

sector, which (as in Britain) received no protection whatsoever from a free-trader government. In industry and the larger service sectors too, it was a decade of strikes and disputes, seeing the rise of organized Socialism, and of the Social Democratic League under Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis. These developments were later and less powerful than in many other western European economies, but even Dutch Catholics were made aware of the consequences of the structural depression in the Dutch open economy. Various forms of organization were growing up to try to look after the interests of Catholic working men, or at the very least to keep them away from the Socialists, and in the course of this development a local discussion grew up around the correct or safest form these organizations might take. The Roman Catholic People's League (*Volksbond*) of 1888 was a general association open to all classes, in many ways emulating the old guilds of the *ancien régime*; this was the form favoured by most of the Dutch bishops. More progressive Catholics, however, like Alphonse Ariëns, and even Herman Schaepman, saw that in order to provide real answers, and a real alternative to Socialism, it would be necessary to set up trade unions on a Roman Catholic basis, exclusively for working men.³ This Dutch debate on the legitimate methods for Catholic organization was a microcosm of the international one played out between the various schools of social Catholicism in the 1880s, like the Fribourg and Liège groups,⁴ and *Rerum Novarum* was seen as an authoritative comment in the dispute, albeit one designed to alienate as few parties as possible.

In this situation, the reception of the encyclical in the Netherlands was understandably mixed. In some Catholic quarters there was ecstasy; in others it was viewed with only thinly veiled alarm. Nearly all parties, Catholic or otherwise, took it seriously. The impact of *Rerum Novarum* has been making itself felt for a hundred years, but here we shall assess the immediate and direct reception in the Netherlands. In some ways the reactions were predictable; in others the nuances are surprising and help to clarify the range of opinion on social issues in the Dutch media at the end of the nineteenth century. It has been neither possible nor desirable to cover every single organ of the contemporary press in a systematic manner, but I have instead concentrated on the daily newspapers, especially those with national ambitions rather than the purely local press; some reference to weeklies, monthlies and even pamphlets has been made here and there to add depth to

3. Rogier, *Katholieke herleving*, 327-328; and Righart, *De katholieke zuil*, 223-224.

4. J. Roes, ed., *Bronnen van de katholieke arbeidersbeweging in Nederland: toespraken, brieven en artikelen van Alphons Ariëns 1887-1901*, Nijmegen 1982, XXXVI.