The Language Cleavage, 1917–80

The line of demarcation between the Flemish and Walloon regions has remained essentially unchanged for 1500 years, and the languages and the regions have been for the most part synonymous. The relative strength of the languages in the national culture has therefore been largely dependent on the economic, political, and cultural dominance of the regions. During the Middle Ages Flanders was by far the more vibrant, both economically and culturally. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries the French language became widely used, especially in commerce, and the counts of Flanders owed fealty to the kings of France. French, Flemish, and Walloon therefore coexisted, but Flemish and Walloon clearly dominated the lives of the common people. The Burgundian dukes took their oaths of office in Flemish, which was the language of government.

The first significant change in the pattern of language use occurred under Philip II. As part of his administrative reforms, French was established as the language of government, although government at the local level continued to be conducted in the local vernacular. Walloon, a dialect sharing common roots with French, was gradually displaced among the wealthy and merchant classes by standard French. After the revolt of the northern provinces, Flanders was cut off from its ethnic cousins, the Dutch. Thereafter, while Dutch developed into a sophisticated, standardized language, Flemish, neglected in the increasingly French-speaking atmosphere, fractured into three or four dialects derived from the same Low German roots but mutually incomprehensible.

Flander's formerly robust economy was all but destroyed by the ravages of war and particularly by the terms of the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended the Spanish war against the northern provinces and closed the Schelde River, effectively strangling the port of Antwerp. It took more than three centuries for Flanders to regain its economic health.

The growing dominance of French as the language of politics and culture was reinforced by the Austrians and particularly by the French occupation of 1795–1814. By the end of the occupation, Belgium was, in the words of a noted scholar, "nothing but an intellectual and cultural province of France." In 1805, although the Walloon Belgians were closer to the French in outlook and customs than the Flemish Belgians, neither was particularly francophile. There was no sense of a Flemish or Walloon "people," and no real geographic distinction was made. "Flan-

ders" still referred to the administrative unit of the Austrian Netherlands, and the word *Wallonia* had not yet been coined. If anything, the distinctions between the areas were becoming less important with the growth of a feeling of national solidarity in the face of the French enemy.

The French language became the standard in government and commerce. High society and intellectual life were conducted in French as early as 1790. Under the French, its use spread to merchants, functionaries, and magistrates and, as a result, both the Flemish and the Walloon dialects were set aside by the upwardly mobile. Under the Kingdom of the United Netherlands, however, William I attempted to reverse the trend of French dominance and replace it with his own "Dutchification" (*vernederlandsing*). The basis of the campaign was political—to end Belgium's ties with his enemy, France, and create a strong Dutch political entity capable of competing with France on its own terms. The establishment of Dutch as a language on a par with French was a crucial aspect of the policy. Dutch became the language of administration, and an elaborate system of primary and secondary education using Dutch as the language of instruction was set up to reinvigorate Flemish culture and stem the conversion of the Flemish bourgeoisie to French. The campaign backfired when the Roman Catholic Church, furious at William's attempts to undermine its influence, and the social hierarchy of Flanders, by now thoroughly French-speaking, joined with the freethinking Walloon Liberals to overthrow the kingdom in 1830.

The reforms nevertheless had a profound impact on Belgian history. A renaissance in Flemish literature, led by Hendrik Conscience, J.V. David, Jan Frans Willems, and Guido Gezelle, was based in the Romantic movement and explicitly designed to foster "Flemish nationality," that is, to reawaken the essence of Belgian consciousness stripped of the contamination of French and Dutch influences. The lower Catholic clergy also provided leadership for the nascent movement, basing its support of it on the need for moral rejuvenation of the nation. As Val Lorwin, the foremost modern analyst of Belgian society, put it: "The tide of godlessness which threatened pious Flanders was particularly associated with the French language and literature which oozed crime and demoralization. It was associated with the French nation, persecutor of the church, with French Wallonia, where Flemish immigrants lost their faith and with the francophone . . . bourgeoisie of Flanders itself." At once a literary and a political movement, it spoke of Flemish nationalism not as something different from Belgian nationalism but rather as an integral part of it. It was virtually

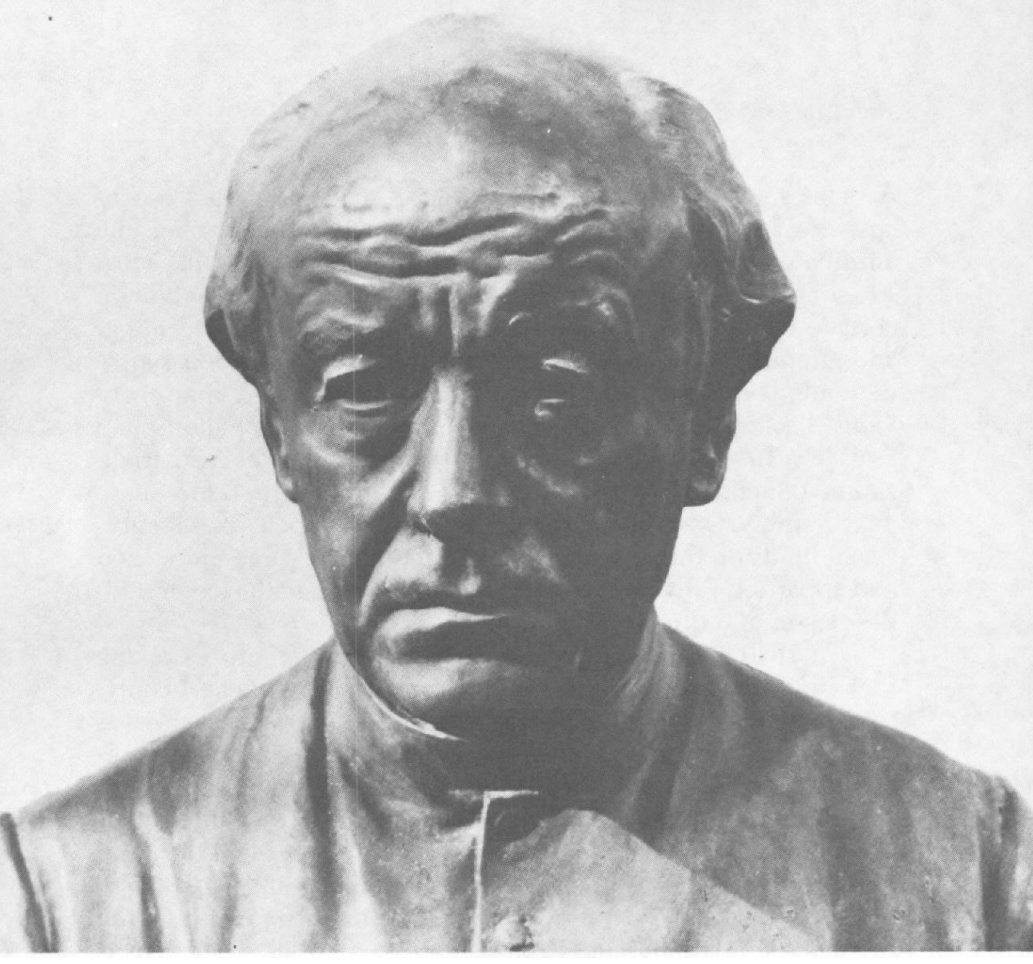
ignored by the French-speaking elite.

Language and the Belgian State

When the Revolution of 1830 broke out, it was widely applauded by followers of the Flemish movement. They quickly became disillusioned, however, as the new state adopted French as the sole official language, relegating Flemish once again to the status of patois, equivalent to Walloon, which had already been largely displaced by French. The movement evolved into a fight for the official recognition of the "Flemish" language (the proper term, *Dutch*, was under the circumstances politically unacceptable) as a language of equal value to French. The "political class" under the restrictive *régime censitaire* constituted only about one out of every 95 Belgians—the nobility and the upper middle class—and was almost exclusively French-speaking. It encouraged the Flemish literary movement as an important component of the Belgian cultural heritage but rejected the movement's political demands as hazardous to the unity of the nation. The masses, both Flemish and Walloon, were politically irrelevant. Apparently, these members of the elite assumed, quite mistakenly, that the majority of the population already spoke French and that the remainder would "naturally" learn it over time.

Although French was the only official language for legislation, justice, secondary and higher education, and the armed forces, local government and primary education in Flanders were allowed to use Flemish. Article 23 of the Constitution guaranteed the freedom of all individuals, French-speaking or Dutch-speaking, to use the language of their choice. The individuals in question, however, were not the common people but the administrators, lawyers, magistrates, and politicians who were free to choose, but always chose French. The citizen, whether Walloon or Flemish, who was not fluent in French, could also choose a language, but if it was not French the speaker would not be understood by officials. Parliament consistently enacted legislation reaffirming the primacy of French, and by the 1840s Dutch had virtually disappeared from public life.

Flemish demands remained moderate, and *Flamingants*, a term used by both language groups to refer to Flemish-minded Belgians of this period, never established a movement of sufficient size or strength to be independent from the two major blocs, the Catholics and the Liberals. They remained divided on the issue of religion and sufficiently afraid of foreign intervention (first Dutch and later French) and social revolution that they rallied behind a unified, unilingual Belgian nation.



Bust of Guido Gazelle (1830–99), Flemish priest and poet. Although writing in French, he had an important influence on the Flemish movement. Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

Development of Flemish and Walloon Movements

In the late 1840s and 1850s, however, Flemish demands took on greater urgency as economic conditions deteriorated markedly. A devastating potato famine in the mid-1840s exacerbated the already desperate condition of many in the lower classes in Flanders. More important politically, a pattern of disequilibrium between the economic growth in Flanders and Wallonia became apparent. Wallonia (which acquired its name only in the 1850s), blessed with abundant coal, was undergoing a discernible burst of industrialization after 1850. The French-speaking bourgeoisie had significant capital resources and invested heavily in land and manufacturing firms in Flanders. The economic future of Flan-

ders became obviously dependent on the goodwill of the French-speaking bourgeoisie. As the traditional textile industry became antiquated by the mass production methods of Britain, most Flemings were reduced to a subsistence existence dependent on cottage manufacturing, child and female labor, tenant farming, and migrant labor. Probably two-thirds of the Flemish peasantry depended on charity for survival. Flanders was undergoing an obvious "backwardization" process in comparison with Wallonia and Brussels. In addition, social mobility in the context of industrialization depended on education, expertise and, therefore, language ability, specifically the ability to use French. The institutional limits on the advancement of Flemings became more rigid and apparent, provoking a distinct reaction among the lower middle classes and the lower clergy.

In 1840 a Flemish petition with 100,000 signatures asking that Flemish provincial and municipal governments and courts conduct their work in Dutch was considered impractical and was dismissed out of hand. Sixteen years later, after continued complaints, a commission was established by the government to examine the problems of Flanders. Their findings were dramatic—only 22 of Belgium's 382 civil servants were Flemings, and provisions for the use of Dutch in primary schools and courts were routinely ignored. Furthermore, still less than 10 percent of the Flemish population knew French, and the first language census in 1846 showed that 57 percent of the population used Dutch as its ordinary language. In 1866 the execution of two Flemish workers, after a trial in which they understood not one word for a crime they almost certainly did not commit, dramatized the dilemma for the vast majority of Flemings. The political system, however, placed no practical value on the needs of the poorer citizen, and the average Fleming had no credible representatives in the political class.

In the 1860s the political situation in Flanders was transformed by the emergence of popular agitation on a scale warranting notice by the political system. A fledgling Flemish nationalism emerged out of the frustration, no longer content with compromise, demanding unilingualism in Flanders, though still in the context of a unified Belgium. The most dramatic outburst of popular unrest was the Meeting Party of 1862, which began as a protest against plans for defense installations around Antwerp but which quickly grew to encompass the whole range of Flemish complaints. Finally the major parties began to take notice. In the next two decades a series of language laws were passed by large majorities beginning with a royal decree in 1864,

which established standard Dutch as the official form of language in Flanders. A turning point was reached in 1873, when the government sanctioned bilingualism in Flanders. Laws promulgated in 1878 and 1883 accorded Dutch a larger place in administration, the judiciary, and secondary education. Although these laws, too, were largely unenforced, they reflected the growing political strength of the Flemish movement. In 1887, for the first time, the King of the Belgians delivered a public speech in Dutch.

The expansion of the franchise, the consolidation of the party system, and the challenge of socialism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were the catalysts for the success, however limited, of the Flemish movement. Although never organized enough to constitute a force unto itself, the Flemish movement represented a large constituency that became critical for all parties after the expansion of the franchise in 1893. The movement had been dominated from the beginning by the church—the lower clergy rather than the central authorities—and was naturally inclined toward the Catholic party, but the Liberals in the 1850s and the Socialists in the 1880s and 1890s made inroads, stressing the need for educational reform and the emancipation of the masses. The internal divisions of the Flemish movement on all questions other than obviously linguistic issues undermined its political power but at the same time made the Flemings sufficiently volatile electorally to persuade all three parties to respond in some way to their demands. The Catholic party in particular, challenged for its base in Flanders, incorporated many of the Flemish demands into its program. In the process, the Catholic party was itself gradually transformed.

For the first time Flemish demands were represented by the political elite, especially among progressive Catholics. The language issue became increasingly politicized and for many took on the nature of a crusade. The first parliamentary speech in Dutch was pointedly delivered in 1894. Parliamentary debates on whether to grant Dutch the status of an official language lasted three years and included bitter opposition from French-speaking members, who used blatant ethnic slurs in their arguments. The law, finally passed in 1898, was called by many Flemings the "equality law," establishing for the first time the statutory equality of Flemings and Walloons. In addition, the insulting tone of the parliamentary debate gave the movement a huge audience of previously passive electors. After half a century of political and cultural activism, the Flemish movement had become a mass movement, no longer limited to the lower middle class, and constituted a significant political force.

As is typical in social movements, success created new Flemish demands. By the turn of the century, Flemish leaders increasingly believed that the advancement of an individual Fleming was dependent not so much on his or her own merits, but on the advancement of the Flemish "people" as a whole. Significant social pressures still remained that led the most talented Flemings to submit to "Frenchification" (Dutch, *verfransing*). In their view, "Flemishization" (*vervlaamsing*) had to become mandatory; the definition of membership in a language group had to be determined by territory and by law, not by personal choice. "In Vlaanderen Vlaamsch" (In Flanders Flemish) became the rallying cry and for the first time implied an abandonment of the state's traditional "neutrality" in the language question in favor of a policy of legally enforced ethnic identification and bilingualism in the central government.

A Walloon national movement arose as a defensive reaction to these reforms, which significantly raised the stakes in the language issue. Walloons in general, unlike the Flemings, had no complaints against the requirement of French as the language of administration, government, and education and feared that forced bilingualism and proportional distribution of political benefits would condemn them to a minority position within the political system and society.

The first Walloon societies were established in Flanders, and together they held a conference in Brussels in 1884. Four years later the Walloon Union (Union Wallonne) was created in Liège and held annual congresses from 1890 to 1893. Walloon and French-speaking defense associations sprang up all over the country, particularly targeting the French-speaking Flemings (Franskiljons), who were the main focus of the Flemish movement's ire. The Walloon movement was by no means a mass movement until well after World War II. As Flemish demands escalated, Walloon rhetoric did likewise. In 1912 Jules Destrée, a leading Walloon Socialist, informed the king in a famous letter, "Sire, . . . allow me to tell you the truth, the enormous and horrifying truth: there are no Belgians. . . . You are reigning over two different peoples. In Belgium there are Walloons and there are Flemings: there are no Belgians." He went on to acknowledge that since 1830 the Flemings had been at a disadvantage but protested that "at the present time, elated with its success and the popular support it has gained, the [Flemish] movement has not only achieved its target: it has over-run it, and is now threatening Wallonia....Only a trial of strength, so to speak, will decide the outcome of this frightening conflict."

The debate centered not on the question of which language was better, but on what criteria would be used to determine the distribution of the benefits of industrialization. In the period prior to World War I, broader questions of implementing a democratic system—deciding "who would get what, when and how"—became increasingly linked in the public mind with language. The economic clock was running in favor of the Flemings. Already by the turn of the century it was possible to discern a pattern of decline in Wallonia and a rapid acceleration of industrial development in Flanders. That trend continued and became more apparent with each passing decade.

Many of the reforms had not had time to take effect by 1914, and the war dramatically illustrated the Flemish condition, especially in the army. Neither the officers who gave the orders nor the doctors who treated the wounded spoke Dutch, although as many as 80 percent of the soldiers were Flemings. Moreover, in the occupied territories the German authorities played on the frustrations and offered to implement the reforms that had been promised for so long, especially a Flemish university at Ghent, as a reward for cooperation. The Front Movement and Activism were more expressions of Flemish frustration than a desire to aid the Germans (see World War I, this ch.).

After the war there was a violent reaction against the Flemish "treason," and the Flemish cause suffered a severe setback. Students at the German-established university at Ghent were stripped of any degrees granted and prohibited from attending any other university in Belgium. Over 100 collaborators were imprisoned, and 45 were sentenced to death. King Albert, however, who had spent the war in the field, apparently recognized the depth of feeling among Flemings and announced equal rights for all national languages and the foundation of a Flemish university at Ghent.

Amnesty for those "unjustly" punished after World War I became a major mobilizing issue among Flemings in the interwar period and formed the basis for the establishment of the Front Party in 1919, a direct descendant of the Front Movement. The national government consistently refused to consider amnesty, but in the late 1920s it became clear that Flemings were losing patience, and support for Flemish nationalist movements reached dangerous proportions. In addition, in 1925 the Socialist Party and the Flemish Catholics formed a coalition based on a joint project for economic and linguistic reform. The coalition lasted only 11 months but convinced both the Liberals and the French-speaking Catholics that the Flemish Catholics had to be accom-

modated. As a result, Flemish Catholics became the arbiters for future Catholic-Liberal coalitions. Thus, linguistic orientation took its place beside religion and class as factors in the politics of coalition building.

A de facto amnesty in 1929 and a series of laws that amounted to a fundamental redistribution of power between Flanders and Wallonia resulted. The Flemings won a Dutch-language university at Ghent in 1930; unilingual secondary education in Flanders, Dutch-language local government, and the use of Dutch by the national civil service for all Flemish matters in 1932; a unilingual judicial system in 1935; and the creation of unilingual military units up to the divisional level in 1938. In 1934 the new king, Leopold III, gave the traditional constitutional oath in both Dutch and French for the first time.

Other movements, especially the Verdinaso and the VNV, took on a fascist cast but were fundamentally Flemish nationalist movements and gained wide popularity in the 1930s (see The Interwar Period, this ch.). Some members of these parties collaborated with the German occupation forces during World War II. Again the Flemish movement was hurt by the alleged connection with collaborators; 75 percent of the 77,000 Belgians found guilty of collaboration were Flemings.

The major parties nevertheless remained the principal conduits for ethnic demands, and the integration of nationalists into the pillar system helped to weaken the centrifugal strains on the political system. The Catholic pillar undercut the Flemish movement as much as it did the Socialists. Indeed, many analysts believe that the Catholic party's success in integrating these demands into the pillar retarded the growth of Flemish nationalism for decades. Likewise, Walloon and French-speaker issues were almost completely subsumed by the Socialist Party.

Since 1945 the language issue has been transformed by the appearance and increasing political strength of nationalist parties, both Flemish and Walloon, and the centrality of economic issues. The Royal Question, which on the surface concerned the behavior of Leopold III during World War II, was seen by many Flemings as a subtle indictment of their behavior, while the Walloons saw it as a mask for "Flemish aggression" (see The Royal Question, this ch.). Although the referendum determined by a slim majority that Leopold should be asked to resume his office, the results indicated a wide divergence between the two regions. The government had to request that the king resign in the face of severe and widespread rioting in Wallonia. The Flemings almost universally saw this as a fundamental attack on the principle of

democratic decisionmaking. Flemish nationalism thereafter became significantly more militant and widespread.

Economic trends that were barely visible 20 years before became quite apparent in the late 1950s. Capital investment, industrial development, and creation of new jobs rose markedly in Flanders, while in Wallonia antiquated industries and depleted coal reserves resulted in a general decline. In addition, the Flemings were pulling far ahead of the Walloons in population growth. Walloon nationalism, therefore, focused primarily on economic issues and became for the first time a popular movement. The territorial or regional component of the language question, first broached by the Flemish movement at the turn of the century, was reinforced by the obvious regional disequilibrium.

The Second School Conflict diverted attention from the growing tension, but the settlement of the conflict left the field open for a full-blown confrontation (see The Second School Conflict, 1950–58, this ch.). The political stage was crowded with parties vying to represent the competing groups. The major parties—the Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals—proved incapable of satisfying the growing militancy of both nationalist camps in the 1960s. The system of pillars and crosscutting allegiances appeared to be breaking down; from the early 1960s it appeared that the lines of cleavage—religious, socioeconomic, and linguistic—were becoming superimposed on one another, dangerously intensifying the conflict. In response, nationalist parties became increasingly important electorally and forced changes in the party system as a whole.

For a decade after the war the Flemish movement was relatively subdued. The first evidence of a resurgence was the creation in 1953 of the People's Union (Volksunie—VU). It was a successor to the Front Party, the VNV of 1936, and the Flemish National Bloc (Vlaamsche Nationale Blok), which contested the 1939 elections. Weakened by charges of collaboration during the war, the VU electoral impact remained relatively small until 1965 but represented the most important Flemish nationalist organization.

In October 1945 the Walloon National Congress was held. Those in attendance—over 1,000 parliamentarians, journalists, and businessmen—were asked to vote on Wallonia's future. To nearly everyone's surprise, only 17 voted to retain the unitary structure of Belgium, almost 400 voted for some form of federalism, over 150 for complete independence, and almost 500 for union with France. Recognizing the political impossibility of fusion with France, a second vote was held, which overwhelmingly opted for Walloon "autonomy" within a federal state. Be-

cause of the proliferation of Walloon organizations, some direction was necessary to ensure a unified voice. In 1947 the Walloon National Congress became a permanent coordinating organ.

The movement, however, remained confined to a relatively few intellectuals and politicians. It was not until the economic crisis of 1960–61 and the subsequent popular mobilization that it became a truly popular movement. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Belgian economy suffered a serious recession that hit Wallonia, the industrial heartland, particularly hard. State budgetary deficits mounted, and by 1960 the situation, exacerbated by the loss of the Congolese resources, reached crisis proportions (see Decolonization Crisis, this ch.; Patterns of Development, ch. 3).

Political Parties and Legal Reform

The Social Christian-Liberal government, headed by Gaston Eyskens, proclaimed in September 1960 the *loi unique* (single law): a budget package of strict austerity measures, including increased taxation and decreased public expenditures (especially in social security and in subsidies to inefficient coal mines) but also including a five-year plan for industrial expansion. The Socialist Trade Union, predominantly Walloon, ordered a general strike to protest the austerity plan, which it called the *loi inique* (evil law), and the unfair burden placed on a working class already pressed by falling wages, mine closures, and rising unemployment. In December 1960 and January 1961 the strike was almost total in Wallonia and Brussels and was accompanied by riots. The Walloon workers, led by André Renard, the Socialist Trade Union leader, appealed to Flemish unionists to support the strikes, but the Catholic unions, controlling well over one-half the unionized workers in Flanders, refused. Many Walloons believed that their Flemish compatriots had betrayed them, transforming the issue from a purely economic question to a matter of rival nationalisms.

Renard and about 440 other members of the Socialist Trade Union established the Popular Walloon Movement (MPW) in April 1961, demanding a federal division of Belgium to allow Wallonia to look after its own future because it could not trust a system in which "clerical, conservative Flanders can impose its will on socialist, progressive Wallonia." Renard's death in 1962 cut short the MPW's development. The next effort to organize was in 1964, when the Front for the Unity and Liberty of Wallonia merged the MPW with a number of smaller groups. In the same year, the Democratic Front of Francophones (FDF) was organized by the French-speaking residents of Brussels. Finally, the Walloon

Rally (RW) was formed out of two smaller parties in 1968. These parties almost universally supported the idea of a federal division of the Belgian state that would give significant powers to Walloon and Brussels regional governments.

Following the strikes, which finally ended when the Socialist Trade Union agreed reluctantly to a compromise, the Social Christian-Liberal government fell and was replaced by a Social Christian-Socialist government. On May 2, 1961, the new coalition promised to end the quarrels between the communities by establishing a language frontier, apportioning the seats in parliament according to population, and addressing the vexing question of bilingual Brussels. In 1962 the linguistic border was legally established, not without controversy, and in the same year a new language law was passed over the protests of Walloon members of parliament. It required that all education in Dutch-speaking areas be conducted in that language and that in Brussels, now officially declared a bilingual city, the language of instruction for a child was to be determined by the language of his or her father.

Complementary laws in 1963 reinforced the educational policies and tried to deal with disputes surrounding the demarcation line set the previous year, especially regarding the Fourons (Voeren) commune, whose residents protested their inclusion in the Flemish community. Brussels, located in Flemish territory but inhabited by a majority of French speakers, was divided into three arrondissements: one bilingual, including the center of the city; one Flemish, on the northern border of the city; and one where the choice of language was "optional" and having a special provision for bilingualism in the schools. The boundaries of the two language communities were essentially fixed, despite continuing controversies over the edges. From this point, attention was focused on the question of Brussels. Flemings in all parties hardened their position on limiting the spread of the Brussels suburbs into Flemish territory, and the French speakers created the FDF in 1964 to defend their interests.

In the parliamentary elections of 1965 the nationalist parties for the first time made substantial electoral gains. In 1961 the Socialists and Social Christians, the government coalition, together accounted for 78 percent of the votes cast, but in 1965 their tally amounted to only 63 percent, a drop of 15 percent shared roughly evenly by the two parties. The reconstituted Liberal Party, which had emphasized the importance of the language issue, doubled its seats in parliament, garnering almost 22 percent of the vote, and the nationalist parties accounted for about 10 percent of the national vote. The election was an unmitigated dis-

aster for the government parties and represented a distinct radicalization of the electorate on the language issue. The opposition parties, despite their gains, chose to remain in opposition; the new government was again a Social Christian-Socialist coalition, this time under Pierre Harmel. Taking a cue from the election, the new government announced a program for limited devolution of administrative responsibilities, especially in cultural affairs, to communal governments.

Three years later the linguistic crisis came to a head. For the first time in Belgian history a government fell over a language issue. The immediate issue was the fate of the French section of the Catholic University of Louvain (KUL/UCL). It had remained the only major exception to the unilingual policies established in 1963. The Flemish faculties and Flemish nationalists demanded that the French division be transferred (or "expelled") to Wallonia. The Catholic bishop's reluctant decision to allow separate Dutch-speaking and French-speaking faculties to emerge failed to stem the mounting unrest. In mid-January 1968 students from the two sections rioted for four days with increasing violence. The Social Christian-Liberal government of Paul Vanden Boeynants was forced to resign on February 7 over its failure to resolve the issue.

A general election was called in March, but it was only after a four-month governmental crisis, the longest in Belgian history, that a Social Christian-Socialist coalition could be formed, in June 1968, under the leadership of Eyskens. The coalition was based on an agreement that henceforth cabinet ministries would be evenly divided between the two language groups (formalized by a constitutional amendment of 1971), that the existing situation of two ministers of education and two ministers of culture (one Fleming, one Walloon) would continue, that there would be two ministers for relations between the French- and Dutch-speaking communities, and that in future there would be equal numbers of Flemish and Walloon appointments to all top government positions (armed forces, diplomatic corps, etc.). Furthermore, it was agreed that economic policymaking functions would devolve to three regional economic councils to be created for Flanders, Wallonia, and Brabant.

The election helped to precipitate a permanent split in the Social Christian Party between the Flemish part, the CVP, and the Walloon part, the PSC. The CVP campaigned on the vague platform that the unitary structure of the state had to be reformed to reflect the existence of two separate communities, preferably by giving more authority to the regions. The PSC stressed the im-

portance of maintaining the existing structure of the state while recognizing the communities. The real dividing line was over Brussels and Louvain; the CVP demanded strict enforcement of existing laws, and the PSC argued on behalf of personal freedom. The Socialist Party flirted with a split but in the end maintained enough cohesiveness to survive the election intact, though substantially weakened.

The Liberal Party, which had been the big winner in 1965, failed to build on its gains in the 1968 elections. It rejected regionalist solutions and presented a detailed program of constitutional reform to strengthen the power of the executive branch to deal with the crisis and, drawing on precedent, called for a national pact among the three parties to resolve the community problem. Its slogan was revealing: "They demolish, we build."

The upshot of the elections was the retreat of the national unitary parties in favor of the nationalist parties, which were all in some measure federalist, i.e., they advocated the end of the unitary state and the creation of regional governments having substantial (though usually unspecified) powers. The VU had the most explicit plan, calling for a federal system and an independent Flemish state; the central government would retain control only over economic policy, social legislation, defense, and foreign policy. Brussels would become a territory with a status similar to Washington, D.C. The parties of French speakers, the FDF and the RW, formed an electoral alliance and were relatively moderate, sharing many positions with the PSC. The RW proposed the creation of a directly elected regional assembly for Wallonia, and the FDF insisted that the unilingual nature of Brussels be recognized and that the surrounding communes be allowed to make policy appropriate to the needs of their residents.

The 1968 elections were a turning point. From that time, the three major parties came under increasing pressure to accommodate the growing regionalist temperament of the electorate. The election results were clear evidence that the party system had failed to capture the language cleavage and that it represented a fundamental challenge to the survival of the major parties and their pillars, indeed of the entire Belgian political system. Every one of the eight governments from 1968 to 1980 fell as a direct result of the community problem. The division of the traditional parties into officially autonomous regionally based wings was probably only a matter of time. Social Christians split over the KUL/UCL issue in 1968. The Liberal Party shattered into three autonomous units in 1972; the Party of Liberty and Progress (PVV), the PLP Wallon, and the PLP of Brussels—one each for

Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels. The Socialists managed to fend off a schism until 1978. The new political situation became infinitely more complex, and the game of constructing coalition governments required consummate skill and dexterity. Whereas from 1958 to 1971 there were only two possible permutations of coalitions (the Social Christians combined with either the Liberals or the Socialists), from 1971 to April 1980 six different combinations succeeded each other. The length of time necessary to pull together a government vastly increased, often taking several months, and the resultant coalitions proved to be particularly fragile.

Political leaders calculated that some form of regionalization or devolution was probably inevitable. The only question was whether the major parties would continue to be the principal actors in the process or whether they would be overtaken by the nationalists. Almost immediately following the 1968 elections, therefore, negotiations began on constitutional reform.

The constitutional reforms of 1971 recognized four linguistic regions—the French-, Dutch-, and German-language regions and the bilingual capital—and three cultural communities—French, Dutch, and German (see The Communities, Regions, Provinces, and Communes, ch. 4). Each community was invested with a cultural council responsible for education and culture. Further complicating matters, the reforms also set up three regions (Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels), which were distinct from linguistic regions and were to be given "regional institutions" having powers yet undefined. Although a breakthrough in the linguistic conflict, these revisions of the Constitution were merely a statement of intent giving the direction of future reforms the details of which had to be worked out. Those details, however, were at the very heart of the conflict and increasingly centered on Brussels. The next decade was spent trying to work out a universally acceptable arrangement, but with little success.

In 1977 general elections were held again, and Leo Tindemans, a Flemish Social Christian, put together a six-party coalition that for the first time included representatives of nationalist parties (CVP/PSC, BSP/PSB, VU, and FDF). They ultimately worked out the Community Pact in 1977–78, made up of the Egmont Pact of May 1977 and the Stuivenberg Agreement of February 1978. This masterpiece of political accommodation detailed a five-tier system of government. The central government would retain control over foreign affairs, defense, justice, fiscal policy, and macroeconomic policy, but the responsibilities and composition of the upper house of parliament would be revised. Regional

councils, tantamount to miniparliaments, would be created to govern the regions, though they would be dependent on the central government for funds, at least in the short term. The cultural councils created under the 1971 constitutional amendment would be reorganized and given expanded powers in matters of culture, education, and health. The existing provinces and communes would retain all their powers. An arbitration court would be set up to mediate conflicts among the various organs of government.

The Brussels question was finessed by limiting the conurbation to its existing boundaries (19 communes) and giving it a status equal to the other two regions. However, to satisfy all sides, French-speaking residents of a dozen communes would be able to establish fictitious residences in Brussels, thereby qualifying for voting status and the right to request French-language documents (identity cards, tax forms, driver's licenses, and so forth). It was an imaginative solution to the intractable dilemma, but neither the Council of State (responsible for upholding the Constitution) nor the CVP could accept it.

The pact failed, partially because Tindemans could not carry along his party, the CVP, owing to an intense internal battle between himself and Wilfried Martens. Tindemans, a unitarist, vied with Martens, a young and dynamic federalist, for the soul of the party. For the moment Martens had won. At the same time, the Socialist Party codified its own split, announcing that its two wings, Dutch-speaking and French-speaking, would henceforth be two separate parties, the SP and the PS. The split was apparently directly related to differences over the Egmont Pact.

A general election was held in December 1978 in which the pact was the major issue. VU suffered because of its support for the pact, losing about 3 percent of its votes, most of which went to the PVV. The overall results, however, were inconclusive; there was no major change in the relative strengths of the parties. The day after the election, the king asked Vanden Boeynants of the PSC to form a caretaker government—the first time this party was asked to lead a government--while negotiations were conducted to form a more permanent coalition government. For over three months various formulas were tested by a series of four party leaders—Martens (CVP), Charles-Fernand Nothomb (PSC), Willy Claes (SP), and Vanden Boeynants, but each failed to overcome the disagreements over reform of the state. Finally, on April 3, 1979, it was announced that Martens had formed a five-party coalition (CVP/PSC-SP/PS-FDF).

The results of the election were interesting. The voters generally appeared to be uninterested in the intricate constitutional

manipulations that were involved in the crisis. There was no major electoral realignment, and some analysts suggested that the language issue, finally embraced by the major parties and now mired in complex technical details, was losing its popular appeal. Opinion polls indicated that about half the electorate thought the election was unnecessary and that very few indeed understood the issues involved. Perhaps more significant were poll data showing that nearly 70 percent of the voters in Brussels and Wallonia considered unemployment a more important issue than the community question. The deeping economic crisis was beginning to steal some of the language issue's thunder (see Patterns of Development, ch. 3).

The reform of the Belgian state, nevertheless, remained the major political issue. Continual attempts at refinement of the details of regional policies, devolution of authority, and community autonomy led ultimately to another series of constitutional revisions in 1980 (see The Constitutional Framework, ch. 4).

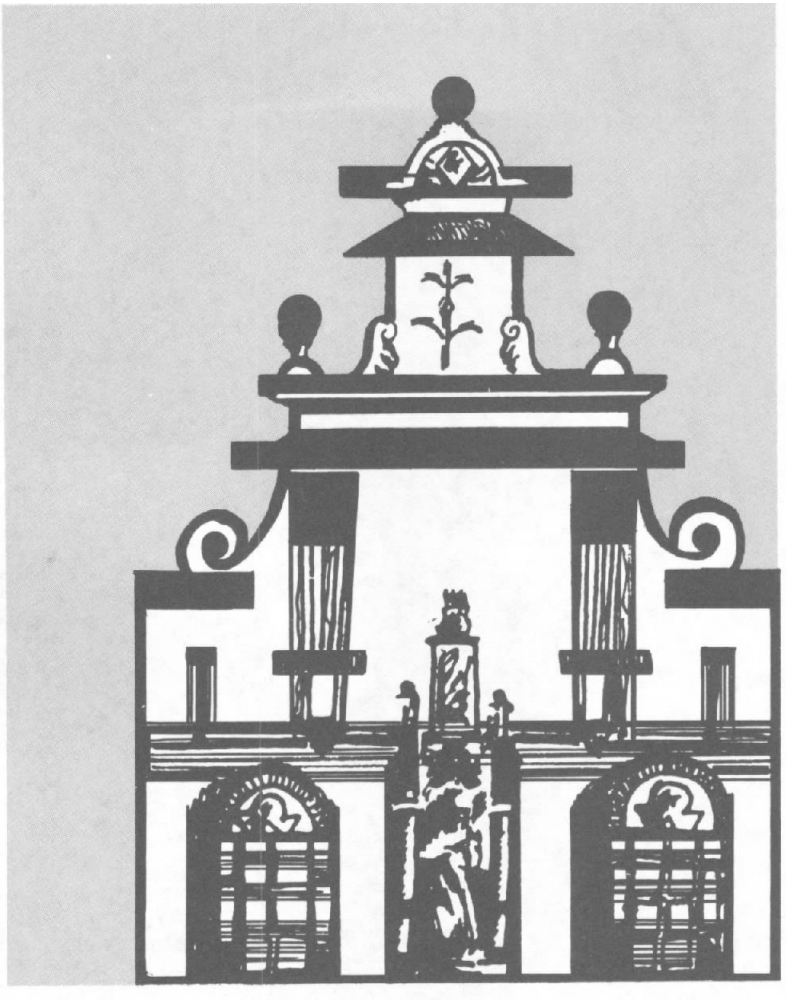
* * *

There are few book-length treatments of Belgian history in English, but a number of excellent articles are available. Val Lorwin's "Belgium: Religion, Class, and Language in National Politics" and Aristide Zolberg's "Belgium" are perhaps the best historical summaries and an excellent introduction to Belgium. *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium*, edited by Arend Lijphart, is a useful compilation of articles on a wide range of cultural, historical, and political topics and includes an extensive bibliography of English-language works on Belgium. E.H. Kossmann's *The Low Countries: 1780–1940* is an exhaustive history and in passing gives an interesting view of relations between Belgium and the Netherlands.

French-language sources include the classic seven-volume series by Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, which ends its coverage in 1914, and *Histoire de la Belgique contemporaine, 1940–1970* by J. Bartier et al., which covers the 1940–70 period and is intended to be a companion volume to Pirenne's work. Dutch-language sources include *Politieke geschiedenis van België van 1789 tot heden* (Political History of Belgium from 1789 to Today) by Theo Luykx and an interpretive history by Els Witte and Jan Craeybeckx, *Politieke geschiedenis van België sinds 1830* (Political History of Belgium since 1830).

On the language issue, perhaps the best single summary is R.E.M. Irving's *The Flemings and Walloons of Belgium.* For a more interpretive view, Zolberg's "The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium, 1830–1914" is helpful. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

Chapter 2. Society and Its Environment



Renaissance architecture, Sint-Truiden, Limburg Province (1665)

LOCATED IN A strategic position in Europe, across the North Sea from Britain, between France and the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium is small and densely populated. Like other West European countries, Belgium has a high standard of living and a well-developed social security system. As elsewhere in Europe, an aging and stabilizing population has caused a crisis in social security and an influx of migrant labor. Cosmopolitan and urban, Belgium has a university that attracts students from all over the world and a capital that is the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Communities. At the same time, the society is marked by extreme social compartmentalization; Belgium's small size is in no way correlated with its complexity. A clear example is Belgian education, having separate Dutch and French systems, as well as parallel, nonsectarian public schools and mostly Catholic private schools. Until the late 1960s the system was segregated by sex, and because of ongoing reform it has secondary schools of both the traditional and innovative types. The universities demonstrate Belgian particularism in regard to their language (French and Dutch), region (Wallonia, Brussels, and Flanders), worldview (freethinking and Catholic), and relationship to the state (public and private).

The regions of Wallonia and Flanders are quite distinct in a number of ways. Flanders is flat, partially coastal, and more densely populated than Wallonia, which is more broken in terrain and was able to provide the resources that were necessary for the country's early industrialization. There have been differences in the roles of Flanders and Wallonia in the industrialization and prosperity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although demographic and religious trends in the two regions have been converging. Easily classified both historically and in 1984, individual Belgians were not confused about their identities as French or Dutch speakers; as Bruxellois, Flemings, or Walloons; as shopkeepers, workers, white-collar employees, or farmers; or as Catholics or nonbelievers.

Conventional wisdom has held that the competing loyalties of language, class, religious or philosophical persuasion, and region have balanced each other, permitting the continuing unity of Belgium. Yet, it is hard to speak of "Belgitude"—what is common to all Belgians—except on the level of values. The language cleavage seems to overshadow all others. French is spoken in Wallonia, Dutch in Flanders, and both are spoken in Brussels. His-

torically, French was the language of the dominant elite, so Belgians have not been able to be neutrally bilingual. The implications of linguistic identity have not necessarily been the same for Dutch and French speakers. Since the mid-twentieth century, to speak Dutch has been to participate in the Flemish community and feel the claims of Flemish identity, but to speak French may or may not have inspired ties to Wallonia, the Walloon dialects, or the culture emanating from Paris. The Flemings have perceived a continuing process of "Frenchification," forcing them to become bilingual at great cost. The French speakers feel threatened by growing Flemish political and economic gains and are reluctant to consider Dutch on a par with French.

Belgians seem to take the concept of class for granted. It is not, however, cut and dried. Objective divisions of Belgians into socioeconomic classes by educational level, occupation, and income might not agree with their subjective designations. The typical Belgian would consider himself or herself middle class and demonstrate that status through his or her standard of living but hesitate to discuss class. This hesitancy does not seem to interfere with the desire for social mobility, achieved through higher education or even a shift in language loyalty from Dutch to French.

At first glance, Belgium seems religiously homogeneous; a vast majority are reported as Catholics. Some, however, are only nominal Catholics, and others are anticlerical or at least freethinking. The importance of the Catholic church was still an issue in 1984 because of the segment of the population that historically had been anticlerical, opposing the church on political and philosophical grounds. It was also an issue because of the widespread belief in the church's loss of influence. The decline in attendance at mass and acceptance of dogma must be weighed against the large membership in Catholic organizations and the Catholic symbols, concepts, and rites of passage shared by many Belgians.

The nuclear family remains a basic unit in Belgian life, but it is the two linguistic communities and the form of social organization that some Belgian sociologists call the social "pillars" that make the society unique. The pillars are three similar complexes made up of political parties, unions, ccoperatives, and a gamut of other organizations; they are divided according to religious and political worldview—Catholic, Socialist, and Liberal. The pillars began because of two splits: on the one hand, between the Catholics and the atheists, freethinkers, and Freemasons; on the other hand, between the working class mobilized by the Socialists and the working class included in the multiclass Catholic organi-

zations. Although the Catholic pillar is multiclass, the Socialist pillar is primarily working class, and the Liberal pillar, middle class. (For the formal names of the three traditional political groupings, see table A; Political Parties, ch. 4.)

The Belgian, regardless of regional, linguistic, or religious affiliation, is likely to be enmeshed in the social world offered by one of these pillars. He or she will be born into a hospital affiliated with a pillar, will vote for a pillar party, will read a pillar newspaper, will arrange a vacation through a pillar agency, and will even find friends and jobs through the pillar network. The compulsory national health insurance is mediated through pillar mutual aid societies. Changing pillar affiliation is a question not only of changing an individual's vote but also of changing social patterns. Because a pillar is a theoretical construct, however, it is not completely clear how it influences social interaction on a day-to-day basis or how the organizations comprising a pillar actually intermesh.

Geography

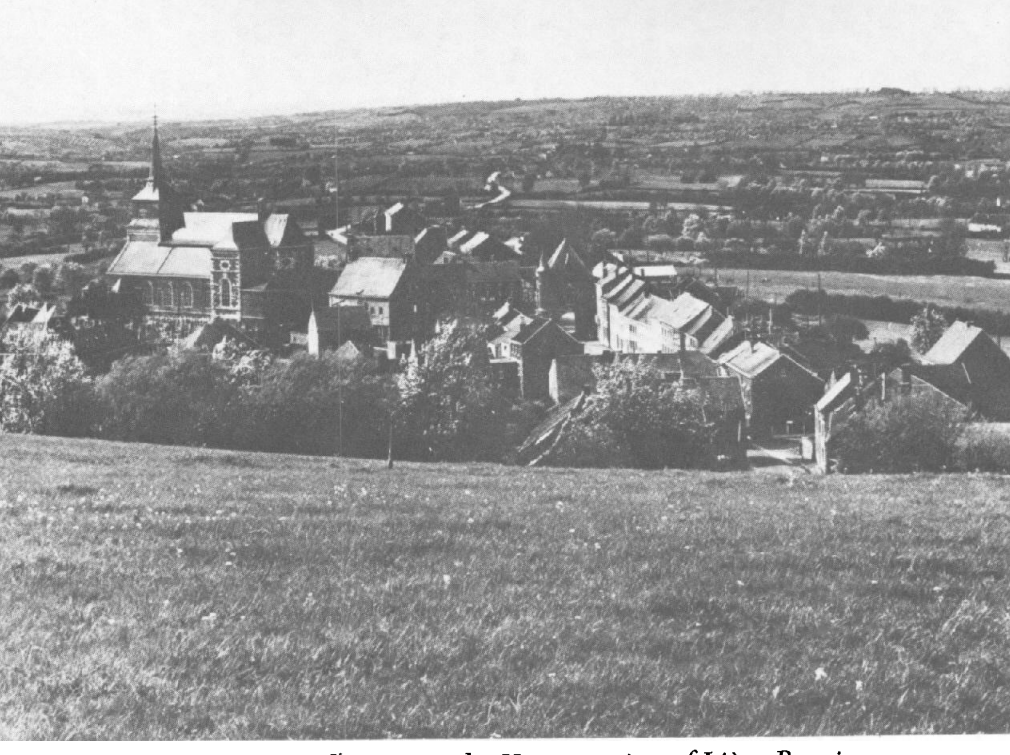
About the size of Maryland, Belgium is located in north-central Europe. It is small but densely populated, having nearly 9.9 million inhabitants for only 30,519 square kilometers of territory in 1983. Its borders are formed by the North Sea and the neighboring states of France, the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), and Luxembourg. Except for the North Sea, Belgium has no natural frontiers. The Belgian Lorraine is a continuation of the French Lorraine and Luxembourg; the high plateau is a continuation of West Germany's Eifel uplands; and the Kempenland continues into the Netherlands, which also shares the coastal polders and the deltas of the Schelde and Rhine rivers. The present-day borders of Belgium are more or less those of the eighteenth-century Austrian Netherlands, the bishopric of Liège, and the duchies of Brabant and Luxembourg. The border with the Netherlands dates from the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the border with France from the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), and the border with Luxembourg from that country's independence in 1867. The German-speaking cantons on the eastern border with West Germany were acquired in 1919 as a war reparation included in the Treaty of Versailles (see The War Period, ch. 1).

Source: Based on information from Aubrey Diem, *Western Europe: A Geographical Analysis*, New York, 1979, 234; Raymond Charles Riley and G.J. Ashworth, eds., *Benelux*, New York, 1975, 25; and Eugene K. Keefe et al., *Belgium: A Country Study*, Washington, 1979, 39.

Figure 3. Topography and Drainage

Physical Regions

Belgium can be divided into three geographic areas: the Northern Lowlands, the Central Low Plateaus, and the Southern Hilly Region (see fig. 3). It is drained by two important and navigable rivers, the Meuse and the Schelde, which both begin in France and flow into the sea through the Netherlands. Most Belgian waterways, through these two rivers, drain to the northeast, although a few streams in the eastern Ardennes flow to the Rhine



Small town in the Herve region of Liège Province noted for its orchards and grazing lands
Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

River, and the IJzer River cuts through the dunes in West-Vlaanderen Province. All waterways are linked through a system of canals to the port at Antwerp.

The western part of the Northern Lowlands is divided into Maritime Flanders (the coastal fringe of beaches and dunes and the belt of polders) and Interior Flanders (the gently rising terrain of West-Vlaanderen, Oost-Vlaanderen, northern Hainaut, and northern Brabant provinces). The coastline, which is nearly straight, is 67 kilometers long and lined by resorts. The white sand beach, practically free of pebbles, is stabilized by fences, called groins, which reach from the higher beach into the water. Behind the beach lie the dunes and behind them the polders—low-lying lands reclaimed from the sea and marshes by dikes and drainage channels. The fate of the coastal cities has depended on their access to the sea, affected by natural scouring or silting. Oostende—a fishing port, terminal for the English Channel ferries, and resort—lies at one of four points where the dunes are cut through; its access is defended by dredging. Brugge and Ghent, however, formerly coastal ports, have retained access by canals. Brugge, in the past an important Hanseatic market, is situated on polder, but Ghent, still a significant port, is in the triangular area

drained by the Leie and Schelde, rivers. Densely settled, Interior Flanders is characterized by intensive agriculture, metallurgical industry, and textile manufacturing (originally using local flax and wool).

The eastern part of the Northern Lowlands, called the Kempenland, is bounded by the Meuse, Schelde, Demer, Rupel, and Dijle rivers. It consists of sparsely populated, barren heathlands. Located on one edge, at the convergence of rivers and the head of the Schelde estuary, is Antwerp, a major European port and industrial center. Industry has also developed near the Kempen coalfield (near Genk and Hasselt) because of the proximity of cheap land, coal, the Albert Canal, and the port of Antwerp.

The gently undulating Central Low Plateaus include northern and southern areas. The northern section covers southern Brabant and soutern Hainaut provinces, the Plateau of Hesbaye (southern Limburg Province and the part of Liège Province north and west of the Meuse River), the "mixed region" (which follows the Demer River valley), and the Pays de Herve (east of the city of Liège). It is a well-populated region and contains small-scale intensive agriculture, industrial villages and towns, and Brussels, which is both the seat of government and the commercial capital of Belgium. Midway through the Central Low Plateaus runs the Sambre-Meuse valley, a furrow dividing the northern from the southern plateaus. This valley is known for its coalfields and various cities—Mons, Namur, Liège, and Charleroi—that have been foci of industrial concentration. Liège, once a trading hub and the seat of an independent bishopric, has continued since the Industrial Revolution to be a metallurgical center despite the recent exhaustion of deposits of iron ore from the Ardennes and the unsuitability of local coal. The southern plateau, including the Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse region, is slightly higher than the northern one and has more forests and pastureland. The industry of the Sambre-Meuse river system contrasts with the agriculture of the Plateau of Hesbaye and the Pays de Herve, which is also a woolens center. East of the Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse region lies the broken hill country of the Condroz Plateau, which is sometimes considered part of the Ardennes.

Its northern edge defined by the Famenne Depression and thinly populated, the Southern Hilly Region consists of the high plateau of the Ardennes and Belgian Lorraine. The highest points of this region are in the Hautes Fagnes near West Germany. Although the Famenne Depression is an important dairying area, the climate, soils, and relief of the Ardennes are not conducive to agriculture, and one-half of the Ardennes is still forested. The

high Ardenne serves as an important watershed between the Meuse and the Moselle river systems, the latter in France. In summer, when the countryside is attractive, tourists come to small towns like Spa (whose name has become synonymous with a European watering place). The scarplands of the small part of Belgian Lorraine at the southern end of the country are also forested; in addition, they support agriculture and the raising of livestock. Ores from the Lorraine iron field, which extends into this area, along with limestone deposits and forests for charcoal, led to the early development of smelting and steelmaking plants nearby.

Climatically, northwest Belgium belongs to the Flemish Oceanic Region and the rest of the country to the West European Continental Region. Regional variations are the result of the division of Belgium into uplands and lowlands and three other climatic factors. First, lowland Belgian climate is similar to Britain's because of the passage of air depressions, which are the result of a combination of tropical and polar air masses; they cause variable weather, such as changing winds, summer thunderstorms, winter drizzle, and overcast skies. Second, the Flemish Oceanic Region has a mild climate because of the warm water of the North Atlantic Drift, which is responsible for fogs, most common in winter. (The fogs are worsened by industrial pollution.) Third, owing to anticyclonic air masses, the interior has more extreme summers and winters, just as the uplands have more severe frost and more cold and rain.

The arrival of the first frost varies from early October in the Ardennes, to the second week of November in Brussels, to mid November in Oostende. Rainfall also varies. The northwest is relatively dry, varying according to the distance from the coast, and the southeast is wet, cloudy, and variable because of its greater altitude and exposure. As a result, north of the Sambre and Meuse rivers, the rainfall averages 510 to 760 millimeters per year; in the hills of the south it may reach 1,270 millimeters. Snow is less frequent than rain, melts quickly, and varies in amount from year to year; the coast receives an average of at least five days of snowfall per year, and the Ardennes get up to 50 days of snow. The average temperatures recorded in 1982 were highest in July and lowest in January. They ranged from 24.7°C to -0.8°C at 100 meters above sea level near Brussels in Interior Flanders; from 23.3°C to -1.1°C at eight meters above sea level in Brugge in Maritime Flanders; from 24.4° C to -3°C at 39 meters above sea level in the Kempenland; and from 23.8°C to -4.2°C at 190 meters above sea level in the Ardennes.

Demography

Belgium is densely populated and highly urbanized, but its small size enables many to reside outside cities and commute to work. The 1981 census reported a population of 9,848,647 persons (see table 3, Appendix A). In 1982 the average population density for the whole country was estimated to be 323 persons per square kilometer. The population density was as high as 6,149 persons per square kilometer in Brussels, 916 persons per square kilometer in Antwerp, and 662 persons per square kilometer in Brabant Province, the most populous province in the country. In 1982 Flanders averaged 418 persons per square kilometer, in contrast to 191 in Wallonia. The World Bank (see Glossary) estimated that 73 percent of the population was urban in 1982, compared with 66 percent in 1960. The largest urban areas in 1982, based on data from arrondissements, were Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, Ghent, and Charleroi. The urbanization data conceal an important feature of Belgian life. Often, instead of moving to another area, particularly another language region, Belgians commute by bus, tram, bicycle, or the extensive railroad system (see Transportation, ch. 3). The proportion of Belgians relying on agriculture for their livelihood is tiny, and the exodus from the rural areas to the big cities has been less important than in France or Britain. People have been able to remain in their birthplaces or where the cost of living is lower.

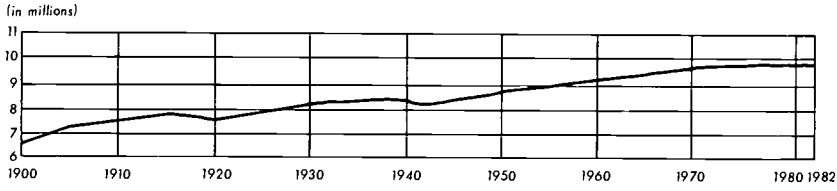
In the post-World War II period, only three provinces—Antwerpen, Brabant, and Limburg—have shown an above-average population growth rate, accounting for almost three-quarters of all growth. Even so, within the urban centers as opposed to the suburbs, the population has been declining. In the late 1970s it was evident that migration to Brussels had dropped significantly since 1961, just as migration in both directions had dropped significantly since 1948. Communes of 5,000 to 25,000 people have grown consistently. About one-half of the population lived in communes in this category in 1982; another 49 percent of the population lived in communes having more than 25,000 inhabitants.

Belgium is situated between two demographic prototypes, Britain and France. As in Britain, there was early though limited industrialization in Wallonia; elsewhere in Belgium, as in France, there was a shift to industry from agriculture and artisanry only in the 1880–1910 period. After the birth rate in France fell below 30 live births per 1,000 in 1830, Belgium was the first on the continent to follow, in 1880. Similarly, in 1882 Belgium was the first to follow France in the decline of marital fertility to less than 10 per-

cent. The marital fertility rate, indicating age and fertility of married couples, reflected the growing use of birth control in the nineteenth century in Belgium as well as France.

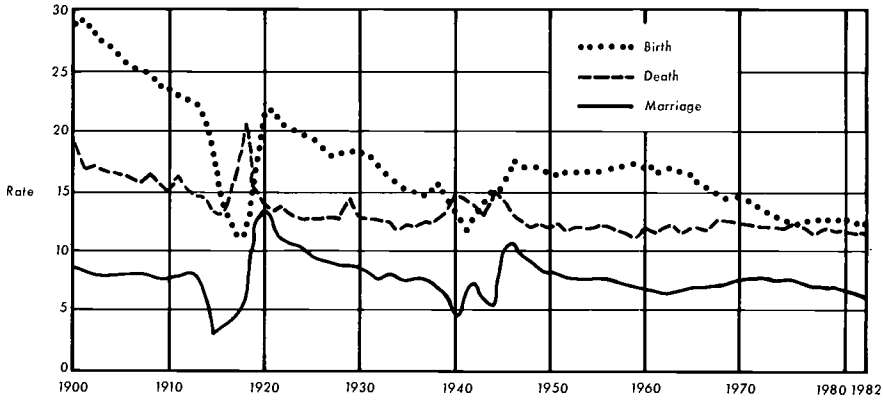
Population growth in Belgium, as elsewhere in industrialized Europe, has stabilized (see fig. 4). In the 1960s Belgium had the highest death rate and the lowest birth rate of any country in the European Communities (EC—see Appendix B). By 1982 Belgium was more or less on a par with other EC members. Crude birth rates have been falling for the last three decades (see fig. 5). Between 1975 and 1980, however, there was a slight growth in births and in the birth rate because of the increase in women aged 20 to 29 years; but during the 1981–83 period births again began to fall. In 1984 the World Bank estimated that the stationary population figure for Belgium, based on its growth rate in the 1980s, would reach 10 million in 2010, but government estimates for 1982 and 1983 showed a total decline of population of 4,994; it is not clear if this represented a statistical aberration or a new trend. At independence in 1830 there were 3.8 million Belgians, by 1900 there were almost 7 million, and in 1981 some 9.8 million. The highest rate of growth was during the 1866–1910 period, but growth rose above 1 percent per year in the 1890–1910 period. The average annual growth rate was 0.8 percent during the 1830–1900 period, 0.5 percent during the 1900–70 period, and 0.2 percent during the 1970–82 period. The decline in growth resulted from a gradually reduced birth rate and from minimal in- and out-migration until the influx of guest workers in the 1960s.

It was 1870 that marked the demographic transition in Belgium. Nuptiality has a direct bearing on fertility in countries like Belgium where the number of illegitimate births has been relatively low. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a decided change from late, nonuniversal marriage, to earlier, more widespread marriage. Between 1852 and 1856 the mean age for marriage was 28.6 for women and 30.5 for men, as opposed to six years younger for each sex in 1960. Similarly, in the mid-nineteenth century, three-quarters of men aged 25 to 30 were single, but in 1970 over three-quarters were married. The proportion of either sex never having married by age 50 decreased substantially between 1829 and 1947. Over time, the proportion of married women between the ages of 15 and 50 years old most sharply increased in western Belgium, in the industrialized provinces, and in wealthier areas. After 1850 Belgians began to control fertility within marriage using coitus interruptus, beginning in the secularized, urbanized, and industrialized areas and then diffusing to rural, more Catholic, and militantly Flemish areas. In



Source: Based on information from Belgium, Ministère des Affaires Économiques, Institut National de Statistique, *Annuaire statistique de poche*, Brussels, 1983, 60.

Figure 4. Evolution of Total Population, 1900–82



Source: Based on information from Belgium, Ministère des Affaires Économiques, Institut National de Statistique, *Annuaire statistique de poche*, Brussels, 1983, 60.

Figure 5. Evolution of Birth, Death, and Marriage Rates per 1,000 Inhabitants, 1900–82

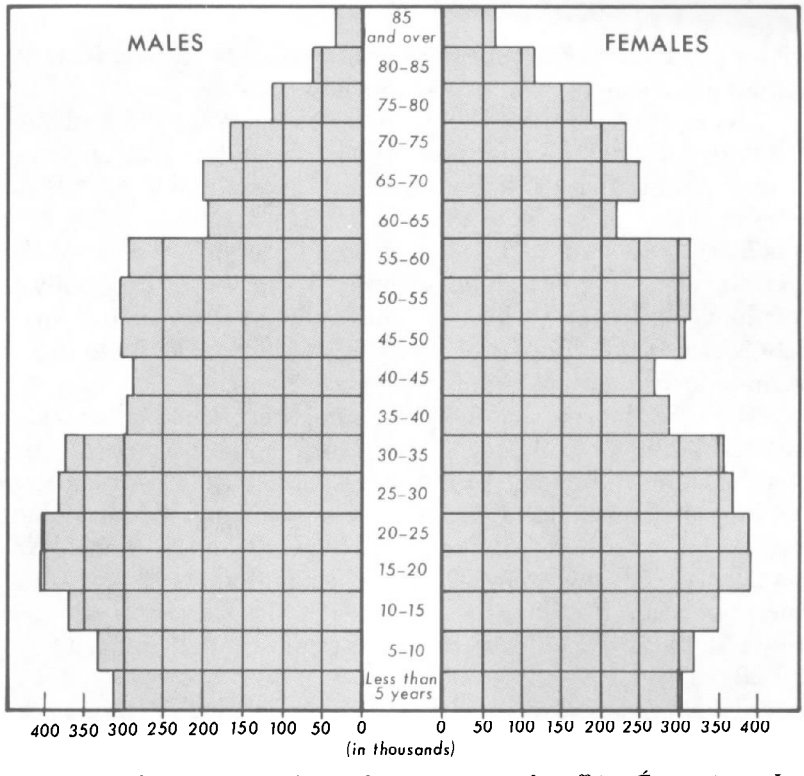
general, Flanders had higher rates of marital fertility, which declined more slowly than in Wallonia and Brussels.

As a result, Flander's share of the population increased after 1860, despite higher adult mortality and an infant mortality rate almost double that of Wallonia. The ratio of population of Flanders to Wallonia was 52 to 48 in 1866, 55 to 45 in 1910, 61 to 39 in 1947, 64 to 36 after 1970. This changing proportion became the basis of a heated political debate after World War I, especially as Wallonia had not only a lower fertility rate but also an aging population. The Sauvy Report of 1962 tied these two factors to a dark economic future for Wallonia.

In 1983 the regional mortality rates were 13.4 per 1,000 for Brussels, 12.9 for Wallonia, and 10.7 for Flanders. The three regions had almost the same birth rate—12.1 per 1,000 for Flanders, 11.7 for Wallonia, and 11.7 for Brussels—although the immigrant population was more important for Brussels and Wallonia. Nationally, people over 65 years of age accounted for 14 percent of the population by 1981, those 25 to 64 years old for 50 percent, those 15 to 24 years old for 16 percent, and those through age 14 for 20 percent.

The population was aging in 1984, especially in Wallonia, because of a falling birth rate, smaller families, and a longer life expectancy (see fig. 6). Life expectancy at birth began to rise during the 1845–81 period and by 1982 had reached 70 years for men and 77 for women. In 1981 there were 1.4 million Belgians over 65 and 1.2 million receiving retirement pensions. Since World War II the country has turned to labor migrants to counteract the lack of young, actively working people, recruiting a first wave from Italy and other EC countries and a second wave from Turkey and North Africa. After 1974 immigration of workers stopped officially, but illegals continued to arrive until 1976, and a liberal policy allowed the entrance of family members. In 1981 only 3,461 new work permits were issued to workers from countries outside the EC, and in 1983 there was a net outflow of 4,140 foreigners. The foreign workers still bolstered the Belgian birth rate. In 1983 Belgians averaged 11.2 births per 1,000, compared with 19.4 births per 1,000 for immigrants. In 1977 some 41 percent of births in Brussels were to foreign nationals.

Until the 1960s, migration in and out of Belgium had had only a slight effect on other demographic factors, except for the brief crises of the 1846–56 period and World War I; flows were mostly between Belgium and the neighboring countries of France, the Netherlands, and Germany. Unable to find a native supply of willing workers, Belgium imported some foreign work-



Source: Based on information from Belgium, Ministère des Affaires Économiques, Institut National de Statistique, *Annuaire statistique de poche*, Brussels, 1983, 59.

Figure 6. Division of Population by Age and Sex, March 1, 1981

ers for the coal mines in the 1930s. Between 1945 and 1963 employers recruited through bilateral agreements to staff the coal mines and the iron and steel industries, for example, bringing in 60,000 Italians in 1946 alone. These temporary workers were allowed to stay and to bring their families. After the formal agreements ceased, workers came as tourists and obtained work and residence permits once they found work. As part of a larger trend across Western Europe, Belgian employers in the 1960s asked the government to allow the expansion of foreign recruitment for other economic areas besides the mines and steel industry.

By 1981 neighboring countries only accounted for 23 percent of immigrants. Italians constituted the largest group (279,700), followed by Moroccans (105,133), French (103,512), and Dutch (66,233). Labor migrants and their families in 1982 made up 8.8

Crowded yet scenic houses of Brugge in the Flemish style
Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

percent of the population, constituting only 4.3 percent of the population of Flanders, 14.5 percent of that in Wallonia, and 31.3 percent of that in Brussels. Wallonia contained one-half of the migrants to Belgium. Of this group, 80 percent came from EC countries between 1945 and 1965 and seemed to have adjusted to Belgian life. In contrast, most of the migrants in Brussels were Moroccans and Turks who had arrived since the 1960s.

Another important effect on the work force resulting from demographic factors, such as aging and lower birth rates, has been the increased participation by women in the work force. Marrying earlier and having fewer children, many married women have chosen to work, which has offset declining male participation in the work force because of age. Improved educational preparation has also encouraged women to work. The proportion of working women out of the total female population rose from 19 percent in 1947, to 25 percent in 1977, and to 31 percent in 1981.

The better educated a woman was, the fewer children she had, and the more she felt the need for a salary, the more likely she was to work. In 1981 women represented 38 percent of the active population, and further increases were likely, especially in the 25- to 29-year age bracket. Increases have occurred despite the economic crisis since 1974 and a higher unemployment rate for women than for men (see Unemployment, ch. 3). Even though women were employed in poorly paid and less skilled positions than men, in sectors hard hit by the economic crisis, unemployed women were better educated than unemployed men. Women tended to be educated for and directed toward less respected positions and toward jobs having lower productivity, toward traditionally feminine occupations of teaching, nursing, and domestic service. They were concentrated in occupations such as office work, which were most likely to be affected by automation and other new technologies.

Once working, women tended to be in jobs that promised little chance of advancement, were usually held only by women, and often required skills such as manual dexterity that were traditionally associated with women. In fields where women were in administrative positions, they held less important posts than men. Despite the increase in the proportion and number of working women, there were clearly two labor markets, separated according to sex; women workers were less favored than men in

terms of salary, benefits, advancement, security, status, and future prospects.

Language

Demographic and geographic divisions in Belgium only partially coincide with social ones. Belgium is marked by particularistic compartmentalization, well illustrated by its complex educational system. It is therefore necessary to understand those loyalties that create the compartments—language and religion. The languages spoken in contemporary Belgium are Dutch, French, and German. Linguistic and political borders do not coincide. German is spoken in the eastern area of the country bordering West Germany, Dutch in the northern area bordering the Netherlands, and French in the western and southern area bordering France. Early Germanic invasions laid the basis for the current linguistic divide (see Roman Period, 57 B.C.-A.D. 431, ch. 1). The provinces of West-Vlaanderen, Oost-Vlaanderen, Antwerpen, Limburg, and northern Brabant became Dutch-speaking Flanders, while those of Liège, Luxembourg, Hainaut, Namur, and southern Brabant became French-speaking Wallonia. The German speakers, using Low German and Franco-Mosellan dialects, live in the eastern cantons of Eupen and Malmédy, but they account for less than 1 percent of the total population. Only in certain areas do linguistic minorities receive protection (see fig. 1). Brussels is a special case, being treated as an officially bilingual region.

Technically, there are residents of Wallonia who speak any of the Romance-language dialects—not necessarily mutually intelligible—called Picard, Gaumais, and Walloon (split into central, western, and eastern dialects). There are residents of Flanders who speak any of the Germanic dialects—also not necessarily mutually intelligible—called Brabant, Limburg, and West Flemish (see fig. 7). For convenience, all the former dialects have been combined in the category of Walloon (*waal*; *wallon*) and all of the latter into Flemish (*vlaams*; *flamande*). Historical circumstance and the point of view of the writer, as well as objective criteria, have determined what constituted a "dialect" and when it became the basis for a supraregional language.

Because of the history of the French nation, the development of French literature, and the role of French as an international language of prestige, Parisian French came to set the standard for Walloon speakers. In contrast, Flemish and Brabant dialects played an important role from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century in Flanders, after which the dialects in the Netherlands—influenced by immigrants from southern Flanders and Brabant—began to dominate. The Flemish speakers in Flanders were cut off from the Netherlands by politics and only decided to adopt Amsterdam Dutch as their written and spoken standard in the mid-nineteenth century. In English, some authors prefer to call the standard spoken by Flemings and residents of the Netherlands Netherlandic, reserving Dutch or Hollandic for what is spoken exclusively in the Netherlands. To complicate matters further, there are about 100,000 people of Flemish descent living across the border in France, although the schools there do not teach Dutch.

A poll conducted by the French and Dutch sections of the Catholic University of Louvain (KUL/UCL) in the early 1980s investigated the secondary languages used in Belgium. Dutch was used frequently in at least one-half of the public utilities and private enterprises in Wallonia; English and German were also used to a lesser extent. In Brussels, French was most common, followed by Dutch, English, German, Spanish, Italian, and Arabic. In Flanders, French was employed in almost all private enterprises and public utilities, and English and German in about 60 percent of private enterprises and 50 percent of public utilities. The frequent use of English was partly explained by its importance in research, academic publications, and computer operations. Apparently, French-speaking university students were weaker at Dutch (75 percent admitted to serious difficulties) than Dutch-speaking students were at French (50 percent admitted serious difficulties). Only 30 percent of the enterprises located in Wallonia considered the linguistic qualifications of applicants when hiring, compared with 60 percent in Flanders. In both regions an average of 20 percent of the jobs in public services required dual language proficiency. These rates contrasted with 90 percent of private enterprises and 75 percent of the public services in Brussels. Outside Brussels students could choose which second language to study. In Wallonia some 58 percent of the students chose to learn Dutch, and 36 percent chose English; in Flanders about 91 percent opted to learn French, and 9 percent selected English. At the same time, if given the choice, the majority of 18-year-olds surveyed in Wallonia said they would like to

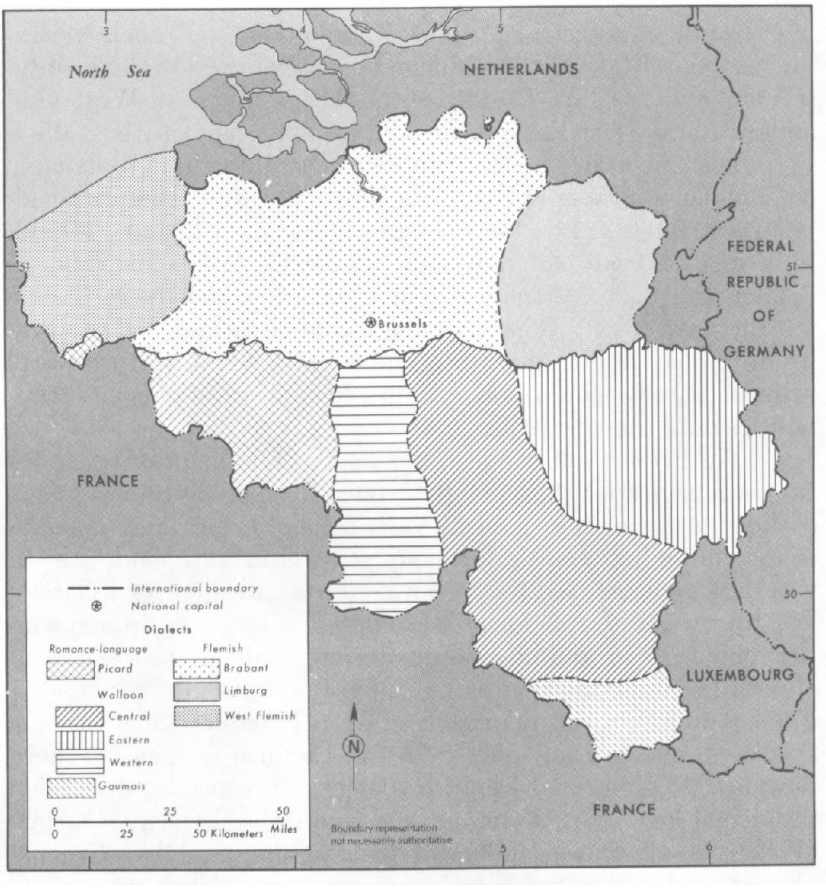


Figure 7. Location of Speakers of Romance-Language and Flemish Dialects, 1984

study English; 18-year-olds in Flanders were equally divided between French and English.

Although language plays an important part in individual, group, or communal identity in Belgium as well as in Belgian politics, it has not always done so. It was a conscious policy in the nineteenth century to make first French and then Dutch political tools, aimed at political unification and French or Dutch cultural domination. At the time of Belgian independence, for example, emphasis lay on differences of religion and politics between Belgium and the Netherlands or France and not on languages or regions within the Belgian state (see The Revolution of 1830, ch. 1).

The term "Wallonia" was reputed to be coined in 1844 by the

poet Joseph Grandgagnage and was applied to the French-speaking region only after 1850. "Flanders" has referred to the county of Flanders, the Low Countries, or the provinces of West-Vlaanderen and Oost-Vlaanderen. Those who came to be called Flemings had earlier been variously called Brabanters, Belgians, or "Belgian speakers of the Flemish idiom"; their language had been referred to as Low German, as well as Flemish, and was held to be distinct from Dutch by some scholars as late as 1946. Local dialects split each region into smaller units, to which the residents felt the most loyalty. The most significant cleavages that showed up in Belgian public life during the country's first century were religiosity and socioeconomic status; language did not dominate politics until the late 1950s.

Like French and English in Canada, Dutch and French in Belgium have not held symmetric roles. French was the language of the elite during the Spanish, Austrian, and French regimes and of the ruling bourgeoisie for many years after independence. It was the language used by the royal courts and the upper classes and thus was essential for political or social success. French was the language of public administration, judicial proceedings, church hierarchy and, after Latin became obsolete, education. The members of the bourgeois elite in Flanders were French speaking, said to know only sufficient Flemish to speak to their servants. Walloon and Flemish dialects were used only at the municipal level of government and by the local clergy. During World War I Flemish soldiers could not understand their French officers, and in 1866 two Flemings were executed for a crime they probably did not commit because they did not understand the French trial proceedings. Three popular sayings of the time told the story of the position of the Flemish language:

> French in the parlor, Flemish in the kitchen.
> You speak the language of the man whose bread you eat.
> It is necessary to cease being Flemish in order to become Belgian.

In the past, Flemish dialects have been associated with illiteracy or the poorly educated masses; French has been associated with success and the bourgeoisie. French speakers have been reluctant to learn or use Dutch, belittling its importance in the world and specifically in Belgian life. In the mid-nineteenth century a majority in Flanders spoke Flemish, and a majority in Wallonia spoke Picard and Walloon, leaving only a small minority of urbanites and members of the elite who spoke more than the rudiments of standard French. The upper classes and upwardly

mobile individuals were attracted to French for its economic and cultural advantages until well into the twentieth century. French speakers tended to dominate in the civil service, diplomatic corps, officer corps, and corporate management; they tended to have better education, higher status, and more income than the speakers of other languages and dialects.

As well as dialects, there are Belgian variations of standard French and Dutch. Almost all speakers of Dutch in one experiment could identify the nationalities of recorded speakers by their accents and speech habits. The efforts of binational commissions and language associations in the Netherlands and Belgium to coordinate Dutch spelling, grammar, lexical codification, and literary awards have been unable to prevent the variations. Flemish in Belgium was developing simultaneously with dialects in the Netherlands. Because of disagreement between the localists (those who supported the dialects) and the integrationists (those favoring standard Dutch), it was only in 1864 that Dutch was adopted as a standard by royal decree. Dutch was favored over the Flemish dialects because of the need for a standard for education and legislation. Only since the period between the two world wars has standard Dutch been used on an everyday basis. Research has shown that the younger generation, exposed to Dutch education and the mass media, has been more comfortable with the linguistic norms of the standard.

Belgian primary-school teachers, as well as the public at large, prefer Belgian variants of vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation as exemplified on Belgian radio and television. For example, the word for an alderman in Parisian French is *adjoint au maire* and in Hollandic Dutch, *wethouder*; French-speaking Belgians use the term *échevin* and the Dutch-speaking Belgians the term, *schepen*. Because of their awareness of regional differences, Belgians sometimes overcompensate for the influence of the other national language and for errors they perceive in their speech patterns (helped by advice on "proper" usage in the media). When speaking the standard, they also unwittingly insert archaisms, literary forms, and regional elements into their speech.

Many Belgians switch between a variety of languages or dialects. Businessmen, oriented to foreign trade, or personnel of the international organizations based in Brussels are multilingual. Migrant workers use their native languages. Television channels from Britain, France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg are received as well as Belgium's own French and Dutch channels. Bilingualism becomes a controversial subject

only when referring to French and Dutch—so controversial that there has been no language census since 1947.

Switching between dialects and the standard language exists on a variety of levels. In a broad sense many children who speak a dialect at home are accustomed to language switching because they are not taught their dialect in school. Still, linguist Jacques Lefèvre reported that 45.7 percent of the respondents to his 1975 survey of Walloons claimed to speak their local dialect "very well"; 64.5 percent understood it "very well." Only 27 percent of the respondents, however, used their dialect often with their kin or friends, and only 20 percent used it often at work. Walloon is especially common in rural areas and in informal situations. A 1971 survey of 350 Dutch speakers found that 90 percent used the regional Flemish dialect with family members and 78 percent with friends. Dialect was less common in more public and formal situations; about 70 percent used it when shopping and 57 percent when working. In situations where it could be of future benefit, the standard language was preferred; some 69 percent of the parents spoke standard Dutch with their children. As in the case of Walloon, standard speech was less common in the rural areas and urban lower class. Confirming these observations for Flanders, a 1975 survey found that 70 to 76 percent of the 1,116 respondents thought it appropriate to use dialect in communication with their friends or spouses.

Social class may also be influential, as socioeconomic classes tend to have different prestige norms. Flemish dialects and standard Dutch, for example, have been linked to separate values and social identities. For members of the working class, the standard language may be associated with situations where they are at a disadvantage (in school or the army). Understanding but not speaking the standard well, they may prefer to keep a social distance from those not using a dialect. Middle-class people, however, may manipulate the standard with the aim of impressing lower class people.

Dialects in Brussels vary from those using French syntax with Dutch vocabulary to those using Dutch syntax with French vocabulary. Many people are bilingual. Flemish dialects or a mix of languages are used informally, but standard French is considered more useful for technical and abstract matters. The linguistic preference of the speaker, as well as the social and the emotional context, is also crucial. Changes in educational patterns are effecting changes in language preference, and Dutch is coming to the fore.

Officially, Brussels is a bilingual region, and the proper role

of the two languages has posed delicate problems. Brussels began as a Flemish city; in 1846 some 67 percent of the population spoke Dutch or a Flemish dialect. By 1910, however, the number of French speakers had risen to 49 percent of the population, by 1930 to 59 percent, and by 1947 to 71 percent. In the 1960s a study conducted by the Free University of Brussels (VUB/ULB) found that French speakers constituted a majority of 80 to 85 percent. Not surprisingly, the Flemings have feared and resisted the expansion of the French-speaking population into the outskirts of the city; artificial "iron collar" political limits have been set to stop the so-called spreading oil stain (see Major Political Developments, 1980-84, ch. 4).

In the past, bilingualism has referred to a one-way shift on the part of the Flemings, perhaps over more than one generation, from the monolingual use of standard Dutch or Flemish dialect to bilingual Dutch and French and then to predominantly French. The shift was seen by the Flemings as pathological but by the French speakers as a civilizing and socially redeeming process. It might come about through intermarriage, migration from Flanders to Wallonia or Brussels, or parental pressure on the children of the Flemish bourgeoisie, who historically made up about 3 percent of the population of Flanders. During the course of a language shift, the first generation adopted French for use in public, the next for use at home, and the third for study and work, maybe even marrying a French speaker. Attributing such shifts to social pressure, the younger generation of Flemings have become Flamingant, i.e., militantly conscious of their Flemish heritage.

Since the controversy caused by the 1947 language census (which found 51 percent spoke Dutch, 1 percent German, 33 percent French, and 15 percent Dutch and French in Belgium), no further official counts have been made. Unofficial estimates are possible by noting the language used on driver's licenses or in telephone directory listings. In Brussels language switching has continued. A survey in the 1960s found that 68.5 percent of the children of Flemings spoke French together, only 27 percent of the total participants claimed Dutch as a mother tongue, about 13 percent continued to speak mostly Dutch, and only 18 percent expressed loyalty to the Flemish community.

Because regional, linguistic, and ethnic identities do not completely overlap in Belgium, it is best to refer to the social division between Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels as communal rather than ethnic. It would seem that French-speaking Flemings have been integrated into the French-speaking community without regard to their physical appearance, place of birth, descent,

cultural traits, or so-called ethnic identity. To the French-speaking Belgians, the linguistic identity of a Belgian is a matter of self-definition, whereas to Flemings, it is a matter of collective identity and membership in a social community (through the family and a matrix of varied organizations). Because language is a matter of individual choice to French speakers, a French-speaking Bruxellois may not share an ethnic or regional identity with a French-speaking Walloon. For the Flemings, influenced by the Flemish movement, language maintenance is not only a right but also a romantic, mystical matter involving self-awareness and one's knowledge of reality (see Development of Flemish and Walloon Movements, ch. 1). Jules Destrée, a Walloon Socialist and politician, reflected this attitude in a famous letter to the Belgian king in 1912:

> A language is a treasure amassed by a human community in the course of many ages. It comprises the memory and the illustration of a people's customs, beliefs and sufferings. In the minds of those who speak it, it awakens confused impressions dating back to the earliest days of childhood when we learned to babble our first words at our mother's knee—and even farther back, to the folk-memories that link us with our remote ancestors. There is a mysterious quality in our attachment to our mother-tongue, one which has little to do with our conscious, reasoning facilities but derives from the depths of our subconscious being.

To combat the loss to their community through the one-way language shift, the Flemings have obtained the passage of laws defining language community by territoriality—those who live in Flanders should speak Dutch, those who live in Wallonia should speak French. The question of Brussels has been settled to no one's satisfaction. Although the attitudes of each community have led to conflict and controversy, they have created neither hatred between language groups nor more than minimal violence.

The Walloons, Flemings, and Bruxellois have nevertheless developed some popular and often unfavorable stereotypes about one another. These have been reinforced by the popular press and the limited communication between the groups. According to an analysis of these stereotypes conducted by sociologist Jozef Nuttin (based upon survey data from the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s), the Walloons see the Flemings as obstinate, forward, touchy, and primitive. The Flemings say the Walloons act superior and are chauvinistic, pretentious, boastful, hotheaded, and attitudinizing. On the positive side, the Flemings credit the Walloons with eloquence and spontaneity. The Walloons believe

themselves to be hospitable, merry, spontaneous, bon vivants, and freedom loving, although they admit to feeling superior to the Flemings and to being undisciplined, individualistic, and complaining. The Flemings also seem more positive about themselves, agreeing that they suffer from an inferiority complex, are hardworking, persevering, courageous, loutish, gregarious, attached to their native soil, idealistic, sentimental, and self-willed. They add that they are freedom loving, frank, concerned for others, and hospitable. The Walloons and Flemings agree, however, in their belief that the residents of Brussels are boastful, self-satisfied, pretentious, profiteering, and superficial. Even the people of Brussels see themselves as grumbling, bon vivants, and individualistic, although they sweeten their self-image with a belief in their own broad-mindedness and spirit of freedom.

Despite their sensitivity to the balance between French and Dutch, Belgians seem little concerned that Italian, Spanish, Turkish, and North African migrants are complicating the language picture (see Demography, this ch.). The migrants come from the lowest socioeconomic levels in their own countries, just as the niche that they occupy in Belgium forces them to accept the lowest ranked jobs. In Brussels migrants tend to live in the most deteriorated housing and form the majority in certain schools and communes. Together, the migrants constitute an underclass and may ally for political ends, but socially and culturally the migrants divide into a series of national groups. Many workers are accompanied by their families, and their children seem caught between an identity in terms of their parent's homeland and Belgium.

Migrants rarely obtain Belgian citizenship and stand out in other ways. Physically, Turks and North Africans do not look like the majority of Belgians and find it hard to escape the consequences of classification as guest workers. Muslims and members of the Greek Orthodox faith do not share the general Belgian familiarity with Catholic rites, symbols, and objects. Suffering the handicaps of alien languages and culture, children of immigrants have not done as well as Belgian children in school; some 60 percent of Turkish children did not finish primary school in the late 1970s. Although the migrants have not been successful by Belgian standards, they have conformed to the Belgian values of frugality and hard work and have earned and accrued much more than would be possible at home. Often thinking of their stay as temporary, however prolonged, they have learned neither Dutch nor French well. They have focused instead on saving and on maintaining contacts with home (by telephone, letters, vacations, remittances). Their presence has been called unobtrusive by one

commentator, living and working as they do out of the sight of middle- and upper-class Belgians; nevertheless, newspaper articles from 1983 and 1984 suggested that, as in other West European countries with high migrant populations, their alleged rates of crime and employment have become issues as Belgian unemployment has risen.

Religion

In addition to language, religion is another source of social cleavage in Belgium. Although Catholicism is by far the dominant religion, there are other religious groups, whether recognized officially or not. There is no state church, and the Constitution allows for various religions to receive state aid. Those religions officially recognized include Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Anglicanism.

Almost all of the country's approximately 9.9 million inhabitants are Catholic. Surprisingly, the second largest religious group after Catholic is Muslim (mostly Sunni). Most Muslims are migratory workers from Turkey and North Africa, in 1981 there were 179,516 from Morocco, Algeria, and Turkey alone. In 1969 the government helped build a mosque and other buildings, and in 1974 parliament recognized Islam as an official religion, helping with the salary and pensions for Sunni imams. There have been Jews in Belgium since before its independence. After a peak of about 90,000 in 1940, because of Nazi persecution there remained only 20,000 after World War II; by 1984 there were about 35,000. They were located in Brussels and Antwerp, and about 45 percent of them were practicing Jews. Like the Jews, the Protestants have been recognized since independence and in 1984 included about 100,000 people. In 1975 about 20,000 were foreigners, concentrated in Brussels, Charleroi, Antwerp, and the Borinage area. The official Protestant church is called the Protestant Church of Belgium, although there are other Protestant groups. Finally, there are about 60,000 members of Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, including families of Russian exiles (from the 1917 revolution) and Greek migrant laborers.

Nonbelievers make up perhaps 20 percent of the population—including atheists, agnostics, and deists—and so are bigger than any non-Catholic religious group. In public forums the Center for Secular Action and the Union of Secular Associations speak on behalf of the (French-speaking and Dutch-speaking) nonbelievers, respectively, although most nonbelievers tend to

Advertising is in two languages in this supermarket at Drogenbos, a suburb of Brussels. Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

be more individualistic than churchgoers.

The Catholic church is neither united with nor separate from the government. However, in addition to the usual rights and freedoms of expression, it receives subsidies for the maintenance of the clergy and the upkeep of church buildings. In return, the church recognizes that religious marriage must be validated by civil marriage, gives up the legal right of its priests to attack the government while performing their duties, and submits to government approval for certain public activities, such as the creation of new parishes. The church was formally associated with the Catholic Bloc until 1945 and before that took openly political stands (see Consolidation of the System, ch. 1; Political Parties, ch. 4). There are eight Catholic episcopal sees in Belgium, of which only the archdiocese of Malines-Brussels (including parts

of Antwerpen and Brabant provinces) is bilingual.

The religious cleavage most significant in Belgium is between Catholics and nonbelievers. In this division, there are two issues to consider: first, whether Catholicism is as important a social factor as in the past and, second, to what extent nonpracticing Catholics are militant rather than apathetic about Catholicism. Catholicism's social influence in the 1980s was a matter of debate. Belgians themselves have asserted that religion is on the decline. The test of this assertion depends on whether "religion" is defined by practices, beliefs, ethical values, philosophical stances, or worldviews. Catholicism is the basis for not only dogma but also religious practices and social relations centered on the family and an array of Catholic-sponsored organizations. Although many Belgians are only nominal Catholics who see the first Holy Communion, baptism, funerals, and marriage as rites of passage rather than as religious acts, Catholic institutions have shaped Belgian worldviews, positively or negatively. The clerical-anticlerical division strongly influenced the first century of Belgian politics and was responsible for the maintenance of the private school system.

American sociologist Renée Fox, who has spent many years researching Belgium, writes that Belgians are convinced that religion is declining for several reasons: because of the abandonment of religious practices; the replacement of obvious church involvement in major political issues with nonreligious conflicts; the perception of secularization as destructive, not transformative; a weakening of ideologies, thus reducing the aggressive stances for and against the church; a reduction of missionizing in Africa by the church and Freemasons; and widespread declarations that religion is declining. She contends that such views have ignored innovative religious forms, inside and outside the church, and signs of relative religiosity compared with that of other nations, such as a rise in Catholic-school enrollment, an increase in pilgrimages to Belgian shrines or to Lourdes, a high proportion taking communion and receiving the sacraments, and a low proportion obtaining divorces. Pessimists have not allowed for a new Catholicism that is more individualized, ecumenical, critical, and private. Hence they have missed less quantifiable and obtrusive forms of religiosity, such as masses celebrated outside church buildings and private study or action groups. She points to a shared Christian past and commonly encountered symbols—madonnas, church bells, religious architecture—and concern with seeking transcendental values as evidence of religiosity. The narrower view of Catholicism of the Belgian seg-

View of the Gothic Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp, a monument to Catholicism, by far the dominant religion
Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

ment of a cross-European survey conducted in the 1980s found that central Catholic conceptions of life were losing their significance if measured by attendance at mass, belief in a personal God, acceptance of church ethics, and the attitudes of the young.

Another survey and an associated series of articles in the largest and most influential Belgian French-language daily newspaper, the independent *Le Soir*, in 1984, portrayed Belgian Catholicism as not completely conventional. Rather, the Belgian archbishop, Gotfried Cardinal Danneels, characterized it as "popular," rooted in daily—not intellectual—life, and responsive to personal needs, being important in marking personal transitions and seasons of the year. He said religious attitudes were affective, as in considering the Virgin Mary as a mother and the

family as a refuge. He noted, as a phenomenon of the last 10 years, the importance given to prayer.

The 3,000 Catholics in the *Le Soir* survey—divided equally among Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia—were defined as "practicing" because of weekly attendance at mass and were chosen from a sample of 6,000 Belgians. These respondents took communion frequently (11 percent several times weekly, 34 percent each Sunday, 29 percent several times yearly); confessed several times a year (31 percent); attended masses at Easter, Pentecost, Ascension Day, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and All Saint's Day (about 60 percent or more); and prayed daily (44 percent). While they participated in these rites, their beliefs did not always adhere to orthodoxy. Although 83 percent accepted the divinity of Jesus, some 65 percent the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and 43 percent the infallibility of the pope, only 19 percent believed in heaven, hell, and purgatory (as opposed to 54 percent in some unclarified form of afterlife). Although 71 percent believed in the general concept of sin, only 46 percent believed in original sin. Some 56 percent believed in the possibility of present-day miracles, 67 percent in the appearances of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes (52 percent had been to the shrine), and 20 percent in possession by Satan (38 percent in Satan himself). Such findings were confirmed by a cross-European study finding belief in God was not necessarily associated with a belief in a soul, heaven, or Satan or with weekly religious practices. It was not coincidental that the last appearances of the Virgin Mary recognized by the Catholic church occurred in 1932 and 1933 at Beauraing (in the province of Namur) and Banneux (in the province of Liège), which have become pilgrimage sites.

According to the *Le Soir* survey, although Belgian Catholic family life continued to be valued, it was not regulated in accordance to church teachings; it was rather a private matter. Birth control, divorce, premarital sex, and abortion were condoned. For 57 percent of the respondents a Christian ideal was a healthy and happy family life, and for 58 percent their Catholicism was a result of a family tradition. Premarital sex, though, was seen by 30 percent as an apprenticeship for marriage and by 40 percent as permissible if the couple were going to marry. Only 23 percent of those surveyed believed abortion is always a crime as opposed to a pardonable sin (23 percent) or a sometimes necessary act (33 percent). The number of children per family should be a matter of choice; 31 percent said the number should depend on family resources and 49 percent on the psychological equilibrium of the parents. About 46 percent said divorce was a private matter, and

29 percent allowed it under certain circumstances. Remarriage after divorce was approved by 44 percent and tolerated by another 36 percent if it involved the partner not responsible for the divorce. Similarly, the cross-European study found 86 percent of the Belgian respondents approved of an abortion if the mother's health was at risk, three-quarters if the child was likely to be handicapped. There was no approval for abortion if the mother was single or the pregnancy a miscalculation.

Another symptom of crisis for the Belgian Catholic church was the increasing scarcity of secular and regular clergy and members of religious orders. In 1978 there were 13,635 priests, or one for every 718 inhabitants. Seminary enrollment and ordinations were declining. In 1963 there were 165 priests ordained, and in 1973 there were only 51. Similarly, in 1963 there were 202 students entering seminaries as opposed to 87 in 1978. As a result, the average age rose to about 55 years for priests in the early 1980s (less than 10 percent were under age 40). Statistics for religious orders were hard to procure. Data for 32 of the 60 female contemplative orders showed that during the 1967-77 period, 157 women entered and 88 left. Parish life suffered, as did the supply of missionaries, nurses, and teachers. Only a partial solution has been provided by the preparation of lay deacons throughout the country and in Flanders, "pastoral workers," and in Wallonia, "animators." Although the new generation of priests was reported to be better prepared and firmer in conviction than before, the question remained of priorities in the eight episcopal sees. Should attention be dedicated to the needs of a shrinking nucleus of practicing Catholics or to influencing the general public on issues such as poverty in the Third World or nuclear war? Worker priests, for example, affirmed the need to "bear witness" and aid in the struggles of the working class, traditionally little interested in Catholicism.

Overall, by objective standards, there were fewer practicing Catholics than in the past. In the 1950-51 period about 50 percent of the Catholic population attended mass regularly (60 percent in Flanders, 41 percent in Wallonia, and 35 percent in Brussels). By 1978 the percentages had fallen to 29 percent of Catholics for the country as a whole, 35 percent for Flanders, 22 percent for Brussels, and 24 percent for Wallonia. The 1968–73 period showed a marked drop, particularly in Flanders.

Using other measures, it can be argued that Catholicism is still strong. Religious rites of passage showed a decline, but a majority of lives were still marked by them. Baptisms were still performed for 83 percent of the babies born in 1980; only in

Malines-Brussels has there been a substantial decline over time, owing perhaps to the larger number of foreign immigrants there. In 1978 Catholic marriages and funerals were still performed for over three-quarters of the population, except in Malines-Brussels, where the proportions were only slightly lower.

The fluctuation in these proportions over time and between regions was open to several interpretations. The relatively high proportion of Catholic funerals may have reflected respect for the beliefs of the aged, religious uncertainty, the affiliation of institutional homes and hospitals with the church, or a move to emulate the practices of the bourgeois Catholics on the part of some members of the working class. That the proportion of baptisms had not decreased more significantly may have been because of the uncertainties of the religious future of the child or the child's need to fit in at school (see Education, this ch.). The proportion of Catholic marriages was relatively low, perhaps because of Muslim migrants, defiance of hypocritical conformity, marriages between practicing Catholics and nonbelievers, continuity of secular working-class customs, or the increasing number of remarriages after divorce. Observers do not doubt, however, that the younger generation—especially those under 35 years of age—have participated less in these religious rites than their elders. It has also been suggested that there has been a decline among members of the middle class and the intelligentsia. Aggregate regional figures did not reflect variation by rural or urban location, sex, or occupation.

Social Organization and Values

Belgians are joiners, being members of organizations encompassing life from birth to death; it was reported in 1984 that about four out of six Belgians belonged to an organization. Orchestras, sports groups, theater groups, and radio and television may be divided by language, but cooperatives, housing for the poor, youth and children's groups, mutual aid societies, unions, savings banks, farmer's associations, hospitals, and leisure clubs are divided on the basis of the three traditional political family affiliations—Liberal, Socialist, and Catholic. The political parties form just one facet of these complexes of organizations, which provide health care, administer health insurance, orient the school systems and, most importantly, bind networks of family, friends, and acquaintances. Belgians rarely know individuals from other groups except by stereotypes. A change in political allegiance

means a drastic change in friends, services, and perhaps jobs. Thus social control is exerted through conformity to the norms of others in the same particularistic groups.

In the nineteenth century both the Socialists and the Catholics sought mobilization through a variety of organizations. The Catholics were the first in the mid-nineteenth century to create a world in which people shared social networks and a worldview, but they were soon imitated by the Liberals and by organizations of the proliferating Socialists. Belgians call each set of organizations a "spiritual family" (French, *famille spirituelle*—see Glossary) or "pillar" (Dutch, *zuil*—see Glossary), more colloquially, "world" or "ideological grouping." These pillars linked members to a negotiating political elite through an intermediary or patron who might be a leader of a cooperative or an association of farmers. Such contacts might be used to find a job or retirement home, following the principle of political proportionality, which meant that each pillar's elite was responsible for the allocation of its share of the resources. It has been a matter of discussion whether the trend has been toward "depillarization" because of the effects of television, social and geographic mobility, declining religiosity, the opening of rural areas, and the emergence of nontraditional parties (see Political Parties, ch. 4).

The extensive Catholic and Socialist networks of organizations are testimony to the importance given by Belgians to the humanistic Christian ideals of mutual aid, solidarity, the common good, and love of one's fellow man. The Catholic pillar is most extensive, having a broad network of private, nonprofit social service and health care agencies and a dense array of organizations in Flanders alone. Despite the declining number of practicing Catholics, the pillar is maintained because it offers not only charitable services respected by the public at large but also a job market. Practicing Catholics form the core of employees and clients, but the services attract many others, too. Those who are not practicing Catholics are Catholics in a sociocultural sense; they still adhere to an ideology that respects evangelical values, the example of Jesus and the selfless lives of those in religious orders—in contradistinction to the anonymity and bureaucracy of modern life—and emphasizes harmony among interest groups and classes and between the individual and the collectivity. This Christian ideology is transmitted by Catholic schools and by Catholic youth and adult movements.

The national Catholic network of social service agencies in 1984 included about 100 hospitals (having 30,000 employees and 50,000 beds), 240 homes for the aged, and 190 day-care centers; it

offered marital counseling, help for the handicapped, and diverse medical services, as well as mutual aid societies that claimed 4.5 million members and were concentrated in Flanders. Such agencies grew out of the charitable activities of religious orders performed for the poor, sick, and outcast during the Middle Ages. State subsidies and the decline in members of both practicing Catholics and vocations for the religious orders have led to doubts, especially in Wallonia, as to why such agencies continue to be directly administered by the church. Karel Dobbelaere, a leading Belgian sociologist, has documented the secularization of schools and hospitals (through the differentiation of functions and professionalization), coupled with decreasing numbers of religious personnel. Because of declining numbers of priests, the growing school populations, and state teaching requirements, priests have been restricted to teaching religion instead of the breadth of subjects they taught in the past. Medical care has been differentiated from pastoral care or personalized caring provided by the religious nurses. Moreover, in 1984 church norms did not necessarily predominate in schools, where the law prohibited the regulation of the private lives of teachers (for example, firing teachers who married divorced persons); nor did they prevail in hospitals, where doctors might justify, for reasons of health, procedures not approved by the church (abortions, sterilizations). Nevertheless, of all the Catholic pillar organizations, Catholic schooling is considered the most important, a "must," according to 71 percent of the *Le Soir* poll's Catholic respondents.

In active contradistinction to the Catholic church's role in education and politics, Belgium has sheltered the movements of Freemasonry, Free Thought (Libre Pensée), and socialism. The heyday of the first two was the nineteenth century, although as recently as 1969 the Center for Secular Action and the Union for Secular Associations was founded to regulate and represent associated secular organizations. Conflict between these three movements and the Catholic church laid the basis for the religious cleavage apparent in Belgium from the nineteenth century through the 1950s.

Freemasonry dates to 1721 in Wallonia, but only in 1833 did most of the lodges unite in the Grand Orient of Belgium. Initially, the Freemasons were not anticlerical. In the 1830s, however, first the pope and then the Belgian Catholic church condemned them, refusing them sacraments and threatening excommunication. As a result, most Catholics left the Freemason organizations, and many anticlericals joined. Catholic beliefs gave way to deism, agnosticism, and atheism. The military lodges disappeared, and a

majority of the aristocratic members left as well. Thereafter, the Freemasons were involved in the founding of the VUB/ULB, the formation of the Liberal Party, and the popularization of various Liberal projects, such as obligatory education and secular education for girls. Many Freemasons, as propertied electors, had an influence on the vote until the turn of the century. Later members of the movement included anarchists, radicals, and Socialists. The two world wars had a divisive and debilitating effect on the worldwide Freemason movement. Because the Freemasons do not divulge membership statistics, it was unclear how many Belgians belonged to a lodge in 1984. It has been reported, however, that a majority of middle-class intellectuals participated in the movement and that its influence was considerable.

Intertwined with Freemasonry and the Liberal Party were the contemporaneous intellectual and political movements of socialism and Free Thought, which were tied to positivism, rationalism, and secularization. Membership often overlapped. In 1863 Free Thought, drawing on bourgeois and intellectual circles, was founded in Brussels with about 1,000 members. It quickly spread, encouraging the diffusion of new knowledge and the establishment of secular alternatives to Catholic rites of passage. Typical projects were conferences or adult education through the Extension of the University of Belgium. Free Thought followed in the footsteps of several small societies founded by rationalist artisans and tradesmen to guarantee one another secular funerals. Appealing to the working class in the late nineteenth century, Socialism also offered a nonconfessional alternative to the submission preached by the Catholic church.

The non-Catholic movements gradually built up organizational worlds similar to that of the church. In 1919 some 54 percent of all voters (males) were in the non-Catholic voting bloc. During the 1900-24 period, in some industrial areas of Wallonia, about 20 to 30 percent of children were not baptized, and 45 percent of marriage ceremonies were not religious. In 1912 there were 370 Free Thought groups having a total of 26,000 members; in 1914 there were 250 Socialist circles. The emphasis on structures to parallel or supplement those of the Catholic church continued in 1984. Some examples included organizations to promote philosophical and nonreligious programming on radio and television, a lay prisoner's welfare society, alternatives to judicial oaths based on the Bible, secular youth festivals to mark the transition from childhood to adolescence, and the substitution of moral for religious instruction in schools on an optional basis.

Social class, like the pillar, lends itself to a vertical examination of Belgians in the aggregate. Unfortunately, in 1984 data were sparse with which to view Belgians as members of smaller groups, for example, nuclear and extended families, clubs, social networks, or local-level communities and churches. A rare anthropological study was conducted as long ago as 1949–50.

A sociological division of Belgian society into classes is difficult because of a lack of data. It would seem that, to Belgians, class implies a contrast between either the middle class and the working class or the middle class and the aristocracy. Class in this sense might refer to the movement associated with the founding of the Socialist party in 1885 (as the Belgian Workers Party) or to negotiations between "social partners," i.e., the unions and employers who cooperate on wages and working conditions. There are a variety of bases for a division of Belgium into social classes—subjective versus objective categories, income and property, occupation, lifestyles and values, social networks, or education.

A 1968 electoral survey asked 4,542 respondents in Brussels, Flanders, Wallonia, and the arrondissement of Halle-Vilvoorde to identify the occupation of their head of household, which resulted in five categories: workers; white-collar employees and lower ranking bureaucrats; tradesmen and artisans; farmers; and upper level management and functionaries, professionals, and heads of enterprises. The survey then asked the respondents to assign themselves a social class (workers; middle classes; bourgeoisie; other). Not surprisingly, over three-quarters of the workers chose the category of working class, as did half the white-collar workers and lower ranking bureaucrats in Flanders and Halle-Vilvoorde. One-half of the white-collar workers in Wallonia and over one-half of the heads of enterprises and professionals in all areas but Brussels considered themselves middle class. Artisans and tradesmen also considered themselves middle class in the majority of cases, as did farmers in Flanders and Wallonia.

These data suggest that occupational and socioeconomic categories can by no means be equated with subjective class identification. Even within occupational categories of blue-collar workers, there was a significant number who did not accept the commonly preferred classification of working class. Also, "middle class" is used with caution in reference to Belgium. The government has assigned responsibility for the "middle classes" to a cabinet minister since 1932. According to a government publication, the term, in this context, refers to "the independent workers or self-employed, the heads of small or medium sized enterprises, members of the liberal professions, intellectuals, shopkeepers,

and craftsmen"; this group holds in common the values of "creativity, a determination to succeed, a readiness to take calculated risks, uncertainty about the future, direct contacts with their customers and work force, strong personal attachment to freedom and all its values, suspicion of the state, middle-of-the-road politics, a concern to save money and invest wisely, individuality, and a sense of professional solidarity."

Sociologist Fox noted in the 1960s that "Belgians are reluctant to speak about their social origins," and this seems reflected in the sociological sources available. Fox has suggested that Belgians fit "within an elaborate hierarchy of social classes that include peasants, factory and mine workers, white collar workers, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, professionals, members of the clergy, and members of the nobility."

This hierarchy, though probably still elaborate, has undoubtedly changed. The diversity of social differences within the agricultural sector found in Wallonia in 1950 (the gentry; independent small-, medium-, and large-scale farmers; and laborers), for example, has necessarily been reduced as the sector has declined. When the socioprofessional data as reported by the government are compared, several other changes can be found. First, the category of independent owners, directors of businesses, and professionals has diminished from 22 percent of all the work force in 1947 to 13 percent in 1977, probably because of the disappearance of many small firms. Second, upper management increased its share from 4 percent in 1961 to 8 percent in 1977. Third, the proportion of other white-collar, salaried employees increased from 23 percent in 1961 to 29 percent in 1977. Fourth, manual workers declined from 49 percent in 1947 to 39 percent in 1977, presumably because of unemployment, being upgraded to white-collar positions, or switching from manufacturing to the tertiary sector (see Employment and Income, ch. 3). In the mid-1960s qualifications for many manufacturing jobs changed from manual skill, muscular power, and dexterity to perceptual ability, imagination, and the coordination of information. This trend, in turn, was linked to a change in working-class consciousness and a shift from ideological to material concerns.

Belgian sociologists have pointed to education, occupation, and income as crucial determinants of class. An examination of educational levels among the population not pursuing studies in 1977 showed a minority (8.6 percent) had any tertiary education—4.2 percent in the age category of 19 to 64 had a university education, and 4.4 percent of the same had nonuniversity tertiary education. Figures also showed that secondary education was by

no means universal, especially among the over 65 group, of whom only 9.9 percent had any secondary education; among the 19- to 64-year-olds 13.6 percent had second-cycle secondary education and 20.5 percent first-cycle secondary education. Secondary and especially university education in this context have become channels for social mobility.

To determine tendencies of social mobility, the 1968 electoral survey looked at the occupational categories of both the respondents and their fathers. Internal recruitment was most important for workers (38 percent of 3,878 people); upper level, white-collar employees, heads of enterprises, and professionals (11 percent); agriculturists (8 percent); and tradespeople and artisans (16 percent). Lower level, white-collar employees (27 percent of the sample) were recruited more from the children of workers than from the children of employees. The category of agriculturists was most closed, despite the movement of farmers to other occupations. At least one-half of the children of upper level employees, workers, and lower level employees remained in the same category as their fathers; one-third of the children of farmers remained in the same category, and about one-third became workers. One-quarter of the children of workers became lower level employees.

The sociologist conducting the study, Nicole Delruelle, suggested that the upper level employees, professionals, and heads of enterprises formed the upper strata; tradespeople, artisans, and lower level employees, the middle strata; and workers and farmers (as manual laborers), the lower strata. Delruelle concluded that ambitious workers and agriculturists had taken advantage of increasing economic opportunities to become members of the middle strata. In Flanders tradespeople became part of the upper strata and in Wallonia, white-collar salaried employees did so. Social mobility seemed to be slower in Flanders than elsewhere, although mobility from the lowest to the highest rung was rare in all regions, especially in Brussels. The tradespeople and artisans formed a "hinge" group, leading to a variety of other occupations. To interpret the results of this study, it must be remembered that continuity of occupation does not imply unchanging values and standards of living.

Standards of living within Belgium can be compared by looking at relative earnings. In 1980 important differences existed between the salaries of men and women and between manual and white-collar workers. In the same sector there were differences ranging from 25 to 45 percent between the average salary paid in enterprises having fewer than 20 employees and those having

more than 200. On average, women were compensated at a rate 55 to 60 percent lower than men, and there was no sign of substantial improvement. Female employees were concentrated in low-paying industries, such as textiles and clothing, and were not proportionately represented in upper management. The larger the firm, the greater the differences in salary between managers and blue-collar workers appeared to be. Regionally, average manufacturing salaries still tended to be somewhat higher in Wallonia, although there were important exceptions in the steel, metal-processing, chemical, mechanical engineering, precision and optical instrument, food-processing, and woodworking industries.

Data on the distribution of household income, available only for the 1974–75 period, must be interpreted with caution because they were estimates; the data nonetheless show some inequalities, surprising because observers have considered Belgium to be marked by the "burgher spirit" and largely middle class. The poorest 20 percent of all households had 7.7 percent of the total income in that period; the next highest quintile, 12.4 percent; the next, 17 percent; the fourth, 23.1 percent; and the highest, 39.8 percent. The richest tenth of all households had 24.3 percent of the income. The figures suggested a pattern similar to that in Britain, where socioeconomic classes have been considered to be important.

A rough idea of the overall standard of living in Belgium can be gained by a comparison with other countries in the European Communities (EC) and the United States. For passenger cars per 100 inhabitants in 1980, Belgium was on a par with the EC average. In 1979 Belgians had 293 television receivers per 1,000 inhabitants and 369 telephones per 1,000 persons--in both cases lower than the EC average but higher than those of Italy and Greece. Belgians consumed 98 kilograms of meat per capita, 13 kilograms of eggs, 32 kilograms of refined sugar, and 79 liters of milk—slightly lower than the EC averages except for meat, which was consumed in greater quantity only in France and West Germany. They consumed over 7 kilograms of chocolate per capita in 1982. Belgium has one of the highest daily per capita caloric supplies in the world—in 1981 it was 3,916 calories (compared with 3,647 in the United States), providing 160 percent of basic requirements.

The strict division into Flemings, Walloons, and Bruxellois implies that there is little to hold Belgians together. The Belgian segment of the cross-European study of values, however, suggested that Belgians of different groups have more in common

than they like to admit. Belgians seem to share a pride in their country's accomplishments, natural beauty, and history of bravery and have been willing to make compromises to permit its survival. They also share values such as Christian solidarity and social concern. The stereotypes of Belgians as hardworking, thrifty, and prosperous suggest central values as well. Not being imbued with the Protestant work ethic, they may not place much emphasis on work per se—its interest, environment, its intrinsic capacity to create happiness and promote individual development—as opposed to work as a means to the ends of prosperity and well-being. They are, however, proud of their work and eager for the prestige it can provide. Part of work's meaning to Belgians comes from its order and extension of social life through new friendships. Belgians tend to feel less exploited and more at liberty during work than other Europeans.

The cross-European study of values conducted in 1981 found that Belgians believed in success through effort and merit and in liberty—in the sense of possession of sovereignty in private life, at home, and among friends and acquaintances. A house was more than a material object; it was also a symbol of a family's shared life and hopes for personal happiness. Individualism did not preclude compassion for others, as manifested by Belgian religious orders involved in social service work at home and abroad. Common sense and compromise were public as well as private family values. Despite their attachment to and division into emotionally laden, compartmentalized social networks and organizations, Belgians tended to avoid extremes and cherish frankness, rationalism, courage, understanding, and tolerance; they also tried to find ingenious ways around difficulties, avoiding rigid authoritarian stances and seeking solutions in the mastery of science. Such shared values were necessary for the inhabitants of such a small, densely populated nation, where the extended family was a focus all through life and where continuity of residence persisted for generations, sometimes for centuries. The only frontier Belgians had experienced was their former colony, the Belgian Congo. Such central values must not be confused with more transitory ones, associated with periods of social and cultural change, nor should it be assumed that all values can be held without being contradictory. During the postwar decades, for example, Belgians focused on security, progress, and consumption; in the 1975-80 period they concentrated on self-development, psychological equilibrium, and neo-individualism. Conflict might be expected between the demands of particularism and compromise, leisure and hard work, quality of life and progress,

and equality and social mobility.

For Belgians, the family remains a social focus all their lives, and happiness is often based on the family. The primary unit in both Flanders and Wallonia is the nuclear family, composed of a married couple and their unmarried children. According to the cross-European survey, the majority of Belgians seem satisfied with family life and use work as an end toward family concerns. If they had more time, 53 percent of Belgians said they would spend it with their families.

Belgian families show some of the pressures evident elsewhere in Western Europe and the United States. Even practicing Catholics are liberal on remarriage after divorce, birth control, and premarital sex (see Religion, this ch.). The number of children per family in 1984 was low. The ideal number of children per family was reported to be 2.2 in 1979, but the actual average had fallen to 1.7 in the late 1970s. The average number of persons per household in 1981 was 2.7 for Belgium as a whole, 2.9 for Flanders, and 2.7 for Wallonia.

Belgians remained, nonetheless, conservative on family values. They believed children needed two parents in the home. A woman was said to need children for her self-development, and children were considered a requisite for a successful marriage. After the biblical commandment against killing, Belgians believed that of honoring parents was most important. A majority of Walloons and Flemings believed that parents should be willing to make sacrifices for their children at the expense of their own well-being. Belgians did not appear to reject the nuclear family; rather, they preferred a home characterized by a happy marriage and fewer children living in a good environment to one having more children but less financial means and a less happy marriage.

Even with a rising divorce rate, marriage was not believed to be outmoded. Important for a successful marriage were fidelity, mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance. A crucial study conducted between 1964 and 1965 showed that marriage was viewed as enriching one's personality, and spouses were seemingly chosen freely on the basis of mutual affection. Homogamy—marrying someone of like occupational, religious, geographical, and social background—was more common, however, than chance would allow.

According to the study, the pattern was for future spouses to see one another daily or several times a week, and to move quickly to engagement, which was considered a more durable, sincere, and exclusive relationship in which to receive affection. (Nonetheless, it was not uncommon to break off an engagement

and begin with a new partner.) For over three-quarters of the respondents, the engagement lasted more than a year, the goal being to prepare for marriage by testing relations with each other and with future in-laws. Delays in marriage were usually related to military service, studies, procurement of a secure and well-paying job, attainment of a given age, or family reasons (aiding parents, mourning a parent, awaiting the marriage of an older sibling). Family considerations were important because the unmarried tended to live with their parents. The ideal length of engagement—from one to three years—was often not attained because of pregnancies in 15 percent of those surveyed. Almost two-thirds of the respondents assumed one-half of the couples had premarital sex, suggesting that although not condoned, it was considered an almost unavoidable result of the intimacy permitted engaged couples. Nearly three-quarters of the newlyweds said they lived with their parents for more than three months after they were married. A similar number continued to see their parents at least every two weeks after marriage. It was more likely for a couple to live with the wife's parents. The wife was also more likely to visit and seek help from her parents.

The data available on divorce did not suggest that marriage was being devalued, although the number of marriages was declining. The number of divorces doubled from 7,204 in 1971 to 15,323 in 1981, but the divorce rate—about 14.5 per 10,000 inhabitants in 1981—was low by European standards. Only 4 percent of the couples who were born in the 1888–92 period later divorced, compared with 15 percent of those couples born in the 1943–45 period. Despite an increasing tendency to divorce during the first five years of marriage, most divorces occurred some five to 15 years after marriage; about 10 percent took place after 25 years of marriage. Two-thirds of all divorces involved families having children. In 1981 the average age of divorced persons was in the early thirties. Lower level employees and administrators, transportation and communications workers, service and recreation employees, and blue-collar workers were disproportionately represented among divorced men.

Education

The importance of education to Belgians has been evident in the political conflicts that have accompanied development of the educational system. More than one government has been threatened by heated debate over educational policy; in 1968, for

example, the Paul Vanden Boeynants government was brought down because of the conflict over the linguistic separation of the Catholic University of Louvain (KUL/UCL)(see The Language Cleavage, 1917–80, ch. 1). As education expert Vernon Mallinson has noted, the Belgian system has been based on the notion of *suum cuique* (to each his own) rather than *idem cuique* (the same for everybody).

In order to accommodate these conflicting demands and interests, the system has evolved in a complex manner, especially since 1969, when a movement toward the democratization of the system began. There were separate or parallel school systems based upon linguistic and religious differences that nonetheless received state support. There were no bilingual schools in the strict sense, but there was a change in the system from one of assimilation to the French language to one of encouragement of separate monolingual communities. Boys' and girls' schools for each sex, however, were being replaced by coeducational facilities, and although special schools existed for the handicapped, there were none for gifted students.

There were 2,273,616 students in the system in the 1980–81 school year—some 16.9 percent in preschool, 37.7 percent in primary school, 37.3 percent in secondary school, and the rest in institutions of higher education. Some 16 percent of the 1984 budget for Belgium was allotted to education. Schools were operated by public and private authorities and by state, municipal, and provincial government. Schools operated by the national or local governments were considered "official"; those run by other sponsors were "free." A "neutral" school (in effect, an official school) was one that respected parental philosophy or religion and where a minimum of three-quarters of the teachers held certificates from another "neutral" school. Similarly, a "religious" school was one where three-quarters of the staff held certificates from church-sponsored schools.

In 1984 legislative and policymaking powers were shared by the two community councils and the national parliament (see The Communities, Regions, Provinces, and Communes, ch. 4). The national-level powers are split according to language. Special advisory bodies existed for parents; different types of higher education; reformation of structure, orientation, and duration of education; and the stimulation or renovation of secondary education. Provision for educational spending was made by the two ministries of national education (current expenses), the Ministry of Public Works and Middle Classes (budget capital), and other assorted ministries (child welfare schools, military academies, navi-

gation, apprenticeships, teachers' retirement pension fund). A corps of inspectors for primary and secondary education monitored curricula and the quality and methods of teaching. The ministries of education assigned government commissioners or representatives and an inspector of finance to each university to oversee administration. In 1971 all universities, according to level and branch of study, were placed on an equal financial footing for receipt of government funds for teaching, administration, maintenance, and research. The government paid over 95 percent of university expenses.

Historical Background

The Catholic church held almost exclusive control over Belgian education prior to 1794, but state control and a secular system under the French and Dutch followed; as a result, the Constitution provides freedom for both public and private authorities to establish schools. The split between ardent Catholics and secular Liberals on the issue of state control and the role of the Catholic church made educational policy a political focus during the nineteenth century. Typically, when the centuries-old KUL/UCL reopened in 1834, the Liberals countered by opening the VUB/ULB.

The school conflicts concerned the government organization and subsidization of public and private schools and the teaching of religion in official schools. Liberals and Socialists championed the neutral public schools—accused by the Catholics of being anticlerical—while the Catholic party supported "free" Catholic schools (see The First School Conflict, 1879–84; The Second School Conflict, 1950–58, ch. 1).

Attention was first directed toward primary education. In 1842 a law required each commune to have a primary school, which could be provided through government adoption of a "free" establishment. Sparking the First School Conflict, an 1879 law permitted sponsorship only of state schools, removing jurisdiction and policymaking from the communes except for building maintenance and the cost of educating the poor. The church answered by forbidding Catholic participation in the new public schools. Then in 1884 a Catholic government rescinded the 1879 law, and the laws of 1884 and 1895 set the basic framework for future primary education administered by the communes: communal determination of the number of schools, responsibility for the budget, appointment of teachers having either state or Catholic training, obligation to provide a school of complementary persuasion if requested by 20 families, and adoption of any

schools fitting general standards. In 1895 religious instruction was made obligatory for Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, although moral instruction could be substituted upon parental petition. Under the Loi Poullet, education became compulsory in 1914, eventually implemented for ages six to 14, and parental choice of secular or religious schools was to be respected.

The Second School Conflict (1950–58) began over subsidies for education beyond the compulsory age. Secondary education had virtually been in the hands of the Catholics until 1850, when a precedent was set by the state takeover or creation of 60 secondary schools. At this time, the government passed a law legalizing the school-leaving examination and formed a committee on texts, curricula, and inspection for middle education. A second law in 1881 integrated the curricula of the various secondary schools and challenged the primacy of Catholic girls' schools.

In 1952 the Social Christians passed a law to support Catholic secondary schools (see Political Parties, ch. 4). After a Socialist government came to power in 1954, threatening to cut aid to the private schools, the Social Christians mobilized pro-Catholic school supporters in two national demonstrations. As a result of this mobilization and their success in the next election, a truce was established, known as the School Pact of 1958, which affirmed freedom of choice between religious and moral instruction and between private Catholic schools and secular state-sponsored ones. For both kinds of schools it also abolished school fees and allowed for subsidies for salary, equipment, facilities, and per capita enrollment; the pact thus increased subsidies to Catholic schools and permitted expansion of the state system (continued in the future as long as both obeyed regulations in regard to organization of studies and linguistic separation). Despite discussion in the 1970s of new schools to be characterized by diversity of views, meaning competition on a purely local level within a new unitary system, the School Pact of 1973 continued this equilibrium.

These pacts neutralized but did not depoliticize the issue of the church's role in education. A majority of children have attended Catholic schools (although perceived quality was as much a factor as religious conviction). The number of secondary students at Catholic schools increased 236 percent between 1957 and 1976. To exemplify the role of religious conviction, in 1967 almost two-thirds of Liberal and Socialist families sent children to public schools, in contrast to over three-quarters of Catholic families sending children to Catholic schools. A regional breakdown for 1977–78 shows that most Flemings sent their children to Catholic schools, and most French speakers sent their children to public

schools. Some 62 percent of Dutch-speaking children in primary school went to "free" schools, and 72 percent of Dutch-speaking children in secondary school went to "free" schools; 60 percent of French-speaking children at the primary level were in public schools, and 53 percent of them at the secondary level were in public schools.

In addition to parallel state and Catholic educational systems, there were Dutch and French school systems. The right to choose between Catholic and secular schools, however, has not been extended to the right to choose between the two linguistic systems. The schools became a linguistic battleground in the 1960s and the 1970s, although linguistic provisions predated eventual linguistic segregation.

After the independence of Belgium, French, as the language of the ruling elite, took precedence over the language spoken by Flemings, considered to be Flemish until standardized as Dutch in 1864. As the Flemings realized the power of numbers given by universal male suffrage in 1893, they demanded equality of Dutch as a national language, and one obvious area of redress was the educational system. Illiteracy rates tended to be higher in Flanders than in other areas of Belgium. King William I of the Netherlands had unsuccessfully attempted to build secular Dutch-language schools before independence, and the right to speak Dutch in primary schools was regained only in 1842. An 1856 report found that, in fact, Dutch was not used in primary schools. In 1850 Dutch was to be the required second language in Flemish secondary schools. French remained the language of instruction until 1926 for lower secondary schools, until 1932 for upper secondary (some sources suggest 1883 for all secondary schools), and until 1930 for the University of Ghent. The Catholic church resisted the change to Dutch for its schools. The impetus toward change increased after obligatory education was mandated, and when, in the 1870s, there were sufficient Dutch-speaking graduates of the universities and teacher training colleges.

Curiously, insistence on Dutch did not lead to bilingual education in French and Dutch. Brussels after 1910 was officially declared a bilingual educational zone, and a 1928 conference report listed unilingual schools for Flemings, dual-language elementary schools, schools where two languages were used successively, and secondary schools where one language was used for some subjects and the other for the rest. Bilingual education, however, had virtually disappeared in the 1980s. Learning was no longer associated with a status language (Latin, French), assimilation to a language used by the elite, or dual languages for public life. At

any rate, in the former bilingual school instruction, Dutch had merely been considered a tool to help ambitious Flemings make the successful transition to French. In the 1920s bilingual education was seen as a pernicious influence on intellectual development and hence a threat to the individual and the community. The Flemings became alarmed, and a 1932 law in effect gave Wallonia and Flanders each an exclusive language of instruction (except for areas with protected minorities). Only in Brussels was there a possibility for linguistic coexistence; then, a law passed in 1963 eliminated classes of transition for minority speakers in Brussels altogether.

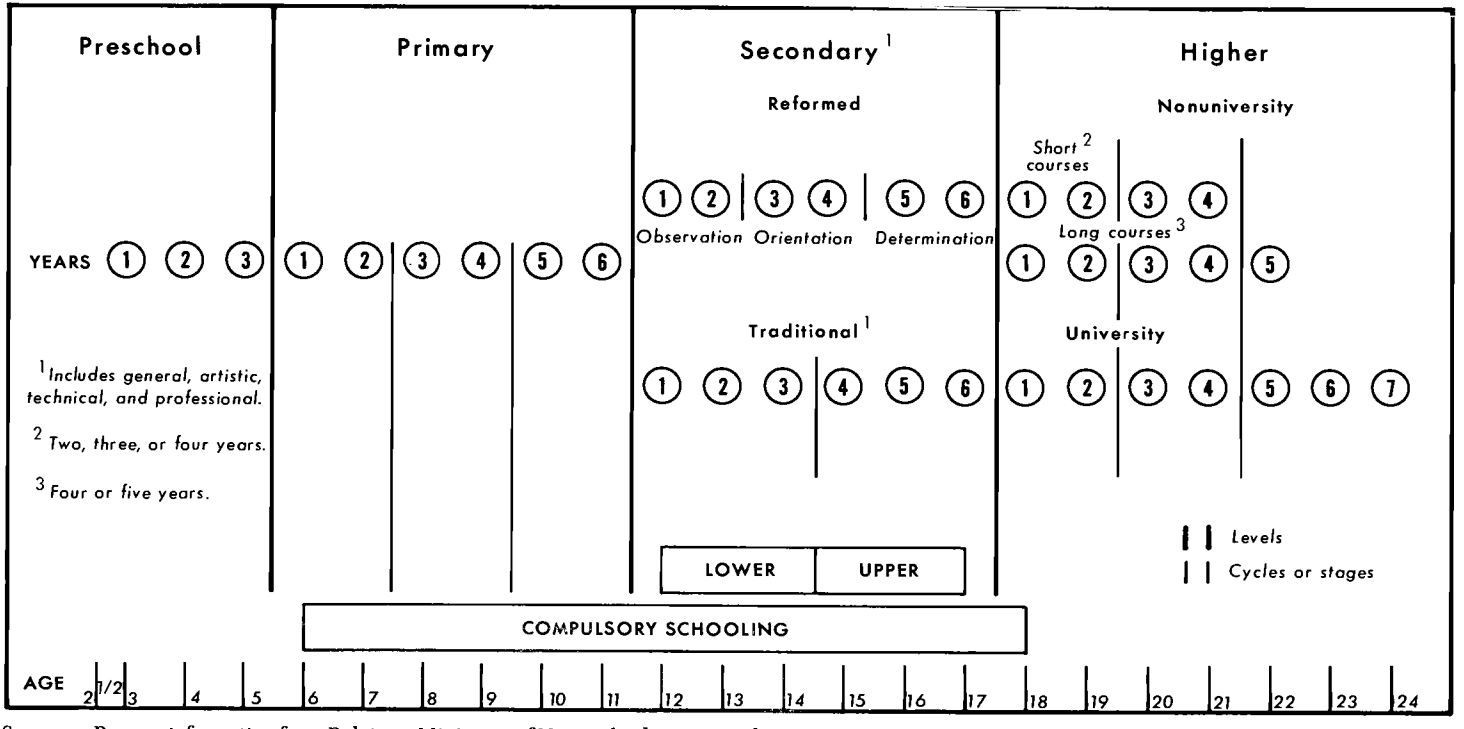
Contemporary Education

In the 1980s the Belgian educational system reflected "linguistic apartheid"—it had two separate ministers of education and two community councils. In the 1980–81 school year two-thirds of the students in state-supported "free" schools were Dutch-speaking and 56 percent of the students at public schools were French-speaking. In the special case of Brussels, except during the 1966–71 period, the law specified that fathers could choose which monolingual system to have their children attend. According to the laws passed in 1962 and 1963, however, the frequency and quality of teaching the second official language were to improve in all regions.

Preschool

Belgium has been known for its progressive approaches to preschool education since the 1860s and 1870s. Schooling in 1984 was not compulsory until age six, but according to data from 1976, more than 90 percent of children from two and one-half years to five years old were in kindergarten. There were also day-care centers for babies as young as two to 18 months and nursery schools for those aged 18 months to two and one-half years. Until kindergarten, however, the services were not free.

Preschool classes permitted no formal instruction but were attached to primary schools and supervised by the head teachers and inspectors from the primary schools. Decroly, Froebel, and Montessori principles guided preschool teaching; those of Decroly were continued in primary-school classes. Teaching was based on the child's own activities and interests in order to devel-



Source: Base on information from Belgium, Ministries of National Education, *Education in Belgium, 1978–80*, Brussels, 1981, 23; and "Enseigement supplement à nos éditions datées du mercredi 6 juin 1984," *Le Soir*, Brussels, June 6, 1984.

Figure 8. Levels and Kinds of Belgian Education, 1984

Preschool classroom in Hainaut Province
Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

of a sense of self-discipline and taste along with powers of observation and manual dexterity.

Primary

Primary school was composed of three cycles each of two years for six- to 12-year-olds (see fig. 8). The children had one teacher for each cycle. A fourth cycle has existed for those not continuing on to secondary school (past age 14). Goals were to teach self-expression in the mother language, reading, writing, and arithmetic and to emphasize practice in spelling and multiplication. The curriculum included moral or religious instruction, a second language, natural sciences, geography, music and art, physical education, and hygiene. Following the Decroly method, some subjects were incorporated into a single activity. An experiment was begun in 1971 to make education more child-centered rather than fact-centered, and afternoons were devoted to informal activities, such as games or teamwork. The final goal was to lessen the gap between play and intellectually oriented activities, for example, through vertical groups of children aged two or three years apart.

Secondary

To deal with youth unemployment, compulsory education was extended to age 18 in 1983, although full-time education was only required until age 15 and the first two years of secondary school. In 1981 some 90 percent of those aged 12 to 17 were in school as opposed to only 69 percent in 1960. There were various options for secondary education: lower level technical, vocational, and artistic school; general middle school; and six-year academic high school (in the state system, *atheneum/athenée* for boys and *lyceum/lycée* for girls; in the Catholic system, *college/collège* for boys and *instituut/institut* for girls). The general middle schools paralleled the first cycle of the academic high schools by offering a general section of Greek and Latin studies and a preprofessional section having secretarial, commercial, and handicraft courses. In the 1980s all the schools were in the process of reform, although the public schools began the change sooner than the others. Choices about which program to enter were aided by a unique system of testing and counseling at 13 psychomedical centers around the country.

The traditional secondary system consisted of two cycles of three years each. If students did not go directly to a six-year academic high school, they could transfer to one of them after the first cycle at middle school. The academic high schools having the highest standards offered a special core of Greek and Latin studies but otherwise paralleled the middle and technical schools during the first cycle. Other sections included a core of classical or modern humanities, economics, science, and modern languages. The second cycle at the academic schools presented specialized fields of study; the choice would depend upon the student's anticipated university discipline. These specialized fields included a Greek and Latin preuniversity course; economics (for girls this often meant secretarial and foreign-language courses); and various combinations of Latin, mathematics, and the sciences.

In 1969 the government inaugurated the program for reformed secondary education (*vernieuwd secundair onderwijs*; *enseignement sécondaire renové*). The first schools to change, on a voluntary basis, were from the state system. The new program established three cycles of two years: observation (of an individual's capabilities), orientation (toward a specialization), and determination (of a specialty). There were four areas of secondary education—general, technical, artistic, and vocational. The new system postponed career decisions and made it easier to switch from one area to another until the third cycle, especially with tutoring. Under the new system, technical and artistic programs

could prepare students for both university study and employment. Assignment to the secondary programs was on the basis of aptitude as well as grades.

To foster a commitment to study, group as well as individual tasks were to be assigned under the new system, and evaluation was to be based on effort and determination as well as scholastic ability. Promotion was to be emphasized and diagnostic tests rather than final exams used. The "discovery method" was to be followed in order to encourage independence and responsibility and prepare students to develop the values, techniques, and knowledge to deal with future problems. One study of schools in Flanders using this innovative program found students more evenly distributed among socioeconomic categories than those in conventional schools. The students in the new program, especially the girls, also showed a greater commitment to study.

Technical education in Belgium may be undergoing a transition because of the 1983 law extending the age and level of obligatory education. New part-time options to combine with part-time education or "social promotion" included apprenticeships in "middle class" occupations and industrial apprenticeships. Under the previous system, technical programs that substituted for apprenticeships in most fields could be entered by children aged 12 or 13. The secondary schools were encouraged to direct the more motivated and abler students away from technical training during the first cycle, after which they could receive three years of such training and qualify as full technicians. Other, less able students might qualify as semiskilled vocational workers at about age 16. Depending on their capabilities, students could study for three or four additional years after they reached 18 in nonuniversity programs (becoming "nongraduate technologists"). Vocational education was distinguished from technical education in that it offered fewer options.

It was possible to earn one of four diplomas during secondary school: a lower secondary-school certificate, attainable after three years of general, artistic, or technical studies; a higher secondary-school certificate, attainable after six years of general, artistic, or technical studies (which was ratified by a standards commission); a diploma of aptitude for higher education as proven by a "maturity" exam; and a certificate of qualification as proven by an examination at the end of the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh year of technical or professional studies. Previously at the end of six years of study, a student took an oral examination covering the entire course of study in order to receive a humanities diploma. It has been replaced by the set of examinations required to be elig-

ible for university study. Candidates had to pass written and oral "maturity" examinations in the three fields they planned to pursue. These were usually pro forma.

Higher Education

At the tertiary level students could opt for a "long" course, consisting of two cycles of two or three years, or a "short" course, consisting of one cycle of two to four years. Certain courses could be pursued full time or part time (at night) or on weekends. Adult education overlapped to include "social promotion" studies, leading to the completion of secondary, professional, or work-related studies.

Nonuniversity education included long and short programs, practically and professionally oriented, at colleges of technology, economics, art, teaching, social work, agriculture, and paramedical professions. Long programs included industrial engineering, commerce, architecture, and interpreting. There were short, specialized two- or three-year courses in subjects such as hotel management and tourism, landscape gardening, industrial agriculture, midwifery, secretarial studies, nursing, marketing, and social work. Art and music were offered at municipal academies, music schools, and royal conservatories or at schools like the colleges of decorative arts and the royal academies of fine arts.

Prospective nursery-school teachers, primary-school teachers, and lower secondary-school teachers attended separate normal schools geared to each of the three levels; nursery-school teachers were all women, primary-school teachers attended normal schools separated by sex, and middle-school teachers attended a mixed school. Normal schools required the certificate of higher secondary education (based on six years of secondary school) and offered two-year programs. To be a teacher in an upper secondary school, hopefuls had to have a university degree in their specialty subjects as well as a teaching certificate that was usually earned in course work and training during the last year of university study. Technical and commercial teachers followed the same course of study or could be recruited directly from industry. Teachers were appointed to a particular school by the state, church, provinces, or communes. Supplementary training was provided by study-circles fostered by the director general of teacher training under the direction of the inspectorate and training college, teacher organizations, and special mathematics and audiovisual training groups.

Belgium has six complete universities, each including at least the five traditional faculties of philosophy, law, medicine,

science, and applied science (engineering). The oldest, which many Catholics consider to be the foremost Catholic university in the world, is the Catholic University of Louvain (KUL/UCL), founded in 1425. The Free University of Brussels (VUB/ULB) was founded by the Freemasons and Liberals in 1834, and the state universities at Ghent and Liège were established in 1835. Reflecting linguistic competition, some 11 additional university-level facilities—including university centers—have been added. Of these, the facility at Antwerp for Dutch-speaking students and the facility at Mons for French-speaking students deserve mention.

Although each university received the same government funds per capita as of 1971, the state controlled only admission and syllabi at state schools. For those who held required credentials, there was no restriction on university admissions, except in the applied sciences. This resulted in a costly 50-percent drop-out rate, which has been stable for decades. Its effect was to make the university even more restricted; according to a 1980 source, only 11 percent of the age-appropriate cohort entered, and 6 to 7 percent finished.

Unlike primary and secondary school, tuition was not free, although one-third of the students received grants and loans in 1980, and tuition was only a few hundred dollars per year. The individual university division (*faculteit; faculté*) was the focus for student life as shown by the distinctive headgear worn by students. Admission to a university division depended on the subjects studied in secondary school. Alumni associations collaborated in continuing traditions, guarding professional interests and the well-being of students. Student organizations represented students before the administration and university bodies and ran restaurants and social clubs.

Higher education (especially nonuniversity) enrollment has broadened, totaling 273,616 students in the 1980-81 school year, although in 1980 the universities were characterized by different observers as "being geared to fit in with the bourgeois aspirations of the Belgians as a whole" and as "elite." Vernon Mallinson, an expert on Belgium, stated in 1980 that 11 percent of working-class students attended the university as opposed to 23 percent in all kinds of higher education. Nevertheless, after serving as the preserve of the elite, universities have become somewhat more reflective of the broader society and a channel for social mobility. They have changed as a result of democratization, smaller families, and government stipends. Student attitudes have also changed, becoming more oriented to their future professions and

roles in society.

Universities enrolled 10,000 people in 1939, some 30,000 in 1960, and 96,795 in the 1982–83 school year. Some 9 percent of the 20 to 24 age-group was in higher education in 1960, but 26 percent was in higher education in 1981. Some 12 percent of those engaged in university study in 1982–83 were foreign (mostly in French facilities); about 39 percent were women. Some 52 percent were Dutch speaking, and over 40 percent of all students were at the French and Dutch sections of the KUL/UCL. The choice of university depended partly on the relative religious and political appeal of the KUL/UCL versus the humanism of the VUB/ULB; the worldwide reputation of the former attracted students especially from Africa and Latin America. Other considerations were location, family tradition, and particularistic loyalties.

All majors required four or five years of study, except dentistry, veterinary medicine, and medicine (five, six, and seven years, respectively). The university career consisted of two to three years of general study, at which time the student became a candidate (*kandidaat; candidat*). The remaining years were spent specializing and being initiated into research methods and specific fields of knowledge, leading to professional qualifications and a degree (*licentiaat; licencié*) that requires a thesis (*verhandeling; mémoire*). A doctorate (except in medicine) requires independent research, a dissertation, and another thesis. In order to teach at the university level, one must hold two titles: *doctor; docteur* and *geaggregeerde voor het hoger onderwijs; agrégé de l énseignement supérieur*. The latter requires a dissertation, three theses, and a special oral presentation to an examining board.

Degrees were either scientific, legal, or complementary. Legal referred to degrees for which the duration and curricula were set by law for certain public service professions such as magistrate, teacher in an academic high school in the state system, dentist, physician, and engineer. Scientific referred to fields outside the traditional faculties for which the university alone set standards or to legal degree students graduating without the legal requirements and so not permitted to exercise their professions. Complementary referred to scientific degrees, usually in the third cycle, in specialized courses.

Health and Social Security

Rates of mortality and morbidity decreased in the 1970s. The 1982 provisional infant mortality rate for the first year of life was

11.7 per 1,000 compared with 21.1 in 1970. The overall provisional mortality rate was 11.4 per 1,000 in 1982, and the major causes of death in 1978, in descending order of frequency, were circulatory diseases; cancer; vascular lesions affecting the central nervous system; ill-defined and unknown causes; respiratory diseases; and accidents, suicides, and homicides. In 1981 the most frequent communicable diseases, which were obligatorily reported, included salmonellosis, gonorrhea, infectious hepatitis, scarlet fever, syphilis, meningitis, and tuberculosis. The 1970s showed the disappearance of poliomyelitis after the 1966 compulsory vaccination; effective measures at borders, seaports, and airports; the prevention of the spreading of quarantinable diseases as a result of the development of preventive medical services; and new drug monitoring and narcotics control mechanisms.

There were 25,629 doctors of medicine in 1982, of whom 23,932 were practicing physicians. Of this group, 3,716 were women and 10,059 were specialists. The increase in numbers of doctors meant that more would be expected to work in prevention, research, medical data processing, or on projects in the Third World. There were 4,690 dentists, 9,942 pharmacists, and 2,531 veterinarians. Such professionals practiced freely, and insured persons freely chose their physicians or dentists if they were qualified to practice and approved by the Medical Council. The number of physicians per 1,000 inhabitants at the national level was 2.6 in 1982 compared with only 1.6 in 1970. In 1982 the ratio varied from 3.9 in Brabant to 1.6 in Limburg. There were 28,250 professional nurses, 1,178 midwives, 23,060 children's nurses, 25,154 assistant nurses, and 10,267 physicaltherapists. In 1980 there were 120 inhabitants per nursing person. In 1979 the number of pharmacists per 100,000 inhabitants was by far the highest in the EC and higher than in Japan, Canada, or the United States. In 1979 there were 9.1 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants. Four Belgians have won the Nobel Prize for Medicine, including Albert Claude and Christien de Duve for work on the cell in 1974.

Virtually all Belgians are covered by national health insurance. Made compulsory as part of the social legislation passed in 1945, health insurance was administered by about 1,745 mutual aid societies, allied to trade unions and grouped as either Catholic (45 percent of the insured population), Socialist (29 percent), Liberal (5 percent), professional (10 percent), or neutral (10 percent) (see Religion, this ch.). Divided into separate programs for the general populace and for the self-employed, health insurance covers care by medical and dental practitioners; hospital stays;

part of the costs for drugs and prostheses; and treatment of mental illness, tuberculosis, cancer, and congenital problems. To discourage overuse, the beneficiary—with few exceptions—pays 25 percent of general care and 25 percent of paramedical care at home or in a clinic and is reimbursed by the mutual aid society. The general scheme is underwritten by payroll contributions by the employer and the employee. By contrast, benefits for the self-employed cover only catastrophic illness and specified diseases and are paid for out of income. There are state subsidies to pay the contributions of the unemployed and also the costs of cancer treatment, tuberculosis, mental illness, congenital diseases, and other medical care.

According to a 1976 survey, 15.6 percent of the gross national product (GNP—see Glossary) was spent on various kinds of medical care, and 10 percent of the work force participated directly or indirectly in the health sector. Because health insurance costs rose more than one and one-half times as quickly as the economy in the 1970–82 period, there was cause for alarm. Medical technology, surplus staff, and hospital capacity, as well as the aging of the population, may have been responsible, but the demographic picture suggested that aging would grow to be an even greater problem because of its association with prolonged incapacity. A common misconception focused on the alleged overreliance of foreign migrant workers on social security benefits. A study in 1980, however, suggested that, taking into consideration their higher risks of unemployment, working-class status, and poor lodging and hygiene, this was not true. The study cited a 1978 health care survey looking at four Catholic mutual aid societies, which showed that the treatment of adult migrants on the average cost less and migrants spent fewer days hospitalized than Belgian employees and workers, although the treatment of migrants' children tended to cost more.

Health benefits are just one aspect of the Belgian social security system. A royal decree in 1944 established the National Office of Social Security to cover disability and retirement pensions, survivors' benefits, unemployment, and family allowances. A major addition was the gradual provision for the self-employed since the early 1960s. The retirement pension is based upon 60 percent of average annual earnings, adjusted to the consumer price index and to the marital status of the pensioners. With certain stipulations, survivors' benefits refer to pensions for widows and widowers, as children (under 14 unless students) are helped by family allowances, which vary according to the number of children, their age, and whether they are handicapped or orphaned. Unemploy-

Advanced scientific research at Janssen Pharmaceutica in Antwerpen Province. The strong tradition of education has given rise to several Belgian Nobel laureates in medicine and an excellent health system.
Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

ment pays a worker with dependents 60 percent of earnings indefinitely, but disability payments continue at 60 percent for only one year. In addition to health insurance, employees also receive part of their regular salary if sick, according to the number of days lost and the permanence of the disability. Workman's compensation is provided by public and private insurance, which the employer is required to provide, and above salary ceilings, employers may offer additional kinds of coverage.

Like health insurance, social security benefits are financed on a pay-as-you-go basis from government subsidies and payroll deductions from employers and employees, having ceilings and floors setting the range of earnings taxed. In April 1984 workers contributed 12.2 percent on full wages and salaries, and employers contributed 37.7 percent (except for 43.7 percent for manual

laborers, to include vacation pay). There is a guaranteed means-tested minimum income for those defined as needy. In 1982 there were 1,354,262 persons receiving retirement and survivors' pensions and 423,847 unemployed job-seekers.

Control of social security costs has been a ticklish issue. Private employers paid out 19.2 percent of GNP in 1980 as opposed to 9.6 percent of GNP in 1962 to pay for the program. Planning policy in the 1950s was concerned with the improvement of coverage and benefits, calculated on expected population trends as well as continued high economic growth. Belgian social security grew by 437 percent during the 1970–82 period–the most rapid in the EC. Thus, government transfers to social security grew much more rapidly than GNP (see Fiscal Policy, ch. 3). An aging population has meant more dependence on fewer contributors, especially with fewer younger workers and more unemployed; the ratio of contributors to pensioners fell from four to one in 1954 to 1.8 to one in 1979. The government was left in the untenable situation of spending more than was collected in 1979 and 1980 and having more recipients of social security grants than private, active workers. Social security expenditures represented 30 percent of the 1984 budget, although almost 80 percent of expenditures came from payroll taxes. The causes behind the problem have been the government's attempt to compensate for inflation and the lost contributions of unemployed workers. As unemployment cut the number of contributors and the population grew older, employer and employee contributions fell from 78 percent of social security expenditures in 1974 to only 59 percent in 1980—a gap government subsidies could not make up, even after increasing from 24 to 35 percent of the total costs.

Politically, attempts to deal with social security were limited through the 1970s. Important reforms began only in December 1980; they reduced benefits, established cost containment in health, drew on funds having surpluses to support those having deficits, increased contributions from more highly paid employees, and tightened up qualifications. In January 1983, one change as part of the austerity program reduced employer contributions for manual workers and firms having fewer than 50 workers partly to increase employment (see Unemployment, ch. 3). One tack introduced in the 1975–76 period was to offer a "prepension" to get older persons to retire early. Another change introduced in 1984 coordinating public and private sector programs addressed the relation of equality between the sexes in regard to retirement pensions and proportionality between what was paid the worker during years of activity and after retirement.

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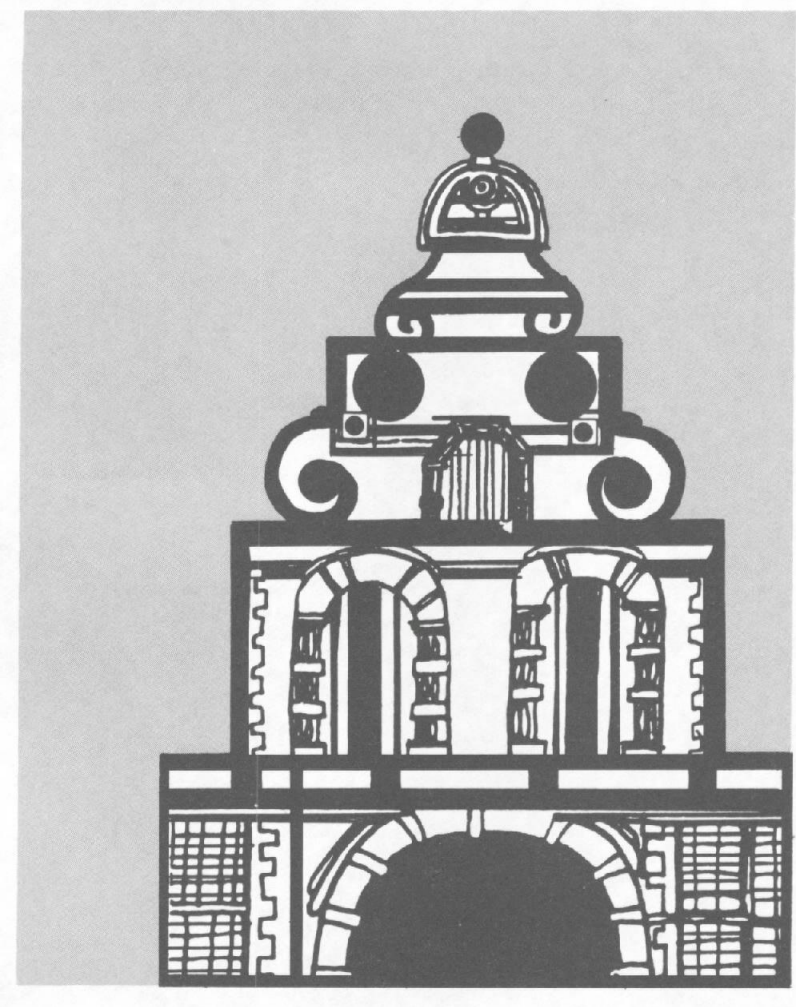
A brief but valuable overview of Belgian geography is provided by Aubrey Diem's *Western Europe*. A fairly complete picture of demography is given in *The Decline of Belgian Fertility, 1800–1970* by Ron J. Lesthaeghe and in Paul Deprez' demographic comparison in "The Low Countries." For political and historical background on the language conflict, Val Lorwin's "Linguistic Pluralism and Political Tension in Modern Belgium" is useful, as are R. E. M. Irving's *The Flemings and Walloons of Belgium* and Aristide Zolberg's "The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium, 1830–1914." To gain an understanding of the interplay of Dutch and French, it is worthwhile consulting Hugo Bustamante, Maurits Van Overbeke, and Albert Verdoodt's, "Bilingual Education in Belgium" and Kas Deprez' "Belgian Netherlandic and Canadian French: A Sociolinguistic Comparison." A good analysis of the problems of the Belgian social security system is offered by William J. Lessard's article, "Social Security and Economic Reforms in Belgium." The Belgian educational system is complicated, but two authors supplying insights are Elizabeth Sherman Swing in *Bilingualism and Linguistic Segregation in the Schools of Brussels* and Ann Fletcher in a forthcoming volume called *Education in Belgium* in the World Education Series (published by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers). Vernon Mallinson's two volumes, *Power and Politics in Belgian Education* and *The Western European Idea in Education*, are detailed but dated. A recent overview of the situation of the foreign workers is "The Multicultural Nature of Contemporary Belgian Society: The Immigrant Community" by Eugeen Roosens.

Unfortunately, there are few English sources readily available on Belgian society in general or class and family in particular. A knowledge of French or Dutch and contacts with Belgian social scientists would be helpful to compensate for this gap. For a cultural perspective, Renée Fox's two articles, "Is Religion Important in Belgium?" and "Why Belgium?" are essential. The two articles by Karel Dobbelaere and Pierre Delooz in *L'univers des belges*, on religion and family, contain up-to-date data. A basic source on marriage is *Le mariage en Belgique* by Claude Henryon and E. Lambrechts. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

Chapter 3. The Economy



Baroque architecture, Leuven (1688)

ALTHOUGH BELGIUM HAD been a very prosperous country from an early date, it entered the 1980s facing a difficult period of structural adjustment complicated by regional conflicts. The country's advanced industrial economy is based essentially on the manufacture of semifinished and finished goods from imported materials and the provision of financial, transport, and other services associated with trade and public administration. Intensive agriculture accounts for a very limited share of employment but is highly efficient and provides about 80 percent of domestic needs. Given its small domestic market and lack of significant natural resources, the country is extremely dependent on foreign trade and highly sensitive to developments in international markets, which accounts for its ardent support of free trade and European integration. Although growth-oriented manufacturing sectors, such as the chemical and metalworking industries, have accounted for an ever larger share of production and exports, traditional sectors, including steel and textiles, are still significant in the industrial structure and have been hard hit by changes in demand and international competition. To compound problems, since the 1970s high labor costs have undermined the competitiveness of Belgian industry, discouraged investment, and led to serious unemployment. The public sector deficit has also grown as the government has attempted to support an extensive social welfare system and finance the restructuring of declining industries; the government had to resort to excessive foreign borrowing after 1977.

The oil crisis of 1979 and resultant global recession shook the economy to the core. The balance of payments showed a record deficit in 1981, and economic growth was stagnant. Regional linguistic rivalries and a lack of continuity in political leadership impeded the formulation of a coherent recovery program until early 1982, when parliament granted the government emergency powers to enact measures to restore corporate competitiveness, control public expenditure, and boost employment. As part of its program, the government suspended wage indexation and devalued the Belgian franc, actions that until then had been considered politically risky. By 1983 corporate competitiveness had been largely restored, and the balance of payments situation was improving. The only hope for recovery in the mid-1980s seemed to depend on export demand; budgetary constraints and wage restraint would continue to inhibit public sector investment and domestic consumption through at least 1986. Belgium was there-

fore seeking to diversify its export products and trading partners and to reattract the foreign investment that had flowed into the country in the 1960s.

Although there appeared to be a consensus that the economic situation called for drastic austerity measures, there were two unresolved policy issues in 1984. One concerned the problem of unemployment and the perceived absence of burden sharing in the recovery program, particularly on the part of the Socialist trade unions in Wallonia. Despite concessions on wages, employment prospects did not significantly improve by 1984, contributing to increasing discontent among the working class. The inability to reach a top level labor-management agreement since 1975 and the outbreak of several spontaneous strikes during 1983–84 without union leader's foreknowledge portended strains in the formerly conciliatory labor relations system.

The second issue involved the regionalization of economic and industrial policy. Despite the process of regional decentralization embodied by the 1980 constitutional reforms, the central government still controlled the purse strings of the regional authorities and the policymaking framework. However, different patterns of industrial development between Flanders and Wallonia and a decreasing sense of solidarity between the regions as economic difficulties mounted continued to generate pressures for further devolution of economic powers. Although there was scope for greater regional responsibility to be assumed in areas such as research policy and technical education, the central government was likely to retain firm control of fiscal and monetary policy.

Patterns of Development

The industrialization process has played a major role in the shaping of the economy, greatly influencing the location and nature of industry in the 1980s. Belgium's modern industrial era began with the rise of coal mining and heavy industry along the Sambre-Meuse axis in Wallonia. The areas of Liège and Charleroi-Mons in particular experienced considerable development between 1830 and 1850. By the end of the nineteenth century, Wallonia was one of the most prosperous industrial regions on the continent, while Flanders remained largely an agricultural region. What industry Flanders did possess was based almost entirely on the spread of the textile industry from Ghent or associated with the port of Antwerp.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, entrepreneurs developed an export trade that became the country's key to prosperity in the next century. Belgian workers and technicians were sent abroad to take charge of vast railroad and industrial plant projects in parts of the world just starting to industrialize, such as Russia, China, Egypt, and Argentina. Along with the increase in trade, there were important modifications in the locational pattern of industry in the early twentieth century. Substantial wage differentials, the opening of mining concessions in the Kempenland and Limburg, and the development of industry along navigable waterways in the north contributed to the advance of Flemish industry over a broad front. Industrial growth continued apace until 1914, when World War I caused significant economic losses: 16 to 20 percent of national assets were destroyed. Recovery was remarkably rapid, however, owing to the availability of raw materials from the Belgian Congo (present-day Zaïre) and a well-organized national effort.

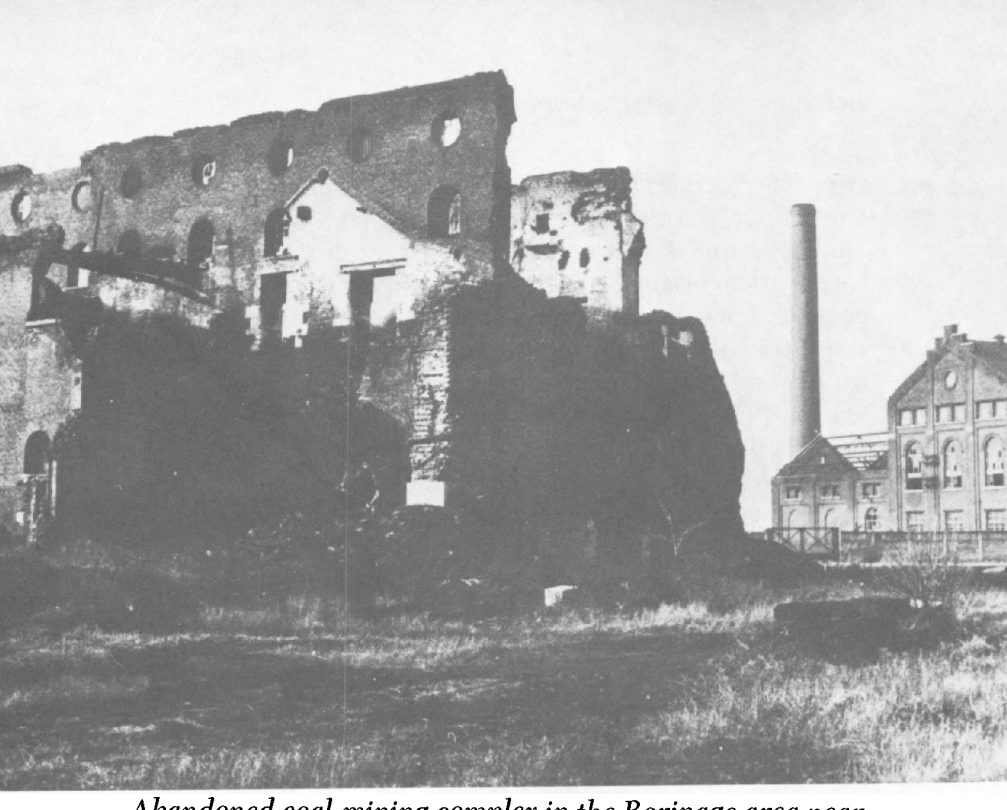
In turn, the Great Depression and World War II wreaked havoc, but economic growth was very high from 1945 to 1948 because the traditional industries could deliver the basic materials for European reconstruction. War-damaged plant was quickly repaired but only belatedly modernized, and then not to the extent necessary to compete with new producers. In the late 1940s the disadvantages of an aging industrial structure became apparent, and growth was below the European average through the 1950s. To stimulate growth, the political parties, supported by the trade unions and employers associations, followed the example set by the United States and began to liberalize trade and capital movements. Indeed, the transition from a national economy to a European economy greatly benefited the country. The rollback of trade restrictions and the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) substantially improved the economic outlook (see Appendix B). There was a dramatic upsurge in trade and an influx of foreign investment in view of Belgium's position as a gateway to European markets. Investment in the 1960s was particularly strong and approached one-quarter of the country's gross national product (GNP—see Glossary). Anti-inflationary policies checked the economy in the mid-1960s and 1971, but up through 1973 foreign and domestic demand generally remained buoyant and growth strong. The GNP increased on average by about 5 percent per year between 1960 and 1973, while unemployment reached a low of 1.6 percent in 1965. Foreign workers filled those vacancies—primarily in mining, manufacturing, and construction—that could not be filled from the ranks of Belgian man-

power.

Obscured by aggregate figures is the shift of fortunes of the Flemish and Walloon regions. One of the most striking elements of the country's economic evolution over the past quarter- century has been the rise of manufacturing and commercial activities in Flemish areas that had previously failed to attract much activity. The increasing replacement of coal by petroleum products made for a virtual revolution in industrial geography. The Brussels-Antwerp industrial axis became the country's economic core, replacing the Walloon coalfields, which experienced a drastic contraction in employment in the 1950s. The rise of port-based manufacturing, particularly in petrochemicals and steel, contributed to economic decline in Wallonia while fostering employment throughout Oost-Vlaanderen. The expansion of the modern service industries—the tertiary sector—also favored the Flemish region. In 1966 the tertiary sector came to represent more than one-half the working population. Rising living standards were conducive to the intensification of financial and commercial activities and more widespread facilities for trade, banking, transport, scientific research, and other services, which were centered on the Brussels-Antwerp axis.

In its postwar development Flanders benefited greatly from state support and foreign investment based largely on its labor situation. In the early 1960s the large labor supply released from agriculture and the youthfulness of the labor force contributed to unemployment in Flanders. Because of the need to create an industrial base to absorb this labor, Flanders received 50 percent more in government grants and subsidies than Wallonia during the 1960s. Wallonia did receive a slightly larger share than the proportion it represented in the population, but new industries tended to shun the visually unpleasing, outworn infrastructure and more militant labor of the traditional industrial areas. Industrial parks established with government support were therefore most successful in attracting domestic and foreign, primarily American, investment to Flanders; between 1959 and 1969 some 80 percent of all foreign investment was effected in Oost-Vlaanderen, Antwerpen, and Limburg provinces.

Foreign investment in newer sectors of the economy, such as automobiles, electric and electronic consumer products, synthetic fibers, and petroleum derivatives, led to greater integration of the Flemish industrial apparatus into the production organization of multinational corporations. In Wallonia the balance of industrial activity continued to rest on the traditional sectors controlled by a small group of powerful domestic holding companies. Yet



Abandoned coal-mining complex in the Borinage area near Mons—symbol of the faded glory of industry in Wallonia
Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

these sectors also became increasingly dependent on neighboring countries both as marketing outlets and as sources of technology. Ever greater internationalization of the economy led to the decreasing importance of interregional trade, making the country more vulnerable to exogenous developments.

The uninterrupted rise in industrial production since 1958 was finally broken after 1975; the shocks of the two oil crises—in 1973 and 1979—and the resultant global recession had severe repercussions for the small, export-oriented economy. External competitiveness declined significantly as the impact of exogenous factors brought internal structural weaknesses to the fore. Belgium began to experience great difficulties in adapting to the changing conditions of international demand, and economic growth slowed dramatically; the real gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary) actually decreased in 1981 and grew only by 0.9 percent in 1982 and by 0.5 percent in 1983. Inflation was 8.7 percent in 1982 and 7.7 in 1983, while unemployment rose to almost 14 percent of the work force at the end of 1983.

These economic problems can be attributed to a series of ad-

verse factors that, taken individually, are common to many countries. First, despite large adjustments that have taken place, declining sectors have accounted for a larger proportion of economic activity than in competing countries. Second, trade has been concentrated in geographic areas that have experienced slow growth. Exporters did not take advantage of the rapid growth of demand from members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) until after 1981. Third, wages, pensions, and social security have been protected from inflation by indexation. Although indexation took the heat off of labor relations, it led to a surge in wage costs. The real rise in wages during the 1970s was excessive in comparison with productivity gains and trends in competitor countries, so labor was shed to increase productivity.

Government economic decisionmaking has been complicated by the problems existing between the two linguistic communities. As industrial strength has shifted to Flanders, a greater sense of regional consciousness has developed, and the relative well-being of the two parts of the country has become an issue of public concern. Because the coalition governments have divided on linguistic lines, most decisions have had to be balanced among regions as well as parties. Government support of the Walloon steel industry, in particular, has raised vitriolic sentiments in Flanders and was a major factor behind the ousting of the Mark Eyskens I coalition in 1981 (see Major Political Developments, 1980-84, ch. 4). Almost all economic policy issues have degenerated into debates about national solidarity, the just distribution of economic assistance, and the relative fiscal burdens borne by the Flemish and Walloon regions. Major public projects in one region have often had to be matched by funds for the other, and there have been corresponding efforts to balance subsidies for the ailing industries.

Ideological differences between political parties on social welfare and the role of the state have also hindered policymaking. The dominance of parties of the center and right in Flanders, the rise of the Liberals, and the strength of the Socialists as the dominant force in Wallonia, have led to somewhat different stances on state aid to industry and public expenditure (For the formal names of the three traditional political groupings, see Political Parties, ch. 4). Despite broad recognition of the need to control costs, political consensus has often broken down over which expenditures to cut. The Belgian treasury and political parties of the right argued for years for a halt to automatic indexation of wages, whereas the Socialist parties and the trade unions staunchly supported its maintenance.

Although successive governments have recognized the urgent need for structural adjustment, as coalitions they have lacked a clear electoral mandate to develop a dynamic, comprehensive program of action. Between 1970 and 1980, six governments fell because of the ethnolinguistic rivalry between the Flemish and Walloon communities, the best they could achieve were stopgap measures and partial economic reforms. The formation of Wilfried Martens' fifth coalition government (Martens V) in December 1981 was of great significance for the redress of the economy. The center-right coalition of Social Christians and Liberals followed the economic policy line that had been increasingly advocated by management and capital groups seeking an improvement in the entrepreneurial climate. They instituted unprecedented measures including a restrictive wage policy, devaluation of the Belgian franc, generous corporate tax concessions, and reduced social expenditures. Although these measures were antithetical to the Socialist position, the coalition defused some of the tension surrounding its economic program by yielding to pressures for increased regionalization. The coalition appeared determined to remain in power for the full four years of the legislature—and even beyond—and to maintain economic affairs as its number one priority (see Major Political Developments, 1980-84, ch. 4).

Role of Government

The Belgian economy is based on free, private enterprise, although since the end of World War II, the state has been gradually redefining its liberal, noninterventionist approach to economic affairs. Immediately after the war, it took an active role in creating an extensive social welfare net for the benefit of all groups (see Health and Social Security, ch. 2). The state also began, particularly after 1959, to support industrial expansion and conversion by granting financial aid and fiscal benefits to foreign and domestic companies. Commencing in the 1970s, economic recession, substantial unemployment, and the failure of the industrial structure to adapt adequately to changing market conditions prompted the formation of a mixed economy (see Glossary) through increasing state involvement in the restructuring of declining industries. State intervention has remained discreet, however, and has been primarily felt only in the weak sectors of the economy, with the exception of transportation and communications services, traditionally run as public services. Because

economic organization is based on concertation (see Glossary), government intervention in private corporations has been taken only after consultation with bodies representing employer associations, trade unions, and financial interests. Although it has checked government power, this system has considerably lengthened the decisionmaking process. The movement toward a mixed economy has also had important repercussions for fiscal and monetary policy, the main tools of economic management.

Fiscal Policy

Government fiscal policy has relied on public expenditure to stimulate the economy, even at the price of incurring large deficits. Belgium has witnessed a great extension of public services over the last few decades, while the state share of expenditure has represented an ever larger share of the GNP. By 1983 current and capital expenditure by the central government and local authorities represented 63.2 percent of GNP, a much greater share than the 48.5-percent average for the European Community (EC—see Appendix B) as a whole (see table 4, Appendix A).

The formulation of the Belgian budget is a major political act, given the vested interests of the various ministries and interest groups. The budget is drawn up by the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Commerce in respect of short-term forecasts made by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the medium-term framework elaborated by the plan (see Planning and Industrial Policy, this ch.). The link between the plan and the budget is not as close as in France, however, and the Belgian government has discretion to make more or less explicit reference to it in justifying its draft budget. Final approval of the budget must be exercised by parliament, but because of political "immobilism" and late submission of the budget by the government, passage has sometimes been delayed well into the fiscal year. In general, the Ministry of the Budget handles the central government expenditures; the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Commerce, revenue collection; and the treasury, public debt management.

Not included in the budget are the capital expenditures of subordinated authorities—represented by the communes and provincial and regional authorities—and of various organizations, such as subsidized housing associations and, in part, public investment institutions, which operate within the framework of government programs. Yet through these different institutions, a large part of capital investment is controlled, either directly or indirectly, by the central government (see table 5, Appendix A).

The increased weight of public sector expenditure is part of a

long-term trend that has been intensified by the economic crisis. Slower economic growth rates and rising unemployment have had a severe impact on public finance in Belgium, given the country's extensive social welfare system and widespread indexation practices. The budgetary effects of automatic stabilization mechanisms were compounded by discretionary policy changes that involved various forms of reconversion, adjustment assistance, and tax concessions to firms as well as employment support measures. Lack of political procedures for arbitrating between the conflicting demands of various social groups and regions has also influenced expenditure growth.

In the central government budget for 1982, the largest expenditure categories after wages, goods, and services were social security transfers to individuals—including expenditure on unemployment benefits and employment programs—at 26 percent of the total budget and interest on the public debt at 17 percent. Over the 1970–82 period, expenditure on unemployment benefits and employment programs increased the most rapidly of all current expenditures, displaying an annual growth rate of 37.1 percent; interest on the public debt followed with a 19.7-percent annual growth rate. Other expenditures that increased twice as rapidly as GNP included rent and interest subsidies, loans to private companies, and the buying of stock in enterprises. Only three categories showed a slower growth than GNP, namely, investments, transfers to foreign countries, and subsidies to enterprises.

In a futile effort to keep pace with expenditures, taxes and social security contributions rose from 26 percent of GNP in 1960 to 48 percent in 1983. Excessive taxation encouraged tax evasion, black work (see Glossary), and flight of capital. One economist from the Catholic University of Louvain (KUL/UCL) estimated that the underground economy represented more than 15.2 percent of the official GNP in 1980, thereby leading to an overestimation of both unemployment and inflation. The government introduced a social security card in 1984 to attempt to curb black work and other fraud, such as working while simultaneously drawing unemployment benefits.

Since tax revenue did not increase rapidly enough to accommodate greater expenditure, the public sector deficit and borrowing requirement rose steeply after 1975. By 1981 the borrowing requirement of central and local authorities was equivalent to 16.2 percent of the GNP, one of the highest rates in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD—see Glossary). Concomitantly, the combined outstanding debt of cen-

tral and local government authorities ballooned from 57.5 percent of GNP in 1974 to 88 percent in 1981. It has been estimated that total public debt will exceed BF4 trillion (for value of the Belgian franc—see Glossary) in 1984, which is equivalent to approximately 96 percent of the projected GNP.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the public sector deficit was basically covered by medium- and long-term security issues on the Belgian market. Since 1977 the National Bank of Belgium has also financed a modest share, but commencing in 1978, the authorities have relied increasingly on foreign borrowing. Foreign currency debt spiraled from zero in 1978 to BF942 billion by the end of April 1984. External financing reflected growing strains on domestic money markets. Since 1979 the public sector's deficit has exceeded the domestic lending capacity, whereas it accounted for only one-half of this capacity in 1973. In 1981 and 1982 more than one-third of the deficit was financed by borrowing abroad. Although the deficit was initially viewed as an inevitable and temporary consequence of the economic crisis, it came to be regarded as a fundamental cause of overall economic disequilibrium and a major source of concern. Debt-service costs alone became so excessive that they interfered with efforts to control expenditure.

The response of the Martens V coalition was to set ambitious targets to reduce gradually the central government's deficit to the EC average of 7.5 percent of GNP by 1985. Reform has proved difficult, however, given the need to balance decisive action against the danger of causing a severe repercussion on stagnant domestic demand. The already excessive burden of taxation limited room for maneuvering on the tax front, although the government did raise the value-added tax (VAT) substantially in 1982. Throughout 1984 the Liberals pressed the Social Christians to leave the tax structure alone and economize only on the expenditure side. Although government expenditure dropped 3 percent in real terms in 1983, lower tax receipts (owing to an easing of the corporate tax burden, low growth, and wage restraint) and interest charges continued inexorably to push up the deficit. At BF510 billion, the deficit was much larger than expected. As a result, the austerity program did little to ameliorate the state of public finances beyond slowing the increase of the deficit and improving the debt structure through less short-term debt and foreign borrowing.

Lacking the means to run an elaborate social security system while implementing an industrial reconversion program, the government cabinet ratified a new three-year austerity program in

March 1984 that would extend beyond the next general elections in 1985. Measures affecting the budget included reductions of salaries in the public sector, further wage restraint, reform of the social security system starting in 1985, tax concessions for modernizing industrial plants, and a requirement that excess company profits be invested in Belgium or made available without interest to the treasury. The program sought to elicit equal sacrifices by all and leave room for growth in employment. On the expenditure side the government planned to maintain investment at its 1984 level, putting emphasis on the modernization of the telecommunications network, public transportation improvements, and labor-intensive public works projects (see New Technologies, this ch.).

The importance of the public sector in the economy meant that austerity measures could be implemented only gradually. Presentation of the 1985 budget in mid-1984 confirmed that initial plans to reduce the budget deficit had slipped. Its relative size in terms of GNP was not expected to reach the EC average until at least 1988. In the meantime, its negative impact on the economy continued to worry officials of the International Monetary Fund (see Glossary) and Belgium's center-right coalition government.

The financial state of the subordinated, or local, authorities has mirrored that of the central government. Between 1977 and 1982 the communes experienced a 10.6-percent annual growth in expenditure compared with a 7.8-percent increase in income. Communes used to depend for 30 percent of their ordinary revenue on the Municipal Fund, financed by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Office. Since 1979 appropriations have fallen short of the amount to have been distributed under criteria set in 1976. Yet, even if the proper allocation criteria had been applied, income would still have been inadequate to cover the growth of expenditure. The reorganization of communes in 1976 did not yield the anticipated economies of scale and actually increased obligations. In particular, personnel costs rose steeply as a result of wage increases and larger staffs. Over one-quarter of local government employment in 1983 was accounted for by the Public Centers for Social Welfare (formerly Committees of Public Assistance). Communal expenditure on these centers increased substantially after 1977 as their duties were progressively enlarged to include a variety of social services to the disadvantaged, in addition to the administration of public hospitals.

Altogether, 527 out of 589 communes had deficits in their budgets in mid-1983, adding up to a total debt of BF400 billion. The cities of Liège and Antwerp were both in such severe finan-

cial trouble that they had to negotiate for emergency loans from the central government. As the problem of municipal indebtedness became politicized and threatened to interfere with the national economic program, the Martens V coalition decided to extend the reform of public finance to the local level. It used its decree powers to rule that, as of 1988, the budgets of the municipalities would have to be balanced; otherwise, the central authorities would be able to intervene to step up revenue collection or cut expenditure. To aid municipalities in attaining balance, the 6-percent limit on the municipal surtax on income was abolished at the beginning of 1983. In the past, this surtax accounted for almost one-quarter of municipal income. The spending pattern, especially of the larger municipalities, will have to be drastically altered to counteract the mushrooming of personnel costs and expenditure on debt.

Monetary Policy

The National Bank of Belgium (NBB), the nation's central bank, was responsible for conducting government monetary policy. Since control of the monetary aggregates was difficult because of the great variety and adaptability of financial channels, as well as the large public and external deficits, the NBB tended to focus on interest rate management as its main regulatory instrument. Interest rate policy sought to maintain international financial equilibrium and defend the exchange rate, while attempting to keep interest rates as low as possible to promote economic activity. The treasury, even though it cleared rates on its security issues with the NBB, exerted a heavy influence on general interest rates because of the volume of its offerings.

Typically, interest rate policy was implemented by adjustments of the discount rate and the rediscount ceiling. There were no minimum reserve requirements, although at times the government used minimum portfolio holding requirements on securities and public bonds to avoid raising rates on government securities. Quantitative restrictions were generally avoided for fear of a strong deflationary effect on overall domestic demand, particularly when both the existing industrial capacity and the working population remained underemployed.

Because the balance of payments deficit has led to the loss of a large share of liquidity, the monetary authorities have considered it acceptable to finance the public deficit by money creation through advances from the NBB and the Securities Regulation Fund, a parastatal (see Glossary) financial institution and regulator of the market for government securities. By 1981 nearly

two-thirds of the deficit was being financed through increases in the money supply. At times excessive money creation has contributed to increased inflation. Since the spring of 1979, the margin for maneuver in monetary policy has been narrowed because of the upward trend in international rates and the weakness of the Belgian franc. Interest rates have been among the highest in the OECD countries, depressing investment and increasing the burden of debt repayments. A strong currency policy has also contributed to the maintenance of high interest rates. Since there were no domestic substitutes for the raw materials and energy that Belgium imported, devaluation of the Belgian franc was avoided until 1982 to prevent higher import costs from being channeled to the price of exports.

Since 1922 Belgium and Luxembourg have been linked in the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU), a customs and monetary union. There is no exchange control between the two countries, and the Luxembourg franc is on par with the Belgian franc. In turn, the two countries participate together with the other EC members, excluding Britain, in the exchange rate and intervention mechanism of the European Monetary System (EMS), which was established in March 1979. The EMS is an outgrowth of the "Snake" arrangement, which was instituted in 1972 to limit fluctuations between the participants' currencies after the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system. Some Belgians, such as former prime minister Leo Tindemans, viewed the Snake as the precursor of an eventual EC monetary union. Since a zone of monetary stability would facilitate trade, Belgium actively contributed to the elaboration of the EMS. Under the agreement Belgium maintains the spot exchange rates between the Belgian franc and the currencies of the other EC members within margins of 2.5 percent above or below the bilateral central rates. To smooth out fluctuations, the NBB stands ready to buy or sell the necessary currencies.

Another distinguishing feature of the Belgian exchange rate system is the presence of two spot markets, the official, or regulated, market and the free market. Most current transactions are settled in the official market, where only authorized banks may carry out foreign exchange transactions. The two-tiered system has taken pressure off the currency by channeling speculative capital flows through the free market, which has deterred the flight of capital somewhat. In late 1981 and early 1982, the spread between the two rates reached a record of more than 16 percent. Although the NBB has had to intervene extensively in the foreign exchange market in recent years, without the two-tiered system

and the cooperation of the Belgian banking community in preventing abuses of the system, it would have had to intervene more often.

The persistent weakness of the Belgian franc has also proved troublesome for monetary relations. When Belgium devalued its franc in 1982, the basis of monetary cooperation with Luxembourg was thrown into question. Luxembourg only reluctantly followed suit because of the negative repercussions devaluation of its franc would have on its healthier economy. As an upshot of the devaluation debate, Luxembourg established its own Monetary Institute in 1983 to take over some of the NBB powers in regard to Luxembourg's monetary policy. Belgium also had to agree to start calculating Luxembourg's balance of payments surplus separately from the combined trade statistics of the BLEU (see Foreign Economic Relations, this ch.).

Planning and Industrial Policy

The first step toward a greater government role in the economy, beyond staving off disequilibrium, was the establishment of an economic planning bureau within the Ministry of Economic Affairs in 1959. The function of the Planning Bureau has been to formulate, after appropriate study, broad guidelines for economic expansion, including public investment, in the form of five-year plans. In 1962 its responsibilities were expanded to encompass regional planning, but since the late 1970s, this responsibility has fully devolved to the regions (see Regionalization, this ch.). Nevertheless, the Planning Bureau, composed of representatives from the public administration, private industry, scientific circles, and trade unions, still makes important medium- and long-term economic forecasts.

Planning originally imposed no obligations on enterprises, but a 1967 royal decree included private holding companies in the planning process. Each year they have been required to submit to the Planning Bureau details of their planned investments, including those of their affiliates in Belgium and abroad. Implementation of the plan has, however, been indicative for most of the private sector, merely providing a summary of market conditions and an indication of the trend of economic and social development promoted by the government. In actuality, private economic decisions have not been greatly influenced by the plan.

Industrial policy and planning objectives in 1984 basically rested on the tenets of the Claes Plan, submitted to parliament by the minister of economic affairs, Willy Claes, in 1978. The paper called for the restoration and modernization of declining sectors,

specialization and diversification in products with higher value added (see Glossary), stimulation of technological research, and export promotion. Special attention was to be given to small- and medium-sized enterprises to develop new products aimed at export markets. Such a program would require a long and sustained effort, but the government had numerous tools to draw on.

To promote industrial and commercial investment in line with planning objectives, the government has relied extensively on fiscal and financial incentives. Aid has taken the form of interest rate subsidies, capital or employment grants, tax relief, and government guarantees on commercial loans. The scope of the first investment incentive law, the General Expansion Act of 1959, still in effect in 1984, was broad. It provided for government aid to firms whose establishment would stimulate economic expansion or introduce productive industries anywhere in Belgium. The Regional Expansion Act of 1970 provided for broader incentives in specified development zones where economic problems are the most acute, as well as regional aid in new, dynamic sectors outside the development zones. Depending on the project location, grant incentives in development zones (which in 1983 covered areas holding over one-third of the population) could not exceed 15 or 20 percent of investment after tax. In July 1982 the Commission of the European Communities granted approval for most of Wallonia to be covered by these zones, but only the Kempenland coal mining area and the Westhoek area of West-Vlaanderen in the Flemish region qualified. For implementing the incentives legislation, the Fund for Economic Expansion and Regional Reconversion was established, capitalized through the budgets of various ministries and by certain tax receipts.

Since late 1982 the government, guided by a more market-oriented approach, has gradually been replacing subsidies and other incentives to stimulate investment in new industries by fiscal measures. These included a reduction of corporate taxes from 48 to 45 percent and increased deductions for investment outlays. In addition, employment zones—T-zones—and coordination centers were developed to encourage foreign investment. T-zones were to be created in geographically delimited areas reserved for the establishment of new industrial or service facilities engaged in advanced data processing, software technology, microelectronics, office automation, robotics, telecommunications, and biotechnology. Those that had their headquarters and facilities inside these zones could be exempted from corporate income taxation for a period of 10 years. Coordination centers offered a similar exemption, but their purpose was to encourage the

development and centralization of corporate research, management, and auxiliary activities in Belgium. Both employment zones and coordination centers extended benefits on a nondiscriminatory basis to domestic and foreign firms that met specified size and employment conditions. In addition, foreign executives and researchers would be exempt from work permit requirements and contributions to Belgian social security. Twenty-two coordination centers had been established by the end of March 1984, over half involved in some form of global treasury management.

Beyond investment incentives, the government's main instrument for implementing its industrial policy and providing financial aid to high-risk and ailing enterprises is the National Investment Company (NIM/SNI), created in 1962 (see National Sectors, this ch.). In addition to providing public venture capital for the setting up, reorganization, or expansion of both Belgian and foreign companies, the NIM/SNI can conduct all operations in financing and real estate, buy stock in private companies, and even create public companies when the private sector fails to take certain initiatives the NIM/SNI considers desirable. The NIM/SNI is assisted in its operation by many specialized affiliates, including the Belgian Company for International Investments, which deals with financing overseas investments, and the Office for Industrial Promotion, which provides research support to the private sector. NIM/SNI activities are also supplemented by three regional investment companies, constituted by the Law of Economic Reorientation of 1978. The activities of the regional investment companies mirror those of the NIM/SNI, except that they are focused on the regions and are capitalized through the regional budgets.

The NIM/SNI has grown rapidly; between October 1979 and September 1982, the value of its investments and public initiatives totaled approximately BFl5.5 billion. Restructuring operations on the part of the state are not included in this total but are much more costly. By 1983 the NIM/SNI had a significant, ongoing stake in more than 120 commercial, industrial, and service firms, employing 22,000 persons. More than three-fifths of the companies that the NIM/SNI aided were export-oriented in recognition of the vital role trade plays in Belgian economic growth, while some 85 percent were small- to medium-sized companies unable to obtain bank capital. Slightly more than one-half were new companies. In choosing candidates for financial assistance, emphasis was laid on productive investments in sectors like energy and high technology. In July 1984 it was reported that the

Well-tended fields, industry, and historic towns characterize the coastal lowlands of Flanders. Courtesy Belgium Information and Documentation Institute

Belgian cabinet intended to raise NIM/SNI resources, despite continuous pleas from Liberals for greater privatization in industry.

Regionalization

Under political pressure the application of the investment incentive laws and planning has become increasingly decentralized. This has led to the establishment of separate ministerial departments for each region and, after the constitutional reform of 1970, to the recognition of the regions as economic entities through the creation of regional economic councils and regional development corporations. The economic councils were vested with consultative powers on economic problems, as well as the development of regional plans to be forwarded to the Planning Bureau. They included representatives from parliament, the provincial councils, employer associations, worker organizations, and economic experts. The Economic Council of Brabant was organized differently because of the bilingualism of the province and of Brussels; half of the council's members were chosen from

Brussels and the other half from the Flemish and Walloon regional economic councils. The councils received annual endowments under the budget of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, equal amounts being allocated to Flanders and Wallonia.

The seven regional development corporations, one each for Brussels and Wallonia and five for Flanders, were set up in the form of public utilities. They were empowered to deal with the promotion of economic development within their own areas and to this end could expropriate, sell, or equip property and carry though all manner of public works. Each received an annual government subsidy but could also contract loans and receive financial and technical assistance from the NIM/SNI as well as from the regional investment companies.

The process of regionalization was furthered by the two laws passed in August 1980 that established new regional bodies for social and economic affairs and institutionalized the transfer of certian economic powers to the regional authorities. The supreme body in both Flanders and Wallonia is the regional council, whose powers in regard to regional economic expansion and regional planning are not much more extensive than those assumed during the provisional regionalization period of the 1970s (see The Communities, Regions, Provinces, and Communes, ch. 4). Specifically, the councils are empowered to deal with matters of town planning and land use, housing, water distribution, aid to industrial enterprises, application of the economic expansion laws, market research, investment promotion, aid to the tourist industry, and the granting of subsidies to various sectors. However, the central government still set standards in many areas, such as employment policy; the regions were often merely left with the execution of decisions made at the national level.

The regional councils are, in theory, financially autonomous and are granted five means of raising revenue: nonfiscal receipts, transfers from the national budget linked to the cost-of-living index, refunds on various taxes, tax receipts, and assumption of loans. Primary stress is placed on budgetary credit since there is limited fiscal potential at the regional level. Overall, the financial arrangements severely restrict the scope for conducting policy at the regional level; under the August 1980 laws, 10 percent of the central government budget was to be annually allocated to the regional councils. Including the fiscal and nonfiscal revenue that could be raised by the regional authorities, total regional revenue potential has been estimated to be about 15 percent of the national budget. This proportion was low compared with the 40 to 45 percent attributed to local authorities in most federal systems

in Europe and North America. Through a hold on the purse strings, the central government has maintained some control of the devolutionary process.

Employment and Income

Employment patterns have experienced fundamental structural changes, the labor force shifting from self-employed to salaried status and from manufacturing and mining to services and public administration. As of June 30, 1981, the economically active population totaled more than 4 million; some 38 percent were women. Of the total, about 56 percent were employed in service occupations, including the career military. Manufacturing industries, which employed approximately one-quarter of the labor force in 1970, accounted for only 16 percent in 1981; the extractive industries represented only 5 percent in 1981, compared with over 7 percent in 1970 (see table 6, Appendix A).

According to data available in 1984, wage and salary earners constituted four-fifths of the labor force in 1977, and the self-employed 13 percent. The proportion of self-employed has declined drastically in the postwar years, mainly because of the reduction of employment in agriculture and handicrafts as well as the rise of large, national distributors and the bankruptcy of small businesses. Public sector employment, which includes teachers, increased substantially, from 24 percent of all workers registered under social security in 1974 to 31 percent in 1982.

The regional implications of these developments have been considerable, for neither the demise of coal mining, steel, and heavy manufacturing nor the rapid growth of investment in light industry and office employment has affected the regions equally. Although employment trends within the provincial economies have followed the same path toward an emphasis on light industry and services, diversification in the coal mining provinces initially lagged. Activities such as banking, finance, and insurance have a proportionately greater representation in the north. Brabant Province employs a good portion of the Belgian total in commerce, public services, and the hotel trade. Together, Antwerpen and Brabant provinces accounted for 43 percent of national tertiary employment and 36 percent of manufacturing labor in 1979. Even though these shares have fallen 10 and 5 points, respectively, since 1970, the Brussels-Antwerp axis clearly remained the national economic core.