

DIVIDED THEY STAND:
MANAGING DIVERSITY IN BELGIUM'S
DIVIDED SOCIETY

Mark A. Bertolini

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Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts
in the Department of West European Studies
Indiana University

June 1998

19980609 042

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE June 1998		3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Final	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Divided They Stand: Managing Diversity in Belgium's Divided Society				5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Mark A. Bertolini MAJ, AR U.S. Army				7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) US Army Student Detachment Bldg 5450, Room 2041 FT Jackson, SC 29207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A Approved for public release; Distribution Unlimited				12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) An examination of the conflict between Flemings and Walloons in Belgium. This study seeks to uncover the sources of national unity in Belgium. The following factors stand out as having served to unify the Belgian people: (1) a common heritage (2) the transition to a federal state (3) a consociational system (4) the intractable debate over Brussels DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4					
14. SUBJECT TERMS nationalism, consociational democracy				15. NUMBER OF PAGES 124	
				16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL		

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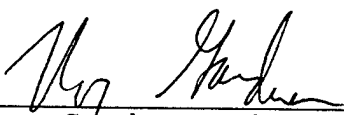
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Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts.

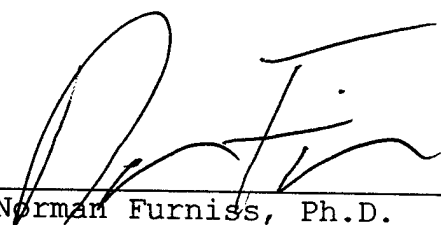
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To my parents,
Cesare and Ann Bertolini

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea behind this thesis was conceived during my attendance at the *Institut Royal Supérieur de Defense/Koninklijk Hoger Instituut voor Defensie* in Brussels, Belgium. Accordingly, I am indebted to my former classmates at the Institute as well as the people of Belgium in general for their hospitality during my stay in their country. I would also like to acknowledge the United States Army for providing the funding necessary to allow me to pursue my studies at Indiana University. Additionally, I wish to thank Professor Roy Gardner, chairman of my thesis committee, as well as Professors Peter Bondanella and Norman Furniss for all their guidance and assistance in the completion of this project. Finally, special thanks goes to my wife Barbara who throughout the preparation of this thesis, as with all my endeavors, provided a constant source of support and encouragement.

MAB
Bloomington, Indiana
December, 1997

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INTRODUCTION

Belgium is situated at the very heart of Europe and consequently has historically been at the crossroads of numerous conflicts and controversies. Today, however, the nation serves as a critical linchpin within a unified Europe, whose future is based on cooperation, solidarity, and a commitment to compromise. Thus it is especially ironic that this same country should be immersed in a state of conflict resulting from a clash of cultures taking place within its own borders.

The Kingdom of Belgium is a culturally divided society, comprised of the two very distinct regions of Flanders and Wallonia. The border between these two regions has for centuries been the invisible dividing line between Germanic culture to the north and Latin culture to the south. Of the almost ten million citizens of Belgium, 57.6% reside in Flanders and 32.5% live in Wallonia. The remainder are residents of the region of Brussels-Capital. Approximately 55% of the population is Dutch-speaking, 44% French-speaking and a minute percentage use German as their primary language. This linguistic partition is at the center of the conflict which threatens to split the country in two.

The strongest pressure for devolution undoubtedly comes from the Flemish. Like most European countries, Belgium has become a post-war welfare state. Under the current common social security system, affluent Flanders subsidizes poorer

Wallonia. Consequently, the Flemish feel that they have supported the Walloons for long enough, especially since they themselves have been treated like second-class citizens despite their numerical and economic superiority.

On the other hand, the Walloons feel they are entitled to the subsidies. In fact, during a July 1996 Parliamentary debate on welfare system revision, Claude Eedekens, leader of the Walloon Socialist party, threatened that Wallonia would blow up Belgium (and join France) if the money from Flanders diminished (Belien 1996, 31).

Although the majority of Belgians are not quite as radical in their views, many believe their country would have split long ago (like Czechoslovakia in 1993) if it were not for the problem of Brussels. The status of the Belgian capital is a tremendous sore point in Flemish-Walloon relations. The city is the country's largest, (comprising 10% of the total population), richest, fastest-growing (thanks in part to the EU), and the capital of Post-Maastricht Treaty Europe. Despite its officially bilingual status, 85% of the city's population is French-speaking. Geographically, however, it is situated in the heart of Flanders. It is in essence a French island surrounded by a hostile Flemish sea. One Flemish journalist has commented, "If we could we'd separate today. Brussels is the problem, and so is the cost of social security that flows from the wealthier north to the poorer south. But you can be assured

that we (the Flemish) will never give up Brussels" (Mosier 1994, 24).

In short, Belgium is a case study in devolution, regionalism, and ethnic problems in general which exist in some form in many parts of Europe. The transnational integration which has taken hold of Europe since 1945 has been accompanied by a growing demand for regional devolution. Examples can be found in northern Italy and the Basque and Catalonia regions of Spain. Additionally, the welfare state is in crisis all across Europe, as countries attempt to limit spending in order to meet the Maastricht criteria for monetary union. Belgium is certainly in need of financial restraint considering it has a national debt to GDP ratio of 130% (the highest in the EU).

Lately there has also been a Europe-wide increase in the feeling that national institutions are overloaded and unresponsive to local needs. Most recently, the people of Scotland have opted for their own separate parliament in a move to "replace bureaucracy with democracy" in the U.K. This regional phenomenon is particularly acute in Belgium due to the fact that it is a nation-state lacking deep roots and is home to two quite distinct ethnic and linguistic communities.

On the other hand, Belgium is also an example of how peoples of different languages and diverse cultures can be held together through a federalist system that asks no one to assimilate. Thus, from this standpoint, it can serve as

a model for those countries experiencing regional turmoil of their own.

The focus of this thesis is on the sources of Belgium's cultural conflict. I have attempted to answer this question: what actually keeps Belgium united despite the country's two very diverse regions and long history of internal conflict, which at times has threatened its very existence?

In order to understand fully what it is that holds Belgium together as a nation, it is critical to understand thoroughly those factors which threaten to pull it apart. On the surface, Belgian national sentiment seems hard to pinpoint. The divisive factors seem numerous and obvious, whereas the unifying elements appear much less so. It is only through the examination of the discord between Flemings and Walloons, however, that we may ultimately discover the sources of Belgian nationalism.

This thesis is organized into four chapters and a conclusion. In chapter one, I examine the origins of linguistic diversity and nationalism in Belgium through a brief history of the prefiguration of the Belgian state. I also address the issue of Belgium as an "artificial" state, as well as explore the role history has played in the development of Belgium as a nation.

In chapter two, I discuss the rise of the Flemish movement and the resulting development of its Wallonian counterpart. I examine the reasons for the emergence of

these regional movements and discuss the political agendas pursued by each.

In chapter three, I focus on the divisive factors fueling Flemish-Walloon discord. I consider the various political, economic, demographic and social issues which have served to divide Belgium throughout its history. In addition, I examine the role that the "Brussels dilemma" has played in Flemish-Walloon relations.

In chapter four, I address measures taken to sustain Belgian unity. In particular, I examine the reform of the Belgian Constitution and the subsequent movement toward a federal system. I also look at the effectiveness of Belgium's consociational form of democracy. Additionally, I consider the effects of EU integration on relations between the linguistic groups.

Finally, in conclusion, I summarize the factors which have contributed to the preservation of the Belgian nation.

A note on place names. As this thesis addresses the linguistic relations between Flemings and Walloons, I have attempted to employ the Belgian compromise in dealing with this sensitive issue. Like the Belgians themselves (on their highway road signs), I refer to particular cities by the names used in the region where they are located. For example, Mons instead of Bergen. In other instances, I have used the more common English version for cities such as Brussels (not Bruxelles or Brusel) and Antwerp (in lieu of Antwerpen).

CHAPTER 1

Linguistic Diversity and Nationalism in Belgium: An Historical Perspective

*La Belgique- formee par accident dans un trou
de l'histoire.**

Belgian folk song

Any attempt to understand the contemporary relationship between Flemings and Walloons requires some knowledge of Belgian history. Without an appreciation of its history, modern Belgium and the relations between Flemings and Walloons seem hardly comprehensible. To trace the subsequent evolution of regionalism in Belgium, a brief overview of historical developments prior to 1830 is useful.

Belgium is not only one of Europe's younger countries but historically and geographically speaking it can be argued that it is its most artificial. Geographically its artificiality is quite evident. Aside from the North Sea and the Ardennes region bordering Germany to the east, Belgium's frontiers with France and the Netherlands are based on history rather than geography. The plains of West Flanders, Hainaut and Campine extend unimpeded into the territories of Belgium's neighbors to the north and south. The openness of the Belgian terrain led to almost unlimited options in the drawing of political boundaries which occurred over centuries. While Belgium dates its independence to only 1830, its frontiers with the Netherlands and France originate with the treaties of

* Belgium- formed by accident out of a gap in history.

Westphalia in 1648 and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

In referring to history, Theodore Roosevelt once said: "It is a base untruth to say that happy is the nation that has no history. Thrice happy is the nation that has a glorious history" (Ravitch 1990, 190). The average Belgian, whether Fleming or Walloon, would most likely agree with this statement and would furthermore point to their long history as a source of national pride. In reality, however, the majority of this history is not "national" at all, but rather represents the history of the prefiguration of the Belgian nation as we know it today. In fact, Belgium developed over epoches as first a name, then a country, and finally an independent state (Boudart, Boudart, and Bryssinck 1990, 191).

Thus, in a larger historical context, the life span of an independent Belgian state has been relatively short, and even this short period has been disrupted by eight years of German occupation during two world wars. Consequently, the modern Belgian state rests upon complex historical foundations, and it is this history which has played a significant role in establishing the underlying (linguistic) tension between Flemings and Walloons which endures to the present. As we shall see, Belgium's biculturalism is a relatively recent phenomenon even though the basis for such ethnic diversity may be traced back to Roman times.

Roman Colonization and the Origin of the Linguistic Frontier

Although history has been instrumental in defining Belgium's territorial frontiers in a positive sense, it has had a contrasting effect on the country's linguistic frontier. The dividing line between Flanders and Wallonia has been present for nearly a thousand years and marks the approximate line along which the Franks halted their advance into the Roman empire in the 5th century. The larger linguistic frontier extends generally from Maastricht in the Netherlands to Boulogne in France and neatly divides present-day Belgium in half (appendix A). Switzerland, it should be noted, shares a branch of this general language frontier, but unlike Belgium, it is in other respects defined by its geography.

In contemporary Belgium, although the linguistic frontier is marked only by a small sign as one crosses it, indicating the border between Flanders and Wallonia, in the minds of most Belgians, it represents a divide as substantial as the Great Wall of China. To them, the language frontier is much more than a vestige of an historical phenomenon. It is a vital reality which is ardently upheld, and more importantly, legally recognized.

The development of this linguistic frontier is surrounded in controversy. Its exact origins are difficult to determine and the reasons for the emergence of a rather distinct language boundary across the middle of modern Belgium are obscure. The sources of evidence are so varied

and the validation so difficult that the debate over the origin of the language boundary is likely to remain inconclusive (Murphy 1988, 42).

Nevertheless, certain basic information is known. Prior to the Roman arrival in the area, all tribes were either Celtic or celticized. Julius Caesar is credited with first calling all the tribes living in northern Gaul between the Seine and the Rhine "Belgae". He is further quoted as saying, "Of all the peoples of Gaul, the toughest are the Belgae" (Boudart, Boudart, and Bryssinck 1990, 54). In spite of this, the region was subjugated by Rome and became the Roman province of Belgica around 15 B.C. Consequently, the administrative language in the area under Roman control was, of course, Latin.

From the middle of the 3rd century A.D. on, Frankish infiltrations occurred with greater frequency from the northern region of Germania. By 406 A.D., Roman authority had all but collapsed and Frankish and other Germanic (mostly Saxon and Frisian) settlements radically changed the ethnic and linguistic makeup of Roman Belgium (Ibid.).

The region comprising modern Flanders became overwhelmingly germanized and Germanic speaking, since Roman influence had been less extensive and local populations sparse. Thus, in the north, control fell to the Frankish majority which continued to speak an old form of Dutch called Diets (Herremans 1967, 3). The remaining Celtic or Gallic tribes were either absorbed by the more numerous

Franks or pushed south into Gaul. In what is now Wallonia, Roman culture was assimilated, and Franks, being less numerous, were absorbed by the local population and consequently continued to speak derivatives of Latin.

The linguistic situation remained somewhat unstable for centuries and was adjusted based on subsequent colonization, finally resulting in a stable boundary. By the 10th or 11th century the boundary between Romance and Germanic tongues had acquired its more or less definitive character (although debate within Belgium still ensues regarding the Fourons area of Flanders and that of Comines in Wallonia). The ultimate location of these Roman and Germanic settlements constitutes the distant base of present-day Flanders and Wallonia.

The low germanic language of the Franks in the northern region developed into modern Dutch. Today, Flemish is indistinguishable from standard Dutch except for minor differences of pronunciation and idiom (Keefe 1974, 80). To the south, dialects (referred to generally as Walloon) developed likewise over centuries. These dialects differ even less from standard French and are almost identical to the Picard dialect spoken in France.

The Middle Ages: The Belgian "No-Man's Land"

When Charlemagne's Empire was divided at the Treaty of Verdun in 843, the majority of the area of the future Belgian state became part of the "middle kingdom" of

Lotharingia. From that point on, the Kingdom of France and to a lesser extent the Holy Roman Empire of Germany developed into recognizable political entities, whereas the middle kingdom never achieved such a status. It is for this reason that Lotharingia has been referred to as a sort of "no man's land" (Outers 1968, 16).

Within Lotharingia, usurpation of imperial power led to the emergence of various principalities to include Hainaut, Brabant, Namur, and Luxembourg (Boudart, Boudart, and Bryssinck 1990, 58). Despite their semi-autonomous status, the Lotharingian principalities had strong cultural connections with the Germanic empire to the east up to the 12th century. The county of Flanders was established and comprised the eastern part of present-day Flanders, French Flanders (in northern France) and Zealand-Flanders (in the Netherlands). Juridically the counts of Flanders were vassals of the French kings. It is at this point that the French language started to infiltrate into the upper classes of Flemish society.

With the establishment of the wool trade as well as the manufacture of glass, copper and brass goods, the region became prosperous. The 12th and 13th centuries saw the rise of free-cities in the north. Bruges, Ypres, Ghent, Antwerp, Leuven, Mechelen (all present-day Flemish cities) and Brussels developed into international trading centers and were at the time counted among the largest towns in northern Europe.

By end of 13th century, Ghent was the biggest producer of cloth in western Europe. Economic prosperity led to a tremendous growth of communes in Medieval Belgium. The County of Flanders became a land of towns. The internal political life of the principalities of Flanders, Brabant and Liege was dominated by the communes. This situation led to virtual political and juridical autonomy as well as personal freedom for the inhabitants of these towns.

Communalism eventually undermined feudalism in these areas. Consequently, after the 13th century, most of the peasantry were free compared with those in Germany and eastern Europe. This "communal revolution" established a process of personal and collective freedom and formed the basis of a deep love of liberty and democracy and most importantly autonomy at the local level (Ibid., 59). In addition, a sense of independence and small-town pride was established which is characteristic of contemporary Flanders.

The nascent Flemish economy was heavily dependent on English wool imports. As such, Flanders sided with England, the Holy Roman emperor and the Duke of Brabant to form an anti-French coalition. As a result of defeat at the hands of the French at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214, French influence in Flemish affairs increased and a brief period of annexation by France occurred. However, at the Battle of Kortrijk on 11 July 1302, the Royal French army was defeated by the Flemish and freedom restored. (Today, Flanders

celebrates 11 July as a regional holiday.) This event had far-reaching consequences, as the County of Flanders is the only region of Medieval Flanders not part of present-day France.

In 1369, a political marriage between the daughter of the Flemish count and Philip the Bold (son of the King of France and Duke of Burgundy) resulted in the consolidation of the area of present-day Belgium under one authority. The so-called Burgundian period was instrumental in furthering the influence of the French language among the Flemish Bourgeoisie. By 1400, the "Low Countries", as the region became known, despite its unified central authority, was little more than a loose union. It actually constituted a collection of largely autonomous and rival principalities.

The 14th and 15th centuries marked the "golden age" of the Low Countries, as they became the chief industrial center of Europe. During this time Antwerp served as the trading capitol for glass, tapestries, diamonds and lace. Although prosperity was found throughout the region, it should be pointed out that the most significant early economic development was concentrated in Flanders, as opposed to the French-speaking region to the south.

Habsburg Control: Foreign Domination Continues

On the eve of the 16th century, as a result of another political marriage between the daughter of the Duke of Burgundy and the future Austrian Emperor Maximilian, control

of the region passed from the Burgundians to the Habsburgs. It became part of a vast dominion which also included certain central European territories, as well as Spain, part of Italy and vast overseas colonies. Consequently, the future state of Belgium became involved in Habsburg European and world policy. All of the territory, including the Netherlands and Luxembourg, became part of the Habsburg dominions and was organized into 17 provinces. The only exception was the region of Liege, which at the time constituted an independent ecclesiastical principality (McRae 1986, 13).

For the first time, the entire population came under one common administration and consequently interaction among the subjects increased. Thus, 1581 marks the beginning of a period in which the ancestors of the modern Belgians, with the exception of those in Liege, came to share a political history. From this point on a certain "sense of common historical experience and, by extension, Belgian nationalism" emerged (Murphy 1988, 45).

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marked the split of the Low Counties into the Calvinist republic of the United Provinces to the north (the Netherlands), and the Spanish Catholic Netherlands in the south (Belgium). As the Dutch Republic became recognized as an independent entity, Flanders and the region of Brabant to the south remained subject to Spain. Thus, despite their common tongue, a demarcation line was fixed, based on religion, that

represents the current boundary between the Netherlands and Belgium (Boudart, Boudart, and Bryssinck 1990, 64).

The region deteriorated as a result of the Habsburg monarchy's lack of an understanding and interest in the area. The economic boom was also hampered by Habsburg tax pressure and fiscal policy. In addition, Spanish rule was religiously intolerant and consequently, despite the strong Catholic majority in the region, led to the emigration of much talent and capital.

A period of warfare ensued between the Spanish realm and Louis XIV over territory in present-day Belgium. This period culminated with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and the Barrier Treaty (1715). As a result, control of the region transferred to the Austrian Habsburgs. This transition proved equally devastating to the region. The population of Flanders was effectively cut off from its ethnic brethren the Dutch. This ended a period of economic cooperation with the Dutch, who initiated high taxes on commerce travelling down the Scheldt River. As a result, Antwerp became economically strangled. Consequently, the Dutch cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam would prosper at the expense of Antwerp.

Despite an attempt to initiate reforms under Joseph II, Austrian rule was met with protest and revolt culminating in the Brabant Revolution of 1789. During the revolution, all the provinces except Luxembourg proclaimed their independence.

Within a year, however, the rebellion was put down and Austrian control restored. Thus, on the eve of the 19th century, the region was still controlled by a foreign monarch. While its neighbors to the north and south had established strong nations, the time for a Belgian state was not yet at hand.

Annexation by France: Entrenchment of French Culture

The return of Austrian authority was short lived. In 1794 Austrian rule ended, but only at the expense of a French invasion and subsequent domination by Napoleon. The period of French occupation, lasting until 1814, had a profound effect on the region. The Napoleonic Wars led to a period of moderate prosperity for certain Belgian cities, particularly those in the south, such as Liege, Namur, Charleroi and Mons. This came as a result of a British blockade which forced the French to seek clothing and arms from the Belgians.

Overall, however, French rule equalled a loss of autonomy and identity. In keeping with their tradition, the French aim was assimilation of the indigenous population. As a result, Belgian society was profoundly changed. Many old regime institutions (nascent self-governing agencies) were abolished. The former semi-autonomous provinces were replaced by nine departments (without considering ancient historical differences and provincial borders), which became the administrative divisions of the French unitary state.

Furthermore, the *Code Napoleon* became the law of the land and French became the only official language. (It should be noted that the imposition of French was not due to any chauvinism but rather for purely practical reasons.) Needless to say, the situation, which was aggravated even further by forced conscription, registered much discontent.

French domination saw the amalgamation of the populations of the former Austrian Netherlands and Liege under French control. For the first time the region of Liege was incorporated under the same authority as the rest of the southern Netherlands and consequently marks a point from which all of present-day Belgium would share a common history.

This period had an impact on Fleming-Walloon relations as well. French occupation heightened some awareness of the differences between the *Belges Flamand* and *Belges Wallon*. Despite this, no one referred to a Flemish or Walloon people; one just referred to the two language groups. Nevertheless, one could not deny that a Flemish-Walloon duality was becoming more evident. Clearly Walloons were closer to the French than Flemish. However, it is critical to point out that both groups had equally resisted Napoleon. Additionally, although in Liege many were in favor of annexation, it was not due to a common language but rather to an ideological affinity with the French Revolution on the part of the Liegiense (Lijphart 1981, 17).

French occupation undeniably had an impact on the language situation. Two decades of forced Frenchification resulted in a strengthening of the already strong position of the French language in Belgium. This was in addition to the pre-existence of French as the dominant language in the Flemish provinces, despite a lack of language policy or legal coercion. It can be further said that from the Battle of Waterloo to the Belgian Revolution, despite Dutch domination, Belgium remained an intellectual and cultural province of France (Ibid., 22).

The United Kingdom of the Netherlands: Rejection of a Netherlandic Future

At the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, the British sought to halt French influence in the Low Countries. Without consulting the indigenous population, an anti-French barrier was formed. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands was established with King William I of Holland as monarch. The kingdom comprised present-day Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The architects of the new state, in their haste to guard against a resurgence of France, had not, however, taken into account the long separate history of the northern and southern Netherlands.

On the surface, it appeared that the arrangement would be beneficial for Belgium. Holland would provide good outlets for Belgian industry and, under the very enlightened

rule of William I, universities were established in Liege and Ghent. Additionally, William had a reputation as a progressive, religiously tolerant monarch and did in fact initiate worthwhile industrial and trade initiatives.

Nevertheless, problems soon arose. Certain conservative Catholic priests complained of Protestant pressure. Opposition developed on the part of Flemings and Walloons alike due to intervention in Catholic Church affairs. They resented, among other things, Catholic private schools being subjected to state inspections. Additionally, despite the promise of economic cooperation, the Belgians felt insufficiently protected by the low Dutch tariff system. Also, they protested equal representation alongside the Dutch in parliament, despite their own numerical superiority.

Language, once again, became a concern, as King William followed the French precept of "one country, one language" and gradually introduced Dutch as the only official language of administration. Eventually 75 percent of the United Kingdom spoke some form of Dutch (Ibid., 20). The population of the Walloon provinces were understandably threatened by an overwhelming Dutch-speaking majority. Even in the Flemish provinces, the French-speaking bourgeoisie did not accept unilingualism, and many who spoke various Flemish dialects considered Holland's the "language of Protestantism" (Boudart, Boudart, and Bryssinck 1990, 70).

In the end, the sense of exploitation, both political and economic, that grew among the Belgians developed into a revolutionary movement which led to an end to the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The period of forced unification with the Dutch added an interesting dimension to Fleming-Walloon relations. Certain differences, apart from linguistic, between the Flemish and Walloon provinces became apparent during this period. The Flemish were not as heavily influenced by their Dutch association as the Walloons were by France during French occupation. Also, parts of the Walloon region were becoming more economically advanced due to King William's industrialization program. Additionally, the Flemish region was more religious or at least subordinated by the Catholic Church (Lijphart 1981, 22).

Still, many more factors, to include a strong Catholic faith and common history up to that time, linked the Flemish and Walloon provinces together than divided them. Additionally, there was a subtle but nonetheless significant difference between the culture of the Belgians and the Dutch. This was confirmed with the revolution. Despite a connection to the Dutch, Belgium's Flemish provinces did not opt for a Netherlandic future. Ultimately, no general Netherlandic national feeling developed.

Instead of a fusion of populations, opposition developed between the Belgians and the Dutch because the Belgians did not consider the state as their state but

rather as a Dutch state. For instance, the king was a Dutchman, the majority of the high officials were Dutch, and the government measures most resented in Belgium were supported by the Dutch deputies in the House of Representatives (Stengers 1980, 51). Consequently, the Belgians strengthened their own common bonds due to their perception of being dominated by the Dutch.

Thus, a nascent "Belgian" nationalism was taking root in the wide-spread consciousness of a differentiation between the Netherlands and Belgium. In addition, the revolution received truly national participation, as all provinces, both Flemish and Walloon took part. The entire population asserted its own "separateness." This separateness was based on a common history, which made Belgium essentially a "foreign country" for its neighbors. The revolution was undertaken by a people who had shared a common political history for more than 200 years as inhabitants of an area administered more or less as a distinct region with some degree of autonomy by the Spanish, Austrians, French, and Dutch (Murphy 1988, 51).

Any differences between the Flemings and Walloons during the revolution had little to do with emerging regional consciousness. The Flemish-speaking provinces had as strong an anti-Dutch sentiment as the French-speaking provinces. Although the Flemish region was dominated by direct military intervention by Dutch troops, they actively participated in the rebellion when the situation permitted.

A lack of linguistic polarization characterized revolutionary Belgium. Any linguistic division which might have existed was clearly subordinated to feelings of antipathy for external domination and a sense of Belgian nationality. The lack of formal or functional regionalization along language lines in 1830 reflects the absence of a conceptual partitioning of Belgium into linguistic regions. Additionally, the lack of linguistic standardization, particularly in Flanders, made the formation of conceptions of territorial unity based on shared linguistic attributes improbable (Ibid., 53).

In the minds of Fleming and Walloon alike, Belgium was a far less artificial state than the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The new country identified with the principalities which were set apart as early as the late Middle Ages.

In short, at the time of independence, Belgium was not a country divided ethnically or regionally along language lines. Belgium's subsequent linguistic polarization should therefore be understood in terms of developments that largely took place after the founding of the Belgian nation and will be addressed in chapter two.

Independence: The Language Issue is Raised

In August 1830 proletarian upheaval broke out in Brussels, Liege, and Verviers. Soon, many within the southern provinces joined the rebellion. A provisional

government was formed in Brussels in November. On December 20th an international conference in London recognized Belgium's independence with an imposed guarantee of eternal neutrality.

The Belgians immediately started work on their constitution. On February 7th 1831, the constitution was approved and the Kingdom of Belgium was established as a parliamentary monarchy (consisting of ministerial responsibility and royal inviolability). Leopold I took the oath to the new constitution on July 21st, thereby becoming its first ruler. The new monarch was a pragmatic leader who discouraged divisive tendencies among his countrymen. As a result, he established a reputation for the Belgian monarchy as a unifying force (see Chapter 4).

Despite Leopold's effective leadership, problems arose from the outset. There was no denying the fact that the new nation was comprised of two disparate groups. Although alike in religion, they were clearly different in language and culture. In addition, the new country possessed only one definitive natural frontier and furthermore was not even recognized by the Dutch (recognition would come several years later). As a result, most of Belgium's neighbors expected its new-found independence to be short-lived.

The Belgians established a unitary state, more or less based on the French model, with recognition of modern liberties such as religion, education, association, meeting, press, and, interestingly enough, language. The new

constitution addressed the matter of language as follows:
"The use of the languages spoken in Belgium is optional
(*facultatif*). It can be regulated only by law, and only
concerning official acts and judicial matters" (McRae 1986,
22).

The fact that French became the *lingua franca* of the kingdom is curious, since the majority of Belgians were (and are) Flemish. The reasons for this include the following: the period of Dutch rule, despite its brevity, left hard feelings with both Flemings and Walloons, who desired a clean break to include language. The Belgian Revolution was led by members of the bourgeoisie, who, whether Fleming or Walloon, spoke French. Finally, there was a lack of a standardized form of Flemish suitable for formal government transactions- only a number of widely varying dialects spoken in the various communes (Keefe 1974, 74).

Thus, French became the *de facto* official language at the state level. Although the constitution made no commitment to the French language, in practice, French became the sole language of law, politics, administration and the army. The authors of the constitution, both Fleming and Walloon were largely Francophone. These writers identified their language as one of commerce, modernity, and progress and were confident that time alone would bring about linguistic unity. On this last point they were clearly mistaken.

Two Views of Belgian History

There exist essentially two schools of thought regarding history and its impact on Fleming-Walloon relations. One of these, the "Belgicist" view, was espoused by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne. In his immense work *Histoire de Belgique* he presents Belgian history as a vast continuum from the earliest times to the 20th century. The initial political unification during the Burgundian period, according to Pirenne, was based on an already flourishing common civilization of Medieval Flanders and Brabant. He emphasizes the "syncretic quality of the relationship between Flemings and Walloons as a blending of Latin and Germanic influences in peaceful coexistence" (McRae 1986, 14). In short, the long period prior to independence is seen as a continuous exercise in nation-building.

Dutch historian Pieter Geyl presents the opposite view. He criticizes the Belgicist perspective as having been promulgated by Francophones seeking to maintain the status quo and deny Flanders its rightful place in history. He adopted a more unified perspective on Dutch and Belgian history. For example, he points out that the restoration of Spanish authority in the southern provinces after the independence of the Netherlands was due to the failure of the Spanish to subdue the provinces protected by the major river systems, and not to a desire of those in the south to break away from the northern provinces (Ibid., 15). This view dismisses the very existence of Belgian national

sentiment and questions the foundation of the Belgian state of 1830.

In fact, critics of the new Belgian state were numerous. In 1830, the French statesman Talleyrand claimed that Belgium was nothing more than an artificial creation of international diplomacy. Talleyrand exclaimed: "Il n'y a point de Belges, il n'y en eut jamais, il n'y en aura jamais: il y a des Francais, des Flamands ou Hollandais (c'est la meme chose) et des Allemands"* (Lijphart 1981, 14). This view, although originally French, was later adopted by opponents of Belgian independence and subsequently espoused by Flemish nationalists and eventually their Walloon counterparts.

These views and others which dismiss Belgian nationalism are somewhat flawed. Geyl's argument is weakened when one considers that virtually all Belgians rejected Dutch rule and opted for independence. Likewise, Talleyrand's comment, although interesting, must be viewed as that of a Frenchman seeking to expand his country's influence over Belgium.

Nevertheless, these notions have gained support, since the Belgians have no common language, possessed no independent status prior to 1830 (since they were controlled by outside powers), and at the time of the creation of the

* There are no Belgians, there never have been, there never will be: there are only Frenchmen, Flemings or Dutchmen (which is the same thing) and Germans.

Belgian state were compelled to live together by the great powers. In short, it is widely believed that Flemings and Walloons have been "artificially herded together."

Jean Stengers, in his essay "Belgian National Sentiments," counters the argument that Belgium is an artificial state with virtually no sense of nationality. Stengers contends that this view is a total misconception. He argues that despite external rule, the Belgians developed a system of administration, justice, law enforcement, and national character starting in the 16th century that constituted a virtual state and served as the precursor to the Belgian nation (Lijphart 1981, 46). He goes on to suggest that even with the most venerable European nations, no other "national" origin exists with the exception of a population possessing the same political destiny who considered themselves a group apart. In this regard, Stengers argues, Belgium has as much national will as any other European nation.

Stengers' view of Belgian nationality is compelling, considering the large body of work which emphasizes the "artificiality" of the Belgian state. Through his as well as Pirenne's argument, it becomes apparent that Belgian history up to the time of independence serves as a unifying force among Flemings and Walloons.

Summary

The history of the prefiguration of the Belgian nation has been long and complex. Devoid of clearly defined natural boundaries and having inherited an internal linguistic frontier from the Roman era has left modern-day Belgium comprised of two distinct cultural/linguistic groups. Subsequently, the population of the region was held together through the imposition of foreign rule.

Despite their ethnic differences, Flemings and Walloons have been united under the same rulers since the Middle Ages and share an underlying tradition that serves as a strong force for unity. At one time or another, despite cultural ties to neighboring peoples, they have been disappointed by the treatment that they received under foreign rule.

Historically, Belgian society has tended to move simultaneously in two different directions-toward national unity and toward ethnic differentiation. In their long march to independence, the Belgian population was assembled from disparate elements, however, because of their feeling of being distinct from both the French and Dutch, an awareness of national consciousness developed.

It is because of this historical legacy that observers liken Belgium to a family whose members quarrel amongst themselves, sometimes fiercely, but forget their differences and present a united front when dealing with the outside world.

Although we have shown that history has played a positive role in relations among Flemings and Walloons prior to independence, the same cannot be said for the period after independence. This period is best examined in the context of the rise of the Flemish and Walloon movements and will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Regional Movements

"... in Belgium there are two communities which can't live together...One are called Walloons and they speak French and the others are called Flemings and they speak this kind of Low Dutch. They can't live together. After the war we should make two states, one known as Wallonia and one as Flamingia."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

As we have seen in the previous chapter, little or no regionalism existed in Belgium during the historical periods leading up to the Belgian Revolution. In fact, there is little evidence to suggest that people living in widely separated parts of northern and southern Belgium felt any regional solidarity. Linguistically, there existed a profusion of dialects throughout Belgium and a small but influential Francophone minority in the North hindered any unity there.

Nevertheless, present-day Belgium is looked upon as a bicultural state defined by its component regions. This is due primarily to the rise of the Flemish movement. The reactions of certain Walloons to this movement eventually led Belgium down the road to linguistic regionalism and ultimately to the development of the federal state which now exists.

The following chapters will elucidate specific aspects of Flemish-Walloon relations. This chapter, however, concerns the development of the Flemish and Walloon

movements with primary focus given to the period from independence to the end of World War II. As such, it is designed to supply perspective in considering contemporary Fleming-Walloon relations.

Flanders and the Flemish Movement

Contemporary Flanders is composed of the provinces of West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg, and Flemish Brabant. Although measuring a mere 135 miles from east to west and 45 miles from north to south, it is home to roughly 60% of the Belgian population. Despite this, Flemish culture has been overshadowed by that of French-speaking Wallonia from the creation of the Belgian nation. The predominance of the French language in Belgium, starting in the 15th century, was bound to elicit a reaction from the Flemish majority.

Since the new Belgian constitution allowed for freedom of linguistic choice, it fostered the dominant position of French because of the disparity between the language groups within the state. Political power lay essentially in the hands of the Francophones. Suffrage provisions of the constitution favored French speakers, because they granted the right to vote to only a small percentage of the population based on property holdings. The majority of the wealth at the time was found primarily in certain industrialized parts of Wallonia and among the urban upper

classes who, even in Flanders, were largely Francophone (Murphy 1988, 60).

In addition, the newly created Belgian state was in no way divided territorially into language regions. The highly unitary character of the Belgian state was opposed to regional distinctions. Consequently, French was the language of administration, the army, the civil service, the courts, and, possibly most significantly, the secondary schools and universities.

This situation could not continue indefinitely. New ideas embodied in the French Revolution (which were instrumental in the founding of the Belgian state) such as human rights and parliamentary democracy, along with the rise in the standard of living provided a theoretical foundation for the Flemish movement (Herremans 1967, 3).

Birth of the Movement

The Flemish movement got its start during the 1830's among a small group of middle-class intellectuals originating primarily from Ghent and Antwerp. Initially they expressed concern over the growing dominance of French in Belgium. To raise awareness of their cause, they promoted symbols of Flemish culture such as the lion from the coat of arms of the Counts of Flanders (still in use today) and the story of the Flemish victory over the French at the Battle of Golden Spurs (Kortrijk) in 1302 (celebrated in contemporary Flanders).

In spite of their support for Flemish culture and history, the nascent Flemish movement did not advocate separatism. It accepted the Belgian state and merely asked that it should not be entirely French-speaking and impose French language and culture on all its citizens. In fact, initially the Flemish movement was essentially directed against Francophone Flemings and Walloons in Flanders and not at the Walloon population at large (Lijphart 1989, 31).

Although decidedly moderate in their demands, the movement's founders were influential in the development of a Flemish ethnic consciousness. Hendrik Conscience, a founding member, proclaimed:

There are twice as many Flemings as there are Walloons. We pay twice as much in taxes as they do. And they want to make Walloons out of us, to sacrifice us, our old race, our language, our splendid history, and all that we have inherited from our forefathers (Clough 1930, 71).

Nevertheless, the movement had little effect on Belgian policy.

In 1840 a petition was submitted to Parliament seeking the use of Dutch in the conduct of official affairs in the Flemish provinces. In it, a comparison was made to Denmark and Switzerland (examples of multilingual nations) in which the population was governed and administered in its own language (Lijphart 1981, 27). This and similar petitions were largely ignored as unnecessary and were considered by

the Francophone Parliament to be detrimental to the stability of the state.

In 1846 a census indicated that there were 2.5 million speakers of Dutch or Flemish dialects as opposed to only 1.8 million French-speakers in Belgium (Irving 1980, 7), yet inequities abounded. The centralized government's campaign to discourage bilingualism, especially regarding education, were expressed in one representative's declaration to Parliament. He stated:

As long as Belgian young people are not educated along the same lines, as long as the two races... have not, by sharing a common education, effected an intellectual fusion, we will always have two races, and we will never have a nation, possessing one common character, one common spirit, one common name; we will have... Flemings and Walloons, but we will not have Belgians (Orts 1849, 1617).

By 1856, only 32 of 382 senior civil-servants were Flemish, laws providing for the use of Dutch in primary schools were ignored, and French was the sole language of the judicial system. Additionally, at the national level, any post of significance required a knowledge of French, whereas even the position of prime minister did not require Flemish.

In response to these inequities, a commission was appointed, comprised of prominent Flemings, to address the situation. Their report called for changes in education, the government, the military, and the diplomatic service. It recommended that secondary schools provide basic instruction in Dutch in the Flemish provinces (with freedom

of choice thereafter) and an equality of Dutch in the Walloon schools equal with that of French in the Flemish schools (McRae 1986, 24). In addition, it called for obligatory courses for Flemish students in Flemish history and literature at the University of Ghent.

The commission also called for reform in the government and administration that would provide the following: linguistic capability in the central government in both languages; a Dutch translation of Belgian laws and decrees; the use of Dutch in documents and letters pertaining to the Flemish provinces; and the conduct of judicial proceedings in the language of the parties to the litigation.

Concerning the military, the report called for the establishment of separate Walloon and Flemish regiments in the army, and the use of Dutch in the navy considering the overwhelming number of Flemish in that branch of the service. (This is still the case today, since Wallonia is a land-locked region.) Lastly, the report recommended that the Belgian diplomatic service be capable of handling both languages.

Changes to the status quo sought by these so-called *Flamingants* (a term coined by Francophones to describe extreme Flemish activists) were regarded by the Belgian government as radical and dangerous, despite their moderate nature. It is important to note that the document never suggested a separate political or administrative status for the Flemish provinces and furthermore never even mentioned

the term Flanders. Its recommendations merely sought increased bilingualism and not regional unilingualism.

The government rejected the proposals as a threat to national unity. Its refusal to pursue any of the report's recommendations actually pushed the Flemish movement in a more political direction and may have inadvertently provided the Flemish cause with greater solidarity. The report, in essence, became the manifesto of the Flemish movement and its rejection on the part of the government illustrated the state's inflexibility to even moderate change.

To counter what it perceived as divisive tendencies on the part of the Flemish, the central government pursued measures of integration designed to help strengthen the Belgian nation. It encouraged workers to migrate from poorer to richer regions (Flanders to Wallonia) despite linguistic differences. It also set to work building rail links from the North to the South in order to further reinforce unitary Belgium (Murphy 1988, 68). These initiatives, however, did little to mask the existing bias toward the French language. In addition, the growing Flemish middle class made it hard to disregard the existing inequities.

The problem in the justice system was particularly significant. There were a number of blatant instances where defendants were convicted in proceedings they could not understand. On one occasion, two Flemish workers were condemned to death after a trial in which they apparently

did not understand what transpired (even their defense attorney spoke only French). Worse yet, it was later determined that they were innocent of the crimes for which they were executed, after the actual murderer confessed. In other instances, when defense lawyers requested that a case be tried on appeal in Dutch, the request was not only denied but sentences were often made more severe. Such cases obviously led to indignation among many Flemings.

As a result of these and other injustices, a bill calling for the use of Dutch in the courts of the Flemish provinces was finally passed in 1873. The law of 1873 marked the first time that an important legislative initiative recognized the unique linguistic needs of northern Belgium. This significant but limited concession sparked a push for greater reform on the part of the Flemish movement. At approximately this same time, the term Flanders was first used to refer to the entire area of northern Belgium and the cry "*In Vlaanderen, Vlaams*" (in Flanders, Flemish) became popular.

As a result of additional pressure, further laws were passed. The law of 1878, for example, required that notices and communications intended for the public in the Flemish provinces be either in Dutch or in both French and Dutch. Following this, in 1883, a law was passed that stipulated that in the Flemish part of the country, courses in the preparatory section of public secondary schools were to be conducted in Dutch. This educational advance was limited,

however, by the fact that only one-fifth of Belgian children attended public schools. The vast majority attended Catholic schools, where secondary level education was conducted almost exclusively in French (Ibid., 72).

The 1880's saw additional minor legislative gains on the part of the Flemish movement. The establishment of a royal academy at Ghent was created to promote the study of the Dutch language and literature. Also, it was required that Dutch be taught in military schools so that officers would have a sufficient knowledge of the language. Finally, in 1891, in order to improve the efficiency of such language laws, the government was compelled to publish a list to specify which communes were in fact Flemish-speaking. This represents the first instance in which the central government demarcated the territorial extent of Flanders.

As the Flemish movement continued to infiltrate the middle-class in northern Belgium, a number of Flamings were elected to Parliament. As a result they were better able to pursue the Flemish agenda. By this point, the desired goal was complete equality of French and Dutch within Belgium. Consequently, certain obvious changes were taking place. For example, the entire reporter of Belgian laws (*Moniteur Belge*) began appearing in both languages, inscriptions on government buildings started to appear in Dutch as well as French, and coins and postage stamps emerged with inscriptions in both languages.

In 1893 universal manhood suffrage was adopted as part of a major reform of voting laws. As a result, the demands of the masses were finally heard in view of the numerical superiority of the Flemish. Francophones still held on to their political influence, however, since property holders were entitled to cast multiple votes.

Finally in 1898 the *loi d'egalite* was passed, formally recognizing Flemish (Dutch) as an official language of the kingdom along with French. It is interesting, however, that only after 68 years did the language of the majority become officially recognized.

Language Takes on a Regional Dimension

Although many concessions had been made to the Flemish, by the turn of the century the overall impact of the Flemish movement was still limited. Additionally, whereas support for the Flemish movement was ever increasing, reform was focused exclusively on individual language rights. By 1945, however, the language areas of Belgium had evolved into well-delineated and established regional entities. This evolution of linguistic regionalism is attributed primarily to the impact of the two World Wars and other intervening events.

In the years preceding World War I, leaders of the Flemish movement continued to pursue an agenda pressing for the right of individual Dutch speakers to use their mother tongue in the schools, the military, the courts, and the

government. Nevertheless, higher education was still conducted primarily in French, Francophone officers dominated the army, and Dutch was rare in the upper echelons of the central government. Concern over education was the greatest since only through advanced training in Dutch could the established hierarchy be changed.

Consequently, in 1906, Lodewijk De Raet published a treatise calling for Dutch to be the sole language of the state university at Ghent. In another work entitled, *Een Economisch Programma voor de Vlaamsche Beweging* (An Economic Program for the Flemish Movement), he supported his position by citing that the Industrial Revolution had a disparate impact on northern and southern Belgium. As a result, he argued, only through higher education could the Flemish hope to improve their economic standing. Although a report was prepared to consider the proposal, it was met with criticism from Francophones in Parliament and as a result would remain an unresolved issue for several years (the university finally converted to Dutch in 1930). The report was significant, however, because it was the first time that someone had characterized the Flemish problem in terms of the relative disadvantage of Flanders from an economic standpoint. The language issue was henceforth associated with larger regional concerns and as such further added to the territorial dimension of the Flemish movement.

The leaders of the Flemish cause picked up on De Raet's theme and began to focus on the regional aspect of the

language situation. They saw an opportunity to extend the base of support for the Flemish cause throughout the entire North. Since, for the most part, Flanders was not unified from a dialectical or socioeconomic standpoint, Flemish leaders sought to forge a stronger movement by encouraging and stressing regional coherence. Once again ethnolinguistic consciousness was promoted through symbolism of flags, songs, slogans and other outward signs of regional identity.

Another important event took place in the period just prior to World War I that further strengthened the Flemish cause. An agreement was finally reached among linguists concerning the Flemish dialects. It was decided that the language of Flanders should be based on the standard form of Dutch, *algemeen beschaafd Nederlands* (common cultivated Dutch), used in the Netherlands. Although it would take some time for implementation, this linguistic standardization went a long way in uniting Flanders as a regional entity.

One other factor adding to the regional dimension was the growing perception of a correspondence between economic and linguistic patterns. There existed a rationale for regional division based on the economic structure of Belgium. Financial and industrial wealth was primarily concentrated in Wallonia and among the Francophones in Brussels. Also, the prosperity of the Sambre-Meuse valley, due to its Steel production and coal deposits, led to

significant migration from all over the country. Those Flemish migrants who settled in this prosperous Wallonian region were immersed in a Francophone environment which required a language change. Thus, all these factors brought the issues of regional extent and delimitation to the forefront of the debate.

Just prior to the outbreak of war, as militarism was gripping all of Europe, language use in the Belgian army was raised again as a prominent concern. Since the scope of previous laws was limited, many Flamings called for the creation of separate Flemish and Walloon regiments. This was seen by Walloon Parliamentarians as an attempt to divide the Belgian state. Nevertheless, in 1913, Flemish pressure led to the passing of a watered-down version of the law, which required students in military schools to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of one of the two national languages and an elementary knowledge of the other. Implementation of the new law took time. Unfortunately, before full execution was realized, hostilities commenced.

Activism and Frontism

It is important to note at this point that at the outbreak of war, only a few of the most radical Belgians had brought the unity of the state into question. In addition, the conceptional division of Belgium into language regions was still limited. However, Belgium entered the war with a developing sense of regional linguistic dualism. As a

result, the war would play an important role in furthering regional awareness. The idea of Flemish political autonomy, once considered only by the most extreme Flemish activists, gained ground through a period of experimentation as the result of German occupation.

Neutral Belgium lay in Germany's path to France in 1914. The German invasion was met with staunch but short-lived resistance. As Wallonia was quickly overrun, the weight of defense fell most heavily on Flemish soldiers. Despite the recently passed language laws which required officers to give commands in a language understood by all, most Flemish soldiers were still commanded by those who could only speak French. This was a major grievance among the Flemish, especially since not only was the war unpopular but the only portion of Belgium remaining in Allied hands was a small area of Flanders itself. For all intents and purposes, by late October 1914, Belgium was out of the war as the national government fled to Le Havre.

A military government of occupation was quickly established by the Germans. German policy, based on dividing and conquering, sought to utilize the existing enmity between Flemings and Walloons to their advantage.

Although the majority of Flemings resisted the Germans, some saw collaboration as a means to further their own ends. The most radical of these saw German occupation as the opportunity to push for greater Flemish rights, and possibly self-determination or autonomy. These radical Flemings were

called Activists and sought to achieve a variety of objectives ranging from the required use of Dutch at the university level, to separation, or even independence for Flanders.

The Germans were all too willing to support the demands of the Flemish since they shared a distant but common heritage and division among the Belgians weakened organized resistance. Consequently, with the backing of the German military government, requirements on the use of Dutch in Flanders were extended. This included, for the first time, the operation of the postal service. Also, in 1916, the University of Ghent was converted to a Dutch-language institution.

Most significantly, in February 1917, the Activists established the Council of Flanders. The council went as far as to propose an administrative division of the country along language lines that was seen as a possible stepping stone to full independence. The proposal was initiated by decree on 17 March 1917 and established separate administrations for Wallonia and Flanders with Namur and Brussels named as the respective capitals. A call for complete independence was announced by the council on 28 March 1918, but failed to receive German support.

While the Activists were busy pursuing their political agenda, a rank-and-file protest by Flemish soldiers against their Francophone officers was taking place. In 1916, a loose organization of Flemish soldiers was created which

eventually developed into a movement called Frontism. The movement was initiated due to the fact that the vast majority of the soldiers were Flemings, commands were still given in French, and promotion was difficult to attain for Dutch speakers. Growth in the movement was facilitated because the army had brought together Flemings from all over northern Belgium who came to realize that their language put them at a common disadvantage (Ibid., 105). Flanders, as a region, became an important symbol for the Frontists, as is evidenced in a common inscription placed on the graves of the Flemish war dead; "*Alles voor Vlaanderen, Vlaanderen voor Kristus*" (All for Flanders, Flanders for Christ). The movement grew and by 1917 the Belgian army even experienced mutinies of soldiers in the trenches.

In retrospect, it is evident that the Activist and Frontist movements received an inordinate amount of attention. Strong feelings of unity prevailed, embodied most clearly in King Albert, who was busy personally leading the Belgian army on the Ijzer front. Both movements sought to exploit the situation to achieve regional goals, but they did not represent the mainstream of the Flemish movement. The more moderate Flemings (who represented the majority), despite their cultural and linguistic concerns, thought it unfitting to press Flemish demands in an occupied nation.

Ultimately, the Belgian state prevailed as the administrative division of the country was dismantled immediately after the defeat of the Germans. Despite this,

the enduring legacy of these movements and the war itself was to place independence on the Flemish movement's agenda for the first time. The memory of the short-lived division of the country and the lengths to which some Flemings went to gain independence (collaboration with the enemy) could not be easily erased.

The inter-war years were marked by a wave of patriotism characterized by harsh repression of unpatriotic behavior. This was evidenced by the swift prosecution of Activist collaborators. The association with collaboration did in fact hurt the Flemish movement. On the other hand, it also intensified antagonism between the language groups, as the Flemish considered the underlying problem to be a stubbornness toward needed reform on the part of Francophones.

Minimalists and Maximalists

In the aftermath of the war, the Flemish movement split into two major groups; Minimalists and Maximalists. The Minimalists pursued an agenda which sought solutions to their grievances in the framework of the unitary Belgian state. They campaigned for education in the native tongue for all children, instruction in Dutch at the University of Ghent (the changes made during the war were not permanent), and stronger laws on the use of Dutch in administration and government in the Flemish provinces.

The Maximalists felt that the solution to the Flemish problems lay in independence, or at the very least, regional autonomy. Their platform demanded the following: autonomy for Flanders in the domains of administration, government, education, and justice; a federalist structure for Belgium; and the reorganization of the military along regional linguistic lines.

Pressure from both groups, coupled with the institution of the one-man-one-vote principle in 1919, led to further reform. Although it would take some time before the numerical superiority of the Flemish would translate into increased political power, changes were set in motion which were irreversible. All this pressure finally resulted in the law of 1921 which stated that in the provinces of Antwerp, East Flanders, East Flanders, and Limburg, Dutch was to be used in all state, provincial, and communal affairs. The law marked the first significant formal recognition of language areas as a basis for regional distinctions and furthermore illustrates the growing emphasis of politicians on the regional dimension of language practices.

The Flemish movement went on to achieve other initiatives as well. A bill was passed in 1928 creating separate regiments for the two language groups within the army. Also, the transformation of Ghent into a Dutch-language institution was finally achieved. These laws, while important, represent the only significant successes of

the combined efforts of the Minimalists and Maximalists in the decade after World War I. Many within the ranks of the Flemish movement were frustrated by the slow progress being made and wanted a stronger and more radical pursuit of objectives. This sentiment is best expressed in a popular slogan of the time, "*De Vlaming meester in eigen huis*" (Flemings [should be] masters in their own house).

Although applying ever-increasing pressure for change, the mainstream Flemish movement still sought reform within the parameters of the Belgian nation. In 1929, a group of Flemish nationalists organized the *Vlaamsch Studiecomite voor Politieke, Sociale en Cultureele Aangelegenheden* (Flemish Committee for Political, Social and Cultural Affairs). They investigated various options for the future of Flanders, to include federalism within the Belgian state, independence, and even union with the Netherlands. Their report concluded that federalism would best serve the interests of Flanders.

The desire for a federalist system was equally supported by the Walloons, who saw their political superiority within the unified state shrinking. As a result of bipartisan interest, a law emerged from Parliament in June 1932, which called for the complete administrative unilingualism in the Flemish and Walloon parts of Belgium. The law further required that communications from the central government be in both languages. Although there were many violations of the law due to an absence of