

## From biography to biofiction?

*Jan Willem Stutje on Hendrik de Man*

Hendrik de Man is a charismatic thinker of Europe-wide bearing. His oeuvre is almost totally dedicated to socialism. Starting as a hard-boiled Marxist, then influenced by his experience at the First World War front, he evolves to a socialism ‘beyond Marxism’, resulting in *plan socialism* (*Het Plan van de Arbeid*, 1933). His main works are *The Remaking of a Mind* (1919), *The Psychology of Socialism* (1926), *Constructive Socialism* (1929), *The Socialist Idea* (1933) and *Au delà du Nationalisme* (1946). He provided socialism with new important philosophical frameworks in fields such as labour, religion, nation, culture and economy. The characterizing atmosphere of his thinking is what he calls ‘eudemonia’, *the pursuit of happiness* in his theory: ‘the socialist motive has to create happy people, and labour has to be a source of joy’; joy in labour was the starting theme of his theoretical work. To him the *here and now* prevails.

De Man’s life and work have been the topic in quite many biographies and research projects, e.g. father Pfaff, Peter Dodge, Adriaan M. van Peski, Mieke Van Haegendoren, Pierrette Rongère, Michel Brélaz, Dan White, Andreas Gatzemann and Tomasso Milani. He has also been amply discussed in numerous articles and essays.

When a new De Man biography is published one is bound to be attentive as to new points of view and conclusions. With *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan*, Jan Willem Stutje was on many lips and his book caused many people to sharpen their pens. On 14th November, 2018 *Knack* was the first to interview Stutje, publishing the result as ‘*How untruthful can a life be.*’ *Left-wing and collaborationist: the fascist features of socialist leader Hendrik de Man*. Various media and opinion sites kept their end up and took the effort to publish a book review and/or an interview with Stutje. Late in 2018 a full-fledged tour of lectures by the author was organized, with the co-operation of, among others, the Masereel foundation. Articles and public activities add up to at least twenty. It has to be conceded that the biography caused quite a stir. It was based on more than four years of research and was supported by the Flemish Foundation for Scientific Research. The biography is well-written and as such, this can only please us.

It is well-known that the author is experienced in the biography genre. His former depictions of the lives of Paul de Groot, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis and Ernest Mandel were very successful and it was somewhat to be expected that this would also apply to his book on Hendrik de Man (1885-1953). Nearly all reactions are strikingly unanimous. At last there is a biography on Hendrik de Man that puts him on the right spot, reveals his craving for power, thus correcting the docility of earlier biographers. Deglorifying and spectacular, nevertheless well-thought-out, is the key attitude in nearly all reviews.

However, the previous biography by Stutje, *Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919). A romantic revolutionary*, issued in 2012, was not unanimously praised. Domela Nieuwenhuis is called an anti-Semite in his book, and in the very same year this resulted in an extremely critical review by Dutch historian Rudolf de Jong.<sup>1</sup> He reproached Stutje for finding persons guilty based upon superficial association (*guilty by association*). E.g., De Jong noted that, should Stutje write an *in memoriam* about him, he would quickly take his copy of *Mein Kampf* out of his library in order to avoid that his children would read he had been a member of the Hitlerjugend. There is more: “*I cannot free myself of the impression that Stutje calls everyone*

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf de JONG, ‘Was Domela an anti-Semite? Biographer Jan Willem Stutje is off target!’, in *De AS* 180, 40, 180 (winter 2012), p. 44-57 [[https://www.tijdschrift-de-as.nl/documenten/de\\_AS\\_180.pdf](https://www.tijdschrift-de-as.nl/documenten/de_AS_180.pdf), consulted on 17th January, 2019].

*who has something against Marx an anti-Semite*".<sup>2</sup> For the sake of completeness, we quote his end conclusion: "*Domela's alleged antisemitism is only one aspect of Stutje's biography, regrettably blown up by himself and critics. A number of positive things can certainly be said about the biography. The book is an excellent read. Nevertheless, I have to say that it contains quite a few allegations on which the same comment applies as the one about antisemitism: Stutje is off target!*"<sup>3</sup>

Stutje calls Hendrik de Man an anti-Semite too. This leads us to the interesting question. Could De Jong's criticism - Stutje jumps to far-reaching conclusions based upon trifles and he is prejudiced against anyone who does not follow his line of thinking – be relevant for *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan?*

Regrettably, in our opinion this is the case indeed. To corroborate this impression, we will start by focussing on Stutje's basic assumption in his most recent biography, which we will then confront with the said biography. Then, building mainly upon this, we deal with source fidelity, balance of construction and intention, attention for historic-societal context, contradictions within Stutje's narrative, and the interest he attaches to the *Wille zur Macht* as De Man's ultimate motivation.

### **Basic assumption: autofiction**

In his preface to *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan* Stutje adopts an utterly critical attitude as to the latter's autobiographical writings. After all, the biography's subject published no less than three autobiographies<sup>4</sup>, which is far from a coincidence according to Stutje. He considers it a sign of self-interest. Did De Man not want to rewrite the truth, subject to the changes in political climate?<sup>5</sup> To corroborate that impression, Stutje refers to the saying of André Malraux, ex-communist, author and a minister under de Gaulle: "*A human being's truth is first and for all what he or she hides.*"<sup>6</sup> The memoirs are mainly meant to put the reader on the wrong track. Stutje defines them as being 'autofictions', which may be worthwhile as far as they give a view on De Man's self-opinion, but should be kept aside as much as possible as a depiction of facts: "*I did not consult the memoirs to find out what De Man remembered about his own life, but to evaluate how he wished to be remembered at specific moments.*"<sup>7</sup>

For that matter, Stutje alleges that previous biographers – Peter Dodge, Adriaan M. van Peski and Mieke Van Haegendoren – were guided all too much by the subsequent memoirs of De Man himself, resulting – specifically as for the controversial war years – in an incomplete picture.<sup>8</sup> He came to the same conclusion about the work of Swiss historian Michel Brélaz. Moreover, the latter is alleged to have been selective in publishing documents and to have delivered them in mutilated form, "*in so-called summaries.*"<sup>9</sup>

In his epilogue Stutje briefly returns to his assumption, i.e. after having compared *Cavalier Seul* (1948) with *Memories / Après coup* (1941): "*De Man, as any autobiographer, wrote from a biased point of view, but he did not allow for the balance between commitment and distance; autobiography soon became autofiction*".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Specifically meant are *Memories* or *Après coup* (Antwerpen-Arnhem, 1941), *Cavalier seul* (Genève, 1948) and *Gegen den Strom* (Stuttgart, 1953).

<sup>5</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Hendrik de Man. Een man met een plan*, Kalmthout, 2018, p. 14-15 en 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

As a critical approach to sources is certainly appropriate for memoirs, Stutje's assumption should not immediately be considered unreasonable; nevertheless, it raises yet other questions that are equally intriguing. The risk of writing from a biased point of view and losing sight of the balance between commitment and distance, is by no means typical of the autobiographer. Though less obvious, the biographer is not immune to it. Did Stutje in *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan* always mind the balance between commitment and distance and did he not leave unmentioned some important elements in De Man's thinking and acting? Did he pay sufficient attention to time circumstances? And how did he wish the reader would remember De Man? Firstly, we will have a look at the way Stutje dealt with his sources.

### Source fidelity

When a biographer quotes any thoughts from the subject's writings, the reader should be confident that the former does so in a correct and complete way. This implies that the reader should also – in a summarized form if need be – become acquainted with all nuances, relativizations, commentaries and the like that were added by the biography's subject himself to the said thought in the writing concerned.

Let us test this on the book *The Remaking of a Mind. A Soldier's Thoughts on War and Reconstruction*<sup>11</sup>, which is extremely important to understand De Man's evolution after the First World War. Stutje took a number of statements and quotes from it, which we quote in the left-hand column. In the right-hand column we summarize De Man's text and give some conclusive remarks.

Jan Willem Stutje in <i>Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</i>	Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i>
<p><i>"On closer analysis, De Man was no adversary of the war. He considered all ethical commandments keeping humans from opting for a form of social organization 'the best adapted to the fulfilment of his needs' and 'the fittest to survive', to be irreconcilable with social progress. What was imperative, was 'a constant struggle between individuals, classes, tribes, nations and races about conflicting interests and ideals'. War, he went on in The Remaking of a Mind, was an engine for renewal supporting the betterment of society, culture and morals.</i></p> <p><i>By using concepts such as 'the existential struggle' and 'the survival of the fittest' De Man turned out to be, though the word was</i></p>	<p>I did not feel towards war in general in the same way as the ethical or Christian pacifists (no man should kill a man) of the Tolstoian type.<sup>13</sup> Sound ethics must aim at making mankind fitter to live. This can only be achieved by social progress. History teaches us that this evolution is not a logical, but a dialectical process, which is realised by a continuous struggle between individuals, classes, tribes, nations, races, and ideals.<sup>14</sup> In that sense, wars are an agency, like racial, class and religious conflicts.<sup>15</sup></p> <p>We may conceive of a state of things where humanity will have escaped the iron necessity that has so far condemned it to the sufferings and waste of energy this dialectical process involves.<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx has referred to this</p>

<sup>11</sup> The work was published in New York by Charles Scribner's Sons and in London by Allen & Unwin and is available via our Association's weblog (<https://hendrikdeiman.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/remaking-of-a-mind-c.pdf>).

<sup>13</sup> Hendrik de MAN, *The Remaking of a Mind. A Soldier's Thoughts on War and Reconstruction*, New York, 1919, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<p><b>Jan Willem Stutje</b> <i>in Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</i></p>	<p><b>Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i></b></p>
<p><i>not used, an adherent of social Darwinism, a school of thought that by combining determinism, voluntarism and moralism was popular at the beginning of the twentieth century</i>”.<sup>12</sup></p>	<p>possibility as "the leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom." We are still so far from this ideal that we have hardly begun to discern the laws which govern our social life and conflicts.<sup>17</sup> And as to the relations between nations or states, we shall perhaps be able to create machinery for gradually replacing war by arbitration and conciliation.<sup>18</sup> Even if we cannot make conflicts superfluous or impossible, we can facilitate their solution by the peaceful establishment of an international court of justice to prevent recourse to actual violence.<sup>19</sup></p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Indeed, De Man's <b>analysis</b> has affinities with social-Darwinist views ('progress is based on battle') and shows historicism, in the sense that he sees dialectical patterns at work in social history. As suggested by Stutje, he is a child of his time in that respect. However, the <b>ideal</b> that De Man pursues, is a world without struggle. After all, which social-Darwinist would count on international arbitration to prevent or solve conflicts between states or nations in a peaceful way?</p>
<p><i>"About war opponents, more specifically pacifists of Tolstoian kind, he did not have a good word to say: 'milk and water pacifists, bleating lambs in a world full of voracious wolves. 'By discrediting the warring parties' motives [...], they harmed their own cause more than any advocate of war and militarism'".<sup>20</sup></i></p>	<p>The "realm of freedom" is the ultimate aim of three great forces - Christianity, acting on individuals, democracy and socialism, versus the political and the economic conditions of life.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, however, we are still in the "realm of necessity," and any attempt to ignore its laws is doomed to failure; this is the case when individual men are given ethical directions independent of the conditions under which they live and which it is not in their power to alter single-handed.<sup>22</sup></p> <p>After all, we still live in a world where the material conditions of the antagonism of</p>

<sup>12</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op.cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op.cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Hendrik de MAN, *Op.cit.*, p. 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Jan Willem Stutje in <i>Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</i>	Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i>
	<p>interests between classes and states-originating in the economic structure of society-still rule the actions of men.<sup>23</sup></p> <p>There have been situations where those whose ideal was the stopping of bloodshed between men have yet had to resort to bloodshed as the only means of furthering the realisation of their ideal. I think of the French revolutionaries who defended the young Republic in 1792, the Americans who loved freedom equally clear in the Civil War and all those who in 1914 and 1917, took up arms against the German aggression.<sup>24</sup></p> <p>If we may judge by results, these lovers of peace, who were not afraid of fighting for the realisation of their ideals, have done more to bring humanity nearer to a state of things where there will be no more wars than have our “<i>milk-and-water pacifists, those bleating lambs in a world of ravening wolves</i>”.<sup>25</sup></p> <p>By declining to take sides, ethical pacifists they have done more harm to their own cause than any promoter of war and militarism could have done.<sup>26</sup></p> <p>The difference between this class of pacifism and my own is not so much a discrepancy of thinking as an antagonism of temperament. With my natural impulses of activity and combativeness, I was, as a pacifist, temperamentally bound to become either a fanatic conscientious objector or a crusader against Prussian militarism.<sup>27</sup></p> <p>What saved me from being the former, was not only the intellectual disposition which I largely ascribe to my historical training, but also and primarily my native realism, inherited from generations of Flemish ancestors.<sup>28</sup></p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>De Man calls himself a pacifist too. He is certainly no opponent of peace, but he does not</p>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<b>Jan Willem Stutje in Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</b>	<b>Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i></b>
<p><i>“He consciously kept his emotions hidden for the troops. This applied to feelings of fear, (...) to feelings of affection (...). And it applied to feelings of ecstasy: ‘the joy in killing’, the immense pleasure caused by a direct hit, including the sight of screaming victims and bodies, arms and legs catapulted in the air. I had to admit to myself that this was one of the happiest moments of my life”</i><sup>29</sup></p>	<p>exclude the use of violence if it turns out to be the only means to achieve peace.</p> <p>I do not want to be misunderstood when I oppose joy in killing as a morally low instinct to combative heroism as a high ethical impulse. Both are the outcome of those fighting instincts we have inherited from our ancestors, the warriors and hunters.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the old slumbering instinct that makes a man enjoy his power to destroy and to kill has been called back to life by the war.<sup>31</sup></p> <p>I had thought myself more or less immune from this intoxication until, as a trench mortar officer, I was given command over what is probably the most murderous instrument in modern warfare. One day, after expending a few rounds on finding the range, I secured a direct hit on an enemy emplacement, saw bodies or parts of bodies go up in the air, and heard the desperate yelling of the wounded or the runaways. I had to confess to myself that it was one of the happiest moments of my life.<sup>32</sup> I could have wept with joy and, if I had dared to, kissed the man next to me, who was as excited as I.<sup>33</sup> As soon as I realised the bestiality of my joy, my conscience felt such a burning shame that its impression will probably be as lasting as that of the incident that caused it.<sup>34</sup> I know of a few friends who have similarly suffered, and felt the same wave of remorse. But I also know that the majority of men have felt the ecstasy of killing without this sense of contrition.<sup>35</sup> Who would not, in view of these facts, be seized with the apprehension that the immediate effect of the war on the masses who fought it may have been to make brutes rather than to create heroes?<sup>36</sup> There is all the more reason to fear the unbridling of the beast should the allied</p>

<sup>29</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op.cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> Hendrik de MAN, *Op.cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197-198.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<b>Jan Willem Stutje in Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</b>	<b>Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i></b>
	<p>governments succumb to the temptation to misuse their victory, forget the ideals for which they have made a generation sacrifice it.<sup>37</sup></p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>De Man admits having experienced the instinctive ‘joy in killing’ at the front, but by no means without remorse. He is very anxious about the said instinct not being curbable any longer after the war, with those who participated in it.</p>
<p><i>“As early as 1919 he fulminated that the Bolshevik sought advice from the Jew. As a Fleming with his roots in a specific national reality, and who was aware of that, he looked down on what he called abstract and cosmopolitan Jewish thinking.”<sup>38</sup></i></p>	<p>De Man recognizes a propensity towards abstract thinking with Germans as well as Jews.<sup>39</sup> The Bolshevik movement is not rooted in a faulty logical development, but in factual circumstances.<sup>40</sup> I will certainly not hold the Jewish race responsible.<sup>41</sup> Asserting that the Bolshevik doctrine has virtually only Jewish adherents, or that no Jews are to be found with socialists who sided with the Entente, is totally wrong.<sup>42</sup> As a cosmopolite element ‘par excellence’ the Jews are a very favourable recruitment base for Bolshevism and other internationalist doctrines, but it would be wrong to ascribe that solely to racial factors.<sup>43</sup></p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>De Man asserts that Jews are a very favourable recruitment base for Bolshevism, but ascribes this to their cosmopolitan orientation, not to their race. Besides, he formulates this opinion in a rather matter-of-fact tone; which can hardly be called ‘fulminating’. This also applies to his assertions about the propensity towards abstract thinking with Germans as well as Jews.</p>
<p><i>“Secondly, it became all the more sharply clear that De Man had always considered socialism as a top-down socialism (...) In</i></p>	<p>Democracy ultimately leads to self-government of mankind as a whole; at least, it is the only instrument by which such self-</p>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>38</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op.cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> Hendrik de MAN, *Op.cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<b>Jan Willem Stutje in Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</b>	<b>Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i></b>
<p><i>his mind, socialism had never been an act of self-liberation, not even at the time het still called himself a marxist (...) 'The idea of self-governance of the masses is a myth in the literal sense', he wrote in The Remaking of a Mind. ".<sup>44</sup></i></p>	<p>government can be freely and consciously achieved.<sup>45</sup></p> <p>We find that even in the democratic armies of the Entente it was only with a minority that conscious and enlightened acceptance of the higher motives of the nation's policy was the mainspring of action.<sup>46</sup> To acknowledge this fact is not to sin against the spirit of democracy.<sup>47</sup> Democracy would not be worse served if those who, like myself, ardently believed in it, loved it with a little more discernment and realised that the idea of self-government of the masses is in its literal sense a myth.<sup>48</sup> In no democratic country on earth is there more than a minority who take a conscious interest in public affairs. Majorities are the instruments through which minorities rule.<sup>49</sup> In this democracy, in its present stage of development at least, resembles all previous, non-democratic forms of government.<sup>50</sup> (However,) it differs from them,<sup>51</sup> first, by the fact that the ruling minority is larger than in any autocracy or oligarchy; then, because this minority, in order to obtain power, disposes of no means of physical coercion and must therefore rely on the machinery of public education, the press, the churches, official organs of "public information," and other means of persuasion to create the required disposition in the "public mind"; and lastly, because the necessity to use these means of persuasion, and the competition of parties, movements and factions, unavoidably result in the indefinite increase of the quantity and the quality of those who take a thinking citizen's part in the government of the nation. It is chiefly because of this last reason that democracy is superior to all previous methods, for it allows of continuous self-</p>

<sup>44</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op.cit.*, p. 431.

<sup>45</sup> Hendrik de MAN, *Op.cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Hendrik de MAN, *Op.cit.* p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176-177.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<b>Jan Willem Stutje in <i>Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan</i></b>	<b>Hendrik de Man in <i>The Remaking of a Mind</i></b>
	<p>improvement. The great value of democracy as it exists is not that it actually means self-government of all the people by all the people, but that it is the only way which ultimately leads to self-government of the people by as large a number as are capable of participating therein.<sup>52</sup> In the meantime, however, let us acknowledge the fact that in every existing democracy the impulses that make the masses act are but an unconscious reflex of the motives of the ruling minorities who make public opinion.<sup>53</sup></p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Again, De Man makes a clear distinction between reality and the ideal. Democracy is a movement that eventually has to result in a government of all by as many of these “all” as possible.</p>

*Van Dale. Groot woordenboek der Nederlandse taal*, the referential dictionary of the Dutch language, defines ‘mutilating’ in a figurative sense as for a text, words or phrases as: “*to change by omitting in such a way that the form or the original meaning is seriously impaired*”; the sentence given as an example is: “*the telegram arrived in a mutilated form*”.<sup>54</sup>

It is extremely clear that Stutje gives the aforementioned thoughts of De Man to the reader in a mutilated form. He selects sentences that have - in the eyes of the contemporary public – a high show value. The context within which De Man came to these thoughts and his crucial nuances, are omitted. Even when Stutje does not paraphrase sentences from *The Remaking of a Mind*, as is the case when Jews and Bolsheviks are the topic, he attributes a meaning and connotations to De Man’s ideas that were by no means intended as such by the latter.

As a result of such framing the complex world of De Man’s ideas is reduced to the most unfavourable interpretation possible. In this way the subject of the biography comes off really badly. Readers of Stutje’s biography who do not consult *The Remaking of a Mind* themselves, will have to admit that De Man was no enemy of war, that he despised pacifists of all kinds, enjoyed killing people, fulminated against Jews and Bolsheviks and did not think much of democratic self-governance. Caricatural presentations that already contain the seeds of the autocrat and collaborator of later times. In this sense, the fragments selected are constitutive for the way Stutje wished the reader would remember De Man.

But Stutje does not stand the test of source fidelity. This is all the sadder knowing he also consulted unpublished sources that were not accessible before, such as the archived documents of the Belgian national Security Department, which will hardly be verifiable for most readers.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177-178.

<sup>54</sup> *Van Dale. Groot woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal*, thirteenth edition, part s-z, Utrecht-Antwerp, 1999, p. 3705.

In view of our findings, Stutje's fidelity as to using the said sources is questionable until proof of the contrary.

### **Build-up and intention**

In what way the focus of attention in *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan* is directed to the stages and aspects of De Man's life?

Quantitatively speaking, the period of 1885-1932 gets much less attention than the period of 1933-1953. Not taking into account the introduction, the epilogue and the following parts - abbreviations, notes, sources and register of persons -, the biography has 369 pages, of which 119 are about the first period and 250 about the second one. This means the ratio is 32,25 % versus 67,75 %. When compared with the related number of years in De Man's life (47 versus 21 of 68 years, or 69,12 % versus 30,88 %), then the discrepancy is certainly to be called significant. *Grosso modo*, the biography underrates the first period by approximately one third and overrates the second one by approximately one third.

In De Man's life the year 1933 is more or less a line of fracture between the thinker and the politician. The years as a politician gained the upper hand of those as a thinker, which results in - using a description borrowed by Stutje himself from De Man – the biography being 'lopsided' or oblique, unbalanced.

This is not only expressed in a quantitative, but also in a qualitative way. The late thirties and the early forties attract a lot of attention and are used to interpret De Man's concepts, even if he used them with a totally different meaning before. Though Stutje refuses an automatism *à la Zeev Sternhell* between saying good-bye to Marxism, and sympathizing with national socialism<sup>55</sup>; yet there is a strong tendency to see long lines in De Man's evolution. Moreover, he seems to consider those lines from a specific point of view, i.e. by looking away from De Man's experiences during the First World War, and from the latter's theoretical renewals after that period. Stutje's perspective rather focuses on the Second World War. He pinpoints aspects and terms that were a potential soil for De Man's controversial positions in the early forties. In this way the Second World War casts its shadow ahead many years beforehand.

E.g., Stutje takes little notice of De Man's theoretical work and gives some rather superficial comments on his merits in that respect. This means that the reader of the twenty-first century is hardly informed about De Man's 'Gesinnungsmotive' or motives theory. In his *Psychology of Socialism* De Man formulates this theory as follows: "*The means only leads to the end if it feeds itself with the same motive from which the concept of the end ensued (...)* *By a bad means – participating in the war – a good end – victory in the war – cannot be reached. Nor is it possible to realise liberty through despotism, democracy by dictatorship, or nonviolence by using violence*".<sup>56</sup>

De Man's will for peace was indeed "*the great passion*" of his life. The First World War had left him with a major disillusion; the victor's actual behaviour did not in the least correspond with the sublime ideals ("*to make the world safe for democracy*") for the sake of which the war had been waged. As soon as ten weeks after the Armistice De Man opposed the *punitive Peace of Versailles*"; as from then, he would never believe in ideological warfare again. In 1926 he integrated this orientation unambiguously in his motives theory: "*war has become as unpractical as it is unethical*".<sup>57</sup> There is no room for a pretext to spare Nazism. Indeed, in 1928 – long before Hitler's takeover of power - the absolute battle against warfare and

<sup>55</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op. cit.*, p. 8 en 215-216.

<sup>56</sup> Leo MAGITS (ed.), *Psychologie van het socialisme*, part II in the series *Hendrik de Man. Persoon en ideeën*, Antwerp-Amsterdam, 1974, p. 283.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

militarism was the very first item at the Heppenheim conference. And in the thirties, De Man's pacifism became the substrate for his support of the Belgian independence and neutrality policy; he wanted to keep the country outside of the war at all costs.

It is a puzzle why this evident preoccupation of De Man disappeared from Stutje's radar. Mentioning it would undoubtedly have infringed upon his framing, stating that De Man, on close inspection, was no enemy of war. However, Stutje could as well have quoted other statements with high show value. As late as 1934, De Man turned out to be in favour of reviewing the Versailles Treaty: « *A ceux qui demanderaient si cela signifie la paix avec Hitler, je répondrais que la paix avec Hitler vaut mieux que n'importe quelle guerre* ». <sup>58</sup>

As Stutje does not study the content of De Man's major works, he resorts to slogansque terms such as 'nationalist', 'authoritarian' and 'corporatist'. Those terms are not elucidated in the way De Man intended using them; nor does the author pay any attention to the way the terms' meaning evolved with De Man. We will do this here instead of Stutje.

#### *'Nationalist'*

De Man was vehemently opposed to nationalism. In his first attempts to reconcile socialism and country, he leaned upon German ethnic-cultural definitions. Only in his *Nationalism and Socialism* of 1931, he made a distinction between liberationist nationalism and authoritarian nationalism. To the former belonged language groups fighting for their rights, such as the Flemish. He loathed authoritarian nationalism, which "does not live for, but from its demands and which is a "national narcissism and egoism", "to that extent that the nation gives its power, its prestige and its specific convictions higher status than the universal values of justice and truth". He promised to the Flemish that they would win their linguistic battle, as they were the only language group in Europe constituting a majority of the population, so they would conquer their rights thanks to the generalised right to vote; after that he participated in the commemorations of the Battle of the Spurs. But he also predicted that liberty nationalism is easily transformed into authoritarian nationalism, as soon as its first program was realised.

However, when Stutje calls De Man's socialism 'nationalist', Belgium, not Flanders is meant, and with the same reserve: "a national party, not because we give priority to nation over humanity, maar because it is the natural framework for the actual expression of our community as a people", as he said on October 15, 1937 in Antwerp. Not De Man coined the concept of 'socialisme national' or 'het nationale socialisme'. It was Spaak who did. De Man could only accept that concept if it is defined in such as to exclude any evil ambiguities, which seems to be very difficult". It could only mean "a socialism that tries to realise what is realisable within the national framework", but "national does not mean nationalist (...) I want to be a good European, as well as a good world citizen, and a good Belgian. I hate the economic nationalism that forces nations to live on their own and get impoverished in autarchy; I hate the political nationalism that provokes wars; I hate racial and cultural nationalism, which denies the higher values of a truly human society". National socialism meant no more than being forced to work within a national framework. In the thirties there was no other option. Versailles and the enormous post First World War protectionism had resulted in dwindling intra-European trade. The European market was still far away.

#### *'Authoritarian'*

Against growing government instability – between 1918 and 1940 Belgium counted eighteen governments, eight of which in the last six years – several solutions were conceived. Not only anti-democratic movements of different feathers saw daylight. There were also voices in favour of strengthening executive power, though preserving the constitutional liberties. Latter

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<sup>58</sup> Hendrik de MAN, 'La défense nationale et le Plan du Travail', in *Le Peuple*, 31 January 1934, p. 4.

tendency did not aim at any dictatorship, but wanted to save democracy by installing a stable and efficient rule and curbing corruption.

It is within this second tendency that one should situate the political reforms advocated by De Man during the thirties, i.e. in his *Labour Plan* and his later articles in *Leadership*: legislature parliaments and governments, enhanced weight of the Prime Minister, a mainly controlling function for Parliament, a one-house system, referendums. For that matter, a number of these reforms have been realised in recent times.

The Labour Plan included nationalising credit, basic industries and monopolies, and it took propelling authorities' action for granted. Governments had to be sufficiently decisive to steer economy and make companies stay in line. By all means, the Plan was not intended at all to infringe upon constitutional rights, as little as was the case with the 'authoritarian democracy' De Man advocated in the later thirties. Post-war politics by general Charles de Gaulle – who put the emphasis on executive power, nationalisations and referendums – clearly showed similarities with planism.

It is correct that De Man did not like the parliament system too much, with its plethora of meetings and solicitor's rhetoric. But at the end of 1937, when dealing with the Van Zeeland case as a Minister of Finance and as supervising minister of the Belgian National Bank in the Chamber of Representatives, he emphasised that the parliamentary regime was the only one capable of uncovering and curbing corruption.

It is also correct that after the German invasion De Man – more specifically in his political programme of June 19, 1940 and his Manifesto of June 28, 1940 – advocated a 'new order', which had an undeniably wider scope than his 'authoritarian democracy' of the thirties. The crucial distinction is whether constitutional liberties are maintained or not. In 1940 De Man was convinced of the German victory and of the possibilities of a social revolution arising from the collapse of the parliamentary regime. Within this context, he was indeed in favour of a Belgian 'Vichy regime', with all its consequences for the internal organisation of the state: unity party and movement, temporary suspension of political freedom, full-fledged power for the head of state, and the like.

By constantly using the concept of an 'authoritarian' state socialism, Stutje denies the specific objective of De Man's proposals of political reform during the thirties. They are lumped together with the political order he envisaged in 1940, but which differs from them in an essential way.

#### *'Corporatist'*

De Man to reserve the term for the socialists and not renounce it to the fascists. In his understanding, corporations meant organising professional interests autonomously, apart from the state, as in the British Broadcasting 'Corporation' and in George Douglas Howard Cole's 'guild' socialism. As for nationalisations, he advocated a management not by the state, but by autonomous institutions controlled by "*the production, the producers (labourers) and consumers*", whereas fascist states muzzled free workers' associations through corporatism.

De Man's project from June 19, 1940 aimed at replacing Parliament with advisory corporatist bodies, and at installing a national unity movement. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same remarks can be made here as with the term 'authoritarian'.

Whereas De Man's thinking is treated harshly, his private life is clearly foregrounded. Stutje prefers searching for characteristics, life style and eating habits, i.e. for all elements of people's private lives that are meant to be protected nowadays by the General Data Protection Regulation. A person's statements or actions performed *privatum*, must have an effect on that

person's intellectual and political life. This is a presupposition Stutje takes for granted, and does not consider to be a hypothesis to be checked. Would it not make more sense, by the way, to start with making a distinction between work and private life?

After Stutje's dissection of De Man's life, what remains is a number of unfounded conclusions that can hardly be called attractive. Facts and interpretations are constantly intertwined. This gives rise to a one-dimensional, Hobbesian general view. '*Homo homini lupus*', as De Man did not love human beings.<sup>59</sup> Whether he acted as a thinker, as a politician or as a private person, he was only keen on power and self-interest.

### **The historic-societal context**

A biographer's task is to situate the biography's subject in his time, between contemporaries from the same group, and to clarify the circumstances of that time that influenced certain choices.<sup>60</sup> Taking that angle, the said choices can be made more easily understandable, without mincing matters, obviously.

We already treated the several reactions provoked by the functioning of the parliamentarian regime during the thirties, which were not clearly distinguished by Stutje. And when writing about king Leopold III and Belgian independence and neutrality politics, he makes some mistakes as well.

In Belgian history the actual part played by the monarchy evolved over a long period. *De facto* at the start it was much more extended than could be concluded from the adage "*the right to be consulted, to encourage and to warn*" (Walter Bagehot), more specifically as for public works, foreign and colonial politics, as well as defence politics and the supreme command of the army. The king himself quite often presided over the Ministers' Council, and this certainly applies to Albert I, the predecessor of Leopold III. During the First World War Albert I had assumed the supreme command over the army – without even allowing for any ministers signing! –, argued in favour of Belgian neutrality, he had stayed with his troops, and, moreover, had aimed at a peace compromise with Germany, shutting out the government; Albert I wanted to spare his soldiers' blood and saw no advantage in any allied offensives with catastrophic endings.<sup>61</sup> And at the start of the thirties he turned out to be enraged by the government's and parliament's powerlessness, and his entourage considered a "*prééminence royale*", and the like.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, Leopold III acted in ways for which today we can hardly use any other terms than 'authoritarian' or 'anti-democratic'. In his contemporaries' view that was not necessarily the case. He was inspired by a tradition and an example – his father – not installed by himself. Therefore, it is wrong to suggest that when Leopold III made the oath in 1934, Belgium suddenly had an authoritarian king, as Stutje does.<sup>63</sup>

When Stutje writes about the Belgian independence and neutrality politics, he neglects the aftereffects of the First World War for contemporaries. That war was the first total war; it took Belgium 76,037 fatalities, of which 26,338 died in action or in accidents at the Western front,

<sup>59</sup> See the above-quoted interview with Willem Stutje in *Knack*, 14 November 2018, p. 113-114.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Marita MATHIJSEN, 'Dit is waar de wetenschappelijke biografie aan moet voldoen', in *NRC*, 17 November, 2017 [<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/11/17/dit-is-waar-de-wetenschappelijke-biografie-aan-moet-voldoen-14077998-a1581622>], consulted on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2019].

<sup>61</sup> Jan VELAERS and Herman VAN GOETHEM, *Leopold III, de Koning, het Land, de Oorlog*, Tielt, 1994, p.11-97, 'Albert I en Leopold III, koningen in crisistijd' en p. 14-41, 'Koning Leopold III in de voetsporen van zijn vader'. See likewise Jan VELAERS, *Albert I. Koning in tijden van oorlog en crisis*, Lannoo, 2009. On the supreme command over the army: Jean STENGERS, *L'action du Roi en Belgique depuis 1831. Pouvoir et influence. Essai de topologie des modes d'action du Roi*, Paris-Louvain-la-Neuve, 1992, p. 89-105.

<sup>62</sup> Jan VELAERS and Herman VAN GOETHEM, *Op.cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>63</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op. cit.*, p. 201.

14,029 illnesses at the Western front and 23,000 civilians – mass murders, bombings and people dying after being carried off -, not to mention the profound economical and moral disruption.<sup>64</sup> In the thirties the First World War was still a fresh memory. In view of growing international tensions, many saw Belgian independence or neutrality as a last spark of hope – with hindsight, this was of course naive – to stay outside of the Armageddon. Stutje takes no notice of the fact that this could be a factor with some relevance. When Leopold III and De Man advocate independence and neutrality politics, his only suspicion is a hidden awe for the German case.<sup>65</sup>

## Contradictions

In *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan* there are some striking contradictions.

On p. 111, Stutje alleges that De Man’s “*argument in favour a nationalist authoritarian state (came) very close to the social order envisioned by Hitler*”. Whereas on p. 197 it is said that De Man’s socialism “*stayed at a great distance from the totalitarian fascist answer to the economic depression for the time being, though, as said, De Man was impressed by certain aspects, such as corporatism and strong leadership*”.

On p. 152, Stutje expresses doubts whether *The socialist idea* and other books by De Man were burnt by the Nazis in 1933. He argues that they were not on the lists of detrimental, undesirable writings, and that hundreds of copies were still in supply after World War Two. On p. 166, his doubts have suddenly turned into certainty: “*the fate of De Man’s books is known by now: they did not end up on the stake*”. But there is no conclusive evidence that De Man’s books really could not have been burnt.

On p. 268, Stutje considers De Man’s collaboration to be “*not necessarily inspired by individual idiosyncrasies, by opportunism, by an urge for self-enrichment nor by lust for power*”. The book’s epilogue more or less corroborates this: “*De Man was a man with many faces. Heaping them together produces trivial abstractions. It either leads to an essentialism yielding little elucidation, as the historic process summarised is too long and too contradictory, or to no more than a random selection from a multitude of identities, making other ones automatically appear to be false or incidental (...) Syntheses or selective qualifications do no justice to De Man. The ‘true’ Hendrik de Man has never existed*”.<sup>66</sup> These considerations are by all means valuable, though Stutje tackles them himself in the next paragraph: “*The question arises if Hendrik de Man settled his hash as a politician as well as a theoretician, due to his ruthless Wille zur Macht, which derailed in collaboration*”.<sup>67</sup>

## Reductionism

Whatever the angles from which De Man’s life can be observed, according to Stutje there can be no doubt as to his will for power as a decisive factor. That conclusion is in keeping with the general purport of the book, as Stutje nearly systematically links his story with De Man’s proclivity to opportunism and self-interest. This is the reason, for that matter, why Marc Reynebeau called the biography a spectacular one: “*Stutje succeeds in finding the logic in what at first sight looks as a series of mistakes or contradictions, or as opportunism or treason. He considers the pursuit of power to be De Man’s central motivation.*”<sup>68</sup> Apparently, Stutje could

<sup>64</sup> Other losses were prisoners of war, detainees in the Netherlands, resistance people, seamen and the like. Cfr. Tom SIMOENS, ‘*De Eerste Wereldoorlog, totale oorlog en militaire patstelling*’, in Luc DEVOS, Tom SIMOENS, Dave WARNIER and Franky BOSTYN, ‘*14-’18. Oorlog in België*’, Leuven, 2014, p. 519-525.

<sup>65</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 427-428.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>68</sup> Marc REYNEBEAU, ‘*Het plan was: de macht*’, in *Standaard der Letteren*, 14 December 2018, p. 18.

not resist the temptation to reduce a complex reality to one all-embracing explanation. Of course, this does not answer the question whether such reductionism is plausible.

It is more than pitiful that in his introduction Stutje did not start by expressing his reservations against an essentialist approach and actively took them as a starting point of his research. It would have allowed him to weigh De Man's 'will for power' as a hypothesis against other attempts at finding an ultimate explanation. After all, here is no lack of such attempts within existing research. As soon as 1966, the American Peter Dodge wrote: "*To be sure all his judgments were products of the same impulses, those that had brought him to devote his life to the cause of socialism (...) It was in this spirit that he castigated the complacent political liberalism that he found that many of his fellow-socialists had absorbed, for he identified this outlook as a disastrous accommodation to the status quo*".<sup>69</sup> And in 1974, Hendrik Brugmans added: "*One could reproach him his stubbornness and one-sidedness, but certainly not foul opportunism (...) It was the urge to act, more than ambition, the need to be historically active in a necessary development – dangerous, yes, wrong means included*".<sup>70</sup>

Only in his epilogue Stutje mentions the small distance between 'the good' and 'the evil' in those days.<sup>71</sup> But in reality Stutje neglected this tragic aspect of in De Man's life, by considering the *Wille zur Macht* to be the latter's one and only plan. Why was it not possible to recognise, as for the early forties, a contradiction with De Man, between, on the one hand, the dangerous, wrong means mentioned by Brugmans, and on the other hand, assuming responsibility for and striving at social change, in circumstances that were totally inadequate, or that turned out to be illusory?

## General conclusion

There are several reasons to consider *Hendrik de Man. A man with a plan* a biofiction. Stutje's dealing with sources can simply be called problematic. Moreover, the way he conceived his work, interpreted the terminology, observed the historical context and reduced the thinking and acting of his subject to one central motive, is extremely questionable. His approach ultimately yields a mutilated, one-dimensional and therefore fictionalised life story.

It is clear that De Man made mistakes in his personal environment as well as in his public actions. As an Association for the research into his work, we have no intention at all to wipe these mistakes under the carpet – nor his problematic attitude during the Second World War.

But when the historic truth about De Man as a person, a thinker or as a politician is violated, our Association is forced to raise its voice. The Association has laid down by statute that its task is promote scientific research about De Man. This means it has to react to speculative historiography, even if for most critics and opinion makers it comes across as deglorifying, spectacular and well-thought-out.

<sup>69</sup> Peter DODGE, *Beyond Marxism: the Faith and Works of Hendrik de Man* , The Hague, 1966, p. 221.

<sup>70</sup> Hendrik BRUGMANS, *Inleiding - De Man en zijn tijd*, in Mieke CLAEYS-VAN HAEGENDOREN (ed.), *Autobiografie*, part I in the series *Hendrik de Man. Persoon en ideeën*, Antwerp-Amsterdam, 1974, p. 5 and 57.

<sup>71</sup> Jan Willem STUTJE, *Op. cit.*, p. 434.