

DEVASTATION AND RECONSTRUCTION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF NORD DEPARTMENT 1914-1930

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Résumé

La destruction la plus intense de la campagne, durant la Première Guerre mondiale, fut concentrée dans la « zone rouge » le long de la Lys, mais les terres cultivées et les forêts de tout le département du Nord ont été bouleversées par l'action militaire, l'occupation allemande, ou la présence des forces alliées. A l'initiative de l'État, des services de secours ont essayé de restaurer les terres, de relancer l'agriculture et réparer l'habitat, mais les résultats n'ont pas été entièrement satisfaisants. Avec la dissolution de ces services, en 1920-21, la reconstruction est devenue la responsabilité des individus et des sociétés coopératives qui ont joué un rôle vital dans la réhabilitation de l'habitat rural durant les années 20 et au début des années 30.

MOTS-CLÉS : coopératives, terres agricoles, logement, repopulation

KEYWORDS : cooperatives, farmland, housing, repopulation

1. NORD IN CONTEXT

The reconstruction of Belgian settlements following the Great War has attracted much research but less attention has been devoted to northern France [36]. This essay focuses on Nord which the front line divided into two unequal parts, the larger being under German occupation and the smaller accommodating camps and training grounds for the allied forces (figure 1). Using reports from prefects to the « conseil-général » and other sources, the fate of farmland, forests and villages will be explored. In the early 20th century Nord was distinguished by manufactures and mines and by its highly-productive farming systems, including enclosed pastures in Flanders, intensively-cultivated farms around Lille, openfields in Cambrésis, and enclosed pastures in Avesnois [27, p. 191]. On the eve of war Nord came second after Pas-de-Calais for the value of its agricultural products [9]. Following was almost completely abandoned, the soil was worked painstakingly, a wide variety of fertilizers was employed, and high quality seeds were used [31, p. 34]. Taking a single example, the average wheat yield per hectare was two and a half times the French men. With 1,961,900 inhabitants in 1911 (including 177,100 foreigners, of whom 169,083 were Belgians) Nord was the most populous of what would be known as devastated departments. After the Battle of Mons (24 August 1914) German troops arrived in Nord, reaching Valenciennes and entering Aisne department two days later [24, p. 329]. Maubeuge was encircled, raids were

launched into the eastern part of Nord, and the front line was fixed near the river Lys, extending north-west into Belgian Flanders [38, p. 487]. For the greater part of the war the Germans occupied three-quarters of Nord, with the front line hardly moving until the German offensive of 9 April 1918. Bailleul was captured and Mont Kemmel was occupied. Hazebrouck was evacuated but the Germans did not proceed beyond Meleren and Merris. They were not to be expelled from the western part of Nord until October.

2. DEVASTATION

In Nord 574 of the 668 communes were occupied by the Germans or evacuated as a result of war [30, p. 8]. Early in 1919 an intensely devastated 'red zone', where the value of land was judged to be less than the cost of restoration, was estimated at 3,000 ha [32, p. 39]. It was confined to the narrow neck of territory in interior Flanders where the front line had been fixed, together with an area west of Cambrai where the Hindenburg Line had been set in place [7]. Cutting of trenches and the sustained impact of warfare meant that « the top soil no longer existed » in some places, being scattered by explosives or buried beneath infertile soil churned up to the surface [26, p. 307]. An estimated 18,400,000 m³ of trenches were cut and 9,250,000 m² of barbed wire needed to be removed [30, p. 9]. On either side of the red zone a further 72,000 ha required shells and debris to be collected, but the greater area (283,000 ha) needed only slight

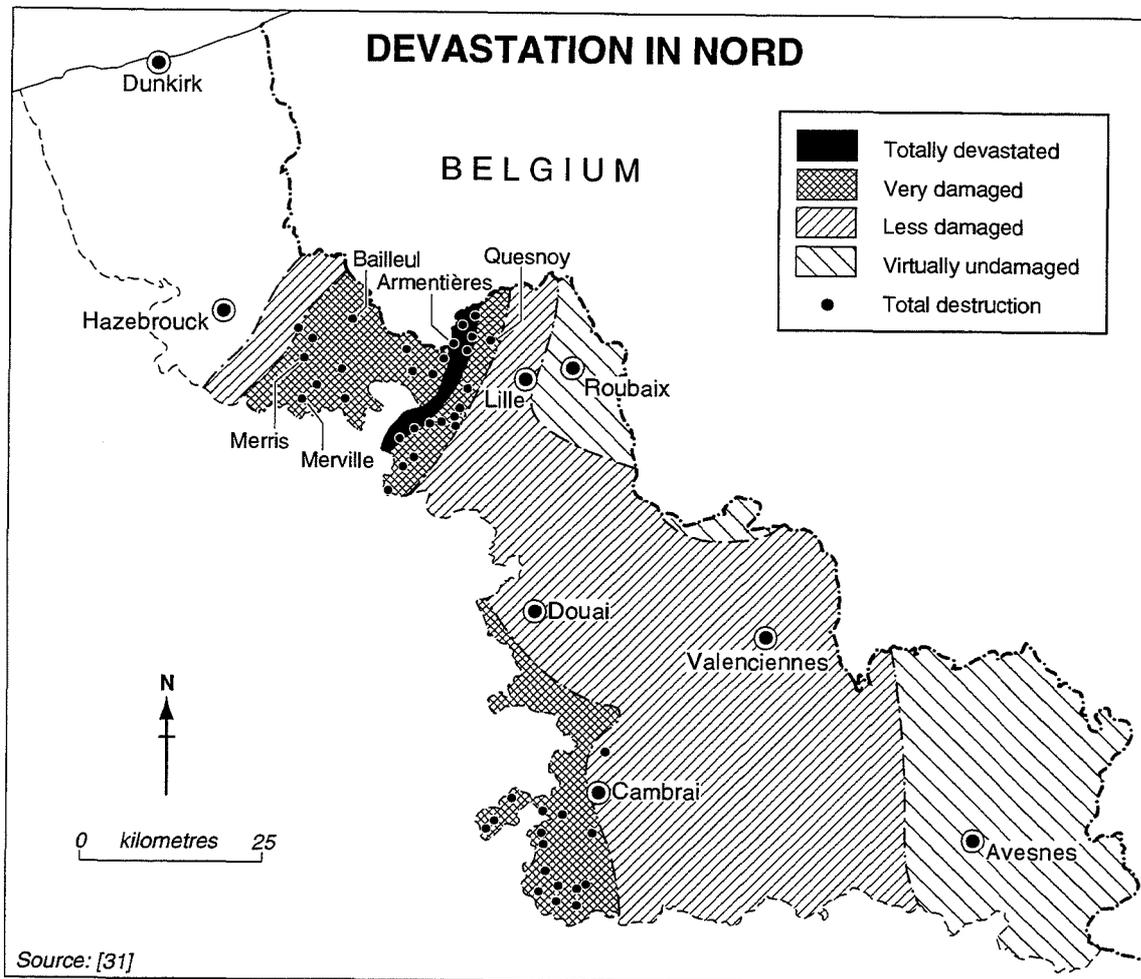


Figure 1 - Devastation in Nord

clearance and hence population clamoured to return without delay [32, p. 39], [39, p. 334]. Hardly any farm animals remained, having been slaughtered and consumed or having been removed by the Germans. Some 59 communes had over 90% of their buildings destroyed, 32 suffered 40-90% loss, and a further 57 experienced less than 40% damage [33, p. 7]. Partial destruction was widespread in southern districts, and maritime Flanders experienced disorganization due to the presence of allied troops rather than downright devastation. Some 52,414 houses had been destroyed throughout Nord and 207,300 had suffered varying degrees of damage out of a total of 425,000 [31, p. 99]. Destruction was most intense in the cantons of Armentières, Bailleul, La Bassée, Merville, and Marcoing further South [31, p. 139]. With fewer than 10 habitable houses, Bailleul experienced a 99% destruction rate [7]. Centuries of land-drainage activity were wrecked in the surrounding countryside [17, p. 67].

At the Armistice Nord contained 1,196,188 inhabitants, compared with 1,961,900 on the eve of war (-39%) [31, p. 14]. Highest relative losses were in the arrondissements of Cambrai (-63%), Douai (-60%) and Hazebrouck (-57%); the cantons of Armentières, Bailleul, La Bassée, Merville and Quesnoy-sur-Deule were essentially empty. Hazebrouck contained only 2,250 inhabitants, compared with five times that number in 1911 [24, p. 332]. The rural economy sustained profound losses, with large amounts of livestock and agricultural equipment removed, and hop gardens, orchards and market gardens destroyed [31, p. 10]. The pattern of landholding had been erased in areas of intense combat and where German tractors had ploughed with no regard for property boundaries [31, p. 46]. Despite horrific destruction, farmers who had been evacuated into the French interior started to return to their devastated land in December 1918, often against the wishes of the administration [31, p. 30]. Some gave up hope straight away, being overwhelmed by the

destruction and the task ahead, but others patched ruined hoes or erected shelters from wood or corrugated iron left by the allies. They started to reclaim farmland in the depths of the winter of 1918-1919. Whilst sympathising with their desire to return, Prefect Naudin had « the painful duty to overcome personal feelings and to oppose such requests » where land was disturbed severely, accommodation was lacking, camps of Chinese labourers or German prisoners of war were found, or water supplies had been polluted [33, p. 9].

Farmland and forests suffered varying degrees of damage on both sides of the front line. Military installations led to notable disruption, with large quantities of field boundaries being destroyed in Randers [26, p. 307]. For example, the mayor of Bailleul complained that British troops exercised horses over sown fields rendering them virtually unproductive [5]. By planning to extend its camp the British army threatened more farmland around Bailleul. The « Directeur des Services de la Mission Militaire Française », attached to the British Army, managed to have the proposed extension relocated to less fertile ground. Surrounding hopfields and fine pastures were declared out of bounds to troops, and he demanded that the British should police training grounds to ensure that private property was respected.

Rural land underwent unwise exploitation behind German lines. During August and September 1914 farmers were required to supply foodstuffs to the German army. In fact, the troops passed through many districts and the harvest was gathered almost normally [26, p. 286]. But after the capture of Lille on 13 October 1914 the Germans implemented their own procedures for exploiting the countryside. All foodstuffs, **industrial raw materials and** manufactured goods that might be useful to their army were requisitioned [4]. Cereals were threshed under German surveillance and local reserves of food were run down. Work in the fields continued relatively normally in the winter of 1914-15 since enough draught animals remained, and women, teenagers and old men replaced farmworkers who had been mobilized or drafted to other work [26, p. 298]. The Germans required farmers to grow cereals and fodder, with cultivation of colza, flax, chicory and sugar beet being forbidden. Farmland that had been abandoned was ploughed and sown by German soldiers. The 1915 harvest was surprisingly good but most cereals were sent to Germany.

Faced with the prospect of a long war, the Germans sought to obtain more grain from the land [16,

p. 32]. « Rural economy officers » (Wirtschaftsoffizieren) were appointed to record agricultural resources (land, labour, housing, seeds, livestock, crops) and to observe farmers to ensure that they continued working the land. The Germans constructed large barns to store grain and ordered that ploughing, seeding, and harvesting should be undertaken collectively, hence « cooperation became obligatory » [26, p. 302]. For the rest of the war, the main objective was to produce grain, but without inputs of fertilizer or manure since most livestock had been dispatched to Germany, or the possibility of pursuing traditional rotations. Cereals followed cereals and the soil became exhausted and invaded by weeds [26, p. 307]. Few areas were abandoned completely, and the president of the « Société Coopérative Agricole du Nord Envahi » was convinced that the soil would recover once fertilizer became available [11].

Farmland in the shadow of the front line was disrupted by exercise grounds, firing ranges, munitions depots, and army camps [26, p. 307]. Narrow-gauge railways (0.60 m), installed by the Germans and the British to serve military sites, further disrupted farming and had to be removed when hostilities ceased so that land could be farmed more effectively [32, p. 66]. At the start of 1919, roads were in a particularly poor state in the former occupied zone, having not been maintained for four years and having been damaged by heavy German vehicles with iron wheels. As Prefect Naudin remarked, their poor state of repair « made travelling at more than 15 km/hour very painful » [32, p. 68].

In 1914 Nord Md contained eight state forests (19,279 ha), a dozen communal forests (1,774 ha) and 20,280 ha of private woodland, most of which was managed carefully [16, p. 37], [31, p. 95]. At first their timber was not exploited heavily, but in 1916 the German army started to fell mature trees for dispatch to Germany [35, p. 395]. Forest work was performed by civilians and Russian and Italian prisoners-of-war who were housed in work camps and « subjected to iron discipline » [35, p. 396]. Trees were felled at a height of 40-80 cm. Sawmills were constructed in or near the woodland being served by narrow-gauge railways which linked to the normal-gauge network. In the « Forêt de Mormal » 5,400 ha (out of 7,562 ha) were cut over, with much felled timber strewn on the ground when the Germans departed. Only about a thousand trees remained standing on the 725 ha of the « Forêt de Marchiennes », and large areas were clear-felled in the forests of Raismes (1,300 ha), Fourmies (800

ha) and Phalempin (600 ha). Tituber that was not sent to Germany or used to support trenches was consumed as firewood or for charcoal. Widespread devastation was compounded by the destruction of sawmills by the retreating Germans [35, p. 396]. Some 15,386 ha of state and communal woodland had been felled or damaged by shelling [16, p. 37]. Large stretches needed to be cleared and forest tracks restored before replanting might commence [31, p. 98]. Devastation of the department's coal mines gave rise to a ready market for felled and damaged timber in 1919 [35, p. 396].

3. THE EMERGENCY PHASE

In the first phase of reconstitution food and clothes were distributed to those who had suffered loss (*sinistrés*), roads and railways were restored, and civilian administration was re-installed [34, p. 3]. In their meeting with Prefect Naudin late in January 1919 the mayors of devastated communes argued that emergency housing was needed urgently and requested that army huts be partitioned to give families some privacy [13]. Health conditions were poor and tents were promised from which medical care would be dispensed by civilian and military doctors. The « *Génie Rural* » took responsibility for various activities, including reclamation of low-lying land around Bailleul and Hazebrouck that had been flooded in the war [18, p. 3]. In addition, special emergency services were created by the state [34, p. 3]. These activities began before the law on compensation was passed on 17 April 1919.

Fanners were impatient at the apparent slowness of emergency work. A week after the Armistice, members of the agricultural societies of Hazebrouck and Bailleul demanded that, since the Germans had been driven out of their district for several months, the state should employ civilian, military and prisoner-of-war labour to remove explosives, fill shellholes, level land, and drain surplus water [11]. The old men who remained in the area were not strong enough to fill trenches. Farmers should be encouraged to group together to restore land, and temporary group together to restore land, and temporary shelters would have to be installed before the arrival of army huts that had been promised. By July 1919 2,700 *sinistrés* had returned to the reins of Bailleul to work their land, despite the deadly risk of unexploded shells [17, p. 67].

The « *Service des Travaux de Première Urgence (STPU)* » was established 13 December 1918 to organize labour to fill trenches and shellholes, level disturbed land, make rapid repairs to buildings.

erect temporary housing, and identify suspect objects. Unexploded shells were collected by experts before being removed for controlled explosion. The STPU used prisoners of war, 'Chinese' workers, North Africans, other immigrants, and local civilians [31, p. 31]. Employing prisoners of war had to be handled cautiously since Nord contained many unemployed civilians as a result of industrial devastation [1]. Prefect Naudin argued that prisoners were best used in the 'red zone' and insisted that they should not work alongside civilians [12]. In June 1919 the STPU employed 30,000 civilians and an equal number of prisoners of war but this labour force dwindled because of repatriation and civilians being laid off in the winter [18, p. 3], [34, p. 67]. By mid 1920 the tasks of filling shellholes, removing barbed wire and restoring soil were « coming to an end » [20, p. 4].

By summer 1919 4,100 army huts had been erected and a further 8,000 were awaited in November [19, p. 25]. Early in 1920 8,337 wooden or corrugated iron shelters had been installed, together with 1,291 temporary houses [32, p. 45]. A further 59,919 damaged houses had been made habitable for the winter. During 1920 temporary housing arrived from the French interior and British army huts were supplied, reaching a total of 11,363 in July [20, p. 4, p. 41]. The STPU was criticized for inefficiency and in August 1919 was reorganized as the « *Service des Travaux de l'Etat* », but was disbanded in the following year. Prefect Morain noted that its labourers « did not always acquit themselves to the entire satisfaction of the farmers; there were many faults; shellholes and trenches were filled insufficiently; and sharp iron stakes and barbed wire were left to complicate the work of ploughmen » [31, p. 31].

The « *Service de la Motoculture* » continued with mechanized ploughing that had been undertaken in 1917 and 1918 away from the front line. After the Armistice groups of state-owned tractors were dispatched to work as soon as the STPU had filled holes, with 500 machines organized in 20 groups operating in Nord during 1919 [31, p. 31]. Prefect Naudin quoted 43,000 ha being worked during that year and the total rose to 46,120 ha by March 1920 [33, p. 11-15]. Some farmers ploughed for themselves using horses or more rarely tractors purchased from the state. Despite shortages of petrol and skilled drivers, virtually all slightly damaged land had been ploughed by December 1919, and two-fifths of the 30,000 ha overtaken by trenches or shell craters also had been prepared [31, p. 32]. In the light of this success many Motoculture

tractors were diverted to Pas-de-Calais or were sold off. Only three groups remained in Nord in March 1920 [31, p. 31]. During that year 14,000 ha were to be ploughed and 5,000 ha worked over by the Service.

Motorized ploughing was declared satisfactory in the arrondissements of Lille, Douai and Cambrai but was less effective around Valenciennes and Avesnes **because of intense property fragmentation** [32, p. 50]. **During 1920 the « Service de la Motoculture » assisted harvesting and threshing in areas where local labour, machinery and military workers proved inadequate** [6]. Because of severe criticisms it was decided in May 1921 to terminate the Service, and equipment started to be sold to farmers. Many landowners and mayors in Nord had complained about Motoculture but failed to appreciate the great difficulties under which it had operated [31, p. 31]. Once it had gone, the sinistrés had to undertake first ploughing themselves and tended to be more appreciative of its activities, with some regretting that it no longer existed. At the end of 1921 1,800 ha awaited first ploughing and only 700 ha twelve months later [31, p. 32].

The « Office de Reconstitution Agricole (ORA) » was formed 6 August 1917 and assumed responsibility for several functions initiated in wartime, including agricultural cooperatives, and collecting and repairing abandoned machinery. For example, the British army had made an important effort to remove equipment from the battle zone and stock it in safe places or return it to its owners who had sought refuge elsewhere [10]. The ORA also supported a special agency (« Société Tiers-Mandataire ») in each department to sell seed, livestock, fertilizers and machinery at discount prices to local farmers. In Nord this was entitled the « Société Coopérative Agricole du Nord Envahi » and had distributed 3,100 farming implements and machines by June 1919 [18, p. 5].

During that year agricultural cooperatives were established with the help of the ORA, enabling returning sinistrés to « share their miseries and their hopes » for re-cultivation [31, p. 32]. Thirty-five existed by June, assembling the resources of 8,000 farmers, and an equal number were being set up [18, p. 13]. Repair centres opened in September 1918 and were among the earliest industrial enterprises to re-start activity [18, p. 5], [23, p. 315]. Most were managed by the ORA but a couple were run privately [14]. Repair centres were found at Lille, Douai, Cambrai, Marly, Hazebrouck,

Bousies, Orchies and Ors, with the Lille centre employing 150 civilians in 1919 plus 200 prisoners of war [19, p. 22]. The centres restored abandoned equipment, distributed machinery recovered from eastern parts of Nord, Belgium and Germany (700 wagon-loads during the second half of 1919 alone), and assembled farm equipment from other parts of France or abroad [31, p. 36]. The activities of the centres gradually declined and private firms assumed their roles. The last ORA repair centre in Nord closed in January 1922.

The « Société Tiers-Mandataire (STM) » was effectively the sole agent in 1919 and 1920 to distribute fertilizers to returning sinistrés, a role that they « would not forget » [31, p. 31]. This function decreased during 1921 as fertilizer factories were rebuilt and private traders assumed responsibility. Traditionally Nord had exported high quality seed to farmers in the « Ile-de-France » and eastern France, but because of the ravages of war the STM was obliged to purchase seed wherever possible [31, p. 35]. It also distributed livestock but the animals were not always satisfactory [40, p. 18]. Army horses were often in poor condition, with some suffering from mange, and the health of cattle imported from the USA had deteriorated during the Atlantic crossing [31, p. 37]. By contrast, farmers were satisfied with horses from Belgium and Ardennes, and cattle from Normandy and Holland. Starting in May 1920 the ORA distributed livestock supplied from Germany in accordance with the peace treaty, but quality was variable and some breeds were unfamiliar. The ORA also supplied plants for restoring market gardens around Lille and Roubaix, and fruit trees to help replace the 120,000 destroyed during the war [31, p. 40]. Early in 1922 the decision was taken to disband the ORA, with its fertilizers, seed and machinery being sold to private distributors. By April the STM had ceased operating, having traded livestock to the value of 122 million francs, agricultural equipment to the value of 70 million francs, and seed to the value of 59 million francs [34, p. 5].

4. INITIAL RESULTS

As a result of the work of the state Services, civilian contractors and individual farmers almost all farmland in Nord that had escaped serious damage had been made ready for cultivation by the end of 1919, and 12,000 ha of the 30,000 ha that had been overturned had received first ploughing [31, p. 32]. Some sinistrés sowed fields during the winter of 1918-19 and in the following spring, however the amount of land under wheat in Nord in 1919 was

only 60% of the pre-war total, and the area under industrial root crops only 22% [31, p. 33]. Results were disappointing because of poor seed, late sowing, insufficient fertilizer, inadequate clearance of weeds, and the cool growing season. Farmers realized that their land needed more thorough preparation, and made a major effort to destroy field mice and other vermin which had proliferated during wartime.

Some 90-95% of the arable land in Nord that had suffered during the war was back in production in 1920, hence « agricultural recovery was very close to completion » [22, p. 80]. Farmers around Lille, Douai, Valenciennes and Cambrai anticipated good harvests in 1920 and were not disappointed. Sugar refineries, distilleries and other processing plants were rebuilt. Pastures in Avesnois had suffered little damage but many livestock had been removed. Restoration of animal numbers was slow. Conditions improved during 1920-21 but agricultural recovery lagged in western Cambrésis close to the extreme devastation in Pas-de-Calais and Aisne [23, p. 315]. In 1921 the amount of land under wheat in Nord was only 10% short of the pre-war total, with the area devoted to other cereals, potatoes and fodder beet exceeding the pre-war figure. By contrast, the amount of land under intensive 'industrial crops' (especially sugar beet and distillery beet) and flax had not caught up [31, p. 34]. Hop gardens around Bailleul and Boeschepe were recovering, and market conditions favoured natural grassland at the expense of cereals and industrial crops. In 1919 Nord had contained only 44% of the cattle recorded in 1912, with the proportion of sheep (20%) and pigs (30%) being even lower, but the number of horses stood at 59% of the pre-war total [31, p. 38]. Livestock numbers had increased substantially by 1921 but were still below those on the eve of the war.

As in most other parts of the « régions dévastées », landowners in Nord did not take advantage of the innovative provisions of the law of 4 March 1919 which enabled plot consolidation to be undertaken at the expense of the state [31, p. 47]. Instead, the inhabitants of 336 communes requested that the « Service de la Reconstitution Foncière » should re-establish the pre-war pattern of fragmented land-holding that suited local intensive agriculture often undertaken on a part-time basis by industrial workers [30, p. 16]. Small plots were particularly suitable for house building and landowners argued that 10 ha of fragmented land with road access was worth more than an equal amount of consolidated farmland [31, p. 48]. Despite widespread rejection of plot consolidation, the « Service de la

Reconstitution Foncière » managed to encourage landowners in 50 communes to exchange parcels voluntarily with their neighbours.

5. RECONSTITUTION PROPER

By early 1921 the government was disbanding the state-run services, substantial agricultural recovery had taken place, and 90% of the 'red zone' of Nord had been reclaimed, with only 300 ha remaining [34, pp. 4-5]. The census of March 1921 recorded a total population of 1,787,918 (173,862 fewer than in 1911), with all but six of 68 cantons having fewer inhabitants than ten years previously. Armentières (50%) and Quesnoy-sur-Deule (54%) contained only half of their 1911 total, with Bailleul, Marcoing, La Bassée and Merville accommodating less than three-quarters of their earlier figure. Nord contained 155,972 foreigners compared with 177,100 in 1911, with the reduction due to a decline in the number of Belgians. Despite the remarkable recovery of agriculture and population, housing remained in short supply and sinistrés were still requesting wooden houses in June 1921 [1], [2].

Under the compensation law of 17 April 1919 each sinistré was responsible to declare losses in a legally acceptable form, and to claim compensation. Many humble farmers and town dwellers could not cope with such formalities and had no resources to employ lawyers or accountants. A formula for mediating between the state and the despairing sinistrés was advanced in the form of « Sociétés coopératives de reconstruction » whereby groups of sinistrés would employ professional staff to prepare claims, establish logical programmes for restoring whole villages or neighbourhoods, and use architects and building contractors in common. The idea had been introduced during wartime and was encouraged by legislation on **seulement** reconstruction and urban growth (14 March 1919) which required plans to be prepared for 251 communes in Nord [31, p. 101]. A law of 15 August 1920 put the cooperatives on firmer foundations by requiring them to adopt model statutes, employ officially approved architects and builders, and open their **accounts to formal inspection**. A superstructure of unions and federations was also established, with a confederation arguing the case of the sinistrés in the ministries in Paris.

Early in 1919 staff of the « Génie Rural » Md organized lectures in Nord stressing the advantages of reconstruction cooperatives [31, p. 131]. By June 35 had been created with over 8,000 members, and

an equal number were being formed [18, p. 13]. By early 1920 272 were in existence, involving the daims of 31,000 sinistrés in 294 communes [31, p. 134]. However, less than a quarter of the early cooperatives functioned properly, about a half had just started, and the remainder only existed on paper [20, p. 28]. The law of 15 August 1920 led to considerable reorganization, with 276 cooperatives being approved by July 1923, involving 31,781 members in 300 communes [31, p. 134]. They enabled a rational timetable of reconstruction to be adopted, with buildings of communal significance usually preceding fannhouses or individual dwellings [34, p. 4]. Plans for most of the 251 damaged or devastated communes had been drawn up by early 1921, and permanent reconstruction duly began [31, p. 101]. The cooperatives entered a phase of great activity but progress was soon constrained by a shortage of credit from the state [34, p. 8]. At the height of the building season of summer 1922 72,000 workers were involved in rebuilding, but by September the total had contracted to 61,794, embracing 41,597 French nationals, 408 citizens of French colonies, and 19,789 foreigners (including 11,277 Belgians and 6,183 Italians) [31, p. 139]. There were enough manual workers but skilled carpenters, masons, locksmiths and plumbers were in short supply [34, p. 21].

In September 1923 Prefect Morain reported the contrast between 1921, when « life seemed to be confined to sordid huts surrounded by ruins », and the present when the 'red zone' was distinguished by « red roofs of completed houses and scaffolding against walls [which] shows that work is being pursued actively » [31, p. 139]. Much had been achieved in the intervening months, with new kilns being opened in 1922 to overcome the shortage of bricks [30, p. 11]. Statistics from the « Ministère des Régions Libérées » recorded 122,636 houses « reconstructed or permanently repaired » throughout Nord by 1 January 1923 (an increase of 41,000 during the preceding twelve months) and 11,638 farm buildings having been reconstructed or repaired (an increase of 9,300) [28]. Prefect Morain identified 120,372 houses repaired by August 1922 but only 2,948 reconstructed [30, p. 9]. He estimated that 44,000 dwellings still needed to be rebuilt in Nord, making « resolution of the housing crisis one of the greatest problems of the day » [30, p. 10]. Large amounts of temporary housing (22,461 units) and temporary agricultural buildings (2,498) also had been completed by August 1922 and a further 872 houses were being built [30, p. 12]. Five years after the Armistice, 135,096 houses had been

repaired in the villages and towns of Nord and work was in progress on a further 70,067, with only 2,137 buildings not having been touched. By contrast, only 7,041 buildings had been constructed anew, with work under way on a further 10,307; rebuilding had not yet started on 35,066 ruins [31, p. 139].

Reconstruction of housing proved much slower than restoration of farmland which was completed in Nord by late 1922, or filling trenches and removing barbed wire which were over by 1925 [29]. The amount of arable land in the department peaked in 1923 but then declined as greater emphasis was placed on grassland and animal husbandry. By 1928 the numbers of cattle, pigs and sheep were very close to their pre-war figures, with the reduced number of horses reflecting arable mechanization and the shift to livestock farming. The department's wheat yield in 1928 (36.4h1/ha) not only exceeded the pre-war level but was three times what had been accomplished in 1919. Houses and farm buildings continued to be rebuilt during the 1920s, and temporary dwellings were sold for use as barns or sheds [25, p. 4]. The reconstruction cooperatives functioned more slowly than anticipated because of cash-flow problems [21, p. 24]. In January 1928 173,490 houses had been reconstructed or permanently repaired in Nord, together with 24,695 farm buildings and 2,787 public buildings [29]. Some 276 reconstruction cooperatives still operated, involving 39,597 sinistrés in 312 communes [29]. In the next nine months 21 completed their work and closed their accounts, with 26 more on die point of doing so [21, p. 24]. The great majority continued to function into the 1930s, as did two special cooperatives established in 1921 to raise Tans for restoring or rebuilding over a hundred churches [8]. These organizations advised architecte, inspected building sites, and audited accounts.

By March 1926 the population of Nord (1,969,159) had regained its pre-war total and five years later stood at 2,029,449, with immigration having played an important role in that recovery. In 1926 219,153 foreigners were recorded, 63% of whom were Belgian and 23% Polish [37, p. 260]. By 1931 the number of foreigners had declined to 212,485 but the Polish proportion had risen to 36% and the Belgian share had contracted to 47%. Thirty of the 68 cantons in Nord were housing more people than in 1911, however the areas of decline apparent in 1921 were still in evidence in 1931. The cantons of Armentières and Quesnoy-sur-Deule contained only

80% of their pre-war figure and the villages that made up Marcoing canton housed only 71%.

By 1936 the Prefect could report that dwellings in the 'red zone' had been « completely or almost completely rebuilt », with reconstruction cooperatives having ensured that new buildings were « more rationally designed and hygienic than the structures they replaced » [7]. Fewer dwellings for farmworkers had been rebuilt, in recognition of the importance of migration to urban work. In addition, some sinistrés chose not to rebuild in their home commune but invested their compensation money in a new farmhouse elsewhere, or even in a suburban villa. As a result, reconstructed settlements were more spacious than their predecessors. Some fifteen years after the Armistice, the chaos of the 'red zone' has been replaced by reconstituted farmland and by repaired or reconstructed buildings, whose bright bricks, tiles and paintwork would soon mellow, leaving only military cemeteries, war memorials and the occasional concrete block-house to bear direct witness to the impact of the Great War on the rural landscapes of Nord [39, p. 335].

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