the Minister of Foreign Affairs van 18/5/1845 en 16/8/1845, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

²⁷⁴ Letters from Nothomb and Goblet to De Cock and Bisschop 29/6/1845 en 9/9/1845, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Colonisation, nr. 2025, Amérique du Nord (Floride 1842 - Texas 1845 - Kansas 1850).

²⁷⁵ Note summarizing the case. s.d., A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banques, nr. 3512, Compagnie Belgo-Américaine du chemin de fer de l'Atlantique au Mississippi et Société pour l'émigration 1851-1852.

government should later consider it necessary to approve the statutes, it took measures to enable them to give provisional approval. The request had been filed by the civil engineer, Le Beaulieu de Hardy, under the authority of Keily. According to him the civil engineer had stayed for six weeks in a small village in Georgia. The climate and the lands were in excellent condition. He admitted that the Belgians had some trouble adapting in the beginning. The isolation, the different morals, customs, language, believes, religion etc. discouraged many emigrants. In particular the fact that it took a lot of patience to make a farm profitable weighed on the settlers. According to Le Hardy de Beaulieu the ‘Belgian-American railroad company from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and Society for Emigration’ offered the best solution for these problems. The colonists could help with the construction of the railroad which provided them with the opportunity to earn money right away. This was easy to combine with agricultural activities. The engineer estimated that at least 2,000 families could begin a new, prosperous life in Georgia²⁷⁶. D’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne believed that the only reason for the company to establish itself in Brussels, was to recruit emigrants²⁷⁷. Keily however defended his project against d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne. He argued that emigration was always directed at farmers and never at labourers. The originality of his project consisted of luring simple labourers to emigrate and later letting them climb up to the class of landowning farmers Keily. A month later Keily urged again to get the approval for setting up a public limited company. He pointed to the colony the government had supported in Sainte-Marie. His project presented the big advantage that the authorities did not need to invest money in it. He took care of gathering the needed funds. A month later he wrote again with a new argument why the government should give his association the statutes of a public limited company. The enterprise showed the importance of a direct line between Antwerp and the southern states. It could only strengthen the relations between Belgium and the United States, which would produce a lot of advantages for Belgium²⁷⁸. All these arguments finally convinced d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to give in. In February 1852 he arranged for a Royal Decree signed by both parties awarding the provisional statutes of a public limited company to the association. A special commission of ministers withdrew this approval a month later.

²⁷⁶ LE HARDY DE BEAULIEU A., Compagnie Belgo-américaine du chemin de fer de l'Atlantique au Mississippi et Société pour l'émigration: Rapport sur les terres, le comté d'Irwin dans l'état de Géorgie, Bruxelles, J-B. Demortier, 1852, p. 32-34.

²⁷⁷ Letter from d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Keily 10/11/1851, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banques, nr. 3512, Compagnie Belgo-américaine du chemin de fer de l'Atlantique au Mississippi et Société pour l'émigration 1851-1852.

²⁷⁸ Letter from Keily to d’Hoffschmidt de Resteigne 14/11/1851, 22/12/1851 en 24/1/1852, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banquition de Macon, Géorgie, Imprimerie Devroye, Bruxelles, 1861, p. 12.

They considered the enterprise to be too hazardous because of the lack of capital and the uncertainty around the ownership of the land²⁷⁹. Articles from American newspapers sent by Mali to d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne proved the commission to be right. An article about the association published in 'The Republican' wrote the following: "*one of the most heartless scams of fraud that has ever come to the knowledge of the public.*" The 'New York Evening Press' wrote: "*the society no one has heard of is apparently designed to trap emigrants*"²⁸⁰.

The last association requesting to obtain the statutes of public limited company in that period was 'The Belgian-American Company for the development of direct commerce with the south of the United States'. It came about after 'Le Phare' in 1859. It is immediately obvious that this association differs from the others. The association was established by businessmen from the state of Georgia. They intended to stimulate direct commerce between Belgium and the southern states of the United States. The association didn't have the intention of stimulating emigration. Therefore it had no trouble at all in obtaining the statutes and recognition as public limited company. The underlying cause for the founding of the association came from the growing tensions between the northern and the southern states of the U.S. The South wanted to eliminate the expensive middlemen (New York and Liverpool) from their commerce with Europe. The southern states wished to disconnect themselves from the northern speculators who they believed exploited them. The South chose the port of Antwerp as a base for building their commercial relations with Europe. The association intended to bring more Belgian products on to the American market. To do so it organized an exposition of Belgian products in Macon, Georgia²⁸¹. Grégoire and Montville got sent to Macon as representatives of the association loaded, with samples from Belgian industries. They published a report of their experience paid for by the ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report described the huge opportunities for Belgian industry in the region. However the venture did not end up being the success Grégoire and Montville hoped for. Both gentlemen blamed the failure on the location chosen for the exposition and the growing political tension in the U.S. Furthermore, another member of the association, De Give, attributed the failure to the poor harvest in the region that year. De Give stated that the government could contribute

²⁷⁹ Letters of d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne to Keily 24/2/1852 en 30/3/1852, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banques, nr. 3512, Compagnie Belgo-américaine du chemin de fer de l'Atlantique au Mississippi et Société pour l'émigration 1851-1852.

²⁸⁰ Letter from Mali to de Brouckère 24/4/1852, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banques, nr. 3512, Compagnie Belgo-américaine du chemin de fer de l'Atlantique au Mississippi et Société pour l'émigration 1851-1852.

to the project by providing better connections with the southern part of the U.S. It should also allocate more funds to scholarships for young students of the commerce school in Antwerp to go and study abroad. Moreover the government could finance a house of commerce in the region²⁸². In the end the public limited company was dissolved in 1861. Given the date the reason seems obvious:

“...if the war would not have burst out, we would already have important orders. The company already had a contract for the delivery of 5,000 rifles plus ammunition and accessories, but the war with the blockade of the ports has made the execution of the contract impossible²⁸³.”

If the war would not have burst out the association could indeed have produced good results. However it is very clear that without the increasing tensions that caused the war, the association probably never would have existed. The only big order that the association received was for 5,000 rifles which sums up both its reason for existing and its reason for ending.

4.4) Conclusion

This summary of parliamentary debates concerning emigration shows that opinions on the subject were divided. The non-intervention policy of Vilain XIII was a compromise between the different opinions. The failure of Sainte-Marie has repeatedly been used by the opponents of emigration to object to new attempts at founding colonies. The emigration of beggars on the other hand received far less opposition. The decision of Vilain XIII to put an end to this procedure quite logically did not come up because of the discretion given to the matter at that time. We have seen however that the minister of Foreign Affairs did not oppose diverting the movement to Canada. The government however would no longer interfere with emigration. This stance of non-intervening also applied to the emigration movement to Wisconsin. The debates show that this idea of non-intervention grew after 1852. The emigration to Wisconsin illustrates this wait and see attitude of the government. From the 7th of April on the government would limit itself to providing information and protecting the emigrants.

²⁸¹ Articles out of : Le Travail National 15/1/1860, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Sociétés anonymes et Banques, nr. 3384, Compagnie Belgo-américaine pour le Développement du commerce direct avec le sud des Etats-Unis 1859-1861.

²⁸² E. GREGOIRE en A. MONTVILLE, Exposition des produits Belges à l'exposition de Macon (E.-U., Géorgie) en décembre 1860, Imprimerie Devroye, Bruxelles, 1861, p. 10.

²⁸³ L. DE GIVE, Exposition de Macon, Géorgie, Imprimerie Devroye, Bruxelles, 1861, p. 12.

From the analysis of the associations' requests for the statutes of public limited companies and the government's responses it is clear that the refusal of Vilain's XIII of 'Le Phare' did not represent anything new. The government only ever approved these requests for statutes on two similar associations: Santa Ana in Brazil and Santo Thomas de Guatemala. The failure of Santo Thomas de Guatemala resulted in the reluctance of the government to grant these statutes to other emigration projects. The authorities were put off by the enormous responsibilities these approvals implied. Most importantly the experience with Santo Thomas de Guatemala had taught the government that the costs could be fairly high. The 'Belgian-American railroad company from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and Society for Emigration' nearly convinced the government after a lengthy period of persistent persuasion. Not surprisingly this happened in 1852 when d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne and Rogier were ministers of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior respectively. In chapter two and three we saw that they supported most projects involving emigration. d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne ended on the proposal of the 'Belgian-American railroad company from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and Society for Emigration'. However a council of ministers decided to withdraw the approval less than a month later. At that time the government evaluated the results the special credit of 1,000,000fr. had produced. All projects regarding emigration failed to yield the expected results. In particular the disappointing events in Sainte-Marie certainly influenced the government's decision. The articles from American newspapers sent by Mali exposing the dubious intentions of the association most likely increased the government's distrust towards such organizations. However associations which aimed to enhance trade between the two countries, received the statutes of public limited company easily. After 1856 the government focused on the stimulation of commerce. Emigration would slowly disappear into the background. As proposed in chapter III, emigration had to yield for the commercial interests of the port of Antwerp. The line to New York still represented the most important destination for Antwerp. The analysis of the associations also illustrates the growing tensions between the northern and southern states. The second request of 'Le Phare' of 1856 contains a passage where the association claims it would protect the emigrants from the hateful speculators of the southern states, what the representatives described as the 'white slave trade'. The 'The Belgian-American Company for the development of direct commerce with the south of the United States' only existed due to the growing tensions. The southern states wished to get rid of the northern states because by the north which acted as middleman in trade between Europe and the south. The growing tensions would eventually lead to the American Civil

War. The repercussions of the war on Belgian emigration will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter V: The American Civil War and the decline of the port of Antwerp

In this chapter the impact of the ‘Civil War’ will be discussed. The war is one of the main reasons for the decline of the port which would cause a similar decline in emigration. Stengers indicated that the period between 1857 and 1879 coincides with the lowest emigration rate of the whole emigration movement. Only a couple of thousand people would leave their home country²⁸⁴. The revival of the emigration of detainees from beggar workhouses and its causes will be discussed here as well.

5.1) The American Civil War

5.1.1) The influence of the Civil War (1861-1865) on emigration

The strict controls on emigration in New York and the growing political tensions in the U.S. made the emigration flow to be diverted to South-America. The Brazilian government had prohibited further imports of slaves. Therefore efforts were made to lure emigrants²⁸⁵. Brazil, Argentina and to a lesser extent Peru took over from the U.S. as the outlet for emigrants²⁸⁶. On the other hand the lengthy Civil War caused a shortage of workers and soldiers in the U.S. The federal government tried to fill this gap in its battle with the unionists’ troops by recruiting workers and soldiers in Europe. This also happened in

²⁸⁴ J. STENGERS, op cit., p. 27.

²⁸⁵ L. SCHEPENS, op cit., p. 180.

²⁸⁶ A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl V, Emigration 1857 and A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VI, Emigration 1858.

Belgium. Francis Balace wrote some very valuable studies on the relations between Belgium and the United States during the Civil War. The position of the government towards emigration on two specific events to be discussed here is based on his research. The new emigration policy pronounced by Vilain XIII will be analysed with the regard to engagement of miners and the recruitment of Belgians for the Federal troops.

5.1.2) The recruitment of mine workers by Dochez

The Civil War caused a shortage of workers both in the northern and southern states. The war mobilised an important part of the male population and it caused the emigration movement to decline. The Civil War heralded a period when the federalists would take measures to actively lure emigrants and speed up their naturalisation to draft them. One of the most notorious acts passed with this purpose was the ‘Homestead Act’. With this law the authorities awarded land to all emigrants who expressed the desire of becoming an American citizen. An emigrant could obtain this after one year’s stay and an honourable service in the army. The secretary of State of the federal government, Seward, wrote a circular letter to different consuls in Europe about this new measure. In this letter he stresses the unique opportunity the United States offered for unemployed European workers. Seward assured that they would find work in America²⁸⁷.

The war caused a major shortage of miners for coal mines in Illinois. The authorities tried to solve the problem by luring Irish and also Belgian miners. The ‘The Coal Association of Illinois’ appointed Dochez to lure miners from Belgium. Agents of this sort had long enjoyed the freedom to act as they wished. Verret, a Canadian agent appointed by the Canadian authorities to lure emigrants, came to Belgium and asked Rogier, minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, if he needed special approval for this. Rogier answered as follows:

²⁸⁷ F. BALACE, En marge de la guerre de sécession: recrutements en Belgique par les troupes fédérales: 1864-1865, Bruxelles, Centre d'étude américaine, 1969, p. 2.

“...no authorisation is necessary. The government has set a very clear rule not to intervene and to leave everyone the freedom to come and to go as they wish at their own risks²⁸⁸. ”

Dochez was a Belgian who in 1856 emigrated to the United States to work for the ‘Illinois Central Railroad Company’. In 1863 he came back to Belgium. His return was announced to Rogier by Henrotin, Belgian consul in Chicago. He sent a copy of an official notice that Dochez was going to distribute among the Belgian miners. The consul thought this could set the foundation for a promising outlet for the future should the Belgian mine industry stagnate or a crisis break out²⁸⁹. The letter contained recommendation letters for Dochez from Henrotin himself and from Yates the governor of Illinois. The entrepreneurs who Dochez represented would advance the money for the transport of the miners. They promised to provide work for the miners for at least three years with wages of 40 dollars a month. The governor assured the workers that they had nothing to worry about regarding the war. The war was fought miles away from Illinois. As long as an emigrant did not apply for American citizenship, no one could force him to join the army²⁹⁰. Dochez distributed the brochure in the mining region of the Borinage. The mayors of the different small communities in the area asked Rogier for more information about the brochure.

The administration of the community Cuesmes did not appreciate the presence of agents recruiting miners in their community. Some men of the community accepted the propositions of these agents. The local authorities feared that the children and wives of these men would be depending on welfare once the men had moved overseas. The local authorities wanted Rogier to distribute an official notice in the area warning the inhabitants against the promises of these agents, much like had been done in 1856 during the emigration movement to Wisconsin²⁹¹. Rogier answered this request very carefully. He explained that the consul in Chicago guaranteed the honesty of the enterprise, but that the government could not take any responsibility in the matter²⁹². Dochez asked Rogier for the same reduction of 40% and the

²⁸⁸ Letter of Rogier to Verret 24/3/1862, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

²⁸⁹ Letter from Henrotin to Rogier 16/7/1863, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

²⁹⁰ Notice: to the coal miners, Bruxelles, Imprimeries Deltombes, 1863, p. 4 en 6.

²⁹¹ Letter from the governor of Hainault to Rogier 7/8/1863, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

²⁹² Answer of Rogier to the governor 10/8/1863, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

free transport of 100 kilos of luggage from Mons to Antwerp as had been given to the foreign emigrants who emigrated through Antwerp. The railroad company granted the rebate²⁹³.

In the fall of 1863 250 miners left Belgium for Illinois and Pennsylvania. The first rumours of the situation of the miners in the U.S. were not very good. This forced Dochez to recruit new ones in other mining regions of Belgium in the provinces Liege and Namur. This campaign received the support of Charles le Hardy de Beaulieu. This person is likely to be a relative of Alfonse le Hardy de Beaulieu who filed the request to obtain the statutes of public limited company for the ‘Belgian-American railroad company from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and Society for Emigration’. In the newspaper ‘The Economist’ Charles le Hardy de Beaulieu blamed the miners from the Borinage for failing to succeed in the U.S. He published different articles in that newspaper to stimulate the emigration of miners. However the new shipment of miners from Liege had produced the same problems. In the meantime other newspapers spread the rumour that the engagement of miners was a cover up for the recruitment of soldiers for the federal army. According to some newspapers the workers were forced to join the army upon their arrival²⁹⁴. The governors of the different provinces asked Rogier to investigate the matter. Rogier asked Mali to look into it. Mali’s report clarified the true nature of the rumours. The miners appeared to have been hired to replace fellow Irish mine workers who were on strike. Partly under pressure of the Irish miners and partly because of discontent with their contract, most of the miners had decided to join the strike. Their contract let them believe that they would earn 40 dollars or 200 Belgian francs. However because of the Civil War the dollar devaluated rapidly. At their arrival the workers realised that 40 dollars was worth a mere 100fr. to 125fr. According to Mali the ‘Coal Association of Illinois deceived the miners. At the moment the contract was signed the dollar was only worth 3.50fr. At the time he wrote this report Mali valued the dollar at 2.05fr. The consul let Rogier know that most of the miners in Illinois returned to New York. Only a few asked for the assistance of the consul. Most of them managed to find a way to make it back to Belgium. The miners in Pennsylvania also encountered problems. The employers did not pay the promised wages either. Some managed to find work at other places and were doing fine. Most however followed in the footsteps of their partners in misfortune from Illinois. Four of them asked the consul to pay for their repatriation²⁹⁵. Vilain XIII, when outlining the new

²⁹³ Letter from Rogier to the administration of Public Works 21/8/1863, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

²⁹⁴ BALACE , op cit., p. 9 en 10.

²⁹⁵ Letters from Mali to Rogier 18/6/1864 en 15/7/1864, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

guidelines regarding emigration in 1856, prohibited the consuls from paying for the repatriation of countrymen. Vilain XIII based this measure upon the guidelines for consuls established on the first of June 1850²⁹⁶. Desperate, the four miners saw no other option other than joining the army. Mali concluded the following out of these events:

“All mass emigration, be it determined by the actions of people with projects concerning commercial speculation or be it triggered by popular ideas can only be a hazardous enterprise. However these emigrations are part of a natural movement in which the government should not act either in favour of it or against it. In case that negative rumours about the ventures reached the home country, the emigration movement will stop by itself...”

For further information I can not ask for advice to Mr. Henrotin, regardless of how good our relationship is, precisely because I think he is involved in the whole issue (I do not say interested)²⁹⁷.”

In August Rogier received a new report with the same complaints. The minister ordered the governors of Hainault, Namur and Liege to make these reports known to the public²⁹⁸. The course of history proved Mali right. The emigration flow stopped when the bad news spread.

The lengthy Civil War increased the demand for workers in the United States. The employers tried to meet this shortage by sending agents to Europe to stimulate emigration. They hoped that the high salaries which in the past had convinced many Europeans to emigrate would do so again. Apparently it worked. The problem was however the rapid devaluation of the dollar. The promised high wages appeared to be a deception. However the government did not possess of the legal means to stop the activities of Dochez. Agents were free to engage Belgian workers to work abroad. The approval of the government was not required. This fitted in the new emigration policy of refraining from interfering in emigration matters. Mali fully supported this policy. He described emigration as a natural movement which neutralised itself. The emigration of miners came to an end during the autumn of 1864. This however does not mean the end of Dochez’s activities in Belgium. He played an important role in the recruitment of Belgian men for the federal army.

5.1.3) Belgians doing military service in the federal government

²⁹⁶ Letter from Vilain XIII to the consul in Rio de Janeiro 8/9/1856, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

²⁹⁷ Letter from Mali to Rogier 15/7/1864, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

The 1862 letter mentioned above from Seward the secretary of State also suggested that poor and unemployed Europeans could join the federal army. This kind of recruitment mainly took place in Ireland and Germany. Officially the American federal government only engaged volunteer recruits. However questions were raised as to the voluntary nature of the recruitment. Some stories claimed that men, who went to America to work, were forced to join the federal army. The recruitment in Belgium happened with the consent of the American legation in Brussels. An agency led by Ross in Boston, Massachusetts, appointed colonel Allen to fulfil this task. In 1864 numerous soldiers who had entered the army in the fall of 1861, were discharged after their three year service. Massachusetts had many puritans. They objected to the draft. Consequently the regiment in Massachusetts had problems filling its ranks. This partly explains why the recruitment in Belgium only started in 1864. Allen had already recruited men in Germany before coming to Belgium. A blockade of the German ports forced him to ship his recruits through Antwerp. This took place on the ‘Bellona’ and the ‘Guerland’ on the 6th and 15th of June²⁹⁹ respectively. The Germans stayed for two weeks in Antwerp.

In the meantime Ross contacted Dochez asking him to help Allen recruit young men in Belgium. On the 2nd of June 1864 Dochez published the following advertisement in the newspaper L’Etoile’:

“In America they look for 800, single, voluntary emigrants between 21 and 40 years of age to emigrate to the United States of America. It is of no use to present one’s self without the certificate of militia. Address yourselves to L. Dochez, bureau of emigration, number 2, Brabant street, Brussels³⁰⁰. ”

Just before the advertisement appeared a representative of the southern states, Mann, complained to Rogier, about the practice of shipping German volunteers through the port of Antwerp. Belgium declared itself to be neutral in the conflict. When the conflict had burst out the minister of Foreign affairs had ordered the consuls to remain neutral and not to intervene in the conflict under any circumstances. He explained that this implied that no weapons could be delivered to the U.S.³⁰¹. Providing one of the sides with soldiers was quite naturally an

²⁹⁸ Letter from Rogier to the governors 13/9/1864, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Renseignements Economiques, nr. 4095, Ouvriers mineurs belges aux Etats-Unis: Dochez 1863-1864.

²⁹⁹ F. BALACE, op cit., p. 15.

³⁰⁰ Letter from Rogier to Tesch 7/7/1864: Advertisement published in L’Etoile 7/4/1864, A.R.A., I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr.154, Enrôlements et recrutements de Belges pour l'étranger.

³⁰¹ Letter from Rogier to all the consuls 12/1/1861, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Guerre de Sécession, nr. 143, 1861-1865.

even greater infringement on the neutral position of Belgium. Rogier sent the Intelligence Department on an investigation. On the passenger list of the ‘Bellona’ made by the maritime police, stood the names of forty eight Belgians³⁰². Most of these Belgians came from the province of Antwerp. According to the maritime police this indicated that the Belgians had been recruited on Belgian soil while the German passengers were residing in Antwerp. The maritime police commissioner confirmed that the Belgian recruits were aware of the true nature of their engagement. Francis Balace pointed out that it was strange that the maritime police commissioner did not report this right away because this practice was illegal³⁰³. None other than Adolphe Strauss was involved in the matter. Allen had appointed the shipping company of Strauss to arrange the transport of his recruits. As has been shown in the previous chapters and will be shown in the chapter that follows, Strauss was involved in every shady scheme taking place at the port of Antwerp. That the police commissioner had not reported the recruitment could indicate that he was involved in the scheme. As described in chapter three, there is a strong suspicion that the people involved with Strauss businesses enriched themselves.

The research of the Intelligence Department showed however that Tesch, the minister of Justice, could not do anything against Dochez. Antecedents where the authorities had failed to react to the recruiting for Portugal, Argentina, the French Foreign Legion, and the Papal States prevented the authorities from intervening. Moreover Belgium did not recognize the unionist South. Therefore the South could not file an official complaint. The Department of Intelligence put Strauss under surveillance. However the Chief of Police in Antwerp responsible for this, neglected his mission³⁰⁴. In the end no one paid much attention to the case. Sanford the American chargé of the Federal States interpreted this attitude as approval for further recruitments. This news pleased Sedman. According to him, considering that no laws existed in Belgium to prohibit the recruitment and the antecedents of similar recruitments had been tolerated, they could start engaging Belgians publicly. He wanted to found a bureau to stimulate such ‘emigration’. Antwerp could serve as a centre for attracting such emigration from all over Europe. Sedman anticipated that the English would protest against it. He believed that Belgium would use the opportunity to assume a more independent position and free up the port of Antwerp³⁰⁵. The emigration bureau was never erected in

³⁰² Ballace estimated that 60 Belgians embarked on the ‘Bellona’ based on the correspondence he found of the recruits.

³⁰³ F. BALACE, *op cit.*, p. 22.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.p. 30.

Belgium. The real reason for the passive attitude of the Belgian government will be discussed later.

Allen's collaboration with Strauss allowed an old procedure to be reused: the sending of detainees in beggar workhouses to the United States. A decade earlier this procedure had caused an important diplomatic conflict between the two countries. Belgium decided to put an end to the procedure at that time fearing sanctions against Antwerp from the American authorities. The American authorities considered it totally unacceptable that the Belgian authorities paid for the transport of beggars to the United States. Ten years later beggars were being lured to the U.S. and their transport paid for by the American authorities.

Dochez pretended that he wrote the mayors of the most important cities with the following announcement:

“...if you have healthy men between 21 and 40 years of age, who are poor and live at the expenses of the community, you can if you wish export them to let them join the army in the United States³⁰⁶.”

Balace doubts that this letter was ever sent. Neither he nor the Department of Intelligence found any trace of it. It is possible that Strauss himself contacted the governors and the beggar workhouses. He knew the procedure by heart. Whether Teichmann or Thielens were involved in the operation or not remains an open question.

The governor of Hainault reacted positively to the proposition. The Department of Intelligence intercepted a letter from the governor that tried to arrange the transport of 45 detainees. The minister of Justice reacted as follows to the news:

“A decision of the governor of Hainault, dating back to the 18th of this month, orders the release of 45 detainees from the beggar workhouse in Mons and their transport to Brussels in a prisoner wagon. In the end there is nothing wrong with that fact that the country gets rid of those lazybones who crowd our beggar workhouses but it is not without inconvenience that an agent of the State favours their recruitment: first of all because it makes us participate in the war of the United States in a way; secondly because these people will lose their Belgian nationality, will than come back to Belgium and end up in the beggar workhouses again but this time as foreigners it will be at the cost of the State, and not of the local authorities.

The Belgian government can't directly nor indirectly aid the recruitments, it should limit itself to announcing the release of detainees and leaving them the possibility of enrolling in the federal army³⁰⁷. ”

³⁰⁶ Article published in ‘L'Etoile’ 30/10/1864, A.R.A., I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr.154, Enrôlements et recrutements de Belges pour l'étranger.

³⁰⁷ Note from Tesch for the governor of Hainault 20/7/1864, I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr.154, Enrôlements et recrutements de Belges pour l'étranger.

Detainees at Ter Kameren also wished to take advantage of the opportunity. The beggars were part of the passengers who embarked on the ‘Geurland’ and the ‘Peter Godfrey’ on the 15th of June and the 8th of August respectively. The controversy around the embarkation dealt predominantly with whether the emigrants were aware of the true nature of their engagement and destination or not. Upon their arrival in the United States, the Belgian Legation was overwhelmed with complaints from the passengers. The press covered the incident thoroughly. Some newspapers in Belgium like these in the United States accused Dochez of having lied to the emigrants, engaging them as simple labourers, but upon their arrival forcing them to enrol in the army³⁰⁸. The news created a great deal of indignation in Belgium. Dochez had to justify himself in the Belgian press. In ‘L’Etoile’ he claimed that the emigrants knew very well that they had committed themselves to joining the army. He stated that the allegations of the emigrants believing that they had signed simple workers contracts were absurd. The contract stipulated that they would receive 100 dollars on arrival in the U.S., a monthly salary of 12 dollars including food and clothing for three years. No reasonable person could ever believe this contract to be a plain workers contract, according to Dochez. Moreover the emigrants could still refuse to sign up with the army on arrival. Some however chose to do so and started begging, Dochez testified³⁰⁹. In the end Van den Bogaert, the Chief of the Intelligence Department, proved the rumours published in the newspapers to be true. The passengers had signed a contract in four languages which committed them to work at a certain dedicated place. Once on board the ship they were forced to sign a new contract in English only which forced them to join the army upon their arrival in the U.S. Once in Boston the people who refused were isolated and pressured to sign on. Most of them ended up giving in. Only a few persevered and obtained their release. They brought the events to the attention of the Belgian authorities in the U.S.

The recruits were sent to the frontlines and to almost certain death. Very few passengers of the ‘Bellona’ survived the war. Most passengers of the two other ships fought at the side of other emigrants. Together with other European nations, Belgium filed an official complaint with the American authorities against this practice. The case initiated a conflict between the United States and Belgium. In October 1864 Allen left Belgian soil which indicates that no further recruitments of this kind took place. With the end of the Civil War

³⁰⁸ F. BALACE, op cit., p.33.

³⁰⁹ Article published in: L’Etoile 30/10/1864, A.R.A., I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr.154, Enrôlements et recrutements de Belges pour l'étranger.

the matter faded into oblivion. Balace calculated that about three hundred Belgians were taken into the Federal army this way.

The reason why Belgium did not intervene before can be attributed to an intricate political issue. At its foundation in 1831 Belgium had to guarantee to uphold the strictest neutrality in all conflicts. However when Maximilian, a relative of Leopold I, got in trouble in Mexico after the uprising of Juarez, Belgium wanted to help him. The country started to organise units composed of voluntary men. As a justification for its actions the government claimed it concerned a police action. Since Maximilian was the only recognized authority, it gave the government an excuse to intervene without offending its neutral position. The American Federalists made clever use of the same excuse to recruit troops in Belgium. If Belgium took action against the Federal states, it would automatically mean that it recognized the Unionist states. By doing this Belgium would recognize the rights to proclaim the state of war to the unionists. If by this way Belgium recognized the unionists' right to declare state of war it would imply that it recognized the same rights of the movement of Juarez in Mexico. Therefore the intervention would no longer be able to be described as a police action but as a military action. This would make future intervention in Mexico impossible. Therefore the Belgian government refrained from intervening in the recruitment of Belgians for the federal army. Only when Van Bogaert discovered that the recruitment involved fraud, did it give the government an opportunity to intervene³¹⁰.

It's hard to comment on what emigration policy the government followed considering that it was trapped in a political situation. Rogier wasn't at all pleased with the recruitment but had to stand by and watch. The recruitment of detainees in beggar workhouse is remarkable. When this procedure started in 1850 Rogier and Tesch were respectively minister of the Interior and of Justice respectively. In 1863 Rogier functioned as minister of Foreign Affairs while Tesch was minister of Justice again. The letter from Tesch proves that he didn't have any objections against this way of getting rid of the 'lazybones'. He did not approve however that a state official was involved in it. Belgium could as such be accused of participating in the conflict. Tesch gave the possible return of the emigrants as a second argument to not interfere with the recruitment. If they ever returned to Belgium, they would as American citizens. As foreigners they no longer depend on the welfare of their community but on the State, more specifically the Department of Justice. This could indicate that more than 2% of the beggars, as Thielens insinuated, who emigrated to the United States between

³¹⁰ F. BALACE, op cit., pp. 59-60.

1850 and 1856, returned to Belgium (see chapter III). The original objection to the beggars of emigrating disappeared at the start of the Civil War. In 1855 the American government lashed out at the Belgian government during the ‘Fléchet’ and ‘Rochambeau’ incidents. It condemned the use of subsidizing the transport of beggars, ex-convicts and convicts to the United States. Ten years later the American authorities came to lure the emigrants out of the beggar workhouses themselves. They even paid for their transport. The immigration into the United States went through a major decline during the war. In 1864 the Congress passed a law to lure the emigrants again to their ports³¹¹. The law stated that the American government would advance the cost for the transport of the emigrants. Their future salary served as guarantee for the repayment of the loan³¹². The emigrant had twelve months to refund it³¹³. Strauss saw an opportunity to do business again. The ship owner was probably personally responsible for the short revival of the emigration of Belgian beggars. The short revival appealed for more.

5.2) The decrease of the emigration movement

5.2.1) The deterioration of the port of Antwerp

Steinman, one of the most important shipping owners of Antwerp, brought the decline of the port to the attention of the Belgian authorities. He proposed that Rogier published a brochure about the port to improve its reputation. Steinman in collaboration with the Belgian authorities wanted to fight against the deterioration of Antwerp. The decline manifested itself above all in the field of emigration and in the field of transit through Antwerp. He blamed the Civil War and the smear campaigns in Germany and Prussia against Antwerp for this downfall. These campaigns were set up in order to direct the whole German emigration flow to their national emigration ports Hamburg and Bremen. Both German ports also represented two of the biggest competitors of Antwerp for attracting the Swiss emigration stream³¹⁴. The United States provided the busiest lines leaving from Antwerp. However these lines suffered

³¹¹ This law was abolished in 1868.

³¹² M. BENNET, *op cit.*, p. 14.

³¹³ Letter from Rogier to the governor of Antwerp, 9/10/1866, , A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³¹⁴ Letter from Steinman to Rogier 17/10/1862, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

a lot during the war. Rogier helped Steinman with the publication of his report on the situation. He also supported a big promotion campaign for the port abroad.

However the true causes for the downfall of Antwerp lay deeper than Steinman insinuated. The decline dates back to 1855. Antwerp had a lot of problems maintaining its competitive position against the other emigration ports. Its biggest competitors Le Havre, London, Liverpool, Hamburg and Bremen gradually stole the emigrants from Antwerp. The foreign competitors offered better infrastructure, facilities and possessed of modern boats which covered the distance faster. Emigrant ships left more frequently from these ports than from Antwerp. Antwerp still didn't harbour steamships which made the connections with North or South-America, in spite of plans dating back to 1855 of establishing such a line with steamships subsidized by the State³¹⁵. In 1855 the authorities feared that the stream of beggar emigrants might endanger the project. To protect the commercial advantages of Antwerp the government decided to put an end to the emigration stream of beggars, convicts and ex-convicts³¹⁶. The steamship line was never established. This was possibly a consequence of the increasing political tension in the United States. Direct connections with North-America fell dramatically between 1858-1865. Of all the emigrants who arrived in the United States in 1865 only 1% came from directly from Antwerp³¹⁷. Emigration was diverted to South-America in that period. Many emigrants used Antwerp only as port of transit. The decline continued until 1871³¹⁸.

5.2.2) Critics on the emigration policy

5.2.2.1) Henri Olin

Three years after Vilain XIII announced the new emigration policy the following book was published: “*About emigration, its causes and effects: The intervention of the government in its regulations.*” This book by Olin was written as report of the ‘Congress for International Progress’ held in Brussels. Olin summarized the ideas the congress produced.

³¹⁵ E. SPELKENS, op cit., p. 106.

³¹⁶ Letter from Teichmann to Vialin XIII 3/4/1855, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl. IV, Emigration 1855-1856.

³¹⁷ Letter from Rogier to the governor of Antwerp 9/10/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³¹⁸ E. SPELKENS, op cit., p. 107.

The problem of overpopulation had been for over a decade put forward as the cause for emigration. During the 1840's the belief that Belgium could not produce enough food for its increasing population prevailed. During the 1850's however this argument faded into the background. Olin refuted this argument and deplored that fact emigration was no longer a topic for debates. However to Olin overpopulation remained important and in the end emigration remained the best solution for it. This overpopulation created a surplus of workforce and as a result wages stayed fairly low. The salaries were no longer in balance with the prices of the goods, according to Olin. That is what causes the poverty and the crisis. Olin concluded that the emigration of a part of the population would be beneficial for the emigrant, for the people who stayed behind and for the home country. The condition for the home country to benefit from the emigration was that the government guided, supported and protected the emigration much like the English government did in England. Olin blamed the passive attitude of the government for the failure in Santo Thomas de Guatemala. The author advised the government to open an 'Emigration Office' like the English one in London. This institution stimulated people to emigrate and the communities financed it. The 'Emigration Office' also regulated the transactions between the emigrant and the home country. This represented an important influx of capital for the home country. According to Olin, as a result of this the number of indigent people in Ireland decreased by 80 %³¹⁹. From page sixteen on the author dealt with the role of the government in depth. The authorities should under no circumstances obstruct emigration. Olin described the freedom of an individual to choose which country to reside in as one of the most fundamental rights of a human being. He also considered it to be a moral duty of the government to inform and protect the emigrant from the dangers emigration involves. In this regard the government should regulate the emigration. An indirect involvement, to which little responsibility was attached, could be very useful. Here also the emphasis remained on the protection of the emigrant: "*the protection is necessary for the emigration to be fruitful, it should become a sacred duty for the government*"³²⁰. Olin pointed out that the publication of the consular reports in 'Bulletin Consulaire' and 'Moniteur Belge' did not reach the population. He urged the government to pressure the consuls to draft thorough reports on the region they were responsible for. The government had to hand these out to the communities who had to make them known to the public. Olin believed that this measure would incite a lot of Belgians to emigrate. Also direct

³¹⁹ H. OLIN, De l'émigration, de ses causes et ses effets: L'intervention du gouvernement dans sa réglementation, extrait du progrès international, Bruxelles, 1859, pp. 6-10.

³²⁰ Ibid. p. 22.

involvement could be required at times. The government could arrange for reductions in the cost of transport or even provide it for free. It could also donate working and farming tools, sowing seed, land, etc., to contribute to the success of the emigrants. Once the emigrants were settled and well on their way the investment could be demanded back from them. Finally Olin discussed associations which drafted emigration projects. He believed that the government should give them privileges. He pointed out the philanthropical, religious and speculative associations in England. With some control of the government these association produced good results. They improved the chances of emigration succeeding thanks to better organization³²¹. Olin, no doubt, alludes to the recognition of these organizations as public limited companies.

5.2.2.2) Charles le Hardy de Beaulieu

A second plea in favour of emigration came from a rich businessman, Charles le Hardy de Beaulieu. During the Civil War the businessman was a prominent supporter of the emigration of miners. He wrote a letter to Lambermont, the secretary-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The tradesman pointed out to the ‘extraordinary opportunity’ for emigration that presented itself at the end of the Civil War. The defeat of the southern states entailed the abolishment of slavery. To fill the gap in the workforce that this created, the southern states were forced to attract immigrants from the northern states and from Europe. Numerous associations who wanted to coordinate this were founded. Le Hardy de Beaulieu wrote:

“Evidently there is an abundance of inhabitants in Belgium and in my opinion it would be an event of great importance if the thought of emigration to the United States would spread among thousands of individuals who vegetate here or who live at the expense of society without hope of ever getting out of this situation.

...I know very well that the Belgian government can not engage itself in the matter. But if it isn’t recommendable that the government does not intervene officially in this subject, I believe it to be its duty to intervene morally³²².”

This moral support implied mainly providing the population with the necessary information. The businessman composed a list of four pages, on what information the report should convey. Le Hardy de Beaulieu volunteered for an exploration mission to gather the necessary information.

³²¹ Ibid. p. 29.

5.2.2.3) The letters from Decorte

In 1866 Decorte wrote some letters to the ministry of Foreign Affairs in which he analysed emigration. Decorte had been on many exploration missions by government order to investigate the possibilities for commerce and emigration. Among the countries he visited were Algeria, Peru and the United States. He wrote the letters while he was on an exploration mission in Argentina and Chilli and the U.S. On his journey in the U.S. he came across small Belgian colonies. However he feared that these would quickly fall apart. According to Decorte Belgian emigration was too weak for the founding of colonies to be successful. If the emigration movement started to grow again, Decorte advised directing it to other European countries. Greece, Spain, Italy and Austria still had a lot of cheap land for whoever wanted to populate them. As long as these were available, he did not see the use of spending a lot of money founding colonies overseas³²³.

In a second letter Decorte discusses the causes of emigration. He observed that in Belgium very little research had been done regarding the organisation and composition of colonies. He considered this to be a good sign. It meant that up to then there had been no need for it:

“The prosperity of the country is growing: the factories are numerous, thanks to a spirit of association that can’t be found anywhere else we have found means to make profit from all the resources of the soil and markets have opened up thanks to the new means of communication. People who find something to live on in their soil of birth, where they enjoy total freedom, do not feel the need to emigrate³²⁴.”

Decorte feared this situation was temporary:

“However there are many indigent families who need support: salaries, due to the increasing population are no longer in balance with the increasing price of food and rent. There are strikes of labourers which is a bad sign. Will there not come a period where the government will be forced to engage in emigration and in colonies in the public interest³²⁵? ”

³²² Letter from Le Hardy de Beaulieu to Lambermont 21/11/1865, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³²³ Letter from Decorte to Rogier 20/2/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³²⁴ Letter from Decorte to Rogier 21/2/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³²⁵ Letter from Decorte to Rogier 21/2/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

Decorte gave three reasons for emigration: work and food shortage, bad governance and people who are driven to improve their situation. According to Decorte the first reason was present in Belgium. Overpopulation and mechanization caused this problem. The third reason could be stimulated in Belgium: “*the will to possess would overpower the love for the country if the means to emigrate were offered to the working-class.*” He noted that North- and South-America had attracted an important emigration movement. These movements had hardly ever been subsidized by the government. The pull factors possessed the South-American governments improved. South-America offered better conditions regarding grants and concessions during the 1860’s than North-America. If Belgium wanted to establish a colony, it would have to be homogeneous, possess of a good administration, a church, a school, and a hospital. Furthermore according to Decorte:

“A colony can not be founded with certain stability and obtain guarantees without the intervention of a public authority or a government for carrying out the contract and the protection of the emigrant³²⁶.”

Decorte pointed out that since the 7th of April 1856 the government had stated a number of times that it would not interfere with emigration any longer. The consequences of this were:

“In this case I would no longer encourage Belgian families to wander thousands of miles away from their country without protection, depending on the good will of a foreign society or a private person who speculates them.

..., better circumstances have to be awaited, to closer destinations, to the point that the population increases until the government will have no choice but to intervene and guide emigration and to organise colonies, like in the era of the Greeks³²⁷. ”

In a third letter Decorte investigated whether the Belgian was suitable for and disposed to emigration or not. He gave a very radical answer to the question: “*the Flemish like the Walloons are very much attached to their clock tower and I do not believe that they are disposed to emigration*³²⁸. ” Decorte stated that other nationalities had more success. It was not a question of lack of capital: “*he is just not disposed to emigration, he prefers his country, his beer, his clock tower*³²⁹. ” Which one of the three the Belgian preferred Decorte did not specify. This however could not form an obstacle to the erection of colonies:

“We could enrol them by deceiving them, by promising them heaven on earth, these poor devils, without education, not having one penny to their name³³⁰. ”

³²⁶ Ibid 306.

³²⁷ Ibid 306.

³²⁸ Letter of Decorte to Rogier 22/2/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³²⁹ Ibid 309.

³³⁰ Ibid 309.

Later Decorte explored the practical aspects of the whole operation in depth: the payment of the transport, the construction of houses, their maintenance till the first harvest, etc. Decorte did not have much confidence in perspective emigrants:

“the Flemish farmers, about the only ones we could enlist, cannot adapt anywhere they go and speak a language no one understands. They cause even greater trouble when they emigrate on their own. They are stupid and don’t know various trades,..., and if they succeed in earning some money, they become drunks and soon they are no longer any good at anything³³¹.”

Decorte concluded: “*spontaneous emigration, the one that is self-fulfilling, does not exist in Belgium.*”

A month later Decorte sent other letters discussing other topics related to emigration. First he discussed whether or not to stimulate or subsidize the emigration of poor and indigent people in times of crisis. The explorer was a great supporter of this emigration policy. He stated that the government did not have to put energy into spontaneous emigration. It should only look to emigration that decreased the number of poor and indigent people in Belgium. This could be done by the government following the example set by the governments of some German states or by associations of all kinds like these in England. Decorte suggested that Rogier followed the example of the English parliament. In 1849 the English government approved a law enabling the communities to collect taxes to finance the transport of poor families³³². As proof of the upcoming emigration movement Decorte pointed to the misery that was spreading among farmers and the intelligent Walloon labourers. The biggest disadvantage to emigration was the fact that the poor did not possess of the means to join the movement. They remained dependent on welfare from their community and found no way out of their misery³³³.

In his last letter, where he makes his final conclusions, Decorte returned to the emigration policy of Vilain XIII. He stated that the government was in no position to inform emigrants. Decorte recommended that the consuls should be sent out on exploration missions to investigate the possibilities of their regions. Once these reports had been gathered, the government still lacked the infrastructure to communicate this information to the people. Moreover Decorte concluded:

³³¹ Ibid 309.

³³² Letter of Decorte to Rogier 21/3/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³³³ Letter of Decorte to Rogier 23/3/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

“First that the problems of pauperism, caused by the increase of the population, could be alleviated through an efficient, however indirect, emigration.

..., all possible liberty and every protection should be given to emigration.

Secondly that the government, the associations, the individuals, all have to combine their efforts, each in their own field, to extract all the benefits that the emigration can possibly entail.

That an institution provided with international correspondence has to in particular gather all possible information on emigration³³⁴.”

5.2.2.4) Some reflections on the three authors

These reflections show that the problem of overpopulation was associated with the problem of low wages. Olin, Le Hardy de Beaulieu, and Decorte all considered emigration as the only solution to fight this problem. The English emigration policy has been put forward at different times as the example the Belgian government should follow. The three authors commented on the new emigration policy of Vilain XIII. Olin indicated that the government should not discount the possibility of an eventual direct intervention in emigration matters. This interference assured better results. He also argued that associations which stimulated the emigration should receive privileges. He did not specify what these privileges should be but most likely he alluded to the refusal of the government to attribute the statutes of public limited company to some associations. Decorte opposed any colonisation attempt without the involvement of the government. He believed these were doomed to fail. He predicted that a time would come where the government would have no choice but to intervene in the Belgian emigration movement. The Belgian, and in particular the Fleming was not disposed to emigration, according to Decorte. However with good organisation and under the supervision of the government he believed that a successful colony could be founded. What unites the three is their joint criticism of one aspect of the new emigration policy. All three showed understanding for the policy, but criticised the way the government provided information on the possible emigration destinations. They rightly pointed out to the dissemination of information was nonexistent, as the information did not reach people that needed it. Moreover the data the government had was out of date. All three strongly insisted that the consuls should make thorough reports on the region for which they were responsible. It was the duty and responsibility of the government to make the information from these reports known to the public. Only twenty years later would the government follow their advice. Le Hardy de

Beaulieu composed a list of all the useful items these reports should contain. Everything seems to indicate that this list was used twenty years later when a circular letter was sent to all the consuls to make such reports. In this letter the mission suggested by Olin, Decorte and Le Hardy de Beaulieu was given to the consuls.

Le Hardy de Beaulieu pointed out the great opportunity the abolishment of slavery offered for emigration. He predicted a big emigration movement from the southern states from the northern states and Europe. This prediction was realized but with some delay. Many European countries were going through economic growth. This caused a decrease in the emigration flow. In 1859 the period of continuous crisis in Belgium came to an end. The first industrial expansion completed between 1856 and 1875. Therefore labour surplus in Belgium in the country side, could find work in the industrial sector³³⁵. Decorte pointed out that mechanization had caused the economic expansion. The decrease of emigration made the topic disappear from the debates and this was undoubtedly associated with the growing economy. However Decorte warned that a new crisis was on its way. This new crisis occurred during the second industrial revolution in the 1880's. The next chapter discusses the industrial crisis in Belgium which caused a more important Belgian emigration movement than the crisis of the 1840's did. This movement proved several aspects of Decortes predictions and statements wrong. The movement came about spontaneously. Moreover the majority of emigrants came from Flanders and most of them succeeded in building a new life through hard work.

5.3) What happened after the Civil War?

5.3.1) Adolphe Strauss and the case ‘Guiseppe Baccarcich

Steinman mentioned the smear campaigns in Germany against the port of Antwerp in his letter to Rogier of the 17th of October 1862 (see 5.2.1). He claimed that many false accusations had been directed to the port in the hope of diverting the Germans to their own national ports Hamburg and Bremen. Steinman was probably right when he said that most of the stories published in the German newspapers were exaggerated, however investigation discovered that many accusations had an element of truth in them. Most of the accusations

³³⁴ Letter of Decorte to Rogier 24/3/1866, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³³⁵ J. VAN MULLEM, op cit., p. 13.

were addressed to Strauss. He was virtually single handedly responsible for the bad reputation of the port of Antwerp.

In chapter three his involvement with the beggar emigrants was discussed. During the ‘Rochambeau’ case it became clear that the ‘American Emigration Commission’ was keeping an eye on his activities. The commission suspected Strauss of being behind a whole international network which transported ‘paupers’ and ‘convicts’ to the United States. Between 1847 and 1860 the consuls of the United States informed the ministry of Foreign Affairs about different complaints of emigrants coming from Antwerp. The two major frauds that the emigrants complained about were the sale of false tickets for the transport to the interior of the U.S. and the withholding of food supplies on the ships. The captains tried to make money from the emigrants by selling what was left of the food supply on arrival in New York. The government tried to fight these abuses by erecting a ‘Supervision Commission’ by Royal decree on the 19th of March 1855. The commission controlled the quantity and quality of the food supply at the departure in Antwerp. The Royal Decree obliged the captains to hand out all the food supplies that were left over to the passengers on arrival. The commission was under the command of the governor of Antwerp³³⁶. Nevertheless the complaints kept on coming in. Most of the accusations were against Strauss. Thielens, as emigration-inspector was responsible for handling these complaints. Considering the far reaching collaboration between Strauss and Thielens it is no surprise that the latter always defended Strauss. To deal with all the complaints filed against Strauss would take hundreds of pages. Only two examples of these complaints will be discussed here.

The U.S. had already proved its intention of fighting the exploitation of emigrants with the foundation of Castle Garden. The American authorities guaranteed cheap food and lodging there. Moreover the emigrants could get valuable information on the country. From there the free transport to the train station was arranged for them. However all the measures could not prevent some abuses from occurring. In particular the sale of false tickets for the transport to the interior of the U.S. persisted. Since a lot of these complaints were against Strauss, the minister of Foreign Affairs ordered for these complaints to be investigated in 1857. Strauss was the most important ship owner in Antwerp at the time. The eight pages report written by the governor of Antwerp refuted all the accusations. In the report the governor claimed that these complaints formed part of an international smear campaign to

³³⁶ MAESENS Linda, op cit., p. 43.

discredit the port of Antwerp and direct emigrants to the German ports³³⁷. The United States authorities were not satisfied with the report. They sent a special agent, Claris Jones, to Europe to clear things up. In his report Jones asked Vilain XIII to prohibit the sale of tickets for the transport to the interior of the U.S. in Antwerp³³⁸. Jones pointed to Germany where this practice was prohibited. It is not clear if Vilain XIII accepted Jones's proposition.

In 1858 the Prussian government took measures against Belgian based shipping companies and emigration agents. The decision of the Prussian authorities came after a new complaint concerning the withholding of food from passengers. The measures made it nearly impossible for under-agents of Antwerp based emigration agents to contract emigrants in Prussia. A report of the 'Maritime Commission' acquitted Strauss of all accusations. The report states that the Prussian police prohibited all newspapers in the Rhine area from publishing advertisements from Strauss. The main argument the 'Maritime Commission' used for the defence of Strauss was the refusal of German newspapers to publish what Strauss had to say to defend himself. The commission considered this argument to be sufficient proof of Strauss' innocence³³⁹. Strauss enjoyed the protection of a lot of people in Antwerp. Complaints against him kept on coming from all sides. As a last illustration I quote Lano who wrote to the king about the ship owner:

"The author of these disappointing events is the most prominent agent, Strauss, who not only deceits the emigrants on all fronts, but has also deceived and keeps on deceiving your Majesty and the whole country every day.

..., requesting in the interest of Antwerp and of the emigrants to revoke the permit of emigrant agent Strauss³⁴⁰."

This shows that not everyone defended Strauss in Antwerp. The way the complaints were handled however proves the influence that the most important shipping owner in the city had in Antwerp. Thielens and Teichmann always covered for him. The complaints were always depicted as lies attributed to German smear campaigns wanting to discredit the port of Antwerp.

In 1867 a new scandal broke out. The ship reached New York with eighteen dead passengers on board. The ship owner responsible for the ship was Adolphe Strauss. As

³³⁷ Letter of the governor of Antwerp to Vilain XIII 9/5/1857, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³³⁸ Letter from Claris Jones to Vilain XIII 16/6/1857, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

³³⁹ Report of the Maritime police 24/4/1859, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

³⁴⁰ Letter from Lano to the King 18/10/1861, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VII, Emigration 1859-1866.

mentioned above, Strauss had been building a very bad reputation both in the U.S. and in Germany. This new incident triggered an enormous campaign against him personally in both the American and German press. The deaths were attributed to both shortage of food and the bad quality of the food that was available. The consul in Buffalo reported about the reaction in the American press regarding the ‘Guiseppé Baccarcich’ case. What was remarkable is that the American press also blamed Thielens for the events³⁴¹:

“All the newspapers in America cover this very sad and dreadful affair. They blame no less than twenty deaths on the dishonesty of Mr. Strauss and the negligence of a so called agent of the government who is accused here of being acquainted with the above mentioned ship owner³⁴².”

The consul mentioned that the Germans received the advice to stop emigrating via Antwerp. According to the consul the maintenance of a permanent line between New York and Germany would be put at risk if the Germans followed this advice.

The report of the ‘Emigration Commission’ in New York was written by Kapp. He stated the food shortage and the bad quality of the food supply. Kapp determined that the water had been stocked in badly washed oil containers. He concluded that four measures had to be taken following this incident. First he requested the strong denunciation of the incident by the ‘Board of Commission of Emigration’. Second the report had to be published in the American press and be sent to the German press. Thirdly a copy should also be sent to the consul-generals in Belgium, Austria, Prussia, Germany and Switzerland so they could take the necessary measures. Finally Kapp concluded that a request should be filed with the Belgian government to revoke the licence of the emigration agent Strauss. The report praised the captain of the ship. All the blame was pinned on Strauss³⁴³. The Belgian newspapers were suspicious on the accusations. The Belgian press based these suspicions of an official document signed by the captain and five members of the ‘Supervision Commission’. The document stipulated that the ship had had enough food on board at the departure in Antwerp³⁴⁴. Mali warned the Belgian authorities that twenty four passengers had filed a

³⁴¹It should be noted that Thielens’s name was not specified in the article. However in chapter three and four has been pointed out to the fact that pamphlets circulated in Antwerp and Germany in which Thielens openly recommended Strauss as emigration agent in 1855 and 1856. Because of this the associations involved in the migration process in America and in Germany associated Thielens with all the businesses and scandals involving Strauss.

³⁴² Letter of the consul in Buffalo to Rogier 1/8/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁴³ Report of the Emigration Commission made up by Kapp 7/8/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁴⁴ Articles taken from L'Opinion and Le Précurseur, 14/8/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

complaint against Strauss. The fact that the complaints received the approval of a member of the ‘Emigration Commission’ worried him³⁴⁵. Straus said that the complaints were unjust. The ship owner claimed that they were instigated by an American competitor, M.M. Hiller and Company. He attributed the attitude of the ‘Emigration Commission’ to the fact that it included many Germans. He said that they always tried to discredit the port of Antwerp. Furthermore, five members of the ‘Supervision Commission’ had approved the food supply, which exceeded the minimum. Strauss concluded that it wasn’t the first ship which arrived in New York with dead passengers on board and that it wouldn’t be the last. That was just the way it was³⁴⁶.

In the meantime the case grew to be an international scandal. The U.S., Germany, France and Switzerland requested an explanation. Rogier ordered the governor of Antwerp to investigate the matter urgently. A week later the governor delivered his report to the minister of Foreign Affairs. The fourteen page report included fifteen testimonies which exonerated Strauss from all guilt. Everyone who had something to do with the ship was interrogated, from the builder of the ship to the biscuit supplier. The report accused the captain of being responsible for the deaths³⁴⁷. Mali investigated the matter in New York but had to deal with many obstacles. The consul also started to believe that some kind of a conspiracy against the port of Antwerp was behind this scandal. Mali also blamed the captain for the deplorable incident³⁴⁸. Rogier sent the report to different countries hoping that they would not take any measures against emigration through the Belgian port. These measures indeed failed to occur. In December 1867 a cholera epidemic broke out on one of the ships of Steinman coming from Antwerp. Fourteen people passed away due to the disease. Again the port of Antwerp was criticised in the German press³⁴⁹. On the 14th of February of 1868, two months later, an article appeared in the ‘Precurseur’ about two German ships, the ‘Leibnitz’ and the ‘Lord Broughen’ which reached New York with respectively 104 and 75 dead passengers. The newspaper

³⁴⁵ Letter from Mali to Rogier 15/8/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁴⁶ Letter of Strauss to different newspapers 15/8/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁴⁷ Report on the Giuseppe Baccarich case 24/8/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁴⁸ E. SPELKENS, op cit., p. 91.

³⁴⁹ Letter from Mali to Vander Stichelen 4/1/1867, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

blamed the deaths on a shortage of food and overcrowded German boats which wanted to take all the business away from Antwerp³⁵⁰.

Because of the incident with the ‘Guiseppe Baccarcich’ the emigration through Antwerp decreased for a while. The new minister of Foreign Affairs, Vander Stichelen, believed that the incident showed the need to review the laws concerning emigration. This reviewing of the laws would take five years before the laws were finally passed in 1873³⁵¹. Vander Stichelen was not the only one who thought the laws were inadequate. The U.S. also urged the Belgian authorities to implement new laws. The American authorities even tried to establish some international laws regarding some aspects of emigration. They tried to open special international law courts in all the major emigration ports to enable the complaints from emigrants to be dealt with more efficiently. Belgium together with other European countries did not support the initiative. However Vander Stichelen asked the Department of Justice to show their good will and cooperate as much as possible. The minister of Foreign Affairs wanted to avoid a new wave of criticism against Antwerp. He did not want to take any risks which might have repercussions on the emigration movement through Antwerp³⁵². The project of establishing such courts dragged on for a few years. However on juridical grounds it appeared to be very intricate implying many different juridical systems. The project was never completed.

5.3.2) New shipments of detainees in beggar workhouses to the U.S. by Strauss

In this chapter the sending of some detainees from beggar workhouses to the United States on the condition that they enrol in the federal army during the Civil War has already been discussed. This emigration always happened with the collaboration of Strauss. The American immigration policy became more liberal during the Civil War. The United States were trying to lure as many emigrants as possible to the U.S. Since the end of the 1850s the port of Antwerp had experienced a decrease in the emigration flow. These two factors probably stimulated Strauss to restart the network sending beggar emigrants to the United States.

³⁵⁰ Article taken from ‘Le Précenseur’ 14/2/1868, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁵¹ E. SPELKENS, op cit., p. 92.

³⁵² Letter of Vander Stichelen to Tesch 5/1/1870, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl IX, Emigration 1870-1895.

A letter from the mayor of Liege to Vander Stichelen revealed the plans of Strauss to the Belgian authorities. Strauss wrote the mayor proposing the removal of his detainees in beggar workhouses for a one-time payment of 350fr. Considering that the cost of maintaining a detainee for one year amounted to 210fr., the city would regain its investment within eighteen months. To convince the mayor he pointed to the decision the city of Brussels:

“...of the seventy detainees sent by Brussels, three years ago, not one has returned to Belgium³⁵³.”

Strauss wrote to the mayor because on the 27th of February 1869 a boat left Antwerp for the United States with some detainees from Verviers on board³⁵⁴. The ship owner urged the mayor to take advantage of the opportunity by shipping men and women who lived at the expense of the city overseas. He hoped to gather bigger groups this way which would bring the costs down. Strauss proposed different destinations in the United States: Great Bond, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Harrisburg, Worcester, etc. The 350fr. fee included the transport to the final destination in the interior 25fr. of pocket money and 71fr. for clothing and materials³⁵⁵. Strauss arranged all the details even the transport to the interior. He realized the necessity of this measure. He knew that the ‘Emigration Commission’ in New York was keeping an eye on his actions. To avoid scandals he made sure that the beggar emigrants did not stay any longer than necessary in New York.

The mayor of Liege saw many advantages in this proposal. He wrote Vander Stichelen to know to what extend Strauss could be trusted. The mayor asked the minister to gather confidential information from his consuls regarding the matter³⁵⁶. The Liege authorities who had apparently not forgotten the incident caused by the circular of Fléchet fifteen years earlier treating the matter with the greatest discretion. Shortly after receiving this letter, Vander Stichelen received news from his chargé in Washington. The chargé sent a copy of a report drawn up by the ‘Emigration Commission’. The commission deplored the fact that there still hadn’t been a treaty signed between Belgium and America regarding emigration issues. Especially since Belgium had been responsible for one of the most barbaric incidents known so far as they quoted, referring to the ‘Guiseppe Bacaracich’. The Emigration Commission described the consequences:

³⁵³ Letter from Strauss to the mayor of Liege 6/2/1869, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁵⁴ Verviers is a city within the provincial borders of the province of Liege.

³⁵⁵ Letter from Strauss to the mayor of Liege 6/2/1869, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

“...the desertion of the port of Antwerp as port of departure for emigrants, the fact that hardly any emigration goes through this way anymore, is an implicit verdict against the neglect of the Belgian government to do anything about it.”

Mali alleged that the ‘Emigration Commission’ was corrupt. The consul stated that it was very hard to fight the spreading of false rumours about Antwerp:

“the battle against unfair competition is hard considering that bribery and corruption are widespread among the New York administration.”

Mali saw a chance to polish Antwerp’s tarnished reputation again. The connection between Antwerp and New York had fallen into the hands of one of the biggest American companies. It was now in their interest that the port had disposed of a good reputation. This American association had built a very good reputation. They played an important role of the port of New York. The consul was convinced their voice would be heard. He proposed to undertake an active press campaign in the United States in favour of the port of Antwerp³⁵⁷.

This undoubtedly influenced the answer of the minister to the mayor of Liege. He opposed the initiative of Strauss. He based this opinion on the bad experience of over a decade earlier. Moreover the American authorities again criticized different European countries for shipping their beggars across the Atlantic. Vander Stichelen formulated his most important argument against the practice as follows:

“Since a new regular navigation line on steam will no doubt soon be installed between New York and Antwerp, an enterprise of which the importance does not seem to be unknown, and the success of which could be compromised if the federal government has to account for new complaints³⁵⁸. ”

Vander Stichelen protested against the expatriation of beggars and inhabitants depending on welfare used by some communities who paid for expenses. It entailed too many risks of disturbing the political and commercial relations between Belgium and the United States. Vander Stichelen didn’t even think of involving the consuls in such matter. The minister of the Interior ordered the communities to stop the practice:

“The shipping of detainees of beggar workhouse would not be approved in any way by the government, if it would do otherwise, it would expose itself to protests of the cabinet in Washington.

³⁵⁶ Letter from the mayor of Liege to Vander Stichelen 10/5/1869, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁵⁷ Letter of Mali to Vander Stichelen 19/10/1869, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

³⁵⁸ Letter of Vander Stichelen to the minister of the Interior, s.d., A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

Moreover the practice isn't compatible with the spirit of good 'neighbourship' which needs to be observed between two friendly nations³⁵⁹."

The minister also warned the provincial governors and the maritime police of Antwerp. The police were not allowed to let such Belgian passengers embark on ships going to the United States. The minister did not require that such controls were applied to other nationalities. That was not Belgian authorities' responsibility. At the end of the 1860's the desire to transform Antwerp into a major emigration port again prevailed. The port tried to regain the confidence of German emigrants. The least possible restrictions were placed on the German emigrants. The purpose seems obvious: to lure as many Germans to the Belgian port again as possible. This explains why the restriction placed on the Belgian beggar emigrants did not apply to other nationalities. Prussia looked into ways of slowing down this emigration movement. The country introduced all kinds of rules under a humanitarian pretext of protecting emigrants from abuse. The Prussian government however wanted to keep as many men within its borders because it was preparing for an eventual war with France. The chargé in Washington explained the Belgian attitude towards emigration:

"... I have noted that Belgium, for the rest, is very uninterested in the question of emigration in itself, that if it is true that while others fear it and look for means to slow it down, we for our part do not have the same motives to obstruct to the movement because first of all the experience has demonstrated that the Belgian is very little inclined to expatriate himself, and second because the population of Belgium is so dense that it could probably withstand better than any other country without any inconvenience a certain amount of emigrants, and finally that our interest in the matter is far from obstructing the movement, but clearly and simply to see to it that the emigration stream goes through the Belgian ports and to effectively favour and encourage the stream, until the emigration movement becomes considerable and permanent³⁶⁰."

The government tried to increase the emigration stream via Antwerp but the beggar emigrants could jeopardize this plan. Therefore Vander Stichelen concluded that the communities had to refrain from expatriating beggars and people depending on welfare. Brussels that had been shipping beggars to the U.S. for the last three years and ignored the order of Vander Stichelen. It kept on paying for the crossing of beggars to the United States however the city got itself into trouble. A group of nineteen beggars without means knocked on Mali's door for help. The consul paid for their transport to the interior. He tried to get his money back through

³⁵⁹ Letter of Vander Stichelen to the mayor of Liege 17/7/1869, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

³⁶⁰ Letter from the chargé in Washington to Vander Stichelen 10/8/1869, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

Vander Stichelen. The minister asked for an explanation from the Brussels authorities. The nineteen had filed a request at the city hall of Brussels to help them find work in the United States. Mister Laureys looked for the financial means necessary and arranged the transport with Strauss in Antwerp and Guion in Liverpool. Mali reproached the administration of Brussels for having sent the emigrants in very bad conditions. They did not possess the means to get to Cleveland as the authorities had supposedly arranged for them. The mayor of Brussels defended himself as follows:

“..., the nineteen who lived at the expense of public charity had applied for the means necessary to move to the United States. The administration who approved nineteen of these requests had reached an agreement with the shipping company of Strauss in Antwerp, to assure the transport of the emigrants to Cleveland. The amount of money paid by the administration had to include the cost of transport till the final destination, as 25fr. pocket money that could only be handed out to them on arrival in Cleveland in order to prevent passengers getting stuck in New York. As to the person that they have designated who favoured their emigration, this employee who had been charged with taking all the measures necessary for their departure, only acted under the orders that had been given to him.

...The situation of these men, ..., can only be attributed to the insufficient use of the measures that needed to be taken by the shipping company, which up to now such similar event had never taken place³⁶¹.”

The nineteen who were at the centre of the incident probably weren't detainees from beggar workhouses. However they had received some sort of public support from the city of Brussels. The incident happened right after the government had sent out a letter preventing the communities from interfering with the emigration of indigent people and beggars. No indications regarding the expatriation of beggars or people depending on welfare on the expenses of the local or national authorities to the U.S. occurred after this incident.

5.4) Conclusion

The Civil War caused a few changes in the American immigration policy. The authorities relaxed the strict controls that had been implemented during the 1850s. Because of the conflict all emigrants were more than welcome. This caused the recruiting of miners in Belgium by Dochez and a recruitment campaign of the Federal army on Belgian soil. The government did not intervene in the hiring of miners until repeated proofs that Dochez had deceived the miners had been presented. The only measure the government took was the

³⁶¹ Letter from the mayor of Brussels to Vander Stichelen 1/10/1869, , A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl VIII, Emigration 1867-1869.

spreading of an official notice warning the labourers. The movement came to an end with the return of a number of miners who spread the word not to listen to Dochez's fraudulent propositions. As Mali pointed out, emigration is a natural movement that regulates itself. He did not consider the intervention of the government to be necessary. Dochez also helped Allen to recruit soldiers in Belgium. The government opposed such emigration but could not intervene because of its involvement in Mexico helping Maximilian to put down a revolt. Only the discovery of solid proof of fraud involving the recruitment on Belgian soil allowed the government to intervene.

With the decrease of the emigration movement to the United States the traffic through Antwerp diminished. The port had a rough time getting through the decline of commerce on its most important line, namely Antwerp-New York. Moreover investments to modernize the port were few. The facilities in Antwerp left a lot to be desired. On top of that the boats failed to travel regularly. This way the port lost its competitive position to other European emigration ports.

Not everyone approved of the new Belgian emigration policy. Olin had already pointed out in 1859 that the passive attitude of the government towards emigration could have negative consequences. The goals that Vilain XIII set with his policy, namely informing and protecting the emigrants, were not reached. The information the government gathered appeared to be inadequate and did not reach the population at all. Decorte and Le Hardy de Beaulieu confirmed this statement after the Civil War. All three were convinced that providing the population with adequate information would encourage people to emigrate. Although the Belgian economy was going through a period of economic growth, Decorte pointed out that it wouldn't last forever and he predicted that in times of crisis this emigration movement would start up again. According to Decorte in times of crisis the government would not be able to stick to its passive attitude. Moreover because of this passive attitude Decorte believed that all other colonisation attempts were doomed to fail. Only if a colony received governmental support and guidance did it stand a chance to succeed. Still according to Decorte the increasing population growth would inevitably cause a new crisis and a new emigration movement in which the government would have to play an active part. However because of the flourishing economy the emigration issue faded into the background. During the 1870's very few Belgians emigrated to the United States. The topic even disappeared from the political and intellectual debates. The crisis Decorte predicted came with the second 'Industrial Revolution' during the 1880's. More than ever emigration became the centre of

interests again. The position of the government towards the crisis and emigration will be discussed in the following chapter.

Shortly after the Civil War the port of Antwerp was again the subject of an international scandal. The case ‘Guiseppe Baccaracich’ caused a further drop in the emigration through the port. Strauss was the subject of controversies again. The emigration agent was no doubt a swindler. His action almost exclusively brought the port of Antwerp into disrepute. As Strauss enjoyed the protection of many important people in Antwerp, he could continue with his business unhindered. However to pin all the blame for the bad reputation of Antwerp on Strauss would be unjust. In Germany and in the U.S. every incident involving the Belgian port was blown up out of proportion in the press. The arrival of the two German ships with far more deaths on board than the Guiseppe Baccaracich proved this. It proved that as Strauss said these things just happened. Also the two boats do not seem to have triggered a major wave of protest as the Guiseppe Baccaracich did. This indicates that the sharp criticism in the press directed at Antwerp originated from competitors, mainly with German ports of Hamburg and Bremen, who wanted to divert the emigration stream away from Antwerp.

The Guiseppe Baccaracich case made some prominent people reflect on the problem. The minister of Foreign Affairs considered it necessary to adapt the emigration laws in order to attract the emigration movement back to Antwerp. In the meantime, Strauss restarted the network sending detainees from beggar workhouses. After the Civil War Strauss shipped beggars to the United States for the city of Brussels. It is plausible to think that Antwerp also kept on shipping beggars since that is where the movement started³⁶². When Strauss tried to enlarge the network by involving Liege, his actions were reported to the national authorities. The minister of Foreign Affairs opposed to the expatriation of beggars and people depending on welfare to the U.S. because Belgium was trying to establish a steamship line between Antwerp and New York in collaboration with the United States. This line was crucial for transforming Antwerp into a competitive emigration port again. The port of Antwerp represented an important factor in Belgian commerce and could therefore under no circumstances be put at risk. Once again economic reasons obstructed an active emigration policy.

Part II: The Belgian non-intervention policy regarding the Belgian emigration to the United States between 1883-1913

Chapter I : The revival of the Belgian emigration at the outbreak of new a crisis during the 1880's

1.1) Industrial expansion leads to a new crisis

After 1856 on Belgium experienced an economic expansion. Between 1856 and 1870 Belgium made the transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy. The flourishing industry put labourers to work who couldn't find work in the agricultural sector. Emigration decreased considerably during this period. Stengers calculated that between 1857 and 1879 only a few thousand Belgians emigrated beyond Europe's borders. Some years only a few dozen left for an overseas destination³⁶³. The emigration to the U.S. was no longer directed to a certain region like the previous movement to Wisconsin. Information on newly established colonies during this period is virtually nonexistent³⁶⁴. In this period the Belgian emigration movement lacked any form of organization in Belgium or in the U.S. to guide it. The U.S. needed some time to restructure after the Civil War. Initially opinions were divided among the northern states on how to deal with the southern states. Some wanted them to pay for their rebellion. Others wanted the southern states to integrate into their economical system as quickly as possible. The transition from the archaic plantation economy, based on slavery, to the mechanized agriculture and industry was fraught with problems. The division in the north as to how the southern states should be treated slowed down the transition³⁶⁵. It took a while before the southern states organised themselves to lure emigrants to fill the gap in the workforce that the abolition of slavery had created. The first serious attempts to lure emigrants from Belgium date back to the 1880's. The French-German war of the early 1870's also had an impact on the emigration movement. Many Belgians crossed the border to fill in for French labourers who were called upon by the French army. This also limited emigration

³⁶² An analysis of the number of detainees at the provincial beggar workhouse in Hoogstraeten might be able to indicate this.

³⁶³ J. STENGERS, *op cit.*, p 46.

³⁶⁴ F. VANDEPITTE, *Belgische emigranten in de Verenigde Staten 1850-1920*, Gent, R.U.G., (onuitgegeven licentiaatsverhandeling), 1988, p. 58. (vakgroep nieuwe geschiedenis).

³⁶⁵ C. FOHLEN, *La América anglosajona de 1815 a nuestros días*, Barcelona, Editorial Laboro, 1967, p. 96.

overseas³⁶⁶. These three factors explain why emigration to the United States remained so limited during this period. The archives used for this research also reflect the decline of the Belgian emigration movement. In the archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs there are hardly any files about this period. Books or articles about emigration also disappeared during this time. This also illustrates how little interest there was in emigration at the time.

The agricultural sector saw many of its labourers make the changeover to the industrial sector. This caused an increase in the wages of the agricultural labourers. Between 1870 and 1880 agriculture went through a few small crises due to crop failures. To reduce the risk of poor harvests and to limit the high labour costs, many farmers chose to change to cattle breeding during the 1880's. Cattle breeding were far less labour-intensive. Mechanization, the change to cattle breeding would create a surplus of workers³⁶⁷.

Belgium was struck by a new crisis during the 1880's. The flourishing American economy partly caused this crisis in Europe. For instance the agriculture suffered because the grain was imported from the United States. The price of grain collapsed due to the surplus. In addition to grain also sugar, tobacco, coffee, cacao, oil and cattle were also imported from other countries. The revenue from agriculture decreased as did the value of land. The importation of these products was enabled by modernization and cheaper transport. Moreover the industrial sector went through a recession. In both sectors a growing number of labourers became unemployed. Before labourers who couldn't find work in one sector found work in the other sector. Now that both sectors found themselves in crisis, the labourers had no where to go. This caused a relatively important emigration movement³⁶⁸.

1.2) The Red Star Line and the revival of the port of Antwerp

The long boat trip put a lot of people off from emigrating to the United States. The outbreak of epidemics occurred frequently on the ships. The break through of steamships during the 1860's shortened the travel time considerably. This limited the risks of epidemics³⁶⁹. In the previous chapter it was mentioned that the modernization of the port of Antwerp took a long time to eventuate. During the 'Rochambeau' incident and the revival of the beggar emigration by Strauss, plans to establish a steamship line between Antwerp and

³⁶⁶ H. DE MAN, "Einjahrhundert Belgische Wanderbewegungen" in: Zeitschrift für geopolitik, Heidelberg, 1942, p. 498.

³⁶⁷ L. SCHEPENS, op cit., p. 122.

³⁶⁸ . VAN MULLEM, op cit., p. 9.

New York were mentioned. This line would be subsidized by the government. However the plans only materialized twenty years later. The failure to modernize quickly in the Belgian port drove the emigration stream to the other European emigration ports.

Vander Stichelen decided to make the port competitive again. In 1868 he ordered the emigration laws to be reviewed. They barely had been adapted since their founding in 1843 because the government wanted to give as much liberty as possible to the shipping companies. Too many restrictions would increase the transport price and lower their competitive position. The continuous abuse forced the government to follow the example of its neighbouring countries. The government needed to create laws which regulated the emigration through Antwerp and protected the emigrants from abuse. In the end it would take until 1876 before the laws would get passed³⁷⁰. From then on a shipping owner, who transported emigrants, could only do so after receiving governmental permission. This permission needed to be renewed and reviewed on a yearly basis. The shipping companies also had to pay a guarantee of 20,000fr³⁷¹.

During this period a fixed line between Antwerp and New York with steamships subsidized by the government was finally established. In 1872 the ‘Public Limited Company of Belgian-American Navigation’ was founded. The association intended to establish a shipping company which would provide a connection between Antwerp and Philadelphia. This took place in collaboration with the ‘International Navigation Company’ which had been transporting petroleum to Antwerp since 1859. To the people the association was known as the ‘Red Star Line’³⁷². In 1874 the government reached an agreement with the company. The Red Star Line would receive subsidies on the condition it provided a regular line between Belgium and the United States and to do so under the Belgian flag. The association had to ensure a connection with New York twice a month. Because of the competition the company had a difficult start. The breakthrough came in 1876. The amount of passengers increased which allowed the company to buy new ships³⁷³.

Because of the foundation of the Red Star Line and the passing of the new emigration laws, Antwerp revived as an emigration port. The emigration of foreigners to the United States via Antwerp increased again. The Red Star Line grew rapidly to become the most

³⁶⁹ J. VAN MULLEM , op cit., p. 12.

³⁷⁰ E. SPELKENS, op cit., p. 93.

³⁷¹ Act of 1/12/1873, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

³⁷² R. VERVOORT, Red Star Line, Pandora, Antwerpen, 1999, p. 12.

³⁷³ R. VERVOORT, op cit., p. 49.

important shipping company in the country. The company came to an agreement with the other shipping companies who operated between Antwerp and the U.S. to end the cutthroat competition. The measure improved the organisation of traffic through the port, and allowed services to be offered on a more regular basis. However the Red Star Line did not only focus on foreign emigrants. When the crisis of the 1880's hit Belgium, the company built a network of under-agents in numerous Belgian communities. These agents earned a commission on every ticket they sold. They received 10fr. to 30fr. per emigrant that signed up with them³⁷⁴. Many complaints were filed against these agents. At the beginning of the emigrant transport the port only numbered a few dozen emigration agents. They arranged for the transport from the port of departure to the final destination of all the emigrants they contracted. The agents chartered ships to transport the emigrants. During the 1860's the shipping companies themselves started to arrange the transport of the emigrants. From then on the emigration agents worked as their representatives. Only after 1876 did these agents start being subjected to controls from the authorities. They had to obtain a governmental license which had to be renewed on a yearly basis. Moreover they had to pay a guarantee of 20,000fr. The shipping companies built up a network of agents and under-agents in Belgium and abroad who they were responsible for³⁷⁵. The emigration agents were based in Antwerp while their under-agents tried to contract as many emigrants as possible in Belgian and foreign communities. Until 1876 these under-agents worked as free-agents. Afterwards they needed the special approval of the government-commissioner. However very few on the dealings of these agents were carried out. The agents working abroad in particular escaped any form of control³⁷⁶. Undoubtedly these agents had an important impact on stimulating the emigration from Belgium. The more tickets they sold, the richer they became.

1.3) The tightening of the American immigration laws

³⁷⁴ G. VERRIJKEN, Aspecten van de emigratie naar Amerika, ingezonderheid de Verenigde Staten, vanuit Antwerpen 1856-1914, Leuven, K.U.L., (onuitgegeven licentiaatsverhandeling), 1984 p. 57. (vakgroep nieuwste geschiedenis)

³⁷⁵ L. MAESENS, op cit., pp.54-56.

³⁷⁶ J. EVERAERT, op cit., p. 14.

In this part two examples will be used to show the influence the unions had on the emigration movement. Under the influence of the unions, in particular the Knights of Labour, the American government implemented restrictive laws to control the persistent stream of immigrants entering the country. This event also had repercussions on the Belgian emigration. The influence of the ‘Knights of Labour’ on the Belgian emigration of glassworkers and diamond cutters will be discussed here. The passive attitude of the government towards emigration will also be explained here.

1.3.1) The Knights of Labour

The discussion on the ‘Know Nothing’ movement already mad it clear that some people in the United States were not pleased with the continuous arrival of new immigrants. After 1857 the influence of this American-nationalistic movement diminished. A second important opposition movement against the growth of immigration were the trade unions. In 1869 the union ‘Knights of Labour’ was founded. It united workers of different trades. Moreover there wasn’t any discrimination based on racial, religious or gender. This explains why the union strived for more general conditions which were applicable to all its members. From 1878 on, the number of members in the union grew rapidly, consequently the influence of the union in political and economic areas increased³⁷⁷. There were some sectors and areas where the oppression of immigrants by American workers had been going on for a long time. The Chinese were the victims of the first oppressive and restrictive measures. As early as 1855 the Chinese had to pay a special tax in the state of California. The Californian authorities took all sorts of measures to restrict Chinese immigration. Eventually this would lead to the nation wide ‘Chinese Exclusion Act’ of 1882³⁷⁸. This precedent gave way to pass more federal laws limiting immigration on a national level. These laws came about, due to pressure from the unions. They wanted to avoid workers being replaced by immigrants while on strike.

1.3.2) The American laws restricting immigration: the ‘Alien Contract Labour Law’

³⁷⁷ F. NOTEBOHM, "Rapport sur la situation des ouvriers aux Etats-Unis", Stockholm, 1905, p. 36-37. in: A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Question ouvrières, nr. 3284, Etats-Unis 1885-1912.

³⁷⁸ M. BENNET, op cit., p. 15.

1.3.2.1) The glassworkers from Charleroi³⁷⁹

On the 26th of February 1885 the ‘Alien Contract Labour Law’ got passed. This law came about after it was discovered that employers had been luring immigrants with false promises. Once these immigrants arrived at their destination they could not get a job. The employers aimed to increase the working-class population. This caused greater competition between workers and allowed employers to keep wages down. Such abuses pushed labourers to organize and associate themselves. In 1885 the ‘Knights of Labour’ already had over 100,000 members. The Unions pressured the American Congress to limit the immigration flow. The persistent pressure produced the ‘Alien Contract Labour Law’. This law denied the right of access of all emigrants who arrived on American soil with an agreement, written or oral, to go and work somewhere. Employers who were caught contracting emigrants before their arrival in the United States were fined up to 500 dollars. Moreover the law also included a tax to be levied on every immigrant who entered the United States. With the money gained from the tax, the American authorities intended to cover a part of the cost of the immigrants who fell at the expenses of the American society³⁸⁰.

American employers also came to Belgium to look for workers who could replace American employees on strike. We have already seen in the previous chapter how Dochez recruited miners to replace striking Irishmen in Illinois. During the 1880’s this would happen again, but this time with glassworkers. During the 1870’s when the American economy was going through a recession, some glassworkers had already crossed the Atlantic. During the 1880’s the American economy recovered. The American employers wanted to stimulate growth by luring new immigrants³⁸¹. It was only during the 1880’s that agents came to Belgium to recruit workers. A letter from the consul in New York informed the minister of Foreign Affairs, Frère-Orban, that the glassworkers would encounter difficulties once the strike was over. The old workers took back their jobs while the Belgians didn’t have anywhere else to go. They asked the consul for support to get repatriated to Belgium. The ‘Association of the Belgian Master Glassworkers’ from Charleroi volunteered to cover up part of the costs, but counted on the government to cover the other half. The association considered repatriation to be a good way to work against the recruiters. Moreover the national

³⁷⁹ Tom Goyens dedicated a whole thesis on the emigration of the glassworkers. His thesis was mainly based on newspaper articles and literature. I did not find any references to the files laying in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However the thesis of Goyens helped to with the interpretation of this emigration.

³⁸⁰ M. BENNET, *op cit.*, p. 16.

³⁸¹ J. DUCAT, *Un pays de Charleroi en Amérique*, s.l., s.n., 1990, p. 2.

glass industry would also benefit from the return of the Belgian glassworkers. The consul asked what Frère-Orban planned to do³⁸². In his answer the minister summarized the guidelines concerning repatriation that had been followed since 1856:

"The instructions prohibit the official agents from giving travel assistance or repatriating indigent people without the explicit authorisation of the Minister for each specific case. When requests for repatriation are filed with the authorities, the administration will investigate the situation of the family of the applicant, more specifically the people who are legally responsible for providing for his needs. When these people aren't in the position to help, the assistance of the local administration or of the charity institution of the community where the applicant resides, is called upon. If in the end the authorities do not in one way or another exonerate the treasury, they examine the benevolence the applicant showed in the past to justify his repatriation at the expenses of the government and grants his wish if the investigation proved that his morality and his antecedents are free from any reproaches and that he has not seriously broken the laws of his country³⁸³."

The government had to take this measure due to countrymen who abused the system by trying to get free transportation. The only exception to the rule were requests from Belgians who due to the nature of their work had to travel a lot. However the glassworkers did not belong in that category. They did not receive any financial support from the ministry. Frère-Orban did point to an agreement the authorities had with the Antwerp shipping companies to grant a special reduction for countrymen who needed to be repatriated. The cost for the crossing of the glassworkers would be limited to 45 dollars. In the meantime more glassworkers continued to arrive in the United States. Mali urged Frère-Orban to take measures against the deceitful practices of the recruiters³⁸⁴. The 'Association of Belgian Master Glassworkers' received permission from the minister to publish the letter of consul Mali on the precarious situation of the glassworkers overseas. The association had to guarantee however that the sender and the receiver would be kept silent. The letter warned against the false promises of agents who encouraged people to emigrate out of self-interest. The glassworkers could not find work and moreover the English language constituted a big obstacle when looking for alternative work..

While the Belgian government let the recruiters do as they pleased, the 'Knights of Labour' decided to take matters into their own hands. The trade union was an amalgam of all kinds of smaller unions. The Knights of Labour absorbed a lot of these smaller unions in their

³⁸² Letter from Mali to Frère-Orban 4/12/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

³⁸³ Letter from the ministry of Foreign Affairs to the 'Association of Belgian Master Glassworkers' 19/5/1883, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

³⁸⁴ Letter of Mali to Frère-Orban 18/9/1883, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

structures during the 1880's. The state of Pennsylvania was home to most of the glassworkers. The American glassworkers organized themselves in the 'Glassworkers Union', one of the branches of the Knights of Labour. The American glass industry went through turbulent times in 1882 and 1883. At the same moment the glassworkers in Belgium founded the 'Union Verrière'. The Belgian union corresponded with the Knights of Labour. The 'Union Verrière' even sent 2,000fr. to support their American colleagues on strike. However in 1884 the Belgian glass industry also went through turbulent times. The Knights of Labour did not hesitate in returning the favour. That same year the head of the 'Glassworkers Union', Cline, travelled to Belgium. He came with 5,000fr. of support for the Belgian union but also wished to organize a meeting with Belgian, French, German and English unions. This resulted in the 'Universal Congress for Glassworkers' which took place in Charleroi on the 5th of June 1884. Cline wanted to control the emigration movement of European glassworkers. He stated that there were 700 jobs available in the United States at the time. The 'Assembly of 300', another branch of the Knights of Labour, was willing to pay for the cost of transport. Cline took advantage of the opportunity to connect the European Unions to the Knights of Labour. From this moment on the 'Union Verrière' was attached to the Knights of Labour. It strengthened its position with the employers but at the expense of the union's independence. The American union hoped to control the emigration stream by affiliating unions abroad. By limiting the emigration to the needs of the American labour demand the union tried to keep the wages high. However these high wages attracted more immigrants to the United States. If the immigration exceeded the labour demand than the wages would start to decrease. Moreover the Knights of Labour wanted to prevent employers employing immigrants when their members went on strike. On the other hand by organising the European workers in their own country the Knights of Labour also hoped that they would obtain higher wages. This would diminish the most appealing factor for emigration³⁸⁵. For all these reasons the Knights of Labour urged the American authorities to pass the 'Alien Contract Labour Law'. It took a while before the law was actually implemented. From 1887 on, Belgian emigrants were sent back to their home country because of this law. Traces of Belgian glassworkers shipped back to Belgium due to the law date back to 1890³⁸⁶. In the meantime the 'Union Verrière' had ceased to exist. The public prosecutor of Charleroi took advantage of the confusion that

³⁸⁵ T. GOYENS, Waalse glasarbeiders in de Verenigde Staten: Pennsylvania, West-Virginia, Ohio en Indiana 1870-1910, Leuven, K.U.L., (onuitgegeven licentiaatverhandeling) 1982, pp. 28-34. (Vakgroep Nieuwste Geschiedenis).

³⁸⁶ Letter from Mali to Chimay 22/7/1890, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

originated during the bloody strike of 1886 to arrest all the leaders of the union and condemn them to long prison sentences. Only in 1893 would the glassworkers unite again in ‘Nouvelle Union Verrière’³⁸⁷. The suspension of the union and the harsh repression after the strike partly explains why a new wave of emigration to the U.S. came about in 1887.

Mali considered the sending back of glassworkers a great injustice and took the case to court. He reported on the course of the lawsuit to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Chimay. The report on the case numbered 126 pages. During the trial the chief-inspector of the Emigration Commission, John Millholland, testified:

“We were, and had been for weeks, on the lookout for these particular class of violators of the law, for these Belgian glassworkers. We had already sent back others”³⁸⁸.

The Emigration Commission in New York were apparently well acquainted with the arrival of the glassworkers. Millholland accused the workers of breaking the ‘Alien Contract Labour Law’. He claimed that the workers had an agreement to get work somewhere before they entered the country. Among the accused in the dock sat Jean-Baptiste Saint. His defence sounded as follows:

“As I was afraid to be send back I said: "Yes I've got work".”

“What caused you to be afraid?”

“Mr Palmeri told me that if I had no work I would be sent back”³⁸⁹.

Mister Palmeri mentioned here, was the translator who translated for the accused during their interrogation by the ‘Emigration Commission’. Apparently Palmeri misled the accused. After the questioning the defendants signed a statement in English which they couldn’t read. This statement had been made up even before the glassworkers arrived. Palmeri explained:

“Mr. Saint was known to us as likely to come. His name was on the list sent to us by an organization, just which one I can't recollect now. It was a glassworkers' organization. He figured as among those that they had received word from their people on the other side, he was among these who were going to come under contract, who had been contracted on the other side. His name was familiar and recognized by the inspector”³⁹⁰.

³⁸⁷ J.P. MAHOUX, "Voorgeschiedenis van de Syndikale Kommissie 1885-1898" in: Een eeuw solidariteit 1898-1998: Geschiedenis van de socialistische vakbeweging, Antwerpen, Drukkerij Verheyen n.v., 1997, p. 27.

³⁸⁸ Report about the trial against the Belgian glassworkers, p. 19. Added to a letter from Mali to Chimay 19/8/1890, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

³⁸⁹ Ibid. p 56.

³⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 104.

The trial proves that the strategy of the Knights of Labour worked. Thanks to contacts the union had in Belgium it obtained lists of perspective emigrants. Once they actually arrived in New York, the glassworkers were subjected to long interrogations. If the Emigration Commission fabricated evidence to enable them to send back the emigrants. The glassworkers were lucky that Mali intervened. The consul informed the ministry that he managed to acquit the glassworkers, but that many others were sent back unjustly.

Most of the American glassworkers went on a three month long strike in 1891. This caused the departure of a new group of Belgian emigrant glassworkers many of which would be shipped back to Belgium. Similar deportations happened frequently until the First World War³⁹¹. In the meantime the ‘Glassworkers Union’ kept on supporting the workers in Belgium. When a new strike broke out in the Belgian glass industry, the union transferred 1,000 dollars daily to the Belgian colleagues on strike. The union even increased it to 1,500 dollars after a while. Some considered this practice to be a danger for Belgian glass industry³⁹². The union again hoped again to keep the Belgian glassworkers in their home country and help them to get a pay rise. The union also used other means to keep workers in Belgium. Mali’s report of 1895 illustrates this. He advised against the emigration of glassworkers. The Americans unions demanded 500 dollars for foreigners to become a member. This amount was not only unreasonable, but also unaffordable for the immigrants. Moreover it was nearly impossible to find work without a membership in a union. The general-director of commerce suspected Bizet lived in Pennsylvania of warning the American ‘Immigration Bureau’ of the departure of glassworkers from the port of Antwerp in 1907. Bizet lived in Pennsylvania but was staying in Charleroi at that time. He had the reputation for making it hard for the glassworkers who intended to emigrate. Bizet tried to gather the names of the people who planned to emigrate. He then wrote the prospective emigrant personally threatening them that they wouldn’t get access to the United States. Bizet was very dedicated to his mission. He even managed to get on board of the ships leaving Antwerp to make sure no glassworkers embarked upon them. If Bizet found some, he wrote down the names and sent them to the ‘Immigration Bureau’. The informer also used other ways to track down possible emigrants. He investigated at the train station of Charleroi which passengers obtained a reduction of 50% on their ticket. This reduction which kept on increasing was

³⁹¹ For instance the expulsion of 30 glassworkers from Ellis Island 14/11/1892, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl IX, Emigration 1870-1895.

³⁹² Letter of the consul of Philadelphia to the Minister of Foreign Affairs 02/03/01, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Question ouvrières, nr. 3284, Etats-Unis 1885-1912.

given by the railroad company to emigrants heading to Antwerp. The general-director of commerce asked the train station to be more careful with the release of such information. Moreover he demanded that Bizet would no longer get access to the boats leaving from Antwerp³⁹³. The assistant commissioner for emigration advised deporting Bizet since he had American nationality. A few weeks later Bizet had to travel back to Pennsylvania. However it didn't take long before a substitute was sent to replace him³⁹⁴.

The last evidence of glassworkers getting sent back from New York is dated from 1908. Fifteen workers from Jumet did not go further than Ellis Island. In the meantime the power of the Knights of Labour had decreased considerably. In 1886 the 'American Federation of Labour' was founded providing an alternative to the Knights of Labour. The new union grew rapidly and surpassed the Knights of Labour in 1905³⁹⁵. The connection the Knights of Labour had with the 'Nouvelle Union Verrière' weakened. Also the solidarity between the glassworkers from both countries deteriorated. A letter from Mali points out that the 'Nouvelle Union Verrière' no longer made arrangements with American unions but with employer's associations. The Bureau of Immigration intercepted a telegram from the president of the Belgian union, Gilles, who promised the employer's organization that he would send 250 glassworkers to break up a strike³⁹⁶. While 25 years earlier the unions sent money to each other to support workers on strike, now the union made arrangements with the employer's organization to break up strikes.

1.3.2.2) The diamond workers

The 'Alien Contract Labour Law' needed different ratifications. Some exceptions had to be made for certain professions. These were: temporary workers, actors, artists, professors, family of people that had already immigrated and educated workers exercising a profession

³⁹³ Letter from d'Avignon to the assistant commissioner of emigration 28/8/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

³⁹⁴ Letter from the assistant commissioner of emigration to d'Avignon 14//9/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

³⁹⁵ F. NOTEBOHM, op cit., pp. 35-62.

³⁹⁶ Letter from Mali to d'Avignon 25/4/1908, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

that was still nonexistent in the United States³⁹⁷. This last exception played an important factor in emigration of diamond workers.

In 1895 the American authorities introduced an import tax of 10 and 25 cents per stone on rough and polished diamonds respectively. An important Jewish community in Antwerp ran a diamond and jewellery business. The import tax caused the emigration of many diamond workers from Antwerp to New York because exporting to the U.S. became so expensive³⁹⁸. When the law became effective about 120 diamond cutters left for the United States. However the Immigration Bureau anticipated their arrival. They were all arrested and interrogated. The diamond cutters were accused of breaking the ‘Alien contract Labour Law’. In the end only twelve were denied access to American soil. Mali still hoped to get them accepted based on the exception of the Alien Contract Labour Law regarding skilled workers practising an unknown industry in the U.S. This did not work. Mali gave the following explanation for it:

“It is not likely that the government will give in at all to the wishes of the workers of the American Union³⁹⁹.”

Similar events happened again in 1909. Eight young diamond cutters were the subject of discussions this time. Mali informed the minister of Foreign Affairs, Davignon that the pressure of the American unions was increasing again during that period. The cause for the growing protest was employers hiring of workers who weren’t members of a union. This time Groesser, president of the socialist association ‘De Bond’ in Antwerp, tipped the Bureau of Immigration of the arrival of diamond workers⁴⁰⁰. Mali took the case to court again. The consul brought charges against the ‘Diamond Cutters Union’ claiming they tried everything to exclude diamond cutters who worked in ‘open shops’. The ‘open shops’ were about the only place where diamond workers who weren’t affiliated to a union could find work. Mali stated that the Immigration Board rejected the Belgian diamond workers because they wanted to prevent them from working in these open shops. However this had nothing to do with breaking the ‘Labour Act’⁴⁰¹. The consul blamed the ‘Diamond Cutters Union’ for publishing

³⁹⁷ M. BENNET, op cit., p. 18.

³⁹⁸ Article from ‘L’Indépendance’ 12/2/1895, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. II, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: ouvriers diamantaires (1895-1909).

³⁹⁹ Letter from Mali to Mérode-Westerloo 2/4/1895, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2961, dl. II, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: ouvriers diamantaires (1895-1909).

⁴⁰⁰ Letter from Mali to Davignon 12/1/1909, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. II, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: ouvriers diamantaires (1895-1909).

⁴⁰¹ The Labor Act is another name for the Alien Contract Labour Law. This law was constantly adapted with new amendments. A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2959, dl. I, Etats-Unis: lois, règlements et

lies about the Belgian diamond cutters in the American press. According to Mali the union consisted mainly of Dutch diamond cutters. They were opposed to the arrival of Belgian diamond cutters coming from Antwerp who worked with the system of open shops. Mali accused the Dutch of unfair competition⁴⁰². The consul reported again about the trial to Davignon. He informed the minister of Foreign Affairs that he normally advised all emigrants to become affiliated with a union on arrival. However the ‘Diamond Cutters Union’ was an exception to that rule because they conflicted with the interests of the Belgian diamond industry. The eight accused were acquitted of all charges. The whole affair cost the consul 1,750 dollars. He asked the minister of Foreign affairs to pay for the expenses. Mali justified the expense by claiming victory was an important step in guaranteeing the continuation of the Belgian diamond industry which was in danger of falling into Dutch hands⁴⁰³. Davignon replied that to his regret he had no budget which allowed him to cover the expenses of the consul.

1.4) Reflections on the emigration movement and the attitude of the government towards it

During the 1880's the Belgian emigration increased gradually to a thousand a year. Most of the emigrants moved to the United States. After 1885 the Belgian emigration started to grow more rapidly. The emigration to the United States doubled in a single year, 1887. Out of the 3,874 emigrants who left Belgium that year, 2,917 left for North-America⁴⁰⁴. This emigration movement culminated in 1888 and 1889 when 7,794 and 8,406 respectively left their home country to build a new future overseas. These two mark the big movement to Brazil and Argentina. The emigration to the United States stayed relatively stable between 2,000 and 3,000 emigrants per year. After 1889 the emigration to South-America fell back drastically. The movement to the United States kept on growing until it peaked in 1892 with

mesures concernant l'émigration (1882-1898) .A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2959, dl. II, Etats-Unis: lois sur l'émigration 1903-1910.

⁴⁰² Letter from Mali to Strauss 15/1/1909, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2961, dl. II, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: ouvriers diamantaires (1895-1909).

⁴⁰³ Letter from Mali to Davignon 15/2/1909, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2961, dl. II, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: ouvriers diamantaires (1895-1909).

⁴⁰⁴ The emigration to North-America basically coincides with the emigration to the United States. Canada only started to attract a considerable number of Belgian emigrants when Treau de Coelie was appointed by the Canadian government to recruit emigrants in Belgium in 1894.

5,042 emigrants heading to North-America⁴⁰⁵. This emigration movement triggered new, intense debates on the subject.

1.4.1) Cartuyvels

In 1887 Cartuyvels published “*De l’émigration Belge en Amérique*”⁴⁰⁶. The founder of the colony New Brabant and the co-director of the colony of Sainte-Marie had returned to Belgium. He worked as vice-rector of the Catholic University of Leuven. Cartuyvels criticized the passive attitude of the Belgian government towards emigration. The immediate cause for his publication concerned the agitation in the industrial centres in the province of Hainault beginning in 1886. Cartuyvels pointed out that many emigrants were industrial workers from that area. Since the beginning of the recession the situation of the workers had become very precarious. Unemployment proved to be an important threat to the labourers. This period was marked by many strikes. Cartuyvels noted that in the past the Belgians remained in their country or crossed the border with France to find work during crisis times. The clergyman tried to give an explanation as to why Belgians did not emigrate:

“...the German emigration is organised, while the Belgian one isn’t. The Belgian doesn’t think about it because there is nothing in Belgium which would facilitate emigration for him,..., no practical information, no organizations to protect him, no national committees to welcome him at his arrival abroad, no organisation what so ever regarding transport, no efficient surveillance of the government, no association abroad who can place the emigrant somewhere and prevent him from being exploited⁴⁰⁷. ”

All these services mentioned above were provided in Germany by the catholic ‘Raphaëlsverein’. Cartuyvels expected that soon a branch of this association would be founded in Belgium. He was convinced that once this organisation started running properly, the emigration would increase. Up to this time the Belgians rarely emigrated in groups. Therefore he became isolated and ended up returning to his home country. Cartuyvles believed that emigration needed to occur in group via an association or a corporation.

In the second part Cartuyvels summed up some reasons to emigrate. First he put forward the Belgian overpopulation again. The population density had climbed to 201 inhabitants per square kilometre. In Germany the population density only totalled 86

⁴⁰⁵ L. SCHEPENS, *op cit.*, p. 145.

⁴⁰⁶ translated: “About the Belgian emigration to America” J.L. CARTUYVELS, *De l’émigration Belge en Amérique*, Luik, Librairie Louis Demarteau, 1887, 33p.

⁴⁰⁷ J.L. CARTUYVELS, *op cit.*, p. 4.

inhabitants per km² and the European average amounted to a mere 33 inhabitants per km². Because of this overpopulation Cartuyvels labelled emigration an absolute necessity. He noted that the density was especially high in industrial centres. If poverty should break out in these centres, than the danger of moral decadence would be important. In order to fight against this threat of moral decadence, the surplus population in the great industrial centres should be directed to the rural areas. Family ties were far more important in the rural areas. However there was no more land available for them in the Belgian countryside, but it could be found in other continents. Moreover Cartuyvels feared that the precarious situation which the agricultural sector found itself in was not likely to improve. Belgium was powerless against the global process of change in the production via the faster communications, connections and the unlimited colonisation of new lands. According to Cartuyvels industry would also end up declining because of a shortage of outlets. All industries were languishing, which caused a constant threat of new strikes. The future of Belgian industry did not seem bright according to Cartuyvels:

“To be able to offer work, one has to make sure he can sell products, so considering that we are surrounded by producing countries as capable, more powerful and more favoured, that we do not posses colonies, nor commercial houses abroad, we are condemned to sell our products to our neighbours at very low prices who take advantage of our powerlessness⁴⁰⁸.”

According to Cartuyvels Belgians abroad were perfect representatives for our industry who could create new markets. They found themselves in a perfect situation to promote our products which were superior to others into new countries. The growing unemployment among intellectuals was another reason the vice-rector gave in favour of emigration. He considered this unemployment to be a dangerous source for the beginning of revolutions.

Finally Cartuyvels indicated where the emigration movement should be directed to. The secretary of the ‘Raphaëlsverein’ had a strong preference for North-America. This preference was based on the climate and the good spiritual care. However Cartuyvels advised people without starting capital to move to Argentina. In his conclusion the clergyman criticized the policy of the Belgian government one last time:

“Since the Belgian State acquired a vast territory along the river Congo, the government has been totally uninterested in other colonization enterprises on foreign soil, and limits its activities to informing private initiatives⁴⁰⁹.”

1.4.2) Martel

⁴⁰⁸ J.L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p. 14.

⁴⁰⁹ J.L. CARTUYVELS, op cit., p. 31.

Martel published: “*De algemene leidsman voor landverhuizers*” in 1889⁴¹⁰. He wrote the book for ‘*all the courageous workers who couldn’t find work or bread in Belgium*’. In his introduction he pleaded in favour of a great number of miserable prisoners. They were disgraced and rejected by their countrymen for the rest of their lives. He noted that there was no longer any room for them in the society. Martel advised all prisoners to emigrate upon their release, preferably to overseas countries rather than neighbouring countries. Martel also blamed the overpopulation for the increasing poverty. Opponents of emigration frequently pointed out to the difficulties caused by the language in foreign countries. Martel refuted this argument: “*the hands of a good workman speaks all languages*⁴¹¹. ” Martel also alluded to the advantages that emigration could produce for Belgian industry. After a short introduction the author discussed all possible destinations. The different states of the United States were all analysed separately.

1.4.3) Navez

For the first time an article came out which radically opposed emigration. Navez questioned the use of emigration in his article: “*La question de l’émigration*”,⁴¹². The author deplored the fact that Belgians, who were ‘happy sedentary people’, followed the example of the Germans and the English by emigrating in large numbers. Navez also criticized the attitude of the government:

“Nearly everyone approves this exodus and the government grants privileges to promote it, for instance the reduction on the transport for people who hope to build up a better future in overseas territories⁴¹³. ”

Navez did not only consider the emigration to be useless, he also believed it to be harmful to Belgium. He claimed that the emigrants were always replaced due to an increasing birth rate and immigration. These immigrants could not be considered patriots who would be prepared to sacrifice themselves. Navez considered immigrants to be a disturbing influence. Moreover according to Navez the fact that the immigration flow filled the gap created by the emigration

⁴¹⁰ translated: ‘The general guide for emigrants’, H. MARTEL, Algemene leidsman voor landsverhuizers, Brussel, Uitgeverij Van Gampel-Trion, 1889, 8°, pp 356.

⁴¹¹ H. MARTEL, op cit., p. 6.

⁴¹² translated : The question of emigration, NAVEZ Louis, La question de l’émigration, Uitgeverij Falk, Brussel, 1889, 12p.

⁴¹³ NAVEZ Louis, op cit., p. 3.

flow, proved the shortage of work to be a fallacy. If an immigrant could find work in Belgium than surely a Belgian could find a job in his own country. He pleaded for better organisation of internal immigration. The government had to coordinate the transition of people who worked in fields where there was a surplus of workforce to fields where there was a shortage of workforce. Navez also argued that the high population density did not constitute a problem. The author gave London as an example where five million people lived in an area of 316 km². Navez also pointed out that most of emigrants did not settle in areas with a low population density. On the contrary they chose places with high population density. He stated that in these places: “*the capital accumulated even more than the men*⁴¹⁴.” Navez concluded as follows:

“... we have to make an effort not to send where our unhappy compatriots but to send the products of their work.

We don’t have to undertake attempts to open up new outlets to decrease pauperism and misery in the social sector, but certainly so in the economic sector⁴¹⁵.”

Navez considered the Congo of Leopold II to be an ideal market for Belgian products.

1.4.4) The interpretation of the different publications

After all his experiences abroad Cartuyvels became an authority regarding emigration. Leopold II even asked his advice for the colonisation of the Congo Free State. It remains unclear exactly how long Cartuyvels resided in the United States. All that is known is that after the failure in Sainte-Marie, Pennsylvania, he settled in Illinois. Surprisingly he no longer considered the U.S. to be best place to emigrate but put recommended Argentina. This preference seemed to be based on economic reasons. However Cartuyvels still considered emigration to be the only solution for the poverty and the overpopulation in Belgium. Furthermore emigration offered the opportunity to open new markets of which Belgian industry had a distressing shortage. The best way to create new markets was to emigrate in small groups and establish colonies. Cartuyvels blamed the government for the fact that important settlements of countrymen abroad had never been established. The emigration movement lacked proper organisation, information and support. According to Cartuyvels the passive attitude of the government was partly because of the acquisition of the Congo Free State. Since that acquisition the government had limited itself to providing information to

⁴¹⁴ NAVEZ Louis, op cit., p. 7.

⁴¹⁵ NAVEZ Louis, op cit., p. 11.

private initiatives. Cartuyvels' advice of emigrating to Argentina would be followed in 1888 and 1889 when a massive emigration movement to South-America took place. The Argentinean government set up a major propaganda campaign to lure emigrants. It even gave grants to immigrants. This movement came to a sudden end in 1890. Argentina was not spared from crisis either. The country ran out of money to subsidize the emigration movement⁴¹⁶. Moreover rumours which reached Belgians about the situation of their countrymen in Argentina deterred a lot of new emigrants. The emigration stream would soon move back to North-America again. A branch of the 'Raphaëlsverein' was founded in 1888 what Cartuyvels had predicted. One of the predominant reasons for this foundation was the abuse of emigrants going to Argentina. However the stimulating effect of the association on emigration predicted by Cartuyvels failed to occur (see below) .

The book of Martel aimed mainly to inform the prospective emigrants of possible destinations. His work proved that the idea of letting ex-convicts emigrate still existed. This idea remained to exist up to 1914. A year after Martel's publication the 'Society for resettlement of convicts and detainees' of Liege held a debate on the matter. Desoer summarised and published the ideas of the debate. Desoer mentioned the problems the government had had in the past when sending ex-convicts to the United States. Therefore the association put forward Argentina as the best destination. Emigration offered the ideal way to help small time criminals to get out of the vicious circle of crime⁴¹⁷. Also beggar workhouses urged the government to let some detainees emigrate. The government did not allow such emigration to be directed to the United States⁴¹⁸. However Desoer mentions a tryout of three ex-convicts who were expatriated to Argentina.

Navez was a notable exception in publishing an article against emigration. Unfortunately the article did not give any information about the author which makes interpretation difficult. However it shows that not everyone was convinced that the high population density needed to be decreased. He considered emigration to be useless and harmful because emigrants were replaced by immigrants. The government had to solve the problems caused by the high population density through internal emigration and by

⁴¹⁶ J. STENGERS, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

⁴¹⁷ DESOER Florent, Rapport sur la question de la libération et de l'émigration de condamnés libérés: présenté par la société du patronage des condamnés et détenus de Liège, Luik, Desoer, 1890, p. 7.

⁴¹⁸ The beggar workhouse of Merksplas urged the government several times to let some detainees emigrate on the expenses of their community. The government ignored the requests. However the government informed the detainees upon their release about the possibilities different countries offered. Maybe some local council decided to pay for their transport at their release. (A.M.B.Z. 2962.) Merksplas housed the biggest beggar workhouse of

facilitating the transition to new professions. He in contrast with Cartuyvels praised the initiative of the king. However Congo would never become the promising outlet Navez expected. Leopold II intended to establish a colony to exploit Congo not to populate it with Belgians. When Leopold II was forced to give up Congo to the Belgian government in 1908, only a mere one thousand Belgians populated the colony⁴¹⁹. Before 1908 the African possession was the private domain of Leopold II. Most of the wealth extracted from it, went to projects of the king. However the greatest profit only came when rubber became important on the world market⁴²⁰.

1.5) The position of the Belgian government towards emigration: providing information

1.5.1) The Belgian emigration policy

When the draft for the new emigration law initiated by Vander Stichelen took shape in the 1870's, the minister d'Asprémont-Lynden explained to the maritime commissioner that the laws were not intended to encourage the Belgian emigration overseas⁴²¹. The government did not want to take any risks with the emigration policy that could harm the interests of the port of Antwerp. This became clear again when Mali the consul in New York, informed about the 'Société française d'émigration'⁴²². Mali had always supported the idea of engaging an emigration agent in New York to guide emigrants upon their arrival. The ministry of Foreign Affairs always declined the proposal claiming it did not have enough funds for it. In 1874 Mali asked the minister of Foreign Affairs to advise the emigrants to look up the 'Société française d'émigration' for advice and information when arriving in New York. The association could help them to find work. The governor of Antwerp objected to this scheme. He feared that the society would be associated with 'Société Alsacienne-Lorraine'⁴²³. The regions of the Alsace and the Lorraine had been conquered by the Germans during the French-German war of 1870-1871. Therefore the 'Société Alsacienne-Lorraine' stimulated

the country. At the end of the nineteenth it numbered 6,000 detainees. D. MUSSCHOOT, We gaan naar Amerika: Vlaamse landsverhuizers naar de nieuwe wereld 1850-1930, Tielt, Uitgeverij Lannoo, 2002, p. 43.

⁴¹⁹ V. FOURTY, "Belgen in Congo" in: MORELLI A., Belgische emigranten, Epo, Berchem 1999, p. 167.

⁴²⁰ A. HOCHSHILD, De geest van koning Leopold II en de plunderingen van de Congo, Amsterdam, J.M. Meulenhof, 1998, pp. 124-130.

⁴²¹ Letter of d'Asprémont-Lynden to the maritime commissioner 24/3/1874, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

⁴²² translated: French Society for Emigration

the emigration of young men of the region to escape from military service in the German army. The governor feared that advising Belgian emigrants to use the ‘Société française d’émigration’ could trigger new smear campaigns in Germany against the port of Antwerp. He reminded the minister that the ports of Bremen and Hamburg used every opportunity to discredit the Belgian port in order to lure emigrants away from Antwerp⁴²⁴. This proves again that the authorities did not take the interests of the emigrants into account. What really mattered were the commercial interests of the port of Antwerp.

During the 1870’s the Belgian economy did well while the American economy went through a recession. In the beginning of the 1880’s this situation was reversed. Belgian emigration started to increase again. The pressure on the government to intervene in the movement increased but it stuck to its non-intervention policy. In the previous chapter we saw how the government method of gathering and spreading information about the possibilities different countries offered to emigrants was criticised during the 1860’s. In spite of these criticisms the government policy remained the same. However when the emigration movement picked up during the 1880’s the government was forced to take measures to better inform the emigrants. The minister of Foreign Affairs, Chimay, realised that the information he had was inadequate. In 1884 he sent out a circular to all the consuls. In his letter the minister specified what their consular reports needed to contain. Vilain XIII had asked from the consuls to include a section which discussed the opportunities for emigration in their reports⁴²⁵. However this section was very limited and the information the minister possessed of was out dated. Chimay requested a report in different sections which generally coincides with what Le Hardy de Beaulieu proposed (see 5.2.2.2). The report included the following sections: (1) land, (2) climate and population, (3) legislation regarding foreigners, (4) the best circumstances for emigration, (5) how much capital an emigrant needed, depending on their professions, (6) what emigrants should do on arrival, (7) advice on where to live first, (8) salaries and the cost of living (9) possibilities for erecting colonies, (10) general observations. This information had to enable the ministry to draw an image of the possibilities the countries offered for emigrants⁴²⁶. The minister sent out the same letter again two years later. After the

⁴²³ translated: the Alsace-Lorraine Society

⁴²⁴ Letter from the governor of Antwerp to d’Asprémont-Lynden 18/6/1874, P.R.A., Provinciaal Bestuur, Emigratie, nr. 275, Landverhuizers - kolonies 1851-1860.

⁴²⁵ L. MAESENS,op cit., p. 76.

⁴²⁶ Circular from Chimay to all the consuls 27/12/1884 en 11/8/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

sending of this circular letter on the consuls would sent a thorough report like this every decade.

In the meantime the crisis in Belgium dragged on causing social strife. The big crisis in the industrial sector frightened many politicians. Some, like Frère-Orban former minister of Foreign affairs, feared a ‘social war’⁴²⁷. The government decided to form a commission to investigate the problem. The ‘Commission du travail Industriel’ was founded by a Royal Decree on the 15th of April 1886⁴²⁸. For the first time in thirty years the non-intervention policy came under serious pressure. The commission had to give answers to a variety of questions. The central issue they had to resolve was: “*Must we encourag the emigration of Belgian workers to foreign countries?*” Furthermore the commission needed to elaborate their answer: “*What kind of workers? To which countries? What measures have to be taken? Does the government need to control the emigration and to what extent?*”⁴²⁹. During the summer of 1886 the crisis reached a new peak. Public opinion held that forward exportation and emigration were the only two solutions to end the crisis:

“We are totally convinced that the solution can only be obtained through emigration directed, organised and controlled by the State”⁴³⁰.

Different newspapers started to publish articles urging the government to participate actively in the emigration movement:

“We are seriously appealing to the attention of the minister of Foreign Affairs regarding the matter. The minister can better than anyone else, *by his own initiative*(!), help to resolve the difficulties of the present situation. We will remind him of this at every opportunity that we receive”⁴³¹.

The emphasis on ‘his own initiative’ in the text, illustrates the author’s criticism of the author of the minister of Foreign Affairs’ passive attitude towards emigration. Many newspapers urged the government to support the emigration movement logically, informatively and financially. Goebel, president of the chamber of commerce of Liege, stressed the importance

⁴²⁷ Article taken from: ‘Moniteur des Intérêts Maritinal’ 10/6/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

⁴²⁸ translated: the ‘Commission of industrial labour’

⁴²⁹ Note added to the information given to the commission, s.d., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commision du travail 1886.

⁴³⁰ Article taken from: ‘L'opinion’, La crise ouvrière et l'émigration, 4/8/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commision du travail 1886.

⁴³¹ Article taken from: “*La crise social et l'émigration*” Moniteur des Intérêts Maritinal, 10/6/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

of teaching the Belgians how to emigrate⁴³². Goebel considered the national authorities to be responsible for educating and informing its citizens:

“The Belgian does not take the initiative. It is hard to change the habits of a nation, however it is possible with the means that only the government possess of⁴³³.”

According to the article, the Belgians should no longer follow the example set by the Germans but the one set by the Italians. The article claimed that many Italians chose Antwerp as an emigration port. The image of trains loaded with poor Italians on their way through Belgium to try their luck in the ‘New World’ seemed to have been an widespread image. However the government paid little attention to public opinion.

The government never really considered intervening in the emigration movement. The topic was only discussed sporadically during parliamentary debates. De Merode mentioned it when making the budget of the ministry of Foreign Affairs. His remarks illustrate the position of the government towards emigration. The parliamentarian did not believe that the government needed to provide concessions or financial aid for the emigrants. Previous attempts had ‘detestable results’. The government had to: “*educate ,inform, prepare and warn them*”. Chimay, the minister of Foreign Affairs at the time supported this point of view. He noted that Belgians were not prolific migrants. The minister had mixed feelings about this. Chimay regretted seeing countrymen leave their home country, but also deplored the Belgians’ lack of initiative in taking advantage of foreign markets. Chimay’s statement that the Belgian ‘hated’ to leave his home country was argued by De Merode. He pointed to the important emigration movement to France. De Merode blamed the smaller emigration overseas on the elaborate precautions Belgian emigrants took. Everything always needed to be well prepared. Maybe this caused Belgians to execute their plans slowly, but at least it prevented them from leaving unprepared, according to de Merode. The parliamentarian pleaded with the minister of Foreign Affairs to establish an information centre about emigration in the ‘Trade Museum’ in Brussels. He claimed that the possibility of getting information from the ministry of Foreign affairs was little known to the public. De Merode also proposed establishing such centres in all the provincial capitals. A big publicity campaign at the opening of these centres would make their existence known to the public. De

⁴³² Article taken from: "La commission de travail industriel et l'emigration" Moniteur Belge, 1886, p.496, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

⁴³³ Article "La crise social et l'émigration" taken from : Moniteur des Intérêts Maritinal, 10/6/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2946, dl. III, Renseignements et documents fourni à la commission du travail 1886.

Merode also hoped to limit the abuses committed by the emigration agents who sold tickets to emigrants by telling fabulous tales and outright lies. The parliamentarian believed that the government had to continue developing its policy based on the law of 1876 (see 1.2). However he criticized the idle manner in which the shipping companies' licenses were renewed year after year. The licenses were handed out regardless of the previous activities of shipping owners. This while some owners were accused of major abuse in foreign countries⁴³⁴. Among the shipping owners alluded to by de Merode we find the sons of Adolphe Strauss. During the 1870's his son Henri Strauss took over the business. The abuse continued unabated until 1890. That year his shipping company license was revoked. This put an end to the activities of Antwerp's most notorious shipping owners of the nineteenth century⁴³⁵.

The law of 1876 was intended to regulate the emigration through Antwerp. It did not include any specific measures aimed at coordinating Belgian emigration. The law obliged the shipping companies which arranged the transport of emigrants to pay a guarantee of 20,000fr. The money would be used to compensate emigrants when abuses of the companies had been proved. It seems that the government hoped to deter the companies from committing abuse with the introduction of the law rather than implementing it. As mentioned above the shipping companies were hardly subjected to any controls. The law also planned the foundation of a medical service to control the health of the emigrants before leaving Antwerp. The government hoped to reduce the risk of epidemics with this scheme. It was also intended to reduce the number of emigrants who did not meet the medical standards set by the New York authorities and who consequently were sent back to Belgium. Moreover the law included measures to make the journey on the ship more comfortable. A special governmental commission was founded to see to it that the law was respected and emigrants protected. Nevertheless the abuse continued. In 1890 the law was adapted to enable the commission to fight the persistent exploitation of emigrants⁴³⁶. The laws ostensibly aimed to protect the emigrants from dishonest emigration agents, but were mainly designed to avoid scandals which might reduce the emigration flow through Antwerp. This movement consisted mainly of Germans, Russians, Austrians and Hungarians. The emigration flow through Antwerp, except for some small fluctuations, increase constantly from 1885 onwards.

⁴³⁴ Annales parlementaires, Sessions 1886-1887, Chambre de représentant pp. 404-412, séance du 28/1/1887.

⁴³⁵ L. MAESENS,op cit., p. 68.

⁴³⁶ L. MAESENS,op cit., p. 72.

The foundation of information centres was the only measure taken specifically for the Belgian emigration. The conclusions regarding emigration of the ‘Commission du travail Industriel’ were not very elaborated. The commission showed little interest for the topic. It tried to solve the problems within the Belgian borders. For instance the commission dedicated a lot of attention to the overpopulation of the beggar workhouses. However the commission did not consider expatriating a proportion of the detainees⁴³⁷. Their answers to the four questions stated above did not reveal new approaches to emigration. According to the commission all kinds of labourers could emigrate. No country prohibited immigration. Therefore the commission concluded that it was possible to emigrate to all countries. As to the question regarding the measures the government could take, the commission advised limiting these to the internationally agreed regulations. Finally it suggested using the law of 1876 as a guideline for the governmental policy towards emigration. The government stuck to this policy. Chimay restated the position of the government in the House of Representatives two years later:

“...the position of the government has to be passive, meaning that the government should hope for, or encourage an emigration movement.
...everyone needs the freedom to act as they wish⁴³⁸. ”

1.5.2) The reaction of the Belgian government towards the ‘Alien contract labour law’

Sources indicate that the law only started to be implemented in 1887. From that moment on there are traces in the archives of emigrants being sent back to Antwerp for having made an agreement to work somewhere in the United States before entering the country. When informed about the law, Chimay wrote a letter to all the provincial governors. The minister ordered the governors to make this measure known to the public⁴³⁹. Mali asked the minister what procedure he should follow when a compatriot filed a complaint against his extradition. The consul noted that the law conflicted with the ‘treaty of commerce and navigation’ signed on the 8th of March 1875. However he pointed out that it wasn’t the first time that the American authorities passed laws concerning immigration which went against treaties and agreements. The consul informed Mali that the law had triggered an international

⁴³⁷ Annales parlementaires, Sessions 1886-1887, Chambre de représentant pp. 398-402, séance du 27/1/1887.

⁴³⁸ Annales parlementaires, Sessions 1888-1889, Chambre de représentant pp. 111, séance du 13/2/1889, uit J. STENGERS, *op cit.*, p 46.

⁴³⁹ Letter from Chimay to the governors 7/1/1888, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

protest but that so far no country had undertaken diplomatic actions⁴⁴⁰. Shortly after receiving the letter the maritime police informed the minister of the arrest of a group of Ottomans for vagrancy in the streets of Antwerp. They seemed to be the first to be send back to Antwerp on the basis of the ‘Alien contract labour law’. The city of Antwerp and the national authorities risked getting stuck with many foreigners who being without means would be dependent on the authorities. Chimay wanted to lodge an official protest against the American law. First the minister wrote his colleague in the Department of Justice, Van Begerem, to see what measures could be taken to prevent emigrants of getting stranded in Antwerp⁴⁴¹. Chimay was determined to take action. He wrote to the ministers of Foreign Affairs of ten other countries to find out what their intentions were regarding the law⁴⁴². The replies show that most countries had no intention of protesting against it. The German minister made clear that he did not plan to protest against the measure. He considered the emigration of compatriots to be detrimental to the country. Russia shared this point of view. Moreover it stressed that it had no intention of interfering with other countries’ legislation. Other nations like Portugal and Great-Britain informed Chimay that they had no objections to the law. These countries preferred to direct the emigration movement to their own colonies. The ministers of Norway and Sweden stated that they preferred to keep their compatriots within their borders considering the vast lands that needed to be cultivated. Finally the Swiss minister said that the government had to remain neutral regarding the issue. It had to refrain from stimulating emigration, but at the same time protect the emigrants from people who tried to make profits of them. After hearing the different opinions of his foreign colleagues, Chimay decided not to protest against the law. In the meantime Mali informed the minister that the case had already been taken to the supreme court under claims that the law was unconstitutional. The court rejected the complaint. Mali advised Chimay to inform thoroughly the population about this new law:

“We would not dare to advise our labourers to come here without a bond or a support assuring them work, but it is important to inform the emigrants to keep this silent if they do not want to experience difficulties upon their arrival in New York⁴⁴³”.

⁴⁴⁰ Letter from Mali to Chimay 6/2/1888, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

⁴⁴¹ Letter from Chimay to Van Begerem 8/2/1888, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

⁴⁴² Letter from Chimay to the ministers of Foreign Affairs 20/2/1888, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

⁴⁴³ Letters from Mali to Chimay 1/3/1888 en 29/8/1889, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. I, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: généralités: (1883-1908).

Chimay's main motive for protesting against the 'Alien contract labour law' was none other than protecting the commercial interests of the port of Antwerp. He feared that poor emigrants who had been using Antwerp as a gateway to the 'New World' would be sent back to the Belgian city and becoming dependent of the local and national authorities. Maybe he also filed a complaint because at the time many Belgians started to emigrate. Since the outbreak of the social unrest caused by the second industrial revolution, emigration had been considered as way of calming the social unrest in the large industrial centres. However considering the reaction of the other countries, Chimay decided not to intervene. During this period the ministry of Foreign Affairs received, as it had during the 1840's, many requests of Belgians to obtain grants for their emigration. The minister turned them down⁴⁴⁴. When discussing the deportation of glassworkers and diamond cutters we saw that Mali engaged himself in two trials to fight against these expulsions. Thanks to his efforts, many Belgians accused of braking the 'Alien contract labour law' obtained the right of passage to the United States. The Belgian government did not contribute much to the consul's efforts. The minister of Foreign Affairs refused to cover any of the legal costs Mali spent on the trial defending the diamond cutters. This apathy towards the interests of the Belgian emigrants characterizes the position of the government towards Belgian emigration during this period.

1.5.3) The insufficient efforts of the government to provide the emigrants with information

The government stuck to its non-intervention policy regarding emigration. In 1856 Vilain XIII had pronounced back that the duty of the government was limited to informing and protecting emigrants. However by the 1880's the government had not taken any concrete steps to inform or protect the emigrants. With the circular to the consuls of 1884 and 1886 mentioned above, Chimay urged the consuls to gather specific information. The parliamentarian Andrimont was behind this scheme. A debate in the House of Representatives shows that he had been trying to obtain these detailed reports on the region each consul resided in since 1879. Andrimont also recommended the organization of a commission to control the consuls. He proposed setting high standards for the appointment of consuls abroad. The parliamentarian criticized the amateurish selection of the consuls. Therefore many incompetent people exercised this important function. According Andrimont their

⁴⁴⁴ A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. I, Renseignements 1884-1896.

incompetence caused the need for expensive exploration missions. Chimay ignored the proposition of Andrimont⁴⁴⁵.

The minister sent out Revleaux, the consul-general of the United States on an exploration mission to add on to the information gathered by the consuls. The mission evoked new speculation in the press about the true nature of the journey of the consul-general. The newspaper ‘La Gazette’ claimed that the government planned to stimulate the emigration of countrymen to the western states. The paper warned that such expeditions should not be underestimated: “*times when emigrants were welcomed with open arms by the Yankee farmers have gone passed*”. However the newspaper predicted positive results from the journey of Revleaux. ‘La Gazette’ hoped that the mission would strengthen ties between Belgian immigrants in the United States and their home country. Belgians had to follow the example of the Germans and group together when emigrating. The newspaper supported the foundation of organisations which coordinated the emigration movement and introduced emigrants to American farming techniques and the English language in order to facilitate their integration⁴⁴⁶.

Revleaux travelled through fifteen different states. The consul-general mostly praised the western states. He stated that lands and the labour market of the older eastern states were saturated. Regarding agriculture, Revleaux always pointed out the possible places to emigrate in group. He believed that the best way to cultivate lands was emigrating to in group through an association which took care of the logistics. However farmers who left on their own and enough capital could surely be successful. The consul-general did warn however that the adaptation problems would be intensified because of isolation⁴⁴⁷. The article taken from ‘la Gazette’ illustrates the media’s interest for emigration from the press during the second half of the 1880’s. The newspaper tried to predict the results of the mission. The report written by Revleaux coincided with many predictions put forward by the newspaper. This shows that newspapers dedicated a lot of attention to such missions. Through the newspapers at least some of the information gathered by the ministry of Foreign Affairs reached a part of the population.

⁴⁴⁵ Annales parlementaires, Sessions 1886-1887, Chambre de représentant pp.388-398, séance du 27/1/1887.

⁴⁴⁶ Article taken from: La Gazette, 5/7/1887, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. V, Renseignements 1908-1914.

⁴⁴⁷ REVLEAUX M., Voyage d'exploration aux Etats-Unis: agriculture, industrie et immigration aux états visités (Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Californie, Orégon, Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Colorado, Georgie, Alabama, Louisiana et Texas), Bruxelles, Wessenbruch, 1888, 62p

Chimay followed the advice of de Merode and erected an information centre at the ‘Trade Museum’ in Brussels. It was founded in 1888. Moreover he also established similar centres in all the provincial capitals in the buildings of the provincial administration. The purpose of these centres was protecting the emigrants from the lies of emigration agents and under-agents:

“The crisis that we are going through has increased the number of Belgians disposed to seek for means of sustaining the cost of living far away from their home country. They are easily inclined to listen to the suggestions of emigration agents who try to take advantage of them by depicting a very attractive image of some overseas countries which does not necessarily coincide with the real economic situation.

...My experience has proven to me that a major part of the emigrants are deprived of all kinds of advice or exploited by unscrupulous go-betweens when willing to leave the country. By centralizing the information gathered by the ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels and limiting it to the capital, would put the information out of reach of people who are interested in the matter⁴⁴⁸. ”

The initiative failed to reach its goal. Lists with the number of visitors at the centres show that approximately a hundred people a year visited the different centres. For most people a trip to the provincial capital meant a whole expedition. A second factor which probably caused the low attendance was that the public was unaware of the existence of the centres. Besides many people who intended to emigrate got information from via the ‘Saint-Raphael Society’. In 1897 all traces of the existence of such information centres disappeared⁴⁴⁹.

1.6) The Saint-Raphael Society

The Belgian branch of the Saint-Raphael Society was founded on the 24th of October 1888. This catholic society was already active in Germany, Austria and Italy and aimed to protect the emigrants. The protection the association offered consisted mainly of spreading information about the different destinations. However the members of the organisation were also willing to prepare the whole emigration procedure with the prospective emigrants. This usually implied arranging all the details, from the village of departure to the final destination⁴⁵⁰ (Musschoot, 2002, 93). About a year after its foundation the first issue of their brochure was published: “*Bulletin van het genootschap van het aartsengel Raphaël, Werk ter*

⁴⁴⁸ Letter from Chimay to the provincial governors 30/6/1887, L. MAESENS, op cit., p. 68.

⁴⁴⁹ L. SCHEPENS, op cit., p. 108.

⁴⁵⁰ D. MUSSCHOOT., op cit., p. 93.

*bescherming van de landverhuizers*⁴⁵¹.” In the first issue the society described their reason to be:

“Leaving? Where to? He asks the priest. How would the good priest know where to go? To the mayor then! But what does the mayor know about this. The offices of the official information centres? He doesn’t know of its existence and would not dare to go there if he did.

That only leaves the go-between, the recruiting-agent. The agent promises heaven on earth: free transport, fertile land, a quick fortune. The labourer listens, and forgets. He signs a contract. Capital mistake because often times this signature drives him to slavery. In the meantime he is happy, full of hopes and illusions, until the day, real close, that he finds out about the reality.

The agent, he is happy as well. He will earn 20fr. If he contracts three a day this will amount to 20,000fr. a year. He does not emigrate. Why would he care that the wages are going down. He has a lucrative income⁴⁵².

This introduction stresses once again how vulnerable emigrants were to local emigration-agents whose only concern was getting rich. As mentioned earlier the main reason for the foundation of the association in Belgium was the rumours of abuses concerning the emigration to Argentina. The ‘free transport’ mentioned in the fragment above, proves this. At the time Argentina was the only country contributing to the transport of immigrants.

The society published an issue of its bulletin every three months. Geert Verrijken subjected these bulletins to a thorough investigation. The association tried to remain neutral towards emigration. It did not want to take a stance either for or against emigration. However Verrijken concluded that the society tended to disapprove of emigration because all happened in a much disorganized way. Therefore the emigrant often lost all ties to his religion, his church and fell into moral decadence. This standpoint also reflects the point of view of the Belgian Church towards emigration which strongly influenced the opinion of catholic politicians. It is no coincidence that the non-intervention policy had been established by a catholic, Vilain XIII. From 1884 to 1914 a catholic politician was constantly in charge of the ministry of Foreign affairs. This partly explains the apathy of the government towards emigration during this period in which overseas emigration peaked.

Most of the articles in the brochures were dedicated to Canada and the United States. Articles devoted to each country each took up one third of the articles published in the bulletin. Verrijken calculated that Canada received most of the attention in accordance with the number of emigrants who emigrated to the country. Canada was also the destination most

⁴⁵¹ Translated: bulletin of the Society of archangel Saint-Raphael, work for the protection of the emigrants.

⁴⁵² Bulletin van het genootschap van de aartsengel Raphaël, Werk ter bescherming van landverhuizers, Sint-Andries, nr 1, 1890, p 2.

praised by the society. It is the only country to which the association dedicated an entire manual, “*Manuel de l’émigrant*”. The reason for the preference of Canada is nothing else than the existence of the ‘Comité catholique du patronage et d’assistance aux emigrants Belges’ who welcomed the emigrants into the country⁴⁵³. The Belgian consul-general of Canada presided over the organisation. According to the Saint-Raphael society the committee offered the best guarantees for a successful future abroad. The society preferred Canada to Latin-America and the United States because of its important influence the Catholic Church had in Canada. The main reason the society advised against emigration to the United States was the relatively high risk of emigrants of losing their faith. The Saint-Raphael Society gave numerous warnings about all kinds of sects in the U.S. The society also deplored the shortage of priests in certain areas⁴⁵⁴.

The association received its information from correspondents who lived all around the globe. They also received information through people they had helped to emigrate. The ministry of Foreign Affairs also served as a source. The ministry and the society exchanged information with each other. Therefore it is most likely that the information gathered in the consular reports reached more people than the number of visitors to the information centres would suggest. The government also subsidized the Saint-Raphael Society⁴⁵⁵. According to Schepens the catholic society guided about two hundred emigrants a year. On top of that it informed about one thousand others. However the organisation did complain about the lack of collaboration with the local clergy. Therefore it could not prevent the majority of emigrants from leaving on the only indications of the emigration agents⁴⁵⁶.

1.7) The economic crisis in the United States

In 1892 Belgian emigration to the United States peaked, when 4,297 people crossed the Atlantic hoping to build a more promising future in the ‘New World’. They arrived at an unfortunate moment. One factory after another closed its doors due to an economic slump between 1893 and 1898. Many workers found themselves on the streets. Salaries, which were constituted the most enticing factor for emigrants heading to the United States, collapsed. The unions ended up losing a lot of influence during the crisis. Everyone was so desperate to find

⁴⁵³ translated: ‘Catholic Committee of the protection and assistance to Belgian emigrants’

⁴⁵⁴ G. VERRIJKEN, op cit., p. 101.

⁴⁵⁵ D. MUSSCHOOT, op cit., p. 94.

⁴⁵⁶ L. SCHEPENS, op cit., p. 177.

a job that they took any work that was offered to them. In 1896 the situation reached its most critical point. The employment had become so deplorable that new strikes broke out⁴⁵⁷. Given the circumstances the pressure to impose more restrictions on immigration rose.

As illustrated in the discussion on the emigration of glassworkers to the United States, more and more American agents went to Europe to stimulate emigration. These agents worked for American employers or for shipping companies. Emigrants also reached the United States via Canada to avoid the increasing controls in American ports. The ‘Alien contract labour law’ was amended in 1891 imposing further restrictions on immigration. A new wave of American nationalism spread over the country at this time. The movement which derived its ideology in the main part the ‘Know Nothings’ called itself the ‘American Protective Association’⁴⁵⁸. The movement quite logically lobbied for restrictions on the immigration flow. The critics of immigration intensified in 1892 when cholera epidemics broke out on certain ships arriving at American ports. The port of Antwerp was not spared from this tragedy. In August 1892 cholera broke out in the city but the authorities managed to get it quickly under control. However the measures could not prevent the ships coming from Antwerp from being placed into quarantine upon arrival in New York. The American authorities wanted to avoid the spread of the disease at all costs. All ships arriving in New York were placed in a twenty day long quarantine. The measure was implemented to the great dissatisfaction of the shipping companies who saw their profits vanish as a consequence. Many shipping companies refused to ship emigrants to New York any longer.

However measures to cut down the emigration drastically have not been taken. Again in 1893 new amendments were made to the ‘Alien contract labour law’. The captains had to hand over passenger lists to the Immigration Bureau. The authorities also required an oath from the captains, proclaiming that they did not transport any passengers who infringed the American immigration laws. In this way the authorities put the responsibility for the control of the immigrants on the captain’s shoulders. All immigrants who were caught breaking the laws, by the immigration inspectors were sent to Belgium again at the expense of the shipping company responsible for transporting them⁴⁵⁹. The controls intensified and the shipping

⁴⁵⁷ J. GODDERIS en R. HOUTHAEVE, Flandria America: een studie van de Vlaamse emigratie naar het Amerikaanse continent, Kortemark, Familia et Patria, 1983, pp. 137-146.

⁴⁵⁸ M. BENNET, op cit., p. 22.

⁴⁵⁹ Annual report of the superintendent of immigration to the secretary of the treasury for the fiscal year ended 20/6/93, Washington, government printing office, p. 11. A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl IX, Emigration 1870-1895.

companies had to comply with more and more regulations⁴⁶⁰. This caused a major decrease in the transport of emigrants via the port of Antwerp. In 1892 about 42,000 emigrants embarked in Antwerp while two years later the number of emigrants had fallen to 13,000⁴⁶¹. The Belgian emigration movement to the United States also diminished a lot due to these events. The peak of 4,297 emigrants in 1892 dropped to under a thousand in 1894. In 1897 and 1898 the number of emigrants didn't even reach seven hundred⁴⁶². An explanation for this can also be found in Belgium. The Belgian economy started to flourish again settling down the social unrest.

A decade after the sending of the first thorough reports the minister of Foreign Affairs ordered the consuls to make up new ones. Due to of the economic crisis all the reports advised against emigration to the United States. Some emigrants even decided to return to Belgium. The advice of the consuls to wait for better times was spread throughout the population by the newspapers. An article taken from 'Le Petit Temps' mentioned that the era of being certain to find work in the United States had come to an end. The emigration of labourers out of the United States would for the first time exceed the immigration of workers into the country⁴⁶³. The report about the mission of the chargé d'affairs in Washington, Leghait, who needed to complete the information of the consuls barely paid any attention to the emigration possibilities of the southern states. The emphasis of the mission seemed to be put on the possibilities the U.S. could offer for Leopold's exploitation of the Congo Free State. Leopold II also specifically asked Leghait to investigate the possibility of initiating a similar emigration movement from the black population of the U.S. to Liberia, but then to Congo⁴⁶⁴.

1.8) Conclusion

⁴⁶⁰ M. BENNET, op cit., p. 23

⁴⁶¹ J. STENGERS, op cit., 48.

⁴⁶² L. SCHEPENS, op cit., 128.

⁴⁶³ Article taken from: Le petit temps 1/3/1895, A.R.A., I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr. 260, Emigration aux Etats-Unis 1857 et 1895.

⁴⁶⁴ M. LEGHAIT, Le sud des Etats-unis d'Amérique, Bruxelles, Weissenbruch, 1895, p. 17-20.

After a long period of limited overseas emigration, a new economic depression in Belgium in the 1880's caused a revival in the emigration flow. This phenomenon also took place in other European countries. Particularly an important emigration movement to the United States originated in Eastern Europe⁴⁶⁵. This movement favoured the interests of the Belgian port. During the 1870's the Belgian government voted new laws to attract the emigrants to the national port again. The foundation of the Red Star Line in 1875 provided the long awaited regular steamship connection between Antwerp and New York. The shipping company received grants from the government for opening the line. The new emigration movement of 1880's allowed the Red Star Line to expand rapidly and become one the most important shipping companies of Europe.

In the United States the labourers started to organise themselves in unions. One of these unions, the 'Knights of Labour', developed into an organisation with considerable power. The union used its influence to pressure the government to pass restrictive immigration laws. They aimed to protect the wages and the jobs of the American workers. The increasing pressure led to the establishment of the 'Alien contract labour law'. The Belgian glassworkers and the diamond cutters experienced the consequences of the law. The Belgian government was not pleased with the law and considered of filing an official protest against it. Mainly the risk of many emigrants without means of who had been denied access to the United States getting stuck in Antwerp worried the authorities. Considering the lack of support from other countries, the government decided not to protest against the law. The authorities followed the guideline of non-intervention set by Vilain XIII to the letter. During the peak of the crisis in 1886 and 1887 the pressure on the government to intervene in the emigration movement increased. However the government never considered doing so. It only took measures to fulfil its responsibility to inform and to protect the emigrants. The advice dating back to the 1860's of collecting more elaborate information from the consuls on the possible emigration destinations was followed twenty years later. The consuls received the mission to draw up reports covering the possibilities for emigration and colonisation. These reports were processed by the ministry of Foreign affairs and put the disposal to anyone who wished go through them at the 'Trade Museum' and at all the provincial capitals. These measures appear to be insufficient for reaching the prospective emigrants. The different information centres only had a couple of hundred visitors a year. After 1897 on all traces of the existence of such centres disappeared. However this does not mean that the information

⁴⁶⁵ W. THOMAS and F. ZANYECKIE, The polish peasant, Chicago University press, 1919, 2346p.

that had been collected was useless. In 1888 a branch of the international Saint-Raphael society was founded in Belgium. The organisation aimed to inform the emigrants and protect them from the exploitation of emigration agents and under-agents who were only out to sell as many tickets possible. The society published a special brochure every three months. Part of the information came from correspondents around the globe. The society also collaborated with the government. The authorities granted the Saint-Raphael society subsidies until at least 1894. The ministry of Foreign Affairs also exchanged information with the society. In this way the information gathered by the consuls managed to reach a broader public. The newspapers also showed interest in emigration. They followed the fluctuations in the emigration movement and the decisions of the government regarding it. The newspapers showed a lot of interests in countries where Belgians emigrated to, the United States in particular. Except during 1888 and 1889 it remained the most popular destination. Some newspapers published parts of the consular reports and reports on exploration missions. Through these different channels the Belgian population was informed about the different emigration possibilities. A thorough investigation into the articles appearing in Belgian newspapers regarding emigration could clarify the influence of the press on emigration.

During the 1890's the American economy went through a slump just as the Belgian economy just started to flourish again. This caused for new restrictions to be implemented on emigration to the United States by the Belgian authorities. From 1892 on the emigration to the United States decreased drastically. The emigration flow would only resume at the beginning of the 20th century. The new emigration movement discussed below would again exceed the previous one discussed above.

Chapter II: The passive attitude of the catholic government towards the increasing emigration movement

2.1) Introduction

Between 1898 and 1913 the emigration movement to the United States picked up again. The flow of emigrants travelling through Antwerp to the ‘New World’ reached a peak during this period. The growth of the emigration movement would only be interrupted by the economic recession in the United States of 1907 and 1908. This crisis caused a drop in the transport prices. Many immigrants took advantage of the situation to return to their home country for a visit. Once the economy picked up again most of these visitors returned to the United States. However in general the time span that will be discussed in this chapter mainly coincides with the economic resurgence starting in 1896. Under the influence of the unions the wages kept on increasing while the immigration laws got stricter. The unions started to use more aggressive strategies. For instance when they blocked the lowering of the wages which would have allowed the employers to get out of the crisis in 1907. When they started to represent a threat to national stability and security the government decided to take measures to limit their influence. In the meantime the southern states actively tried to lure emigrants to populate their lands and factories. This part of the country was trying to bridge the economic gap between it and the north. The newer western states also made efforts to attract people to populate their lands.

The economic situation in Belgium between 1898 and 1913 was favourable. The foundation of the Belgian socialist party, ‘Belgische Werklieden Partij’, in 1885 resulted in social improvements for the labourers. The socialist movement brought in universal plural suffrage which implied that politicians would have to take the unskilled labourers and the farmers into account. The economic and social climate was favourable in Belgium. Nevertheless more Belgians than ever before would emigrate during this period. The consul of Washington noted that the emigration to the United States was hitting new peak in 1903. This time it wasn’t a economic crisis in Europe that triggered the emigration movement, but rather the exceptionally favourable economic situation in the United States. Craftsmen and farmers only formed a small proportion of the emigrants heading overseas. Most of the movement consisted of unskilled workers⁴⁶⁶. Most of the Belgian emigrants who left their country at the beginning of the 20th century, came from Flanders. The Belgian catholic government would hardly interfere at all in the emigration flow.

2.2) The increasing restrictive measures on immigration into the United States

2.2.1) The amendments of 1903

Once again when the emigration movement started to pick up, the protests against the influx of immigrants increased as well. The protest resulted in new amendments to the existing immigration laws in 1903. The laws enlarged the administration which controlled the immigration, it enlarged the number of categories of people who could not enter the country and also included better inspection of the immigrants⁴⁶⁷. Right after the new laws were implemented a new consul-general, Church Howe, was appointed in Antwerp by the American authorities. He immediately filed a report in which he strongly criticized the port. The consul-general spoke of a conflict between the two nations. Howe claimed that the Belgian government tried to obstruct every attempt by American agents to control and supervise the emigration flow to the United States passing through Antwerp. This supervision of the emigration flow to the U.S.A. by American agents in the different emigration ports had been ordered by an amendment to the ‘Alien contract labour law’ in 1893. Until the new amendments of 1903 the consul-general had the right to control the passenger lists of the doctor and the captain and exclude passengers if he decided it necessary. The amendments of 1903 stipulated that in the future this responsibility would be transferred to an immigration officer at the port of arrival. Howe protested against this adaptation. This weakened the control and facilitated the immigration of criminals, according to the consul-general. Howe states in his report that he knew of no other government in the world which stimulated emigration as much as the Belgian government. The Belgian authorities did this by giving the shipping companies and their under-agents complete freedom to organise the emigration:

“Emigration is made a business and is stimulated to a very great extent by the steamship companies. Under the present regulations I do not have the opportunity to ascertain what inducement emigrants receive from their government.

...as far as surveillance by the Belgian authorities concerned, there is nothing to prevent any discharged convict or anarchist of any country in Europe being provided with a ticket and embarking in Antwerp for the United States.

.I do have knowledge about the failure of our government to examine and discriminate emigrants at the port of embarkation which is very satisfactory for the steamship companies and no change is desired on their part⁴⁶⁸.”

⁴⁶⁶ Letter from the consul in Washington to de Favereau 18/04/1903, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. III, Renseignements.

⁴⁶⁷ M. BENNET, op cit., p. 23.

⁴⁶⁸ HOWE C., Emigration through Antwerp to the United States, Bruxelles, s.n., 1903, p. 5. in: A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. II, Renseignements.

Venesoen, the emigration commissioner appointed by the Belgian authorities to the national port in 1888 to keep an eye on the emigration movement did not take long to react to the allegations of Howe. He stated that Howe did not know much about emigration. Venesoen claimed that the consul-generals' report had only one purpose, namely to slow down by any possible means the emigration of labourers who were hoping to better their position by moving to the United States. He considered the report to be the result of mounting frustrations among the American authorities who in spite of all their new laws to restrict immigration did not manage to decrease the influx of emigrants. Furthermore the emigration commissioner stated that Howe tried to convince the American public that many emigrants had a criminal past in order to force even more restrictions on immigration. Venesoen refuted the criticism by pointing out that foreign emigrants were controlled in their home country if they had a criminal history. Belgian emigrants were subjected to a long interrogation at the port before embarking on a ship. Moreover Venesoen himself made a personal file of each Belgian emigrant. The emigration commissioner concluded that the main motivation for Howe's attack on the Belgian port was based on self-interest. He claimed that by transferring the responsibility for signing off the passengers' lists made up by the captains and the doctors the consul-general lost an important source of income. According to Venesoen all the measures taken at the port of Antwerp were completely in compliance with the American requirements. Moreover the American laws did not stipulate that emigrants had to be questioned about their criminal or anarchist history at their departure. The emigration commissioner said that the new laws passed by the American Congress in contrast to what Howe claimed, improved control. Still according to Venesoen Howe's statement that shipping companies used their under-agents to stimulate emigration was another misconception of the consul-general. Venesoen said he was not aware of any case which could substantiate the allegations of Howe. Venesoen stated that since his appointment as emigration commissioner sixteen years earlier his experience had taught him that emigration was stimulated by people and events within the United States itself. Emigration was mainly stimulated by family members who lived in the U.S.:

“The shipping companies only take care of transport and not of the question of emigration which moreover would be very difficult since the laws of most of European countries severely sanction every individual who provokes or encourages emigration⁴⁶⁹. ”

⁴⁶⁹ Letter from Venesoen to de Favereau 27/1/1904, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. II, Renseignements.

Venesoen noted that the shipping companies had every reason to execute strict controls, because most of the time they had to cover the cost the repatriation of passengers who were denied the right of passage. Regarding the new measures involving health controls, the emigration commissioner let the minister of Foreign Affairs, de Favereau, know that these were still done by Belgian doctors. The American doctors appointed by the American authorities hadn't arrived yet.

The analysis of Howe's complaints and Venesoen's reply allows some aspects to be clarified. What part of Howe's story was accurate and truthful? In the previous chapter we saw that the Belgian government imposed conditions on the emigration agents with the laws passed in 1876 and the amendments of 1890. These measures mainly aimed at protecting the emigrants, but had little influence as any real control of the agents and under-agents remained virtually nonexistent. The emigration agents were forced to insure the emigrants against loss and damages. For any delay in arriving at their destination which was not caused by circumstances beyond emigrant's control, the emigration agent needed to pay the emigrant 2fr. damages a day. If the journey needed to be interrupted than the emigration agent was responsible for covering the costs of maintaining of the passengers. Moreover every emigrant had to receive a copy of the contract he signed. The law also stated that the emigration agents had to put their contract books at the disposal of the authorities for control. Furthermore the emigration agents were responsible for the actions of the under agents who guided the emigrants around while they stayed in Antwerp. The law also specified that all emigration-agents had to pay a 20,000fr. to 40,000fr. guarantee to the authorities. The law of 1876 stipulated that the under-agents needed to get official authorisation from the local authorities. The amendments of 1890 passed the responsibility for this authorisation to Venesoen⁴⁷⁰. However these laws still gave a lot of freedom to the emigration companies. Moreover neither the guarantee nor the official authorisation had much influence on their activities. The emigrant trade brought in by the emigration agents were vital to Antwerp. The government had no intentions of obstructing the emigration agents. This provided the emigration companies with a considerable amount of power. This is illustrated by the conflict that arose between the Red Star Line which biggest shipping company and emigration agent of Antwerp, and the government. In 1893 the national authorities demanded a list with all the names of agents who were working for them. However the company refused to provide this

⁴⁷⁰ L. MAESENS, op cit., pp. 72-94.

list. They wanted to keep the names of their employees secret from their competitors. The Red Star Line feared that its competitors might steal some of their agents by promising them higher commissions. The government ended up withdrawing its demand⁴⁷¹.

The guarantee of 20,000fr. meant nothing comparing with the large profits that the transport of emigrants produced. It did not constitute any threat to the emigration agents at all. Segaert stated that only a guarantee of at least a couple of hundred of thousands francs could scare the emigration-agents from committing abuses (see further 2.3)⁴⁷².

Thus Howe claimed that the new amendments to the American immigration laws and the existing Belgian measures facilitated the emigration of ex-convicts and anarchists. Venesoen admitted that the American measures did not stipulate that interrogation had to be done at the port of departure to find out about a possible criminal or anarchic past. This needed to be done by the under-agent who sold the ticket. However the consul-general was right when he stated that the Belgian government did not take measures to prevent these kind of individuals emigrating. On the contrary the government liked to see them leave. In 1889 Armand Baert filed a request to obtain a passport to emigrate to the United States. The individual had been condemned three times by a correctional court and ten times by a police court. The minister of Justice decided to approve his request. He decided that every convict who had served his sentence had the right to receive a passport. The discussion arose because of the ambiguous law of July 27th 1847. Basically the law stated that convicts had no right to own a passport but on the other hand the government could not refuse any requests. In the previous chapter we saw when discussing the publications of Martel and Desoer that the committee for after-care and resettlement of ex-prisoners urged the government to help them emigrate. It is possible that the government gave in on to the repetitive requests of the mentioned committees. However this does not mean that the government did not hand out passports to ex-convicts, but the decision of the minister normalised the situation⁴⁷³.

The answer of Venesoen contains some statements that are surprising to say the least. What seems very clear is that he defended the emigration companies. His predecessor, emigration-inspector Thielens, had always done the same. Venesoen claims that emigration agents and under-agents did not stimulate emigration. He would not be able to produce any example of it. The same year Venesoen started as emigration commissioner, the branch of the

⁴⁷¹ R. VERVOORT, *op cit.*, p. 61.

⁴⁷² H. SEGAERT, *Protection et direction en matière d'émigration*, Hayez, Bruxelles, 1905, 10p.

⁴⁷³ A.R.A., I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr.35, Pasports délivrés aux vagabonds et condamnés.

Saint-Raphael society got founded in Belgium. The main reason for this was just to protect the emigrants from being exploited by emigration agents and under-agents. The government also opened up information centres with the same purpose. However the complaints about abuses from emigration agents and under-agents persisted. The government was well aware of the problem. However regarding the minor conflict it had with the Red Star Line as mentioned above, the government practically had no control over these agents. Officially the under-agents needed authorisation from Venesoen, but if the Red Star Line wasn't even required to give a list with the names of people who worked for them, then how could Venesoen give them authorisation? This proves the power that the emigration agents had and how much importance the government attached to the commercial interests these transports produced. Furthermore Venesoen stated that anyone who stimulated the emigration in some other European countries could be severely punished. Unfortunately comparative research between the Belgian emigration and emigration movements from other countries is limited. Only the similarities and differences with the Irish emigration movement have been studied based upon the existing literature⁴⁷⁴. In Ireland there were no laws defending agents to encourage emigration. Comparative research with the neighbouring countries and Switzerland could clarify this statement of Venesoen⁴⁷⁵. The characterising aspect of the emigration movement of the period as Venesoen pointed out was that most of the emigrants joined friends or families overseas. The personal interviews of each Belgian emigrant taken by the emigration commissioner shows that 90% gave this reason for their emigration⁴⁷⁶. This figure seems to minimize the importance played by the emigration agents and under-agents in the decision-making of emigrants. However considering the facts that the under-agent earned 10fr. to 30fr. for each ticket sold and the persisting complaints against abuses committed by them, it seems unlikely that they only played a minor role in the decision of emigrants to cross the Atlantic.

2.2.2) The amendment of the 20th of February 1907

⁴⁷⁴ A. NUYTENS, Ierland: 19^e eeuwse exodus naar Noord-Amerika – vergelijkende studie met België, Leuven, K.U.L., (onuitgegeven licentiaatsverhandeling), 1995, p. 224 (vakgroep nieuwste geschiedenis).

⁴⁷⁵ Switzerland is added here because it seems that the Swiss government also stimulated the emigration of beggars during the 1850's. Moreover part of the Swiss emigration movement went through Antwerp. The Belgian government tried to lure as many Swiss emigrants as possible. It would be interesting to compare both the emigration policies and emigration movements.

⁴⁷⁶ J. STENGERS, op cit., p. 49.

The restrictive laws on immigration remained a subject of continuous discussion. The existing laws did not seem to be able to diminish the immigration flow into the U.S. The opponents to immigration always tried to get radical laws approved in Congress. In 1906 they entered a proposition to raise the tax per immigrant for the right of passage to five dollars. Moreover they had been urging for a long time to subject all emigrants older than sixteen years old to a reading test in English. This way they hoped to keep illiterates out and limit the important influx of unschooled immigrants. Protests against this measure came from different sides. First of all from the Jews because it would obstruct the strong movement of orthodox Jews coming from Russia during that period. Objections also came from the Catholic corner and more so from the Pope himself. This test would hinder the important emigration movement from southern Italy to the U.S. Moreover the employers did not want to see the movement slow down, because this would increase the wages. Finally the shipping companies quite logically tried to prevent these radical restrictions being approved. Part of the campaign to prevent this from happening as funded with money from companies who looked after the transport across the Atlantic⁴⁷⁷. Those two measures did pass the vote in Congress.

In 1907 the immigration law was reviewed once more. Again the categories of rejected individuals got expanded. The income tax on immigrants increased to 4 dollars. Moreover a special commission was formed within the Congress which needed to deal with the immigration regulations. The following year the Congress voted in another law which had an indirect influence on the immigration laws. The two main unions, the 'Knights of Labour' and the 'American Federation of Labour' kept on opposing immigration. They mainly protested against the big flow of unschooled immigrants. This class of labourers were very vulnerable when striking. Employers could easily replace this class of workers by immigrants if needed. The unions used all means to make life hard for newly arrived immigrants. Most of the time immigrants had to join a union before being able to find work. Their membership fee however could be ten times as high as for Americans. Furthermore considering the fact that both unions mentioned above included workers from different sectors they formed a serious threat to the stability of the country. The risk of sympathizing strikes from one sector with another which could immobilize the whole country existed. Moreover the strikes started to take an increasingly violent turn. Therefore public opinion started to turn against them. Because of the increasing danger the employers also decided to organize themselves. The unions constituted a danger for the government. The constant unrest which unions created

⁴⁷⁷ Letter from Mali to de Favereau 24/5/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2959, dl. II,

endangered the stability of the country. In 1907 and 1908 the American economy went through a new recession. The unions did not permit the employers to implement cuts on wages in order to get out of the slump. Therefore the government decided to pull back article ten of the ‘Edmond Act’. This act had been implemented ten years earlier. The article prohibited the employers from forcibly restraining their employees to joining a union and from firing them when they became a member of one. The government hoped to break the tyranny of the unions⁴⁷⁸. From the moment the government pulled back the Edmond Act, the power of the unions started to fade. The government would go on with taking measures to decrease the influence of the unions.

2.2.3) The White Slave Traffic Act July 25th 1910 and Dillingham Project 1913

The special commission formed within Congress which needed to investigate the immigration issues published a forty page brochure in 1910. It evaluated the entire immigration movement and the immigration laws voted up to then. The commission stated that the American government had always tried to maintain the natural course of the movement. However the commission concluded that the government needed to intervene and adapt the movement to its economical and social needs. The two main instigators for the immigration influx were friends and family who assisted immigrants to get into the United States and the many thousands of emigration agents and under-agents spread all over Europe. According to the commission:

“A great number of immigrants are induced to come by quasi labour agents in this country who combine the business of supplying labourers to large employers and contractors with the so-called immigrant banking business, as well as selling steamship tickets.

...by the laws of most European countries the promotion of emigration is forbidden nevertheless steamship agent's propaganda flourishes everywhere⁴⁷⁹.”

Furthermore it noted that because of the new measures taken in 1907 the number of ill people sent back to their home countries reduced drastically. Moreover the measures taken also decreased the number of immigrants becoming dependent of the American society. However regarding the immigration of criminals, still no satisfying regulations had been found to keep

Etats-Unis: lois sur l'émigration 1903-1910.

⁴⁷⁸ Letter from the chargé d'affaires of Washington to Davignon 30/1/1908, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr 2669bis, dl. I, Etats-Unis 1885-1939.

⁴⁷⁹ THE IMMIGRATION COMMISSION, Brief statements of the conclusions and the recommendations of the immigration commission, Washington, Government printing office, 1910, p. 22.

them out of the country. Unfortunately the control on it was only possible in the country of origin. The law of 1907 did allow the American authorities to control if the laws regarding the matter did not get by-passed in the emigration countries. Nevertheless the commission urged to take further measures. Furthermore it noted that the influx of unschooled immigrants constituted a persistent phenomenon. Most of these emigrants had work arranged by family members or friends before leaving Europe. There wasn't much to be done against this. In general the laws voted prevented the massive arrival of beggars, indigents and criminals to the country.

This report clearly defines the two major stimulants for emigration. The commission also stresses the important profits that the transport of emigrants produced. Based on this report, the American authorities tried to increase control on immigration. From 1911 onwards the immigrants not only needed to possess a passport but also an official certificate proving that they did not have criminal past. As shown before the ex-convicts kept their rights to obtain a passport in Belgium. Moreover the minister of Justice noted that criminals on probation also managed to receive a passport via special request, nevertheless that this was prohibited by law. It proves how lenient the Belgian authorities were toward the emigration of convicts on probation and ex-convicts. It offered them all legal means to enable them to emigrate⁴⁸⁰. Therefore the passport did not offer the American government any guarantee of not having a criminal past. Davignon proposed to design a new certificate to meet the new American requirements. The minister of Justice, Lantshere, mentioned that a certificate of good conduct and moral behaviour would probably be sufficient⁴⁸¹.

The plan set up by Dillingham in 1913 mainly focused on keeping out the unschooled workers from eastern and southern Europe. His propositions aimed to: "*limit the feared immigration from Antwerp and other European ports*". Dillingham also proposed to obtain the right for American agents to embark on ships transporting emigrants. They had to control the captains and be empowered to give orders to the captains regarding the treatment of the passengers. This proposal triggered a big wave of protest from Germany who asked Belgium to support this protest⁴⁸².

⁴⁸⁰Letter from Davignon to Vandervelde 11/4/1912, A.R.A., I 160: Archives du Ministère de la Justice: Administration de la sûreté publique du Régime français à 1914, nr.35, Passeports délivrés aux vagabonds et condamnés

⁴⁸¹Letter from Davignon to Vandeveld 17/5/1911, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. IV, Renseignements.

⁴⁸² Letter from the chargé d'affaires in Washington to Davignon 3/2/1913, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr 2669bis, dl. I, Etats-Unis 1885-1939.

Surprisingly only one week later the chargé in Washington pleaded to the minister of Foreign Affairs to send more emigrants. He noted that in spite of the important immigration influx, the younger western states of the country struggled to populate their lands. The officials of these states did not manage to lure the immigrants to that part of the country. Most of these immigrants concentrated themselves in the Midwest and the old eastern states in the big cities. The increasing concentration of population in the east posed a threat to create a shortage of food supply. The chargé in Washington urged the minister of Foreign Affairs to help the officials of the western states⁴⁸³.

This letter proves that the limited spreading of the immigrants caused the biggest problem. However it confirms that most of the emigrants joined up with friends and family members in the U.S.A. Neither the western nor southern states were fervent supporters of restriction on the immigration movement. They could not prevent however that most of Dillingham's plan was implemented. Even a veto from President Wilson could not prevent that from the 5th of February onwards the immigrants were subjected to an English reading exam. The immigration laws culminated in the Quota Act of 1921. This law determined that only three percent of the total number of immigrants per nationality represented at the time within the country borders would be allowed into the United States every year⁴⁸⁴.

2.3) The international congress for the worldwide economical expansion: 1905

Segaert, a lawyer at the court of appeal in Brussels, laid out a report about the 'International congress of worldwide economical expansion' applied to the emigration issues. He stated that three possible attitudes towards emigration were possible: encouraging it, discouraging it or leaving total freedom to the movement. Segaert pointed out that the Belgian government used this last policy. However he noted that this did not absolve the government from its duty to protect the emigrants. The lawyer rightly stated that mainly the unschooled poor inhabitants proved to be vulnerable to the fabulous stories of emigration agents and under-agents. He did not elaborate on how the government should take up its responsibility. According to Segeart it was only in 1885 that the authorities started to do something about the protection of the emigrants. He suggested that the laws of 1876 and 1890 aimed only to better the facilities at the port of Antwerp to attract the foreign emigration movements. The

⁴⁸³ Letter from the chargé d'affaires in Washington to Davignon 11/2/1913, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr 2669bis, dl. I, Etats-Unis 1885-1939.

⁴⁸⁴ M. BENNET, op cit., pp. 26-28.

measures regarding emigration taken at the outbreak of the social and economical crisis in 1884 were the first which intended to protect the Belgian emigrant. However Segaert exposed the shortcomings of the measures. He pointed out that the erected information centres at the time had hardly been visited by anyone. He proposed that the emigration commissioner should be charged with providing the proper information to the emigrants. All the Belgian emigrants had to go through him anyway.

Segaert also urged the government to execute stricter controls on the emigration agents and their under-agents. The guarantee of 20,000fr. meant nothing to them. That sum had to be increased to a couple of hundred thousand francs. Segaert was convinced that only this serious threat to emigration agents would force them to run their business more honestly. The emigration agents would have to tighten the control on their under-agents themselves to prevent them from spreading lies. This would also lead to a greater confidence in emigrants when dealing with emigration agents. Furthermore victims of deceit by these agents did not dispose of any means to prosecute these agents when returning to Belgium. Moreover the foreign agents were not subjected to any form of control. An intervention by the government could only be executed when agents recruited emigrants on Belgian soil⁴⁸⁵. Segaert concluded that the only interest of the government regarding emigration consisted in protecting the commercial interests of the port of Antwerp:

“...with the law of 1876, the government and the entrepreneurs of Antwerp united their efforts to enhance the progress of modern navigation. This collaboration was necessary to moderate the excessive competition between the different transportation companies which obstructed this progress⁴⁸⁶.”

Segaert suggested that the adaptations of the law in 1890 had the same goal. He believed that the responsibility of the government did not limit itself to providing the emigrants with information and protect them from abuses on Belgian soil. The government also had to help them on their way in their new country. The authorities needed to establish information centres abroad to inform newly arrived emigrants about the customs and possibilities of the country. He mentioned the organisations of Montevideo and Buenos Aires as examples. Such initiatives would keep the ties between the emigrants and their home country strong. According to Segaeart these ties could later be used for the economical expansion of Belgium.

In 1905 some amendments were made to the emigration laws. The governor of Antwerp was co-responsible for the approval of the under-agents. Moreover the emigration

⁴⁸⁵ Letter of Favereau to Van den Heuven 23/5/1899, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr 2669bis, dl. I, Etats-Unis 1885-1939.

agents were forced to be domiciled in Belgium. This opened the possibility to sue them. The guarantee they had to pay was raised from 20,000fr. to 40,000fr.⁴⁸⁷. Measures to make the information gathered by the consuls available to the public, were not successful.

2.4) American states try to lure Belgian emigrants

The outcome of the Civil War caused the abolishment of slavery in the United States. This disrupted the archaic economical structure of the southern states, based on the plantation system. Many slaves moved to the northern states or returned to Africa. The southern states got confronted with an important shortage of workforces. Only after the economic depression of the 1870's the situation partially stabilized in the United States. From that moment on the slow integration process of the southern states in the national economy started. These states had an important backlog regarding industrialisation. Furthermore the agricultural sector in this part of the country had to reorganize after the fall of the plantation economy. These states needed workers to make this possible because many of them were sparsely populated. They tried to lure people from the northern states and from Europe. From the early 1880's some states started to campaign actively in Europe to attract people. Special representatives of the states crossed Europe and America seeking labourers and farmers. There was no global organisation to coordinate this for the entire south of the country. Some states started these propaganda campaigns during the 1880's while others only began theirs right before the First World War. Since every state recruited emigrants separately a competitive battle among them originated. This battle got intensified by the younger western states like Oregon and Colorado who also tried to populate their lands. The actual recruiting mostly occurred through speculators. The states sold big parcels of land or gave them as concessions to railroad companies. To make their investment profitable the speculators needed to populate their lands. Here not all the different states will be discussed one by one. Some important examples of the situation in various states will be discussed below to show how the Belgian government reacted on them.

2.4.1) Louisiana

⁴⁸⁶ H. SEGAERT, op cit., p. 5.

⁴⁸⁷ L. MAESENS, op cit., p. 77.

Louisiana was one of the first southern states to recruit emigrants in Europe. With New Orleans being one of the biggest ports of the country it could dispose of this ideal gateway to do so. Antwerp also had a line connecting it to the port. In 1884 the first traces of such recruiting campaigns appeared in Antwerp. Those recruiting agents were subjected to the laws of 1876 regarding emigration agents. This meant that they needed to pay a guarantee of 20.000fr. The ministry of Foreign Affairs had no control on the activities of the agents. The supervision was left to the commissioner of the emigration commission. This person had to report on his findings to the provincial governor of Antwerp. A letter of Vermeersch informing on an advertisement he read in the newspaper proves this. According to the advertisement, farmers without means could settle in large furnished farms provided with the necessary tools and sowing seeds in the fine state of Louisiana. By giving up a quarter of their crops every year they could become the owner of the farm. The advertisement was signed by mister Lysbaert and mister Canon. Vermeersch inquired about the trustworthiness of the whole operation⁴⁸⁸. Chimay ordered the governor of Antwerp to investigate the reliability of the affair. The investigation pointed out that the initiative went out from the 'Louisiana State Immigration Society' under the supervision of Morrison. This association only disposed of two locations, one in New Orleans and one in Antwerp. The society had paid the guarantee of 20.000fr. in the month of October. The governor possessed a pamphlet of the association which confirmed the promises made in the⁴⁸⁹. The governor believed that the agents mentioned in the advertisement were representatives coming from the United States. They had been active in Antwerp for the last two months. The governor had no irregularities to report on these agents. Both gentlemen had been preceded by Dörnhoffer and Van Rafleghem. They had left after a complaint was filed against them. The complaint against these gentlemen got passed on to Lysbaert and Canon when their business was taken over. Because of the consequences and implications of the complaint they stopped distributing pamphlets. The governor mentioned that their work hadn't produced any results up to now. Unfortunately the governor did not specify what the complaint against the gentlemen contained. He did mention however that Morrison who helped to start up the bureau with Dörnhoffer and Van Rafleghem returned to Louisiana. According to the governor, Morrison had made arrangements with the Red Star Line behind the backs of Lysbaert and Canon for

⁴⁸⁸ Letter from Vermeersch to Chimay 15/1/1885, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr 2669bis, dl. I, Etats-Unis 1885-1939.

⁴⁸⁹ MORRISON J.C., Louisiana State Immigration Society: pour encourager, protéger et assister l'émigration, s.l., s.n., 1884, 8p.

the transport of the emigrants he had convinced to move to Louisiana before leaving Antwerp. The governor informed that he had warned the Red Star Line of the shady practices of Morrison. However he could not prevent that this ‘powerful company’ started doing business with Morrison. The information which the governor had about Louisiana was not in agreement with the information stated in the pamphlets. The governor concluded that such good propositions did not need advertisement. He suspected the whole operation to be fraudulent⁴⁹⁰. His suspicions proved to be right. In his consular report of 1886 the consul of New Orleans informed the authorities that many compatriots came knocking on his door, asking him to repatriate them. The language barrier constituted the main obstacle for them to find a job. The consul advised only farmers with a certain amount of starting capital to move to Louisiana⁴⁹¹.

This example illustrates that emigrants were lured by false promises. It also shows that the law of 1876 did not think elaborate measures to prevent or fight such fraud. Morrison fled to the United States as soon as the first complaint got filed against him. The Belgian justice couldn’t do anything once he had left Belgian soil. Moreover Morrison had been sly enough to trick two other agents to take over the guarantee. It remains unclear how many Belgians got convinced by Morrison to emigrate and whether or not the first expedition has ever been followed by others. The agreement he concluded with the Red Star Line possibly included other shipments of Belgian emigrants lured with false promises through this shipping company subsidized by the Belgian government. His collaboration with the Red Star Line proves that the shipping company showed little interest in the faith of the emigrants. In spite of the governor’s warnings of the fraudulent practices, the company did not stop to collaborate with Morrison. The proposition of the American businessmen must have appealed to the Belgian’s imaginations. Belgium was going through an economic crisis at the time. The Belgians who trusted Morrison found themselves in the United States with no means to provide for themselves. Because of the language they struggled to find work. They could not count on the consul getting them repatriated.

Twenty years later the authorities of the state of Louisiana themselves would take the initiative to lure emigrants from Europe. The emigration agent Shuler was charged with this

⁴⁹⁰ Letter from the governor of Antwerp to Chimay 4/1/1885, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr 2669bis, dl. I, Etats-Unis 1885-1939.

⁴⁹¹ Consular report from the chargé d’affaires in Washington to Chimay 22/7/1886, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. I-II, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration en général.

mission. Shuler announced his visit to the minister of Foreign Affairs. His letter to the minister was joined by a recommendation letter from the archbishop of New Orleans:

“We signers, strongly recommend to your particular willingness, Mr. Shuler, agent of the ‘Board of Agriculture and Immigration of the State of Louisiana’. This gentleman, worthy of all your trust has received from his Excellency, the governor of the State of Louisiana, the important mission of visiting every country in Europe, with the purpose of engaging industrious people to come and settle down in our country where the most sincere welcome and many advantages for business and work to which they wish to dedicate themselves to, awaits them. All the help and encouragements you will wish to grant him during his mission will be highly appreciated by us, of whom the holy duty is to improve by all means possible the material interests as well as the spiritual interests within the archbishopric that God trusted to our care⁴⁹². ”

Davignon, minister of Foreign Affairs, arranged a meeting for Shuler with Venesoen, the emigration commissioner. After this meeting the emigration commissioner seemed to be convinced that the attractive offers and work guarantees were genuine. The pamphlet Venesoen received assured him that the emigrants could choose between different professions. Of course a contract could not be signed before arriving in the U.S., because that would be infringing upon the ‘Alien contract labour law’ and the emigrants would be refused entrance into the country. However after deliberation with Davignon, Venesoen decided to advise the emigrants against the attractive propositions of Shuler. They explained their decision based on a new amendment on the ‘Labour Act’⁴⁹³, and a worrying precedent concerning a Cuban emigrant. The amendment referred to here is the one passed on the 20th of February 1907. The precedent mentioned regards the rejection of a Cuban emigrant because he had made an oral work agreement with the ‘Board of Agriculture and Immigration of the State of Louisiana’. Venesoen feared that the spreading of the pamphlet would be considered as an oral work agreement by the American Immigration Bureau. He wanted to avoid the Belgians being sent back at all costs. Therefore the authorities decided to advise against Shuler’s project for emigration to the U.S.⁴⁹⁴.

Here we have got an initiative that went out from the state authorities. The recruitment was directed at the industrial workers. Because of the involvement of the official authorities, the initiative received more credit. Further down will be shown that the government proved to be more willing to cooperate when official were involved. The letter of the archbishop of Louisiana surely contributed to the credibility of Shuler as well. The Catholic Church played

⁴⁹² Letter from the archbishop of New Orleans to all the European bishops, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁴⁹³ The Labour Act is another denomination for the Alien contract Labour law.

an important role in the emigration to the United States. This will also be discussed further down. This example proves that the increasing restrictions on immigration in the United States caused the Belgian government to be more reserved towards the emigration to the United States.

2.4.2) Colorado

Colorado was one of the last states to be populated during the big migration to the ‘West’. The state was only founded after the Civil War. Just like Louisiana the state sought people to cultivate its lands and work in its industries. The propaganda of this state is discussed here because it was specifically directed towards Belgian emigrants. However the propaganda was more indirect. It does not seem that an agent came to Belgium to recruit emigrants. Information was given to the Belgian consul of Colorado knowing that he would pass it on to the ministry of Foreign Affairs. The people who had interest in attracting emigrants hoped to influence the Belgian government to direct the emigrants to Colorado.

In 1889 the consul of Denver mentioned to Chimay that state authorities were hiring a great number of miners. He assured the minister of Foreign Affairs that people who couldn’t find work in Belgium, definitely could in Colorado. The state possessed of unmatched resources. Moreover you could find very fertile lands, according to the consul. He informed that a group of Belgians already worked in the mines⁴⁹⁵. The ‘U.S. Freehold Land and Emigration Company’ offered very good conditions for starting a colony in Colorado⁴⁹⁶. The consul of Denver stressed once more the extraordinary conditions that could be found in Colorado in his report of 1895. He added a letter from a mister Tonge, ‘Secretary of Manufacturers Exchange’ who described the colonisation possibilities. Tonge doing so was not that uncommon for that time, but his way of doing it was striking. He described the possibilities for Belgians specifically. Tonge pointed out that many crops grown in Belgium could also be grown in Colorado. The land and the climate lent themselves perfectly to agriculture. According to Tonge Colorado had: “*a great need for small farmers for intense cultivation.*” He preferred to establish small farms rather than big ranches because of the higher productivity. Colorado lacked dairy products, pig- and chicken nurseries, fruit and

⁴⁹⁴ Letter from Venesoen to Davignon 20/11/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁴⁹⁵ Letter of the consul of Denver to Chimay 1889, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁴⁹⁶ REVELAUX, op cit., p.52.

sugar beet growers and in particular hop growers. He predicted that the state had a great potential for building a major hop industry. The hops could be transported to the bigger breweries of Saint-Louis and Milwaukee. Tonge hoped to attract a hundred well selected families to begin with. He estimated the set up cost per family at 1000 dollars. Considering the large sum he suggested that the Belgian government advance it⁴⁹⁷. Three years later Tonge sent another letter to the minister of Foreign Affairs with the request to send a copy through to the different information centres. The need for farmers was growing as the state had just made another 600,000 acres of land for sale which used to belong to the Ute Indians⁴⁹⁸. Tonge seemed to be well aware of the Belgian agricultural situation. He discussed many crops in which the Belgians farmers specialised. His stress on the hop cultivation illustrates his knowledge of the Belgian agricultural tradition. He admired the intensive agriculture used in Belgium. However the high set up cost constituted an insurmountable deterrent for Belgians to go and found a colony in Colorado. His hope that the government would advance the costs was a big miscalculation of Tonge. Later on he would propose a smaller scale project on a including 35 Belgian families in the vicinity of Denver. There are traces indicating that Belgians did settle there. However if they were influenced to move there by his report remains questionable. His project for the development and expansion of the hop cultivation on the other hand was successful. Colorado not only exported hops to Milwaukee and Saint-Louis, but also brewed its own beer. The Colorado based Coors brewery is still one of the biggest in the United States⁴⁹⁹.

Four years later another proposition from Colorado reached the ministry of Foreign Affairs. The ‘Colorado Fuel and Carbon Company’ informed the ministry that hundreds of miners could immediately start working in their mines. The consul in Denver encouraged the minister to take advantage of this offer:

⁴⁹⁷ Letter from the consul of Denver to de Mérode Westerloo 19/10/1895, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. I-II, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration en général.

⁴⁹⁸ Letter from the consul of Denver to de Favereau 4/5/1899, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962, dl. III, Renseignements.

⁴⁹⁹ If Belgians played a part in the foundation of the brewery remains open for investigation. However it should be noted that nowadays the state numbers a large amount of breweries and micro-breweries. One of them is the ‘New Belgian brewery’ in Fort Collins. The influence of Belgians in the American beer culture could be an interesting subject to investigate. Going through the archives it called to the attention that Belgians were very active in brewing beer and distilling other alcoholic beverages. During the prohibition the Belgians appeared to be very active moon shiners. Moreover one the most frequently mentioned adaptation problem of Belgian emigrants to the United States is the lack of beer!

"There are no unions that could cause trouble in this region and it is not required of coal miners to be a member of the miners union to be able to work for this company"⁵⁰⁰."

Minister de Favereau sent the proposition to the minister of Industry and Employment who sent it through to the provincial governors of the provinces, Hainault, Liege and Namur where the mining industry was located. He asked the governors to handle the information discreetly fearing it might trigger a rush out of the mining centres. The general-inspector of the mines, Dejaer, decided not to keep the information to himself. He told the minister that he needed the miners on hand at that time. He advised the minister to just pass the letter on to the information centres. He knew very well that no miners would ever learn about the offer this way. Moreover it is even questionable whether these information centres still existed at the time or not. Anyways no candidates volunteered⁵⁰¹. The government claimed that its responsibility towards emigration was limited to informing the population. However this letter from the consul of Colorado proves that this responsibility could also have an important influence on emigration. The decision to keep this information secret to avoid a rush proves that the authorities were well aware of that impact of informing the population of emigration opportunities could have.

In 1906 the number of Belgians living in Colorado remained very limited. The consul knew of a little colony in Globeville near Denver where the inhabitants worked in foundries during wintertime and on the beet fields during the summertime. Apart from this colony, the consul seemed to be aware of the existence of smaller Belgian settlements scattered around the state. However the entrepreneurs of Colorado did not give up on luring Belgians. It seems that they were determined to populate part of the state with Belgian immigrants. An article taken from the 'Denver Republican' praised the high level of welfare in Belgium considering the high population density. The newspaper ascribed this to the strong character of the Belgians, their industrious minds, their austerity and their thrift. The article stated that this was the kind of people that Colorado needed. The Belgians would be highly productive with their intensive small scale agriculture. The consul also mentioned that there was still a strong interest in coal miners in the state. The 'Colorado Fuel and Carbon Company' paid very high wages. The opinion of the consul on the whole issue was the following:

⁵⁰⁰ Letter of the consul Mignolet to de Favereau 11/11/02, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. III, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: envoi de cent mineurs belges à Denver (1903).

⁵⁰¹ Letter of the minister of Industry and employment to de Favereau 22/12/02, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr.2961, dl. III, Ouvriers Belges aux Etats-Unis: envoi de cent mineurs belges à Denver (1903).

“...in the whole western region there is an enormous shortage of workers and as such the wages keep on increasing. However in accordance with your views, I understand it to be more appropriate that I do not insist in my reports destined for the public to elaborate on the favourable economical conditions of Colorado the knowledge of which in Belgium could deprive the country of its good workers to the benefit of American industry⁵⁰².”

These last two fragments prove that the non-intervention policy has not always been consistently applied. The method of spreading of information could have a huge impact on the emigration movement. This had already been suggested by Le Hardy de Beaulieu, Decorte and Olin during the 1860's. The Belgian government was well aware of this fact. Spreading the information would stimulate emigration, while keeping it silent would slow it down. The alternation between keeping information silent and making it known to the public was a conscious decision of the authorities which depended on the Belgian economic situation. When the economic situation in Belgium was favourable than emigration was considered a loss for the country that would benefit the industry of a possible competitor. During periods of economic crisis on the other hand the idea that emigrants could establish contacts which favoured the Belgian commerce and industry was put forward.

2.4.3) South Carolina

South Carolina belonged to the group of southern states which went through a long adaptation period after the Civil War. The state situated on the Atlantic coast had a port in Charleston which facilitated immigration. In 1905 the state decided to actively recruit emigrants from Europe. The South Carolina authorities developed a project to recruit these immigrants from Belgium with the consent of the Belgian government.

The ‘Department of Agriculture, Commerce and Immigration’ decided to direct part of the emigration movement from Europe to the U.S. towards South Carolina. It appointed Watson to go to Europe and guide part of the flow directly to Charleston. Watson wrote to different European governments hoping to collaborate with some of them. In a letter to de Favereau the Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs, Watson assured the minister that his project was totally in accordance with Belgian and the American law. Moreover his plan would produce benefits for both governments:

⁵⁰² Letter from Mignolet to de Favereau 1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

"I present this request to you with the desire to do the utmost good and I ask you for your approval as a favour from one government to another.

...there is a great number of capable individuals with large families who have not been able to succeed in the densely populated Belgium and who are willing to improve their situation in America, but who can't take advantage of the situation offered to them because they do not have the necessary funds and will not be able to acquire them within a short period of time.I do not intend to offer a free trip or even a reduction in the prices of crossing, but I hope that the Belgian government allows me to advance or to loan the cost for the transport which they will have to refund. ...I am looking for families of agricultural workers, small farmers and labourers for work in factories⁵⁰³."

With this letter, Watson was asking for the cooperation of the government. The main difficulty in obtaining the approval of the government was the advance or loan he planned to give the emigrants for the crossing. After the abuse that occurred during the subsidized emigration of the poor by the Argentinean government in 1888 and 1889, the Belgian government decided to prohibit the transport of emigrants paid for by anyone else but themselves. Watson feared that the government would deny of his request to recruit emigrants for this reason. To assure the government that his project would not create any problems for the government, Watson wrote a second letter offering more guarantees:

"I hereby give my official guarantee to your government that all individuals in the event of dissatisfaction desire to return, be returned to Belgium at the expense of my department.

I give you the assurance that all that comes to South Carolina will be provided immediately upon arrival with work at the scale of wages attached hitherto⁵⁰⁴."

The persuasiveness of Watson had its effect on the minister of Foreign Affairs. Watson received the preferential treatment and the official approval of the government on he had hoped for:

"The government does not consider official agents of foreign governments officially charged by their authorities as emigration agents in the strict sense stipulated by the Belgian law of whom the actions result in assuring a more efficient protection of Belgians willing to expatriate themselves.

They escape from the measures: foregoing permission, guarantees, etc. stipulated by the law⁵⁰⁵."

This preferential treatment had already been attributed to Treau de Coeli who came to Belgium under the authority of the Canadian government to lure emigrants. Treau de Coeli

⁵⁰³ Letter from Watson to de Favereau 7/9/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909.

⁵⁰⁴ Letter from Watson to de Favereau 20/9/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909.

⁵⁰⁵ Letter from Watson to de Favereau 20/9/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909.

opened an office in Antwerp in 1898. From the opening of the regular line between Antwerp and Canada in 1903, a considerable number of Belgians started to emigrate to that country. Watson proved to be very pleased with de Favereau's decision. This is shown in the following article taken from the American 'Journal of Commerce':

"Belgians work in the finest factories that can be found in the world... I have been able to obtain from the Belgian government what no other state has ever been able to obtain and that is the government's official sanction of this immigration movement. Other states have tried to get this sanction but failed. This I accomplished through Baron de Favereau, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in conjunction with the Belgian commissioner for immigration, with the great assistance of mister Capelle of Belgium to whom much of the credit is due⁵⁰⁶."

Watson appeared to be very proud that he reached an agreement with the Belgian government which many had been unable to do. It must be said that the propositions and guarantees offered by Watson were extremely favourable to the government. On the contrary most other organisations or emigration agents had asked financial support from the government. This always proved to be a major miscalculation. Watson only received the approval once he gave enough guarantees that the authorities would not have to intervene financially. Watson had to commit himself to paying for the return to Belgium of any and all dissatisfied emigrants. Furthermore he had to guarantee to employ these emigrants at an agreed upon wage. Also the fact that the emigration agent intended to recruit among the poorest class of the population enhanced the favourable decision of the authorities. The government had already made it clear that it preferred to see people from the lower social class leave the country. As an official representative of South Carolina, Watson enjoyed more credibility in the eyes of the Belgian government than other emigration agents. Finally the support he received from Leon Capelle was also to his advantage. Leon Capelle, director general of Trade and Consulates, was responsible for the repatriation of Belgians. The number of compatriots requesting repatriation had been increasing since the 1880's. The costs for it took up an ever increasing part of Capelle's budget. In order to bring these costs down Capelle asked Venesoen, commissioner of the 'Emigration Service', to interview all Belgian emigrants before their departure. This way he could verify in the conditions that the Belgian emigrants left their homeland in. As emigration commissioner Venesoen was responsible for the protection of the emigrants leaving from Antwerp. He had to investigate what measures could be taken to improve the situation of the emigrants. However, in doing so the emigration commissioner

⁵⁰⁶ Article taken from: Journal of Commerce 7/11/06, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

had to take the commercial interests of the shipping companies into account⁵⁰⁷. In spite of all the efforts and interviews made by Venesoen, Capelle still had an increasing number of repatriations to deal with. Watson's proposition to cover the expenses of repatriation if needed solved Capelle's problem. Moreover, the emigrants would be welcomed and guided upon arrival and Watson guaranteed work for them.

Watson appointed Oscar Van der Meersch as official delegate of South Carolina to recruit workers from Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Oscar Van der Meersch was not unknown to the Belgian ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice. In 1905 he was involved in some dubious business. At the time he lived in Chicago and worked in the industrial sector. Van der Meersch asked his brother to place an announcement in the Belgian newspaper 'Het Laatste Nieuws' promoting jobs for farmers (400), maids (200) and printers (1000) in the United States. The contact addresses mentioned under the announcement were those of Bogaert in Brussels and Van der Wichelen in Gent. The police investigated whether the people involved were qualified to act as emigration agents. Neither Bogaert nor Van der Wichelen complied with the laws of 1876 concerning emigration agents. Moreover, they had not received permission from their respective community council to work as emigration agents in their towns. In a statement taken by the police both Bogaert and Van der Wichelen declared that they had never agreed to have their names published in the announcement. The police also interrogated Edward Van der Meersch, Oscar's brother, who was not qualified to be an emigration agent either. The police concluded that Edward had acted in good faith under the orders of his brother. They closed the case without taking further action but this incident proves the dubious character of Oscar Van der Meersch⁵⁰⁸.

A year and a half later Oscar Van der Meersch moved to Belgium. He opened an office to encourage Belgian farmers and labourers to emigrate to South Carolina under Watson's authority in the Bagattenstraat 21 in Gent. As an official delegate he distributed pamphlets and placed announcements in different newspapers to promote emigration to South Carolina. He advertised that this State was looking for 10,000 farmers and 25,000 labourers. The announcement stressed that farmers did not require any starting capital to apply. Everything they needed would be advanced by the state authorities. Furthermore the labourers

⁵⁰⁷ KURGAN-HENZENRIJK, "Belgian migration to the United States and other overseas countries at the beginning of the 20th century" in: Emigration through Antwerp into the new world, Brussel, Center for American studies, 1976, pp. 1-50.

⁵⁰⁸ Case Bogaert, Van der Wichelen and Van der Meersch 1905, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. I, Renseignements 1884-1896.

did not need to be skilled. Training would be provided on site⁵⁰⁹. Van der Meersch had prepared his campaign in October 1905. The first ship with emigrants recruited by him left Bremen for Charleston on the 14th of October 1906 with 64 Belgian passengers. This is only twelve days after de Favereau had given his approval to the project. This indicates that everything was well prepared before de Favereau's authorization.

Meanwhile, the Saint-Raphael Society published a letter by Notebaert, priest of the French church in Rochester, New York, objecting to the emigration to South Carolina:

"The departure of Belgians occurs under the protection of the Belgian government. ...the Belgian government must ignore the fact that the emigration which it supports is very harmful to our compatriots from a moral, social and religious point of view... The contact with the Negroes is very dangerous on various levels and will inevitably lower the moral state of our emigrants. There are no less than 10,000 Catholics in this State and there is no Belgian priest on site that can take care of them... everything should be done to stop this movement⁵¹⁰."

The biggest fear of the Belgian Catholic Church concerning its Belgian followers moving to the United States was that they would renounce their faith. The Belgian Catholic Church sent many missionaries to America to convert Native Americans and immigrants, but it preferred that the Belgian Catholics stayed in their home country.

Oscar Van der Meersch reacted immediately to Notebaert's letter and set up a big campaign in the press to refute Notebaert's accusations. In an article published shortly after Van der Meersch expressed his gratitude towards the press for the fair reporting of the case. This may indicate that at least a part of the press was favourable to Watson's project. However, because of Notebaert's letter de Favereau needed to reassure some high placed officials. The minister of Foreign Affairs stressed that the government had no responsibility whatsoever for the content of the pamphlets and announcements. The biggest concern of the people contacting de Favereau about the emigration to South Carolina was the government's responsibility for the costs of any eventual repatriation. De Favereau reassured them by pointing out the guarantees given by Watson. Moreover, the minister of Foreign Affairs informed that, Key Frost, Belgian consul in Charleston would keep an eye on the project and ensured that Watson fulfilled his promises. De Favereau and Watson had agreed that Key Frost would act as mediator should a conflict between the Belgian workers and the State

⁵⁰⁹ Pamphlet distributed by Oscar Van der Meersch 10/11/06, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. I-II, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration en général.

⁵¹⁰ Letter from Notebaert to the Sint-Raphaël Society 3/11/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

authorities of South Carolina arise⁵¹¹. De Favereau also informed the minister of Justice that the emigration agent Oscar Van der Meersch should enjoy preferential treatment. This treatment should be the same as that awarded to Treau de Coeli, the emigration agent who worked for the Canadian government and encouraged the emigration to Canada. These two agents had to be exempt from the more rigid controls the ministry of Justice placed on the other emigration agents and companies which dealt with the transport of emigrants of:

“ In my opinion The intervention of the Belgian authorities would only be justified if the above-mentioned official agents violate their mandate and explicitly hire emigrants or use methods which are prohibited by the effective laws and regulations⁵¹².”

The whole project received a lot of attention. For instance, de Favereau got a letter from a mister Antoni⁵¹³ who proposed setting up catholic farmer union and health insurance based on the Belgian model. Antoni planned to emigrate to South Carolina and work in a cotton factory for a while. He intended to work there until he managed to earn the labourer's respect. If the solidarity among the Belgian workers proved to be strong and the situation in South Carolina was as good as it appeared to be, unfortunate families in Belgium could be encouraged to emigrate, according to Antoni⁵¹⁴. De Favereau did not take Antoni's proposition into consideration.

In the United States the emigration to South Carolina gave rise to heated discussions. A movement came about which fought against Watson's kind of recruiting, claiming it did not comply with the immigration laws. The ‘American Federation of Labour’ took measures to obtain the extradition of these immigrants. It filed a complaint with Strauss, the American Secretary of Trade and Employment⁵¹⁵. Strauss investigated the case and judged in favour of the State authorities of South Carolina. According to his interpretation of the immigration laws nothing prohibited a State from encouraging foreign labourers to immigrate when the local industry required it. According to Strauss only if the initiative was from a private person or organisation would, the immigration to South Carolina be deemed illegal. Mali, the

⁵¹¹ Letter of de Favereau to unknown receiver, 3/12/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵¹² Letter of Favereau to the minister of Justice, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵¹³ The letter did not specify his function.

⁵¹⁴ Letter from Antoni to de Favereau 14/12/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵¹⁵ Letter from Mali to de Favereau 15/12/06, , A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

Belgian consul in New York, warned de Favereau that the trade unions would most likely fight this decision at the department of Justice and in different courts of Justice⁵¹⁶.

The first transport of emigrants to South Carolina encountered many problems. Twenty four Belgian immigrants let themselves be repatriated virtually as soon as they arrived. The Belgian adjunct-commissioner for emigration, Bisschop, received the order to interview these immigrants and find out the reason for their return. Two of the passengers did not make it further than Ellis Island. They were denied entrance to the U.S. because of health reasons. Bisschop also reported that during the crossing one of the emigrants put up the others to refuse to work until they received higher wages. However, when they arrived in Charleston, nobody was waiting for them. The immigrants were left to their fate for their first three days in the U.S. Bisschop stated that many emigrants lost faith in the project because of this incident. He concluded that the whole operation lacked the proper preparation and that the poor selection of emigrants caused the repatriation⁵¹⁷. Immediately problems arose with the funding of the repatriation costs. Mali advanced the money, convinced he could easily claim it back from Watson. However, Watson refused to reimburse Mali because the immigrants breached their contract by never working before being repatriated. In the end Watson covered the charges fearing to lose favour with the Belgian government. Just before the incident, on the 6th of December a new group of a 168 Belgians left for Charleston. Again Watson paid for the crossing of most of the passengers. On the 7th of February approximately another hundred workers were ready to leave from Gent. However, at the very last moment most of them reconsidered their decision. In the end only fourteen left for the U.S. The reason for this sudden change was not mentioned. Three weeks later another group of 54 left for South Carolina⁵¹⁸. Meanwhile, the Saint-Raphaël Society continued to disapprove of the emigration flow to the southern state. In the first issue of the Society's Journal of 1907, it strongly advised against the emigration to South Carolina. According to the organization there was no work there and the emigration was illegal. Venesoen asked Capelle to urge the president of the Society, Gilles de Pélechy to check his sources better. According to Venesoen De Pélechy needed to be more careful with what he published, because his assertions were

⁵¹⁶ Letter from Mali to de Favereau 19/12/06, , A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵¹⁷ Report of Bisschop about the repatriation of the passengers travelling with the "Wittekind", 19/12/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909.

⁵¹⁸ Report of the consul of Philadelphia 22/5/1908, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

false⁵¹⁹. Mali did not totally agree with Venesoen's point of view. The consul mentioned that South Carolina had a bad reputation in the U.S. regarding work conditions. In a letter to de Favereau, Mali quoted a couple of people who expressed an unfavourable opinion of Watson and South Carolina. According to priest Nageliesen, director of the 'Leo House' in New York, Watson visited him before leaving for Belgium. The 'Leo House' was a catholic institute which welcomed and advised recent arrived immigrants in the U.S. It offered the facilities for poor immigrants to spend their first nights in their new county for free and distributed free meals⁵²⁰. Watson asked Nageliesen to advise the immigrants he received to travel on to South Carolina. The priest accepted on the condition that Watson paid them decent wages and deposited an advance with Nageliesen as a guarantee for carrying out his promises. In the end Nageliesen did not come to an agreement with Watson claiming that he intended to pay the immigrants 'nigger wages'. Apart from this letter Mali also mentioned that at the 'Labor Bureau', a kind of employment fair organized by the Department of 'Commerce and Trade', weavers refused to go to South Carolina for the same reasons. The consul also pointed out the above-mentioned letter of Notebaert. Mali informed de Favereau that in the American press a lot of articles were published concerning the exploitation of workers in the southern states. He also mentioned owning two booklets which found the immigration practices of South Carolina to be illegal. If de Favereau judged it necessary Mali would send him a copy of these⁵²¹. In March 1907 The Congress declared the immigration policy of South Carolina to be illegal. The money used to finance the project mainly came from the private sector. The State authorities only provided 2,000\$ for the project while private companies endowed more than 30,000\$ on it. Therefore the project could not be considered to be a matter under State authority. Congress decided to adapt the existing laws to avoid such abuses in the future. It would sharpen the controls regarding the prohibition on paying the fare of emigrants before their departure to the U.S. The conditions to extradite immigrants lured to the country through promises about work, would be made more specific and stricter. This decision triggered a flood of criticism among the senators of the southern States who had been trying to start up an emigration movement to their region⁵²².

⁵¹⁹ Letter of Venesoen to Capelle 28/2/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵²⁰ G. VERRIJKEN, op cit., p 122.

⁵²¹ Letter of Mali to de Favereau 1/3/07, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909.

⁵²² Letter from the American legation in Brussels to de Favereau 23/3/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

In the meantime Watson had replaced Van der Meersch with Braeckelaere because of the poor choice of emigrants Van der Meersch had recruited. Van der Meersch accompanied the passengers who left on the 6th of December. Watson took advantage of his absence to replace him. Braeckelaere had immigrated to South Carolina on the first ship organized by Van der Meersch. Now he returned to Belgium to convince fellow countrymen to cross the Atlantic. Van der Meersch mainly had recruited in the Gent area whereas Braeckelaere looked for candidates in the province of Namur. Apart from farmers and labourers, the emigration agent tried to recruit maids to serve the rich families in Greenville⁵²³. Van der Meersch was very upset with Watson's decision. He claimed that the hiring of his substitute was illegal. Only he had received the special permission of the Belgian authorities to encourage the emigration to South Carolina 10th of October 1906. Van der Meersch mentioned that he had ordered his subordinates to stop looking for Belgians willing to emigrate to the South Carolina⁵²⁴. Two months later Van der Meersch sent a new letter to de Favereau denouncing the hiring of maids by Braeckelaere. He claimed that Watson only received the permission to encourage farmers and labourers to emigrate. Luring maids to emigrate was illegal, according to Van der Meersch⁵²⁵. Davignon, the new minister of Foreign Affairs, asked Venesoen to investigate the matter. The emigration commissioner informed the minister that Braeckelaere acted in accordance with the law. The emigrants that Braeckelaere convinced to move to South Carolina paid for their own crossing. Moreover the special permission of the 10th October 1906 had been given to Watson and not to Van der Meersch. Watson was free to choose his own employees⁵²⁶.

To get clarity on the situation of the Belgians in South Carolina Capelle decided to send Mali on an investigation mission. The consul made a comprehensive report. He made a list of frequently occurring complaints. Many Belgian immigrants complained that they had to work harder and for less money than promised. The information spread by Watson about the employment situation appeared to be quite truthful. However, according to Mali, Van der Meersch had spread lies concerning the wages and the housing. Also the living conditions turned out to be more expensive than what Van der Meersch had told the emigrants. The

⁵²³ Letter from Braeckelaere to Watson 9/2/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909.

⁵²⁴ Letter of Van der Meersch to de Favereau 30/3/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵²⁵ Letter from Van der Meersch to Davignon 22/5/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵²⁶ Letter from Venesoen to Davignon 25/5/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

biggest problem for the emigrants adapting to life in South Carolina turned out to be the prohibition of alcoholic beverages in this State. Finally good land cost more than the tenfold what the emigrants were led to believe. Of the 168 Belgians that left Bremen for Charleston on the 6th of December 1906, only 69 of them still lived in the State six months later. Mali attributed this to the poor selection criteria used by Van der Meersch when recruiting emigrants. He proposed that the Belgian government should have a say in the appointment of a substitute for Van der Meersch. Mali tracked down nearly every Belgian living in South Carolina, and interviewed every Belgian that crossed his path. Of approximately 300 Belgians who had moved to South Carolina, only 103 of them still lived in the State. Most of them had moved to other States. Mali advised sending only specialised day labourers to the State. Unskilled day labourers had to compete with Negroes and they were often treated as such by their bosses⁵²⁷.

Van der Meersch did not accept losing his job very well. He kept on discrediting Watson. In September of 1907 an article appeared in ‘Het Laatste Nieuws’, in which Van der Meersch claimed not to be responsible for the promises which had not been kept. He blamed Watson and the State authorities of South Carolina. The former delegate of Watson strongly advised against emigrating to South Carolina. He also mentioned that a second attempt by Braeckelaere to send Belgian maids to South Carolina had failed. According to Van der Meersch, Braeckelaere would have told Venesoen no longer being involved with emigration matters because of this failure⁵²⁸. It seems that after the first sending of maids organized by Braeckelaere no more Belgian emigrants were encouraged to emigrate by the South Carolina State authorities. There are no indications that new attempts were organized. The consular report for South Carolina of 1908 only mentions the four groups discussed above. The consul estimated the number of Belgians still living in the State to be a bit higher than Mali’s estimate. To his knowledge approximately 130 compatriots still lived in the southern state. According to the consul of South Carolina the others had been convinced by propaganda to move to other states. The biggest concentrations of Belgians were to be found in Greenville,

⁵²⁷ MALI, Report on the living conditions of the Belgians in South Carolina, June 1907, 55p. in: A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵²⁸ Article taken from ‘Het Laatste Nieuws’, 1/9/07, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2020, dl X, Emigration 1895-1909

Columbia and at the cotton factory in Managhan. Only maids and some craftsmen could find decent work in South Carolina according to the consul⁵²⁹.

The emigration movement to South Carolina illustrates the efforts made by southern states to start up an important emigration flow towards their region. With the appointment of Watson, companies hoped to trigger this movement in collaboration with the State authorities. They believed that by helping move a couple of thousand of emigrants an important movement to the State would come about. The companies relied on the fact that once a couple of thousands of families had settled, their letters to the home country would attract many others. Watson tried to activate this emigration movement in different European countries. He managed to receive official approval from the Belgian government. Watson got this consent mainly because of the guarantees he offered to cover the repatriation costs should problems arise. Capelle, responsible for the repatriation of compatriots saw in this project the ideal solution to decreasing the repatriation costs which had weighed heavily on his budget. Venesoen who was responsible for the protection of the emigrants, believed that the project of Watson offered more guarantees for successful emigration. He preferred guided emigration in group coordinated by state authorities, to isolated and unorganised emigration. The fact that Watson recruited among the poorest class of the population and guaranteed to cover the charges for any eventual repatriation played to his advantage when obtaining support from Belgian officials. As such Watson received the official approval from de Favereau. Watson was given a special status as emigration agent. He enjoyed more freedom, would be liable to fewer controls and did not have to comply with all the rules and regulations other emigration agents were subject to. Only Treau de Coeli, delegate of the Canadian state authorities to encourage Belgians to move to Canada enjoyed the same preferential treatment. The Canadian agent opened an office in Antwerp and campaigned actively for his cause. He obtained favourable results thanks to his zest for enterprise. Because of him approximately 10.000 Belgians moved to Canada between 1898 and 1913⁵³⁰. The emigration to South Carolina was restricted to 300. The difference between Treau de Coeli and Watson was that the latter delegated his special status to someone else. The appointment of Oscar Van der Meersch as delegate contributed to the failure of the operation. Moreover the emigration movement was criticized in Belgium and the U.S. In Belgium the critics mainly came from

⁵²⁹ Consular report of the consul in Charleston 2/05/1908, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵³⁰ M. JOURNEE, Lokgroep van een nieuw frontier: Belgische emigratie en expansie naar Canada 1880-1940, Leuven, K.U.L.,(dissertation), 1981, p. 57 (vakgroep nieuwste geschiedenis)

the Catholic Church. In spite of these criticism Watson kept the support of the Belgian catholic government. The protest against emigration movement in the U.S. eventually led to the end of the movement. The American Congress prohibited emigration organised by the South Carolina ‘Department of Agriculture, Trade and Immigration’ once the involvement of private companies was exposed. Because of this incident the immigration laws were reviewed and made stricter to the great dissatisfaction of the southern states. As mentioned above, the State of Louisiana sent a delegate to Belgium during the summer of 1907 with the same intentions as Watson. However, the Belgian authorities refused to confer the same preferential treatment to him because of the reviewing of the immigration laws. This would remain so until the First World War.

2.4.4) The southern states after 1907

In 1908 the consul-general for the U.S. made a special report on the situation of the southern states. He criticised the ‘Negroes’ for being too lazy to work. Therefore the southern states tried to attract the immigrant flow away from the northern states. According to the consul-general this explained why European villages were overrun with propaganda in which the southern states were praised. This propaganda deceived the prospective-emigrants with exaggerations. The consul-general suggested that Belgian emigrants needed to be warned of this dishonesty. He claimed that the slave mentality was still predominant among rich people in the south. Labourers and farmers were not respected at all. This contrasted strongly with the north where farm hands were treated as members of the family. In the southern states on the contrary they were virtually treated as slaves. Moreover the wages were still based on ‘*nigger work*’ as quoted the consul-general. A day labourer earned a lot less in the south than in the north. This explained why the southern states remained an unpopular region for emigrants, according to the consul-general. However, the colonists could count on a warm welcome from the state authorities who wanted to drastically increase the production. There was also an important demand for skilled workers. The industrialists of the south established the ‘Southern industry and immigration Association’. This organisation centralised all the job vacancies to help the emigrants to find work upon arrival. The organisation also bought important stretches of land to sell it at a very low price to colonists who are willing to settle

down south⁵³¹. The consul advised to discourage unskilled workers from emigrating to the southern states for the time being. However, the Belgian authorities preferred to see these people leave the country. Attempts to attract skilled workers from Belgium were considered to be a threat for the Belgian economy. Between the start of the 20th century and the First World War the Belgian emigration to the U.S. increased and peaked in 1913. Only during the economical crisis in the U.S. of 1907 and 1908 did the movement stagnate. During the crisis the transport prices for the crossing plummeted. Many Belgians took advantage of these low prices to return to their home country. However, most of them just returned for a visit⁵³².

After the decision of Congress against immigration to South Carolina, a wave of protest emerged from the southern states. It strengthens the ties between the southern states as they had mutual interests. The establishment of the ‘Southern Industry and Immigration Association’ illustrates this. They decided to jointly do something about their economic arrears towards the northern states. However, after 1908 no more traces have been found of official delegates representing state authorities coming to recruit emigrants in Belgium. This does not mean that there were no longer agents in Belgium spreading propaganda for the southern states. On the eve of the First World War there was a notable increase in the number of people promoting emigration to the southern states under the authority of land speculators. Land speculation boomed in the southern states with the opening of the Panama Canal. This was the case especially in Florida. An acquaintance of the Belgian royal family, Mister Bradley, warned the Belgian authorities of dishonest land speculators. He claimed that most of the land they offered in Florida was worthless. The tropical climate and the diseases associated with it made this territory practically uninhabitable. He noted that the population urgently needed to be warned of this, considering the fact that according to reports many Belgians and Dutchmen were on the verge of leaving for Florida⁵³³. In Belgium the ‘Syndicat Belge Floridien’ was founded. According to some sources this syndicate had bought 500,000 acres of land worth 15,000,000 dollars, while other sources talked about 100,000 acres worth 9,000,000 dollars⁵³⁴. Venesoen investigated the case. He confirmed the existence of the ‘Syndicat Belge Floridien’. It consisted of tradesmen and financers who speculated on land.

⁵³¹ Letter of the consul-general to Davignon 25/5/1908, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵³² L. SCHEPENS, op cit., p. 145

⁵³³ Letter of Bradley to the Belgian king, 7/10/1912, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵³⁴ It concerns two different articles taken from two not further specified American newspapers 21/2/1913 and 13/3/1913, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

The syndicate possessed over 50,000 acres of land in Florida. Their goal was to divide the land into small parcels and populate it with emigrants who would cultivate it. However, Venesoen did not find any traces of propaganda of the ‘Syndicat Belge Floridien’ trying to recruit farmers to sell the land to. He only mentioned that a Belgian group of 60 emigrants left with a considerable amount of capital to establish an agricultural colony in Montana under the leadership of Bishop De Brabandere.

In the Newspaper, ‘Le Métropole’ an announcement was published on the 8th of May 1913 about the foundation of a colony in Florida. The announcement was placed in the newspaper by mister Spawn. He offered the possibility of settling Florida and cultivating fruit and vegetables. Spawn planned to leave for Florida in June. People who were interested in joining him were encouraged to contact him⁵³⁵. Venesoen summoned Spawn and his trading partner in Antwerp, mister Nieberding, to come to his office. During the interview both gentleman claimed to have founded a ‘mortgage society’ for farmland. They wanted to form a union of farmers owning a certain amount of capital and not just recruit random colonists⁵³⁶. Everything was described in a pamphlet handed over to the emigration commissioner⁵³⁷. Venesoen sent the gentlemen through to the minister of Foreign affairs. However, they never showed up at Davignon’s office. The minister ordered Venesoen to warn the Belgian emigrants intending to leave for Florida about the negative description that the State had received in consular reports. Venesoen had to send them through to the information centre where they could look into the reports themselves⁵³⁸. The information to which Davignon alluded came from engineer Buttenbach who had lived in Florida and still kept in touch with people residing there. He mentioned that the agricultural and the fruit growing industries suffered from intense competition with the neighbouring States who were closer to the big cities of the east. These formed the most important markets. Due to the warmth and the humidity of the climate the living conditions in Florida were considered to be unhealthy. Europeans became sick easily. Moreover, the cost of living was fairly expensive. Buttenbach informed the minister of the existence of approximately fifty real estate agencies in Florida in 1912. Only a few of these could be trusted. However, his friends living over there advised against emigrating to Florida in his report. In contrast the Belgian vice-consul for the State

⁵³⁵ "Colonie Belge en Floride", article taken from Le Métropole, 8/5/1913, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵³⁶ Letter of Venesoen to Davignon 8/5/1913, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵³⁷ E. SPAWN, Florida, Jacksonville, s.n., 1912, 38p.

encouraged the emigration to Florida. Buttenbach explained this discrepancy by pointing to the fact that the family of the vice-consul owned a lot of land there⁵³⁹.

The southern states built a bad reputation regarding the treatment of emigrants. Many consuls reported that ordinary labourers were treated as ‘Negroes’. Another factor that played to the disadvantage of the southern states was the warm and humid climate. Consuls usually advised against emigration to these states. However, some consuls were totally in favour of emigration towards this region. This indicates that some of the consular reports were written out of self-interest. The example of the vice-consul for Florida is far from being an isolated incident. Some consuls even openly admitted to possessing land. The consul of Kentucky, Mister De Ridder, for instance even asked Davignon to send some colonists to populate his territory⁵⁴⁰. Davignon responded as follows to De Ridder:

“...my Department could under no circumstances help you with this matter. The royal government has decided not to provoke or encourage the expatriation of Belgians, and not even to advise the emigrants to move to a specific country. It limits itself to put information about the resources that the different countries offer to colonists at the disposal of people who take an interest in emigration. However, your information will be communicated to the people who intend to emigrate to Kentucky⁵⁴¹.”

Attracting immigrants to certain regions has always been an area of an intense competition between land speculators in American immigration history. Therefore, it is no surprise that entrepreneurs lobbied with the consuls to direct newly arrived immigrants to their territories. Some consuls accepted in to these propositions, other refused. This undoubtedly had an important influence on the content of the consular reports.

The opening of the Panama-Canal triggered a new wave of propaganda in Europe promoting the southern states, especially Florida as possible destination for emigrants. Land speculators bought huge parcels of land which they divided into small parcels and tried to sell to immigrants. The ‘Syndicat Belge Floridien’ for instance possessed 50,000 acres in Florida. The First world War most likely put an end to their project. The archives do not reveal what happened to this the syndicate. Another land speculator, Spawn, came to Europe to recruit emigrants. Davignon ordered Venesoen to warn compatriots who intended to emigrate to the

⁵³⁸ Letter from Davignon to Venesoen 23/5/1913, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵³⁹ Letter from Buttenbach to Davignon s.d., A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵⁴⁰ Kentucky is not a southern states. It is only used here as an example.

⁵⁴¹ Letter from Davignon to De Ridder 3/12/1910, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

south and to make them read the consular reports about the region. This amounted to advising against emigration to this region. Belgian emigration to Florida remained very low⁵⁴².

2.5) The influence of the Belgian Catholic Church

In the section above the emigration of a group of 60 Belgians to establish an agricultural colony in Montana under the leadership of bishop De Brabandere was mentioned. Montana is not a southern state but was, like Colorado a young state where a lot of cheap and uncultivated land could be found. Belgian groups emigrating under the leadership of a priest, like the one mentioned, was not uncommon. In this part the position of the Belgian Catholic Church towards the Belgian emigration movement to the United States will be discussed. During the 19th century many Belgian missionaries left for America and Canada, their influence on the emigration flow will also be clarified.

At the end of the 18th century under the rule of Pope Pius VI the first diocese was established in the U.S. The Catholic Church had to fight against the hostility of other churches, but nevertheless it managed to grow fast. Between 1790 and 1830 the number of Catholics in the U.S. increased from 20,000 to 500,000. The growing number of followers caused an important need for priests. Many Belgian clergymen felt called upon to leave on a mission to the United States. One of the most famous Belgian missionaries is undoubtedly priest Jan De Smet. He crosses the Atlantic to convert the ‘Indians’. He mainly worked in the Midwest region. De Smet had an important place in American history as he was a mediator during negotiations between the Native Americans and the American government. In Belgian history he is known as one of the pioneers who started up the Belgian missionary corps in the United States. He often returned to Belgium to collect funds and encourage young clergymen to work as a missionary across the Atlantic. With the Irish exodus during the 1840’s hundreds of thousands of Catholics settled in the country. The Catholic Church had a distressing shortage of priests to take care of them. An important part of these immigrants lost their faith⁵⁴³. Another Belgian clergyman, mister Kindekens, travelled to Europe to point out to the gravity of the situation. He went to the Vatican with the proposition of founding an American college which would serve to the educate missionaries for the United States. He could not find a location in Rome and therefore decided to go to Belgium. He met a financial backer,

⁵⁴² F. VANDEPITTE, op cit., p. 152.

⁵⁴³ R. HOUTHAEVE Robert, P.J. De Smet de grote zwartrok: missionaris en vredesstichter, Moorslede, Houthaeve, 2001, pp. 50-52.

Felix de Mérode, who put 60,000 fr. at the disposal of Kindekens for the purchase of a building. The rector of the University of Leuven also offered his help. De Mérode died shortly after making his promises and without putting his commitment on paper. Kindekens had to look for an alternative and found it in Leuven where he rented a building. The ‘American College’ was realized. In the first year eight clergymen committed themselves to enrol. The college grew quickly and would produce four archbishops, 12 bishops, and hundreds of missionaries⁵⁴⁴.

The Belgian missionaries in the United States were always pleased to be able to welcome compatriots. The missionaries advised the new arrivals where to go and helped them to settle somewhere. An early example of this was priest Daems who helped founding the Belgian colony in Wisconsin. Most Belgian missionaries worked in the Midwest area. Coincidence or not, this is also the area where most Belgians migrated to.

Other missionaries openly encouraged emigration. This has been illustrated previously when priest Cartuyvels and the colony of Sainte-Marie were discussed. Cartuyvels was determined to found a Belgian colony in Sainte-Marie. His failure in doing so did not undermine his conviction that the United States offered great possibilities for an ‘overpopulated’ Belgium. He often criticized the passive attitude of the Belgian government towards emigration. He also complained about the lack of information given to prospective emigrants by the authorities. As he predicted in 1887 a branch of the German Saint-Raphael Society was established in Belgium. Cartuyvels was an enterprising person and also decided to found an organisation which informed the prospective-emigrants. This organisation was called ‘Circle de l’émigration’⁵⁴⁵. A thorough study dedicated to the influence of Belgian missionaries on the Belgian emigration has yet to be carried out⁵⁴⁶.

The authorities of the Belgian Catholic Church were less enthusiastic about the emigration to the United States. The main reason for their scepticism was that many emigrants renounced their fate once they lost their ties with the home country. It took a long time before a catholic organisation took interest in the faith of the emigrants from Belgium. In other countries, like Germany, religious associations were quickly organized to assist emigrants. The Belgian Church did not take any initiative for the emigrants until the foundation of a

⁵⁴⁴ P. SABBE en L. BUYSE, Belgians in America, Uitgeverij lannoo, Tielt, 1960, pp. 133-135.

⁵⁴⁵ Letter from the consul in Detroit to Davignon 30/11/1889, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d’émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵⁴⁶ Some works have been published dealing about Belgian communities founded by clergymen. There are the publications of Amatoa, Houthaeve and Verthé to name a few. However, a study which covers the influence of the missionaries on the Belgian emigration in general has yet to be done.

branch of the Saint Raphael Society. This passive attitude is also noticeable in the emigration policy of the catholic governments, in power since the mid 1880's.

The Saint-Raphael Society has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The society preferred Canada to the United States as a destination because of the existence of the ‘Comité catholique du patronage et d’assistance aux émigrants Belges’ in Montreal⁵⁴⁷. The absence of such an organisation in the U.S. is surprising. When taking all the Belgian missionaries working in the U.S. into account, a lack of priest couldn’t possibly be the reason for this. The Belgian legation in Washington informed Davignon that Belgian priests were abundant in the north of the U.S. They estimated that approximately a hundred priests and eight bishops lived in that area. The chargé d’affaires in Washington attended the 25 year jubilee of priest Notebaert in Rochester. When he arrived there, no Belgians lived in the town. In 1907 the Belgian community in Rochester numbered about 400 people. The colony had impressed the chargé d’affaires of Washington:

“Even when admitting that it runs against the interests of our country to encourage the Belgian emigration, one has to admit that centres like Rochester can be of a great utility. In other areas the emigrants have trouble finding work because of the unions; here Notebaert is respected by everybody and helps the emigrants to get a job. I would advise all the Belgians who move to the United Stats to contact Notebaert⁵⁴⁸. ”

It was only in 1910 that a Catholic society became involved in Belgian emigration in the U.S. The organisation was founded in the Midwest and was called ‘Association of Belgian and Holland Priests’. The society had bought cheap land in Minnesota and established the ‘Katholieke Kolonisatie Maatschappij van Minnesota’⁵⁴⁹. The organisation tried to sell the land to immigrants. The society would provide a temporary housing and a priest to guide the colony⁵⁵⁰. Davignon asked the consul of Green Bay to investigate the possibilities and the chance of establishing a successful colony. The consul claimed that the project had many chances of becoming a wealthy colony. The consul sent the minister of Foreign Affairs a second pamphlet about the purpose of the society. The society had several aims. First it wanted to group catholic immigrants in successful colonies. The second aim was to help neglected parishes. It also planned to found new colonies where land was cheap and the prospects looked good:

⁵⁴⁷ The Catholic committee of patronage and assistance to the Belgian emigrants.

⁵⁴⁸ Letter from the Belgian legation of Washington to Davignon 14/7/1907, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. IV, Renseignements.

⁵⁴⁹ The Catholic Colonisation Society of Minnesota’

⁵⁵⁰ F. VAN NISTELROY, Katholieke Kolonisatie Maatschappij van Minnesota, Kimberly, s.n., 1910, pp. 1-6., A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. IV, Renseignements.

“The land in the United States is being bought up rapidly. Our compatriots should also take advantage of the fact that everyone can achieve here by moving to the country. We want to try to gather people in certain good locations and possess of a good parish⁵⁵¹. ”

The main goal of the society was advising the immigrants and warning them against the land speculators. The organisation did not buy land itself, but investigated the land of companies which were prepared to cover the charges for the foundation of a Catholic colony. They stated that it would be much safer to buy land through the organisation than through land speculators. The society insinuated that the main reason for their foundation was to prevent Catholic immigrants from renouncing their faith. The Belgians and Dutchmen were spread around the U.S. The society considered isolated emigration to be a threat as it caused emigrants to forsake their moral duties. The society hoped to establish small Belgian-Dutch colonies all over the country. The organisation promoted their cause by publishing announcements in American and Belgian newspapers⁵⁵². Priest Bogaerts founded a similar society for colonisation in Louisiana for the southern states. Bogaert wanted to stimulate the formation of Catholic Colonies on the ‘fertile’ land of Louisiana. The Belgian consul of New Orleans advised all the emigrants who planned on settling down in the southern states to contact priest Bogaerts for information about where to go⁵⁵³.

What influence these organisations had on Belgian emigration still needs to be investigated. The presence of a Belgian priest in a colony was certainly preferred by the Belgian authorities. The Belgian clergymen made sure that the ties between the home country and the Belgian emigrants remained strong⁵⁵⁴. Nothing indicates however that the government supported these organisations in any tangible way.

2.6) The standpoint of the government and the political parties towards emigration

The Catholic governments which succeeded one another between 1884 and 1914 had an important influence on the emigration policy of Belgians. This period is characterized by a

⁵⁵¹ J-E. DEVOS, Vereniging van Belgische en Hollandse priesters: afdeling kolonisatie, Rochester, s.n., 1910, p. 2, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. IV, Renseignements.

⁵⁵² "La situation religieuse des émigrés Belges aux Etats-Unis", Le patriote, 13/6/1911, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵⁵³ Letter of the consul of New Orleans to Davignon 14/8/1911, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. III-XX, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

⁵⁵⁴ Letter of the Belgian consul of Washington to de Favereau 8/3/1906, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2962. dl. III, Renseignements

relative indifference towards the matter. Even during the period of poverty and social unrest in the mid of the 1880's the government never considered helping a part of the population to emigrate. The passive attitude of the government corresponded with the attitude of the Catholic Church to the topic. The main concern of the Church was that the emigrants would renounce their faith when they settled in the U.S. However the Church possessed of an important network of Belgian priests throughout the country. If the emigration had been organised and guided by the Church then the Belgian emigrants would have formed a greater number of larger more and formed bigger, stronger groups and more attractive colonies for other compatriots to join. It is quite surprising to see how the church feared that the emigrants would lose their faith, but that they never called upon the many priests in the U.S. to prevent this from happening. The church preferred to remain aloof from the issue. The Saint-Raphael Society often complained about the lack of cooperation it received from priests in Belgium when trying to inform prospective emigrants about the various destinations. With the exception of this Catholic inspired society nothing was done by the Belgian Catholic Church to help the emigrants. It is obvious that the Church hoped to discourage the emigration rather than encouraging it. The church authorities even openly criticized the government when it gave official approval to Watson to encourage emigration to South Carolina. This was only the second time since the Catholic government had taken over the power that they took measures in favour of emigration. The government preferred emigration organized by official authorities to isolated emigration. Therefore it had previously given its official approval to Treau de Coeli, delegate for the Canadian authorities. Moreover, Watson committed himself to paying any necessary repatriation costs. This appears to be the deciding factor for the government giving its official support to the project. Their main concern was not so much the protection the project offered to the emigrants, but the guarantee that it wouldn't cost the government any money was t. Rumours reached Belgium that the living conditions of the emigrants were alarmingly poor. Nevertheless, the government kept on supporting Watson's project. It was only because of the intervention of the American Congress that the emigration came to an end. The reason for the relative indifference of the Belgium government towards the situation of the emigrants most probably comes from the fact that it concerned poor Belgians for whom Watson had paid crossing. The government liked to see poor compatriots, ex-criminals and detainees from beggar workhouses leave the country.

The Catholic government did not take any measures to protect the emigrants. As mister Segaert pointed out in 1905, all the laws and measures taken by the government

regarding emigration were to protect the commercial interest of the port of Antwerp. Laws to protect emigrants from abuses that would harm the interests of the shipping companies were not passed or not implemented. The refusal of the Red Star Line to make public the list of under agents which it employed illustrates this. The question remains in what way control of these under agents was possible if the government did not even know their names? The government never took effective measures to protect the emigrants against the much complained about abuses committed by the under agents. Moreover, the so called information bureaus opened by the government for prospective-emigrants were completely useless. These were only founded under the pressure of the social-economic crisis midway through the 1880's when the debate on whether the authorities should encourage emigration or not peaked. After the crisis the information bureaus seem to have been neglected without being replaced by a better solution. The distribution of information about possible destinations for emigration had an important influence on the movement, something the government was well aware of. Keeping silent the vacancy for hundred miners in Colorado silent (see 2.4.2) proves this. A consular report about Wisconsin from 1887 clarifies the governments' point of view towards the distribution of information. A lot of cheap and fertile lands was available in the state, but starting capital was required. The consul concluded as follows:

“I do not believe it would be in the interest of our country to favour the emigration of our farmers who own relatively small parcels of land, because in fact they provide our day labourers with work⁵⁵⁵.”

The consuls had to report about the opportunities for emigrants in the area they were responsible for. In general it can be concluded that these reports advised against emigration to the older eastern states. For the other states the emigration of unskilled workers and poor farmers without starting capital was advised against. Only farmers with a starting capital of 2,000fr. and craftsmen could succeed, according to the consuls. However, the authorities hated to see these people leave the country. It was considered to be counter productive to the national economy. On the other hand the authorities liked to see the unskilled workers and poor farmers cross the Atlantic. This could be a reason why the government did not want to give too much publicity to the consular reports. Decorte, Le Hardy de Beaulieu, Olin and Cartuyvels were all convinced that emigration would increase if the government provided the population with accurate information. So what were the reasons for the authorities not to do so?

⁵⁵⁵ Consular report of the consul-general to Chimay 4/10/1887, A.M.B.Z., Catalogue par matières, Emigration, nr. 2960, dl. I-II, Rapports consulaires sur les possibilités d'émigration par état (1885-1914).

Emigration was predominantly an economic matter. The economic situation of a country partly determined the intensity of the emigration movement. The economy of the home country was decisive but the economic fluctuations of the destination country also had an important influence. After the crisis midway through the 1880's the Belgian economy generally fared well until the First World War. Therefore, the Catholic government did not have economic reasons for stimulating the emigration. Nevertheless, it was between 1900 and 1913 that Belgium experienced its biggest emigration movement to North America. Most of the emigrants moved for the high wages which could be earned in the U.S. The interviews taken by Venesoen revealed that 15 % of the emigrants came from the province Hainault. These were predominantly industrial labourers coming from the Borinage. About 60 % of all the emigrants came from the rural areas of the provinces East- and West-Flanders. Most of them moved to the Midwest area of the U.S. The remaining 25 % emigrated from the other six Belgian provinces⁵⁵⁶. Since the introduction of the right of plural voting in 1893 poor labourers and small farmers had an influence on the composition of local and national authorities. The support for the catholic party, in power from the mid 1880's till the First World War, mainly came from the rural areas where most of the Belgian emigrants came from. This possibly also explains why the catholic government was more inclined to discourage rather than encourage emigration.

The socialist politicians were also openly against emigration. They believed that emigration would reduce the number of their supporters and therefore hamper their fight. The socialists assumed that the aristocracy were stimulating emigration for this reason. However, the Belgian emigration movement at the beginning of the 20th century demonstrates that only a small part of the industrial population emigrated. Most of them came from the Charleroi area and moved to Pennsylvania. This was a continuation of the emigration movement which started during the 1880's and for which the aristocracy was not directly responsible⁵⁵⁷. The socialists considered emigrants to be deserters who fled the social fight⁵⁵⁸. The socialist press published many articles aiming to discourage emigration⁵⁵⁹.

From midway through the 19th century the liberal party had to deal with internal tensions. In 1887 this resulted into a division of the party into a radical and a doctrinal wing. The break up caused a decline in the political power of the liberals. Only in 1900 both wings

⁵⁵⁶ J. STENGERS, *op cit.*, p. 50.

⁵⁵⁷ M. JOURNEE, *op cit.*, p. 113.

⁵⁵⁸ MORELLI Anne, *Belgische emigranten*, Berchem, Epo, 1999, p. 11.

⁵⁵⁹ VERRIJKEN G., *op cit.*, pp. 16-34.

came to reconciliation⁵⁶⁰. The liberals believed emigration stimulated for the economic expansion. This ideology was strongly defended by the liberal press. In 1883 it even founded the ‘Moniteur de l’ Emigration⁵⁶¹. This journal continuously promoted emigration. However the split up of the liberals prevented them from executing this policy⁵⁶². It is Possible that if the liberals had been in power during the social unrest of the 1880’s emigration would have been encouraged and thus have been more important.

Everaert claims that the Belgian overseas emigration remained relatively small because Belgians preferred to emigrate to closer destinations, predominantly France, because of the lack of governmental support⁵⁶³. However, the reaction of the other countries regarding the implementation of the ‘Alien Contract Labour Law’ showed that Belgium was the only country who wanted to protest against these measures. All the neighbouring countries had no objections to the law which aimed to restrict immigration to the U.S. Most countries were not in favour of emigration. In many European countries encouraging emigration was prohibited. Moreover, the comparative study about the Irish and Belgian emigration by Nuytens shows that there were many parallels between the English and the Belgian emigration policies. The English government also tried to found agricultural colonies populated by poor Irishmen in Canada and in the Cape colony before 1850. Both experiments failed and no new ones were undertaken after that. The government only started to intervene in emigration matters during the big famine. It openly stimulated the crossing of poor inhabitants to the United States. Detainees of beggar workhouses were also helped to move to the other side of the Atlantic. However, after 1850 the English government stopped supporting emigration directly, but remained in favour of it⁵⁶⁴. The attitude of the Belgian authorities largely corresponds to this. Further comparative studies would allow us to shed more light on the influence of the government on the emigration movement. The biggest difference between the organisation of emigration in both countries can be found in the involvement of charity institutions. As early as in 1839 the Irish established the ‘Irish Immigration Society’ in New York. The Society guided the emigrants upon their arrival. Also in the main English ports and of departure and throughout the country charity institutions helped the Irish emigrants on their way. As

⁵⁶⁰ J. CRAYBECKX en E. WITTE, De politieke geschiedenis van België van 1830 tot heden, Antwerpen, Standaard, 1997, 478p.

⁵⁶¹ The Monitor for Emigration

⁵⁶² M. JOURNEE, op cit., p. 114.

⁵⁶³ J. EVERAERT, op cit., p. 14.

⁵⁶⁴ A. NUYTENS, op cit., pp. 75-80.

discussed before this was not the case in Belgium. This could possibly also explain why the Belgian emigration movement remained rather small.

Conclusion

The rise of the German emigration movement via Antwerp started once the blockades on the trade through the port were lifted in 1839. The transportation of these emigrants quickly developed into a well organised and profitable business. This provoked the interest of the Belgian government in emigration. In the meantime the Flemish countryside struggled with a structural crisis which lasted from 1840 till 1855. The government had no solutions for the increasing poor and distressed population. The governments of Van de Weyer (July 1845–March 1846) and de Theux-Malou (March 1846 – August 1847) fell under the growing pressure of the crisis. They were followed by the first liberal government of Charles Rogier (August 1847 –September 1852). The Liberals were very favourable towards emigration. They considered emigration as an economic necessity which created new outlets and stimulated national industry. Moreover, the conviction spread that Belgium was overpopulated; hence emigration also became a demographic necessity. However, the recent failure of the colony in Santo Thomas de Guatemala founded with governmental funds undermined support for emigration. The tropical climate was blamed for this failure.

Nevertheless, Rogier tried to found agricultural colonies in Sainte-Marie (Pennsylvania) and Kansas (Missouri). Some parts of the U.S. had a similar climate to Belgium. Moreover cheap and fertile land was abundant in the U.S. Rogier hoped that their success would inspire charity institutions to follow his example and to encourage part of the poor population to emigrate. Both colonies failed to produce a better outcome than Santo Thomas de Guatemala. The colony of De Ham in Saint-Marie failed because of the poor quality of the land and colonists and the competition of other landowners who lured away the colonists. The colony in Kansas was struck by a cholera-epidemic and never recovered from it. Both failures would frequently be used in parliamentary debates to prevent new attempts at founding such colonies. The Belgian government would not undertake similar initiatives again.

In the meantime another way of sending the poor across the Atlantic was established in Antwerp. The governor of Antwerp Teichmann and the emigration-inspector Thielens in collaboration with the shipping agent Strauss set up a network expatriating detainees in beggar workhouses. The system quickly expanded to include convicts and ex-convicts with the approval of the government ministers. Between 1850 and 1855 at least 750 Belgians were sent across the Atlantic at the expense of the local and national authorities. When this practice was leaked to the American press a diplomatic conflict broke out between Belgium and the U.S.A. The American authorities threatened Belgium with sanctions against ships transporting emigrants from Antwerp. The authorities decided to stop sending beggars, convicts and ‘ex-convicts’ to protect the commercial interests of the port, in which the transport of emigrants was becoming more and more important. Sanctions against the port of Antwerp would have considerably weakened its competitive position against the other major emigration ports of Le Havre, Liverpool, Rotterdam, Hamburg and Bremen. These ports also used this incident to discredit Antwerp in smear campaigns in an effort to attract the emigrant trade to their ports. Shortly after the catholic minister of Foreign Affairs (1855-1857), Charles Vilain XIII pronounced his emigration policy which did not encourage or discourage Belgian emigration. The government would limit itself protecting and informing emigrants. This non-intervention policy would be the guideline for future governments concerning Belgian emigration until the First World War however this does not mean that the government stopped having an influence on the emigration movement.

After 1855 the Belgian economy picked up again while in 1861 the Civil War broke out in the U.S. As a result the emigrant trade through the port of Antwerp declined. Antwerp dropped behind its competitors as the port was not modernized of the port. The transition to

steamships also failed to happen. Therefore, the emigration issue faded into the background until the 1880's. However the shortage of workers caused by the Civil War forced American industrialists to recruit Belgians miners. Soon it became clear that the recruiters were using deceitful means to enlist recruits. The government intervened by publishing an official warning against this practice. Shortly after the Federal Army began recruiting soldiers in Belgium. A portion of these recruits were detainees from beggar workhouses and the recruitment happened in collaboration with provincial and local authorities. The government could not intervene because of the military support it was giving to Maximiliaan against rebel troops in Mexico. Only when the government was able to prove that the recruiting process was deceitful, did it manage to stop this practice.

The passive attitude of the government towards emigration matters after 1856 was often questioned. The supporters of emigration mainly criticised the government for not fulfilling its promise to inform and protect the emigrants. They urged the consuls to gather more detailed information on the possibilities for emigrants in their areas. They also urged the government to make this information known to the public. The supporters of emigration believed that spreading this information would be sufficient to trigger an emigration movement. The government did not respond to the critics. Also during this period of decline in emigration the shipping and emigration agent Adolphe Strauss decided to revive the network sending detainees from beggar workhouses to the U.S. He wrote to mayors of different cities to finance the crossing. For two years his activities escaped the attention of the government. However when the government caught wind of the practice, it immediately ordered Strauss to stop. The government did not want to jeopardize the long awaited steam line that was about to be opened in 1869. Moreover Strauss had been involved in a scandal when one of his ships arrived in New York with 20 dead passengers aboard in 1867. This had harmed the reputation of the port of Antwerp, something the minister of Foreign Affairs J.Vanderstichelen, wanted to avoid at all costs. At the end of the 1860's and the beginning of 1870's the government upgraded the port. Vanderstichelen reviewed the laws and royal decrees on emigration transport. The government also subsidised the 'Red Star Line' a corporation which would open a frequent connection between Antwerp and New York. Shortly after Antwerp experienced a revival as an emigration port.

The second industrial revolution brought the issue of emigration back into the debates. Midway through the 1880's Belgians who were looking for a better future overseas found their way to the U.S. again. The pressure on the government to take effective measures to

protect and inform the Belgian emigrants rose. Some people even proposed the reintroduction of an active emigration policy. However, the successive catholic governments from 1884 and 1914 did not favour the Belgian emigration. The measures taken by the government regarding emigration were designed to attract the emigrant trade to Antwerp. Specific measures for guiding Belgian emigrants failed to materialize. The authorities were reluctant to take responsibility for the matter. However during the volatile years of the social-economic crisis midway through the 1880's, Chimay the minister of Foreign Affairs was forced to take measures informing Belgians about possible emigration destinations. He ordered the consuls to write detailed reports on emigration and colonisation possibilities. These were made accessible to the public in the trade museum of Brussels and the administration buildings of each provincial capital. However the government hardly informed the people that these reports could be found in these places. Moreover for many people a trip to the provincial capital was already a whole expedition. The national authorities were well aware of this fact but did nothing to make the information more accessible. The consular reports about the U.S. indicated that the country offered good opportunities for farmers with capital and skilled labourers. The consuls gave poor farmers and unskilled labourers little chance of succeeding. The catholic government preferred not to spread this kind of information in Belgium. The government feared that the departure of skilled labourers and farmers with capital would have a negative influence on the national economy while it never opposed the departure of poor farmers and unskilled labourers. Nevertheless, some of the information gathered by the consuls spread through the newspapers and the Saint-Raphaël Society.

During this period from 1884-1914 the American authorities started to pass restrictive immigration laws. The employers used the immigration flow to break up strikes and keep the wages low. Companies may have been less mobile in the 19th century than they are today, but the influx of immigrants was used as means of putting pressure on the workers. However during the 1870's the rise of unions occurred. These unions pressured the government to restrict the immigration in the U.S. The era when the U.S. received emigrants with open arms had ended. Nevertheless in the southern and younger western states there was still an important demand for immigrants. These states would organize a propaganda campaign in Europe to lure emigrants to the U.S. The authorities of South Carolina even received the official approval to do so from the Belgian government. The main reasons for this official approval were the guarantees that South Carolina would cover the expenses for any eventual repatriations and that it recruited among the poor of the Belgian population. The recruitment

did not end up being a success. Apart from this exception the Belgian government remained reluctant to interfere in emigration matters. Nevertheless the Belgian emigration movement towards the U.S. grew. Criticism arose again about the lack of information and protection the government offered to Belgian emigrants. In spite of this criticism the catholic government much like Belgian Catholic Church did not change its passive attitude towards emigration. The Belgian Church took unlike other European countries, with the exception of the Saint-Raphael Society, took no initiatives to guide, protect or inform emigrants. The Belgian Church opposed emigration to the U.S. because it feared that the emigrants would lose their faith in catholic religion. Even though the Belgian Church had many priests doing missionary work in the U.S., it never used them to prevent Belgian immigrants from losing their faith. The same goes for the government. Even though it possessed information to increase the chances of success of emigrants, it left them fending for themselves. The Belgian emigrants lacked any form of organisation or guidance. Again the Saint-Raphael Society was an exception here. However its assistance in guiding emigrants remained limited. The Belgian Church, charity institutions, or the government failed to guide emigrants. A comparative study between the Belgian and Irish emigration movement proved the lack of organisation to be one of the reasons for the limited Belgian emigration to the U.S. An extensive study concerning the view of, and the influence on the Belgian emigration of the Belgian clergymen, missionaries and the Belgian Church would shed new light on the lack of organisation of the Belgian emigration movement.

The port of Antwerp influenced in many ways the Belgian emigration movement. During a parliamentary session of 1854 de Merode stated that the location of Belgium on the North Sea offered good opportunities for guiding countrymen to the fertile lands of the U.S. According to de Merode, Antwerp offered the ideal gateway to do so. However this ideal gateway which had a stimulating effect on Belgian emigration at first soon hampered it. A comparative study about the emigration policy of other European countries could shed more light on the influence of authorities on their respective national emigration movements. Countries with major emigration ports would be particularly worthy of future comparative research because this study has proved that commercial interests involved with the transport of emigrants influenced the emigration policy of the Belgian government.

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