

The Belgian War Press

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The Belgian War Press: a User-Friendly Access to the Digitised War Press

The Belgian War Press introduces you to hundreds of Belgian newspapers that were written, printed and distributed clandestinely during the two World Wars. Until now, this clandestine press had remained hidden in many archives, libraries and documentation centres. At the initiative of the CEGESOMA and funded by Belspo, these newspapers have been digitized. It is now possible to read and search them at home. Also the censored press of the First World War can be consulted in this way.

First page of the clandestine newspaper "Patrie!", n°14, July 1916. (Cegesoma, collection The Belgian War Press)

New Research Methods

The website has two functions. It offers access to the collections, and also the context to facilitate the use of this source for a non-specialised public.

Making the collections accessible is the first objective of the site. The reader can search in a variety of ways. The newspapers can be consulted in a traditional way via lists of alphabetical titles (per war and per type of press), in combination with a practical calendar. As these newspapers have also been OCR-ised, their complete content can also be searched via a random word. This is very useful when looking for information on events in a village or a specific neighbourhood, on sabotages or strikes, or on a particular company.

The website is a major step forward for academic research, not only because the different titles have been assembled, but also because searching by a specific word leads to an efficiency gain. Furthermore, research on the newspapers themselves has become a lot easier (for example analysis of the use of words and discourse, iconography, the editorial line?).

Context Information

This website is not only a tool for accessibility and consultation, but also provides context information on the censored and clandestine press during the two World Wars. From the start, the objective of the project was to stimulate the use of this rich collection, not only by specialised researchers, but also by the 'broad public'. The press lends itself well to this purpose. It gives information (sometimes in a tendentious way) on very different aspects of daily life, and on questions which seem trivial at first sight, but are in fact essential in the context of wars, such as rationing (for example rationing tables, publicity for ersatz products, etc.). The press is also a first rate source for local historians. The clandestine press in particular offers multiple possibilities, because of its often local presence and distribution.

To initiate and guide the non-specialised reader, short articles have been published on the site related to the clandestine and censored press and to certain newspapers and the people who played a central role in them. The reader will furthermore find a digitised version of the most important repertoires and reference works on the clandestine and censored press in Belgium.

The Federal Digitisation Project

CegeSoma's own collections possess the major part of the clandestine press from the Second World War and could be completed with the collections of many other collection holding institutions, federal (the Royal Library, the General Archives) as well as Flemish, Walloon and Brussels. The added value is not only the online accessibility, but also the possibility to consult hardcopy collections spread among different institutions.