

Posters, pamphlets
and prints the ways
and means of
disseminating
dissident opini...



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Chapter 7 Posters, Pamphlets and Prints: The Ways and Means of Disseminating Dissident Opinions on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt. When Maximilien Morillon, the vicar-general of the metropolitan see of Mechelen, wrote on 7 June 1567 to his master and confidant, Cardinal Granvelle, then in Rome, he was in a rather cheerful frame of mind. The past twelve months had truly been an ??? annus horribilis??™.

But now, after the unnerving explosion of Calvinist field services, the devastation of hundreds of churches and a rash of local insurrections, things seemed at last to be returning to normal. The heretics had fled the country, the Feast of Corpus Christi had just been celebrated in Brussels with great devotion and the vicar-general had even overheard people expressing regret that Granvelle had ever left the Habsburg Netherlands. To Morillon one of the most hopeful signs was the cessation of ??? posters and pasquinades??™. His relief was understandable. For a year or more the religious and political establishments had been openly assailed by a hostile press. With the country awash with Protestant books and Beggar pamphlets, even respectable printers had concluded that they would do no harm if they followed suit and reprinted such material.

Besides, entrepreneurs hate to turn away good business and in those topsy-turvy times, the future seemed more than ever uncertain. In the history of the Low Countries 1566 has become known as the ??? year of marvels??™; it was a crazy time when the collapse of the old order seemed a distinct possibility. Protestants thought of it as the year when the ??? door of the gospel??™ first opened in the Low Countries and others, looking back on 1566 from the perspective of the successful revolt in 1572, spoke of it more

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generally as ??? the first freedom of the Netherlands??™. 1566 was also a high point in the history of printing in the Low Countries.

According to the recently completed Belgica Typographica [BT], which furnishes a finding list to almost ten thousand titles published in what is now Belgium between 1541 and 1600 and which may be found in Belgian libraries, output during this sixty-year span averaged around 160 titles a year. Yet in 1566 the presses issued 262 works; indeed if variant editions from the same printer are excluded, 1566 emerges as the single most productive year in this entire period for the southern Netherlands, and that impression is confirmed when north Netherlands publications are added. This upsurge in book production can be attributed almost entirely to the publication of explicitly Protestant texts and dissident political writings of one sort or another. When we conflate the data from the BT, with the first part of the Typographia Batava [TB], which also covers the period 1541??“ 1600, we find that almost one quarter of all the books produced in 1566 ??“ eighty plus titles out of a net total of 342 ??“ fall into one or other of these two categories. The umbrella ??? Protestant publications??™ accommodates works of polemic directed against Catholic theology, titles related to the Lutheran-Reformed doctrinal debates as well as the metrical psalms, of which there were no fewer than 13 Dutch editions, and 24 Dutch Protestant confessions, most of which were Calvinist. ??? Dissident political??™ literature is rather more of a catch-all. Here it is taken to include any publication unwelcome to the Habsburg government in Brussels, apart from explicitly Protestant titles.

The distinction is crude and the inclusion of anticlerical publications under this latter rubric is open to challenge. But it seems defensible insofar as people at the time made a de facto distinction of this sort: Protestant writings usually appeared on the index of forbidden books, whereas dissident political titles only occasionally were to be found in this company. The spectrum of publications subsumed under this rather unsatisfactory head is very broad indeed. At one end were what we might regard as ??? press releases??™ from the side of the Compromise of the Nobility and their supporters, including their petitions to the King, details about their negotiations with the central government and their appeals to the Holy Roman emperor. Then there was the quasi-official propaganda written to support the Beggars??™ cause and perhaps sponsored by the leaders of the Compromise and of the Antwerp Reformed. Though ostensibly addressed to Philip II, these argued that religious toleration was essential for the stability and commercial prosperity of the country. Finally, we have a motley collection of ephemera – broadsheets, satires, lampoons, songs and political prints.

These targeted the conventional hate figures – Granvelle, the inquisitor Titelmans and Sonnius, the new bishop of ??™s-Hertogenbosch ??” and stirred up anticlerical sentiment. Though we can now quantify the volume of Protestant and politically subversive material, we should remember that the STCs and the catalogues of prints only record what has survived or for which there is unimpeachable bibliographical evidence. They almost certainly seriously understate the number of broadsheets, songs and political prints in circulation in 1566. For example, if we accept the evidence of the STCs at

face value, then it would appear that many printers published an implausibly small number of titles, though for some, of course, printing was just a sideline. Then, too, a high proportion of this sort of material was very cheaply produced ??“ just how cheaply we shall shortly discuss – and had a short shelf life. Whereas medals and counters were collectibles to be treasured as keepsakes ??“ they might even be stored in purpose-made containers, these ephemeral publications, unbound, often unpaginated and carelessly printed, had no aesthetic appeal. By the time antiquarians and book collectors took any notice of them in the nineteenth century, many had mouldered away before the combined assaults of worms, mice and mildew.

Besides, their very subject matter rendered them an acute source of danger to those caught in possession, when the day of reckoning came with the arrival of Alba. We may therefore safely suppose that many would have been destroyed, either by their fearful owners or by the authorities. Though we cannot even guess how much has been lost, references in contemporary sources to handbills, pamphlets and woodcuts which have since disappeared, or at least cannot be identified with extant publications, suggest the losses were significant. In many cases only a single copy has survived. More than once forbidden books have come to light by accident during restoration work, most recently in Delft, where six suspect books were found under the floorboards, four of which were previously unknown editions. Such chance finds demonstrate just how precarious and partial is our knowledge of these vulnerable publications. At this point it might be helpful to say a word about the shape of printing in the Low Countries on the eve of the Revolt and in particular in 1566. In the early sixteenth century books

were printed in some twenty places, often in close association with monastic houses and with the early centres of learning.

But this dispersed pattern gradually changed during the next half century as the book-trade of the Low Countries was pulled into the gravitational field of the Antwerp market. It has been reckoned that more than half the printers active in the Low Countries between 1500 and 1540 worked in this city; together these accounted for 2254 of the 4100 [55 per cent] titles produced in this period; by contrast, the printers of Amsterdam are credited with a mere hundred publications. By 1566 only three towns in the northern Netherlands ??“ Amsterdam, Delft and Kampen ??“ could boast three or more printers and several had none at all.

By and large these northern printers were unadventurous. Spurning the humanist writers, including Erasmus, they stuck instead to school textbooks, works of Catholic devotion, almanacs and rates of exchange, for which they used the traditional gothic, rather than more fashionable roman or italic fonts. When a belated attempt was made to set up a humanist press in Haarlem in 1561, it folded after three years, despite initial optimism and a hefty subsidy from the magistrates. In the southern Netherlands, Leuven, Ghent and, to a lesser degree, Brussels remained important centres of printing, but none could hold a candle to Antwerp. There was, however, one branch of the book-trade that bucked this trend; the clandestine printing of Protestant literature moved out of Antwerp??™s orbit.

Until the mid-1540s most of the evangelical works intended for readers in the Low Countries had also come from Antwerp presses, but the execution in

the early 1540s of two printers involved in this work underscored the risks. At the same time opportunities opened up outside the Low Countries. From 1547-1553 Dutch emigre printers were active in London and after Mary Tudor succeeded, they moved their operations to Emden, which swiftly rose to become the foremost centre of Dutch Calvinist printing, a position it retained for the next fifteen years. In the early 1560s Protestant literature intended for the Low Countries also came off the presses of both emigre and local printers in Wesel, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Sedan, Rouen and Lyon. But until the explosive growth of Calvinism in Antwerp, Flanders and the Walloon cities after 1559, the market for evangelical books in the Low Countries was quite modest ??“ according to one scholar only 170 Protestant works appeared in Dutch between 1520 and 1540.

Though Protestant printing was conducted on a small scale, those who engaged in this illicit and dangerous trade were compelled to develop a variety of subterfuges in an attempt to outwit the Catholic authorities, subterfuges that have made this niche of the book trade a source of endless fascination. These books were antedated and often published anonymously or with pseudonyms with false or fictitious addresses. Sometimes too their Protestant content was concealed under a Catholic veneer. They also set up covert distribution networks, smuggling books into the country in barrels and chests, for forwarding in smaller consignments to well-disposed individuals for re-sale and to booksellers who would supply these under the counter to trusted clients. In this process itinerant bookmen also played a key part.

Some like the colporteur arrested in Flanders in 1563 with his sales catalogue of sixty odd books, many by Calvin himself and printed in Geneva,

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were strong Protestants, but others were illiterate pedlars, who simply stocked the odd religious or anticlerical pamphlet along with their routine merchandise. In the freer conditions prevailing in 1566, the trade in heretical and dissident publications could be conducted, if only briefly, more openly, and some printers at Antwerp and in the northern Netherlands did publish Protestant books, though the majority of such works continued to come from presses operating outside the Low Countries. By contrast, relatively few political titles were published abroad: the well-established Emden presses were, for example, responsible for no more than a couple.

Andrew Pettegree attributes the modest showing of Emden in respect of political pamphlets to its distance from the chief markets in the southern Netherlands. If these were to sell, time was of the essence, whereas in the case of the Bibles, psalm books, catechisms and confessions of faith there was less urgency. Zealous Reformed Protestants may also have been reluctant to get too close to the grubby world of politics, lest their doctrinal purity be sullied.

Some Calvinists, for example, disliked the idea of sailing under the flag of the Confession of Augsburg in the hope of winning the support of the German Lutheran princes and others had reservations about the propriety of taking up arms in defence of the 'true gospel'. Besides, the leaders of the Compromise of the Nobility who led the political campaign against the repressive anti-heresy laws had no need of the Emden printers. They had at their disposal a formidable press in the small town of Vianen, that was conveniently located on the borders between Holland and Utrecht. From the point of view of the Beggars, Vianen was ideal for as a quasi-sovereign

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lordship, it was theoretically beyond the reach of Brussels, while its ruler, Hendrik van Brederode, headed the Compromise of the Nobility. During 1566 the printer-in-residence there, Albert Christiaensz., became in effect the official printer to the Beggars, and Dutch historians of the book now credit him with having printed at least fourteen of the political pamphlets published that year, or almost one-third of all the dissident publications. Until the mid-1560s political pamphlets had been conspicuous by their absence in the Low Countries and when these first appeared, they took the authorities aback.

Ever since 1521 the Habsburg government had concentrated on the elimination of heretical books and it built up a comprehensive system to police the book trade, backed up by draconian penalties so that the mere possession of a forbidden book became a capital offence after 1529. Apart from a single rather bland edict, which proscribed the printing and dissemination of pasquils prejudicial to the common weal and the prince??TMs prerogatives as well to the Catholic faith, there is very little evidence that political malcontents used the press to ventilate their grievances. This neglect seems strange, because print had become part and parcel of every day life in the Low Countries. Central and local government, fraternities and individuals routinely used the new technology in the interests of administrative efficiency: they printed rates of exchange, began to use pre-printed forms and increasingly printed, rather than copied by hand, edicts and even local ordinances. The press was also used to produce lottery tickets, new year school songs and the programmes for the civic militias??TM shooting matches. Indeed a certain Hendrick van Aken even advertised his quack medicines in print, promising a refund to anyone who did not benefit

from his sovereign remedies against worms and other parasites! Political grievances could then have been readily aired in print; there just seems to have been no desire to do so.

This may be explained by the relative domestic tranquillity, which the Low Countries enjoyed under Charles V, certainly when compared with the German lands or Tudor England. And where discontent resulted in defiance of the central government ??“ as happened at Ghent in 1539 ??“ the strength of particularist sentiment and competing rivalries between the chief provinces curtailed the benefit of circulating printed appeals to the country as a whole. Not for the first or last time, the decentralised character of the Habsburg Low Countries worked to the advantage of the government. Political grievances were more likely to be redressed by hard bargaining behind the scenes. When the magistrates of Antwerp eventually persuaded Charles V to modify some of the most objectionable features of the so-called ??? Blood Edict??™ of April 1550, they did so by enlisting the support of Mary of Hungary, rather than by rushing into print. In the towns, personal quarrels and local feuds were, however, often expressed in hand written lampoons and libelles fameux ??“ defamatory bills – dropped in the street or stuck on gates, walls, doors or pulpits. After 1559 opposition to Philip II??™s conservative religious policy gathered strength. Great nobles as well as merchants, openly questioned whether a country that was so dependent on commerce could continue to enforce Catholic uniformity with the same severity, especially after Protestant regimes had been established among the Low Countries??™ main trading partners.

In Brabant, the plan to admit the new bishops to the provincial states in their capacity as abbots of the great monastic houses aroused concern because it threatened the power of the traditional orders, while the Flemish towns resented the inquisition's disregard for their urban privileges. Within the Council of State, the great nobility felt marginalised as Granvelle assumed the role of first minister. At the same time the influence of the radical element within the Calvinist movement grew in response to the intensified repression. Meanwhile south of the border, the French Protestants became more highly politicised, with the Huguenots, as they now became known, launching their propaganda offensive in a bid to secure religious toleration and even to oust the Catholic establishment. Since their more direct approach persuaded the French government to grant the Calvinists a modicum of religious toleration, their co-religionists in the Low Countries were rather less willing to suffer ??? under the cross??. The extent of collaboration between the Reformed churches in France and the Low Countries is hard to assess, not least because an understandably watchful government in Brussels was prone to exaggerate the dangers of a Calvinist international.

But the fears of Brussels were not entirely groundless: Granvelle, who had received a copy of the resolutions taken at the Reformed synod of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre in April 1564, knew the French Calvinist churches intended to sound out their coreligionists in the Low Countries about raising money to defend the new religion. But if the dissidents in the Netherlands took their cue from the Huguenots, they also took their time. The Huguenot pamphlet campaign, begun in France in 1559, had no immediate counterpart in the

Low Countries. Apart from a Latin pamphlet of 1560 that blamed the papacy and the inquisitors for the persecution, the first overtly political pamphlet to be published was a Dutch edition of Brabant^{??}™'s Joyeuse Entree, printed at Cologne in 1564, when it caught Morillon^{??}™'s eagle eye. Interestingly, the Grandees who began to agitate for Granvelle^{??}™'s recall in 1561 did not directly invoke the press; instead they advertised their opposition by means of cryptic badges and devices and mocked him behind his back when they assembled for their family banquets. But the trial of strength between Granvelle and the Grandees did not pass unnoticed. A stream of ??? seditious^{??}™ handwritten bills, posted on prominent buildings, brought these to the notice of the public. These ??? offensive bills^{??}™ represent the opening salvoes in a political campaign.

Unlike the run-of-the-mill libelles fameux, the posters that now appeared in Brussels and Antwerp defamed national figures and raised constitutional objections to the operation of the Inquisition in Brabant. From the first, Granvelle suspected that these bills were carefully orchestrated. The chronology is certainly suggestive.

They first appeared in the spring of 1562, when the anti-Granvelle League began to emerge; the next wave coincided with the Cardinal^{??}™'s undignified departure from the Low Countries in 1564 and the third, and most intense, began in late December 1565, hard on the heels of the creation of the Compromise of the Nobility. These hand written posters did not pull their punches. One attached to the gates of Antwerp in March 1562 cast the Cardinal in the role of the evil genius.

He was accused of seeking to make Brabant subservient to his spiritual father, the ??? dragon de Rome??™ and of enslaving the people to the ??? Spanish swine??™. It ended by bluntly warning those who did the inquisitors??™ bidding, that ??? the bludgeon had been strengthened and the sword sharpened??™. During the first three months of 1566, such bills heightened the tension and inflamed opinion against the clergy, Spaniards and the Spanish inquisition. Yet hand written bills could never on their own sustain a national political campaign; they reached too few people.

If the critics of the King??™s religious policy were to be effective, they had to exploit the printing press, and this they eventually did. In his account of the events of 1566, written in exile, Jacob van Wesenbeke, a pensionary of Antwerp and subsequently publicist for William of Orange, recalled the great variety of publications that had kept the public in a state of agitation: ??| more and more [material] was printed and turned out, not only a great many coloured prints, pictures, engravings, ballads, songs and pasquils, in manuscript and in print, but also many and diverse small books both in French and Dutch, all attacking these persecutions, inquisitions and innovations. I should like now to turn to consider the production, sale and dissemination of these ephemeral publications during 1566, when for almost a year the laws of censorship were in abeyance. Much of the material in circulation ??“ the satirical prints, anticlerical songs, parodies and the echoes ??“ an echo is a verse form where one line echoes the concluding syllables of the previous line so as to supply an answer to the question contained in it ??“ was printed on local initiative. But the press was also enlisted to mobilise public support for the nobles, when they presented their request in

April 1566. Let us begin by looking at the economics of printing pamphlets and other cheap publications. On 10 May 1566 Nicholas du Bar, a merchant from Valenciennes and since 1557 an ??? habitant??™ of Geneva, where he had connections with the book-trade, entered into a contract with Gillis le Clercq, a lawyer and the Calvinist eminence grise in the Low Countries.

Du Bar undertook to arrange the printing of 1500 French and 2000 Dutch copies of a remonstrance addressed to Philip II, which Le Clercq had probably written. The two men were to share the risks and the rewards and Le Clercq duly handed six half gold reales to his co-religionist. If, as seems likely, Du Bar contributed an equal sum, the risk capital for this publishing venture came to 12 half gold reales, that is some 21 carolus guilders or 420 stuivers.

On this basis the unit cost of each pamphlet was a mere 0. 12 stuivers.

Though the octavo publication in question cannot be identified with complete certainty ??“ there are two likely candidates, one of 44 pages, the other of around 72 – the production costs seem improbably low. There are, however, precedents. In 1522-23 the cathedral chapter at Utrecht commissioned two publications. The first was intended as a puff to assist the indulgence sellers in the diocese. They had seen their sales plummet, due, it was said, among other reasons, to Luther??™s influence and the chapter therefore decided to publish a brief refutation of the German reformer. Five hundred copies were ordered for the equivalent of 105 stuivers, i.

e. 0. 21 stuivers per copy.

The second was an order for 1600 papal breves for 350 stuivers, where the

unit cost was only a fraction more, at 0. 218 stuivers. When the Illustrious
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Fraternity of Our Lady in ??TMs-Hertogenbosch commissioned the printing of 500 copies of the guild regulations in 1562, it paid a total of 86 stuivers, so that each copy, which was made up of four sheets, cost only 0. 17 stuivers. Shorter publications were still cheaper. In 1566 a book pedlar working in the northern provinces paid a printer in Overijssel one guilder to reprint a one thousand copies of three Beggars songs, which gives a unit cost of only 0. 02 stuivers. There was of course a world of difference between the cost of a substantial book and a pamphlet.

In the mid-sixteenth century one printer who published an octavo of 800 pages with a print run of 1400 copies required a capital of at least 450 livres tournois (approximately ? 45 sterling), more than twenty times what it cost to produce the 3500 copies of the Le Clercq pamphlet. A copy of the Bible in either French or Dutch sold for between 50 and 80 stuivers in the mid-sixteenth century and was therefore beyond the reach of all but the most dedicated of ordinary people. Sometimes you could pick up a Bible more cheaply. In the early 1540s an inhabitant of Leuven bought a Bible from a student for 30 stuivers and two tankards of beer, though in this case student poverty may have been a factor.

Evangelicals at Leuven were prepared to pay eight stuivers for a forbidden book of some 350 pages in the 1540s; by contrast an Amsterdam Anabaptist paid two stuivers for an anti-Catholic polemic of around 44 pages in the early 1550s. As ever, Netherlanders wanted value for money. In a letter of 1555 to the Reformed church at Emden, the minister of the underground congregation in Antwerp explained why Utenhove??TMs edition of the

metrical psalms was not selling. ??? Some of the brethren??TM, he wrote, ???
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will only pay two stuivers a copy and reckon that for the number of pages they are too dear??™.

We are ill informed about the price of the pamphlets on sale in 1566. At the first field services around Ghent at the end of June 1566, the metrical psalms were on sale, for the giveaway price of a ??? twaalvaard??™, that is one quarter stuiver. Though this seems implausibly cheap, it tallies with the report of another Ghent chronicler, who tells us stallholders had Calvinist literature for sale at ??? the small sum of 12 myten??™, that is one quarter stuiver. Perhaps such publications were subsidised or the booksellers shaved their profit margins in the expectation of high volume sales. A catalogue of current publications, dated January 1610, listed selling prices from three-quarters of one stuiver to 18 stuivers, though most fell in the three to five stuiver range. Thirty or so years later a bookseller in Friesland ordered twenty-eight pamphlets at a cost to him of one or two stuivers apiece. Such scanty evidence makes it impossible to reach definite conclusions about the cost of pamphlets and other ephemera in 1566, but my best guess would be that two stuivers would have been the ceiling price, and most would have cost no more than one stuiver.

Even at this modest price, publishers could make hefty profits. If, for the sake of argument, we suppose that the pamphlet which Du Bar published for Le Clercq sold for no more than one half stuiver, then the two men stood to make in excess of eighty carolus guilders, a four hundred percent profit! Such profit margins are not as far fetched as they might at first appear, for Plantin was selling a few titles in the mid-1560s at prices that would have

brought a return of upwards of 350%. Of course, all such estimates make the unrealistic assumption that the entire print run was sold.

Nevertheless, one can see why some established printers in Antwerp and elsewhere might have decided, for purely commercial reasons, to supply the sudden appetite for Protestant and politically dissident titles in 1566. Van Wesenbeke, you may recall, noted the sale of ??? coloured prints, pictures [and] engravings??™. The mention of prints is particularly noteworthy, for until the mid-1560s anti-Catholic, let alone anti-government, visual propaganda was virtually unknown. In the Netherlands, as also in France, very few Protestant works were illustrated, and home-produced anti-Catholic images were no less rare.

Both countries differed markedly in this respect from Germany, where the proponents of the Reformation had exploited the visual medium ever since 1520, using both single-sheet woodcuts and illustrated broadsheets. Yet there was no lack of interest in prints among the public at large. Indeed the Antwerp printmaker and publisher Hieronymus Cock was especially active in the period 1555-1565, when he began to produce prints of Pieter Brueghel??™s drawings. House inventories show us that topographical prints and allegorical engravings were not uncommon.

The reason for this dearth of polemical images, (as well as pamphlets) should probably be sought in the inchoate character of the Reformation in the Netherlands, where the process of confessionalisation began later than in Germany. As we have seen in chapter three, with the important exception of the Anabaptists, evangelicals in the Low Countries were slow to break their

ties with the Catholic Church into which they had been baptised and whose services many continued to attend, whether from fear or doctrinal uncertainty, we do not know. An analysis of the evangelical literature before 1555 reveals a marked preference for works of spiritual edification, rather than strident anti-Catholic polemic. No doubt, too, the fierce anti-heresy laws deterred printers from publishing, and the public from displaying, explicitly anti-Catholic images. When therefore satirical prints first appeared more or less at the same time as political pamphlets, they attracted considerable attention. As nothing is known about the price of prints in 1566, one has to fall back on information relating to prints that are broadly comparable.

Plantin, for example, sold his ??? Triumphs of Charles V??™, made up of twelve small, but finely engraved, prints for fifteen stuivers, while his portraits of rulers cost a stuiver apiece. The Cologne patrician Hermann von Weinsberg, who liked to collect Hogenberg??™s engravings of the Dutch Revolt as these appeared, paid a similar price for 21 prints in 1585. As these were similar in size, though artistically superior, to the satirical woodcuts and engravings produced in 1566, it seems reasonable to suppose that these would not have cost any more, and possibly rather less. In the abstract, the pamphlets and prints seem modestly priced, but whether ordinary workers could have afforded them is another matter. According to the Belgian social historians Scholliers and Vandenbroecke, ??? the low point in the development of living standards in the southern Netherlands [between the mid-fourteenth century and 1800] certainly occurred in the period 1550-1565??™. Minimum day wage rates for unskilled labourers in Antwerp at this time hovered around the 6-7 stuivers mark. This was the rate paid to textile

workers who, having been made unemployed by the disruption of the cloth trade with England, were set to work on the town walls; a master carpenter in Alkmaar could expect 12 stuivers in the summer of 1566. In a working year ??” reckoned at best at 264 days ??” unskilled labourers would be lucky to earn ninety-odd guilders per annum (or 1800 stuivers).

Outside Antwerp wage rates were significantly lower. Common sense tells us that families living so close to the bread line would have spent all their earnings on the necessities of life – food, housing, fuel and clothing; inessentials like prints and ballads, no matter how cheap, would have been beyond their means. Yet common sense would not always have prevailed in the febrile conditions characteristic of 1566. There can scarcely have been a soul in the southern towns who would have been impervious to the alarming rumours of Catholic conspiracies and Calvinist putsches, to say nothing of the excitement generated by the field services, following by the iconoclastic riots. In this hothouse atmosphere, where cheap Beggar medals sold like ??? hot pies??™ in the streets of Antwerp, the thirst for the latest gossip must have been hard to resist, even for those on low incomes. Besides, in the case of Brussels and Antwerp, it was not always necessary to buy the publications.

A fair number of the smaller pamphlets were distributed, or ??? sown??™ as they said, – they were indeed sometimes called ??? sown books??™ – at night in various parts of the town. A pamphlet spread around the streets of Antwerp after dark on 27 April, warned the governing classes in Brabant on no account to have any truck with the ??? pitiful??™ moderation, by which the authors understood the government??™s offer to suspend the
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repression. A month later a handbill, printed in Vianen, appeared overnight simultaneously in the four chief towns of Brabant. Someone annotated on one such pamphlet that ??? large numbers of these little books were publicly sold at the Beurs (in Antwerp) about noon on 19 and 20 June, and [that] during the night of 30 June and 1 July they were distributed on the street in Brussels in French??™. It would not be difficult to expand this list of list of ??? sown??™ books. The propaganda benefits from these ??? freebies??™ were evidently considered to repay the costs of their production which were, at any rate, fairly low. In 1566 dissident pamphlet literature was abundantly available almost everywhere in the Low Countries. The field services provided the obvious venue for their sale.

No sooner had people begun to attend the Calvinist preaching outside Antwerp, than the book pedlars, scenting business, set up their stalls selling, we are told, ??? prints, some with offensive refrains, images and pictures attacking the mass, the pope and the clergy??™. Bookstalls also sprang up around the newly built Calvinist temple at Ghent, where you could buy ??? attacks on the mass, confession, libels against the inquisitors and the Cardinal, various despicable rhymes??™ as well as more edifying literature such as Dutch Bibles. Pedlars and chapmen took the pamphlets and prints into the remoter corners of the land. One such was Cornelis Pietersz.

Though only seventeen in 1567, he was used to travelling around the towns of Friesland in search of employment. Having been in contact with book pedlars, he saw the possibility of making a little on the side from selling cheap Beggar literature. With modest financial help from his father, he duly bought an unknown number of such songs from two men in Bolsward.

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When these had sold out, he took a copy to a printer in Steenwijk, and asked him to re-print a thousand copies. Cornelis Pietersz. was working on a shoestring. But in Delft book pedlars with a stock estimated at as much as thousand guilders set up their stalls in the market in sight of the town hall, sometimes for three weeks at a time. According to the Delft printer Harman Schinckel, on trial for his life in 1568, these pedlars came from all over the Low Countries. It was the same in Kampen.

At the end of October 1566 Peter Warnersz., a local printer, was indicted for having reprinted a pamphlet, which claimed Granvelle, the Cardinal of Lorraine and the papacy were in cahoots. The printer did not deny the charge, but refused to believe he had done anything wrong. In his defence he claimed that this pamphlet, along with others, had been on sale at five or more locations around the small town. Nor did these booksellers think of doing their business behind closed doors; on the contrary they noisily advertised the latest titles to passers by, shouting out ??? Here??™s something new. Buy the three popes and the inquisition here??™. And the printer went on to recall that recently several anti-Catholic prints had been sold in front of the shambles, indeed he had observed one of the burgomasters looking on and then walking away.

In the small south Holland town of Gorcum you could buy anti-Catholic ??? coloured prints??™ from a pedlar who displayed his wares on the steps leading down to the quay. When a local Calvinist took along ??? a scandalous picture??™ from his own collection to show him, the stall holder asked if he might borrow it because it was new to him and proceeded to hang it up on a cord so that others could view it. Antwerp was, as we might expect, also the <https://assignbuster.com/posters-pamphlets-and-prints-the-ways-and-means-of-disseminating-dissident-opinion-on-the-eve-of-the-dutch-revolt/>

epicentre of the trade in satirical prints, as we may see from tracking the diffusion of two of the eight such prints known to have circulated at this time. In July that year, the Antwerp Lutheran, Godevaert van Haecht, who kept a close eye on the pamphlet literature of the time, described in detail one particular anti-Catholic print. This showed a Catholic church being pulled down by three men, while a crowds of ecclesiastics vainly struggled to prevent the collapse of the building. The three wreckers represented, as the caption explained, the Lutherans, the Huguenots and the Beggars, while an onlooker remarks: ??? If these three go on pulling, then its goodbye to the Roman Church and all its merchandise??™. In mid-August, shortly before the imagebreaking began at Ghent, the Catholic patrician, Marcus van Vaernewijck, whose antiquarian interests had caused him to record for posterity??™s sake, the sensational events then occurring in Flanders, noted that the same print was on sale in the market of his home town.

He also described another anti-papist print he had heard was on sale in Antwerp, of which unfortunately no copy has survived. This print showing the overthrow of the Roman Church also came to the attention of German readers, for it was described in detail in a contemporary zeitung about the imagebreaking in Antwerp. Perhaps it was from this source that Johan Rengers ten Post, a Protestant from the Ommelanden, heard about the print; his description of it bears an uncanny resemblance to the report in the zeitung and Rengers was very probably in Germany in 1566. Its fame may also have spread to London for in August 1566 the poet-printer John Awdeley published a ballad entitled, ??? The pluckyngne Donne of the Romyssche churche??™, which includes the suggestive line ??? Pul down her shop of

wares??™. Though in the case of Awdeley, we cannot be certain that he was referring to the Dutch print, as we shall see, at least one other satirical print from the Low Countries found its way across the North Sea. We can follow the dissemination of our second print, of which two copies have fortunately survived , still more closely.

On 25 June Godevaert van Haecht mentioned a print on sale at Antwerp which he described as follows: in the centre [of the print there was] a long pole or mast from which hung the inquisition and the placard; on one side the nobles of the country (i. e. the Compromise) and on the other side the pope, cardinals and other adherents pulled on the ropes. A fortnight later Morillon in Brussels sent Granvelle a copy of what he called ??? the tree of the Inquisition??™ and at the same time he tried to identify some of those on the Catholic side. He thought the gentleman with the pitchfork was Alonso del Canto, the Spanish paymaster, who reported directly to Philip on the political and religious situation in the Low Countries, and in particular distrusted the Grandees. Someone had apparently told Morillon that the cleric in the black bonnet (on the right at the back of the Catholic group) was none other than himself. Almost certainly Morillon??™s source was mistaken, but the idea no doubt tickled the vicar-general??™s ego, prompting him to remark somewhat wryly that his left arm was not up to such energetic exercises ??“ and indeed the churchman was then thinking of taking the waters at Herentals to relieve his rheumatism.

This print, which was also known to Rengers ten Post, was on sale in Kampen by October 1566, and it was also noted by an English agent in Antwerp, who forwarded it to William Cecil, describing it rather vaguely as ??? a <https://assignbuster.com/posters-pamphlets-and-prints-the-ways-and-means-of-disseminating-dissident-opinion-on-the-eve-of-the-dutch-revolt/>

conterfacture of the Geusis and Catholikes meaning touching the Plackat and Inquesisstion??™. Yet, if we may believe the Spanish Ambassador, Cecil could have picked up a copy in London. In a despatch of 3 August the ambassador reported that the print, which he evidently knew at firsthand, was by then on sale in London; indeed it may even have been re-printed there. The ambassador made his displeasure known to the English authorities, for, shortly afterwards, he noted (with heavy sarcasm) that ??? the bishop, as they call him, of London??™ had given instructions that copies of the print should be seized from the booksellers. The flood of pamphlets and other ephemera carried the message of the Protestants and the Beggars across the Low Countries and beyond.

But it did more; it provided the political opposition with the means to orchestrate public demonstrations of support, as may be seen in the case of Request presented by the Nobles of the Compromise in April 1566, discussed in the previous chapter. The presentation of Petition on 5 April was preceded by a flurry of printed bills, though quite how many is unclear. Moreover, since the complete text of only one has survived, we have to re-construct the contents from confused and contradictory reports in the official correspondence. There seem to have been at least two bills, which were distributed in large numbers ??“ the sources mention five thousand copies – at the very end of March or the beginning of April in several southern towns, including Brussels, Antwerp, Tournai and Valenciennes. The first of these, was described understandably by the Regent as ??? very seditious??™, for it conjured up the spectre of mass burnings and wholesale confiscation through the agency of the inquisition and apparently incited rebellion. The

second was quite different in character. It was addressed to the ??? bourgeois??™ of several southern towns and invited them to attend the nobles in Brussels when, in two of three days??™ time, they presented their request for the abolition of the inquisition. It also urged them to use their good offices to persuade the magistrates either to come themselves or to send deputies in support.

While there can be no doubt that the second bill had the seal of approval from the leaders of the Compromise and of the Calvinist consistory at Antwerp, who indeed supervised its distribution, the nobles and the Calvinist leadership would certainly have repudiated the first. Yet insofar as the two bills marshalled support for the nobles??™ demand that the inquisition be abolished, they served the same purposes, even if one employed shock tactics while the other used a rather more deferential register. It is not known how many Calvinists from Antwerp and elsewhere turned up outside the Coudenberg Palace on 5 April to cheer the nobles. What is certain is that the dissemination of these bills greatly alarmed the government and the urban authorities, who offered substantial rewards for information leading to the arrest of the authors. This concern was entirely justified. For the first time in the history of the Low Countries political dissidents had deployed the press in order to mount a campaign that took hold in several towns in Brabant as well as the Calvinist strongholds of Valenciennes and Tournai. In the face of this tide of dissident publications, one cannot but be struck by the inability of the authorities to meet this challenge.

Recent work done on the pamphlet literature and visual propaganda of the

Dutch revolt as a whole only confirms that rebel propaganda was vastly
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superior to anything the government could produce. The best they could hope for was, as Morillon wrote in June 1567 was that the ??? posters and pasquinades??™ would go away. Unfortunately for Morillon and his fellow loyalists, that hope was soon to be extinguished as a fresh, and rather better wave of propaganda prepared the way for the invasion of William of Orange in 1568.