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# Statistics and Social Policy in Inter-war Belgium

The 1928-1929 Inquiry into the Family Budgets of blue-collar and white-collar Workers\*

Patricia Van den Eeckhout

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*“Een statistiek is waard wat haar maker waard is”*<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Confronted with the critique of sources such as population censuses, students of family labour, family income and women's work have turned to another and allegedly “better” source: budgets of working-class families' income and spending, compiled from the beginning of the 19th century onwards<sup>2</sup>. The shortcomings of family budgets did not pass unnoticed. Their focus on better-off working-class families, their preference for nuclear families and the questionable reliability of data on income and expenditure have all been acknowledged. However, after the “inevitable” criticism of the source, social and economic historians tend to rush for “the figures”. The study of the Belgian budget inquiries of 1891 and 1928-1929 suggests, however, that these historical statistics teach us more about the context in which they were executed than about the object of their inquiries. Acknowledging this implies a shifting research focus. The social, ideological and intellectual climate in which historical statistics were compiled and the administrative and practical “details” that governed their execution are promoted from “background information” to the status of a major research object.
- 2 Peter Scholliers and I took apart the Belgian family budget inquiry of 1891<sup>3</sup>. This investigation was indirectly used as a means of attenuating class antagonism. The industrial *jacquerie* of 1886 had made a strong impression on the Belgian *élite* and when tension rose in the course of 1890 as a result of increasing socialist mobilisation for universal male suffrage, an inquiry into the condition of the Belgian working class was ordered. The official reason for the investigation was the fact that France had denounced its commercial treaty with Belgium<sup>4</sup>. The inquiry was supposed to answer the question whether the Belgian working class was in a condition to struggle through an industrial crisis and possible wage reductions. However, in the parliamentary discussion that took place a month before the inquiry was ordered, the need for

industrial and labour statistics was stressed without any reference to the commercial problem, although the latter subject had been on the agenda since the end of 1890. Instead, it was argued that in an era when some tried to agitate the working class in order to promote universal suffrage, the government might want to prove how devoted it was to working-class interests<sup>5</sup>. The organisation of the budget inquiry put to work the newly created organs of class conciliation (*Conseils de l'Industrie et du Travail*) where these were most needed, and its results reassured both reformers and the working-class *élite* that Belgian capitalism was on the right track.

- 3 P. Scholliers and I also concluded that the inquiry of 1891 was a fine example of how world views held by reformist Leplaysian bureaucrats interacted with the statistical “evidence” they gathered. What the survey takers found and described was largely a projection of their “ideal” world: one populated by mainly prosperous, large nuclear families with a low proportion of working mothers and girls. On the basis of these “scientifically” established facts, women’s wage work was construed as a marginal, unproductive and superfluous activity, which was to be condemned not merely on moral grounds but also for reasons of efficiency.
- 4 The following discussion of the 1928-1929 family budget inquiry deals with the role of this particular type of labour statistics in post-war social policies. In contrast to what might have been expected, the inquiry was not used for specific political purposes, such as the compilation of a cost of living index, but as a means to demonstrate the long-term improvement of the standards of living of Belgian workers. My study focuses on the difficulties that the organisers of the inquiry had encountered and on the way in which these difficulties were concealed in Armand Julin’s presentation of the results. To this *grand commis de l’État* and *éminence grise* of Belgian statistics, demonstrating Belgian workers’ improved standards of living and the excellence of Belgian social statistics were different sides of the same coin.
  1. The Belgian budget inquiries of the 1920s
- 5 In the year following the end of the Great War, Belgium was characterised by strikes and social unrest. The loss of purchasing power as a result of galloping inflation was one of the grievances that triggered social agitation. In order to reduce social tension, the Belgian government, under the impulse of the socialist minister J. Wauters, introduced the principle of measuring inflation by compiling an index of retail prices<sup>6</sup>. In its issue of 1 May 1919 the Ministry of Labour’s periodical, the *Revue du Travail*, published its first price index<sup>7</sup>. In their negotiations, representatives of workers and employers could (but did not have to) use the price index to adapt wages to changing price levels. Conceived as a means of transforming potentially explosive class antagonism into negotiable matter, the index of retail prices itself, however, became the object of discussion. The inter-war period witnessed an endless debate as to how it should be calculated<sup>8</sup>.
- 6 One of the most important points of criticism, expressed from the very beginning of its existence, concerned the fact that the index of retail prices was a non-weighted average of prices of products, regardless of their relative importance in consumption<sup>9</sup>. As early as 1920, the Ministry tried to counter criticism by publishing a weighted index of food prices, based on the results of an inquiry into food consumption held in 1910 by the *Institut de Sociologie* of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*. The parallel development of this weighted index and the official index of retail prices was meant to reassure the interested parties that the latter was doing a fine job<sup>10</sup>.

- 7 Assuming that consumption patterns had changed since 1910 and given the fact that only food expenditure had been included in the pre-war investigation, a new budget inquiry was called for in 1921<sup>11</sup>. On the basis of the results of the inquiry into the budgets of 673 blue-collar workers' families and 175 petty-*bourgeois* families, a weighted index of the cost of living was compiled. Again, however, the purpose of the exercise was not to replace the index of retail prices by a weighted variant. On the contrary, the parallel evolution of the two was meant to show that it was justified to continue to use the former. The government and social partners preferred to stick to the non-weighted price index because its evolution was more stable. In view of the existing controversy, however, the weighted cost of living index had to provide the straight average with a quality label. Both indices were published in the *Revue du Travail*<sup>12</sup>.
- 8 In the light of widespread inflation, calculating cost of living indices was not limited to Belgium. Budget inquiries were organised in Denmark (1922), the United States (1918-1919), Japan (1919-1920), New Zealand (1919), Norway (1918-1919), the Netherlands (1917, 1918-1919), Finland (1920-1921), the Soviet Union (1922), the United Kingdom (1918), Ireland (1922), Sweden (1916-1918, 1920, 1923) and Switzerland (1921)<sup>13</sup>. In the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s budget inquiries were conducted in some thirty countries<sup>14</sup>.
- 9 The *International Labour Office* was a strong promoter of this kind of exercise. International comparison of the cost of living was one of its preoccupations. In this respect, it continued the comparative work initiated by the British Board of Trade round the turn of the century<sup>15</sup>. The second international conference of labour statisticians (1925) voted a resolution recommending countries to conduct a budget inquiry as soon as the post-war economic situation had improved and, if possible, the inquiry was to take place before the end of 1928<sup>16</sup>.
- 10 By 1928 these conditions had certainly been met in Belgium. The Belgian franc had been stabilised, the government had successfully tackled the problem of unsecured debt and the economy was booming. The recommendation of the conference of labour statisticians was probably the main reason for the organisation of the Belgian budget inquiry of 1928-1929<sup>17</sup>. In contrast to what might have been expected, given the precedent of 1921, its outcome was not used for adapting the weightings of the cost of living index to changes in consumption patterns<sup>18</sup>.
- 11 Neither the budget inquiry of 1921 nor the one of 1928-1929 therefore interfered directly in the emerging machinery of institutionalised industrial relations<sup>19</sup>. The weighted index of the cost of living, compiled on the basis of the inquiry of 1921 and meant to "correct" the index of retail prices, was never used as such. The main use of the inquiry of 1928-1929, so I will argue, was ideological. It demonstrated:
- "que ce sont les familles à revenus modestes qui ont le plus largement bénéficié de l'augmentation de bien-être qu'on a enregistrée au cours des quarante dernières années"*<sup>20</sup>.
2. Information sources on the budget inquiry of 1928-1929
- 12 There is no information available on the individual budgets gathered in the inquiry of 1928-1929, but we have two unpublished typewritten reports at our disposal dealing with its organisation (see further). They were found in the "Household budgets" section of the Belgian *Institut National de Statistique*. These internal reports received no publicity. For decades the only sources of information on the results of the inquiry were two short articles by Max Gottschalk and four contributions by Armand Julin, the *éminence grise* of Belgian statistics<sup>21</sup>. Julin's most extensive article on the inquiry of

1928-1929 was published in the journal of the *Institut International de Statistique*<sup>22</sup>. He had presented this account during the London session of 1934, in the section dealing with social statistics. A summary of his presentation to the London conference was reproduced in the periodical *Revue du Travail* of the *Ministère du Travail et de la Prévoyance Sociale*<sup>23</sup>.

- 13 The burden of the articles by both Gottschalk and Julin is clear: all six stress the tremendous improvement in the standard of living of Belgian workers. Max Gottschalk, a collaborator of the *Institut de Sociologie* of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, hardly commented on the fact that the inquiry had been conducted in a period of great economic prosperity and that since then things might have deteriorated<sup>24</sup>. In two of his articles Julin mentioned the current crisis without really going into the matter<sup>25</sup>. In a third contribution, partly reproduced in a fourth one, Armand Julin explicitly addressed the question of the effects of the economic crisis and of unemployment<sup>26</sup>. The improvement of the standard of living had perhaps been halted, he argued, but never again would the dark days of the 1840s return.
- 14 Quite another tone from that of Julin's and Gottschalk's contributions was apparent in the two typewritten reports on the budget inquiry of 1928-1929. Here there are no comparisons with former investigations or appreciation of the evolution of the standard of living, but rather dry reporting, partly of the results and partly of the organisation of the inquiry. However, the typewritten reports (a French/Dutch text and a report that only exists in French) are undated.
- 15 The report that is available only in French is 26 pages long and was written by V. Lion, a collaborator of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. It was clearly written after the Second World War, since the commission and sub-commission mentioned in the title of the report were established only in 1945 and 1946 respectively<sup>27</sup>. It is much more difficult to date the more extensive French/Dutch reports, running to some 100 pages each. It is possible that they too were compiled after the Second World War (see Appendix 1). This does not imply, however, that the information they contain was previously unavailable. Quite a few tables in the Dutch/French reports are identical to those in Julin's contribution<sup>28</sup>. Julin's article, however, did not include the tables illustrating the methodological problems encountered by the organisers. Armand Julin himself is not very clear as to the material he used. In a footnote he refers to an *Enquête sur les budgets de familles ouvrières et de la petite bourgeoisie 1928-1929*, (inédit) without any further details<sup>29</sup>.

### 3. Armand Julin: statistics serving the aim of harmonious class relations

- 16 Given the prestige of their author and the scarcity of other information sources, Armand Julin's articles largely determined how the inquiry of 1928-1929 was presented. Some biographical details with regard to Julin therefore appear appropriate.
- 17 For students of the 1891 budget inquiry, Armand Julin is an old acquaintance. Indeed, we meet him as its most authoritative commentator<sup>30</sup>. Educated at the University of Liège, where he studied law and political and administrative sciences, he was a pupil of Émile de Laveleye. The latter was a professor of political economy, *Kathedersozialist* and member of the Liberal party. Émile de Laveleye rejected *laissez-faire* but recognised the benefits of competition and was in favour of state intervention in the social field<sup>31</sup>. Armand Julin worked under de Laveleye's guidance in 1889-1890 and his first publication dealt with wages in the Belgian mining industry between 1810 and 1889<sup>32</sup>.

- 18 In November 1890, Armand Julin joined the industrial directorate of the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Industrie et des Travaux Publics*, the administration that organised and published the budget inquiry of 1891<sup>33</sup>. Despite its Leplaysian inspiration, the latter, as its name clearly states, inquired into the budgets of 188 working-class families and made no attempt to produce a series of Leplaysian monographs, which would have implied intensive observation of a very limited number of families.
- 19 Belgian Leplaysians were not the only followers to propose a pragmatic adaptation of Le Play's legacy. In France, the project of the so-called orthodox Leplaysians was quietly revised in the 1890s. The Leplaysian monograph was gradually replaced by statistics, and methods were no longer explored within the *Société d'Économie Sociale*, but in the newly created ministerial department, the *Office du Travail*, whose function was to inquire into the state of labour and the condition of the working class. In the *Office du Travail*, Leplaysians and the French state apparatus joined forces<sup>34</sup>. The Belgian Leplaysians followed the same track. They were well represented in the administration of industry and between 1884 and 1899 they provided the catholic ministers (the catholic party was in power from 1884 to 1914) who had industry and labour within their brief. The creation of a separate *Ministère de l'Industrie et du Travail* in 1895 was largely due to Leplaysian efforts<sup>35</sup>.
- 20 A. Julin formed an almost archetypal example of the Leplaysian at the service of the state, exchanging the monograph for statistical calculations. In 1890, the year he joined the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Industrie et des Travaux Publics*, he was admitted as a member of the Leplaysian *Société d'Économie Sociale*<sup>36</sup>. In 1895, Julin produced his own Leplaysian monograph on a Liège metal worker and in the Leplaysian periodical *La Réforme Sociale* he published extensive discussions of the Belgian family budgets collected in 1891 and (rather haphazardly) in 1886<sup>37</sup>. Gradually, however, he built up a reputation as a statistical expert. He directed statistical projects at the Department of Industry and Labour, published on the subject, and in the inter-war years he taught statistics at the universities of Ghent and Liège<sup>38</sup>. In a textbook on statistics from 1928, Armand Julin emphasised the difference between the Leplaysian monograph and statistics. In the former, he argued, mass observation and representativeness were lacking. Moreover Le Play's ambition was to establish universal truths and this dogmatism ran counter to the statistical spirit<sup>39</sup>.
- 21 In 1913, Armand Julin became head of the *Office du Travail* (the name was identical to that of its counterpart in France), a part of the Department of Industry and Labour that carried out its inquiries and which he had joined in 1895. He reached the highest administrative post of the Department in 1919, when he became its secretary general<sup>40</sup>. Despite the fact that he had become the administrative head of the Department, Julin was still involved in some of its statistical work. With regard to the statistics section of the directorate of labour, the *Almanach Royal* mentioned that "*le secrétaire général dirige personnellement ce service*"<sup>41</sup>. For Julin's successors this was no longer the case.
- 22 During the Great War, Armand Julin worked on a theoretical treatise of statistics, in which the calculation of indices occupied a prominent place. So it was to him that the socialist Minister J. Wauters turned for the calculation of the index of retail prices in 1919<sup>42</sup>. The issue of index calculation would preoccupy Julin all through the inter-war period. Although he retired in May 1930, he became chairman of the *Commission de l'Index*, a commission set up in 1935 in order to reassure the critics of the way in which the index of retail prices was calculated<sup>43</sup>. On the occasion of his retirement, the

catholic minister of industry and labour, Hendrik Heyman, characterised him as a “savant statisticien dont les chiffres, comme les procédés scientifiques dont ils émanent, pouvaient impunément affronter la critique”<sup>44</sup>.

- 23 Armand Julin’s renown was not confined to Belgium. He was elected a member of the *Institut International de Statistique* in 1895, becoming its vice-president in 1929 and its president in 1936. Between 1921 and 1931, he was the Belgian delegate to the conferences of the *International Labour Office*. Julin was twice awarded the Heuschling price for statistics and he was an honorary member of numerous statistical societies in different countries<sup>45</sup>.
- 24 Armand Julin can be regarded as a technocrat, who placed his expertise in techniques of social investigation at the disposal of a state apparatus whose cautious interventions seemed to provide the best guarantee for harmonious class relations. He was not only the father of the index of retail prices, but also one of its most authoritative and passionate defenders, which is not surprising given the strong symbolic value in Belgian industrial relations of a credible index figure<sup>46</sup>. Harmonious social relations were probably not Julin’s only motive for defending the index of retail prices. Since the index was conceived and developed within “his” administration of labour statistics, defending the index was tantamount to standing up for the prestige and reliability of the administration. It seems that both these considerations were present in Julin’s presentations of the budget inquiry of 1928-1929. Not only did he strive to document the advantageous social effects of Belgian capitalism, but he also emphasised Belgium’s excellence in the field of social statistics.
- 25 The detached tone of scientific reporting that characterised Julin’s extensive article on the inquiry of 1928-1929 published in the journal of the *Institut International de Statistique* was absent from his other contributions on the subject, which focused on the standard of living of the Belgian worker and not on the budget inquiry as such. Julin drew comparisons with 1891 and the 1840s. Colourful details of investigations conducted in the 1840s were cited, illustrating the terrible conditions in which the Belgian proletariat had lived<sup>47</sup>. The message was clear: even those who were suffering from the present economic crisis could hardly imagine how bad things had been back in the 1840s.
- 26 Parts of the latter article were reproduced and provided with additional material (mostly on the 19th century) in a discussion of the condition of the Belgian working class between 1830 and 1930<sup>48</sup>. Again progress was emphasised, but the tone was less self-assured. This was understandable, perhaps, since the article was published at the end of the year in which the Belgian government had been forced to devalue the Belgian franc by 28%. Given the importance attached to a strong currency, this was regarded as a clear defeat after five years of deflationary policies. The quality of Belgian social statistics, however, remained uncontested, although Julin did formulate some minor critical remarks on 19th century (budget) inquiries. One has the impression, though, that the latter were merely mentioned in order to stress how impeccable the organisation of the inquiries of 1921 and 1928-1929 had been<sup>49</sup>.
- 27 Time and again, the Belgian budget inquiries were used to back up Julin’s argument. Demonstrating Belgian workers’ improved standard of living and the excellence of Belgian social statistics were therefore interlocking exercises. In this respect, it was important for Julin to convince his audience of the solidity of the material on which he based his conclusions.



### 3. The concept of representativeness

- 28 Armand Julin's presentation of the results of the 1928-1929 inquiry in the *Bulletin de l'Institut International de Statistique* opens by situating this most recent exercise in the long and glorious tradition of Belgian (budget) inquiries starting in 1843. The quantitative richness of these inquiries is stressed. A comparison is made with Germany (1927), a far larger country, but where a proportionally smaller number of cases were collated than in Belgium<sup>50</sup>. On a second occasion, anticipating criticism of the relatively small number of white-collar workers involved in the inquiry of 1928-1929, Armand Julin repeated the comparison with Germany and extended it with a reference to the United States, again a large country with a proportionally smaller number of cases than Belgium. "*Sans conteste, la proportion est bien plus satisfaisante en Belgique*", Armand Julin adds with satisfaction<sup>51</sup>.
- 29 After assuring his readers that the sample is large enough, Armand Julin affirms explicitly that the inquiry was conducted according to "... *'la méthode représentative' dans laquelle on peut se contenter d'un nombre restreint d'échantillons pour représenter assez exactement le total*"<sup>52</sup>. To us, such arguments seem self-evident. At the time, however, representativeness and sample taking were relatively new concepts that had only gradually been accepted since the turn of the century<sup>53</sup>.
- 30 Nowhere in the instructions, publication and comments of the budget inquiry of 1891, did the word "representativeness" appear. In Julin's comment on the inquiry of 1928-1929 and the typewritten reports describing the organisation of the investigation, the notion was not only explicitly used, but it was even presented as an ideal.
- 31 It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that the survey takers of 1891 were completely indifferent in this respect. In the homothetic relationship embodied in the concept of representativeness, the important question revolves around the issue of whether the part measured can legitimately stand for the whole. It would appear that the survey takers and commentators of 1891 were scarcely less convinced than their successors of 1928-1929 that the part measured should be able to stand for the whole, i.e. the standard of living and the way of life of the Belgian working class. The major difference resided in the way in which the measured part was conceived.
- 32 For the Leplaysians who developed and undertook the inquiry of 1891, the part measured had to consist of a collection of "typical cases". In this respect, they were the inheritors of A. Quetelet's holistic worldview, since "typical cases" formed the contingent manifestations of the one divine whole<sup>54</sup>. For every region and industrial sector, the inquiry of 1891 investigated a typical household: *types moyens* who embodied "*la condition la plus fréquente*". In practice, families were selected in the light of their resemblance to the average cases that the organisers had in mind<sup>55</sup>. They showed a preference for large families whose breadwinners earned higher than average wages, lived in the most industrialised parts of the country and were often occupied in the best paid sectors<sup>56</sup>.
- 33 The concept of representativeness as such was introduced a few years later by Anders Kiaer, a Norwegian statistician, who presented a paper on representative sampling to the Bern meeting of the *Institut International de Statistique* in 1895. As opposed to the Leplaysians, Kiaer did not aim to describe "typical cases" but a "variety of cases". He wanted to give a fair view, not of a putative average, but of *la variété des cas*<sup>57</sup>. The newly named representative method met with scathing criticism from the adherents of full coverage: no calculations when observations can be made, was their motto<sup>58</sup>.



- 34 At the Berlin session in 1903, a resolution was adopted acknowledging that a correct application of the representative method allowed generalisations. The report delivered by the Danish representative Adolph Jensen at the Rome session in 1925, revealed, however, that the representative method was still far from self-evident and that statisticians were still struggling with the question of how to compose a representative sample<sup>59</sup>. Between 1925 and 1934, the debate focused on the choice between either purposive sampling (“*le choix judicieux*”) or random sampling<sup>60</sup>. In 1934, the debate was concluded by the victory of the latter. The paper delivered by the Polish statistician Jerzy Neyman looked at Gini’s unfortunate experience with purposive sampling and turned most statisticians away from this sampling method. The combination of random sampling and stratified samples of the population became the orthodox method<sup>61</sup>.
- 35 At first sight the former Leplaysian Armand Julin appears to have assimilated these latest developments. He refers explicitly to notions of representativeness and random choice (see further), two qualities that the inquiry of 1928-1929 was supposed to have. On the other hand, he stresses “*la continuité de pensée et de méthode indispensable à la comparaison scientifique*” between the inquiries of 1891, 1921 and 1928-1929<sup>62</sup>. A belief in the continuity between the Leplaysian exercise of 1891 and the “modern” examples of *la méthode représentative* of 1921 and 1928-1929 was a precondition for Armand Julin’s comparisons over time.
- 36 Remarkable is the fact that Armand Julin defined the concept of representativeness merely in terms of the size of the sample and that in several respects he completely neglected the problem of its composition. This is striking, given the importance attached to different methods of sample taking during the Rome conference of the *Institut International de Statistique* in 1925. It also contrasts with the unpublished Dutch/French reports that devote substantial space to this aspect (see further).
4. The problem of non-response
- 37 The organisers of the inquiry of 1928-1929 wanted 2,500 families to contribute to the inquiry into food consumption, while 400 of these would also provide information on other expenses. From the experience with the 1921 inquiry, the organisers knew that quite a few participants would be lost in the course of the operation: only 56.5% of the 1,500 families involved in the investigation of 1921 had returned the complete information<sup>63</sup>.
- 38 Although Julin also drew attention to the problem of non-response, he never mentioned how many families were “lost” in the course of the inquiry. The typewritten reports were quite explicit about it<sup>64</sup>. For the inquiry into expenditure on food which was held for two weeks in each season of the year, starting in May 1928 and ending in April 1929, the first period of observation ended with 54% of the forms returned. The second period of observation concluded with 47% completed forms, the third one with 43%, and the fourth one with 30%. After visits to the defecting families, some additional forms were returned: eventually 41% of the forms were completed. The inquiry into non-food expenditure, running from April 1928 to April 1929, required fewer participants but they had to co-operate for a whole year: 173 out of 400 families (43.2%) completed the exercise<sup>65</sup>.
- 39 In order to create some enthusiasm for the whole operation, the Ministry of Labour had provided some incentives<sup>66</sup>. The *agents enquêteurs* were paid 20 francs for every form returned for the inquiry into spending on food and 200 francs for the whole of the inquiry into other expenditure. The families that co-operated were attracted by the

promise that a sum of 50,000 Belgian francs would be distributed by lottery among the 100 families who completed the exercise.

- 40 As the figures for non-response show, the possibility of financial reward does not seem to have convinced all the families concerned that it was worth the fuss and the intrusion in their private affairs. To the organisers of the inquiry, this did not come as a surprise. In their report they stated that the Belgian experience of 1928-1929 simply confirmed what was already known in Belgium and abroad: it was very difficult to convince families to participate and to continue to participate in such investigations<sup>67</sup>.
- 41 Investigating families' income and expenditure was a delicate matter, as the organisers of the inquiry acknowledged. Besides the promise of a financial reward, another way of overcoming families' reluctance was by relying on people who would be trusted by the families. This procedure was not new. In the budget inquiry of 1891 for instance, the members of the *Conseils de l'Industrie et du Travail* were required to obtain the information from a working-class family known to them personally<sup>68</sup>. The inquiry by Louis Varlez into the incomes of Ghent working-class families around 1900 was carried out with the help of the local stewards of the trade unions<sup>69</sup>. The inquiry by the British Board of Trade in 1908 into the budgets of Belgian working-class families was also conducted with the unions' help<sup>70</sup>.
- 42 For the 1921 inquiry, "*des enquêteurs habitant la région et parfaitement au courant du genre de vie des catégories sociales à étudier*", were engaged<sup>71</sup>. It appears that most of these were schoolteachers<sup>72</sup>. Persuading families to participate and to fill in the forms truthfully was something that required tact, skill and moral authority, according to the organisers of the 1928-1929 inquiry<sup>73</sup>. For this, the inquiry relied on the co-operation of directors of social organisations, members of the boards of sickness benefit funds, co-operatives, unions, teachers, priests, visiting nurses, inspectors of labour legislation and the agents who collected retail prices for the calculation of the price index<sup>74</sup>. In his statistics textbook of 1928, Armand Julin mentioned only the delegates from the socialist, Christian and independent sickness benefit funds<sup>75</sup>.
- 43 These *agents enquêteurs* had to convince families that the results of the investigation would be published in generalised terms and that individual situations would be unrecognisable. This did not always help, however. Armand Julin speaks of "*une répugnance marquée à livrer, même sous l'anonymat, le secret de leur vie de famille*"<sup>76</sup>. The investigators were also required to stress that the inquiry would not serve as a basis for new taxes or would not give rise to wage cuts<sup>77</sup>.
- 44 The *agents enquêteurs* were given some autonomy in the organisation of their work. They were the ones who had to select families among those who were prepared to lend themselves to the exercise<sup>78</sup>. They were also allowed to decide when exactly the four seasonal inquiries into food expenditure had to take place. The most appropriate moment had to be chosen, taking into account the families' mood, the families' time budget and local customs. Where possible a "normal" two-week period was picked, e.g. a fortnight without festivities that might entail extraordinary expenditure occasioned by family reunions<sup>79</sup>.

##### 5. The composition of the representative sample

- 45 As opposed to the inquiries of the 19th century that focused on blue-collar workers, the inquiries of 1921 and 1928-1929 explicitly included petty-*bourgeois* families. Both in the typewritten reports and in Julin's and Gottschalk's contributions, this was regarded as self-evident. No comment was made on the fact that in the Belgian tradition of family

budget inquiries, this had not always been the case. It appears, however, that Belgian social policy, hitherto obsessed with the threat from labour, had at last “discovered” the petty *bourgeoisie*, regarded as a model of stability and therefore not a matter for urgent preoccupation. Before the First World War, complaints about the crisis of the petty *bourgeoisie* and its increased electoral importance since the changes in the suffrage (1893), led to a slight increase of interest in their fate<sup>80</sup>. In the post-war period, the wage-earning petty *bourgeoisie* was affected by the question of the price index.

- 46 The Dutch/French typewritten report stated that of the 2,500 families whose co-operation was sought, 75% had to belong to the working class and 25% had to be members of the petty *bourgeoisie*<sup>81</sup>. Lion's report simply took note of the fact that the proportion was the same as in the inquiry of 1921, but no other explanation was given<sup>82</sup>. The short presentation of the inquiry of 1921 does not give any clarifications either<sup>83</sup>. As the petty-*bourgeois* households were slightly less zealous in returning their forms on food expenditure, the proportion of working-class families rose to 78,3% for this part of the inquiry, but it fell to 67% in the part of the investigation dealing with other spending<sup>84</sup>.
- 47 Nowhere in the discussion of the inquiry did anyone bother to define a working-class family. The term was simply circumscribed with the words “*ménages d'ouvriers de l'industrie*”<sup>85</sup>. Petty-*bourgeois* families were “*bourgeois à revenus modestes*”<sup>86</sup> or in Dutch “*klein-burgers met bescheiden inkomen*”<sup>87</sup>. According to the typewritten reports these included white-collar workers' families with a maximum annual income of 24,000 francs and retailers and industrialists employing a maximum of 10 blue or white-collar workers<sup>88</sup>. Farmers were explicitly excluded, given the difficulties in calculating their expenditure on food. Neither the unpublished reports nor Armand Julin himself specified what the composition of the group of petty-*bourgeois* families was exactly. Julin and Lion simply stated that most of the petty-*bourgeois* budgets came from white-collar workers<sup>89</sup>.
- 48 The family was the inquiry's unit of observation. It was defined as the assembly of persons united by family ties, living together and usually taking their meals together<sup>90</sup>. Families with lodgers were excluded. Collaborators were instructed not to bother about the families' composition, given the fact that, at least where food consumption was concerned, results would be presented in units of consumption, the so-called *quet*<sup>91</sup>. Survey takers were invited to address mostly *familles normales*, defined as families with one or more children and without other dependants<sup>92</sup>.
- 49 Families were also best chosen among “*les familles originaires de la localité ou des environs, de façon à répondre au type moyen des ménages de la même catégorie professionnelle ou sociale*”<sup>93</sup>. Here we recognise the Leplaysian ambition to gather information representing the condition of the alleged “average” worker. In his 1928 textbook on statistics, Julin was rather critical of this quest for *la famille moyenne* which he identified as a Leplaysian method that had nothing to do with statistics<sup>94</sup>. The inquiry carried out by his department in that same year, however, did exactly that: selecting “average” families.
- 50 Armand Julin's article defined representativeness mostly in terms of the absolute number of selected cases. The typewritten reports reveal more specific selection criteria:

“ces ménages devaient être choisis en tenant compte de la répartition géographique des industries, de la densité de la population et des particularités locales”<sup>95</sup>.

- 51 Where blue-collar workers were concerned, the inquiry had to reflect the relative importance of the number of workers employed by the different industries, according to the industrial census of 1910 and the industrial inquiry of 1926. The distribution of the number of workers per province in 1910 and 1926 was to dictate the geographical selection of families<sup>96</sup>. For the selection of petty-bourgeois families, the organisers admitted that they could only attempt to reflect the demographic strength of the Belgian provinces<sup>97</sup>. As early as the 1921 inquiry, an attempt at representativeness had been formulated. The brief details from this investigation do not reveal, though, whether any sectoral or geographical weighting was used in order to compose the sample<sup>98</sup>.
- 52 How exactly the required distribution of cases was calculated is unclear. A comparison of the organisers' "ideal" distribution with the results of the industrial inquiry of 1926 shows that they effectively translated the relative importance of the provinces as regards industrial employment and that they more or less succeeded in taking the sectoral distribution into account. Overall, one has the impression that the survey takers of 1928-1929 were aiming at producing some sort of proportionate stratified sample, in order to assure that the different strata of the Belgian working-class population (by province and by industry) would be correctly presented<sup>99</sup>. Within these strata, however, the *agents enquêteurs* were led not by random sampling, but rather by a variant of Leplaysian selection. It seems that the inquiry of 1928-1929 showed a mixture of "old" and "new" sampling methods and that the survey takers themselves had anything but a clear view on the matter.
- 53 In this respect, the international conferences of labour statisticians were not of much help. According to Armand Julin, the inquiry had carried out the recommendations of the third conference of labour statisticians (1926)<sup>100</sup>. Their selection advice, however, appears to have been very general:
- "Le choix devrait porter sur un nombre suffisant de familles appartenant à des classes différentes de revenu, des groupes de la population pris en considération ainsi qu'à des industries et régions différentes"*<sup>101</sup>.
- 54 While the *Institut International de Statistique* appears to have been strongly preoccupied by the subject of sample taking, labour statisticians seem to have had rather a relaxed attitude to the whole matter. The report on the methodology and practice of family budgets, prepared for the 1926 Geneva conference, remarked casually:
- "bien souvent, on ne discerne aucune méthode précise dans la manière dont les familles sont choisies"*<sup>102</sup>.
- 55 In their world-wide survey of family budget inquiries published almost ten years later, Williams and Zimmerman pointed out that the adherents of the statistical approach to family budgets had criticised the Leplaysians for choosing supposedly typical families, while they were using unsystematic selection methods themselves<sup>103</sup>. In his methodological discussion of family budget inquiries, held in some thirty countries in the 1920s and 1930s, Morse Woodbury declared that, although the question was fundamental to claims of representativeness, most inquiries gave little or no information on their selection procedures<sup>104</sup>.
6. Geographical, sectoral and demographic composition  
of the budget inquiry of 1928-1929
- 56 It appears that the organisers' "ideal" composition was not reflected at all in the inquiry's final results. The goal of representativeness, as defined by the survey takers,

was reached neither from the sectoral nor from the geographical point of view. One of the major shortcomings of the budget inquiry of 1891, i.e. its overrepresentation of the industrialised Walloon part of the country, was once again apparent.

Table 1. “Ideal” and effective geographical distribution of blue-collar workers’ families<sup>105</sup>

<i>Provinces</i>	<i>inq. food exp. « ideal »</i>	<i>809 cases effective</i>	<i>inq. other exp. « ideal »</i>	<i>116 cases effective</i>
Antwerp	12.3%	12.7%	11.7%	10.3%
Brabant	17.1%	14.1%	16.7%	15.5%
West-Flanders	5.8%	2.5%	6.7%	3.4%
East-Flanders	13.3%	6.7%	13.3%	10.3%
Hainault	25.9%	29.5%	25.0%	23.3%
Liège	18.1%	30.0%	18.3%	32.7%
Limburg	2.1%	0.5%	2.0%	0.8%
Luxembourg	1.1%	1.2%	1.3%	0.8%
Namur	4.3%	2.8%	5.0%	2.6%

- 57 The industrialised provinces of Hainault and Liège, which were supposed to cover 44% of the families in the part of the inquiry dealing with food consumption, in fact included 59.5% of the participants. Within the province of Liège, the single Liège *arrondissement*, containing the city of Liège itself, provided 79% of the province’s contribution. This means that one single Belgian *arrondissement* (out of 41) provided 23.6% of the households participating in the “national” budget inquiry. One may add that the organisers’ “ideal” distribution was itself already somewhat biased. It was based on the industrial inquiry of 1926 which covered only firms employing ten workers and more. This led to an overrepresentation of firms in the *provinces* of Liège and Hainault, whose size was generally bigger<sup>106</sup>.
- 58 Another characteristic of the 1891 budget inquiry was also reproduced in the 1928-1929 inquiry, viz. the overrepresentation of heavy industries. Of course this partly reflected the disproportionate presence of the industrialised Walloon provinces. Mining, metal, quarries and glass, typical of these regions, provided 54% of the cases instead of the requested 39%. More craft-based trades and the textile industry were underrepresented.

Table 2. “Ideal” and effective sectoral distribution of blue-collar workers’ families<sup>107</sup>

sectors	inq. food exp. « ideal »	809 cases effective	inq. other exp. « ideal »	116 cases effective
fishery	0.5%	-	0.7%	-
mines	14.1%	16.7%	13.3%	13.8%
quarries	3.5%	4.6%	3.3%	3.5%
metal	18.7%	29.4%	18.2%	29.3%
pottery	2.7%	5.4%	2.7%	4.3%
glass	2.7%	3.3%	3.3%	2.6%
chemical ind.	4.3%	2.7%	3.3%	2.6%
food ind.	6.4%	4.4%	6.7%	6.0%
textiles	12.8%	7.8%	13.3%	10.3%
clothing ind.	5.8%	2.2%	5.0%	0.9%
building ind.	5.8%	6.1%	6.7%	6.9%
wood & furniture	5.8%	3.8%	6.7%	4.3%
leather ind.	3.2%	1.7%	3.3%	1.7%
tobacco ind.	1.1%	0.2%	1.7%	-
paper ind.	1.1%	1.9%	1.7%	4.3%
printing	1.6%	1.9%	1.7%	2.6%
art & precision	1.9%	0.7%	1.7%	-
transport	8.0%	7.2%	6.7%	6.9%

- 59 The geographical distribution of petty-bourgeois families was also unbalanced. The “ideal” distribution would have effectively reflected the demographic strength of the provinces according to the population census of 1920, but in the final outcome one quarter of the participating households appears to have been living in the province of Liège.

Table 3. “Ideal” and effective geographical distribution of petty-bourgeois families<sup>108</sup>

	inq. food exp. « ideal »	224 cases effective	inq. other exp. « ideal »	57 cases effective
Antwerp	14.4%	17.0%	10.0%	5.3%
Brabant	20.8%	15.5%	20.0%	24.5%
West Flanders	11.2%	3.6%	10.0%	3.5%
East Flanders	14.4%	17.0%	15.0%	12.2%
Hainault	16.0%	14.3%	15.0%	15.8%
Liège	12.0%	25.0%	15.0%	28.1%
Limbourg	4.0%	-	5.0%	-
Luxembourg	2.4%	3.6%	5.0%	5.3%
Namur	4.8%	4.0%	5.0%	5.3%

- 60 The organisers of the budget inquiry of 1928-1929 intended to gather a sample that would reflect sectoral and regional differences within the Belgian working class. The use of census data as a basis for the composition of their sample illustrates that they were familiar with the most recent methods in sample taking. The tone of the comments on this topic published in the first half of the 1930s reveals that this approach was still far from self-evident<sup>109</sup>.
- 61 Despite these efforts, the budget inquiry of 1928-1929 appears to have been no less biased than its 19th century forerunners. In fact, this outcome was not surprising. Organisers relied heavily on the zeal of their local agents and their relationship to local workers. Organisers may have had an “ideal” distribution of cases in mind, but



depended in practice entirely on the local situation as far as the end result was concerned. The unpublished reports acknowledged this:

*“On ne peut oublier, en outre, que la répartition des ménages, au point de vue régional, ou au point de vue professionnel, dépend en grande partie du degré de dévouement et d’activité des enquêteurs, de la plus ou moins bonne disposition des familles à se prêter aux investigations, du degré d’aptitude des ménagères choisies pour tenir les comptes de ménage imposés”<sup>110</sup>.*

- 62 The unpublished reports fully acknowledged that the proposed distribution of cases had not been reached at all. Immediately following this *confession*, however, it was argued that there was no reason to split hairs. Downplaying the original goal, the report suggested that, apart from the *nombres fictifs ayant servi de base au travail*, the inquiry might be considered representative of the way of life of the Belgian working class<sup>111</sup>. That the organisers of the inquiry should first attempt to produce a stratified sample and then, after failing to do so, should finally decide that this was not so important after all, is again symptomatic of the pragmatic attitude of labour statisticians in this respect.
- 63 In his account of the inquiry, Armand Julin did not mention that the organisers had been confronted, in their own terms, with a problem of representativeness. Although he acknowledged the problem of non-response and even complained about it, he never alluded to the fact that this might have influenced the composition of the sample. In fact, Julin remained rather discrete as to the methodological issues of the whole inquiry. He did not mention the strong geographical bias of the investigation. Bending the truth as to what had been achieved, Julin asserted that the branches of industry were represented in the inquiry *selon leur importance*<sup>112</sup>.
- 64 More remarkable still is Julin’s attempt to see as an advantage what had in fact been considered a serious setback by the organisers, viz. the fact that results did not match the “ideal” blueprint. Julin’s magic word in this attempt was *le hasard (chance)*. This referred to the new method of sample taking, i.e. random sampling, and the suggestion was that the Belgian statisticians had in fact applied *la méthode représentative* in which *le hasard* played an important part<sup>113</sup>. On three successive occasions, Julin argued, “*chance*” (i.e. a random selection) had taken place. First of all, survey takers had complete liberty as to what blue or white-collar worker’s family they would choose, in the second place a lot of families had failed to complete the survey and, finally, the administration eliminated those families who had not provided adequate information<sup>114</sup>!
- 65 Armand Julin did not seem to be aware of the fact that the principle of random selection had not been respected because selection was done by human choice and “representative” cases had been chosen. In his 1928 textbook on statistics, however, Armand Julin appeared to be rather critical of any intervention that might arbitrarily influence the composition of the sample<sup>115</sup>. Moreover, the element of random selection, if any, was bound to be undermined as a result of the fact that better-off families had more chance of being selected to participate in such exercises. They were more likely to be members of the same organisations as the survey takers and they were less likely to be eliminated for not filling in the forms properly. Statisticians of the 1920s were already aware of the fact that *housewives who undertake to keep an account will as a rule have a greater sense and understanding of economics than the general run of housewives; and these individual qualities will influence more or less the manner in which the family distributes its expenditures*<sup>116</sup>. In contrast to his light-hearted comments on the problem of non-



response with regard to the 1928-1929 budget inquiry, Julin acknowledged that lack of responses undermined the whole idea of random sampling in a methodological article written in 1930 and published two years later<sup>117</sup>.

- 66 In the 1891 budget inquiry, combining various criteria led to the selection of large families: the average number of persons per household was 6.2 while the Belgian average was 4.5<sup>118</sup>. This bias towards large families was less pronounced in the 1928/29 survey. Here we find 4.4 persons per family in the blue-collar households and 3.7 persons per family in petty-*bourgeois* families, while the Belgian average was 3.4. Apart from the proposal to select “normal” families with children and no other dependants, the organisers did not provide any explicit instructions. Although the nuclear family remained predominant (78.0% of cases in blue-collar workers’ families and 65.2% in petty-*bourgeois* families), we find a significant number of couples without children and “normal” couples with children but with other dependants. The fact that organisers and their co-operators had so many difficulties in convincing people to continue to participate in the investigation might have made them less demanding.
- 67 As opposed to his discretion with regard to the geographical and sectoral composition of the sample, Julin explicitly addressed some of its demographic features, such as the numbers of children in the selected families. In order to assure the reader of the representativeness of the sample, he compared the number of children per family with the statistics with regard to families receiving family allowances: the two appeared to be a perfect match<sup>119</sup>. Comparison with the results of the population census of 1920 confirms that the inquiry adequately reflected the distribution of families with children, but that childless families were underrepresented. In 1920, 27.3% of married couples had no living children, while married couples participating in the inquiry appeared to be childless in only 13.4% of cases<sup>120</sup>.

#### 7. The delicate matter of income sources

- 68 Information on families’ resources contained in budget inquiries have been used to reconstruct family income strategies and to disentangle the factors that determined members’ contributions to household resources. A family’s income is a very sensitive issue, however, and very often people were (and are) reluctant to reveal how they acquire it and how high it is exactly. The observations on the organisation of the inquiry of 1928-1929 give an idea of the difficulties the organisers had to face.
- 69 Families participating in the inquiry into food expenditure carried out for two weeks in each of the four seasons were given a 14-pages *carnet de ménage* for each period of observation, in which they were supposed to write down daily what their expenses were. The cover of the booklet was reserved for information regarding the composition of the family, occupations of its members, address and the family’s income sources. Those who also participated in the inquiry into other expenses, received a *simple carnet de notes* for each season of the year. Day after day, the page on the right was to register income, the page on the left expenditure. To the organisers, it was obvious that the housewife would be the one keeping the books<sup>121</sup>.
- 70 The *agents enquêteurs* had to make sure that the entries were exact and were filled in on a regular basis. They had to check carefully whether the earnings of all family members were registered, and that additional resources and income in kind were not forgotten<sup>122</sup>. In order to keep the *agents enquêteurs* alert they were given a list of income sources a family might possibly have<sup>123</sup>.

- 71 During the processing of the data, doubts arose with regard to the accuracy of some of the income figures. The *agents enquêteurs* were asked to check the information. The housewives concerned were invited to explain the anomalies. The seasonal differences in income could in some cases be explained by wage increases. Unemployment, local festivities, strikes, bad weather, overtime and sickness were also responsible for some of the divergences<sup>124</sup>.
- 72 In some cases co-operating housewives had overlooked certain supplementary resources, such as family allowances, pensions, insurance, income earned in a small business, a second job or overtime, free coal and free lodgings<sup>125</sup>. These omissions were not merely accidental. It appears that families had few problems revealing what they ate, but providing information on their overall resources was a more delicate matter.
- “Un grand nombre de familles qui avaient accepté assez facilement de se soumettre au contrôle de l'enquête alimentaire regimbèrent quand on a voulu des précisions sur leurs ressources. Même les hommes de confiance de leurs organisations syndicales, politiques ou religieuses échouèrent dans la tentative de vaincre cette obstination”,* Armand Julin complained<sup>126</sup>.
- 73 In general, the Dutch/French report concluded, income from wage labour was reported accurately<sup>127</sup>. When wages were unspecified or doubtful, survey takers compared them with wages registered for another season of the year or wages earned by members of the same occupation<sup>128</sup>. On the basis of such supplementary information, some of the budgets were “corrected”<sup>129</sup>.
- 74 When information on such items as family allowances, pensions or free lodgings was recorded in one of the four periods of observation, but missing in the others, the information was added if no changes in the situation of the family had occurred<sup>130</sup>. The same procedure was followed when in the supplementary inquiry into other expenditures, an investigation lasting for a whole year, these sources of income had been omitted. Again assuming that it was safe to extrapolate, the average of the four seasonal figures was multiplied by 26<sup>131</sup>. Sometimes the families had completely forgotten to mention any secondary sources of income. As a result, the *agents enquêteurs* were obliged to formulate numerous requests for additional information<sup>132</sup>. It remains unclear whether these were successful.
- 75 Adjustments were therefore made in the preparation of data. However, the unpublished reports remain very vague in this respect and we have no idea in how many cases organisers felt inclined to extrapolate. One might feel justified in assuming that family allowances and pensions remained constant over the year where the composition of the household remained the same, but what about unemployment allowance, which was limited in time? And what about the assumed regularity in income from wages? In how many cases were wages adjusted on the basis of comparison with wages of fellow workers or wages earned in the rest of the year? How were fluctuations dealt with in the clearly irregular income from overtime and small businesses or income in kind from the garden or from livestock?
- 76 In his published report, Armand Julin commented on the difficulties encountered in collecting information about resources, but he did not mention adjustments or extrapolations. He suggested that the compilers of the data had been quite strict and had preferred to collect a limited number of observations, providing they presented “*toutes les garanties d'exactitude et de sincérité*”<sup>133</sup>.

- 77 When budgets revealed a deficit, survey takers felt more encouraged to persist in their quest for additional information on household resources: families had to explain how they could possibly cope<sup>134</sup>. Quite remarkably, the inadequacy of information about secondary and irregular sources of income was not considered a possible explanation for the “deficit”. Survey takers assumed that other supplementary resources were available and savings or shares seemed the most likely ones. A major problem, however, was that the participating families never mentioned such resources<sup>135</sup>. Questioned on the subject, they always succeeded in avoiding the issue and sometimes they simply refused to discuss the matter any further. Even Armand Julin, who tended to minimise the inquiry’s shortcomings, admitted that the investigation offered little information in this respect, which he attributed to the fact that:

*“les familles se sont montrées en général peu disposées à fournir des renseignements sur les ressources autres que celles ayant pour origine le travail”*<sup>136</sup>.

- 78 Fear of the tax administration was mentioned as one of the reasons that withheld them from disclosing this information<sup>137</sup>.
- 79 Both the typewritten reports and Julin suggested that savings and the selling of shares could have covered the deficits<sup>138</sup>. It is not surprising that they should suggest that families had savings: savings banks were booming in the inter-war period<sup>139</sup>. More remarkable is the assumption that ordinary people would have shares. Unfortunately, the idea was not developed any further.

#### 8. Sources of family income according to the budget inquiry of 1928-1929

- 80 I have already demonstrated the geographical bias of the 1928-1929 investigation: 59.5% of the cases were in the *provinces* of Liège and Hainault. One table, linking the geographical distribution of families and income, suggests that this geographical bias also involved an income bias: these provinces had a lower proportion of households in the lowest income category.

Table 4. Average income per quet and per two weeks in blue-collar workers’ families<sup>140</sup>

	<i>less than 50 BEF</i> <i>(192)</i>	<i>50 to 75 BEF</i> <i>(412)</i>	<i>more than 75 BEF</i> <i>(205)</i>
Antwerp (103)	36.9%	46.6%	16.5%
Brabant (114)	39.5%	40.3%	20.2%
Hainault (238)	16.0%	55.9%	28.1%
Liège (243)	14.4%	56.8%	28.8%
Other prov. (111)	32.4%	42.3%	25.2%

- 81 We must therefore be aware of the fact that the 1928-1929 family budget inquiry largely represents the situation of the working class in the *provinces* whose industrial workers were the most prosperous<sup>141</sup>. Another indication that the industrial workers’ families who took part in the survey were relatively well off is that 15% of them had a yearly income that was equal to, or surpassed, the 24,000 francs maximum limit for the selection of petty-*bourgeois* families. 30% of industrial workers’ families earned as much as, or more than, the average white-collar worker’s family included in the inquiry<sup>142</sup>. In his international survey of budget inquiries, a collaborator of the *International Labour Office* admitted that budget inquiries in general only touched the most prosperous working-class families:

*“On doit reconnaître que la plupart des enquêtes portent principalement sur des familles aisées, intelligentes et occupant un sommet dans la hiérarchie ouvrière. La raison en est surtout qu’il est difficile de trouver dans les catégories inférieures de la classe ouvrière, des familles qui soient aptes à fournir les données nécessaires.”<sup>143</sup>*

- 82 Our discussion of the information on income sources suggests that the inquiry probably overestimates the earnings of wage work in general and of regular wage work in particular. Anything out of the “ordinary” is bound to have been underestimated: either because the co-operating housewives refused to declare it, or because the survey takers themselves were rather anxious to model income sources according to a pattern of regularity. The impact of this tendency was not necessarily the same for all family members: regular earnings of the head of the family probably had more chance of being recorded than the intermittent contributions of other members of the family. The *agents enquêteurs* were required to deliver household accounts that *looked* exact and sincere. This might have given rise to a temptation to create uniformity and to get rid of anything that “messed up” expected regularities, both in space (comparison with workers of the same occupation) and in time (comparison between different seasons of the year).
- 83 On the basis of the 1928-1929 budget inquiry, the following picture of family income sources emerges. We calculated the composition of family income for blue and white-collar workers in general and for the largest categories of blue-collar workers: metal (238), mining (135), transport (58), building industry (49), textile industry (63), pottery (44), wood and furniture (31), quarries (37) and food industry (36).

Table 5. *Distribution of income sources in blue-collar and white-collar workers’ families in 1928-1929*<sup>144</sup>

	<i>bl.col.</i>	<i>mine</i>	<i>metal</i>	<i>transp</i>	<i>build</i>	<i>text.</i>	<i>pott.</i>	<i>wood</i>	<i>quarr</i>	<i>food</i>	<i>wh.c.</i>
fath	70.2	71.8	74.1	71.8	71.6	57.8	63.7	60.4	65.2	67.9	80.0
moth	3.7	1.6	3.1	1.9	4.0	10.7	1.0	3.8	-	7.5	2.3
chil	16.2	14.7	12.8	15.2	16.7	23.7	23.8	27.9	25.1	14.5	6.8
fam.a.	2.0	1.9	2.1	2.9	0.7	2.5	2.8	0.4	1.3	1.9	0.6
unemp	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.7	1.8	0.2	0.3	0.1	-
p/ins	0.6	1.5	0.7	0.3	-	0.4	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.8
kind	2.4	2.6	2.3	3.6	1.8	1.5	4.1	2.6	3.8	1.8	1.3
other	2.0	3.7	1.5	2.6	1.5	0.9	0.7	1.0	1.5	2.9	3.7
rent	2.4	1.9	3.0	1.4	3.0	1.7	2.0	3.1	2.4	2.7	4.5

- 84 Work, but not necessarily wage work, provided some 90% of income, both in blue and white-collar workers’ families. However, the way in which the inquiry was organised and the problems encountered in collecting information about income, were conducive to producing a picture of a specific type of family: one of regularly employed workers, who led orderly lives and whose income sources seemed both clear-cut and simple.
- 85 In the late 1920s, income resulting from social insurance was still a marginal phenomenon. It is not unlikely that in the Belgian working class in general it was even less important. The fact that the *agents enquêteurs* were chosen among directors of social organisations may possibly have led to an overrepresentation of people who were members of the union and sickness benefit fund and were more frequently insured against unemployment and health hazards.

#### 9. The composition of family income: a non-issue

- 86 Information on families’ resources contained in nineteenth-century budget inquiries have been used to reconstruct family income strategies and to disentangle the factors

that determined the contributions of its members to household resources. In most cases, however, providing information on the composition of family income was not the main aim of such inquiries. Finding out whether households were able to make ends meet and at what cost a family could be kept, were undoubtedly their most crucial questions. As a result, information on income was made available more as a way of checking or “explaining” expenditure, than for its own sake. Much more attention was devoted to how people spent their money than to the way in which they earned it, while the total sum of available resources appeared more important than the way in which it had been composed. This explains why in most cases we are provided with detailed lists of expenditure and especially spending on food, while information on income sources remains rather scant.

- 87 Where Belgian budget inquiries are concerned, the composition of family income and the contributions of its different members were explicitly addressed only in the 1890's. This is not a coincidence, probably, since the uprising of 1886 encouraged commentators to emphasise, even more than before, the connection between girls' and women's paid labour and the social crisis that Belgian society was going through<sup>145</sup>. Armand Julin tackled the question of the composition of family resources in his discussion of the budgets of 1886 and 1891. He dealt with this in relation to the increasing standard of living, the alleged disintegration of the family and the welcome marginalisation of women's work<sup>146</sup>. A more nuanced view is presented by Louis Varlez, who did not in fact conduct a budget inquiry but focused entirely on the level and the composition of family resources<sup>147</sup>. Although he also cherished the idea of a single, male breadwinner, he acknowledged that in the textile city of Ghent, characterised by a low male wage level and a lot of job opportunities for women and children, all family members made an important contribution to household income.
- 88 By the 1920s, the question of women's work in relation to the family budget seemed to have become marginal. In the discussion of the budget inquiries of the 1920s, most attention was paid to expenditure in general and food expenditure in particular. This is not surprising, since these investigations had been explicitly designed to collect information on patterns of consumption. Armand Julin, who in the 1890s had an axe to grind concerning married women's paid labour and especially factory work, ignored the matter completely in his discussion of the 1928-1929 inquiry. In contrast with the 1890s, it did not seem to be necessary to convince the reader that real wages had improved to such an extent that women's work had become “superfluous”. Instead Armand Julin focused on the relationship between blue-collar workers' income levels and patterns of expenditure and the fact that the differences in the ways of life of industrial workers and white-collar workers could not be explained by income variations alone<sup>148</sup>.
- 89 Social investigations have never been disinterested activities, but with the amplification of social policies after the First World War, they became an integrated part of the arsenal of policy instruments. Together with their political relevance, the qualitative demands made on statistical inquiries rose. More than before, it became crucial to be able to demonstrate that reality had been mapped in a fair and impartial way. The aim developed of being representative, objective, even scientific<sup>149</sup>. Survey takers tried to live up to these expectations, but work in the field hardly matched the theoretical requirements of scientific worth and representativeness. Technocrats, such

as Armand Julin, who were as much devoted to “their” social statistics as to the social policies that they served, found it difficult to assess the shortcomings of social statistics. Openly questioning the figures could have engendered unwanted side effects for the legitimacy of the policies involved. As a result, the difficulties encountered in investigations like the 1928-1929 budget inquiry were dealt with more than leniently: they were downplayed or concealed. Biased as they were, they were nonetheless presented as representative surveys of the wage-earning population.

- 90 In a way, one can understand the statisticians’ resignation, because not much could be done about it. Survey takers were at the mercy of the families that they investigated. Despite the assumed superiority and claims of familiarity with the object of their inquiries on the part of the social scientists, it remained the families’ prerogative either to conceal or to disclose information. Where family income is concerned, the type of information that was probably most “visible” was the wage income of regularly employed male industrial workers: precisely what contemporaries and social historians were and are already best informed about. Family budget inquiries may therefore have the peculiarity of reproducing the picture of male-dominated income strategies, while they were initially welcomed as a way to nuance and differentiate these.

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## Appendix

### Dating the undated reports

Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Middenstand, *Onderzoek naar de familiale begrotingen van 1928-1929*, S.l.n.d.

Ministère des Affaires Économiques, *Enquête sur les budgets familiaux de 1928-1929*, S.l.n.d.

The title pages of these reports contain contradictory information. The Dutch report mentions the *Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Middenstand*, the French version has *Ministère des Affaires Économiques* on its front page. Neither existed when the 1928-1929 inquiry was conducted: it was the *Ministère de l'Industrie, du Travail et de la Prévoyance Sociale* that was in charge. In 1934, a *Ministère des Affaires Économiques* was created, which had its name changed to *Ministère des Affaires Économiques et Classes Moyennes* in 1938. This might suggest that the French report was "published" as a sort of internal document between 1934 and 1938, and that a Dutch translation was produced afterwards. However, the same succession of names for the department of

economic affairs also occurred between 1946 and 1948. It cannot therefore be excluded that these reports were compiled in the 1940s.

Another element might indeed point to the 1940s. On the title page of the Dutch report, the Marchant spelling system is used (the so-called modern orthography which was officially established in 1946) while the report is written in the old orthography. The Dutch report might have been written in the middle of the 1940s, a transition period as far as Dutch spelling is concerned, or the title page may of course have been produced several years after the report had been compiled (in the 1930s, for example). An indication in the direction of the 1930s is the fact that the 1928/29 budget inquiry figured on the agenda of the *Commission de l'Index* in June and July 1939. The commission discussed whether it was best to use the 1928-1929 budget inquiry or to organise a new inquiry in order to adapt the weightings of the cost of living index. Lion looked into the matter and prepared “*un travail (...) à propos de l'enquête sur le coût de la vie*”<sup>150</sup>.

The conclusion is that some elements seem to point to the 1930s, others to the 1940s. On the basis of the information currently available a more precise dating of the Dutch/French report is therefore impossible.

## NOTES

\*. This paper was presented in the international workshop “Measuring the labour force. Labour statistics and the national state, 18th-20th centuries”, *Research Network-Labour, labour relations and labour markets in Western Europe, 1500-2000* organised in Ghent in April 2000.

1. *Statistics are worth what their maker is worth* is the conclusive remark of an anonymous clerk of the Ministry of Economic Affairs in a report on the price index dated 24/01/1948. Ministerie van Economische Zaken. Dienst indexcijfer. Box “Index interbellum”.

2. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998, pp. 73-74; a few examples: HORRELL, S. & HUMPHRIES, J., 1995; HORRELL, S. & OOXLEY, D., 1999; HATTON, T.J. & BAILEY, R.E., 1993.

3. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998.

4. JULIN, A., 1892, pp. 557-559. See also: SAVOYE, A., 1994, p. 62.

5. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998, pp. 79-80.

6. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1991.

7. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1985, p. 110.

8. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1991.

9. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1991, p. 421.

10. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1985, p. 142.

11. JULIN, A., 1923, pp. 1887-1888.

12. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1991, p. 421; SCHOLLIERS, P., 1985, pp. 142-145.

13. *Bureau International du Travail*, 1926.

14. MORSE WOODBURY, R., 1941, p. 147.

15. DESROSIÈRES, A., 1993, p. 274.

16. *Bureau International du Travail*, 1926, p. 3.

17. The unpublished reports regarding the inquiry (see further) explicitly refer to this recommendation: *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 1; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 1.

18. SCHOLLIERS, P., 1985, p. 144. Ministerie van Economische Zaken, Dienst indexcijfer. Box “Index interbellum”. Rapport “Prijs indexcijfers”, 24/01/1948. The fact that

Armand Julin, the Belgian authority on household budgets, presided over the meetings of the ILO where these recommendations were discussed, may have constituted an incentive to organise the inquiry: SAVOYE, A., 1994, pp. 67-68.

19.A. Desrosières points to the fact that in inter-war France the role of budget inquiries in industrial relations was limited to the local level: DESROSIÈRES, A., 2003. I thank the author sincerely for permission to consult the manuscript version of the article. See also: SAVOYE, A., 1994, pp. 72-73.

20.JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 559.

21.GOTTSCHALK, M., 1931,1932; JULIN, A., 1933, 1934, 1935a, 1935b.

22.JULIN, A., 1935a.

23.JULIN, A., 1934.

24.GOTTSCHALK, M., 1932, p. 841.

25.JULIN, A., 1934, pp. 388, 396; JULIN, A., 1935a, pp. 551, 559.

26.JULIN, A., 1933; JULIN, A., 1935b.

27.LION, V., S.d.

28.When referring to Julin's contribution regarding the inquiry of 1928-1929, we use his best documented article, namely the one published in *Bulletin de l'Institut International de Statistique*, unless stated otherwise.

29.JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 516.

30.JULIN, A., 1892.

31.LAMBERT, P., 1968.

32.DUPRIEZ, L.H., 1965. Archives de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Dossier personnel Armand Julin, nr. 11559.

33.*Ibidem*.

34.SAVOYE, A., 1981.

35.PUISSANT, J., 1986, p. 96.

36.LORRY, A., p. 157.

37.JULIN, A., 1891; JULIN, A., 1892.

38.DUPRIEZ, L.H., 1965.

39.JULIN, A., 1928, pp. 360-363.

40.Archives de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Dossier personnel Armand Julin, nr. 11559; KADOC, Archief Hendrik Heyman, 8.2.2.

41.*Almanach Royal*, 1928, p. 234.

42.SCHOLLIERS, P., 1985, p. 109.

43.SCHOLLIERS, P., 1985, p. 148.

44.KADOC, Archief Hendrik Heyman, 8.2.2.

45.Archives de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Dossier personnel Armand Julin, nr. 11559; KADOC, Archief Hendrik Heyman, 8.2.2.

46.SCHOLLIERS, P., 1991, p. 432.

47.JULIN, A., 1933, pp. 559-566.

48.JULIN, A., 1935b.

49.JULIN, A., 1935b, p. 295.

50.JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 517.

51.JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 547.

52. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 547.
53. DESROSIÈRES, A., 1993, pp. 258-288.
54. DESROSIÈRES, A., 1993, p. 263.
55. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998, p. 81.
56. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998, pp. 80-82.
57. DESROSIÈRES, A., 1993, p. 280.
58. KRUSKAL, W., & MOSTELLER, F., 1980, pp. 174-175.
59. JENSEN, A., 1926.
60. DESROSIÈRES, A., 1993, p. 283.
61. DESROSIÈRES, A., 1993, pp. 282-283; KRUSKAL, W., & MOSTELLER, F., 1980, p. 188.
62. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 517.
63. LION, V., S.d., p. 4.
64. *Onderzoek*, S.d., pp. 18-19; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 18-19.
65. LION, V., S.d., p. 6.
66. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 15; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 15.
67. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 18; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 18.
68. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998, p. 81.
69. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P., 1993, p. 88.
70. *Cost of living*, 1910, p. XI.
71. *Une enquête*, 1922, p. 690.
72. JULIN, A., 1928, p. 418.
73. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 14; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 13-14.
74. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 14; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 14.
75. JULIN, A., 1928, p. 418.
76. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 539.
77. LION, V., S.d., p. 5; JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 539.
78. LION, V., S.d., pp. 8-9.
79. LION, V., S.d., pp. 9-10.
80. KURGAN, G., 1992.
81. *Onderzoek*, S.d., pp. 3-4; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 3.
82. LION, V., S.d., p. 4.
83. *Une enquête*, 1922.
84. LION, V., S.d., p. 6.
85. LION, V., S.d., p. 1; *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 2; *Enquête*, S.d. p. 2.
86. *Enquête*, S.d., p. 2; LION, V., S.d. p. 1.
87. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 4.
88. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 4; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 4-5; LION, V., S.d., p. 2.
89. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 518; LION, V., S.d., p. 2.
90. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 15; *Enquête*, S.d. p. 14; LION, V., S.d., p. 3.
91. JULIN, A., 1935a, pp. 520-522.
92. LION, V., S.d., p. 2.
93. LION, V., S.d., p. 2.
94. JULIN, A., 1928, p. 362.
95. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 3; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 3.
96. *Onderzoek*, S.d., pp. 5-7; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 5-7.
97. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 13; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 12

98. *Une enquête*, 1922, p. 690.
99. MOSER, C.A. & KALTON, G., 1972, pp. 85-86.
100. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 517.
101. MORSE WOODBURY, R., 1941, p. 142.
102. *Bureau International du Travail*, 1926, p. 9.
103. WILLIAMS, F.M. & ZIMMERMAN, C.C., 1935, p. 43.
104. MORSE WOODBURY, R., 1941, p. 23.
105. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 7; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 7.
106. *Enquête sur la situation...*, 1928, p. 30.
107. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 6; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 6.
108. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 13; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 13.
109. NIXON, J.W., 1933, p. 575; WILLIAMS, F.M. & ZIMMERMAN, C.C., 1935, p. 43.
110. *Enquête*, S.d., p. 35.
111. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 35; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 37; LION, V., S.d., p. 7.
112. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 522.
113. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 547.
114. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 547.
115. JULIN, A., 1928, p. 407.
116. JENSEN, A., 1926, p. 362.
117. JULIN, A., 1932, p. 268.
118. VAN DEN EECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998, p. 85.
119. JULIN, A., 1935a, pp. 519-20.
120. *Recensement*, 1925, p. 519.
121. LION, V., S.d., pp. 9-10, 12.
122. LION, V., S.d., p. 9.
123. LION, V., S.d., pp. 12-15.
124. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 19; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 19.
125. LION, V., S.d., pp. 15-16; *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 19; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 19.
126. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 524.
127. *Onderzoek*, S.d., pp. 26, 52, 86; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 27, 53, 86.
128. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 52; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 53.
129. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 19; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 19.
130. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 19; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 19-20.
131. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 19; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 20.
132. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 52; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 53.
133. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 524.
134. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 86; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 86.
135. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 53; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 54.
136. JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 540.
137. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 86; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 86.
138. *Onderzoek*, S.d., pp. 26-27, 86-87; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 27, 86; JULIN, A., 1935a, p. 540.
139. VANTHEMSCHE, G., 1986.
140. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 30; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 31.
141. According to the census of 1937, the *arrondissements* of Liège and Hainault province were among those with the highest hourly wages, see: SCHOLLIERS, P., 1982, p. 321.
142. *Onderzoek*, S.d., p. 46; *Enquête*, S.d., p. 48.
143. *Bureau International du Travail*, 1933, p. 677.

144. *Onderzoek*, S.d., pp. 53-56; *Enquête*, S.d., pp. 54-57. Distribution of family income sources according to the inquiry of 1891 (JULIN, A., 1892, p. 680): father: 69.05%; mother: 1.77%; sons: 23.78%; daughters: 2.83%; irregular work: 1.03; poor relief: 0.4%; other: 1.08%.
145. GUBIN, E., 1991.
146. VAN DEN ECKHOUT, P. & SCHOLLIERS, P., 1998.
147. VAN DEN ECKHOUT, P., 1993.
148. JULIN, A., 1935a. In this respect Armand Julin is part of a tradition: “Le revenu occupe bien sûr une place centrale dans les comptes rendus des enquêtes, depuis Engels, mais l'idée que la structure du budget exprime autre chose qu'un effet mécanique du revenu, suit elle aussi son chemin, depuis Le Play”, see A. DESROSIÈRES, 2003.
149. BULMER, M., BALES, K. & KISH SKLAR, K., 1991, p. 42.
150. Ministerie van Economische Zaken, Dienst indexcijfer. Commission du nombre indice des prix de détail, 24/06/1939 and 25/07/1939.

## ABSTRACTS

The second international conference of labour statisticians (1925) voted a resolution recommending countries to conduct a family budget inquiry as soon as the post-war economic situation had improved and, if possible, before the end of 1928. Belgium followed this recommendation. Given the fact that the Belgian index of retail prices, in existence since 1919, was a non-weighted average of prices of products, the budget inquiry of 1928-1929 could have been used to compile a weighted variant. However, the inquiry was never used as such and it therefore had direct impact on the emerging system of institutionalised industrial relations. The main use of the inquiry was ideological. Its most authoritative commentator Armand Julin, *éminence grise* of Belgian statistics, used it to demonstrate the improvement of Belgian workers' standards of living from the middle of the 19th century on. His discussion of the inquiry, for several decades the only source of information on the subject, played down and concealed the difficulties that the organisers had encountered. Unpublished internal reports concerning the organisation of the budget inquiry of 1928-1929 provide us with a glimpse behind the scenes.

**Statistique et politique sociale belge dans l'Entre-deux-guerres. L'enquête de 1928-1929 sur les budgets familiaux des ouvriers et des employés.** En 1925, la seconde conférence internationale des statisticiens du travail vota une résolution qui recommandait que des enquêtes sur les budgets familiaux soient entreprises dès que les conditions économiques seraient suffisamment favorables et, si possible, avant la fin de l'année 1928. La Belgique suivit cette recommandation. Étant donné qu'il existait un index des prix de détail non-pondéré depuis 1919, l'enquête sur les budgets d'ouvriers et d'employés de 1928-1929 aurait pu servir à calculer un indice du coût de la vie pondéré. Celle-ci n'a cependant jamais été utilisée dans ce sens et n'est donc jamais intervenue directement dans le système en gestation des relations de travail collectives. Son usage fut plutôt idéologique. Armand Julin, “éminence grise” de la statistique belge, l'a commentée et l'a utilisée pour démontrer l'amélioration du niveau de vie de l'ouvrier belge depuis les années 1840. Ses commentaires, seule source d'information sur l'enquête de

1928-1929 pendant quelques dizaines d'années, ont eu tendance à minimiser et à dissimuler les difficultés rencontrées par les organisateurs. Des rapports internes non publiés nous permettent d'avoir un aperçu de la réalité cachée de cette enquête.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** histoire des statistiques, histoire sociale

**Chronological index:** XXe siècle

**Geographical index:** Belgique et Pays-Bas

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