

CHANTAL KESTELOOT

WALLOON FEDERALISM OR BELGIAN NATIONALISM?
THE WALLOON MOVEMENT AT THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

NISE ESSAYS 6

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of the First World War*

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The Walloon Movement at the End of the First World War

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INTRODUCTION

In 1993, Belgium officially became a federal state. The demand for federalism, however, dates back much earlier, as it was first popularised under the ambiguous term of ‘administrative separation’ by the Walloon Movement before the First World War. Beyond the human toll and global impact, the War would prove to be consequential in Belgium because on the one hand it acted as a key driver for the growing scrutiny of the Belgian unitary state structure, whilst (paradoxically) on the other hand, the War consolidated said state’s legitimacy.

This complexity reveals how global conflicts have had an impact not only on states but also on political and social emancipation movements. In this article, we will focus on the Walloon Movement.¹ To what extent did the war shape and transform it? How much did it change the identity of the Walloon and Flemish movements? The two World Wars do appear to be decisive elements in understanding contemporary Belgium, as they contributed to opposing or divergent social representations that served as a driving force – through games of images and counter-images – in the identification processes of all the actors in Belgian society. The wars have not only nourished but also exacerbated the factors of division and created fragmented memories. In addition, they constituted key moments to grasp certain concepts such as loyalty or allegiance, but also heroism, victimisation, and betrayal. In addition to the immediate impacts, there were also upheavals in the long term. And this story is probably far from over.

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LETTRE AU ROI sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre

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1. THE ORIGINS OF 'ADMINISTRATIVE SEPARATION'

We know how wars can destabilize empires and nation-states, reshape them, or even lead to a new demarcation of borders and the creation of new states. But their impact also affects other groups including those who have a strong regional identity. This identity can be seen as an extension of a sense of national belonging. This is the image of the Russian dolls, demonstrating the dynamic image of local and regional identities that cement nationalism: the 'little homelands' that we cherish and that only make us love the 'big one' more.² Nevertheless, they can also be built in opposition to the feeling of national belonging. For a long time, the two movements – Flemish and Walloon – which asserted themselves during the second half of the nineteenth century appeared, each in their own way, as elements of consolidation of the Belgian nation.³ Evidently, the models they advocated were radically different. In the eyes of the Flemish Movement, the main objective was bilingualism in Belgium, centring it as a strong marker of its identity, as bilingualism was what made the country original and set it apart, for example, from France. For the Walloon Movement, on the other hand, monolingualism was the guarantee of a functioning and developing state. Any form of bilingualism could only lead to cultural impoverishment. Moreover, 'Flemish' was not even considered an official language, it was at best a conglomerate of dialects. Both these movements stemmed from Belgium and each considered itself its most ardent proponent.⁴ At that time, it was by no means the proper moment to call the Belgian state into question.

First published on 15 August 1912 in the "*Revue de Belgique*", "*La lettre au Roi sur la Séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre*" (Letter to the King regarding the Separation between Flanders and Wallonia) can be considered as one of the founding documents of the Walloon Movement. This Letter (20 pages) sums up the claims of the Walloon Movement in the context of the fear of the minorisation. The arguments are of course not new but given the personality of its recipient (the King), it had a considerable impact. The Letter remained a reference for the Walloon Movement for decades. *Le journal de Charleroi*, 24 August 1912. [©KBR, Newspapers Department, Brussels]

In the years preceding the First World War however, some more radical voices came to the fore. The most significant ones stemmed from the south of the country as they emanated from the Walloon Assembly (*Assemblée wallonne*), the most important militant organisation in which personalities from the socialist and liberal world as well as influential activists from local groups gathered.⁵ Officially founded in the autumn of 1912, this informal parliament named the Walloon Assembly included the investigation of administrative separation in its programme, a formulation that can be characterised as a form of federalism.⁶ One man epitomised this period better than any other, and can also be considered as one of the founding fathers of the Walloon Movement: the socialist Jules Destrée, Member of Parliament (from Charleroi) and besides a future minister, also the author of a 'Letter to the King on the separation of Wallonia and Flanders' in 1912.⁷ The term 'administrative separation' had been directly borrowed from the beginnings of the Belgian revolution of 1830, even though it was evident to the leaders of the Walloon Movement that its objective was by no means to pull the country apart. The phrasing of this claim – even though earlier traces of it can be found – was directly linked to the results of the legislative elections of 1912. Since 1884, Belgium had been governed by an absolute Catholic majority. In order to pose a counterweight to the Catholic Party, liberals and socialists joined forces as they created a common electoral list. The result however proved disappointing: not only did the alliance fail in overturning the absolute Catholic majority, but, what's more, the Catholic Party succeeded in strengthening its majority.⁸ However, the Catholics' electoral bulwark was mainly anchored on the Flemish provinces in the north, which were predominantly Catholic. Due to demographic evolutions, fears arose that the Catholic-Flemish dominance might translate into the Walloon side constituting a perpetual political minority in the country. Consequently, the demand for administrative separation was perceived as a way to circumvent the northern (Flemish) majority, allowing for the Walloons to decide upon their own fate. Nevertheless, the content of the claim remained vague. In the summer of 1912, Destrée declared that it was necessary to 'affirm it' while adding that it had, above all, a 'sentimental' value and that 'it was popular because of that'.⁹ As historian Catherine Lanneau wrote in 2012, the expression was used more as 'a talisman, an intimidation, a slogan' or even 'a potluck' than as



Jules Destrée (1863–1936), lawyer and member of the Belgian Workers' Party. His first position statements in favour of Wallonia date back to the end of the 19th century, but it was only in the 1910s that he joined the Walloon movement. He is best known as the author of the "Letter to the King". He is also the author of one of the first syntheses about the linguistic question in Belgium ("*Wallons et Flamands. La querelle linguistique en Belgique*", Paris, Plon, 1923). Picture taken in 1933, on the steps of the Justice Palace in Brussels. [©Province de Liège-Musée de la Vie wallonne, Liège]

the translation of a structured project.¹⁰ Two years later, the project had not become more concrete. Besides, even though the Walloon Assembly was created to investigate administrative separation, the term did not occur in its statutes. As soon as the outlines of administrative separation were meticulously debated, the movement got divided. This division was largely caused by the discussions about the future status of the country's capital and the presence of militants within the Walloon Assembly who were more attached to the defence of the language than to a project of reorganising the country from a federalist perspective. Was it for this reason that no session of the Walloon Assembly had been devoted to clearly defining its content when, during the same period, it adopted a flag, an anthem, and a national holiday? Administrative separation was a rallying cry but, if necessary, it could be silenced. During the Joyous Entry of King Albert into Liège in 1913, Walloon flags were flying, but the directive was clear: 'Let us leave out for this day any rallying cry such as "long live the separation!" Let us all shout: Long live the King! Long live the Queen! Long live Wallonia!'

Initially greeted with circumspection by the Flemish Movement, which remained firmly attached to Belgium, this demand ended up seducing the Walloon Movement's most radical wing, with some young French-speaking students from Ghent even using the claim for administrative separation as the title of a monthly newspaper which was published from 1 May to 1 August 1914.¹¹ This radical wing was in full development in a context of repeated failures to transform Belgium into a truly bilingual country. The supremacy of the French language remained largely the norm; after 1900, the linguistic legislation was trampled upon.¹² The issue of the struggle for the Dutchification of the University of Ghent became emblematic of the battle of the Flemish Movement before the First World War. On both sides, therefore, it was a feeling of frustration which contributed to the popularisation of the demand for administrative separation. Within the Walloon Movement, the frustration was linked to the electoral defeat of 1912. Within the Flemish Movement, the frustration related to the inability to impose a full recognition of the Dutch language.

How would things evolve during the First World War and what impact would this evolution have on the end of the war? In the Belgian context,

historiography has mainly focused on the impact of the Great War on Belgian nationalism and the emergence of a competing one, i.e. Flemish nationalism. At the very least, it resulted in a surprising situation: at a time when the legitimacy of Belgium was more established than ever as Belgian nationalism seemed to affect large sections of society, a competing nationalism weakened it straight away. But what about the Walloon side? Did a significant surge in support for federalism take place or was the movement continuously linked to Belgian nationalism? It is thus a question of not only evoking the history of the Walloon Movement during the Great War but also, and above all, the way in which it developed in 1918–1919. What was the legacy of the ideas of administrative separation that had been advocated before 1914? How was the movement shaping up at a time when Belgian nationalism was triumphing?

2. THE UPHEAVAL OF THE GREAT WAR

For Belgian society, the war constituted an unprecedented shock. Since its creation, Belgium had been a neutral country and Germany was among the powers which guaranteed its neutrality. The German ultimatum of 2 August 1914 was greeted with stupefaction, indignation, and anger. The population showed its incomprehension and attacked the German residents in Belgium. Meanwhile, patriotic fervour reached its peak on 4 August when the king went to parliament and delivered a speech ('A country that defends itself garners respect from everyone: such a country does not perish') in which he announced that Belgium indeed intended to defend itself even if its army was ill-prepared for the confrontation. Meanwhile, German troops were already crossing the border. From November 1914 onwards, the front stabilised, and attrition warfare began. The Belgian government went into exile and settled in Sainte-Adresse, near Le Havre in France in mid-October 1914; a small strip of national territory remained unoccupied as it was part of the Western front. This was also where the king resided.

Most of the national territory was occupied by the German army, which was an unforeseen occurrence as the Schlieffen Plan had stipulated that crossing the territory in the direction of France would suffice. The occupation did not cease until November 1918. Initially, German policy was based on two premises: maintaining order with a minimum of personnel and making the best possible use of the country's economic resources. But to occupy also means to manage; hence, a German governor general was installed who exercised both legislative and executive power. As the war raged on, the occupier gradually commenced to reflect on Belgium's future. After the massacre of civilians in August 1914, Germany wanted to both restore its reputation with a part of the Belgian population and seek allies within the national space. In order to do this, Germany decided to exploit Belgian internal problems, in particular Flemish claims which were barely recognised in pre-war Belgium. This was how, step by step, a *Flamenpolitik* (Flemish Policy) was being set up whose objective it was to draw on Flemish claims in order to undermine the legitimacy of Belgium and even to dismember it in the long run. A milestone was reached on 21 March 1917 with the establishment of administrative separation, divid-

ing Belgium into two regions: Flanders and Wallonia. Brussels was part of Flanders and designated as its capital. On the Walloon side, Namur functioned as the capital city. Walloon ministers settled in Namur as the result of the forced decentralization. The German civil administration was modelled on this new administrative organisation, with the occupier looking for allies on the Walloon side as well, prompting historian Paul Delforge to argue that one could indeed speak of a 'Wallonenpolitik', but only starting from the summer of 1917.¹³

A Presence Policy

Since the Walloon Movement had been particularly active in the years leading up to the war, one wonders on what grounds the traditional assertion is based that the Walloon Movement was completely inactive and that the war would become synonymous with a period of silence(s)? For a long time, the general idea was that nothing had happened as the Walloon Assembly had held its last meeting in Brussels in July 1914 and only resumed its work in March 1919: 'The Walloon Assembly met for the last time before the war in a committee session on 8 July 1914. Following the war, the first session, which was a plenary session, took place in Brussels on 9 March 1919. Between these two dates, or throughout the duration of the war, the Walloon Assembly held no meetings and completely suspended its work and activities. [...] The crucial element was to conform to an absolute silence as long as the enemy defiled Belgian territory with its presence. It was scrupulously followed'.¹⁴ However, can one imagine a situation in which the German occupier was interfering in matters related to nationalities in order to weaken Belgium, while it was only the Flemish Movement – and again, it was its radical wing that was qualified as 'activist' – that remained active? But if there were any (re)actions, could one indeed speak of 'Walloon activism'?

For Walloon militants, the start of the war resulted in a dispersal as most Walloon associations ceased their activities. Some went to England, others to France or the Netherlands, without counting all those who decided to stay in Belgium. Consequently, the first months were indeed synonymous with silence. It was not until January 1915 that the first newspaper

(*L'Echo de Sambre et Meuse*) appeared which could, regarding the views of some of its editors, be considered close to the Walloon Movement. In reality, however, it was only after the occupier declared administrative separation that this newspaper started arguing in favour of federalism and the right of self-determination.

Even before the establishment of the occupier's *Flamenpolitik*, various signs attested to the occupier's desire to favour the Flemish population.¹⁵ But it was mainly from 1916 onwards that things accelerated because of the Dutchification of the University of Ghent, which had been one of the Flemish Movement's essential demands before the war. This initiative immediately provoked a protest by forty notable persons in the north of the country, and activists went in search of signatures: a hundred other individuals supported the occupier's initiative. At the outbreak of the war, universities were closed as they complied to a war measure taken by the Belgian government. The occupier tried in vain to reopen the University of Liège, followed by splitting up the Ministry of Arts and Science. Henceforth, the occupiers deployed a proactive policy that went well beyond the implementation of a number of decisions taken by the Belgian legislator, which *de facto* had remained a dead letter in Belgium before 1914. In the spring of 1917, a next step was taken as the occupier introduced administrative separation. This time, it indeed affected the very structure of the state, as the initiative constituted a complete rupture with the provisions relating to the law of war, included in the Hague Convention of 1907.

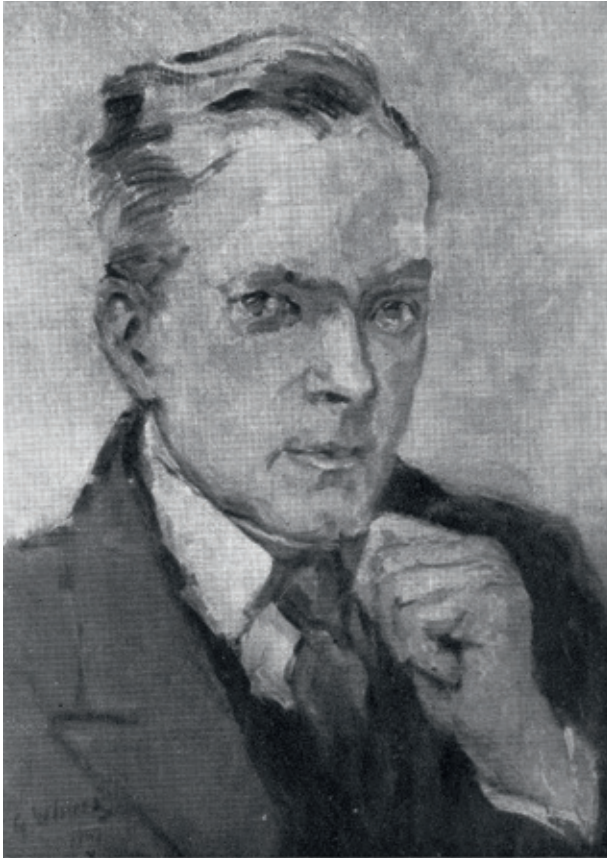
One month after the opening of the Dutch-speaking university in Ghent, a new Walloon newspaper was launched: *L'Avenir wallon*. This publication was clearly in line with the German objective for administrative separation. Among the members of the editorial board, we find Franz Foulon¹⁶, as well as Members of Parliament René Branquart¹⁷ and Emile Buisset¹⁸ – these two men ceased their cooperation with the newspaper after the visit of the delegates of the Raad van Vlaanderen in Berlin in the spring of 1917¹⁹ – as well as Oscar Colson.²⁰ But the issue of collaboration was often difficult to deal with. Censored newspapers did not hesitate to republish pre-war articles with the signature of their authors, without asking their permission. The initiative to publish the newspaper was jus-

tified by the attitude of the occupier: 'Since we are currently living under German occupation and as it is hastening to accede to the demands of the Flemish Movement, the French language remains abandoned and threatened while dying of starvation and in the doldrums in Wallonia'.²¹ Beyond this assertion, there was the conviction that the measures imposed by the occupier would remain in force after the end of the conflict, which was a naive point of view since the Belgian government enacted a decree-law in April 1917, stipulating that 'the measures taken by the occupier are considered to be incrementally revoked when the territory is liberated'. This text was distributed to the public in occupied Belgium in the form of parachuted printouts.²²

Oscar Colson (1866–1933), a teacher, became involved in the Walloon cultural movement from 1890 onwards. It was quite natural that this commitment led him towards political combat. Favorable to federalism even before the First World War, he agreed to participate in the Walloon ministries created by the occupant. After the war, he fled to Germany where he died in November 1933. Belgian justice sentenced him to 20 years of forced labor in his absence.

[©Province de Liège-Musée de la Vie wallonne, Liège]





RAYMOND COLLEYE
vu par le peintre Georges Wilmaers

Raymond Colleje (1890–1963) portrayed by the painter Georges Wilmaers (1900–1996). From 1916, Colleje stayed in Paris where he first published "*La Wallonie. Organe de la Belgique française*" but the newspaper was rapidly forbidden. In May 1916, he started the publication of "*L'Opinion wallonne*" that had a certain influence. In this newspaper, strong criticisms were formulated towards the Belgian government. The federalist thesis was widely defended. The newspaper also echoed the point of view of Flemish federalists, a very exceptional fact. [©Province de Liège–Musée de la Vie wallonne, Liège]

This presence policy was a mixture of naivety, idealism, opportunist and careerist strategies, and, for some, it testified to the will to serve the enemy. For the occupier, once the administrative separation became a reality, finding Walloon interlocutors began to be important. In the summer of 1917, a number of delegates from the Walloon Assembly were invited to attend a meeting in Brussels. Once again, the issue of administrative separation was raised as pressure from the German occupier increased. The aim was to create a Walloon counterpart to the *Raad van Vlaanderen* [Council of Flanders]. However, the meeting did not achieve the expected results as members of the Assembly refused to participate in the project. Consequently, the occupier was forced to turn to less prominent personalities. They, in turn, tried to convince the leaders of the Walloon Assembly who had chosen to stay in the country. In the spring of 1918, they were nonetheless obliged to admit that the initiative had failed.

In addition to the publication of newspapers or manifestos under German censorship, the public commitment of some Walloon militants was reflected in their participation in the ‘Walloon ministries’, which were installed in Namur on the occupier’s initiative after the introduction of administrative separation. Some may have acted out of idealism, others out of greed, or both. Accepting the appointments in the ministries of Namur could evidently be considered as a further step taken since it involved remuneration and promotion in a context where daily survival became increasingly difficult for growing sections of the population. The rallies remained very limited as well.

The last initiative to be highlighted was the creation of the *Comité de Défense de la Wallonie* [Wallonia Defence Committee] on 1 March 1918. It ranked among its members three delegates from the Walloon Assembly (Arille Carlier²³, Oscar Colson, and Franz Foulon), with six others who were civil servants from Namur without a militant past. This committee was established after the proclamation of independence by the *Raad van Vlaanderen* in the spring of 1918. During its brief existence, it disseminated two manifestos demanding federalism. The first one, in the spring of 1918, was the continuation of *L’Avenir wallon*: it included the issue of beligerents, a call for the internationalisation of the Belgian situation, and ‘the right of nationalities to have a say for themselves’. Due to Flemish

initiatives, Wallonia was presented as compelled to react to a context in which administrative separation was considered a reality. The signatories also took shelter under the moral authority of the Walloon Assembly, and referred to Article 9 of its statutes in particular, stipulating that 'Belgium can only pursue its destiny by the union of the two groups of people that make it up, which is a union based on reciprocal independence that makes up a loyal and cordial understanding'. Another remarkable point was the willingness of some Committee members to turn to members of the Raad van Vlaanderen. Nonetheless, they opposed establishing a formal rapprochement with the Raad due to both Committees' marginal nature as well as to anti-Flemish positions taken by some of its members or even to the status of Brussels. The second manifesto was published in July 1918 which, similar to the first, reaffirmed the hope that Flanders and Wallonia would unite their destinies in a Belgian federal structure.²⁴ It could be seen as a response to the *Raad van Vlaanderen's* declaration of independence in June 1918 which had been troublesome for the German occupier. The Committee's second manifesto was therefore more in line with the occupier's vision of Belgium's future, despite the fact that the Committee's legitimacy and representativeness had remained unaltered.

Underground Meetings

In addition to these public initiatives – which were endorsed by the occupier – underground meetings were organised in order to have discreet discussions about a state reform. These meetings were attended by both militants who refrained from any public activity as well as some adherents of the presence policy, making it rather difficult to make a clear distinction between the two. The one-sidedness of sources does not facilitate things either, insofar as those who spoke out about this subject after the war were the ones that had experienced problems with either the Belgian justice system or with those Walloon associations which no longer tolerated their presence. In contrast, those who just participated in these underground meetings but, as sources do suggest, were no longer publicly active, remained silent as they did not want their names to be associated with the so called 'Walloon activists'. The goal of the clandestine meetings remained problematic as well. Was the aim to scrutinize

Belgium's fate after the war or were plans designed which opted for immediate action? Evidently, most of the participants opted for the former and took advantage of the circumstances to further contemplate on Belgium's post-war fate. How this might have unfolded is traceable via sources that assert the organisation of meetings in Brussels, Liège, and Charleroi in the autumn of 1914. Among the participants, we find militants who were involved in public activities and others who stuck to strict secrecy. The length, content and frequency of these meetings therefore remain unknown.

At the same time, pamphlets circulated more or less secretly as well. In the beginning of 1915, a text entitled *Appel aux Wallons* was published. In his autobiographical writings, René Branquart also pointed to a clandestine brochure (summer of 1917) of which he was the author: *La guerre et la question des langues en Belgique*. He even referred to 'clandestine' conferences: 'But the conference which was not able to be organized publicly was held in closed offices, and I presented it to Walloon friends everywhere in the district'.²⁵ In the addendum of his response to his post-war indictment, Arille Carlier wrote: 'One would make a profound mistake in imagining that the Walloons who remained in the country were not concerned with the internal reorganization of the country. Many projects have been conceived, studied, and frequently discussed among the members of the parliament. Also various projects were reproduced in printed versions and circulated under the table, such as the projects of MM. Troclet, Member of Parliament from Liège²⁶, Pater from *Gazette de Charleroi*²⁷, my [Carlier's] colleague Gustave Abel²⁸ [...], designs by colleagues Buisset and Pastur.²⁹ [...] Within the group of Walloons from Liège, similar plans were circulating among the colleagues of Andrimont, Remouchamps, Malieux, Buisseret, etc'.³⁰ Among them were several militants who were to present projects to the Walloon Assembly in 1919. When he published his study on bilateral voting in 1919, Joseph-Maurice Remouchamps signalled the clandestine dissemination of his project and of several texts by Emile Buisset and Arthur Pater, including *La Belgique d'hier et demain*, and *L'organisation générale du pays après la guerre*.

There were apparently two phases of extensive writing. The first one came to the fore in 1915 when initial manifestations of the Flamenpolitik

emerged. The second one lasted from the middle of 1917 until the last year of the war. This wave concurred with a phase of intensive German pressure to set up a 'Walloon Council'. It is difficult to assert that this was a pure coincidence, as the Walloon question was clearly presented. The Flamenpolitik had already incurred its effects and even though it had not incited mass mobilization, it had provoked radicalization of the Flemish activists. Such circumstances urged the leaders of the Walloon Movement to prepare for the post-war period, to design a policy that coincided with the plans of the Le Havre government, and to refine the Walloon demands. These and other indicators clearly attest to the fact that one cannot maintain that the Movement remained completely inactive during the war.³¹

Radicalisation in Exile

In addition to the active militants in occupied Belgium – whether secretly or publicly – another issue was particularly stirring: the role of Walloon militants who were in exile in Paris. They were united within the *Union wallonne de France* [Walloon Union of France], created in March 1916, and claimed to already count approximately 500 members a few months after its foundation. Initially, the Union was primarily concerned with the fate of Walloon refugees. The journalist Raymond Colleye for example, an active member in the *Walloon Brabant League* since 1908, resided in the French capital since February 1916.³² Colleye distinguished himself before the war as a supporter of the creation of a Walloon party. He could be considered as an ardent defender of federalism and even of the union between Wallonia and France, i.e. 'rattachism'. While in Paris, Colleye founded a newspaper, *La Wallonie. Organe de la Belgique française*, which was banned after its third issue, ultimately resulting in the launch of another newspaper, *L'Opinion wallonne*, on 1 May 1916.³³ In terms of doctrine, there was not much distinction between the activists exiled in Paris who published articles in *L'Opinion wallonne* and the ideas formulated in *L'Avenir wallon* in occupied Belgium. On both sides, it was the same federalist claim that came to the forefront, the same aggressiveness towards the Belgian government in Le Havre whose censorship harassed *L'Opinion wallonne*, the same desire to take inspiration from fo-

reign models. Some articles even seemed to postulate explicit calls for action and demands. There was, moreover, no clear condemnation of the supporters of the presence policy in the occupied country. On a doctrinal level, the pre-war hesitations had evaporated and were replaced by outspoken demands for federalism and, in the wake of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, for the right of self-determination. The matter of linguistic minorities was omitted as it was no longer considered an issue to be raised by the Walloon Movement. It was as if those political matters which had precisely prevented the formulation of a coherent pre-war doctrine – recognition of linguistic minorities, bilingualism in Flanders, the status of Brussels – had simply disappeared. Also, a similar attitude towards the Flemish federalists unified the militants exiled in France and those who had remained behind in occupied Belgium. If the situation in occupied Belgium could be considered to be part of the logic of German policy and therefore as a fragment of the necessary adherence of 'Flemish activists', then there was nothing comparable in France, where the same policy of openness towards Flemish federalists was practiced. *L'Opinion wallonne* repeatedly used extracts from *Ons Vaderland*, the Flemish newspaper published in France, which was considered as the unofficial organ of the Flemish *Frontbeweging* (Front Movement). Because certain tactics, positions, and attitudes of the Flemish continued to provoke irritation, the Walloon autonomists primarily attacked the Belgian government. This policy of the outstretched hand towards the Flemish federalists was found in the points of view they defended: the right of the Flemings to express themselves in their own language and to benefit from education in Flemish from primary school to university. This attitude was an important fact as it recalled the attempts of contact in occupied Belgium between the *Comité de Défense de la Wallonie* and certain members of the *Raad van Vlaanderen*. Until then, dialogue between the Flemish and Walloon Movements had been non-existent as both sides showed indifference and discontent towards each other.

Echo of the Points of View

To what extent did the radicalization of the Walloon Movement resonate? The newspaper *L'Opinion wallonne* regularly underwent the throes of cen-

sorship. But what lay behind that? We know how much Flemish activism perturbed the Belgian government, but what about its Walloon counterpart? During an audience on 15 September 1916 he allowed Prosper Poullet, then Minister of Arts and Science, the king referred to the Walloon Movement as he vented his concerns about ‘the Walloon trend which, in Paris, found a remarkable field of expansion and which even slid towards subservience to France’. In November 1916, *L’Opinion wallonne* announced that it had 1,200 subscribers. In February 1918, the paper referred to some 25,000 readers.³⁴ Even though this figure was undoubtedly exaggerated, it testified to a certain legitimacy, provoking concerns. This fear of Francophilia was repeatedly echoed in official circles, but the attitude of the Belgian government also posed a matter of concern. Several Walloon activists believed that it was too conciliatory with the Flemish Movement, a conciliation which may be linked to the desire to counter the occupier’s policy. In other words, they argued that the solution to the Belgian case had to be linked to its specific Belgian context and should not relate to the context of foreign occupation. This attitude aroused the exasperation of certain Walloons who interpreted it as an incentive for betrayal. Even though they were primarily concerned with the evolutionary path of the Flemish Movement, both in terms of the government’s and the king’s position, they feared a possible reaction in Wallonia. In a report from the autumn of 1917 addressed to the king, explicit reference to a ‘separatist Walloon movement’ was made which might manifest itself as the solution to the conflict. What is clear here is the fact that the war had fully demonstrated that for certain minority groups the importance of the question of languages was weighed more heavily than the emotional bonds with the ‘fatherland’.

What now was the actual range of *L’Opinion wallonne*? It is a difficult question to deal with. Evidently, according to the opponents of administrative separation, *L’Opinion wallonne* had no impact, but one could argue the contrary as the newspaper was read by refugee militants in France. The newspaper also circulated in occupied Belgium and censored Walloon newspapers frequently referred to it. Among the contributors to the newspaper were Walloon soldiers. Before being prohibited, the newspaper was also read at the war front and published letters of encouragement from soldiers but whose content was occasionally censored.³⁵ Simultaneously,

contributions to *Le XXe siècle* denounced such propagandistic outings at the front by *L'Opinion wallonne*. Reactions of this kind attested to a certain level of diffusion of the newspaper which as a consequence had been deemed dangerous by official circles. From March 1917 onwards, censorship had increased considerably as articles were occasionally downsized by half. In the fall of 1917, selling the paper at the front was suddenly prohibited, but it could not prevent subscribers from receiving it illegally. In any event, the paper benefited from more recognition than the official 'Walloon' press that suffered from the occupier's strict supervision, allowing the most radical wing of the autonomist movement to express itself, causing deep concern in the upper spheres of the government.

3. AT THE END OF THE CONFLICT

Restoration of the Walloon Assembly

The end of the war marked the Movement's return to public activity. Beyond the euphoria of rediscovered peace new challenges arose: The throne speech of 22 November 1918 had aroused discontent. Hadn't the king promised equality of languages and the creation of a Dutch university in Ghent? The king's speech had reneged on the promises made by the exiled government in Le Havre, and its call for complete equality echoed those of the government of Le Havre and its promise of complete equality. For Walloon militants, this was the last straw, as the statements were interpreted as a reward in disguise to those who had collaborated with the occupier and had betrayed Belgium, whilst simultaneously neglecting the demands of the south of the country. Because the Walloons had refrained from any engagement, they felt very badly rewarded. As Destrée pointed out: 'To appease the Flemings who had betrayed, it (the government) promised them the Flemish university. As the Walloons had not betrayed the country, they were promised nothing'.³⁶ It also initiated the Walloon Movement's strategy to ignore the activities of the Walloon Assembly during the war as the new government led by the Catholic Leon Delacroix reaffirmed its political minoritisation. For the Walloon Movement, the end of the war caused great concern, as they feared being completely ignored whilst the Flemish demands benefited from an abundance of public and governmental attention. It was therefore essential to regain a public presence and realise unification in order to be able to propose a coherent program of demands.

The Liège delegates of the Assembly were the first ones to meet on 10 December 1918. They condemned the attitude of the national government, which, like the king, immediately declared its support to concessions to the Flemish. The Liège delegates also protested against the composition of the new government, arguing that Walloons were almost completely excluded.³⁷ The programme they defended remained in line with the Assembly's previous work: maintenance of Belgian nationality, loyal and cordial union of Flemings and Walloons, political equality of the two 'races', and freedom of language.³⁸ The kinship was apparent: the fear

of minorisation, the upholding of unilingualism in Wallonia and bilingualism in Flanders, all fitted within a specific Belgian framework and coincided with the main tenets of the Assembly's pre-war programme. This programme however was unclear and indefinite, and contrary to its regional groups, it took almost four months for the Walloon Assembly to resume its work.

In the meantime, the Walloons' discontent remained closely monitored. In March 1919, Max-Léo Gérard³⁹ was appointed as King Albert's secretary. Originally from Liège, he maintained privileged links with certain Walloon militants. In April 1919, he wrote a memo for the king, drawing his attention to the Walloon Movement. The choice of words was significant:

'There is no doubt that more attention has been paid to Flemish issues for a few years and, moreover, it is distinctive to note that each of the two branches of the Belgian family complains of being oppressed by the other. Be that as it may, the Walloon claims are gaining traction and intensity, and a time could come when the reasonable and moderate elements of the Walloon movement get overwhelmed by excessive elements, especially if Wallonia alleges that the demands by the Flemings had been granted privilege. To avoid this extremity, calls to the National Union may not be enough, and it might be necessary to examine, in an entirely objective way, what reforms could gratify this need of autonomy – or independence from the Flemish, to be more precise – which appears in all sorts of demands by the Walloons. I also believe I should mention that, according to the information gathered from French-speaking Ghent circles, the opposition to the transformation of the university into a Flemish university remains extremely strong. Many good minds even fear the adoption of more or less transactional solutions, such as either duplicating the courses of the University of Ghent or creating a Flemish university in Antwerp or Malines from scratch. About the solution of the duplication, it is observed that Ghent will remain an object of perpetual quarrel. When it comes to the solution of an exclusively Flemish university, there is the fear of seeing it degenerate into a centre of Germanic propaganda soon'.⁴⁰

This note was indicative of the attention from which the Walloon Movement benefited, but at the same time, it still did not have a new and well-developed strategy. How was it going to position itself? What was going to be the fate of the multitude of projects developed during the occupation? Was the issue of administrative separation finally going to be tackled?

Even though the current of radicalism of 1912 had hardly been translated into reality, the radicalism of war would shake up the Walloon Assembly. The year 1919 indeed appeared as a pivotal moment during which the outlines of the administrative separation program were being debated, which was henceforth called 'federalism', as the terminology used by the occupier had become taboo, or as the liberal François Bovesse⁴¹ from Namur stated in January 1919: 'administrative separation? These are words that momentarily sound very bad'.⁴²

Eight projects were proposed to the Assembly in a pre-electoral context – the first elections by universal male suffrage took place on 16 November 1919 – and in the perspective of the announcement of a constitutional revision which potentially offered possibilities in terms of a state reform. All the projects presented came from militants from the provinces of Liège or Hainaut and were obviously texts that were secretly drawn up before and during the war in occupied Belgium or in France. Five projects were clearly in line with a federalist creed, two were closer to admini-

After the war ended, the newspaper "*L'Opinion wallonne*" continued to appear until 1920. It largely echoes the debates that divided the "Assemblée wallonne". In this issue, the newspaper is very critical regarding Jules Destrée, accused of having renounced his pre-war commitment to "administrative separation". "*L'Opinion wallonne*", 9 November 1919. [©Province de Liège-Musée de la Vie wallonne, Liège]

strative decentralization, and the last one advocated bilateral voting. The aim of the last option was to introduce a double majority system in parliamentary votes. In other words, in order to be adopted, a law had to obtain a majority in each of the two linguistic groups in parliament. The newspaper *L'Opinion wallonne*, which had not ceased to appear, also proposed a project; nonetheless, as its author Raymond Colleye did not have a seat in the Walloon Assembly, his project was not put forward by his constituency and therefore failed to fuel the debate. A special committee was assigned to examine the projects during the Assembly's first meeting on 9 March 1919, ultimately presenting its final report a little over a month later in Liège on 27 April 1919.

The commission initially proposed to limit the discussion to the subjects related to decentralizing and federalist projects – which ‘best respond to our present mindset’ – thus effectively discarding the most moderate project that favoured bilateral voting, and invited each project's author to present its content. Divergences evidently separated federalist projects – ‘administrative separation’ was no longer a question – notably on the status of the national capital Brussels but, for the convenience of the discussion, the Assembly brought them together as a whole. The nuances did not really matter after all, as the discussion centred on the level of general principles.

After this first overview, more radical voices were gradually being heard, demanding the revision of the famous Article 9 of the Assembly's statutes, constituting an underhanded attempt to put forward the call for the attachment of Belgium to France.⁴³ This attitude elicited a very strong response from Destrée – who seemed even more moderate than in 1914 – and which provoked his return to the Assembly and successfully withdrew the proposal without much debate, even though the supporters of the idea of attachment to France were to take up the position again later. The discussion therefore focused on how the working hypotheses fell within an exclusively Belgian framework. A particularly rough and confusing debate, no decision was ultimately taken and the discussion postponed. Moreover, after it had been initially ruled out, the option of bilateral voting was debated once again. This resurgence of bilateralism was surprising, given that there had been no chance of success in the first place.



Members of the "Assemblée wallonne" at the end of the meeting they held in Liège on April 27, 1919. During this meeting, each author of a proposal (federalist, partisan of administrative decentralisation or bilateral voting) was invited to present his project to the other members. It took almost one year and seven meetings before the "Assemblée wallonne" finally adopted the bilateral voting. In the centre of the picture, in the front row, we recognize Jules Destrée with his clear coat. [©Province de Liège-Musée de la Vie wallonne, Liège]

This situation was due to the idea's originator, Joseph-Maurice Remouchamps, who relied on a broad network of contacts and could boast of his uninterrupted commitment as well as continuous presence in occupied Belgium without having collaborated with the occupier. Founder of the Museum of Walloon Life in 1912, Remouchamps appeared to be a respected and notable person. Moreover, he succeeded in maintaining a significant sphere of influence, particularly among moderates – those who defended the use of Walloon dialects (we can compare them to the so-called Flemish 'taalminnaars' [language aficionados]) for example and focused less on political issues – despite the fact that his city was also home to the most radical currents, i.e. those who wanted to change the structures of the Belgian state.

While Remouchamps appeared as a wise figure in the new political context which was starting to take shape, in the summer of 1919 his victory was not yet complete. On 13 July, the Walloon Assembly met in Saint-Gilles. Destrée brought all his political force to bear in order to discredit the federalists by reminding everyone of the repressive measures introduced by the occupier.⁴⁴ The discussion petered out, Destrée ultimately withdrew, and no vote was taken during this meeting. Consequently, the Assembly decided to organize a referendum among its members in order to prepare for the next meeting in Verviers, two days later on 6–7 September 1919. Out of the 147 members consulted, 101 returned their ballot. Evidently, some members had cast several votes – a preference vote and a subsidiary vote, which made the interpretation of the data extremely difficult. There were two separate counts, one providing the number of votes for each project and the other dividing them according to the type of vote.

1°. Distribution of votes by project

Projects	Received votes
André-Pastur (provincialism)	53
Remouchamps (bilaterism)	30
Mockel-Jennissen (three-tier federalism) ⁴⁵	23
Trochet (three-tier federalism)	20
Buisset-Pater (provincialism/regionalism)	18
Delaite (three-tier regionalism) ⁴⁶	52

2°. Distribution of votes by types of votes⁴⁷

Options	Preference Votes	Subsidiary Votes
Bilateralism	30	0
Provincialism	27	26
Federalism	41	29

The two tables complement each other. It is also notable that the projects more akin to provincialism were categorized under the federalist option. This was the case of the projects by Buisset and Pater that envisaged the constitution of five regions with increased provincial powers. Unfortunately, there was no breakdown by project regarding the preference votes and subsidiary votes. Based on data provided by Destrée, one

can observe that the project proposals formulated by Mockel–Jennissen obtained the most votes on the federalist side, followed closely by Troclet’s project. Apparently, the high number of federalist projects harmed their cause as the votes were thinned out. On the one hand, considering the distribution of votes, it can be legitimately claimed that the proponents of bilateralism opted for provincialism as a subsidiary. On the other hand, the divergence of opinions between bilateralism and federalism were too profound to imagine such a disposition. The subsidiary votes for federalism were undoubtedly the work of the federalists themselves.

Undoubtedly, the referendum was only for advisory purposes. In addition, it seemed difficult to consider the possibility of a clear option to emerge. The Assembly had never encountered such a scenario. Before the war, disagreements were debated within committees and the outcomes presented in unanimous reports during the plenary sessions. What did the statutes stipulate? They did not address the issue at all. When the documents available are re-examined, no trace of a settlement can be found until 1920.⁴⁸ It was specified that the decision needed support of a two-thirds majority, though the procedure followed prior to that is unknown. The next session was spread over two days: the first informal session on 6 September (when the goal was clearly to come to an agreement) and the public session the following day, which, it was hoped, would resolve the disagreements. These sessions were preceded by meetings of the provincial delegations.

A proposal was submitted to the members during the public meeting of 7 September. The show-of-hands-method of voting was to be applied. Delegates had to choose between the federalist option and a combination of provincialist solutions and bilateralism. The opponents of federalism expected to win as they were united. Thirty-two delegates took part in this vote, which had a very tight result: sixteen votes for federalism against fifteen votes in favour of combining provincialism and bilateralism and only one abstention by Emile Jennissen. For Remouchamps and his supporters, the vote was unquestionably a failure. Once again, the federalists won by a small margin, although it was insufficient as a two-thirds majority was required. Destrée’s absence was remarkable during the final vote. Was this a planned strategy or pure coincidence? Based

on the available information, everything points to the fact that provincial decentralization was gaining his support.⁴⁹ He was inquisitive about Remouchamps' project as he considered it interesting yet complicated. In fact, little is known about the nature of the relationship between the two men. Politically, they belonged to different parties. Destrée would address Remouchamps by calling him 'My dear friend' but they did not seem really close. In any case, Destrée carefully avoided giving his point of view, which was an attitude he had already adopted during the Congress of 1912, preferring to use rhetoric as his weapon.⁵⁰

A conciliatory agenda was therefore proposed, which was approved by 34 votes against one. It first summarized the points upon which all the delegates agreed, i.e. the maintenance of Belgian nationality, understood as a notion that cannot serve as 'a basis of political subordination of Wallonia to Flanders', and the will to see the next constitution implement 'a new status ensuring our two peoples' full political equality'.⁵¹ In accordance with the votes cast, the members were once again invited to express their views in writing. Two options were proposed. The first one offered a combination of the federalist option and a tenuous application of parliamentary bilateralism for matters of national interest. The alternative advocated a combination of the provincial option with bilateral voting. Let us point out that, in both cases, bilateralism was integrated. This was undoubtedly a compromise made in favour of the moderates who opposed both federalism and provincial decentralization as they perceived these as a threat to the Francophones residing in Flanders.

Consequently, the members were consulted once again, and the results of the referendum were pronounced. Weariness however was gaining ground, and the subsequent consultation drew a much smaller crowd than the previous one: 44 votes were cast in favour of the combination of provincialism/bilateralism against only 28 votes for the combination of federalism/bilateralism (with five abstentions).⁵²

A new session was held in Namur on 19 October 1919, confirming once again that the federalist option was only supported by a simple majority, as it obtained 19 votes in opposition to 17 votes for the non-federalists and 2 abstentions. The discussion, however, was coming to a grinding

halt. While the supporters of the federalist option clearly did not back down in the public sessions, the moderates – who did not participate in the meetings – voiced their different opinion via their vote during written consultations. Because absenteeism still remained important among the ranks of the Assembly, the most radical members, as is often the case, were able to overemphasize their presence. Continuing the debate was therefore futile. In addition, the discussion had been rendered meaningless after it had been announced which articles of the constitution had been opened up for revision, making it abundantly clear that the question of reforming the unitary structure of the state was not put on the government's agenda.

The impossibility of obtaining a real majority made it very difficult for the Assembly to resume its work. Discussions were no longer contained within the committees but were held during plenary sessions where disagreements broke out and damaged the Assembly's prestige. Destrée – who was about to become a minister – left no doubts about it as he reminded the Assembly of more discreet practices: 'If the Walloon Assembly does not want to become a simple meeting, it must return to its old working methods and absolutely refuse to discuss proposals that have not been passed by the committee and by a report with specific conclusions, except for the case of unanimous consent'.⁵³

The stalemate was truly over: in December 1919, Jules Destrée was appointed Minister of Arts and Science and had renounced his post as Secretary-General of the Walloon Assembly. His departure consolidated Remouchamps' supremacy, as he was promoted to the post of Secretary-General of the Assembly in February 1920. He surrounded himself with close allies and centred the meetings on issues he personally deemed crucial. The Assembly reviewed its *modus operandi*: heated debates like those that had taken place in 1919 were no longer tolerated. The Assembly was henceforth directed by an all-powerful Permanent Bureau that took most of the decisions and defined the priorities. From 1920 onwards, its members started dealing with the language issue in administrative matters and the ultimate rejection of bilingualism in Wallonia. The linguistic dimension however clearly posed an obstacle for the demand for administrative separation, as the linguistic issue was equal to the defence of

the French language throughout the country and therefore incompatible with federalism. In addition, another priority was outlined by the new team: the fight against 'Flamingantism'. The last months of 1919 thus (provisionally) spelled the end of any demand for a reform of the state's structure. It took almost a year for the Assembly's new leadership to claim its victory over the more radical movement which had its roots in the war, fed on the ideas professed in Paris by *L'Opinion wallonne* and had aligned itself with Wilsonian ideas. Henceforth, the discourse was clear. If the Walloon Assembly wished to remain convincing, administrative separation would be politically suicidal; 'In addition, if the Walloon Assembly wants a large part of the population to side with its cause and to dispel their distrust as soon as possible, it should clearly declare that political or administrative separation is not pursued. Consequently, priority is given to defending the French language'.⁵⁴

4. THE ISSUE OF WALLOON ACTIVISM

After the war, the issue of Walloon activism drew a lot of attention. It had two dimensions. On the one hand, there was the attitude of the Walloon Assembly and that of various associations within the Walloon Movement; on the other hand, the judicial dimension with its trials of the so-called Walloon activists had to be accounted for.⁵⁵ For some, the very idea of Walloon activism made it possible to refer simultaneously to the Walloon and Flemish Movements. The fact that both movements used to be minority engagements did not matter to them as it became possible to discredit each of them by simply applying the term activism.

If the Walloon Movement wanted to maintain its legitimacy, it was vital to distance itself from its alleged past as quickly as possible and to state loud and clear that Walloon activism had not existed in the previous years. It was equally crucial to take distance from those who had spoken publicly on behalf of the Walloon Movement under German occupation. Consequently, the Walloon Assembly addressed the matter at its first meeting in Brussels, on 9 March 1919. Three cases of activists were brought to the fore: those of Oscar Colson, Arille Carlier, and Franz Foulon. The fate of the first one was very quickly decided on. For having participated in Walloon ministries during war time, he was simply expunged and took refuge in Berlin. As for the other two, a commission of inquiry was set up in order to reach a verdict, but it took more than two years before a final decision could be presented in July 1921.

In the *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, the historian Jean-Pierre Delhayé turns to the question of Walloon activism.⁵⁶ He suggests that it is impossible to deny its existence. But what about its impact? According to him, those who were seen as the leaders of Walloon activism 'can be considered as the precursors of federalism and not merely as activists in the service of Germans', but he immediately adds, paraphrasing Hervé Hasquin, that in the aftermath of the war, anyone who could be suspected of having questioned the unity of the country was instantly stigmatized. In that case, can Flemish activism and Walloon activism be considered as similar? Two elements distinguish them very clearly: their scale on the one hand, and the position of their respective movements on the other.

Numerically, the comparison seems ridiculous: compared to 20,000 Flemish activists – a figure considered to be minimal by Pieter Van Hees in the *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging* – one cannot count more than a hundred Walloons in the ‘Walloon ministries’ of Namur, with twenty to thirty activists at most who had engaged in the censored press or who had joined the *Comité de Défense de la Wallonie*. Twenty-three people were prosecuted in the so-called Walloon activist trial; twenty of whom were given sanctions such as two years of imprisonment to fifteen years of forced labour, and three people were acquitted. For the sake of comparison, 268 judgments were passed against Flemish activists. Administrative sanctions however were administered to ‘several thousands’ of civil servants. Moreover, according to Governor General von Falkenhausen, the situation was clear: if there is a Flemish Movement that would prove advantageous for the German cause, ‘von einer wallonischen Bewegung im separatistischen Sinne war bisher überhaupt kaum zu sprechen gewesen; sie müsste erst geschaffen und entwickelt werden’.⁵⁷ [up until now there had hardly been any talk of a Walloon movement in the separatist sense; it still had to be created and developed – translated by I.U.].

After the war, Flemish activists who were convicted of activism quickly found support from the Flemish Movement as a whole. Some Flemish Catholic and socialist parliamentarians also asked for clemency.⁵⁸ For its moderate wing, this strategy counted as a bulwark against increasing radicalization. A dissident party indeed emerged, the *Frontpartij*, and it was particularly attentive to those who had been engaged in activism. Rapidly, the demand for amnesty was supported by the Flemish Movement as a whole. There was no comparable development in the south of the country, though. On the side of the Walloon Movement, because of the chosen strategy, condemnations were harsh, and clemency not tolerated, as a patriotic loyalist discourse of the First World War was dominating the atmosphere. According to Destrée, one could not speak of a proper Walloon ‘activism’: ‘They never tried to activate events; they just followed them’, he wrote in 1923. Even if there had been a reaction, starting from 1916, it was against Flemish activism and the government of Le Havre, which, in the eyes of the leader of Charleroi, ‘proved its loyalist character’.⁵⁹

Walloon activists were brought to trial and the majority of those being condemned ceased all militant activities. In addition, those who attempted to re-enter the Walloon Movement were cursed by their past which never exempted them entirely. Among them, Arille Carlier, the former intern of Destrée, is a notable figure. He insisted on returning to the Walloon Assembly. In July 1921, when justice had already ruled in favour of a dismissal, the bad news arrived: Carlier could not be reintegrated; his demeanour during the war remained unforgivable in the eyes of the new board of the Assembly. Nonetheless, the organization was profoundly divided: 15 votes to 13, a proof that the condemnation was not as unanimous as it was expected by the board. In any case, the vote revealed the increasing division between the 'centralists' and the 'federalists'. In June 1923, the federalists, led by Destrée, resigned from the Walloon Assembly. A few months later, the Walloon Action League was born out of a merger of pre-existing groups, embodying the federalist trend. Furthermore, proposing a state reform ceased to be a taboo, even if there was still a long way to go. Nonetheless, the Walloon Assembly remained hostile to the issues related to the structure of the state and maintained its fight in favour of the French language's supremacy, though it gradually lost all its representativeness during the interwar period.

Article written by Jules Destrée about the Walloon "Activisme". In his eyes, there is no Walloon Activism that can be compared to the Flemish one. But he admits that some Walloon militants have been active during the First World War. To a certain extent, he shows understanding towards them: "they helped the enemy in a certain way but they helped Wallonia to a much larger extent".

Le journal de Charleroi, 2 August 1922. [©KBR, Newspapers Department, Brussels]

5. UNDER THE GUISE OF CONCLUSION: WAR AND RADICALISM

Throughout these few pages, the objective was to establish the impact of the First World War on the history of the Walloon Movement. It appears that its effects were extensive. Various forms of radicalization as well as moderation can be discerned. In fact, radicalization existed in both the Flemish as well as the Walloon Movement, as the pre-war hesitations seemed to be swept away. But the two movements would take different paths after the Armistice. The attempt to impose federalism within the Walloon Assembly failed. In addition, it took a much more moderate path compared to its inclinations prior to the First World War. Regarding the discredits of the demand for an administrative separation, the Walloon Movement preferred not only to renounce it but above all to use it to discredit the Flemish Movement. However, in order to be able to do so over the longer term, the Walloon Movement had to discard any possible traces of misconduct. It therefore opted for the path of moderation. Here, we encounter a case of representation of images and counter-images. In order to be convincing while claiming that a 'righteous struggle' took place, it had to be demonstrated that the other went astray. At a time when Belgium had been attacked by Germany, nothing could be more legitimate than associating the Flemish Movement as a whole with the enemy in order to discredit it effectively. To achieve this, the Walloon Movement found a new ally: Belgian (French-speaking) nationalism. Consequently, all demands of the Flemish Movement were systematically used to stigmatize it and to associate it with the enemy, even in terminology. Members of the Flemish Movement were called 'Flamboches' (a combination of 'Flamands', (Flemish people) and 'Boches' (Krauts) or the 'von Bissing law' (about the legislation on the use of languages in administrative matters) or even a 'von Bissing University' (with reference to all Dutchification projects at Ghent University) came into play. The Flemish Movement found itself excluded from the national ground, embodying betrayal and anti-patriotism. In this context, it was impossible to advocate any reforms that were reminiscent of the German occupier as well as to reinstate anyone whose patriotism could be perceived as dubious.

Associating French-speaking Belgian nationalism to a certain 'culture of war' was obviously a strategic choice which corresponded well to the

sensitivity of the new leadership of the Walloon Assembly.⁶⁰ It found itself united in the fight against the new law on the use of languages in administrative matters and ardently favoured the continuity of a French university in Ghent, an issue that was predictably touched upon by the occupier. Nevertheless, the alliance did not last, and its fight did not end with victory. Despite the stigmatising deeds it was confronted with, the Flemish Movement successfully re-established itself as it could count on the strong support from adherents within the Catholic political party. From 1923 onwards, the Walloon federalist current also gradually re-affirmed itself. It took time to gain a foothold, particularly because of the continued reverence for the French language. Giving up French in Flanders was not as easy as accepting the omnipresence of Dutch in Flanders (at the time, it was mainly a question of 'Flemish', a term that referred mainly to the idea of a conglomeration of dialects and not of a separate language), which was internalized as a second class language compared to French, the language of 'civilization'. However, this renunciation was essential if the demand for federalism was to gain any traction.

Nevertheless, the Flemish Movement remained prone to suspicion and it always remained so for some rare Walloon militants who had been active during the First World War. Only a few Walloon militants were ready for a dialogue with their Flemish counterparts. In 1928, after the 'Borms election' (named after a prisoner sentenced to death after the First World War), the gap widened further. The conversion of the nationalist wing of the Flemish Movement to the far-right permanently marked the end of all rapprochement. More broadly, its commitment to collaboration during the Second World War once again allowed the Walloon Movement to mobilize a set of images and counter-images, demonstrating how it positioned itself on the right side immediately, which was the side of the resistance.⁶¹

Once again, a patriotic starting point was mobilized at the end of the Second World War. Through it, the Flemish Movement was targeted but the Walloon Movement did not completely escape from demonization. As in 1918, the two movements turned their backs to each other. As far as the demand for federalism was concerned, it definitely fitted into the demands of the Walloon Movement after the Second World War. Admittedly, it was

going to take time for it to be relayed by traditional political parties, and for the Movement, it was first promoted by the communitarian parties. Progressing from one state reform to another, it was in 1993 that Belgium officially became a federal state. We are now far from the stigma that struck the demand for administrative separation in the aftermath of the First World War. Even better, federalism is now elevated to the rank of a new civic spirit.

ENDNOTES

1 This contribution has been presented in the framework of a *NISE Lecture* in Antwerp, on November 15, 2018. It was partially published under the title 'De la séparation administrative au nationalisme belge: la quête identitaire du mouvement wallon à la faveur de la Grande Guerre', in Sylvain Gregori & Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti (dir.), *Minorités, identités régionales et nationales en guerre 1914-1918*, Rennes, 2017, pp. 221-234.

2 See Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France. L'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique*, Paris, 1997 and, more specifically, for the war period itself, Mickaël Bourlet, Yann Lagadec, Erwan Le Gall, *Petites patries dans la Grande Guerre*, Rennes, 2013.

3 See Bruno De Wever, Frans-Jos Verdoodt & Antoon Vrints, *Flemish Patriots and the Construction of the Nation: How the Flemish Nation Ceased to Be Small*, [NISE Essays 4], Antwerp, 2019.

4 See: Chantal Kesteloot, *Régionalisme wallon et nationalisme flamand. D'autres projets ou simplement un autre nom?*, Brussels, 2013.

5 For the history of the Walloon Assembly, see: Paul Delforge, *L'Assemblée wallonne 1912-1923, premier Parlement de la Wallonie*, [Institut Jules Destrée], Namur, 2013.

6 In 1910, the senator and a liberal state minister Emile Dupont (1834-1912), yet known for his moderation, had already written "Long live administrative separation" during a debate in the parliamentary hemicycle. See Alain Colignon, *Emile Dupont*, in: *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon (EMW)*, vol.1, p. 531.

7 About the importance of the year 1912, See Vincent

Scheltiens, *Met dank aan de overkant. Een politieke geschiedenis van België*, Kalmthout, 1917, p. 72 and also Jules Destrée (1863–1936), who was a lawyer and a socialist Member of Parliament of Charleroi; secretary general of the Walloon Assembly between 1912–1914 and in 1919, minister of Arts and Science between 1919 and 1921. See Philippe Destatte, *Jules Destrée*, in: *EMW*, vol.1, pp. 483–490.

8 Of the 186 seats in the Chamber of Representatives, the Catholics prevailed 101 (61 of which in Flanders); the liberals conserved their 44 seats (while the number of seats increased from 166 to 186) and the socialists held 39 seats. The Daensist party also held two seats. The cartel lists held 44 seats out of 72 in Wallonia.

9 Philippe Destatte, *La Lettre au roi de Jules Destrée: pourquoi et comment*, in: Philippe Destatte, Catherine Lanneau and Fabrice Meurant-Pailhe (dir.), *Jules Destrée. La Lettre au roi, et au-delà. 1912–2012. Actes du colloque, 24 and 25 April 2012*, [Musée de la vie wallonne/Institut Jules Destrée], Liège, Namur, 2013, p. 74.

10 Catherine Lanneau, *Le congrès wallon de 1912, impact, significations, retombées*, in: Philippe Destatte, Catherine Lanneau et Fabrice Meurant-Pailhe (dir.), *Jules Destrée. La Lettre au roi, op.cit.*, p. 65.

11 Vincent Scheltiens, *Les effets profonds du long été wallon de 1912 en Flandre*, in: Philippe Destatte, Catherine Lanneau et Fabrice Meurant-Pailhe (dir.), *Jules Destrée. La Lettre au roi, op.cit.*, p. 128.

12 Lode Wils, *Onverfranst, onverduits ? Flamenpolitik, activisme, frontbeweging*, Kalmthout, 2014, p. 320.

13 About the history of the Walloon Movement during the First World War, see Paul Delforge, *La Wallonie et la Première Guerre mondiale. Pour une histoire de la séparation administrative*, [Institut Jules Destrée], Namur, 2008.

14 'L'action de l'Assemblée wallonne et l'activisme flamand', in: *La Défense wallonne*, 31/12/1920, p. 164.

15 See Lode Wils, *Onverfranst, Onverduits? Flamenpolitik, Activisme, Frontbeweging*, Kalmthout, 2014.

16 Franz Foulon (1861–1928) was a literary man and liberal. Before the war he was the political director of *L'Avenir* in Tournai and of *L'Echo d'Ath*. He was the delegate of the Tournai region in the Walloon Assembly, and one of the leading figures of Walloon activism. As a federalist and the author of many brochures dedicated to the Walloon issue, he was admitted to the *Comité de Défense de la Wallonie*. In addition, as a convict, he benefited from a *nolle prosequi* ordonnance on December 1, 1919. See the biography of Jean-Pierre Delhaye in *la Nouvelle Biographie nationale*, [Royal Academy of Science, Letters and Art in Belgium, t. II] Brussels, 1990, pp. 156–158.

17 René Branquart (1871–1936): as a physicist, he got engaged in politics with the Belgian Worker's Party (Parti ouvrier belge). Consecutively, he was a municipal council member, alderman and then burgomaster of Braine-le-Comte. He also served in the parliament, as a deputy first and senator thereafter, almost without interruption from 1899 to 1936. He was a member of the Walloon Assembly until 1923. See Jean-Pierre Delhaye, *René Branquart*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, p. 194.

18 Emile Buisset (1869–1925): as a lawyer, he got engaged in politics as a member of the Liberal Party. Consecutively, he was a member of the municipal council, alderman and then burgomaster of Charleroi. He was member of the parliament from 1904 until 1925 and member of the Walloon Assembly until 1923. See Paul Delforge, *Emile Buisset*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, pp. 208–209.

19 See René Branquart, *En Wallonie pendant la guerre*, Braine-le-Comte, 1919, p. 65.

20 Oscar Colson (1866–1933) was a teacher and passionate about ethnology. He was one of the three founding fathers of *Wallonia*, the benchmark review magazine par excellence for all those interested in Walloon activism as well as cultural and political activism before 1914. As the organizer of the 1905 Congress, he was one of the first partisans of federalism. He was a liberal and a freemason. He participated in the creation of the Walloon Assembly. His actions during the First World War cast a deep discredit on his public figure. He went into exile in Germany where he spent the rest of his life while the Namur Assize Court sentenced him to 20 years of forced labor. See A. Colignon, *Colson Oscar*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, pp. 298–299.

21 ‘Our Program’, in: *L’Avenir wallon*, n°1, 9–15 November 1916, p. 1.

22 See Luc Schepens, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

23 Arille Carlier (1887–1963): As a lawyer (he was an intern of Jules Destrée), he got involved in the Walloon cause in 1906 and continued this commitment until his death. His activism is both political and dialectical. During the First World War, he was active publicly at the *Comité de Défense de la Wallonie*. After the war, having been imprisoned for six months, he was finally dismissed. He continued his involvement in many Walloon associations, he was one of the key players in the dialogue with the Flemish federalists during the 1950s. See Paul Delforge, *Arille Carlier*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, pp. 230–232.

24 The text of the two manifestos are reprinted in the work of Jean–Pierre Delhaye and Paul Delforge, *Franz Foulon. La tentation inopportune*, [Institut Jules Destrée, Collection Ecrits politiques wallons] Charleroi, 2008, p. 247.

25 R. Branquart, *En Wallonie pendant la guerre*, p. 101.

26 Léon Troclet (1872–1946), socialist and Member of

Parliament from Liège for an almost uninterrupted period from 1900 until his death. He was also a founding member of the Walloon Assembly. See P. Delforge, *Léon Troclet*, in: *EMW*, vol. 3, pp. 1551–1552.

27 Arthur Pater (1883–1932), a journalist and a liberal Member of the Parliament of Charleroi. He was a founding member of the Walloon Assembly where he served until 1932. See P. Delforge, *Arthur Pater*, in: *EMW*, vol. 3, p. 1241.

28 Gustave Abel (1866–1945): lawyer, journalist and member of the Liberal party. See https://data.bnf.fr/fr/10879352/gustave_abel/ [last accessed November 2019].

29 Paul Pastur (1866–1938) was a lawyer and a socialist from the Charleroi region and a provincialism partisan. See P. Delforge, *Paul Pastur*, in: *EMW*, vol. 3, pp. 1240–1241.

30 ‘Mémoire présenté par Maître Carlier en réponse à l’inculpation dont il est l’objet’, Archives, Fonds d’Histoire du Mouvement wallon , June 1920, pp. 12–13. Gustave d’Andrimont (1863–1949), lawyer and founding member of the Walloon Assembly. See P. Delforge, *Fernand Malieux*, in: *EMW*, vol. 2, p. 1066. Auguste Buisseret (1888–1965), lawyer, liberal and senator between 1936 and 1961. He rerun as a minister many times after the Second World War. See P. Delforge, *Auguste Buisseret*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, pp. 206–208. Joseph–Maurice Remouchamps (1877–1939): lawyer and member of the Liberal Party and senator from 1920 until 1925. Founding member of the Walloon Assembly in which he was the secretary–general during the 1919–1937 period. See S. Jaminon, *Joseph–Maurice Remouchamps*, in: *EMW*, vol. 3, pp. 1376–1377.

31 See P. Delforge, *La Wallonie et la Première Guerre*, p. 249 and the following pages.

32 Raymond Colleye (1890–1963) was a journalist. He was

close to the federalist current but was rather on the fringes of the most important associations. He was one of the few activists to make lasting contacts with Flemish activists. He was also among the initiators of the Walloon pilgrimage from Waterloo in 1928. See P. Muret, *Raymond Colleye*, in: *Biographie nationale*, vol. 43, Brussels, 1983, pp. 204–220.

33 About *L'Opinion wallonne*, see M. Leroy, *La presse belge en Belgique libre et à l'étranger en 1918*, [Centre interuniversitaire d'Histoire contemporaine, vol. 63], Louvain, Paris, 1971.

34 See L. Schepens, *Albert Ier et le gouvernement Broqueville*, Gembloux, 1983, p. 121.

35 About the reception of *L'Opinion wallonne*, see M. Bolle De Bal M. (ed.), *Les survivants du boyau de la mort. Lettres de deux jeunes Wallons en 14-18*, [Collection Mémoires d'Europe], Brussels, 1998, pp. 95–97 and 113–114.

36 Article published in the review *Le Flambeau*, November 1919, n°11, p. 641 cited by P. Destatte during a discussion of the 'Jules Destrée' colloquium, Destatte e.a., *Jules Destrée. La Lettre au roi*, p. 110.

37 Assemblée wallonne. Groupe de Liège, December 10, 1918, Fonds Max-Léo Gérard, Archives du Palais royal.

38 L'Assemblée wallonne se réunit, in: *L'Opinion wallonne*, December 22, 1918, p. 1. The Liège Group's position was followed by a similar attitude by the Brussels Group (December 17, 1918) and the Charleroi Group (December 23, 1918) a few days later. The latter also marked its hostility towards the creation of a Flemish university in Ghent ('Le groupe carolorégien de l'Assemblée wallonne sollicite un meilleur régime politique et administratif pour la Wallonie' [The Charleroi Group of the Walloon Assembly requests better political and administrative conditions for Wallonia] in: *L'Opinion wallonne*, January 5, 1919, p. 1).

39 Max-Léo Gérard (1879–1955) was a civil engineer from the University of Liège. He became the director at the Office of Financial Affairs of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (1917–1918). The king chose him to become his private secretary, which was a position he held from January 1919 to October 1924. This important figure in the liberal world also held various mandates in industrial and banking companies. As a short-lived finance minister (1935–1936), he led major financial reforms. During the Second World War, he was a member of the Galopin Committee. See G. Vanthemsche, *Famille Gérard*, in: G. Kurgan–Van Hentenryk and J. Puissant, *Dictionnaire des Patrons en Belgique*, Brussels, 1996, pp. 308–309.

40 Note to the king about the actual situation of the issue of languages April 29, 1919, Fonds Max-Léo Gérard 3/ 1/ A, APR.

41 François Bovesse (1890–1944) was a lawyer and a liberal Member of Parliament (1921–1925 and 1929–1937) who served as a minister many times. Assassinated by a Rexist party supporter in February 1944 (See P. Delforge, *François Bovesse*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, pp. 186–189).

42 F. Bovesse, Ce que nous voulons, in: *L'Opinion wallonne*, January 12, 1919, p. 1.

43 'The Walloon Assembly declared its strong will to maintain the Belgian nationality. Convinced that Belgian unity, based on the domination of one race over the other, would be impossible to conserve and defend, it affirmed that Belgium could only pursue its destinies through the union of the two peoples that compose it, which was a union based on mutual independence and made up of a loyal and cordial understanding' in: *La Défense wallonne*, February 1913, p. 72.

44 'Any system with the German label on it will always have public opinion against it' in: *L'Assemblée wallonne de Bruxelles*, *L'Opinion wallonne*, September 7, 1919, p. 2.

45 Albert Mockel (1866–1945) was a journalist and a founding member of the Walloon Assembly. See P. Delforge, *Albert Mockel*, in: *EMW*, vol. 2, pp. 1108–1109. Emile Jennissen (1882–1949) was a lawyer and a liberal Member of Parliament from Liège (1922–1939). See P. Delforge, *Emile Jennissen*, in: *EMW*, vol. 2, pp. 871–873.

46 Julien Delaite (1868–1928) was a scientist and a Walloon militant with liberal tendencies. See P. Carlier, *Julien Delaite*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, pp. 429–430.

47 L'Assemblée wallonne, in: *L'Opinion wallonne*, September 14, 1919, p. 1.

48 Walloon Assembly – Regulation adopted on April 25, 1920. Revised in July 8, 1923 and January 20, 1924. *Mouvement wallon* n°180, Fonds Putanier, Fonds d'Histoire du Mouvement wallon.

49 'Should we proceed until Federation? I don't believe so!' in: J. Destrée, *Wallons et Flamands*, p. 183.

50 'Otherwise, we will be forced to reckon with the Flemings themselves and to seek our salvation, our independence and our freedom, with them, in the path of federalist neo-activism' in J. Destrée, *Un programme wallon*, pp. 633–644 (quotation p. 644).

51 'Ordre du jour concernant la Réorganisation politique de la Belgique présenté par M. Mallieux, amendé par MM. Buisseret et Sasserath et adopté en séance du 7 septembre', Archives Assemblée wallonne, Musée de la Vie wallonne.

52 'Assemblée Wallonne – L'Assemblée wallonne s'est réunie à Namur le 10 octobre' in: *La Terre wallonne*, vol. 1, November 1919, n°2, p. 65.

53 Declarations made by Destrée in *Journal de Charleroi*

reprinted in Destrée et les Wallons. Le leader contre l'Assemblée wallonne, in: *L'Opinion wallonne*, November 9, 1919, p. 1.

54 Assemblée wallonne, July 1921, Archives François Van Belle, Fonds d'Histoire du Mouvement wallon, Liège.

55 For the details of the trial, see P. Delforge, *La Wallonie et la Première Guerre mondiale*, *op.cit.*, pp. 423-482.

56 J.P Delhaye, *Activism*, in: *EMW*, vol. 1, 2000, pp. 22-26.

57 L. Von Falkenhausen, *Erinnerungen aus dem Weltkrieg, 1914-1918: General-Gouverneur in Belgien*, s.a., s.l., vol. 2, p. 266.

58 See Christine Van Everbroeck, *L'activisme entre condamnation et réhabilitation*, in: S. Jaumain, M. Amara, B. Majerus and A. Vrints (eds.), *Une guerre totale? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre mondiale. Nouvelles tendances de la recherche historique, Actes du colloque international organisé à l'ULB du 15 au 17 janvier 2003*, [Etudes sur la Première Guerre mondiale, 11], Brussels, 2005, pp. 481-493.

59 J. Destrée, *Wallons et Flamands. La querelle linguistique en Belgique*, Paris, 1923, p. 147.

60 See A. Tixhon, *Continuer la guerre: sentiments germanophobes et francophiles dans la Wallonie d'entre-deux-guerres*, in: *Quand les canons se taisent. En toen zwegen de kanonnen. When the guns fall silent, textes réunis par/teksten samengebracht door Pierre-Alain Tallier et Patrick Nefors*, [Etudes sur la Première Guerre mondiale, 18], Brussels, 2019, pp. 255-268.

61 See C. Kesteloot, *La résistance: ciment d'une identité en Wallonie?*, in: *La Résistance et les Européens du Nord = Het Verzet en Noord-Europa*, Brussels, 1994, pp. 406-418.

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